Casual and Hardcore Players in HBO’s *Westworld* (2016): The Immoral and Violent Player

MA Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis approaches the HBO series *Westworld* (2016) through the lens of game studies and interprets the series as a commentary on the stereotype of casual and hardcore players and immoral violence in video games. By performing a textual analysis, this thesis explores how *Westworld* as a series makes use of the casual and hardcore player stereotype, looking at the way the series explores the construction of player categories and how it ties these to the dialogue about violence and immoral behaviour in video games.

Keywords: Westworld, games, player types, Western, casual gamer, hardcore gamer, violence, ethics, morals

SPOILER WARNING

This thesis reveals certain plot twists that may spoil part of the storyline of the first season of HBO's *Westworld*. If you have not watched the series, read at your own risk.

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1. Introduction

When Michael Crichton’s dystopian science-fiction film *Westworld* was released in 1973, it reflected the contemporary fears surrounding artificial intelligence and the dark side of humanity. The film imagined a world in which AI starts fighting back after being (ab)used by humans for the gratification of the human ego’s darkest cravings. More than 40 years later, in 2016, HBO rebooted the 1973 film and released a television series also titled *Westworld*. In this series, the concept and the setting are largely the same as in the 1973 film: a ‘theme park’ with a Wild West setting, inhabited by highly realistic humanoid robots made for the entertainment of human visitors. Like in the film, the visitors of the park in the television series dress up and are allowed to be(come) whoever they want and do whatever they want within the setting of the park, without any real-life consequences and with everything being ‘reset’ and put back into order after they are done. One of the differences between the *Westworld* film (1973) and the *Westworld* series (2016), however, is that while the film focuses on a robot malfunctioning and killing all the park’s visitors, the series takes a more complex approach and explores in more detail the interaction between the park’s visitors and the humanoid robots.

Westworld explores “the dawn of artificial consciousness and the evolution of sin,” set in “a world in which every human appetite, no matter how noble or depraved, can be indulged” (“Westworld” 2017). In the series, visitors’ freedom to indulgence seems to be expressed mainly in the form of many instances of violence being inflicted by the park’s visitors upon the robot hosts. Due to the highly realistic humanoid design of the robot hosts, visitors’ acts of violence towards them evoke questions about visitors’ morals – they are shown to wantonly harm, abuse, and even kill the park’s hosts simply for fun and a thrill. The series shows how visitors choose to engage in violent and immoral behaviour in a setting that does not necessarily ask for it. The series highlights this even more by contrastingly showing two storylines: that of the first visit to Westworld Park of the protagonist William and that of his latest visit 30 years later, portrayed as the Man in Black. William is presented as an innocent, righteous man who has a strong moral sense and does not participate in the violent behaviour as portrayed by the other visitors. The series then contrasts this strongly with its portrayal of the Man in Black, who is presented as having turned into a bitter and malignant man, over the course of his continuous visits to the park, no longer having a problem with engaging in (immoral) violent behaviour.

This portrayal of the interaction between visitors and robots taking form mainly as violent encounters, is then placed into the context of a game. Several times throughout the series, Westworld Park and its visitors are referred to as a game and its players. For instance, already in the series' first episode, while talking to a host, one of the series' protagonists says "You know about games, don't you, Kissy? Well, this is a complicated one. […] Who said anything about you playing? You're livestock, scenery – I play" ("The Original," 40:15). The series also shows the head narrative designer of Westworld Park, as saying that "[o]ur narratives are just games," comparing it to a toy he is holding in his hand ("The Bicameral Mind," 48:20-48:23). In addition to these direct comparisons of the park as a game and the visitors as players, the series also shows many characteristics of video games in its portrayal of Westworld Park. For instance, Westworld Park is portrayed as bearing resemblance to what in the game industry is called a virtual persistent world. Virtual persistent worlds accommodate large numbers of players assuming the role of self-chosen characters, but exist and evolve independently of the players (Bartle 2004, 1). Similarly, Westworld Park is shown to accommodate trainloads of guests visiting the park at the same time. All guests go through a character-creation stage in which they can assemble an outfit, accessories, and equipment before entering the park. Just like the players of role-playing games create a character through which they exercise agency in the game (Švelch 2010, 56), the visitors of Westworld Park create a kind of character as well, despite the fact that they are physically present in the 'game world' instead of through a medium.

Moreover, the series also portrays Westworld Park as having characteristics of open world games, in which players can freely roam the game world. Visitors are shown to be free to act out any fantasy and engage in any behaviour they want to, as long as it is within the boundaries of the park. Visitors can interact with each other, choose to set forth on a quest offered to them by one of the park's hosts, or simply explore the park at their own pace. The portrayal of Westworld Park also borrows from another game genre, by having the park's narratives and NPCs reset when visitors are done with them. This process of resetting certain parts of the virtual world so that each player can have a turn at the same quest is also a feature that is used in MMORPGs such as *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard 2004). In this online role-playing game, as Glas puts it, "[t]he world's fictional time is caught in a loop: whatever players are allowed to do within it, it will reset again to allow other players to do the same thing" (2012, 81). The difference, then, between this perpetually resetting loop in a video game and in

Westworld Park, is that in a game it happens digitally whereas in Westworld Park this loop is reset manually by the park's employees who collect and repair the park's hosts and scenery props.

In its portrayal of Westworld Park and its visitors as a (role-playing) game and its players, *Westworld* as a series presents another take on the way the gamer is often presented in the media. In contemporary media, gamers are usually portrayed as having social, physical, and psychological impairments (Kowert et al. 2012; Kowert and Oldmeadow 2012; Kowert et al. 2014). An example of such a stereotypical portrayal of the gamer can be found in the popular crime television series *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* (NBC). In season twelve, episode two (2010), the plot revolves around a girl who has been severely neglected by her gamer parents. Both parents are portrayed as being overweight, sweaty individuals who have lost touch with reality, and the father is unkempt and behaves rudely. Another example of such a stereotypical portrayal can be found in the American television comedy series *The Big Bang Theory* (CBS). In season two, episode three (2008), one of the female protagonists, previously a non-gamer, starts playing an MMO game and turns into an obsessed, dishevelled gamer, living in a mess, and ignoring personal hygiene due to her obsession with the game. Throughout the episode, she is portrayed as losing her social skills, increasingly withdrawing herself from the people around her and from society and not going to work anymore. Both portrayals of gamers enforce the stereotype of the gamer as being "unpopular, unattractive, idle, and socially incompetent" (Kowert and Oldmeadow 2012, 475-77). By presenting a portrayal of the gamer that deviates from this stereotype, *Westworld* as a contemporary television series distances itself from other contemporary media that do make use of this stereotype.

While *Westworld* as a series does not make use of the abovementioned stereotype in its portrayal of the park's visitors as players of a game, it does make use of another stereotype, one that is used mainly in game culture, namely that of casual and hardcore gamers. This stereotype is a distinction used in game culture to discuss player activities and "differences in skill and time-investments" (Tuunanen and Hamari 2012, 12). The term 'casual gamer' is used to refer to someone who "plays casually," "for fun with a laid-back attitude when it suits them", but also as "hardcore gamers who cannot find the time to really commit themselves to gaming as a hobby," or as "someone who uses the lack of time as an excuse for not being willing to 'spend the effort'" (Kuittinen et al. 2007, 106). Casual gamers, as opposed to hardcore gamers, only play for short periods of time, enjoy simplicity and "[p]refer having fun, or immersing themselves in an atmospheric experience" (Chehimi, Coulton, and Edwards 2008, 20). The casual gamer is usually defined through the relation to the hardcore gamer and is looked down upon by the hardcore gamer: the casual gamer only plays games that are simple, easy, and do not require much time, since the casual gamer, unlike the hardcore gamer, is unwilling or unable to dedicate time and effort to gaming. The hardcore gamer, then, is stereotypically seen as being very dedicated and involved, playing more games, more regularly, and for longer periods than casual gamers (Chehimi, Coulton, and Edwards 2008, 20). Additionally, hardcore gamers are seen as preferring games with a challenge and "enjoy mastering the complexity" of the game (ibid.). Moreover, for hardcore gamers, games are considered to be a fundamental part of their lives (IGDA 2008, 18). Taylor calls hardcore gamers 'power gamers' and argues that they "seem to be at times *too* focused, *too* intent, *too* goal-oriented" (2006, 71, italics in original). Power gamers are stereotypically associated with gamers who see winning and/or "being as powerful as possible" as the (primary) purpose of playing, and they therefore are sometimes considered to be ruining the game for other players (Anablepophobia 2003).

By using the distinction between hardcore and casual gamers, *Westworld* confirms this stereotype that is prevalent in game culture. This does not mean, however, that *Westworld*'s use of casual and hardcore gamers in its portrayal of Westworld Park's visitors as gamers does not offer new insights into this stereotypical distinction. By tying the use of casual and hardcore gamers to another issue, namely that of ethics and violence in video games, *Westworld* as a contemporary television series links into the ongoing debate about violence in video games. This debate is continually sparked by the news media, which tend to link in-game violence to real-life violence. For instance, the following quotations from the headlines of news articles about mass shootings give an indication of how certain media tend to link video game violence to real-life violence: "Anders Breivik 'trained' for shooting attacks by playing *Call of Duty*" (Pidd 2012), "Sandy Hook shooter notched up 83,000 online kills including 22,000 'head shots' using violent games to train himself for his massacre" (Bates and Pow 2013), "New Mexico teen Nehemiah Griego was 'heavily involved' in violent video games" (Ortiz 2013), "Munich gunman, a fan of violent video games" (CNBC 2016). There have been numerous research studies about the influence of violence on players that suggest that video games actually do not make players violent in real life (e.g. Etchells et al. 2016; Szycik et al. 2017). At the same time, however, there also have been studies that suggest that playing violent video games is a significant risk factor in making players, particularly children, aggressive in real life (e.g. Anderson et al. 2010; Bushman and Huesmann 2013; Anderson et al. 2017).

However, since *Westworld* only portrays the behaviour of visitors of Westworld Park within the park, within the game, the series evades addressing the debate whether in-game violence does or does not influence real-life behaviour. Instead, it focuses on players' in-game behaviour and ties into another aspect of the issue of violence in games, namely that of the responsibility for (im)moral behaviour in game worlds. By contrasting the portrayal of William as being opposed to (immoral) violence with the portrayal of the Man in Black as embracing (immoral) violence, *Westworld* draws attention to the difference between real-world morals and 'in-game' morals – making moral decisions for oneself versus making moral decisions for the character one plays. As Švelch mentions in his chapter on moral engagement in single-player avatar-based video games, "making a moral choice for a fictional character in a video game is obviously different from making a moral choice for one's self in the real world, because it remains a mediated experience" (2010, 54). In the game that *Westworld* portrays, however, the game is not a mediated experience like a regular video game. Instead, the players are physically present in the game world by physically visiting Westworld Park. Moreover, *Westworld* portrays a game that allows people to do whatever they want, a game in which players are free to act out any fantasy, engage in any behaviour they want to, as long as it is within the boundaries of the park, and the series shows how players freely engage in (immoral) violent and destructive behaviour while they could also choose not to, like the protagonist William is portrayed as initially doing.

Approaching *Westworld* from the notion that its portrayal of Westworld Park and its visitors is a representation of a game and its players, I will argue that *Westworld* as a series can be seen as a commentary on (im)moral and violent behaviour in games. Moreover, I will argue that *Westworld*, instead of playing into the stereotype of the gamer as being socially, physically, and psychologically impaired, makes use of the stereotypical distinction between hardcore and casual gamers. During his first and latest visits to the Westworld Park, William's playing style is presented as being very focused and intense, while the park's regular visitors are shown to play in a much more laid-back attitude. These portrayals are suggestive of the stereotypes of casual and hardcore players in game culture. By exploring (im)moral violent behaviour through the stereotype of the casual and the hardcore gamer, *Westworld*, as a contemporary television series, offers a unique perspective on the issue of ethics and violence in video games. To underline this interpretation of *Westworld*, this thesis revolves around the following research question: <u>How does *Westworld* (HBO 2016) make use of the stereotype of the casual and hardcore gamer in its portrayal of the visitors of Westworld Park and how does it tie this into the perceived issue of immoral and violent behaviour in games?</u> By investigating how *Westworld* makes use of the stereotype of the hardcore and the casual gamer and how the series links this to immoral violent behaviour, this thesis aims to contribute to the bigger debate about ethics and violence in video games.

In order to answer the research question of this thesis, I will conduct a textual analysis of the first season of the HBO series *Westworld*, as I will detail in Section 3. To accurately explore the series' use of the stereotype of the casual and hardcore gamer and how it ties this into the perceived issue of (im)moral and violent in-game behaviour, I will divide the main question into the following sub-questions: What kinds of behaviour is Westworld Park portrayed as affording? How does *Westworld* employ the stereotype of the casual and hardcore gamers? How does the series link these to its portrayal of immoral behaviour and violence within Westworld Park? Before answering these questions, and ultimately the main question, however, I will provide some context and explore how in contemporary video games is dealt with the responsibility for (im)moral violent behaviour by players and how the player fits within any moral experience a game may offer.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. (Im)moral Behaviour in Game Worlds

Throughout the years, the majority of video games have contained some form of violence or aggression (Dietz 1998; Dill et al. 2005). Some video game genres afford more violence than others. In open world role playing games, for instance, players are relatively free to do what they want. Players may choose to interact with the game environment in a different way than the game's narrative intends, or players may disregard the main quest of the game and instead enjoy themselves with other aspects of the game world. In their interaction with the game world, players may attempt to engage in violent behaviour towards non-player characters (NPCs) or other elements of the game environment, and thereby raising the issue of morality, particularly when it comes to child NPCs. Whose responsibility is it to ensure that players do not engage in immoral and violent behaviour? Is it the players' or the designers' responsibility? How violence in video games may take form depends on the way game designers deal with violence and immoral player behaviour in their game.

Game designers have several ways to deal with managing violence and immoral behaviour in the game world. One option is to simply exclude the element that could cause immoral and controversial behaviour from players, like in the game *Grand Theft Auto* (*GTA*) (Rockstar Games 2001). In this sandbox game with relatively violent content, there are no children – "a conscious design decision" since all other characters in this open world "are killable, and there is a plethora of weapons, from flamethrowers to giant pink dildos" (Sjöblom 2015, 72). Such an exclusion is a simple yet effective method to "solve the dilemma of unlimited violence in an open world sandbox game" (ibid.). *GTA* does, however, allow the killing and harming of all other NPCs. Another way of dealing with violence in games is to limit the infliction of violence by making certain elements unassailable. This often happens in the form of players not being able to kill or harm their in-game allies, but also in the form of players not being able to inflict violence on child NPCs. An example of the latter is *Fallout 3* (Bethesda 2008), which includes children, but they have been made invulnerable by the designers. *Fallout* (Interplay Entertainment 1997) and *Fallout 2* (Interplay Entertainment 1998), in turn, deal very differently with the issue of violence against children. In both games, players can harm or kill child NPCs in any way they want, and yet this does not mean the player's behaviour goes entirely unpunished: violent behaviour towards child NPCs gives the player bad karma and "negative modifiers when interacting with NPCs" (Sjöblom 2015, 73).

The abovementioned examples of in-game violence indicate that the infliction of violence upon children in many video games, although they are fictional characters, is often considered to be off-limits. Violent behaviour towards other in-game characters, however, is often approached less conscientiously. In some games, inflicting violence upon other characters is allowed entirely, while in other games it is limited to the killing of enemies only. Even other games allow violence towards characters but punish players for it. Sometimes a game applies a combination of several of these methods. The responsibility for (im)moral behaviour and violence in-game does not lie only with the game designer, however, but also with players themselves. Generally, players like to test the rules and push the limits of game worlds. This may happen in the form of players trying to kill other players and random NPCs, or engaging in violent behaviour towards other elements of the in-game environment. In games that allow violence towards their characters, in whatever way, players often end up harming or killing NPCs, either because they find it humorous or simply because they can and they are exploring the limits of the game world. *GTA* players, for instance, are known to slaughter random NPCs and run over, shoot, or assault random pedestrians. But what kind of moral experiences do games actually offer players and what does it mean to be a player?

2.2. The Player as a Moral Agent

According to Sicart, a player interacts with the game world as a moral agent (2009, 214). Sicart argues that a game's rules "can create ethical values that are […] enacted, interpreted, and judged by the players" – these rules not only constitute what is right or wrong in the game but also what is possible within the game world and "how the player can manipulate it and inhabit it" (ibid., 35-6). Moreover, as Sicart argues, computer games can have a closed ethical or an open ethical design, two forms that have different implications for players' ethical experience in the game world. In a closed ethical design, "the game creates an ethical experience in which the player cannot implement her values beyond the constraints of the game;" this design forces the player to "create her values as a player according to the game's values, without the possibility of contributing her values to the game itself" (ibid., 214). In an open ethical design, "the game is designed to create a set of possible actions with different moral weights, and the player will use her moral reasoning and her values, both as player but also potentially as a human being, in her relation with the game world, and the game world will be open to the results of that reflection" (ibid.).

Games like, for instance, *GTA*, “afford certain behaviors that are culturally considered unethical” (Sicart 2009, 49). Nonetheless, as Sicart points out, unethical practices “are voluntarily undertaken by a moral agent who not only has the capacity, but also the duty to develop herself as an ethical being by means of practicing her own player-centric ethical thinking while preserving the pleasures and balances of the game experience” (ibid., 17). Sicart views the player as “a moral user capable of reflecting ethically about her presence in the game, and aware of how that experience configures her values both inside the game world and in relation to the world outside the game” (ibid.). This means that players knowingly engage in immoral behaviour, whether they are forced to by the game’s rules or not, and are ethically aware of their actions. A player’s moral engagement with a game may be weakened, however, by justifying violence as righteous, necessary, or as not bearing any consequences (Hartmann, Krakowiak, and Vogel 2014, 312). For instance, a game may justify killing an NPC by making it necessary if the player wants to survive a confrontation with an enemy. By presenting violence in such a context, the player may have a different ethical experience than when she kills an NPC without it being necessary but not having any punishment.

For this research paper, Sicart’s open ethical design is particularly relevant due to *Westworld*’s portrayal of Westworld Park as not restricting visitors’ actions. Westworld Park is portrayed not as presenting visitors with a specific set of possible actions but as allowing visitors nearly unlimited possible actions. This means, however, that Westworld Park is portrayed as a world in which the rules, like in *GTA*, afford certain actions that are culturally considered unethical. Unlike *GTA*, however, in which the player is punished for crime by losing money and weapons when caught by the police, Westworld Park is presented as not punishing crime, although the park’s rules forbid violence towards other visitors. Guests are free to harm hosts, however, even child hosts, and the series does not show visitors being punished for such crimes.[1] This means that in its portrayal of Westworld Park and its visitors as a game and its players, the series presents the park’s designers as ridding themselves of the responsibility for (im)moral behaviour and placing it instead with the players.

[1] The only instance in which the park’s hosts are shown to punish criminal behaviour by a visitor, is in a situation in which the visitor himself made the punishment part of his scheme to advance in a narrative. In episode 4 (“Dissonance Theory”), the Man in Black deliberately gets himself and an NPC arrested as horse thieves as part of his plan to break another NPC out of prison.

3. Method

It is in this context that I will analyse how *Westworld* explores violence, morals, player types, and the responsibility for ethical and moral behaviour. In order to do so, I will conduct a textual analysis of the first season of the *Westworld* series. A textual analysis is an interpretation of the meaning of a media text in an attempt to "obtain a sense of the ways in which people make sense of the world around them" (McKee 2003, 1). Textual analysis "seeks to understand the ways in which […] forms of representation take place, the assumptions behind them and the kinds of sense-making about the world that they reveal" (ibid., 17). The question that textual analysis aims to answer, then, is the following: "How do television programs construct their representations of the world?" (Allen 1992, 10). In a textual analysis, the text at hand is "the *means* to the study […], not the *end*; of interest is not the text itself but what the text signifies" (Curtin 1995, 12, emphasis added). Performing a textual analysis allows me to study the media text at hand, to understand the meanings and ideas through the analysis of content rather than structure. What a textual analysis will not be able to answer is *why* the media text conveys certain messages, since it is a more descriptive method. However, since I aim to explore how *Westworld* portrays and explores player (stereo)types and violence in games and not why it does so, a textual analysis is the most appropriate method.

In my analysis of how *Westworld* makes use of player stereotypes while conveying a message about violence and ethics in games, I will focus on how the series portrays William, including as the Man in Black, since he is the protagonist, but supporting characters, such as Logan, and minor or even background characters will also be analysed where their portrayal is relevant for my argumentation. In order to analyse the way in which William and the other characters are portrayed in the *Westworld* series, I will perform a close reading of the media text at hand, analysing mainly focalisation and narration devices such as flashbacks, voiceover commentary, and character dialogue (cf. Allrath and Gymnich 2005). Data for my analysis has been gathered by taking notes while watching the entire first season of *Westworld*. I have watched *Westworld* with the main question in mind and focused on characters' behaviour and dialogue, the way the series portrays these (e.g., by presenting two storylines alternately), and in which context they are presented.

4. Analysis

In this chapter, I will look at how *Westworld* as a series deals with the concept of the stereotypical distinction between casual and hardcore players and the issue of immoral behaviour in games through the lens of the fictional 'theme park' Westworld and its visitors as a game and its players. First of all, to provide the context within which *Westworld* presents these issues, I will explore in some more detail the portrayal of the design of Westworld Park as being similar to the design of an open world game and what its design affords. I will then move on to analyse the way the series introduces the issue of immoral behaviour of visitors by making use of a convention from the classic Western film genre. Finally, I will show how *Westworld* ties the issue of immoral behaviour to the stereotype of casual and hardcore players in order to answer the main research question of this thesis: How does *Westworld* (HBO 2016) make use of the stereotype of casual and hardcore gamers in its portrayal of the visitors of Westworld Park and how does it tie this into the perceived issue of immoral and violent behaviour in games?

4.1. The Affordances of Westworld Park

The world of Westworld Park as shown in the series is designed in such a way that its rules, like most contemporary video games, afford both behaviour that is culturally considered unethical and behaviour that is culturally considered ethical (cf. Sicart 2009, 49). The series shows how visitors are equipped with weapons of choice before entering the park and subsequently displays how many visitors make use of their weapons. Throughout the series, protagonists, but also minor background characters, are shown to engage in violent behaviour towards the park's robotic hosts. For instance, in episode two, when the protagonist William and his soon-to-be brother-in-law Logan are eating dinner in a saloon on the first evening of their visit, they are approached by a host who wants to express his gratitude to William for helping him out earlier when he fell off a horse carriage. He tries to offer William an adventure that Logan calls a "bullshit treasure hunt" ("Chestnut," 19:58), and when he does not listen to Logan's rejecting the offer for the both of them, Logan takes his dinner knife and stabs the host through the hand into the table. This interaction shows how visitors may take a violent approach, like Logan, or a peaceful approach, like William, who is shocked by Logan's unprovoked, violent assault on the friendly host.

This scene also shows that, although Westworld Park is portrayed as affording both violent and peaceful approaches, its design indirectly encourage visitors to interact with the world and the hosts in unethical ways by not providing punishment for violence and immoral behaviour. Anything is allowed in the simulated world of Westworld: visitors can kill, harm, rape, pillage, and so on without long-lasting repercussions. In contrast to most regular video games in which the player can die or lose in-game, in the world of Westworld Park there is no way the player can lose – there is no such thing as dying and losing one's progress or having to re-play a scene or level after making the wrong choice according to the game's narrative or design. The park is designed in such a way that the human visitors cannot be physically harmed in any way but that visitors in turn can kill the robotic hosts. As the Man in Black states several times throughout the series, the game is rigged in favour of the park's guests and the hosts are there to be the losers ("The Original," "Dissonance Theory," "Trace Decay"). There are no long-lasting consequences to visitors' actions, specifically violent acts, as opposed to the real world. Hence, although the game world of Westworld Park is presented as neither directly rewarding nor punishing destructive and violent behaviour from visitors, it does invites such a playing style. Since players' immoral behaviour towards hosts do not have negative consequences in the world of Westworld Park, players' moral engagement with the game world and characters may be weakened (Hartmann, Krakowiak, and Vogel 2014, 312). Nonetheless, the reactions of Westworld Park's hosts to violent behaviour from visitors are created in such a way to evoke an ethical reaction from the visitor, through the rules of the game world that dictate that violence towards innocents is wrong (cf. Sicart 2009, 35-36).

4.2. Black Hat versus White Hat

At the beginning of the series, the viewer is shown how William, while assembling an outfit and gear for his character within the park, is presented with a wall filled with hats in a few assorted colours, ranging from white to black with a few shades of grey and brown in between. William is shown leaving the 'character-creation' stage with a white hat in his hand. In the next scene, William's choice is sharply contrasted with that of Logan, who is portrayed as dressing entirely in black, wearing a black hat to top off his outfit. Additionally, several of the park's hosts wear a black hat as part of their character, such as the host Hector Escaton. Hector is Westworld Park's most wanted bandit and he causes a lot of mischief in the park, making him part of several narratives within the park. For instance, the viewer is shown the journey of the visitor couple Craig and Lori, who join the narrative of a bounty hunt for Hector but decide to return to Sweetwater town, where they find Hector and his gang in the middle of robbing the saloon. Craig ends up shooting Hector and his partner Armistice before they get away with the loot. In this particular narrative, the visitor is shown as playing the hero by saving the inhabitants of Sweetwater from the criminal intentions of Hector and his gang. Hector also appears in another narrative, however, one that the Man in Black – a black-hat visitor – is following, and in which Hector has to be broken out of prison in order to progress the narrative. In this case, the visitor is not playing the hero but a bad guy who is helping out another bad guy. These scenes show how the park is designed to allow for visitors to play either the hero or the villain of the story.

At first sight, the feature of the white and black hats seems to be a reference to the classic Western genre, in which the hero of the film wears a white hat and the villain a black hat (Agnew 2012, 131). It soon becomes clear, however, that this seemingly clear-cut distinction is much more complicated. There are several instances in the series in which visitors of the park are shown explicitly talking about 'playing white hat' or 'playing black hat.' For instance, in one of the first scenes in the first episode of the series, the viewer is shown two visitors on the train to Sweetwater, the park's starting point. One of the two is wearing a black hat and tells the other that "the first time [he visited, he] played it white hat," because his family was with him, but that the last time, when he visited the park on his own, he "went straight evil," calling his visit "the best two weeks of [his] life" ("The Original," 03:35). This scene implies that white-hat is the family-friendly choice, while black-hat is the outright evil choice of playing styles. The black-hat visitor shown in this scene suggests that 'playing black hat' is the more fun option of the two. This belief is also reflected by another black-hat visitor, Logan, who equates 'playing white hat' with paying "$40K a day to jerk off alone in the woods" ("The Stray," 56:35). He even begs William to "go black hat" with him ("Dissonance Theory," 50:05). For black-hat visitors such as Logan, who are portrayed as being impulsive and who thrive on the thrill of action and violence, 'playing white hat' is a waste of time and money.

Initially it seems that the two playing styles of white-hat and black-hat imply ethical and unethical play – the hero player only kills bad guys in order to save others while the villain player kills and harms due to malice. However, *Westworld* shows several instances in which visitors' hat colour does not actually represent their playing style. Instead, visitors' choice of hat colour is more of a representation of the playing style they *think* they have or even wish they have. The series shows white-hat visitors behaving like stereotypical black-hat visitors, and black-hat visitors who are not up to the challenge of playing black hat. For instance, in episode three, the series presents a few black-hat visitors who have chosen to go on bounty hunt organised by one of the park's hosts. When the party is under fire, the series portrays a male black-hat visitor who immediately regrets his decision and wants return to town. His reaction is contrasted with that of the female black-hat visitor Marti, who is portrayed as actively and confidently taking part in the narrative, enjoying the action and challenge of the narrative she has chosen. This scene shows that the hat colour not always corresponds accurately with visitors' playing style. However, the series also shows visitors wearing neither a black nor a white hat. Instead, these visitors wear hats in varying shades of grey or brown. Several of such brown- or grey-hat visitors are shown in the series to behave the way black-hat visitors (or white-hat visitors, but less regularly) usually seem to behave in the series. This further strengthens the notion that the feature of black-hat and white-hat visitors reveals in itself little about how players actually play.

What seems to be the case, then, is that *Westworld* portrays the park's use of the two playing styles as a marketing tool of the park's designers. Westworld Park is portrayed as catering to two different playing styles, which are referred to as 'playing white hat' and 'playing black hat.' This corresponds with how real-world game designers tend to make use of player typologies. As Tuunanen and Hamari argue, game designers often target players through player typologies since it means that "targeted players find the games intended for them, playing them the way [they are designed]," which in turn "pleases the players" (2012, 12). However, by making sure that a game contains elements that resonate with specific player types, game designers create a situation "where game typologies are self-fulfilling and self-validating. In other words, designing a game for certain player types results in the same player types ending up being the dominant player types within the game as well" (ibid.). Westworld Park is presented as being aimed at black-hat and white-hat players and subsequently the series also shows mainly these two types. However, as Tuunanen and Hamari point out, while player typologies might work "as marketing and design frameworks," they are not necessarily useful as an explanation of playing styles and "more fundamental human characteristics" (ibid.). As I have argued in the previous paragraph, this is indeed also the case in *Westworld*'s portrayal of Westworld Park and its visitors, since their choice of hat colour does not always accurately represent their actual playing style.

What *Westworld*'s use of the white-hat and black-hat playing styles does, however, is drawing attention to players' moral engagement in Westworld Park. By referring back to the genre of classic Western film in which the white hat is associated with the good guy and the black hat with the villain, *Westworld* introduces the issue of ethics and violence into its portrayal of Westworld Park. The 'player types' of black-hat and white-hat are portrayed as having different moral values. The series' portrayal of William and the other visitors suggests that visitors of Westworld Park either play by their own morals from the real world or by the morals of the character they created for themselves in the park. This links into Švelch's argument that making a moral decision for oneself in the real world is different from making a moral decision in a game (2010, 54), a difference which Westworld Park is portrayed as blurring due to its apparent authenticity. For instance, when William just arrives in Westworld Park, he is shown choosing a white hat for his first visit and is portrayed as playing by real-world morals – he does not want to harm others, not even humanoid robots, or commit anything that would be considered a crime in the real world. William is perpetually trying to save the host Dolores for whom he seems to have a romantic obsession, even wanting to 'save' her by getting her out of Westworld Park. His behaviour matches with the convention of the white-hat character in Westerns being the good guy, the hero, who saves the innocent victims from the bad guy(s) in the narrative.

The majority of the black-hat visitors in the series, however, are portrayed as playing according to the morals of their character. Or at least they are acting out morals that they cannot act out in the real world without punishment. Since they have chosen to play as a black-hat character, conventionally associated with the bad guy, their playing style is (supposed to be) immoral from a real-world perspective. The series presents the viewer with a game world in which many players have made a deliberate choice to behave violently and destructively and they are presented as enjoying it. William resents the behaviour of such visitors who, in William's words, are there "to just kill or fuck everything" ("Dissonance Theory," 13:22). By portraying William as the good guy who upholds real-world morals while other visitors are shown to play by the immoral values of their in-game character, *Westworld* appeals to viewers' own moral values and ethics and implies that the viewer should identify with William since he is making the morally 'correct' choices.

The series' portrayal of William as a white-hat visitor who plays according to his own moral values from the real world is additionally contrasted with the storyline of one specific black-hat visitor, the Man in Black, who is revealed to be William as a veteran visitor of Westworld Park. William's change of hat colour and playing style is attributed to his having finally found Dolores again after having looked for her throughout the entire park and realising she has had her memory wiped and does not remember anything from their time together, just like every other host who is reset after every encounter with a visitor. This realisation seems to break William, and from that moment on, the series presents him as having a more violent playing style. Like other black-hat visitors, William is now no longer morally averse to hurting the hosts in any way. Unlike other black-hat visitors, however, William is not portrayed as enjoying the infliction of violence upon the hosts as much as most other black-hat visitors are shown to do, such as Logan. Instead, he is presented as having become evil not for fun's sake but as part of his journey of self-discovery.

4.3. The Casual Player versus the Hardcore Player

The series' portrayal of William also brings to the foreground the stereotype of the casual player versus the hardcore or power gamer. Looking at the way William (including as the Man in Black) is presented throughout the series, it becomes apparent that, already from the beginning, he is portrayed as having characteristics of stereotypical hardcore and power gamers. William has been visiting Westworld Park for 30 years, and the viewer is alternatingly shown William's first visit with his soon-to-be brother-in-law Logan and his latest visit 30 years later as the Man in Black. Already during his first visit, William is shown as having characteristics that are stereotypically associated with hardcore players, such as being very dedicated and involved and playing for lengthy periods of time (cf. Chehimi, Coulton, and Edwards 2008, 20). William seems to take the park's narratives very seriously and seems to become deeply involved in the 'game' of Westworld Park. For instance, he is portrayed as becoming consumed by the belief that the hosts are sentient and experience emotions and pain just like humans, and he is therefore appalled by Logan's destructive and disrespectful behaviour towards the hosts. When he is on a quest with Logan, William kills a few hosts who threaten to kill Dolores. In the heat of the moment, he also shoots an unarmed host, deliberately. While this 'heroic' act of saving Logan and Dolores corresponds to his white-hat playing style, it unsettles him deeply since it goes against his moral instinct not to hurt the hosts. The series portrays William as struggling with this fact since he feels like he betrayed his own moral values. Soon after, he realises how the designers of Westworld Park, as William puts it, "create an urgency, a sense of danger, so they can strip [the visitors] down to something raw, animalistic, primal." He calls it "a sick game" and says he does not want to be a part of it ("Contrapasso," 43:26-43:44).

Nonetheless, William continues playing the game and even goes as far as wanting to 'rescue' Dolores and take her with him to the real world. Logan calls him crazy and feels like he needs to wake William up from his dream-like state by killing Dolores in order to show that she is just a robot. He hopes that by doing so William realises how deeply involved he is in her narrative within Westworld Park, but it does not have the desired effect. In episode nine, William tells Logan that he finally understands how to play the game of Westworld and he kills a whole camp of Confederate soldier hosts because he thinks they have taken Dolores away from him. From this moment on, he takes matters into his own hands and does not depend on Logan anymore. He even goes as far as tying Logan behind his horse while he is traveling around the park looking for Dolores. The storyline of William's first visit ends with William having joined the 'war game' narrative of Westworld Park. While still looking for Dolores, William has gone on a killing spree through the park, mercilessly killing all the Confederate soldiers he encounters because he thinks they have taken Dolores away from him. What he does not seem to realise is that Dolores has already been rebooted and placed back into her regular narrative in the town of Sweetwater in which William and Logan started their visit.

The series contrasts William's first visit with his latest visit, 30 years later, which shows him as the Man in Black on his latest visit to Westworld Park. As for a hardcore player, it seems that for the Man in Black the game has become an integral part of his life (cf. IGDA 2008, 18). Over the course of 30 years, he has continually visited Westworld Park and, like Taylor's stereotypical tenacious and focused power gamer, he is determined to find every single secret in the game (2006, 71). The Man in Black repeatedly points out to whomever he is interacting with that "there's a deeper level to this game" ("The Original," 44:38) and he seems willing to do anything to find it. The series shows him slicing off a host's scalp, violating and killing Dolores, in his search for this 'deeper level' that he is determined to find. It seems that the Man in Black is looking for a (final) challenge, that he is not there just to "shoot a couple of Indians," like "the others" who "just come here to get their rocks off," as he likes to point out ("The Original," 44:31). *Westworld*'s portrayal of the Man in Black wanting to master the entire park and be the first (and perhaps only one) to do so, corresponds with the notion of power gamers seeing winning and power as the primary purpose of playing (Anablepophobia 2003). The Man in Black has visited Westworld Park so often that he knows everything and even seems to have become bored by the regular narratives within the park, hence seeking a deeper, newer, final challenge.

Moreover, the Man in Black continually explicitly distances himself from other visitors, who are presented as casual players. The Man in Black seems to feel superior to the other visitors, like he is the only *real* player and the rest are just 'fake' players who do not take the game seriously and only play for instant gratification of dark fantasies. He, on the other hand, as he is sure to point out often, is playing for the deeper (level of the) game. He looks down upon visitors who simply visit the park for some scares, thrill, and "some sweetly affirmative bullshit" ("Contrapasso," 49:39). His view of the park's other visitors correlates to the stereotype that casual players are "hardcore gamers who cannot find the time to really commit themselves to gaming as a hobby" (Kuittinen et al. 2007, 106). The Man in Black is portrayed as looking down upon the other visitors for their preference for fun and simplicity, in the same way as hardcore gamers tend to look down upon casual gamers (cf. Chehimi, Coulton, and Edwards 2008, 20). He, on the other hand, is perpetually looking for the moral, for the meaning, for "something true" behind Westworld Park ("Contrapasso," 49:39). While William is presented as initially looking for "a glimpse of who [he] could be" ("Chestnut," 55:53), the series' portrayal of him as the Man in Black conveys that he feels like he is above that, as he believes the park has shown him who he is and he is now looking for a final challenge. He sees Westworld as a set of levels that he is going through, and he is currently trying to reach something that actually lies beyond the highest level. What the Man in Black ultimately wants from the park is that the hosts are able to fight back, that they are free and that they therefore can offer him a real challenge in which they are not predestined to be the losers.

Westworld portrays the Man in Black as a hardcore or power gamer who takes the game too seriously and uses violence as a means to an end in his perpetual search for a challenge to master, and contrasts him with Westworld Park's 'regular' visitors who are portrayed as casual players who derive pleasure simply from immoral behaviour and for whom violence is an end, not a means. *Westworld* then plays the two player stereotypes off against each other, by having the two look down upon each other – the Man in Black scoffs at the simplicity and superficiality of the regular, casual visitors' playing style, while a casual visitor like Logan sees William as being too focused and goal-oriented. By juxtaposing the two stereotypes in this way, *Westworld* condemns the way Westworld Park's casual players derive enjoyment from immoral, violent, and superficial play, while at the same time criticizing the way hardcore or power gamers play as playing without fun and instead striving continually for something beyond what they already have mastered.

5. Discussion

Placing the results of this analysis into the wider framework of game culture, *Westworld* corroborates the notion that hardcore or power gamers are sometimes "*too* focused, *too* intent, *too* goal-oriented" (Taylor 2006, 71, italics in original). Moreover, in contrast to Taylor's argument that "the controversy about power gamers highlights the diverse orientations people can bring to the exact same game" (ibid.), *Westworld*'s portrayal of casual and hardcore or power gamer seems to emphasize the difference between the two while leaving little room for other orientations that players might bring to the Westworld Park. In the same way, the portrayal of the Man in Black seems to dismiss the way in which hardcore gamers play as not being fun, instead of exploring more deeply how their playing style tells us something about how the player stereotypes of casual and hardcore or power gamers are constructed, as Taylor argues, since they "play in ways we typically do not associate with notions of fun and leisure" (ibid., 72). Additionally, Taylor found that power gamers "consider their own play style quite reasonable, rational, and pleasurable," and that their approach shows several qualities: "a focus on efficiency and instrumental orientation (particularly rational or goal-oriented), dynamic goal setting, a commitment to understanding the underlying game systems/structures, and technical and skill proficiency" (ibid., 72-73). While goal setting, commitment, and proficiency are indeed characteristics that the Man in Black as a hardcore or power gamer portrays, *Westworld* shows him as a player who does not play for fun but has become obsessed with what he calls the deeper level of the game.

By using a stereotype like that of casual versus hardcore players, *Westworld* also touches upon the idea that such players do not have much happening in real life (Taylor 2006, 70) and that the main purpose of games is escapism (Goldberg and Larsson 2015, 7). The series refers to these notions in its portrayal of William, who says that Westworld Park offers him "a life in which [he does not] have to pretend, a life in which [he] can be truly alive" ("Trompe L'Oeil," 21:22), suggesting that William prefers escaping into Westworld Park. Moreover, the series presents William as continually having escaped into the world of Westworld Park over the course of 30 years. The Man in Black is presented as taking "vacations" to Westworld Park during which he does not want to be bothered by anything that concerns his real-life responsibilities and thereby neglects his wife and daughter in the real world. Hence, *Westworld* also touches upon the notion that games have negative social effects on players (cf. Kowert et al. 2012; Kowert and Oldmeadow 2012; Kowert et al. 2014), like the gamer parents in *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* who neglected their daughter due to their gaming addiction; it is a stereotype that is mostly associated with role-playing games, to which Westworld Park bears so much resemblance. Hardcore or power gamers in particular are associated with this stereotype since they are seen as spending so much time in-game, but casual gamers are by some also seen as playing games "as an escape from daily life" (IGDA 2008, 18).

Westworld links its portrayal of players through the stereotype of casual and hardcore players to the issue of violence and ethics in video games. *Westworld*'s presentation of Westworld Park as being designed like what Sicart calls an open ethical design (2009, 214), allows the series to show characters whose portrayal raises questions about moral behaviour. While Sicart argues that players are moral agents who are able to reflect critically on their presence within the moral experience a game offers (ibid., 17), *Westworld*'s portrayal of the park's visitors reflects this only partially. The majority of the park's visitors, those who show characteristics of casual players, are presented as mindlessly killing and rampaging, while only a few, like the protagonist William, are shown to reflect on their actions within the moral experience that Westworld Park offers them. As the analysis section of this thesis shows, William specifically is portrayed as struggling with his moral values during his first visit, when he finds himself surrounded by other visitors, presented as casual players, who seem to disregard real-world morals and engage in behaviour that is culturally considered unethical.

As Taylor argues, "dialogue about the difference between types rests on unproductive rhetoric and tells little about real styles of play, everyday experience, and what brings people back to a game over and over again. It dichotomizes and oversimplifies the much more complicated social experience of players in each category" (2006, 70). Similarly, *Westworld*'s portrayal of player types does not tell much about why players are drawn back to Westworld Park, with the exception of the Man in Black who is portrayed as continually coming back as part of a sort of journey of self-discovery. *Westworld* does not show why players such as the stereotypical black-hat player Logan and other casual players keep returning to the park, when all they are (shown) doing is 'killing and fucking,' as William points out in episode four of the series.

Since stereotypes are a form of making sense of the world, of 'ordering' incoming data, the notion of their being a "very simple, striking, easily-grasped form of representation" that condenses "a great deal of complex information" forms an important part of how people see certain groups within society (Dyer 1993, 12). Stereotypes invoke an apparent consensus, they pretend "to express a general agreement about a social group, as if that agreement arose before, and independently of, the stereotype" (ibid., 14). Moreover, stereotypes "insist on boundaries exactly at those points where in reality there are none" (ibid., 16). Hence, stereotypes present a view of (part of) the world that is not necessarily true. If stereotypes are used to portray certain social groups on television, viewers may accept such stereotypes as realistic representations. With *Westworld* not only being broadcasted through Time Warner's premium cable and satellite television network HBO but also being the third-most pirated television series through online torrent services in 2016 (Ernesto 2016), the series reached millions of viewers, who were all presented with a stereotypical representation of casual and hardcore or power gamers.

However, the distinction between casual and hardcore or power gamers, and the fact that "power gamers play in ways we typically do not associate with notions of fun and leisure," as argued by Taylor, "tell us something about the ways we construct those categories" (2006, 72). The stereotypical distinction between casual and power gamers highlights the different orientations players may bring to a game. Taylor points out that the ways power gamers play, for instance, "often look more to the outside world as work," and this in turn "leads to a much broader ambivalence about what constitutes legitimate play" (Taylor 2006, 73). The stereotype of the hardcore or power gamer says something about our construction of what constitutes 'fun.' The intensity and focus on goals that our culture associates with hardcore players does not match our notion of fun and leisure. *Westworld* seems to play with such constructions, but in fact it only repeats the notion of the hardcore gamer not playing in a way that is culturally associated with fun by portraying William as playing too seriously and, specifically as the Man in Black, too goal-oriented. By contrasting the casual and hardcore players and playing them off against each other, the series confirms prevalent stereotypes of casual and hardcore gamers and a notion of fun that excludes the playing style of hardcore gamers.

Westworld not only portrays a construction of the categories of casual and hardcore players and the construction of the notion of fun; it also plays with the construction of other player types, namely that of white-hat and black-hat players. As mentioned before, these types are not clear-cut and only represent the playing style that the park's visitors think they have. However, although Westworld Park is portrayed as accommodating these two player types, with a little bit of room in between, the series portrays a situation in which the park seems mainly to attract one type, that of the black-hat player and, moreover, that of the casual player. Hence, the series rejects the notion that player typologies are, as Tuunanen and Hamari call it, "self-fulfilling and self-validating (2012, 12). By portraying this player type, the casual (black-hat) player, as the prevalent player type in Westworld Park and contrasting it with that of the hardcore or power gamer, *Westworld* suggests that hardcore gamers' playing style is not fun. The series complicates casual players' notion of fun, however, by portraying them as playing immorally and violently for fun, which leads us back to the debate about violence in video games. The series' portrayal of casual players as deriving enjoyment from immoral and violent play and of hardcore or power gamers as playing violently as a means to an end without fun, suggests that players are inherently bad if given the chance, presenting casual players as specifically bad for using immoral violent gameplay as a quick source for fun.

6. Conclusion

In this thesis, I approach HBO's *Westworld* from the perspective that Westworld Park and its visitors are presented as a game and its players due to its resemblance to open world games and RPGs. Like RPGs allow players to create elaborate characters through which they experience the game, visitors of Westworld Park are portrayed as creating a character for themselves through which they present themselves in the park. Moreover, similar to the affordances of many open world games, Westworld Park is presented as affording violent as well as non-violent behaviour from the visitors. Guests can go around the park and harm innocent hosts, or they can interact with the hosts in a peaceful manner, but the series presents the park's visitors as being inclined to immoral and destructive behaviour and as enjoying such behaviour. In thesis, I have argued that *Westworld* links this portrayal of visitors' immoral behaviour to the convention of the classic Western genre of the good guy wearing a white hat and the bad guy wearing a black hat, by changing the two types into seemingly distinct playing styles. Through a close-reading of the series, however, it becomes clear that the two playing styles do not accurately depict how the park's visitors actually play. The two types of 'black-hat' and 'white-hat' are in fact a representation of what visitors think their playing style is like.

By presenting the two apparently distinct playing styles of black-hat and white-hat, *Westworld* introduces the topic of ethics and ties it to the issue of violence in games, a much-debated topic due to its potential influence on players. While other media such as the news often tend to link in-game violence to real-life violence, I have argued in this thesis that *Westworld* does not actually go into the potential influence of video games on real-life violence. Instead, the series presents a portrayal of players' moral experience within a game. *Westworld* contrasts the protagonist William, who is portrayed as struggling with the difference between real-life and in-game morals, with the majority of the park's visitors who are portrayed as playing violently, mindlessly, and immorally.

Westworld's portrayal of William also shows another player (stereo)type, namely that of casual and hardcore players. William is strongly contrasted with the other visitors of Westworld Park through characteristics that are stereotypical for hardcore or power gamers.

William, especially as the Man in Black, is shown as playing in the same way that people associate with hardcore gamers – too focused and goal-oriented, while the majority of the other visitors is portrayed as showing characteristics that are stereotypically associated with casual players – playing for fun, enjoying simplicity. I have argued in this thesis that the series illustrates that for the hardcore player violence is a means to an end and the purpose of the game is completion and mastering of the game, while for the casual player violence is not a means to an end, but the purpose of playing. Moreover, by portraying the two stereotypes in a contrasting way, the series plays the two off against each other, with the hardcore player looking down upon the casual player for finding satisfaction in simplicity and preferring fun, while the casual player looks down upon the hardcore player for being too serious and goal-oriented in the game. Hence, the series condemns the way that casual players derive enjoyment from immoral and violent play while at the same time also criticizing the way the hardcore player plays without having fun. *Westworld* as a television series thereby dismisses the notion that hardcore gamers simply play in a way that is not associated with the usual notions of fun and leisure.

In this thesis, I have explored how a medium that usually portrays gamers through the stereotype of the socially incompetent, unpopular, and overweight gamer, can also present another perspective of the gamer, one from inside game culture instead of outside. I have argued that by not making use of the aforementioned stereotype, *Westworld* distances itself from other contemporary television shows that do make use of the stereotype. Instead, *Westworld* makes use of the stereotype of casual and hardcore gamers, one that is prevalent in game culture, but ties this to the issue of ethics and violence in video games, which is an ongoing debate in the media and academics. While the news tends to move this debate to the potential influence violence in video games has on players, *Westworld* highlights another part of this debate and explores the issue of immoral violence from the perspective of the player as a moral agent in a moral experience offered by the game, in a comparable way to Sicart (2009).

This research thesis aims to give insight into the way *Westworld* portrays a unique perspective on immoral violent behaviour in games and the stereotype of casual and hardcore gamers by exploring through a textual analysis how the series links the two topics. What this thesis does not and cannot explore is the deeper moral experience Westworld Park's visitors have since the series is a portrayal and the park does not exist. Hence, in this thesis I have explored the way the series portrays the park as enabling certain moral experiences and the way visitors are portrayed as using immoral violence as a source for fun. Although this analysis of *Westworld* cannot solve bigger issues concerning immoral and violent behaviour in games and the debate surrounding it, it gives insight into the way the media deal with this issue often through stereotypical representations. In order to gain a better understanding of the perceived issue of violence in video games and the way the media represent gamers, further research is necessary into the ways other television series or films portray gamers. Additionally, one could approach *Westworld* from a different but similar angle and analyse the way the series deals with other stereotypes about games and gamers, such as the prevalent notion of gaming as a form of escapism (cf. Goldberg and Larsson 2015).

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