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# THE EDUCATIONAL POTENTIAL OF VIDEO GAMES IN THE DECONSTRUCTION OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY THROUGH THE VIGLIAM METHOD (VIDEO GAMES LITERACY FROM ALTERNATIVE MASCULINITIES)

*El potencial educativo de los videojuegos para la deconstrucción de la masculinidad hegemónica mediante el método VIGLIAM (Video Games Literacy from Alternative Masculinities)*



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## **Abstract:**

Generally, male video game characters represent a hegemonic masculinity based on a patriarchal system that shows as a protagonist and dominant a white, western, heterosexual, wealthy male, disabled man and anti-ecologist. Videogames are one of the most consumed entertainment industry products worldwide. For students, video games are spaces where to find their masculine identity. Therefore, education must include video games. Video games are used as an educational resource for the improvement of the teaching-learning process of students. However, the aim of this study is to



propose a didactic method untitled VIGLIAM (acronym for Video Games Literacy from Alternative Masculinities). From this method, firstly, students deconstruct critically the hegemonic masculinity of the characters in video games. Secondly, students build critically and creatively alternative masculinities that promote a fairer and more equal society. From this way, students develop empowering and empathetic skills from categories as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, body and nature. In short, this research is part of masculinities studies in the area of education and it is fundamental in the light of the emergence of posmachism that arises given the possibility of the loss of male privilege.

*Key Words: critical thinking; game literacy; gender; masculinity; posmachism; video games.*

### **Resumen:**

Habitualmente, los personajes masculinos de los videojuegos representan la masculinidad hegemónica construida bajo los parámetros de un sistema patriarcal que presenta como sujeto protagonista y dominante al varón blanco-occidental-heterosexual-poderoso-adulto-sin discapacidad y antiecológico. Si a este hecho sumamos que los videojuegos son uno de los productos de la industria del ocio y del entretenimiento más consumidos mundialmente, observamos el papel crucial de la educación ante la búsqueda de una identidad masculina por parte de los alumnos en los videojuegos. Siendo éstos utilizados como recurso educativo para la mejora del proceso enseñanza-aprendizaje del alumnado, este estudio tiene como objetivo principal proponer un método didáctico, al que hemos denominado VIGLIM (acrónimo de Video Games Literacy from masculinities) mediante el cual, el alumnado deconstruya críticamente la masculinidad hegemónica de los personajes en los videojuegos y construya crítica y creativamente masculinidades alternativas que contribuyan a una sociedad más justa e igualitaria fomentando el desarrollo de competencias empáticas y empoderadoras desde las categorías género, raza, clase, orientación sexual, cuerpo y naturaleza. De modo que este trabajo se enmarca en los estudios de masculinidades, fundamentales en el ámbito educativo ante el surgimiento del posmachismo que surge ante la posibilidad de la pérdida del privilegio masculino.

*Palabras clave: alfabetización en videojuegos; género; masculinidad; pensamiento crítico; posmachismo; videojuegos.*

## **1. Introduction**

Video games are increasingly being used as an educational resource (Shaffer, Squire, Halverson, & Gee, 2005; Annetta, 2008; Squire, 2008; Squire, 2011; Kardan, 2006; McMichael, 2007; McCall, 2011; Watson, Mong, & Harris, 2011). However, this has not always been the case. Despite the widespread popularity of these entertainment products, until recently there were very few studies exploring their educational potential (Quesada & Tejedor, 2016). The traditional highbrow culture/pop culture opposition tended to favour the incorporation of the former in the educational sphere, to the exclusion of mainstream media products. Then research began to appear in the area of cultural studies (Hoggart, 1958; Williams, 1976; and Stuart Hall, 1981), and more specifically, in critical pedagogy, that advocated the integration of popular culture into the education curriculum.

Educators who refuse to acknowledge popular culture as a significant basis of knowledge often devalue students by refusing to work with the knowledge those students actually have, and in doing so eliminate the possibility of developing a

pedagogy that links school knowledge to the differing subject relations that help to constitute their everyday lives (Giroux & McLaren, 1998, p. 174).

Video games are classified as popular culture, which in turn is defined as ‘mainstream culture for the masses’ (Huysen, 1986/2006, p. 9) associated with consumerism and commercial objectives (Storey, 2012), which—according to numerous studies conducted mainly in the fields of psychiatry and clinical psychology (Aranda, Sánchez-Navarro & Martínez-Martínez, 2016, pp. 12-13)—have produced negative effects in terms of psychological disorders, aggression or addictions. On the other hand, Aranda, Sánchez-Navarro & Martínez-Martínez (2015, p. 4) also argue that video games belong to the realm of play that extends to every dimension of human life (social relations, work, education, etc.). There are thus two discourses in relation to the rise of the video game phenomenon: one that criticises the excessive presence of play as a threat to productivity; and one that acknowledges the potential of play to generate cultural, educational and economic innovation. These discourses correspond to the position between the recognition of highbrow culture in the academic sphere and the exclusion of popular or media culture from the classroom.

However, the recognition of ‘ludoliteracy’, defined as ‘literacy in digital play [...] that reveals the capacity of the video game and grants it prestige it as a cultural object’ (p. 4), along with the European Parliament Resolution of 2009 that stresses that ‘schools should pay attention to video games and inform children and parents about benefits and disadvantages that video games can have’ (Article 3) and notes that ‘video games can stimulate learning of facts and skills such as strategic thinking, creativity, cooperation and innovative thinking, which are important skills in the information society’ (Article 5), have led to a reassessment of video games as didactic tools for teaching content and developing the skills established in the education curriculum (Aranda, Creus & Sánchez-Navarro, 2014; Marín & Martín, 2014).

It also cannot be overlooked that the video games sector has been definitively established as one of the biggest sectors in the entertainment industry. According to the Entertainment Software Association (2015), 1,800 million people around the world play video games. In terms of profits, in 2015 alone they generated 91,800 million dollars worldwide and 1,083 million euros in Spain (Méndez, 2017, p. 546). While these figures may be somewhat slanted given that they come from an association representing the industry’s major distributors, such as EA, Capcom, Microsoft, Nintendo and Sony, it is impossible to deny the diversity of their audiences, their ability to maintain popularity over time to an extent that a theatrical film release cannot match, and, above all, their interactivity—the defining feature of the video game, which makes its players active participants rather than mere spectators. In this sense, Gee (2003) stresses that video games allow their players to be not just consumers but also producers.

The objectives of this study are based on Gee’s observation in relation to the consumer/producer role of video game players and its direct relationship with two of the negative effects of video games associated with their glorification of violence and aggression: the roles they assign to males and females (Etxeberria, 1998). These

effects are related to the symbolic power of the cultural industries that produce video games, which reflect patriarchal structures and the fact that 98% of video game creators are men, despite the fact that the proportion of female video game players has increased considerably in recent years, to around 45% (Bernárdez, 2015). In this respect, Méndez (2017) explores the negative impact that the minimal presence of female creators has on video game content, with the exclusion of female perspectives that could offer alternative visions of female characters, in opposition to the usual stereotypes associated with masochistic or sadistic women and Barbie doll characters (Martínez, 2007, pp. 254-255). The importance of this issue was highlighted by the Gamergate controversy, the name given to the harassment campaign launched by online video gamer communities targeting the video game developer Zoe Quinn (2017), in reaction against attempts by women to establish a place in the industry. This campaign revealed the new strategies being adopted by post-machismo groups to exclude women as video game creators. On this point, it is worth highlighting the creation of the WIGI (Women in Games International) project (Bernárdez, 2015), which has the goal of increasing the number of female programmers in the video game industry in order to offer different visions of female characters.

These issues need to be prioritised for education in the twenty-first century. We need to recognise that we are dealing with a student body made up of 'digital natives' (Prenkys, 2001) who could benefit from the educational opportunities offered by video games through 'digital game-based learning' (Prenkys, 2008), to teach them curriculum content and to develop their critical thinking skills in relation to male and female roles and stereotypes in video games that contribute to the reinforcement of machismo and sexism among young people.

While to date the focus has been on the use of video games as a didactic tool to motivate students to engage with course content, this study explores an approach, in line with Aranda, Sánchez-Navarro & Martínez-Martínez (2015, p. 6), which takes media literacy in video games a step further by focusing on the video game as an object of study itself, prior to its incorporation as a didactic tool. Analysing the video game as an object of study itself has allowed us to identify its important and pivotal role in the promotion of a hegemonic masculinity associated with the two negative effects indicated above, which can be defined as

the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue. Hegemonic masculinity was distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities. 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. (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832)

From this perspective, this study considers the following research questions:

- If video games are digital platforms based on patriarchal frameworks that shape the construction of male characters in accordance with hegemonic masculinity, how can we propose their use as a didactic tool for teaching academic subjects without taking this underlying problem into account and facilitating critical reflection on it in the classroom? Gifford (1991; quoted in Etxebarria, 1998, p. 178) identified seven attributes of video games that make them effective as learning tools: free play, allowing players to exercise their fantasies; the access they offer to alternative 'microworlds'; instant replay, encouraging risk taking; skills mastery; interaction with friends in a non-hierarchical environment; clear goals, and; intense absorption, increasing attention and self-control. For Gee (2003), the video game promotes motivation, which is the most important factor for learning. This assertion is supported by Cuenca, Martín & Estepa (2011), who highlight the motivating potential of video games as a resource for studying social sciences, and corroborated by Vergara & Mezquita (2016) in their analysis of the use of serious games to motivate senior secondary students to learn content that fosters their creativity. However, while the use of video games constitutes a form of media-based learning, it also requires an education in media from a gender perspective that will foster critical and egalitarian thinking.
- The inclusion of the gender perspective in video games research has facilitated critical reflection for the identification of characters that conform to male and female roles and stereotypes. This helps students to recognise misogynist situations in the audiovisual narrative and to raise awareness about them. However, we wondered whether such identification was enough. In recent years, teaching guides on video games (CIDE & Instituto de la Mujer, 2004; Bertoméu, 2008) have begun to appear that promote empowered female characters that are not subject to sexual objectification. But what about subverting the image of male characters that reflect hegemonic masculinity? Is simply identifying them enough? What alternatives to hegemonic masculinity are there? If stereotypical images of female characters in video games are being challenged by images of women that break such stereotypes, how can we promote alternative male characters dissociated from hegemonic masculinity?

Considering these questions, we proposed a teaching method that we have called 'Video Games Literacy through Alternative Masculinities' (VIGLIAM). The purpose of this method is to deconstruct the hegemonic masculinity visible in video games and reflect on how male characters that reflect alternative masculinities might be introduced. In this way, video games can be understood both as educational tools for the teaching process and as transformative spaces for the development of an education curriculum that fosters critical and social skills and empathy in students.

## 2. Video games in the post-machismo context

Modernity established a ‘fraternal contract’ (Pateman, 1988) that promoted the idea of the complementarity of the sexes. This view was consolidated in Enlightenment thought in texts on education. For example, Book V of Rousseau’s essay *Emile, or On Education* (1762) is dedicated to the role of Sophy, or the woman in relation to Emile: ‘It is not good that man should be alone. Emile is now a man, and we must give him his promised helpmeet. That helpmeet is Sophy [...]. [W]oman is made to please and to be in subjection to man, she ought to make herself pleasing in his eyes’ (pp. 248-249). The fact that this is just one chapter in a book dedicated to the education of men and that it assigns a subordinate role to the woman stands as evidence of the consolidation of the patriarchal system, defined as ‘a social structure in which males occupy a position of domination over women [...] founded on machismo, misogyny and homophobia’ (Bernárdez, 2015).

Rousseau’s *Emile* is essentially a grand narrative that establishes a heterosexual Western white male with purchasing power as the protagonist of history. This male is associated with the hegemonic masculinity promoted by the patriarchal ideology, whose attributes are:

phallocratic sexism, heterocentrism, individualism, competitiveness, dominant activism, hegemony, domination of the public sphere, undervaluing of the private sphere (the realm of women), constant obsession with success, work, the use of force, strength, and the repression of basic emotional levels and of affective/relational attitudes (Zurian, 2011, pp. 36-37)

The questioning of this grand narrative is the proposition of post-modernity (Lyotard, 1989), which challenges the idea of a single history, a single historical subject and, consequently, a single model of masculinity, proposing post-modern values like tolerance and pluralism, recognising the diversity of our world and, consequently, calling for a change from a single masculinity to the recognition of multiple masculinities.

However, despite the virtues of post-modernity, it can also sometimes harbour new narratives in which the traditional misogynist grand narrative lurks in the background, resulting in what has come to be known as ‘post-machismo’ (2009). According to Lorente (2013),

post-machismo is one of the latest ruses of the patriarchal culture. Its objective is clear: to try to push normativity as an argument, and to do so, paradoxically, in the name of equality. For advocates of post-machismo, any attempt to correct inequality, which will logically involve measures supporting the women who suffer its consequences, is depicted as a manifest example of inequality because it excludes men from such measures. Such initiatives may even be portrayed as an attack on men, given that many of them target privileges that the hegemonic culture has given them—in other words, the privileges that men have given themselves (p. 69).

Through a series of strategies, post-machismo conveys the idea that men are victims of a feminist movement that is biased against them, and they therefore need to defend themselves; in this way, post-machismo conceals its real purpose, as a new misogynist discourse that seeks to hold onto the privileges afforded by hegemonic masculinity. According to Lorente (2013, pp. 68-72), these post-machismo strategies include invoking neutrality, scientism, or the common interest, claiming indoctrination, discrediting and attacking people who argue for equality or suggesting they are only seeking to profit financially, victimhood, contradiction, and the misappropriation and misrepresentation of arguments put forward to promote equality and eradicate gender violence.

This research takes an approach based on masculinities studies, and specifically on the theories of R. W. Connell (2001) describing schools as agents in the formation and construction of masculinities (p. 160). As Angels Carabí discusses with Lynne Segal (p. 177), there is an undeniable reluctance among some feminist theorists to address these studies on the grounds that they distract attention from the basic objective of feminist and gender studies, which is to tear down the patriarchal ideology that oppresses women.

However, the introduction of video games in schools from the perspective of alternative masculinities may offer a unique opportunity for students to think critically about their own masculinity and the influence of video games on the construction of male identity. Indeed, a recent study on how sexist and violent video games considerably reduce empathy for victims of gender violence (Gabbadini, Riva, Andrighetto, Volpato & Brushman, 2016) confirms that teenage boys and young men use video games as spaces for exploring their male identity:

media stereotypes construct a stylized view of masculinity and femininity that influences the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of those who consume these media. In the mediated world, men are expected to control their feelings in order to be less vulnerable and more powerful. Emotions such as fear and empathy are prohibited because 'real men' are not supposed to express these feelings [20,18]. However, not all emotions are prohibited. Feelings of anger and rage are encouraged in 'real men' because they are associated with high status and power. The portrayal of men in the media as socially powerful and physically violent reinforces assumptions about how men and boys should act in society, as well as how they should treat women and girls. (Gabbadini, Riva, Andrighetto, Volpato & Brushman, 2016, p. 3)

Thanks to the progress made by feminist movements, young men are becoming aware of patriarchal dominance. However, they are unable to find a male identity distinct from hegemonic masculinity, and all the messages they receive from video games continue to uphold the patriarchal ideology.

If the school classroom can become a space that brings together the use of video games and a masculinities studies approach, male students will find the tools they need, as Sanfélix (2011, p. 27) suggests, to make our societies fairer and more egalitarian. Conversely, if we do not address this issue, young men may turn to a post-

machismo position as a way of resisting the rise of equality and feminism and the fight to bring down the patriarchy.

Gender-based research on audiovisual culture—and more specifically on video games—has focused mainly on female roles and stereotypes, even establishing new images of empowered women that break away from the ‘dominant male/subordinate female’ binary and offer role models for new generations of girls. But the field of gender studies itself conceives of gender as a cultural construct that determines the behaviour and physical appearance of both men and women. In this sense, male stereotypes can draw on four dimensions of masculinity, according to Brannon & David (1975, quoted in Segarra, 2000, pp. 36-37): a rejection of feminine qualities; success in economic terms and winning the respect of others; strength and self-confidence; and aggression.

As Zurian points out (2011), criticism of the patriarchal system from a male perspective is less well-known, pointing to a pedagogical opportunity “to promote a construction of free masculinities, encouraging a questioning of traditional patriarchal images of masculinity and inspiring a quest for new models of masculinity” (p. 39) that could defuse male power over women and over men who do not fit into the hegemonic model, such as homosexuals, Blacks, the elderly, etc. (Kimmel, 1997).

### **3. Video Games Literacy through Alternative Masculinities: the VIGLIAM method**

Video games are generally associated with the development of digital literacy, defined as “the ability to use digital technology, communication tools or networks to locate, evaluate, use and create information” (UNESCO, 2011, p. 185). However, video games also play a critical role in media literacy as defined by the Commission of the European Communities, as ‘the ability to access the media, to understand and to critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media content and to create communications in a variety of contexts’ (2007, p. 3). At the same time, UNESCO has proposed the notion of media and information literacy, referring to ‘the essential competencies (knowledge, skills and attitude) that allow citizens to engage with media and other information providers effectively and develop critical thinking and life-long learning skills for socializing and becoming active citizens’ (p. 185)

Video games are thus of interest not only in terms of ‘games literacy’, defined as: ‘1. Having the ability to play games. 2. Having the ability to understand meanings with respect to games. 3. Having the ability to make games’ (Zagal, 2011, p. 23); but also, in terms of media literacy, given the importance of developing critical thinking. Video games, unlike other media products, have two dimensions: ‘how they create (or make possible) meaning and pleasure [... and] how users (players) make sense of them and learn about them’ (Buckingham & Burn, 2007, p. 325). It is these two dimensions that inform the method proposed for this study, in relation to the recognition of the attributes of hegemonic masculinity in video games, and the proposition, as players, of alternatives to that hegemonic view from the perspective of alternative



masculinities. The Video Games Literacy through Masculinities (VIGLIAM) method (Table 1) thus proposes to develop literacy in video games from the perspective of masculinities. To this end, our starting point is masculinities studies (Connell, 1987; Kimmel, 1987; Connell, 1995) and their objectives:

- To foster critical thinking in students through a questioning of the male and female roles and stereotypes of the characters they adopt as video game players from a gender perspective.
- To identify representations of hegemonic masculinity, both in video games and in the school curriculum, where the supremacy of the abled, privileged, heterosexual Western white male is made visible, while male alterity is relegated to the 'hidden curriculum' (Jackson, 1992).
- To propose alternatives to the role of hegemonic masculinity through a recognition of the plurality and diversity of masculinities that promote equality between men and women, giving rise to the development of a critical curriculum that gives visibility to male otherness.
- To compare and reflect on the female and male characters favoured by the patriarchal system in contrast with the construction of new alternative models in video games.

In this way, the VIGLIAM method not only focuses on identifying male roles and stereotypes in video games from a gender perspective, but also aims to develop a critical pedagogical process that can facilitate the deconstruction of hegemonic masculinity and the construction of new masculinities. UNESCO (2005, p. 5) identifies how masculinities are configured in different ways depending on the context of time and location and on the basis of gender relations, while also proposing how men should behave in a particular environment. This definition, combined with the attributes of hegemonic masculinity described by Connell (1995), based on their complicity with the subordination of women, the marginalisation of all other races, their hegemonic domination of others, and their negation of any sexual orientation that does not conform to heteronormativity, constitutes a method that would enable the identification of a hegemonic masculinity that dominates through categories of gender, race, and class. In addition, in this study we include two other categories: the human body and the natural environment. These two additional categories facilitate reflection, firstly, on the age of masculinity and the invisibility of disability in men, and secondly, on man as a dominator of all other species and of nature in general. All of this constitutes the first stage of the method, when questions are posited to help students to reflect critically on the role of the male character in the video game.

In the second stage, a process is established that is both critical and creative, as students will be required to construct a character with reference to alternatives to hegemonic masculinity. This can lead to the proposition of a model of masculinity with empathy for gender equality; a global masculinity that takes into account both its own and all other cultures, the local and the global; an empowered masculinity, in the sense of refusing to establish societies based on the superiority/inferiority of certain classes over others; a diverse masculinity that recognises all types of sexual

orientations; an inclusive masculinity that gives visibility to men of all ages and men with disabilities; and an ecological masculinity with an awareness of other species and of environmental protection.

Table 1  
*Video Games Literacy through Masculinities (VIGLIAM)*

Didactic Method for De/Construction of Masculinities in Video Games			
Categories	Questions to deconstruct traditional masculinities	Categories	Questions to construct new masculinities
GENDER Complicit Masculinity		GENDER Empathic Masculinity	
	What is the player like? How does the player act when interacting with women? How does the player interact when interacting with men? Does the game compel, question or impede such interactions? Does the player interact with women from a position of inferiority, equality, or superiority? Why? Does the player interact with men from a position of inferiority, equality or superiority? Why? Does the game compel such positions when interacting?		How can the player empower women? How can the player act against the gendered violence enacted by other men? How can the player encourage other men to empathise with the situation of women? How can the player resist gender roles and stereotypes?
RACE Marginalised Masculinity		RACE Glocal Masculinity	
	What is the player's race? Is it the same as the character he/she plays? How does the player act when interacting with other races? How does the player act when interacting with his/her own ethnicity? Does the game compel, question or impede such interactions? Does the player interact with other races from a position of inferiority, equality or superiority? Why? Does the player interact with his/her own race from a position of inferiority, equality or superiority? Why? Does the game compel such positions when interacting?		How can the player empower his own race, or those marginalised by society? How can the player act against racist violence? How can the player make other races empathise with those in a situation of inferiority? How can the player resist the roles and stereotypes associated with his/her race, or with those in a situation of inferiority?
CLASS Hegemonic Masculinity		CLASS Empowered Masculinity	

<p>What social class does the player belong to? Is it the same as the character he/she plays?</p> <p>How does the player act when interacting with people of other classes?</p> <p>How does the player act when interacting with people of his/her own class?</p> <p>Does the game compel, question or impede such interactions?</p> <p>Does the player interact with other classes from a position of inferiority, equality or superiority? Why?</p> <p>Does the player interact with people from his/her own class from a position of inferiority, equality or superiority? Why?</p> <p>Does the game compel such positions when interacting?</p> <p>How does the player exert power, if he/she has it? If he/she does not have it, how does he/she obtain it?</p>	<p>How can the player empower his/her own social class, or those in a situation of inferiority?</p> <p>How can the player fight against poverty and/or social marginalisation?</p> <p>How can the player resist roles and stereotypes associated with his/her own class or those in a situation of inferiority?</p>
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SEXUAL ORIENTATION	Heteronormative Masculinity	SEXUAL ORIENTATION	Diverse Masculinity
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<p>What is the player's sexual orientation? Is it the same as that of the character he/she plays?</p> <p>How does the player interact with people with other sexual orientations?</p> <p>How does the player interact with people with the same sexual orientation?</p> <p>Does the game compel, question or impede such interactions?</p> <p>Does the player interact with people with a different sexual orientation from a position of inferiority, equality or superiority?</p> <p>Does the player interact with people with the same sexual orientation from a position of inferiority, equality or superiority?</p> <p>Does the game compel such positions when interacting?</p>	<p>How can the player empower sexual diversity?</p> <p>How can the player fight against sexual orientation-based discrimination?</p> <p>How can the player contribute towards respect for sexual diversity?</p> <p>How can the player resist roles and stereotypes associated with his/her own sexual identity, or those in a position of inferiority?</p>
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BODIES	Ableist and Ageist Masculinity	BODIES	Inclusive Masculinity
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<p>Does the player have any disabilities? Does the character he/she controls have any disabilities?</p> <p>What is the player's age? What is the age of the character he/she controls?</p> <p>How does the player behave when interacting with disabled people?</p> <p>How does the player behave when interacting with abled people?</p> <p>How does the player behave when interacting with older people? How does the player behave when interacting with younger people? Why the difference, if any?</p> <p>Does the game compel, question or impede such interactions?</p> <p>Does the player interact with people with disabilities from a position of inferiority, equality or superiority? Why?</p>	<p>What can the player do to empower disabled people?</p> <p>What can the player do to fight against ableist prejudice?</p> <p>What can the player do to fight against ageist prejudice?</p> <p>What can the player do to defy stereotypes and roles associated with age and disability?</p>
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Does the player interact with abled people from a position of inferiority, equality or superiority? Why?

Does the player interact with older people from a position of inferiority, equality, or superiority? Does the player interact with younger people from a position of inferiority, equality, or superiority? Why?

Does the game compel such positions when interacting?

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**NATURE Speciesist Masculinity**

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**NATURE Ecological Masculinity**

What species does the character belong to? Is it human or animal?

What can the player do to contribute towards the protection of his/her environment?

Does the player acknowledge the sentience of other living beings?

What can the player do to respect the sentience of other living beings?

What is the relationship of the player with nature?

What can the player do to resist the opposition between technology and nature?

What benefits does the player extract from nature?

How does the player contribute towards the conservation of his/her environment?

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Source: Prepared by authors.

## 4. Conclusions

In contrast with a positivist research model focusing on identifying the effectiveness of video games in the student learning process (Rodríguez-Hoyos & Gomes, 2013), this study proposes the use of video games from the perspective of gender studies, masculinities studies and cultural studies with the aim of presenting video games as transformative spaces for the proposition of alternatives to the hegemonic masculinity constructed by a patriarchal system in terms of domination and subordination.

The inclusion of popular or media culture—in this case, serious and/or commercial video games—in classrooms is necessary not only to support the development of media and information literacy, but also to teach students how to think critically about these media products as spaces where children, adolescents and young adults seek models of masculinity to inspire them and to identify with. Herein lies the role of video games as moral educators (Khoo, 2012). This highlights the need to ‘(de)construct or dismantle the traditional male identity so firmly entrenched in our bodies, and attempt to construct alternative models that offer other possible ways of being a man that are fairer and healthier for everyone’ (Sanfélix & López, 2019, p. 17).

Video games become the ideal space for this deconstruction and for counteracting the rise of post-machismo, whose advocates, in reaction against the increased presence of women as both video game players and creators, are adopting new strategies—as identified by Lorente (2013)—to reinforce a hegemonic masculinity that refuses to relinquish the dominant position of male privilege. This is the reason

for the creation of the Video Games Literacy through Masculinities (VIGLIAM) didactic method, which posits a series of questions to prompt students to think critically and creatively about the identification of attributes of hegemonic masculinity in male video game characters and the proposal of alternative masculinities that can break down the domination-subordination relationship in categories of race, class, sexual orientation, body and nature; in short, the empowerment of otherness. By way of conclusion, we recall the words of bell hooks (2004) in *The Will to Change*, in a chapter titled “Popular Culture: Media Masculinity”, which explores the importance of media culture for the establishment of masculinities outside the patriarchy:

Mass media are a powerful vehicle for teaching the art of the possible. Enlightened men must claim it as the space of their public voice and create a progressive popular culture that will teach men how to connect with others, how to communicate, how to love. (p. 134)

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