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Abstract:

The video game industry often defaults to White, male, muscular, and religious main characters, limiting marginalized identities in lead roles. Black characters, in particular, are frequently based on stereotypes. This content analysis explores representations in AAA action games, focusing on the evolution of these stereotypes and their impact on player perceptions. It also examines Jim Crow Era stereotypes and their modern parallels. Previous research highlights the overrepresentation of White male protagonists, while Black characters are sidelined or abused. Marginalized groups, especially people of color and women, often recognize these stereotypes. Using a sample of 10 games, 1-2 characters were selected for a survey of 25 participants, gathering their views on character design. A content analysis of Steam comments provided further insight. Results showed that characters like Sheva, Everett, and Marcus received similar responses in both the survey and Steam comments. This research underscores the need for diverse representation in gaming, advocating for increased inclusion and empowerment of marginalized voices.

## Introduction

### *Historical Context*

The word ‘Culture’ can have many different definitions. According to Merriam-Webster, culture is defined as “the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group.” (Merriam-Webster, n.d). Culture also spans different hair styles, music, artwork, or accessories. The physical representation of culture is often shown in media to hint at a character – either human or non-human – ethnicity and race. These media representations can have a positive and negative effects on a how people perceive and learn about new identities and cultures. For example, games like *Grand Theft Auto V* (GTA), *2K18*, and *Resident Evil V* include stereotypes that are harmful to people of color – specifically individuals from the African diaspora.

Many of these modern stereotypes are evolutions of stereotypes created during the Jim Crow Era (1877-1965). The Jim Crow Era was a period of segregation between White and African Americans that followed the Reconstruction Era of the United States. Jim Crow was guided by the belief that ‘white people were superior to black people’. This belief led to many negative portrayals in the media specifically through Minstrel shows. These shows led to historic stereotypes such as Uncle Tom, Mandigo, Jezebel, and Sapphire. Stereotypes like Mandigo and Jezebel are based on physical attributes. For example, a Mandigo (Black Buck) is “a Black man who is very strong and agile to the point of being considered brutish.” (National Museum of African American History, 2024). Unlike the Mandigo stereotype, the Jezebel caricature was based on both looks and personality. Jewell described a Jezebel as “thin lips, long straight hair, slender nose, thin figure and fair complexion.” (Jewell, 1993). The physical feature of being light-skinned also attributed to the rise of colorism. The Jezebel caricature also focused on the sexual prowess. Literature says, Jezebel was considered “sexual deviants who will fulfill any and all sexual fantasies.” (Pilgrim, 2002). These stereotypes were created to simplify the demographic. Although these stereotypes are very overt during Jim Crow, they have transitioned with the process of time.

From a modern perspective, stereotypes have become more overt and more insidious. For example, instead of the Mandigo stereotype, young black teens are relegated to either athletes or thugs. Adult Black men are considered ‘angry’, ‘aggressive’, and ‘dangerous’. This can be seen in media and news reports surround the Black Lives Matter Movement. For young girls and women, the Jezebel stereotype has evolved to young girls being labeled as ‘grown’ based on their clothes. With adult women, they are labeled as ‘angry’ or ‘masculine’. With these insidious stereotypes in modern society, it is no wonder that these stereotypes have made their way into video games.

### *Stereotype and Videogames*

With many countries designing and publishing video games, certain problematic issues such as stereotypes are often missed due to uninformed ignorance. An example would be Japan’s versus United States’s view on ‘blackface’. In Japanese media, ‘blackface’ – the pitch-black face, red lips, with bulging eye – is considered funny (McCullough, n.d.). Due to these cultural differences, many Japanese games must be modified for U.S. audiences. For example, the game *Doki Doki Panic* – changed to *Super Mario Bros 2* for the U.S – included an African Shrunk

head, which were changed to Koopa shells in the American releases (McCullough, 2021) [see Figure 1A]. Another example would be Jynx from Pokémon [see image 1B].



Figure 1A & 1B: Two examples of the liberal use of blackface in Japanese games. In image 1B, this is the recoloring from Japanese to American versions of Pokémon.

The video game industry is very diverse and broad; however, there is favoritism toward White game developers. According to the International Game Developer Association, only around 2% of game developers are Black or a part of the African Diaspora (Dornieden, 2023). With a system that is led by non-black individuals, there is room for improvement around the unintentional use of stereotypes. Organization such as NNESSAGA are created to help non-black developers with avoiding these potential pitfalls. NNESSAGA is described as “multi-awarding leading gaming and media entertainment organization that is dedicated to celebrating & pushing diversity, inclusion, representation & equity.” (Ijoma, 2015) . The founder, Stephanie Ijoma, said it best about being in the industry, “The problem is, we are not a priority to the gaming industry. The few times that we are, what tends to happen is that they give us a token choice of choosing the colour of our skin as opposed to making us the skin as they have basic and limited skin shades to do so. The solution is to hire more black people in the gaming industry and give them more power so that they can tell our stories and represent us well.” (Banda 2020).

### *Historical Perspective on Videogame Representation*

In 1987, *Heavyweight Champ* was the first game with a black person (Dornieden, 2020). Around the 70s and 80s, there was a clear divide to where players could find representation. Many Black male characters, designed as caricatures, were shown in sports and fighting games. Like Black male characters, black women had the same struggle. The first Black female lead was D’arci Stern from 1999 *Urban Chaos* (Goard, 2023). Interestingly a Google search of games with the prompt “Games with Black Characters” showed a Wikipedia page that had five main categories. These black male characters are the following: Celebrity Musician Games (e.g., *Michael Jackson experience*), Celebrity Sports Games (e.g., *George Forman KO boxing*), Violent Games (e.g., *50 Cent: Bullet Proof & Blood on the Sand*), Music based (e.g., *Ghetto Blaster*), and more historical games (e.g., *Freedom*) (Wikipedia, 2024). These games majority have monoliths of the Black community (i.e., celebrities) stepping into the role of characters.

An analysis by Williams et al (2009) found a “systematic over-representation of males, white and adults and a systematic under-representation of females, Hispanics, Native Americans, children and the elderly.”. This over-representation is prevalent in the depiction of the main character. Many games have a main character who is white, male, muscular, and religious (e.g., Chris Redfield from Resident Evil V). “Out of 53 heroes, 46 were White; Asian/Pacific Islanders

accounted for less than 8%, whereas African Americans and Latinos were even less likely to be heroes, at 4% and 2%, respectively. As Whites are heroic figures, Black characters are reduced to the stereotypical athletes. More than 80% of Black characters appear as competitors in sports-oriented games. Black women face a different racist reality, as more than 90% function as props, bystanders, or victims.” (Leonard, 2006, p. 84). This inequality of Black main characters and heroes can cause resentment in young players surrounding their identities.

Although there is an over-representation of white males in games, there is an interesting phenomenon that happens with underrepresented males and negative representations. Two studies by Burgess et al (2011) found that “in video game magazines, minority males, underrepresented generally, were more likely to be portrayed as athletes or as aggressive, and less likely to be depicted in military combat or using technology, than White males. Study 2 also showed evidence of the “dangerous” minority male stereotype in video game covers. Again, underrepresented overall, minority males were overrepresented as thugs, using extreme guns, and as athletes.” (Burgess et al 2011). This can be seen in many modern games especially in the *Grand Theft Auto* Franchises, *Resident Evil V*, and *Watch Dogs* Series [see Figure 2]



Figure 2A, 2B, 2C: These are some of the portrayals of gangster and militarization of Black characters. From CJ (left; 2A) and Marcus Holloway (right; 2C) being criminals, to Sheva (center; 2B) being a part of the in-universe military.

Now modern games are being more inclusive either in their production teams or through their characters. For example, games like *Dot's Home*, has a Black developer team. Compared to *Dot's Home*, the creators behind *South of Midnight* are white; however, they are seeking out Black designers to make sure the representation is accurate. In each of these games, the main character and cast are black without any of the insidious stereotypes. Other games like *Apex Legends* are debuting more diverse characters, but their storyline is not explored in game but through short promotional videos on YouTube.

### *Psychological Perspective on Representation*

Literature has shown there is a need for representation in games. A study by Cicchirillo (2014) showed that “Black participants who played the video game with the Black main character ( $M = 4.15$ ,  $SD = 2.86$ ) reported higher levels of identification with that character than did White participants ( $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = 1.38$ ). The results showed that there was a significant interaction effect between participant race and condition  $F(1, 176) = 4.94$ ,  $p < .05$ . Black participants in the Black main character condition (*Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*) experienced less positive affect ( $M = 4.54$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ) than White participants ( $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) in the same condition” (Cicchirillo, 2014). These results suggest that Black participants will have a deeper connection to Black main characters because of similar lifestyles, backgrounds, appearances, and dress. Unlike the Black participants, white participants were more focused on

physical characteristics (e.g., do they look badass?). Although the Black participants could relate to the character, they were still aware of the insidious stereotypes.

Through the increased use of the internet, many people get their information from a variety of sources. This biased information can come from stereotypes, or the treatment of characters shown in video games. A study by Henning et al (2009) found that "...girls were more likely than boys to recognize stereotypes in the games, particularly for the female-stereotypic games in which females were portrayed in sexually explicit ways. Further, girls were more likely than boys to view the male-stereotypic games, which depicted male characters as aggressive and violent, as negative. "The findings indicate that these stereotypical images are understood and processed by adolescents. Games with similar messages could affect the way individuals view themselves based on an intersectionality of race and gender. Even the portrayal of a certain character (e.g., zombies or androids), will have an underlying association with society. "In what Bernard Perron, calls the current climate' of zombie studies, the staggering undead are being theorized in a myriad of different ways. They are being examined as embodiments of the disabled, the diseased, the displaced, as symptomatic of Western fears of the breakdown of capitalism or the uprising of the disenfranchised." (Geyser & Tshabalala, 2011). Adolescents and other players can attribute negative or wrongs to society to the outliers or 'zombies' of society with enough repeated game playthroughs.

### *Project Rationale*

This project aims to discuss the importance of 'coded racism' in modern AAA games. The term 'coded racism' draws inspiration from the work of Ruha Benjamin specifically the idea of 'Jim Code'. The idea of 'Jim Code' is that discriminatory designs are encoded into technology causes racial bias and increases racial hierarchies (Benjamin & McNealy, 2019). Through the 'coded racism' framework, this content analysis aims to answer the following questions: how does 'coded racism' go from subtle dog whistles to learned behavior? Is the inclusion of 'coded racism' achieving the opposite effect in bringing awareness to race representation?

## **Methods**

### *Video Game Sampling*

The video game sampling was based off six main inclusion criteria. (1) The character had to be African American or from an African country. (2) The character had to be either a main or side character in the story. (3) On the same vein as the story, the characters story had to be a part of the main story and not in optional materials such as YouTube videos. (4) The characters chosen from the games also had to be explicitly human and not a non-human character who fans assumed was Black. (5) The game development team had to be a AAA studio. To be a AAA studio, a game studio had to have "a significant budget, high-profile games that are distributed by large, well-known publishers." (arm ltd., 2004) (6) The games had to be created around the early to mid 2010s.

Before accounting for the inclusion criteria, the original sample was 15 games. Five games were excluded (i.e., *Detroit Becomes Human* (DBH) , *Mafia III*, *Urban Chaos*, *Uncharted: A Thief's End*, and *Overwatch*). The games were excluded for the following reasons: DBH had non-human character, *Mafia III* and *Urban Chaos* did not fit the time window of early 2010's, *Uncharted: A Thief's End* has a racial ambiguous character, and *Overwatch*, which has

optional materials to see the characters backstory. The sample for the study is 10 games, where 1-2 characters were chosen with balance for gender when applicable [see *Graph 1*].

<b>Game of Origin (n=10)</b>	<b>Characters chosen (n= 15)</b>
<i>Final Fantasy VI</i>	Barrett Wallace (M)
<i>Bioshock Infinite</i>	Daisy Fitzroy (F)
<i>Spider-Man: Miles Morales</i>	Miles Morales (M) Phin Mason (F)
<i>Resident Evil V</i>	Sheva Alomar (F) Josh Stone (M)
<i>The Walking Dead</i>	Lee Everett (M) Clementine (F)
<i>Watch Dogs 2</i>	Marcus Holloway (M) Horatio Carlin (M)
<i>Assassin Creed Liberation</i>	Aveline de Grandpre (F) Agate (M)
<i>Dishonored: Death of an Outsider</i>	Billie Lurk (F)
<i>Dead by Daylight</i>	Adam Francis (M) Claudette Morel (F)
<i>Grand Theft Auto (GTA) V</i>	Franklin Clinton (M) Lamar Davis (M)

*Table 1:* The games of origin and the grouping of characters with their sex marked in parenthesis as ‘F’ for female and ‘M’ for male.

#### *Steam Comment Search*

After selecting the games, 4 comments were chosen from the Steam community page. The primary criterion for selection in the Steam Search was that the comment made a passing acknowledgment of one of the characters of interest in the study. These comments were used to determine how the community expressed their opinions on the game and the characters. However, two games, *Dead by Daylight* and *GTA V*, were excluded because most comments primarily discussed the games' community and bugs.

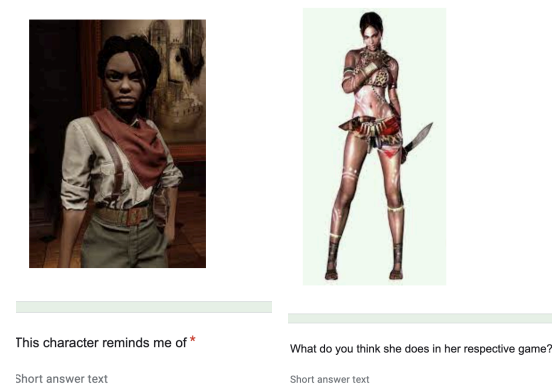
#### *Survey Recruitment*

Subjects were recruited through multiple internet sources (e.g., Instagram, LinkedIn, GroupMe, and Discord). With the help of my mentor, the survey was also distributed to the University of Rochester community through the Digital Media Studies Department, StudioX, and MAGIC. The sample was a combination of video game players and non-video game players from the University of Rochester Community.

Through recruitment efforts, a total of 60 volunteers were sent the survey. After viewing the data and cleaning for any incomplete answers, the final sample of the project was 41 volunteers. Out of the sample, 24 were videogame players and 17 were non-videogame players. Most of the sample was White (n=19), with the rest of the sample being Asian (n=15), African American (n=5), Mixed (n=1), African (n=1), and Latino (n=0).

#### *Survey Questionnaire*

The survey's questions were focused on the overall appearance of the characters. If a character was well known outside of the video game community (e.g., Miles Morales or Clementine), their photo was not included in the survey as to not bias the responses. The total number of characters was 10. The survey included both closed ended questions – using the Likert scale – and open-ended questions asking about word associations. The questions were randomized for each character being shown. Each character had a certain question associated with them. For example, a picture of Billie Lurk, with open-ended questions such as “What is the first thing you notice about the character” [see image 3].



*Figure 3:* An example of what the participant sees when they complete the survey. For the character on the left, the text below says ‘This character reminds me of’. The text under the right character says ‘What do you think she does in her respective game.’

## Results

### *Steam Comment Search*

The analysis of the Steam comments showed limited discussion relating to the characters of interest. Although many comments were off-topic (e.g. food recipes) or other aspects of the games (e.g., game bugs), several key patterns emerged in the comments about Sheva Alomar, Lee Everett, and Marcus Holloway. There were also some comments around Miles Morales and Barrett Wallace that were not as overtly offensive but caused some controversy.

### Sheva Alomar (Resident Evil V)

Comments about Sheva Alomar reduced her character to a sexual object, which reflected the historical stereotype of the Jezebel, for example, players often talked about wanted ‘smash’ her [see *Figure 4A*]. Other comments reduce her a potential relationship partner [see *Figure 4B*]. These comments show that Sheva’s portrayal in game reinforces the Jezebel stereotype even though the story tries to solidify that she is a great asset to Chris Redfield (e.g., understanding the native language, being a skilled fighter, etc.)



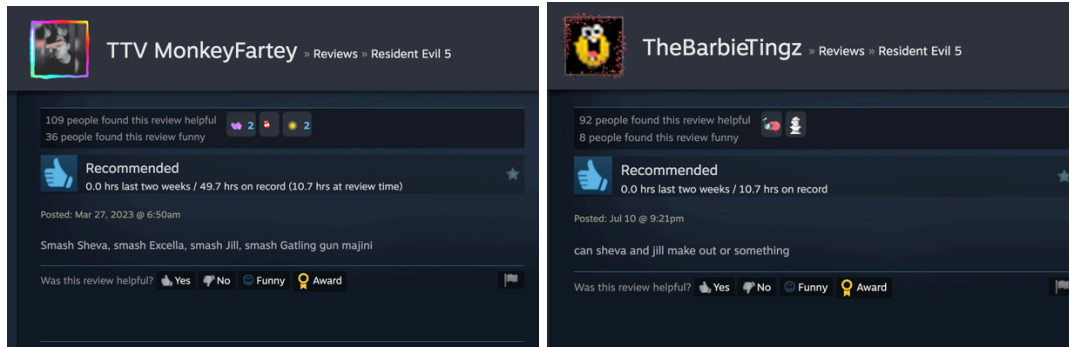


Figure 4A & 4B: Example of sexual Steam Reviews for *Resident Evil V* by TTV MonkeyFartey & TheBarbieTingz

### Lee Everett (*The Walking Dead*)

When looking at comments about Lee Everett contained subtle dog whistles while referring to his race in ways that highlighted negative stereotypes. For example, one comment creates a dialogue where ‘urban’ is used to replace more overt racial slurs such as the n-word [see Figure 4]. This shows how coded language can be used to perpetuate the stereotype that Black men are inherently aggressive and violent. This is interesting because Lee Everett is an American History professor, yet this white character thinks he is still dangerous. With this role reversal, it shows how dog whistles like ‘urban’ can be used in the same derogatory way as ‘ghetto’.



Figure 4: An Example of coded dog whistles in Steam Reviews for *The Walking Dead* by Nysmosu

### Marcus Holloway (*Watch Dogs 2*)

Like Lee Everett, Marcus Holloway was also talked about in the context of his race. Due to Marcus being falsely accused of a crime which causes him to work with the bad guys, it was not a surprise that the comments talked about criminal justices [see Figure 5]. However, an interesting mechanic was revealed by the comment mentioning how the police respond faster to Marcus than his white protagonist counterpart in Watch Dogs 1.



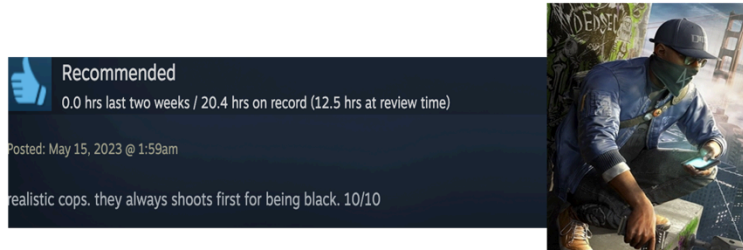


Figure 5: Similar to the Lee Everett, this comment toward Marcus Holloway (image on the right) discusses the black experience's negative side. This is in comparison to the first Watch Dog game where the main character is white.

### Miles Morales (*Spider-Man: Miles Morales*)

Most of the comments were a mix of spiderman memes or references to how good the swinging mechanics are. There were also some jokes about this race. Many comments keep quoting the statement “just enough exaggerated swagger for a black teen”. At first I was confused on if this was a dig about Miles Morales’s identity – being Black and Puerto Rican. Many people on Reddit were also concerned about this statement with an entire thread being dedicated to finding answers. This quote is a part of a longer excerpt from an infamous Spider-Man: Miles Morales’s review on gamespot.com [see Figure 6] . This inside joke was first started by a Black man, Jordan Ramee, that has been repeated endlessly on the internet.



Figure 6: Example of the running joke in the Steam page for *Spiderman: Miles Morales* by Tony Soprano

### Barrett Wallace (*Final Fantasy VII*)

The comments in the Final Fantasy VII Steam page were mostly focused on the main characters of the franchise (i.e., Cloud). One comment in particular compared Barrett to Mr. T, a pop culture figure, [see Figure 7] . When comparing the two side by side, I did not notice a similarity in their designs. This comparison is more focused on the personality of both Barrett and Mr. T, hypermasculine and aggressive. Although Barrett is not a main character, his brief appearance continues the stereotype that Black men are aggressive and perceived as very masculine in certain contexts.



Figure 7: An example of the misidentifying of Barrett on Steam’s *Final Fantasy VII* page by Fergaderg

### Survey Responses

This survey had a diverse range of responses to the videogame characters, with some being very positive to outright offensive. Overall, through the closed-ended questions most participants responded neutrally to questions on if the characters were offensive, and if the character was good representation of Black culture. Questions regarding the characters appearance (i.e., I like this character) was more positive [see *Graph 2*]. However, participants’ responses to specific questions about individual characters were more mixed. These responses could be categorized into two categories: Stereotypical and Neutral/Ambiguous.



Graph 1: Two examples of the divide between the closed-ended questions.

### Stereotypical Responses

This category is used to group responses that reflect the historical and modern racial stereotypes. These included associated related to the following: crime, aggression, and hypersexuality. Comments that could be perceived as covertly harmful or ‘coded’ language is included as well. An example of a covertly harmful comment is the misattribution of a quote from one Black character, CJ, to another, Franklin. For instance, Franklin Clinton from *GTA V* elicited responses like “gangster”, “gang”, “violence/racism”, “thug”, and “ah shit here we go again” when participants were asked what first came to mind when seeing him. Similarity, when asked what role Sheva Alomar from *Resident Evil V* plays in her game, participants gave stereotypical answers like “seduce the protagonist”, “sex slave”, and “tribal fighter”, “femme fatale”. Another example is Marcus Holloway from *Watch Dogs 2*. When participants were asked, ‘If you saw this character in real life, what would you do?’, they responded with comments like ‘cross the street as fast as possible’, ‘avoid eye contact’, and ‘depends – at a BLM protest, befriend; at an amusement park, be watchful.’. Even Lee Everett from *The Walking*

*Dead* received comments associating him with criminality, such as “criminal”, “immigrant”, and “leader of an investigatory team”.

### Neutral/Ambiguous Responses

Neutral or ambiguous responses neither conveyed strongly positive nor negative judgments of the characters. Instead, participants responded with general descriptions or comments that were more observational or vague. For example, Phin Mason from *Spider-Man: Miles Morales* was noted for physical traits like “her curly ponytail” or “her jacket”, while Claudette Morel from *Dead by Daylight* prompted career guesses like “professor” or “social worker”. The responses for Daisy Fitzroy from *Bioshock Infinite* referenced historical elements like “steampunk”, “western”, and “Harriet Tubman”. For Billie Lurk from *Dishonored 2*, responses were more varied, including terms like “Afrofuturism”, “evil”, “cyborg”, and “lesbian”. Barret Wallace from *Final Fantasy VII* had responses that focused on his hypermasculine look such as “militarized”, “violent”, and “empowered”. Agate from *Assassin’s Creed Liberation* was described with terms like “tribal”, “African”, and “leader” with some responses mentioning his appearance as a “strong survivor” or “adventurer (except no shoes)”.

## **Discussion**

### *Main findings*

One of the most important findings from this preliminary study was the persistence of racial stereotypes among both videogame players and non-video game players. Both historical and modern stereotypes were evident in how participants perceived characters, particularly Sheva Alomar, Lee Everett, Franklin Clinton, and Marcus Holloway.

Survey responses consistently aligned Sheva Alomar with Jezebel stereotype, portraying her as a light-skinned woman often reduced to a sexualized figure. This stereotype is present in her character design being a racially ambiguous light-skinned woman in an unnamed African country. Despite her role as the skilled partner and translator to Chris Redfield, the white protagonist of *Resident Evil V*, Sheva was objectified into being “eye-candy” or a hypothetical sexual partner for the audience. Even if Black female characters, even when depicted as strong and capable (through help with talking to Swahili speaking natives), is still diminished.

For Lee Everett, the comments and survey responses reinforced the stereotypes of Black men as criminal. Even though the picture of Lee was neutral (outside of him holding a gun), participants still viewed Lee through a lens of suspicion and danger. This was seen by the multiple responses calling Lee a criminal. Additionally, several comments acknowledged the coded language (i.e., ‘dog whistles’) in *The Walking Dead*, which was a conscious choice by the developers.

Franklin Clinton from *Grand Theft Auto V* was frequently associated with being a criminal. It is due to the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise being attributed to showing ‘gangster’ lifestyle. With this knowledge, it is no wonder that many responses included terms of ‘gangster’, ‘thug’, and ‘violence/racism’. However, it was interesting to note how Franklin got

confused with another Black man (CJ) from another game in the series. One response misattributed the quote ‘ah shit here we go again’ to the wrong character.

Marcus Holloway’s portrayal had two distinct perspectives. On Steam, many comments focused on issues of police brutality toward Black men, with some users making joking about the police responding more quickly to Marcus than to his white counterparts in *Watch Dogs 1*. In the survey responses, participants expressed an underlying fear of Black men, with several noting that they would call the police or cross the street if they encountered him in real life. These responses further reinforce the stereotype of Black men as dangerous and evoke the broader societal issue of racial profiling.

In contrast to these overt stereotypical portrayals, a significant portion of survey responses fell into the neutral or ambiguous category. This was evident through both the closed-ended and open-ended questions. Out of the 10 characters included in the survey, 6 were associated with neutral or ambiguous responses. These comments often focus on surface-level characteristics or general descriptors rather than speculating on the characters’ role or identities. For example, Claudette Morel from *Dead by Daylight* was described as having ‘tech vibes’, while Phin Mason from *Spider-Man: Miles Morales* was noted for hair and her leather jackets. These neutral responses suggest either a lack of strong emotional connect or have never see these characters before.

### *Limitations*

This preliminary study has three main limitations. The first limitation is the survey used. The survey was a combination of open-ended questions and close ended questions for each of the 10 characters. One major issue with the methodology was the close ended questions were repeated for each character. Although the questions were randomized, many participants said they felt tired or bored after the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> time seeing the same question (i.e., ‘I like this character, ‘This character is offensive’). This resulted in fatigue effects and decreased attention in the task. To try and combat this, the open-ended questions would be added as an attentional check while also allowing for participants to explain their perspectives.

The second limitation is the sample population recruited to do the study. The population was a mix of people who considered themselves video game players or non-video game players based off what type of games they played in their free time. This mix of video game status led to led to a confounding relationship in recognizing the character and answering the open-ended question with their name or game. An example would be the image of Franklin Clinton, and one response was just ‘GTA’. With the games also being AAA, this means that even non-videogame player would see these character just not the titles that they come from.

The third limitation was the character chosen from the videogames. These characters were very skewed toward male presenting characters with only five characters (e.g., Sheva, Phin, Claudette, Billie, and Daisy) making up the female character. This could be attributed to the overrepresentation of male characters in videogames but also of the inclusion criteria of the study.

### *Future Directions*

To better address the limitations of the current study, the continuation of this study will include a series of brief questionnaires that include a mix of sections involving image-based, story-based, and personality-based questions. The image-based questions would be used to assess possible biases involving the characters’ appearance. The story-based questions would

involve a vague description of the character's backstory with an open-ended question to ask how much they relate to a storyline. The personality-based question would include a name with multiple options to associate personality traits. For example, participants would see a black-centric name (e.g., Markus) and both positive and negative words (e.g., strong, unique, unmasculine, urban).

Future directions for this area of research include a re-analysis of other game genres (e.g., RPG, Fantasy, or Horror). This re-analysis could look at the roles and characterization of the characters in this game. For example, in a fantasy title, will the black characters be human or entities 'coded' as black based on personality traits? Another possible direction to explore is how avid fans react and express their love of the characters. This can be explored through fan art (e.g., lightening dark-skinned characters), fan fiction (e.g., using them as punching bags or for props), and cosplay (e.g., doing blackface). A theme of interest in this analysis could be colorism and misogynoir.

## **Conclusion**

This study, although preliminary, has shed light on the representation of the video game industry. By completing the surveys, non-video game players can learn more about the variability of black characters in action games. The continuation of the study would allow for future game developers to gain valuable insight into how to create better Black characters through character design, storylines, and themes. Throughout this analysis, two types of games were discovered - created by Black creators (*Dot's Home* and *Hair Nah*) and non-black creators with marginalized voices (*South of Midnight*). These games are the first step in making the video game industry more diverse.

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