"A Jill Sandwich". Gender Representation in Zombie Videogames.

Esther MacCallum-Stewart

From *Resident Evil* (Capcom 1996 - present) to *The Walking Dead* (Telltale Games 2012-4), women are represented in zombie games in ways that appear to refigure them as heroines in their own right, a role that has traditionally been represented as atypical in gaming genres. These women are seen as pioneering – Jill Valentine is often described as one of the first playable female protagonists in videogaming, whilst Clementine and Ellie from *The Walking Dead* and *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog 2013) are respectively, a young child and a teenager undergoing coming of age rites of passage in the wake of a zombie apocalypse. Accompanying them are male protagonists who either compliment these roles, or alternatively provide useful explorations of masculinity in games that move beyond gender stereotyping.

At first, these characters appear to disrupt traditional readings of gender in the zombie genre, avoiding the stereotypical roles of final girl, macho hero or princess in need of rescuing. Jill Valentine, Claire Redfield and Ada Wong of the *Resident Evil* series are resilient characters who often have independent storyarcs within the series, and possess unique ludic attributes that make them viable choices for the player (for example, a greater amount of inventory). Their physical appearance - most usually dressed in combat attire - additionally means that they partially avoid critiques of pandering to the male gaze, a visual trope which dominates female representation in gaming. Ellie and Clementine introduce the player to non-sexualised portrayals of women who ultimately emerge as survivors and protagonists, and further episodes of each game jettison their male counterparts to focus on each of these young adult's

development. Joel and Lee are men who express abjection, fear and paternalism all unusual qualities within a media where binary representations of male wish-fulfillment and desire are rigorously endorsed.

These insertions within AAA games appear to present disruptive, progressive representations of gender that have largely had a positive reception, or have simply been accepted as part of the richness of narrative now available in gaming discourses. This is particularly important given recent resistance to the integration of female characters and players within gaming, and controversies surrounding the poor representation of women in games. All of these games use female protagonists in interesting ways, and all of the games mentioned have not only received generally positive reviews, but have generated substantial levels of income (*The Last of Us* outgrossed the *Superman* movie, which was released on the same weekend).

This chapter analyses how survival horror games have become a place gendered relationships are explored in more complex ways than simply heterosexual coupling. Unlike romance, which is a popular theme within many games, or sex, which is represented with varying degrees of success (and pleasure), all three game series explore non-sexual relationships in sometimes complex ways. This insertion into the text of the survival horror is potentially what has made these series so successful - countering the tension of a zombie narrative with the closely knit, vulnerable relationships needed to survive it.

"...Or a Man". Survival Horror and Gender.

Horror is an ideal genre for videogaming, given that it draws together a number of stylistic themes within a recognisable framework. The pleasures of watching horror are, in videogames, given an extra angle via player agency. A player's experiences of fear, surprise and disgust are linked directly to their actions, thus enabling exploration of the effects of horror from within. As Perron argues, 'the reader/viewer is playing at frightening (them)self' (2009, 3)

Survival Horror is a term first used to describe the *Resident Evil* series of games (Capcom 1996-present). Survival Horror has become a staple of videogaming and has used various techniques - both ludic and narrative, to explore the portrayal of horror narratives within it. Whilst zombies do not always feature within them, they are a core element of many survival horrors, and are presented in a number of familiar ways within these texts - from the slow shambling walkers in *Resident Evil* and *The Walking Dead*, to the creepy, dehumanised Clickers in *The Last of Us* (*TLOU*) and armies of necrotic evil besieging the protagonists in *Resident Evil 5* (Capcom 2009).

Within these games, playable female characters take a dominant role. In the *Resident Evil* series, a female avatar is presented alongside a male counterpart from the beginning of the game series, and the player is given a choice between the two. Considerable criticism was levelled at *Resident Evil 5* for making Sheva only playable in the two-player option of the game, and for continuing this trend in *Resident Evil 6* (Capcom 2012), where the second player has to wait for her partner to complete fifteen minutes of gameplay before she can take the role of Helena. However, the early female characters of *Resident Evil* set a useful precedent in usually making a selectable female character a default within survival horror. In the case of *The Last of Us* and *The Walking Dead*, the main character starts as the male protagonist, but the

female character takes over both during the first game, and in the resultant sequels. It is her story that the player follows in subsequent games or expansions.

A potential reason for this is the identification of the player with the 'final girl' trope more commonly seen in horror and zombie movies (Clover 1992). As described by Clover, the final girl is a female character who survives until the end of the movie to confront the killer or monster. This character possesses several dominant characteristics that map themselves well onto the role taken by the player in a zombie / survival horror game. They make it through to the end of the narrative (one would hope!), possess a will to survive, must be resourceful and resilient; often through the manipulation of scarce resources or via the combination of mundane objects to form weapons, and their positioning allows the player to revel in the experience of fear induced through play. Taking the role of someone who is average, but must survive in extreme circumstances, bonds the player with their avatar in these situations. As the game escalates (more zombies, more difficult situations to overcome), the player additionally becomes more effective and powerful, but without losing their sense of humanity (another key trope in zombie narratives). Narrative Designer Shinji Makami very specifically developed the female characters in the *Resident Evil* games to avoid casual objectification, and to reflect this type of (character) progression:

I don't know if I've put more emphasis on women characters, but when I do introduce them, it is never as objects. In some games, they will be peripheral characters with ridiculous breast physics. I avoid that sort of obvious eroticism. I also don't like female characters who are submissive to male characters, or to the situation they're in. I won't portray women in that

way. I write women characters who discover their independence as the game progresses, or who already know they are independent but have that tested against a series of challenges.

(Mikami in Stuart 2014)

The female avatars within these games tacitly acknowledge the female player as an entity within gaming. Clover argues that the final girl is placed within the narrative because many viewers simultaneously reject a film that shows abject terror by men and want to experience the vicarious harming of the female body. To survive, their progression and survival through the narrative depends on them adopting masculinized traits, and Clover ultimately presents the final girl as a male surrogate; a 'boyish knife-wielding victim hero(es) of slasher films' (Clover 1992, 35). Kirkland argues that characters like Heather in *Silent Hill 3* (Konami 2003) or early iterations of Jill Valentine, might seem to support this argument (Kirkland 2009), but overall the assertion that the female avatar exists solely for the male gaze has come under considerable scrutiny by games scholars, especially as it is subject to arguments concerning the agency of the player. First and foremost, the female avatar gives the player an opportunity to play as female, and it is essential to recognise that the player is not always cis-male. Cassell and Jenkins argue that the overtly sexualised bodies of women in games visually refute this trope and that 'Clover's attempts to explain the appeal of such figures for male horror-film fans, however, may foreclose too quickly the possibility that women may also find such figures sources of identification (however compromised by male interests and fantasies)' (Cassell and Jenkins 1999 31). although the female body in videogames is often presented specifically for a male gaze, it is possessed by a multitude of players, all of whom bring different readings to their corporeal form in-game (Carr 2002, Kennedy 2002, Aarseth 2004, MacCallum-Stewart

2008). Additionally with over 40% of gamers consistently identifying as female over the last decade (ESA 2006, 2016), this is a significant element of representation that should not be overlooked.

In another counter to Clover's argument, the experiences of Joel in *TLOU* and Lee in *The Walking Dead* very specifically engage with male terror. The protective paternalism that both men show for Ellie and Lee, and Joel's loss of his daughter Sarah in the early stages of *TLOU* demonstrate abjection and fear through a less binary reading of fear as exclusively female. In film, this trait has also developed - for example through the positioning of protagonists Pat in *Green Room* (Saulnier 2015) or Chris Washington in *Get Out* (Peele 2017).

This chapter now moves onto a more specific look at how gender plays out in the three game series, moving towards an examination of each series and some of the specific issues that arise in each.

The Master of Unlocking? *Resident Evil* and gender stereotyping.

Within the *Resident Evil* games, gender is played out in a number of different ways, frequently presenting a playable female avatar as a central motif, but more generally conforming to traditional ideas about the female body in videogames.

Survival horror draws heavily from more standard horror movie tropes, but caters specifically to the requirements of an interactive player. The genre is typified by a horror scenario such as an Old Dark House or Bug Hunt, relying on survival through scarce resources (for example,

ammunition or pack space), limited save points (an aspect virtually removed from other game genres) and puzzle solving in order to proceed, as well as more familiar aspects of the horror genre such as jump scares and chases (these latter largely instigated by the player trying to avoid combat). The genre differs from other games via the sense of urgency and economy - it is unusual in contemporary games for elements like ammunition or save points to be limited.

The *Resident Evil* franchise contains multiple spinoff titles and has a reputation for using developmental console technology (for example light guns and VR sets),with varying success. Whilst the series is not known as innovative - often due to only partial successes with design elements, it is clear that Capcom have used the franchise to explore new developments. Similarly, the series is also known for its inadvertantly hammy plotlines and dialogue, an element that helped to popularise the earlier games but has been criticised in later installments. The series was also made into an extremely successful series of movies, starring Mila Jonavich. The *Resident Evil* films are the most successful series of films derived from a videogame, having grossed $915 million USD worldwide. (Tussey 2013).

In the first two *Resident Evil* games, the player has a choice of two avatars - either male or female, who have slightly different resource related attributes. For example, in the first game, Jill Valentine, 'the master of unlocking', has a larger inventory and starts the game with a pistol, whereas Chris Redfield has more health, and access to the NPC Rebecca Chambers during the game, who helps him at key points. Although female avatars were already a staple of the videogaming genre by the time of *Resident Evil*'s release, the nature of the games means that the player is strongly engaged with highly developed narrative adventures for both characters, and the characters are well known within gaming cultures.

As the most well known example of the survival horror genre, and the game to first use this moniker, *Resident Evil* strikes an awkward balance between narrative and characterisation. The game is famous for its extremely clunky dialogue and voice acting, an element which lent the otherwise suspenseful game an element of charm that endeared it to players. Usually attributed to poor translation, the lines deviate from traditional gaming dialogue in a way that makes them stand out. An insistence on referring to people by their names; 'Don't be a hard dog to keep under the porch, Barry', as well as detailed character building via the supporting art and advertising at launch, meant that the characters became quickly identifiable.

Every character in the original game returns to the franchise at some point, but Jill undergoes a significant series of changes. More developed graphic capabilities allowed developers to repeatedly alter Jill's appearance and clothing, and her reappearance as a mind controlled villain in *Resident Evil 5* race-switched the character from a mixed race Japanese - French woman, to a blonde with extremely pale skin (explained in-game as the effects of the Uroborus virus on her body). This deliberate (and quite literal) whitewashing of the character was received poorly by fans (*Resident Evil.org* 2011), as was her new costume - a skin tight purple battlesuit. Whilst early iterations of Jill presented her as attractive and capable, her adoption of domme-like mannerisms and dress whilst under mind-control were not popular and sat awkwardly within her overall narrative. This overt sexualisation is typical of the female character arc in videogames, and can also be seen in the *Tomb Raider* (1996- 2015) and *Metroid* (1986-2015) series, where the bodies of Lara and Samus are altered to please a hypothetical male gaze (larger breasts, more skin on show, tighter / fetish clothing, and a movement from capability to inferred sexual domination) as time passes. As expectations have

changed, including those related to male desire and expectations of the sexualised body, all three characters have returned to a more normative body type - idealised, but more athletic than enhanced. These changes potentially bely a recognition by developers of the more nuanced desires of a multi-gender player. In short, Jill's physical alteration has been symptomatic of an industry that traditionally skews towards pleasing a young, male, heterosexual player, but has increasingly realised that sexual stereotypes of desire do not sit well with a more nuanced audience.

Players have also criticised the erratic portrayal of women within the *Resident Evil* franchise because of its inconsistency. The first two games allowed a binary choice between a male or female avatar, but later versions complicate or remove these possibilities. In *Resident Evil 3* (1999) the player is only allowed the role of Jill Valentine, an unusual choice in a male dominated era, and possibly following the popularity of Lara Croft as a female protagonist, however, this was one of the episodes that received poor reviews and the game itself was initially intended for a totally different series of games. (*Resident Evil - Code: Veronica* (2000) was the original sequel, and is often referred to as such by fans). Similarly, in *Resident Evil 5*, Sheva Alomar is very much a secondary character to Chris Redfield and can only be accessed in the two player version of the game. Unconscious bias is evident throughout the game, with flavour text and dialogue de-emphasising Sheva's role. When the player is instructed to ask the other player for help in opening a heavy door, for example, Sheva's flavour text states 'Chris could help open this door', whereas Chris' text reads 'Another person is needed here'. Events like this serve to trivialise Sheva's position as an equal, and reduce her to the role of nameless helper.

Gender in the *Resident Evil* series is regrettably straightforward, and although the characters initially presented gave the player the ability to pick between male and female genders, subsequent games reduced these possibilities or simply reformed existing characters into more sexualised versions of the originals. This inadvertently moves the Resident Evil space towards one which privileges stereotypical desires of the archetypal male gamer. The series is symptomatic of a more retrospective attitude towards gaming representation, and although women within it usurp the traditional horror roles of victim, princess-to-be-rescued or Final Girl, there are still some uncomfortable elements of representation, most especially through later games which also engage with the monstrous horror of the female form. In *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard* (2017), the character of Marguerite Baker is a boss who combines the incestous hillbilly archetype with that of the monstrous feminine. Her weak spot is the pupating hive of insects where her genitals should be, which she periodically exposes to the player. This is a fairly typical (and rather immature) example of body horror, deliberately estranging the female form and problematizing her sexuality; both through her grotesque appearance and through the implication of incestuous/promiscuous behaviour with the rest of her family (see Creed 1993).

'Not so scary, huh?' *The Walking Dead*: Coming of Age and Fatherhood.

'A zombie outbreak, much like a plague epidemic, is an event in which the anxieties associated with social connectivity come to the fore - the more boundaries between self and other are broken down in plague time, the more the contagion spreads

(Boluk and Lenz 2009, 7)

The Walking Dead is a combined series of transmedial texts which create a shared world depicting an alternative universe inhabited by human survivors and zombies. Initially published as a comic book series by Robert Kirkman (2003-present), *The Walking Dead* universe is now collectively formed of the original comic series, two long haul TV series; *The Walking Dead* (2010 - present) and *Fear the Walking Dead* (2015 - present) and several differing game series. Telltale Games' *The Walking Dead* is an adventure / point and click game, and comprises the central example in this chapter. *The Walking Dead: Road to Survival* (Scopely 2015), and *The Walking Dead: No Man's Land* (nextgames 2015) are mobile games - the first being a turn based RPG with a story by one of the television series writers, Jay Bonansinga, and the second an RTS which has plotlines correlating to the current series of the TV show. Finally, an FPS game, *The Walking Dead: Survival Instinct* was released for the PC market in 2013 by Activision. The dramatic lack of success of this title when compared to the others is possibly symptomatic of *The Walking Dead*'s audience, who skew towards females between 22 and 37 years of age. (Schkenker 2016). Comparative research into the demographics of female players shows that they prefer casual games with stronger narratives themes (ESA 2006, ESA 2016) and tend to avoid games which require extended periods of play (Enevold 2009).

Telltale Games' *The Walking Dead* series is an episodic point-and-click adventure game, released as three seasons and one extra episode; *400 Days* (Telltale Games 2013), which bridges the gap between Seasons One and Two. As with the television series, episodes are released steadily throughout each season, and provide an overarching narrative counterpoised with a series of vignettes and individual incidents within each episode. The first season focuses on the experiences of Lee Everett, who encounters a an eight year old girl called Clementine after the police car he is being transported in crashes on the outskirts of Atlanta (the same area

that *The Walking Dead* is set in). Their subsequent attempts to reach a safe environment through various different encounters with zombies and the remaining community of survivors around the city of Atlanta form the basis of the first season. In the second season, Clementine is the sole protagonist, and in the third (*The Walking Dead: A New Frontier* 2015) she is a joint protagonist alongside a new character - another surrogate father - called Javier.

The series echoes the ethos of the TV series (and many other zombie media) in that the humanity and moral choices made by the survivors are thrown into sharp relief by their day-to-day experiences of a largely hostile world. This is emphasised by the game's charting of decisions made by the player, many of which have no correct solutions and most of which are implied to have further consequences. When a decision is made, a short piece of text stating that the accompanying characters 'will remember that' underscores the social implications of the protagonists' choices. In some cases, these decisions directly affect which characters accompany the player, or survive the zombies. If the player uses the same machine to play all of their games, the games also carry forward decisions into the next installment. For example, in order to make all six of the characters featured in *400 Days* join Carver's settlement in Season 2, the player must make specific decisions throughout the game.

The Walking Dead presents two major elements in an investigation of gender in zombie games which show significantly more complexity than those of earlier zombie games. Firstly, it examines a coming of age narrative via Clementine's journey. First seen as an eight year old girl, Clem's journey from innocence to experience is played out as she witnesses the zombie apocalypse firsthand. However, it has also been praised for presenting this without constructing Clementine as a victim. As Hannah Rutherford exclaims during her YouTube playthrough on

meeting Clementine again in Season Three: ‘Oh my God what have I done to her? (to Clem) Girrrrrllll! (gasps). I’ve made her amazing!’ (Rutherford 2016). MarenWilson adds to this with a clear revocation of the ‘innocent victim’ idea:

Better yet, at no point over the course of the series lament the loss of Clementines innocence. Instead players are rewarded pretty early on TWD 1 for teaching her how to shoot. Saved by her increased independence, showcasing the value of being brave in a survivalist world. Because that’s what Clem is, is a survivor. She managed to make it longer then any group she’s been associated with. She’s a constancy in the world of Telltale Games The Walking Dead. She has no use for naivete and I on more than one occasion took unbridled glee in directing Clementine to bluntly take no flak from patronizing adults.

(MarenWilson 2014)

Clementine is presented throughout as a survivor, and this encodes her gender in a very specific manner. Elsewhere, as in the later episodes of the *Resident Evil* series or *Bioshock Infinite* (2K Games 2013), the female is presented either as a victim of events, or as subordinate to male counterparts. Elizabeth in Bioshock Infinite has a story arc that revolves around the ‘princess-to-be-rescued’ motif (she has been a prisoner most of her life) and her ludic function is primarily to enable the main character Booker DeWitt by supplying him with items. Whilst later iterations of Clementine show that she is hardened by her experiences, she also resists more familiar videogame tropes and becomes neither temptress (an archetype which would be incredibly distasteful in this instance), victim or sexualised action heroine. Her unease when first getting her period in *The New Frontier* is possibly a unique event in

videogaming, but it also signals a very realistic approach to representing the female body as a dynamic, changing organism. The subsequent scene, in which Javier can approach the issue with a variety of approaches ranging from awkward to open, lies in stark contrast to other zombie / paranormal texts where menstruation is a sign of shame (King 1974) or endangerment (Twohy 2000) (Creed 1993, Farrimond 2016).

The first *Walking Dead* season also presents the player with a father / daughter relationship which has to be navigated as part of the story arc. Hitherto unusual within videogames, this motif is repeated in *TLOU* and again in *The Walking Dead: The Last Frontier*. Neither Clem nor Lee are related, but he almost instantly becomes a surrogate father to her after finding her hiding in a treehouse in Episode One, Season One.

Moral consequences and decisions are becoming an increasingly popular part of adventure videogames, as they allow the player to identify more closely with the central protagonist/s (Lange 2014). Whilst some games include these elements in order to give characterisation more flavour (for example the *GTA* or *Assassin's Creed*) series, in others they have more permanent narrative consequences. *Beyond Two Souls* (Quantic Dream 2013) has twenty-four possible endings based on the actions that the character Jodie Holmes takes in the game. *The Walking Dead* often uses a timer against these choices, forcing the player to make 'snap' decisions in crisis situations.

Taylor et al. (2015) examine the tensions that the relationship between Lee and Clem causes in players as they struggle to reconcile their understanding that the game is a zombie narrative, and thus contains familiar and perhaps inevitable narrative elements, with the relationship of

care created between Clem and Lee. They conclude that 'the game itself disrupted and undermined this moral (and conventional) certainty', by creating situations in which no clear moral decision predominates, and in which some actions happen regardless of the players' choice (an element for which the game was criticised elsewhere). Elsewhere in the game, the relationship between the two highlights some of the major issues concerning race in the USA, as Lee must modify his responses to other people in the lieu of having a small, mixed race child within earshot:

'Players must decide not only how they respond to physical attacks and racial slurs from a white man as a black man, but also as a father figure to a frightened young girl searching for her parents. By forcing players to experience and acknowledge racism through other characters and making them respond with their choices, The Walking Dead allows the player a great deal of agency and make the experience of 'playing race' … far more complex than it is in many other games'

(Custer 2015)

When Lee encounters racism through the character of Larry, an elderly white male who makes a number of racially codified remarks and appears to object to Lee conversing with his daughter Lilly, his optional response to Mark in episode 2 'He's just an old racist asshole' is provided specifically when Clem is not present.

The moral balancing within this relationship is interesting, as Clementine's limited life experience beyond the apocalypse leads her to both trust and judge Lee through a modified

moral framework. This is complicated further by Lee's role as a surrogate father, and with it the implication that he has a duty to pass down moral codes and practices to his child. However, the prosaic attitude that he takes towards educating and guiding Clementine, which happens regardless of the differing responses given by the player, demonstrates that he avoids making gendered assumptions about what actions she is expected to take. Instead he adopts a paternal role of care to protect and instruct Clementine in a way that correlates with this new world order, and ultimately sacrifices himself to save his child.

The scene identified by MarenWilson, in which Lee teaches Clementine to shoot a gun, is also that in which Lee cuts her hair 'short enough so it can't get grabbed (by a Walker)'; an act which is both intimate and nurturing:

Clementine 'So did you kill someone before?'

Lee (quietly): Yep.

Clem: You could have just told me, I wouldn't have been afraid of you or anything.

Lee: I'm sorry.

Clem: 'You've killed loads of things now, it doesn't even matter.

Pause whilst Lee continues to cut Clem's hair:

Dialogue Options:

No it's different

Killing is bad no matter what

You're right.

(Clementine will remember that)

(*The Walking Dead*, Season 1, Chapter 3)

Lee, and later Joel in *TLOU*, are also symptomatic of male heroes within gaming that eschew the 'macho template' and present the player with new versions of strong masculinity. King and Krzywinska first identify this trait as typical of characters such as Max Payne, whose trauma contributes to the narrative and forces the player to approach the narratives they encounter in a more complex manner (PAGE REF 2005). As Ewan Kirkland argues of the *Silent Hill* franchise:

As a horror series, the masculinities these games evoke often contrast with the confident, dominating, assured masculine identities observed within other genres… While in some respects conforming to familiar gender formations, the games frequently complicate, undermine, or interrogate such stereotypes.

(Kirkland 2009)

The player frequently sees Lee articulate a plethora of emotions including horror, fear, shame and indecision, and these characteristics, help to define his role as a father. Towards the end of the game, Lee finally kills an unturned human in front of Clementine, but by this time he has also been bitten. There are a choice of endings, but neither are positive. Clementine either shoots Lee, or leaves him to turn. In a clear callback to the earlier scene, Lee admonishes her 'Keep that hair short', and Clem answers fiercely; 'I will, I'll cut it myself!'. Lee is unusual because of his humanity - he is not a wisecracking hero who survives against the odds, he is a vulnerable, normal history professor who exhibits traits that are totally out of keeping with those of a videogame hero and it's hitherto very prescriptive qualities of masculinity.

'Swear to me that everything you said about the Fireflies is true' ***The Last of Us*** **and Love.**

More than any other monster, zombies are fully and literally apocalyptic... they signal the end of the world as we have known it for thousands of years. Also, in the original meaning of "apocalyptic," they reveal terrible truths about human nature, existence and sin'.

(Paffenroth 2006, 13)

The Last of Us is unique in the three case studies presented here in that it is only one stand alone game, with one extra segment of DLC (Downloadable content): *The Last of Us: Left Behind* (Naughty Dog 2014). A trailer for a sequel was released in 2016, but as of September 2017, the title is still in development.

As with *The Walking Dead*, *TLOU* is a AAA game which covers emotionally complex ideas. The game *is* a survival horror, with all of the usual chasing, zombie inhabitants, unpleasant humans, jump cuts and alarming moments, but *TLOU* also presents the player with a non-romantic love story about acceptance and overcoming grief. The relationship between Joel, a reluctant father figure who lost his own daughter Sarah twenty years previously and Ellie, a teenager who has grown up during the apocalypse and is so hardened to trauma and survival that she doesn't understand the point of ice-cream vans or Halloween festivities, is both a coming of age story and one about emotional recovery for both characters. Gender is again played out as a complex, non-binary state, with the revelation that Ellie is gay in *The Last of Us: Left Behind*, and the subversion of Joel's positioning as an apparently traditional hero with far more complex responses to emotive situations.

Unlike the relationship with Lee and Clementine, Joel and Ellie are a less organic couple. Ellie is a prickly, angry teenager (by her age, Clementine has struck out on her own as a solo agent), and Joel is a gruff middle aged man, Whilst slightly older than most videogame heroes, he fits much more into the classic mould of representation - white, gruff and proficient with weapons and resources. Joel is played by Troy Baker, a voice and body actor well known for other hyper-masculine videogame heroes such as Booker DeWitt (2K Games 2013), Batman, Samuel Drake (Naughty Dog 2016, 2017), as well as characters including Hawkeye and Loki in the Marvel Animated Universe (2013-2017). His identification as a traditional videogaming male icon therefore plays out through both his casting and his physical representation within the game.

At the heart of *TLOU* is a lie. At the end of the game, the two central protagonists talk about the climactic events of the game on a hilltop in front of their new 'home'; an abandoned town. Joel has just rescued Ellie from a group called the Fireflies, a resistance group who say they can discover the cure to the apocalyptic 'spores' turning the population into zombies. Unfortunately, it transpires that they can only doing this by killing and dissecting Ellie, the only person immune to the spores. Joel decides that he'd rather save Ellie, sacrificing the greater good for the life of one person. As they escape, Joel lies to Ellie and tells her that he has saved her because there were 'a whole lot more like you. Ellie… dozens actually', and that the Fireflies (the resistance group he has been transporting her to) have stopped looking for a cure. In fact, she remains the only person who is immune. Joel shoots his contact Marlene, and escapes the building with Ellie. On the hillside, Ellie challenges Joel and him whether he is telling her the truth. Joel replies 'I swear'. The game cuts to Ellie's face as she says 'Okay'. It is unclear whether she believes him and the game ends with a fade to black.

Should Joel have made this decision? Did Ellie believe him? This is an essential part of the closing narrative in the game and a contentious point for fans who, used to multiple endings for games of this nature, were surprised that agency was removed from them at this point and that they were unable to decide the outcome of this conversation. By doing this, the game highlights the complex strands of moral decision making. Joel makes the choice autonomously, without the player's interference. Key to this is the relationship that has developed between the two; a relationship built throughout the course of the game via co-dependence, antagonism and an eventual acceptance of each other in the father daughter role. By presenting the two as a couple, the game also throws into sharp relief how gender relationships play out in a very

human way, and also emphasises a form of agape love which does not refer to sexual contact or romance.

TLOU UI designer Alexandra Neonakis highlights a very similar positioning of Ellie to Clem when discussing her autonomy within the game:

Ellie's power comes from her bravery, ingenuity, and determination throughout the game. … She was ultimately the hero of this story. She's powerful the whole time, and it had nothing to do with wielding a gun or physical ability

(Neonakis 2013)

This is echoed by Stace Harman, during whose interview with *TLOU* designer Neil Drunkmann, comments that:

Joel may have the tools to survive this world but it's Ellie who has the capacity to find meaning in it. However, such is the writing, performances and the blending of narrative through systemic game play elements that by the time their roles are reversed, we can understand and emphasise with Joel's weakness. As he says to himself "You keep finding something to fight for" and for him it's a fourteen year old girl that has become his world; he now needs her more than she needs him

(Harman 2014)

This reversal is metaphorical as a well as actual within the game. When Joel is wounded, the player adopts the role of Ellie as she seeks medication for him - an incident played out in more detail in *The Last of Us: Left Behind*. In addition it is Ellie's story that continues in later content, not Joel's. Finally Harman alludes to an end scene in the original game where Joel visits Ellie in the town. Whilst Ellie seems content to continue without Joel, it is Joel who has come to find her and perhaps seek some form of companionship.

Conclusion

The Last of Us and *The Walking Dead* demonstrate two core aspects that have not been previously present in the representation of gender in games - complex character development and change. Ellie and Clem are distinctly different in the sequels to their original games, and provide a narrative of growing up in an apocalypse, complete with skewed representations of morality, difficult decisions and resultant familial/romantic relationships. Joel and Lee are atypical heroes, eschewing the wise talking superman to instead appear as characters who express a plethora of emotions that are not only traditionally unmanly (tears, shame, grief), but are at odds with those of resolute, indestructible videogame heroes. Whilst the *Resident Evil* games laid the foundation for fallible characters, most notably through the concept of 'survival', and the ludic structure of resource management and scarcity, they have increasingly fallen back on stereotypical visions of gender in games and horror texts which seem superficial in comparison.

The topics that these games present are not typical of gaming narratives in general, although they are familiar to the zombie / apocalypse genre. They also allow experimentation with more

complex concepts, such as the coming of age story as bildungsroman, and present relationships that prefer agape forms of love rather than the overt sexuality displayed elsewhere through the representation of bodily forms in games.

Neonakis argues of *TLOU* that 'This was not a game "about men." It was about a mutual relationship and about how people need one another' (Neonakis 2013). This is key to the ways that gender is played out within *The Walking Dead* and *TLOU* especially - eschewing traditional videogame binaries of the hero, the damsel-in-distress and the temptress, and avoiding assumptions about what the player desires from a lead character. Instead, the characters we encounter in these games are complex, flawed, and human. This is very much counter to typical videogame dynamics and ludic construction, and is possibly enabled as a result of the zombie narrative as backdrop - a narrative which counterpoises the humanity of the person with the morality of the zombie (and has done since Romero).

Through these games, it is possible to move beyond the perennial bugbear of gender representation in gaming - an exclusive focus on one gender or type of representation. The narratives of The Walking Dead and *TLOU* do focus on the female characters, but they also subvert male representation. *TLOU: Left Behind* and *The Walking Dead: The Last Frontier* additionally naturalises sexuality via Ellie and Clem as Clem's period, and Ellie's gayness are are simply developmental aspects of the narrative rather than the driving force behind it.

Bibliography:

Aarseth, Espen. 2004. “Genre Trouble, Narrativism and the Art of Simulation” in Wardrip-Fruin, Noah, and Harrigan, Pat Eds. *First Person. New Media as Story, Performance and Game*. Massachusetts: MIT Press. pp. 45-55.

Boluk, Stephanie and Lenz, Wylie. 2009. *Generation Zombie: Essays on the Living Dead in Modern Culture*. Jefferson, NC: MacFarland.

Carr, Diane. 2002. “Playing with Lara” in Krzywinska, Tanya and King, Geoff eds. *Cinema/Videogame Interfaces*. London: Wallflower Press.

Carr, Diane. 2016. *Delicate Subjects: Vulnerability and Validation in Action Adventure games*. Proceedings of DiGRA/FDG 2016. https://playhouse.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/final-digra-carr-delicate-subjects.pdf

Clover, Carol. 1992. *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Creed, Barbara. 1993. *The Monstrous-Feminine. Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge.

Custer, Stuart. 2015. “Walking Black: Examining Telltale’s *The Walking Dead* as a Radicalized Pedagogical Zone”. *Digital Rhetoric Collaborative*. Blog Carnival 6. April 24, 2015.

http://www.digitalrhetoriccollaborative.org/2015/04/24/walking-black-examining-telltales-the-walking-dead-as-a-racialized-pedagogical-zone/

Enevold, Jessica. 2009. "Mama Ludens goes all in: Gaming Mothers, Fun and the Ludic Generation". Paper presented at Playful Experiences, University of Lund, 2009. https://lup.lub.lu.se/search/publication/c2cec84a-baac-4681-b3b7-2334be7232fb

ESA. 2006. *Essential Facts about the Gaming Industry 2006*. https://library.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/2006.pdf

ESA. 2016. *Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry 2016*. http://essentialfacts.theesa.com/Essential-Facts-2016.pdf

Farrimond, Katherine. 2016. "Supernatural hymens and bodies from hell: screening virginity through the gothic body" in MacCallum-Stewart, Esther and Roberts, Jude. eds. *Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Popular Fantasy*. London: Routledge. pp REF.

Harman, Stace. 2014. "The Last of Us: How the apocalypse brought about gender equality". *The Telegraph*. August 18, 2014 http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/video-games/11040273/The-Last-of-Us-How-the-apocalypse-brought-about-gender-equality.html

Kennedy, Helen. 2002. "Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or Cyberbimbo: On the Limits of Textual Analysis". *Game Studies* Vol.2, #2. http://gamestudies.org/0202/kennedy/

King, Stephen. 1974. *Carrie*. New York: Doubleday.

Kirkland, Ewan. 2009. "Masculinity in videogames: The gendered gameplay of Silent Hill". Ca*mera Obscura: Feminism, Culture and Media Studies* 71. Vol 24 #2. pp 161-83.

Kirkland, Ewan. 2013. "Gothic Videogames, survival horror and the Silent Hill series". *Gothic Studies*. Vol 4 #2. pp 108-122.

Krzywinska, Tanya and King, Geoff. 2005. *Tomb Raiders to Space Invaders: Video Games in the 21st Century*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Lange, Amanda. 2014. "'You're just gonna be nice': How players engage with moral choice systems'" *Journal of Games Criticism*. Vol 1 #1. http://gamescriticism.org/articles/lange-1-1/

MacCallum-Stewart, Esther. 2008. "Real Boys Carry Girly Epics: Normalising Gender Bending in Online Games". *Eludamos. Journal for Computer Game Culture*. Vol 1 #2. http://www.eludamos.org/index.php/eludamos/article/view/vol2no1-5/51

MarenWilson. 2014. "Women I have loved: The importance of being Clementine". *WinGS. Women in Game Studies*. October 22, 2014. http://womeningamestudies.com/the-importance-of-being-clementine/

Miller, Greg. 2013. "The Walking Dead: Survival Instinct Review". *Ign.com*. March 21, 2013.

http://uk.ign.com/articles/2013/03/22/the-walking-dead-survival-instinct-review.

Neonakis, Alexandria. 2013. “Game Theory: The Last of Us, revisited”. *The New York Times*. December 30, 2013. https://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/12/30/game-theory-the-last-of-us-revisited/

Paffenroth, Kim. 2006. *Gospel of the Living Dead: George Romero’s Visions of Hell on Earth*. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press.

Perron, Bernard. 2009. *Horror Video Games: Essays on the Fusion of Fear and Games*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Residentevil.org. (various contributors). 2011. “Why was Jill a Blond?”. *ResidentEvil.org* forums. https://residentevil.org/threads/why-was-jill-a-blond.3013/.

Rutherford, Hannah. 2016. “The Walking Dead: A New Frontier #3 - Clementine”. *Yogscast Hannah*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4LmIcxvVL4&t

Sckenker, Brett. 2016. “Demo-Graphics: The Walking Dead”. *Graphic Policy*. https://graphicpolicy.com/2016/04/04/demo-graphics-the-walking-dead-3/.

Stuart, Keith. 2014. “Shinji Mikami, the godfather of horror games”. *The Guardian*. September 30, 2014. https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/sep/30/shinji-mikami-evil-within-resident-evil

Taylor, Nicholas; Kampe, Chris and Bell, Kristina. 2015. "Me and Lee: Identification and the Play of Attraction in The Walking Dead". *Game Studies*. Vol 15 #1. http://gamestudies.org/1501/articles/taylor

Tussey, Ethan. 2013. "Alice Remembers Everything: The Resident Evil Franchise as Film Franchise". *Critical Commons*. http://www.criticalcommons.org/Members/MCIMR/clips/resident-evil-slideshow

Filmography

Marvel Animation. 2013-2017. *Avengers Assemble.* Marvel Animation

Marvel Animation. 2013-2017. *Guardians of the Galaxy.* Marvel Animation.

Peele, Jordan. 2017. *Get Out*. Universal Pictures.

Saulnier, Jeremy. 2015. *Green Room*. A24.

Twohy, David. 2000. *Pitch Black*. PolyGram Filmed Entertainment.

Gameology

Beyond:Two Souls. 2013. Quantic Dream.

Bioshock Infinite. 2013. 2K Games.

Depression Quest. 2013. Quinn, Zöe.

Freshman Year. 2015. Freeman,Nina; Knetzger Laura and Clark, Stephen.

http://ninasays.so/freshmanyear/

The Last of Us. 2013. Naughty Dog.

The Last of Us: Left Behind. 2014. Naughty Dog.

Resident Evil (1996). Capcom.

Resident Evil 3: Nemesis. (1999). Capcom.

Resident Evil - Code: Veronica. (2000). Capcom.

Resident Evil 5. (2009). Capcom.

Resident Evil 6. (2012). Capcom.

Resident Evil 7: BioHazard. (2017) Capcom.

Silent Hill. (1999). Konami.

Uncharted 4: A Thief's End (2016). Naughty Dog.

Uncharted: THe Lost Legacy. (2017). Naughty Dog.

The Walking Dead. (2012-3). Telltale Games.

The Walking Dead: 400 Days. (2013). Telltale Games.

The Walking Dead 2. (2013-4). Telltale Games.

The Walking Dead: Survival Instinct. (2013). Activision.

The Walking Dead: Road to Survival. (2015). Scopely.

The Walking Dead: No Man's Land (2015). nextgames.