(Re)presentation and (re)production of ideology: the case of Grand Theft Auto IV, a framework for the analysis of culture and violence, and the role of critical media literacy in an education for democratic citizenship

Jeffery H. Warnke
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(Re)Presentation and (Re)Production of Ideology: The Case of Grand Theft Auto IV, a Framework for the Analysis of Culture and Violence, and the Role of Critical Media Literacy in an Education for Democratic Citizenship

by

Jeffery H. Warnke

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Education Degree in Educational Theory and Social Foundations

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The University of Toledo

May 2012
An Abstract of

(Re)Presentation and (Re)Production of Ideology: The Case of Grand Theft Auto IV, a Framework for the Analysis of Culture and Violence, and the Role of Critical Media Literacy in an Education for Democratic Citizenship

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The intersection of culture, ideology, power, identity, and violence are explored and interrogated through the lens of media literacy in this study. A transdisciplinary framework is developed for the purpose of an ideological analysis of violent media and employed in a case study of the Grand Theft Auto IV video game. The ubiquity of media and the representation and reproduction of ideologies inconsistent with the democratic ethics is a necessary site for education. Popular/mass culture and its meanings have implications for media literacy as response/resistance to a culture of violence within the traditions of democratic education, social reconstructionism, and peace education.
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Chapter One

Introduction

A. Statement of the Problem

This study addresses the nature of violent video games, specifically, *Grand Theft Auto IV (GTA IV)* as reproduction and representation of a culture of violence. The mass appeal of the dystopian virtual world of *Grand Theft Auto IV (GTA IV)* is one part of a cumulative media that propagates, normalizes, and legitimates ideologies of power and domination. Socio-cultural patterns of oppression are embedded in and reified by the game while the expression of human and democratic identities and potentials are diminished or limited. This investigation will focus upon the construction of cultural regimes of power and identity and how these interact with ideological assumptions embedded in cultural products such as the *GTA IV* video game and the role of violence as both a part of the value system and as a regulator of hierarchical relations. To this end, a conception of culture, ideology, power, and identity will be defined, as will the concept of violence. Likewise, the role of media literacy will be presented as a necessary component of democratic education which addresses the development of students’ capacities for full citizenship as mitigation to the social forces of culture, ideology, and power. These social forces when they are reproduced in popular culture and embedded with non-democratic messages and representations, contribute to unjust social conditions through the normalization and legitimation of such conditions. The social organization and ideologies that are predominant in current social trends will be discussed as threats to democratic life and they will be the basis for the ideological analysis of *GTA IV*. 
Discussions of the topic of GTA between the researcher and students in multiple sections of an undergraduate course on issues of diversity have stimulated personal interest as to the nature of the game. Anecdotally from such discussions, it has become apparent that the game is especially prominent among young men who often declare “it’s fun” or “cool”. Conversely, many of the young women are familiar with the game, but often discuss it, with visible signs of disdain and note that it is their boyfriends who play. Sales figures support this claim of ubiquity. In May of 2008 shortly after the release, Matt Vella of Bloomberg’s Business Week reported that “the no-holds-barred gangster epic was snatched up by some 6 million players worldwide, with about 3.6 million of those copies sold on April 29, its opening day. First-day sales were worth about $310 million globally, setting a record and putting GTA sales ahead of the games industry’s last mega-blockbuster Halo 3” (businessweek.com).

As a product of mass consumption, produced by a global media industry, the virtual world constructed in GTA is a necessary site for research into the dynamic interplay of culture, ideology, identity, power, and pleasure. Furthermore, the socio-political implications of mediated cultural reproduction provide a valid and rich source for discourse into the underlying assumptions guiding cultural systems of meaning, values, norms, standards, and beliefs. In this discussion, the concept of cultural representation will be used to describe cultural products as portraits, expressions, or artifacts of the semiotic and ideological aspects of a culture, which includes systems of meaning, values, norms, standards, and beliefs. Muffoletto (1995) suggests that representations must “be encoded with social and culturally accepted meanings…messages about the social world, about gender, class, race, and normalcy.”
These messages have intended and interpretive meanings” (p. 30). The term reproduction, rather, will refer to the transmission and reification of those patterns of culture. While players, or gamers, have agency and capacity to construct meaning and value of the images and media with which they interact, the accumulated power of media institutions to frame cultural patterns and condition templates or schemas of knowing and understanding must not be underestimated. Henry Giroux has often referred to the educative nature of the media as a form of “public pedagogy” in which the media forms or “shapes” American popular culture, a site of struggle and contestation over meaning, value, power, and pleasure.

Mass-produced images fill our daily lives and condition our most intimate perceptions and desires. At issue for parents, educators, and others is how culture, especially media culture, has become a substantial, if not primary, educational force in regulating the meanings, values, and tastes that set the norms that offer up legitimate particular subject positions – what it means to claim an identity as a male, female, white, black, citizen, noncitizen (Giroux, 1999, p. 2).

Video games such as GTA IV are highly educative spaces where the gamer is actively engaged in the virtual world. Knowledge and skills are constructed by the player, yet the parameters of the experience are defined by the game and its producers. The effective video game links pleasure and entertainment with learning. In Good Video Games + Good Learning, respected linguist and video game scholar James Paul Gee (2007) delineates the complex nature of video game learning in which the mediated experience is imbued with cognitive principles that are applied in a way that captures the player’s attention, holds and motivates that attention, and actively engages the player in processes of learning. Gee further explains, that the interactive nature and the deep investment or commitment to a game offers opportunities for role playing that present the
gamer with a wide range of problems and dilemmas. To succeed, the gamer must develop “effective” thinking and problem-solving skills. Here Gee defines effective thinking as the capacity to adapt to new or different contexts, the capacity to analyze a situation and to adapt knowledge and behaviors that are effective responses to the changing context. In essence, Gee views video games as positive learning experiences in which the games provide a positive space for how learning occurs, but he does not engage the question of what the gamer learns in terms of cultural values and normative beliefs. For instance, in violence oriented games, the gamer learns problem-solving skills, but also learns that violence is an effective and legitimate means for asserting one’s will or achieving one’s goals, the very essence of what it means to hold power, a lesson with deeper cultural, historical, and contextual meaning.

Much debt and gratitude should be expressed for Gee’s outstanding contribution to the study of video games as exemplary modes of cultural expression and as educative forms. The debate on media and video game violence falls within a narrow construction of the phenomenon. Henry Jenkins (2004) identifies two predominant perspectives among researchers. One perspective is the effects based research that looks at the phenomenon from a behaviorist model of human learning and is exemplified by the work of Col. David Grossman (1995; 1998; 2000), Grossman and DeGaetano (1999) and Eugene Provenzo (1991; 1992; 2003). The second perspective defined by Jenkins is the humanist or meanings based research. Examples of this line of thinking are James P. Gee (2003; 2005a; 2005b; 2007) and Kurt Squire (2003; 2005; 2006). This perspective focuses on the individual meanings that are constructed by the gamer or consumer of the media. Meanings refer to the reflective nature of learning and the interpretive aspects of
individual experience within the interaction. The meanings approach emphasizes the agentic capacity of the individual to make meanings and valuations and deemphasizes the power of cultural products to embed messages that have cognitive impact. Yet, Jenkins, does offer that the question of violence should be addressed from this meanings based approach in which media literacy serves the role of empowering students to make more informed choices in consumption of such media forms. From a review of the literature, it appears that the meanings based approach often asserts the positive aspects of video game culture while superfluously dealing with the violence question. A third perspective could be added to Jenkins discussion of opposing viewpoints on video game violence in which the proponents of media products such as the Entertainment Software Association (ESA, 2010; 2009) suggest that games are merely entertainment and spaces for leisure and pleasure and have little or no impact on the behavior or cognitive development of the user. The industry supports a “free-market” perspective that suggests the media producers merely provide what the public wants and that the market is the ultimate force in regulating the content. However, what is missed in the debate is the necessity to address cultural products as both representations and reproductions of culture. The links between violence and culture must not be forgotten. As will be developed in more detail in Chapter Two, the current debate operationalizes a narrow conception of violence that is direct and somatic while ignoring the multifaceted and nuanced nature of violence and its expressions. Likewise, the conception of culture is also under scrutiny as many in current post-modern discourse deemphasize the role of culture and its force in making meaning of the world.
The World Health Organization (Krug et al, 2002) reports that multiple risk factors have been identified for the prevalence of youth violence. These factors intersect across individual psychological/behavioral domains, relational influences of family and peers, community factors such as gangs, drugs, and crime, as well as, societal factors such as poverty, political upheaval, social change, and cultural influences. Cultural influences can be defined as the norms and values that prescribe and socially sanction behaviors and are further signified in linguistic and semiotic expressions. Violence, then, can be embedded within the culture, as values and norms that sanction or propagate the use of violence to solve conflict or to exert power. As identified by the WHO (p. 38), the media is a factor in the proliferation of violence supportive culture. Numerous studies over fifty years of research have found relationships between media violence and violence in society (Anderson et al, 2003; 2010; Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Bushman & Huesman, 2001; Huesman, 2010). Much of this scholarship largely falls into what Jenkins identifies as the effects oriented research.

Thus, educators concerned about the culture of violence and youth must be prepared to confront the lived experiences of students. Learning should construct knowledge and critical consciousness with the capacity to deconstruct the violent discourses of popular culture. Though games such as GTA appear to be new, innovative, and irreverent, the systems of meaning that operate to make the game accessible are imbued with traditional ideological frames or schemas. These frames and schema are part of the interaction between individual cognitive and social development in which culture provides the basic structures of learning that allow individuals to operate within a shared system of meanings that are influenced by philosophical assumptions regarding values
and norms, as well as beliefs and attitudes. Figure 1 below is an adaptation of Flavio Vega’s (1976) *A Holistic Model for the Study of Social Policy on Race, Sex, and Class Diversity in Education*. This diagram is intended to be a heuristic device that schematicizes an investigation and understanding of the process involved in the culture of violence. As Galtung (1990) suggests, societies around the world have the components of violent culture built within broader cultural systems. This culture of violence functions as a means of regulating and perpetuating dominant cultural forms within various these larger cultures.

**Figure 1: An Holistic Approach to the Understanding of a Culture of Violence, Adapted from Flavio Vega (1976) A Holistic Model for the Study of Social Policy on Race, Sex, and Class Diversity in Education. A heuristic device for analyzing multiple dimensions of violence in society at the individual, cultural, and institutional levels.**
The focus of this study will be upon dominant cultural/ideological themes or frames in Western society that permeate the processes of globalization. Media, including video games, is both a producer and reproducer of culture and often crosses linguistic and national borders. In other words, media is produced within the semiotic framework and value system of a culture by members of that culture as individuals work or function within the society and its institutions. But also, media functions as a mechanism and institution for enculturating and socializing the consumer of the media images and messages. Yet, individuals have the potential for making meaning of the media forms which includes the potential for resistance of the messages and images through valuation or devaluation of such representations. As numerous authors across disciplines such as Rogoff (2003), Schweder (2003), Geertz (1973), Hall et al (1996), or Bourdieu (1990, 1989) have discussed, culture is a powerful force in socialization and the development of ways of thinking and being. Culture through social relations and practices is a process that socializes individuals and influences expressions and understandings of the self and identity through individual cognitive and social development (Erikson, 1997, 1964). As illustrated by Figure 1, individuals interact with the culture and the institutions that constitute the society. This dynamic interplay involves reproduction of socio-cultural systems which includes systems of meaning as well as patterns of organization and access to resources, but also involves the agentic capacity of individuals to produce culture change and reinvigorate the complex ways of knowing and interacting with the world.

Within this context of society with the analytical domains of culture, self/identity, and institution, the GTA series presents an interesting case for analysis of the
normalization and valuation of violence and its meanings across the multiple domains. The game has been widely acclaimed by game developers, reviled by critics, purchased and played by gamers, and adored by fans. However, though few in number, critical investigations into the previous incarnation of the GTA series, GTA San Andreas, have illustrated the reproduction of dominant cultural paradigms within the games messages. Paul Barrett (2006, p. 95) critiques GTA San Andreas for its glamorization and spectacle of violence, an insistence on “a culture of cynicism”, and “problematic representations” of African Americans. Barrett also exposes the underlying neoliberal assumptions that promote a “sense of the public sphere as a site of danger” in which the public space is one of chaos and individual’s act on competing self-interests. Barrett concludes that “Video games offer narratives that are formative in terms of individual and social understandings of race, youth, and citizenship in the modern, neoliberal, globalized world” (p. 96). A more full discussion of neoliberalism will be included in Chapter Two’s discussion of ideological frameworks such as patriarchy, capitalism, individualism, materialism, consumerism, meritocracy, and militarism.

David Leonard (2009) also discusses the nature of racial representations and the role of violence in the virtual space of GTA San Andreas as being educative of white supremacist ideology and supportive of state violence. Leonard uses state violence to mean the normalization and legitimation of violence as a means for establishing order, oppression, and the subjugation of citizenry through “laws, policies, cultural formations, etc.” (p.269). As such, the racial stereotypes and the role of violence intermingle in the virtual space of GTA San Andreas in a way that promotes the destruction and domination of bodies of color. Leonard points to the fact that the majority of gamers are typically
white and suburban and thus learning dominant culture discourses on “race, place, and state” from interacting within this commodified “ghetto” [sic] portrayed in the video game.

This way out of the suburbs is not mere escapism, as the play of the privileged speaks to the normalization of institutional violence towards the less privileged in U.S. society. The reduction of violence within marginalized communities to individual choices devoid of societal influence provides two key functions in the context of GTA: it justifies unquestioning consumption of racist imagery, and justifies violent state policing of America’s morally (whiteness) deficient (2006a, p. 60).

Of importance for critical educators is the necessity to consider that young people are learning the hidden nature of white privilege, the ideological patterns, as well as behavioral patterns that legitimate oppressive social conditions for some while normalizing the privileged positions of those who identify with the dominant culture (McIntosh, 1997). As will be discussed in chapter two, identity is a relational or positional social construction that entails ideological and structural patterns. Individuals have multiple identities based upon the various positions that she/he occupies and the way in which these positions relate to others and the world. Some aspects of identity are adaptive and matters of choice while other aspects of identity are imposed by others and the society in which one lives. Stereotypes, then, are simplified categorizations of identities applied to social groups. Social identity theory as developed by Henri Tajfel (1981), John Turner (1999), and Michael Hogg (2003) to name a few will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two and provides an analysis of and means for understanding the role of stereotypes and categorization in the identity development process. The work of Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson (1995; Aronson & Steele, 2005) has shown the
negative effects of stereotypes on individual’s competencies, performance, and self-concept within this tradition of social identity theory. The proliferation of stereotypical images within video games such as GTA then has practical concerns that can influence interactions and attitudes related to both the gamers and those misrepresented within the game space. As Leonard suggests, the geographic and social distance that exists in society allows the video game and the media in general to exert strong influences on the meanings and the understandings of the unfamiliar, the “out-group” or the “other”.

Barrett (2006) and Leonard (2009; 2006a; 2006b) both focus specifically on the reproduction of racial stereotypes as well as dominant discourses and practices on race and violence that legitimate racist social and political patterns of white hegemony. The nature of sexuality and the gendered patterns of oppression being perpetuated by GTA are briefly mentioned by both authors, but neither discusses the issues of patriarchy, sexism, homophobia, or gendered violence with specificity or detail. However, Leonard (2009) did discuss the role of GTA in perpetuating myths of Black masculinity in which themes of violence and hyper-sexuality interlock to exacerbate dominant cultural fears of Black men. This fear has deep historical and political roots in the American psyche relating to laws against miscegenation, segregationist policy and practice, and legitimized racial violence. These fears are reinforced by the lack of socio-historical knowledge and the lack of experiences in intergroup dialogue for many in society.

The absence of cultural knowledge of diversity and issues of social justice as exhibited by undergraduate students entering a course on such topics (Martin et al, 2011, Unpublished pilot study, manuscript in development) illustrates the lack of knowledge that could provide alternative meanings and valuations to the violent, racist, and
misogynistic media images. This also speaks to the necessity to expand or transform “standard curriculum” to deal with culture, diversity, and social justice issues. Such an educational endeavor could serve as mitigation to the exacerbation of the impact of this “public pedagogy” in which educative play reinforces stereotypes and socio-cultural patterns of oppression while implicating the pathological individual as the source of social ills. In fact, as this study will demonstrate, the violence as represented by the virtual public space of GTA is not only legitimated, but also normalized, valued, and prioritized as the expedient and effective means for asserting oneself in the world.

Furthermore, the dimensions of violence (direct, state, structural, and symbolic violence) that is learned in multiple media forms as legitimate exercise of authority and power reflect a culture dependent upon violence and interventions must become part of the educational practice of resistance and transformation. Such praxis has a place across different educational perspectives such as media literacy, peace education, and multicultural social reconstructionism. This discussion will be further defined in Chapter Two’s sections on violence and educational perspectives. The work of Hannah Arendt (1969), Johan Galtung (1969; 1990) and Pierre Bourdieu (1989) will be used to define violence. Galtung and Bourdieu will also be used to link the study of violence to the role of education, while the section on media literacy will be focused upon the works of W. James Potter (2005) and Kellner and Share (2005).

Video games present a viable means for a discussion of social justice issues that can be related to the lives of students, yet this potential has been limited by the paucity of academic work in the genre. Games such as GTA have sparked much public debate as to the pros and cons of video game play and violent video games in general. As previously
mentioned, much of the scholarly discourse has focused upon the pathological effects of video games upon individual expressions of violent behavior while the public/political discussion focuses upon issues of censorship and the protection of children from the harmful effects of game play. The effects based research on violence in media has a long tradition in academic circles while research on violence in video games is relatively new. Still, examples of these studies deserve mention for the range of negative effects on behavior, cognition, and affect (Anderson and Morrow, 1995; Bartholow et al, 2005; Bartholow and Anderson, 2002). Violent video game play has also been linked to desensitization and effects on moral evaluation in children such as lowered empathy and stronger proviolence attitudes (Funk et al, 2004). Research by Dill and Thill (2007, p. 861) has shown that video game stereotypes impact perceptions and attitudes of gender roles and self-conceptions in adolescents and result in expectations of aggressive masculinity and tolerance of gendered violence. Furthermore, Dill et al (2008) have shown links between violent video game play and rape supportive attitudes.

The public debate on video game violence tends to be problematically simplistic in terms of defining violence and limiting the effects to quantifiable, often clinical pathologies. While this line of research is valid and does contribute to an understanding of video games and violence, the limitations of the debate have socio-political implications. What is lost is a discussion of the nature of violence and how it relates to issues of racism, sexism, homophobia, neoliberal globalization, and other anti-democratic tendencies in society. Leonard (2006b) offers a valid critique of the popular video game violence debate:
Violence that justifies, naturalizes and rationalizes persistent inequality, while simultaneously shifting public discourse away from racism and toward morals and values – the condemnation of hip-hop or thugs (i.e. blackness) is not a racial phenomenon but one about behavior; it is the sin and not the sinner...as evident in the ongoing debate regarding GTA, the various lines of debate emanate from a similar place that does not question the ways in which these games perpetuate violence through distorting, dehumanizing, and reifying dominant understandings of race and racism (p. 64).

Leonard’s statement on the relationship of violence to race and racism should be expanded to recognize the multiplicity of positions in society and how hegemony interacts in a dynamic struggle and legitimation that privileges some while marginalizing others in racist, sexist, classist and homophobic patterns. As Audre Lorde (1996) suggests, “there is no hierarchy of oppression”, but rather there are interconnected patterns that limit human possibility and potential and so must be considered in a discourse on the ethics and practice of democratic visions. A society that limits the opportunities and equal standing of some members of the society for the privilege and aggrandizement of other members of the society regardless of the basis of factors that determine that access to social goods will fail to meet the demands of democracy, liberty and justice. While recognizing the unique positions that individuals hold in a society in which these positions are vital to the development of self/identity, and the unique perspectives that each individual holds, the moral, ethical, and legal consideration of equality suggests that no one position should hold privilege over any other. The symbolic nature of these patterns of valuation and normative beliefs attached to the privilege of some and the devaluation and disfranchisement of others provides a legitimating force that makes the oppressive conditions (race, sex, class, and heterosexism) appear “normal” and natural. Pierre Bourdieu (1991) has defined this process as symbolic
violence and relates this to the concept of ideology. In his discussion of Bourdieu’s theories, David Schwartz (1997, p. 89) defines “symbolic violence as the capacity to impose the means for comprehending and adapting to the social world by representing economic and political power in disguised, taken-for-granted forms”. Power is manifested through acceptance of the hierarchies and inequitable distributions of power by both the privileged and the disfranchised. The violence of this condition is in terms of the harm committed to individuals or groups. The harm is done symbolically through the culture and its representation and reproduction of stereotypes, devaluation/valuation in normative beliefs, and the unequal access to cultural goods, goods which Bourdieu discusses in terms of economic and political power, but also includes socio-cultural power as well. In fact, the failure to create conditions of equality is an abasement of the moral/ethical/legal nature of American society. And thus “there is no hierarchy of oppressions”, but merely accumulated injustice.

One aim of critical research and cultural studies is to deconstruct the meaning and assumptions in media and popular culture while promoting social justice as it relates to representation and reproduction of culture. The ethics of democracy, intrinsic human equality and self-determination defined by liberty and participatory public practice, are guiding principles in interrogating mediated cultural reproductions of imagery, meanings, values, and norms. While many of the voices embroiled in the video game violence debate look to legalistic answers such as censorship and regulation, the field of cultural studies is concerned with deconstructing myths, media, social practice, and culture. By deconstructing the underlying assumptions and dimensions of power that are constructive of identity, value and belief systems, and also legitimate structural patterns of human
relations, a better understanding of the institutional and educative forces of the media can be uncovered. Giroux (1999) contends, “Critical learning must be linked to the empowering demands of social responsibility, public accountability, and critical citizenship” (p. 12). The citizen must be engaged to discourse in public spaces, empowered by critical consciousness, and free to make informed choices regarding the public good. To this end, critical media literacy focuses upon education rather than censorship. It must not only view the citizen as consumer of media and culture, but also as one who makes meaning of the cultural texts, one who is a producer of culture in traditional institutional roles, as well as in roles that are alternatives to corporatized forms. It is through participation in the public space with free and open choice and discussion that must be the zone for resistance and contestation rather than censorship from an authoritative body. Researchers, then, must provide a nuanced analysis of popular culture and media that can be used and modeled by parents, teachers, and students. Through critical media literacy, education can serve the development of democratic citizens who have the capacity for full participation in society. A participation that is defined by informed choice, decision-making, and responsibility. Such capacities citizens must develop through educative endeavor. Education must provide for students to become citizens endowed with analytical skills for discerning options and choices. Furthermore, education must develop students’ faculties to make informed decisions regarding pleasure, leisure, and play, as well as contest and resist hegemonic practices and patterns of oppression through an understanding of the ethical responsibilities and duties that accompany individual rights. Parents and educators alike can benefit from a
better understanding of the messages and lessons embedded in the virtual worlds, such as \textit{GTA IV}, that are experienced by many young people.

\textbf{B. Purpose of the Study}

The purpose of this study is to develop a framework for understanding the media’s hegemonic reproduction of culture, ideology, identity, power, and violence as exhibited in the \textit{Grand Theft Auto IV} video game. More specifically, the representation of social scripts and oppressive worldviews performed by the video game characters that pertain to the intersection of multiple positions in society such as race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality will be explored.

\textbf{C. Research Questions}

1. How is identity represented? How are social positions of race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality represented in \textit{Grand Theft Auto IV}? What cultural stereotypes are reinforced?

2. What are the predominant ideological assumptions embedded in the game, more specifically, how is human nature represented and what is the nature of human interaction?

3. How is power manifested in the game?

4. How is violence characterized and/or reified?

5. What are the potential meanings and ideological assumptions of culture, identity, power, violence and the value system of the virtual world in \textit{GTA IV}? How do gamers’ present these meanings when interacting with each other in the sphere of mass-mediated communications?
6. Who or what entity benefits from the reproduction of such cultural paradigms?

D. Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical foundation for this study is transdisciplinary or interdisciplinary in that it draws from the fields of anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, psychology, and education. The educational perspectives that influence this framework are media literacy, peace education, and Multicultural Social Reconstructionism with an overarching emphasis on democratic education. Douglas Kellner’s work in critical media literacy is exemplary of the theoretical focus that will be employed in this study and draws upon critical theory, critical pedagogy, and cultural studies. Critical media literacy, then, is the application of critical pedagogy to the study and analysis of culture and media with the view that a curriculum must address the societal issues embedded in the culture within the tradition of democratic education. Kellner and Share (2007) suggest that a critical media literacy “focuses on ideology critique and analyzing the politics of representation of crucial dimensions of gender, race, class, and sexuality; incorporating alternative media production; expanding textual analysis to include issues of social context, control, resistance, and pleasure”. In other words, education must address the intersection of structure, culture, and ideology and analyze the production and proliferation of knowledge, power, and hierarchies. Within this construction of curriculum, is the potential to mitigate media’s negative influences and empower students with a critical consciousness or awareness that promotes agency as democratic citizens and as consumers and producers of cultural forms. This is a democratic citizenship in which students become aware of both the rights and duties required for democratic living. These rights include freedom from harm and the duty to ensure that others have the right to an
equal claim to freedom from harm. Thus, democratic citizenship recognizes that the many dimensions of violence, physical, emotional, structural, and symbolic, are a contradiction of democratic values and thus, unjust. A more detailed discussion of these underlying democratic concepts will be included in chapter two of this study. Built within critical media literacy is the concept that education should be transformative for both the individual and for society. Transformation is a key component of social reconstructionist education which emphasizes the development of critical capacities in learners. This is grounded in the work of Paulo Freire’s (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in which he defines the “banking model” of education as a form of transmission that replicates social patterns and hierarchies. Freire dismisses this model and emphasizes that the role of education should be the development of conscientization, which is the intellectual capacities for critical consciousness or a deep awareness of the world, its contradictions and struggles, the capacity for action, and thus individual freedom. Transformative educational practice asks questions that go beyond the “what is?” to questions of “what can be?” The conditions and experiences of diverse groups is necessary and fertile intellectual ground in that the development of an awareness of oppression and the role of power in creating and maintaining social hierarchies is a component of this approach. Yet, this approach to learning also seeks to develop the creative and agentic capacity of students/citizens to participate in transforming unjust social conditions and producing cultural change that diminishes the power of oppressive regimes, thus the name social reconstruction. (Sleeter & Grant, 1991) A more expansive discussion of transformation and social reconstruction will be included in chapter two’s section on the role of education which will detail the perspectives from peace education and multicultural
education and how these concepts relate to media literacy, as well as a discussion on feminist perspectives. In terms of transformation, critical media literacy engages the student in analysis of the intersection of ideology, domination, and oppression embedded in culture and social institutions while challenging students to be active, participatory agents with an ethical duty to resist injustice and promote positive change for themselves and for their community.

This vision or framework of education runs counter to the current trends towards commercialization and privatization in education in which nationalistic, militaristic, neoliberal concepts guide a managerial, business oriented emphasis (Chomsky, 2003; Giroux, 2003; Giroux & Saltman, 2009; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2006). These trends fall into a tradition of schooling in the United States that has sought to reproduce societal status quo conditions (Bourdieu, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Within these trends, standardization and high stakes testing create a culture of competition that privileges objective truth and development of measurable skills. The emphasis on such skills development is geared toward viewing the student as a future human resource in the globalized economy, as workers and consumers in a world that emphasizes economic development over other societal spheres. This coincides with the diminished role for social studies and humanities, as well as arts, music, physical education, and extra-curricular endeavors. Rather than focusing on holistic development of conscientious citizens, this model of education develops nationalistic, competitive, performance focused learners.

Furthermore, this study is influenced by feminist scholarship that provides a necessary dimension of perspectives on the issues of sexism, gendered violence, and
homophobia and how multiple positionalities interact within a framework of patriarchal capitalist regimes. To this end, the work of scholars such as Sylvia Walby, Carol Johnson, and Katherine Lutz will inform the discussion on patriarchy and its relationship to capitalism, militarization, globalization, and violence.

R.W. Connell will also provide a necessary perspective on the construction of masculinity, hegemony, and global capitalist order. Connell (2005) is attributed with defining the concept of hegemonic masculinity and positing the multiplicitous masculine identities related to unique and differentiated social positions. Furthermore, the work of Jackson Katz (1999; 2006) is valuable to understanding media’s reproduction of hypermasculinity, homophobia, and violence. Katz’s work points to a culture of violence as a factor contributing to the construction of masculine identities and as a regulatory mechanism for maintaining patriarchal and dominant cultural relations. The construction of masculinity is a “box” that limits the full potential of males to express and define themselves as human beings with homophobia and violence or the mere threat of violence as a regulator of such identity. The social scripts and norms that are essentially an act or “guise” by which socially constructed masculinity masks the range of human capacities for males.

The symbolic interactionist perspective can further help to describe this dynamic socio-cultural process. Much of the theoretical foundation of this study is from a macrosocial perspective. Symbolic interactionism then provides a necessary perspective on microsocial processes, in which insights are gained towards understanding the interaction between the self, identity, and the larger society. Broadly defined, symbolic interactionism is the interaction between the individual/self and the society and the
meanings ascribed to the presentation and construction of identities and situational contexts. Important to this study is the conception that meanings are important to the construction of identities, of the self, and of the social group. The self and society are engaged in dynamic social interaction and meanings are constructed from reflecting, interpreting, and validating these situational-contextual interactions (Stets & Burke, 1996; 2000). As Burke (2004) suggests, identities are linked to the structural nature of the situational context. Positions structure access to material as well as socio-cultural resources and contribute to the social interaction that defines individual and group identities. These patterns are linked to individual positions within the social structure, positions that give identity to interrelations and a structure that refers to access to societal and material resources. This access is regulated and legitimated by social institutions, traditions, and ideology that organize and pattern human interaction and relations with disparities in power and meanings of identity. Of importance to this study, then, is the patterned nature of cultural representation and reproduction as exhibited in video games such as GTA that legitimates and regulates the construction of identities, relations, ideology and access to social goods.

In summation, this study is an investigation and interrogation of culture, ideology, identity, and violence. Culture is seen as a symbolic and material representation of the knowledge, values, and norms that prescribe and proscribe behavior and human relations with each other and the world. Culture is both produced and reproduced in that it is learned through socialization/enculturation, but also dynamic, malleable and open to invention and innovation. The nature of culture is this plasticity and the adaptive capacity to change to meet perpetually changing socio-historical contexts. Ideology, then, are the
beliefs that contribute to an explanation, legitimation, and shared perspective of this value system and the ways of being and understanding the world. Identity is the way in which meanings are attributed to the individual self and how that self relates to others and to the world, that is the social and ecological world. Within this dynamic exchange and process, violence is employed as a means within the political realm of power, hierarchy, and regulation. The development of democratic visions of human relations and lifeways provides alternatives to this dynamic play of violence and oppressive conditions. The role of education within a democratic society necessitates the development of citizens with the capacity to think, critique, and create alternative explanations and valuations beyond the reproduced ideological assertions that dominate popular culture and media expressions of life and interrelations. As will be developed in chapter two, media literacy is a necessary and valuable component of a democratic education. Democratic education has shared objectives with other educational frameworks such as peace education which generally focuses on nonviolence and a culture of tolerance in human relations and multicultural education that promotes the valuing of pluralism and respect for diversity. Both of these perspectives in education are within this tradition of democratic ethics and thus the development of a framework for media literacy must include the ideological analysis of popular culture and media forms. To this end, GTA IV will be used as a case for analysis and demonstration.
Chapter Two

Review of Related Literature and a Framework for Interrogation

A. Situating the Study

As stated in Chapter One, this study is as much an analysis and interrogation of culture, ideology, identity, and violence as it is a study of video games or GTA IV. In this chapter, the framework for analysis will be explicated and the study will be situated within the scholarship that defines the concepts of the predominant themes of culture, ideology, identity, and violence. Democratic ethics will then be explored as a means to establish an alternative vision of the world and the nature of human relations and interconnections. It is possible to critique democracy as an ideology and the education for democratic citizenship as a form of inculcation or indoctrination. A response to this plausible critique is that democracy as an ideology supports the empowerment of all individuals in a manner that provides personal self-determination with the responsibility to respect others equal right to the same opportunities for self-determination and expression. In this regard, the dogmatic and rigid nature of ideology is mitigated by the pluralistic foundation and the participatory distribution of power. This argument will be further developed later in this chapter. Following the section on democratic ethics, the ideologies and social forces that are antidemocratic or threats to democratic life, including marginal threats that have a dialectical relationship with democracy, such as capitalism, will be explored. Regarding the role of education, as George Counts (1932) suggested in his essay progressive education must not be afraid of the critique of indoctrination. All societies and cultures pass on a system of meaning and values of what they understand as vital to membership in that society. It is the role of education to
provide the capacities to develop and express the full potential of students as citizens and as human beings. It is this consideration that democratic ethics provides as the potential for individual empowerment and agency. Agency here is conceived as similar to Freire’s (1970) conception of conscientization that provides for the transformative capacity of individuals to participate, innovate, and adapt culture in ways that promote a more just society. And finally, the role of media literacy will be explored within this vision of democratic education that values peace, pluralism (multicultural and intellectual), and respect for life.

**B. Culture, Ideology, and Power**

An interdisciplinary study that spans the fields of anthropology, sociology, psychology, cultural studies, aesthetics, and education has the difficult task of finding unity and consensus across the various disciplines in defining the concept of culture. The concept of culture is typically conceived through paradigmatic lenses that are influenced by the philosophical foundations of the often divergent disciplines. Likewise, a conception of culture is generally operationalized differently within these various disciplines. While a comprehensive discussion of these various disciplinary conceptions of culture is beyond the scope of this paper, a definition of culture must be presented.

Culture is a dynamic and complex concept that evades consensus. Popular conceptions of culture often focus on the idea of “high culture” that refer to intellectual, artistic, musical and literary works. Social science has generally sought a more inclusive and expansive conception. Typically, culture refers to knowledge that is learned and shared. Definitions that express the symbolic nature of culture and explicate the shared characteristics in manners of language, thought, beliefs, norms, and values for members
of social groups across generations are common across disciplines. The inclusion of behavior into the realm of the cultural, however, is typically the point of contention. Within this debate, some scholars point to the ideational or mental nature of culture, stressing the values, norms and beliefs shared by a social group that shape cognitive processes. Still, others such as Marvin Harris (1999) argue for the inclusion of behavioral manifestations such as attitudes and material expressions as well as the ideational components.

Kroeber and Kluckholn (1952) provide a thorough explication of the concept that has been influential in the fields of anthropology and sociology:

> Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other hand as conditioning elements of further action (p. 357).  

Multiple nuances of culture are expressed in this excerpt which includes the symbolic nature of culture, in which ideas are expressed in beliefs about the world, as well as normative standards and values of what is good, bad, right, wrong, sacred and profane. Kroeber and Kluckholn were inclusive of the behavioral aspects as well as the ideational aspects of human cultures as exemplified by the statements that culture contains “embodiments in artifacts” and must “be considered as products of action”. Culture also has prescriptive qualities that guide behavior and interrelations as expressed by “conditioning elements of further action”. As Shweder (2003) suggests, this “standard view” of culture in American anthropology compels a broader investigation of human lifeways to include not only the study of “explicit ethnosciences and doctrinal moral and
religious codes of members of a community but their tacit, implicit, or intuitive understandings as well” (p. 9). While inclusive and comprehensive in scope, the Kroeber and Kluckholn definition can be difficult and cumbersome in meaning and in operation methodologically.

Another classic notion of culture within this tradition of American anthropology has been developed by Clifford Geertz (1973) most notably in his work *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Geertz is soundly within the camp that emphasizes meanings as the basis of culture, yet, it is meanings that are described as “semiotic actions” that broaden the semiotic concept of culture. Behavior then is couched in the concept of action. Meanings are associated with action and with the semiotic representation of signs. Here signs confer communication which can be linguistic and behavioral forms of communication. Behavioral actions carry communicative meanings such as the non-verbal cues of body language (i.e. winks, nods, etc), the scripts or roles performed, as well as the rules that accompany these performances. Thus, “culture is public because meaning is” (p. 12) or in other words, communicative actions require shared meanings and understandings; the point of the communication then is interrelational. Geertz posits the necessity of interpretation within the concept of culture. Interpretation is both a part of the communicative meaning system of a social group, but also the purview of the social researcher. Citing Gilbert Ryle, Geertz describes the work of cultural analysis as “thick description” which relates to the understanding of culture as a complex system of meaning that entails the value system, the normative standards, and beliefs, but also, the traditions, customs, and institutions that constitute a society. To interpret and gain understanding of a culture then requires “thick description” which involves both emic and
etic perspectives of culture to more fully capture the multiple levels of human association and the context of that association.

Based upon these conceptions of culture this study conceives of culture as having both a capacity for transmission and transformation. It is transmission in the sense that knowledge (ideas and meanings) and patterns of living (language, manners, customs, etc.) are passed from one generation to the next with intergenerational consistency. Yet, culture is adaptable and constantly changing in ways that express a socio-historical context. It is this adaptive nature of culture in which human agency and the transformative qualities of culture exist. The adaptive, transformative nature of culture is a distinctive aspect of the concept in comparison to an ideology which will be defined shortly.

Critiques of the concept of culture point to the aspects of domination and resistance that are embedded in cultural practices. This means that culture when it intersects with power contributes to the inequities and injustices in a society and legitimates and normalizes these patterns. Here power means the capacity or ability of an individual or group to influence, to meet goals, and to exert will over others. A full discussion of power is beyond the scope of this study, however, it should be noted that power is embedded and manifested across the social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of society. Stewart (2001) identified two predominant themes in the discourse on power. One school of thought that is developed by such authors as Steven Lukes, Talcott Parsons, Anthony Giddens and Michel Foucault focuses upon a conception of power as a form of domination in which power is constructed as “power over” others. Power in this definition focuses upon organization, ideology, and structure as the sites of
contestation. The second strand of thought as expounded by theorists such as Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas promotes the perspective of a “power to” which emphasizes the collective power as expressed in the concept of human agency and distinguishes between power and domination. One dimension of power is the relationship of power to domination, alternative dimensions are also proposed including the relationship of power and community and the relationship of power and interests. In this study, power will be discussed in relation to domination, as a means for reifying and reproducing dominant patterns in society. Yet, the capacity for agency which is power related to community and shared, collective interests will be discussed as a purpose of media literacy in education.

The “Frankfurt School” in social theory is often attributed with the early writings by authors such as Theodor Adorno, Karl Mannheim, and Luis Althusser on the subject of culture and power. When culture intersects with power, the space is contested in that domination occurs when power influences the culture. Yet, culture is also the space where resistance occurs. When an individual or collective agency pushes back on the influence and domination of the dominant culture there is resistance. This can be in the form of alternative meanings or in the production of alternative cultural forms.

The concept of dominant culture represents the contested nature of culture in which an elite or privileged group or class has an unequal position of power and influence in the expression of cultural systems and is associated to the reification of access to the social structure and its institutions. The dominant culture then is constructed in the values and norms as well as the language and forms of knowledge that reflect the interests of the privileged group. Related to this concept of dominant culture is Pierre Bourdieu’s (1986, 1990, 1991) discussion of domination and the concept of cultural
capital, habitus, symbolic power, and symbolic violence. Symbolic violence will be discussed more fully in the section on the various conceptions of violence. Cultural capital is an extension or broadening of the Marxian conception of capital. Bourdieu’s (1986) conception of capital expands the materialist conception of goods and the production of those goods to incorporate dimensions of capital that have symbolic power. The acquisition and use of knowledge, skills, language, and status/credentials are power resources. These can be transformed through conversion into economic capital or can be sources of social and political power. Swartz (1997) describes symbolic power as being tied to legitimation and that all forms of power including force require legitimation. Power that has symbolic capital then has disguised interests that legitimate the “demands for recognition, deference, obedience, or the services of others” (p.43). Bourdieu (1990) further advances this discussion with his concept of habitus which involves the habituation of practices or action that reify these patterns of domination through subconscious normalization. The nature of coercive mechanisms that operate to legitimate social practices, statuses, and hierarchies which reproduce the social order are of interest to this study. As will be discussed shortly, consent is a necessity of legitimate authority in a democratic society. Within the democratic tradition, consent requires an absence of coercive power, open and free information, and the freedom of thought and choice. Furthermore, as will be discussed later in the section on video games studies, the video game is a necessary terrain for interrogating issues of habituation. The video game has the capacity to teach automaticity through repetition and practice such behavioral and attitudinal habits related to value, judgment, violence, and “othering” (Grossman, 1998; 2000; 2002).
This concern leads to a consideration of the media as an institution that produces culture while reproducing and privileging dominant cultural paradigms. Theodor Adorno (1991) has described the nature of this phenomenon as the “culture industry”. Adorno has defined the takeover of cultural production by corporate, industrial forces that turned culture into a commodity and the “masses” into consumers of culture, thus the masses are passive receivers rather than active producers of culture. This alteration of cultural production becomes a form of domination as the adaptive, creative capacities of culture are stripped away for the “manipulative product of interlocking commercial interests” (How, 2003, p. 34). Buechler (2008, p. 40-41) identifies three key components to the culture industry’s form of domination: 1) reduction of people to passive receivers and consumers of culture rather than active in its creation, 2) the prevalence of consumerism as an ideology; 3) the ubiquity and intrusion of media across the spheres of society. The role of consumerism is a form of ideology that gives meaning and understanding to the world as a place of market perspectives and materialist values. Bailey and Gayle (2003, p. 23) define ideology as “a set of beliefs that seems to serve and shape interests of a certain group in society; has a legitimating/justifying function; and has the power to control or influence how people think about, or act in, their social circumstances”. While this seems similar to the concept of dominant culture, the focus for ideology is a set of beliefs that legitimate a value system, in that sense, culture is a much broader and expansive concept of human knowledge, it is the value system that is justified by ideological beliefs. Multiple ideologies can work within one culture and multiple cultures can employ an ideology. But what is distinct from culture is the more rigid nature of the ideology, the dogmatic and doctrinal nature of the set of beliefs. In this study, an
investigation of the predominant ideological themes embedded in *GTA IV* will be explored. A more full discussion of these ideologies will be discussed later in the section on *Threats to Democracy* and further applied to the analysis of the textual and visual nature in the case study of *GTA IV*.

Critical investigations of society and social phenomena explore the intersection of culture and power. Culture has the potential to reify and legitimate oppressive social conditions. The meanings, values and norms embedded in culture can express and illustrate unequal social conditions while justifying the inequalities as natural and normal (Bourdieu, 1989; 1990; see also Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991). For instance, language can express the valuing of dominant cultural norms and the condition of unequal access to social goods based upon identity and its multiple positionalities. These inequities and social conditions can be further explained and justified by ideological conceptions that express beliefs about the world and human nature. Of interest to this study is the representation of images and messages that express the culturally prescribed values, norms, and meanings and ideologically based beliefs regarding human nature and the nature of human associations as well as social and ecological interactions.

**C. Identity: Social Construction and Multiple Positionalities**

The concept of identity relates to the idea of self and how the self relates to others and the world. Identity has a reflexive quality in that individual meanings are associated with culturally prescribed notions of the self. Internally, identity is defined by the meanings and self-concept the individual makes of her/his qualities and relationships to others. Externally, identity is prescribed by cultural norms and values regarding social roles and the imposition of traits, behaviors, expectations, and definitions by others.
Likewise, identity is constructed from categories related to group membership.

Stereotypes are an example of culturally prescribed identities which can be both positive and negative in nature, but what is harmful is the limiting nature of the stereotype, the box that limits a full expression of one’s self and humanness. Identity can be associated with roles such as mother, father, brother and sister, or by occupational and educational status titles, and religious affiliation. Also, the social constructions of identities are products of power intersecting with human associations and interactions across social positions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, social class, and ability. Social identity theory in social psychology and the sociological perspective of identity theory are two of the theoretical traditions that describe the cognitive and social construction of identity.

Stets and Burke (2000) define two ways of operationalizing this concept of reflexive social self: 1) the process of self-categorization and 2) identification. Self-categorization is at the heart of social identity theory in social psychology while identification and its focus on roles and positions in society predominate in the sociological paradigm of identity theory. Both will be discussed in more detail shortly. In this study, the aspects of identity that will be explored are the stereotypical images and representations that define human individuals and groups, as well as the representations of human association and the nature of those interactions within the virtual space of GTA IV.

a. Social identity theory. As suggested, social identity theory is generally associated with social psychology and focuses upon self-categorization and the cognitive processes associated with this categorization such as social comparison, accentuation, self-enhancement, salience, and self-esteem. The identity of the self is situated within group affinity and affiliation. As Tajfel (1981) suggests social identity is “that part of the
individual’s self-concept which derives from his [sic] knowledge of his [sic] membership in the social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that group membership” (p. 255). The concepts of in-group and out-group are important to understanding social identity. In-group refers to accepted members of a social group. Out-group conversely refers to “others”, to people outside the group often another different distinct group. Hogg (2003) further contends that group membership and the attributions of that membership are important, but also, the emotional investment in group membership is vital to understanding social identity. This involves group members’ perceptions of social standing or status of the group in relation to other groups. An interest in social comparison is constructive of the self-enhancement and group enhancement practices that become embedded in cultural beliefs and values. Social identity theory provides a basis for understanding intergroup relations in which categorization defines group membership while accentuation and social comparison explain social behaviors such as conformity, stereotyping, discrimination and ethnocentrism (Hogg et al, 1995; Turner et al, 1979). A key element of the research is the assertion that individual identity attributes are distinct from social identity processes in which group dynamics can have profound impact upon behavior when the focus is on intergroup distinctions. For this study, the conception of in-group and out-group distinctions as related to ideological and cultural representations in the video game space is of interest to understanding the nature of identity and the ways in which the self is situated in the social and physical environment. One outgrowth of social identity theory is the study of “othering” in which social groups accentuate differences. This distinction is a
factor in the dehumanization process associated with perceptions of threat and contributive to violent interactions (Davies et al, 2008; Goff et al, 2008; Sen, 2006).

b. **Identity theory and symbolic interactionism.** Identity theory also explores a conception of the self grounded in social relations and has similar terminology to social identity theory while the definitions and conceptions are distinct (Stets and Burke, 2000; Hogg et al, 1995). Identity theory has focused more upon sociological explanations of identity and generally follows the work done in the interactionist perspective. Often referred to as symbolic interactionism, this perspective grew predominantly from the work of Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead and has three basic premises as identified by Herbert Blumer (1969) which continue to characterize contemporary perspectives. First is the centrality of meanings. Human beings act on objects and subjects based upon constructed meanings. Meaning then refers to the interpretations and definitions that categorize and conceptualize the world, but are also influenced by the ways in which people interact with an object of meaning. Also, human behavior is considered a reflection of the meanings and values that are placed on people, groups, objects, events, and ideas. In terms of identity, the self is seen as both object and subject in which identity serves as the meaning of whom and what the individual is, as well as how that individual relates to others. The second premise then is that meanings are derived from social interaction. An individual interacts with other individuals, within groups, and with the world. The culture (the language, symbols, and value system shared by a social group) provides a framework for understanding the social and physical world. Buechler (2008) suggests meanings are intersubjective accomplishments of social interaction (p. 187). In other words, there is a blending of objective qualities and
subjective choice in person’s understanding and definitions and these are navigated through human social interaction. The third premise is that meanings are managed and modified in an interpretive process in which the meaning is adapted to the specific context or situation. The interpretive process is a function of individual reflexivity, a self which is reflective of the self, of others, of the world, and of the complex interaction of these domains.

The works of Peter Burke, Jan Stets, and Sheldon Stryker, among others, point to the role of social structure in this process of meaning making or symbolic interaction. These authors help to extend the concept of symbolic interactionism into more macrosocial spheres. Much of the work of these authors provides a perspective or framework in which individual interpretation does not overshadow the stable patterns and order of human interactions. Stets and Burke (2000) suggest that the social structure is the often abstract forms and patterns that constitute groups, networks, organizations, and political units. Burke (2004) elaborates on the conception of the social structure as involving access to resources. “Social structure is the human organization of resource flows and transformations; social structure is the control of resources” (p.8). Resources can be material, as in food, water, or air, or can be social, such as social support or privileged positional/cultural knowledge.

Identities which are socially constructed are influenced by and adaptations to the factual and perceived structural realities. Burke (2006) links the construction of identities to the social structure through the definition of resources and access to those resources. Identities are the meanings attached to the multiple positions and roles/counter-roles that form social interactions and which are constructed to navigate the terrain of the structure.
But also as Burke suggests these identities maintain organization and order within the society and function in the allocation of resources. The culture which is the system of shared meaning for social groups provides the values, norms, and standards that establish expectations and role categories. These enculturate or socialize individuals into this shared system of understanding and meaning. Stets and Burke (2000) suggest, the self and the society are in a dynamic reciprocal relationship. The individual influences society through action, the validation of the cultural constructs, and the action of social relations. Reciprocally, the society provides the language, signs and symbols of meaning, the patterns of organization, and access to resources that influence the construction of identity and the reflexive self. Of interest in this study are the presentation of identities and the meanings associated with a culture of violence, masculinity, and the position of the self and the “other”.

c. Social constructionist approaches to identity. Another valuable perspective on identity is the social constructionist approach which explores the multiple identities that are products of power intersecting with human relations across social positions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, social class, and ability. The self is a reflexive actor adopting and adapting a repertoire of identities to match socio-historical and situational contexts. For instance, aspects of the self can have shifting salience dependent upon these contextual factors that are influenced by dynamics of power in individual and intergroup relations and interactions. The dialogical self with shifting identities is an adaptive coping mechanism for the complex, dynamic social environment. (Kumar et al, 2011). In this study, the constructions of these positionalities are salient, but also, questions of how are
these positions represented and how the nature of human interaction is presented related to the identity positions are of interest.

As Leonard (2006a; 2006b; 2009) and Barrett (2006) have suggested and has been discussed in chapter one, the racialized space of GTA illustrates the troubling dominant cultural assertions and representations of race and the intrinsic superiority of whiteness. Added to this discourse on race and ethnicity, the gendered nature of video games such as GTA IV is of interest to this study. Action genre video games are widely considered to be produced by, marketed to and played predominantly by males (Kerr, 2006). The representation and reproduction of gender identities and the sexual nature of many themes within GTA IV require a definition of the concepts of gender and sexuality.

**Gender and Sexual Orientation.** Key to discerning the nature of gender and sexuality is the distinction between attributions of the nature and nurture debate. The term sex refers to the biological and physical traits associated with genetic and phenotypic expressions of male and female. Sexuality can refer to the expression of sex traits or to the expression of sexual orientation which is a complex combination of biological, psychological/emotional, and socio-cultural factors. Sexual orientation is an “enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes. Sexual orientation also refers to a person’s sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviors, and membership in a community of others who share those attractions” (American Psychological Association, 2008, p. 1). In this analysis, sexuality will be used interchangeably with sexual orientation. Conversely, gender refers to the social construction of identities that relate to roles/counter-roles, social scripts, and the cultural meanings associated with being a male or female. The influence of social, cultural and
historical factors across these dimensions intersecting with power contribute to the
collection of gender. The terms male and female will be used to refer to the biological
sex of an individual which is determined by physical and genetic factors while
masculinity and femininity are terms of gender which relates to cultural conceptions that
have diverse expressions cross-culturally.

The nature of gender representations are of interest to this study. Gender is further
developed as the social construction of identities associated with socio-cultural attributions
of what it means to be male and female, including the norms of behavior, but also
symbolic and semiotic understandings of those identities. Traditionally, the focus of
gender research has been on the concept of sex roles associated with distinctions in the
gendered divisions of labor (Chafetz, 2006; Connell, 2005). However, drawing from the
large contribution of feminist scholarship, conceptions of gender have shifted away from
the discussion of “sex roles” due to the refutation of biologically deterministic
approaches (Chafetz, 2006; Connell, 2005). The term “sex roles” obfuscates the socially
constructed nature of gender in that sex is a biologically referenced concept while roles
are a socially constructed concept. This masks the great diversity of experiences within
populations and between social groups in terms of cultural understandings of gender
while presenting the biological differences as a source for culturally constructed
differences. However, the concept of roles still provides a plausible analytical tool for
understanding the constructed values, norms, beliefs, and behaviors that give meaning
and organization to human interactions grounded in gendered positionalities with the
caveat that social and cultural constructions are the source of gendered differences
(Chafetz, 2006). The terms masculine and feminine are used to describe the gendered
distinctions related to males and females. Connell (1985; 1997; 2005) has proposed multiple expressions of masculinities intersect with relationships of power. Key to understanding masculinities then is the socio-historical context in which identities are situated. The concept of hegemonic masculinity is associated with the privileging of masculine identity across human relations. While individuals may experience subordinated positioning based upon other aspects of identity, such as race, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, or ability, the masculine aspects of the identity are a privileged position. To this end, hegemonic masculinity serves as an idealized form of masculine privilege or superiority in a Gramscian sense, which is based upon situated socio-historical contexts of class domination (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men (p. 832).

In this sense, hegemonic masculinity operates through legitimacy reified in the culture and in institutions.

While domestic and gendered violence can be seen as a means of regulation and control of the gendered order, Connell suggests that violence is not necessary for the regulation of these positions. Much as Bourdieu conceives of habitus, symbolic power and symbolic violence, the positions are normalized in practice, yet, force employed as a means of regulation is legitimated. As will be discussed shortly in the conceptions of violence, Connell’s use of the term violence is based on a definition of direct violence. A broader more inclusive conception of violence would suggest that cultural and symbolic forms of domination resulting in oppressive and unequal social and institutional access
amounts to harm and is thus a form of violence. Still, Connell’s contribution to an understanding of the socially constructed nature and the multiple dimensions of masculinity intersecting with power and privilege is informative. The contribution of feminist scholars to the interrogation of patriarchal systems will be further discussed shortly in the section on *Threats to Democracy*.

Katz (1999; 2006) provides a model for understanding the relationship of masculinity to aggression and violence. Masculinity as Katz defines it is a practice and performance that is socially constructed in the values, norms, beliefs, and prescriptive behaviors (or scripts) associated with culture. The “tough guise” is a façade that is essentially a performance of a narrowly defined, extremely limited view of masculinity and manhood characterized by stereotypes associated with strength, power, stature, masculinity, individualism, assertiveness, action, aggression, ruggedness and toughness. Hypermasculinity then is an exaggeration of these traits in the idealized construct. This narrow construction of idealized masculinity is both unattainable and undesirable according to Katz. Furthermore, rigid socio-cultural controls that regulate alternative expressions of masculinity and manhood diminish the full expression of human potential for men and have implications across individual, relational, and social dimensions for both men and women. Homophobia, misogyny, and violence, including the threat of violence, act as regulators that “box” men and women into limited visions of masculinity and femininity. Homophobia can be defined as the irrational or unreasonable fear and hatred of homosexuals and homosexuality. Misogyny is the hatred, dislike, and/or mistrust of women. The links between violence, homophobia, and misogyny can be seen in the high rates of domestic and gendered violence in American society (Katz, 2006, p.
Direct violence, the threat of violence, verbal assaults, and sexual harassment are means for regulating and enforcing the dominant paradigm of male privilege. As will be discussed shortly, the inequities in access to social and material goods based upon gender amounts to a form of structural violence (Galtung, 1969). Also, reification of these patterns of hierarchy and privilege that legitimate domination based upon gender amounts to cultural and/or symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1990; Galtung, 1990). According to Katz’s model, homophobia also operates on the devaluing of stereotypically feminine traits that regulate male attitudes and behaviors, limiting alternative expressions of masculinity and further contribute to a devaluing of women. As white male privilege has been challenged by social movements through the era of civil rights in the United States, a backlash has sought to maintain the patriarchal and privileged positions of males in society in which this backlash is related to the growth of the hypermasculine ideal. The costs of this ideal are seen in the emotional and psychological health of individuals, the relational costs of isolation and disassociation, and the social costs of high rates of domestic and interrelational violence. Katz further suggests that the epidemic of violence in the United States is largely a gendered issue in that males are predominantly the perpetrators of direct violence, with both men and women as the victims of that violence. In Katz’s model, the media is a strong socializing factor in constructing images and representations of an idealized masculinity that is powerful, aggressive, violent, and heterosexual while openly homophobic and misogynistic. This is illustrated across various genres and popular media forms, including movies, television, music, and video games. The optimistic aspect of Katz’s work is that gender is a social construction, and thus violent expressions of masculinity are learned, culturally embedded practices. Much
of Katz’s work has focused upon a critical media literacy to counteract the negative representations of violent masculinity in the media and to empower men to construct more full expressions humanness.

Connell (1998) has discussed the links between masculinity and globalization. Gender is understood as the construction of both masculine and feminine identities not in isolation but reciprocally as a “gender system” (p.7). If gender is considered a system rather than merely an individual expression, then the gender system can be applied on a global macrosocial dimension. The institutions such as national governments and transnational corporations that comprise the spheres of globalization (international relations, international trade, and global markets) are gendered as related to patriarchal organizational patterns. This gendered pattern or superstructure is constitutive of a gendered order. “The term can be defined as the structure of relationships that interconnect the gender regimes of institutions, and the gender orders of local society, on a world scale” (p. 7). The gender order is maintenance of dominant patterns of access to political, economic and social resources and constitutive of power.

Furthermore, in War and Gender, Goldstein (2001) has shown that biological differences between males and females are insufficient factors for explaining the prevalence of war, violence, and aggression by men. Rather, the prevalence of male participation in war and acts of violence is potentially a “reverse causality” of living within a society that is influenced by a war system which is linked to the purpose of controlling access to resources. Betty Reardon (1985) supports this conclusion with her discussion in Sexism and the War System which identifies the preponderance of war and militarism as a condition of contemporary social life that influences the roles and
expectations associated with gender. Reardon’s work in peace education will be further explored in the section on educational implications. The discussion will now turn to an exposition of violence.

D. Violence

A general definition of violence is typically grounded in direct forms of harm enacted in human interpersonal and intergroup relations. This is the conception of violence that is predominant in the literature on media and video game violence that investigates direct, personal actions related to viewing violent media or playing violent video games (Anderson et al, 2010; 2003; Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Bushman & Huesman, 2001; Huesman, 2010). In this study, the concept of violence is conceived from a more broad and multidimensional perspective that recognizes structural, cultural, and symbolic dimension of violence. The work Johan Galtung (1969; 1990) will provide a basis for a rejection of narrow conceptions of violence and an expanded definition that provides a framework or typology for understanding the multidimensional aspects of violence.

But first, Arendt (1969) has defined violence in distinction to the often conflated meanings of the terms power, strength, force, and authority. Power is associated with the human capacity “to act in concert”, this is a form of collective agency. Power is Arendt’s conception does not rest in the individual, but human association and cooperation. Strength then is conceived as being in the individual domain, “unequivocally something in the singular, an individual entity” (p.45). Strength is a property or capacity of the “object or person”, it is an individual resource. Force is distinguished from violence, as a “force of nature” or a “force of circumstance”. It is a form of momentum associated with
“physical or social movements”. Authority is then defined as “recognition by those who are asked to obey” absent of coercion or persuasion. It is linked to the kind of respect for position or institution in which one occupies a place of authority. Violence according to Arendt can be distinguished by its “instrumental nature”. It is a means that requires justification, but it is destructive of authority when used. Consider, “Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power’s disappearance…Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it” (p.47).

Galtung (1969) links the definition of peace to a conception of violence. Generally, peace is the “absence of violence” (p. 168). Traditional conceptions of violence involves the “somatic incapacitation, or deprivation of health, alone (with killing as the extreme form) at the hands of an actor [sic] who intends [sic] this to be the consequence” (p. 168). Galtung rejects this notion as too narrow and includes dimensions that acknowledge the harm to human capacities and potentials as points of difference to realizations of actions. Galtung’s definition of violence is a rejection and broadening of the basic notion of violence to include structural (1969) and cultural (1990) dimensions as well as direct forms. Violence as an avoidable harm is the basis from which Galtung begins an explication (p. 169). A key distinction is to recognize psychological forms of violence as well as physical forms. Psychological forms of violence include the nature of threats of violence which limit people’s capacities and potential through a specter of fear and are manifest in physical (i.e. diminished health due to anxiety and depression), emotional, and mental harm. The nature of coercion and force then constitute harm to human potential. Physical forms of violence are constitutive of the traditional definitions that include such acts as killing, maiming, and inflicting pain/misery. Within this initial
explication of typologies of violence (1969) are further distinctions including personal/direct dimensions and structural dimensions. Personal domains focus upon interpersonal relations and result in somatic/physical and/or psychological harms while structural dimensions consider the nature of limits to human potential based upon unequal access to social goods that result in harms, these can be both physical and psychological as well. Cultural violence has been added to these dimensions and is defined as “those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence – exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics) – that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence” (1990, p. 291).

Cultural violence is the justification or legitimation of direct or structural harm to four basic domains of needs: survival needs, well-being needs, identity needs, and freedom needs (see Table 1 below, 1990, p.292). Of interest to this study is what Galtung suggests is the focus of violence studies, “the use of violence and legitimization of that use” (p.291). Internalization of violence as an appropriate and valued means as exemplified by attitudes supportive of the use of violence to solve problems and exert one’s goals will be interrogated in the case study of *GTA IV*.

Table 1: Galtung’s (1969) Typology of Violence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survival needs: mortality</th>
<th>Well-being needs: morbidity</th>
<th>Identity needs: alienation</th>
<th>Freedom needs: repression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct violence</td>
<td>Killing</td>
<td>Maiming, Siege, Sanctions, Misery</td>
<td>Desocialization, Resocialization, Secondary citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural Violence</td>
<td>Exploitation A</td>
<td>Exploitation B</td>
<td>Penetration, Segmentation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The harm to human potential through the legitimation or justification of domination as described by Galtung’s concept of cultural violence is amenable to Pierre Bourdieu’s (2001; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991) concept of symbolic violence. Violence in this sense refers to the harm of hierarchy and domination that are normalized and legitimated in symbolic forms. It is symbolic in the sense that language, knowledge, and meanings are employed or embedded with interests that reify the dominant culture. As discussed previously, the cultural capital of a dominant group or groups is privileged and is convertible to other forms of capital such as economic advantage, political control, social status, and power. The unconscious nature of domination in this form of violence is exemplified by such phenomena as blue collar workers voting against labor interests or women exhibiting attitudes supportive of gendered violence through victim blaming rationalizations. The unconscious nature of domination is embedded in mental or cognitive structures and “misrecognized” as natural or normal.

What I put under the term of "recognition," then, is the set of fundamental, prereflexive assumptions that social agents engage by the mere fact of taking the world for granted, of accepting the world as it is, and of finding it natural because their mind is constructed according to cognitive structures that are issued out of the very structures of the world. What I understand by misrecognition certainly does not fall under the category of influence…. It is not a logic of "communicative interaction" where some make propaganda aimed at others that is operative here. It is much more powerful and insidious than that: being born in a social world, we accept a whole range of postulates, axioms, which go without saying and require no inculcating… Of all forms of "hidden persuasion," the most implacable is the one exerted, quite simply, by the order of things (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 272).

In essence individuals are unconsciously complicit in their own domination through implicit consent to a social order that is viewed as normal or natural. Ideologies operate
in this domain to reinforce such patterns. For example, meritocracy which purports success or opportunity is given based upon merit or desert grounded in intelligence, skills, or knowledge is taken for granted as the mechanism that operates in many capitalist societies, yet the nature of what it means to have knowledge, skills or intelligence and the privileges that are associated with developing those capacities based upon unequal access to education or experiences are not interrogated. As will be discussed in the section on video game research, automaticity of knowledge and skills through game play (Gee, 2003; 2005; 2007) is cause for concern when considering the ideological nature of the images and messages that employ representations of culture, identity, violence, and power in violent video games.

E. Democratic Ethics

John Dewey states in his classic work Democracy and Education (1916), “A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience”. Dewey (1937) has also suggested that the ideal of democracy is “a frame of reference”; as such it must be viewed as an ethic which can serve as an ideal that guides human associations and relations to each other and to the world. So then, the exposition of the democratic ethic should include defining the values and principles of equality, liberty, and justice.

Robert Dahl’s assertion of intrinsic equality as the foundation for democracy and human political engagement is consistent with the moral concept of respect for life.
Instead we mean to express a moral judgment about human beings; we intend to say what we believe *ought* to be. One such moral judgment might be put this way: “We ought to regard the good of every human being as *intrinsically* equal to that of any other.” Employing the words of the Declaration, as a *moral* judgment we insist that one person’s life, liberty, and happiness is not intrinsically superior or inferior to the life, liberty, and happiness of any other. Consequently, we say, we ought to treat all persons as if they possess equal claims to life, liberty, happiness, and other fundamental goods and interests. Let me call this moral judgment the principle of *intrinsic equality* (Dahl, 1998, p. 65).

Intrinsic equality is Dahl’s justification for “why it is reasonable to commit ourselves to political equality among citizens of a democratic state” (p.64). Rather, it is the statement, “We ought to regard the good of every human being as intrinsically equal to that of any other”, which has the potential to provide an overarching ethic or moral judgment that moves beyond the realm of state and citizen and can connect democracy to the ethics of human rights. Within this description of equality is the respect for human dignity which must guide human association and interaction, and is the foundation of a pluralistic humanist perspective of human rights that ensure equality and liberty.

A simple definition of liberty is freedom. But what is freedom? Negative conceptions of liberty assert that it is freedom from harm, which is an absence of coercion or force. Negative liberty is generally related to private spheres in which individuals have private zones for living as he/she sees fit. Extending the concept of liberty, positive forms of liberty express the necessity of public spheres for participation that allows for self-determination within a conception of the sociability of human lives, that is individual humans cannot be divorced from the social milieu. Human associations and interrelations are the substrate in which people are born and live and it is in human social relations that the individual develops his/her capacities and potentials. As Arendt (1963) and Macpherson (1977, as cited in Snauwaert, 1992) both suggest, positive liberty
represents the promise of freedom that promotes self-determination through participation in public spheres. According to Macpherson, the aim of liberal democracy is the ethical value that “the equal right of every man and woman to the full development and use of his or her capabilities” (p.114). Arendt posits that participation in public life is the place where freedom is exercised in contrast to libertarian conceptions of freedom that suggest the private zones are places for self-determination. For Arendt, seclusion and removal of the self from human sociability is counter to the expression of liberty. Macpherson also suggests that for true participatory democracy to exist, socio-cultural shifts are requisite to broadening conceptions of human nature beyond market driven ideologies that purport competition and individual interests as the basis of human nature and human relations.

If all humans are endowed with an intrinsic equality and a right to liberty, how does democracy advance a respect for human life and dignity within human interactions and associations? How can an individual be free within the social milieu and does not the society bound the individual and limit his or her expression or self-determination? As stated previously, the individual or self cannot be separated from the social milieu. Rather, the self is defined by one’s relation to others; identity and self are formed by association through social and cultural bonds. For instance, one is defined by familial relations and through the common language and culture of her/his society. Democracy is the means by which humans freely associate and communicate. Liberty is practiced in the public realm through participation (Snauwaert, 1992). Democracy provides a means for a way of life that strives to achieve peace, which is a means for resolving conflict with an absence of violence and the promotion of more just conditions that ameliorate structural and cultural forms of violence. For Dewey (1937), the democratic ethic extends beyond
the political realm into the “economic, domestic, international, religious, cultural, economic, and political” (p. 125).

So then, the democratic citizen must be endowed with a sense of duty and ethic which stands for justice in the disposition of the social goods when government and society do not uphold the standard of equality and liberty. Justice is based upon rights, rights that acknowledge the inherent dignity and intrinsic equality of all people. Cornel West (2004, p. 68) states that “Democracy is always a movement of an energized public to make elites responsible – it is at its most basic foundation the taking back of one’s power in the face of the misuse of elite power…it is more a dynamic striving and collective movement than a static order or stationary status quo”. For West, the democratic spirit is the critical consciousness and authentic expression of humanity, one that extends to all human beings regardless of position in society.

Thus, democracy is a way of life, an ideal, or a frame of reference that recognizes the intrinsic equality and the inherent dignity of all human beings. The conceptions of self-determination and participation are vital to the expression of liberty and equality and form the basis of human rights in the cosmopolitan understanding of humanity. This understanding and disposition are requisite of the survival of the democratic ethic in a world that is interconnected ecologically and economically, and increasingly socially and geo-politically. The next section will discuss in greater detail the threats to democracy and the necessity for a citizenry that has the capacity for a critical consciousness and vigor to respond to those threats and maintain the promise of democracy.
F. Ideological and Societal Threats to Democracy

Democracy has been defined as an ethic grounded in human rights that acknowledge the intrinsic equality of all people, the freedom of self-determination, and the principle of participation. Furthermore, the Deweyan conception of democracy expounds a lifeway of shared interests, free communication, and growth. More narrowly, democracy has been defined as a system of rights that ensure the equal protection and equal claim of all human beings within the prescribed bounds of a community, i.e. the modern nation-state. Within the necessities and exigencies of modern statehood and political process, the potential for power to become concentrated is a threat to the perpetuation of democratic ethics and the endeavor for a democratic existence. Likewise, modern human societies are structured in hierarchical and stratified organizational patterns embedded in the economic, socio-cultural, and political milieu. To understand the threats to the application and propagation of democracy, social forces such as patriarchy, capitalism, militarism, racism, ethnocentrism and xenophobia, as well as indoctrination must be considered.

a. Patriarchy. Sylvia Walby (1989, p. 214) defines patriarchy as “a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women”. Social structures refer to “institutionalized features of society which stretch across time and space, which involve the dual aspects of reflexive human action and of their continuity over and above the individuals involved in any one instant” (p. 220). In society, males possess an empowered and privileged position in relation to females. The position of male privilege extends across socio-cultural, economic, and political structures and functions ideologically as well. Patriarchy is a conception of the dynamic
power relations between men and women that develops and changes over time and space, yet consistently privilege males and is represented in beliefs that men are valued and legitimate leaders across institutions. Likewise, multiple positionalities within society also interact with and impact the nature of patriarchy and the function of multiple oppressions. For instance a working class, homosexual African–American woman may experience racism and heterosexism as more salient forms of oppression and thus have a very different experience of the patriarchal structure of society in comparison to a white, middle class heterosexual woman, yet both women are impacted by a valuing or privileging of males in the dominant culture.

In terms of how the patriarchal system privileges men relationally, Walby further defines the system of patriarchy as being a derivative of six structures. These structures are “a patriarchal mode of production in which women’s labour is expropriated by their husbands; patriarchal relations within waged labour; the patriarchal state; male violence; patriarchal relations in sexuality; and patriarchal culture” (p.220). Both the patriarchal mode of production and the patriarchal relations with waged labor confer an oppressive economic relation. The patriarchal mode of production involves the division of labor in the family and household, while the patriarchal relations with waged labor discusses paid work. As Tong (2009, p. 119) suggests, “Worldwide, women’s oppression is strongly related to the fact that women’s work, be it home or outside the home, is still unpaid, underpaid, disvalued, a state of affairs that largely explains women’s lower status and power nearly everywhere”.

Likewise, in relation to the state, women are under-represented in positions of authority and leadership such as in the judiciary, politics, the military, and the police.
Under-representation results in less power in the decision making apparatus of the state. Walby also discusses male violence as a regulating force in which “it is significant in shaping women’s actions, and therefore may be considered to have causal power” (p. 225). The threat as much as the act of male violence, be it rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment or sexual assault, is a source of male power, misogyny functions ideologically as a means for legitimating gendered inequality. Homophobia also functions within this gendered system as a means of regulation as previously discussed. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) point out, males who benefit from patriarchy despite a limited, passive form of compliance or enacting “a strong version of masculine dominance” (p. 832) are complicit in the gendered order and contribute to the persistence of male privilege. All humans have the right to be free from harm by others and the society is culpable for the proliferation and sanction of persistent patterns of violence that are supported by attitudes and values in the culture. Likewise, patriarchal relations in sexuality and patriarchal culture narrowly define femininity and masculinity, and thus create inequities in socio-cultural power that are reinforced in the media, through religious practice, in education, and the arts and leisure.

The existence of patriarchy is a threat to democracy due to the inherent inequities in access that relationally privileges men to the social goods. The principle of intrinsic equality recognizes the inherent equality and dignity of all human beings, men and women. Thus any ideology, culture, or social structure, whether de jure or de facto, that privileges one group in society over another violates the democratic ethic and the principle of intrinsic equality and self-determination. The patriarchal system is thus a hierarchical and unjust system of organization that stifles growth and human expression.
and does not adhere to democratic principles or human rights. Of importance to this study are the representations of patriarchy in the video game space and the reification/legitimation of these patterns in the construction of identity and society as well as the nature of violence in relation to these patterns. The representation and normalization of males in positions of power and authority will be investigated. This power and authority associated with the gender system contribute to a form of hegemonic masculinity that has been globalized. Globalization of hegemonic masculinity is grounded in the ideology of neo-liberalism and institutionalized in the corporate/governmental agencies. “We might propose, then that the hegemonic form of masculinity in the current world gender order is the masculinity associated with those who control its dominant institutions: the business executives who operate in global markets, and the political executives who interact (and in many contexts, merge) with them” (Connell, 1998, p. 16). The discussion will now turn to the capitalist system.

b. Capitalism, militarism, and propaganda. The economic inequities outlined in the discussion of patriarchy persist in the capitalist system. Yet, capitalism itself has much that must be considered. Robert Dahl discusses in his book, *On Democracy*, the “antagonistic symbiosis” or enduring conflict of capitalism and democracy. Capitalism has been associated with the rise of the modern nation-state and the development of polyarchal or representative democracy. “Here the record is amazingly ambiguous. Polyarchal democracy has existed *only* in countries with predominantly market-capitalist economies and never (or at most briefly) in countries with predominantly nonmarket economies” (Dahl, 1998, p. 166). Dahl suggests that the market-capitalist economy is favorable to representative government due to long term economic growth. In turn,
economic growth produces surplus for public investments such as education and infrastructure. Also, economic growth reduces social and political conflict that arise due to competition for resources, “when conflicts do arise, growth provides more resources that are available for a mutually satisfactory settlement in which each side gains something” (p. 168). Likewise, economic growth has historically created the rise of a large middle class of property owners with surplus wealth and income for intellectual and leisure pursuits.

Yet as Dahl points out, “economic growth is not unique to democratic countries, nor is economic stagnation unique to nondemocratic nations. Indeed, there appears to be no link between economic growth and a country’s type of government or regime” (p.170). Just that economic growth is a favorable context for the rise of representative democracy. As in the rise of the United States, prior to industrialization, “the economy was highly decentralized (more, indeed, than it was to become with industrialization); it gave political leaders little access to its resources…a decentralized economy that helps create a nation of independent citizens is highly favorable for the development and maintenance of democratic institutions” (p.171). The democratic ethic is founded on principles of self-determination and participation. The essence of Dahl’s discussion of the positive factors of decentralized market-capitalism hinges upon the expansion of distributive mechanisms that extend economic and political empowerment to increasing numbers of citizens. However, within this early expansion of democratic ethics to more citizens, the system was also founded on patriarchal, classist, and racist structures that limited the expansion of rights and freedoms based upon gender, social status, and skin color, a legacy that continues to exist.
As such, capitalism has a contradictory nature to the democratic ethic and is defined by the accumulation and concentration of wealth and the rights of property.

Heilbroner (1985, p. 33) states:

We must begin by investigating the single most important element in capitalism – an element visible in the logic enacted by the world of business but originating deep within the system as an essential and indeed primary aspect of its behavioral orientation. This is the driving need to extract wealth from the productive activities of society in the form of capital.

The organization of society in a capitalist economy is geared towards the production of wealth and in turn to produce more wealth from the wealth that exists. “This is the use of wealth in various forms, not as an end in itself, but as a means for gathering more wealth” (p. 34-35). Capital refers to the transitory, dynamic process of increasing wealth from wealth rather than referring to a material or tangible product, such as goods or money. Heilbroner employs the Marxian formula of M-C-M' described as the “continuous transformation of capital-as-money into capital-as-commodities, followed by a retransformation of capital-as-commodities into capital-as-more-money… the repetitive, expansive metamorphosis through which “capital” manifests itself” (p. 36).

Capital is a social process or activity based upon social relations and the protection of property. Property is defined as a legal standing that allows owners to “refuse to allow their possessions to be used by others” or what is termed the “right of exclusion” (p. 38). Heilbroner continues: “The idea of capital as a social relationship leads directly to the core of that relationship: domination” (p. 38). The form of domination enacted by capital is different than that of an authoritarian state. The power that capital holds is relative to the “right of exclusion” or the power to withhold a resource or good from those in need of that good, whereas a state has the power to use
authoritative force to meet ends. The domination that capital enacts requires the social
context of dependency, through the exclusion to the means of subsistence.

Only by understanding that the seemingly concrete entity of capital is in
fact the representation of this relationship of dependency between two
different categories of social existence can the significance of capital be
grasped, and with it the behavioral influence that it exerts as a central
constitutive element in the nature of the system erected in its name
(Heilbroner, 1985, p. 42).

Wealth then is the accumulation of social and natural goods in the control of the owners,
in terms of the right of exclusion, control over access to those goods. Wealth then equates
to power, the power to control access and the power of coercion, in other words,
“possession confers on its owners the ability to direct and mobilize the activities of
society…This is power” (p. 45). Power is understood to mean the ability to “command
or control the behavior of others” (p.46). Power used to organize and structure society for
the purpose of economic growth that leads to accumulation and concentration of wealth
then, is a form of what Heilbroner defined as domination, which is based on the
“structured inequality” of the members of society.

At the moment, however, it is enough to recognize that the drive to amass
wealth is inextricable from power, and incomprehensible except as a form
of domination. The social formation of capitalism must therefore be seen
in the first instance as a regime comparable to regimes of military force,
religious conviction, imperial beliefs, and the like. Capitalism is the
regime of capital, the form of rulership we find when power takes the
remarkable aspect of domination, by those who control access to the
means of production, of the great majority who must gain “employment”
(Heilbroner, p. 52).

Macpherson supports this assertion that power is commensurate with wealth and
that capital is concerned with the maximization of wealth production rather than the
“maximizing” of intrinsic equality and liberty. “It lies in the fact that liberal-democratic
society is a capitalist market society, and that the latter by its very nature compels a
continual net transfer of part of the power of some men to others, thus diminishing rather than maximizing the equal individual freedom to use and develop one’s natural capacities” (Macpherson, p. 10). The transfer of power is described as a contradiction of self-determination as one’s power to develop capacities to the fullest are impinged.

Dahl agrees to an extent, in that “market-capitalism brought gains for some; but as it always does, it also brought harm to others” (p. 173). Dahl suggests that market-capitalism requires “extensive government regulation and intervention to alter its harmful effects” for the continuation of a stable democracy. However, the inequalities of the market-capitalist system with the concentration of wealth and power impacts the ability of representative forms of government to act in the best interest of all the people due to inequalities in access to the social goods, including access to the government and political apparatus. Dahl refers to “the inequalities of the distribution of political resources” as a major threat to the capacity of polyarchal democracy to meet the demands of political equality. By political resources, Dahl means “everything to which a person or group has access that they can use to influence, directly or indirectly, the conduct of other persons” (p. 177) Just as Heilbroner had suggested, the accumulation of wealth is commensurate with the accumulation and concentration of power. Inequality exists due to the unequal distribution of wealth and power, and thus reifies the social and political inequality of the citizenry.

Capitalism by its very nature of consolidation of power and wealth, limits the access and control of many in the hands of the few. In polyarchal democracies, where participation is limited to voting for representatives, the inequalities associated with wealth and power contribute to political and social inequality. Thus capitalism as an
economic system that structures and organizes society violates the basic tenets of the
democratic ethic. The corporatization of business interests that has grown from
industrialization has further reinforced inequalities and access to the social goods, as
corporate entities that are structured in oligarchic bureaucracies infiltrate the fabric of
modern life. Intrinsic equality and self-determination are assailed by the underlying
nature of capitalism to consolidate, accumulate, and concentrate wealth in the few
through the labor of the many. As suggested by Dahl, this translates to the inequities in
political resources and violates the democratic principles of self-determination and
participation. Likewise, within the system of rights, capitalism infringes upon the equal
rights of all people to liberty and freedom from harm.

Neoliberalism. Ideologically, the current trends in globalization of markets and
the expansion of transnational corporations are grounded in neo-liberalism. Neo-
liberalism is focused upon economic and social policies associated with privatization and
deregulation and grounded in the language of free markets, finance, and efficiency, as
well as consumer choice and individual autonomy. Drawing from classic liberalism, neo-
liberalism incorporates the ideology of individualism celebrating the moral worth of the
individual, with an emphasis on individual initiative, personal responsibility, self-
reliance, an absence of governmental intervention, and a rejection of the public good or
public sphere (Bailey & Gayle, 2003, p. 32-33). Incongruously couched within this
ideology of laissez-faire capitalism and individual liberty that promotes a meritocracy
based on initiative and enterprise, neo-liberalism and the trends of globalization which
began with the era of colonialism have also coincided with the rise of corporatization and
bureaucratic rationalization. Democratic ethics do not guide this association in which
Corporations are hierarchical and oligarchic in nature while often operating transnationally beyond the authority of any one polity. The corporate agenda can be characterized by the profit incentive, placing value in materialist conceptions of goods and products and increasingly commodifying all aspects of life. Competition is considered the natural condition of existence and meritocracy the justifying/legitimating ideology that explains the existing inequities (Chomsky, 1999; McChesney, 1999).

**Militarism.** To maintain a system that constitutes de facto inequality as illustrated in patriarchal social organizations and the capitalist economic system which result in inequities in the distribution of social and economic goods, democratic potentials are enfeebled or undermined, unintentionally or deliberately. Two mechanisms that work to this end are militarism and indoctrination/propaganda. First, militarism, as defined by Chalmers Johnson (2004, p. 23-24), is “the phenomenon by which a nation’s armed services come to put their institutional preservation ahead of achieving national security or even a commitment to the integrity of the governmental structure of which they are a part”. Dahl suggests that in a democracy, civilians must have an overriding control of the military for democracy to exist and to endure. However, the lines between the military and the corporate military industry are blurred. The connection of the military to capitalist enterprise is a spurious consolidation of political, economic, and socio-cultural power that reorganizes and restructures society. Katherine Lutz (2002) provides an articulate summation of the militarization of society as a process that:
Involves an intensification of the labor and resources allocated to military purposes, including the shaping of other institutions in synchrony with military goals. Militarization is simultaneously a discursive process, involving a shift in general societal beliefs and values in ways necessary to legitimate the use of force, the organization of large standing armies and their leaders, and the higher taxes and tributes to pay for them. Militarization is not only connected to the obvious increase of militant nationalisms and militant fundamentalisms but also to the less visible deformation of human potentials into hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality, and to the shaping of national histories that glorify and legitimate military action (p. 723).

Militarism operates conjointly with nationalism and unquestioning or uncritical patriotism and is marred by ethnocentric and xenophobic assertions and attitudes. The goals and objectives of the military-industrial complex impact the value system, altering participatory dialogue and freedom of thought as luxuries in an unsafe world where the exigencies and necessities of security and social order trump liberty and justice. The hierarchical and authoritarian practices of the military structure do not adhere to democratic ethics and principles such as equality, self-determination, liberty, and dialogue or dissent.

**Propaganda/public relations/media.** Sprung from the origins of the military propaganda machine of the First World War, the modern public relations sector has at its core the control and manufacture of cultural values and norms that influence and drive human behavior and consumption. M. Crispin Miller (2005) describes the early originator of the field of public relations, Edward Bernay’s view of “public opinion” as a social force that required management by skilled and trained experts. Bernay’s self-described vision is that “The world informed by public relations will be but a smoothly functioning society, where all are guided imperceptibly throughout our lives by a benign elite of rational manipulators” (p. 16). The public relations industry would foster the values of
conspicuous consumption and materialism while functioning as a form of social control, indoctrination, and regulation. “Just as during the war, propaganda would at once exalt the nation and advance the civilizing process, teaching immigrants and other folks of modest means how to transform themselves, through smart consumption, into happy and presentable Americans” (Miller, p. 13). Just as Heilbroner’s discussion that power in capitalism is constructed through coercive mechanisms of dependency and consent, public relations and propaganda function in the corporate-capitalist regime as a form of coercive power, rather than a form of force or might. Herman and Chomsky (1988) discuss the concept as the “manufacture of consent” in which mediated discourses channel public debate away from dissent and critical understanding towards a malaise of disinterest in the political and exuberance towards the banal. Ideas and knowledge are disseminated through mass mediated culture and related to the façade of pleasure and happiness in what Henry Giroux describes as “public pedagogy”.

As a performative practice, pedagogy is at work in a variety of educational sites – including popular culture, television and cable networks, magazines, the internet, churches, and the press – where culture works to secure identities; it does the bridging work for negotiating the relationship between knowledge, pleasure, and values, and renders authority both crucial and problematic in legitimating particular social practices, communities, and forms of power. As a moral and political practice, the concept of public pedagogy points to the enormous ways in which popular and media culture construct meanings, desires, and investments that play such an influential role in how students view themselves, others, and the larger world (Giroux, 2002, p. 1153).

The purpose of public relations and corporatist media is indoctrination, coercion, and the “manufacture of consent” or a legitimation of undemocratic forces that are based upon elite interests rather than public interests. Attempts to influence and control human behavior through deceitful practices infringes on the conception of self-determination and
the freedom of mind, thought, choice, dialogue and debate. Within this construction of culture and consent, people are viewed as consumers of culture rather than as producers of culture and knowledge. The commodification of human beings is a violation of the values of equality and liberty, human dignity and respect for life. Implicated in the discussion of indoctrination of capitalist and elitist dominant culture is the institution of education and schooling (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Gintis & Bowles, 1976). But a counterpoint, education can be a source of empowerment and agency, where students and citizens develop capacities, experiences, and understandings of themselves and the world.

The threats to democracy are multiple and varied. Social structures such as patriarchy, racism, and ethnocentrism organize the societal resources and goods with the intersection of race, ethnicity, class, and gender. While the list in this discussion was by no means complete, these are the predominant forms of domination that persist in society. These forces all interact within the regime of patriarchy, capitalism and the mechanisms of mass mediated culture to produce a multiplicity of threats to the cosmopolitan vision and ideal of democracy. The ideal is one of optimism and potential that elevates the human condition and compels a vision of growth. The next section will discuss the nature of video games as a form of propaganda that is infused with the dominant cultural values and ideologies that legitimate a worldview grounded in neo-liberalism, individualism, meritocracy, and intrinsic superiority. This followed by a discussion of media literacy in education as an amelioration of these forces that have the potential to serve the democratic ideals. A further discussion of media literacy within the scope of education for democracy, pluralism, and peace will be further explicated in the final chapter on implications for education.
G. Video Game Studies

Henry Jenkins (2004) has identified two predominant trends in video game studies. The first is the “effects” based research that is common in the discipline of psychology. In such effects based research, violence is operationalized as a direct form of interpersonal action or behavior resulting in physical or psychological harm. These studies mirror the discourse in media effects literature spanning much of the second half of the twentieth century. Studies show links between violent video game play and violent or aggressive behaviors and affect. “Five decades of research into the effects of exposure to violent television and movies have produced a thoroughly documented and highly sophisticated set of research findings” (Anderson & Bushman, 2001). Research into the correlation of video game violence and other forms of media violence upon aggression has also been established. Violent video games are linked to increases in aggressive behavior, aggressive cognition or thoughts, aggressive affect (feelings of anger and hostility), and physiological arousal, as well as decreases in prosocial behavior (Anderson et al, 2003; 2010; Anderson and Bushman, 2001, 2002; Bartholow & Anderson, 2001; Bartholow et al, 2005; Huesman, 2010). Likewise, Funk et al (2004) have shown links between violent video games and desensitization and moral evaluation in children in which exposure to violent video games results in “lower empathy and stronger proviolence attitudes…In violent video games, empathy is not adaptive, moral evaluation is often non-existent, but proviolence attitudes and behaviors are repeatedly rewarded”.

A second line of study is the “humanist” approach. A general emphasis of the humanist approach is to investigate the meanings of representations in video games and the game play. Within this approach, there appear to be two camps, one that focuses upon
human agency and the capacity of gamers to create their own meanings of the
2005; 2006) exemplify this approach. Other research, however, has focused upon
ideological analysis and the reproduction of cultural systems of meaning. Studies in this
camp have shown that the images and messages in video games contain the elements of
patriarchy in which hyper-masculinity is reinforced along with stereotypic images of
female characters. Male characters predominate throughout the video games in which the
majority of “heroes” are male characters. Males are represented as action oriented, using
a multitude of weapons, with unique powers and abilities, and have large muscles and are
powerful. In comparison, female characters are typically portrayed as sexualized, as more
attractive, some innocent, yet sexual, others as overtly promiscuous, less powerful and
more scantily dressed than men (Beasley & Standley, 2002; Miller & Summers, 2007).
As discussed in Chapter One, Barrett (2006) and Leonard (2009; 2006a; 2006b) have
illustrated the reproduction of racial stereotypes as well as dominant discourses and
practices about race and violence that legitimate white supremacy and racist social and
political patterns in previous versions of GTA. Both authors mention the nature of
sexuality and the gendered patterns of oppression perpetuated by GTA, but neither
discusses the issues of patriarchy, sexism, homophobia, or gendered violence with
specificity or detail. Leonard (2009) did discuss the role of GTA in perpetuating myths of
Black masculinity in which themes of violence and hyper-sexuality interlock to
exacerbate dominant cultural fears of Black men. Paul Barrett also exposes the
underlying Neoliberal assumptions that promote a “sense of the public sphere as a site of
danger” in which the public space is one of chaos and individual’s act on competing self-
interests. This is significant to the discussion of ideological assumptions based in the neo-liberal globalist agenda that devalues the public sphere and promotes a zone of individual privacy in which government has a limited role of providing protection of private property and interests (McChesney, 1999, p. 9). Barrett concludes that “Video games offer narratives that are formative in terms of individual and social understandings of race, youth, and citizenship in the modern, neoliberal, globalized world” (p. 96). Of interest to this study is the implication of violence as supportive of these ideological positions.

While a full exploration of the links between violent game play and violence supportive attitudes in the meanings made by gamers is beyond the scope of this research, a theoretical basis has been established for further exploration. As suggested previously, militarism and the preparedness for violence has been associated with the enterprise of globalization and the neo-liberal enterprise (Chalmers, 2004; Lutz, 2002). Conducive to this enterprise is a culture that values materialism and consumerism in which human beings are now sites of commodification, (Chomsky, 1999; Giroux, 2002) sites in which the planet and forms of life are resources for consumption and profit (Orr, 2004). Furthermore, hegemonic masculinity is increasingly extreme in its construction of violent and aggressive identities (Connell, 2005; 1999; Katz, 1996; 2006) while perceptions of the “other” are further enhanced, dehumanized and devalued, perpetuating and enhancing a social distance that contributes to perceptions of threat and the enactment of aggressive and violent responses (Davies et al, 2008; Goff et al, 2008; Sen, 2006). Added to this pattern of human disconnect and aggressive individualism is a sense of apathy and cynicism toward the social/public/political sphere in which neo-liberalism de-emphasizes
the social/public good and rejects human and ecological interconnection. “Instead of citizens, it [neo-liberal democracy] produces consumers. Instead of communities, it [neo-liberal democracy] produces shopping malls. The net result is an atomized society of disengaged individuals who feel demoralized and socially powerless” (McChesney, 1999, p. 11). Violence and aggression are enhanced as social means in the absence of power and legitimacy when strength and force are valued. “It has often been said that impotence breeds violence, and psychologically this is quite true, at least of persons possessing natural strength, moral or physical. Politically speaking, the point is that loss of power becomes the temptation to substitute violence for power” (Arendt, 1970, p.63)

In light of this seemingly pessimistic view, consider this statement by Noam Chomsky (1999):

There is no more reason now than there ever has been to believe that we are constrained by mysterious and unknown social laws, not simply decisions made within institutions that are subject to human will – human institutions, that have to face the test of legitimacy and, if they do not meet it, can be replaced by others that are more free and more just, as often in the past (p. 62).

H. Critical Media Literacy

Douglas Kellner’s work in critical media literacy provides a theoretical focus that will be employed in this study. It draws upon critical theory, critical pedagogy, and cultural studies. Critical media literacy applies critical pedagogy to the study and analysis of media and culture. The media literacy curriculum must address societal issues such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and violence that are embedded in the culture and are congruent with the tradition of democratic education. Kellner and Share (2007) suggest that a critical media literacy “focuses on ideology critique and analyzing the politics of representation of crucial dimensions of gender, race, class, and sexuality;
incorporating alternative media production; expanding textual analysis to include issues of social context, control, resistance, and pleasure”. In other words, education must address the intersection of culture, power, identity, and ideology and analyze the production and proliferation of knowledge, hierarchies, domination, and violence. The potential to ameliorate media’s negative influences and empower students with a critical consciousness or awareness that promotes agency as democratic citizens and as consumers and producers of cultural forms is the promise of a democratically attuned media literacy. As discussed previously, democratic education for citizenship involves students becoming aware of both the rights and duties required for associated living. These rights include freedom from harm and the duty to ensure that others have the right to an equal claim to freedom from harm. Thus, democratic citizenship recognizes that the many dimensions of violence, physical, emotional, structural, and symbolic, are a contradiction of democratic values and thus, unjust. Built within critical media literacy is the concept that education should be transformative for both the individual and for society.

I. Social Reconstructionism

Transformation is a key component of social reconstructionist education which emphasizes the development of critical capacities in learners. This is grounded in the work of Paulo Freire’s (1970) Pedagogy of the Oppressed in which he defines the “banking model” of education as a form of transmission that replicates social patterns and hierarchies. Freire rejects this model and emphasizes the role of education should be the development of conscientization, that is the ability critically think and act. The development of intellectual capacities for critical consciousness and a deep awareness of
the world, including its contradictions and struggles, as well as the ability to develop capacities for action should be the purpose and modus Vivendi of education.

Transformative educational practice asks questions that go beyond the “what is?” to questions of “what ought to be?” The conditions and experiences of diverse groups is necessary and fertile intellectual ground for the development of an awareness of oppression and the role of power in creating and maintaining social hierarchies. Yet, this approach to learning also seeks to develop the creative and agentic capacity of students/citizens to participate in transforming unjust social conditions and producing cultural change that diminishes the power of oppressive regimes (Sleeter and Grant, 1991). A more expansive discussion of transformation and social reconstruction will be included in chapter five’s section on educational implications which will detail perspectives from peace education and multicultural education and discuss how these concepts relate to media literacy. Critical media literacy from a social reconstructionist approach to education engages the student in analysis of the intersection of ideology, domination, and oppression embedded in mediated culture and social institutions while challenging students to be active, participatory agents with an ethical duty to resist injustice and promote positive change for themselves and for their community.

Giroux’s discussion of a “public pedagogy” brings attention to the political and ideological nature of media and the normalization of dominant cultural values and beliefs about the world. Media forms are often presented as entertainment and leisure pastimes that are politically neutral, yet as Giroux suggests, dominant cultural practices and ideologies are embedded in the representations. Giroux’s analysis of popular culture draws from the work of critical theorists’ critique of the culture industry and the work of
Stuart Hall and others in the cultural studies discipline. Hall’s contribution has been extensive, but what is of relevance for this study is his analysis of the intersection of identity within the representations and reproductions of dominant culture. The nature of colonialist, neo-colonialist, and globalization practices that require the subordination of many people, predominantly people of color and women, and the legitimation of hegemonic power structures are implicated in the representations and reproduction of meanings associated with identity in the culture. Hall (2001, p. 124) articulates a system of discursive forms practiced in linguistic and symbolic “vehicles” that constitute a continuous circuit of “production, circulation, distribution/consumption, reproduction”. Mediated messages rely upon cognitive structures that make communication possible. The narratives and identities represented rely upon the capacity of the viewer to recognize and make meaning of the messages in ways that are consistent with the producers’ understandings and meanings for communicative action to be productive of intersubjective meaning. One role of media literacy is to educate citizens that are capable of not only understanding the meanings of these media representations, but also to reflecting and creating new understandings that resist reification of dominant cultural patterns of oppression and hierarchy. Democracy demands such capacity. To this end, this framework for analysis has been developed as a means for interrogating culture, identity, ideology, power, and violence in media in general, but in video games more specifically. The methods of this ideological analysis will be defined in the next chapter.
Chapter Three
Research Design and Methodology

A. Rationale for Qualitative Research

The theoretical framework expounded in Chapter Two is aimed at guiding an ideological analysis grounded in qualitative research methods employing textual and visual analytical processes. Qualitative research is equipped to explore and interpret the nature of communicative practices, which include the actions associated with verbal language and other signs that constitute socially constructed meanings (Jensen, 1995). This investigation focuses upon the construction of cultural regimes of power and identity and how these interact with ideological assumptions embedded in a cultural product such as the GTA IV video game. Furthermore, the role of violence as both a part of the value system and as a regulator of hierarchical relations is interrogated.

Qualitative research answers questions pertaining to “understanding some social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved, to contextualize issues in their particular socio-cultural-political milieu, and sometimes to transform or change social conditions” (Glesne, 2006, p. 4). Creswell (2007) suggests ontological, epistemic, and axiological assumptions are distinctive to the diverse field of qualitative research. Ontologically, “reality is subjective and multiple” (p.17) which contrasts with the objectivism and positivism of traditional scientific knowledge. In terms of epistemology, the researcher “attempts to lessen the distance between himself or herself and that being researched” (p.17) which includes participation and reflection of the experiential nature
of the research process. Also, qualitative researchers acknowledge the saliency of values, “that research is value-laden and that biases are present” (p.17).

It is this philosophical basis that makes qualitative research methods adept at gleaning understanding of questions regarding the nature of social phenomena and human interactions, but also at exploring the nature and role of values in the social milieu.

“Qualitative researchers … seek to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them” (Glesne, 2006, p.4). Through observation, participation, and interpretation, researchers explore and reflect upon socially constructed realities. In this study, the values, norms, and directed behaviors embedded in the video game *GTA IV* reflect the meanings and understandings about the world and human nature held by the producers of the game. Also, the meanings associated with the gaming experience and illustrated by fans of the game will be explored to determine if the value and meaning system in the game space is shared by those who play the game.

**B. The Site and Setting**

The site and setting for this study is the virtual space of the video game, *GTA IV*, and the complementary websites that further enhance the gaming experience. As described by Gee (2008; 2005) and Shaffer et al (2005), video games constitute virtual worlds that represent spaces for interaction, cognition and learning, and the embodiment of experience. Squire (2006; 2005) further defines this experience as “a designed experience”. The virtual setting of *GTA IV* is an urban environment intended to replicate the design and atmosphere of New York City and its various boroughs. One of the two websites is the video game producer’s domain (http://www.rockstargames.com/IV/). This
site is a marketing tool, but also provides technical and narrative support for the game. Included in this website is a map of the metropolitan area of the game, video trailers and vignettes that develop the story, various characters and the atmosphere of the game. Also, additional downloads and interactive games that contribute to the play of the game and information on the various services and activities available for exploration are available at the site. The other website, http://www.gta4.net/, is a fan-developed site that offers information and access to a community forum that exhibits the attitudes and meanings attributed to video game players. It is a basis of this study that the culturally constructed design and narrative nature of these sites exhibits ideological assumptions that are educative about the world and what is valued.

C. Research Questions

The video game, GTA IV, as a popular cultural product with mass appeal is a site for research and investigation of questions surrounding the ideological nature of the representations and the reproduction of dominant cultural paradigms. Adapted from Silverblatt et al’s (1999, p. 62-63) handbook, the following questions have been developed to guide this investigation.

1. How is identity represented? How are social positions of race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality represented in Grand Theft Auto IV? What cultural stereotypes are reinforced?

2. What are the predominant ideological assumptions embedded in the game, more specifically, how is human nature represented and what is the nature of human interaction?
3. How is power manifested in the game?

4. How is violence characterized and/or reified? What is the purpose of violence?

5. What are the potential meanings and ideological assumptions of culture, identity, power, and violence the virtual world in GTA IV? What is the nature of the value system? How do gamers’ present these meanings when interacting with each other in the sphere of mass-mediated communications?

6. Who or what entity benefits from the reproduction of such cultural paradigms?

D. Research Design

This study employs methodological approaches consistent with case study research. A case study can be defined as research investigating an issue or problem through a closed or “bounded system” such as a specific setting or context. (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). In this case, the bounded system is the virtual space of the video game GTA IV and the web-based sites associated with the marketing of the game and the community of gamers that play GTA IV. This is a single instrumental case study design meaning that GTA IV operates as a bounded system for investigating these questions of representation and reproduction of culture, ideology, identity, power, and violence (Creswell, 2007, p. 74). Creswell defines this approach as focused “on an issue or concern, and then selects one bounded case to illustrate the issue” (p. 74). This involves an examination of the whole case and presents a description, emergent themes, and interpretations of the meanings of the case.

The video game itself is conceived as the first of three sites that will be investigated in this case study. The game includes many types of data for analysis,
including the narrative of the game, the visual and audio production, and the role of the player as a character in a story, as case studies are defined in part as studies that utilize multiple types of data (Creswell, 2007, p. 74). Participant observation methods are employed for this first phase of the study. A fan developed guide available at http://www.gta4.net/ which provides details on successfully accomplishing the various missions was used to ensure completion of the entire game. Notes were added to the document during the play of the game and also during the viewing of other gamers playing the game. A community of gamers provides video presentations of the game play available for public viewing on the website Youtube.com, a list of the videos viewed is available in Appendix A. As will be discussed in the problems section of this chapter, the researcher had to rely on the videos to gain a complete viewing of all of the missions in the video game. The guide was saved as a Microsoft Word document and printed for the purpose of adding notes. Use of this document as data will be discussed in the section on data management.

A second distinct site of interest in this case study is the video game producer’s (Rockstar Games) website (http://www.rockstargames.com/IV/) for this specific game. The website serves multiple purposes, one of which is to market the product while also providing supplemental support to the video game experience. The entire site was surveyed for data and computer generated jpeg files were made using the screen print function on the computer keyboard. These photo quality files were the basis of the data used in the analysis. Two areas on the web site merit special mention, the LoveMeets.com activity and The Men’s Room activity are components of the website.
that gamers can use for added features in the actual game play itself. The screen print images of these activities are presented in Appendix B of this report.

And the third site of investigation is a web-site (http://www.gta4.net/) that has been developed by fans of the game as a resource for information and interaction as a community of gamers. As noted previously, this web site includes a player’s guide that provides details about each of the game’s missions with insights on successfully accomplishing each mission’s goals. The site also includes a forum on a list of topics ranging from technical support to conversations regarding topics of interest regarding game play and story lines. In this study, the forums have been the final observations with the purpose of locating conversations between gamers that provide meaning to the themes developed through the analysis of the other two domains. This research design is intended to investigate the following questions which were discussed in Chapter One.

E. Data Management

Investigations of the virtual space offer unique data management issues. First and foremost the visual and adaptive nature of the game presents a unique challenge. No two experiences are completely alike, yet patterns and a basic plot exist that are similar across experiences. Game play follows a basic storyline, but also has adaptive and unique cause and effect designs that make the missions of the game contextually different as the missions unfold for each player and each time a mission is attempted. The adaptive and fluid nature of the game is dissimilar to many other forms of visual media such as movies and television which are visually and textually the same with every playback. The use of Youtube videos are an attempt to bring replicability to the study. For this purpose, a list of Youtube videos are included in Appendix B. Maintaining the site domains for the data
was necessary. Also, the textual nature of the websites presented a unique challenge. Conversion of data into a format that could be imported into Atlas.ti was necessary.

A textual production of the video game story line has been employed for a narrative analysis. This text was available as a guide on the website http://www.gta4.net/ and was created by gamers for gamers to improve the play experience and increase the chances of completion of the multiple missions. The researcher contributed notes to this text while playing and also observing the game play to more fully capture the narrative quality of the game, the final copy was saved as a Microsoft Word file. Hyperlinks were also saved to a Word file for the purpose of reviewing the videos relating to each mission. For the purposes of visual and textual analysis of the website, screen-prints of web page content were kept as .jpeg image files. The public domain community forums were copied and saved as Microsoft Word files. The anonymity of the users was built into the practices and procedures of the website. All data has been kept in a secure non-public portable hard-drive. The qualitative computer software, Atlas.ti was employed for the purpose of managing the multiple files and as a means for coding the data. Atlas.ti also provides tools that are utilized in the analysis of the data.

F. Data Analysis

Analysis of the visual and textual nature of the mediated materials was done in a hermeneutic, interpretive approach. Hermeneutics is an interpretive understanding or meaning making associated with active participation in the context of the experience. “The hermeneutic circle dictates the principle that one must understand the parts from the whole and the whole from the parts” (Introna, 1993). According to Boeije (2010) analysis involves “segmenting and reassembling the data” in which data is categorized in
sections or bits. This involves coding the text and images for categories or emergent themes by assigning a label to a segment of data. The texts were reread and images were reviewed to develop broad thematic categories. These emergent thematic categories were then related to existing social theory. This is the aspect of reassembling the data. A code list is presented in Appendix C of this report. This approach has been intended to elicit the holistic nature of socio-cultural representations that include intersections of identity, power, and violence and how this pattern is legitimated through ideological frameworks.

Furthermore, a textual analysis views that human behavior and communication is represented as a text through the language and symbols that people use to communicate ideas. Likewise, the researcher produces textual representations of observations that are also subject to analysis. In this study, notes and memos have been included in the data analysis and the memo function tool in Atlas.ti has been utilized for this means. Norman Denzin (2001, 1991) has used a form of textual and visual analysis to investigate the ideological and political nature of movies and television. His methods of ideological and textual analysis have been influential in this form of research methodology.

G. Validating the Research

Validity is defined as “the extent to which the research produces an accurate version of the world” (Bloor & Wood, 2006). Triangulation enhances the validity of analysis and is defined by the use of multiple data sources, methods, and theoretical schemes (Lather, 1991). In this study, the data was collected from three different domains related to the video game as a means for triangulation of data. Furthermore, the theoretical schemes as discussed in Chapter Two span multiple disciplines and provide broadened perspectives on conceptual themes such as culture, identity, power, and
violence. The methods employed have been situated in textual and visual analysis, but also in the tradition of ideological analysis. Ideological analyses have been influenced by postmodern perspectives that suggest objectivity in scientific methods is false and that reality is multiplicitous and subjective (Denzin, 1991). Creswell (2007) uses the term validation “to emphasize a process” rather than “verification”. Here the process is linked to “prolonged engagement” and “persistent observation” by the researcher with participants and sites of research. Lather also points to the necessity of the researcher to “admit situatedness and partiality”. This I will accommodate in the following section.

**H. Limitations**

Limitations of this study include reliance upon mediated productions such as public domain community forums to gain a glimpse into the meanings and understandings of the game players. An ethnography of game development practices and interviews with game developers would have been valuable sources for understanding individual and collective meanings associated with the ideological nature of the video game. Likewise, an ethnographic study of actual game players engaging in the game space and interviews with gamers would have been beneficial for this purpose. However, such a research practice has been determined to be beyond the scope of this study which is intended to be a preliminary exploration of the ideological nature of the video game phenomena. Another limitation of the study has been the researcher’s limited skill with the actual game play. As a participant gamer, I was only able to complete approximately twenty percent of the game. Despite limited access to the in-group community of active gamers, video has been viewed through the Youtube.com website that illustrates the successful completion of every mission in the game including the valuable cinematic cut-
scenes that develop the storyline. This procedure allowed the researcher to take more effective notes than if actually playing the game.

Also, my own subjectivity must be acknowledged. While I have been an avid gamer for most of my life, I have generally avoided playing games from the genre of violent, action games, of which GTA IV is an example. I have always devalued violence as a means in my own life and have rejected the voyeuristic and pleasurable nature of virtual violence in the media. Also, my research interests have been guided by democratic, pluralistic views of the world that are interested in education as a means for the transformation of society to be more inclusive, less violent, and more interconnected.

However, as a member of the gaming community, I have access to the systems of meaning that operate within GTA IV. As a member of the society and my experiences in the cultural terrain, the dominant cultural paradigms are familiar. The representations and reproductions of dominant culture within the media is interpreted and analyzed through the combination of subjective experience linked to theory. The theoretical framework then acts as a heuristic device to decenter the self and allows what Mills (1956) describes as the “sociological imagination” to explore alternative perspectives and situate subjectivity in a larger discourse on domination and oppression.
Chapter Four

Analysis and Interpretations

The video game is a site for representation and reproduction of cultural systems of meaning that illustrate the values, norms, and standards of a society and the ideological assumptions that represent a specific worldview. The virtual nature of the video game simulates experiential learning through a bound system that is structured based upon the design of the developers and producers. *Grand Theft Auto*, the series in general, has been acclaimed for its innovative design and game play. The virtual geographic space of *GTA* is a highly complex space that simulates real urban and interurban terrains. Game play is structured along a narrative with a plot and fully developed characters. Players are given directed objectives or missions that lead to new chapters of plot development. The development of skills and knowledge that contribute to success in the game space are adaptive responses to the problems presented in the game and constitute a representation of the perceived solutions to problems that are privileged by the game developers. For instance, violence is a common theme throughout *GTA IV*. Hence, the enactment of violence is seen as a valued means of problem solving. To be successful in the game, players must develop a shared understanding of these values, norms, and behaviors. Another aspect of the game is its open ended construction of play which affords the gamer opportunities to freely explore the virtual world once the missions are completed.

Creswell (2007, p. 196) suggests case study presentations of results should focus upon the themes that emerge from the analysis of the data. Emerging from the data are the ideological assumptions that form the basis of the worldview represented in *GTA IV*. These assumptions intersect with representations of culture, power, identity, and
violence. GTA IV like its predecessors in the series is on the surface highly irreverent and mocking of modern American society. However, similar to Jackson Katz’s (1999) discussion in the video Tough Guise regarding the irreverence of media personalities such as Howard Stern, the irreverence masks a fundamental synergy with very traditional ideologies and worldviews. As will be elaborated in more detail shortly, in the case of GTA IV, neo-liberalism and hyper-masculinity form a basis for an extreme individualism that consumes, harms, and views people as “other” and violence is aggrandized and valued as a means for asserting ones will and achieving goals. As discussed in Chapter Two, the ideologies of neo-liberalism and hyper-masculinity are linked to patriarchal and unregulated free-market capitalist socio-economic orders. The cynicism that fuels the mockery of American society and culture when coupled with neo-liberal ideology suggests to the viewer or player that the world is as good as it gets, so get while you can with an ethic of “do unto others before others do unto you”. The discussion of the results will focus upon three predominant themes: 1) Neo-liberal and materialist assumptions embedded in the GTA IV culture, 2) hyper-masculinity as the privileged identity, and 3) violence as a preferred means of asserting individual interests and solving problems. These themes were pervasive across the three sites or domains of investigation, the game itself, the producer’s website, and the fan developed website and forum.
A. A Brief Synopsis of the Story

Rock Star video games asks:

What does the American Dream mean today? For Niko Bellic, fresh off the boat from Europe, it is the hope he can escape his past. For his cousin, Roman, it is the vision that together they can find fortune in Liberty City, gateway to the land of opportunity. As they slip into debt and are dragged into a criminal underworld by a series of shysters, thieves and sociopaths, they discover that the reality is very different from the dream in a city that worships money and status, and is heaven for those who have them and a living nightmare for those who don't.

(http://www.rockstargames.com/games#/?game=25)


GTA IV follows the story of the character Niko Bellic from the moment he arrives in the United States in the fictional metropolitan city named Liberty City. Liberty City is loosely based upon post-9/11 New York City. Niko has emigrated from an unknown war-torn eastern European country where he had been a soldier. Niko’s cousin, Roman had previously immigrated to Liberty City and greets Niko upon his arrival. Niko is pulled into a world of crime and works for a number of characters ranging from mobsters to drug dealers, loan sharks, corrupt cops, and a clandestine government agent. He reveals his driving motivation is to locate the two survivors from his military unit and uncover the traitor whose betrayal led to the massacre of the unit and exact his revenge.

B. Emergent Themes

a. Neoliberalism and materialism. Neo-liberalism as an ideology has been characterized by economic and social policies associated with privatization and deregulation. The language of free markets, finance, and efficiency, as well as consumer choice and individual autonomy are the basis of the worldview associated with Neo-liberalism. Neo-liberal forms of individualism celebrate the moral worth of the individual
and emphasize individual initiative, personal responsibility, self-reliance, an absence of governmental intervention, and a rejection of the public good or public sphere (Bailey & Gayle, 2003, p. 32-33). This ideology of laissez-faire capitalism and individual liberty promotes a meritocracy based on initiative and enterprise. Neo-liberalism and the trends of globalization have coincided with the rise of corporatization and bureaucratic rationalization. As discussed in chapter two, democratic ethics do not guide this association in which corporations are hierarchical and oligarchic in nature. Often, transnational corporate conglomerates operate beyond the authority of any one polity. The corporate agenda can be characterized by the profit incentive, placing value in materialist conceptions of goods, products and services which results in the commodification of all aspects of life. Competition is considered the natural condition of existence and is the basis of human nature. Meritocracy is the justifying/legitimating ideology that explains existing inequities and discredits social justice conceptions of structural violence (Chomsky, 1999; McChesney, 1999).

Neo-liberalism mixed with cynicism undergirds the ideological assumptions of GTA IV. Competition for power, resources, goods, and services characterize the missions and modus operandi of the narrative and game play. Niko is repeatedly placed in scenarios where he must be self-reliant and take initiative to meet the assigned goals. This idea of self-reliance, initiative, and efficiency are rewarded in the game in which Niko gains access to higher levels in the hierarchy of the criminal world while his own wealth, status, and resource grow from the successful completion of missions. These messages are reinforced by the narrative and statements from characters. Crime boss Jimmy Pegorino says “You’re a good earner Niko…You did good kid…we’re gonna
need your skills again soon, arrivederci” (Scene 73, Pegorino’s Pride) The fan website characterized the Pegorino statement as one of efficiency: “Jimmy Pegorino is impressed by Niko's efficiency, and he [Pegorino] wants him [Niko] to go back and see him for some more work” (Document 3, line 428). The Godfather Jon Gravelli, an aging mafia kingpin, tells Niko following an assassination mission “How efficient you were...I like that" (Scene 81, Dining Out).

Niko can only rely upon himself in this world of competing self-interests in which lies, deceit, extortion, and blackmail rule human interactions. When Niko does “favors” for people, it is a matter of trade, trade for money, information, or cover from the police. There is a message of disdain for governmental intervention or interference throughout the game’s narrative. Avoiding the police is necessary in nearly every mission. Often avoidance does not work and direct violent response to interference is required to complete a mission. This involves the killing of officers. But also, this idea of an absence of interference is related to the cynicism projected in the game towards the corrupt nature of the government, its institutions and personnel. The dirty cop, Francis McReary repeatedly blackmails Niko into working for him to solve McReary’s “problems” (i.e. Scene 43, Call and Collect). There is also a clandestine agent of the government who extorts Niko’s help with “problems” associated with criminal organizations and national interests to regulate markets, such as the heroin or weapons trade (Scene 38, Wrong is Right; Scene 42, Dust Off).

It is this cynical nature of the game that underscores the message that there is no public good, but rather a world of competing interests, in which national interests are related to personal business interests to control markets and maintain the status quo in the
power structure. This can be represented by the scene *Deconstruction for Beginners* in which Niko is hired to eliminate the Union that is blocking development of a construction site. The union is characterized as a mafia organization, "Shit, union is just another word for mafia" (Document 2, Line 205). They are extorting money and stifling the development project. Niko violently responds to the “problem”, killing all of the union members in a massacre. During the fight, union members can be heard shouting statements such as "Stupid immigrants takin’ American jobs" and "We're gonna fight to keep American jobs in American hands". Here the gamer is primed to the perspective of neo-liberal business interests that seek to diminish the power of labor to organize and represents a negative connotation of unions. Ironically, Niko, the immigrant, is taking more than jobs; he is taking lives.

This is also represented by Niko’s interaction with Jon Gravelli, the Godfather character, his cohort, a clandestine government agent, and Bobby Jefferson, a politician who campaigns against organized crime (Scenes 80-82). In Scene 82, the agent is sitting next to Gravelli in Gravelli’s hospital bed, Niko states: “Interesting friends you have”. Gravelli responds, “The mayor will be here in a minute, and I have two senators dropping by later… Niko, our friend here is telling me that the Ancelottis are in league with the Russians…And now he’s dealing drugs with Ivan the Goddamn Terrible”. The agent then discusses that this is a matter of national security: “Normally, I don’t care about cocaine, keeps controllable people in power, but this is no good”. The order is to wipe out the distribution network by any means necessary.

These scenes speak to the neo-liberal perspective and the cynicism that the economic order is the paramount interest. Here, drugs, guns, and other commodities, licit
and illicit, are of interest to the government which plays a role in maintaining these markets for an economic elite. The government, represented by the clandestine agent and the politician, Jefferson, work with the criminal syndicate of Jon Gravelli to maintain a status quo. The social and economic hierarchy is an interconnection of government, corporations, and organized crime. In these scenes, the goal is to ensure that narcotics and weapons trade remains with the “Americans” as the “Russians” are competing for dominance in this trade. Niko is informed that he is working for the “good guys”. This can be related to the neo-liberal approach to globalization and the conception of national interests as being tied to access and control of trade and foreign markets. Furthermore, this speaks to an inherent superiority; certain people should have privilege, a position that is merited by initiative and personal drive, yet is based upon bloodlines and patriarchy.

b. Identity – hypermasculinity. The concept of identity relates to the idea of self and how the self relates to others and the world. Identity has a reflexive, dialogical quality in that individual meanings are associated with culturally prescribed notions of the self. Stereotypes are generalizations or simplifications regarding identity. They are an example of culturally prescribed identities which can be both positive and negative in nature, but what is harmful is the limiting nature of the stereotype. In essence, the stereotype is a box that limits the full expression of one’s self, humanness, and dignity. The status of the “other” is a common theme regarding identity in GTA IV. Ethnic and racial differences are represented throughout the game with examples being the Irish Americans represented as drunken hooligans, the Italians as mobsters, African Americans as street level gang members, and eastern Europeans such as the Albanians and Russians as hired thugs. Niko does develop friendships across racial and ethnic lines and the
stereotypes seem to function as a narrative device playing on popular knowledge of the “other” to simplify character development. The eastern European immigrant experience is highly stereotyped and commodified in this edition of the series. While race and ethnicity are portrayed in the game, it is the gendered nature of this edition that will be the focus of this theme of identity.

Gender, as discussed in chapter two, is defined as the social construction of identities associated with socio-cultural attributions of what it means to be male and female, including the norms of behavior, but also symbolic and semiotic understandings of those identities. In *GTA IV*, there is a distinctive gendered order based upon a dichotomy of gender roles. Males are active, powerful, violent, aggressive, and the earners of wealth. Conversely, women are portrayed as docile, submissive, deceitful or not to be trusted and weak or in need of protection. Males are in positions of authority and power as represented by leaders of crime families, gangs, government, and business. The women are portrayed as girlfriends, wives, strippers, prostitutes and secretaries. Likewise, a common theme regarding the female characters who are wives and girlfriends is the idea that they are property that must be controlled and dominated otherwise they are likely to “cheat” on the man. Examples include, Roman’s girlfriend Mallorie who has an affair with her boss, Jimmy Pegorino’s wife has an affair with one of his lieutenants, and Niko’s girlfriend Michelle who is working for the government and is dating him to keep tabs on him.

Masculinity in *GTA IV* can be described as hyper-masculinity, the extreme forms of masculine identity as discussed in Chapter Two. Violence and aggression are normalized and a routine expression of that masculinity. Within the game, the term “real”
man is used repeatedly to describe this violent and aggressive identity. Masculinity is associated with the individualistic orientation discussed previously. A “real” man is strong, self-reliant, takes initiative, solves “problems”, makes money, seizes power, and wields force. As will be discussed subsequently in the section on violence as a theme, violence is equivocated with power and force. In relation to gender, gendered violence is a means for controlling women and maintaining the privileged masculine position.

Conversely, misogyny is represented in the game repeatedly through uses of terms such as “bitch”, “whore” and “cunt” [sic] to describe women and men who do not add up to the masculine ideal, homophobia is also present in the representations of gender in GTA IV and will be discussed shortly. The gendered nature of GTA IV is well represented in the scenes regarding the abduction and detainment of the young woman Gracie. Niko sets up a meeting with Gracie under the ruse that he is interested in buying her car. While he is test driving the vehicle, Gracie makes a series of sexually provocative statements that portray women as promiscuous and easy, such as "Not that I don't like a guy trying to get in my pants...I appreciate fun as much as the next girl...maybe even more than the next girl" (Scene 68, I’ll Take Her). Niko ignores her invitations and informs her that he is kidnapping her. She puts up a fight in which Niko calls her a “bitch”, he then hits her as he tells her to “Shut up”. When they arrive at the safe house, Niko’s compatriot Packie states: "I'll take this piece of ass". The innuendoes of gendered violence and rape permeate these scenes. Niko hits Gracie again to quiet her so that he can take her picture while she is bound to a chair. This serves as a means to secure a ransom. Later, Gracie would be traded for diamonds which further represents the commodification and objectification of the female body, as an object for trade and profit. This theme of
females as objects is recurrent throughout the game as women are portrayed as strippers and prostitutes, but also in the ways in which wives and girlfriends are treated as the property of men.

Gendered violence relating to homophobia is a complex issue within the *GTA IV* space. Early in the game, Niko is hired to assassinate a man who is gay. He uses a website dating service to arrange the meeting and then guns down the man after meeting him in a diner. His motives are based on earning money in this scene. The gay male is a stereotypical representation and unlike the majority of killings in the game, there is little to no threat of violence directed at Niko in the encounter. The reason for this man’s murder is ambiguous and appears to have little impact upon the narrative of the story. This absence of development plays to a mindset that homosexuals are less than or inferior human beings, legitimately denied full recognition, and uninterrogated targets of violence.

Later in the story, Niko would reunite with an old friend (Florian Cravic, aka Bernie Crane) from home who has come to Liberty City to live his authentic life as a gay man. Bernie is a blatant stereotype of the “flaming” gay man. He is emotional and flamboyant. The characterization of Bernie focuses heavily upon a preoccupation with love and sex. Still, deviating from the patterns of homophobia that generally characterize hyper-masculine portrayals in the *GTA IV* game, Niko befriends him.

In Scene 65, *Hating the Haters*, Niko defends Bernie from a hate crime perpetrated by a man described as being with the “WBC”, a Christian extremist group that has an anti-homosexual message. Bernie has been harassed and beaten by this extremist while out jogging on numerous occasions. Niko says he will follow Bernie and
take care of the “problem”. On the surface, Niko discusses the absurdity of these extremists and the hate associated with the group that is directed at homosexuals. Niko says, “You should be able to be whoever you want to be”.

However, the portrayal of Bernie is couched in a form of homophobia that privileges the hyper-masculine and devalues gay men as “other”. Niko is the one who actively defends Bernie’s rights and life whereas Bernie is portrayed as incapable of doing so, even though he had been a soldier in Niko’s military unit as well. Being gay somehow magically diminished Bernie’s masculine vigor and required the protection of a “real” man, Niko. Strength and vigor are characterized in a very narrow conception of masculinity as the only way to be secure in the world. The irreverence of *GTA IV* as previously discussed is illustrated throughout the scenes with Bernie. While Niko is following Bernie through the park during a jog, there are a series of scatological jokes made referencing Bernie’s “rear”, “tail”, and “behind” and the need for Niko to be on Bernie’s backside. Also, Niko is forced to chase Bernie’s attacker by riding a scooter. The brand name of the scooter is “Faggios” suggesting the scooter is not as “manly” as a motorcycle; it is not a fast vehicle and makes it difficult to catch the attacker. The valuing of “real” masculinity in the form of a strong, silent, aggressive hero such as Niko is represented at the expense of ridiculing what stands as different, as other than the constructed norm.

In a later scene, Bernie is riding with Niko during a car chase. Their car overturns and catches fire, Bernie emerges in flames. Bernie walks around the street on fire playing on the association with gay men being “flamers”. This is used as a humorous device in the game, and gamers on the forum site were laughing and joking about the scene. But
what is lost in the discussion is the more subtle forms of homophobia that persist in the
game despite the superficial attempts to voice disdain for hate and hate crimes. The
socio-historic context of terms like “fag” and “flamer” are unexamined and their
meanings continue to represent domination and oppression of gay men. The gendered
order is left intact and “real” men are still the hyper-masculine heroes of the game and
gay men are left being represented as lesser, devalued “others” who make good comic
devices, legitimating the ridicule that many homosexual men and women face.

The hyper-masculine personas that populate GTA IV fit the framework established
by Jackson Katz in the video Tough Guise. The “tough guise” is a façade that is
essentially a performance of a narrowly defined, extremely limited view of masculinity
and manhood characterized by stereotypes associated with strength, power, stature,
muscularity, individualism, assertiveness, action, aggression, ruggedness and toughness.
Hypermasculinity then is an exaggeration of these traits in the idealized construct and is
related to the hegemonic position of the male in society. In GTA IV, as in society in
general, patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity operate to positionally privilege males
with power. The representations in GTA IV legitimate these conditions and these patterns
are reproduced in the culture of the game players as exhibited in discussions on the
forums. Misogyny and homophobia operate as regulators of behavior and legitimation of
a gendered order.

Studies have shown that stereotypic portrayals of characters in video games
influence the socialization of gender norms for players of the games. Dill et al (2008),
discuss the ramifications of violent video game exposure upon the attitudes towards
sexual harassment in their research subjects. Males, but not females, reported a higher
degree of tolerance towards sexual harassment after short-term exposure to violent video games containing stereotypical gender roles. As the authors suggest, these implications when placed in the context that more males play violent video games and also hold dominant or more powerful positions in society is problematic in a society in which domestic violence is pandemic.

Furthermore, research by Dill and Thill (2007) has shown that video game stereotypes impact perceptions and attitudes of gender roles and self-conceptions in adolescents. Also, Dill and Thill relate exposure to gender stereotypes in media to negative outcomes such as acceptance of violence as a masculine trait and the acceptance of rape supportive attitudes.

Examples of hyper-masculinity are illustrated in Appendix C which contains screen prints from the website by RockStar Video Games, the producer of GTA IV. The messages and images illustrate the connections between hyper-masculinity, misogyny, and violence. GTA IV has a website completely designed for the marketing of the product and the proliferation of a gaming community with links to blogs, merchandise, and information about the product. Information includes geographic details and a map of the city, as well information about characters, points of interest, and services available in the city. Likewise, “radio stations” and “TV” shows are available for sampling which create a very realistic and rounded experience that seems to very similar to the real world. Included in this part of the website are interactional media in which users do more than learn about Liberty City, but that actually engage the user in activities intended to be entertaining. An example is the What Kind of Man Are You? Show which has two co-hosts who ask a series of questions, the user then picks which host has the best response.
When finished, the user is given a synopsis about the kind of man that they are. This exercise was sexist in nature with one character, Jeremy, deemed the “metrosexual” in a mocking manner and the other character, Bas, portrayed as quintessentially hyper-masculine. Question 1 asked Are you romantic? Both responses are stereotypic. Jeremy’s response is “wordy” and focuses on flowers and long conversation, but it is the response of Bas the hyper-masculine character that shows the kind of misogyny presented on the website, he says: “the only thing you need to do is whip it out and say what are you gonna do about this”

(http://www.rockstargames.com/IV/#?page=mensRoom&content=interactive0)

Another interactive menu is called Love-Meet, a simulated dating site which asks a series of questions that users respond to from a list of answers. An example is Question 4, my idea of a perfect date is… a) Dinner and a movie…then I slit your throat, b) a romantic stroll along the beach, then I catch an STD, c) drinking and driving the night away, d) unshaved

(http://www.rockstargames.com/IV/#?page=loveMeet&content=interactive0).

Overall, the website glorifies violence, aggression, homophobia, and misogyny through overt statements of a sexualized and violent nature. The women that are present on the GTA IV website are objectified and sexualized; most portray the role of strippers and prostitutes. Much violence is overtly directed at these women in the forms of harassment, both verbal and physical, as well rape and murder. The impact is that in comparison to the virtual world of GTA, the real world seems much less dangerous, but also less fantastic. The patriarchy of the real world is sanitized and normalized in comparison, while the patriarchal gender roles are reinforced by both the overt hyper-
masculine ethos of most of the characters. Also, any kind of deviation from the hyper-masculine ethos is mocked in a homophobic manner with the result of masculine gender role regulation, as exemplified by Jeremy, the “metrosexual” character from the *What Kind of Man Are You* quiz.

c. Players meanings associated with gender and violence. The excerpt below is an exchange from the fan forum regarding the absence of animals and children in the game and the pleasure associated with misogyny and violence (http://www.gtaforums.com/index.php?s=217f2c062beb81fcee11bbed6513d6&showforum=234):

Guns NRose: Of course, everyone knows that people like dogs way better than hookers.

EZHIK: You are correct. I'd rather beat up a hooker than a puppy.

IRANOVERLASLOW: If there was kids in gta i'd hate it. I'll happily have a hooker blow me than stab her to death and get my money back. But kids would ruin it. Maybe all there parents sent them to Bullworth Academy? Lol

Hydro_pt: There aren't kids or animals in GTA games because the society is not yet ready to understand that a video game is just that, a video game, a bunch of coloured pixels that don't hurt nobody in real life….Maybe one day Rockstar will get enough balls to add everything they want to the game and make it the most realistic possible. A bit like Postal 2, which is a great game when it comes to violence. You can cut heads off and kick them around the city, use a shovel and decapitate peds [*pedestrians*], burn dogs and cats, choke people on their own piss/vomit, put cats in your rifle and shoot them around, throw scissors and infected cow heads, kill terrorists on a church, piss on graveyards, electrocute peds until they die, etc, etc…

This passage illustrates the value and enjoyment attached to simulations of sex and violence against women. The players relish the killing of “hookers” and assume the vulgar persona that is characteristic of the cynicism and irreverence portrayed in the
game. Is the game just providing what people want or is the culture of the GTA series educating the gamers to these dispositions? To answer such a question would require a different methodological approach, but certainly the gamers’ meanings and perspectives reflect the cultural and ideological perspectives represented in the game.

**d. Violence.** As discussed in Chapter Two, violence in this study is conceived as having broader dimensions than just the direct, somatic physical harm. Symbolic forms of violence privilege some while oppressing others, legitimating these inequities in society and in cultural representations. Structural forms of violence limit access to social, economic, and political goods, thus causing harm. Violence as it is represented in GTA IV spans these multiple domains or dimensions with the most obvious being representations of direct violence. Nearly every mission and scene in GTA IV contains direct physical violence. Random murder, plotted assassination, and massacre of groups are all represented throughout the game play. By far the most common code used in this analysis has been the code for violence; see Appendix D. The threat of violence was recurrent as well. As previously discussed, gendered violence was common throughout the game and functions as a legitimation of gendered hierarchies in society. It is through this legitimation of hierarchy that the broadening of the concept of violence is illustrated. Of interest then in this analysis of the themes is the purpose of violence, its role in the game, and the meanings attached to the acts of violence.

Hannah Arendt’s discussion of the conflation of violence with power, strength, force, and authority proves insightful to this task. To review from Chapter Two, Arendt (1970) has defined violence as distinct from the often conflated meanings of the terms power, strength, force, and authority. Power is associated with the human capacity “to act
in concert”, this is a form of collective agency. Power in Arendt’s conception does not
rest in the individual, but human association and cooperation. Strength then is conceived
as being in the individual domain, “unequivocally something in the singular, an
individual entity” (p.44). Strength is a property or capacity of the “object or person”, it is
an individual resource. Force is distinguished from violence, as a “force of nature” or a
“force of circumstance”. It is a form of momentum associated with “physical or social
movements”. Authority is then defined as “recognition by those who are asked to obey”
absent of coercion or persuasion. It is linked to the kind of respect for position or
institution in which one occupies a place of authority (p. 45). Violence according to
Arendt can be distinguished by its “instrumental nature”. It is a means that requires
justification, but it is destructive of authority when used. Consider, “Violence appears
where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power’s
disappearance…Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it” (p.56).

In the world of GTA IV, violence is conflated with these concepts of power,
strength, force, and authority. Violence is the preferred means for asserting one’s will and
solving problems. But as Arendt skillfully illustrates, violence is destructive of power, yet
in GTA IV, violence repeatedly is the means for achieving an end. As a game, GTA IV
commodifies violence as a spectacle to be consumed and enjoyed, as a site of pleasure
and intrigue. Furthermore, violence is glorified and valued as pleasure in the meanings
that gamers make about the experience. The instrumental nature of violence is conflated
with the means to fulfillment and pleasure as well as a means to achievement and
success. In GTA IV, power is viewed as something wielded by an individual within the
competition of interests. Power, force, strength and violence meld into an amalgamation
of hegemonic masculine domination. As construed in the culture of GTA IV, authority is neither accepted nor achieved. Violence and the threat of violence is the means by which people obey and conform, those who do not conform, die.

e. Linking the themes. GTA IV is an example of the socializing forces of media to an ideology supportive of sexism, misogyny, homophobia and hyper-masculinity that validate the patriarchal society through a lens of Neo-liberalism. Violence operates as a means to maintain and assert these interests in a world of competing interests. Embedded in the claims to rights for freedom of speech and expression are the forces of a patriarchal capitalist system which seeks profits from the heightened arousal of the virtual violence and mayhem enacted in these video games characterized by a cynicism and irreverence for life and public interconnections. Lost is the responsibility and duty of citizenship which holds the promise that one’s freedom will not harm another’s right to freedom and justice. Instead players are socialized in the normalcy of masculine hegemony, supported by homophobia and the threat and use of violence as regulation of gender roles. The roles constitute a gendered order that is defined by simplistic and rigid expectations of masculinity, femininity, and representations of identity that produces “others” rather than fellow human beings deserving of dignity and respect. RockStar video games is just one part of the powerful institution that is the media which reifies and reinforces the inequitable structure of American society. The goal is that through critical analysis and critical pedagogy, students can be empowered with the necessary skills to deconstruct the images and messages that are competing for their attention and realize their role as democratic citizens with the voice to choose what media they will value and those media that are deleterious of the promise of an active democracy.
Chapter Five

Implications and Conclusions

A. Implications of GTA IV and Violent Media

GTA IV is more than a game and a site for leisure and play. It is part of a media that “shapes” popular culture and has been described as a form of “public pedagogy” (Giroux, 2008, 2005, 1999) in which cultural systems of meaning and social practices are negotiated. The messages in GTA IV are more than representations of dominant culture, but also reproduce ideologies that justify and legitimate practices and patterns of domination and oppression. These ideologies include messages regarding the nature of society and the world, the nature of identity and human interaction, the nature of power and violence, and also what we as a culture should value and consider the norm. With the ubiquity of mediated communication in the contemporary world, media literacy must address these messages and provide students with the capacity to interrogate and reflect upon the meanings of media representations. Media literacy as part of a democratic education is vital to the preservation and transformative potential of democracy.

The term “public pedagogy” should not be confused with a pedagogy that seeks to teach for the public good. The concept of “public” confers a space where individuals have a collective agency (Arendt, 1963) and where principled reasons, dialogue and deliberation form human associations and interconnections. In democratic ethics, the public is the place where liberty is practiced (Macpherson, 1973; Snauwaert, 1992). But, in Giroux’s use of the word, the “public” in public pedagogy implies the negotiation of private interests or the tension between individual and corporate interests which are negotiated in popular culture. This is a popular culture that is consistent with the
conceptions of Theodor Adorno’s (1991) work regarding the culture industry. As described in Chapter Two, the culture industry is a corporate owned mass production of cultural goods that are commodified and consumed through mass transfers in the market. It is the corporate interests that are served by these productions and representations. As seen in this analysis of GTA IV, representations in mass media contain dominant cultural paradigms that reproduce ideologies supportive of a globalized market-oriented conception of the world.

In GTA IV, the ideology of neo-liberalism and its supportive ideologies of individualism, meritocracy, consumerism, and materialism teach about a world that is based on competition of individual interests in which the markets of consumption and material goods are central to human interests and interactions. This market centered world amounts to a form of social Darwinism in which the strong survive and flourish based upon the merits of individual initiative and individual capacities. Ends justify means including the valued use of violence to assert one’s will and achieve individual goals. In GTA IV, the market-oriented language of efficiency is complicit in the use of violence as a more efficient means than diplomacy or dialogue. Violence, strength, force and power are conflated as equivalent ideas quite unlike the nuanced distinctions of these concepts defined by Hannah Arendt (1970) in On Violence and discussed in detail in Chapter Two. According to Arendt, violence is always destructive of power which is a form of collective agency and rooted in legitimacy. The idea of the public, itself, is viewed with cynicism and disdain in GTA IV in which the world is corrupt and dangerous, a source for pain and misery. The world is a place where one must be strong, aggressive, and violent to survive, if not succeed.
Hyper-masculine identity is characterized by extreme strength, aggression, and violence, but is also related to the rugged individualism and self-reliance through strength and perseverance that is portrayed in popular American myths. As Katz suggests in the video *Tough Guise*, the mythic quality of characters in popular American media such as John Wayne, Rambo, and a slew of action film stars exemplifies this phenomena of individualism and hyper-masculinity. In *GTA IV*, Niko Bellic is a contemporary character that connects to this tradition of rugged masculine bravado. In the world of *GTA IV*, the masculine is valued and social hierarchy is gendered in ways that are supportive of Connell’s (2005) conception of hegemonic masculinity. The representation of the “other” is both gendered and based in stereotypic portrayals of groups based on ethnicity, race, and sexual orientation. The aspect of identity that is valued in *GTA IV* is the concept of the individual, an individual male, while what is conversely devalued is the “other”, the generalized groups of people, gendered, ethnic and racial others. So there is valuing of the individual and a collective devaluing of whole groups based upon associations of gender, ethnicity, race, and sexual orientation.

Identity conceived as it is in *GTA IV* is grounded in neo-liberal concepts of human nature and association in which humans are viewed as atomized beings driven by competition, individual interests, and material concerns. Violence within this social phenomenon is a valued means for assertion of the good which is a conception of individual interests in competition where the strong survive and flourish by merit and desert. Violence is portrayed as a valued means for maintenance of a social order that is hierarchical, “hetero-gendered” (heterosexual masculinity), and racialized. The broadened conception of violence discussed in Chapter Two presented by Galtung (1969,
1990) and Bourdieu (1990) is vital to understanding the nature of violence discourse in the GTA IV game. Direct violence is normalized and the hierarchical social order with its domination and oppression amount to a normalization that implies legitimacy, and thus constitute forms of structural, cultural, and symbolic violence.

**B. Implications for Democracy**

It is the basis of this study that media representations that instruct worldviews regarding society, culture, identity, power, and violence are reproductions of dominant cultural paradigms. Ideologies that support the social conditions of domination and oppression constitute a harm to a conception of the public good and to the principles of equality, liberty, nondiscrimination and nonrepression (Gutmann, 1987) that constitute democratic life ways. Democracy requires recognition of human sociability, mutuality and reciprocity in the associations and interconnections that construct communities and public life. It is associations defined by principled reasons that unite all citizens in a public discourse where equal rights and duties mutually and reciprocally observed provide the potential for democracy to fulfill the promise of human dignity and respect for life (Feinberg, 1998). As Dewey (1937) suggests, this association and interconnection of interests must extend into all dimensions of society, the social, cultural, economic as well as the political. Media literacy then must address such popular discourses in which private interests are embedded in the representations and reproductions of media such as GTA IV. The purpose of media literacy within this democratic framework is to provide students and citizens with the critical capacities for interrogating such messages and maintaining the promise of self-determination, freedom of mind, and freedom of choice that constitute a democratic vision of the world.
As delineated in the theoretical framework in Chapter Two, the vision of the world represented in *GTA IV* and legitimated through the predominant ideology of neoliberalism is a threat to democracy. Media portrayals such as *GTA IV* are essentially propagandist rhetorical devices that sponsor patriarchy, laissez faire corporate capitalism, and the militarization of culture and leisure. As noted in the limitations to this study, the intent of the producers of such media products cannot be determined through this form of research and analysis, however, intent is not necessary. As Sen (2009) suggests, positional objectivity has the potential to obfuscate understanding of the world. People hold beliefs which may blind them to others perspectives and to a broader conception of the world. Producers of video games such as *GTA IV* may have good intentions, but are producing representations that illustrate personally held biases that may not be recognized, reflected upon, or understood. Sen suggests that to overcome such positional deficiencies, individuals must be open to alternative perspectives and visions of the world. Democratic ethics and practice supports this stance for dialogue, deliberation and public reason as means for extending an inter-subjective understanding of the world. The capacity to engage in dialogue and deliberation requires the development of skills and dispositions which benefit from educational endeavor. Media literacy has the potential to add to the discourses in the educational traditions of democratic education, social reconstructionism, and peace education as a means for engaging students in a discourse that is grounded in the lived experiences of the students.
C. Implications for Education

a. The necessity for transdisciplinarity. Johan Galtung (2010) urged scholars and researchers interested in the issues of peace and violence to adopt a transdisciplinary dialogue for the purposes of developing a peace pedagogy that transcends compartmentalization and paradigmatic rigidity. Intersubjective understanding requires a broadening of the discourse or dialogue on issues relating to peace and violence for greater understanding to occur. The disciplines of the social sciences are uniquely equipped for the investigation of the problems and issues associated with peace research. Yet paradigmatically, each discipline has its own lexicon, methods, and knowledge that requires synthesis and flexibility to create cross discipline dialogue. As Galtung suggests, the disciplines of psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science, history, and philosophy often have unique perspectives that are based upon paradigmatic foci and scopes. What is needed is research and dialogue to be based upon issues and problem solving discourse. The theoretic framework developed for this study employed such a trandisciplinary approach, incorporating theories and research from multiple disciplines to inform the discourse on media, culture, ideology, power, identity, and violence. Early in the educational endeavor, students should begin to develop the capacities to understand the concepts from diverse disciplines that span social, political, and philosophical theory while creating knowledge through research and dialogue in problem-solving, issue-driven learning experiences.
b. Democratic conceptions of education. Education is vital to the survival and proliferation of democracy as both a political and ethical endeavor. Education should meet the purpose of cultivating a citizenry that has the capacity for a critical consciousness and a vigorous public spirit to assert cosmopolitan human rights, express human dignity and maintain the democratic promise of equality, liberty, and pluralistic inclusion. Democracy as an ethic and an organization of society is antithetical to hierarchy and violence, yet should not be construed as an absence of conflict, but rather a means for peaceful resolution of conflict. The results from this study illustrate the anti-democratic tendencies within the “culture industry” and affirm the necessity for a media literacy that develops critical faculties associated with capacities for self-determination, participation in public discourse, and freedom of mind and choice.

John Dewey conceives of democracy as “a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (1916, p. 101). Communication and dialogue are the means by which people articulate their experiences and understanding of the world and hence create an understanding of the mutual or shared interests of their community. For Dewey, growth is the aim of democracy, one that fosters the development of the full human potential of all people. Likewise, education should serve the purpose of growth and development, of the mind and one’s potential.

A society which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic. Such a society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder (p. 115).
For Dewey, education should develop the individual capacities of the democratic citizen to participate in a life of experience, dialogue, and growth. The human capacity for growth is guided by principles of equality and liberty as self-determination, the capacity of which must be fostered by education.

**c. Social reconstructionism in education.** George Counts identifies in his speech, *Dare a Progressive Education Be Progressive*, the inequalities and injustices of the economic system embedded and magnified in the American social structure must be ameliorated if education truly seeks to liberate. Education must be responsive to the social condition in which it is situated. “And there is also no good education apart from the conception of the nature of the good society… It [education] must always be a function of time and circumstance” (1932, p. 2). The conditions of capitalist economic exploitation, which manifest domination in the spectrum of social, political, economic and cultural relations, require the reconstruction of society, the cultural value system and the socially constructed ideals, as well as the relational power structure. Counts asserts that “our educational theory will have to embrace the entire range of life. It will have to deal, not only with labor and income and property, but also with leisure and recreation, sex and family, government and public opinion, race and nationality, war and peace, art and aesthetics” (p. 5). Counts recognizes the inherent contradictions and inequalities in the American tradition. While founded upon exalted ideals of liberty, equality, and justice, the American social order has been deeply rooted in stratified relations of power and opportunity. For instance, the agrarian individualism of the founders can be understood as an economic system requiring the forced labor of slavery. Likewise, the political equality at the nation’s founding can be seen as exclusive or aristocratic, with
inclusion only accorded to white males with a large holding of property. The legacy of this condition has been magnified by the age of industrialization and corporatization and continues to advantage some while disadvantaging others, thus as Counts proposes, education is a vehicle or agent for change of the social order. “To my mind, a movement honestly styling itself progressive should engage in the *positive* [emphasis mine] task of creating a new tradition in American life – a tradition possessing power, appeal, and direction” (p.5). Education must have the purpose of empowering all people in society to create a more just and sustainable world. “I would consequently like to see Progressive Education come to grips with the problem of creating a tradition that has roots in American soil, is in harmony with the spirit of the age, recognizes the facts of industrialism, appeals to the most profound impulses of our people, and takes into account the emergence of world society” (p. 6).

Paolo Freire’s work discusses the constructs of systemic oppression and the method by which education in an unjust society functions to maintain the status quo conditions of the oppressed and the oppressor. Freire describes such an educational system as “banking education” in which students are trained to receive knowledge and to view themselves as separate from the knowledge. Teachers in “banking education” stand in opposition to the student and act as figures of authority and as keepers of some disconnected gift. The educational system in an oppressive society promotes the inurement of the individual to an unfulfilled existence where power and knowledge are separated from the individual and removed from the experience. Thereby, the individual becomes a passive receiver of knowledge and culture and thus accepts the domination of the oppressor. Freire posits the necessity of a critical pedagogy that views the student as
the central figure in the learning experience and the teachers as “partners” in this exploration and inquiry. Dialogue is an important part of the learning process as student capacities for critical thought and analysis are entangled with the creation of knowledge and communicating the experience with others compounds the process. Freire writes: “Authentic liberation – the process of humanization – is not another deposit to be made in men. Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (2003, p. 79). The teacher is more a model of inquiry and dialogue, learning along with the students, exploring the world and the relationship between all things. Teachers and students “become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow…Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are owned by the teacher” (p. 80). The role of the teacher then is to pose problems for inquiry and to create an environment in which knowledge is created and power and agency is transformative. For Freire, education is “the practice of freedom”, built upon the progressive and liberal view of education as liberating the mind, but extending that liberation to the social and economic experience as well.

Freire’s work informs my personal philosophy of the transformative potential of education, both on the personal and social level. Transforming society from the unjust and unequal structures is vital for the development of an enduring democracy and just society. Critical pedagogy is thus a cornerstone of how we teach. Likewise, the school community should model the democratic society in organization and structure. Learning should be cooperative and experiential, with a focus on inquiry and interests. Dialogue and creative endeavor should be components of the process. Reflective practice should
inform the participant of his or her role in the dynamic relationships of social and intellectual discourse. Capacity for creative expression should be developed and allowed to flourish with value attached to the aesthetic and affect. Media literacy within this tradition then provides a means for reflective practice and the inspiration for the creation of alternative forms of communication and production of non-corporate media.

**Multiculturalism and social reconstructionism.** The Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist Approach (MCSR) is a transformative approach described in the work of Christine Sleeter and Carl Grant (1999). The MCSR delineates nine fundamental premises (Martin):

1) Culture is partially a product of power relations.
2) The approach helps students to investigate issues of inequality in their own environments and encourages them to take action regarding those conditions.
3) Culture and identity are conceptualized as complex and dynamic with race, class, gender, ability, and sexual orientation delineating power relationships in which everyone participates.
4) The approach considers all cultures to be an integral part of the curriculum.
5) The curriculum is organized to incorporate students’ multiple backgrounds, experiences, and learning styles.
6) Schools are used as laboratories to prepare students to participate actively in a democratic society.
7) The curriculum is built to enable students to become change agents in the society.
8) An environment that celebrates diversity is created.
9) Students are taught to build coalitions and develop cooperative learning strategies.

The MCSR approach blends two movements in education, Multiculturalism and critical pedagogy. The usage of the term “critical” implies a focus upon investigating issues of power relationships as in the tradition of “critical theory” from the Frankfort School rather than the cognitive concept of thinking critically. The goal or purpose of this
educational approach is to promote transformation rather than mere transmission of culture. The transformation is intended to empower students as reflective and conscientious democratic citizens with the capacity for individual and cooperative action and growth. The idea of transformation is that citizens must have the capacity for change to meet the demands of pluralistic democracy in a world of dynamic social, economic, political, and ecological contexts that are perpetually changing. Recognition and self-determination are extended to cultural groups as well as to individuals with multiple positionalities and unique expressions of identity (Taylor, 1992). A media literacy that interrogates issues of identity and power in popular culture representations helps students investigate the meanings and practices that form stereotypic assumptions. The embedded nature of such discourses provides opportunities to explore issues of diversity and the institutionalization of biases.

**d. Implications for peace education.** Betty Reardon (2000, p. 6) proposes there is a shared purpose to peace education across the multiple approaches that constitute its broad conception. Peace education is “learning that attempts to comprehend and reduce the multiple forms of violence (physical, structural, institutional, and cultural) used for the advancement or maintenance of cultural, social, or religious beliefs and practices or of political, economic or ideological institutions or practices”. Peace education has arisen from multiple disciplines including progressive education, international education, conflict resolution, multicultural education, environmental education, and traditional peace studies. The holistic or comprehensive approach to peace education promoted by Reardon develops a synthesis of these approaches, grounded in a holistic view of the world. A pedagogy of peace should address both negative and positive peace and
develops basic capacities for understanding human interconnections with each other and the world. Negative peace refers to the absence of war and violence while positive peace is a transformative approach to creating just and sustainable societies. Reardon points to five principle capacities that should guide this pedagogy: ecological awareness, cultural proficiency, global agency, conflict competency, and gender sensitivity (p. 19-20).

Leonard (2004) points to the potential of media literacy and a discourse on popular culture as a means for engaging students in a pedagogy of peace. Within this discourse, video games provide the potential for engaging students in a deconstruction of messages and images that are familiar and unexamined or “taken for granted”. The intersection of entertainment (or the culture industry) with the militarization of society is a site for practicing a pedagogy of peace, in which the messages and images regarding war, violence, and identity are decoded, analyzed, and critiqued. Furthermore, the role of the media in perpetuating a culture of violence and promoting “national interests” is engaged.

The erasure of carnage and bloodshed through smart bombs, CNN, video games, and other forms of virtual warfare is making peace increasingly more difficult, necessitating an increased emphasis on popular cultural literacy. Against a background where war takes place within the hyperreal (virtual) and where war-making itself is increasingly virtual and hyperreal, … [the practices of media literacy] demonstrate the importance of challenging and deconstructing video games as part of a pedagogy of peace. (p. 3)

Again drawing from the work of Betty Reardon, peace education should occur in democratic educational forms that emphasize transformational approaches constructing knowledge rather than transmitting knowledge. Transformational peace education should “draw out a new mode of thinking that is life-affirming, oriented toward the fulfillment of the human potential, and directed to the achievement of maturation as the ultimate
Transformation is holistic in a sense that students’ attitudes, beliefs, and values are transformed through experience, analysis, reflection, critique, and evaluation. Also, while this transformation works at the level of human agency, it also has the potential to transform the cultural norms, values, and standards as well as the institutions and structures of society through the development of capacities for collective human agency.

e. A critical media literacy for democracy and peace. Critical media literacy is a transformative approach that employs the application of critical pedagogy to the study and analysis of culture and media with the view that a curriculum must address the societal issues embedded in the culture through the framework of democratic education. Kellner and Share (2007) suggest that a critical media literacy “focuses on ideology critique and analyzing the politics of representation of crucial dimensions of gender, race, class, and sexuality; incorporating alternative media production; expanding textual analysis to include issues of social context, control, resistance, and pleasure”. In other words, education must address the intersection of structure, culture, and ideology and analyze the production and proliferation of knowledge, power, and hierarchies. Students engage and create alternative media forms that address the issues of poverty, sexism, racism, homophobia, and violence. Within this construction of curriculum, is the potential to mitigate media’s negative influences and empower students with a critical consciousness or awareness that promotes agency as cosmopolitan democratic citizens. A cosmopolitan democratic citizenship in which students become aware of both the rights and duties required for democratic living. These rights include freedom from harm and the duty to ensure that others have the right to an equal claim to freedom from harm.
Thus, cosmopolitan democratic citizenship recognizes that the many dimensions of violence, physical, emotional, structural, and symbolic, are a contradiction of democratic values and thus, unjust. Built within critical media literacy is the concept that education should be transformative for both the individual and for society. Critical media literacy engages the student in analysis of the intersection of ideology, domination, and oppression embedded in the culture and challenges students to be active, participatory agents with an ethical duty to resist injustice and promote positive change for themselves and for their community through alternative media forms. The potential for students to learn agency in the proliferation of information and alternative media forms has the potential to be a mitigating force against the effects of global corporate media conglomerations which are the controlling entities in media production and distribution. The nature of globalization and the role of inequity and injustice in producing instability and conflict in the world is a central focus for a pedagogy that seeks positive peace.

D. Suggestions for Future Research and Conclusions

The limitations addressed in this study point to the necessity for further research into the meanings being constructed by producers and players/consumers of violent video games and of media in general. Violence is ubiquitous in the world as it presently exists. Certainly conflict is a natural condition of human relations and interactions, but the valuing and use of violence as a means for resolving such conflicts is not a prescribed, but rather a culturally embedded practice. As suggested in Figure 1, individual and collective agency has the capacity to resist popular notions of human behavior represented in cultural systems of meaning and structured in the institutional dimensions of society. It is individuals collectively that construct culture and social institutions.
Through the capacity of critical consciousness and agency, individuals can alter or transform culture and society.

Educational research must also address the concern for constructing a positive peace and seek new and innovative ways to educate students about the world and about human relations. As educators, how can we better prepare students to understand holistically the interconnections of humanity to each other and to the natural world? This requires a pedagogy and curriculum that is intertwined and transdisciplinary, not compartmentalized or disassociated from cross-paradigmatic dialogue and multiple perspectives (Galtung, 2010).

The goal of this study is to emphasize the importance in developing students’ critical capacities through engagement in media literacy as a component of a larger curriculum aimed at democratic citizenship, pluralistic and multicultural understanding, and peace pedagogy. Through such a conception of education, students can be empowered with the necessary skills to deconstruct the images and messages that are competing for their attention and realize their role as democratic citizens. Citizens with the voice to choose media they will value and the media that are deleterious of the promise of an active, vital democracy that recognizes the intrinsic worth of all life. Thus, a culture affirming and respecting life in its many forms.


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Appendix A

List of Final Coding Structure

American Society:
  Equality/ Superiority
  Freedom/ Liberty
  Meritocracy
Cynicism
Identity
  Gender Identity
    Gender Stereotype
    Homophobia
    Hypermasculinity
    Misogyny
Race and Ethnicity
  Ethnic Stereotype
  Racial Stereotype
  Slur or pejorative
Neoliberalism
  Absence of interference
  Efficiency
  Individualism
  Market orientation
  Materialism
Violence
Appendix B

A list of videos documenting the completed missions in GTA IV

Mission 01: The Cousins Bellic: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LO67Ek68f7s
Mission 02: It’s Your Call: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LO67Ek68f7s
Mission 03: Three’s a Crowd: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KO0fhOp-A5o
Mission 04: Bleed Out: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WWFjrbvDerU
Mission 05: First Date: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g1PdaCTKyxI
Mission 06: Easy Fare: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEnWocSrMcY
Mission 07: Bull in a China Shop: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YbVW4pBcMyc
Mission 08: Hung Out to Dry: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EmSYTMK5bUA
Mission 09: Clean Get Away: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jLUdISY7oZM
Mission 10: Ivan the Not So Terrible: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=za0w6808CDg
Mission 11: Jamaican Heat: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gWcmvKXQnFY
Mission 12: Uncle Vlad: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-L68Qn9pSA
Mission 13: Concrete Jungle: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gWcmvKXQnFY
Mission 14: Crime and Punishment: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1MGFlw3Pzo
Mission 15: Do You Have Protection: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3SJ9CKyygE
Mission 16: Final Destination: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZ69u1DINSc
Mission 17: No Love Lost: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ji2jIDbyy_E
Mission 18: Shadow: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9OPAXb091
Mission 19: Logging On: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_VjBKb_0No
Mission 20: Rigged to Blow: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryt7NPSkBTc
Mission 22: Russian Revolution: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNlJcTE9NXg
Mission 23: Roman’s Sorrow: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9SrDjAWKU8
Mission 24: Escuela of the Streets: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yH0Z-29ICH0
Mission 25: Street Sweeper: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EK5ftDLctUQ
Mission 26: Search and Delete: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzWWTnev1BY
Mission 27: Easy as Can Be: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THKvtsK_rYQ
Mission 29: Luck of the Irish: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXISzU3ypCo
Mission 30: Blow Your Cover: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fIT2rN_4s2A
Mission 31: The Puerto Rican Connection: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=faT6nyYKvPs
Mission 32: The Snow Storm: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OMab9SHZIyc
Mission 33: Have a Heart: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pHDdGqlsZI
Mission 34: No. 1: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkxEY_uxkR0
Mission 35: Deconstruction for Beginners: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5DjciVwdNo
Mission 36: Ruff Rider: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HCq06gCBAb8
Mission 37: Undress to Kill: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xrd_ajPU_eM Mission 38: Photo Shoot:
Mission 39: Wrong is Right: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y2f_NqmnVYs
Mission 40: The Holland Play: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdjnUerPRK4
Mission 41: Hostile Negotiation: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKCNexB3a2I
Mission 42: Portrait of a Killer: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DShh0N1Ocg
Mission 43: Dust Off: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKCNexB3a2I
Mission 44: Call and Collect: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-eTy6VFVNA
Mission 45: Paper Trail: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YfuilDsbH7o
Mission 46: Final Interview: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hz1Aoug1D6w
Mission 47: Holland Nights: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FC_c_qz8LUc
Mission 48: Lure: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2otzwHwOUUs
Mission 50: Waste Not Want Knots: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-eDOXLEnPVc
Mission 51: Three Leaf Clover: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CC6IXmAixGE
Mission 52: A Long Way to Fall: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXYUeAcSCpE
Mission 53: Taking in the Trash: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hEG1wGbr3Ss
Mission 54: Meltdown: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4JgCmOG1BY
Mission 55: Museum Piece: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNPNC7kJCNNo
Mission 56: No Way on the Subway: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ElhrYgt6yuw
Mission 57: Weekend at Florian’s: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUIID--1-gsA
Mission 58: Late Checkout: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mocu5rkA2nM
Mission 59: Actions Speak Louder than Words: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=19jKC9E3JM0
Mission 60: I Need Your Clothes, Your Boots, and Your Motorcycle: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ockhxAJW4Z8
Mission 61: Smackdown: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mfGH_RaMsdM
Mission 62: Babysitting: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIw9hKZN_t4
Mission 63: Tunnel of Death: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2z17hva7bj4
Mission 64: Blood Brothers: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9vQDbW8kKw
Mission 65: Undertaker: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjQGRaq3mO8
Mission 66: Hating the Haters: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1s-k6YWPQFw
Mission 67: Union Drive: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOA6N-LOuB8
Mission 68: Buoys Ahoy: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkfSsv0R2FU
Mission 69: I’ll Take Her: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o9DzOuOsq5M
Mission 70: Ransom: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gtm0eunmEQE
Mission 71: She’s a Keeper: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRmPgEr-Xjo
Mission 72: Diamonds are a Girl’s Best Friend: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KmmEsR0yok
Mission 73: Truck Hustle: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIIOdX3eNus
Mission 74: Pogorino’s Pride: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LaulbiGfFWM
Mission 75: Payback: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14MYXq-KLFG
Mission 76: Catch the Wave: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_uzsbEdJc0k
Mission 77: Trespass: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QsXhXyYDKo
Mission 78: To Live and Die in Alderney: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_aJ55AlpdQ
Mission 79: Flat Line: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5eY0F9Jb70
Mission 80: Pest Control: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4mMEWygrr3g
Mission 81: Entourage: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lFE0UuzR0nU
Mission 82: Dining Out: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6ltw3VLWUG
Mission 83: Liquidize the Assets: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awGdYKHJbgo
Mission 84: That Special Someone: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t1Y3dezL6P4
Mission 85: One Last Thing: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUrfJhUbW8k
Mission 86: If the Price is Right: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fMiHwNcDRnE
Mission 87: Mr. & Mrs. Bellic (Deal): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLpqU7OgSIY
Mission 88: A Revenger’s Tragedy (Deal): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7TWGRuHIDUA
Mission 89: A Dish Served Cold (Revenge): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFeQZnA3k7A
Mission 90: Mr. and Mrs. Bellic (Revenge):
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ph5iQDncEQ

Mission 91: Out of Commission (Revenge):
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jatDQ55dnKc
Appendix C

Computer generated screen print copies of the website contents.

Figure 2: Screen Print from GTA IV website: Hyper-Masculinity, Misogyny and Violence

Figure 3: Screen Print from GTA IV website: Misogyny and Violence
Figure 4: Screen Print from GTA IV website: Hyper-Masculinity, Misogyny, and Gendered Violence

Figure 5: Screen Print from GTA IV website: Hyper-masculinity and Gendered Violence
Figure 6: Screen Print from GTA IV website: Hyper-Masculinity and Homophobia

Figure 7: Screen Print from GTA IV website: Misogyny and Cynicism
Figure 8: Screen Print from GTA IV website: Misogyny and Violence

Figure 9: Screen Print from GTA IV website: “War is Necessary”
Appendix D

Output of Coding Frequency of the Primary Documents Related to the Narrative of GTA IV

CODES-PRIMARY-DOCUMENTS-TABLE (CELL=Q-FREQ)

Report created by Super - 10/23/2011 02:44:10 PM
"HU: \tsclient\C\Users\Harry\My Thesis\Data\JWarnke_Th_Analysis_20111023a.hpr6"

Code-Filter: All [23]
PD-Filter: All [4]
Quotation-Filter: All [221]

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<td>Gender Identity</td>
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