Female characters in ten mature rated game trailers according to a sex object test

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Abstract

Sexual objectification is a topic that is frequently discussed but its importance is underestimated by many in the game industry as well as the general public. This thesis examines and analyses ten mature rated game-trailers with the help of a sex object test to determine if the trailers are sexual objectified. The Sex Object Test (SOT) originally was developed by PhD Caroline Heldman (2012) to measure the presence of sexual objectification in images, a research she based of Martha Nussbaum (1995) and Rae Langton (2009) theories on sexual objectification.

During the first part of the examination process, the used qualitative classification method consisted of listing the top ten games of 2013 with sufficient amount of reviews on gamerankings.com with a mature rating in which the trailer had to contain a female character. During the second part of the classification process, all frames of each trailer were searched and analyzed according to SOT. The result of this examination shows that female characters in the majority of tested game trailers were sexually objectified. However, by briefly comparing these trailers with the game content, the results of this investigation shows that it is not possible to determine if the game the trailer represent is sexually objectifying or not against female characters.
Acknowledgements

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Table 1: Overview from the result of the sex object test

Table 2: Result from the Sex Object Test.

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1 Introduction.

Sexual objectification in media affects us each day and is omnipresent in forms of billboards, TV commercials and social media. This is a growing problem, especially for young women, who are being influenced to change themselves to meet unrealistic ideals, and in the process also risk hurting themselves, Berberick, (2010). The increasing numbers of computer usage the past ten years, Statistiska Centralbyrån, (2014) is a reason for concern now when there has never been easier for normal people to interact with media directly through blogs, tweets and feeds. It is not rare to see women online posing in a sexualized way or competing in taking the most appealing pictures.

There is sexual objectification in games, Berberick, (2010). One term that has slowly begin to flourish is the ‘slut bikini’ or ‘platekini’ (fig 1) where a female character has some kind of heavy armor that covers the areas a bikini does. A player starts with a heavy armor and as the player progresses, more elegant and less covering armor is attained. Burgess, Stermer and Burgess, (2007) discuss in their article, where they asked the question “Were male and female characters equally likely to be portrayed as role objectified?”, that over 30% of the females were objectified opposed to that none of the primary male characters were.

![Figure 1: A female character wearing a ‘platekini’ in the game Guild Wars 2, NCsoft (2012)](guildwarsinsider.com)
Female characters are seldom seen as the protagonist (the lead character or hero in games). The female characters in games are often referred to a “Damsel in distress” or “background decoration”, Anita Sarkeesian (2013). Lara Croft in Tomb Raider series is perhaps the most well-known protagonist. Early versions of Lara in the 1990s were substantially sexually objectified, having abnormal large breasts with minimal waist, which are typical signs for sexual objectifications, Heldman (2012). When Lara Croft remerged in 2013 she was redefined with a more normal appearance and is one of the female characters shown in the trailers tested in this thesis.

Female characters are sexually objectified in ten mature rated game trailers, according to the ‘Sex Object Test’ developed by Caroline Heldman, 2012. I will look at ten game-trailers that had the highest popularity ranking during 2013, according to gamerankings.com that feature a female character and have the ESRB (Entertainment Software Rating Board) rating ‘Mature’ and see if female characters are objectified in the games launch trailers. The trailer has to have a female character in them to be used as material for the thesis.

1.1 Background.

The background is divided into two categories that each touch briefly at the areas that led to this thesis. Firstly sexual objectification is explained to give the reader a basic knowledge that it is not a new phenomenon. Secondly statistics is showing increased computer usage and users.

1.1.1 Previous Research: What Is Sexual Objectification?

The eighteenth century German philosopher Immanuel Kant discussed the subject sexual objectification and has had great impact on today’s writers and philosophers. In Kant’s work ‘Lectures on Ethics’ he writes “Sexual love makes of the loved person an object of appetite; as soon as the appetite has been stilled the person is cast aside as one casts away a lemon which has been sucked dry.”, Kant (1963). Quoted from Evangelina (Lina) Papadakis, (2011). Papadakis adds: “Objectification, for Kant, involves the lowering of a person, a being with humanity, to the status of an object”.

During the 20th century the discussion about sexism and objectification, have been intensified, especially concerning women. Martha Nussbaum has identified seven features that help define
if a person is objectified. Those features are in short: Instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership and denial of subjectivity. Nussbaum (1995) Rae Langton later added additional features to the list: reduction to body, reduction to appearance and silencing. Langton (2009). Caroline Heldman developed Nussbaum’s and Langton’s definitions, constructing a test. This test consists of seven questions and is the basis for my thesis.

Sexual objectification is a broad topic with many theories of its definition that in the end varies between countries, religions, social standards and the individual interpretation. The Wikipedia definition of sexual objectification is:

Sexual objectification is the act of treating a person merely as an instrument of sexual pleasure, making them a “sex object.” Objectification more broadly means treating a person as a commodity or an object, without regard to their personality or dignity. Objectification is most commonly examined at the level of a society, but can also refer to the behavior of individuals. Wikipedia,(2014)

Wikipedia further define sexual objectification of women:

The objectification of women involves the act of disregarding the personal and intellectual abilities and capabilities of a female; and reducing a woman's worth or role in society to that of an instrument for the sexual pleasure that she can produce in the mind of another. Wikipedia, (2014)

These quotes Wikipedia, (2014) from Wikipedia corresponds well with Langton and Nussbaums theories and serves as summery on what sexual objectification is referred to in this thesis.

1.1.2 Increasing Of Computer Users.

Statistics of Swedish households (table.3 p29) show that during 2003-2012 the time spent in front of the computer is constantly increasing. The same statistics show that the activity in front of the computer of men of all ages has doubled while the activity in front of the computer of women of all ages has tripled, playing games, listening to music, downloading games/music/pictures. Despite the fact that the activity of women spending time in front of the
computer has tripled over the past ten years, a larger number of men are still more active 2012. Statistiska centralbyrån, (2014). Sundén and Sveningsson (2012) mention, that American statistics about females who play games can be misleading:

..the computer games most often played by women are solitaire or casual games, which are often not seen as ‘real’ computer games either by the industry or in the field of game studies. (Sundén and Sveningsson, 2012, p6)

1.2 Hypothesis.

The hypothesis of this thesis is:
Female characters are sexually objectified in ten mature rated game trailers from 2013, according to the Sex Object Test (SOT) from PhD Caroline Heldman.

Heldman’s (2012) Sex Object Test (SOT) developed by her to measure the presence of sexual objectification in images could be used on game trailer to measure objectification of female characters.

1.3 Aims and Objectives.

The aim of this thesis is to examine if female characters in game trailers are sexual objectified. The result can help game development to be more aware of possible sexual objectification in their games and too raise awareness to the general public of sexual objectification in games through game trailers.

1.4 Method.

The method applied in this thesis is a qualitative classification research method. Qualitative research in this thesis means understanding and interpretation of the SOT and how it corresponded with the game trailers. Classification or statistical classification in this thesis means the result can be measured in answers of yes and no too then be analyzed as a whole.

Ten mature rated game-trailers featuring a female character in 2013 were analyzed based on Heldman’s sex objectification test. The applied method was to gather material in form of
trailers and then frame by frame go through them, analyzing every frame that portrayed a female character with the help of Heldman’s test to discern if they were sexually objectified.

1.4.1 Risks.

One of the risks about this method is subjective interpretation. Cultural differences, personal experience and opinion are always difficult to avoid when doing research on interpretations. Each ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ answer are explained in Chapter 3.1.1: Results For Each Specific Game Trailer.
2 The Sexual Objectification Test Applied To Games.

2.1 Test Procedure.

The qualitative method used in this thesis is to compare and classify ten games trailers using Heldmans (2012) Sex Object Test (SOT).

The chosen game trailers represented the most popular games from 2013, (gamerankings.com) that have a mature rating and featuring a female character. The source gameranking.com was chosen due to the fact that it can sort the games based on popularity (by popularity means: The amount of game sites, magazines and newspaper that has reviewed and scored the game). Each game had to receive 20 reviews on gamerankings.com, to be defined as a popular game in this survey. The number of reviews was to insure the rating was reflecting a larger number of people. Mature means ‘Mature’ according to the ESRB rating which is similar to the PEGI 16 rating (Pan-European Game Information). ‘Female characters’ include nonplaying characters.

The first official trailer of the games is examined to ascertain material whether there is a female character displayed in the game-trailer. The ‘Sex Objectification Test’ (Heldman, 2012) is then the basis for analysis. If a trailer does not contain a female character, that game is not included in this thesis.

It should be noted that listing the games at gameranking.com with year and popularity shows both games with all kind of ESRB ranking. The games in the result were crosschecked with the ESRB ranking to ensure the games had a mature ranking. Only the game’s first official trailer was checked to ensure it contained a female character. A total of 27 listing were discarded due to having multiply entries on different platforms, to low ESRB rating or lack of a female character in the trailer.

Heldman’s Sex Object Test was developed with the intention to analyze still images in ads and focuses on sexual objectification of women in media, whereas this thesis examines and analyses female characters in games using the same parameters for classification of female’s visual representation. Heldman’s sex objectification test consists of seven yes or no questions where female characters may be objectified sexually if one or more of the questions receive a ‘yes’. These questions are:
“1) Does the image show only part(s) of a sexualized person’s body?” Heldman, (2012)
Female characters where the head is not shown or shown from behind, in a way that you as a viewer do not see the face (fig 2) are analyzed. Not seeing the head or a face of a character erases individuality.

Figure 2, Levi’s ad, Ida Van Bladel, (1971)

“2) Does the image present a sexualized person as a stand-in for an object?” Heldman, (2012)
Female characters presented, shown, displayed as objects are analyzed. An example is a woman posed as a table (fig 3).

Figure 3, 'Table' by Allen Jones, (1969)
“3) Does the image show a sexualized person as interchangeable?” Heldman, (2012)

Quantity of female bodies and/or body parts are examined since “more is better” (fig 4) is commonly used in advertising. This makes the female body fungible.

![Figure 4: Ad for the Lingerie Football League, (2010)](image)

“4) Does the image affirm the idea of violating the bodily integrity of a sexualized person that can’t consent?” Heldman, (2012) For example this ad (fig 5) shows a woman in an inferior position surrounded by very muscular men.

![Figure 5: ad from Dolce & Gabbana, Steven Klein (2007)](image)
“5) Does the image suggest that sexual availability is the defining characteristic of the person?” Heldman, (2012). Female characters that, by the way they move or are positioned, signal sexual availability. An example is the woman in the ad (fig 6). She poses in a sexually inviting position.

Figure 6: An ad from American Apparel, (2012)

“6) Does the image show a sexualized person as a commodity (something that can be bought and sold)” Heldman, (2012) Games trailers that show prostitutes in their trailer are an example of analysis. Quote: “By definition, objects can be bought and sold, but some images portray women as everyday commodities.” “In the ad below for Red Tape shoes, women are literally for sale”. Fig. 7 shows the Red Tape shoe ad.

Figure 7 Red Tape ad, Makani Creatives, (2010)
“7) Does the image treat a sexualized person’s body as a canvas?” Heldman, (2012). This part of the test determines if any female character is drawn upon, for example see fig 8. Other examples can be sexualized tattoos, or markings.

Figure 8: A female body portrait; shown as being an object with instructions how to handle it. http://visual-records.wikidot.com/humanoid, (n.d.)

2.2 The Chosen Games.

For the test ten games were chosen presented below in according to: Game name, developer, publisher and year.

Grand Theft Auto V, Rockstar North, Rockstar Games, 2013
The Last of Us, Naughty Dog, SCEE(Sony Computer Entertainment), 2013
Bio Shock Infinite, Irrational Games,2K Games, 2013
Deus Ex: Human Revolution - Director's Cut, Eidos Montreal, Square Enix, 2013
Saints Row IV, Volition Inc., Deep Silver, 2013
Tomb Raider, Crystal Dynamics, Square Enix, 2013
Diablo III, Blizzard Entertainment, 2013
DMC: Devil May Cry, Ninja Theory, Capcom, 2013
The Wolf Among Us: Episode 1 - Faith, Telltale Games, 2013
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Blacklist, Ubisoft Toronto, Ubisoft, 2013
2.3 From Trailers To Screenshots.

To explain some of the content in the game-trailers, illustrative screenshots are made at some random moments were female characters were found (see 1.5.1). It is the author’s opinion that this will help the reader form their own view of the games, and at the same time urge the reader to look at the trailers to form their own opinion about sexual objectification.

2.4 Illustrative Screenshot From The Game Trailers.

Above figure 9: Female character in Grand Theft Auto V, Rockstar Games (2013)

Above figure 10: female character in The Last of Us, Sony Computer Entertainment (2013)
Above figure 11: Female character from the game Bio Shock Infinite, 2K Games (2013)

Above figure 12: Female character from the game Deus Ex: Human Revolution, Square Enix (2011)

Above figure 13: A torso of a female character from the game Saints Row IV, Deep Silver (2013)
Above figure 14: Lara croft in the game Tomb Raider, Square Enix (2013)

Above figure 15: Female character from the game Diablo III, Blizzard Entertainment (2012)

Above figure 16: A male and female character in the game DMC: Devil May Cry, Capcom (2013)
Above figure 17: The main character and a female character in the game The Wolf Among Us, Telltale Games (2013)

Above figure 18: a female character in the game Splinter Cell: Blacklist, Ubisoft (2013)
3 Results.

In this section the result from the ‘Sex Object Test’, Heldman, (2012) will be presented. Each result is explained more detailed in 3.1.1

3.1 Overview Of Results From The Sex Object Test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Game name:</th>
<th>Are female characters sexually objectified in the game trailer?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grand Theft Auto V</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Last of Us</td>
<td>No*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bio Shock Infinite</td>
<td>Yes*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deus Ex: Human Revolution</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saints Row IV</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomb Raider</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diablo III</td>
<td>No*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMC: Devil May Cry</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wolf Among Us</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Splinter Cell: Blacklist</td>
<td>No*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Overview from the result of the sex object test

* = borderline decision. Specific explanation for each game in 3.1.1
### Question

|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|------------------|---------------------------|---------------|-------------|------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------------|

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1) Does the image show only part(s) of a sexualized person’s body?</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>No*</th>
<th>No*</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2) Does the image present a sexualized person as a stand-in for an object?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Does the image show a sexualized person as interchangeable?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes*</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Does the image affirm the idea of violating the bodily integrity of a sexualized person that can’t consent?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No*</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes*</td>
<td>No*</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Does the image suggest that sexual availability is the defining characteristic of the person?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Does the image show a sexualized person as a commodity (something that can be bought and sold)?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Does the image treat a sexualized person’s body as a canvas?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Result:** No | No* | Yes* | Yes | Yes | Yes | No* | Yes | Yes | No*  

*the result is questionable and explained in 3.1.1*
3.1.1 Results For Each Specific Game Trailer.

Grand Theft Auto V’s trailer does not contain any female characters being sexually objectified according to the sex object test. The only female character in the trailer is displayed for two seconds at the time 0:41 - 0:43. (Figure 9) The female character is a middle age woman yelling at a male character. Her face is clearly shown; she is not objectified as an object graphically or in speech. The female character is not interchangeable as she is shown alone in the scene. The female character shows with her body language and her speech that she is in control in the scene, even when she is wearing a tight workout outfit, it does not invite to sexual availability. No female character is viewed as a commodity either graphical or in speech. The female character is not covered in any liquid, paint or sexualized tattoos or markings.

The Last of Us - This trailer is a borderline case. It partly meets the criteria of the first question in the sex object test, several parts of the trailer shows a female character turned away from the camera, not displaying her face( 00:02, 00:07-00:10), making her a female object without personality. The trailer partly meets the criteria where the female is in several helpless situations without being able to control her own actions (00:10-00:11, 00:17-00:19, 00:21-00:22), all three situations are controlled by a male character (fig. 19 shows an example screenshot at 00:11).

Figure 19: A screenshot of the trailer 'The Last of Us' ,Sony Computer Entertainment (2013)
What makes this a borderline case is the fact that the female character is fully clothed throughout the trailer, does not give any sexual signals throughout the trailer and is of minor age.

Bio Shock Infinite - This trailer is a borderline case. It partly meets the criteria of the first question of the sex object test, the female character is partly shown (00:44, 00:46) diminishing her personality. The trailer also shows the female character in a helpless environment. At the first scene the female character shies from an approaching fire truck (00:33-00:34) and in the second example of helplessness she is tossed through the air (01:00-01:06). What made this game-trailer positive to sexual objectification is the body language she displays as she is helpless together with the choice of clothes. Between 01:00 and 01:06 the female character has a deep décolletage.

Deus Ex: Human Revolution - This trailer is sexual objectified. An example of that can be seen between 02:15 and 02:16 and again between 02:21 and 02:22 where a female character is partly shown, her eyes and hair is covered in what resembles latex, and she is strapped down to an examination table, screaming. The trailer also shows another female character in a very low cut cleavage (01:44-01:45) that suggests sexual availability (see fig 12).

Saints Row IV - This trailer shows multiple examples of female characters and sexual objectifications. At 00:09 and between 00:17 and 00:18 several female characters are shown from behind, objectifying the female characters by making them interchangeable. At 00:23 two female characters are shown, the female character to the right (fig. 20) is being posed in an exposed manner, has a low cut top with a large cleavage with large breasts that displays sexual availability. The female character to the left has a neutral look. At 00:25 a female character is in an exposing pose but with a neutral looking outfit.
At 00:54 a male character is shown reading an adult magazine with a naked female character on the cover that shows an inviting sexual position (fig. 23). At 01:08 a female character with a deep cleavage and large breasts is shown, displaying sexual availability. At 01:11-01:12 the camera starts to pan over a female body from the neck down to her legs, sexually objectifying the female character. The female character is wearing small shorts with a loose shirt tied in a knot under her breasts that signals sexual availability. At 01:15 a rapid series of pictures flashes before the camera, one of the pictures is a pair of huge breasts with a cleavage, objectifying the female character by not showing any personal traits.

Tomb Raider - This trailer is sexual objectified. Between 00:08 and 00:13 a body of a female character is seen hitting the water. During this scene the face is never shown, partly meeting the criteria for the first question in the sex object test about displaying a body without face and from behind. The female character is also helpless as she has no control over the situation. From 00:21 to 00:30 a female character is shown either from behind or partly. At 00:36-00:40 the camera shows a female character’s upper torso before panning up to her face. Between 00:43 and 01:22 a female character is in a situation she cannot control, until she is saved by a male character. Between 1:23 and 1:51 a female character is shown being encouraged by a male character to jump between collapsing boat parts, the female character fails and falls into the ocean, sinking motionless. During the series of the event, the female character is never in control of the situation. As the female character falls she is in a helpless situation, the camera shows the female character from a high camera angle falling in slow-motion. The female
character is wearing boots, army pants and a low cut top throughout the scene with her skin being wet, reflecting the light. 2:15-02:32 shows a female character is covered in dirt and blood, the female character also moans during this time. Between 02:33 and 02:50 a female character is displayed covered in dirt, limping.

Diablo III - This trailer is a borderline case. Between 01:15 and 03:06 a female character is in a situation she cannot control, showing with her body language that she is submissive, she is not showing a sexual pose during this time, her body language and speech does not show or contain any sexual availability.

DMC: Devil May Cry - This trailer contains sexual objectification. Between 00:27 and 00:39, a female character is shown in a latex-resembling dress together with a pose that signals sexual availability and submission. At 00:47 a scene is displayed where a male character is ripping out a heart from a female character. 01:29 - 01:31 shows a scene from a club, where female characters are dancing at poles in wings and bikinis. 01:37 - 01:39 shows a creature with female characteristics with no clothes and blank textures in her face. 01:59 - 02:00 shows a female character, partly displaying her breasts with a low cleavage, with a pleading body language.

The Wolf Among Us - This trailer is sexual objectified. 00:17 - 00:18 shows a female character having a hand on a male characters shoulder, having her head close to his ear, talking in a low voice saying he is not as bad as everyone thinks he is. 00:46 - 00:47 shows a female character walking away in a short skirt, a corset and high heels. 00:48 - 00:50 show a male and a female character, the female character is bruised on both arms with a black eye.

Splinter Cell: Blacklist -This trailer does not contain any female characters being sexually objectified according to the sex object test. 00:16 - 00:20 contains two female characters, the faces of both female characters can be seen. 00:25 - 00:26 two female characters are seen, one of them does not show her face, is not shown in a sexual inviting pose or any body parts that would suggest sexual availability. Throughout the trailer no use of sexual language is used.
4 Discussions.

The hypothesis in this thesis is:

*Female characters are sexually objectified in ten mature rated game trailers from 2013.*

In the ten games I have chosen according to the popularity at gamerankings.com, female characters are sexually objectified in 60% in the trailers according to the “Sex Object Test” Heldman, (2012).

4.1 Decisions In The Sex Object Test.

The results from the sex object test may vary depending on who is conducting the test. This part of the thesis will explain the results from the author’s viewpoint.

4.1.1 Grand Theft Auto V

For those who played Grand Theft Auto V, the negative result in the sex object test may come as a surprise (results 2.1). As mentioned in the result, the only female character shown was of middle age, in a tight workout outfit. In some cultures such as the Catholic, Islamic and Jewish, this may be considered offensive and sexually objectifying. It is the author’s opinion that together with the pose, strong language and the male characters submissive position, the female character is not sexual objectified, instead the male character is objectified. The male character is being degraded verbally as the women shouts, standing on a higher position. The male character is wet from being in the pool, putting him in a humiliated position to the female character advantage.

4.1.2 The Last of Us.

The author always tried to be as neutral as possible in conducting the sex object test. One of the complications that arose in examining the game trailer for The Last of Us was that the female character is a child. It is the opinion of the author of this thesis, that even if the female character is treated as an object, and is on several occasions in a helpless situation, it seems to be in the best interest of the female character to be treated in such a way for her own protection. Thus the trailer for the last of us is considered not to be sexual objectified.

4.1.3 Bio Shock Infinite.
The trailer for Bio Shock Infinite has a very high pace with fast showing images and action filled scenes. The fast pace made it hard to distinguish parts where the female character was sexual objectified. There are several scenes where the female character is objectified, but not sexually. The part where the author deemed the trailer sexual objectified according to the sex object test, occurred in the later part of the trailer where the female character had a large décolletage and where not in control in the situation. One can argue that it is hard to remain in control when there is a collision as the trailer shows, but even if the female character had not been in an uncontrolled situation, the outfit she wore at that time was deemed sexual enough by the author to be considered a sexual object. (Fig21)

![Female Character from Bio Shock Infinitive](image)

Figure 21: Female Character from Bio Shock Infinitive, 2K Games (2013)

4.1.4 Deus Ex: Human Revolution.

The Deus Ex: Human Revolution trailer showed multiply female characters. One in particular meets the criteria of sexual objectification head on. The female character is being strapped down in an exposed situation and cannot escape (fig 22). Firstly the female character meets the criteria of being in a helpless situation, according to the sex object test, Heldman, (2010.) Secondly the scene where the female character is strapped down is a good example for sexual objectification by several of the features Nussbaum (1995) identified. The feature ‘Violability’ is about treating a person lacking boundary-integrity. The strapped down female character also
meets the description of Langton (2009) feature ‘reduction to body’; the female character is only partly visible, most of her face is covered by a mask, stripping her of personality and identity.

Figure 22: Screenshot from the trailer: Deus Ex: Human Revolution. Square Enix (2011)

4.1.5 Saints Row IV.
The trailer for Saints Row IV is interesting for the author and this thesis, as it seems that the concept of the game is to break as many of the moral and ethical ‘rules’ as possible. The examples of sexual objectification in the trailer are multiple and of different categories. The most evident one is when the camera begins panning from the neck of a female character, down along her body to her legs, showing a light dressed slim body (fig.13). The example meets both the criteria of sexual availability and the criteria of partly showing the body. It can further be discussed if the image also meets the criteria of the female character is being showed as a commodity that can be bought. It is however the authors opinion that too little of information was given to make a positive decision. Another example of sexual objectification of the female body occurs when the trailer shows a male character viewing a porno magazine (fig 23). The porno magazine meets the criteria as having the female body as a commodity, as the cover of the magazine displays a sexualized female body.
For more than a decade, Tomb Raider’s main female character Lara Croft has been discussed if she is a sexual object for men’s desire or a role model for young women (Sundén and Sveningsson 2012). Croft’s appearance in the trailer is, as the author of this thesis call modernly sexualized. By modernly sexualized the author means that the female character does not display the typical characteristics of a sexualized female character as in the examples of Saints Row IV or the versions of Croft from previous games. In this trailer, Croft’s sexual objectification comes from how she is treated by the environment and her ‘realistic’ behavior compared to the male characters in the trailer. Croft is constantly displaying a weakness, having to be assisted by male characters on several occasions (fig 24, fig 25)
Blizzard Entertainment has provided the market with a series of popular games over the years as one of the leading game developers. The trailer for Diablo III is not to be objectified by any sexual means. The female character is in a situation she cannot control, on her knees in a submissive position (fig. 26). This alone may be a discussion for a positive outcome for female objectification. However it is the author’s opinion that the developer’s choice of female anatomy, choice of clothes, the female character’s young age and circumstances in the trailer, makes this trailer not sexually objectifying.
4.1.8 DMC: Devil May Cry.
The DMC: Devil May Cry trailer contains multiple female characters, of which all of them are sexual objectified at some point. It seems to the author of this thesis that the developers of the game has focused on the Christian religious sin; ‘lust’ when making the trailer. The female character (fig.26) is in a submissive position to the male character, positioned sideways of him. The female character looks pleadingly and affectively up to him. The male character is faced forward in full view, his large body radiating power.

4.1.9 The Wolf Among Us.
The trailer for “The Wolf Among Us” is very short and does not contain many scenes with a focus on a female character. The scene mentioned in the result, where a female character is walking away, may for some not seem to be sexualized or objectifying at first. It is the author’s opinion that in fact she is not showing her face, and the choice of clothes at that time of day makes the female character qualify for the first criteria for the test. It raises the interesting question, if women are being dressed in a particular way, is she considered too available for sexual objectification? The movie ‘Missrepresentation’ (2011) (fig. 28) and Berberick (2010) bring up statistics of increasing assaults and sexual harassments against women. Berberick says:

The National Crime Victimization Survey, 2008, finds one woman per hour being raped or sexually assaulted in the U.S.. The same survey also reports that 1,006,970 women are stalked annually in America, and of that number, 79% will report sexual abuse during the time that stalking occurs.

Swedish statistics show (table. 3) that our time in front of the computer has multiplied during that same period (Statistiska centralbyrå 2014). The trailer for “The Wolf Among Us” is interesting that is display a female character standing silent in the background, with bruises on her arms and face(fig. 27). The author has intepreted this as a criteria for the last question in the sex object test, being displayed as a canvas. The bruising send a message of violence and abuse even if the act of hitting or violating her is absent.
1.10 Splinter Cell: Blacklist

The trailer for “Splinter Cell: Blacklist” is not sexual objectified against female characters. This thesis is aimed to focus on female characters although it can be amusing to argue that it is sexual objectified against male characters. The stereotypic muscular men are taking order from a female commander, and told what to do from a female ‘coordinator’. The one scene that can be questionable is, when the back of a female character is shown, not showing her face, thus
partly qualify her for the first criteria in the sex object test. It is the author’s opinion, that the position the female character is in, does not make her an object of sexual desire.

4.2 Authors Reflections.

During the writing of this thesis it has also become apparent for me that one cannot judge a game by its trailer as one cannot judge a book by its cover. For example the game ‘Grand Theft Auto V, that just by viewing the trailer gives the impression it is not sexually objectifying against female characters. On the contrary to what the trailer shows, the actual gameplay of Grand Theft Auto V contains multiply scenes where women are sexually objectified. (fig.29)

Figur 29: Two strikers doing a private show in the game Grand Theft Auto V. Rockstar Games (2013)

Can it be that history of the Grand Theft Auto franchise, Rockstar, which develops Grand Theft Auto, has learned to be cautious in their first meeting with the player, when they release a new game? Rockstar had after the “hot coffee” modification to “Grand theft Auto: San Andreas”, received criticism about sexuality in their game. In the “hot coffee” modification the player had the option to visually have sex and interact in the actual sex act (fig. 30).
On the contrary to Grand theft Auto V, which showed a negative result on the sex object test, Tomb Raider, starring its main character Lara Croft got a positive result.

Lara Croft, The main character in the game Tomb Raider, has often been referred to as the first heroine within the game industry, even though Lara Croft has in the earlier games often been symbolized as a sex object with large breasts and a thin waist, Burgess, Stermer and Burgess, (2007). (Fig. 31) , that follows the Barbie ideal and sets unrealistic goals for young women.

Lara Croft is today a symbol for many of the feminists who have embraced the idea that she is a sign of that the game industries change to a more gender equal industry as she was remodeled with a more normalized appearance 2013.

From the author´s point of view, Lara Croft has gone from an exaggerated sexualized image as seen in figure 31 that was a strong confident character, to a low-sexualized image but with a weaker character who is often viewed in a degrading perspective; being covered in mud or sexual demeaning scenes. For the author personally, the new Lara Croft is much worse objectified then she ever was in the early versions.
Another interesting aspect of this thesis concerning sexual objectification is the young female character in “The Last of Us”. Is she objectified? She is obviously a minor and the male character is protecting her from the dangers. It raises several questions. Would there be objectification if the older male character was female? It is in the author’s opinion it would per the definition of objectification, although it would necessarily not be wrong in doing so as it is in our nature to be protective of our children.

Recommendation for further studies is encouraged, Nussbaum and Langton touches many interesting topics for discussion that need to be updated to the fast media evolvement, especially in the game industries. The thorough examination on one of these games paired against another would be interesting. The increasing rate of male objectification is also alarming.

Author’s notice: When there ever was hesitation when doing the examination and analysis, the solution to put a male character in the situation helped resolve any doubts. But as the society evolves, we begin to see more sex objectification of men. In a time span of ten to twenty years it may not be as simple to put a man in a pair of women’s shoes to discern sexual objectification if we continue to turn a blind eye to sexual objectification in media.
5. Conclusion.

According to the results it appears some game-trailers are sexually objectifying female characters. A trailer is often the first thing a person sees before he or she first comes in contact with a game. Grand Theft Auto V is an example of a trailer that does not sexually objectify female characters. Even if Lara Croft had abnormal proportions in comparison to her body, a female character’s breast size does not automatically make her sexually objectified, according to the authors interpretation of Heldman’s SOT (2012), for example the female character seen in the Grand Theft Auto V trailer. However as the thesis has shown, a trailer free from sexual objectification is no guarantee that the gameplay is free from it. The difference between Sexual objectification and objectification is not an easy thing to define and four out of ten game trailers in the result had borderline cases where there both were objectification and sexual objectification.

It may be alarming, that the SOT resulted in sixty percent of the game trailers contain sexual objectification. Looking at sexual objectification in games, we have to broaden our view and look at sexual objectification in media and understand we need to form a new way to portrait female characters in games so they are not causing harmful behavior among the youth. The limitation of this thesis is mature rated game-trailers with female characters, chosen by popularity from gamerankings.com. The trailers are at most a few minutes long when trailers represent a game that contain several hours of gameplay. There is however, no way of knowing if the player will skip a cut scene that contains sexual objectification or actively seeks a part of the game where he or she will experience it. The result shows that with so many borderline cases and the qualitative method, that sexual objectification is hard to determine, but harmful to a lot of young women and men. Hopefully further research and studies on the subject will make it easier to determine sexual objectification and help the game industry to become aware of the problem.
6 References.

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Online sources:


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<http://film.missrepresentation.org/>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexual_objectification>

Game-trailers:

Bio Shock: Infinitive: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8f3XJePYPpo
Diablo III: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9j25nlgyQpA
Saints row IV: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZMAbpoolm_s
Splinter Cell: Blacklist: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wYGoFH6bWXg
The Last of Us: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NCXFnb9Fr5o
The Wolf Among Us: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9o8Gnn3wtbk&list=PLDLO0Hn9-0EhiJFsMLr4l24P24PKgTy5k
Tomb Raider: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFBrgeSjj-0
7 Appendices.

Internet usage among persons aged 16-74 in Sweden, that either listens to music, play games or downloading music/games/images (Statistiska centralbyrån (SCB), 2013)

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Table 2: Statistiska centralbyrån (SCB) 20130229 09:30