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# The First But Hopefully Not the Last: How The Last Of Us Redefines the Survival Horror Video Game Genre

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THE FIRST BUT HOPEFULLY NOT THE LAST: HOW *THE LAST OF US* REDEFINES
THE SURVIVAL HORROR VIDEO GAME GENRE

by

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# ABSTRACT

For this study, I applied generic criticism, which looks at how a text subverts and adheres to patterns and formats in its respective genre, to analyze how *The Last of Us* redefined the survival horror video game genre through its narrative. Although some tropes are present in the game and are necessary to stay tonally consistent to the genre, I argued that much of the focus of the game is shifted from the typical situational horror of the monsters and violence to the overall narrative, effective dialogue, strategic use of cinematic elements, and character development throughout the course of the game. I also found that the game challenges notions of masculinity and femininity and takes inspiration from Bildungsroman, which are coming-of-age novels. I proposed a new genre called "Zombie Drama" which refers to texts that focus on character development in a zombie world backdrop. Next, I deconstructed the visual and auditory aspects of the game and how they contribute to the overall construction of the narrative. Lastly, I covered the filmic influences of *The Last of Us* and drew connections between the texts and the game.

Key Words: survival horror, video games, narrative, genre

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**CHAPTER I:  INTRODUCTION**

"Let's just wait it out. We can be all poetic and lose our minds together." This quotation

comes from the downloadable content for the remastered edition of *The Last of Us,* a video game

that challenges the notion of morality in video games and how dual protagonists should function.

These last words from Riley have always resonated with me since Ellie and Riley decide to enjoy

their final moments by staying alive together instead of committing suicide, despite being

recently infected with the Cordyceps fungal disease. By the end of the game, players learn that

Ellie lives, but the game implies that Riley has become a part of the Infected. With such a rich

narrative and compelling characters, *The Last of Us* struck a chord with critics and audiences

alike and garnered multiple awards including the coveted Game of the Year award (Hughes 150;

Lucas 98).

Coming on the heels of their biggest success, *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves*, Naughty

Dog, which is a video game production company owned by Sony, was ready to create a new

intellectual property while developing the third installment for the *Uncharted* series in 2010

(Moriarty). The first trailer for *The Last of Us* released at the Spike Video Game Awards in 2011

and features Joel and Ellie fending off Hunters and Clickers, which are one of the forms of

Infected, which share similarities to zombies in other survival horror video games ("*The Last of

Us* Exclusive Debut Trailer"). Because the trailer is blatantly violent and features human

characters battling zombie-like creatures, it suggests that *The Last of Us* might be another

generic survival horror video game in the video game market that relies on the usual tropes

present in the survival horror genre. The actual game, however, would prove to be quite

different.

When the game was released in 2013, I had the chance to play it on the PlayStation 3 (PS3) and I found that the game exceeded my initial expectations. *The Last of Us* challenged me and other gamers to think deeply about strategic portrayals of violence in video games, the roles of anti-heroes challenging our understanding of morality, and the significance of narrative-rich video games in society. As a scholar, I found myself compelled to study *The Last of Us* because I want to understand how this game impacted and redefined the survival horror video game genre through its use of narrative. I cover my purpose statement for this study in the following section.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to analyze how the video game *The Last of Us* subverts tropes in the survival horror video game genre through the use of narrative. Particularly, I will examine the different narrative aspects of the video game, such as narrative construction, characterization, literary and filmic influences, and visual and sound dimensions. In the next section, I intend to cover my rationales, which justify the significance of my study.

**Rationales**

My analysis of *The Last of Us* is significant because of the following reasons. First, since *The Last of Us* is a fairly recent game, scholarship on this game and other games of similar literary merit is starting to emerge. Video games are a prominent part of American culture as consumers have spent $30.4 billion on video games in 2016. In terms of genre, consumers mainly purchased shooter and action games in that same year. It should be noted that survival horror is a sub-genre of shooter and action-adventure games, which are main genres in the video game industry ("Facts on Video Game Industry"). Along with receiving rave reviews from critics and audiences, *The Last of Us* sold 1.3 million copies worldwide in its first week of its release in 2013 (Tassi). The studies I have encountered focus on the narrative elements of the game in

relation to the gameplay and the bibliographical differences between the original edition and the Remastered version of *The Last of Us* (Lucas 98; Hughes 1; Young 1). I will carry out an analysis of this video game by applying generic criticism to understand where *The Last of Us* stands in relation to the larger survival horror genre. My analysis will also feature elements of current research on the game, as I will focus on narrative and characterization of *The Last of Us* and other survival horror video games. I intend for my research to act as a critical lens towards further understanding *The Last of Us* as a rhetorical text and how it shapes our perception of what a survival horror game should be.

Second, my study will raise more awareness about the current flaws and tropes in the survival horror video game genre, which is described "as a genre of video game in which a protagonist must escape or survive a horrific, eerie, and violent environment, and which typically aims to create an atmosphere similar to that of a horror film" and often feature zombies as enemies ("Survival Horror"). As the main inspiration for survival horror video games, horror films have existed since the early 20th century and often reflect the American political climate for each decade and are socially significant. For example, during the Great Depression, the general public flocked to see *Frankenstein*, a pioneer to modern horror films and survival horror video games, to provide a sense of hope that their lives would get better and they would overcome this dark period in their lives (Sanders 210). This study will provide exposure to how *The Last of Us* challenges survival horror tropes, like female protagonists that adhere to the male gaze, which is described as male viewers objectifying female characters for pleasure, and an overemphasis on violence for shock value, and generate conversations about how the survival horror genre can expand in a meaningful manner (Lahti 165; "Feminist Film Theory").

Lastly, I feel that it is important for more video games to be studied in an academic context because video games represent significant texts that feature elements from horror and thriller films and can allow us to understand our current political and social culture. In his book *Media, Gender and Identity*, David Gauntlett's criticism towards video games focuses on how action is favored over the narrative and that female characters are capable of such action, but are hyper-sexualized (68). This has been a recurring problem in the industry, despite the fact that there is a sizeable population of female gamers in the market (Paaßen 421). I intend for my analysis to explore how *The Last of Us* subverts these general video game tropes. While scholarship in psychology has paid attention to video games – focusing, for example, on how participants perceive video game violence (Anderson et al. 151) – researchers in media and cultural studies often overlook this popular form of communication. Even most film scholars who study the portrayals of zombies in horror films do not include survival horror video games in their research (Kirkland 29). If more media and communication scholars studied video games, we not only would know more about their narratives, but also might gain insights about interactivity that could have application to everyday communication technology like ATMs and cell phones. This interactivity between humans and machine is classified as user interface (Wolf 27). In the following section, I will provide background information on *The Last of Us*.

**Background Information**

*The Last of Us* began in development since 2010, when Naughty Dog finished their successful Uncharted 2: Among Thieves (Moriarty). Naughty Dog was initially known for their platforming game *Crash Bandicoot*, but later explored the action-adventure genre with their *Jak and Daxter* and *Uncharted* series. The game was official released for the PlayStation 3 in 2013 for the retail price of $59.99 and received critical acclaim from both critics and players alike.

With 1.3 million copies of the game sold by the end of 2013, the game became the fastest selling

PlayStation 3 title in 2013 and the 10th bestselling video game overall in 2013 (Tassi).

The box art of the game is compelling since there are two different covers for the game.

The PS3 cover of the game features Joel and Ellie in an abandoned city with Joel holding a

revolver and Ellie carrying a rifle with the title to the left of them. The PS4 cover of the game

also features Joel and Ellie, but in a black backdrop, standing by each other with guns in their

hands. The title *The Last of Us: Remastered* is to the left of the characters with the tagline "Over

200 Game of the Year Awards" placed above them.

It would be best for me to provide a brief overview of the game to contextualize my

study. Twenty years after Joel faces a tragic loss, he becomes a smuggler in a world infested with

humans affected by the Cordyceps fungus disease. After a deal goes bad, he stumbles upon

Marlene, who is the head of the Fireflies, a militia group countering the martial law governments

in cities across America. She instructs Joel to deliver a girl named Ellie, who is immune to the

disease, across the country, as she is a potential cure to the disease. Over the course of the year,

Joel and Ellie experience the best and worst parts of a barren America and they are forced to

make dire decisions for each other along the way. In the following section, I will define

important terms in video gaming and video game studies.

**Definitions**

In order to provide context to my study, I need to include concepts from video game

studies and define them. These concepts are crucial in order properly understand the terms I will

use in my analysis, and I will cover them extensively in my Literature Review. At its essence, a

video game is a game as it is "a certain activity associated with play (as opposed to a general

activity performed playfully) which is contextualized and structured according to certain rules

and social conventions (and typically, goals and winners)" (Chandler and Munday). Therefore, a video game can be defined as "an artifact in a visual digital medium [that] is intended as an object of entertainment, and is intended to provide such entertainment through the employment of either rule and objective gameplay or interactive fiction" (Tavinor 32-3). It would be important to note that there are two common perspectives when playing action-adventure games, which are the first-person and third-person perspectives. The first-person perspective "hides all but the arms of the in-game figure – thus perfectly aligning the player's gaze with that of their in-game character," which allows for players to empathize with the characters (Solarski 61-2). On the other hand, the third-person perspective "enables [the player] to view [their] heroic avatar in action from an external viewpoint" (Campbell et al. 87). In addition, "the camera [is placed] in a persistent location over the player character's shoulder, which allows the player to see their avatar situated inside the world while still making clear who the player's character is" (Sharp 112). Lastly, there are two different game modes called single-player and multiplayer, which can determine the narrative and the types of gameplay presented to the players. Single-player games feature "[campaigns] laden with narrative components" (Joseph and Knuttila 211). Also, "computer-controlled opponents – or the environment itself – must respond entertainingly to the player's actions" in single-player games (Edgenfeldt-Nielsen 97). Multiplayer is an "option that involves multiple participants, typically using the internet" where players play with or against each other (Chandler and Munday). In the next section, I describe the method I intend to utilize for my analysis of *The Last of Us*.

**Description of Method**

In this study I will employ the method of generic criticism to deconstruct the whole text in relation to its genre which is survival horror video games to describe and analyze how *The*

*Last of Us* subverts tropes present in the survival horror video game genre, in relation to the game's narrative and characterization. As I own the *The Last of Us: Remastered Edition* for the PS4, which includes the downloadable content *The Last of Us: Left Behind*, I intend to include sections of this part of the game in my analysis. A genre is defined as "a class of messages having important structural and content similarities and which, as a class, creates special expectations in an audience" (Hart and Daughton 116). Genres tie specific texts together through previously themes, narrative structures, and tropes. In a broad sense, generic criticism features the following implications: these genres maintain social norms, generic deviance is a slow but eventual process, and language is significant to the text (Hart and Daughton 119). According to Sonja K. Foss, generic critics "[seek] to discover commonalities in rhetorical patterns across recurring situations" (137). Beyond pointing out the patterns in a text in relation to its genre, it is also a critic's duty to understand the genre in relation to its text in order to have a deeper understanding of the rhetoric ingrained in the text and the rhetorical situation of both text and the genre. I conclude the introduction of my study in the following section.

**Conclusion**

In my analysis, I will provide an analysis of *The Last of Us*, in relation to the tropes that the game subverts in relation to the survival horror video game genre. I will also analyze the game's narrative and character elements. This study is significant as it will create more conversation on this revolutionary game as the video game industry is constantly changing and public notions of the survival horror video game genre are changing as new elements are introduced. Also, I intend to analyze *The Last of Us* to shift away the conversation of video game violence influencing social harm to video games as art, which is a revolutionary form of storytelling. To achieve the purpose of this study, I will apply generic criticism in order to

effectively analyze *The Last of Us*. The next chapter of my study is my literature review, which

will look at previous studies from the disciplines of Game Studies, Literary and Generic Studies,

and Media and Cultural Studies.

**CHAPTER II:  LITERATURE REVIEW**

Before analyzing *The Last of Us*, I intend to contextualize my study by providing information from video game theorists and game studies scholars ranging from video game history to contemporary gaming culture. I would also note that I will mention plot points that happen in *The Last of Us: Left Behind*, which is downloadable content that is included in the Remastered version of the game for the PlayStation 4 (PS4) (Young 460). In the first section, I include a history of video games and describe the current political economy of the video game industry to contextualize the evolving nature of the video game industry. The next section features further information on the characteristics of the genre and describing each video game genre. Third, I discuss who video game players are and why they play video games. Lastly, I cover video game narrative, which is a significant part of my project, and three theories which will assist me in my analysis of *The Last of Us*. In the next section, I provide a history of video games to contextualize the medium of the text I am analyzing.

**History of Video Games**

As a medium, video games have existed for four decades and are evolving, in terms of hardware, gameplay, and narrative formats, at fast rates compared to other media (Wolf xv). The beginning of video games can be traced back to the Industrial Revolution in the late 19$^{th}$ century, which brought about technological advancements and allowed for leisure time in America. As work was becoming more refined, since workers operate machines to assist them in their daily tasks and leisure time was becoming more accessible, Americans would flock to entertainment centers and piers in their past-times. Coin-operated machines in penny arcades, which showed stop motion films, tested strength or love, or gave fortunes, were one of the first forms of modern entertainment which inspired the creation of video games. Many decades later in the 1940s,

pinball came into the mainstream and was a game of skill that required players to hit the flippers to prevent the ball from falling into the pit. Pinball was initially heavily regulated as it was considered as a form of gambling by local governments. Eventually, officials understood that pinball was a valid form of entertainment and would become more accessible in the 40s (Campbell et al. 75-77).

A few years later, Thomas T. Goldsmith and Estle Ray Mann created the first video game through their "Cathode Ray Tube Amusement Device." Games for this device were created and tested among computer science students, but were not distributed because they were clunky and expensive. This was not until the Magnavox *Odyssey* was released in 1972 for home televisions by Ralph Baer, which came with twelve simple games and could only display simple white shapes on screen. It was very popular at the time and sold very well until Atari came out with their console in 1975 which had a better processor (Winter 50-1). Nolan Bushnell and his colleagues created a game called *Pong* which was a huge hit in arcades in 1972. The game was simple and required players to turn a dial to hit a ball back and forth until a player misses. A home version of the game was released for the Atari game console in 1975. Eventually Atari fell out of relevance in 1984. Since then Nintendo, Sony, and Sega led the video game industry in the 90s with their systems the Nintendo 64, the PlayStation, and the Saturn respectively (Barnes 217; Campbell et al. 78; Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. 53; Herman 66; Waggoner 6).

Eventually Sega stopped making video game consoles with the release of the Dreamcast in 1999 and focused their efforts on creating video games for the other systems, since the Dreamcast did not sell well and Microsoft emerged in the video game industry with the release of the Xbox in 2001. The Xbox was known for its Xbox Live online service which launched in 2002 and was considered revolutionary at the time, as the service allowed players to play online

and download additional content for their games. In the mid-2000s, Nintendo released the Wii which revolutionized gameplay and player experiences and accessibility through motion controls. The Wii remote allows players to simulate in-game actions like pointing, catching, shooting, or hitting. Around the same time, Sony and Microsoft released their new generation of consoles, which are the PlayStation 3 and the Xbox 360 (Waggoner 6). Compared to Sony and Microsoft, Nintendo struggled in keeping up with creating an online interface. Though they reached non-traditional gaming audiences or casual gamers, which led to the Wii's eventual success. Sony and Microsoft had their own version of motion controllers with the PlayStation Move for the PlayStation 3, which had similar features to the Wii remote, and the Kinect for the Xbox 360, which is a camera which senses body movements and speech. For the next generation of consoles, Sony and Microsoft found success with the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One as they outsold the Wii U, which was Nintendo's successor to the Wii (Campbell et al. 79-81; Herman 167-71).

Looking forward into the future, gaming technology will become more immersive and portable, which is why the video game industry will constantly progress and change over time. For example, virtual reality technologies are making games even more immersive than they already are. The word gamification refers to how interactive game experiences are being integrated into everyday activities. For example, *The New York Times* created a game to warn people of the dangers of texting and driving. These technological advancements make video games a part of our everyday lives (Campbell et al. 99). In order to understand how the video game industry operates, it would be important to deconstruct the political economy of the industry, since the video game industry is a for-profit business.

**Political Economy of the Video Game Industry**

In terms of demographics and sales of the video game industry, 72 percent of households play video games and the market for video games is valued at $20.8 billion annually. The identity of the "gamer" is changing due to the introduction of the Wii and smart phones, which means that video games are becoming more accessible to multiple populations. The average age of a gamer is thirty years old and almost half of gamers are women (Campbell et al. 99-100). In regards to racial buildup of US gamers, 67% are white, while 13% are Hispanic, 12% are Black, 5% are Asian, and 3% are Other, according to a 2015 survey conducted by Nielsen ("Distribution of Gamers").

The process of releasing games is very lengthy, costly, and intensive as games are becoming increasingly complex to make. In fact, most of a game studio's budget goes into production costs and marketing. During the development process, writers create concepts, design the gameplay, and write the story for the game while artists sketch out scenery and character designs. All members of the team brainstorm and communicate their ideas to each other in order for the production to run smoothly. From that point, programmers code the game and play testers play the game during the initial stages of development and report bugs or errors to the programmers and game designers (Egenfeldt et al. 19; Tschang 231-4). Once the game is built, developers must pay royalties to a combination of any of the three major console developers: Sony, Nintendo, and/or Microsoft. These royalties exist so the three major companies can ensure a profit from the outside developers who want to release a title on the companies' consoles. The three major companies own their own development companies, which means that they can produce games for their own consoles without having to worry about royalty fees. After going through licensing, developers must market their games to their audiences. The most common

forms of advertisements for video games are through online ads, magazine ads, in-store ads, or television ads. Game developers try their best to have these advertisements mimic an advertisement for a summer blockbuster film to build attention towards their game. Like avid moviegoers who attend midnight screenings, gamers who are devoted to a particular video game franchise will go to their local video game outlet at midnight to buy their favorite video game at launch (Campbell et al. 103-4).

Just as other media formats are transitioning to digital distribution, the methods of video game distribution are changing as technology is becoming more advanced. In terms of payment methods, games are still being sold traditionally through retail stores in boxes which feature a disk copy of the game. The way that consumers are purchasing games is changing as physical copies of games can be ordered through Amazon or digital copies of games can be bought in-store or through a digital marketplace like PlayStation Network. Two new methods of payment for games include subscriptions and free-to-play. Through subscriptions, players pay a monthly fee to play the game and is most common in online games like *World of Warcraft*. With free-to-play, game developers allow players to download their games for free but entice players with paid in-game upgrades or ad blockers in order to make revenue. (Campbell et al. 104-5; Egenfeldt et al. 12).

Video games may be seen as an American invention, but we must not forget about the sales of video games outside the United States. Although European countries do not have the same release dates for video games like the United States and Japan, they are still significant to the global culture of video games. The British and the French have found success in the 80s and the 90s, as their game development studios, like Eidos and Ubisoft, have found much success with titles ranging from *Tomb Raider* to *Prince of Persia*. These two countries are leading the

video game market within Europe and internationally (Konzack 203-6). Video games have become a significant part of European culture to where the European Union has been supportive in investing in projects and assisting with entrepreneurship in the industry. The European Union created a program called MEDIA, which initially started in 1991 for filmmakers, where video game developers have the ability to apply for funding starting in 2007 (Konzack 209-210). It is apparent that European countries place an aesthetic value to video games, as it is an attitude that is eventually emerging in America.

After discussing video games in Europe, it only makes sense to also include Asia since Japan is also known for their digital culture, which has a global influence because of its strong appeal to multiple audiences (Ng 211). Although Americans manufactured some of the first video game home console hardware with the Atari 2600, the console was not successful in Japan since the units were expensive and Japanese gamers preferred playing video games at game centers. Nintendo changed Japanese gaming culture by releasing the popular Nintendo Entertainment System (NES). Although the system was popular in Asia, it was still considered very expensive in the 80s, so children would go to each other's houses to play video games. In the 90s, Sega began dominating the video game market and became rivals with Nintendo. A few years later, Sony and Sega introduced CDs and high-tech graphics for their newest systems. Sony found the biggest success during this era since they marketed their console to other Asian countries according to each country's cultural practices and owned offices for each country. At the same time, it was very common for players to modify their hardware and play pirated versions of popular games (Ng 213-5). Next, I will define what genre is before deconstructing each video game genre in the video game market.

**Genre**

Genre "in literary, film, and aesthetic theory, [is] a type of text recognized by particular conventions of form and content which are shared by other texts of that type (e.g. westerns, thrillers, historical romances)" (Chandler and Munday). In other words, they are categories in which narratives fit specific forms with the use of characters, themes, and scenes in different sequences. In the field of literary studies, literary genres can be referred to classical models defined by Aristotle which determined whether plays were "tragedies" or not (Turner 7). In a basic sense, rhetors "imitate" by borrowing from "the past" to create new messages in "the present" (Hart and Daughton 104). Media industries make use of genres to adhere to their economic goals of product standardization and differentiation, which are defined by creating familiar formulas. Through standardization and differentiation, it easier for media industries to release texts that are familiar to audiences. However, it should be acknowledged that some genres are not easily identifiable and can change over time. Also, the texts may not include all elements of their respective genres and may even be classified under multiple genres or subgenres (Berger 16; Campbell et al. 243; Chandler and Munday; Creeber 1; Gunn 442). After covering genre in a broad sense, it would be important to discuss what video game genres are and cover the different types of video game genres in the market.

**Video Game Genre**

Video game genres specifically are "types of videogames that both borrow generic conventions from other media, especially film (e.g. science fiction, gangster, horror, and war) but also focus on the activity of the player (e.g. 'beat 'em up', driving, first-person shooter, role play, 'shoot 'em up', simulation, and sports) which all imply different modes of engagement" (Chandler and Munday). The video game industry tends to associate video game genres with

simulation over visuals or narratives, which is typical for almost any other media format. Game scholars, like Espen Aarseth, have issues with classifying game genres solely by gameplay since the other elements of a game, which include the visuals and narratives, should also be taken into account. It should also be noted that new genres of video games can come out of pre-existing genres (Campbell et al. 84; Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. 40; Fencott et al. 14; Suckling and Walton 49). Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Jonas Heide Smith, and Susana Pajares Toscar argue that video game genres are arbitrary and are constructed based on different people's perspectives of categorization. Therefore, they propose a video game genre system that is categorized by the game's purpose and end goal (41; Wolf 260). In the following sections, I will present the genres which inspired the multiple video game genres, along with the video game genres which are as follows: action-adventure, role-playing, strategy and simulation, casual, sports and driving, and music and rhythm. I also include a section on the survival horror video game genre, which is a subgenre of the action-adventure video game genre. As *The Last of Us* is the text that I selected for this study and fits within the survival horror video game genre, this section is covered more thoroughly than the other video game genre sections.

*Action-Adventure Video Game Genre*

Action-adventure cinema in the late 20th century was defined by visual representations of action and enemies suffering from the hero's prevalence. Most protagonists in this genre tend to be hyper-masculine white men situated in foreign contexts, like Soviet Russia in the 80s, and their goal was to defeat the enemies and save another character or represent their country. These films were notable for their emphasis on action and spectacle over narrative or character development (Eagle 142). In a similar manner, action and adventure television also follows this similar trope. Some television shows which fit this genre include *The Sweeney*, *Robin Hood*, and

*The A-Team*. The genre was influenced by Cold War era politics, where narratives about spies

and surveillance were prominent. Narratives within the action-adventure genre involve heroes

dealing with elemental fears, most often claustrophobia as open spaces are integral to these

television programs. Over time, the action-adventure genre on television began to face a decline

in the mid-1990s, as only one percent of series were categorized within this specific genre

(Miller 31-3).

Just like how the action-adventure genre is depicted in other media, games within the

action-adventure genre typically emphasize players using combat to advance further in the game

with acts like punching, slashing, or shooting while in intense situations. Characters can equip

items like weapons, keys, or tools in order to progress further in the game. During non-combat

sections, players are encouraged to explore their environments and interact with characters or

solve puzzles. Some video games can feature more combat sections over exploration and vice

versa. Games within this genre include *Street Fighter*, *Halo*, and *Myst* (Campbell et al. 86;

Egenfeldt-Nielsen 43; Elliot et al. 156; Suckling and Walton 49; Wolf 262). The first known

action-adventure game was a text-based game called *Adventure* which was released in 1976 for

the Atari 2600 console by Don Woods and Willie Crowther. The game featured text that

described the scenery and it was up to the player to type their actions. *Adventure* garnered a lot

of success and sold one million copies and inspired other games in the genre (Robinett x). I

discuss the conventions of role-playing video games in the next section.

*Role-Playing Video Game Genre*

Most texts within the fantasy genre defy generic classification as they deal with differing

plot elements that do not fit neatly within categorization (Johnson 56-7). It should be noted that

*Dungeons & Dragons*, a paper-and-pencil role-playing game, influenced the creation of role-

playing games in the 1980s like *Final Fantasy* (Campbell et al. 88; Suckling and Walton 50).

*Dungeons & Dragons*, which was inspired by J.R.R. Tolkein's Middle Earth series, is situated in

a fantasy world with magic and creatures where players can create their personas and customize

their attributes and class. Another player has to play the role of the "dungeon master" and

determine how the story plays out, help the other players visualize the world they are situated in,

and act as non-player characters (NPCs) who interact with other players in the world. It set the

standard for table-top role-playing games and inspired similar games in different worlds to be

produced (Waggoner 13).

Very similar to *Dungeons and Dragons*, role-playing video games are characterized by

the fantasy setting and the players selecting or creating characters with certain skills and

backgrounds, which can influence the combat sequences with enemies and can lead to multiple

outcomes. The online version of role-playing games are Massively Multiplayer Online Role-

Playing Games (MMORPGs) which feature players creating their own characters, called avatars,

and interacting and collaborating with other online players in the massively created world. An

example of a role-playing game is *Final Fantasy*, which features dynamic plots and character

narratives (Campbell et al. 88; Chandler and Munday; Elliot 156; Wolf 26).

*Strategy and Simulation Video Game Genre*

Many strategy and simulation video games were inspired by war films because the genre

is defined by conflict, history, action, and adventure. Like action and adventure films, war films

featured masculine white male protagonists in a foreign environment. War films allow an

audience to view exhilarating battles between good versus evil without having to ever experience

combat. In fact, films that cover on-going wars will be embraced by the public despite being

controversial. Though the genre is changing over time as stories are featuring more gray characters and critical perspectives to wars that are the subject of these films (Davenport vii-ix).

Strategy and simulation video games share similarities to role-playing video games, except they emphasize battles and logical thinking and planning in order to be successful. Games within this genre occupy a space within action-adventure games. Players often have access to view the whole playing field, which can influence the decisions they make while playing the game. Just like war films, players can view the on-going battles without having to partake in the combat besides giving commands. *StarCraft* defines the strategy game genre as it is played competitively around the world. Players typically study maps and brainstorm strategies before competing in a match. In order to win, players must pay close attention to their opponent's actions (Campbell et al. 88; Egenfeldt et al. 43; Elliot 156; Suckling and Walton 51; Wolf 273). In the following section, I explain what casual video games are and describe their characteristics.

*Casual Video Game Genre*

Casual video games are distinguished by simple and quick gameplay and often can be addictive to players. Many video games in this genre tend to be puzzle games, as they are the most accessible and easy to learn. The first video game identified as a "casual game" was *Tetris*, which is also a puzzle game, when it came in a bundle with a Game Boy in 1989. More modern examples of games that fit within the casual game genre include *Angry Birds*, *Candy Crush Saga*, and *Words with Friends*, which became popular due to the accessibility of smart phones (Campbell et al. 89; Suckling and Walton 52). In the following section, I discuss the conventions of the sports and driving video game genre.

*Sports and Driving Video Game Genre*

Sports media is a way for fans to satisfy their personal and cultural needs for storytelling when they form loyalties to teams, watch games, and celebrate team victories. One example of a sporting event that is broadcasted nationally is the Super Bowl, which is the most viewed television program in the US. ESPN has become the premier network for sports broadcasting since its inception in 1979, as they specialize in live sports where they broadcast sporting events in real time to audiences in the comfort of their homes. Each year, ESPN airs thousands of hours of sports programing from a range of sixty-five different sports (Campbell et al. 198; Brookes 199-201). In tandem to sports broadcasting is sports journalism, which *Sports Illustrated* has redefined for decades through its coverage of major league sports to recreational sports. Although they are the leading publication for sports journalism, one of their main competitors is the ESPN magazine (Campbell et al. 327).

Inspired by sports television and journalism, sports films tell stories situationally and often times fictionally than cover actual sporting events in real time. For example, films from Charlie Chaplin in the 20s featured him partaking in sports in a comedic manner. One of the most defining sports films is *Rocky* which was known for its characters and memorable theme song and won the Academy Award for Best Picture in the 70s. Sports films are known for their realistic action sequences, which either feature real life athletes playing themselves or actors undergoing intensive training to learn how to play their character's sport. Directors frame the shots in these films to place the viewer in the action by using multiple cameras and strategic editing. In regards to the stories of these films, filmmakers often tell an underdog stories, which feature protagonists struggling in their sport, who eventually overcome adversity and succeed (Edgington et al. vii-ix).

Sports and driving games simulate televised team sports and professional race car driving events and can sometimes require a special motion controller, which makes the gameplay feel more realistic and allows players to connect with the teams they are representing on an interactive level compared to other sports media. These games can have players playing competitively or cooperatively. A defining game in this genre is *Madden NFL* which allows players to control their teams and play football as if they were watching Monday Night Football (Bogost 129; Campbell et al. 89; Elliot 156; Wolf 272). Just as sports games drive a competitive or collaborative nature among players, music games foster the same feeling but through musical instruments and virtual stage presence, which I discuss in the following section.

*Music and Rhythm Video Game Genre*

Music has impacted American culture in a significant manner, as it is a medium that affirms our identities and can be used as a tool for social change. Popular music has existed in many forms throughout multiple generations and is viewed by parents and sometimes government officials as controversial and corrupting the youth. (Campbell et al. 115). Today, listeners can listen to MP3 files through the Internet, originally through illegal downloading through file-sharing sites like Napster in the early 2000s, until Spotify and Apple Music emerged as primary music streaming services. (Campbell et al. 120-1).

Television has played an active role in transmitting live music to audiences in their homes, which influenced record sales. Live performances on television shows like *Your Hit Parade*, *American Bandstand*, and *Top of the Pops* were enhanced by visual elements like lighting, camera effects, and editing, which in turn enhanced both the music and the performers and were an integral part of pop music in the 1950s. Decades later, MTV came into emergence in 1981 and changed the way audiences consume music through television, as it was a channel

dedicated to music and showcased different pop artists' videos back to back (Donnelly 201-3).

Eventually, YouTube and Vevo became the primary sites for popular artists to upload their

music videos for instant streaming to global audiences (Campbell et al. 121).

Inspired by elements from MTV concerts and music videos, music and rhythm games

involve players using an instrument controller, a camera, or a dance pad to play, sing, or dance

along with the music and the onscreen cues. Music and rhythm games simulate the act of

performing in front of an audience. One example of a very popular music game is *Rock Band*

which allows multiple players to play along to hits from their favorite rock bands on the drums,

guitar, or microphone. The game tests the player's reflexes as they have to hit the correct notes in

tandem with the song or else they will "fail" (Campbell et al. 89-90; Elliot 156; Suckling and

Walton 51; Wolf 271). Since understanding the survival horror video game genre is a significant

part of my analysis, I thoroughly cover the conventions of the genre and include examples of

video games other than *The Last of Us* that are classified under this genre.

*Survival Horror Video Game Genre*

As a genre, horror features simple plots portrayed in a compelling and terrifying manner

and many subgenres exist from this broad genre; they include slashers, thrillers, and monster

films (Sanders 203). Henry Jenkins provides another different but similar definition for the

horror film genre, whom he cites film critic Robin Wood describing the genre as monsters

threatening "the norm" and arguing that American horror films encourage audiences to embrace

these monsters and reject such norm (45). Some popular films in this genre include Alfred

Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), the predecessor to the slasher film, George A. Romero's *Night of the

Living Dead*, which was one of the first zombie films and was an inspiration for many survival

horror video games including *The Last of Us*, and James Wan's *The Conjuring* (2013), which is a

supernatural thriller film. While it may seem that directors created horror films organically from exploring the terrifying aspects of the human psyche, horror literature from the nineteenth century inspired the genre, which feature monsters as an integral part of the plot. These monsters symbolize humans meddling with the supernatural (Altman 224).

The plot for horror films typically starts off by portraying the protagonist's mundane lifestyle, which shifts into the "exceptionally heightened" to show a glimpse of the supernatural. Horror films in the 1970s utilized simple visual effects, still camera shots, and editing used mainly for suspense over art (Hand 39). The "sexually disturbed but entirely human monsters" perform on screen murders, which prominently feature female characters as victims (Williams 145). Many feminist scholars have linked the visual deaths of female characters to sadism, sexual fetishization, and being pornographic in nature (Williams 148). Laura Mulvey is a prominent scholar who argues that "the male gaze" is a prominent aspect of film, which suggests that filmmakers portray female characters as objects of desire for male characters and viewers. Another compelling trope of the genre is the "final girl," who is the last female character who embodies traditional femininity but briefly embodies masculine actions in order to stay alive and kill the antagonist (Sanders 241).

Horror films mostly appeal to teenagers, and critics imply that teens are attracted to this genre because horror films are packed with "anti-adult messages and [do] not appeal to most adults" (Campbell et al. 244). It should also be noted that another demographic of audiences who consume horror films are men, which is why films almost never feature men as victims, although more efforts have been made in contemporary cinema to offer this kind of representation (Sanders 241). Also, more horror films in contemporary cinema focus on shocking the audience

with the use of gratuitous blood and gore and creating narratives inspired by true crime stories (Sanders 252).

Just like how horror films borrow aspects from horror literature to create their own art form, survival horror video games were inspired by both horror literature and horror films, especially films that involve zombies and other monsters (Campbell et al. 88). While elements of video game studies came from film studies, it is important to note that audience participation is the major factor that separates video games from films, since the video game narrative cannot progress without it (Arsenault 114). After all, if the player does not move the character, the environment around the character will stay dormant, with the exception of the enemies. Survival horror as a label is unique to video games because it accounts for player interactivity, which means that compared to horror films and television, players have the ability to control characters to "survive" the virtual horror-themed contexts.

According to Campbell, Martin, and Fabos, survival horror games are a sub-genre of adventure games that emphasize players controlling their characters to interact with other characters and their environment in order to solve puzzles (88). Games situated in this genre often feature environments that evoke fear and dread, as players attempt to survive against hostile monsters (Suckling and Walton 50). Survival horror video games have been classified as very violent since they require players participating in some form of combat in order to advance in the game and prevent their characters from dying a very gruesome death (Campbell et al. 95). The most common enemy in survival horror video games are zombies, which have been described as creatures that are killed without any moral dilemma from the protagonist's and player's actions (Hart 335).

Much of the criticism made towards the survival horror genre applies to many games in the market, but most of it seems to revolve around *Resident Evil* specifically, a game that is viewed by many players as the pioneer to the genre. *Resident Evil* was released in 1996 by Capcom for the PlayStation and was classified as one of the few video games in the market where zombies are the primary enemy. The game involves three characters, Jill, Chris, and Barry, in a police task force named STARS, who take shelter in a mansion after being attacked by zombie dogs are searching for their missing comrades. Players shoot enemies, pick up items, and solve puzzles. As a videogame, it features B-movie style bad dialogue, a specific example is when Jill escapes a closing room and Barry mentions that she almost became "a Jill sandwich," and enhances the "zombie experience" by including player interactivity, which is something that horror films do not incorporate. Resource management is an integral part of the game, as players have limited supplies and weapons to defend themselves, which heightens the tension the players feel and adds a sense of realism to the story (Fencott et al. 74; Marak 150-151).

Before Capcom released *Resident Evil* 7 this year, which is the most current game in the series, *Resident Evil 6* was released in 2012 and was heavily criticized for deviating from its survival horror roots by having the gameplay revolved around the action video game genre (Cummings). Even Shinji Mikami, the creator and director of *Resident Evil 1-4*, admitted that the survival horror genre was not what it used to be, as he wants to refocus his games on the fear aspect of survival horror and emphasize less on action. He intended to "fix" the genre by releasing *The Evil Within,* which was released in 2014 (Stuart). *The Evil Within* received average reviews from critics, which included praise towards gameplay elements, but criticism was directed towards the convoluted plot and forgettable characters (McInnis). After going through

each video game genre, I intend to discuss the characteristics of video game players and the reasons why they play video games.

**Video Game Players**

The game industry is constantly shifting to include players' interests as gaming formats fall in and out of popularity. For example, social network games like *Farmville* on Facebook are not as popular anymore, while virtual reality games are starting to emerge. In a study conducted by Pew Research Center in 2015, about half of American adults have ever played a video game, but only 10% of people consider themselves to be "gamers". Also there is an equal number of men and women who play video games, though men are twice as likely to identify as "gamers" (Duggan). Many people who do not identify as "gamers" are playing games as video games are becoming more accessible on phones, tablets, and computers.

Along with accessibility, the way we interact with video games is changing as "tandem play," which refers to when two or more players engage with a single-player game and has existed since home consoles were invented, is becoming digital. Specifically, viewers are tuning into the live streaming site Twitch.tv, which is a platform for gamers to broadcast their gameplay along with commentary to spectators. An alternative to live streaming is recorded "Let's Plays" where players upload recorded videos of their gameplay on YouTube. What makes these gameplay videos compelling are the gamers' reactions to failure to the game's assigned missions. While gamers dislike failure, it is necessary for players to learn how to progress. Also, players enjoy games less if they perceive them to be too easy (Consalvo 84-5).

Player habits of video games can range from casual to hardcore and psychologists have been studying gamers to understand why they play video games. Juan Alberto Estallo used reinforcement theory, which is defined by the boost of self-esteem that players experience, to

gather a list of conclusions, which include players applying symbolic value to the games they play and find their own rewards while playing. Estallo also noted that video game players have "high level[s] of creativity and extroversion, and a heightened capacity for learning" (Egenfeldt et al. 149-50). Just like how players' interactions with a video game are significant, video game narrative allows players to connect with the characters and the virtual world on a deeper level, which I will explore in the following section.

**Video Game Narrative**

Narrative is defined as "a representation of sets of events chose for their contribution to an unfolding plot with a beginning, middle, and an end" (Tavinor 20). From a very simple standpoint, a game is a "framework for structured play" as it requires a goal, challenges, ways for players to reach that goal, and penalties (Pearce 144-5). Essentially, players must understand their positionality in a simulated situation before taking action and playing through the game. Narratives create context and inform players of such situation, which can lead to focused interpretations instead of chaotic possibilities (Nitsche 43). Although many video games on the market exist without a coherent narrative, like digital pinball or digital chess, video games separate themselves from other media through the combination of narrative and gameplay together. Also, narration in video games challenges traditional notions of storytelling because the overall story experience is told by both the player and game itself (Thabet 1).

Video games need narrative as they "provide a natural transition framework into virtual worlds through emotional engagement and personal identification" (Zarzycki 209). Narratives as a form are universal and intrinsic in human nature to seeking connection with other people and ideas. Also, video game narratives provide extraordinary experiences and simulations in an accessible manner, as some in-game actions cannot be performed in real life (Lee et al. 269-70).

A narrative form that video games take is the multiform story, which is described as "a written or dramatic narrative that presents a single situation or plotline in multiple versions, versions that would be mutually exclusive in our ordinary experience" (Murray 30). This narrative form gives the most players agency, because they can customize their characters appearances and use different strategies to advance in the game. Once the players reach the climax of the game, they can be presented with different endings depending on their performance throughout the game. The players are then enticed to replay the game multiple times to achieve all the endings. In terms of similarities to other narrative formats, video game narratives follow "the emotional curve of a dramatic arc" (Pearce 145). Specifically, video game narratives will feature a protagonist, controlled by the player, who will face a conflict and will go out of their way to defeat the person or thing causing such conflict.

It should be noted that games are defined by both gameplay and narrative, as the player experience is taken into account. The adaptation of narrative to video games has opened up new opportunities as literary techniques like second-person narration is more suitable for interaction in the video game's story compared to other media formats (Wolf 304). Narrative based games are effective and successful because they take the compelling aspects of other narrative formats and apply it to enhance the gameplay experience (Pearce 144). A major part of video game narratives is player immersion, which describes how players emotionally connect with the story and the characters of the video games they are playing.

*Player Immersion*

Through video games, players can live through stories and play a role in the narration of the game. Although video games have been described as "interactive," there are other ways to explore the medium as the term does not describe narrative immersion. Specifically, video games

can tell us a lot about ourselves as players and make the narrative a personal experience. Through playing the game, the player owns the story through a "psychological dimension and a unique meaning-making process" (Thabet 3). Specifically, players identifying with their characters is a form of embodied empathy, which expresses how characters are an extension of the players themselves (Aldred 357). In other words, players experience a journey with their characters and will do anything in their power to keep them alive. The experience becomes ethereal as they build a connection with their characters by taking specific and drastic actions to complete their story. It should also be noted that players experience a transformation, where players can feel like they are a part of the video game world by interacting with different game elements (Nitsche 209).

It is important to identify the role of the game player, as the player is involved in the story and the game universe by acting through the protagonist. Players assume three different roles when playing games: the protagonist, the narrator, and the audience (Thabet 5). As the narrator, players have control over how events are portrayed as they have control over the protagonist's actions and decisions, leaving a personal mark on the game's narrative itself (Lee et al. 266; Thabet 20-1). Despite players being engaged with the story of the video game, they are never expected to be pushed beyond their level of comfort, as stories are compelling to varying degrees of engagement (Suckling and Walton 303).

The player also has the unique role of controlling the camera and sequence of actions, thus fitting the role of the narrator of the game as they have control over the information presented on screen (Thabet 24). This is typically done by the player moving the right thumb stick to bring the frame to a comfortable angle. It should be understood that the "placement" and aesthetics of the camera differs, depending on the point of view. In first-person games, the player

does not see the character during gameplay sections and only sometimes during cutscenes. Through this point of view, it creates an illusion of the player taking on the role of the protagonist which is a form of immersion. On the other hand, third-person games allow the players to act as puppet masters, as their protagonists are shown from behind. Some distance is created between the player and the protagonist, but the immersion is still present (Thabet 39). Although video games are known for player agency, there are moments when the story needs to progress in a fixed manner through cutscenes.

*Cutscenes*

Cutscenes are described as scenes with cinematic elements that briefly suspends gameplay sections to explain the section of the game the player is immersed in, where the players will go, and advance the plot and characterization. They also allow players to take a break from the gameplay aspects of the video game. The first known game with cutscenes is technically Pac-Man, as the game featured intermissions of animations with Pac-Man chasing the ghosts. The most defining game to feature cutscenes is *Final Fantasy VII*, which was released for the PlayStation in 1997, for its use of pre-rendered full-motion video. (Klevjer 301-2; Tavinor 112). They provide a different perspective and break player immersion because they are framed differently than the gameplay sections. It should also be noted that cut-scenes display events within the game's world and are fixed, as they lack player interactivity and are used to advance sections of the game's narrative (Juul 135).

Very recently, programmers have tried seamlessly integrating cutscenes with gameplay by using the same graphic engine for both sections (Crawford 259). Games in the 2000s, like *Grand Theft Auto III,* maintained player immersion by integrating real-time cinematics for aesthetic consistency. In comparison, modern games' cutscenes are generated in-game and they

are cheaper and easier to produce than in the past. Motion capture is a tool that developers use to enhance the performances for the games (Klevjer 303). Just as cutscenes are a major part of storytelling in video games, video game characters are the subjects of the story and allow players to become immersed in narrative of the game.

*Characterization*

Video game characters play multiple roles in game worlds that they are situated in: they are supposed to represent the player, are drivers that are supposed to advance the story, and act as symbols of the game and its title. Thus, players both identify with the character as a part of themselves while acknowledging their nature as a fictional person or being, which is described as the "double-consciousness" of play (Aldred 355). In other words, players can become immersed with the action on screen and their characters while not feel detached from reality when they pause the game or turn off the console and go about their ordinary lives. Games develop more compelling and dramatic narratives when multiple characters are involved, although the risks of implementing more complex characters is a lack of story cohesion and fickle amounts of player sympathy. Yet, these issues are determinant on how the characters are constructed in relation to the narrative. (Suckling and Walton 300-1).

As brands, iconic characters have been integral to the video game industry by creating brand awareness through their unique imagery. These characters entice fans to buy video games and themed merchandise, since they operate as a brand. These characters can also operate as icons to promote spin-off video game series, creating brand loyalty (Adlred 360). In the next section, I cover three theories to understand the immersive nature of video games and the new potentials for storytelling through new technology.

**Theories**

Since my study is analysis of genre and narrative in *The Last of Us*, the following theories that I feel would be appropriate to apply are new media theory, narrative theory, and genre theory. According to Mia Consalvo, theory is significant to Game Studies because "[it] can help us understand player behavior and perhaps provide a critique of systems, practices, or designs" (302). In other words, theory can allow us to understand both the video game itself and how players interact with the game, which can push the medium into new directions both aesthetically and technologically. New media theory is related to this belief as it implies that emerging technology emulates previous media (Barnes 218). Regarding video games, it is a medium that combines aspects of both literature and film and adds an interactive component. Three other implications of new media theory are immediacy, hypermediacy, and remediation. Immediacy is described as when a medium makes experiences immersive, which makes it easier for users to receive messages. For example, virtual reality allows users to interact with virtual environments, which makes the users forget that they are interacting with digital imagery. Tied to immediacy is hypermediacy which is described as different media combining with each other to become a single space, like television being shown through the internet through services like Netflix or Hulu. Lastly, remediation implies that new mediums take aspects from previous formats and create a rivalry in the process (Barnes 218-9).

In the context of video game narratives, narrative theory is defined in a basic sense as the "study and theory of narratives, or complex stories—what they are made of, how they are structured, and what we gain from using them as a vehicle for communication" (Browning 673). Narrative theory argues that "narratives and stories are powerful instruments of meaning-making, both in the formation of personal identity" and in video games (Waggoner 21). Narrative

theorists make the case for "true narratives" where they argue that it is compelling and features a type of moral (Browning 674). Narrative theory also points out that media texts allow us to make sense of the world around us and understand human nature and motives. If the storytelling in the selected text is effective, we lose awareness to our surroundings and find ourselves invest in the story of the game as players. This form of storytelling is something that is more effective through digital media like video games (Waggoner 34). Players identify with video game narratives because the characters situated in those stories convince players to persevere in times of conflict, which allows for players to identify or aspire to the characters' morals (Browning 676). Many video game theorists tend to focus on immersion to explain and understand the whole video game experience. Players immerse themselves in the visual worlds and express a comfortability with alternating simulated realities for real life (Waggoner 38).

Along with narrative theory, I also have found genre theory to be practical for this specific study as I am also providing an analysis of *The Last of Us* in relation to the genre it is situated in, which is survival horror. Genre theory is defined as "a diverse set of approaches or methods for identifying patterns in, and expectations for, a variety of communicative phenomena" (Gunn 442). Referring to Aristotle, who is the father of this theory, he argued that while it is suitable for speakers to disrupt norms within a form, by including different stylistic speech techniques, they must work within most of the conventions in order to satisfy the audience's expectations (Gunn 442). One significant aspect that is integral to genre theory is the "habitus," which are guides that inform players of the types of gameplay and stories they should expect out of the game. Video game theorists argue that players have to be obedient to the games rules in order for players to succeed and the players must be aware of and understand the genre conventions of the game they are playing, in order to have a wholesome experience with

identifying with characters and the themes of the story of the game. Another aspect of genre theory is that the genre of a particular game defines rules and influences the choices and behaviors players exhibit within the digital world, which is a fraction of identity construction and alteration (Waggoner 44-45). I conclude my literature in the next section, where I provide a summary of all of the studies I cited.

**Conclusion**

In my Literature Review, I provided background information regarding the history of video games, the political economy of the video game industry, an overview of different video game genres, who video game players are and why they play video games, video game narrative, and the theoretical frameworks I have selected for this study. After providing context on the history of video games and an overview of the political economy of the video game industry, I explained the compelling nature of genre. I found that genre is rooted in the idea of categorization, which is something that Aristotle valued when speaking in the public sphere, that media industries use to create formats that are familiar to audiences. Video game genre is different from other media since it considers gameplay elements along with the narrative. As I covered each video game genre and described the characteristics that define it along with examples of some video games, I contextualized each section by including other media that inspired each one.

Next, I described who video game players are and why they play video games. I found that although more people are playing video games, only a minority of the population in America consider themselves to be gamers. Also, although less people are playing video games together in a physical space, a lot of people turn to websites like Twitch or YouTube to watch their favorite gamers play video games. In the following section, I talk about aspects of video game

narrative and I found that storytelling through video games is powerful because of the agency that the game grants to the players.

I close this section by discussing the three theories I intend to integrate in my study are new media theory, narrative theory and genre theory. The basic implication of new media theory is that modern technology implements aspects of pre-existing media. Along with this, narrative theory is based on the ideas that storytelling allows us to make sense of the world and builds a part of our identities and video games allow players to experience conflict and understand their character's motives in certain situations. Regarding genre theory, players must understand the tropes and conventions of the game's genre in order to have a wholesome experience playing the game. In Chapter III, I will provide further detail into the method I will employ to analyze *The Last of Us*. I also intend to justify the method that I selected, cover further background information on my selected artifact, and I will provide specific details on how I will carry out my analysis.

**CHAPTER III: METHOD**

For this study, I will employ rhetorical criticism to deconstruct the *The Last of Us* in relation to its genre, which is survival horror. According to Hart and Daughton, a genre is defined as "a class of messages having important structural and content similarities and which, as a class, creates special expectations in an audience" (116). Genres tie specific texts together through previous themes, narrative structures, and tropes. As I am focusing on genre and narrative in *The Last of Us,* I specifically select generic criticism because I am interested in exploring how the game's narrative deviates from survival horror video game tropes. In a broad sense, generic criticism features the following implications: these genres maintain social norms, generic deviance is a slow but eventual process, and language is significant to the text (Hart and Daughton 119). According to Sonja K. Foss, generic critics "[seek] to discover commonalities in rhetorical patterns across recurring situations" (137). Beyond pointing out the patterns in a text in relation to its genre, it is also a critic's duty to understand the genre in relation to its text in order to have a deeper understanding of the rhetoric ingrained in the text and the rhetorical situation of both text and the genre. I intend to explore the ways in which *The Last of Us* deviates from the tropes present in the survival horror video game genre through its narrative. In this chapter, I explain why I selected generic criticism as my method for my analysis, the artifact I chose to analyze along with further background information, and the methodological steps of generic criticism.

**Justification of Method**

As my study deals with deconstructing the narrative and the survival horror video game genre in relation to *The Last of Us*, I feel that it would be best for me to apply generic criticism compared to other methodologies. One of the advantages of conducting textual analysis is the

deduction of themes, which will be my Chapter 4. As I have mentioned in previous chapters, it is evident that the game has a compelling narrative and breaks genre conventions, so I intend for my research to explain why and how the game tells its story and breaks genre conventions in the process. Also compared to other methodologies like ethnography or quantitative content analysis, it is the most accessible since I do not have to buy expensive equipment or gather participants for my study, as I already own both a PS4 and a copy of *The Last of Us: Remastered*. Lastly, although my study will feature a personal and singular interpretation of the game, I anticipate that my study will start further conversations about *The Last of Us*' narrative and how the game subverts tropes in the survival horror video game genre. In the following section, I explore other aspects of *The Last of Us* that would be beneficial to understanding my analysis.

**Artifact**

The video game that I will be analyzing is *The Last of Us*, which was released in 2013 for the PS3 by Naughty Dog, which is a video game company owned by Sony. *The Last of Us: Remastered* was released in 2014 for the PS4 by Naughty Dog and features the same exact gameplay and modes as the original game with a few new features (Young 459-61). This version of the game includes improved graphics, new game modes and costumes for the online multiplayer mode, a photo mode, where you can pause the game and control an in-game camera to take pictures of the characters and the scenery, and *The Last of Us: Left Behind*, which is downloadable content that was released separately for the PS3 version of the game and costs $19.99 to download digitally. Since *The Last of Us: Remastered* has all these extra features compared to the PS3 version of the game, it requires at least 50 gigabytes (GB) worth of space on the PS4 console. For context, that is 1/10 of memory space available for the 500 GB PS4 or

1/20 of memory space for the 1 terabyte (TB) PS4. In comparison, the PS3 version of the game only required 27 GB of space. Considering completion time, *The Last of Us: Remastered* can be completed in 14.5 hours on average play time, according to the website HowLongToBeat ("The Last of Us Remastered"). I intend to cite *The Last of Us: Remastered* over the regular PS3 version, since it features both the main campaign and *The Last of Us: Left Behind*, both of which I will integrate into my analysis.

In regards to the lead developers of *The Last of Us*, Neil Druckmann is the creative director while Bruce Straley is the game director. Neil Druckmann wrote the script for the game and was inspired by a game concept he created while he was a graduate student at Carnegie Mellon University in 2004. George A. Romero, who was an acclaimed director in horror cinema, was a guest in one of his classes and students were required to pair into groups and pitch a concept to the director. Druckmann took influences from a PlayStation 2 game *Ico (2001)*, Frank Miller's graphic novel *Sin City,* and George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead (1968)* to create his game concept. The concept itself featured a cop and a young girl surviving a zombie-infested world. Compared to other games that had escort missions, the cop character was not powerful as his vulnerability was his heart condition. Whenever he would be affected by his heart, the girl character would take over and protect the both of them. Ultimately, Romero selected another group's concept and this zombie concept was shelved until Druckmann used this as the basis for *The Last of Us* ("IGDA Toronto 2013 Keynote: Neil Druckmann, Creative Director & Writer, Naughty Dog"; Webster).

Compared to film and television which can be accessible on multiple devices and formats, video games can only be played on video game consoles and computers. Specifically regarding *The Last of Us,* it can only be played on the PS3 or PS4 systems. Also, *The Last of Us*

does not fit with in the casual video game genre, which means that players who are new to survival horror video games or have never played a video game may have difficulty with the controls of the game. This means that my readers may never have the chance to play the game since they do not have access to a PS3 or PS4 console or experience with survival horror video games. Therefore, it would be best to provide a summary of the game, which will be featured in the next paragraph. I intend to retell the events of the main campaign of *The Last of Us* by the title "*Main Campaign,*" while the title for *The Last of Us: Left Behind* downloadable content will be labeled as "*The Last of Us: Left Behind*". In order to make my game summaries easier to follow, I will implement additional headings that describe a specific section of the game.

*Main Campaign*

**Prologue**

It is the year 2013 and a man named Joel is trying to escape Infected with his daughter Sarah and his brother Tommy. When they crash into another car, Joel has to carry Sarah, while Tommy protects them. After being chased by two Infected and leaving Tommy behind, they are saved by a soldier who shoots the Infected down. Unfortunately, he shoots them next. Before, the soldier can shoot Joel in the face, Tommy shoots the soldier with Joel's revolver. Despite this save, Sarah took most of the bullets and dies from her wounds. Joel cries carrying his dead daughter in his arms.

**Title Sequence**

This sequence shows fungi growing and shooting out spores in black and white, while showing title credits of the individuals who worked on developing the game along with the names of the lead actors, Troy Baker and Ashley Johnson, who play as Joel and Ellie respectively. In terms of the audio aspects of this sequence, it features the title theme music and

audio clips of news reports talking about infection spreading over parts of America and the country resorting to martial law to handle the Infected.

**Summer**

Joel wakes up from a presumed nightmare and players are shown text that reads "20 Years Later," which means that Joel is now in his late 40s and lives in Boston. After living in this world for 20 years, Joel resorted to drug smuggling. His partner Tess comes back after making a drop and is bruised in the face after being beat up by men who were sent by one of their clients, Robert. After getting caught in gun fights and negotiations, they finally catch and kill Robert, who reveals that he sold the guns to the leader of the Fireflies, Marlene. The Fireflies is a militia group resisting against the martial law present in America.

Marlene shows up suddenly and tells Joel and Tess that she will give them their guns back if they do a favor for her. They eventually discover that they have to smuggle Ellie, a 14-year-old girl, to the Capitol building. Joel, Tess, and Ellie leave in the middle of the night to get to the Capitol building. Along their travels, they are attacked by both the military and Infected and Ellie reveals that she is immune to the virus. When they get to the Capitol building, Tess reveals to Joel and Ellie that she was bitten. She sacrifices herself to the military to allow Joel and Ellie to escape.

Joel and Ellie's course changes and they reach a mysterious town where they encounter Bill, Joel's business partner, as they escape hordes of Infected together. Bill is reluctant to find them a functioning car but eventually complies. When they get to the garage of a high school, Bill is shocked that his truck's engine is missing, so they find shelter in a house, only to encounter the dead body of Bill's partner Frank. As Bill mourns his loss, Ellie finds a truck in the garage of the house. They drop Bill off at the edge of town and drive westward.

In the car, Joel and Ellie bond over a comic book called *Savage Starlight*, Hank Williams' discography, and a gay pornographic magazine that Ellie stole from Bill's shack. Joel and Ellie are ambushed by Hunters in Pittsburgh and crash the truck in a convenience store and barely escape the Hunters. After Joel and Ellie explore more of Pittsburgh, they encounter Sam and Henry, who are brothers. When they are being ambushed by Hunters, a ladder breaks and Sam and Henry decide to leave Joel and Ellie behind.

After cutting through a restaurant, Hunters lead them to a broken freeway bridge, which prompts them to jump into the river. The two of them drown, but are saved by Henry and Sam. After cutting through a sewer system, they enter a suburb full of Hunters. The four eventually escape and find shelter and food.

The next morning, Joel, Henry, and Ellie wake up to an Infected Sam attacking Ellie. Henry is initially reluctant to shoot Sam, but eventually does so. Henry starts to cry to himself and points his gun at Joel before shooting himself in the head.

### Fall

Months have passed since that incident and Joel and Ellie reach Wyoming on foot to find Tommy. Joel and Ellie eventually reach a powerplant and they meet Tommy and his wife Maria. Joel asks Tommy if they can speak privately. When they find an empty room, Joel reveals to Tommy that Ellie is immune and asks him to drop off Ellie to the Fireflies. Tommy refuses, which causes them to argue until Hunters ambush the power plant. Joel, Tommy, and the other workers fight off the Hunters to get to Ellie and Maria.

After speaking with Maria, Tommy confirms his obligation to Joel. They realize that Ellie ran off, so they get on horseback and find Ellie at an abandoned ranch. Joel goes upstairs to

find Ellie in a girl's room. Joel, Ellie, and Tommy kill the Hunters inside and escape the ranch on horseback. Joel tells Tommy that he is willing to take Ellie to the Fireflies, so they part ways.

Joel and Ellie reach the University of Eastern Colorado campus and are closer to finding the Fireflies. They eventually reach the science building of the university, which is the presumed location of the Fireflies, only to run into a dead corpse and a recorder, which tells them that the Fireflies escaped to Salt Lake City. Joel and Ellie attempt to escape the university and in the process, Joel falls off a balcony and gets impaled by a metal rod after fighting a Hunter. Eventually, Joel and Ellie escape and get back to the horse but during their ride, Joel falls and passes out and Ellie tries to help him back up.

**Winter**

A few months pass, and Ellie runs into two mysterious men, David and James, after hunting a deer. David offers to trade the deer for anything that Ellie wants, which leads Ellie to request for antibiotics. As James leaves to get the antibiotics, they get ambushed by Infected, so they escape to a warehouse. Once the Infected are clear, David reveals that Joel and Ellie killed his men at the university. David insists on Ellie joining his group, but she refuses and takes the medicine from James before leaving. She escapes on horseback and tends to Joel in the basement of a house before falling asleep.

The next morning, she discovers that David sent his men to track Ellie. Ellie diverts them from the house and takes shelter in an abandoned lodge resort, only to be found by David who knocks her out. Ellie wakes up in a cell to the sight of James cutting up a human body. David tries to flirt with her and Ellie plays along before she breaks his fingers.

The next few hours, Joel wakes up revived but slightly injured. He goes outside to find Ellie, only to be ambushed by Hunters. Outside of a house, Joel beats up two Hunters and drags

them into a house. He tortures them to inquire about Ellie's whereabouts, where they reveal that she is with David in the town. Before Joel leaves the house, he kills both men.

Ellie wakes up to James and David dragging her onto the cutting table. She lies about being infected. While they are distracted, Ellie kills James with a meat cleaver and escapes from David. Ellie escapes other Hunters and finds shelter in an abandoned steak restaurant. When she encounters David, Ellie stabs him three times before he knocks the both of them out. Joel follows Ellie's path and realizes that David's group are cannibals when he sees dead bodies hung upside down. He leaves the meat shop and encounters a burning building.

In the final sequence, an injured Ellie wakes up and crawls to reach for David's machete. She eventually grasps David's machete and slashes his hand before gaining control and hacking away at his face. Joel eventually enters the burning steak restaurant and consoles a traumatized Ellie and escorts her outside the building.

**Spring**

Joel and Ellie explore Salt Lake City and encounter a giraffe and bond over it. Joel tries to convince Ellie to forget about going to the Fireflies, but she insists on seeing them. At a power plant, Joel falls in the water prompting Ellie to jump in and save Joel, which causes the both of them to drown. As Joel saves Ellie and performs CPR on her, the Fireflies arrive and knock Joel out

When Joel wakes up in the hospital, Marlene tells him that they were able to save Ellie. When Joel tries to look for her, Marlene informs him that they are planning to extract Ellie's brain to understand her immunity, which will kill her. After Marlene leaves, Joel kills every Firefly in his sight. He picks up a comatose Ellie in the operating room and runs to the elevator while being chased by Fireflies. When the elevator door opens, Marlene threatens Joel at

gunpoint to let go of Ellie. Joel shoots Marlene and escapes with Ellie by car. When she wakes up she asks what happened and Joel lies by saying that they Fireflies stopped looking for a cure.

### Epilogue

Eventually the car runs out of gas and they reach the power plant in Wyoming. Joel and Ellie hike and reach the top of the hill. Ellie stops him before they continue any further to ask whether Joel was telling the truth or not. He promises, which leads to Ellie saying, "Okay" before the screen cuts to black.

*The Last of Us: Left Behind*

For context, this downloadable content takes place before the events of the main campaign and in between the Fall and Winter chapters. The game warns players that they should play the main campaign of the game before playing this downloadable content, in order to avoid being shown scenes from the main campaign of the game that are major spoilers.

### Present 1

The game reminds players of the events that take place towards the end of the Fall chapter when Joel gets gravely injured at the university. It ends with him passing out and Ellie trying to help him up.

### Flashback 1

This scene is set before Ellie met Joel and she is living at the military school in Boston. She is asleep in her pajamas and wakes up to her friend Riley pretending to be an Infected. It is revealed that Ellie had not seen Riley in a long time and expresses concern for her. Riley convinces her to join her for a surprise. Ellie reluctantly follows her.

**Present 2**

Ellie takes refuge in a frozen yogurt shop at a mall where she tries to look for medical supplies for Joel's wound. When she finds an empty medical kit at a pharmacy, Ellie decides to explore the rest of the mall to find another one.

**Flashback 2**

Riley and Ellie jump rooftops to get to the mall undetected from the military. Once they reach the mall, they decide to visit their deceased friend's old tent and drink his whiskey in his memory. They eventually enter a Halloween store and try on different masks. Next, they have a car window breaking contest. If Ellie wins, she gets to ask Riley a question and the players are given a choice between four personal questions. Afterwards, they go to the basement of the mall to find the generator room and turn on the power.

**Present 3**

Ellie enters the basement of the mall to turn on the power for an electric gate. In the process, she gets attacked by Infected but manages to restore power. Ellie opens the door and is able to jump into a helicopter, retrieving the medical kit.

**Flashback 3**

When they open the doors, Riley shows Ellie a functioning merry-go-round. Riley operates the ride, while Ellie jumps on a horse and enjoys the ride. Next, the two of them read jokes out of a joke book and then decide to enter a photobooth. When they finish, Ellie and Riley try to print out their photos, which leads the machine to malfunction. Afterwards, they decide to take the escalator to go upstairs to play an arcade game. The machine is broken but Riley gets Ellie to close her eyes and imagine playing the game. Players are given button prompts to press in order to win the imaginary match. When Riley wants to explore the rest of the mall, Ellie tells

her that she needs to head back to school and that they can hang out another time. Riley reveals to Ellie that Marlene is ordering her to leave Boston. Riley runs away when Ellie tells her to go with the Fireflies.

She ends up finding Riley in an abandoned department store, where they argue about Riley leaving Ellie in the past. They eventually decide to have a water gun fight before they leave the mall. After the water gun fight, Riley grabs Ellie's Walkman and blasts an Etta James' "I Got You Babe" in the department store, where the dance on top of jewelry displays. Eventually Ellie stops and feels sad about Riley leaving. Because she is happy that Ellie told her not to go, Riley rips off her Fireflies dog tag, which prompts Ellie to kiss her. Ellie apologizes but Riley expresses her happiness with the kiss. Their happy moment is interrupted when the music attracts Infected and they try to escape the mall in the process.

**Present 4**

Ellie eventually jumps out the helicopter and encounters both Infected and Hunters along the way. As soon as she reaches the Frozen Yogurt shop, she gets shot at by another round of Hunters. She kills them all before she enters the shop and tends to Joel.

**Flashback 4**

While the music is still playing in the background, Ellie and Riley attempt to escape from the Infected running after them. Ellie tries pushing an Infected away and gets bitten in the process. Riley kills the Infected, before being attacked by another Infected, which Ellie beheads. They both find bitemarks on their body and realize that they are infected.

**Epilogue**

This moment blends both the past and the present together. Ellie enters the shop and stitches up Joel's wounds. The next scene cuts to Ellie smashing pots and screaming out of

frustration. She gets consoled when Riley tells her that they should stick together even though they could turn into Infected. This monologue is spliced with a scene from the present where Ellie put Joel on a sled and contemplates her past before leaving the mall in Colorado. When Ellie asks about the possibility of staying alive, Riley tells her "Sorry" and they decide to stand up. After thoroughly summarizing the plots of the main campaign of *The Last of Us* and *The Last of Us: Left Behind*, I discuss the methodological steps of generic criticism in the following section.

**Methodological Steps**

According to Sonja K. Foss, there are four basic steps in the application of generic criticism to a text:

(1) describing the perceived situational requirements, substantive and stylistic strategies, and organizing principle of a genre; (2) describing the perceived situational requirements, substantive and stylistic strategies, and organizing principle of an artifact that is representative of that genre; (3) comparing the characteristics of the artifact with those of the genre; and (4) evaluating the artifact according to its success in fulfilling the required characteristics of the genre (144).

In other words, critics will have to list the generic conventions of a particular genre, list the conventions of a text within the particular genre, compare and contrast the characteristics, then analyze how a text fits or does not fit within the conventions of that genre.

As I am applying generic criticism to analyze *The Last of Us* in relation to the larger survival horror video game genre, I will conduct a similar but revised and specific version of the method. First, I must play through both the main campaign and *The Last of Us: Left Behind* at least once, while taking note of what is happening on screen. I will also write brief

interpretations of scenes along with my feelings towards scenes. These notes will allow me to process larger moments being portrayed on-screen in relation to generic conventions of the survival horror video game genre. Next, I will take major points from my Literature Review regarding different genres and create bullet points. Doing this will make it easier to cross examine genre conventions and brainstorm appropriate scenes from the game to include in my analysis. After making connections, I will organize major points into an outline and create subheadings. Lastly, I will flesh out each major point in the outline and include a thorough analysis of the game. I will be analyzing how *The Last of Us* challenges tropes present in the survival horror video game genre through its narrative, which can range from dialogue to the visual aesthetics. In the following section, I conclude my method section by providing an overview of the previous sections.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I further explore the nature of generic criticism and how I can apply it to conduct my analysis on *The Last of Us,* the reasons I specifically chose generic criticism as my methodology, further information on the game ranging from memory requirements to plot summaries, and the methodological steps of generic criticism. In the following chapter, I will analyze *The Last of Us* in relation to its narrative and generic conventions.

## CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS

After providing contextual information on my methodology, I will analyze *The Last of Us'* narrative structure in relation to the survival horror genre and explain how the game subverts narrative and generic tropes present in the genre. My analysis will be divided into the following main sections: Narrative, Character Development, Literary Elements, Visual and Auditory Aesthetics, and Filmic Inspirations.

**Narrative**

When creating this game, Neil Druckmann did not set out to create another zombie video game, but rather a game that looks at the relationship between a man and a young girl and the sacrifices they make in order to protect each other from Infected and Hunters. When the players have an emotional attachment to Joel and Ellie's story, they become self-aware of the virtual environment and control the characters to use violence for self-defense rather than for spectacle. As I have mentioned previously, narration in video games challenges traditional notions of storytelling as the story experience is told by both the player and game itself (Thabet 1). This means that as the narrative of the game progresses, players create meaning from the visual narrative which can lead to them becoming emotionally involved with the lives of the on-screen characters. To create this rapport between the players and the characters, Neil Druckmann as a writer utilizes smaller and intimate moments to allow the players to get to know the characters on a personal level. Players do not have to worry about enemies being present at every moment and are allowed to explore empty buildings and open city environments through a linear path. The characters' interactions with artifacts from a pre-Infected America can lead to interesting side conversations, which can only be triggered if the players press triangle on the controller. This feature is unique to *The Last of Us* since other survival horror games focus on getting the players

from one point of the story to the other, while this game encourages interaction with other characters and exploration of the environment.

Essentially, *The Last of Us* is embodying the adventure aspect of the action-adventure genre, which is a larger genre for survival horror. For example, Joel and Ellie are given the chance to explore an abandoned hotel for supplies and letters left behind from survivors of the outbreak. Exploration is also a major part of *The Last of Us: Left Behind*, since there are only four major moments of combat in the game, which take place during the "present" sections. In the "flashback" sections, both Ellie and Riley spend time with each other at an abandoned mall together and gossip about their past, try on masks at a Halloween store, and play video games at an arcade. During these sections of the game, the players get to play fun mini-games that were not present in the main campaign like taking pictures at a photobooth or having a water gun fight. Players get to uncover and understand the relationship between these two girls through the isolation and the combat-free environment in select scenes, which leads to a larger understanding for Ellie's motivations for survival as the only immune human of the Cordyceps virus. These interactions allow players to immerse themselves in the relationships of the two characters on-screen and see the NPC as an ally rather than a nuisance to the players trying to beat the game. In the next section, I discuss how *The Last of Us* tells a story that is a father-daughter tale.

*Father-Daughter Tale*

Along with the encouragement for players to probe additional scenes of dialogue amongst the characters, *The Last of Us* manages to tell an emotional father-daughter tale between two characters who are not related to each other. This story is compelling for the player because it explores a type of relationship that is not typically portrayed in video games. In fact, Joel and Ellie view each other as major inconveniences in the beginning and comply with Marlene's

instructions so Joel can get his guns back and Ellie can be brought to a drop-off point. One of their first conversations with each other is when Joel asks about Ellie's parents, which leads her to coldly and sarcastically reply, "Where are anyone's parents? They've been gone a long, long time" (*The Last of Us: Remastered*). This is a very specific and subtle moment where the characters learn more about their familial histories, which shapes their perceptions of each other. This is one of many moments in the early part of the game which reveals how both Joel and Ellie are equally emotionally vulnerable characters who have experienced loss in this hostile world, specifically Joel losing his daughter and Ellie being raised without a mother and losing Riley through infection. It has been twenty years since Joel had a daughter, so he learns to act less hostile towards Ellie. Ellie eventually accepts him as her mentor and father figure and becomes independent when she learns how to fight and shoot a gun. Over time, they both learn to care for each other as they experience the good, the bad, and the ugly together.

Relationship building is something that is not present in other survival horror games, which focus on one character's journey for survival rather than two characters. *Resident Evil* may have allowed the players to play as two different characters, but players never get to see the two characters on screen at the same time, probably due to the limited technology at the time it was released. Although Ellie is an NPC, as she accompanies Joel for most of the game but is playable during the "Winter" and "Epilogue" sections, the players become emotionally invested in her through her ordinary interactions with Joel in non-combat sections of the game. These scenes serve as tension relief for players after they encounter Infected or Hunters. For example, after Joel encounters Infected in a building in the University of Eastern Colorado to turn on a generator, Ellie inquires about his safety and proceeds to ask him about his dream career had the apocalypse not occurred. Ellie mentions that she would have liked to be an astronaut, while Joel

says, "I used to want to be a singer" (*The Last of Us: Remastered*). Like Ellie, this response can prompt players to laugh in amusement since we would not expect a response from a man who has thus far displayed a gritty and dark persona. This is also a sign that Joel is becoming vulnerable by disclosing personal information that allows them to develop their relationship as a father and daughter. Joel and Ellie's conversations reflect the Family Communication Patterns Theory which implies that families create a shared social reality which determines relationship dynamics and the communication style of the family (Koerner 423). Using the example above, Ellie creates a conversational space, which is a form of a shared social reality, to discuss aspirations as they are riding on a horse across the campus of the University of Eastern Colorado. The way Joel responds, which is in a genuine manner, shows that he is comfortable enough disclosing personal information to Ellie. This allows Ellie to feel comfortable enough to continue to disclose more personal information, joke around, and ask Joel questions about when he used to be a father throughout later parts of the game.

As the game progresses, Joel and Ellie's relationship eventually mirrors that of a father and daughter in specific moments in the game. For example, after Ellie hacks away at David's face, Joel pulls her away and tells her "It's me. Oh, baby girl…" (*The Last of Us: Remastered*). The last person that Joel has called "baby girl" was his daughter Sarah, so this is a sign that Joel has formally accepted Ellie as his daughter. Also, despite being initially uncomfortable, Joel eventually opens up to Ellie about having Sarah at a young age and the difficulties of being a young single father. On the other hand, Ellie confesses to Joel about losing her friend Riley in the mall in Boston, which is another form of disclosure that builds their relationship. Both Joel and Ellie allow each other to reexamine their pasts and come to terms with the trauma from their losses.

In *The Last of Us: Left Behind,* players are given the chance to play as Ellie for this section of the game, since Joel is injured and is inside a frozen yogurt shop. At this point of the game, Joel becomes a foil to Riley since Ellie recalls her time in the mall in Boston while aiding Joel in his recovery. Ellie cares enough about Joel to risk her life to fight Infected and Hunters in order to revive him. As most games focus on building unexpected situational tension and a sense of terror among their players, *The Last of Us* emphasizes unexpected intimate conversations to entice players to become sympathetic for these characters and protect them from the danger that is present in the world. The terror in the game indirectly comes from the fear of letting either Joel or Ellie die. In the following section, I cover how the game implements effective dialogue in order to tell its story.

*Effective Dialogue*

Emotional stories cannot exist without thoughtful dialogue, which is used to portray a sense of realism and tension throughout the game. Compared to earlier games in the survival horror genre, *The Last of Us* sets the tone for narrative-driven video games by closely following cinematic dialogue styles rather than previous video games. In a general sense, the in-game dialogue makes use of silence and subtle and realistic phrases that are appropriate for the situation. *Resident Evil* and other survival horror games heavily rely on one-liners and less on emotions other than terror. For example, when Jill Valentine is about to get crushed in a closing room, Barry tells her, "That was too close. You were almost a Jill sandwich" (*Resident Evil*). This line is an example of poorly written dialogue that is rather corny and feels out of place in a game that is supposed to evoke fear. This is not something someone would say if they almost die. In comparison, *The Last of Us* subtly shows character motivations and does not overtly explain them to the players, which is a significant element in creative writing. When Ellie saves

Joel from a thief almost killing him, Joel expresses his discontent by saying, "Why didn't you stay back like I told you to?" (*The Last of Us: Remastered*). Through this line, Joel is expressing to Ellie that she could have been potentially harmed by the Hunter and that she should not have followed him. He indirectly displays that he values her safety over his own but does so in an aggressive manner, indicating he does not quite see her as an equal yet.

Along with thoughtful dialogue, the game also uses silence or a lack of dialogue effectively to portray feelings and emotions. It should be noted that silence is a form of nonverbal communication, as it has meaning attached to it based on the context (Guerrero 53). In the beginning of the game, Tess does most of the talking around their clients, while Joel acts as the muscle. Joel's silent nature in the beginning of the game makes confrontation scenes intense and shows how Joel's role as a drug smuggler has turned him into an emotionally cold character. Also, he is reluctant to answer Ellie's questions initially since he views her as a stranger. This eventually changes when Joel begins to spend more time with her and opens up to her by disclosing personal information. On the other hand, Ellie is a very talkative character, though this changes towards the end of the game, when Ellie is recovering from her trauma and is silent to show Joel that she has not gotten over what happened to her during the "Winter" section of the game. Also, Ellie is mostly quiet during the "Present" sections of *The Last of Us: Left Behind,* which is sensible since she is alone. The only times she speaks is when she speaks quietly to herself or shouts at the Hunters attacking her. Going back to the subject of in-game conversations, *The Last of Us* excels on implementing subtle and ordinary conversations in order to develop characters.

Although the game's narrative features the initial "chosen one" trope, which is described as a character being chosen by some unexplained force to solve the plot, present in many texts

based on Ellie's immunity from the infection, *The Last of Us* manages to expand upon the

characters and their interests through smaller ordinary conversations, which avoids having to rely

on this major story arc as a constant topic of conversation ("The Chosen One"). For example, in

a scene where Joel and Ellie are in a truck on their way to Pittsburgh to head west to the

Fireflies, they bond over a Hank Williams cassette tape that Ellie stole from Bill. Joel clearly

tries not to sound excited over the tape but admits to it when he says, "You know that's actually

before my time. But that is a winner though" (*The Last of Us: Remastered*). From viewing this

small scene, the players are able to witness Joel and Ellie having an ordinary conversation over

country music, which is an icebreaker. This moment allows the players to subtly piece together

an understanding of who Joel and Ellie are as characters in order to stay emotionally invested in

the larger story. Along with this, there are smaller intimate moments that explore the

personalities of the two main characters. For example, Joel and Ellie are not fighting off Hunters

or Infected and they get to gaze at the view of the city from a rooftop, which leads Ellie to say,

"You can't deny that view" (*The Last of Us: Remastered)*. This line signifies that Ellie is still

able to appreciate the beauty of the landscape, despite it being abandoned and overrun with

Infected and Hunters. From a character standpoint, Joel is able to learn more about Ellie and

understand her hopes and desires. The dialogue makes the game more compelling by investing

the players in the relationship between Joel and Ellie, despite not knowing much about their past

initially or how their relationship will develop after the game ends.

Credit for the effectiveness of the dialogue should be given to the voice actors'

performances, as they use strategic forms of vocal and physical delivery to embody the

characters they are portraying through motion capture technology ("Grounded: The Making of

*The Last of Us*"). Through their captured performances, subtle inflections and grunts are

recorded as they perform gestures and actions on the motion capture stage. This process of performance is different than other games which rely on voice actors reading their lines behind a booth. In the following section, I look at how cutscenes and the third-person perspective are effective forms of developing the narrative of the game.

*Cinematic Elements*

The developers of *The Last of Us* use cinematic-style cutscenes in order to enhance overall gameplay. The cutscenes were filmed using motion capture technology, which track the gestures the actors make on an enclosed set. The actors wear spandex suits and have to visualize their environments when they act out the scenes. As mentioned previously, cutscenes are described as scenes with cinematic elements that briefly suspends gameplay sections to explain the section of the game the players are immersed in, where the players will go, and advance the plot and characterization (Klevjer 301-2; Tavinor 112). In total, *The Last of Us* features 38 cutscenes, which allows for players to view the characters interacting with each other before transitioning back to scenes of gameplay. It is very common that survival horror games do not feature cutscenes that emphasize character interactions, since these games focus on the players completing concrete objectives rather than experiencing a story. *The Last of Us* focuses on telling a compelling visual narrative which provides a new form of player interaction.

Cutscenes allow the game's narrative to stay linear and focused, which is why the story is effective and resonates with many players. When these scenes come on the screen, players are prompted to put the controller aside and watch the characters interact with each other and the environment. Although many could argue that cutscenes impede on player experiences because they break player immersion, I argue that cutscenes enhance the narrative of *The Last of Us* because it allows players to view the characters as people with their own agency, rather than just

being avatars that represent the players. The developers portray interesting character interactions and include significant plot details that entice the players to watch the cutscenes rather than skip them and continue playing the game. Cutscenes in *The Last of Us* also feel theatrical because they usually take place in a confined location before cutting back to gameplay. It allows for the interactions to feel contained despite being set in a larger world.

The camera zooms close into the characters faces during intense scenes of dialogue, which allows for the players to feel their anger, frustration, or sadness. Since most survival horror games do not feature cutscenes, we rarely get to view characters beyond the first and third person perspective in-game. The camera shakes and focuses on the protagonists whenever a violent scene is being portrayed on screen. Some cutscenes become meta in nature, whenever blood is splattered on the camera like when Bill shoots an Infected in the face which allows Bill, Joel, and Ellie to enter through the window of a classroom for shelter. The creators also added a lens flare effect to the camera to give the game a cinematic feel, as the effect is often featured in films shot in sunny locations.

Beyond cutscenes, the use of the third-person perspective allows for a cinematic experience, as the camera is wide enough for players to view the environment around them. There are moments in the game where players get to explore their environments and the third-person perspective allows for players to see what Joel or Ellie is seeing while having them physically in the frame. The protagonists could be walking anywhere in the woods or in an abandoned building and the players will become immersed in the setting. In the following section, I discuss the character development of the protagonists in the game.

**Character Development**

Narratives cannot exist without characters and are more effective if they feature characters who grow with the narrative. On a basic level, players are supposed to step into the shoes of the characters and interact with their environment. *The Last of Us* takes this concept further by giving all of the characters distinct personalities, which humanizes them instead of limiting them as drivers for action. Each action they perform becomes meaningful and comes with potential consequences compared to other video games. This is evident when Henry, a man who joins Joel's and Ellie's group, has to shoot Sam, his brother, who becomes infected after a raid. After killing his brother to protect everyone in the room, Henry experiences guilt and shoots himself. This particular scene was not meant to be pleasant and strips away the thrill of violence, making the situation tenser. Players come to understand Henry and Sam's goals and motivations during the middle part of the game, which makes these deaths feel real and personal. Morality is a major part of *The Last of Us,* as many of these characters are not necessarily morally righteous, as they sometimes act on their own self interests. Specifically, *The Last of Us* has moments where characters perform questionable actions like Henry and Sam abandoning Joel and Ellie when Joel cannot join them on the truck. On the surface, players could interpret Henry and Sam's actions as selfish against Joel and Ellie until they realize that Joel and Ellie would have done the same, which is what Henry mentions when Joel attacks Henry at the beach. Another questionable action includes Joel killing Marlene at the end and stopping Ellie's surgery. This controversial end allows players to question Joel's intentions as selfish or righteous. These moments affirm how the notion of good and evil is fluid based on perspective and context. The following section looks at how the game emphasizes character development over terrifying enemies.

*Focus on Characters over Enemies*

As I mentioned earlier, other games in the survival horror genre, especially the first *Resident Evil* game, place an emphasis on the monsters, while the players control the characters as drivers to meet their goal of completing the game. Due to the technology present at the time, the developers could not put two characters together during the gameplay sequences, so players had to play through two separate campaigns for the two characters. The overall plot of the game is police officers entering a mysterious mansion after being attacked by zombie dogs and finding a way to uncover the hidden truths behind the mansion. Throughout the game, players never get to learn much about the backgrounds of the characters since the gameplay emphasizes game completion and puzzle solutions. While players can pick up artifacts like letters and ID cards and learn more about the world of the game, players never get to learn more details about the characters, like their interests or what they do outside their occupation. The characters only express superficial comments about themselves, or how terrified they are of the world and the enemies.

This problem is not the case with *The Last of Us* as the game challenges the stereotypical lack of developed characters by focusing on character development over the terror from the monsters. Although the Infected are grotesque and terrifying, as they look like bloodied humans with mushrooms grown all over their bodies, they only appear in select segments in the game and do not often appear unexpectedly. Also, while Joel and Ellie focus on surviving the world around them, they are given opportunities to talk and interact with each other. Ellie, in particular, often pokes fun of the world that they live in, which breaks the bleak nature of the game and the survival horror video game genre. For example, when she turns through her joke book, she tells Joel, "People are making apocalypse jokes like there's no tomorrow" (*The Last of Us:*

*Remastered*). While this joke is corny in nature, players acknowledge that Ellie is purposefully

attempting to be funny versus the one liner that Barry spits out in *Resident Evil* about Jill

becoming a "Jill sandwich."

Other survival horror games emphasize constant combat with exploration being a

secondary element; *The Last of Us* does the opposite. Sections where players are supposed to

fight Infected and/or Hunters typically last ten minutes at a time and after completing these

sections, players are invited to further explore their environments and interact with other

characters. In fact, exploration is a major part of *The Last of Us: Left Behind* since there are only

four major combat sequences in this portion of the game. Artifacts in the game range from

Ellie's joke book to Joel's picture of him and Sarah, which allows players to indirectly

undercover aspects of these characters' personalities and identities. People's possessions can tell

many things about them and are effective narrative devices for character development in video

games. Gender is a major factor of determining character development, which will be explored in

the next section as I deconstruct the roles of the female characters in the game.

*Well-Rounded Female Characters*

Another aspect that is tied to the characterization present in *The Last of Us* is the

portrayal of female characters. As mentioned earlier, scholars like Gauntlett critique video games

for how female video game characters are given little to no agency and are sexualized, which

adheres to the male gaze; it is described as female bodies being sexualized and used as visual

pleasure for male viewers (68). As the protagonists of *The Last of Us: Left Behind*, Ellie and

Riley deviate from traditional forms of female video game femininity as they physically present

themselves in a tomboy-ish manner. Ellie's standard outfit is a red t-shirt with sleeves, jeans, and

sneakers, while Riley's standard outfit is a denim short sleeve shirt with an interior white shirt,

jeans, and sneakers. They engage in rebellious behavior by swearing around each other, drinking hard liquor in one scene, and throwing bricks at cars as a contest. Both male and female players are fascinated by Ellie as a character since she does not adhere to traditional feminine norms. For example, when Ellie was in a Halloween store and encountered Skeleseer, a skeleton-shaped magic eight ball, and started asking it questions, it gave a response that Ellie did not like which prompted her to respond, "Well Skeleseer can suck my dick" (*The Last of Us: Remastered*). This line demonstrates Ellie's rejection of feminine norms of being passive and quiet by joking about having male genetalia, which places her in a position of agency. There are no male figures around policing her behavior, so Ellie feels like she can be her true self around Riley.

Also, she is a prominent female video game protagonist who is not sexualized for male audiences and is capable of fighting alongside Joel, which challenges Gauntlett's critique of female video game characters being sexualized and lacking agency (68). She can be interpreted as "one of the guys" to male players and a new kind of woman to female players. Since society has been mostly wiped out, the current norms we place on femininity are not enforced, which explains how these characters do not feel pressured to present themselves in a certain way. For example, when Ellie and Joel run into an advertisement of a skinny woman wearing a red dress, Ellie asks Joel about why she is so skinny and Joel replies that some people did not eat food in order to maintain a slim figure, which leads her to reply, "That's so stupid" (*The Last of Us: Remastered*). It should also be noted that Ellie and Riley are queer characters in a survival horror video game, which often does not feature any LGBT representation. Since most of human society is wiped out, Ellie and Riley are able to be together without worrying about social stigma, but their relationship gets cut when Riley dies. Ellie also challenges traditional teenage femininity head on through her conversation with Joel during the "Fall" section of the game.

When Joel stumbles upon Ellie relaxing in a teenage girl's room, she addresses him by saying,

"Is this all they had to worry about? Boys? Movies? Deciding which shirt goes with which skirt?

It's bizarre" (*The Last of Us: Remastered*). Ellie's outspokenness towards these past cultural

practices reinforces her sense of identity as a woman and can open a conversation for players to

question gendered norms that exist in our current society.

In the main campaign of the game, the other female characters, which include Tess,

Marlene, and Maria, also embody a similar form of gender expression. Tess wears a short

sleeved buttoned-up shirt and a bandana hair wrap. Marlene wears a hoodie and jeans and Maria

wears a black winter jacket. These female characters also either have shorter haircuts or tie their

hair which serves a practical purpose, since Infected can grab at anything they can get a hold of.

This means that having long hair could lead to potential death. Also, the clothes that these

characters wear are practical for fighting and running in.

Another compelling aspect of the game is how all the women are able to engage in

combat. Even though Ellie had to initially learn how to shoot a gun, her staple weapon is her

knife. All the other female characters, Riley, Tess, Marlene, and Maria, know how to shoot a gun

and fight enemies, which allows them to fight alongside Joel, instead of Joel fighting for them.

For example, when Tess and Joel trap Robert in an alleyway for selling their guns, Tess does

most of the negotiating and eventually shoots Robert in the head. This breaks down societal

notions of women lacking agency in video games and not being a part of the action sequences.

To accompany this section on the female characters in *The Last of Us*, it would also be

significant to analyze the role of the male characters in the game. I write about them in the

following section.

*Emotional Male Characters*

What makes this particular game compelling is how the male characters embody stereotypically masculine traits, but their personalities deviate from typical male video game protagonists. As I have mentioned previously, male characters in video games are often the default and have the most action and agency in the story. Although the male characters in *The Last of Us* are skilled in shooting, fist combat, and choking Infected and other enemies, they still struggle to come to terms with their internal feelings. A significant moment that affirms this point was when Joel has an intense argument with Ellie over Joel dropping her off with his brother Tommy. When Joel firmly insists that Ellie join Tommy and that it would be best for them to part ways, she proceedes to say, "I'm not her you know. Maria told me about Sara and…" (*The Last of Us: Remastered*). Ellie is referring to Joel's daughter who dies in the beginning of the game, which is a significant scene because Joel cries over his daughter's death. Joel responds with anger and sadness by saying, "You are treading on some mighty thin ice here" (*The Last of Us: Remastered*). Joel has not come to terms with his daughter's death and was upset at Ellie mentioning her name. Another emotional scene that features a male character crying on screen is when Bill discovers that his partner Frank hung himself in a house in the town. He tries not to break down as he points out Frank's bite marks to Joel. As a queer man living in the apocalypse, Frank means the world to Bill who is his only reason to survive. Bill does not take Frank's disappearance well, which leads him to become pessimistic about surviving with other people as evidenced with his hostile and reluctant interactions with Joel and Ellie. Displays of weakness in men in videogames are very uncommon, especially something as meaningful as crying. The fact that *The Last of Us* includes multiple scenarios which display masculine vulnerability subverts preconceived notions of video game masculinity.

Along with male characters expressing their emotions on screen, Joel embodies maternal characteristics, which include intimate actions and mentorship, when he accepts Ellie as his daughter. When Joel pulls Ellie away from killing David, he proceeds to hold her face and give her a hug to comfort her. The last person he held in his arms prior to Ellie was Sarah when she died. Also, at the end of the game when Ellie feels guilty about her condition of being immune to the virus, Joel listens to her and gives her life advice by saying, "No matter what, you keep finding something to fight for" (*The Last of Us: Remastered)*. These actions show how Joel cares for Ellie beyond physically protecting her from Hunters and Infected. Male protagonists are almost never given this level of emotional depth in video games. Writing the male characters in this manner contextualizes their struggles and makes them feel more fleshed out and relatable to audiences. In the next section, I discuss how literary elements inspired the narrative structure of the game.

**Literary Elements**

Related to narrative design, literary elements inspired the way stories are told on digital media. Literary elements are a major aspect of understanding narrative structure and genre, which can be applied to *The Last of Us*, as written texts were one of the first mediums for storytelling. According to Suckling and Walton, "stories permeate all aspect of human activity; they teach, inspire, allow us to step into other worlds, and give us a way to try to make a sense of our own, so naturally we also find them within video games" (5). In its essence, fiction tells stories that feature morals that reveal certain truths of human nature. Like literature, video games also tell stories but with visual and interactive elements, which allow players to deepen their understanding of themes and motifs that the developers included in the game. Players are able to sympathize and project themselves onto their character's journey and objectively evaluate the

character's actions. Despite being situated in a low-brow medium, *The Last of Us* pays homage to the literary elements, specifically Bildungsroman, that classify certain stories. In the next section, I cover how Ellie's arc of the game fits the classification of a Bildungsroman.

*Bildungsroman*

By analyzing Ellie's arc throughout the entire game, *The Last of Us* can be classified as a bildungsroman. The term is mostly used to describe literature that "depicts a youth who struggles toward maturity, forming a worldview or philosophy of life and leaving behind the concerns of adolescence. The development of the protagonist gives the bildungsroman a coherent plot structure, and each character encountered and action undertaken proves a formative step in the youth's course toward adulthood" (Kennedy et al. 16). Despite being different media, both literature and video games employ narratives to explore human nature. *The Last of Us* as a game is rooted in the themes of survival, identity, rebirth, and family. By focusing on Ellie's arc of the story, she is a protagonist who is struggling to come to terms with her identity as a young woman, as she loses loved ones, creates new familial bonds, and learns how to kill Infected and Hunters. After initially experiencing the death of her friend Riley, Ellie comes to further terms with death in the world when she witnesses Tess, Sam, and Henry die in front of her. This raises the stakes and makes her ready to kill. Also, she did not grow up with a sense of family and discovers it after staying with Joel for many months. Under Joel's guidance, she trains to become a killer out of self-defense. By the end of the game, Ellie becomes capable of making her own decisions and becoming independent, which are how many Bildungsroman novels end.

The coming-of-age conventions are further explored in *The Last of Us: Left Behind*, when she interacts with her friend Riley at the mall and tries to have fun. Both Ellie and Riley are young teenagers and are dealing with potential separation. Riley tries to aid this with fun mall

activities, where they are allowed to act like kids without being supervised by adults. As they are alone in the mall, they fit in a liminal space, which is a transitional period people experience when entering a new stage in life, where they want to have the chance to be kids, despite the pressures to become adults in this bleak world. This is especially evident by the fact that Riley joins the Fireflies and is required to leave Boston. That one day in the mall allows Riley to hold on to her youth before she starts her adult work. The girls bond to the point of where they acknowledge their love for each other and decide to rebel against the systems that are set out to tell them what kind of person they should become. Ellie experiences what it is like to fall in love with someone and lose them the next minute. This is her first step towards adulthood and this moment prepares her for the future loss she will experience along the way with Joel. I create a new genre called "Zombie Drama" in the following section and discuss how *The Last of Us* is unique compared to other zombie-based texts. I also briefly provide other examples of zombie-based texts that could fit in this genre.

*"Zombie Drama"*

A new term that I would like to coin for this particular text along with those similar to it is called "Zombie Drama." Just like *The Walking Dead Game*, *Zombieland, 28 Days Later*, and *The Walking Dead* television series, these texts are character-driven and place a focus on the characters' peril instead of the horror from the zombies themselves. While *The Walking Dead Game* and *The Last of Us* are both video games*, The Walking Dead Game* is an interactive adventure game with survival horror elements as the game is focused on player choices and simplified combat. Texts within my proposed genre are capable of telling compelling stories akin to political dramas and family dramas while being set in a zombie world backdrop. In fact, the politics of the world of *The Last of Us* parallels that of science-fiction dystopian novels since

Joel and Ellie live in a version of the US that runs on martial law and ally themselves indirectly with the Fireflies, which is a resistance group.

The deaths within texts in this genre are meaningful because the writers take their time to flesh out the characters to make them feel real to the viewers or players. This is why Joel's brutal injury mattered to players. He is Ellie's father figure and partner and his injury came out of nowhere. When he gets impaled by the metal rod, Joel could potentially die and Ellie would be on her own. Regarding the actual characters' deaths, Sam and Henry impacted a lot of players because they were a foil to Joel and Ellie's relationship. As soon as Sam turned, Henry felt helpless which prompted him to kill himself. Players had the chance to interact with the brothers and view them as trustworthy characters, which made their deaths matter.

While other zombie-based texts feature pessimistic themes and endings regarding death and the apocalypse, *The Last of Us* refocuses the conversation of death towards the relationships the different characters have with each other. Specifically, the game does not look to create gratuitously violent death scenes with someone being eaten alive. Rather, a lot of the deaths in the game are often from gun shots or being bitten and becoming infected. Players who play as Joel or Ellie during certain sections of the game can lead them to death which can range from them being shot by a Hunter or bitten by Infected. Compared to other survival horror video games which will show characters being eaten alive, the screen will fade to black as soon as their deaths happen, and the players will have to restart the encounter.

Besides Joel and Ellie, Robert, Tess, Henry, and Marlene die from gun shot wounds while Sam and Riley become infected. *The Last of Us* portrays death in this manner to make the stakes high regarding survival, which is affirmed by Joel saying, "Make every shot count" to Ellie (*The Last of Us: Remastered*). The on-screen deaths make players feel emotional about the

loss rather than feel disturbed. Despite the dark undertones, which sets the mood for this "zombie drama," the game features light moments of banter which gives Joel and Ellie a personality rather than reducing them to a type. Compared to other bleak zombie-texts, the narrative of *The Last of Us* features a more optimistic tone and the moral of the game is that being with the ones you love makes life worth living. Ellie's resilience and Joel's strength have allowed them to fight alongside each other and find a purpose in a dark and unforgiving world. In the next section, I cover the visual and auditory aesthetics of *The Last of Us* and how they are an integral to its narrative.

**Visual and Auditory Aesthetics**

Although the narrative structure of video games is heavily inspired by literary elements, it should be acknowledged that what separates digital media from literature is visual imagery. Visual images in video games are the environments and characters that are represented on screen, which allow players to immerse themselves with the world and interact with enemies or NPCs. Images are produced on screen, which present the players the visual aspect of the story and it is up to the players to follow on screen directions and not lead their character to death in order to win the game. Writers have visions of what they want their video games to look like, so it is up to designers, coders, and artists to bring those visions to life (Suckling and Walton 79-80). Video game visuals can range from being grand and photo-realistic to being simplified and 8-bit. The artists of Naughty Dog put effort in their designs to make the characters and the enemies look realistic with high-definition graphics. Along with this, they conducted extensive research in abandoned environments to replicate them visually in game, which adds to the level of realism ("Grounded: The Making of *The Last of Us*"). The artists took the most effective elements of survival horror games, which are gritty and dark environments, and combined it with

light and naturistic settings. These settings influence character interactions and push the narrative of the game in directions that other survival horror games have not attempted.

Despite making up most of the video game playing experience, visual elements co-exist with sound, which also enhance the narrative of the game in a similar but different manner. Survival horror games need sound in order to build the creepy atmosphere of the environment. As another main component of the gameplay experience, sounds warn or notify players of incoming enemies or NPCs without the player seeing them on-screen (Fencott et al. 145). According to Grimshaw, "sound, though, is capable of depicting events and spaces beyond the confines of the screen to a greater extent than image" (117). In other words, sounds enhance images on screen and can make players believe that a car is crashing, or they are shooting a gun at an enemy. If players are running away from an Infected and still hear an Infected moaning, it means that it is still in proximity to the players' character, which can allow them to fight back or continue to run away. These sounds are used to create tension rather than scares in the game. I deconstruct the scenic design of the game in the next section, where I focus on the art design of the environments.

*Scenic Design*

Apocalyptic environments are often presented as bleak and dangerous with characters struggling to survive, but *The Last of Us* portrays its world in a different manner. While the art design of the game does feature dark and bleak artistic tones in certain moments, like when Joel, Ellie, Sam, and Henry explore the sewers outside of Pittsburgh, the game also implements naturistic and bright imagery in other moments. Specifically, many of the buildings that Joel and Ellie explore are abandoned and have trees growing inside of them and animals living in them, like in the university building. The mall that Ellie and Riley explore in Boston is abandoned and

rundown but still features faded bright décor. Compared to *Resident Evil*, which takes place in a

dark mansion at night, most of *The Last of Us* takes place during the day and outdoors. The

outdoor daytime scenes feature brighter visuals with the sun reflecting off building windows and

greenery. Whenever enemies are not around, players are given the chance to explore parts of the

city for ammo and supplies and appreciate the abandoned and visually pleasing scenery.

The way that the environments are constructed enhances the narrative of the game, since

how Joel and Ellie interact with their surroundings tells us more about their characters.

Specifically, when Joel and Ellie enter Pittsburgh, they encounter billboards of a *Twilight*-esque

teen romance movie called *Dawn of the Wolf.* Joel reveals that he saw the movie and Ellie asks if

"he totally gut[s] her by the end," which prompts Joel to reveal that it is a "dumb teen movie"

(*The Last of Us: Remastered*). In the beginning of the game, there is a *Dawn of the Wolf* poster in

Sarah's bedroom, which reveals that Joel saw it with his daughter. This artifact tells the player a

lot about the city and is a marker for what life was like in Pittsburgh before Infected and Hunters

took over. It is evident that time has passed since the billboard is slightly torn and foliage is

starting to grow around it.

Regarding the use of foliage and green in scenery, the developers use a naturistic and

bright approach in select scenes to explore how the Earth is reclaiming its land after most

humans are extinct, which enhances the theme of human abandonment leading to a revitalization

of nature. When Joel and Ellie reach Salt Lake City, they explore an abandoned building with

trees and vines growing inside. Some walls and partitions are broken down, so players have a

clear view of the rest of the city. While exploring this building, Joel and Ellie encounter a giraffe

trying to eat the foliage growing inside the building and decide to pet it. When they get to the

roof of the building, they look at the other herds of giraffes and realize the beauty of nature and

animals in the city. This scene has an optimistic tone and fits with the theme of spending moments with loved ones. Compared to the dark and bleak visual tones used to portray Boston under martial law, the naturistic and brighter tones in this scene show how a world free of human control can lead to peaceful environments and nature reclaiming its lost space. To accompany my analysis of the environments in the game, I analyze the protagonists' physical traits in the next section.

*Character Design*

Despite Joel and Ellie being familiar with shooting guns and combat, they physically embody everyday people which makes them relatable to the players. They use the most practical means of survival and do not have super abilities or are formally trained in combat like the military in the game. The two protagonists' ordinary nature is reflected by how they physically appear to the players. How characters look visually can communicate threat level and status to players, which helps determine the actions the players take in order to progress through the game (Suckling and Walton 142). For example, players anticipate that they will use forceful action like shooting or fighting if their characters have a tall and masculine appearance versus a small stature and a friendly demeanor. Regarding *The Last of Us*, players are expected to use different strategies of attack, depending on if they are playing as Joel or Ellie, during encounters with Infected and Hunters.

As one of the two protagonists of the game, Joel embodies ordinary qualities found in a regular man stuck in an apocalypse. He is a man in his late 40s with a beard, green flannel, jeans, and boots. Compared to the Hunters who wear armor or combat gear, Joel's clothing is practical for the amount of walking and fighting he does. His rolled-up sleeves allow him to throw more punches and his boots allow him to kick enemies to the ground. Despite being physically able to

fight Infected and Hunters, Joel's age is apparent through his wrinkles and graying hair. There is also a moment towards the end of the game when Joel and Ellie are hiking back to Tommy's settlement and he tells Ellie, "Feelin' my age now" (*The Last of Us: Remastered*). Joel acknowledges that his body is not as strong as it once was and is verbally acknowledging his physical vulnerability to Ellie, which challenges the notion of male video game characters being more muscular and powerful than female video game characters (Miller and Summers 735). Also, in regards to his facial expressions and personality, Joel does not smile or laugh until the Pittsburgh section of the game when he plays the Hank Williams cassette. His face is stoic for a majority of the game and starts smiling and having a more upbeat attitude towards the end of the game when he accepts Ellie as his daughter. This aspect of Joel's character makes him human since he is learning how to process his past trauma and fight for someone he truly cares about.

Just like Joel, Ellie also embodies ordinary qualities, but that of a teenage girl in an apocalypse. She is a 14-year-old girl with a palm tree shirt, jeans, and sneakers and has a tom-boy aesthetic. Since she is smaller in stature and is not muscular, she fights enemies with her pocket knife. Ellie uses her size to her advantage by hiding in smaller spaces and jumping on enemies backs to stab them to death. Like Joel, her clothing is light and practical for fighting and running away from Infected and Hunters. The only difference between her and Joel's clothes are that they are suitable for her as a young teenager. At her age, Ellie is experiencing physical and emotional changes as she is growing up in this Infected-infested world. In *The Last of Us: Left Behind*, Ellie is becoming aware of her maturing body when she asks Skeleseer, a skeleton-shaped magic eight ball, "Am I going to get boobs or what?" (*The Last of Us: Remastered*). This scene is supposed to be humorous and puts female puberty in the forefront to the players, which is a subject that is almost never discussed in video games. Unlike Joel, Ellie starts off with an

upbeat and positive attitude and facial expressions. She is very observant of the environment around her and discusses it with Joel by asking him questions or joking about it. After the "Winter" section of the game takes place, Ellie's attitude and facial expressions change as she falls to sadness and vulnerability after being physically assaulted by David. When they reach Salt Lake City, she is quiet and appears distracted when interacting with Joel. However, the feelings of sadness are interrupted with the giraffe scene, when Joel and Ellie get to pet a giraffe up close and gaze at the giraffes flocking together. Like Joel, this aspect of Ellie's character makes her human since she is maturing in an unforgiving world and learning how to process old and new traumas and become an independent young woman. Visual aesthetics are not the only significant part of video games, since they need to be accompanied by sound in order to provide a rich experience for the players. I discuss the significance of sound, or a lack thereof, in *The Last of Us* in the following section.

*Sound Design*

Compared to other survival horror video games that use unexpected noises, accompanied with frightening visuals, to induce scares among players, *The Last of Us* uses sound in a strategic manner. As I have mentioned before, the subtle use of noise from the enemies induces anxiety and tension among the players. The noise of Infected moaning or the warning shots from Hunters will cause players to either fight back or hide and sneak past the enemies. The developers use a lack of loud noises to build tension during combat sequences, which mirrors how some horror films create terror minus the jump scares. Subtle noises in the game are used to keep players alert for enemies, rather than to freak them out and cause them to attack instinctively. Instead, the game emphasizes players thinking about the strategies they will use to advance in the game, whether that be sneaking past enemies or killing them one by one.

Along with sounds coming from enemies, sound is used to complement the naturistic elements of the game. Tied with my description of the scenic elements of the game, the sound of trees rustling in the wind matched with visual images of trees rustling in the wind creates a realistic moment that players can immerse themselves in as they witness Joel and Ellie explore the University of Eastern Colorado campus. The most vivid sound in the game is the water in the river rushing as Joel and Ellie make their way to Tommy's settlement in Wyoming. The sound of water adds to the surrounding visuals of the wilderness that Joel and Ellie are trekking through. In a similar manner, films also use sound to enhance the narrative. Many films have inspired *The Last of Us* regarding its visual and narrative designs. In my final main section, I look at the significance of the filmic inspirations of the game.

**Filmic Inspirations**

In many articles written on *The Last of Us* by the video game press, Neil Druckmann was rather explicit in mentioning his influences for the game (Roth; Takahashi). Disregarding the gameplay aspects of the game, *The Last of Us* features many overt film influences that range from character types to setting. These film influences are significant to the construction of the game's narrative as it both pays homage to the texts that have existed prior to the game and situates the game in the survival horror genre with specific tropes while shaping it in new directions at the same time. In the following sections, I included a list of five different films that inspired the developers to create *The Last of Us*. I watched every film and drew connections between the game and each film. I begin first with *Dawn of the Dead*.

*Dawn of the Dead (1978)*

As one of the original zombie films in the horror film genre, *Dawn of the Dead* is the second film in George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* series but is not a sequel to his first

film *Night of the Living Dead (1968)*. The film features a group of four people, Stephen, Fran, Peter, and Roger, surviving a recent zombie apocalypse in an abandoned mall in Pittsburgh. Regarding backgrounds, Stephen and Fran work for a news broadcasting station and are inexperienced with combat, while Peter and Roger are a part of the SWAT team. When I first watched the film, the first influence I noticed was the setting, as the film takes place in Pittsburgh and a portion of the "Summer" section in *The Last of Us* takes place in Pittsburgh. Including *The Last of Us: Left Behind*, both the film and the game also take place in a mall with the protagonists of both texts leisurely taking advantage of the resources, until the Infected begin attacking. Pittsburgh plays a huge role in the careers of both George A. Romero and Neil Druckmann as both men are alumni of Carnegie Mellon University, so they situate their texts in Pittsburgh to pay homage to their pasts. Along with setting, *Dawn of the Dead* was one of the first films to set the rules for how to survive in a zombie-infested world. These rules include the following: humans can become zombies after being bit by one, you have to kill a zombie by shooting them in the head or decapitating them, and zombies are typically mindless monsters. *The Last of Us* follows similar tropes but spins it in a different manner. Specifically, Infected are affected by the Cordyceps fungi which eat at their skin and grow out of their heads. Also, Infected are more intelligent than regular zombies since they use their hearing to catch their prey with a tight grip. Once a human gets caught in their grip, they automatically die and become an Infected. The next film I discuss is *Children of Men*, which came out 28 years after *Dawn of the Dead*.

*Children of Men (2006)*

  *Children of Men* seems like an oddball out of this list since it is a science-fiction dystopian film with survival elements. Despite this generic difference, it shares multiple

similarities with *The Last of Us*. First, is the overall narrative and plot, which is a major part of the game. *Children of Men* is about a man named Theo Faron who is commissioned by his ex-wife, Julian Taylor who runs a militia group called the Fishes, to deliver a mysterious girl named Kee to a ship port outside of England. It is revealed that the girl is pregnant and is the key to restoring human life after infertility plagued the world. Based on this plot summary, the similarities between *The Last of Us* and *Children of Men* are apparent. Joel is supposed to be like Theo, as he is escorting Ellie, who is like Kee, to a drop off point because Ellie is immune to the virus and could potentially be the cure to the disease. This plot helped set up the world building of *The Last of Us* as Neil Druckmann added additional details and characters to this basic premise. Along with the plot, stealth plays a big role in the survival of the protagonists in the film and the game. Throughout the movie, Theo and Kee are hiding and sneaking past both the military and the Fishes who want to seize Kee and her baby. In a similar fashion, Joel and Ellie utilize the same strategy in specific parts of the game whenever they need to get past a group of Hunters or Infected and they do not have enough ammunition to kill them all. Lastly, the cinematography in both the game and film feature similar techniques. Specifically, they both move with the characters and use limited amounts of cuts. Also, whenever surrounding enemies die around them, blood splatter gets on the camera which stylistically makes the action scenes more intense. In the next section, I look at the popular BBC documentary *Planet Earth* and how it inspired the creation of the concept for the game.

*Planet Earth (2006)*

Along with *Children of Men* being a major influence of the plot of the game, *Planet Earth's* segment on the Cordyceps fungus plays a major role in the formation of the enemies in the game. Spores from a Cordyceps fungus can affect an insect's neurological system until it

dies. Once the insect dies, fungi grow out of the insect's body ("Cordyceps: attack of the killer fungi - Planet Earth Attenborough BBC wildlife"). Neil Druckmann took the Cordyceps fungus after watching this documentary and made it the catalyst for the virus that is affecting humans in the game. By taking a virus that exists in our world and making it something that can affect humans in the game, the developers are turning the survival horror genre on its head by rooting a zombie infection with a sense of a possible reality. I discuss the inspiration of morally gray characters from *No Country for Old Men* in the upcoming section.

*No Country for Old Men (2007)*

As a neo-Western, *No Country for Old Men* broke boundaries for its morally gray characters in a modern Western backdrop, which is very similar to *The Last of Us*. It should be noted that protagonists in Western films are characterized as "cowboys [who are] the ultimate hero[es], fighting the bad guys, forging notions of manhood, and delineating what constitutes as honor as [they] work to build civilization out of wilderness" (Day 11). In other words, the protagonists are traditionally portrayed as being morally righteous and powerful figures of authority. In *No Country for Old Men*, a man named Llewelyn Moss is on the run from hitman Anton Chigurh after stealing a case with two million dollars. Llewelyn deviates from a typical Western protagonist archetype as he is not a morally righteous character since he steals money that does not belong to him and intends to use it for personal gain; his greed leads to his eventual death. Joel's physical and personal character type is evidence of the film's influence on *The Last of Us*. Like Llewelyn, Joel is a culturally-Southern man from Texas and has a beard and a gritty and stoic persona. Despite being the antagonist of the film, Joel also has similarities to Anton in terms of their outlooks on human nature and morality. Both characters are cold-blooded killers and are willing to kill anyone who stands in the way of their goals. For example, during the

"Winter" section of the game, Joel kidnaps two of David's men in a house and brutally tortures them for answers about Ellie's whereabouts before killing them. Molding these two characters personas was an effective way for the developers to build Joel's character, which impacts the tone of the narrative. The narrative of the game would not have been effective if Joel was a righteous protagonist, since Ellie would not be able to form her identity and desire independence in the latter part of the game. Along with the character types, silence plays a key role during the action sequences of both texts. There is a shoot out scene between Llewelyn and Anton that does not feature any background music, which builds tension among viewers. In a similar manner, the music in the game is subtle during the action sequences in order to build tension and allow the players to concentrate on the gameplay. In the final section, I look at how *The Road* inspired the technical gameplay and narrative aspects of *The Last of Us*.

*The Road (2009)*

  *The Road* shares similarities to *The Last of Us* as both are apocalypse stories and are father-child tales, though *The Road* does not feature any zombies. A compelling aspect of *The Road* is that the protagonist has limited ammunition, which brings about a sense of desperation among the viewers. The father only has two bullets in his revolver and saves those shots for the direst circumstances. The limited ammunition makes the narrative feel realistic since any kind of resources would be difficult to acquire in an apocalypse. In a similar way, *The Last of Us* also emphasizes resource management. Players are encouraged to save their ammunition, as they are only given a few bullets at a time, and must choose wisely when deciding whether or not to attack Hunters or Infected in an encounter. Also, there is a scene in *The Road* where the father and son find themselves in a house with cannibals and silently find a way to escape. This aspect of the narrative is carried over to *The Last of Us*, specifically in the "Winter" section, when Ellie

is trying to escape from David and his group, who are also cannibals. The cannibals in the game are used as a plot device to challenge Joel and Ellie's morality, since David's group could be viewed as victims to Joel and Ellie's attacks at the university. As I have completed a thorough analysis of *The Last of Us*, I cover the conclusion of my study in the following section.

**CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION**

As I mentioned in my Introduction, the purpose of my research is to analyze how the video game *The Last of Us* subverts tropes in the survival horror video game genre through the use of narrative. In this project, I analyze the PS4 version of the game which includes the main campaign and *The Last of Us: Left Behind*. In the following sections, I discuss the major conclusions of my study, the implications derived from my study, limitations or shortcomings, recommendations for future research or new areas of focus, and my final thoughts.

**Major Conclusions**

By analyzing *The Last of Us* in relation to the survival horror genre, I found that while *The Last of Us'* gameplay elements are mostly derivative of other survival horror video games, the narrative and characterization are ways in which the game deviates from tropes in the survival horror genre. In terms of narrative, I argue that *The Last of Us* places an emphasis on players interacting with their environment and other characters, which deviates from other survival horror video games with strictly linear narratives. Also, the father-daughter dynamic between Joel and Ellie creates a more compelling story that is not typically explored in survival horror video games. The thoughtful dialogue and the heavy emphasis on showing cutscenes enhance the player's perceptions of the characters and the in-game world. In terms of character development, players follow along with the game and are a part of the same journey as the characters, who must make dire decisions which affect future decisions they make. Both the female and male characters do not fit the standards of what male and female video game characters should be, as the female characters are not dressed sexually and fight alongside male characters, while the male characters have moments to express emotions.

Also, by following Ellie's arc, I argue that *The Last of Us* can be classified as a bildungsroman due to the fact that Ellie is forming her identity as a young woman living in the apocalypse and training to become a skilled killer. Since the game features a strong narrative that places emphasis on character development over the enemies themselves, I proposed a new genre called "Zombie Drama." Some games and films that I would include in this genre are *The Walking Dead: The Game, 28 Days Later,* and *The Walking Dead* television series. Next, I deconstructed the visual and auditory aesthetics of the game, which are tied to its narrative structure. In regards to scenic design, I found that the developers use a naturistic and bright approach in select scenes to explore how the Earth is reclaiming its land after most humans are extinct and adds on to the theme of human abandonment leading to the revitalization of nature. For character design, I explain that Joel and Ellie are not formally trained in combat and feature every-person qualities which make them relatable to the players. Lastly for sound design, I found that the developers use a lack of loud noises to build tension during combat sequences and use sound to complement the visual and naturistic elements of the game.

Lastly, I uncovered the filmic influences of *The Last of Us* among five different films: *Dawn of the Dead, Children of Men, Planet Earth, No Country for Old Men,* and *The Road*. I found that the game mirrored the setting and world building of *Dawn of the Dead,* the overall narrative and plot, stealth aspects, and cinematography of *Children of Men,* the Cordyceps fungi from *Planet Earth* as the basis for the infection in the game*,* gritty character types and silent action sequences from *No Country for Old Men,* the father-child tale, the limited ammunition, and cannibal subplot from *The Road*. In the next section, I discuss the implications I derived from analyzing *The Last of Us*.

**Implications**

After overviewing the conclusions from this study, I generated three significant implications that will further deepen our understanding of *The Last of Us*. First, in order for video games to be well received by players and critics, they must feature a balance of story and functional gameplay, while adhering to and challenging tropes. Hart and Daughton mention that generic deviance is a slow but eventual process (119). Generic texts, in this case survival horror video games, use some tropes in order to create a sense of familiarity among players. Even if a survival horror game hypothetically deviated from all tropes, the elements of the game will be characterized with tropes that are present in other genres. Second, the characterization present in *The Last of Us* is proof that our society's notions of masculinity and femininity are constantly changing. Players are beginning to become comfortable with deeper portrayals of men and women that deviate from tropes ingrained in videogames, which can lead to more thoughtful representations of characters of different backgrounds. Lastly, new video game genres can form from previously existing genres from film. This is evidenced by how I coined the term "Zombie Drama" to refer to texts that feature narratives that center around human experiences in zombie infested worlds. *The Last of Us* was inspired by films both within and outside the Horror genre. Neil Druckmann took the human aspects of science-fiction dystopian films and thriller films and combined it with the visual aesthetics of horror films to create the game. As every study is not perfect, I cover the limitations of my study in the next section.

**Limitations**

Despite the interesting analysis I conducted on *The Last of Us*, my study operated under four limitations. First, I left out video game influences in my analysis. Neil Druckmann was explicit with his influences and mentioned video games like *Ico (2001)* being one of the main

forms of inspiration for *The Last of Us* ("IGDA Toronto 2013 Keynote: Neil Druckmann,

Creative Director & Writer, Naughty Dog"; Webster). Despite the fact that I own a PS4, I do not

have access to a PS2 or a copy of different games like *Ico.* If I had access to an archive of

different video games, along with access to more classic video game consoles, I would be able to

derive connections between modern video games and classic video games. Another way I could

have approached my study is to analyze *The Last of Us* in relation to *Ico* or other games like *The*

*Walking Dead: The Game* or *Resident Evil*.

Second, my favoritism towards the game may have prevented me from analyzing the

video game in an objective and critical lens. This is a form of bias and I looked at the game from

a very specific perspective of a fan. It would be important for more scholars to study this

particular game in order for there to be more objective perspectives. Also, another scholar who is

familiar with video games but has not played *The Last of Us* can conduct a similar analysis and

have a different interpretation of the narrative from mine.

Third, I have not taken classes in video game design or theory, so I wrote this paper in the

style of a general film or television paper while integrating some explanations of gameplay

elements. If I had the background knowledge in video game design and theory, I would be able

to implement more content that would enhance my analysis of video game narrative in *The Last*

*of Us*.

Finally, I originally included a section under *Sound Design* that deconstructed the

musical score of the game in relation to the narrative of the game. As I was in the process of

constructing an argument for the score that the score evokes emotion over horror among the

players, I experienced difficulty writing out this section due to my lack of background in music

and music theory. I feel that it would be best if I knew how to read sheet music or interpret

musical sounds or point out which instruments were being used in a song, which could allow me to write a thorough analysis on music in video games. Despite these limitations, I discuss the recommendations I have for studying *The Last of Us* in the next section.

**Recommendations**

Some recommendations I have for future research are for researchers to use other forms of rhetorical criticism, which can lead to a deeper understanding of *The Last of Us* as it is packed with meaning and social significance. For example, I briefly touched on the roles of the female and male characters in the characterization section of my analysis. By applying feminist ideological criticism, a researcher could analyze the representation of the main characters of the game.

I also recommend that researchers consider conducting a cross-analysis of *The Last of Us* and another game, which could create conversations ranging from the technical complexities of new video games or differing video game narrative structures. Along with this, more research can be conducted on the survival horror video game genre, where researchers can conduct a narrative analysis on multiple survival horror video games to show how current survival horror video games are exploring different forms of storytelling.

Another recommendation I have is for future researchers to analyze *The Last of Us'* impact on the political economy of the video game industry. I mention the intricacies of the political economy of the video game industry in my Literature Review, but it was not the focus of my research since I wanted to understand how *The Last of Us* challenges survival horror video game genre conventions through its narrative. If future research is to be conduct from this approach, researchers could analyze the sales of both the PS3 and PS4 version of the game, along

with the PS3 and PS4 bundles that include the game. They can also look at social media and forum archives to look at how fans are interacting with the text.

I acknowledge that one of my flaws as a researcher is that this is my first attempt in conducting a research project on a video game. Therefore, my last recommendation would be for a researcher who is trained in video game design or video game writing to take an interdisciplinary approach to studying this game, as they would be able to explain the complexities of the game mechanics and programing. After thoroughly studying *The Last of Us*, I conclude my study with final thoughts in the next section, where I discuss the trailers for the upcoming sequel.

**Final Thoughts**

A few years have passed since *The Last of Us* entered the market in 2013 and Naughty Dog released a trailer in 2016 for a sequel called *The Last of Us Part II*. In the new game, five years have passed and Joel enters an abandoned house scattered with dead bodies before walking in on Ellie silently playing the guitar and singing. When Joel enters through the door and asks Ellie how she is doing, she replies, "I'm gonna find and I'm gonna kill every last one of them" ("*The Last of Us Part II* - PlayStation Experience 2016: Reveal Trailer | PS4"). This particular line is intriguing since the first game explored the nurturing relationship between Joel and Ellie and it seems that Ellie has grown to despise a group of people that has done something bad to her.

The most recent trailer of the game was released on October 30, 2017 during Paris Games Week 2017 as a surprise for the attendees. The trailer did not feature Joel or Ellie, but rather a cast of four new characters, Yara, Lev, Emily, and an unnamed woman. Both the unnamed woman and Yara are taken to Emily for questioning and are tortured until Lev saves them with

their bow and arrow. Like the first trailer, the second trailer is intriguing as it features the first

Asian characters in the game. Also, Lev is the first transgender/gender non-conforming character

in the game, which is a step in the right direction after the game explored queer representations

with Bill, Ellie, and Riley. I predict that the next game will push the developers to explore more

gameplay elements and narrative themes and further shape the survival horror video game genre.

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**APPENDIX A: PREWRITING ANALYSIS QUESTIONS**

1. How is *The Last of Us'* narrative different from other survival horror video games?

2. Since this is a character-driven story, how are the characters significant to the plot and how are they compelling?

3. How do the characters look and why is their appearances significant to their personas?

4. In what ways is gender represented in this game? How much agency are the female characters given? How do the male characters subvert traditional video game masculinity?

5. What texts shaped and inspired the creation of *The Last of Us*? What connections can you draw between the films and the game?

6. How are visuals and sound significant to the narrative of the game? What can be said about the art design and the sound of the game?

7. How can the environments influence how the players perceive the tone of the game?

8. How is the dialogue of the game compelling? How does it push the narrative of the game further?

9. What purpose do cutscenes serve in the game? In what ways are they helpful in storytelling?

10. What are examples of compelling character moments? How do their interactions tell us more about who they are as people? In what ways does the game construct their identities and make them feel real to players?

11. How do the characters appearances and physical traits make them every-person characters?

12.  What are the major themes of the game? How does *The Last of Us* deal with death and human relationships versus other survival horror video games?