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## Gender Sexualization in Digital Games: Exploring Female Character Changes in *Tomb Raider*

Jingjing Liu

University of South Florida, [jingjing@mail.usf.edu](mailto:jingjing@mail.usf.edu)

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Gender Sexualization in Digital Games:  
Exploring Female Character Changes in *Tomb Raider*

by

Jingjing Liu

A thesis submitted in part fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Zimmerman School of Advertising and Mass Communications  
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Major Professor: Kelli Burns, Ph.D.

Scott S. Liu, Ph.D.

Roxanne Watson, Ph.D.

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my parents. Thanks for always encouraging and supporting me.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study is aimed at exploring a better understanding of gender-biased context in digital games. Based upon a female analysis of *Tomb Raider* series, this study attempts to compare the appearance and figure of female characters in video games by researching the representative game. A focus group with a group of women from different countries has been used to better understand how women feel and react to female images in the video game *Tomb Raider* and figure out how female protagonist Lara Croft changed in the video game. The thesis attempts to offer a better understanding of biased context in video games and to compare differences in dressed figures of female characters through the *Tomb Raider* series. From this, the sexualization of female figures and their images of power has positively changed during last two decades. Ultimately, the connotation of this thesis is to discuss the possibilities of negative effects on audiences in digital games, typically for the young generation.



## **CHAPTER I:**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Since the emergence of video games in the 1970s, the video game industry has become influential and powerful (Izushi & Aoyama, 2006). In recent decades, video games have become more and more like films, and users can play with more realistic characters set in beautiful scenes (Griffiths, 1997). Based on data from the Entertainment Software Association (ESA, 2015), more than 50 percent of Americans over age six play video games (ESA, 2015). Globally, video games have become the most popular recreation activity among youth (Hartmann & Klimmt, 2006). Recently, American customers spent more than \$16.6 billion playing video games (ESA, 2015). Furthermore, the ESA data indicated that the video game market earned \$67 billion worldwide.

Meanwhile, although video games have gradually become a part of popular culture, they have a negative impact on some aspects of the community, such as perceptions of sex, gender, ethnicity, and race (Hartmann & Klimmt, 2006). According to the principles of progressivism and cultural diversity, it is easy to locate such negative influences in current video games, even in some obscure details (Cassell & Jenkins, 1998). This situation has created a negative

atmosphere. The irony is that gender stereotypes in video games are entrenched which contributes to the negative atmosphere (Anderson & Bushman, 2001).

Accordingly, the implications of portrayals of women in video games were extensively underrepresented and were excessively sexualized when portrayed (Dietz, 1998). Video games provided more limited ranges than other mass media on female roles (Morawitz & Mastro, 2014). In general, experimental findings were that female roles were usually portrayed as victims or prizes in video games and took up biased gender characteristics, for instance, immoral sexualized roles and characters of sexual fantasy (Miller & Summers, 2007).

The debate about sex and gender discrimination has been continuing for many years in the game industry. Normally, a character putting up a fearless fight to rescue a weak woman has been a common theme in video games, while female protagonists are more like a caricature resembling a hero (Miller & Summers, 2007). Neither of these portrayals are suitable performance traits of the character itself. Whether the main character is male or female, he or she must surrender to the game industry's rule of a "male standard archetypal narrative" (Morgan, 1987). Game developers are more willing to add a delicate temperament for female characters in video games. In the past few decades, even if the female characters have been given enough scenes, they have still been in an awkward position. Under this circumstance, women are subservient to the main character, and in marginal roles, they can't adapt to the so-called "generous" life (Burgess, Stermer & Burgess, 2007). Bulimia.com has conducted a survey which indicates that most producers of games would like to manufacture sexy and perfect body models

to represent their own personas, which aims to meet the demand of market. Meanwhile, even though it has been proposed to make roles more real and accurate, the consequences are not as expected (Oliver & Kalyanaraman, 2009).

Recently, however, there has been a significant change in video games. This thesis aims to investigate the changes happening on female protagonists in video games, and female gamers' reaction to those changes will be studied as well. Between 1989-2014, Lynch et al. (2016) researched 571 female characters in video games, and they found that the situation has been improved. According to their research, the peak of gender discrimination in video games was in 1995, and it has been constantly reducing since then (Lynch et al., 2016). Lynch et al. (2016) indicated that the change in gender bias in video games across recent years reflects that the producers of video games are responding to the critics. The study found that this type of decline was not only because of an increased interest of women in playing video games, but also because of the increasing criticism of male supremacy in video games (Lynch et al., 2016).

Based on this trend, this study mainly focuses on changes in the female protagonist in the *Tomb Raider* series. Take Lara Croft as an example, the female protagonist was re-generated multiple times through the *Tomb Raider* series, which has been released for seventeen years (Han & Song, 2014). After launching *Tomb Raider* in 1996, she had been chosen as the cover feature of over 200 magazines globally, including *Time* and *Newsweek* (Han & Song, 2014). Moreover, Lara Croft as a heroine emerged in a male-dominated internet games environment and, to a certain extent, may have changed the situation of male-dominated video games (Summers &

Miller, 2014). As a classic game character, Lara Croft, with her exaggerated voluptuous figure in early series of *Tomb Raider*, has become the sexual fantasy of countless male players (Beasley & Standley, 2002). Moreover, game producers seem quite “cooperative”. They don’t even show Lara’s face in the *Tomb Raider* series’ eighth poster, but just highlight her large breasts and sexy abs (Mou & Peng, 2009). However, with the decline of game sales, producers started to realize the necessity of changing Lara’s appearance (Han & Song, 2014). This thesis will explore how female gamers feel about the sexual features of the female protagonist in *Tomb Raider* and their reaction to the change in female features in the series.

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Gender Portrayals of Women in Media**

Many researchers have explored the portrayal of women's representation in different media such as television and advertisements (Jaffe & Berger, 1994). In general, the perception is that women are portrayed in a stereotypical way (Miller & Summers, 2007). In the 1970s, many researchers observed that women were normally portrayed as housewives; on the contrary, men were depicted as workers and athletes (Jaffe & Berger, 1994). A content analysis found that women's features in 1970s advertisements were depicted in stereotypical ways that reflected ignorance and compliance, doing degrading household duties, and relying on males (Russo, Feller, & Deleon, 1982). Past studies indicated that women were portrayed in stereotypical ways in traditional media; however, more recent studies found some new viewpoints (Fox & Tang, 2014).

Women were found to be portrayed in unjust ways in the media; moreover, women are often treated as sex objects in media (Lavine, Sweeney & Wagner, 1999). One of these studies tested over 2,000 advertisements from U.S. magazines and discovered that over half of these

advertisements depicted women as sex objects (Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008). Some other related studies found that the most stereotypical features of women were portrayed in beer advertisements (Rouner, Slater, & Rodriguez, 2003).

To sum up, female characters were often portrayed stereotypically and depicted as sexual objects in traditional media, especially between the 1970s and 2000s (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). Beyond this, some recent studies suggested that gender stereotypical portrayals would affect gender-related opinions and attitudes (Scharrer, 2005). Based on this finding and cultivation theory, exposing audiences to television in the long term would change their cognition of social reality (Gerbner et al., 1980).

### **Cultivation Theory in Video Games**

According to cultivation theory audience's perspectives on social reality are shaped by media (Gerbner et al., 1980). It has been held by traditional theorists in the field of cultivation that television viewing would have long-term effects on steadily influencing the audience. One of the top priorities of these cultivation theorists is the effects of viewing in the attitudes of the viewer without created behavior. For most video games, the media distribute the thin ideal of women (Morgan, 1987). Cultivation theory offers an explication of how the thin ideal is transmitted through video games and media and how it turned into an public aesthetic. Harrison (2003) found that mainstreaming influences have been discovered for expectations of the ideal female breasts, waist, and hip sizes. This thin ideal phenomenon has even been found to have negative effects on adolescents (Harrison, 2003).

The cultivation theory indicates that audiences' perceptions of social reality are influenced and shaped by media. Mass media and video games build people's social and ethical values by disseminating them with how the world should run. Similarly, media pictures aggregate in the minds of adolescents and "finally lead to expectations of the real world that correspond to media representations" (Harrison & Hefner, 2008). Kubic & Chory (2007) analyzed that "makeover" television programs passively impact the confidence of audiences and affirmatively portray "perfectionism" and "body dissatisfaction". Other research stated that overweight audiences, among whom young men are the most typical, of the reality dating shows were most likely to have bias on such perceptions that "men are sex-driven", "dating is a game", and "women are sex objects only" (Ferris, Smith, Greenberg, & Smith, 2007). It follows with the views that overweight audiences are more vulnerable compared with their casual counterparts (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Based on this, it makes sense to presume that the influences on overweight video players are similar to that on TV viewers.

Chong et al. (2012) stated an essential theory they applied to analyze video games. He argues that "involvement" matters and actors in mass media are proactive rather than passive. The cultivation theory can be applied as a statement that explains why thin shapes, large breasts, and beauty ideals are taken into account today (Martins, Williams, Harrison, & Ratan, 2009). Harrison (2003) claimed that overweight female TV audiences were influenced by the disseminated female character too much that they perceived themselves were compelled to fulfill it by reducing their larger breasts or smaller breast with augmentation surgery.

Such a theory was then applied to another case, which was around video games as well. Harrison and Bond (2007) pointed out that male gamers who loved game magazines were more preferable to demonstrate muscularity while audience of sport magazines would not have such tendency. Such findings showed that powers represented by characters in video games are pretty much likely to affect the attitudes of gamers. Under such circumstances, they are convinced gradually that they can access to the same power. Likewise, female gamers desire a ideal figure that includes large breasts and small waists and hips like female protagonists in video games. The “ideal body” that has been disseminated by video games is not physically possible and causes unhealthy desires by female gamers who wants to reach that standard. Meanwhile, larger number of male gamers are affected by female representations on their attitudes about female ideal body. Based upon this situation, male players might affect their female counterparts through peer pressure. Harrison (2000) proved that by researching a study of adolescent boys in the United States. The study found that people always looked for thinness in that obesity was believed as a shame by a majority of population (Harrison, 2000). Corresponding to this study, the character like Lara Croft has led some critics to consider that video games are duty bound to generate a stereotype on the thin ideal body of women (Fantone, 2003).

### **Gender Stereotypes Portrayals in Video Games**

The pioneering research that explored gender stereotypes in video games was Dietz’s (1998) research. The study analyzed the image of women in a sample, which is popular video games in Nintendo and Sega Genesis. Aiming to assess the figure of women, she summarized four



probable female stereotypes in accordance with appearances and behaviors: women as sex objects or prizes, women as victims, women in feminine roles, and women as heroes or action characters (Dietz, 1998). Unsurprisingly, Dietz (1998) discovered that 41 percent of the video games include women figures. Only 15% depicted women as active or hero characters. Moreover, 21% described women as victims or vulnerable groups that need to be saved. Meanwhile, among 28% of these video games, women were depicted as sexual objects on account of their physical appearance or sexually-oriented behaviors (Dietz, 1998).

Beasley and Standley (2002) examined gender character stereotypes through observing the existence or nonexistence of women roles in video games. They also measured the appearances which included clothing of female roles, especially the distinction between male and female clothing. The study found that women were largely non-existent in video games and were presented in anthropomorphic roles (Beasley & Standley, 2002). The women who appeared in these games were also inclined to dress in low-cut shirts and have exposed legs than men. Almost half of the female roles were designed for women to have big breasts and butts. Beasley and Standley (2002) summarized that women in video games are portrayed and clothed in order to increase their sexuality, which could affect the invention and amendment of gender models.

### **Female Protagonist in *Tomb Raider***

In 2013, the famous female protagonist of *Tomb Raider*, Lara Croft, abandoned her original figure that had exaggerated breasts and replaced her sexy shorts with suitable trousers for adventure (Tremblay, 2012). This is the first significant change since the birth of Lara. The ninth

edition of *Tomb Raider* not just worked hard on Lara's style and stature; but it also brought a new subversive shape to Lara Croft's character. Lara changed from a fledgling young girl into a battle-scarred, mature, calm woman. The extreme makeover of Lara shook the gaming world. In the past ten years, this goddess had never revealed her delicate side. Many players could not accept the smaller breasts of Lara; after all, this is the most important topic of the *Tomb Raider* series in video game forums (Miller & Summers, 2007). This significant redesign of Lara brought *Tomb Raider* back to the center of video games. Within 48 hours of the release of the book, it had sold more than one million copies and became the fastest-selling game in the United Kingdom (Han & Song, 2014).

Recalling the previous 20 years from the inception of *Tomb Raider* in 1996, the figure of Lara as it was the epitome of the image of women and change in women status in that era (Kennedy, 2002). It embodies the topics such as gender equality and women's voice, which is basically the symbol of reformation that women start to cut a figure in video games (Han & Song, 2014). In the 1990s, the initial position of Lara was the "woman version of Indiana Jones" (Han & Song, 2014), yet in the early years of *Tomb Raider*, people seemed to talk more about "sexy Lara" (Mou & Peng, 2009). With gaming 3D technology appearing, women characters in video games have seen a new round of changes. They were changed from the 2D figure into a diorama in the space, and the characteristics of the female body also better presented in front of the players, which brought huge visual shock to players. Moreover, as the first female protagonist of action-adventure, the sexy figure of Lara attracted lots of male players. Lara's

original character designer, also Toby Gard, known as “the father of Lara”, acknowledged that he initially set the protagonist as a woman because he considered that the 3D physical models could attract more male players (Mikula, 2003). *Time* magazine used to define the appearance of Lara as the first sexy symbolic representatives of game industry. In 1999, The Austin Chronicle had teased those sexy female protagonists in video games: “What’s going on with the sexy shorts and huge busty Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider*? She is supposed to explore the tomb rather than send those lewd coward men to the grave” (Anderson & Bushman, 2001). At that time, Lara’s sexy label came from her body. Navel-baring tank tops, mini shorts, small waist, and big breasts were all significant symbols deliberately transmitted by the game designers. The frustrating problem was that since the first sexual shape of Lara in *Tomb Raider* attracted many male gamers, the designers of the game began to make the size of Lara’s breasts bigger and bigger. When compared with her slender waist, Lara’s overall body proportions are somewhat unscientific (Hartmann & Klimmt, 2006).

## **Uses and Gratifications**

The uses and gratifications theory views audiences as active media users who choose and employ media according to their intention and demands (Morgan, 1987). In addition, leisure is one of the gratifications received when playing video games (Summers & Miller, 2014). The reason why video games are so popular is that players can release their pressures by winning the games to acquire a sense of achievement, and they gain power and control through commanding the characters of video games (Scharrer, 2005). Based on those reasons, the producers of video

games are constantly adjusting the level of competition and changes, even the appearance of characters. The former studies on the relationships between video games and uses and gratifications theory merely referred to how audiences changed the characters in video games, especially how players react to the level of sexualization in video games.

Based on Lynch et al. (2016), the decline in gender discrimination in video games is because the interests of women in playing video games has been rising, and criticisms of male supremacy in games has become more and more often. The shaping of characters are dependent on the reaction and needs of players to a large extent (Lynch et al. 2016). Besides, the research of Lynch, et al. (2016) shows that although female protagonists in current video games are more playable, they still come in minor roles. Moreover, the research found that there is scarcely a relationship between sexualization of women and the key success in video games, which is as well as the description in the game of adolescent and rated games. Besides, the research finds that the sexualization of women has closed the relationship with her abilities (Lynch, et al., 2016). The research explains in detail of their methods which only considers “dynamic process”, rather than “static art” or “opening animation of low interactivity”. In many other examples of the actual definition of sexualization, Lynch, et al. (2016) states that they thought “breast is the hardest hit of sexualization: chest and figure disproportionately ( $a = .81$ ), the bare skin between the armpit and chest ( $a = .70$ ) and artistic style or dressing (such as shadows,  $a = .73$ )” (Lynch, et al., 2016). Their methods of research are thorough and scientific, but at the same time, they also highlight the issues of defining sexualization in research. Sometimes when Lara is climbing the

ladder, the lens is facing her rear end, or breasts when the *Tomb Raider* rebooted the camera in 2013 (Lynch, et al., 2016). Occasionally, it is more concrete to acquire simple things like suggestive dialogue and eye contact than see women wearing bikinis walking on the battlefield (Lynch, et al., 2016). However, Lynch, et al. (2016) is mainly expressing his perspectives through his research. Based on Lynch, et al., (2016), it would make the environment of video games better. Making female protagonists more normal and capable, so that it may be able to reduce hostility to women without materialized description of them in video games. As a result, the declining trend of sexualization of women, especially without reducing their power or their scenes in games, could build a more equal environment of video games (Lynch et al., 2016).

### **Research questions:**

Previous chapters propose that Lara Croft as a classic figure of video games has been improved on her appearances and personality in recent years, and the reboot of the *Tomb Raider* has acquired success based on its increased selling and customers. However, there still largely exists sexualized representations of game characters, which could lead to some negative impacts on society. Thus, there are three main research questions in this thesis:

1. How have female game players reacted to Lara Croft's changes in the *Tomb Raider* series?
2. How would female players in video games describe the prevalence and sexually suggestive representations of their characters?
3. How do video games shape female participants' perceptions of female ideal body?

## **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants and Settings**

#### *Participants*

Nine female gamers had been recruited through snowball sampling to participate in this study referred by professors and friends of the researcher. All participants are women aged 18 to 28. The sample is diverse in terms of race. Fundamental information related to demography, types of games, choices of platforms and some other related data were collected during screening process.

#### *Screening Procedure*

Participants are asked the following questions to determine if they are qualified:

1. How many years have you been playing video games?
2. How many hours a month do you play?
3. Have you played the *Tomb Raider* series?
4. Are you familiar with Lara Croft?

These answers must fit the following criteria: 1. must be more than 1 year; 2. must be no less than 6 hours; 3. YES; 4. YES.

All participants that met the criteria and were interested in attending this study contacted researcher, then they were scheduled for the focus group. A semi-structured focus group lasting one hour was held on July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

### *Discussion Guide*

The following section studied individual experiences on video and computer games, the technology bringing them as well as their relationship with gender bias. After they have been determined to be qualified, they were asked their age and race.

Table 1 lists participants' demographic information which was collected from previous questionnaire.

*Table 1. Participants' information: A general overview. (For the privacy of participants, all the listed name are pseudonyms.)*

	<b>Participants</b>
<b>Number of participants</b>	9 participants: Cora, Emily, Sophia, Tabby, Sarah, Nadia, Daisy, Wen, Barbara
<b>Average age</b>	23 Cora: 20, Emily: 21, Sophia: 22, Tabby: 22, Sarah: 23, Nadia: 21, Daisy: 26, Wen: 25, Barbara: 27
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Cora (Korean), Emily (American), Sophia (African-American), Tabby (Indian), Sarah (Chinese), Nadia (African-American), Daisy (British), Wen (Chinese), Barbara (American)
<b>Degree of preference in playing video game</b>	Cora, Emily, Sophia, Nadia, Daisy and Wen enjoy playing video games very much; Tabby and Tabby playing video game as interests; Barbara is OK with playing video game.
<b>Average age of first playing video game experience (years)</b>	Cora: 9, Emily: 10, Sophia:9, Tabby: 8, Sarah: 8, Nadia: 10, Daisy: 9, Wen: 9, Barbara: 12



*Table 1. (Continued)*

<p><b>Number of games played till 2018</b></p>	<p>Average: 22            Cora: 22, Emily: 27, Sophia:25,            Tabby: 16, Sarah: 21, Nadia: 22,            Daisy: 26, Wen: 25, Barbara: 14</p>
<p><b>Frequency of playing video games</b></p>	<p>Every day (Cora, Emily, Daisy, Wen and Sophia); Every weekend (Sarah); once a week (Tabby, Nadia); Once every two weeks (Barbara).</p>

**Data Collection**

The focus group was built and hosted in the study room of USF library, and it lasted one hour. A moderator and a transcriber who are native speakers were hired during this in-depth discussion.

*Pre-workshop questionnaires*

A questionnaire was applied in the preliminary status of this study, which was to acquire a better understanding of participants’ background materials and perspectives on video games. The questions were organized based on participants’ habits in according to types of games, elements in video games that they enjoyed, stereotyped characters that they ever noticed in video games, and sexualized female protagonists who made they feel uncomfortable. All these profiles simplified the procedure in administering the post-workshop interviews by obtaining background information and thoughts on video games of participants.

*In-workshop profiles*

Participants were asked to take part in a discussion which can achieve the study's tenet of self-determination. Several pictures of the *Tomb Raider* series especially the figure of Lara Croft was provided during this discussion. Participants needed to give opinions about the change of the main character of the *Tomb Raider*. In exploring the experiences and perceptions of participants when they encountered sexualized presentation of female characters in video games, researchers used questionnaire information to conduct an open discussion. In addition to this, audiotapes of discussion were recorded and transcribed to explore research questions.

The following photos were displayed to participants during focus group discussion to better acquire comprehensive outcomes:



Figure 1: The changes of Lara Croft's appearance (The Crapbox of Son of Cthulhu, 2016)

### **Data Analysis and Trustworthiness**

In an attempt to figure out the collected information, texts and images in all kinds of video games were coded and then classified based on categories and themes. In fact, it can be called as categorical aggregation (Creswell, 2007). The collection of existing codes and newly emerging codes was adopted as a whole to analyze data.

Appropriate use of language is a must to code. For instance, gender stereotype is found to have the potential to code. The researchers made an analysis and comparison of their respective descriptions and the themes among the respondents.

Finally, data analysis would concentrate on triangulating previous findings.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

According to data collection from questionnaire information and focus group interviews, the findings of this study suggest that the figures of female protagonists in video games has shaped the ideal body in female players' perception in a certain extent, especially during adolescence. The research found out the following factors, (1) the perceptions of participants of Lara Croft's changes in the *Tomb Raider* series, (2) participants' perceptions of sexualized female characters in video games, (3) influences of ideal body presented in video games.

## CHAPTER IV:

### RESULTS

#### **Perceptions of Lara Croft's Changes in the *Tomb Raider* series**

Participants viewed the pictures of Lara Croft in the *Tomb Raider* series, which they had already were familiar with. They were confirmed by the moderator that they had comprehended every detail of personality and appearances of Lara Croft.

The focus group interview highly revealed participants' awareness of the sexualized figure of Lara Croft in the early versions of the *Tomb Raider* series. Participants stated their satisfaction with how Lara Croft changed in the new series of the *Tomb Raider*, including her appearance and personality:

Lara Croft has left me deep impression, which has changed after the revival of the franchise. It has been found that abhorrence is the nature of Lara Croft. To be specific, when a warm coat is appreciated in a chilly environment, the so-called "realism" is embedded into all corners of the game. Similarly, in the context of a desert, tight pants will be the last thing that people wants. Different from those people who think of it as irrelevant to her personality, I would describe dresses as a form of expression, especially the design of big breasts and tight butt were aim to attract more male gamers. In other words, it develops into a statement with iconic stuff such as the teal tank top and shorts. People usually describe Lara Croft in that way; however, such a perception could change any time soon.

Meanwhile, participants pointed out the details of the change of Lara Croft, which

emphasized the significance of rebooting in Lara Croft:

A different perspective on the existing character is provided, which has never shown up before. Lara Croft got weaker and she was continuously challenged in terms of emotions and psychology. However, it is because of such adversity that reflected her personality. Such image of Lara Croft had never been demonstrated. Some people believe that the change in the plot was designed to make the main character stronger; however, this was not the case in practice. The real fact is that her attempts and struggles would be the only factors that excite her.

On the other hand, participants generally expressed how Lara Croft affected the era of video games. Although they had noticed the change of Lara Croft in the new version of *Tomb Raider*, they had paid more attention on the contribution of Lara Croft changing male-dominated video games. Basically, the older age participants showed their subjective opinions on Lara Croft. The earlier time that they got in touch with video games made them treat Lara Croft as a heroine. However, the younger age participants had more options when they first played video games, which gave them more objective attitude towards Lara Croft:

It is believed that Lara remains a classic character for everyone who has seen her before. The era when she was created was a time without so many successful and engaging video games in today's world, and that is one of the main reasons why she could spark off, although she was a typical image of a bad girl living in the old-schooled 80s-90s. She was destined for influence. In today's world, there are a variety of AAA video games and a wide range of charming females who could compete with Lara.

One of participants stated that the reboot of Lara did not change her perceptions on "classic" Lara. Participants who played video games during the launch period of *Tomb Raider* had expressed their admiration of classic Lara Croft. They basically treated Lara Croft as the earliest heroine figure who had succeeded among male-dominated video game environment:

Speaking of ethics and morality, the revived Lara remains to be the classic Lara in that she had been contextualized early back in the 1990s, when another group of customers could communicate with the video game. However, it bothers me a lot in that Lara was created by a feminist who would like to educate people with gender bias to have a better understanding of girls. In fact, I do not prefer a hero who is mentally weak and who always needs protection from males.

One of participants directly stated her opposite opinions that she subjectively was not fond of the reboot of Lara Croft. Besides, she felt comfortable about Lara's "unrealistic" body shape because it was a classic figure:

Lara Croft impresses me a lot in that she is beyond a superhero who lives in an ideal world full of crazy things and fantasies. It does not apply to me when some people regard it as dark and realistic. Generally speaking, I am not a fan of popular culture; however, Batman performed very well, and it was suitable for Molarization. In the past decade, popular culture has been witnessed to be very complex and nuanced. There draws a line between brusqueness and tastelessness; however, it is way more than puritanical from my perspective. In other words, it is not right to exaggerate the beauty of women and masculinity of men is demonized.

In the end, participants preferred the new looking of Lara Croft, including her suitable outfits and "not exaggerated body shape". Although some participants did not consider the design female protagonists especially their appearances in the mattered, the majority of participants shared the same perceptions:

Reboot Lara is no more than another version of original her. It depends on you regarding if she is decent or not. Personally speaking, the new image of Lara is my type in that she is brilliant and impresses me a lot.

### **Perceptions of Sexualized Female Characters in Video Games**

Participants' discussions strongly reflected their dissatisfaction on sexualized female roles in video games. Despite participants from all groups described some improvement of sexualization,

such as the dress and body shape changed in video games, they still felt gender-biased when they played games:

Players, regardless of gender, will drag those sliders right over into unrealistic territory. They will spend more dollars on the cosmetic outfits with no gameplay effect, that reveal more character skin, than the ones that reveal less. They will play a game longer if there are sexy characters in it. They will pay more for a game and more will buy it if there are sexy characters on the cover art.

Some participants were not satisfied about game companies kept selling sexualized female figures to attract more customers:

It is not advisable to sell sexualization in that it cannot be applied in reality, and it depreciate the image of women. Take an example, the prostitutes in GTA describes a lifestyle which is almost impossible and improbable. In addition to that, women are objected in many other scenarios. As far as I am concerned, women should be treated equally with more respects in the field of gaming.

Besides, participants indicated the negative effects towards society by posting sexualized content in video games:

It's sexist and is sending out a bad message. It is a marketing tool but is disrespectful to women. You usually don't see men oversexualized, and that would be considered bad so why isn't female oversexualization? It also sends a bad image to children who play the games because they can grow up thinking that "females are weak and unimportant", just like in games. Another message can be that in order to be strong, females must wear skimpy clothing and be really sexy. It can also be harmful because people who play these games can then want all real females to look like the characters and act like them. This is dehumanizing and wrong. Lots of people say that women still wear this clothing in public, but I never see anyone wandering around in outfits such as Kitana's. It makes women seem as objects incapable of proper human emotions and are simply used for sex. It's unfair because women aren't just for sex, they are human too and has anyone ever thought that women have interests other than having sex?

Some participants pointed out there are high requirements from the market, because the

status of the male-dominated industry environment. With the number of female players increasing, the sexualization of female protagonists did not have a great improvement. Instead, sexualization is still a selling point in the market:

In my opinion, female characters are sexualized because it is what the market wants. Once video game consumers make it clear that they are no longer interested in seeing pixelated tits and ass, game developers will stop pumping out women who are expected to wreak havoc in bikinis. The prototypical male characters shown above are popular because they fuel a distinctly masculine tough-guy fantasy - the rugged adventurer with raw sex appeal who kicks ass and always has a witty retort. It is an appealing concept, and it sells video games.

A few participants shared their discomfort on sexualized female characters in video games, while they considered game companies and gamers put more focus of attentions on the contents of games rather than sexualization itself:

Sexualization is not a focus of gaming. Sexualizing female characters should not be used as a device to gain attention and appeal for the franchise. The main things we should be focusing on with regards to games are the mechanics, gameplay, backstory and not the physicality of female characters particularly which is known to be commonly exaggerated in a negative way, and not for the means of promoting confidence in body type and sexuality. The fact of the matter is, women who are sexualized in games are often demeaned, victimized and objectified, and many women take offence to this, as the focus of our video games should not have anything to do with these concepts.

Rather than complaining about the environment of video games, most participants focus more on the reason why sexualized characters in video games are welcomed. In fact, the sexualization both of female and male characters has been existing for a long time since video games rose, and it will not fade away as long as gamers has requirements of it:

Marketing is the easiest explanation. As the old saying goes 'Sex sells. Human beings are sensitive to visualization, which means that our eyes are sensitive to bright colors and provocative pictures. This, however, confuses our instincts as humans and can easily distract



our attention from other things going on. Therefore, interesting characters shown on the covers will make us curious about who they are, and presentation of these images are significant. This is also something heavily associated with the action genre in general across all media. We play games to feel empowered. They give us a sense of agency in our lives and more. This is often achieved by having us play a beautiful character. One who reeks of confidence and charisma. This is part of the experience that makes it feel so good. Even if you are playing as the opposite gender your brains still knows that you are playing as someone desirable and assumes that role.

Game developers launch games based on different requirements from diverse cultures all over the world. Sexualization has been welcomed selling points globally, and it might diverge a little in different countries. Consumers tend to acquire fantasy that they could not have through video games. Therefore, game developers keep publishing welcomed elements of video games to attract and retain more possible and potential customers:

I think it's also concerned with cultural differences and some other reasons. Game developers are from all around the globe. Someone in Japan will not have the same values as someone in Sweden. Japan is a good example because they have a lot of games that are just straight up weird to us. Their whole culture has many items that simply don't exist here and the lower age of consent there allows for things our countries don't have.

All these selling points are the way things are done, how they've always been done. It is what people have come to expect and when games deviate from this norm then they face losing profits. Games that deliberately make ugly characters are seen as making a statement and that is often resented (mainly due the context around such issues. Feministic activism and mainstream video games being a lot like oil and water).

I have to say another reason is about aesthetics, presentation matters. Game developers are really a lot like artists. Crafting these amazing worlds and populating them with people. Why wouldn't you want to make everything as ideal as possible? If I was creating a work of art I don't think I would think about making things ugly just to appease people. I'd want to make my world and the character in it as beautiful as I could imagine.

The current study mostly stated that female characters in video games were portrayed in a stereotyped, especially sexualized way (Dill & Thill, 2007). Contracting Ivory (2009)'s research,

which stated there was a gender gap in perceptions on sexualized images in video games, older age participants thought female players were also attracted by sexualized elements in video games. In fact, older age participants indicated market-oriented factors cannot be ignored, which drew forth that even with large amount female players, sexualized characters were still a selling point in the current video game market.

### **Influences of Ideal Body Presented in Video Games**

Massive studies find that gender stereotypes are getting popular among people (Beasley & Standley, 2002) in all forms of media, which includes advertisements, traditional media, social media, and video games. Many of these sexualized images have negative impacts on game players, especially on adolescents (Martin, 1996). It has been shown by content analysis that the female characters in video games prefer slimness. Under such circumstances, female adolescents find themselves longing for the body shape demonstrated by the female images:

We tend to copy the behavior and even the images of ideal figures shown in the mass media so much that we almost forget who we are. Beauty and good looking mean the whole world for us. Unfortunately, obsessed with losing weight will easily make the audience troubled by eating disorders. This should be taken seriously in that adolescents in the modern era are getting more vulnerable to such disorders.

Three fundamental factors can motivate self-comparison with peers: self-evaluation (which stresses your relative status), self-improvement (which looks for a solution to a problem), and self-enhancement (which aims to learn to get along well with yourself) (Sedikides & Strube, 1997). Similarly, in the context of video game, participants tend to meet their own expectations through the three motivations:

The world has put certain standards on what is okay and what is not, it has led several people to feel so insecure about themselves. These guidelines made by media have hurt many people by making them feel as if they are not good enough. The media portrays women to be a size and shape and that means you are beautiful, attractive, or sexy which cause many issues for females. I still remember when I was around 13 and I really wanted to be a female character who had “ideal body” of my favorite video game, so I refused to eat just in order to reach perfect weight in me supposedly to be physical grown age. That was a dark period of my life.

Participants had shared their own experiences on how video games impacted their ideal body images, which revealed the negative influences that media had been disseminating to the public. In some certain ways, female gamers desire an ideal figure that includes fantasy body with thin shape like female protagonists in video games:

When I was a teen, I kind of went through a sensitive period that many factors play roles in affecting my body shape. Where you live, how is your living environment, peer pressure and even the social culture will do their part. In my opinion, too much focus on extreme body shape will make them go on diet, especially when no one gives them an acknowledgement. When I was so into playing video games, I also overly impacted by the figures of games. I couldn't stop wishing that if I could have the same body. It did confuse me for a long time until I passed that period. I'm glad that I'm strong women with self-esteem, but I also worried about teens who have same problems just as I had.

Some participants pointed out that media could only affect people's perceptions when they are obsessed with it. Gamers' attitudes on social reality are influenced and shaped by media. In video games, characters build people's view of the real world and its social and ethical standards by means of disseminating them with major perceptions of how the world and a person are supposed to be and act:

Video games should not be the only factor that to be blame; however, it does slow the increasing attention to extremely negative body image. According to what kind of games they play, the problem will show up in different ways. Take an example, spending most of

their time playing games with large amount of unrealistic female body images, the problem will get clearer. However, if they stay up all night playing puzzle games and strategy games, this might be less of a problem.

Other perceptions on this topic might reveal this negative influence had existing since mass media's prevalence. Especially when mass media rose, television program passively influence self-esteem of audiences and affirmatively portray "perfectionism" and "body dissatisfaction". When it comes with sex-driven content of media, there are large amount of gender-biased figures of women posted on the public in male-dominated environment:

As mentioned before, video games and the internet are not the first source of negative body images from adolescents. When the audience are at their early age, they are frequently exposed to the skinny actors on the Television. However, in various video games, no one would judge the teenagers that overweight is wrong, and they are believed to be beautiful the way they are. Even their imperfection is an important component of their identification. In that case, it is not the video games but the Television or advertisement that mislead our teenagers.

Almost all participants expressed negative opinions on this topic. Some participants had their own passive experiences on the influences that video games brought to them. Based on Ivory (2009), it has been over debated that visual design and a lack of realism are the key problems. Many studies explored and found that it is the beautiful image showing up on TV and video games that influence the perceptions of these young audience. Many studies explored that the standard of beauty widely presented on television, movies, and video games is having a powerful effect on adolescents (Morawitz, et al., 2014). In addition, participants pointed out the effects that media brought to adolescents reinforced the low self-esteem which can make them so risk seeking that they would go for dieting. On the other hand, most participants agreed that the

*Tomb Raider* reboot had contributed a lot to the creation of a natural female character whose appearance is not unrealistically perfect.

## CHAPTER V:

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

According to the study of this focus group, almost all participants had positive opinions about Lara Croft's change in the *Tomb Raider* reboot, yet there were some divergences upon Lara Croft's appearances. Basically, participants who are older average age stated more emotional perceptions on Lara Croft because they treated Lara as a cutting-edge character of the male-dominated video games era, while younger participants had more chances to contact diverse video games, which made them treat Lara objectively.

Though many of the participants' perceptions on sexualization of video games are in line with the perceptions responded in the previous literature, especially when it comes to the demands of the market. Through this study, participants indicated their negative opinions on how female protagonists were portrayed in sexualized way in video games. In contrary to the stereotypes, this research has also claimed that female players are not completely averse to sexualized portrayals of protagonists and may understand the demands of market causing this phenomenon in current video game world, while others including male players may even enjoy sexualized protagonists in their game play. It is noteworthy that there was no hint of female

restraint in the discussion. Rather than complaining about a sexualized environment in video games, participants discussed more of the reasons of it. In addition, participants pointed out there were not only female protagonists were portrayed in sexualized way but also male protagonists, which might indicate the main reason that they had been discussing market needs.

Because the population of female gamers is far larger today than it in the past, game developers should consider this trend when designing games. Based on previous studies and research, female characters were generally portrayed with exaggerated body shapes and sexualized dressing. Based on the research of this thesis, game developers should consider different selling points, even sexualization to respond to be the demands of market.

Almost all participants indicated video games had created unreal figures of female characters which could lead to negative effects on participants when they were adolescents. Some participants even shared their own experiences on how the “ideal body” shown in the media affected them. There are risks that young people would be over exposed to unrealistic body image, which could cause their obsession with physical thinness. Even more, based on Vitelli (2014), for those adolescents who hold the belief that they are not comparable to the image on video games, they would be stuck in low self-esteem; thus, they would be very strict with themselves in terms of what they should or should not eat.

Many potential challenges have been put forward. First, participants were asked some private questions concerning their own experiences in a group and individual personality might affect the outcomes of the research. Besides, this research only focuses on one game with a small

sample group. In the future, the following research is advised to take into consideration the differences between individual participation and group activities at the same time.

Apart from that, the roles that different genders take differ, which is decided by the cultures in different countries. In turn, it will shape the opinions of game players. (Brenick et al., 2007; Hayes, 2005; Miller et al., 1996). Based on Brenick et al. (2007), it is easy for participants to realize what kind of games have stereotypic gender images and which do not. Previous studies have shown that young people are vulnerable and sensitive to extreme physical features, which are usually linked to stereotypic gender roles.

The environment in video games closely reflects to the real world. Characters in fantasy worlds link with the common desires in modern society. This thesis aims to analyze Lara Croft, one of the most classic female protagonists, to explore how and why she has changed through the *Tomb Raider* series, and how sexualization has been driven in markets and gamers. Subsequently, the results of this thesis indicate that we should examine the relationship between game developers and game players in a dynamic and flexible way.

In sum, female participants of this thesis showed market demands by players of stereotyped and sexualized characters of both men and women, so that this phenomenon will keep its prevalence for a long time. However, the sexualized and stereotyped contents of video games have negative impacts on some gamers, especially those adolescent audiences by shaping their “ideal body” in unhealthy way. Under this circumstance, there are suggestion for game developers that they should launch healthier games for young gamers and consider game rating



system to limit adolescences to contact with sexualized contents too early.

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## **APPENDIX A: *Focus Group Interview Protocol***

1. What video games do you prefer to play?

2. Reaction to Lara Croft's change:

Have you noticed there are changes of Lara's feature in *Tomb Raider's* series? If so, how do you feel about the changes?

3. Sexually suggestive representations of female characters:

Have you noticed that sexually suggestive representations of female characters in video games are mutually prevalent, and how do you feel about this phenomenon?

4. Have you been affected by the shape of female characters on your own attitudes of ideal body, especially during your adolescence. If you have, what kind of actions did you take to achieve your 'ideal body'?

5. If playing games is a daily routine for you, have you ever noticed that gender is captured by some significant issues in the game context? (For example, macho males, sexualized females, female armor not being very covering, hookers, strippers, violent tendencies, etc.)

6. Name your favorite main female character from any game franchise. You may also explain why they are your favorite.

7. Are your favorite characters oriented to your aesthetic standard (shape of body, dressing style, degree of exposure, et, al.), especially when you were adolescent.

8. How do you think women are represented within video games?

1) What do you think about the way they are dressed?

2) What do you think about their body shapes?

9. Do you feel like video games have improved the portrayal of female characters in current years?

10. Do you have any additional comments that may benefit my research?



## **APPENDIX B:**

### **TRANSCRIPT**

Moderator: First of all, thank you all for joining this discussion. The first question is what video games do you prefer to play?

Participant A: Oh, yeah. I like games like that too, especially connect with your discussion--the Tomb Raider, since Lara's medicines in words like a virtual war. Controlling like the characters and kind of every day, like things like that. Or the like really action. It's like fighting me, uh, or the ones that was like a task. Like, it's like you're get some change, you have to click.

Moderator: Anybody else? Okay, let's move to next questions which connect with research questions--Have you noticed there are changes of Lara Croft? If so, how do you feel that the changes?

Participant C: Sure, I would say that like how she used to be was a big three. Um, kind of like what men, what society thought. Thanks, she is beautiful always. Um, but big hips, the big boobs like that's how like society of things, what things is beautiful. Hold on kind of like the same thing, like and stuff like that.

Participant I: It is believed that Lara remains a classic character for everyone who has seen her before. The era when she was created was a time without so many successful and engaging video games in today's world, and that is one of the main reasons why she could spark off, although she was a typical image of a bad girl living in the old-schooled 80s-90s. She was destined for influence. In today's world, there are a variety of AAA video games and a wide range of charming females who could compete with Lara.

Participant D: Actually, I don't think Lara is sexualized, it's so silly to believe he is to the point it's laughable and you really don't grasp the meaning of a character being sexualized, so I'm going to explain it to you: sexualization occurs when individuals are regarded as sex objects and evaluated in terms of their physical characteristics and sexiness. Nobody does this with Lara whereas with female characters like Tail or Ivy, you see guys doing this in this forum, there are waifs and stuff out there. Lara is not relevant because she is sexy, but because she is strong, brutal and so, whereas characters like ivy are because of her appearance.

Participant G: Speaking of ethics and morality, the revived Lara remains to be the classic Lara in that she had been contextualized early back in the 1990s, when another group of customers could communicate with the video game. However, it bothers me a lot in that Lara was created by a feminist who would like to educate people with gender bias to have a better understanding of girls. In fact, I do not prefer a hero who is mentally weak and who always needs protection from males.

Participant C: It's funny when certain gamers assert that sexualization in games is perfectly fine, but then also cry bitter piss tears because Laura Croft looks like a human and not a weird sex alien. I generally get the arguments that sexualization in games can be perfectly fine, depending on the context, but people who demand that female characters must be sexualized have always struck me as incredibly immature.

Participant B: Yeah, I agree with you. The same type of and like I guess like for many draws more try attraction to them. So like sales because like the beautiful getting to play rock are for a new year, a beautiful woman society her being like strong thing, but still a lady on, yeah, the change of the commercial a society cater to day. It's true. The change like Its kind of like as Asian like to be. Since his wife. It's normalized.

Participant H: Lara Croft impresses me a lot in that she is beyond a superhero who lives in an ideal world full of crazy things and fantasies. It does not apply to me when some people regard it as dark and realistic. Generally speaking, I am not a fan of popular culture; however, Batman performed very well and it was suitable for Molarization. In the past decade, popular culture has been witnessed to be very complex and nuanced. There draws a line between brusqueness and tastelessness; however, it is way more than puritanical from my perspective. In other words, it is not right to exaggerate the beauty of women and masculinity of men is demonized.

Participant F: Lara Croft has left me deep impression, which has changed after the revival of the franchise. It has been found that abhorrence is the nature of Lara Croft. To be specific, when a

warm coat is appreciated in a chilly environment, the so-called 'realism' is embedded into all corners of the game. Similarly, in the context of a desert, tight pants will be the last thing that people want. Different from those people who think of it as irrelevant to her personality, I would describe dresses as a form of expression, especially the design of big breasts and tight butt were aiming to attract more male gamers. In other words, it develops into a statement with iconic stuff such as the teal tank top and shorts. People usually describe Lara Croft in that way; however, such a perception could change any time soon.

Participant G: It's not of like how we changed over time, but we like as a society over time like what we find beautiful country some change all the figures. I feel like, but then it was okay to do those things because women, we're just seen as like, you know the like, they stayed like as time shifted, that woman are starting like they kind of so are based on beta games phenomena. Female character sexual, not only about their appearance that also about they were treated as victim or prize.

Participant A: A different perspective on the existing character is provided, which has never shown up before. Lara Croft got weaker and she was continuously challenged in terms of emotions and psychology. However, it is because of such adversity that reflected her personality. Such image of Lara Croft had never been demonstrated. Some people believe that the change in the plot was designed to make the main character stronger; however, this was not the case in practice. The real fact is that her attempts and struggles would be the only factors that excite her.

Participant A: Reboot Lara is no more than another version of original her. It depends on you regarding if she is decent or not. Personally speaking, the new image of Lara is my type in that she is brilliant and impresses me a lot.

Moderator: So you think it's connected with gender stereotypes? Could you detail it?

Participant G: Yeah of course, The real problem with this piece is that they are telling you what "gamers are like" without providing anything to back it up except killing prostitutes in GTA. Yet of course they don't tell you everyone can be killed not just prostitutes. On top of all that Anita Sarkisian will take any violence towards women, not violence toward them because they are women, and spin it into games that are specifically being violent toward women. If anything, the fact that women can be hurt in video games is the opposite of sexism. Also, only in America does the sexualization of things matter. I mean really, what is the big deal. It's not like anyone actually expects real women to be or even look like video game women.

Participant G: That touches on what I'm saying about the disparity between image representations. While it seems to be acceptable to sexualize and objectify female characters, male characters have to be handled in a much more subtle and safe way when it comes to representations of sexuality. It would be interesting to see how many people would simply brush it off and use the "its just a game, don't worry about it" argument if it was the male characters being objectified in a much more blatantly homoerotic way.

Participant C: I agree. It's not that gender biases don't exist; they do. But when people insist on

making everything an example of gender bias, it clouds the issue and makes it impossible to discuss rationally. People are in such a hurry to join the good-guy's team and excuse themselves from any possible accusations of bigotry and they feel they can do that by being the first to finger someone for over-sexualization. Whether or not the fingered entity is guilty of anything is beside the point; doing something about it if they are is beside the point. This is internet activism in a nutshell - bitch and moan to make yourself look good but let someone else fix the problem.

Moderator: Okay, so it led to the next question. Have you noticed that phenomenon that there are sexually suggestive representations of female characters in video games? If so, how do you feel basically?

Participant E: Well, I think I've noticed like for video games, like I used to play like a lot of the fighting ones, and like the girl characters, games have always been like the way they dress them like their outfits. We're very like showed a lot like skin tight, but I never really saw, I guess like you just like me. IT's like, but I did notice that like the girl characters are all like the way they dress. Like we want you here and there.

Participant C: Sexuality is something that we see everywhere in media.

Participant E: Yeah, It's kind of funny how the new *Tomb Raider's* have shifted the sexualization from her chest onto her ass.

Participant A: You said, like if you notice like how they were like you betrayed. Okay, yeah, so

like I noticed that. But the whole, um, like the, I guess I don't know how they treat them in the game, because I haven't played a lot of games like that. But mostly I just saw like just the way like their dress, the way that they portray them should be I just feel like they are, but I feel like they more geared video games also later like catering to like, well, do you feel couple?

Participant C: Everyone always comes at with "it's empowerment, not over sexualization/objectification" line, but I just can't see this. Everything about these games screams to me to appeal to prepubescent adolescent in the portrayal of the main character. Nearly everything. I find myself shaking my head when I play them. The camera angles, the moves, everything screams sex and nothing but sex. That does not define female empowerment to me, and if that is what the definition depends on, then I wish to be no part of it anyhow.

Participant D: Players, regardless of gender, will drag those sliders right over into unrealistic territory. They will spend more dollars on the cosmetic outfits with no gameplay effect, that reveal more character skin, than the ones that reveal less. They will play a game longer if there are sexy characters in it. They will pay more for a game and more will buy it if there are sexy characters on the cover art.

Participant E: I'm more offended by how overboard they went with the sexualization. I mean come on does anyone actually find that character art sexually appealing? I'm okay with breasts and all, but not when they're twice the size of the woman's head.

Participant H: I agree, they went overboard with the sexualization, but the proportions for all the

characters are like that. Exactly, it's part of the art style as a whole. The fact some are considering it a valid criticism is ridiculous.

Participant I: Yup. That and there have probably been games that are far worse than Dragon's Crown as far as sexualizing women goes and probably didn't even sexualize the male either not that that would have necessarily been good, but at least it would be fair.

Participant D: I've read some connected articles before and the explanation for the slight shift in direction is pretty reasonable. It's also not the first time that Itagui or TN have expressed some concern that maybe they'd swung too far into over the top sexualization in the series. I agree that games are art and should be regarded as art in the same way that TV shows, movies, music, poetry, etc. are. However, they bear a greater resemblance to movies in as much as they are also large-scale products designed to make money, and as such they need to choose directions for their projects that are likely to please the largest audience. DOA has always been higher on the sexualized content factor than most other fighting games, but it's not the top seller. DOA5 did decent but not as well as they would have liked, and it certainly didn't pull Street Fighter or Tekken numbers. I'm not surprised that they are trying to change up the formula. Sexy content is one of the things that drew some fans to the franchise, but it also pushed a lot away. Even some tournaments started banning the more ridiculous outfits because they felt it was taking away focus from the game. At the end of the day, games are not sold or not sold based on the opinion of sites like Kotaku or even Game spot. They are sold on what the customers like and if pendulous boob physics and dental floss outfits were what sold the most games in the end, I



guarantee you that TN would be knocking out Dead or Alive: After Dark. Actually they -did- do that already. It's called DOA Beach Volleyball/Extreme, and those games didn't sell nearly as well as the fighting games because they were all about the sexualization and pretty light on the game part.

Participant G: We'll give that to like, so that's true. Like I would prefer it to be more realistic, or at least like not as like, looks like section, especially like manner. It's not like realistic like to portray us how majority like so. Given men, yeah, and then it's a reflex in their house. Um, in which is bad because then the real world, they're going to want to control their how they want them to be when it's like you have to this is just the games is not my dear in life there just for you know that they can.

Participant E: It is not advisable to sell sexualization in that it cannot be applied in reality, and it depreciate the image of women. Take an example, the prostitutes in GTA describes a lifestyle which is almost impossible and improbable. In addition to that, women are objected in many other scenarios. As far as I am concerned, women should be treated equally with more respects in the field of gaming.

Participant A: It's not just criticizing. It's gone well beyond that at this point because there honestly are very few blatantly sexist games even getting released these days. I suppose one could say Japanese developers are moving a bit slower to make that change but that is a different culture and they will obviously market their games to their audience rather than just westerners.

There is a certain amount of ignorance when it comes to foreign cultures so people criticizing Japanese developers should keep that in mind. Japanese women might feel differently about things for reasons you don't fully understand because you didn't grow up there and you don't know that culture. In any case i find it hilarious that those criticizing games on the basis of misogyny actually claim all the hostility started from the opposite end. I suppose all the wonderful stereotypes to describe male gamers thought themselves up, right? Think for a second about that person, who yes happens to fit all the stereotypes. Why exactly is it somehow moral to insult and shame an overweight, socially awkward, virgin who enjoys video games that cater towards his interests? Chances are, that person is probably like that for a reason and it more than likely stems from childhood and circumstances beyond their control. Society rejected this individual and as a result turned to unpopular nerd-like hobbies. Common sense should dictate this individual is not going to be particularly happy to find out his hobby now has to completely change to accommodate the interests of women who have little to no interests in gaming anyway aside from cell phone games, and the few females i do run into on Xbox live or whatever don't care either way, and are irrational and illogical when games depict some of the most heinous crimes known as it is but can somehow cherry pick sexism from every situation as if that is the most important issue in the known world.

Participant C: I haven't seen many blatantly sexist games in the same way that I haven't seen many blatantly racist movies. However, from what I've seen, a lot of the criticism of games isn't even claiming blatant sexism but is instead pointing out the existence of sexist themes and

attitudes. If people can criticize the existence of racist themes in movies, for example, the magical negro trope or the fact that a black male protagonist is rarely allowed to hook up with a white female protagonist without sending death threats or harassing the critic's family, then what the hell is wrong with the video game community? This doesn't seem happen to this extent, anyway in any other medium. Whether the person criticizing games, or the game industry is right or not, why does it seem like any time someone makes a high-profile criticism of games that the response from a big section of the gaming community ends up being downright ugly? And for the record, if someone levels accusations of sexism at the games industry, then it actually strengthens their argument when the gaming community rises up to call that person a "bitch", a "c-word", and to then send death threats. If anything, that kind of behavior makes it look like, "yeah, looks like the gaming industry really does have a problem with sexism and misogyny." Also, if you haven't noticed, gaming is no longer a thing that's exclusively for boys. Video games are mainstream, and it's a bit too late for the attitude of "games belong to us, girls need to stay out." The people who treat it that way are being socially awkward of their own doing, and there's not a thing wrong with people calling them out on their business.

Participant D: Yeah, I agree, and A you mentioned Japanese developers, I think over-sexualization of young females especially in the Neptunian games. These games bring a bad taste of Japanese-developed games. Another is the tacky character designs in games like Castle Vania Judgment and the recent Final Fantasy games. I prefer characters dressed as real-world people instead.

Participant A: Over sexualization is definitely an issue.

Participant C: Also the females have weird doll eyes and don't look human.

Participant E: In my opinion, western games do that a lot too. But you don't have to narrow it down to female bodies, every male body also looks the same. Why? Because artists are taught a pretty repetitive, pronounced version of human anatomy, me included. People don't like to draw/model fat people because they never learned how. Like how you never see a sculpture of a fat person out of ancient Greece. It's all canonical. And I disagree with only Japanese developers launch sexualized contents. Japanese character designs are just as good as any, depending on the game, of course. I know that you're probably joining the over sexualization and repetitive anatomy, but seriously, a lot of Japanese games have memorable characters, a lot of them are very unique. There's a reason that so many otakus/JRPG fans put video game characters in their profile pics.

Participant I: And I also think that breasts are fabulous. But not all cultures sexualize breasts, hence my question. Depends on the degree you would consider it sexualization I guess. Being able to display them publicly doesn't really mean they aren't sexualized. I mean a mans chest is sexualized to a degree and yet it's still totally culturally acceptable even in the US. Pretty sure men around the world can agree breasts are pretty great, just not to the same degree. The US is pretty oddly obsessed with boobs for example, even compared to Europe. The cultures I speak of are tribal cultures that view breasts as mere bags of flesh used for feeding children. I recall

reading somewhere that the women of one such tribal culture were informed that breasts are heavily sexualized in America, and in response, they actually laughed, mentioning their perception of breasts as purely non-sexual "baby-feeders". Not only do the women go around topless but breasts themselves were also entirely devoid of sexualization. The world is a weird place.

Participant G: I believe in study after study, if you give a player two characters to play, then whatever the gender of character or player, they will overwhelmingly go for the sexier or, the more heroically proportioned one. Not just players, but also artists. Bethesda tends to make very non-sexy characters and clothing. The majority of madders, male and female, who add new bodies or clothing, make them sexier than the default. The better bodies mods are consistently among the top ten downloads on mod sites, for every game. So, it's not so much it's for the men or men are pervs - it's most humans like looking sexy and interacting with other sexy people.

Participant A: Sexualization is not a focus of gaming. Sexualizing female characters should not be used as a device to gain attention and appeal for the particular franchise. The main things we should be focusing on with regards to games are the mechanics, gameplay, backstory and not the physicality of female characters particularly which is known to be commonly exaggerated in a negative way, and not for the means of promoting confidence in body type and sexuality. The fact of the matter is, women who are sexualized in games are often demeaned, victimized and objectified, and many women take offence to this, as the main focus of our video games should not have anything to do with these concepts.

Participant D: Technically, sexism encompasses a bigger concept than simple rape myth acceptance or hostile sexism towards women. While I don't agree with the idea of sexualization affecting overt sexism, I do believe it reinforces the existing gender roles that are institutionalized. However, that is in the realm of philosophy and not psychology.

Participant C: It's also silly because both sides do have legit concerns I feel. On one hand depicting sex or having sexualization is perfectly fine and is natural, and the human body shouldn't be such a taboo thing, what I wish the "SJW" side would realize. On the other hand, I wish the "anti-SJW" side would realize that sometimes it is taken too far, or is handled without any kind of subtlety or reality, and makes something that is inherently fine to something that is shallow, obnoxious and just downright stupid, and the fact that many gamers will fight so hard over such blatant, nonservice trash is just embarrassing. Overall, I feel sexualization should be used to promote the human body; should be used to empower it, not exploit it. Bayonets is probably the perfect example of how sexualization can be empowering.

Participant E: I mostly agree with what you're saying in this post, but I have a slightly different perspective. Yes, I agree that there are a lot of people on the side of feminism who frankly I think do a lot more harm to the cause/ideal than good. I wouldn't want everyone in my video games to be ugly, but at the same time I don't think that's the real complaint as often as people make it out to be for a couple reasons: I think there's a pretty clear double standard between the concept of male and female beauty in our media and society and what is and isn't acceptable in for example our celebrities, and that extends to game characters. In the US TV and Movies, we have a pretty

defined template of what we want from our stars when it comes to women. High cheek bones, thin and athletic but not at all muscular, narrow chin, highly symmetrical features. You can be a minority but not too much of a minority, but you need to be freak in' hot first and foremost. When it comes to our male stars, it's not like that at all. They can come in all kinds of sizes. And ages, too. Secondly, the complaint in games isn't from what I've seen generally about the women in games being too attractive, it's about them being too sexualized which are very different things. Alex Vance was an attractive woman in Half Life 2, but she was also a real character with impact on the story and was no point in the game where she wasn't also dressed like a normal human being. There was no point in which Alex's shirt got ripped in a suggestive fashion or a scene where she's changing in the other room and Gordon gets a peek. Did the game suffer for that? I don't think so. It would have been weird and out of place, but a ton of games and movies try to cram that in somewhere because why have an attractive woman if you aren't going to show her off at some point, right?

Participant F: Yeah, like the they're feeding into like they're mainly geared towards men want. So, they're feeding into those and they things to make organization is selling point. Yeah, just like when you look at a lot of industries like the tobacco like they know it's bad, but they have that addiction. And so keep pushing. Was there. And even if they might not think it's like a lot of people think all this time, no, I'm just playing a game. It does affect. And that should be obvious, when we think about it. That's a really obvious source of endorphins, in every animal. We already knew that.

Participant C: To me, sexism in media is a tricky subject. It touches upon inherent differences between men and women, but also culturally constructed differences which are sometimes hard to distinguish. Then there's the whole minority versus majority aspect and of course the target audience aspect. It's extremely difficult to determine to what extent the sexualization or objectification of women is objectionable or acceptable, also in comparison to the objectification or sexualization of men. I mean, both of those things happen, but they happen in different contexts and they are interpreted differently by the people involved. While skimpy armor can sometimes be depressing, it shouldn't distract you from the fact that the female character wearing it can still do great things and can still be in control of her own character, as was pointed out with Lara. But hey, in the case of Lara one could also argue that the game, through presentation and characterization cleavage shots, gruesome deaths, exaggerated moaning, is subtly still creating a rather weak and sexualized female character that relies on the care of the predominantly male gamer to survive. I don't think that's the case, but it's another way of looking at it. And there's always more than one way to look at a character.

Participant D: Umm, I still believe there is gender-biased representation between male and female characters in video games. At least not on the same level. Think about it. Take a character like Thor. He HAS to be muscular because he's a god. He's supposed to be strong, because that's the expectation of his character; it's a physical representation of his abilities. Has very little to do with sexualization. Now, if his costume had him in tight whites or Speedos to accentuate his bulging crotch, then sure, he's sexualized. But take a look at nearly any female superhero. Huge



breasts, usually with a cutaway in their costume to reveal cleavage, skin tight pants that crawl into their ass cracks or cover very little of their pelvic area. It's everywhere. All these women with different backgrounds, different ethnicities, different abilities, and they all share one thing in common: huge breasts and asses. Whether you want to admit it or not, it's because they're sexualized. I'm not saying it doesn't happen to male characters, just not anywhere on the same level.

Participant F: Gamergate is not a 'male' issue, it is an ethics and integrity issue, and if you really start looking into what's been going on you'd realize this stuff is important to all gamers. Zoe Quinn's role is only the tip of the iceberg in all this. Her exposure simply set off a chain of events long in the making, similar to how the assassination of Ferdinand triggered WWI. The harassment and threats are also not condoned by Gamergate at large. Even though they try to shut it down, there's only so much you can do vs the anonymity of the internet, unless the cops get involved. As for the sexualization of both males and females in gaming, I don't see that going anywhere; we are all sexual creatures, and there is a market for it. The good news is there is an incredible variety of games out there, so there is no reason you'd ever have to play a sexualized game if you don't want to, unless your definition of 'sexualized' includes someone like Princess Peach like Sarkeesian would, in that case I don't know what to tell you. Sarkeesian is a con artist. She can't open her mouth without lying and misrepresenting the topics she covers. Offer up any example, and I guarantee she will find a way to make it into a sexist plot perpetuated by the patriarchy. If you still love games, I highly recommend you watch Kite Tales More than a

Damsel in a Dress.

Participant D: I get what you're saying. But gamers already have a bad reputation, and this Gamergate thing has only made it worse. I'll definitely check out the video.

Moderator: Next question is that have you been affected by the shape of female characters in video games on your own attitudes of ideal body, especially during your adolescence.

Participant I: I believe reinforcing negative gender roles, sexism, stereotypes etc. has a higher probability of influencing behavior than being exposed to fictional violence since there's a much lower threshold for engaging in such thoughts or actions. Therefore, it's worse.

Participant C: The media is just a convenient scapegoat, so we can avoid taking responsibility for how we failed to teach children right from wrong. The media is a cesspool of scummy and entertainment. It's got everything. Entertainment that glorifies and sometimes makes light of violence, sex, promiscuity, alcohol, drugs, the thug life, ignorance, the sexualization of underage teens, objectification of multiple groups of people. Entertainment that outright lies to sell you some product. Entertainment that values materialism, vanity, and superficiality over virtues like humility, manners, and education. Shockingly inappropriate entertainment there only to seek attention. Trash that will idolize some bimbo celebrity with E-cups in the news over the numerous intelligent individuals who work to make the world a better place and weren't born into money. Reality shows where a bunch of dumb broads fight and throw drinks at each other. And of course, the suits behind the scene who shove this stuff at us. The list goes on. It would

take a metaphorical atom bomb to cleanse all the scum from the media.

Participant G: That's a good point. And it's best to teach people while they're young that that size 0 model is unhealthy, and her figure is unrealistic. Teach your daughter to carry herself with class and not think it's cute to be promiscuous. Teach your kids to have some self-respect and a thick skin. Teach them to think critically and not to believe everything they see on TV and read on the internet. Teach them to be educated individuals that think for themselves and don't need some teen pop star to tell them what's cool. Don't just let them spend 10 hours on their Xbox or in front of TV or on the computer. People expose their kids to this harmful media, and sometimes even buy it for them like idiots, yet don't even want to raise them to become intelligent, upstanding adults. They don't want to teach them what's right. And when the kids lash out, get depressed, kill themselves, become rude and disrespectful, are easily led, get pregnant, abuse drugs, or fail to become anything in life, the parents are always like "what happened to my baby!?" and then are quick to blame everyone else but themselves for their own failings. If only people spent half as much time looking at themselves and how we can positively improve our lifestyles, loved ones, community, and our overall attitudes as they do finger pointing and scapegoating others and the media.

Participant I: Marketing is the easiest explanation. As the old saying goes 'Sex sells. Human beings are sensitive to visualization, which means that our eyes are sensitive to bright colors and provocative pictures. This, however, confuses our instincts as humans and can easily distract our attention from other things going on. Therefore, interesting characters shown on the covers will

make us curious about who they are, and presentation of these images are significant. This is also something heavily associated with the action genre in general across all media. We play games to feel empowered. They give us a sense of agency in our lives and more. This is often achieved by having us play a beautiful character. One who reeks of confidence and charisma. This is part of the experience that makes it feel so good. Even if you are playing as the opposite gender your brains still knows that you are playing as someone desirable and assumes that role.

Participant I: We tend to copy the behavior and even the images of ideal figures shown in the mass media so much that we almost forget who we are. Beauty and good looking mean the whole world for us. Unfortunately, obsessed with losing weight will easily make the audience troubled by eating disorders. This should be taken seriously in that adolescents in the modern era are getting more vulnerable to such disorders.

Participant H: My name is that it's affected. See, so there is a there is a but um, the traditional during especially mass media. They just keep pushing the images were put them into your if that in. So, I just want to not just in video games, especially when you wear teenager. Have you ever effect hit by the like the shape of the games war. If you really like a character, when you a teenager, you want to be her.

Participant B: Yeah, and uh, maybe you want to achieve her body, shame that the ideal body ah, through some unhealthy way. So, I just want to know if you ever have that idea. Or um, if you have, what kind of action have you date? Yeah, to achieve that goal, I think growing up like

seeing like characters, only movies like t v show like just like barbie doll see stuff like that. I think they're almost like I kind of like the almost like a barbie done want to be like perfect, I guess. Um, but I never really, I don't think I ever took.

Participant E: Sure, Like, I don't think I really did anything to make myself to look like look like them. Whereas just I used to just think about it like, wish I were, but like I love foods like to be let go because I want you know want to be like small and stuff, but like too much to actually do it. But I didn't think about it like I wish like, you know, when I was younger, I think the most the biggest things just like movie star celebrities like they just always seem so perfect.

Participant D: Yeah there's a thin line between distorted sense of reality vs imagination. Id put flying/magic/superheroes into the imagination category. The overt perfectly sexual people on television, games, ads and everywhere else--that is distorted reality. If I see more fat people in TV or video games, I think I'd be a happier person overall.

Participant F: But I know people who have like, you know, but it does affect them to the point where they do like a drastic stuff, like not then think, no, no, it's just the I only wish that I can um, uh, super power. So, I just I wanted to be like Cinderella after liking you becomes like a princess. Yeah, I used to one of your princesses. And um, like a secret like super woman, you know, like be able to fly stuff. I was like, wish I could fly electrons. No, that's not real. So, I can um, yeah, that's I used to dress up like syndromes. Well, that was a little bit.

Participant G: The world has put certain standards on what is okay and what is not, it has led

several people to feel so insecure about themselves. These guidelines made by media have hurt many people by making them feel as if they are not good enough. The media portrays women to be a particular size and shape and that means you are beautiful, attractive, or sexy which cause many issues for females. I still remember when I was around 13 and I really wanted to be a female character who had 'ideal body' of my favorite video game, so I refused to eat just in order to reach perfect weight in me supposedly to be physical grown age. That was a dark period of my life.

Participant A: When I was a teen, I kind of went through a sensitive period that many factors play roles in affecting my body shape. Where you live, how is your living environment, peer pressure and even the social culture will do their part. In my opinion, too much focus on extreme body shape will make them go on diet, especially when no one gives them an acknowledgement. When I was so into playing video games, I also overly impacted by the figures of games. I could't stop wishing that if I could have the same body. It did confuse me for a long time until I passed that period. I'm glad that I'm strong women with self-esteem, but I also worried about teens who have same problems just as I had.

Participant D: Video games should not be the only factor that to be blame; however, it does sllow the increasing attention to extremely negative body image. According to what kind of games they play, the problem will show up in different ways. Take an example, spending most of their time playing games with large amount of unrealistic female body images, the problem will get clearer. However, if they stay up all night playing puzzle games and strategy games, this might be less of

a problem.

Participant C: As mentioned before, video games and the internet is not the first source of negative body images from adolescents. When the audience are at their early age, they are frequently exposed to the skinny actors on the Television. However, in various video games, no one would judge the teenagers that overweight is wrong and they are believed to be beautiful the way they are. Even their imperfection is an important component of their identification. In that case, it is not the video games but the Television or advertisement that mislead our teenagers.

Moderator: If you do you play games regularly, or do you notice any significant issues with how either gender is portrayed in video games, for example, uh, macho male, sexualized females, hookers, strippers, violence.

Participant F: I feel like the males are always like really muscular macho. They have some really sticking. We're like, yeah, there there's like strippers, like walking out, but mostly I'm attention like that.

Participant C: Yep, super muscular, actually, uh, I when both make me and we talk, yeah, we talked about like the female, but I think the males too pictures. It's just which is on realistic too. So, it's like making boys who play game think that that they need to. So how do you think women are referee seventeen in video games or about they how they presented other body shapes. I think it's i'm realistic for like for everyone there are some people have, you know, my they show how everyone, I guess at the time, I think they always draw it.

Participant A: Just like males, they are highly varied. In any form of mass media, you can always find what you are looking for. For the most part it is annoying to see the typical damsel in distress or excuses like, “Oh she has to be almost-naked because people of her race require sunlight on their skin even though the males of her race are completely covered old/ugly men”. But for the most part, I think it’s been improving at least a little and with some franchises/series which have always been with a unisex appeal.

Participant D: Ah yes, I am not convinced either that sex sells most in video games. Which is interesting to me because I remember seeing some stats from I guess about 10 years ago that an enormous chunk of websites made every day were pornographic and online a lot of the money was made with pornographic content. I wonder how that has developed over time. Because I always thought that it would transition slowly into games. But yes, you are clearly right that you can make very successful video games without needing to sexualize characters in any way. And that is great for the people who don't like that sort of stuff.

Participant C: I think it’s also concerned with cultural differences and some other reasons. Game developers are from all around the globe. Someone in Japan will not have the same values as someone in Sweden. Japan is a good example because they have a lot of games that are just straight up weird to us. Their whole culture has many items that simply don’t exist here and the lower age of consent there allows for things our countries don’t have.

All these selling points are the way things are done, how they’ve always been done. It is what



people have come to expect and when games deviate from this norm then they face losing profits. Games that deliberately make ugly characters are seen as making a statement and that is often resented (mainly due the context around such issues. Feministic activism and mainstream video games being a lot like oil and water). I have to say another reason is about aesthetics, presentation matters. Game developers are really a lot like artists. Crafting these amazing worlds and populating them with people. Why wouldn't you want to make everything as ideal as possible? If I was creating a work of art I don't think I would think about making things ugly just to appease people. I'd want to make my world and the character in it as beautiful as I could imagine.

Participant E: Yeah for people who go for that sort of thing, sure, but I'm not one of those people. I don't go for huge boobs and butts. To me, those are useless additions to a game such as Neptunian series. Overall, the series is very engaging and has beautiful visuals. Also, I don't understand why people are always picking on big boobs or whatever, like they would be the reason we are playing games like this.

Participant D: Yeah, it's pretty stupid to assume people are only playing those games because of the sexualization. It's just something that comes with some Japanese games. I'm pretty neutral towards it. I don't bother if it has it but I'm not going to buy a game just because of fanservice.

Participant H: Surely creating your characters of what to say. There is no doubt. I think it's always been the our last figure small way in America. And that's different. Each culture like for

it's like the small speak up speak. That's like the idea, which is not like realistic, but they're portraying like seem people like this is what women should look like making men feel like since they're catering more to so they're putting this unrealistic, like given those ideas to men, a person makes sense.

Participant A: That's true, I do not really know of modern games that oversexualize women. I do know some that sexualize female characters, though. With which I mean to say they're not actual women being sexualized. Yet, anyway. And I don't know if that's oversexualized. I mean, that's different for everybody, isn't it? I get the concern I think. That we change perception. I would say we don't do that. We don't have masses of gamers thinking they will respawn at a checkpoint when dying. But I grand you that it's subtler than that. And that could be changing our perception of real women gradually. I just think that this change in perception, if it occurs, is something that would then occur in so many ways that we don't know of that it's tough to point at sexualization and say it's bad. For all we know it may have the opposite effect on us. It also makes me wonder about advertising. Not as an argument for why this is not important. But as a concern. Because advertising, unlike games, is specifically made to change your perception of things. It's designed to mess with your mind. To insert associations and make you want something. So, if games are starting to have such an effect that is noticeable in people, we should be on high alert for advertisements and find ways to prevent ads from being presented to people. Or at least restrict their ability to change our perception. If media could manipulate people's ideas or perception of what is normal I would expect advertisements and news articles to have magnitudes more

influence than something like a video game. And I do think that maybe that is happening. That is something we should keep an eye on.

Participant I: I figure you can coin it up as culture. Every nation does things based on culture. Some of it is downright weird. Others would be outright illegal in other countries. Some give too much freedoms according to some and others not enough. A man or woman's nipple goes through the same physical changes on the exterior based on temps, discomfort, and arousal. Least in the U.S. the purpose of the female nipple, to feed our young, is allowed in most public places or states. However, in the U.S. we also have highly increased the sexualization of the female breast or nipple. We do have laws scaling sexualization in public areas. So one could say that the more we make female boobs about sex the less reason there is to allow women to openly display nipples if we continue to censor other things that we consider highly sexualized.

Common sense man.

Participant A: I somewhat agree about culture being the reason. A female's buttocks is the peak of scaled sexualization, not that I'm complaining, and society encourages women to firm it up and proudly display it, despite its real purpose, we all relate the booty to a sexual desire. Women's nipples come in different sizes, shapes and colors and breast feeding is in public is becoming less frowned upon. They even have breast feeding on sesame street. When you compare the purpose of a woman's nipple (milk) to her booty (taking a dump), you would think a nipple wouldn't be a big deal to hide.

Participant D: It all comes down to symbolism. Whether it is about sexual freedom or equality or about wanting to see bare boobs for a kick, it is our current culture's fault for wanting it for the reasons that it does that keeps it from happening.

Participant C: I'd like to say, don't change yourself to be this ideal person. And It's crazy because you're like, oh, it's just a video game, but IT really work. So, we must see here brain, especially if it's something like you play like all the time even notice that my like I was like that person. They also have the the most conventions would people just don't business character. It's just unrealistic. And if they put realistic, because everything that we do everything that like affects us, even though notice it does. But like, yeah, it looks like that.

Participant E: About the same as how I feel about how men are portrayed in games. Some men are portrayed as incredibly feminine, some as brutish, some go charging into battle with a loincloth, and some go into battle in full armor. Some men are really annoying, useless, or some are heroic and overpowered. You can say the same thing about women that are represented in games. You can take any one of those descriptions and find the same in women that are portrayed in games - women who are masculine, women who are girly, poorly dressed, or in full armor.

Participant C: Yep, women are portrayed pretty positively in video games. They're not all stuck in the kitchen, they can't only use kitchen knives as a weapon, and they're not always in a PMS rage, so I'm pretty happy that I can find some strong women that can beat the living heck out of enemies.

Participant E: I'm finding this question getting harder to answer, times are changing and they're very slowly changing for the better. That's not to say that women in games are not being portrayed as flat tropes, damsels in distress, sex objects, trophy conquests or just another woman in the fridge. That's still a thing but it's a thing that's slowly becoming less common. Games are transitioning to a more female friendly media, it'll take some time, but it's getting there. Maybe we need to give it more pressure, but I think in time games will make this transition on their own as new developers make their way into the industry. We're seeing stronger well written support characters but we're also starting to see an increase in female leads.

Participant G: Or like the dominance shows like there just to please control. Oh, I feel like a negative is like the same like with social media and just all these images, like we see all these images, even though we're just looking at these images for a short time in the video game for like like I feel like it really messes with have because I noticed like me sometimes like I have like stay, we're looking at like all that still feels I start feeling bad about myself and like the way I look and it shouldn't be that way. But I do you feel about female characters in video games about their dressing, their body shape.

Participant A: As a gamer in the 80's and 90's I didn't notice the lack of female protagonists so much but then games started giving you much more choice. The first game that comes to mind is Secret of Mana, okay, Primm wasn't technically the lead, but she wasn't a damsel either, her introduction saw her rescue the protagonist and her goal was to rescue her boyfriend, at the time, that was a refreshing role switch and Primm was my favorite character. Once I'd had a taste of it

though I wanted more, but games rarely had a female playable character. Now it seems much more prevalent, I've played several games already this year with female leads, though some like Mega dimension Neptunian still rely on anime tropes and fanservice, some like Beyond Two Souls present a more realistic portrayal of a strong woman. I've just finished playing Nights of Azure and while it's not the greatest game I've ever played and still leans on fan service, the romance that develops between the two female leads is a refreshing breakaway from some anime tropes. What I generally find most troubling is the way gender roles are portrayed. I'm currently playing Dungeon Travelers 2 and while it's got some serious over the top fanservice, what really bothers me is the dialogue between the girls and the protagonist, it's actually hard to get into a game when you don't like your character. I think that's the key here, values have changed a lot in the last generation and the old worn out tropes are no longer relevant to the attitudes of modern gamers, some are even distasteful, but as the audience changes, the media will eventually have to follow suit and I think we're already beginning to see that shift take place.

Participant F: I personally believe the best way to get over this whole gender divide thing is to not think of people as male and female and working with that, but instead just think about people as people. Gender should be as secondary a trait as hair color or favorite dessert because, for true equality, gender doesn't matter at all beyond general physical traits. I know it sounds lame and maybe cliché but it's the truth. I feel the same way about how females are portrayed in games as I do about how tacos are portrayed in games. If I'm playing a game and all the girls are stereotypically featherbrained or overly dramatic or something like that, then I'll scrunch my

forehead and make a note that the devas need to get out and meet more people because they obviously don't know what girls are like, although if all the characters are walking stereotypes I'll just chalk it up to horrible character design. Then again if there is a good female character I would never consider female as one of her defining traits. I really just wish people would stop worrying about how characters of each gender are portrayed and try to create believable people, some guys some girls. It really shouldn't matter at all. I could go on and spill my entire views on the whole gender equality debacle but this is probably good enough for here.

Participant G: I think it's more of a cultural difference, between Japanese media and Western media, rather than a difference in attitude between film/literature and games/animation/comics, especially nowadays, as games/animation/comics have become mainstream. Western culture has been shaped by the Abrahamic religions, while Japanese culture has been shaped by Shinto and Buddhism, influencing the social norms of their cultures. While nudity was seen as something shameful in traditional Western culture, there was little-to-no shame in nudity for traditional Japanese culture. In feudal Japan, it was even the norm for men and women to bathe naked together. This was offensive to Western Christian visitors, so the Meiji government eventually outlawed mixed-bathing while attempting to "Westernize" Japan. But traditional Japanese attitudes to nudity and sexuality have persisted. Today, there's a similar culture shock when Westerners are exposed to Japanese media. In Japanese media, there is often more nudity than what Westerners are used to, occasionally even in Japanese media for younger audiences. To Western audiences, it might appear to be a form of sexualization. Yet many Japanese audiences

don't see it as sexualized. There are quite a few Japanese artists and designers for example, the designers of FFXV's Cindy, who have expressed surprise at Westerners finding their work to be sexualized and denying that their characters are sexualized. And more often than not, the allegedly sexist characters were designed by Japanese female artists, for example, the designer of Bayonets. Another issue is different attitudes to feminism in Japan. In this video, most of the Japanese people interviewed on the streets have never even heard of feminism. There's also an Ipsos poll which shows only a minority of Japanese support feminism, compared to the majority of Westerners. In other words, there hasn't been a feminist backlash against nude or sexualized characters in Japan, like what we've seen in the West these last few decades. Not too long ago, it was common for Western games and comics to also sexualize female characters like their Japanese counterparts, but with the rising influence of feminism, sexualization has significantly reduced in Western games and comics. One reason why such a feminist backlash didn't occur in Japan goes back to my point above about differing cultural attitudes to sexuality and nudity, which usually isn't as offensive to Japanese as they are to Westerners.

Participant C: It's just not just um, look like they. So, there you have to as a business person looking at it tend to sell like their product then yes, I was like on corporate are working to sound like that product then. Yeah, I would want to whatever is going to be more addictive. Whatever people are going to, I look at like, you know, society right now is focused on like fit people with fit bodies and ads. And it's like, okay, then I know like I'm going to go after these people because there are like prone to addiction, because they want to look the certain way, the people who are



going to buy it. So it's like, you know, the more money I like if I'm thinking like them, the more one is better, you know, pushing my product out there, knowing that they're going to get addictive, because the men who like control or able to like if they could control their characters and create how they look, you know, you're going to want to do that. But then you have to think of like ethically, is that right? Like, should I push pushing these things, especially like younger a lot of younger people, I think, should you be putting these things in their head, you know, and you have to look and like personally, I don't think it's right.

Participant E: I think you should do more ideal people. And they're like what everyday people, um, producer there only care about them. So, they don't they don't think they have like social responsibility figures, good communication, establishing a positive. What it's it is not their job that they only care that office. So, all about money, yeah. Because if given the option, like I feel like more people would buy like a bee, it's like either men or women that more attractive minute.

Participant B: Well, sex sells in movies, literature and games. It always has, and most likely always will. Having said that, I do see where you're coming from and how it can be over the top sometimes. I mean it is obvious that when the woman is wearing hardly anything that it is just for the sake of gratuitous nudity and sexualization.

Participant D: Now it's attractive. Yeah. Entertainment in entertainment. We watch movies like we're trying to look at whatever she wants me. And that makes us more, even if it's like not a good movie, you're not that good of a b you know, but it's like all these, like, it's entertaining. It's

sometimes subconsciously, It's uh, and it's so that's what people mean. Yeah, fantasy like everything is perfect, could be whatever that short time. And then they have games that you can actually talked over p t c mi like talk to other people like, but I'm sure some people just play the games for the action, or, you know, maybe they're not paying so consciously. I feel like society, we know that they're more female gamer.

Moderator: How do you think women are represented within video games?

Participant D: In general women are portrayed as being young and attractive. While men are generally portrayed as being young/mature and attractive. Games are made to appeal to us as gamers. Most of the female gamers that I've known haven't been bothered by scantily clad females in games. On the contrary, a majority of them would choose the sexier outfits if the stats were good. They were still gamers at heart so you if tried to give them armor with shitty stats but looked sexy they wouldn't grab it, but if the stats matched? See, here's the thing. Both men & women usually prefer looking at attractive men and women. Admittedly there are more male characters who are ugly on purpose, but those are definitely a minority.

Participant F: Well it seems like quality playable female characters are a rarity in video games these days. It's not just the sexual factor, but they always seem to make the females inferior to the males in some way like giving them less missions or weaker stats or making it to where you have to beat the game as the male character first just to play as her. I don't really mind female characters being sexy, but I like for them to be just as tough and important to the story as the

male characters. Anyways this is kind of the reason why I'm looking for games with female characters as the only leads, because in these games the women get to be the strongest fighters because they don't have a male character to compete against and their backgrounds gets explored more.

Participant C: I think both men and women underrepresented and too often a trophy rather than an actual person, though the two states aren't mutually exclusive. However, being a trophy is not good enough, and this is a difficulty games need to overcome. By their very nature, games turn things into objectives or boxes to tick off. Overcoming this on a regular basis where love interests, be they female, or rarely male, is a challenge we must face. There are positive examples of females in games, but it is not the norm, and that must change. Good female characters shouldn't be an astonishing and noteworthy feat, it should be run of the mill, typical.

Participant D: It's sexist and is sending out a bad message. It is a marketing tool, but is disrespectful to women. You usually don't see men oversexualized, and that would be considered bad so why isn't female oversexualization? It also sends a bad image to children who play the games because they can grow up thinking that "females are weak and unimportant", just like in games. Another message can be that in order to be strong, females must wear skimpy clothing and be really sexy. It can also be harmful because people who play these games can then want all real females to look like the characters and act like them. This is dehumanizing and wrong. Lots of people say that women still wear this clothing in public, but I never see anyone wandering around in outfits such as Kiana's. It makes women seem as objects incapable of

proper human emotions and are simply used for sex. It's unfair because women aren't just for sex, they are human too and has anyone ever thought that women have interests other than having sex?

Participant B: Well, actually, I don't care at all. Certain games are for certain demographics and certain designs others would call offensive are simply good for marketing and therefore a good idea to implement. I believe in freedom of expression and that also applies to designers in video games. Women aren't discriminated in society, so I couldn't care less what people do with pixels and polygons on digital screens.

Participant F: In my opinion, female characters are sexualized because it is what the market wants. Once video game consumers make it clear that they are no longer interested in seeing pixelated tits and ass, game developers will stop pumping out women who are expected to wreak havoc in bikinis. The prototypical male characters shown above are popular because they fuel a distinctly masculine tough-guy fantasy - the rugged adventurer with raw sex appeal who kicks ass and always has a witty retort. It is an appealing concept, and it sells video games.

Participant C: One could argue that all these games are made with the male gamer in mind, at least, that's what a lot of people are using as an excuse for female characters being presented the way they are. The number of women playing these particular games is presumably relatively small. Therefore, there's no reason to cater to women by making these men eye candy. They're eye candy, because they're a male power fantasy. They're supposedly what the men playing the

game want to be. They're not there to cater to that tiny amount of female gamers. They might appeal to some female gamers as a side effect, but I don't think that's the aim. They should first and foremost appeal to male gamers. Also, while a lot of women obviously prefer an attractive and healthy-looking man over a fat and ugly one, I also think women are more likely to be attracted to success and confidence than men are. I don't doubt that both genders value purely physical aspects, but I think the level of preference for specific characteristics generally differs between the two. I think women are much more likely to be attracted to an ugly, but confident man than men are attracted to an ugly, but confident woman. It's ridiculous to say physical appearance doesn't matter to women, but I think it matters less or other aspects matter more significantly in comparison to men. It's this difference in the level of perceived preference that might lead to a clash.

Participant D: Definitely, on top of that, I think any level of equality in the amount of sexualization of characters is irrelevant. Men and women aren't the same. If both genders are equally sexualized and women have a problem with that and men don't, then you have to take those women into consideration. Saying a woman shouldn't care about being sexualized, because a man doesn't really care about being sexualized, isn't really an argument. And if men do have a problem with being sexualized, then they should speak up more. The fact some women make an issue out of their sexualization while apparently no man makes an issue out of his potentially because he's afraid to, is not a reason for women to shut up about it.

Participant C: I think a lot of gamers, not addressing the TC, get way too defensive over the idea

of misogyny in games. As if it's unheard of that an industry that is made by men, for men could somehow end up being sexist in some way. Women are just playing the victim card, they will say. When people make claims that games are misogynistic, they are not saying, at least the reasonable ones that people who make the games, or play the games are necessarily sexist or have some woman-hating agenda. No one is calling for these games to be banned. It is simply a critique, meaning that if games are a form of artistic expression, these are some of the messages that they are expressing. And I think for the most part these critiques are right. And I find it ironic that a lot of the same people that would get defensive over the charge that games are misogynistic also get defensive over the claim that games are not a form of legitimate art. It's not a matter of sexualization, or even a question if characters are empowered or not; it's a matter of presenting certain characters as objects of desire.

Participant H: Yeah, and the argument also kinds of falls apart when you consider that sexuality for males and females is just simply really different. Sexuality and arousal for men can be purely visual or physical, whereas the emotional component for women is very important and isn't isolated from the visual or physical part. Meaning that for men, having a character with visually large breasts and butt is enough to pique a bit of desire. Whereas for women, you won't get the same result by just having male characters that are visually attractive. Plus, I don't exactly think the hulking body builder type build we often see is what women are necessarily looking for. In short, we'd have to see a bunch of Edward Cullen type characters in our games if we are equally sexualizing or making objects of desire for both sexes. If you look at the kind of sexualization we

have in games, it's quite clear as to which sex it's geared towards.

Participant D: I really like that the game focuses on making the female sex equal to the male sex. Very few fighting games feature female protagonists, and here, the women have a high level of inner power. The problem is, the history of the *Tomb Raider* has been overshadowed by the hypersexualization of these characters. Honestly, this series has had some of the best fighting mechanics in fighting game history, the multitier levels are amazing to play in, and graphically, it's astounding. Sadly, even fans of the game series point out that the selling point is the female fanservice, when I play this game despite the fanservice and it overshadows the good in this game, as well as the use of portraying women to be a powerful species. So, in the case of shaming games like this, I say it's not that I do so, it's more of a disappointment that in the past, the game hasn't been allowed to stand for itself without marketing some level of focus on better and stronger eye candy than previous games.

Participant F: I think females have their theoretical best quality's enhanced curvy agile and cunning. whereas guys have there's strong courageous and handsome. As we both know not all girls are curvy agile and cunning and all guys are not strong courageous and handsome I say the stereotypes are about equal as for the girls getting locked away as prisoners' guys are in the same situation I think payday there are more male hostages than female.

Participant B: Yep, I was speaking in reference to anime-style games. Not games in general. It just seems like most of those coming to the PC platform focus on the sexualization of the female

characters, rather than the gameplay or really, anything else. I wanted to see more games like Valkyrie Chronicles hit PC, with the emphasis on good gameplay, story-telling, etc. Not just sex.

Participant C: the new Lara Croft is a prime example, the new Tomb Raider is proportioned realistically, but the story takes place before she is the great adventurer. and to top it off they're going on the grittier real go at it in that "yeah. dropping down caves will get you hurt". and now the complaint is that she is now this suffering girl for the gamer needs to protect. really I just want to throw my hands up and give up because there is no pleasing anyone. they've said it she comes out on top in the end, she is forged into the great adventurer, that means getting knocked around a bit and learning to be awesome. Nathan Drake can't even touch that, he has no similar story arch like it except a section in UC3. This will tell a better and more engaging story and yet people still complain. whenever I hear "prove to me sexualizing of men" i'm typically expected to provide examples that are usually designed to attract gay men. which if you look for what attracts gay men. not all the different from men ogling women. it's visual based. hunky guys in tight underwear, making a pose you'd see in clothing magazine or sexual poses for that matter. women don't require that, and it's pretty evident they don't if you look up what 13-year-old girls are falling infatuated with all the time. every male-lead in games is an alpha male, every male has it all together in the games except in JRPG's the lead-male don't know what the hell they're doing but virtually all the woman can kick all their asses left and right. the men in games are either incredibly intelligent, charming, or witty. if they're not that then they don't have much of a personality aside from having some super power or a very healthy body and they persevere



through adversity. you cannot pretend that these are qualities that women do not find attractive in men.

Participant A: Yeah, I do agree on better portrayals of women in video games, but i expect someone somewhere will find fault in all of them. "she's not wearing pants, wears a skirt or something else" "she's a weak character" "she's a psychologically troubled woman" "she is devoid of femininity and we can't relate" "her breasts are too large" whatever. and then try to project it as though where are too dumb to realize that isn't that case for every single person of the female gender.

Participant D: Regardless i could care less about sexualization of characters male or female. The fact is most people prefer to play as attractive people. Dante, Giralt, Kratoms, Nathan Drake.. they would all be considered attractive in their own way. Same with female heroes Laura Croft, Bayonets, chunk Li, Ivy etc. Its only recent with this push from regressive liberals where they want the hero to be an average looking girl. The fact is most men don't want to play as an average looking girl or a female period. It's not about people's views about what is sexualization, it's about what is sexualization and Lara simply isn't sexualized for the reasons I've already mentioned.

Participant E: Yes exactly. I think gaming can embrace all of these things. We can have games with very realistically 'portrayed' or more ideally 'portrayed' virtual 'women'. And we can have games with sexualized bodies. It's not meant to be a lesson of reality, it's escapism first and

foremost. So, I find it ludicrous to try and change all of gaming to the image of a couple people online. To me it's akin to how some companies thought that all games should be like WoW when WoW became successful. Or all shooters should be like COD. That all games should be brown. Of course, that's not true. And in those instances, gamers were quick to point it out, too. One of the best things of gaming and why it has become so big is that all sorts of people with all sorts of interests can find games they like to play. We shouldn't strive for less variety in games but for more variety. I want Ellies and I want Lara's and I want Jades and I want Sopita's. They can all exist. We shouldn't push for the extermination of a character style or virtual clothing style just because one group of people doesn't find it appealing.

Moderator: Do you feel like video games have improved the portrayal of female characters in current years?

Participant B: Have you ever noticed that there is a government about agenda realization, video games on. But I would think it would I have noticed that there are women that play times I watched to video is they show like and there's like a lot of like girls. So I think that now they have to know only cater. And now they they're like more women are playing. So they have to like cater to know. So I think even women who don't play, you know, like children, they might get upset.

Participant C: I'm glad western developers are moving away from sexualization of women in their games, towards more realistic portrayals. We've come a long way as a society, but still have

a long way to go. Japan is still stuck in the stone ages when it comes to their treatment of women.

Participant D: I believe in the video game industry, the sexualization of video game characters has been called into question by mainstream audiences. In general, video game makers have voiced their opinions that there are issues in this industry which need be addressed, according to them. Furthermore, several video game news organizations have voiced their opinions about this topic by stating that respecting all audiences rather than objectifying one group for the sake of another is one action which can be done for the sake of improving the quality of video games and the industries which they surround them, technology and media, and in some cases, medicine and education. Various data from humanistic, sociological, and psychological sources show that regarding individuals with care rather than hatred or even apathy leads to a more prosperous society. The European Renaissance, for example, was great because of the improved regard for respecting human expression instead of continuing to live within the rigid and counterproductive confines of the mentality of the European Middle Ages. More recent is United States history which displays the fact that society has improved in a number of ways as certain worthwhile rights have been considered self-evident. Thus, pervading improvements are considerably likely to occur in the video game industry if socio-political issues are respected, so it is likely that more video games with socio-politically relevant topics are going to continue releasing.

Participant H: Games like that. Just more about maybe I think specially that I just feel like now that a lot more like aware, just aware to make a difference is not the idea and stuff. Plus size

women, things like that. Like now they average size, like what is actually so I think like as a whole our society a list in America starting is like starting to get but with that because like even like clothing stuff like that. Like I noticed like there average size clothes for action.

Participant I: So, I just noticed that the whole like I just feel like people are more stepping up and speaking about it. This issue like we don't women don't look like this, like my realistic like we have to starve ourselves to look like we have to work out for ours deliver. This is not like what we look like. So, I feel like now more company like just different industries are more you know where like their customers are actually like sing you need a change like this is not don't fit this as a whole, okay, actually the situation calmness is.

Moderator: That's all for this discussion it. Thank you all for joining this focus group.

**APPENDIX C:**

**IRB APPROVAL LETTER**



RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE  
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669  
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799  
(813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-7091

July 10, 2018

Jingjing Liu

School of Advertising and Mass Communications  
Tampa, FL 33612

**RE: Expedited Approval for Initial Review**

IRB#: Pro00035370

Title: Gender Sexualization in Digital Games: Exploring Female Character Changes in Tomb Raider

**Study Approval Period: 7/10/2018 to 7/10/2019**

Dear Ms. Liu:

On 7/10/2018, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above application and all documents contained within, including those outlined below.

**Approved Item(s):**

**Protocol Document(s):**

[Protocol, Version #1, 02/02/2018.pdf](#)

**Consent/Assent Document(s)\*:**

[Adult Consent, Version #1, 07/06/2018.pdf](#)

\*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent documents are valid until the consent document is amended and approved.

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval via an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) business days.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kristen Salomon', followed by a horizontal line.

Kristen Salomon, Ph.D., Chairperson

USF Institutional Review Board



## **Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk**

**Pro #** 00035370

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You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher or study staff to discuss this consent form with you, please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called:

Gender Sexualization Digital Games: Exploring Female Character Changes in *Tomb Raider*

The person who is in charge of this research study is Jingjing Liu. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Kelli Burns.

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### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study is to explore the change of a female protagonists in video games and female gamers' reaction to those changes. Basically this study is aimed at exploring a better understanding of gender-biased context in digital games. Based upon an female analysis of *Tomb Raider* series, this study attempts to compare the appearance and figure of female characters in video games by researching the representative game.

### **Why are you being asked to take part?**



We are asking you to take part in this research study because you are a game player who are familiar with the *Tomb Raider* and aged in 18-28, which match our study direction.

### **Study Procedures:**

During screening process, if you fulfilled the requirements and wish to join the focus group, you will take part in this study and you will be asked to join focus group. About 9 individuals will take part in this study at USF. You will take part in a focus group by a guide of focus group protocol. This study will be take you around 1-2 hours to discuss.

### **Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal**

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.

### **Benefits**

You will receive no benefit(s) by participating in this research study.

### **Risks or Discomfort**

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

### **Compensation**

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

### **Costs**

There will be no additional costs to you as a result of being in this study.

### **Privacy and Confidentiality**

We will do our best to keep your records private and confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Certain people may need to see your study records. These individuals include:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator, study coordinator, research nurses, and all other research staff.
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study, and individuals who provide oversight to ensure that we are doing the study in the right way.
- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research.
- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, including staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

Please be advised that although the researchers will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others.

### **You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints**

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an unanticipated problem, call Jingjing Liu at (813)817-2748.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at [RSCH-IRB@usf.edu](mailto:RSCH-IRB@usf.edu).

### **Consent to Take Part in this Research Study**

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

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Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

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Date

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Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

## **Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent**

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person obtaining Informed Consent

Date

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Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent