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Revealing a Spectrum of Racialized Sexuality: Representations of Video Game Characters Over Time, 1981-2012

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**REVEALING A SPECTRUM OF RACIALIZED SEXUALITY:
REPRESENTATIONS OF FEMALE VIDEO GAME
CHARACTERS OVER TIME, 1981-2012**

by

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2010**

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

While researchers have examined controlling images of race and gender in the media, many have failed to acknowledge the role video games play in the hegemonic domain of power and few have examined the simultaneity of race and gender. This study expands upon existing literature by using video games as a site of racial formation, through which racialized "others" are created and Whiteness is normalized. Through the lens of intersectionality, I examine representations of female characters that appeared in popular video games between 1981 and 2012 and assess changes in racial composition, sexualization, narrative role, and aggression. A content analysis indicates belated portrayals of women of color and an analysis of odds ratios reveals a hierarchy of racialized femininity and sexuality in which Hispanic females are portrayed as hypersexual and passive and Asian females are depicted as aggressive but sexually modest. Examination of narrative roles indicates that, while women of color appear much later and far less often than white women, they are more likely to secure a significant role than white female characters when they are present.

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INTRODUCTION

The media has the potential to perpetuate stereotypes and shape societal perceptions of race and gender (Hazell and Clarke, 2008). With increases in plastic surgery, dietary plans, and sexual female images inundating advertising and the media, video games have contributed to the trend and become outlets through which designers can sexualize the female form, perpetuate specific gender roles and stereotypes, and construct, often negative, images of race. Video games are a relevant and powerful cultural, technological, and economic force, existing in the form of a multi-billion dollar industry, extending beyond the virtual realm into television and magazine advertisements and films. Images of females in video games do not only appear in the games themselves, but also in video game trailers, magazine covers, video game covers, movies, movie posters, and the Internet. Therefore, people who do not play video games are also exposed to images in the games.

These images exist within the hegemonic domain of power and reflect dominant discourses on race and gender. Racialized and sexualized imagery serve to provide meaning in social structures through which certain groups are marginalized and inequality is produced and justified. Mass media promote portrayals of white women as the norm, while women of color are often constructed as both racialized and sexualized "others" who are perceived and internalized as inferior. Differential representations of women based on race become commonsense notions of what constitutes normalized beauty, femininity, and sexuality. Images featured in visual media that exist beyond the parameters of white and male are often stereotypical (Hazell & Clarke 2008).

Unfortunately, negative depictions of race and gender become a part of the culture and the standards from which new images are constructed (Baker, 2005). The consumption of media content endorses viewers' internalization of ideological standards. This mechanism not only influences societal beliefs concerning racial inequality and gender roles, but also affects personal attitudes regarding racial and gender identity (Baker 2005; McLaughlin and Goulet 1999; Hazell and Clarke 2008).

Because video games are part of a cultural social structure, it is important to consider the role depictions of race and gender in video games plays in constructing and reinforcing social expectations of race, gender, and sexuality. Due to the complexity of race and gender as categories of social identity, it is imperative that we examine these representations through the lens of intersectionality.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality examines categories of identity through "interlocking systems of oppression" that exist within interpersonal, structural, disciplinary, and hegemonic domains of power (1990: 221). The hegemonic domain incorporates each of these components that constitutes the matrix of domination, which describes the overarching power structure within a society, and validates oppression through cultural facets, such as social values, practices, rituals, ideas, and images that are reinforced by ideological institutions such as mass media. One effective mechanism through which the hegemonic domain of power reaffirms subordination is the perpetuation of controlling images or representations that promote and support dominant discourses of identity. For example, according to Patricia Hill Collins, the objectification of African-American women contributes to their subordination by catering to the Eurocentric, masculinist discourse. Images of African-American women as exotified, sexualized, and fulfilling secondary and subordinate narrative roles in the video game industry are predominantly produced and replicated for, as well as consumed by, white males.

The inclusive paradigm of intersectionality focuses on the simultaneity of race, class, sexual orientation, age, social class, religion, and gender within a system of oppression and domination, rather than simply the dichotomous comparison of individual categories of identity. Patricia Hill Collins perceives these categories as existing within the context of a larger structure of domination and oppression and examines how they interrelate in different ways to produce inequalities. Kimberle Crenshaw uses the term representational intersectionality to discuss the ways in which representations of race and

gender marginalize women of color in popular culture. The interests of women of color are often invisible because they tend to be funneled into broader concerns regarding either sexism or racism (1993). While Omi and Winant emphasize the impact the categorization of race has on social identity and inequality, they acknowledge the importance of viewing the complex intersection of multiple categories of oppression (2015:132).

This theoretical framework provides a useful analytic tool for the evaluation of the intricate dimensions of race and gender when viewed simultaneously, rather than additively and for assessing the ways in which varying inequalities are legitimized at the cultural, individual, and institutional levels. For example, the roles of white female video game characters, due to their gender, are often subordinate to their male counterparts, however, because of their race, it is estimated that white female characters are given more agency and their narrative roles are rendered more significant than female characters of color. Thus, when viewed through the lens of intersectionality, white female video game characters are contextually portrayed as both oppressed and dominant.

CONTROLLING IMAGES OF RACE AND GENDER IN THE MEDIA

Gender in Video Games

Traditionally, video games have relied on representations of white masculinity to advance gameplay, while neglecting the female narrative (Sze-Fai, 2006). This skewed gender dichotomy can be seen in the narrative development of video games. With advancements in technology, video games have evolved from simple, goal-oriented activities to elaborate narratives with intricate plots and character-development. Video games are overwhelmingly developed by males and males have primarily been their intended audience. The male-dominated field of video games has therefore dictated how men and women are portrayed. As a result, female characters in video games have typically been excluded from the main storyline.

Results from previous research on gender and video games are nearly unanimous in how women and men are portrayed. Women are largely absent from video games and other video game related media, such as magazine and game covers, while males however, are dramatically over represented relative to female characters (Burgess and Stermer 2007; Miller and Summers 2007; Dill and Thill 2007). Dill and Thill (2007) found that male video game characters are more likely to fulfill meaningful roles such as heroes and lead characters, whereas women are more likely to fulfill less meaningful, supplemental roles such as damsels in distress, and love interests (Burgess et al. 2007; Dill et al. 2007; Miller et al. 2007). Males are also more likely to be represented as powerful, muscular, use weapons, and have more physical abilities, while women are

frequently portrayed as helpless and innocent (Miller et al 2007: 741). Although lead female characters are underrepresented in video games, when they are featured, they are objectified, degraded, and portrayed as sex symbols and eye candy (Dill et al. 2007: 856; Downs and Smith, 2010; Miller et al. 2007; Burgess et al. 2007). "For female video game characters, the norm is for characters to be depicted as sex objects who wear skimpy clothing, conform to an idealized body type, and are visions of beauty" (Dill et at. 2007: 859). This traditional role, however, appears to be shifting.

According to Jansz and Martis (2007), women in video games are beginning to appear as lead characters rather than sidekicks or damsels in need of rescuing, becoming more aggressive and powerful, and securing gender atypical roles such as soldiers, law enforcement officers, CEOs, villains, and warriors. Jansz and Martis dubbed this trend the "Lara Phenomenon," which refers to "the appearance of a tough and competent female character in a dominant position" (2007: 142). This shift may reflect the closing wage gap between men and women, the expansion of women in male dominated fields, and the increase in heroines and powerful women in movies. The paradox, however, lies in the portrayal of women as both aggressive and overtly sexualized.

Although women in video games seem to be transforming from damsels in distress to heroines, there is also a new iconic image of the female character as a femme fatale, or what Karen E. Dill and Kathryn P. Thill have defined as "eroticized aggression" (2007: 859). The femme fatale is powerful, capable and aggressive but is also highly and blatantly sexual. The femme fatale is a merger of two competing female images: the vixen and the heroine. Although female characters appear to be gaining equality in terms

of power, they are losing credibility and becoming hindered by their disproportionate bodies, revealing clothing, and the seductive ways in which their bodies are displayed.

Hazell and Clarke (2008) note that media analyses have focused on representations of race and gender independently and have failed to incorporate the relationship between the two. While research on video games primarily draws comparisons between men and women, revealing male dominance and female subjugation, it is important to address how race influences these binary depictions.

Racialized Femininities

Pyke and Johnson use a social constructionist framework to examine gender through a racialized lens. Hegemonic masculinity reveres white men as a an ideal type and legitimates white male privilege and dominance over women and men of color in a gendered and racialized hierarchy. In a similar fashion, the dominant culture adopts and promotes hegemonic femininity, which justifies white women's privileged status and the subordination of women of color (Pyke and Johnson, 2003; Collins, 1990). Controlling images that promote hegemonic femininity also promote assimilation, as western society advocates whiteness as a standard of gender equality. According to this framework, Asian women, for example, will be able to achieve gender equality once they exchange their culture for white standards of femininity (Pyke and Johnson, 2003).

Pyke and Johnson use the concepts of hegemonic and subordinated femininities to explain the internalized oppression of women of color, specifically Asian American women. Controlling images act as a mechanism for the construction of racialized and

gendered "others" who are often the subject of marginalization and derogation. White women are often portrayed as fulfilling a normalized role within a spectrum of femininity, wherein black women are characterized as aggressive and masculine, white women are depicted as possessing ideal characteristics associated with femininity such as submissiveness, and Asian women are depicted as frail and hyperfeminine (Hazell et al. 2008). These images become internalized as discernable indicators of superiority and inferiority, limiting the ability of members of marginalized groups to establish their own race and gender identity (Pyke and Johnson, 2003). Through the framework of the matrix of domination and hegemonic femininity, women simultaneously fall within a racial hierarchy and a spectrum of femininity, creating racialized femininities wherein femininity is discernible by race. Images of what constitute femininity are differentiated based on race and are socially constructed by stereotypes and dominant discourses on sex and race. (Frankenberg, 1993).

Intersectionality of Race and Gender in Video Games and the Media

According to Behm-Morawitz and Mastro, video games are popular in western, industrialized nations and are their intended audience is white, middle-class males (2009). Because the vast majority of consumers of video game imagery consists of white males, the images and narratives evident within video games are likely to feature expectations of race and gender that compliment the white supremacy ideology (Baker 2005). The colonialist and imperialist ideologies associated with video games that allow players to control an explorer in an exotic location are likely to appeal to this target audience. In such games, players are able to "travel" to virtual worlds based upon real

locations and interact with (and even control) "primitive" characters within these settings. For example, the controversial game, *Resident Evil* 5 (2009) revolves around a viral outbreak in Africa. While earlier games in the franchise took place within the U.S. and primarily featured white infected victims (zombies), *Resident Evil 5* features dark-skinned, tribal African zombies. In an attempt to be politically and geographically correct, game designers at Capcom incorporated racial stereotypes (towards men and women) into their newest game (Brock, 2011). The game takes players to actual locations in East Africa where the residents are depicted as aggressive, dark-skinned natives wielding spears, sickles, and bow/arrows and displaying a bloodlust for the fair-skinned tourist-esque hero the player controls.

Video games seldom feature minority characters (Williams, Martins, Consalvo, and Ivory 2009) and their representations are often derogatory and unflattering. According to Stephanie Shields (2008), possessing two "subordinate identities" renders an individual invisible compared to individuals who only possess one subordinate identity (308). This explains why, women of color have especially limited roles in video games, rarely surpassing the role of tertiary characters. When their presence is prominent, it is through a sexualized, victimized stereotype (Dickerman, Christensen, Kerl-McClain 2008). Upon examining the intracategorical, or in between group differences between white women and women of color in video games, Dragiewicz, Manzano, and McMullin (2002) found that white women are portrayed as pure and angelic, while black women are portrayed as victims and Latina women are notably marked by their absence in video game narratives (2002: 6).

Controlling images of Asian women in video games reflect Pyke and Johnson's (2003) image of the hyperfeminine, submissive Asian. Images of racialized femininity are evident in the popularity of Japanese-produced video games. Japan is one of the leading producers of video games and video game consoles, however, many male and female Japanese video game developers contribute to racist and sexist representations of Japanese women. Because these games are released to a global audience, controlling images such as the Japanese schoolgirl, or the seductive Geisha are received worldwide. This Japanese self-representation supports Shiu Sze-Fai's (2006) notion of yellowface. According to Sze-Fai, these Japanese-produced stereotypical images of subservient, hyperfeminine Japanese women promote white masculinity and question cultural identity in a process he coins "yellowface" (2006: 109).

Controlling images of Native American women include the Indian princess and the squaw (Bird, 1999). According to Bird, the Indian princess or maiden archetype is an exotified, Pocahontas-like Native woman who is regarded as beautiful and is "nonthreateningly erotic" (1999: 72). The squaw, however, is an obedient servant, sexually available to white men. The squaw does not play a prominent role in the film(s) in which she appears and is easily discarded. Similarly, Arab women are often protrayed as eroticized slave girls who are silenced, alienated, and humiliated (Shaheen, 2003).

Controlling images of black women in the media predominantly revolve around the stereotype of the dominant black woman, including the matriarch; the "authoritative [head] of household, the Sapphire, who is "independent, headstrong, and overly expressive" (Collins 1990; Baker 2005; Hazell et al. 2008) the Jezebel; sexually

aggressive women who possess features that adhere to white standards of beauty (Collins 1990; Jewell 1993; Baker 2005; Hazell et al. 2008); and the "angry black woman" (Childs 2005; Kretsedemas 2010). Upon examining representations of race and gender in magazine ads and fashion spreads, Millard and Grant (2006) found the opposite; black women were shown as submissive, while white women were portrayed as explicitly sexual. The dominant representation of Hispanic women in the media is the "hot Latina" stereotype, depicted as overtly eroticized, scantily clad, and sexually available (Merskin, 2007). Unlike the Jezebel, however, the Latina sex object is dependent and helpless, often relying on manipulating men to achieve her goals. A study conducted by "Children Now," a child research organization, examined the percentage of black women and Latinas in popular video games and the implications such imagery have on children. According to the periodical, portrayals of women of color in video games perpetuate stereotypes of disadvantage and acts of violence, specifically associated with black female characters (Dragiewicz, Manzano, and McMullin, 2002: 6). Therefore, young viewers are especially likely to internalize the negative images of black women living in poverty and residing in slums amidst barbaric acts of violence as portrayed in *Resident Evil 5* (2009) and images of Hispanic women living on the impoverished streets of San Andreas, selling drugs and engaging in acts of prostitution in *Grand Theft Auto* (2004).

Digital Racial Formation

According to Omi and Winant's racial formation theory (1994), the process of racial formation occurs as the construction of racial categories and the level of importance of these categories is ascribed by social, economic, and political forces.

Video games constitute a cultural force through which race is identified, contextualized, organized, and assigned meaning through an interactive interface, vivid graphics, complex narratives, and engaging repetition. According to Omi and Winant, "as social beings, we must categorize people so as to be able to 'navigate' in the world - to discern quickly who may be friend or foe, to position and situate ourselves within prevailing social hierarchies, and to provide clues that guide our social interactions with the individuals and groups we encounter" (2015: 105). Scott Rogers, author of *Level Up!: The Guide to Great Video Game Design,* extends this notion of constructing categories to navigating the virtual realm. "Within your game, you can create groups of enemies based on shape, color, physical attributes. . .they need to look different at a glance. Stereotypes are stereotypes for a reason: They're easy for the viewer to understand. Don't be afraid to use them" (2014: 314).

Lisa Nakamura's digital race formation theory (2004) expands upon Omi and Winant's broader theory and states that new media interfaces such as the Internet allow for the fluid construction of race and ethnicity and, through this interface, users can not only create race, but control the newly-formed "racialized other." This theory is essential in assessing the significance of race in new media such as video games and the control gamers have over characters devised in a digital realm. In Andre Brock's analysis of the controversial video game, "Resident Evil 5," Omi and Winant's theory structures his key argument that video games represent Whiteness and White privilege through their interactive social structure:

Omi and Winant's (1994) racial formation theory notes that race is formed through cultural representations of human bodies organized in social structures. Accordingly, depictions of race in electronic spaces rely upon media imagery and social interactions. Videogames construct exotic fantasy worlds and peoples as places for white male protagonists to conquer, explore, exploit, and solve. Like their precursors in science fiction, fantasy, and horror, videogame narratives, activities, and players often draw from Western values of white masculinity, White privilege as bounded by conceptions of "other," and relationships organized by coercion and domination (2011: 429).

The visual culture of the video game industry provides support for Lisa Nakamura's theory of digital racial formation. Nakamura expands upon Omi and Winant's racial formation theory by examining the mechanisms through which race is constructed within the social structures of graphic interfaces. Her theory is essentially racial formation in the digital age. In *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet* (2004), Nakamura investigates new media and digital racial formations in Internet culture. According to Nakamura, interfaces are "prime loci for digital racial formation". Gamers utilize interfaces and avatars so that players of any race, gender, and nationality can virtually embody and control a character of another race, sex, nationality, etc. Many groundbreaking video games include a feature that allows players to create their own custom character, selecting skin color, hair length, facial features, breast size, type of clothing, type of weapon, etc. This interactive process allows players to design avatars, which can be interpreted as the digital creation of race and gender.

Video game designers and programmers can fictionalize and exotify their characters, render their depictions of these characters and alter them to be "real" (Brock, 2011). Because the ethnographic aspects of these games are intended to be seen as a representation of reality, millions of gamers worldwide are interacting with "truth" and internalizing distorted images of indigenous people. For example, the video game *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* allows players (primarily white males) to take control of black and Hispanic characters and, in turn, act out neoliberal cultural fantasies through the safety of a graphic interface (Barrett 2006: 95). Similarly, David Leonard addresses the concepts of race and gender in video games in terms of their narrative roles, character development, and 'ideological sub-texts.' He relates race and gender to the formation of virtual stereotypes that often blur the lines between fantasy and reality. In players' ability to take control of a minority character directly relates to the commodification of the other (2003: 9). Video games therefore raise issues of gender and race identity, which Nakamura suggests is a key component of interactivity on the Internet. Because many video games are played online, a player's avatar can "signify ethnic, national, gender, and linguistic identity in the context of Internet youth culture" (2004: 30).

Mass media is often neglected as a site of racial formation. According to Omi and Winant, racial projects are a key component of racial formation (2015: 109). Racial projects reify race through racial perceptions that become part of the social structure (2015: 124). Video games produce cultural expectations of race through the experience of virtual interaction and visual representation. These representations are then given meaning through gameplay and marketing. Meanings associated with these

representations become part of the cultural vernacular through the media social structure. As such, video games act as a racial project. Because race is not a static concept, rather, because it is continually constructed and reconstructed, it can be used as a "fundamental tool of social stratification" (Morning 2008: 106). Cathelena Martin examines children's video games and assesses the racialization process that takes place during interaction with these games. The interactive nature of video games, combined with the vivid visual characteristics allows for children to internalize perceived truths about race at an early age (2008: 2).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

There has been little work investigating how women are depicted in video games (Burgess et al. 2007) and future research needs to address how video game characters have changed over time (Millers et al. 2007). Over time, technological advancements in games have influenced the expression of race and sexuality by providing an increasingly realistic visual platform through which distinguishable phenotypes can be constructed and exaggerated. While achieving ethnic diversity in earlier decades was challenging due to technological limitations, more recent improvements in game mechanics have allowed for fine-tuned portrayals of different skin tones, facial features, hair textures, and body types. Using a longitudinal study is therefore an appropriate method because it allows the researcher to capture larger trends and assess significant changes over time. It is also beneficial because it makes it easy to identify potential improvement or recognize if new problems arise. To account for changes in controlling images, I employ a longitudinal content analysis that examines representations of female characters in video games over a 31-year period.

According to Collins (2011), many studies report that women are underrepresented in the media and that, when women are portrayed, they are often depicted as scantily clad and are limited to pre-circumscribed roles, however, she suggests that future research include differences between racial categories. Furthermore, she claims that scholars should focus on how women are portrayed, rather than limiting themselves to the investigation of whether they are portrayed. The current research simultaneously examines race and gender, therefore contributing to the broader category

of intersectional research. The inclusion of a race variable is significant because it is a category that researchers describe as being absent from not only research on video games, but also broader content analyses, new media studies, and even intersectional research (Collins 2011; Mou and Peng 2009). Collins also suggests that content analyses rarely examine depictions of gender in new forms of media. Little focus has been directed towards media as a macro structure of dominance and privilege. While research often focuses on traditional media such as television, film, newspapers, and music, the expeditiously evolving forms of media require attention. This paper will contribute to the newly emerging literature on new forms of media content analysis.

Due to the complex nature of exploring multiple dimensions of identity, research on intersectionality poses methodological problems when attempting to capture such complexity (Bowleg 2008). Leslie McCall provides several methods aimed at methodologically managing intersectionality, one of which is intracategorical complexity (2005). McCall suggests exploring intracategorical or between group dimensions in order to focus on the specific intersection of individual categories of identity, rather than attempting to examine the entire extent breadth of categories (2005). I adopt this approach by using intracategorical analysis to account for the range of racial diversity within the broader female category.

Expanding upon Pyke and Johnson's (2003) hegemonic and subordinated femininities, I use the term "racialized femininity" to refer specifically to the spectrum of passivity and aggression that differentiates female characters by race - wherein aggression is often associated with masculinity, while passivity is usually attributed to

femininity - and use the term "racialized sexuality" to describe the different degrees to which female characters are sexually objectified by race. Finally, I use the term "racialized sexualization" to specifically refer to the process by which women are constructed in a way that promotes dominant discourses on race and sexuality.

Based on the existing literature, if controlling images of race and gender in video games reflect dominant perceptions of race and gender, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, and Arab female characters should be portrayed as overtly erotic and submissive and black women should be appear aggressive and sexualized. This raises the question, do images of women in video games reflect white privilege or do they challenge preexisting ideas of race and hegemonic femininity?

METHODS

<u>Sample</u>

To assess the controlling images of women in video games, I've employed a visual content analysis, examining characteristics of each female character that appears in a game that has sold at least one million copies, globally since its release date. This ensures that the characters have received substantial exposure due to the popularity of the games in which they appear. I relied on three video game databases to create an index of female characters: VGChartz.com, a marketing/sales database (Walton, 2006-2014), Giantbomb.com, a video game content database (CBS Interactive Inc., 2014), and Creativeuncut.com, a video game art and design database (Carillet, 2003-2014).

I searched VGChartz.com (Walton, 2006-2014) for global sales, in millions of units, per game and compiled a list of all games that have sold at least one million copies from the time they were released. The search yielded 1,853 titles and includes video games from all platforms (see appendix A) sold worldwide with Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) ratings ""Everyone" (E) (games containing material generally suited for audiences of all ages), "Everyone 10+" (E10+) (games containing minimally suggestive themes suited for children ages ten and older), "Teen" (T) (games generally suited for audiences ages 13 and older), and "Mature" (M) (games featuring intense themes intended for audiences ages 17 and older). The games featured in this study are therefore popular games intended for a broad audience.

After compiling a list of nearly 2,000 top-selling video games, I obtained a render (a fully body image used for production and marketing purposes) of each character that

appears in each video game from the list of popular game titles. I used two video game

databases to find the renders used in my analysis: Giantbomb.com (CBS Interactive Inct.,

2014), a website that features a comprehensive, searchable archive of over 4,000 games

and 27,589 characters (as of summer 2012, the year of data collection) and

Creativeuncut.com (Carillet, 2003-2014), a virtual database, which boasts 30,546 official

renders and concept art from an alphabetized list of 661 games (as of summer 2012). I

was able to find and save a promotional image of each female character by entering each

title from the list of top-selling games into the character search at Giantbomb.com (CBS

Interactive Incs., 2014) and by cross-referencing each title with Creativeuncut.com's

(Carillet, 2003-2014) list of video games. By implementing two separate image archives,

I was able to eliminate any inconsistencies between the two websites. I was also able to

obtain larger, higher quality images when available. I omitted games that featured no

female characters and/or no human characters.

From the resulting list of games, I left characters who appeared to be children and

non-human characters out of the analysis because non-human characters cannot be coded

by race and children can or should not be coded by skin exposure for the purposes of

being sexualized. The resulting population of adult human or humanoid female characters

from top-selling video games consisted of 2,030 renders. I organized the images into

folders corresponding with the release date and title of each game, creating an easily

navigable visual database from which I could view and analyze each render. After

creating the database of renders, I coded each character's race, sexualization, aggression,

and narrative significance. To measure change over time, I assessed female video game

characters from 1981, the first year to feature a female character in a video game that sold over a million copies, to 2012, the last year to pass before a new generation of video game consoles was released.

<u>Race</u>

The first variable I coded for was race. Because the conceptualization of race is difficult to measure, I used five broad categories to assess the racial composition of female video game characters: white, black, Asian, Hispanic, and "other" (consisting of groups with too few characters to measure in meaningful way, including Pacific Islander, Native American, and Arab).These classifications were based on visual features such as skin tone, eye shape, and hair texture typically associated with each racialized group, as well as visual contextual cues such as clothing and additional adornments such as headdresses, jewelry, and decorative fans traditionally used as identifying markers of national origin. For example, bellydancing attire and hijabs are commonly associated with Arab women, feathered headresses are associated with stereotypical images of Native Americans, and Kimonos and Shinobi Shozoku (ninja garb) are iconic identifiers of Asian women in the media.

For more racially ambiguous characters, I relied upon ethnic indicators, including surname, spoken language, and national origin. I obtained more detailed information about each character, beyond their visual interpretation, from the Wikia sites for the games in which the characters appear. The Wikia pages are virtual encyclopedias that contain information uploaded, hosted, maintained, and edited by users. Although the wikia page for each game is not an authoritative source, the pages are comprised of in-

depth information regarding the video games, as well as the storylines and characters within. The information is compiled by people who are considered experts, not in the developmental stages, but in the experiential stages of video games and it provides context to the controlling images of race and gender within the games. The character Citra Talugmai (see Appendix A) from the *Far Cry* (2004-2015) franchise, for example, is an indigenous, racially ambiguous character whose identity I categorized, not solely by her appearance, but also by the languages spoken in her tribe. According to *Far Cry'*s Wikia site, Citra is the leader of the Rakyat tribe, whose members have facial tattoos similar to those of the Maori people of New Zealand. The Rakyat speak several languages including Bahasa Indonesia, Bahasa Melayu, and Maori ("Farcry Wikia", 2013). Based on the Indonesian and Malay-Polynesian languages and discernible tattoos, I classified Citra as a Pacific Islander.

While nonhuman characters were removed from the analysis because they do not signify any race or gender based characteristics, I included humanoid characters - characters that resemble humans such as angels, fairies, mermaids, and elves. The reasoning for such inclusion is that, although they may possess nonhuman features such as wings, horns, tails, etc., humanoid characters are typically rendered with specific traits often associated with racialized groups such as exotified facial features, hair texture, body type, and skin tone (see Appendix B). I categorized the race of humanoids in the same fashion as the human characters.

Sexualization

The second variable I created was sexualziation. I assessed the degree to which each character was sexualized by creating a skin exposure variable. I evaluated skin exposure by assigning a point for each body part exposed with the intention of objectifying and/or sexualizing the character. Criteria for skin exposure included legs exposed above the knee, arms exposed up to the shoulder, exposed middrift, any part of the unclothed breast (including cleavage), and any part of the unclothed buttocks. I used a seven point scale (0-6) to assess how provocatively exposed each character is. A score of zero indicated no body part exposed for sexual appeal, one indicated slight provocative skin exposure, two represented some provocative skin exposure, three represented moderate skin exposure, four signified substantial skin exposure, five indicated significant skin exposure - maximum skin exposure possible while clothed - and six represented a character who appears nude, with a minmum requirement of bare breast exposure (see Appendix C). I measured skin exposure to address whether sexualized images of female characters uphold or contradict controlling images often seen in other forms of media. I also coded for skin expsousure to determine whether there are differences in sexualized images between white women and women of color.

Aggression

The third variable I assessed was aggression. I measured aggression by identifying the presence or absence of a weapon in each character's render. Wielding a weapon evokes an impression of hostility, therefore characters shown with a weapon were classified as aggressive. I then coded each character as either aggressive (1) or

passive (0) in terms of their visual representation. Notions of passivity and aggression are often race-related, as evidenced in Pyke and Johnson's (2003) hegemonic and subordinated femninities.

<u>Narrative Significance</u>

The final variable I constructed in my analysis was narrative significance. Because the visual representation alone may not reveal enough about the character, I created a narrative role variable that assessed the importance of each character's presence in her respective game. I did this by examining each character's in-game persona, coding information from each game's Wikia page to assess whether each character's narrative role was significant (1) or not significant (0). Significant roles typically include the primary character/protagonist and the lead villain, while more passive roles usually consist of damsels, sidekicks, love interests, and secondary/tertiary characters. The Wikia pages revealed whether each character's role is crucial to her respective storyline or if she plays no vital role. I used terms such as "main protagonist," "aids the hero," "is rescued," and "is captured" to determine agency or lack thereof. I deemed a character's narrative role significant if she deomonstrates agency, her presence advances the plot, she does not rely on the actions of others. If, however, a character does not influence the dynamics of the game, she does not demonstrate agency, her presence in the game does not contribute significantly to the overall storyline, or she relies solely upon others to complete tasks, I regarded her narrative role as not significant. Findings from previous studies suggest that women of color are under and misrepresented and do not often fulfill meaningful roles in mass media. I evaluated narrative significance to assess whether white female characters

and female characters of color are equally represented and whether they fulfill different roles during gameplay. This level of interpretation could only be achieved by examining in-game context, rather than simply analyzing the static images. These in-game characteristics are vital to this research because they provide further insight into a character's role that may contradict her appearance. For example, some female characters appear physically inadequate in their renders but may fulfill the role of a lead heroine.

Because my dataset consists of a selective population of characters, I calculated percentages regarding racial composition, sexualization, aggression, and narrative significance for the entire population. In addition, I compared these percentages over time in five-year increments to assess significant changes in these figures over time. Finally, I ran odds ratios to compare characters' likelihood, based on race, of fulfilling a significant narrative role, falling within a higher skin exposure category, and being depicted with a weapon.

Methodologically, this study expands upon previous research, providing more contextual depth and detail by examining more games and more characters, over a comprehensive time span. This study is the first to apply racial formation to video games while looking at the intersectionlity of race and gender over time.

Limitations

Ideally, examining actual gameplay would yield more comprehensive results, however, video games require hours for completion and, because games are too complex, it would be difficult to code for everything observable during gamplay. Furthermore,

because the operationalization of race is principally a subjective process, a second coder may have been beneficial, My use of an "other" racial category and indicators of race beyond simply the visual representation, however, reduced the need for inter-coder reliability.

Additionally, although examining games that have sold at least one million copies is useful for adequately assessing exposure, it prohibits an analysis of less popular games intended for a marginalized demographic. For example, games that cater to specific consumers such as women may promote different discourses than popular video games that target young, white males. Such games may not have sold enough copies to make the list. Games rated "EC" or "Early Childhood" (games intended for very young children) were not featured on the list, likely because they target a very specific audience and do not sell as many copies as video games directed towards a broader age group. Similarly, the list excluded games that are rated "Adult Only" (AO). These games are sold exclusively online and through catalogs - they are not sold in stores - and are usually sexually explicit.

Finally, the incorporation of more detailed measures of aggression such as aggressive stance and violent actions taken by the character within the game could strengthen the variable. That is not to say, however, that weapon presence is an insufficient measurement; it is the most immediate and visually evident indicator of aggression. Identifying the type of weapon may also add another dimension to the aggression variable. A wand or scepter, for example, may be more whimsical and less threatening than an assault rifle. This difference should be addressed.

RESULTS

To capture larger trends in controlling images and assess significant changes, rather than report minor, year to year variation, I present results for each variable in six time periods, consisting of five-year increments. The first time period refers to years 1981, 1983, 1985, 1986, and 1987;. no female characters appeared in top-selling games in 1982 or 1984. Time periods two through six refer to years 1988-1992, 1993-2007, 1998-2002, 2003-2007, and 2008-2012, respectively.

Racial Composition of Video Games

Figure 1: Percent Racial Composition
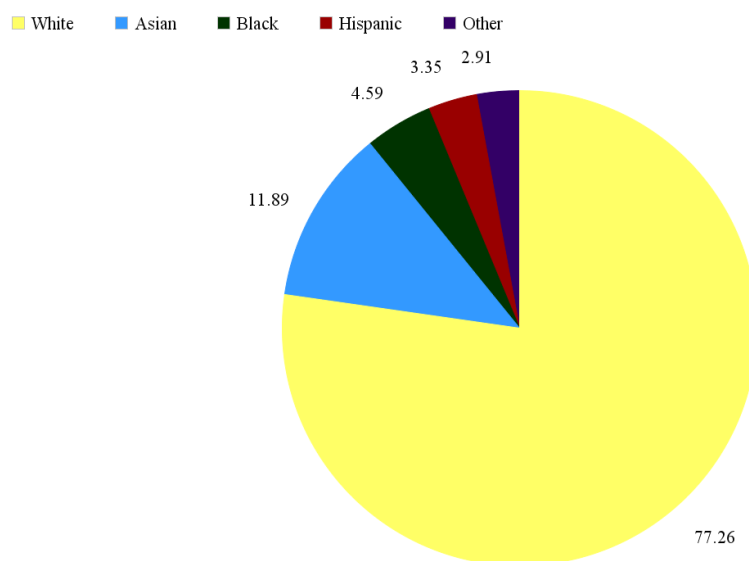
According to *Figure 1*, white female characters make up the overwhelming majority of all adult female characters that appeared in top-selling video games, at 77%, followed by Asian female characters comprising approximately 12% of the total female character population. The racial groups that constitute the smallest percentages of the total female character population are black female characters at roughly five percent and Hispanic female characters and female characters classified as Other at approximately three percent.

Figure 2: Racial Composition Over Time
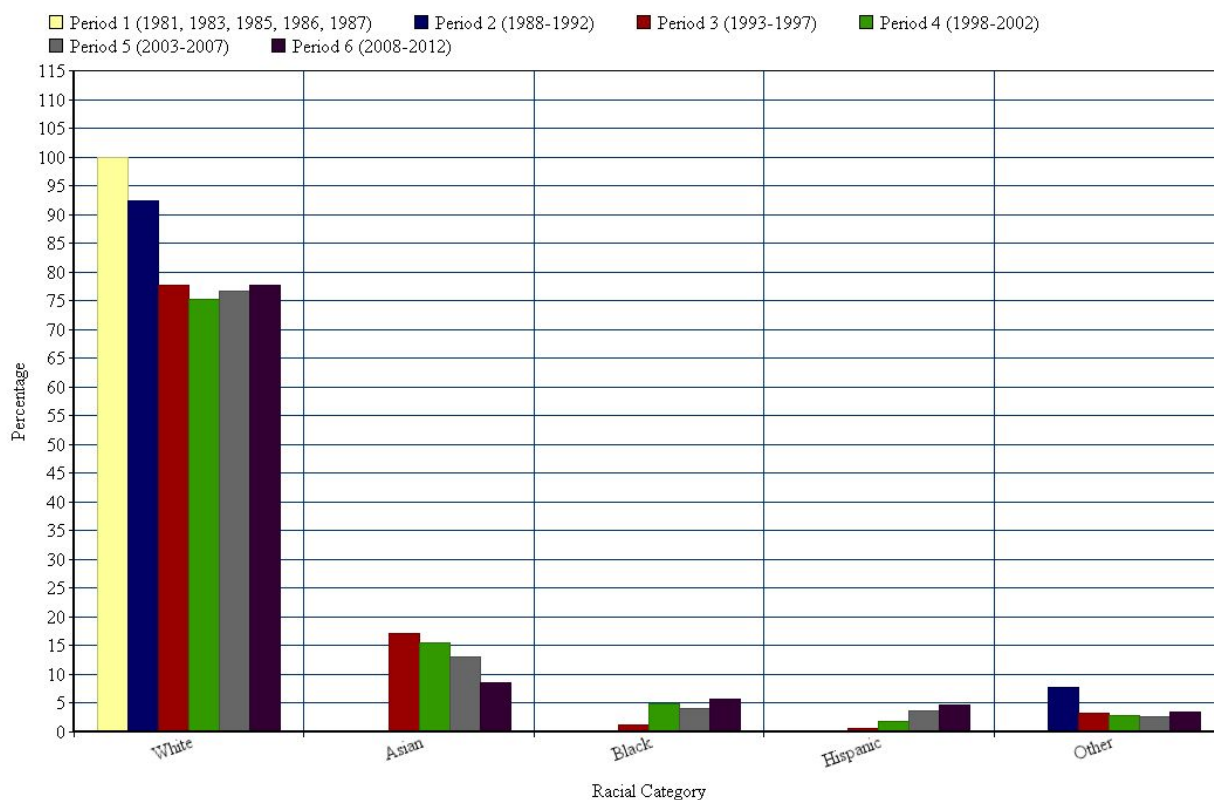
White female characters started appearing in popular video games in the early

1980s, however, female characters of color did not start appearing in popular video

games until 1990, and only in small numbers, consisting solely of Arab females. Asian

female characters started appearing in 1993, Hispanic female characters did not appear

until 1994, and black female characters were not featured until 1995. One-hundred

percent of female characters in the first five years of analysis were white. The second five

years (1988-1992) marked a slight decline; 92 percent of all female characters in popular

video games were white. From 1993 to 2012, the most recent year of data collection,

white females comprised percentages of the total population of female characters in the

mid to late seventies. Most of the Asian female characters in the population appeared in video games sold during the time period in which they were introduced (1993-1997). However, from 1998 to 2012, their presence has consistently decreased.

While the presence of white and Asian female characters has gradually decreased over time, the presence of black and Hispanic female characters has slowly increased over time. Regardless of their increased exposure, however, Hispanic and black female characters, at their highest percentage between 2008 and 2012, make up a mere five and six percent of characters featured in popular games sold during that timeframe, respectively. The presence of Arab, Native American, and Pacific Islander characters fluctuates slightly between time periods. These characters make up the smallest proportion of female video game characters.

Narrative Significance

Figure 3: Percent Narrative Significance by Race
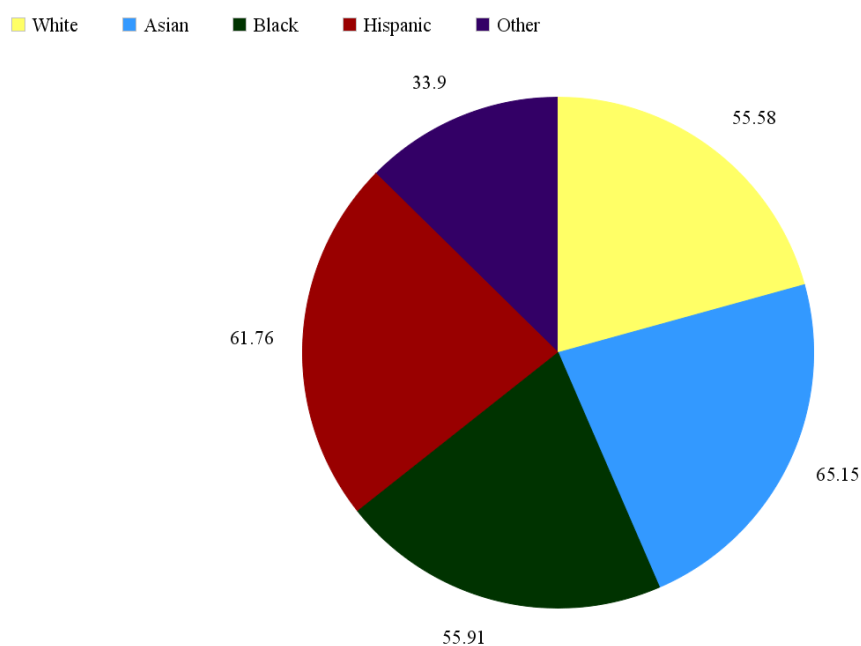
Although women of color appeared in video games much later than their white counterparts and they make up considerably smaller proportions of female video game characters, when they are present, they are more likely than white females to fulfill significant narrative roles, with the exception of Arab women, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders. According to *Figure 3*, 65 percent of Asian women secure roles that advance the plot and demonstrate agency, followed by 62 percent of Hispanic women, 55.9 percent of black women, and 55.5 percent of white women. Only 34 percent of women who fell within the Other racial category played an important part in the storyline or gameplay mechanism.

Figure 4: Narrative Significance by Race Over Time
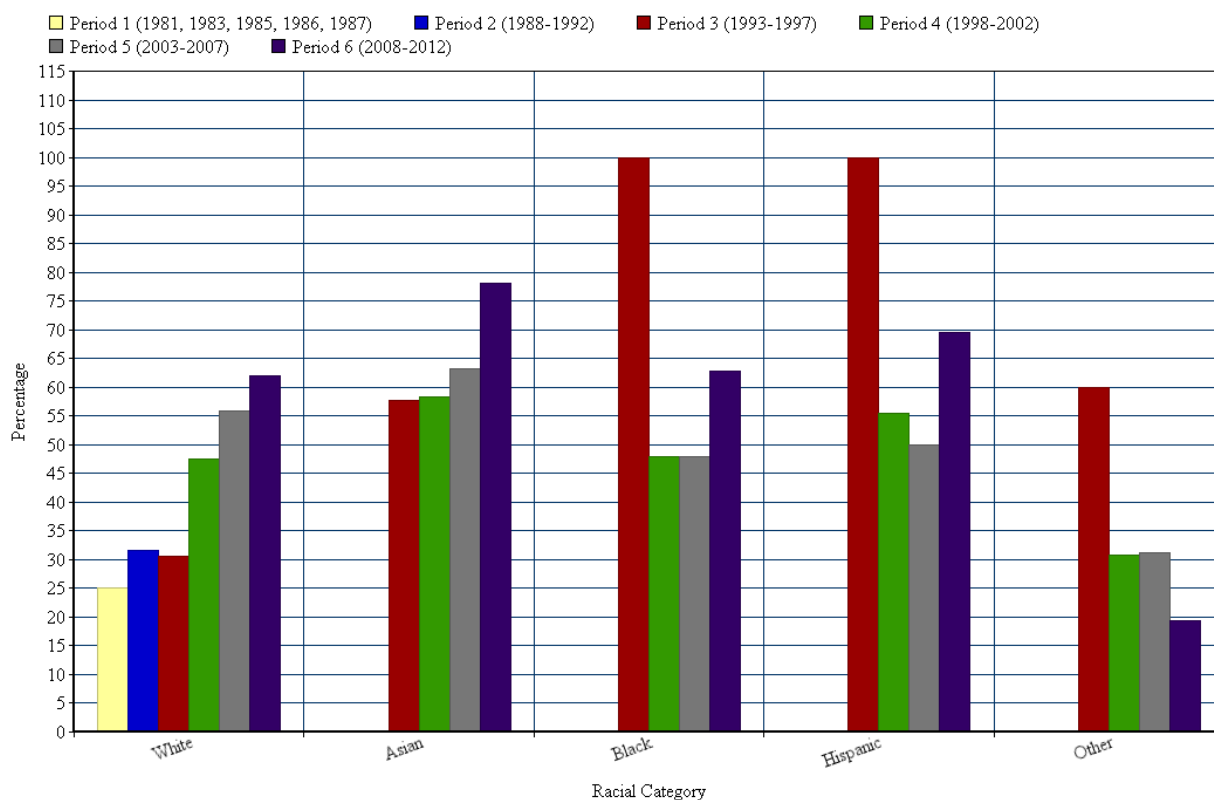
Time has had a positive influence on the narrative significance of white female

characters and Asian female characters. Over a 31-year time span, the proportion of white

female characters playing important roles in video games has increased from a quarter to

well over half. According to *Figure 4* (above), only 25 percent of white females played

an important part in the games in which they appeared during the first time period.

During the second and third time periods, this percentage increased slightly to 32 and 31

percent, respectively. White female characters that appeared in popular games during the

fourth time period experienced another increase in narrative significance with nearly half

(48 percent) fulfilling important roles and over half (56 percent) of white female

characters met the criteria for securing a significant role during the fifth time period. By

the sixth time period, 62 percent of white female characters played an important role. Although Asian female characters did not appear in any games that sold at least one million copies between 1981 and 1992, approximately 58 percent demonstrated narrative significance between 1993 and 2002. This number increased to 63 percent and 78 percent during the fifth and sixth time periods, respectively. Despite the belated appearance of Asian female characters in top-selling video games, their presence has consistently been associated with important roles from 1993 to 2012. According to *Table 1* (below), Asian female characters are 1.7 times more likely to fulfill a significant narrative role than white female characters in an average year.

From 1993-1997, 100 percent of black female characters secured an important narrative role, however, the exceedingly small number of black female characters appearing in popular games during this time period accounts for this figure. Similarly, 100 percent of Hispanic females during the same time period fulfilled important narrative roles due to the minute presence of Hispanic female characters. From the fourth and fifth time periods to the sixth time period, black female narrative significance increased from 48 percent to 63 percent. Hispanic female characters began appearing more consistently during between 1998 and 2002, at which point 56 percent secured significant narrative roles. This figure decreased slightly between 2003 and 20087 to 50 percent and increased to 69 percent by the sixth time period. According to *Table 1*, Hispanic characters are 1.2 times more likely to fulfill an important role in a game's narrative compared to whites.

While white, black, Hispanic, and Asian female characters have experienced a significant increase in narrative importance over time, the percentage of Pacific Islander,

Arab, and Native American female characters fulfilling significant roles has declined, despite their increase in numbers. While female characters categorized as "other" began appearing during between 1988 and 1992, their presence was marked by small numbers and none secured important roles in their respective plots. The number of "other" characters increased slightly between 1993 and 1997 and 60 percent secured significant roles during that timeframe. From 1998 to 2007, the percent of "other" racial characters continued to increase, yet their narrative significance decreased to 31 percent and, despite a continued increase in numbers, their narrative significance continued to decrease to 19 percent, the lowest rate of narrative significance for all time periods and racial categories. Races including Native Americans, Arabs, and Pacific Islanders are a mere 0.4 times more likely to fulfill a significant narrative role than their white counterparts.

Table 1: Logistic Regression Coefficients & Odds Ratios Predicting Narrative Significance

	b	SE	Odds Ratio
Year	0.060***	0.009	1.062
Race (vs White)			
Black	0.011	0.217	1.010
Asian	0.539***	0.146	1.714
Hispanic	0.202*	0.257	1.223
Other	-0.868**	0.283	0.420
Constant	-120.407		
N	2030		
McFadden's Pseudo R²	0.026		

Source: Personal Dataset (2012)

+ p<.1, * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

Sexualization

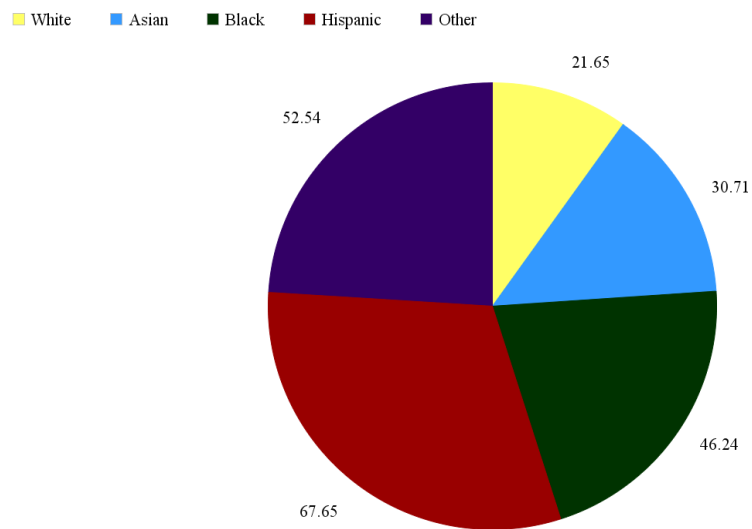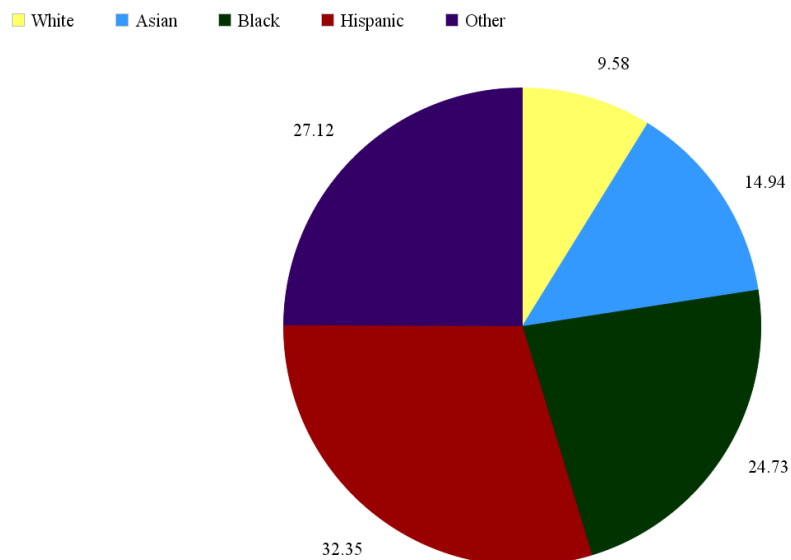*Figure 5:* Percent Skin Exposure (3+) by Race

Figure 6: Percent Skin Exposure (4+) by Race

Hispanic female characters are the most sexualized demographic in video games. According to *Figure 5* (above), sixty-eight percent received a 3 or higher on the skin exposure scale, indicating moderate skin exposure, while 32 percent received a 4 or higher, indicating substantial skin exposure (see *Figure 6*, above). An analysis of odds ratios reveals that Hispanic females are 4.8 times more likely than white females to fall within a higher skin exposure category (see *Table 2*, below). Fifty-three percent of female characters that fell within the "other" racial category received a 3 or higher and 27 percent received a 4 or higher, revealing that female Arabs, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans constitute the second most sexualized group. Black female characters were the third most sexualized group; 46 percent received a 3 or higher on the skin exposure scale and 25 percent received a 4 or higher. According to *Table 2*, black females are 2.5 times

more likely to be depicted as more exposed than their white counterparts, controlling for year.

Asian female characters were the second to least sexualized group; 31 percent received a 3 or higher on the skin exposure scale and 15 percent received a 4 or higher. The majority of Asian female characters received a zero on the skin exposure scale (34 percent) and were therefore not provocatively exposed and 20 percent only received a 1 on the scale, indicating minimal provocative skin exposure. Despite not being portrayed as overtly sexualized, Asian female characters are 1.4 times more likely to fall within a higher skin exposure category than white female characters, controlling for year. White female characters were the least sexualized racial group. Twenty-six percent received a 3 or higher on the skin exposure scale and only ten percent received a 4 or higher. The majority of white female characters were not provocatively exposed (40 percent). Twenty percent only received a 1 on the skin exposure scale.

Table 2: Logistic Regression Coefficients & Odds Ratios Predicting Skin Exposure

	b	SE	Odds Ratio
Year	0.017**	0.008	1.017
Race (vs White)			
Black	0.923***	0.195	2.518
Asian	0.328**	0.126	1.388
Hispanic	1.564***	0.210	4.779
Other	1.171***	0.244	3.224
Constant	-120.407		
N	2030		
McFadden's Pseudo R²	0.015		

Source: Personal Dataset (2012)

+ p<.1, * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

Aggression

Figure 7: Percent Weapon by Race
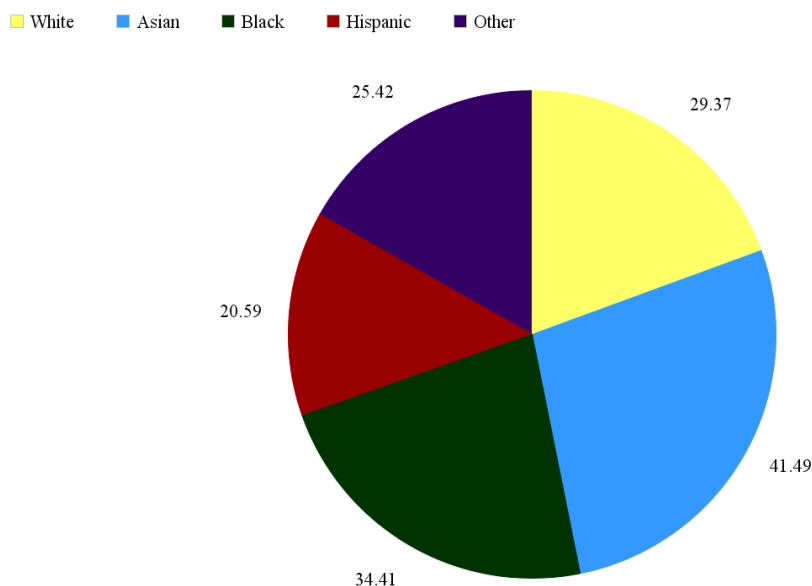
According to *Figure* 7, 29 percent of white female characters were shown with a weapon, compared to 34 percent of black female characters and 25 percent of "other" female characters. Other races, including Pacific Islanders, Arab women, and Native American women are only 0.8 times more likely to be shown wielding a weapon than white female characters, controlling for year (see *Table* 3, below). Hispanic female characters, while the most sexualized, were depicted as the least aggressive; only 21 percent were portrayed with a weapon. According to the odds ratios in *Table* 3, Hispanic female characters are only 0.6 times more likely to be portrayed as aggressive compared to their white female counterparts.

Asian female characters were portrayed as the most aggressive with 41 percent shown in possession of a weapon. According to *Table 3*, Asian female characters are 1.7

times more likely to be portrayed as aggressive by wielding a weapon in their

promotional renders than white female characters in an average year.

Table 3: Logistic Regression Coefficients & Odds Ratios Predicting Aggression

	b	SE	Odds Ratio
Year	0.027***	0.009	1.028
Race (vs White)			
Black	0.196	0.226	1.216
Asian	0.558***	0.143	1.747
Hispanic	-0.534*	0.306	0.586
Other	-0.216**	0.305	0.806
Constant	-55.370		
N	2030		
McFadden's Pseudo R²	0.011		

Source: Personal Dataset (2012)

+ p<.1, * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

Figure 8: Weapon Possession by Race Over Time

Legend:
- Period 1 (1981, 1983, 1985, 1986, 1987)
- Period 2 (1988-1992)
- Period 3 (1993-1997)
- Period 4 (1998-2002)
- Period 5 (2003-2007)
- Period 6 (2008-2012)

Y-axis: Percentage
X-axis: Racial Category (White, Asian, Black, Hispanic, Other)
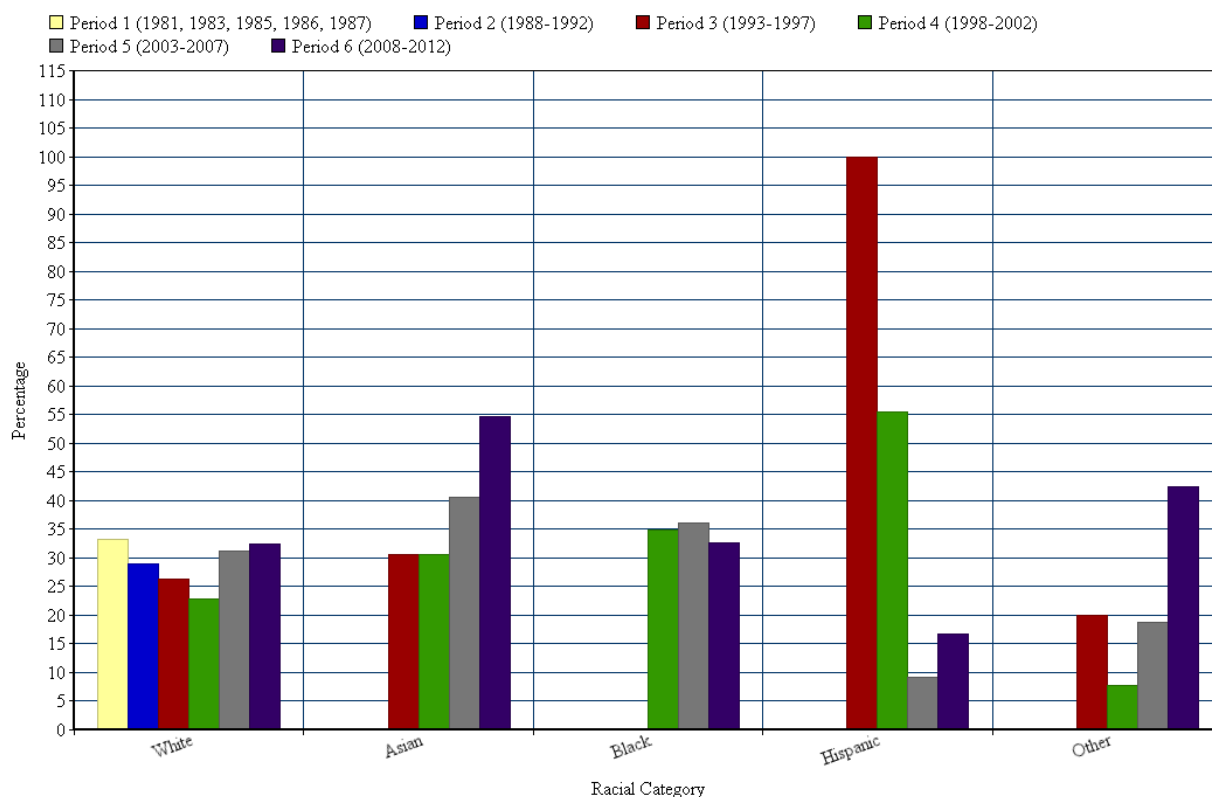
Time had little influence on the aggression of white and black female characters. The percentage of white female characters in possession of a weapon fluctuated slightly between each time period with an average of 29.3 percent between 1988 and 2012. No black female characters were shown with a weapon during the third time period, the first to feature black female characters, however, between 1998 and 2012, an average of 34.7 percent of black female characters were in possession of a weapon.

Hispanic female characters are becoming less aggressive as their numbers increase, until the last time period, where they experienced a slight increase in weapon possession (see *Figure 8*). The number of Hispanic females in video games increased to a significant level between 2003 and 2012 yet, during that timeframe, only an average of

13 percent were shown with weapons. On the contrary, characters in the "other" racial category are ultimately depicted as more aggressive as their numbers increase. While a few characters classified as "other" appeared during the second time period, none were shown in possession of a weapon. During the third time period, however, the percent of characters in the "other" racial category increased, as did the percent portrayed as aggressive. According to *Figure* 8, 20 percent of Arab, Native American, and Pacific Islander characters were shown with a weapon between 1993 and 1997. Furthermore, the percent of renders featuring weapon wielding Arabs, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders doubled between the fourth and fifth time periods (from eight to 19 percent) and nearly doubled again between fifth and sixth time periods (from 19 to 42 percent).

Similarly, Asian female characters are becoming more aggressive over time; during their initial appearance in the third time period and the fourth time period, 31 percent were portrayed as having a weapon. This number increased to 41 percent during the fifth time period and increased to over half (55 percent) during the sixth time period (see *Figure 8*).

CONCLUSION

Controlling Images of Female Video Game Characters

This study yields some surprising results, as well as some expected outcomes in the ways white women and women of color have been portrayed in video games. The content analysis has revealed some trends that challenge existing stereotypes. Controlling images of Asian female characters in video games, for example, exemplify neither the submissive nor sexualized archetypes that are often associated with Asian women (Pyke and Johnson 2003). On the contrary, they are the most likely of all racial groups to have a weapon and thus be portrayed as aggressive and they are less likely than all other women of color to be represented in a sexualized way. In addiction, results from this study challenge the notion that, when the presence of racial minorities is prominent, they suffer lackluster character development, a diminished back story (if one even exists), and significant reliance on other characters to drive their narrative role (Dickerman, Christensen, and Kerl-McClain 2008). According to the data, while the under representation of racial minorities is still largely reflected in video games, women of color (with the exception of Arabs, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders) are actually *more* likely than white female characters to secure a significant narrative role when they are present. These findings challenge the controlling image of the dispensable, trivial minority.

While the data affirm some controlling images that contradict existing stereotypes, my analysis also demonstrates that video games reinforce prevailing stereotypes. Hispanic female characters are by far the most sexualized and least

aggressive. They therefore fulfill the submissive, hypersexual archetype attributed to Latinas in Merskin's (2007) article. According to the data, female characters classified as "other" are the second most sexualized, the second least aggressive, and the group least likely to fulfill a significant narrative role. These findings parallel the predominant depictions of exoticized women of color in the media as subservient and sexually available. Moreover, females in the back racial category are the second most aggressive and the third most sexualized. This combination of aggression and eroticism confirms the controlling image of the assertive black woman, perpetuated in the hegemonic domain of power. The controlling image of black female characters in video games also fulfills the characteristics attributed to the femme fatale archetype. Finally, the scarcity of minorities in the dataset supports the under representation of women of color in the media. Native American women, Pacific Islanders, and Arab women are the most underrepresented in video games, as they are less likely than any other racial group to be present in an important way. These negative depictions contribute to the cultural assumption that women of color are inferior. Furthermore, the creation and promotion of these controlling images supports video games as a site of racial formation in the hegemonic domain of power, wherein game developers create women of color as exotified, racialized "others" compared to white women, whose representations are not racialized.

Finally, Pyke and Johnson argue that white American women and Asian American women are socially constructed in opposition to one another (2003). Interestingly, white and Asian female characters in video games are comparable in terms of narrative role and sexualization. They are the least sexualized groups and make up the

largest racial demographics. This suggests that both white and Asian females serve as ideal types in video games, contrary to findings from content analyses on other forms of media. It is against these two ideal types (most successfully produced by western and Asian countries) that other women of color are racially constructed, as exhibited by the scarcity of Hispanic, Black, Arab, Pacific Islander, and Native American female characters, as well as the propensity for their sexual portrayal. However, while Asian and white female characters had a strong presence early on, their numbers are decreasing, leaving some room for increases in other minority groups, indicating some progress.

The Importance of Intersectionality and the Normalization of Whiteness

According to previous research on gender and video game representations, females have been depicted as inferior compared to male characters. When only observing gender, women are regarded as sex objects, degraded, objectified, and submissive. However, after incorporating race, it is evident that controlling images of white female characters not submissive or sexualized rather white women are privileged with normalized portrayals and adequate representation compared to female characters of color.

Based on the results of this study, it is evident that one way controlling images of women in video games perpetuate the normalization of Whiteness is through racialized femininities or racialized depictions of aggression and passivity. White female characters are portrayed as more aggressive than Hispanic and "other" female characters and less aggressive than Asian and black female characters. This places white females directly in the middle of a spectrum of aggression in which they are neither portrayed as too passive

nor too aggressive. By situating women of color at extreme ends of a spectrum of femininity, white female characters are constructed as the norm. Another way controlling images of female characters in video games normalizes Whiteness is through a hierarchy of racialized sexuality in which Hispanic bodies are the most frequently exposed, followed by characters in the "other" racial category, black female characters, and finally Asian female characters. White females are the least scantily clad, and therefore the least sexualized racial group.

The data indicate a belated presence of women of color in video games over time, which reveals a racial hierarchy in media exposure. White female characters have maintained a consistent presence throughout each time period, followed by characters in the "other" racial category appearing during the second time period, then Asian females during the third time period, and finally black and Hispanic females appearing consistently beginning in the fourth time period. White females dominating the virtual realm exemplifies white privilege; while their presence is not as extensive as that of men in video games, the consistent representation of white women throughout the majority of the video game industry is an extension of white women's presence in popular culture. This representation is one of the advantages whites often taken for granted in what Peggy McIntosh refers to as a matrix of white privilege (1989). This privilege is only revealed upon examination of the complex simultaneity of race and gender through the lens of intersectionality. This study therefore demonstrates the importance of examining multiple dimensions of dominance and oppression when describing inequality; strictly viewing dynamics of gender neglects the ways in which femininity is racialized and solely

examining race overlooks the ways in which race is often gendered and sexualized. While the increasing emergence of female minorities in video games and their prospect of securing significant narrative roles challenges this notion to some extent, white females continue to make up the vast majority of female video game characters and normalized representations of Whiteness continue to dominate the hegemonic domain of power.

Future Research

Future research will examine specific characteristics of each character to assess sexualized racial archetypes and other ethnic stereotypes. Through the content analysis process, I have observed the general trend of minority characters sexualized in a more primitive way than white female characters. Further, detailed analysis needs to be conducted in order to assess these controlling images. Further analysis will also investigate whether these images are the product of specific games and/or genres. For example, Hispanic female characters may be portrayed as hypersexual, partially as a result of the *Grand Theft Auto* video game franchise, infamous for highly sexual portrayals of Latinas as "hood rats" and prostitutes.

Previous studies have examined characters' apparent role as either a supplemental or lead character; however, they have not addressed what the character actually does. More female characters seem to be performing gender atypical occupations such as law enforcement agents and doctors and this is an important aspect to consider upon investigating race and gender roles in the media. Expansion of the current research will include a variable to measure women's occupational roles in video games over time, which may parallel temporal trends in women's protest, educational attainment, and

occupational status. Furthermore, the subsequent study will identify gender typical and atypical occupational roles, as well as high and low status occupations to examine trends in gender over time, and differences in occupational status by race. Due to time constraints, I had to remove a variable that would measure occupational role, which would serve as a proxy for class. This variable will be included in future research expanding on the dataset.

In addition, future research should examine whether changes over time parallel an egalitarian cultural change and if the apparent progress in depictions of women, overall, reflects the progress of women in western culture such as an increase in political participation, academic achievement, and presence in male-dominated career fields. There is an evident delay, however, in progress that corresponds to a racial hierarchy. Further analysis needs to be conducted to assess this delay and whether it reflects other racial postponements in progress such as access to education and the right to vote.

While objectification occurs when female characters are portrayed as sexualized or exotified, dehumanization occurs when characters are depicted as less than human. This happens by means of the controlling image of the humanoid or animal-human hybrid. According to Patricia Hill Collins, "all categories of humans labeled Others have been equated to one another, to animals, and to nature" (1990: 226). Based upon images I have already seen from popular video games, a hierarchy of skin tone exists, not only among human characters, but also non-human humanoids. For example, light skin seems to be associated with purity and can be seen in characters such as angels, elves, sirens, and mermaids or technology as demonstrated by female cyborgs, whereas dark skin

seems to be associated with more animalistic creatures such as ogres and animal/human hybrids. Humanoid characters also often possess cultural cues that insinuate a racial identity such as "Harem sand creatures" that, although are not explicitly human, don a Hijab and gold bangles, signifying an ethnic identity. An additional assessment will more expressly address the process of 'othering' by means of dehumanization.

Furthermore, from what I've observed, many of the renders contained racialized weaponry - weapons that connote racial stereotypes. For example, Asian female characters were frequently armed with katana, sai, bladed fans, and weaponized umbrellas, all of which allude to cultural stereotypes of the samurai, ninja, and geisha. Native American and black female characters that embodied the tribal archetype were equipped with knives, bows, arrows, and spears, while white female characters were rendered in opposition, with futuristic and technologically advanced weapons such as plasma rifles and laser pistols. Thus, weapon type may reveal a racialized spectrum of aggression that needs to be addressed. Future research will code for weapon type.

Finally, while this study focused on games that are sold to a broad target market, future research could investigate the different discourses on race and gender that video games, which target specific audiences have to offer. Adult Only games, for example include a sub genre of rape simulationgames, a niche that is detrimental to women.

Appendices

Appendix A: Citra Talugmai

Appendix B: Racialized Humanoids
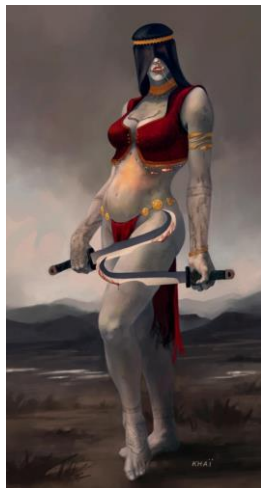
Appendix C: Skin Exposure

Skin Exposure (0)   Skin Exposure (1)   Skin Exposure (2)   Skin Exposure (3)

Skin Exposure (4)   Skin Exposure (5)   Skin Exposure (6)

Appendix D: Table of Descriptive Statistics

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics

	Proportion	Mean	Standard Deviation
Character	-	**-**	**-**
Game	-	-	-
Year	-	2004.57	5.38
Weapon	.31	-	-
Present	.31	-	-
Absent	.69	-	-
Skin_Exposure		1.50	1.53
0	.37	-	-
1	.19	-	-
2	.17	-	-
3	.14	-	-
4	.08	-	-
5	.03	-	-
6	.01	-	-
Narrative_Role			
Significant	.55	-	-
Insignificant	.45	-	-
Race			
White	.77	-	-
Black	.05	-	-
Hispanic	.03	-	-
Asian	.12	-	-
Other	.03	-	1.68
N	2030		

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