

MA MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

An Exploration of Lara Croft: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly

Laura Bacigalupo

Dr. Jennifer Burwell

September 13, 2011

The Major Research Paper is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Joint Graduate Program in Communication & Culture Ryerson University – York
University Toronto, Ontario, Canada

September 13, 2011

Introduction

The video game *Tomb Raider* features an authoritative young woman who is physically active, brave and assertive, and conquers countless adversaries. Out of context, this sounds like a great role model for young men and women who are video game fans and players. Unfortunately, the reality is that Lara Croft also reinforces the traditional sexual stereotypes of women. Dressed provocatively in tight, form-fitting clothing and accentuates her large breasts, which can arguably distract the viewer from her more 'masculine' features of action, courage and leadership, Lara disappoints feminists in the sense that she does not send a clear or consistent message of what it means to be a strong female.

In this paper, I explore the character Lara Croft from the *Tomb Raider* game and affiliated film series through the lens of several feminist theories. The interpretation of Croft by the game's player as either a positive or a negative role model is challenging and presents an opportunity to participate in a continuing debate concerning the expected social behaviours of gender. While my focus will be on feminist theories, I also include an exploration of George Herbert Mead's play stage and its relevance to the reception of video games by their audiences. I will use Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze, Judith Butler's thesis of gender as a performance, as well as Donna Haraway's concept of the cyborg to answer the question of whether Lara Croft is a benefit or detriment to the progression of women in the video game industry.

Game Background

The first game in the Lara Croft series, *Tomb Raider*, was released in the United Kingdom in 1996 by the then relatively unknown game developer Core Design, a subsidiary of Eidos Interactive (IP Profile Tomb Raider, 2008; Deuber-Mankowsky, 2005). Rick Dangerous, closely modeled after the American movie character Indiana Jones, preceded Lara Croft in the action-adventure game that eventually became the *Tomb Raider* series (Deuber-Mankowsky, 2005). After *Tomb Raider*'s initial release, reviews of the game highlighted its strikingly similar game play and cinematic perspective to the Indiana Jones series, despite the fact that the main character is a woman (Deuber-Mankowsky, 2005). The change from male to female character lead was quite dramatic, as Rick Dangerous, "a rotund little man who wore a slouch hat and carried a pistol" (Deuber-Mankowsky, 2005, p. 14), could not hope to compare visually to Lara's voluptuous female body, tight dark pants, green tank top, hiking boots and several dangerous weapons (Herbst, 2004, p. 30). This shift in the lead character from a short, stocky male to a curvy, beautiful woman proved to be a successful gamble for the small developing firm. Following this success, in 1997 Core Design released *Tomb Raider II*, earning top sales of more than seven million units--the highest of any single game to date (IP Profile Tomb Raider, 2008). Each succeeding year, including 2009, has seen a release of another chapter in the *Tomb Raider* saga (IP Profile Tomb Raider, 2008). The huge success of *Tomb Raider* allowed Eidos to expand onto the international gaming market (IP Profile Tomb Raider, 2008).

While a virtual figure, Lara Croft's detailed image and history have granted her an almost real persona, complete with personal history. Lara Croft is the daughter of British aristocracy, born in Wimbledon, London, UK to Lord Henshingly Croft and his wife. Lara's adventures begin after an airplane crash in the Himalayans, which forces her to fight her way through the treacherous mountain terrain to safety (Deuber-Mankowsky, 2005). We know Croft is blood type -A/B-, that her birthday is February 14, 1968, and that her favourite pastimes include shooting and free climbing. Croft has also had an illustrious education at English and Swiss boarding schools (Deuber-Mankowsky, 2005). Measurements repeated through the websites of fans and developers report that Croft's physical features come in at 5'10" 34DD-24-35 (Lara's Identity, 2006). These measurements paint the picture of a woman who is, under normal circumstances, not physically adapted to engaging in combat or going on wild adventures. Croft's costume throughout the series consists of tight shorts or pants, hiking boots, several varieties of weaponry including, but not limited to, a 9 mm handgun and an M-16 automatic rifle, paired with a green Lycra tank top (Herbst, 2004). It is obvious that Croft's clothes are designed for appeal to the primary video game market of adolescent males and not for ease of movement or comfort.

While physically the lead figure of *Tomb Raider* displays a feminine body and appearance, the game play is far from what most would describe as 'girly.' Players guide Croft through tombs, chambers, and ruined palaces in search of abandoned treasure, priceless artefacts, and other archaeological booty, all while fighting off a seemingly endless number of adversaries (Deuber-Mankowsky, 2005). This

depiction of a female lead is in contrast to traditional video games geared towards young woman gamers. However, the overly sexual portrayal of female action figures is not uncommon, as discussed in Jeffery Brown's (2004) *Gender, Sexuality and Toughness: The Bad Girls of Action Film and Comic Books*.

Brown argues that the response to putting women in masculine roles has its challenges as well as its strengths. In an industry that attracts players of varying ages, genders and skill sets, it is vital for men and women to take turns at the helm when it comes to acting as video game lead. More female character leads in action-adventure role playing games (RPGs) will demonstrate progressive gender behaviour for both males and female players. For female players especially, placing a woman on the screen provides a site of empowerment that was traditionally lacking from the video game industry.

Games targeted for a primarily female audience were and still are arguably less active than those geared for male audiences. Examples of such include the *Sims* series, *Charm Girls Club: My Perfect Prom*, *My Baby Girl*, and *Disney Princess*. It is evident through the titles of these games that video games directed towards girls heavily emphasize traditional female norms such as vanity, motherhood, and caretaking. These traditional and restrictive categories for girl gamers may help explain the commercial success of the *Tomb Raider* series, as it provides an emerging trend to highlight women as action heroines. Placing the action of traditionally male-centric video games in the body of a stylized and sexualized woman also began new interpretations of player identification with game characters

that were previously rooted in gender (Brown, 2011). The successful commercial reception by a primarily male audience was in contradiction to previous conceptions of how game players and moviegoers were thought to identify with leading actors or characters based on same-gendered counterparts. Lara Croft proved that not only could a female video game character be a strong warrior, but she could also be a commercial and financial success.

Lara as a Contentious Role Model

During the mid to late 1990s, a wave in popular culture espoused the independence, assertiveness, ambition and self-reliance of women and girls. The “girl power” slogan of this era, that encouraged female independence and empowerment was ubiquitous in chart-topping musical singles by bands like the Spice Girls, Garbage and No Doubt. Feminist scholars such as Rosalind Gill have criticized the fact that when used in conjunction with consumerist commodities such as records, clothing and films, such a revolutionary idea loses its credibility.

The popularity of the Spice Girls was due in part to the unique and distinctive identity of each of the group’s singers – Geri “Ginger Spice” Halliwell, Victoria “Posh Spice” Beckham, Emma “Baby Spice” Bunton, Melanie “Sporty Spice” Chisholm and Melanie “Scary Spice” Brown. Their strong and individual identities were not without their points of contention for feminist scholars, as the band proudly flaunted its sexuality and the singers’ physical appearances. While the lyrics in the group’s songs encouraged independence, friendship, and respect, the physical appearance of the Spice Girls spoke more loudly of cleavage, mini skirts and

platform sandals. As with Lara Croft, the Spice Girls represented a contradiction for feminists: the Girls endorsed an active and empowered female, yet saw that message contradicted with overly sexualized appearances. The Spice Girls had commercial success similar to the *Tomb Raider* series, with a major box-office movie, a television special and numerous sold-out arena tours. The immense popularity of the Spice Girls helped to promote globally the “girl power” message and make it a mainstream phenomenon. Due to their widespread success, the Spice Girls reached an audience of millions of young females, who embodied the message of female empowerment but also began dressing like the band’s members. This led to widespread concern over the sexualisation of young teenage girls and negatively affected the positive connotations of the Spice Girls’ message (Gill, 2009).

The feminist ideals espoused by the Spice Girls, Lara Croft, and many other popular culture figures of the 1990s may have marked the beginning of what Rosalind Gill identifies as the re-sexualisation of women’s bodies (2009). Gill argues that this backlash against feminist qualities of the 1960s and 1970s – equity with men on issues of sexuality, authority and personhood – also represents a shift from the “external male gaze to a self-policing narcissistic gaze”; wherein women are actively choosing to participate in behaviours that make them sexualized objects (2009, n.p.). This shift in paradigm is evident in the examples of the Spice Girls and the commercial success of Lara Croft. Female consumers are becoming active participants in the subjectification and sexual objectification of themselves and their peers, which undermines the parallel message of participation in traditionally male dominated spheres, and empowerment.

This mid-1990s rise in third-wave feminism in response to perceived failures of the second-wave (Freedman, 2003) also saw the introduction and swells in popularity of the *Tomb Raider* game series (IP Profile Tomb Raider, 2008; Deuber-Mankowsky, 2005). Author Jeffery A. Brown's (2011) *Dangerous curves: Action heroines, gender, fetishism, and popular culture* outlines the historic success the Lara Croft series witnessed. Featured on magazines, music charts, thousands of websites, as well as an appearance on tour with U2, a brief Gucci modelling career and two Hollywood blockbusters starring super-celebrity Angelina Jolie, Croft proved her worthiness as a marketing marvel (2011, p. 108). The timing could not have been better for the arrival of a rather new video game action hero: an independent, very assertive, very sexy woman.

The representation of women in video games remains a highly contentious issue, and is the subject of study for many feminist scholars (Ivory, 2006; Miller & Summers, 2007; Beasley & Standley, 2002, for example). Within this medium, women are very frequently included in the game only to fill a minor role, limiting their contribution to the overall story (Beasley & Standley, 2002; Ivory, 2006; Miller & Summers, 2007). While *Tomb Raider* proves to be an exception in this regard, it does follow the dominant expectations that female video game characters, in comparison to their male counterparts, be drastically underdressed (Beasley & Standley, 2002). Additionally, female characters are styled in a more sexual manner (Miller & Summers, 2007; Beasley & Standley, 2002; Ivory, 2006) and overall are included in game narratives fewer times than male characters (Beasley & Standley, 2002; Ivory, 2006; Miller & Summers, 2007).

The contradiction of Croft's command over her harsh physical environment and her overtly feminine and sexualized appearance is where the character becomes further complicated: on the one hand, she stands as a still new type of video game character who is a battle-hardened woman. On the other hand, Croft succeeds in reinforcing an age-old representation of women as sexualized, fetishized objects, and in this case, literally ready to do the man's bidding by means of the console's controllers. This juxtaposition of qualities – power and objectification – positions Croft as a productive site to analyse the role of women in video games. Croft is not alone, however, as many narratives that position women as their lead character often combine this traditionally oxymoronic set of characteristics.

In his article *Gender, Sexuality, and Toughness: The Bad Girls of Action Film and Comic Books* (2004), Jeffery A. Brown looks at the issues involved when a woman is cast in an action role, and many of his comments are easily applicable to the role of Lara Croft. Brown's central concern is whether the women cast in these lead roles are truly in "a position of empowerment" (Brown, 2004, p. 47), or whether they are merely reinforcing the sexualized stereotypes that we have become accustomed to seeing. How a film's audience interprets this model of female action heroines is the focus of Brown's discussion, from which he has drawn several important conclusions.

Brown (2004) argues that female action heroes act as men in drag, a viewpoint, he writes, that is now commonplace. This representation of female action heroes "limits the acceptability of toughness as a legitimate characteristic for

women" (Brown, 2004, p. 52). Brown's argument counters conventional psychoanalytic theory, which proposes a strict gender binary, positioning females as passive, males as active. Brown (2004) argues that this dichotomy no longer applies to women who participate in these transgressive gender displays, and instead, he suggests, these roles straddle "both sides of the psychoanalytic gender divide. She is both subject and object, looker and looked at, ass-kicker and sex object" (p. 52). This description, while written in Brown's text about Pamela Anderson in the cinematic flop *Barb Wire* (1996), could just as easily been penned with Lara Croft in mind. Anderson's character in *Barb Wire* can be further compared to Croft's in the sense that both women are overtly sexualized, but are still able to maintain a masculine and tough persona. Brown (2004) argues that this combination of sexual appeal and physical toughness is exactly what allows the character to step outside of the supposed naturalized gender roles and instead play in both worlds at once (Brown, 2004).

Brown (2004) also examines the depiction of female super heroes in comic books, and the representation of their sexuality and aggressive action. As in *Tomb Raider*, the women in *Bad Girl Comics*, an all-female series of women action heroes, are shown as strong, athletic, and independent (Brown, 2004). At first glance, this may be an improvement for women in yet another male-dominated industry, but an appreciation of how women are depicted quickly extinguishes much hope of a transgressive gender movement (see Figure 2). The women in these comics are drawn as having tight, revealing clothing, large breasts, bare legs, and perfectly coiffed hair (Brown, 2004). Included in this hypersexualization of women in comics

are the cartoon and television classics many women grew up admiring, such as Wonder Woman, *X-Men's Rouge*, *Charlie's Angels*, and *The Avengers*, which captured the attention of the predominantly young male audience (Brown, 2004). Lastly, Brown (2004) suggests that the hypersexualization of female action heroines is an attempt by male directors and game developers to disguise the fear of castration, which psychoanalysts argue is present within adolescent males and is directed towards females. Lara's ubiquitous accessories including sunglasses, holster/garter belt, and long braided hair further reinforce her femininity and remove her as a threat to players' masculinity (Kennedy, 2002).

While women and girls have picked up pace as active consumers and players of video games, there are still many instances of mis- or under-representation of women in the games themselves. As many female avatars continue to serve male fantasies, many female gamers hesitate playing video games. Female evaluation of games marketed for male tastes and preferences noted condescending representations of women as more offensive than frequent in-game violence (Kerr, 2003, Thornham & McFarlane, 2011). Women gamers who make these observations may find the games so offensive they stop playing, further reducing the female presence in the gaming industry.

The Gender Gap

As women and girls continue to increase their presence in the video game industry as producers, writers, developers and importantly as players, it would seem only logical that women's presence within the games would similarly increase.

This has not been the case, as males continue to dominate the lead character of many titles. When an integral aspect of the game-player connection is dependent on the game's lead character, it does not make sense for developers to leave females out of the picture. Decisions about whether or not to render a leading character male or female, or whether the player has the option of choosing one gender over the other at the game's beginning are crucially important in respect to the game's development and to its commercial reception.

A successful video game character is one wherein a player feels the character is representative of themselves in regards to gender and ethnicity. When a player can identify with aspects of the game's character, the player is able to forget the action is happening in a digital world and they can lose themselves in the game-play. The expectation for games to be as realistic as possible often results in representation of traditional gendered behaviour and character development. This accounts for the very strong male presence in war/combat games such as *Call of Duty*. There are a few exceptions, however, as *Halo* allows players the choice of male or female avatars. A simple explanation as to why many games provide only one (male) lead character ties back to resources. Creating a game that allows players to choose either a female or a male lead may mean having to build two separate narratives since a woman character would have different types of interactions than the man (this is seen in games such as *Star Wars: Knights of The Old Republic* 2003). In addition to creating a story geared for two visually different people means creating two sets of costumes, possibly with different items for each (skirts instead of pants, various headgear, style differences in shirts, etc.). Developers must also take care to

change gendered references in the speech of secondary characters. In an attempt to include both genders, developers may run out of resources as these differences can take hundreds of hours and dollars to change. There are exceptions of course, with games such as *Mirror's Edge*, *Left 4 Dead*, *Portal*, and Lionhead's *Fable I-III* — all of which include either both female and male characters, or a primary female character.

Lionhead's *Fable* series allows the player to choose at the game's onset whether she wants to control a male or female character. Both male and female characters face the same choices throughout the game's narrative. This includes the freedom to choose spouses of either gender; each shows physical growth the same way through increased muscular build, and both are equals in terms of ability. Despite this even footing, many gamers and indeed the game's designers have admitted that while a female character is a wonderful benefit to the *Fable* series, many try to maintain the feminine figure of their character (Marie, 2010). Instructing your character to avoid foods that have a high fat score and choosing only celery sticks shrinks the character's size. While this diet regime is problematic unto itself for the way it takes an extreme view of healthy and balanced eating, Lionhead has stated they will not sacrifice a female character for sake of appearance, and will continue to design female leads even if they are not necessarily beautiful by contemporary standards (Marie, 2010).

Other companies have encountered the same issues as Lionhead when incorporating female characters. Crackdown developers Thomson and Cope had

difficulty translating a female character into their game because they did not know how to handle the physical progression through the game as the character became stronger and thus bulkier in size (Marie, 2010). They found the male version easy to bulk up and re-dress as the levels progressed, but they felt the female character “didn’t look nearly as nice at the top levels” as it had at the game’s onset (Ibid). Epic Games’ Cliff Bleszinski shares the same concerns about creating a perfect female character, and proposes that the ideal design has relatability for male and female players, is attractive without appearing too sexual, is aggressive but not masculine, and smart but not too smart (Ibid). While it may be a tedious list of requirements to get just right, the bottom line is that sex still sells. If designers feel the game’s design style cannot render a female character commercially attractive then the decision to exclude her is easily made to alleviate the risk of poor market reception.

If only to provide a ray of light in a relatively bleak situation, characters from widely popular series Kat-320 (*Halo*), Alyx Vance (*Half-Life*), Zoey (*Left 4 Dead*) and Chell (*Portal*) stand as female characters who pose as viable counterparts to male characters. Female representation in the *Gears of War* series is problematic, as women become part of the military ranks only if they are infertile, unable to assist in the re-population of the world. Hope is on the horizon however, as developer Crystal Dynamics readies for the 2012 release and re-boot of the *Tomb Raider* franchise.

New Directions

Sagging critical and commercial successes in the *Tomb Raider*’s most recent series due to faulty game-play, and increasingly poor graphics, demanded a change

in course, and in 2008 Eidos (now Square Enix) enlisted game developer Crystal Dynamics to provide this fresh vision. Crystal has been involved with the *Tomb Raider* series since 1998, helping to develop the latest chapter ending with *Tomb Raider: Anniversary* released in 2008. Simply titled *Tomb Raider*, the latest iteration of this series is set for release in late 2012. The new title is a reboot of the series rather than a continuation of a now familiar narrative. Croft's escapades began in 1997 against the backdrop of a plane crash. The struggle Croft endured to survive this crash and return to civilization was the first of many dangerous adventures. The series reboot will show a younger Croft surviving a shipwreck off the coast of Japan and the ensuing challenge of staying alive (Marie, 2010). Crystal Dynamics aims to achieve a video game character that is more approachable, likeable, and realistic to the increasing gaming audience. To obtain these goals, Croft's physical appearance, behaviour, and environment were changed.

With the game's development now in Crystal Dynamic's hands, *Tomb Raider: Legend* (2006) showed Croft as more athletic looking, with an emphasis on softer and more natural facial features while at the same time maintaining the sensual M-shape profile of her lips. *Legend* also saw Croft as having increased firepower at her disposal, drawing more attention to her actions and strength than her looks. Released in 2008, *Tomb Raider: Underworld* ushered in an even more realistic and proportional depiction of Croft, including increased muscular and bone structure. In this title, game developer Core Design had fully embraced Croft as a sex symbol and emphasized her physicality through inappropriate clothing for the environment (i.e. minimal and skin-tight), and a more curvaceous form (Marie, Game Informer, 2010).

Coupled with Croft's sexy appearance are provocative marketing images, which included near-nudes, gratuitous cleavage shots and Croft dressed in slinky evening attire. In 1999 with *Tomb Raider IV*, Lara reverted to her now trademark outfit of tight tank top and short cargo shorts for the game's entirety. *Tomb Raider Chronicles* (2000) included a second skin black cat suit, an almost-caught-while-changing Lara, and several more wardrobe changes. In 2003 with *Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness*, Croft modelled moodier make-up, messier hair and realistic proportions thanks to technical advancements. Developers kept the form fitting clothing and these sizing modifications are difficult to notice. *Angel of Darkness*, due to technical bugs and unresponsive controls, was the last title developed by Core Designs and poorly received by critics and gamers (Marie, 2010). Croft's developers have recognized her unrealistic imagery and have attempted to normalize her appearance to make her popular once again with the gaming audience.

As one of the most recognizable characters in video game design, Croft's physical appearance is an important and profitable marketing tool. Changing too much would alienate players; however, revisions needed to be made as Croft became an increasingly unrealistic and unrelatable figure to the increasing (female) gaming population. Helping the solution Crystal utilized significant progress in technical rendering, allowing Croft's image to be more realistic than ever before in the series. More proportionate and realistic, Croft's makeover included decreased breasts and an increased waist circumference. The environment and her movements dictated Croft's clothing choice, rather than current trends or sexual appeal. In reference to the increased realism of the game, designers ensured the clothing

would reflect Croft's situation and for instance will rip, tear and dirty as she progresses through the game. Crystal Dynamic developers have emphasized the human side of Croft with the hope players will better connect and feel empathy towards her. Sexuality is downplayed in the series reboot, something Art Director Brian Horton expresses when he states that Crystal Dynamics chose not to make Croft a sexual object (Marie, Game Informer, 2010). Keeping with this theme, Croft will not have a multitude of wardrobes, nor will sexualized items such as bikinis or bathrobes be available as unlockable items as they were in earlier titles.

Increased realism in Croft's behaviour as well as her wardrobe is another new direction. While earlier titles had Croft unnecessarily back-flipping herself onto ledges in a way that at best resembled a circus performer, or worse an exotic dancer, the focus in the upcoming game is on capability, not acrobatics (Marie, Game Informer, 2010). Having Croft behave in realistic and appropriate ways will redeem the series from being a voyeuristic site for game-boys' fantasies and establish her as a bona-fide action heroine. Game designers also attempted to show the effects of Croft's physical action on her body as well, but determined that a character with a broken arm would likely hinder game-play. Another more intangible aspect of Croft's persona that was changed was the depiction of her self-confidence. The beginning of the game will show Croft unsure and afraid of her surroundings, but as challenges are completed and levels passed, the player will see an increasingly confident young woman on their screen. This internal strength is what keeps the character pursuing her adventures and defeating her enemies. Allowing players to

see Croft grow internally will create a bond between player and character that will keep the game going.

The attempts to depict Croft as a more realistic and human character will also move the player's focus from Croft's body onto what her body is doing, emphasizing the active behaviour, what I argue to be the game's most positive feature. Maintaining Croft's appealing looks is important for commercial success, but increasing the realism in her clothing and behaviour is vital to communicating a clear and positive message of women in video games.

As the developers of the *Tomb Raider* series prepare for a re-launch of the classic storyline, other video game companies are seeing the potential in attracting female gamers. Consoles such as Nintendo's Wii and Microsoft's Xbox Kinect are two such innovations that are reaching out and gaining the attention of girl gamers. These new technologies allow players to learn new games more quickly with shorter learning curves and more universally appealing content such as sports and dance.

The introduction of interactive gaming consoles such as Wii and Xbox Kinect have influenced gender involvement in video game play. Both of these systems produce games for players that are both physically involving for the once sedentary player and transferable across the genders. The introduction of these games into the market creates a stage for both male and female characters and players to share and experience the game in an egalitarian manner. While the Wii console focuses heavily on sport-themed games, players are encouraged to create avatars (called Miis) to

represent themselves during game play. Allowing players to personalize the game's characters provides a site of identity and representation for the players as they manipulate avatars that look and move as they do. Another important aspect to the Wii console, and others like it, is the rapid learning curve for new players due to the similarity of the actions in both the real and virtual settings (Juul, 2010). For example, Wii tennis requires players to flick their controller when the ball is heading for their avatar. This similarity between the Wii games' actions and the movements in real tennis presents an approachable environment for new gamers to explore. Creating games that so closely mimic their real-life counterparts allows players to compete against each other in a way that is equal for both males and females. Microsoft's X-box Kinect is well known for its dance game *Dance Central* (Harmonix Music Systems, 2010), which has vast appeal to both young men and women due to its advanced graphics and high entertainment value at social gatherings (Vincent, 2010). To make the Wii widely appealing beyond the primarily male gaming demographic, developers updated and re-released older games to be compatible with the console's new level of interaction. *Tomb Raider Anniversary* (1997) was one of these releases, which featured new interactive components and modes of control. Although the developers incorporated new ways of manipulating Croft through the game, features such as her physical appearance, including her wardrobe, were untouched.

It is the sexual style of Croft's wardrobe, however – left mainly untouched for nearly twenty years – that is one of the biggest contributors to her objectification by the games' players. At the same time, it is also her relation to the male player invites

a discussion on the hierarchal relationship formed between the viewer and the viewed, which I will explore using Laura Mulvey's essay on the male gaze.

Lara as Subject of the Male Gaze

The player experiences Croft's adventures through a third-person perspective, which brings her into the player's field of vision throughout the series' adventures (Herbst, 2004). This constant ability to watch Croft allows the formation of a hierarchal relationship between the player and the character that is receptive to analysis through Laura Mulvey's (1975) theory of the gaze. Several of Mulvey's (1975) arguments within *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) can be applied to the *Tomb Raider* game series, including the similarity in viewing styles of both film and video games and the use of female characters as subject for the male gaze.

Cut-scenes are transitions between narrative arcs when the player is no longer controlling players and is observing scripted dialogue and action footage. This technique is frequently used for progressing storyline in adventure RPGs such as *Tomb Raider*. These observe-only sections of games can be analysed through traditional film techniques due to the cinematic quality and similar response from the player/audience. The description of its opening scene found in Deuber-Mankowsky's (2005) text, *Lara Croft: Cyber Heroine* further explains this connection between game and film:

Tomb Raider leads off with a video sequence accompanied by music. The player gets carried away as he or she watches an unconscious Lara slide

through a tunnel into a dark tomb...[F]rom the outset of *Tomb Raider* one is forced to assume a “passive, receptive role, as in film.” After the video sequence, the game begins, and the player navigates Lara through the various levels via a keyboard or joystick, watching her movements from the perspective of an imaginary camera. Among the game’s graphic innovations was the integration of dynamic perspective; that is, the positions of rooms [etc.] adjust to the movement...of the camera. [...] The various features of *Tomb Raider*...lend one to conclude that its message, its content, is the interactive movie. (pp. 28-29)

Traditionally, playing an action adventure RPG occurs in a setting that decreases face-to-face interaction with other individuals. The individual playing an action role-playing game (RPG) sits facing the images displayed on either the computer screen or television. Similar to viewing a movie, the players or audience may be surrounded by other participants of the game or viewers of the images (Mulvey, 1975), but their interaction with each other is somewhat limited during game-play as it is during the screening of a film. Focusing the player’s attention at the screen creates a relationship between player and game that is similar to the one between audience and film star. This connection is more intense as the game’s players direct the action of the character, and therefore the story’s narrative, themselves.

The result of this viewing experience creates a hierarchy of power between the player and the images, allowing the viewer to objectify the image on screen.

Because of this power, Mulvey (1975) states, the male viewer is able to project his sexual fantasies onto the on-screen image without fear of social repercussions or shame. This process is present for video game players as well, as much of the literature suggests (Beasley & Standley, 2002; Deuber-Mankowsky, 2005; Herbst, 2004; Ivory, 2006; Kennedy, 2002; Miller & Summers, 2007).

Although Mulvey applied her theories to cinema, the video game is also an appropriate arena for application of these terms. The effect of this intense concentration and focus allows the spectator/player to project onto the female characters his own sexual fantasies and objectifications, as in cinema. This already intensified gaze is increasingly problematic due to the sexualized or peripheral role of women as minor and supporting characters within a game's narrative. Setting aside how the audience/player views Lara Croft, I now turn to Croft's gender bending behaviour. Judith Butler's 1990 book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, deals specifically with these issues and argues that gender performance is a socially and culturally prescribed phenomenon. Our bodies, Butler argues, are the sites of inscription for these behaviours and we reflect our choice to adhere to or reject these expectations through our physical appearance and actions. It is evident within the *Tomb Raider* series that Lara Croft, while at once an object for the audiences' gaze and projected sexual fantasies, is also a maverick in the sense that she rejects traditional gender roles and behaviours, alluding to the potential of Croft as ideal feminist action heroine.

Lara Croft on Performing and Rejecting Gender Roles

The unequivocal depiction of gender role transgression as shown by Lara Croft is her explicit adoption of the active/male gender attributes despite her overtly “feminine” appearance (breasts, slim waist, pronounced hips, long hair, etc.). Lara’s positioning as lead character in an action-adventure RPG moves her away from the conventional depiction of traditional female avatars, which traditionally were mothers, waitresses and prom queens. The highlighted absence of any conventional female behaviour such as emotional expression and nurturing behaviours further aligns Croft with the traditional active/male classification. In the light of traditional gendered behaviour, Croft is at best a complicated subject. She is a representative model of transgressed gendered norms, while at the same time stands as a site of objectification due to her sexualized appearance.

Butler’s core thesis in *Gender Trouble* (1990) is that gender is socially constructed and inscribed upon and within our bodies by the repeated practice of the gestures associated with each gender. The cultural sites responsible for our socialization further entrench this process of inscription. Butler examines families, legal and political bodies, as well as visual cultural media, all of which aim to reinforce what is prescribed as gender appropriate behaviour. In direct opposition to behaviour that is presumed as inherent and natural female behaviour, Croft assumes the male action and role of aggressor, rather than dutifully fulfilling what should be her presumed nurturing female behaviour.

Instead of being a stereotypical female, that is one who is nurturing, caring, and concerned about and her romantic relationships with men, Croft is tough, cold-hearted, and aggressive. Lacking any remorse, she kills her adversaries with skill and without hesitation. To see these “tough” attributes successfully played by a woman shows the arbitrary nature of ascribing supposedly inherent features to genders. Croft’s active and aggressive performance throughout the series indicates the fallibility of culturally prescribed assumptions about what it means to “be” female/male. If we were to go on appearance alone, Lara Croft would be more culturally acceptable as a fashion model or adult film star than action hero. Yet at the same time, the overtly sexualized feminine appearance holds Croft back from attaining the status of a progressive female role model, as she is still a sexual object of desire for the audience.

In her text *Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular Culture* (1999), Sherrie A. Inness examines what it means for both men and women to be defined as tough, and concludes that while toughness is a socially constructed and prescribed notion, it lends itself to a concise definition. Inness describes “tough” as women being capable of withstanding great physical endurance, often being in possession of supernatural abilities, as well as “[having] the stamina to endure when physically weaker women might fail” (Inness, 1999, p. 13). Lara Croft certainly proves this point: however, her limitless digital “lives” as programmed into the game’s design does question the validity of this toughness (Herbst, 2004)¹. Lacking

¹ The concept of toughness tied to mortality is further complicated, due to the summer 2001 release of *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* starring the flesh and blood actor Angelina Jolie. Herbst, C. (2004). Lara’s Lethal

the physiological requirements to die physically skews the ability to describe Croft as “tough” as her physical challenges will never cause her to feel pain. The issue becomes increasingly complicated when taking into account the fact that Lara Croft “became” a real woman (i.e. Angelina Jolie) for the first feature film in 2001. The physical challenges and stamina shown by Jolie during the taping of the film were certainly real, therefore the “tough” label is more accurately applied to her real-life counterpart.

Another socially prescribed attribute of women is the assumption that they will engage in childbirth and reproduction. Croft again defies this expectation, symbolically represented through her physical build. Herbst notes that while Croft blatantly signifies sex through her ample bust and revealing clothing, her impossibly cinched waist just as loudly declares her as “not pregnant and thus ‘available’ for the act of procreation” (2004, p. 29). Furthering this point, Herbst says Croft is “designed to trigger sexual impulses leading up to reproduction but biologically she is clearly not capable of reproducing” (2004, p. 33). Herbst concludes that perhaps Croft’s hard and hostile femininity is yet another method of easing the threat she poses to males (2004). She is, as Herbst sums up, “the antithesis of a caretaker” (2004, p. 31) a male character when it counts, a fantasy female character when it counts, and a non-threatening character when it counts.

Herbst (2004) argues that this obvious lack of reproductive ability echoes a larger movement wherein technology replaces the natural reproduction process.

and Loaded Mission. In S. A. Inness (Ed.), *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture* (pp. 21-45). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Intimately linked to this shift is the fact that the video game is a series of pixels and polygons. Herbst's theory indicates a link between the concept of a cyborg and Lara Croft as a machine/human hybrid. A cyborg, at once part human part machine, "both imagination and material reality"² is feminist theorist Donna Haraway's (1991, p. 150), epitomized figure of the future. While Croft visually has the traits of a physical and material woman and invites/encourages the objectification of her flesh-and-blood counterparts, her location in a virtual world of code and graphics explicitly positions her inside a machine. Reality and technology are inextricably linked through the image of Lara Croft, placing her in alignment with Donna Haraway's cyborg. Using this description to view Croft as Haraway's cyborg invites consideration of the future of gendered behaviour and how technology permits changes to contested expectations.

Croft as Cyborg

Haraway (1991) uses the cyborg as an embodiment of a new feminism that promotes a transition away from a world without gender. Haraway's (1991) description of what constitutes a cyborg is strikingly familiar to the figure of Lara Croft, as she is at once biological and technological; she is a work of fiction as well as physically real, inhabiting a world at once constructed and natural not to mention eternally youthful (Schleiner, 2001). The cyborg, as well as Lara Croft, embodies a "no fear" attitude towards "partial identities and contradictory standpoints" explicit in Croft's participation in physical battle and her overtly feminine appearance

² This rings particularly true when one considers the transition of Lara Croft from the gamers' television screen to her debut in two major Hollywood films starring A-listers Angelina Jolie.

(Haraway quoted in Keen, p. 2). This post-gender world envisioned by Haraway also shakes off the structural boundaries surrounding genders, which are often the driving force behind patriarchal gender inequalities (quoted in Spittle, 1997, p. 5). While Croft does not go so far as to be without gender, she indicates a step in the direction of permeable gender roles and behaviours by successfully enacting the traditional role of males and frequently discarding the expected passive behaviours of females.

The cyborg is important to Haraway because it represents “transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities” for Western patriarchal society (1991, p. 155). All of these factors are present within Lara Croft as she goes beyond the cultural expectations of women by adopting the active/male role, as well as symbolizing a potentially dangerous future for those who subscribe to traditional gender ideologies of what women’s roles could become.

Haraway’s cyberfeminism embodies the reluctance for a prescribed set of gendered behaviours and attitudes, which Butler echoed in *Gender Trouble*. With the help of technology, cyberfeminism throws aside identity, gender and sexuality constraints (in Kunzru, 1992) for an ideal world without prescribed expectations. With the aid of the game’s controller (i.e. technology), the player manipulates a feminine figure to enact behaviours that are in opposition to the traditional constraints placed upon women. The interaction with technology and how individuals absorb the powerful messages within now requires attention. In the case of video games, a state of immersion overcomes the player as she becomes

engrossed in the narrative and images on her television screen. Within this state players subconsciously adapt the attitudes and beliefs of the story with which they are interacting.

Immersion

The quality of immersion in video games can determine how strongly a player adopts the beliefs and attitudes presented within the games' narrative structure into her own belief systems (Lewis et al., 2008, Lankoski, 2011, Murray, 2004, Mayra" & Ermi, 2003). Immersion in a video game relies on the presence of several factors, including a complex environment that is ideal for exploration and discovery of hidden artefacts; multiple opponents varying in skill and strength to match the player's own progress; diegetic sensory effects ("mood" lighting, sounds, scripted speech, etc.); a variety of textures and dynamic lighting; new weapons, health and ammunition as rewards; and a solid narrative structure (Mayra" & Ermi, 2003 pp.4).

These environmental characteristics help a player forget that she is in a virtual world, and give the impression she is truly interacting with the images on-screen. Depending on the intensity of immersion, for a few hours a player can feel as if she is a character in the virtual world, accomplishing the tasks and goals of her computer generated persona. Games scholars Brown and Cairns (2004) identified three categories of immersion experienced by video game players, but of most concern here is total immersion. Described colloquially as "being in the zone" or "in the groove", when a player experiences total immersion she is engrossed in every

moment of game play. Additionally she is easily but genuinely challenged by the obstacles placed in her character's path (Brown and Cairns, 2004). Factors that increase immersion experiences include increased audio-visual output (i.e. bigger, clearer screens/displays and sound systems) that enhances the game's usability. Increased usability assists the creation of meaningful play that in turn leads to immersion. In sum: if the game successfully responds to the player's inputs and the play experience is relevant (is doing what the player wants) then the game feels more like real life. For immersion to be completely satisfied, the game must meet the user's expectations, it must provide significant tasks for the player to accomplish, and the game world must be consistent (Ermi & Mayra, 2005, pp. 4). An integral part of the game world is a believable and relatable character.

Furthering this suspension of disbelief is the connection players create to their on-screen characters. This bond between player and character are common in games such as *Tomb Raider*, wherein the player manipulates and takes over the control of traditionally one lead character. Lewis et. al (2004) identify the main role of playing games (RPGs) as allowing a player to lose herself in the virtual world, creating empathy for the lead character. When a player begins playing as Lara Croft, she begins to imagine she is the one being chased by rumbling boulders, attacked by wild wolves and bears, and this connection is the motivating factor driving game progression. If the player is willing to accept the virtual world as real in that moment – and if the factors within the game consistently maintain this belief – the attachment between character and player intensifies. Indeed, the player begins to feel a sense of responsibility over her characters' safety and progress, and shares

with them the excitement of defeating a challenging boss or finding unexpected treasure. Additionally important to the formation of character attachment is how effectively the player can control the character's actions, because if the game/character is not responsive the prerequisites of immersion, usability, and consistency cannot be satisfied (Ermi & Mayra, 2003, pp.4). Highlighting the connection between player and character is the act of cosplay. Cosplay is the practice of creating and wearing costumes based on characters in video games or movies (Jenkins, 2008). While cosplay participation traditionally occurs at conventions or other major events in the gaming community, the simplicity of Croft's digital uniform is appealing. This strong connection with a character may lead to the player's adoption of this sexualized outfit in her offline life, which may influence her interaction with other gamers who view Croft as a sexual fantasy (Gamer Totoy, 2011, KATSUCON, 2010). Reproducing this objectification and in turn internalizing its effects is further explained through G.H. Mead's play and game stage, wherein children practice assuming the roles of others, which in turn affects their growing perceptions of self. This imitation of Croft's outfit shows the ease with which a player can put herself in a position of objectification.

Play and Game

The interpretation process of Croft's images, created for distribution and consumption by mostly children and young adults (Miller & Summers, 2007), requires deeper analysis. G.H. Mead theorizes that the "play stage", the process through which children develop a self, occurs via the interpretation of the social and gender role expectations exhibited by others around them. In essence, children

practice these behaviours and adapt these expectations in a way that is best for them. In the game stage the child must assume the roles and ideas of the other players on their team in order to behave appropriately according to what the child believes is expected of them by significant others (Mead, (1934) 1972).

In *Tomb Raider* the play stage is most important, as the attitude of computer-controlled players in the series is impossible to assume. The need for caution arises in this category of self-development because as Mead explains, “[t]hese social or group attitudes are brought within the individual’s field of direct experience, and are included as elements in the structure or constitution of his [sic] self” (Mead, (1934) 1972, p. 158). Dill and Thill (2007). note that video game players are not the only people influenced by the sexist and gendered messages, and that individuals who do not play video games are also affected, as illustrated above Awareness of the attitudes and ideologies expressed through the games is crucial, as they reach and may affect a larger audience beyond the game’s players.

Children can easily imitate the attitude and gender roles exhibited by Lara Croft after playing *Tomb Raider*. Pretending to be on an exciting adventure filled with danger, treasure and unforeseen enemies is a thrilling way to spend an afternoon. These young audiences then act out Croft’s adventures as if they were their own, exhibiting the same bravery, leadership and stamina of their idol. Lara Croft is not a one-dimensional figure and also projects with her negative connotations about what it means to be female. These negative aspects also affect the audience, and the same young girls could alternatively interpret femininity to

mean scantily clad and impossibly proportioned. In addition to the young girls playing these games, young boys are also internalizing the values projected by video games such as *Tomb Raider*, leading to the subjection of females in the boys' offline life. Countless academic studies recount these affects (Beasley & Standley, 2002; Ivory, 2006; Miller & Summers, 2007; Eastin, 2006; Chumbley & Griffiths, 2006; Dill & Thill, 2007). It is therefore vital that video games – those that feature a male or female lead – must fairly and respectfully represent all genders, as the targeted audience internalizes the material.

Reflection and Future Possibilities

The image and actions of Lara Croft have proven to be a contentious issue for feminist scholars, and for male and female video game players. At times, she represents a new powerful, assertive and aggressive female who is unwilling to adhere to social regulations or expectations. She is independent, a leader, strong both physically and emotionally, and ready to face any challenge head on. However, Lara Croft's blatantly sexualized physicality serves to reinforce practices of viewing women as sexual objects, demoting any positive message she may carry. The combination of these characteristics defies analysis in any straightforward way. In one sense, Croft symbolizes a break from the traditional female roles as housewife, caregiver and inhabitant of the domestic sphere. On another, she continues to reinforce the image of women as sexualized objects desired by men. As a potential for the future and as a figure akin to Donna Haraway's cyborg, Croft continues to transgress boundaries of gender, sex, nature and technology, creating a new image and potential model for the boundaries of gender roles.

Continued analyses of the Lara Croft character must equally take into account her actions and appearance, regardless of the chosen medium. The medium chosen for her presentation also influences how the viewers/players interpret her connotative messages. Developers need to be conscious of how games and play, while at first seemingly trivial and mundane pursuits, are important learning opportunities. This extremely important learning stage demands that publishers and developers ensure the message they are sending within their publications are appropriate for the audience. If developers are intentionally sending a sexualized message to its players, then higher ratings are required to restrict this content from more vulnerable audiences. Media campaigns, while targeting a select demographic, reach individuals far beyond the preferred audience. Additionally, tying a virtual image with a flesh and blood counterpart further muddles the message of attainability and expected gender norms. If a real woman acts out a virtual character, then the message sent is that an unattainable set of traits is possible, and that model (or in this case, set of models) is representative of the desirable beauty and physicality. Ironically, one of the reasons attributed to the downturn in sales of the *Tomb Raider* series was the embodiment of a virtual figure in a real person. This transfer of a digital character onto a real person failed to meet the expectations of players who related to her as a virtual character.

Tomb Raider's developers have realized that the gaming audience and its changing demographic has more sophisticated needs and requirements, and are adjusting the messages Croft espouses. This demand and change in standards holds for women in action heroine roles across all media. These figures should provide a

clearer site for positive role models to young women. Emphasis of women action figures should be less on their sex appeal and more on their actions and inner strength. Only a handful of female action figures are free from over-sexualized depictions (Buffy from the 1990s television series, and the previously mentioned video game characters: *Halo's* Kat-320, *Fable* character leads, and *Portal's* Chell). The new Croft should be an interesting character to watch, play and analyze, and as a female gamer I maintain hope that the developers have succeeded in bringing more of her intangible traits to the fore instead of her physical assets. The direction of women characters in video games is unknown. Future releases of titles such as *Fable*, *Portal*, and *Halo* are already in the works, ensuring that there will be *some* representation in upcoming games. Women's use of video games - for entertainment or educational purposes - must not stop. Potential gains from video game participation range from a presence in a world dominated by men, increased visual-spatial skills, problem solving and leadership skills, increased confidence, and an interest in digital arts. Last but not absolutely not least, we would gain equal and truthful representation of women in future games as designed by female developers.

Perhaps in time the more positive messages inherent within Lara Croft's image will increase while the gender binaries, that dominate the behaviour of offline males and females, will decrease. In a 2007 study, Dill and Thill found that the representation of women as passive in video games was changing, even though the sexualisation of women was not. This may be a brief change of course, and gender roles and expectations could reverse and narrow in a conservative reaction towards provocatively dressed female action heroes. The discourse that has begun around

Lara Croft and other women in non-traditional gender roles will continue to involve intimately the players as consumers of these images, and assist in the creation of new expectations for both men and women.

Appendix



Figure 1 - Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider: Anniversary*

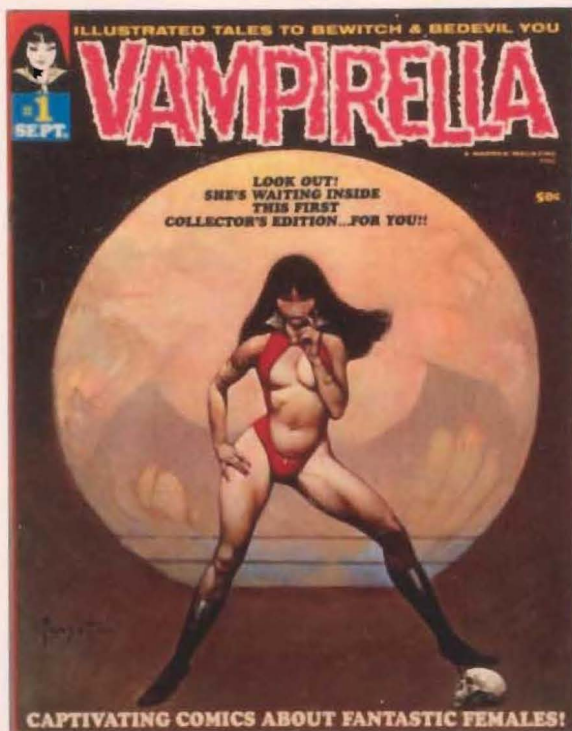


Figure 2 - *Vampirella* Comic Book from the Bad Girl Comics series



Figure 3 - Croft as she will appear in the upcoming 2012 re-boot

References

- Attendee Policies*. (2010). Retrieved August 19, 2011 from KATSUCON:
<http://www.katsucon.org/faqs/attendee-policies/>
- Beasley, B., & Standley, T. C. (2002). Shirts vs. Skins: Clothing as an iNdicator of Gender Role Stereotyping in Video Games. *Mass Communication & Society*, 5 (3), 279-293.
- Brown, E., & P, C. (2004, April). A Grounded Investigation of Game Immersion. *CHI '04 Extended Abstracts on Human Factors and Computing Systems*, pp. 1297-1300.
- Brown, J. A. (2004). Gender, Sexuality, and Toughness: the Bad Girls of Action Film and Comic Books. In S. A. Inness (Ed.), *Action Chicks: new images of tough women in popular culture* (pp. 47-74). New York, New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Brown, J. A. (2011). *Dangerous curves: action heroines, gender, fetishism, and popular culture*. Mississippi, USA: University Press of Mississippi.
- Butler, J. (1990). Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions. In J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (pp. 163-180, 215-216). New York: Routledge.
- Chumbley, J., & Griffiths, P. M. (2006). Affect and the computer Game Player: The Effect of Gender, Personality, and Game Reinforcement Structure on Affective Responses to Computer Game-Play. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 9, 308-316.
- Deuber-Mankowsky, A. (2005). *Lara Croft: Cyber Heroine*. (D. J. Bonfiglio, Trans.) Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dill, K. E., & Thill, K. P. (2007). Video Game Characters and the Socialization of Gender Roles: Young People's Perceptions Mirror Sexist Media Depictions. *Sex Roles*, 57, 851-864.
- Eastin, M. S. (2006). Video Game Violence and the Female Game Player: Self- and Opponent Gender Effects on Presence and Aggressive Thoughts. *Human Communication Research*, 32, 351-372.
- Freedman, E. (2002). *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women*. Toronto Canada: Random House Canada.
- Gill, R. (2009, May 09). *MR Zine*. Retrieved June 07, 2011 from From Sexual Objectification to Sexual Subjectification: The Resexualisation of Women's Bodies in the Media:
<http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2009/gill230509.html>

- Haraway, D. (1991). A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, 149-181.
- Herbst, C. (2004). Lara's Lethal and Loaded Mission. In S. A. Inness (Ed.), *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture* (pp. 21-45). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- How to Avoid Getting Harassed: 5 Simple Steps for Female Cosplayers*. (2011). Retrieved August 19, 2011 from Gamer Totoy: <http://www.gamertotoy.com/how-to-avoid-getting-harassed-5-simple-steps-for-female-cosplayers/>
- Inness, S. A. (1999). *Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular Culture*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- IP Profile Tomb Raider*. (2008, November 14). Retrieved November 26, 2009 from Develop Online: <http://www.develop-online.net/features/320/IP-Profile-Tomb-Raider>
- Ivory, J. D. (2006). Still a Man's Game: Gender Representation in Online Reviews of Video Games. *Mass Communication & Society*, 9 (1), 103-114.
- Jenkins, H. (1998). "Complete Freedom of Movement": Video Games as Gendered Play Spaces. In J. C. Jenkins (Ed.), *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games* (pp. 262-297). 1998, Massachusetts, USA: The MIT Press.
- Jenkins, H. (2008). Media Literacy - Who Needs It? In Willoughby, T., Wood, E. *Children's Learning in A Digital World* (pp. 15-39) Malden Massachusetts USA Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Juul, J. (2010). *A Casual Revolution: Reinventing Video Games and Their Players*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Keen, C. (n.d.). *On the Cyborg Manifesto*. Retrieved July 10, 2011 from University of Penn State - English Department: <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~jenglish/Courses/keen2.html>
- Kennedy, H. W. (2002). Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or Cyberbimbo? On the Limits of Textual Analysis. *The International Journal of Computer Game Research*, 2 (2), unknown.
- Kerr, A. (2003). Girls Women Just Want to Have Fun - A Study of Adult Female Players of Digital Games. *Level up: Digital games research conference* (pp. 1-17). Utrecht: University of Utrecht Press.
- Kunzru, H. (1992). You are Cyborg. *Wired*, 5 (02).

- Lankoski, P. (2011). Player Character Engagement in Computer Games. *Games and Culture*, 6 (4), 291-311.
- Lara's Bio. (2009). Retrieved November 26, 2009 from Tomb Raider Inc.: <http://www.tombraiderinc.com/tru-game-info/laras-biography>
- Lewis, M., Weber, R., & Bowman, N. D. (2008, November 4). "They May Be Pixels, But They're MY Pixels:" Developing a Metric of Character Attachment in Role-Playing Video Games. *Cyberpsychology & Behaviour*, 11 (4), pp. 515-518.
- Marie, M. (2010, December 7). *Game Informer*. Retrieved July 4, 2011 from Features: http://www.gameinformer.com/b/features/archive/2010/12/07/lara-croft_3a00_-the-evolution.aspx
- Marie, M. (2010, December 9). *Game Informer*. Retrieved July 7, 2011 from Features: http://www.gameinformer.com/b/features/archive/2010/12/09/a-survivor-is-born_3a00_-the-new-lara-croft.aspx
- Marie, M. (2010, March 25). *Game Informer*. Retrieved July 8, 2011 from Features: <http://www.gameinformer.com/b/features/archive/2010/03/25/the-gender-gap.aspx?PostPageIndex=3>
- Mayra, F., & Ermi, L. (2003). Power and control of games: Children as the actors of game cultures. *Level up Conference Proceedings* (pp. 234-245). Utrecht, Netherlands: University of Utrecht.
- Mead, G. ([1934] 1972). *Mind, Self, and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Miller, M. K., & Summers, A. (2007). Gender Differences in Video Game Characters' Roles, Appearances, and Attire as Portrayed in Video Game Magazines. *Sex Roles*, 57, 733-742.
- Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. *Screen*, 16 (3), 6-18.
- Murray, J. (2004, May 01). *From Game-Story to Cyberdrama*. Retrieved October 2, 2010 from Electronic Book Review: <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/firstperson/autodramatic>
- Pitzulo, C. (2008). The Battle in Every Man's Bed: Playboy and the Fiery Feminists. *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 17 (2), 259-289.
- Schleiner, A.-M. (2001). Does Lara Croft Wear Fake Polygons? Gender and Gender-Role Subversion in Computer Adventure Games. *Leonardo*, 34 (3), 221-226.
- Spittle, S. (1997, December). *Is Any Body Out There? Gender, Subjectivity and Identity in Cyberspace*. Retrieved July 10, 2011 from http://74.125.155.132/scholar?q=cache:iVJEr7zF7iIJ:scholar.google.com/+lara+croft+AND+cyborg&hl=en&as_sdt=0,5

- Thornham, H., & McFarlane, A. (2011). Cross-generational gender constructions. Women, teenagers and technology. *The Sociological Review*, 59 (1), 64-85.
- Vincent, B. (2010, November 19). *PopZara*. Retrieved July 7, 2011 from Games Reviews: <http://popzara.com/pages/1407/>