UNDER THE HOOD: AN (AUTO) ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF HOW WHITE
ADOLESCENT MALES CRITICALLY ENGAGE WITH RACE IN
GRAND THEFT AUTO V

PAUL DARVASI

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN EDUCTION
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

DECEMBER 2019

ABSTRACT

Grand Theft Auto V (*GTA V*) is emblematic of the public controversies that associate video games with violence, misogyny, and damaging depictions of race and gender. However, it is also a layered referential and self-reflexive text that roundly critiques US culture, including the pernicious complicity of media on issues of identity. *GTA V* is the third best selling video game in history, and primarily targets white adolescent males, but its effects on the attitudes and behaviors of its chief consumers are virtually unstudied. Furthermore, the tendency for schools to keep controversial games at a distance may neglect a need to better equip adolescent boys with the tools to critically consume the complex media in which they are immersed. This doctoral dissertation employs a postcolonial lens and documents a month-long qualitative study where a high school class of ten white adolescent boys played *GTA V* while in a formal instructional context that encouraged them to critically reflect on their gameplay. Although they viewed the game through the lenses of gender, masculinities, violence, and hegemony, my research specifically reports on how they engaged with representations of race and racialized places in the elaborate urban simulation. The participants were positioned as co-researchers and trained in basic ethnographic methods, and the fieldnotes and filmed videos of their play were synthesized in autoethnographic accounts of their experiences. Data was also gathered from pre- and post-surveys, filmed classroom sessions, a private Facebook group, the counter-hegemonic media they produced, and their notes and videos.

The investigation revealed that participants naturalized racial stereotypes and problematic connections of race and place. And, the instructional approach was found to provoke a greater awareness about discriminatory depictions of race in the game and, in some cases, media at large. Some also become aware of their own tendencies to appropriate commodified forms of blackness. Finally, their discourse and views were found to be largely shaped by media, highlighting the need for a greater emphasis on media literacy in schools.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my life partner, constant companion, and best friend, Leana. It was her encouragement, support, feedback, and sacrifice that conceived this project and saw it through to the end. I also dedicate this work to our two children, Max and Paloma, whose love and inspiration fueled this endeavour, and who often sat by me and played as I wrote. Finally, I dedicate this work to my students, who are and will continue to be my greatest teachers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

*What is false creates taste, and reinforces itself by knowingly eliminating
any possible reference to the authentic. And what is genuine is reconstructed
as quickly as possible, to resemble the false.*

- Guy Debord

Introduction

I teach English and Media Studies in an independent all-boy's high school, and
this study justifies and documents the results of my experience carrying out a unit of
instruction with the world's most controversial video game. My students are uniformed,
generally polite, and variably motivated. Our English classes proceed with a typical blend
of short stories, novels, plays, and poetry, but also include films, videos, music, graphic
novels, interactive fiction and, occasionally, video games. Even when video games are
not on the curriculum, the young men in my classes know that I can be easily swayed to
the topic. When drawn into video game talk, we talk about new releases, graphics, nar-
rative choices, characters, mechanics, strategy, and gameplay anecdotes. Inevitably, I let
them know that my doctoral research is on *Grand Theft Auto V* (*GTA V*), which is met
with surprise and many questions: Why *GTA V*? What are you writing about it? How long
does it have to be? I don't get far with a response before they break-off into animated
exchanges about the game. They share the intricacies of infiltrating a high security mil-
itary compound to steal a fighter jet, recite a commercial they heard on the in-game radio
while racing in a stolen cab, or laugh at the episode with the opportunistic yoga instruct-
or. I try to settle them down with a question of my own: "raise your hand if you play or
have played *GTA V*?" It usually manages to reclaim their attention as a few hands proudly
shoot up, but several pause to consider the consequences of a formal admission, espe-
cially since they are often younger than the recommended playing age. Maybe they can't
decide whether it is more embarrassing to admit that they play or that they don't play.

Background

It's been six years since *GTA V*'s release and, when I recently posed the question, three quarters of a Grade 10 class put up their hands. I've asked over a dozen classes of adolescent boys, and have never seen fewer than half the hands raised. In the competitive video game market, where thousands of games jostle for control of consoles, computers, and mobile phones, *GTA V*'s commercial resilience is virtually unrivalled. My informal class polls are hardly rigorous or statistically significant, but they do hint at the game's staggering reach. Since it launched in 2013, it has sold over 110 million copies, with an estimated revenue of $6 billion, making it the third-best selling video game of all time (Grubb, 2018; Kain, 2019). The copies in circulation are likely much higher due to the resale market and illegal duplication and sharing (Vanolo, 2012). The game's prevalence and influence have led some to call it a "symbol of contemporary youth culture" (Latorre, 2015, p. 14) and even before *GTA V,* it was "one of the most dominant media franchises of the new millennium and a cornerstone media point for millions of today's youth" (DeVane & Squire, 2008, p. 264). Aside from sales figures, there is almost no data, demographic information, or empirical studies available about *GTA V*. An informal sweep of player forums and Steam gameplay charts indicate that offline *GTA V* players devote between 50-100 hours to the single player edition, while online players frequently log over 1,000 hours of gameplay, with many reporting over 5,000 hours. These figures are not reliable, but considering the game's scope and astronomical popularity, it's reasonable to estimate that tens of millions of adolescents spend hundreds of hours in the virtual city of Los Santos, a social phenomenon about which we remain largely in the dark.

GTA V's enormous popularity is due to its magnitude of scope, photorealistic graphics, and edgy, open world play, but it is no stranger to controversy. Players can undertake an array of criminal enterprises in an elaborate city simulation that The Guardian reviewer Keith Stuart called "a warped mirror of Los Angeles" that is nothing less than a "monstrous parody of modern life" (Stuart, 2013). The game combines a layered narrative campaign with an open world urban playground where players can blow up

meth labs, visit strip clubs, blackmail celebrities, murder prostitutes, hijack luxury cars, torture terrorists, and manipulate the stock market to buy expensive clothes and luxurious mansions. In a social climate where video games are sometimes linked to mass killings, school shootings (Draper, 2019), misogyny (Campbell, 2018), suicide (Kohn, 2002), and addiction (Meyers, 2019), no other mainstream video games have generated more public outcry than the *GTA* franchise. It has been the target of lawsuits, blamed for gun violence, and condemned for its degrading representations of women, racial stereotypes, celebrations of criminality, and even caused a political firestorm in the US Congress for sexually explicit content in the now infamous "hot coffee" scandal (Barrett, 2006; DeVane & Squire, 2008; Everett & Watkins, 2008; Ferguson, 2010; Gabbiadini et al., 2016). *GTA V* also offers more benign activities, such as golfing, tennis, scuba diving, jet skiing, dancing, yoga, and cruising while listening to music. However, its penchant for headlines and massive sales have earned *GTA* the dubious distinction of being crowned the most controversial game in history by the Guinness Book of World Records (Moore, 2016).

Value of the Research

The understudied collision between *GTA V* and a generation of white adolescent boys presents some exciting investigative directions, and as a teacher, I also see a timely pedagogical opportunity. In terms of research, it would be beneficial to better understand complex player responses to interactive media, which may deliver deeper impressions than traditional spectatorial media such as film or television (Bijvank et al., 2012; Bogost, 2008; Gabbiadini et al., 2016; Jansz, 2005; Olson et al., 2008). How are attitudes and behaviours affected by spending hundreds of hours in a rhetorically layered and politicized interactive environment? How does *GTA* shape views on gender, race, and sexuality? Are players passive recipients of problematic material, or do they filter their experiences critically? How does ancillary media and paratextual consumption dialogue with their gameplay? These are big questions, and only the tip of the iceberg for possible research. These questions can also serve to drive a curricular agenda that asks students to interrogate their

own gameplay.

Schools are understandably risk-averse, and not likely to welcome a violent game like *GTA V* that is "saturated with racialized, gendered, sexualized, and national meaning" (Leonard, 2006, p. 83). However, scholars like Ferguson (2010) argue that turning a blind eye to violent games like *GTA V* may prove a disservice to the youth who play them, and that schools that ignore "the use of this medium out of hand may be short-sighted" (p. 77). Video games cannot be understood in any meaningful way without critically examining their ideological constructs, and the social worlds represented in games like *GTA V* warrant particular attention to better gauge their impact on social discourse (Latorre, 2015; Leonard, 2006). This is why Barrett (2006) recommends that a "critical analysis of cultural texts such as [*GTA:*] *San Andreas* is essential to understanding the very real pedagogical and political work that these texts do" (p. 115). Adolescent boys are often left to contend with representations of senseless violence, narrow scripts of masculinity, misogynistic portrayals of women, and racial stereotypes, often without guidance, constructive dialogue, the space for reflection, or an informed critical context (Barrett, 2006; Sanford & Madill, 2006; Polasek, 2014). This is a troublesome circumstance since adolescent engagement with media is found to impact the development of identity, moral reasoning, and emotional regulation (Bijvank et al., 2012; Olson et al., 2008; Jansz, 2005).

Learning with video games. Despite the contentious relationship between schools and video games, a growing body of work supports the value of leveraging digital games for teaching and learning (for example, Bogost, 2008; De Castell & Jenson, 2005; De Castell & Jenson, 2007; Gee, 2003; Granic, Lobel & Engels, 2014; Squire, 2011; Steinkuehler, 2007). Moreover, digital games are culturally dense multimodal artifacts that, like all media texts, are susceptible to deconstruction and analysis. Gee's (2003) widely referenced and foundational work outlines thirty-six discrete "learning principles" derived from commercial video games; however, Barrett (2006) calls for a more critical approach, and critiques Gee for looking at "how concepts, identities and politics are

represented in video games, paying little attention to what is being represented in these games" (p. 96). Leonard (2003) also charges that Gee's work is politically limited "since he believes that games teach children and teenagers 36 core learning principles. Yet he makes no mention of how games perpetuate stereotypes, induce racialized fantasies, and affirm racial inequalities" (p. 2). Video games reproduce "aspects of the world we might, or might not, want" (Borchard, 2015, p. 8) and therefore would benefit from the application of literacy practices to unpack how they might "make or critique the systems we live in" (Bogost, 2008, p. 136). Imaginaries formed in these synthetic worlds can translate to material consequences for culture, society and identity politics, which underscores the need for research that better understands and supports youth to critically process their gameplay experience. Moreover, a program of critical consumption and production can help alter cultures and practices within the game spaces and contextual communities which can transform potentially damaging media into a site for resistance and empowerment (Everett & Watkins, 2008; Murray, 2017; Sanford & Madill, 2006).

Compared to critiques of violence and gender in digital games, public and scholarly discourse that addresses race has been minimal (Barrett, 2006; Everett & Watkins, 2008; Higgin, 2009; Murray, 2017, Polasek, 2014). Shaw (2012) claims that examinations of race in gaming are generally underserved because "Whiteness in gaming, like Whiteness in general, is uninterrogated" (p. 37). Krüger (2018), who also sees video games as white-centred spaces, charges that the disregard of race issues in video games amounts to "a disavowal of the traumas of ethnocentrism and racial violence that remain fundamental aspects, not only of *GTA V*, but of the social, material, political and economic realities to which the game refers and the foundations upon which it rests" (p. 14). The lack of a constructive dialogue about the treatment of race in video games is a concern, especially since they are "informal yet effective spaces for teaching, or in many instances, reproducing particular ideas about race, ethnicity, and difference" (Everett & Watkins, 2008, p. 145). As such, *GTA V*'s popularity, immersive depth, photorealistic depictions,

and racialized content constitute a dense and relevant media artifact by which to investigate how adolescent boys encounter race in the game.

Learning to Race in *Grand Theft Auto V*

Some commentators describe *GTA* games as a "compilation of racist myths that misrepresent African Americans" (Miller, 2008a, p. 274); however, the franchise's ironic tone disrupts any easy criticism of its stereotypical depictions of race (Barrett, 2006; DeVane & Squire, 2008; Miller, 2008a; Polasek, 2014). *GTA V* includes media clichés like Italian American gangsters, Chinese triads, Middle Eastern terrorists, Latino drug lords and, most pertinently, black gangsters from the "hood" (Polasek, 2014). These hyperbolic stereotypes walk a shaky line between caricature as critique or, as Leonard (2006) charges, lending a "legitimizing voice to hegemonic discourses about race" (p. 85). In a move that drew both fire and praise, Rockstar Games featured black male criminals as protagonists in *GTA*: *San Andreas* and *GTA V*. The player-controlled avatars squarely fit media stereotypes of physically powerful, criminalized black gang members from the ghetto. These black antiheroes were created according to a template drawn from "hood" and blaxploitation films, hip-hop music and videos, and other mass media depictions of black urban culture that echo the "sameness" of fossilized media tropes (Miller, 2008b). The (re)circulations of these stereotypes cultivate white imaginaries that can legitimize the perception that "the 'authentic' black experience is one of crime, shooting and violence, naturalizing and even sexualizing the violence many young black men experience" (Barret, 2006, p. 106). However, the *GTA* protagonists are also informed by extensive research and consultations with members of the represented community (Miller, 2008; Everett & Watkins, 2008), which produces a semantic field where parody can provoke "an apparent belief in the accuracy of the stereotypes" (Polasek, 2014). Thus, *GTA V* yields an ambivalent reading as a social critique whose satirical bent lampoons how black men — for one — are stereotyped in popular media. But, does the potential fallout from the overt stereotypes override the subtle counterstep of irony? Do the visible caricatures

overwhelm the invisible reality beyond recuperation? How are white adolescents' views shaped according to how black characters and neighbourhoods are represented in the game? And, how can a pedagogical intervention turn these discriminatory depictions into a "teachable moment"?

It is important to stress that video games can "reverse or reinforce unnecessarily oppressive systems" (Passmore, Birk & Mandryk, 2018, p. 9). For one, the vast online player communities that form around games like *GTA V* share experiences and media about their in-game sojourns, which make it a genuine social and politically influential space (Vanolo, 2012). The layout and demographic distribution of Los Santos reproduce "existing socio-spatial inequalities in contemporary cities" that pertain to race and re-inforce the status quo of racially segregated communities (Vanolo, 2012, p. 288). Thus, racial imaginaries rooted in inaccurate representations can be naturalized by white ado-lescents in insular communities who have little contact with other races. Thus, Higgin (2009) cautions that assuming a "complacent and politically unaware stance in dealing with blackness threatens to cultivate the gamer population's fear of race and a belief in the adequacy of stereotypes to articulate blackness. Once matured, these digitally re-inforced antiprogressive attitudes will migrate into the outside world" (p. 12-13). How-ever, the problematic operations of race in *GTA* and their potential effects on individuals and society discussed by Barrett (2006) and others (Everett & Watkins, 2008; Miller, 2008a; Miller, 2008b; Polasek, 2014) are largely speculative and not based on empirical evidence, as little research has been carried out that gauges how racial dynamics within the game translate to the real world (DeVane & Squire, 2008). Polasek (2014), for one, specifically recommends that *GTA V* should be used as a pedagogical tool to investigate race. However, there is a need for more ethnographic and theoretical work to uncover the significance of white players inhabiting and encountering othered bodies and places in digital games (Barrett, 2006; Leonard, 2006). And, as discussed, advancing this work with white, middle class adolescent boys seems particularly pertinent because of their

impressionability, privileged social position, and they appear to be the most significant consumers of *GTA V* (Fron et al., 2007; Krüger, 2018).

Focus of the Research

This study endeavours to shed some light on how white adolescent boys engage with race in *GTA V*, while its pedagogical dimension aims to encourage them to critically unpack and reconsider their assumptions about race, including their own. Although I live in one of the world's most multicultural cities, the students at the independent boys school where I work are almost exclusively white, which presented the chance to examine the target demographic in situ. The study was carried out from April 25 to May 30, 2017, with the seniors enrolled in an elective high school class I teach called Literature in the Digital Age that explores contemporary narrative forms ranging from transmedia to environmental storytelling. The ten participants were 17-18 year-old high school seniors who identified as white, and all but one had played *GTA V* prior to the study. The participants were recruited as co-researchers, and prepared with a basic background and training in ethnography so that they could take fieldnotes and film videos of themselves while playing, which would culminate in an autoethnographic report. Throughout, participants read and viewed instructional material focused on ethnography, gender, race, and hegemonic masculinity and spent class sessions discussing or writing about their gameplay. In addition to the final ethnographic report, each participant also produced counter-hegemonic media in response to the game. I collected data from all their fieldnotes and gameplay videos, my fieldnotes, multimedia posts from a private Facebook group, the autoethnographies and counter-hegemonic media, and the video transcripts from the 12 class sessions.

In the pedagogical implementation of this work, I will establish that *GTA V* is a complex cultural milieu that invites ethnographic observation, as well as foregrounding its status as a rich text whose matrix of literacies yields diverse critical readings. This will lay the groundwork to certify the importance of better understanding how white

male adolescents encounter problematic representations in *GTA V*, and how their views and attitudes are affected and/or altered when they undertake a self-reflexive, mindful, and critical research process to unpack this potent and influential cultural artifact. In a relevant example, Netcoh (2013) used hip-hop media with high school students to unpack issues of race, and advocates for critical media education to fulfill the "imperative that adolescents are provided spaces to participate in open conversations about race and encouraged to develop new understandings of how it functions in society" (p. 18). As will be discussed, *GTA V* intersects significantly with hip-hop media and can be similarly unpacked to critically explore constructions of race and their social consequences. The productivity of this work does not only rely on working with those directly or indirectly injured by damaging media representations, but it must also be taken up by dominant groups, such as middle class white male adolescents, so that they can critically reflect on broader social realities, unpack their own tacit privilege and complicity, and think about how they can contribute to the responsible amelioration of social inequity. Assisting adolescent boys to pursue a line of healthy self-interrogation captures a central aim of this study, as it elucidates prevailing mindsets and attitudes that transpire when they engage with race in the game. It is also an opportunity to foster a critical mindfulness and self-awareness and embed the experience in a broader and more informed context. This may help equip them with tools that can later be applied to other media they consume, and also encourage a more balanced and judicious approach to interpersonal relationships and, ultimately, help shape a more equitable society.

To that end, Chapter 2 will review work that examines the nuanced political commentary and satire woven into *GTA V*. I will discuss how the game's textual and representational complexity might be leveraged to invest boys in diverse and relevant literacy practices, and to critically reflect on race through the game's production, rhetorical construction, intertextuality, and media tropes. Using a popular game as a means of engagement may also offer a way to mitigate what some are calling a boys' crisis in

education.

In Chapter 3, I will outline and justify the postcolonial foundations of the study, whose epistemological and material implications will inform my approach to pedagogy, research, and analysis of text and discourse. Moreover, I argue that *GTA V* is a mediated cartographic artifact that is situated in a long tradition of imperial cartography and, thus, (re)produces imaginative geographies that circumscribe and fix racially segregated spaces according to prevalent media stereotypes. Much like its cartographic predecessors, *GTA V* "uses the duplicating procedures of mimetic representation and structuralist reconstitution as strategic means of stabilizing the foundations of Western culture and of "fixing" the position (thereby maintaining the power) of the West in relation to cultures other than its own" (Huggan, 1989, p. 126). In the case of *GTA V*'s postcolonial map of Los Angeles, the othered culture is not "fixed" abroad in the colony, but in the heart of the urban metro-pole.

Chapter 4 will refine how I theorize race through a postcolonial lens, and review literature that studies representations of race in digital games, as well as player responses to racial stereotypes. The enactments of white players who temporarily adopt black avatars and inhabit virtual black neighbourhoods will be framed with Nakamura's (1995) concept of "identity tourism" and Strain's (2003) postcolonial theorization of the tourist practice of "distanced immersion." Chapter 5 will continue the examination of race and show that, as a video game, a map, and a virtual city, *GTA V* is primarily a spatial media artifact, and that places in the game are racialized according to popular media tropes, primarily stemming from hip-hop music. White adolescent males are the chief consumers of hip-hop, and have been found to adopt corresponding codes, fashions, speech, and mannerisms. Thus, Hayes (2004) observes that since rap was popularized with white youth in the 80s, "it has become as much the soundtrack of the suburbs as the inner city, impacting the ways in which many white youth come to understand black identity" (p. 64). I will argue that much of *GTA V* was spatially designed according to a hip-hop template and

thus offers a digital destination where white adolescent identity tourists can safely inhabit the bodies and milieus of black urban criminals to enact their hip-hop fantasies and authenticate their allegiance to the musical genre.

Chapter 6 will outline the methodology, setting, and participants of the study, including how participants were enlisted as co-researchers to conduct autoethnographies on their own gameplay. Furthermore, I will outline how the classroom implementation of the study will follow a participatory action research (PAR) framework. Finally, I describe how using critical media literacy to dialogically unpack issues of race, racialization, and racism in a popular culture artifact entails a "postcolonial style of education" (Hickling-Hudson et al., 2004, p. 7). This will lay the foundations to proceed with an examination of how members of a dominant group in a privileged setting encounter, discuss, reflect on, and are provoked to interrogate representations of the racial "other" in *Grand Theft Auto V*.

Chapter 7 synthesizes data from classroom transcripts, a private Facebook group, fieldnotes, pre- and post- surveys, gameplay videos, autoethnographies, and participant generated counter-hegemonic media. The data was selected to show how the participants played with Franklin, the black avatar, engaged with race and racialized neighbourhoods in the game, the experiments they designed to "test" the game's biases, and to track their evolving views and commententaries on race, racism, and representations of race in the game. Chapter 8 draws from the same data set as Chapter 7 to examine how the participants reflect on their white privilege, and how the instructional approach enlisted diverse media to support them to critically formulate their views on race and cultural appropriation based on their *GTA V* gameplay.

Finally, Chapter 9 discusses major findings and puts the research in context. I will review how a prevalent pattern emerged where participants learned their research strategies from media, used examples from media to frame their gameplay experiences, and referenced media to articulate their views and beliefs about race. Second, the chap-

ter reports on the learning outcomes from the pedagogical strategies used to unpack the game, including what they learned from participating in the study as researchers. I also discuss how some participant views evolved over the course of the study and what they reported to have learned from their experience. I end with a discussion of what I learned as a teacher and researcher, how my views evolved, the study's limitations, what I would change, and directions for future work.

Chapter 2: How They Race in Los Santos: White Adolescent Gamers and *GTA V*'s Double-Voice

Introduction

This initial foray into the literature will establish white adolescent boys as the main consumers and target market of *GTA*. I will then review some possible motives for why adolescent boys choose to play violent and antisocial games in order to foreground the need to better understand how they are affected by their gameplay. This will be followed by an examination of *GTA*'s satirical tone and how it can yield ambivalent readings of how gender, race, and political ideology are represented in the game. Finally, I will make the case that *GTA V*'s nuanced treatment of fundamental social issues, particularly in the realm of identity politics, along with its sway with white adolescent boys, warrants the implementation of a pedagogical framework to cultivate critical thought about their gameplay, themselves, and depictions of race.

In the Crosshairs: White Middle Class Adolescent Boys

On the surface, recent data undermines the popular assumption that video games are the domain of adolescent boys. The Entertainment Software Association (2019) reports the average age of a video game player as 33, that 54% of game players are men, and 46% women. Moreover, only 21% of gamers in US households are under 18 years old, while 40% are in the 18-35 year-old category. However, these findings are inclusive

of a broad range of games, including casual mobile games like Candy Crush and desktop computer solitaire simulations (Jenson & De Castell, 2010). Relevantly, 83% of millennial males (18-35 years old) play action games, while 76% of millennial females play casual games (Entertainment Software Association, 2019). Thus, young men are in fact dominant consumers of violent action and first-person shooter games like *GTA* (Jansz, 2005; Ferguson, 2010). For example, Olson et al. (2007) found that boys were five times more likely than girls to play violent M-rated games. It may be tempting to interpret findings like these as an indication that boys are more "naturally" predisposed to violent games than girls, but Yee (2008) suggests that it is not violence but male-dominated game culture that deters girls from greater participation. This is in line with several studies (Ang, 2003; Bird, 1992; Butsch, 2000; Morley, 1986) cited by Shaw (2012) that support socialization and power relationships as primary factors accounting for gender differences in media consumption.

Although there is virtually no available information on *GTA V* player demographics, data derived from previous editions of the franchise indicate that an overwhelmingly high percentage of *GTA* players are adolescent boys. Olson et al. (2008) cite a 2005 Kaiser Family Foundation survey that found 77% of boys in Grades 7 to 12 had played one of the *Grand Theft Auto* titles. A more recent Kaiser Family Foundation (2010) report states that "*GTA* is especially popular among boys, with 70% of all 8- to 18-year-old boys saying they've played it, including 38% of 8- to 10-year-old boys, 74% of 11- to 14-year-old boys, and 85% of 15- to 18-year-old boys" (p. 26). Olson et al. (2007) studied children aged 12 - 14 and found that 44% of the boys (as opposed to 20% of the girls) had played one or more games in the M-rated *GTA* series. The game's popularity with males under 30 is also supported by an online survey Miller (2008a) circulated in *GTA*'s web-based player communities where, of the 82 respondents, 95% were male, and 43% identified as students. These studies predate the 2013 release of *GTA V*, whose sales and popularity far surpassed any of its predecessors and, presumably, has reached even more

high school boys.

Adolescent boys are found to have a broad swathe of motives to play violent video games. Violent video game spaces can be seen as "private laboratories" where they can safely experiment with the uncertain status of their identities, emotions, and masculinity without fear of reproach or ridicule from parents and/or peers (Jansz, 2005). By assuming diverse in-game identities, boys can escape narrow social categories (jock, nerd, rebel, etc.) and resist the "traditionally stereotypical ways they are viewed in society" (Sanford & Madill, 2006, p. 298). Olson et al. (2008) anecdotally suggest that video games are cathartic emotional regulators that some teenage boys play to release stress and anger. They are also sites of resistance where both academically successful and unsuccessful adolescent boys can find success, challenge authority, socialize, break laws, bend rules, and perform inappropriate and illegal activities within the relative safety of the game (Olson et al., 2008; Sanford & Madill, 2006). Ribbons and Malliet (2015) found that the way adolescent boys enacted violence in games depended on where they fell along three gameplay preferences axes: narrations versus action, discovery versus mission completion, and reaction versus strategy. Although gameplay styles or preferences are complex and perhaps ultimately irreducible (Ribbons & Malliet, 2015), these three spectra roughly point to a range of ways in which violent games might appeal to adolescents. Finally, white middle class players, who are significant consumers of black hip-hop culture (Barrett, 2006) are drawn to *GTA*'s affordance of adopting the personas of black urban criminals (Miller, 2008b), one of the many ways that they experiment with identity.

African American and Hispanic boys spend proportionately more of their entertainment money on console games than their white counterparts, but have less disposable income. There is also a lack of access to broadband and game hardware by "historically disadvantaged minorities" (Higgin, 2009, p. 22). Consequently, US and European game companies continue to target white, middle class adolescents (Shaw, 2012). Williams, Martins, Consalvo, and Ivory (2009) explain the appeal to white players as a ''combin-

ation of developer demographics and perceived ideas about game players among mar-

keters" (p. 831), while Fron et al. (2007) note that mainstream companies like Rockstar

Games deliberately target an adolescent male sensibility because they are a demographic

category closely tied to the notion of a "hardcore gamer." This male-oriented market

construct is characterized by a persistent adherence to violent first-person shooters,

competitive games, and action games. The *GTA* franchise is emblematic of this ethos,

and is marketed accordingly. However, Fron et al. (2007) also argue that the "hardcore

gamer" or merely "gamer" identity is a market demographic which they classify as a

"third gender" game industry construct. In this study, I follow Connell's (2005) view that

masculinity, like race, and the developmental stage of "adolescence" are also socially and

culturally constructed categories. This framework stresses the importance of encouraging

white adolescent boys, whether self-identified "gamers" or otherwise, to foster awareness

about\how the video game industry and video games in general contribute to the con-

struction of their identities and how, consequently, this influences their conceptions of

self and other, with particular attendance to race.

An Overview: "Where do you begin talking about *Grand Theft Auto V*?"

As discussed, *Grand Theft Auto V* is an enormous "open world" game set in Los

Santos, a parody of Los Angeles that Vanolo (2012) describes as a "distorted criminal

milieu" (p. 286). Players control avatars and have the option to complete directed mis-

sions or freely explore and interact with the vast city and surrounding countryside. *GTA

V* departs from prior editions with the option to play three criminal protagonists. Players

alternate between the interconnected lives of Michael, a white, affluent former bank rob-

ber in witness protection; Franklin, an African American former South Los Santos gang

member trying to reform his life; and Trevor, a white career criminal and psychopath with

a penchant for extreme violence. As characters advance, they can spend their largely ill-

gained loot on consumer goods, and *GTA V*'s elaborate in-game media ecology includes

TV networks, and radio stations with multiple channels featuring fully developed ads and

programming. There is even a navigable internet that includes a website to monitor and invest in the stock market.

GTA V is an extensive critique of American culture and parodies the very same social issues it is accused of aggravating (DeVane & Squire, 2008; Frasca, 2003; Latorre, 2015; Miller, 2008a; Miller, 2008b). Its reflexive, self-effacing irony and extensive social satire cast it as "the most cutting criticism of the American dream that video game history has produced" (Latorre, 2015, p. 14). Accordingly, it is a fallacy to simply dismiss *GTA V* as mindless violence, or gratuitous criminality because "the ability of some players to 'read' sophisticated critiques of social, political, and commercial institutions suggests that the game's semiotics and overarching narrative may have more depth than its critics allow" (DeVane & Squire, 2008, p. 282). *GTA V* is an elusive, referential cultural artifact that embodies the worst of society while simultaneously critiquing it. It is no wonder that Carolyn Petit (2013) opens her famously controversial review of the game with an exasperated "Where do you begin talking about *Grand Theft Auto V*?" as she endeavours to reconcile her appreciation for the game's depth, breadth, and entertainment value with its misogynistic attitude towards women and problematic representations of race.

The Double-Voice: Irony, Parody, and Ambivalence

In a description of *Grand Theft Auto*: *San Andreas* that seems even more applicable to *GTA V*, Miller (2008a) writes that the game is "a story collection, a performance context, a virtual museum of vernacular culture, and a pop-culture artifact [that] gives rise to diverse interpretative communities" (p. 258). Far surpassing its predecessors in scope, *GTA V* is a multivalent text, whose spatial expanses, superabundant content, and ironic tone constitute a rich cultural space whose occasional ambivalence invites diverse readings.

Rockstar Games used their considerable financial resources to hire advisers, writers, researchers, and consultants with first-hand knowledge of the codes, modes,

and customs of the US cities and communities depicted in their games (Miller, 2008a; Vanolo, 2012). However, this knowledge base was never intended to produce faithful reproductions of the featured cities. Vanolo (2012) identifies the game's "realism" as "a copy of a copy, or a simulacrum of realities produced through multiple representations" (p. 292), a comment on Rockstar's predilection for creating complex representations where verisimilitudes of authenticity are constructed by blending realism with a parodical patchwork of stereotypical media portrayals. In-game TV and radio content, billboards, physical spaces, characterization, dialogue, parody brands, and even missions that satire Facebook (Life Invaders) and self-obsessed celebrities level "an unprecedented burn on the U.S. consumer culture, a mediatic Molotov cocktail that torches everything from get-rich-quick hucksters to sleazy neoconservative politicians" (Redmond, 2006, p. 108). The irony-infused urban topography creates what Miller (2008a) terms the game's "double-voice," a sometimes subtle and sometimes overt lampoon, advancing a meta-commentary on the violent, racist, sexist, consumerist, media-obsessed, and politically contentious nature of contemporary American society.

The elusive neoliberal ideology of Los Santos. On the surface, *GTA V*'s political commentary parodies both major US political parties by means of exaggerating their plat-forms and satirizing their politicians. The overt satire of the effectiveness and credibility of responsible government coexists with the game's structural endorsement of neoliberal-ism (Baerg, 2009; Barrett, 2006; Latorre, 2015; Vanolo, 2012). The critique of American government and democracy is deeply reinforced by *GTA V*'s formal aesthetic and struc-tural constraints, which creates "a logic for the arrangement of actions" (Vanolo, 2012, p. 296). The logic is that of a neoliberal police state, where individuals are left to fend for themselves, divested of the possibility of "collective agency and democratic change" (Barrett, 2006, p. 102). There are few to no options to earn a legitimate living, and the missions mostly amount to committing crimes for profit, forcing players to perform in a scheme "framed around the dichotomy of legal and illegal activities" (Vanolo, 2012, p.

293). Despite its oft touted "free" and "open" play, the game is also constrained by "offering no structure or language by which to imagine any sort of collective, or at least public response to the oppression that the characters experience in the game" (Barrett, 2006, p. 113). Without adequate contextualization, the violence or potential for violence and general insecurity that characterizes public spaces in Los Santos are too easily reducible to "gang problems" or the individual actions of reckless criminals, rather than a function of privatization, neoliberal policies or a culture of incarceration that creates career criminals.

Neoliberal values underpin a game world where politics take a backseat to the marketplace. Revenue from crime, gambling, businesses, odd jobs, or investments can be spent to buy vehicles and upgrades, weapons and ammunition, businesses, land, and houses. The naked acquisition of capital is ostensibly the overarching incentive for most actions, making the game world "a realization of the neoliberal dream in which the market becomes the apparatus around which all institutions are organized" (Barrett, 2006, p. 105). The presence of government and public regulation recedes into non-existence in a wild west atmosphere where anything goes in the name of profit and gain. Barrett (2006) argues that the game is structurally coercive in that the "potential for a vocabulary of resistance is completely absent, where the right of the individual to accumulate wealth, through any form of self-justified power, is seen as the greatest social freedom" (p. 113). This is the dark aberration of free markets, individual freedom, self-reliance, and the American dream: staples of Western cultural identity which may, in the minds of some players, be interpreted as a viable endorsement of Western values.

The game's ironic tone can be seen as a repudiation of these very same positions. But, do the players "get it"? Is the ironic register a sufficient antidote to the antisocial content? Latorre (2015) argues that the parody of neoliberal values in *GTA* amounts to a social-democratic perspective that critiques "social inequality and the lack of opportunities for disadvantaged minorities" (p. 18). However, *GTA*'s treatment of race might not be easily vindicated by its satirical tone, that leverages hyperbolic racial stereotypes to

allegedly critique pervasive media depictions of race. Krüger (2018) claims that *GTA V*'s white worldview "constantly threatens to turn formerly colonized subjects into 'caricatures'" (p. 15), and elaborates that any insights into race through irony "will exhaust itself in the savvy consumption of the ironic product itself. We play the game, are in on the joke, are critical of its social representations and then...we play some more. In this way, irony ultimately allows us to consume and enjoy more of what, intellectually, we should be able to leave behind" (p. 23 - 24). It is striking to consider that, rather than produce a prosocial effect, the satire may licence a prolonged "guilt-free" enactment of stereotype which may only deepen the naturalization of the problematic representation.

Even if these neoliberal and racialized representations are ironic, they are so implicit to gameplay that they can be easily naturalized and taken at face value. The social productivity of *GTA V*'s ironic critique may be limited because it does not offer an alternative worldview, and that the consumption of irony does not necessarily translate into changes in attitude or behaviour (Krüger, 2018). Thinking of the pedagogical potential of *GTA*: *San Andreas*, Vanolo (2012) highlights the ambivalence of the game's double-voice, where some players "assume there are no alternatives to exploitation and violence in the neoliberal city…[while other] players may also be led to a radical critique of the brutalization, racism and greed characterizing the neoliberal city" (p. 295). Interpretations of a game function according to diverse variables, including deliberate critical approaches and/or each individual's unique disposition, positionality, and cultural perspective (Keogh, 2014; Miller, 2008a; Squire, 2005; Vanolo, 2012), not to mention that players are not "equally attuned to [*GTA*'s] ironic dimensions" (Miller, 2008a, p. 276). The game is variably received and interpreted, especially if players are unable or unwilling to dig beneath the surface, and only rehearse "their preexisting ideas about black criminality, the moral corruption of urban life, [and] the thrill of violence" (Miller, 2008a, p. 279). Irony might be missed or ignored, and stereotypes and biases reinforced, as there is a "fine line to (t)read between parodic critique and discursive reinscription, especially in relation to

the deployment of racialized archetypes and the persistent linkage of these archetypes with criminal elements" (Chan, 2005, p. 28). *GTA V* is a dense semiotic artifact whose influence is prevalent but its antisocial or prosocial alignments are contingent and, ultimately, its meaning is in the hearts and minds of the players; however, this does not make it politically neutral.

Critical Contexts to Unravel the Hegemony of Play

The mainstream video games industry, of which Rockstar Games is emblematic, is a market-driven and culturally hegemonic space dominated by the values and perspectives of white masculinity (Fron et al., 2007; Higgin, 2009; Leonard, 2006; Young, 2016). Video games are generally "about and for males [and] equally a White-centred space" (Leonard, 2006, p. 84) which constitute what Fron et al. (2007) identify as a "hegemony of play" whose narrow worldview informs game design and development, game scholarship, and player culture. *GTA* games similarly privilege a white male perspective, which raises concerns about how impressionable white adolescents appropriate a racial "other" without a broader political context or direct experience with their lived realities (Barrett, 2006; Krüger, 2018; Leonard, 2006; Miller, 2008b). Without a critical context, gameplay can proceed as spectacle and entertainment for a depoliticized audience (Barrett, 2006). Conversely, a critical approach can disentangle problematic representations from the slips of irony, and also attend to the hegemonic forces that inform *GTA V*'s production, form, and content. Thus, Fron et al. (2007) call for a deeper unpacking of the implicit and normative ideological substrata of games, "as we seldom analyze and critique the power structures from which they emerge" (p. 310). This is particularly crucial with regard to video games because their procedural rhetoric makes them powerful instruments of persuasion (Bogost, 2008).

Sanford and Madill (2006) report that some technical and factual learning occurs when boys play games on their own, but they found little evidence that they actively thought about or reflected on socio-cultural issues and "cultural models of the world" (p.

300). The researchers also found that adolescent males exhibited little critical thought in regard to representations of stereotypes or potentially harmful views of their own privileged positions. In fact, they observe that "video game play serves only to reify the traditional stereotypes and cement them firmly in place" (Sanford and Madill, 2006, p. 301). In the case of *GTA*: *San Andreas* and *GTA V*, white players become black gangsters and adopt fashion, music, slang, and a hyper-masculine persona without considering the "histories of discrimination and 'accumulated advantages' of whiteness" (Barrett, 2006, p. 100). Leonard (2006) argues that the wider implications of this issue must be addressed, especially "how and why games provide their primarily White creators and players the opportunity to become the other [and]...elicit pleasure and play on White fantasies while simultaneously affirming White privilege through virtual play" (p. 86). This, perhaps above all else, underscores the need to create a supportive critical context by which players can frame their gameplay and address issues of "power, control and difference" (Sanford and Madill, 2006, p. 301).

Media in general has been found to significantly affect adolescent behaviour and development, and video games may impact players even more profoundly (Bijvank et al., 2012; Bogost, 2008; Gabbriadini et al., 2016; Jansz, 2005; Olson et al., 2008). Video game users direct the actions of their characters, which may lead to greater identification between the players and their in-game avatars (Gabbiadini et al., 2016), and the degree of immersion and interactivity may also intensify the psycho-emotional involvement of the players (Olson et al., 2008). Miller (2008a) also recommends that video games receive special attention "because of the possibility of long hours of immersion in the game world, the repetitive nature of many game tasks, and the player's active performance of violent behaviour" (p. 279). Interactive and photorealistic video games like *GTA V* might exact a deeper influence on the attitudes and behaviours of adolescent boys than more passive traditional media, such as music, film, and television. The use and consumption of these games are usually carried out without structured dialogue, cultural-historical

context, or directed attunement to the social issue at play. Ideally, schools would provide a much needed critical apparatus to help adolescent boys process problematic representations of violence, gender, race, and attendant ideologies with the support of relevant literacy skills.

Gaming schools: Solving the boy crisis with video game literacies. Research on the learning benefits of video games and their use in formal school settings have made significant strides in the past fifteen years (Bogost, 2008; De Castell & Jenson, 2005; De Castell & Jenson, 2007; Gee, 2003; Granic, Lobel & Engels, 2013; Squire, 2011; Steinkuehler, 2007). Counter to perceptions that video games "sap" intelligence, De Castell and Jenson (2007) note that video games are increasingly "researched and studied by educators as sophisticated syntheses of digital sound, image and text which can offer complex strategies, resonant narratives and compelling contextual meanings that engage, sustain, and can develop player attention—and with it, intelligence" (p. 114). Granic et al. (2013) review literature that examines the social and educational benefits of video games and concludes that they can provide "immersive and compelling social, cognitive, and emotional experiences" (p. 66). The authors also found that video games bestow cognitive benefits that are transferable to real-world contexts, operate as sites to apply problem-solving skills, and enhance creativity. Advocating for the innate learning potential of video games in general, Everett and Watkins (2008) claim that it "is difficult, if not impossible, for games not to have a pedagogical function" (p. 155), and Latorre (2015) claims that they are "a fundamental element in the construction of collective imaginaries" (p. 2). Furthermore, video games can be crucial and relevant active learning tools to engage a generation of students reared on interactive and participatory media (Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton & Robison, 2009) and, as De Castell and Jenson (2007) indicate, they can help educators enhance instruction to meet the demands of the attention economy.

Video games are multimedia, intertextual, and semiotic artifacts that are in dia-

logue with a wide array of contingent paratextual material, including forums, gameplay videos, other games, reviews, critiques, walkthroughs, gamer streams, and trailers, to name a few. Hence, they are elaborate meaning-making nodes which can engage a broad range of literacies (De Castell & Jenson, 2005; De Castell & Jenson, 2007; Gee, 2003; Steinkuehler, 2007). Consequently, De Castell and Jenson (2007) suggest that formal educational institutions rethink their adversarial relationship with digital games, and accept a cultural shift that calls for "a paradigmatic change of view to reshape and rethink the study of digital games as information-rich cultural texts" (p. 114). Students can practice and develop traditional and multimedia literacy skills through in-game communication, participate in game forums and discussion boards, create gameplay videos and tutorials, modify various elements of the game, and carry out activities that provoke critical thinking and reflection about games and gameplay (Gee, 2003; Squire, 2005; Steinkuehler, 2007; Steinkuehler & King, 2009). In these spaces, they learn about and experiment with a wide range of multimodal skills and literacies, including "[t]ext design, intertextuality, semiotics, transfer of knowledge, or probing and identifying multiple approaches" (Sanford & Madill, 2006, p. 294). The relevance of this repertoire of skills and knowledge to the aims of school curricula is supported by Steinkuehler (2007), who argues that playing massive multiplayer online games (MMOs) do not replace literary practices, but are literary practices in and of themselves that fulfill national literacy standards. Furthermore, learning can extend beyond the mechanics of communication, to the broader social and cultural codes and contexts that underpin literacy instruction, inclusive of the aims and practices of textual analysis and critical media literacy, to thoughtfully examine the implications of production, consumption, and the political, social and cultural ramifications of representation (See, for example, Kellner & Share, 2007; Lotherington & Jenson, 2011; Squire, 2005).

Furthermore, games like *GTA V* are not only robust sites for social and cultural inquiry, but might also assist with the urgent business of better investing boys in school.

Boys have significantly higher dropout rates than girls and underperform in K-12 education, especially in the area of literacy (Carr-Chellman, 2012; Kimmel, 2010; Steinkuehler & King, 2009). Carr-Chellman (2012) advocates for the use of commercial video games as "one of the best ways to teach boys" (p. 13), while Ferguson (2010) submits that even violent games like *GTA V* can be leveraged to invigorate boys' interest in education. De Castell and Jenson (2007) raise the importance of free ludic engagement in the learning process, and argue that regardless of whether "you particularly like or respect or understand what that person is attending to, this is where his or her intelligence is being deployed. And nowhere do we see more rapt and immersive attention than in the voluntary activities of play" (p. 131). *GTA V* seems to be an important context where adolescent boy intelligence is being deployed. Perhaps counterintuitively, *GTA V* might provide a unique learning opportunity to meet boys where many of them are, and to use a text that is meaningful to them to practice a multitude of literacies and exercise critical thinking around pressing social issues, like gender and race.

This section unfolds an alarming situation where a high percentage of white male teens are regularly interacting with an influential medium with problematic social content. Discriminatory representations are internalized without a structured critical context and, from a research perspective, there is little understanding of how this experience shapes the attitudes and behaviours of a dominant and influential social group. This is why Sanford & Madill (2006) recommend that "[e]ducators and researchers need to be aware of the cultural and critical literacies that may or may not be addressed through the extensive videogame play that is currently in vogue with many boys and young men" (p. 302). Furthermore, Kellner & Share (2007), prominent advocates for critical media literacy, believe it is crucial that dominant groups explore the experiences of minorities and oppressed people, while Giroux (1997), Rodriguez (2000), and Leonardo (2002, 2004) are proponents of pedagogical projects that encourage white students to reflect on and unpack whiteness. Thus, the very matrix of representations in *GTA V* that might

perniciously seed antisocial imaginaries and consequent attitudes and behaviours with a socially influential demographic, could achieve exactly the opposite when processed through a critical pedagogical context. It seems timely and beneficial to open a curricular space to encourage reflection, foment a fertile exchange of informed views and opinions, and encourage critical awareness about how a game like *GTA* inheres and transmits ideological messages.

Conclusion

The literature thus far reviewed delimits *GTA V* as a sophisticated media text, whose perpetuation of racial stereotypes, as well as its ideological underpinnings, are complicated by ostensible and subtle inflections of social satire. Moreover, there is no clarity or understanding of how adolescent white males, the targeted and significant consumers of the popular game, receive, process, or internalize the layered and ambivalent matrix of representations. This lacuna invites further research to better understand how a dominant category engages with such an influential and potentially pernicious game, while it also warrants a pedagogical intervention that supplies a formal critical framework from which to process their experience. I will aim to contribute to these entwined ends with particular attendance to race and, specifically, how white adolescent males encounter and respond to predominantly black racial representations in the game, and how their views are affected, evolve, or change when their gameplay is filtered through a critical lens in an instructional setting.

Chapter 3: Postcolonialism: Polemics, Power, Praxis, and Cartographies of Play

Introduction

In this section, I will review literature to position my research and corresponding instructional design, as well as *GTA V* and its target audience of white adolescent males, within a localized postcolonial framework. Postcolonialism, whose interdisciplinary use

has transected a multitude of theories, histories, textualities, critiques and perspectives, has become a diffuse and heterogenous concept, thus it is important to specify how and on what terms it is being conceptualized and applied (Frankenberg & Mani, 1993; Loomba, 1998; Yaeger, 2007). To that end, I will refine my position by addressing selective objections and criticisms of postcolonialism to justify its relevance for this study in this moment. This will be followed by a review of Michel Foucault's contributions to postcolonial theory to identify how his work will inform the particular configuration of my postcolonial framework. Then, I will look at postcolonial studies of the games industry, games, and gameplay, and how each of these contribute to a view that *GTA V*, as a mediated and racialized cartographic artifact, participates in and promulgates a "new form of cultural imperialism" (Krüger, 2018, p. 6). This review will largely draw from the work of scholars like Catherine Nash, Patricia Yaeger, Ania Loomba, Ruth Frankenberg, Catherine Hall, Lata Mani, Ann Hickling-Hudson, Sybille Lammes, Soraya Murray, Tracy Fullerton, and others who approach postcolonialism with a feminist lens from a host of disciplinary trajectories.

The term "postcolonialism" is a historical periodization, i.e. the aftermath of the European colonial project, as well as theoretical positions that deploys "a range of critical perspectives on the diverse histories and geographies of colonial practices, discourses, impacts and, importantly, their legacies in the present — critical engagements that often preceded and must continue long after formal political independence" (Nash, 2002, p. 220). As situated research and pedagogical praxis, this work necessarily combines postcolonialism's historical and epistemological dimensions. In a broad sense, my project "stages an encounter" (Frankenberg & Mani, 1993, p. 301) in the historically and geographically located white settler society of Toronto, Canada, and is specifically distributed across the spatially and temporally disjunctured sites of an independent school classroom, diverse domestic places, and the (im)material cartographic space of *GTA V*. I enlist the theoretical tools of postcolonialism to unveil and critique the incipient (neo) colonial

inscriptions and legacies that shape discursive knowledge/power formations in education, research, the video game industry, media representations, and racial interactions. These operate at all scales, and range from "transnational flows of capital or bodies, global imaginary geographies, national stereotypes, urban re-mappings, to domestic routines and individual psychology" (Legg, 2007, p. 265). Each of the aforementioned "scales" are relevant to the study and will be addressed accordingly.

(Un)Settled: The Provisional and Contested Grounds of Postcolonialism

For some time now, postcolonial theory has buckled on the verge of collapse under the weight of critical scrutiny. In 1992, for example, Ella Sohart advanced an oft cited criticism of postcolonialism's "'dizzying multiplicity of positionalities,' its 'a-historical and universalizing displacements' and its 'depoliticizing implications'" (in Hall, 2002, p. 242). She alleged that the "post" announces a chronological break with historical colonialism while epistemologically transitioning into politically ambiguous territory that dissolved clear oppositions between colonizer and colonized, empire and colony, oppressor and oppressed. On the surface, this seemingly self-effacing post-structuralist graft seemed to defeat postcolonialism's critical raison d'etre. In another example, Arif Dirlik accuses the theories of being invested in localized cultural causes at the expense of naively ignoring the deterministic forces of global capitalism. Dirlik also suggests its prevalence — when he wrote in the mid 90s — was due to it being fashionable and thus marketable for American academic institutions (Hall, 2002). More recently, in 2006, a group of scholars convened for a roundtable at the University of Michigan in what amounted to part obituary and part postmortem in an examination of the "potential exhaustion of postcolonialism as a paradigm" (Yaeger, 2007, p. 633). Between them, the participants raised many of the major concerns that had hitherto been leveled at postcolonial studies. Susie Tharu pointed out that its scope was paradoxically "too diffuse and too narrow" (p. 642), while Mamadou Diou and Fernando Coronial each charged that it had failed to gain significant traction or make headway in the real political world. Sunil

Agnani relayed Gayatri Spivak's pronouncement that postcolonialism is "moribund in an age of globalization. To discuss the postcolonial was to rely on a notion of state sovereignty derived from an earlier period in world history" (p. 638). However, today it seems that reports of postcolialism's demise were greatly exaggerated, as its relevance endures under the circumstances of persistent colonial legacies, the perseverance of new corporate imperial formations, and the troubling global regression to populist and nationalist agendas.

A deeper engagement with the critiques that beleaguer postcolonialism and its defenders falls well outside the productive scope of this study. However, these incomplete polemic fragments highlight the contested, flexible, and variable formations of the chronologies and epistemologies that converge in and around postcolonial theory, which can provide a 'useful shorthand for conveying a structure of inequality, which is, in practice, highly variable because it always works alongside other structures' (Loomba, 1998, p. 18). Furthermore, Hall (2002) and Nash (2002) point out that some of the very same characteristics for which it has been targeted underpin its productive strength and vitality. For example, Hall (2002) overturns Sohart's indictment and argues that, rather than disintegrate from its lack of "clear-cut politics of binary oppositions" (p. 244), postcolonialism better enunciates colonial and neocolonial conditions that "never operated in a purely binary way" and thus retains its productive value because it is "so sensitively attuned to... questions of hybridity, syncretism, of cultural undecidability and the complexities of diasporic identification which interrupt any 'return' to ethnically closed and 'centred' original histories" (p. 250). Similarly, Nash (2002) defends postcolonialism's permissive flexibility and proposes that, instead of seeking "a theoretical framework or descriptive model that is all-encompassing, settled and complete, it would be better to keep this a contested and provisional term, constantly under review and in question" (p. 227-228). Rather than criticize it as an amorphous monstrosity that limps along without clear shape or purpose, postcolonialism offers a foundation from which to assemble theoretical affiliations to

articulate localized phenomenon. Most importantly, at the heart of its mutability remains a hard constant that is the contestation of inequality, violence, and injustice perpetuated by imbalances and abuses of power.

Bhagat-Kennedy (2018) refutes the position that postcolonialism has been rendered irrelevant in light of globalization and neoliberal economic circuits that transcend nationalist agendas. The author reviews the state of the geopolitical present, including surging Islamophobia, the migrant crisis, nationalist and populist movements in the UK, France, and the US, to name a few, and the advent of anti-Western nationalist rhetoric by "demagogic leaders" in Turkey, China, and India. Rather than the world unfolding into a state of "mass cosmopolitanism," as commonly predicted at the turn of the millennium, both the left followed by the right have increasingly distanced themselves from globalization. Consequently, Bhagat-Kennedy (2018) argues that as "much as we may have imagined ourselves as part of a postnational, transnational or truly 'global' era, the recent inward turn towards nations suggests that postcolonial theory's conceptualization of anticolonial/nationalist/populist struggles to secure different modes of sovereignty remains not only relevant, but pressing" (p. 340). Even while globalization dominated scholarly discourse, Hall (2002) convincingly argued for the relevance of postcolonialism as it "re-reads 'colonization' as part of an essentially transnational and transcultural 'global' process — and it produces a decentred, diasporic or 'global' rewriting of earlier, nation-centred imperial grand narratives. Its theoretical value therefore lies precisely in its refusal of this 'here' and 'there,' 'then' and 'now,' 'home' and 'abroad' perspective (p. 247). Hall not only defends postcolonial theory as a means to better articulate the widespread complexities of (neo)colonial legacies, but he also validates its relevance in light of globalization and, most relevant to this study, underscores the value of exposing localized processes that subvert easy binaries.

Mamadou Diouf observes that postcolonialism as the historical condition of advancing past colonialism can apply to white settlers societies, like Canada, Australia, and

New Zealand but, in other parts of the world, like Africa, it is "a most pernicious fiction" (Yaeger, 2007, p. 639). To this day, many African nations continue to be subject to the interference of powerful nations that exploit resources, influence politics, and intervene in territorial disputes. Frankenberg and Mani (1993) acknowledge the divergence of post-colonial realities, histories and temporalities when they state that "not all places [are]... similarly 'postcolonial' (p. 302). However, despite the salient differences in the tempor-alities and trajectories of these historical colonies, I follow a line of thought that none have cleanly moved "past" colonialism. Far from unfinished, the Global North, white settler societies, and the Global South, are still imprinted by (neo)colonial politics, legal structures, and disputes that circulate in ostensible and incipient ways through geopol-itics, localized and global social practices, neoliberal market forces, and the media. The idea that the suffix "post" announces the end or an "after" colonialism "elides continued neocolonial processes, the endurance of colonial discourses, and the economic, political and cultural inequalities which persist long after the end of formal political colonization" (Nash, 2002, p. 220). Hall (2002) elaborates that "after" means "in the moment which follows that moment (the colonial) in which the colonial relation was dominant. It does not mean...that what we have called the 'after-effects' of colonial rule have somehow been suspended (p. 254). The scope of postcolonialism, then, not only encompasses those countries and people who have been left impoverished, displaced, disenfranchised, and suffering forms of discrimination, but it also includes examinations of white settler soci-eties, like Canada, that contend with "problems of decolonization, disadvantage and priv-ilege closely related to their distinct versions of internal colonialism" (Hickling-Hudson et al., 2004, p. 4). Nash (2002) qualifies that "this does not negate the continued hierarch-ies of power or privilege within settler colonies nor between former colonial powers and former colonies, but it opens up the complexities of these different postcolonial contexts and the complexity of their interconnections" (p. 227) Lammes (2010) alludes to these complexities in the context of a postcolonial analysis of digital games, and argues that

postcolonial concerns must attend to how the colonial past echoes in the cultural present 'in hybridized and transformed ways" (p. 2). This view is inclusive of how (neo)colonial inscriptions of race, hegemony, segregated racialized spaces, the politics of representation, cultural imperialism, and white imaginaries shape and are shaped by a global and influential cultural product like *GTA V*.

Traditionally, postcolonial theory's chief adherents have worked in the areas of literary studies, cultural studies, sociology, geography and, to a lesser degree, anthropology. Therefore, its interrogative and critical tools have largely operated in the textual realm. Mamadou Diou and Fernando Coronial together voice the persistent concern that, for a conceptual framework that is rooted in activism and aims for material changes, postcolonialism has had little consequence, engagement or effect in the real world of politics and violence (Yaeger, 2007). More recently, Murray (2018) channels Slavoj Žižek and wonders whether postcolonial games studies, as a critical cultural approach, are prone to produce "analysis as the products of academia's neoliberal turn" (p. 13) and "traffic in interventions at the level of culture, but fail to make any true intervention" (p. 14). Similarly, from the research perspective, Kumar and Parameswaran (2018) charge that postcolonial theory generally privileges "textual critique at the expense of ethnographic and qualitative fieldwork methods" (p. 354). However, this study is grounded in education which is a site of praxis and an "action oriented discipline...[which] tempers what tendencies postcolonialism may have to lapse into discursive abstraction" (Hickling-Hudson et al., 2004, p. 7). Also, I employ an (auto)ethnographic research approach to study how attitudes and behaviours might evolve by a concrete pedagogical intervention and thus offer a case where postcolonialism is mobilized within and towards material consequences.

Finally, Nichols (2010) states that a central objective of postcolonial theory should be "to 'provincialize,' 'de-naturalize' or 'de-transcendentalize' Western forms of knowledge and the universalist pretensions that came with them" (115). Moreover, Loomba (1998) notes that a recurrent critique of postcolonial scholarship is its continued

reliance on Western epistemologies to engage and theorize on non-Western postcolonial subjects and subjectivities, at worst, falling into "complicity with colonial structures of thought" (p. xi). However, later, the author reviews numerous examples of how anti-colonial movements used "Western ideas and vocabularies to challenge colonial rule… [and] hybridized what they borrowed by juxtaposing it with indigenous ideas, reading it through their own interpretive lens, and even using it to assert cultural alterity" (p. 174). Somewhat paradoxically, Michel Foucault's work, which is almost entirely preoccupied with the West (France, in particular), offers a path through this polemic. His knowledge/ power formulation and highly localized methodologies, which will be further detailed in the next section, not only dismantle the "grand narratives" of Western scientific discourse, but models a flexible approach that localizes inquiry in defiance of "totalizing" or "pure" systems of theory. Furthermore, it is worth emphasizing that the subjects and settings of this study are decidedly Western, and that the use of Western analytical tools are not a culturally incongruent imposition. However, as will be expanded in subsequent chapters, my methodology will deconstruct its very own theoretical (im)positions and instruments, and expose "their assumptions as a set of foundational effects" to be used in their "deconstructed form" as "conceptual instruments and tools with which to think about the present" (Hall, 2002, p. 255). This strategy of a "confessional" self-referential critique will disclose the knowledge/power mechanisms that constitute the intersecting discursive fields of classroom pedagogy, institutional research, and hegemonic play that emerged from this project.

Haunting Presence: Foucault, Said, and the Discursive Circulations of Knowledge/ Power

On the surface, Foucault's canon appears to have a limited engagement with colonialism and race, however, his theoretical principles and methods are widely enlisted and referenced in postcolonial studies (For example, Goodwin-Smith, 2010; Hall, 1995; Hickling-Hudson et al., 2004; Legg, 2007; Nakamura, 1995; Nichols, 2010; Said, 1979;

Yaeger, 2007; Young, 1995). Goodwin-Smith (2010) places Foucault at "the centre of postcolonial studies" (p. 588) due to his underpinning Edward Said's Orientalism, while Legg (2007) describes the "haunting presence of colonialism in Foucault's writing" (p. 265). Despite criticisms of Foucault's almost exclusive Euro-Franco focus, his linked theories of bio-power, knowledge/power, discursive formations of subjects and sub-jectivities, and investigations into institutional spaces of control and confinement have been deployed for postcolonial analysis in diverse areas and settings. His methodologies, which Foucault characterizes as "diffused and at the same time repetitive" (Foucault & Gordon, 1980, p. 78), can be crudely summarized as the application of "genealogical" and "archeological" approaches to unearth localized instantiations of power, knowledge, and classification that circulate as legitimizing discourses that shape subjects and govern bodies. Foucault defines his use of genealogy as "the union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today" (p. 83). He postulates that this method is not a science, or an operation that functions within or like the totalizing, positivist tem-plate of science, but rather an "anti-science" that draws attention to "local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchise and order them in the name of some true knowledge" (p. 84). He specifies that this is not a direct critique of scientific discourse per se, but an "insurrection of knowledges" that "wages its struggle" against the effects produced by its centralizing powers.

Of particular relevance here is the inextricable coupling of knowledge and power, where "the formation of knowledge and the increase of power regularly reinforce one another in a circular process (Foucault, 1979, p. 224). Localized instantiations of know-ledge/power produce discursive "regimes" that govern and constrain what is considered "true" with attendant material consequences. This framework has helped postcolonial theorists and scholars (beginning with Said's study of Orientalism) identify how dis-

cursive cultural formations produce and license instances of domination, exclusion, and silencing that characterize (neo)colonial violence. It also works to reconcile the tension between the field's preoccupation with history and theory as the "post- of postcolonialism became at once a temporal and an epistemic marker, a critical lens through which to view the complicity between knowledge and power in multiple domains, past and present" (Yaeger, 2007, p. 635). For Loomba (1998), the cultural productions of diverse texts and images are crucial to investigate colonial processes. Similarly, Hickling-Hudson et al. (2004) explain that postcolonialism's preoccupations with "opposition, privilege, domin-ation, struggle, resistance and subversion as well as contradiction and ambiguity…[are] fundamentally related to a critique of the relationship between knowledge/power and an understanding of how representations of the world in words, ideas, images and texts both create and reflect beliefs and produce actions" (p. 2). Power circulates and takes effect by means of diverse representations of knowledge, which reaches beyond merely literary texts to all media inclusive of digital games.

As discussed, Said used aspects of Foucualt to advance his thesis in Orientalism, a text that is both foundational and contested. Said deployed knowledge/power to explain how the European body of work encompassed by Orientalism framed Eastern cultures and imposed Western views and understandings of the Middle East and Asia. The sprawl-ing and influential Orientalist discourse constructed by European scholars, historians, writers, travellers, and artists was often self-referential, and mutually informed, and thus proceeded without the voices of the represented and abstracted from the lived reality of its subject(s). Consequently, Said argues that the collective "geographic imaginary" or "fantasy" of Orientalism that passed as objective knowledge legitimized and informed European material and political colonial projects and practices, perpetuating a pernicious and violent circulation of mutually generative knowledge/power.

While recognized as an inaugural and influential text, Orientalism has been the target of extensive opprobrium. However, it continues to be productively referenced,

defended, and employed, albeit, usually with caveats and qualifications (For example, see Goodwin-Smith, 2010; Langer, 2008; Mukherjee, 2015; Nakamura, 1995) An exhaustive or even partial review of the history of its criticism is not warranted here, but it would be useful to take up some polemics to justify how Said's cultural discourse analysis informs this study. Young (1995), for one, addresses the recurrent criticism that Orientalism employed "too determining and univocal a notion of discourse" (p. 4), which the author ascribes to Said's overreliance on Foucault's early work. Foucault would later rearticulate discourse as "discontinuous segments" that are neither "uniform nor stable" and warns not to "imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies" (Foucault in Young, 1995, p. 4). Similarly, Legg (2007) writes that Foucault "saw any seriality as an internal order within dispersal" (p. 270). This position complicates any clean binaries produced by notions of a dominant discursive monolith and those subjugated by it. Conversely, another perceived failing is that Orientalism only "half-embraced" Foucault, and thus undermined the perceived theoretical integrity or "purity" of his larger system. Goodwin-Smith (2010) defends Said on the grounds that he deliberately resists "partisanship and dogma or purity" and, instead, pursues "the judicious, hybridising and transformative insistence on taking only what is required," a trajectory he terms "affiliative amateurism" (p. 591). This piecemeal approach, a type of theoretical bricolage, is not at odds with Foucault's own conception of his analytical methods, which he offers as "little tool boxes" (p. 590).

Rather than wholly dismiss Said's project of cultural discourse analysis, these defences rearticulate his position to resist theoretical totalization and purity and invite localized analyses to grapple with the nonbinary, unstable, reciprocal, and fractured cross-currents of how knowledge/power operates in any given instance, particularly in relation to identity. Therefore, I intend to examine how players engage and encounter

racialized representations in *GTA V* through the lens of a highly localized application of cultural discourse analysis, whose specific deployment will be refined in subsequent sections. To that end, it would be valuable to review some examples of how postcolonial theory has informed the analysis of the material production of games, their structure and content, and how they are played.

Postcolonial Playgrounds and Criminal Empires: The Sun Never Sets on *GTA V*

In this section, I review the intersections between digital games and postcolonialism through three intersecting registers. First, I examine how the global games industry, and large multinational studios in particular, operate as an imperial force whose cultural influence perpetuates what Fron et al. (2007) identify as "hegemony of play." Secondly, Mukherjee and Hammar (2018) observe that the design of many digital games in and of themselves are cultural products that "reproduce colonial power-logics" (p. 506) and, as such, warrant corresponding questions, critiques, and interrogations. Finally, Lammes and de Smale (2018) find that studies on postcolonialism and play often leave players out of the formula, and thus stress a need to better understand the circuits of player and game. Murray (2018) reviews postcolonial games literature and also found a "paucity of theorization regarding the player" and a scarcity of questions about "who exactly that player actually might be" (p. 11). My examination of how players engage with *GTA V*, both in its enactment and description, involve the asymmetrical and manifold assembly of knowledge/power discursive fields that converge between industry, game, and player in a historically located postcolonial moment. Consequently, each of these facets warrants a closer inspection to demonstrate how "imperialist legacies continue to infect the contemporary imagination" (Breger, 2008, p. 45), particularly in regard to white adolescent males.

The global digital game industry is dominated by a handful of multinational corporate studios that account for the lion's share of international sales (Entertainment Software Association, 2019; Fron et al., 2007). Digital games are commodities that

circulate globally, and thus participate in neoliberal and capitalist economies which lead some commentators to "connect them with colonialism and empire" (Mukherjee, 2018, p. 506). Fron et al. (2007) also argue that the "predominantly white...secondarily Asian [and] male-dominated" industry shapes the "global culture of play in much the same way that hegemonic nations, such as the British Empire or post-WWII America, have, in their times of influence, dominated global culture" (p. 1). As influential cultural products, digital games are rhetorical tools and powerful instruments of persuasion that exercise power and (re)produce particular types of knowledge in a discursive field that shape sub-jectivities and, in turn, attitudes and behaviours (Bogost, 2008; Mukherjee, 2017). Keogh (2014) argues that formalist approaches that narrowly define and "purify videogames" abet in the perpetuation of "a homogeneous and hegemonic culture that privileges the most privileged producers and players, and marginalizes the most marginalized" (p. 8).

Rockstar Games, a division of Take-Two Interactive, typifies the corporate studio that produces and markets their games to "an adolescent male sensibility that transcends physical age and embraces highly stylized graphical violence, male fantasies of power and domination, hyper-sexualized, objectified depictions of women, and rampant racial stereotyping and discrimination" (Fron et al., 2007, p. 7). No game more accurately fits this description than *GTA V* and, considering its global sales and standing as the third-best selling game of all time — it is fair to say that the sun never sets on *GTA V* (Kain, 2019). Like so many colonial enterprises before it, *GTA V* and its predecessors span the globe to amass capital for Rockstar and Take-Two's global market empire. However, in a decid-edly postcolonial turn of digital neoliberal market efficiency, *GTA V* fuses the vessel, the trade goods, the colonized, the colonizers, the slaves and indentured labourers, the ex-peditionary force, and attendant bureaucracies into a single immaterial cultural product. Meanwhile these global, market-driven cyber-circulations perpetuate "a particular set of values and norms concerning games and game play" (Fron et al., 2007, p. 2) that exact a powerful influence on players around the world.

Rockstar Games, then, can be seen to operate as a neo-imperialist force where distributed multinational corporation substitutes and transcends the centralized nation state, and its fluid "colonial" activity is similarly deterritorialized and without fixed borders and boundaries. Traditionally, subjugated and oppressed colonial subjects and their lands were exploited for physical labour and material resources. In this case, problematic and stereotypical representations of the postcolonial subject, which I understand to continue a legacy of bondage, are the resources which are commodified to produce lucrative entertainment. Despite their dislocation from the physical world, digital games have an extensive reach that "conquer the private homes of millions" (Harrer, 2018, p. 4) and their often pernicious structures of representation constitute a field of knowledge/power whose discourse imposes, reinforces, and shapes social imaginaries with tangible material consequences. However, Harrer (2018) cautions that the social implications and consequences are easily ignored: "Once disconnected from history, the fun object can be celebrated as a commodity irrespective implications of race, gender and class. This allows designers, players and scholars to act without suspicions of racism or neo-colonialism: all they do is produce, consume and study objects of fun, after all" (p. 3). This statement is perhaps overly dismissive of the critical production and reception of games, but it raises some important questions. How do games specifically produce and reproduce racist and racialized representations and discourses? How does their target demographic — or anyone else, for that matter — engage with and receive said representations? How are these representations damaging? And, of immediate pertinence, how can the forms and contents of these games, and *GTA V* in particular, be understood as postcolonial?

There has been a recent surge in studying games through a postcolonial lens (Breger, 2008; Harrer, 2018; Lammes, 2010; Lammes & de Smale, 2018; Magnet, 2006; Mukherjee, 2015; Mukherjee & Hammar, 2018; Murray, 2018). Accordingly, Harrer (2018) observes a growing trend in "neocolonialist video game design…[that] spans platforms, technologies and markets; and concerns game production and consumption

worldwide" (p. 6). Many of the games that are studied through a postcolonial lens are, predictably, directly concerned with empire-building and/or simulating historical periods such as popular franchises like Age of Empires, Civilization, Total War, and Tropico. Lammes (2010) refers to these historical strategy games as "postcolonial playgrounds par excellence" (p. 1), as they motivate exploration, expansion, the subjugation of states, the annexation of resources by violent and coercive means, the expropriation of wealth, and hail the "player to create...hierarchical and concentric arrangements of the capital and the colonies" (Mukherjee, 2015, p. 303). Maps and cartography are a central and common feature in all of these titles; thus, players assume a position once enjoyed by monarchs, regents, and military leaders as they "transform maps according to their needs and purposes" and exercise personalized forms of domination through cartography, which was "one of the main institutions for national states to 'imagine' their power" (Lammes, 2010, p. 3). Spatial hegemonies become forms of subjective, hybridized play, and Lammes (2010) argues that these games are not postcolonial because they reproduce the colonial past or assume colonized perspectives, but because players "create their own postcolonial stories by translating world histories into personal stories" (Lammes, 2010, p. 3). *GTA V* is not a historical strategy game but, as will be discussed below, it is a mediated and interactive map that provides a compelling case for how ludic postcolonial cartographies as "imaginative geographies" reinscribe, obscure, and normalize the racist histories that produce racialized places.

Some postcolonial critiques have also addressed games that do not directly involve empire-building, but bear traces of colonial themes and tropes (Breger, 2008; Geyser and Tshabalala, 2011; Harrer, 2018; Langer, 2008). For example, Breger (2008) looks at the "archeological narrative" of the Tomb Raider games that "complicate matters of power and domination" (p. 45) and, in the final tally, recall "some of the worst tropes of the imperialist imagination" (p. 56). Harrer (2018) touches on the neocolonial dynamics in Resident Evil 5, with particular attention to the white protagonist's murder and plunder

of an African colony, where "imperial acts of demolition are rewarded by the exclusive acquisition of vases, treasures and tribal bodies" (p. 8). Geyser and Tshabalala (2011) also examine the "colonial fantasies" perpetuated by Resident Evil 5, and observe that it depicts Africa as constructed by media and films like Black Hawk Down. "Africa" and its black inhabitants are turned into zombies and reduced to "faceless and featureless" (p. 6) stereotypes "characterized by the ruins of colonialism" (p. 10). The authors source the zombie trope in Hatian folklore, which scholars have alternately read as representing the slave, the subaltern, the revolting colonial, the migrant, and the game avatar itself.

Langer (2008) investigates how World of Warcraft's two main factions fall along clear lines of familiarity and otherness, with corresponding colonial binaries of "civilized and savage, self and other, and centre and periphery" (p. 87). The othered Horde faction retains features and characteristics that are directly linked to real world ethnocultural groups, and Langer (2008) notes that the game reinforces the notion that race is biologically determined rather than constructed. However, she also sees redemptive elements that invest the game with a degree of ambivalence, noting it "is both racist and antiracist, frequently at the same time" (p. 105). Finally, Krüger (2018) examines the work of two artists who created machinima (films made with video games) with the *GTA V* in-game video editor that explore the ways the game "commodifies black men for the consumption of white players" (p. 1). Inspired by the work of Frantz Fanon, Krüger (2018) describes how the counter-hegemonic films turn *GTA V* onto itself to highlight its "Western rationality" (p. 6), "white gaze" (p. 6), and "neocolonial rationality" (p. 21) that marginalize players of colour and perpetuate "a new form of cultural imperialism promoted by the *GTA* series" (p. 6). Saliently, the final two examples indicate that even games that do not directly reproduce historical colonial settings or circumstances can still bear (neo)colonial inscriptions.

Each of these examples illustrate that, far from residing in the historical past, (neo)colonial forces and systems persevere in widely disseminated and influential digital

games. Harrer (2018) argues that, despite the understanding that colonial representations can have a negative impact on the "previously colonized" (p. 2), empire themed games persist as popular, light-hearted, and "casual" recreation whose colonial content is often seen as easily dispensable or incidental to their entertainment value. The author suggests that the designation "casual" in certain games is "a pervasive ideological category, which resists decolonization by rendering the problem of empire invisible" (p. 2). This invisibility applies to *GTA V*, whose neocolonial imprints are much more subtle than with games themed according to ostensible historical empire-building tropes and mechanics. Furthermore, Harrer (2018) advocates for designers to become more mindful of how they create games and alter structures of representation. This is well intentioned, and certainly worth pursuing, but it involves a hydra-headed challenge and seems to underestimate the massive momentum of market forces. She, however, recognizes that players must acquire the "literacy to recognise their own living room couch as an arena for contemporary commodity racism" (p. 22), without explicitly recommending a deliberately pedagogical approach.

The cybernetic circuit: Incorporating the player. The aforementioned cases examine games in isolation from players, but Keogh (2014), like Lammes and de Smale (2018), argues that video game studies must necessarily encompass the player as part of the "cybernetic circuit" that produces digital play. They prescribe a localized approach that resists adherence to preexisting evaluative and formalist schemes that might ignore the possibility that games, as cultural artifacts, produce effects on players that transmit "representations of spatial domination or cultural arenas of othering" (Harrer, 2018, p. 20). Instead, analysis would benefit from examining the unique configurations of the "messy assemblages" of game-hardware-player-community ecologies that emerge in discrete instantiations of gameplay (Keogh, 2014, p. 5). This view is shared by Lammes and de Smale (2018), who conducted a collaborative autoethnography of their experience playing Civilization VI in multiplayer mode to examine the extent to which they could

"play with dominant discourses" and draw attention to the "player's role in co-construct-ing postcolonial spatial stories" (p. 4). The authors submit that a postcolonial approach should not reduce gameplay to either an act of complicity with a Western-centric hegem-onic view or an entirely resistant "counterplay." Instead, play precipitates a hybrid of coexistent positions that "simultaneously reinforce and resist hegemonic discourse" (p. 8), which produces a zone of ambivalent meaning that the authors connect to Homi Bha-bha's notion of "thirdspace." Also engaging with the potential for counterplay, Mukherjee (2018) maintains that players can be interpellated to complicity within the game's (neo)colonial hardwiring even when they attempt to "rewrite history" or "write back" against the forces of imperialism through gameplay. Like Lammes and de Smale (2018), he recognizes that digital games can produce "the simultaneous possibilities of subalternity, protest, elitism, and hegemony; [thus] it is the actualization by the player that results in a deeper understanding and experience of the postcolonial" (p. 517). Langer (2008) finds a similar ambivalence in how racial stereotypes and representations in World of Warcraft are subject to complex feedback loops between player and game that produce a hybridity where "issues of race and colonialism are both reinscribed and subverted" (p. 105). Thus, a study of a game through a postcolonial lens must be attuned to the ambivalence and attendant to complexities that emerge from the interactive circuits of knowledge/power that act upon and are enacted by the player.

The aforementioned examples illustrate how the video game industry, diverse digital games, and game/player interactions continue to perpetuate and exhibit dynamics, mechanics, and representations of a decidedly (neo)colonial character. Each case was brought to bear on *GTA V* to establish that the popular cultural artifact is a media text that conducts and reproduces (neo)colonial power structures through its production, market-ing, distribution, content, and gameplay. Moreover, as a carefully constructed field of representation that satirically indexes Los Angeles and its racialized partitions, Los San-tos also assumes a cartographic dimension. As such, it reinscribes discriminatory spatial

practices and, in "this resurrection of segregated city space, in these 'imagined geographies,' the expressive content of racialized discourse and racist terms are invented anew" (Goldberg, 1993, p. 202). The section that follows will discuss that the "imagined geography" of *GTA V* is simultaneously place and cartography, a tourable map in the tradition of imperial adventure stories that participates in a discursive field of knowledge/power that bears on the construction of race, subject, and formations of white male adolescent identity.

Imaginative Geographies: Imperial Cartography and Unmapping the Island of Los Santos

In this section, I draw from Richard Phillips' *Mapping Men and Empire: Geographies of Adventure* to argue that *GTA V* not only offers in-game maps to help players navigate the labyrinthine expanse of Los Santos, but that the navigable virtual city and environs constitute a map in and of itself. As such, considering the game's racially segregated geography, which was produced by an elite multinational game studio run by wealthy white males, it can be read as a modern manifestation in the tradition of imperial cartography. Furthermore, the game's imperial tracings become more pronounced when I extend its genre status beyond action-adventure game, and locate it in a trajectory that reaches back to the popular adventure stories that targeted white adolescent males in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, whose "geographic imaginations and adventure narratives often appear committed to continuous reinscription of dominant ideologies of masculinity and empire" (Phillips, 2013, p. 5). Phillips (2013) also contends that adventure stories are almost entirely contingent on and highly descriptive of their geographic settings and, as such, can be classified as maps.

Cartography has been an indispensable companion for the projects and projections of imperial power. Traditionally, maps have enabled territorial acquisition, control and regulation, and their production is linked to exploration, military deployment, trade routes, partitioning and fixing of populations and cultures, and establishing imperial cen-

tres in relation to colonial peripheries. This is why Mukherjee (2018) asserts that "cartography has always been a key element in the colonial construction of space" (p. 506). Due to their strategic importance and the challenges associated with their creation, historically, maps were always produced by sectors of affluence and power, and thus "cartography's role in the transaction of power relations usually favoured social élites" (Harley, 2009, p. 131). They are necessarily reductive and selective, and enforce the cartographer's view of what is important or not important, valuable and not valuable, owned and not owned; thus, as Harley (2009) states, the map-maker "has always played a rhetorical role in defining the configurations of power in society (p. 142). This asymmetrical application of knowledge/power that produces and reinforces dominance contributes to the constitution of what Said terms an "imaginative geography," or a discursive imposition that narrowly (mis)represents people and places, which he deemed as culturally legitimizing and intimately bound with the material enactments and violence of colonial projects.

Today, the sovereign hold on cartography has loosed and maps have proliferated to a wide range of purposes and sectors. These might include topographical maps, paper and digital maps to help drivers navigate roads and highways, fantasy maps of places like Middle Earth, caricature maps of cities, maps to find celebrity homes in Los Angeles, maps that indicate average property values in neighbourhoods, and the maps on and by which we play. However, none of these are benign or stripped of knowledge/power dynamics for "maps are never value-free images" (Harley, 2009, p. 129). They have agendas and impose views, largely driven by economic incentives. As Edney (2007) points out, even "the most 'scientific' of maps are revealed to be utterly interested conceptualizations of geographical space" (p. 84). Similarly, Harley (2009) explains that all maps are conscious and / or unconscious distortions of reality. Conscious distortions are for reasons of propaganda, military discretion, political expediency, or commercial purposes. Unconscious distortions include "silences," which Harley (2009) explains "exert a social influence through their omissions as much as by the features they depict and emphasize" (p.

136). In Foucault's terms, the totalizing imperial maps of the past, a reflection of sovereign power, are now fractured into "discontinuous segments" of cartographic knowledge/ power whose localized operations do not diminish their potential for harm, but perhaps make them more insidious.

Paperson (2010) forwards a striking example of a 2006 map published by the San Francisco Chronicle entitled "The Plague" that marks murders in Oakland with black dots, mostly clustered in predominantly black neighbourhoods. The exclusion of other demographic data and the focus on homicide disproportionately define the community by violence and crime. Paperson (2010) asserts that making violence seem endemic to the ghetto obscures larger structural causes, and "the focus on 'crime' naturalizes violence to pathologized places, as something that 'happens in' the ghetto rather than something that is 'done to' the people there" (p. 17). The cartographic record would tell another story in a "counter-map [that] would highlight the institutionally permissible violences of police brutality, home evictions, immigration raids, environmental poisonings, school closures, suspensions, and pushouts" (p. 18). Thus, a seemingly "helpful" map published in a seemingly respectable and widely circulated newspaper inscribes a harmful, localized field of knowledge/power that nourishes a larger discourse on racialized violence. Meanwhile, the proposed counter-map highlights, by contrast, how omissions are equally harmful. These cartographic "silences" sustain cultural stereotypes and thus "enshrine self-fulfilling prophecies about the geography of power" (Harley, 2009, p. 136). "The Plague" continues a long tradition of maps "attaching a series of racial stereotypes and prejudices to the areas being represented" (Harley, 2009, p. 141), whether through coding, symbols, decorations, partitions, or omissions.

As previously touched on, empire-building strategy games and historical simulations that include themes of imperialism and colonization make extensive use of maps and cartography. Discussing Civilization VI, Lammes and de Smale (2018) write that the game is a map that supplies "a dominant and constant technology needed to explore and

dominate the world, thereby fitting neatly in a (post)colonial cartographical discourse"
(p. 3). This view extends to most map-reliant strategic games whose goals, rules, and
mechanics encourage territorial acquisition and subjugation of virtual inhabitants, usually
to gain resources and wealth. These games ludically rehearse imperial enterprises, but
also streamline their cultural-historiographic schemes of representation to suit game-
play goals. For example, Mukherjee (2015) criticizes Empire: Total War for its depiction
of Indian history and territory, as its map design over-simplifies regional diversity and
rearranges demographics and geography to accommodate the game's "imperial logic."
Mukherjee (2015) connects the studio's representation of India with a knowledge/
power discourse in line with Orientalism that can apply to the "imagined geographies"
of cartographic representation that underpin many history and empire-building games.
Notably, the map and the playable gamespace in many of these games are one and the
same (Lammes & de Smale, 2018). The map in not merely used as a navigational index
to guide extraneous movements and actions, but it is also inhabited and activity is enacted
within the representational artifice of the "living" digital map that changes and responds
to the player.

Although *GTA V* is not ostensibly a historically themed strategy game, its game-
space is a playable map whose graphic spatial representation, (neo)colonial interpellation
of the player, and motive for and mode of production constitute a contemporary mani-
festation of imperial cartography. First and foremost, the game is a parodic reconstruction
of Los Angeles and, thus, a navigable cartographic interpretation of the living city where
"the map becomes the landscape and the landscape becomes the map, folded into the spa-
tial stories woven by the player" (Lammes & de Smale, 2018, p. 15). The "minimap" to
facilitate navigation is the most prominent feature of the interface, and a full map of the
city can be toggled, but the playable topography of Los Santos itself is a distorted map.
Lammes and de Smale (2018) understand that this "hybridization of mapping and going,
or gazing and looking, is directly related to postcolonialism when subject and object pos-

itions are no longer easily distinguishable" (p. 17). *GTA V* also employs a "fog of war" mechanic common to historical strategy games, where the map is only revealed when territory is first accessed. This procedural unveiling motivates *GTA* players to explore by piquing their curiosity, but it also impells them by the possibility of discovering new opportunities for rewards and resources, often gained through coercive or criminal appropriation, a patently imperialistic pattern of activity. This mechanic of territorial exploration and acquisition engages players as they navigate "neighbourhoods, using maps, and develop a sense of mastery and ownership over a particular locale...This is especially true of [*GTA*: *San Andreas*], in which the player must acquire and continually defend gang territory" (Miller, 2007, p. 409). It is not difficult to see how this ludic dynamic proceeds according to the "imperialist logic of penetration and appropriation" (Breger, 2008, p. 53).

GTA V's cartographic status is further bolstered by Phillips' (2013) view that maps need not be spatial or factual, and even written "geographies of the imagination" can be considered maps that naturalize "the geographies they represent, and normalize the constructions of race, class, [gender], and empire" (p. 15). Thus, maps can assume many forms of representation, including symbols, graphics, and words, as long as what is described is spatial, a condition met by *GTA V* in its rendering of Los Angeles. By defining maps in this way, Phillips (2013) aligns adventure stories with British imperial cartographic discourse, as the settings and tropes of the genre are "constructed cultural space in which imperial geographies and imperial masculinities were conceived" (p. 12). The stories, popular from the early nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, generally featured white English and American men and boys who venture from civilized metropoles and outposts to the fringes of the colonial empire, where they braved remote islands, inhospitable wilderness, and faced the natives, "savages," and "antisocial degenerates" who populated the backwaters of the colonial geographic imagination. Boys and men were seduced to "to participate in the fantasies and realities of colonialism" which, in turn,

"inspired and legitimated the colonial acts of white men" (Phillips, 2013, p. 88). As I will submit, *GTA V* can be read as a (neo)colonial cartographic narrative that continues the adventure story legacy, inculcating imaginaries in the minds of white adolescent boys that perpetuate the status quo of discriminatory racialized spaces.

   GTA V and the adventure story legacy: Playing at the frayed edges of empire. The spatial and topographical details and settings of adventure stories were intimately bound with formations of empire and identity. Despite the illusion of freedom offered by a wilderness devoid of civilizing restraints, the colonial geographic narrative mapped narrowly confined representations of hegemonic masculinity, and even more reductionist stereotypes of the "savage" other. Robinson Crusoe, considered to be the inception of the genre, embeds seemingly authentic geographic and cultural details within a fictional narrative and, although much of the "realism" is invented, it "led many readers to believe that they were reading a 'real' map and a true 'story'" (Phillips, 2013, p. 15). The book "mapped" constructions of empire: England is the civilized home centre, while the island is the wild far-off periphery; the white Christian Crusoe master is juxtaposed to his servant, the non-white "savage" pagan Friday, etc. This template was reproduced in countless adventure stories that followed, where white European men defined themselves by their encounter with the other in the wild. In a description that could apply to *GTA V*, Phillips (2013) comments that in these narrative geographies, young men are "able to play with wilderness and savagery, to playfully transgress social conventions and rules, because [they are] far from [their] 'civilized' home, in a kind of playground, a space of pleasure but also a space where identities are dissolved and constructed. White masculinity cannot be mistaken for its 'savage' others...here masculinity and race are mutually constitutive" (p. 60). Also, it bears adding that although more diverse than apparent here, as some adventure stories featured and were written by women, the typical geographic narratives mapped views of self and other along pronounced imperial white masculine demarcations.

The connections between *GTA V* and the adventure stories that preceded it are striking, albeit the game updates the colonial tropes to reflect the operations and hybridities of the postcolonial world. First, they are mass marketed cultural products intended to be consumed at leisure and deliberately designed and commercially targeted for the "gaze" of the white adolescent male. Secondly, they are both cartographic narratives characterized by the illusion of movement and freedom (Singh, 2006), where maps double as the sites of action and are constructed as liminal spaces whose schemes of representation demark and fix racialized territories. However, the textual wilderness in adventure stories tend to be suggestive and loosely mapped, while Los Santos is a carefully constructed, highly detailed multimedia cartographic design. Thirdly, the terra incognita of exotic islands and inhospitable wilderness that are sites of violence, reward and identity formation — now explored and mapped — are replaced in *GTA V* by the forbidden zones of the inner city in the urban jungle. It is important to add that "the idea of the city as a jungle where bestial, predatory values prevail...has contributed significantly to contemporary definitions of 'race,' particularly those which highlight the supposed primitivism and violence of black residents in inner-city areas" (Gilroy, 1994 in Loomba, 1998, p. 122). Urban and wilderness, metropole and colony, home and away, self and other collapse in Los Santos, a virtual postcolonial Heart of Darkness that offers an inhospitable environment, where perilous adventures are undertaken to secure territory and loot. Interestingly, De Castell and Jenson (2007) conceptualize these "collisions between traditionally disconnected cultural spheres" (p. 114) as a prevalent characteristic of digital games.

As an enclosed geographic space with fixed boundaries and surrounded by ocean, Los Santos is also a distant but familiar island, mapped but explorable, replete with hideouts, hidden treasure, and crawling with outlaws, hustlers, criminals, and racialized others who are marked by savage violence, material scarcity, and who operate on the outer margins of civilization. Unlike the classic adventure stories, *GTA V* also invites the adolescent white male to play as the "savage" other, deepening the transgression into the

ambivalent liminal third space. In *GTA V*, the imperialist's map merges with the popular colonial conceit of the cannibal's cauldron as, paradoxically, identities are both firmly fixed and territorialized while simultaneously consumed, hybridized, and amalgamated.

GTA V, then, is a cartographic artifact, an "imaginary geography" that is formed by and reproduces a particular type of knowledge/power discourse with implications on the communities it (mis)represents and the corresponding formation of white male adolescent identity. Harley (2009) relevantly notes that the production of cartography "is still largely controlled by dominant groups. Indeed, computer technology has increased this concentration of media power. Cartography remains a teleological discourse, reifying power, reinforcing the status quo, and freezing social interaction within charted lines" (p. 141). Like the static paper maps that precede it, *GTA V* is a medium, or perhaps media might be more suitable to acknowledge its layered, dynamic, and complex multimedia construction, that "freezes social interaction" and reinscribes representations of race within a mediated spatial construction that amalgamates referential media stereotypes and a real-world city.

Conclusion: Localized Magic Networked Assemblies to Tell Untidy Stories

The impulse to "localize," expressed by many of the scholars and studies reviewed in this section, draws a theoretical axis that traverses postcolonialism, Foucault, and game studies with significant methodological implications. Many of the postcolonial scholars reviewed here advocate for the importance of researchers attending to the messy, complex pluralities and multiplicities that emerge in highly localized colonial and postcolonial experiences (Hall, 2002; Legg, 2007; Loomba, 1998; Nash, 2002). Loomba (1998) warns that the deracination of postcolonial inquiry from a specific location can "obscure the very relations of domination that it seeks to uncover" (p. 20). In a similar vein, Foucault recommends that an examination of power should not descend from the large-scale "juridicial edifice of sovereignty" but, rather, a more fruitful analysis begins at the specific extremities or "local configuration" of its material exercise. Therefore, his

analytical focus was aimed "towards domination and the material operators of power, towards forms of subjection and the inflections and utilizations of their localized systems, and towards strategic apparatuses" (Foucault & Gordon, 1980, p. 102). Finally Keogh (2014) emphasizes the importance of a localized approach when researching digital games in order to capture the granular nuances of game/player interactions "and understand them as gestalts of cultural meaning" (p. 3). Similarly, DeVane and Squire (2008) contend that a game's plurality of meaning depends on each player's unique cultural model compounded with the "situated practices in play" (p. 279) being contingent on the identities being inhabited and a game's plastic design. Therefore, the localized approach embraced by postcolonial scholars and Foucault corresponds with a similarly localized methodology to study game/player interactions that attends to gameplay's "dense contextualization" (Loomba, 1998, p. 181).

It is important to stress that Foucault's rationale for localizing analysis is not cleanly aligned with, nor necessarily determinant of, how and why it is employed in postcolonialism. In Foucault's case, the analysis of localized knowledge/power dynamics reveal how subjects are enmeshed, constituted by, and perpetuate a discursive matrix that is far more nuanced than revealed from a top-down approach. Meanwhile, postcolonial scholars parlay the specifics and particulars of a localized approach that exposes otherwise invisible or unvoiced conditions to draw generalizable and, ideally, actionable conclusion about (neo)colonialism and its attendant inequities, injustices, and violence. A fundamental cleft between the two is that Foucault was deeply skeptical that positive large-scale changes could occur within discursive knowledge/power regimes, and that only highly subjective forms of resistance were possible, at best. According to Goodwin-Smith (2010), this is the gap Said tries to reconcile in his hybrid use of Foucault and Gramsci, a strategic fusion for which he has been criticized. Relevantly, Loomba (1998) observes that in much of Foucault's analysis "emancipation is conceptualized as a personal affair, understandable only to those who resist, something that cannot be analyzed

or represented by anyone else" (p. 42). For this study, I do not attempt to cleanly reconcile these views, that are in effect not so far apart. Instead, I practice a version of Goodwin-Smith's (2010) "affiliative amateurism" to leverage unique affordances and productive tensions that arise from spaces characterized by ambivalence and hybridity. In my view, the localized examination of the "material operators of power" can seed tangible practices of disruption and resistance.

This project, then, enlists a highly localized methodological assemblage of research, pedagogy, and play that attends to what feminist scholar Rosi Braidotti (2005, in Lather, 2008) views as a "post-post" philosophical context that turns to "embodied materialism, situated epistemologies, scattered hegemonies and disseminated hybridities" (p. 61). My methods proceed to reveal otherwise invisible knowledge/power circulations that act upon and are enacted by a dominant category in the intermingled and reciprocal constitution of self and Other. The deliberate construction of these entwined material and theoretical components entail a mapping or territorialization that demarcates and reifies a localized nexus of manifold knowledge/power formations that collapse clear distinctions between colonizer and colonized, centre and periphery, metropole and colony, material and immaterial, malignant violence and benign play, school and home, black and white, researcher and subject, and teacher and student. Thus, the historical and epistemological are commingled to expose and interrogate emergent reverberations that bear the fractured and sometimes silent imprints of the impositions, displacements, discontinuities, dislocations, and structural violence inaugurated by (neo)colonial enterprises. Theory is grounded by pedagogical and research praxis to engender (self) awareness of subjects, subjectivities, spatial and racial imaginaries, asymmetries, inequalities, repress(entations), the normalization of racialized places and how dominant subjects can be surreptitiously interpellated to comply with structures of control, subjugation, and oppression. As such, I view this work as politicized activism enacted to problematize perspectives and alter trajectories in the hopes of disrupting structures of violence.

The selection and arrangement of the works reviewed here outline, but do not tightly circumscribe or delimit my theoretical foundations. Lammes and de Smale (2018) do not view digital games as "magic circles," but as "magic networked assemblages" (p. 18). Likewise, I extend their metaphor and resist a totalizing "magic circle" of theory in favour of a networked assemblage to articulate a view of knowledge/power production as radically subjective, locally determined, fragmented, discursive, and endlessly contingent.

Chapter 4: The New Grand Tour: White Boys, Black Bodies, and Ghettocentric Fantasies

Introduction

The issues of race, racial representations, and racialized content in digital games are understudied, and, consequently, there is a paucity of research that examines how players interact with and internalize in-game racial representations (Bayeck, Asino, & Young, 2018; Burgess, Dill, Stermer, Burgess, & Brown, 2011; Leonard, 2003; Leonard, 2006; Mou & Peng, 2008; Murray, 2017). This may be particularly problematic in regard to *GTA* games where white teen audiences access mediated "ghettocentric" content and play as stereotyped black characters (Leonard, 2006). This can be framed according to a broader practice of white adolescents adopting commodified aspects of blackness, in a persistent trend where "black culture has become such a central part of white youth's consumption habits" (Barrett, 2006, p. 98). The desire to assume marginalized identities can produce material consequences when whites who live outside such communities "often refuse to engage 'ghettos' at a political, economic, or social level because they are content to enjoy playing inside those spaces from the safety of their own home through video games" (Leonard, 2003, p. 7). However, despite the prevalence of the phenomenon, little is known about how white adolescent males engage with or are affected by black stereotypes and discriminatory representations of blackness in digital games like *GTA V*, nor is there a clear understanding of why they are drawn to temporarily adopt black codes

and partake in dislocated enactments of blackness.

To advance this study's aim to shed light on some roots and consequences of these complex racial dynamics, this chapter will review literature that pertains to how race, racism, and racialized representations and interactions take place in and with digital games in general, and *GTA* games specifically. The chapter opens with a preliminary overview of how I theorize race, followed by a look at some useful concepts drawn from postcolonial tourism literature to frame how players inhabit exoticized bodies and locations in digital games. Next, I review research that quantifies and addresses the under-representation of minorities in digital games, followed by works that examine how digital games represent race. Then, I survey research that gauges player responses to racialized content and stereotypes in games, and synthesize commentators who discusse the dynamics of racial representations and racialized play in *GTA* games. Finally, the chapter concludes with a consideration of literature from whiteness studies, pedagogies of whiteness, and studies that probe white adoptions and appropriations of codes, speech, dress, and mannerisms associated with blackness.

Discourses of Race: Contexts, Contingencies, and Constructions

Race, here, is understood to be a constructed and mutable category whose meaning shifts according to "particular historical contexts and alongside other social hierarchies" (Loomba, 1998, p. 123). Therefore, the characteristics of a designated race are "historically unstable, constantly invented and reinvented to suit a range of political, economic, and social circumstances" (Harris, 2007, p. 3). In the cartography of identity, the lines are drawn and territories assigned by those in power, whose knowledge imposition attempts to consolidate otherwise mutable frontiers, that are not inherently fixed, essential, or mutually exclusive. The delimitation and confinement of racial identities by prevalent discourses precipitate a state where "forms of being...are erased by power" (Paperson, 2010, p. 7). Racial categories, which include whiteness, are not reducible to essential qualities, traits, or temperaments; therefore, at any given time, notions of race

are constituted by diverse definitions, conceptions, self-conceptions, and identity codes and markers. In this regard, I follow Loomba's (1998) precept that an analysis of race "must take cognizance of both the reality of racial discriminations and oppressions, as well as call attention to the constructedness of the concept itself" (p. 123). Furthermore, I theorize this position through a Foucaultian lens where the discursive contexts that inform the constructions of race in any given place or moment are formations of knowledge/power. As detailed earlier, these discursive fields are best researched at localized points of application to uncover how "subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts, etc." (Foucault & Gordon, 1980, p. 97). Although circulations of knowledge/power are irregular and asymmetrical, each individual "is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation" (p. 98). Power, then, is not wielded absolutely, nor is any individual wholly divested of it, which problematizes binaries of dominance and subjugation. Furthermore, conceptualizing racism as a knowledge/power discourse "situates racialised thinking as a legacy of colonialism, which continues to sustain material inequalities" (Hickling-Hudson et al., 2004, p. 5).

When analyzing constructions of race, it is important to consider the tensions that arise between how racial identities are structured and defined through mutual absorption and oppositional differentiation. First, whiteness has traditionally been excluded from racial discourse, and much has been written about the unmarked, naturalized, invisibility of whiteness as the default (non)racial position from which other races are marked and othered (See, for example, Bonilla-Silva, Goar, & Embrick, 2006; Bonnet, 1997; Dyer, 1988; Harris, 2007; Giroux, 1997; Leonard, 2002; Murray, 2017). Whiteness, then, when dominant and foundational, has proceeded as the normative non-race which produces and defines the other as raced. However, this dialectic mutually constitutes and implicates whiteness with the raced other. Even the act of defining oneself in reference to the other

necessarily involves the implied other, whose haunting spectre is raised at the moment of definition. Catherine Hall (2002) frames this mutuality in psycho-colonial terms where "the projection of 'the other' is also always about repressed aspects of the self. Relations between colonizer and colonized are characterized by a deep ambivalence, 'the other' is both an object of desire and derision, of envy and contempt, with the colonizer simultaneously projecting and disavowing difference in an essentially contradictory way, asserting mastery but constantly finding it slipping away" (p. 70). This formulation conceptualizes race as an analytic category that transcends biological determinants and disrupts clear borders of discrete racial identity. For example, Leonardo (2002) distinguishes between white people and whiteness, and explains that white people as phenotype are a "socially constructed identity, usually based on skin colour," while whiteness is a "racial discourse" (p. 31). Consequently, an examination of racial identities and their formations must attend to their inherent complexities, contested territories, imbrications, and mutualities. The implication is that whiteness is a race sustained and informed through constructed dialogues with other races, and thus susceptible to be critically interrogated and redefined.

Ghost in the Machine: Whiteness Studies

The participants in the study all identify as white, attend a predominantly white school and interact almost exclusively with white peers. Therefore, interrogations of "whiteness" is a relevant consideration when investigating how male adolescents who self-identify as white inhabit and interact with racialized black avatars and virtual urban spaces in *GTA V*. Whiteness studies offers a helpful frame by which to investigate historically and geographically located instances of whiteness through a blended praxis of pedagogy, scholarship, and activism. This section will review relevant literature in the area of whiteness studies or critical whiteness studies, a field whose aims Harris (2007) succinctly states is "to understand the ways in which power operates through the construction of white identities and the privileges accrued to those identified as white" (p.

3). The works surveyed will inform a pedagogical approach where white students unpack whiteness to reveal otherwise invisible assumptions about race, and to critically engage with racial hierarchies and power dynamics (Giroux, 1997; Kolchin, 2002; Rodriguez, 2002; Leonardo; 2002). Encouraging white students to reflect and think critically about the socially constructed category of whiteness may, ideally, alter attitudes and behaviours in regards to racism, racialization, and racial inequality. Nash (2002) broadly validates the focus on a dominant category as a postcolonial project and proposes that, rather than "locating the postcolonial only in the non-white non-European world, which displaces the tainted histories of colonialism to racialized peripheries, postcolonialism includes critical attention to the colonial histories of white settler colonies and metropolitan colonizing countries" (p. 227). Therefore, unravelling pernicious conceptualizations of race and racialized practices centred in hitherto unexamined whiteness can contribute to dismantling persistent colonial legacies.

Kolchin (2002) surveys the field of whiteness studies in what he terms "a tentative progress report on a literature still very much in evolution" (p. 155), and found that a fundamental and recurrent principle that underlies whiteness studies is the notion that race is a construct. Likewise, I understand whiteness, like all races, to be a nuanced and fluctuating category that is constructed within a particular field of discourse. The historical, geographic, cultural, and social contingency of whiteness, whose formations are necessarily bound to "power, conflict, and interest" (Rodriguez, 2000, p. 6), unsettle its territorial borders and subvert stable definition. This is reflected in Murray's (2017) incomplete inventory of whiteness in the United States as a "racial categorization, an ideology of power relations, a Western term of normativity, an 'empty' signifier for lack of authenticity or ethnicity, a marker of violence and terror for some, and an extension of an institutionalized and pernicious form of categorization installed during European colonial and imperialist expansion (p. 44). Bonnett (1997) also locates the advent of whiteness as a category of identity "at the time of, and in response to, the emergence of

European global hegemony and the, not unrelated, development of the biological concept of 'race' in the late 18th century (p. 197). The pliability of the category is highlighted by Leonardo (2002; 2004) and Twine and Gallagher (2008) who discuss that non-Caucasians, such as some Latinos and Asians, and those formally excluded from the category, such as Irish immigrants and Jews, now participate in whiteness. However, in the United States, African Americans "symbolically and politically [continue] to represent the most significant racially defining other at the national level" (Twine & Gallagher, 2008, p. 14), and are clearly limited, if not wholly barred, from participating in the benefits traditionally associated with whiteness. Thus, despite the apparent flexibility that seems to characterize the construction of racial formations, Hess (2005) emphasizes that these are experienced as real and constitutive by individuals. The concrete determinate reality of these constructs are informed by what Lipsitz (2007) terms the "white imaginary," or pervasive contemporary North American and European social and cultural templates that form the blueprints for the social and cultural enactments of race. Whiteness, for example, is cast as a dominant and privileged position in society and bundled with access to "resources, power, and opportunity" (Hess, 2005, p. 281), which produces congruous social consequences that, in turn, reinforce the imaginary. Therefore, despite the theoretical plasticity of racial categories, social and cultural realities enforce very real constraints on the latitudes of racial possibility and performance.

It is also important to add that, historically, race studies have shifted from an emphasis on individual and psychological manifestation of bigotry and prejudice, to locating racism within a larger institutional framework (Bonilla-Silva et al., 2006; Gardner, 2017; Leonardo 2002; McWhortle, 2005; Twine & Gallagher, 2008). Gardner (2017) forwards that racialized subjects and subjectivities are predicated within the discursive fields of power rather than produced "purely of bodies and individuals" (p. 1588). Similarly, McWhortle (2005) theorizes that race is constructed within a matrix of social, economic, and political structures of power, concluding that "racism can function quite well in the

absence of any identifiable racists" (p. 535). Therefore, McWhortle (2005) champions
a Foucaultian approach to investigate, critique, and disrupt traditional discursive power
structures that engender race and produce "a network of counter-memories to begin to
build alternative accounts of raced existence and possibilities of living race differently"
(p. 552). These discriminatory structures are not only legislative and commercial, but also
include contingent imaginaries produced and reinforced by the media, codes and as-
sumptions that circulate in homogeneous white communities, and the material spaces and
places that define and constrain discursive formations of race. Therefore, each of these
last three will be addressed in the methodological and pedagogical approach of this study.

Due to its contested precincts, Gardner (2017) acknowledges his struggle to define
"whiteness;" however, he sees the ambiguity as productive as it invites for the concept to
become re-territorialized according to localized and specific inflections and manifesta-
tions. This resistance to a totalizing conception allows for — in fact calls for — localized
inquiry and research to articulate specific manifestations of the phenomena. Twine &
Gallagher (2008) identify the most recent trend (or "third wave") in whiteness studies
as partially characterized by the interrogation of "the nuanced and locally specific ways
in which whiteness as a form of power is defined, deployed, performed, policed and
reinvented" (p. 5). This position maintains that whiteness is "a multiplicity of identities
that are historically grounded, class specific, politically manipulated and gendered social
locations that inhabit local customs and national sentiments within the context of the new
'global village'" (p. 6). I will thus approach whiteness with an emphasis on the "white
inflections" or historically and geographically localized and specific ways in which
whiteness occurs. This aligns with the localized methodological approaches proposed by
Foucault to interrogate power relations, by Keogh (2014) to analyze player-game inter-
actions, and the localized analysis favoured by some recent postcolonial theorists and
critics (see, for example, Hall, 2002; Legg, 2007; Nash, 2002). Also, and of particular
relevance to my aims and methodology, a distinguishing feature of recent work in white-

ness studies is what Twine & Gallagher (2008) term a "micro-political analyses" (p. 15) of cultural products and sites, including media texts such as a popular commercial video game like *GTA V*.

The social construction of race is foundational for both the research and peda-gogical dimensions of this study, which warrants a consideration of how notions of race, racism, and racialized subjects might be constituted. Racial encounters staged with and by *GTA V* emerge from game/player circuits and entanglements, which extend to the game's paratextual discourse, ranging from game wikis and forums, to reviews and gameplay footage; thus, theories "that rely solely on the interpretable logics of the game's technical design cannot adequately account for how players deal with issues of race on an everyday basis" (Higgin, 2009, p. 5). The game's racialized avatars and virtual places — black, white, or otherwise — along with the unique instantiations of player positionality are implicated in an elaborate identity dance of othering, ephemeral passings, inhabita-tions, appropriations, hybridities, and transgressions, to name a few. These are all ex-hibited when white adolescent males temporarily assume black identities in *GTA* to role-play as stereotypical violent black criminals derived from popular media, and specifically hip-hop music and culture. Ideally, theorizing racial ontologies as constructed implies that they are necessarily susceptible to be deconstructed and reconstructed, which may open a path to free race from stereotype and some recourse for the liberation of identity. How-ever, in reality, this potential is rigidly bound by narrow discursive regimes perpetuated by media representations and social imaginaries, which inform material actualizations and, in turn, reinforce representations and imaginaries. In this way, textuality, media, and corresponding spatial configurations interpellate (post)colonial subjects by incorporating them within narrow schemes of representation (Frankenberg & Mani, 1993; Goldberg, 1993; Tiffin & Lawson, 1994 in Loomba, 1998). These cyclically inscribed structural constraints constitute racial discourses that prescribe and enforce particular assemblies of blackness and whiteness.

I proceed with a view that structures and contexts of racial discourses can be exposed, interrogated, and disrupted by a hybridized intervention of research and pedagogy that endeavours to unpack how race is presented in a game and how it is experienced by players. Ideally, this approach might unsettle assumptions, deepen understanding and awareness, and encourage self-awareness for those invested in the project. Retooling imaginaries may then lead to changes in attitudes and behaviours and create a space to reformulate the imbricated racial constructions of self and other.

Slummin' IT: Identity Tourism and Distanced Immersion in the Virtual Ghetto

Tourism provides a helpful trope to describe how primarily white players inhabit and encounter exoticized bodies and spaces in digital games. Miller (2007) applies this conceit to *GTA* games, which "offer a simulacrum of the ultimate tourist experience, that of passing as a native and gaining access to the gritty 'real life' of one's destination" (p. 409). The problems and practices of "passing as a native" in a digital realm are taken up by Lisa Nakamura (1995) who employs the term "identity tourism" to describe instances where players temporarily occupy other races and gender through online identities and/ or avatars. Her research was conducted in a text-based community, but, as will be shown, it translates well to the photorealistic virtual city of Los Santos. Likewise, Strain (2003) finds parallel postcolonial impulses and practices between real-world tourism and the "armchair tourism" carried out when accessing symbolic renditions of the world, whether cinematic or virtual. In either case, the tourist undertakes a form of "distanced immersion" in their exotic destination as they oscillate between modes of proximity and distance. On one hand, they extract themselves when they consult a map, guidebook, or seek "to view a locale from above" (Strain, 2003, p. 27) while, on the other, tourists desire direct and authentic experiences with environments, artifacts, monuments, and "locals." A tourist's distanced immersion translates to a *GTA* player's reliance on the in-game map and their physical distance from the virtual sphere of play, while also engaging in embodied street-level interactions. Accordingly, this section will draw from relevant work on

tourism to structure a broader discussion on the complex matrix of relations that emerge when white *GTA V* players engage with racialized representation of people and places in the game.

Identity tourism and asserting the dominant self. In her ethnographic study of avatar identities in the online community of *LambdaMOO*, Nakamura (1995) found that white players assume and perform the role of other races, largely based on media generated stereotypes, and "indulge in a dream of crossing over racial boundaries temporarily and recreationally" in what she describes as "identity tourism" (p. 3). The author locates this tendency in a longer tradition of colonial fiction, first elaborated in Said's Orientalism, where Europeans writers like Rudyard Kipling, T.E. Lawrence, and Sir Richard Burton describe the "pleasures and dangers of cross cultural performance" (p. 3). Said observed that these actors enjoyed the freedom "to do anything" in the colonial holdings of the empire in contrast with the limits on the possibility of action at home in the West. Nakamura finds a similar freedom exercised by identity tourists in the "phantasmic imperial space" of the online digital world and its perceived affordances of freedom, agency, and exoticism. The perceived freedom and safety of the gamespace allows players a latitude of expression that is unavailable in their day-to-day lives.

In *GTA San Andreas* and *GTA V*, white identity tourists who inhabit the digital bodies of gang-affiliated black avatars can cruise around the hood, blast hip-hop, and engage in gun fights on the mean streets of South Los Santos. Barrett (2006) criticizes that, in the hands of a white player, the black avatar is reduced to "primarily a body, disconnected from notions of autonomy and agency...controlled by some external power or logic" (p. 97), as they are commodified, compartmentalized, and rendered disposable. However, bodily control also goes the other way, as the game's rules and mechanics, and the soft and hard controller configurations necessarily constrain the player's performative range. These restrictions impose a procedural rhetoric (Bogost, 2008) where the scope of possible action reinforce "physical markers of urban, black, male being-in-the-world

[where] the player is never the lead choreographer" (Miller, 2008a, p. 267). For example, black avatars' limited dialogue capabilities in but extensive resources for violence in *GTA*, reinforce recurrent tropes of "blackness in video games that honours a hypermasculine, material, anti-intellectual, and violent cybertype" (Higgin, 2009, p. 3). The identity tourism enacted in *GTA V* follows a pervasive video game script where race is essentialized and parallels "certain offline retrograde notions of naturally or physiologically determined and unchangeable human races" (Galloway, 2007, p. 94). *GTA V* not only constrains action despite its much touted and illusory "freedom" of play (Frasca, 2003; Schwartz, 2006), but it also restricts the enactment of race, whose constrained and repeated rehearsal may inculcate the notion that racial identity is equally essentialized, static, and immutable in the real world.

The pleasures of passing, crossing, and inhabiting the exotic other is also theorized to stem from a desire to affirm the dominant self. Nakamura (1995) comments on the tendency to "co-opt the exotic and attach it to oneself" (p. 4), where the "appropriation of racial identity becomes a form of recreation, a vacation from fixed identities and locales" (p. 4) while, conversely, it also satisfies "a desire to fix the boundaries of cultural identity and exploit them for recreational purposes" (p. 4). Temporary virtual excursions into racialized communities, or the ludic habitation of the other can be seen as instances of what Bell Hooks identifies as "an alternative playground where members of the dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power over intimate relations with the other" (in Leonard, 2003, p. 5). Furthermore, Strain (2003) suggests that beneath the pleasure and fetish of encountering the exotic other is also a threat to one's own sense of identity and cultural integrity. Experiences with other cultures are reminders that cultures are subjective, diffuse, and may "denaturalize" one's own sense of cultural identity. Therefore, the "confrontation of difference involves a negotiation of boundaries in order to bolster a sense of self" (Strain, 2003, p. 17) The formula of "distanced immersion" applies here because maintaining some distance, even in a "direct" or embodied tourist

experience, preserves the illusion of the "impenetrability, autonomy, and coherence" (p. 18) of selfhood. However, in both ethnic and identity tourism, the "historical and modern day impact of colonization are deemphasized so that the tourist may enjoy a guilt-free experience, fetishizing but not critically reflecting upon the relationship between themselves and the Other" (Monson, 2012, p. 67). Encounters and embodiments of the exotic other are thus marred by preconceptions and primed expectations, which only lead to rehearsing existing stereotypes, hierarchies, and racial fantasies. In a decidedly colonial dynamic, the occupation of a fixed racialized other becomes an exercise of power and domination, where the other becomes a resource by which to strengthen the borders and economy of one's personal sovereignty.

In both real world and virtual tourism, distancing occurs by virtue of mediations that operate as barriers and thresholds. "Environmental bubbles" such as hotels, trains, tour buses, observation decks, and even sunglasses, afford tourists proximity at various stages of remove from direct involvement with the native other (Strain, 2003). These framed "views" of the subject in travel resemble media interactions "as the space on the other side of the window becomes less real and less easily entered, like a painted canvas, a televisual depiction, or a movie screen" (Strain, 2003, p. 35). This literal framing may be most applicable to the ubiquitous tourist tool of the photographic camera, which also creates distance and intimacy, orients the tourist, and safely constrains complex experiences within Cartesian parameters. The exotic local(e) is presented as a "representable and thus knowable object; [corresponding to] a belief of the image as a conveyor of truth...To view the world as being a 'picture postcard' is to attain the illusion of mastery through vision of aestheticized representation" (Strain, 2003, p. 25). In *GTA V*, players deliberately work to "master" the game's challenges and content while accessing Los Santos through the frame of their screen. The interface, including the minimap, the full map that can be toggled, and control of the game's camera angle, afford "commanding" and privileged views from above, while simultaneously offering immersive embodied interactions at

localized levels — all from the comfort of home.

Much in line with the most insular "bubbles" of commercial tourism, such as all-inclusive resorts, bus tours, amusement parks, and cruise ships, *GTA V* identity tourists can access and appropriate highly curated markers of exoticized black criminals, while ignoring contextual political and social realities (Barrett, 2006). For instance, the character customization options for the black protagonist in *GTA*: *San Andreas* are in line with baggy clothes, power medallions, and hair styles prominent in their media portrayal, implying that blackness is a "style" that is nothing more than a "commodified aesthetic with no associated political or social meaning" (Barrett, 2006, p. 100) that white players can adopt and dispose of at will. Krüger (2018) also charges that *GTA V*'s commodification of black bodies by white players "has the effect of normalizing and naturalizing the precarious position of black people in Western society (p. 6). *GTA* games invite white players to empathize with and develop loyalty to their black avatar, but Leonard (2003) is skeptical that such identification can help create understanding or alleviate the plight of African Americans. Rather, it can be seen as exoticizing the other, "which masks the colonial policy of the degradation of indigenous culture, [and turns] colonial posts into commercial artifacts to be enjoyed by the white imagination" (Leonardo, 2004, p. 147). *GTA V* largely obfuscates the broader conditions that precipitated Franklin's life as a ghetto-born career criminal whose father died of gun violence and left him to be raised by a drug-addled mother. The public, economic, and social policies that may have shaped these circumstances are invisible, and encourage a view that crime and violence are the natural state of African Americans, or a product of their individual failings (Barrett, 2006; Leonard, 2003). Without contextual knowledge, *GTA V* players become "tourists in the virtual ghetto. On one level, they enjoy what they experience. On another level, they come to believe that social problems are the result of community or individual failures" (Leonard, 2003, p. 7). As identity tourists who maintain immersive distance, white players temporarily assume black codes, but not subjectivities, and thus "invite the dangerous

idea that because one plays...one knows in some small sense what it is like to have the subjectivity" (Langer, 2008, p. 103). However, Langer (2008) also opens the possibility for counterplay when she states that "the inherently hybrid identity of the player/avatar [have] the potential not only to be used for identity tourism, but also for subversion of the expected norms" (p. 105). This could be enacted informally, or designed as a deliberate counter-hegemonic pedagogical intervention.

This section enlisted some tropes and concepts from a postcolonial reading of tourism as a means to conceptualize how and why players might inhabit online identities and environments and participate in a mediated tension of distance and proximity. The linked motives revealed by this frame include the desire for pleasure, a search for authenticity, the bolstering of self identity, the exercise of power through encounters with the other, as well as productions of certain types of knowledge about the other. Theorizing these ideas through a tourism lens is also helpful because it encompasses both the inhabitations of the other, which is the subject of this chapter, while also exploring the implications of virtual travel to exotic locations and attendant cartographic practices, which is the subject of the next.

Jamaican Trolls, Black Gangsters, and African Zombies

Here, I take a wider view of the operations of race and racial representation in games. Studies and commentators have reported on an enduring trend of minorities being underrepresented in video game (Bayeck et al., 2018; Burgess et al., 2011; Leonard, 2003; Mou & Peng, 2008; Passmore et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2009). Content analyses of commercial video games (Williams et al., 2009), independent video games (Passmore et al., 2017), video game trailers, introductory sequences, (Mou & Peng, 2008), gamer magazines and game covers (Burgess et al. (2011), and even avatar creation tools (Dietrich, 2013) all indicate a statistical under-representation of minorities, with white males appearing as protagonists in 85% of popular games (Williams et al., 2009). Of particular concern is the near invisibility of women of colour in video games (Burgess et al., 2011;

Higgin, 2009; Leonard, 2003). Some researchers attribute the lack of inclusion to the prevalence of white developers that project a corresponding worldview (For example, Dietrich, 2013; Higgin, 2009; Williams et al., 2009). And, even when minorities are included and visible, they are a projection of the dominant culture that can be "wholly devoid of nuance and [undermine] the expectation that representation allows" (Higgin, 2009, p. 17). This applies to *GTA V*, where the problem is not one of minorities being underrepresented, but rather how they are being represented. As Higgin (2009) and Leonard (2003) note, when black men are featured in games, they tend to be either criminals, gangsters, or athletes. Therefore, there is a responsibility to not merely include minority characters and content, but to be mindful and sensitive as to how they are represented. This section will review examples of problematic racial depictions in popular games before delving into the handful of empirical studies that examine some ways that players respond to engagements with representations of racial minorities.

Word of whitecraft: Essentialism and stereotypes in fantasy races. Much work that examines how race is represented in games has focused on high fantasy games like World of Warcraft (WoW), Elfquest, and licensed franchises from Tolkien's foundational novels, Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit. These operate according to what Monson (2012) terms race-based societies, where social groupings, culture, and personality traits are drawn along highly defined racial lines. Scholars have observed that many of the seeming "fantasy" races exhibit codes and markers that associate them with real world races (Galloway, 2007; Langer, 2008; Monson, 2012; Higgin, 2009; Young, 2016), and they map "stereotypes onto fictional races" (Monson, 2012, p. 68). Race in fantasy games is often depicted as stereotyped, essentialist, biologically determined, tied to environment and geographically segregated (Galloway, 2007; Higgin, 2009; Monson, 2012). "Human" races are most closely associated with whiteness, and blackness is obfuscated, distributed, or erased (Higgin, 2009). Also, light skin is associated with good, while dark skinned characters are often evil (Langer, 2009; Monson, 2012). Finally, these representations of

race are rooted in Eurocentric high fantasy conventions that collectively privilege white-ness and a white worldview that demographically reflects the bulk of the popular games' designers and targeted consumers (Young, 2016). Racial stereotypes, issues of under-representation, and essentialist depictions of race all have freer play under the guise of fantasy. Collectively, these popular games, played by millions, perpetuate and reify a white worldview that pervades the video game industry. Consequently, several commentators call for responsible design and critically minded play. Higgin (2009), for example, recommends, that in "the midst of bigotry, activist design and play can begin with the simplest of strategies: calling attention to the constitutive excesses of gamespace, scrutinizing the restrictions or parameters of the machine and code, and countering racist expectation of parody or stereotype" (p. 19). These precepts can, of course, expand to gaming in general, including *GTA* titles that also, as will be shown, geographically contain essentialized and stereotypical representations of race that correspond to a "Western rationality" and a "white gaze" (Krüger, 2018, p. 6).

But, how do players — particularly white players for whom this racial pageantry is intended — engage with, process, or internalize these stereotypes? Next, I will review the handful of empirical studies that have gauged player responses to racial depictions in video games.

Blind alleys: To fear and desire African zombies and black gangsters. This section will open with a brief survey of studies that look at racial representations in games through a cultural lens, followed by an overview of empirical studies that gauge how predominantly white players respond to video games that feature stereotypical depictions of minorities.

Like the literature on fantasy games, a broader swath of research supports that race in video games is constructed by and for a white worldview. For example, Resident Evil 5 (RE5) depicts a white militarized hero and a highly sexualized and culturally deracinated black female assistant/sidekick who battle waves of black African zombies.

Brock (2011) looked at how controversial depictions of race in RE5 can be situated as "articulations of White racial identity" (p. 432). The author concludes that, despite it being produced by a Japanese studio, whiteness is the "unifying cultural logic powering the game's aesthetics, narrative, and use" (p. 448). Similarly, Nishi, Matias, & Montoya (2015) see avatar creation in video games as part of a larger tradition of white projections in minstrelsy, literature, and film, all of which reinforce white hegemony and perniciously uphold a discriminatory status quo. Šisler (2008) also found that Arab and Muslim characters in American and European produced video games are typically, and stereotypically, associated with terrorism and hostility. Conversely, smaller Western studies and games developed in the Arab world presented more nuanced and diverse representations. These cases offer a brief cross-section of how white, Western-centric views inform stories, perspectives, and aesthetics in video games, but questions remain about how these schemes affect the player.

This study endeavours to better understand the effects of white adolescents playing with avatars that are represented as stereotypical violent black gangsters. Deskins (2013) reviews psychology literature in the areas of stereotyping, prejudice, and neural responses to video game play and hypothesizes that stereotypes might be internalized, affect identity formation, and lead to prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes and behaviours. However, none of the studies cited directly measure player responses to minority stereotypes in games, and thus the author's conclusions are, self-admittedly, speculative. Deskins (2013) finds "no current empirical study that examines the long-term effects of video games on prejudice" (p. 33); however, there is a cluster of recent research that looks at short-term effects, which I herein review.

Several of the studies that measured player responses to depictions of violent black males found that they augmented discriminatory attitudes and perceptions. Burgess et al. (2011) explored how exposure to stereotypes of black violent criminals might precipitate negative attitudes towards black men. The researchers found that participants

who initially did not exhibit overt racist tendencies in the pre-test, unconsciously connected black men with violence following play. Similarly, Yang, Gibson, Lueke, Huesmann, and Bushman (2014) conducted two linked experiments to test the hypothesis that "playing a violent video game as a Black avatar will provide exposure to stereotype-consistent violent actions, thus priming and strengthening those negative associations" (p. 699). Together, the experiments indicated that playing a violent game with a black avatar reinforced stereotypes. White players exhibited more negative feelings about blacks, and developed stronger associations with blacks and weapons. Behm-Morawitz, Hoffswell, and Chen (2016) designed an experiment to test whether whites who played as black violent gang members would, through repeated exposure, exhibit "stereotyping of African Americans and lower support for 'pro-minority' policies" (p. 309). The results indicated that the fear produced by the threatening image of an outgroup member, even if the black gangster avatar was player-controlled, has a greater effect on producing a negative response than the degree of immersion in the game. Cicchirillo and Appiah (2014) carried out a study to measure for positive affect, degree of identification, and perceived similarity when black and white players play with black or white avatars. Predictably, the authors found that players more closely identified and found perceived similarity with avatars in line with their own race. However, black players had lower positive affect when playing highly stereotypical black protagonists, which presumably demonstrates a distaste for the portrayal of black negative stereotypes, while white players showed favourable positive affect in both conditions. The narrowly targeted experiments reviewed here reveals a pattern where predominantly white players who engage with or play as stereotypical depictions of minorities, especially violent black males, can produce unfavourable attitudes towards that demographic.

It also seems that playing video games in general can negatively dispose white players towards blacks. Behm-Morawitz and Ta (2014) applied cultivation theory and social identity theory to explore whether "heavy, repetitive playing of video games [in gen-

eral] would be linked to increased reliance on the depicted racial and ethnic stereotypes when making judgments about minorities" (p. 2). Their results indicated that the more white college students played video games in general, the "less favourable their beliefs about Blacks (p. 9), but no effect was found for Asians. The authors conclude that recurrent images, representations, and motifs in games can influence real world beliefs, and that when "contact with a nondominant group is infrequent and of low quality, the media may be more likely to cultivate White individuals' perceptions of the minority group, resulting in stereotyping" (p. 5). Although empirically unfounded, one might conclude that the subtle and ostensible "whiteness" that has been found to pervade video games, even seemingly racially innocuous fantasy games, might collectively construct a worldview that is unfavourable to perceptions of minorities.

DeVane & Squire (2008) used a qualitative approach to examine player reactions, responses, and perspectives in regard to a *GTA*: *San Andreas*, with a focus on depictions of violence and race. Data was gathered from semi-structured focus group interviews with three cohorts, each comprised of four "at-risk" adolescents who ranged from 9-18 years old. Two cohorts were made-up of African American participants, while the other was white, and each participant had played *GTA* for over 75 hours. Only a handful of the participants agreed to be taped, thus much of the data was parsed from handwritten notes. Members of the white cohort (16-18 years old), who were the oldest and most dedicated game players, prided themselves on knowledge of the game. They were acutely aware that racial depictions in the game were stereotypical, and identified several ways in which *GTA* games were inspired by and referenced other racialized media. The older African American cohort (15 years old) had first-hand experience of street level violence, and reported that violence in the game was out of sync with reality. However, they believed the game realistically depicted LA projects and neighbourhoods, but did not reflect their own northern Midwest community. They also felt that the perceived racism of the police in the game matched their experiences in their own community. The results from the youngest

cohort (9-12 years old), who played the game casually, were largely limited to the views of a single participant, who expressed a preference for "pimping rides," rescue missions, and racing over engaging in gun-based violence. This cohort favoured sandbox/play-ground options in the game over gangland violence, for reasons ranging from finding it boring to upsetting parents. The authors concluded that each player and group expressed divergent modes of play, interpretations of play, accessed different content depending on expertise, and expressed different attitudes towards play depending on the social setting, which made a "different" *GTA*: *San Andreas* available to different players" (p. 281). This conclusion, again, supports a localized research approach to examine the unique ways in which players interact with the game in a given circumstance.

A few distinct patterns and gaps emerged from the literature reviewed. First, further evidence appears to support that video games in general privilege whiteness and white perspectives. Secondly, the empirical studies suggest that white players who play as or are exposed to stereotypical representations of aggressive black characters are generally inclined to develop negative attitudes towards said demographic. And, as Behm-Morawitz and Ta (2014) suggest, even increased video game play in general, seems to cultivate unfavourable views of African Americans. Much of the empirical research papers surveyed are short term and narrow mixed and quantitative measure that certainly trace an alarming tendency, but with little specificity as to why attitudes might be negatively inclined. Also, most of these studies were carried out with college students and involved limited exposure to games. Few were carried out in "natural" settings where games are normally played, and there was little consideration of the qualitative nuances of how the stereotypes were represented or received. DeVane and Squire (2008) stood out, as they conducted a qualitative analysis based on extended gameplay in natural settings that revealed a diversity of individual player experiences. However, the interview sessions were relatively contained, the dozen participants ranged widely in age, race and social settings and the data relied heavily on handwritten notes. Acknowledging these

limitations, the authors propose that their work outlines "what future research into contentious subjects in videogaming might look like" (DeVane & Squire, 2008, p. 270), a trajectory which I will take up and expand upon in this study.

Conclusion

This chapter surveyed cultural commentaries and empirical studies to reveal some dynamics, possible causes, and potential consequences to better understand how white players engage with complex racial dynamics in *GTA* games. The literature reviewed yielded data to help shape the research methodology and instructional design of this study. Whiteness was found to occupy a dominant position in the design, production and consumption of video games. Consequently, minorities are underrepresented or invisible in video games that most typically feature white male protagonists. Also, race and racial groups are frequently presented as essentialized, segregated, and exhibiting biologically determined traits and characteristics. In the rare instances when black characters are assigned lead roles, such as the protagonists in *GTA*: *San Andreas* and *GTA V*, they follow the well-worn and widely-circulated racialized script of the violent, hypermasculine criminal gangster from the ghetto. Several of the empirical studies reviewed found that when white audiences played with and encountered these stereotypical depictions, they inadvertently developed unfavourable attitudes towards blacks. Moreover, while players of colour were found to be keenly aware of the problematic (under)representation of minorities in video games, many white players are not as cognizant of the issue — a circumstance that invites further education (Passmore, Birk & Mandryk, 2018). A better understanding of how and why white players engage with "the racialized other" in video games can contribute to the design of a corresponding pedagogical strategy that cultivates self-awareness and critical thinking about this issue.

Although a number of scholars who study issues of race in games call for a more responsible and ethical approach within the industry (for example, Brock, 2011; Harrer, 2018; Higgin, 2009; Passmore, Birk & Mandryk, 2018), few recommend a pedagogical

intervention which, at this time, seems like a more productive and realistic approach. On one level, as a media text that is replete with complex and nuanced schemes of representation, *GTA V* offers a relevant and timely vehicle by which to unpack stereotypes and instruct on literacy. Secondly, the whiteness studies literature points to an instructional strategy where white students can interrogate the implicit and often invisible privileges of their own whiteness. Thus, a pedagogical approach would profit from leveraging the racialized content in *GTA V* as a means for white students to think critically about problematic representations in relation to their own dominant category of whiteness. This might be particularly relevant if they exist in an insular white community, of which the game industry is an extension.

The research also supported the value of a qualitative research design. The aforementioned quantitative and mixed methods studies that found that negative stereotypes can produce unfavourable views were based on limited exposure to the game, studies were carried out in clinical settings, and participants were narrowly tested or surveyed for responses. However, a game like *GTA V* can be played for hundreds of hours and subverts the representation of racial stereotypes with satire and parody, which complicates the reception by the player. These cross currents of representation highlight that *GTA V* gameplay can provoke a broad range of situated responses and interpretations which are not easily captured in constrained experiments based on limited play. Moreover, Leonard (2003) also cautions that merely focusing on stereotypes excludes "the larger structures of domination and the longstanding practices of whites generating pleasure through the exploitation and consumption of the racialized other" (p. 4). This, again, underscores the importance of casting a methodological net that is situated on individual and localized player responses that also attends to a larger contextual assembly of contingencies.

Chapter 5: Keepin' it Real in the Hood: Staged AuthentiCITIES and Hip-Hop Tourism

Introduction

To investigate the ways in which white adolescent males access and are influenced by the way *GTA V* depicts blackness in South Los Santos, this section will review literature that examines relationships between race and place, with a focus on racially segregated urban communities. The connections between race and place are understudied (Harris, 2007; Lipsitz, 2007; Murray, 2017) and are almost entirely without empirical support; however, the existing body of work supplies a helpful outline by which to guide both research methodology and instructional design. Neely and Samura (2011) duly note that what has "become increasingly clear is how spatial theory offers racial theory a unique lens for examining the complex processes by which racial difference and inequality are organized and enacted" (p. 1934). Scholarly work in the area includes an examination of the colonial roots of urban racial segregation (Goldberg, 1993); legal, political, and market policies and practices that predicate racially segregated spaces and places (Razack, 2002; Lipsitz, 2007); the postcolonial "cartographies of containment" that impose a "white imaginary" on the urban ghetto (Paperson, 2010; Phillips, 2013), and how social relations "produce and reproduce our comprehension of spatiality" with a specific attendance to certain types of hip-hop music and culture (Forman, 2002, p. 26). Some commentators suggest that discursively produced racialized spaces and places are intimately bound with the construction of race and racial identities. For example, Neely and Samura (2011) highlight that "the dialectical process of space and race-making, in which multiple actors with collective and conflicting narratives and interests create racialized spaces, just as space and race act (through people) back upon identity and social formations" (p. 1940). This applies to black communities, white communities, and how they mutually constitute each other. However, far from balanced or equitably, racialized places materialize how "[p]ower and authority are unevenly distributed throughout society, with space emerging as one important vector among many for the expression of dominant-subordinate relations within the hegemonic order" (Forman, 2002, p. 2). But, what are the consequences of white players undertaking a type of identity tourism and inhabiting and

consuming mediated reproductions of subordinated black neighbourhoods in a seductive video game space? This may be especially problematic when a reductive and simplified game is taken to be realistic, as is the case with *GTA V*.

The productive examination of the complex relationships between racial formation within and in relation to matrices of spatialized power can help "remap the terrain, identify hegemonic and subaltern sites of relationships and, in the process, develop a new and critical cartography of social practices" (Laguerre in Harris, 2007, p. 4). However, does the value of this work, particularly from a pedagogical perspective, also apply to racialized digital spaces like Los Santos in *GTA V*? How does the representation of racially enclosed black and white urban communities reinscribe and deviate from the lived reality? How does encountering these mediated representations affect player perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours? Following a brief clarification of the differences between the terms "space" and "place," I will review works that explore the connections between race and place to underpin the subsequent discussion of how the layered mediality of racialized places in Los Santos are constructed according to prevalent media tropes drawn largely from hip-hop music and culture. The final section will examine how players who enter the South Los Santos "hood" may engage in complex enactments of staged authenticity which pervade both the placebound loyalties of hip-hop and commercial tourism.

Placing the Space of Los Santos

In this preliminary section, I will review relevant theories to distinguish between space and place and establish that the virtual city of Los Santos in *GTA V*, much like a real world place, is a social arena imbued with meaning, interpersonal relevance, and emotional investments. Positioning Los Santos as an urban place that situates and produces social processes will help validate the recruitment of literature in sociology, geography, urbanism, and cultural studies originally designated for examining real cities so as to analyze digital spaces.

Geography scholar Yi-Fu Tuan made the first significant contribution towards conceptualizing how human beings relate to and distinguish between space and place. Tuan (1979) delineates a notions of space that he associates, on the one hand, with abstraction — coordinates, locations, measurements, but also theorizes that "objective" or "geometric" space is a "sophisticated cultural construct" (p. 389). Ultimately, notions of space change over time, are culturally relative, and always implicate the human body. Place, on the other hand, is a site invested with "history and meaning...that incarnates the experiences and aspirations of a people" (p. 387). As such, place must be studied "from the perspective of the people who have given it meaning" (p. 387). For Tuan, space becomes place either by virtue of public symbols such as monuments, works of art, or significant architecture, or through "fields of care," where spaces accrue personal meaning by virtue of emotional bonds created over time. Forman (2002), Bogost and Klainbaum (2006), and Neely and Samura (2011), all cite Tuan as the foundation for their discussions of space and place.

Tuan's theorizations of space and place, however, do not directly address the virtual realm, so it would be helpful to frame how these terms can apply to a digital game like *GTA V*. First, it is important to consider that spatiality is an essential characteristic of digital games, and a defining feature of *GTA V*, as a sprawling, 3D urban simulation. Aarseth (2007) argues that computer games are characterized by spatiality while, in a similar vein, Jenkins (2004) sees space as a video game's primary mode of expression and claims that "game consoles should be regarded as machines for generating compelling spaces" (p. 122). Aarseth (2007) distinguishes the space of a digital game from the real space which contextualizes the game and proposes that game spaces are ultimately "allegorical: they are figurative comments on the ultimate impossibility of representing real space" (p. 169). Although he does not directly unfold a theory of "place," the discussion of his framing suggests that, as a site for social activity that is contextualized by the space of the real world, a video game may better qualify as a place.

Without reference to "real space," Bogost and Klainbaum (2006) define space in digital games as an "absolute grid within which objects are located and events occur" (p. 163). In this formulation, space in digital games is the mathematically generated computer graphics that correspond to Cartesian geometry that form an abstract grid with the potential to contain objects and events. The authors also consider the cartographic representation of the virtual city used to help players navigate is also a representation of space in the game. Place, on the other hand, is the concrete and localized rendering of the specific gameworld experienced by the player, whether a spaceship, a home, or a city; therefore, place is a visible and specific manifestation of meaningful volume within the space's potential.

I expand on Bogost and Klainbaum's (2006) concept of place as constructed and visible graphic objects, avatars, and environment in the game. Specifically, in the case of Los Santos, it can also be designated as a place due to its status as a social arena. Following sociologist Henri Lefebvre, Forman (2002) contends social relations transpire in place, and that "there is no sense of place that can be derived in the absence of social processes" (p. 26). Furthermore, he specifies that place "emerges as a meaningful domain through experience, perception, and the visceral contact that occurs as one interacts with the physical and social environment" (p. 28). Social processes foster connections to contextualizing environments and invest them with meaning, affect, and memory, with implications for the construction of identity. Forman (2002) theorizes place as it occurs in the real world, but how does this translate to the hallucinatory urbanism of a digital game?

There may be some hesitation to accept the Los Santos of single-player *GTA V* as a social site, but I contend that the ideas of place proposed by Tuan (1979), Bogost and Klainbaum (2006), and Forman's (2002) translate well from the physical to the digital realm. The buildings, highways, monuments, cars, businesses, homes, and public areas in Los Santos are verisimilitudes of Los Angeles in its popular representation in the media. Wiggins (2016) notes that a "sense of place in popular culture develops only through a

negotiation between the viewer's ignorance and knowledge of the area, the main cultural object, and the network of cultural objects that comment on and interact with the main text" (p. 2597). Also, players invest Los Santos with their memories of experiences from previous gameplay sessions, including those with prior versions of the city in *GTA*: *San Andreas*. For Forman (2002), one way a space becomes a place, is when "the description of its attributes is rendered explicit or where the value invested in one's relationships to place are communicated with others who may either express a shared identification with it or, conversely, have little or no relationship to it" (p. 30). This is very much the case with Los Santos, where millions of its ephemeral citizens from around the world exchange anecdotes, stories, videos, screenshots, maps, and critiques about their circulations and habitations within the virtual city, regardless of the lack of simultaneous occupation. Finally, player interactions with computer generated avatars constitute valid social interactions. All of these comprise social relationships with, within, and about a virtual space that players often inhabit and discuss for hundreds of hours, which leads me to conceive of Los Santos as a meaningful place.

Establishing the virtual city of Los Santos as a place acknowledges it as a social site invested with fears, desires, connections, and memories, much like a real-world place. But what type of place is it, especially in regard to its distributions of race? It would now be beneficial to specify how Los Angeles is mapped to Los Santos and, particularly, how the stark geographic division between Los Santos' affluent white north and its depiction of South Los Santos as a black ghetto produces a postcolonial "cartography of containment" (Paperson, 2010) that can inform and construct the racial imaginary of the white adolescent male.

The North-South Divide: Urban Racial Segregation in Los Santos

Los Santos reproduces a distilled version of Los Angeles's racialized binary urban geography: The neighbourhoods in the north part of the city are white and affluent, while the proverbial ghettos in the industrial south are black, crime-infested, and economically

depressed. Far from being unique to Los Angeles, racialized enclaves are characteristic of many Western urban centres where "affluent areas of the city are all white and poorer areas are mostly of colour" (Razack, 2002, p. 6). Los Santos, as a satirical reduction of LA, concentrates and intensifies the association of blackness with poor, crime-infested ghettos, and whiteness with the sanitized prestige of "racially exclusive neighbourhoods, segregated suburbs, and guarded and gated communities [that] comprise the privileged moral geographies of the contemporary national landscape" (Lipsitz, 2007, p. 15). This section will review literature that demonstrates how *GTA V*'s racially polarized urban design reproduces the material boundaries of periphractic containment and privileged enclaves without accounting for the social, economic, and political forces that produce them. Consequently, the game's sophisticated and navigable spatial simulations that present stereotype in the guise of authenticity may contribute to shaping white social imaginaries that naturalize discriminatory urban planning.

Racially segregated communities in cities like LA inform constructions of race and place and materially sustain and reify racism, racial hierarchies, and racial tensions. Harris (2007) holds that "segregation, seclusion, marginalization, incarceration, hierarchy — are all spatial phenomena or have a spatial corollary" (p. 2), while Neely and Samura (2011) situate the origins of racialized places in historical colonial practices and policies, where "racializing bodies and groups has always been linked to the theft of land and the control of space" (p. 1934). The connection between race and place is a mutually reinforcing tautology where racism "become institutionally normalized in and through spatial configuration, just as social space is made to seem natural, a given, by being conceived and defined in racial terms" (Goldberg, 1993, p. 185). In the case of LA's urban development, Forman (2002) cites Mike Davis' study and concludes that the "containment of what the dominant classes often consider to be 'undesirables' or 'aliens' is explicit… [and] that the 'contemporary city...remains the primary space of racial division and racial tension and...apparatuses of urban racial segregation have taken new, sophisticated, and

highly technologized forms'" (p. 7-8). Goldberg (1993) locates the origin of these material "apparatuses" in colonial African cities where "buffer zones" such as tracts of lots or fields, called cordons sanitaires, were used to separate Africans and protect European colonists from plague outbreaks. Contemporary buffer zones between white and non-white neighbourhoods include parks, reservoirs, train tracks, and abandoned lots, which were not deliberately built for the purposes of segregation, but later "facilitated physically reifying the symbolic divides of racialized city space" (Goldberg, 1993, p. 195). The highways emblematic of both LA and Los Santos are, paradoxically, thoroughfares of mobility and, in each case, also form the cordons sanitaires that definitively separate socially immobile black neighbourhoods in the south from their well-heeled and predominantly white northern counterparts (Whalen, 2006).

Much like how *GTA V* fails to account for the social forces that contribute to a stereotype of criminalized black males, the game does not acknowledge the contextual causes that precipitate segregated racial spaces. Redmond (2006) critiques *GTA* games for their "tendency to privilege specific aspects of American place over the narrative possibilities of multinational space" (p. 109), and argues that it fails to account for the true source of violence, racism, and a carceral culture that characterize what the author terms "the U.S. Empire" (p. 112). Similarly, Lipsitz (2007) submits that it is a moral imperative for urban planners to disassemble and disrupt "a national spatial imaginary" that is "racially marked" (p. 10), a recommendation that might extend to the designers of *GTA V*. Surveying the social and legislative forces that contribute to racialized geographies, the author catalogues a history of laws and policies that prejudice communities of colour, including housing and lending practices, school district boundaries, policing, zoning regulations, urban renewal projects, transit systems design, and inheritance through home ownership. These are supported by "contemporary media characterization of 'the Underclass'" that include pervasive depictions of white homeowners as morally superior in contrast to the disreputable, lazy and "property-endangering" black tenants (Goldberg, 1993, p. 201).

The pernicious roots that produce real-world urban ghettos and their digital projections are invisible in *GTA V*, which only further normalizes the game's portrayal of the space-based segregation that affects so many North American cities.

Representations of contained white communities also bear consideration when investigating how racial imaginaries are shaped and reinforced by interactions in and with built environments. This is supported by Harris (2007) who states that "historically white spaces such as upper class suburbs, corporate office parks, gated communities, or upscale urban spaces are equally racialized as white and therefore may also be examined through this lens" (p. 3). Bonilla-Silva et al. (2006) contend that white enclaves are more socially and spatially isolated than black, ethnic, and minority communities and thus must be looked at as a significant contribution to race-related problems. Much like the invisibility of whiteness itself, white spaces and places are naturalized and hiding in plain sight (Bonilla-Silva et al., 2006; Harris, 2007; Forman, 2002). Insular communities, whether black or white, produce group cohesion and inform identity formation that "severely limits close personal relationships between blacks and whites, [and] whites' collective experiences with blacks are extremely limited and based on racial stereotypes and generalizations perpetuated by the media or through other second-hand sources" (Bonilla-Silva et al., 2006, p. 233). The consequence of the social conditions of group isolation are broadly addressed by Lipsitz (2007), who writes that the "spatial confinement and containment that accompanies racialization in the United States damages both individuals and communities" (p. 18). Therefore, it would be beneficial to direct critical attention to the normalized containment of white communities and their representation in games like *GTA V* to make the invisible visible, and cultivate awareness and self-awareness about how these socio-spatial formations negatively impact society at large.

Many of the scholars who theorize the links between place, space, and race maintain that built environments — both real and represented — can impact the formation of attitudes and behaviours (Dietrich, 2013; Forman, 2002; Harris, 2007; Harvey, 1993;

Leonard, 2006; Murray, 2017; Whalen, 2006). Location exerts a strong influence on the social meaning of experiences, and participation in spatial narratives can cultivate "spatial sensibilities and cues that are continually enacted throughout our social lives" (Forman, 2002, p. 16). Harvey, for example, holds that "representations of places have material consequences insofar as fantasies, desires, fears, and longings are expressed in actual behaviour" (in Forman, 2002, p. 8), while Whalen (2006) argues that urban spaces yield a type of aesthetic literacy whose spatial poetics can affect the behaviour of its inhabitants. The invisible ideologies that structure built environments also construct race and, together, space, place and ideologies of race manufacture social and cultural norms (Harris, 2007). Therefore, the built places that shape everyday life must be examined as a determining force "in the formation of ideas about race, identity, belonging, exclusion, and minoritization" (Harris, 2007, p. 2). With regard to video games, Murray (2017) discusses that realistic digital environments can influence how players think about particular spaces which have the capacity to form imaginaries and produce persuasive anticipatory images. In *GTA V*, players who enter the deceptively "authentic" racialized South Los Santos neighbourhoods may implicitly accept the inscriptions of the virtual hood, unaware that while they engage in a mediated but "authentic" black experience, they become complicit with established power structures through the celebration and enactment of their "ghettocentric imagination" (Leonard, 2006, p. 50). White adolescent players, then, who are forming worldviews, seem likely to navigate compelling racialized spatial constructions with little critical attention to how their ideas of race and place are formed and informed by their in-game experiences.

The works reviewed in this section examine relationships between race and space in urban settings, and how attitudes and behaviours in regard to race are formed by and linked to specific urban constructs. The decontextualized representation of racialized places in *GTA V* may shape social imaginaries that normalize the discriminatory structures that sustain segregation. However, with the exception of Bonilla-Silva et al. (2006),

the works cited are cultural and sociological critiques without empirical support. The study of the connections between race-space are relatively new, undertheorized, and understudied (Harris, 2007; Murray, 2017); a circumstance that especially applies to how race and place are experienced in virtual cities like Los Santos in *GTA V*, for which there is no research. Thus, no studies have explicitly or conclusively determined how video game players — white, adolescent, or otherwise — encounter and respond to racialized representations of places. Considering the pervasive influence of *GTA V*, and the well documented problems of urban racial segregation affecting cities around the world and the United State, investigation into this area could be of significant value. Lipsitz (2007), for example, calls for an "examination of concrete racial and spatial practices" to better understand how exclusion plays a role in "the racial meanings of places…[to] amelior-ate the racialization of space and the spatialization of race" (p. 12). Harris (2007) also advocates for the investigation of the spatial dimensions of race and privilege, and the lack thereof, and "link social justice to environmental or spatial justice...to dismantle or reapportion such political and social structures (p. 2). Moreover, it is also productive to study racialized white communities and question the "implicit assumption that all spaces are white unless otherwise specified as a barrio, a ghetto, a reservation, a plantation, or a historically black college campus" (Harris 2007, p. 3). These views support a need to investigate how racialized environments are constructed in *GTA V*, how players encounter racialized places and, from an educational standpoint, to foster critical perspectives on how race is represented in the game, and the potential social fallout. To that end, the next sections will look at the role of media and mediality in the construction of race and place in Los Santos.

Los Santos: Media, Mediality, and the Fabrication of AuthentiCITIES

The virtual city of Los Santos is a media assembly that widely references popular media and contains a diverse media ecology within it, all the while representing a version of Los Angeles, the world capital of media production. Here I will look at a handful of

works to demonstrate that *GTA V* is a rich semantic artifact that (re)constructs an inter-textual caricature of LA. This will lay the groundwork to examine how the racialized South Los Santos neighbourhoods are built according to layered and manifold references largely derived from hip-hop music and media.

The sprawling virtual city of Los Santos and its hinterlands preserves the general layout of LA, including iconic landmarks and buildings, main roads and highways, and salient geographic features. Previous instalments of the franchise are also set in iconic US cities: *GTA*: Vice City is played in a version of Miami, New York becomes Liberty City in *GTA* III and, in *GTA*: *San Andreas*, San Fierro stands in for San Francisco. Each city is carefully reconstructed to reflect the distribution and architecture of the signified place, but they are also designed according to how they are represented in the media and popular culture. Moreover, Aarseth (2007) sees digital games as spatial allegories that "pretend to portray space in ever more realistic ways, but rely on their deviation from reality in order to make the illusion playable" (p 169). However, in *GTA* games, divergence from reality is not merely to facilitate gameplay, nor a function of technical limitations but, ironically, is also driven by a desire to produce a sense of "authenticity" that conforms to how audiences imagine the cities based on their portrayal in media. Bogost and Klainbaum (2006) elaborate:

> In our increasingly mediated society, what is perceived as real and what is mediated are notions that are becoming blurred. Rockstar's ability to create a compelling place lies in its awareness of these contemporary cultural shifts. These games are designed with a deep understanding of the layered representations that define our media-saturated world, giving GTA games their popular appeal. In essence, Rockstar has created an expressive virtual environment highly influenced by the contemporary tradition of mediated artifacts. (l. 3314)

Representations of cities in games that are "presented as authentic — the characters, environments, music, and language, just to name a few — are in reality deliberately selected symbolic materials that draw much of their appeal and believability from representations of urban life in other popular media cultures" (Everett and Watkins, 2008, p.

144). Los Santos is designed to evoke an array of mass media, including films like Boyz in the Hood, LA Story, Heat, Get Shorty, LA Confidential, hip-hop music and media, previous *GTA* games, and the Rodney King riots, to name a few. *GTA*'s referential convergence provokes Redmond (2006) to quip that the "result deserves the name 'grand theft video' due to its capacity to parody, pastiche and subvert vast swathes of the mainstream media culture" (p. 104). However, Redmond (2006) criticizes Rockstar for not pulling from a broader range of independent African American media to project a more nuanced representation of black life in America. Rather than alienate audiences, the semiotic density of a highly mediated artifact like *GTA V* reproduces the familiarity of the media saturated environment which its players inhabit.

Furthermore, *GTA V* not only operates as a referential nexus in a broader media ecology, but it is also a media ecology onto itself. The game contains in-game TV networks with hours of original content, a navigable internet, multiple radio stations with extensive programming, news shows, billboards, video games, mobile phones, and even a social media company (Life Invader). Common Sense Media (2015) reports that average weekly rates of teen media consumption exceed 60 hours — far longer than the average work week. There's an argument that perennially wired adolescents increasingly live in media, a condition which is mirrored within the thoroughly mediated space of *GTA V*. The *GTA* gamespace, then, is not only familiar because the content is designed to reference popular media, but its formal qualities echo the diverse media landscape outside the game.

GTA V assembles layered and multitudinous depictions of Los Angeles in popular cultures. On one hand, the mediated spatial and geographic references parody a city that typifies an entertainment saturated culture that celebrates self-indulgence, corporality, violence, crime, greed and corruption — all under the sunny skies, walled mansions and flashy cars that are the cosmetic icons of the American Dream. The reflexivity intensifies when we recall that the game itself is an entertainment colossus that occupies the

current apex of the very "rockstar" culture it satirizes. On the other hand, players raised on popular media will feel at home, seduced by the illusion of the familiar as authentic and validate the game's "realism" while internalizing corresponding imaginaries about the real world. This is particularly true for those who have no lived experience or direct contact with the people and places that the game distantly indexes. The tension that arises from what feels "real," familiar, and authentic in the game and the distancing effect of satire that draws attention to the artifice of its own mediality recalls Strain's (2003) characterization of tourism as "distanced immersion." Like the tourist, the player's desire to safely and temporarily engage in a mediated and staged "authentic experience" entails a problematic swirl of appropriation, consumption, and commodification of the other. Consequently, I align with Murray's (2017) suggestion that tools for cultural analysis are vital to unpack the implicit and potentially pernicious effects of the tiered rhetoric, particularly because a photorealistic game ostensibly portraying a real city can easily be interpreted as a valid representation of reality. The author cautions that in an "absence of understanding how these many layers of meaning-making take place, through representation and secondary orders of representation (which drifts in orders of degree away from the thing in itself), the highly ideological images of games may become taken for granted as realism" (l. 3085). It is therefore vital in a pedagogical intervention to not only consider the *what* of media and representation, but also the *how*.

The next section will explore how blackness and black neighbourhoods in *GTA V* are deliberately coded to evoke tropes from mainstream hip-hop music and media. White hip-hop fans have been found to enact temporary racial crossings and passings, or identity tourism, that express a desire to transcend their racial borders and inhabit the lives and places of the physically excluded and absent other. By designing a hip-hop inspired South Los Santos, white fans are supplied with a tourist destination that allows them to commune with the hoods and gang activity evoked by music they love.

Keepin' it Real: Hip-Hop Tourism and Staged Authenticity in the Virtual Hood

Like its media-inspired urban design, the objective of authenticity in *GTA* is not to represent black urban culture as it is, but as it is perceived by the population at large (Everett & Watkins, 2008). Popular white middle class notions about marginal urban life are generally shaped by media rather than by direct exposure; therefore, producing a sense of presence in what aims to feel like an "authentic" environment relies on devising a milieu that conforms with pre-existing scripts that "resonate with popular perceptions of urban culture" (Everett & Watkins, 2008, p. 148). This leads to the perpetuation of media generated stereotypes of race that "construct authentic urban culture as ultraviolent, hypersexual, exotic, and a repository of dangerous and illegal activity" (Everett & Watkins, 2008, p. 147). African American adolescents interviewed by DeVane & Squire (2008) reported that the characters and violence in *GTA* did not seem realistic to them because they did not align with their own everyday experiences in a low-income black urban community; a salient reminder of how seemingly authentic virtual portrayals deviate from lived realities. For those without real-world points of reference, *GTA V*'s realism is validated as it resonates with a media chorus of discriminatory racial tropes and, in the case of video games, becomes a "powerful learning environment for not only portraying but also performing race" (Everett & Watkins, 2008, p. 149). The literature reviewed in this section will demonstrate that the thrill of the identity tourism involved in "performing race" in *GTA V*, particularly by white consumers of hip-hop and rap, is accentuated by the unique importance of place and location in the lyrics, sounds, and ethos of the urban music genre, where authenticity and credibility are almost inseparable from geographic provenance. The South Los Santos neighbourhoods in *GTA V*, then, will be theorized as providing white fans of popular strains of hip-hop access to the otherwise inaccessible hood where they seek to authenticate their commitment and participation in the genre, and playfully embody the music's prevalent narratives. First, however, I will begin with a review of studies that investigate the ways in which whites have been found to deliberately adopt certain types of black codes, mannerism, speech, and markers.

Hoodwinked: Wannabes, prep-school gangsters, and white hip-hoppers. In a rare 2013 Playboy interview with Harold Goldberg, Sam Houser, one of the two Scottish brothers behind the *GTA* franchise, spoke emphatically about his adolescent fascination with hip-hop music. Houser's early "head-over-heels affection [for hip-hop] would inform his future work at Rockstar Games...He made his mother sew Def Jam [a seminal hip-hop label] patches onto his clothes, and when his father finally took him to Manhattan in 1988, Houser made a beeline for the Lower East Side's Orchard Street, a bastion of Air Jordans and leather puffer jackets. He loved England, but in New York it was as if he'd come home, and home was an urban, hip-hop heaven" (Goldberg, 2013, para 14). Houser, who was a private school student in the UK at the time and later worked as a music producer, was well aware of the legion of middle class white adolescent boys who obsess over hip-hop. Consequently, he deliberately infused *GTA*: *San Andreas* and *GTA V* with representations of particular forms of hip-hop aesthetics and culture, including gang controlled neighbourhoods, gangster protagonists who can be outfitted from a wide selection of "bling" and streetwear, and multiple rap and hip-hop radio stations. The Housers created a digital mise-en-scène for white adolescent fans to live out their hip-hop fantasy. As will be seen, almost all the participants in the study displayed some affinity for the music, language and styles associated with hip-hop, and reported frequent interactions with affiliated aspects in the game. *GTA V* is a portal to enter the exotic and perilous world of the ghetto and virtually experience the lifestyle celebrated in the music. To explore this impulse, I will review literature that examines how white hip-hop identity tourists negotiate and exhibit attendant cultural codes and practices that are associated with poor black urban life.

The near cliché of white adolescents, particularly boys, adopting urban black codes through hip-hop music culture is widespread but understudied. Hip-hop rose from inner city African American and Latino communities and is expressive of "the experiences of marginalization, truncated opportunity, and oppression within the cultural impera-

tives of African American history, identity, and community" (Xie et al., 2007, p. 454). Since, the genre has grown to become a global cultural force and with a proliferation of local variants; however, Hess (2005) notes "fans and artists continue to frame hip-hop as part of African American culture" (p. 372). In North America, it is a top selling music genre, with the lion's share of sales driven by white consumers (Xie et al., 2007). Surprisingly, there are few studies that examine white hip-hop fans and their cultural crossings and adoptions of "black urban sensibilities" by way of the music genre. While some investigate linguistic crossings (Bucholtz, 1999; Cutler, 1999), there are also examples of small-scale qualitative research that looks at the cross-racial dynamics of hip-hop consumption and appropriation by white fans (Bennett, 1999; Rodriguez, 2006; Sulé, 2015) and artists (Hess, 2005). The prevalence of white consumers who adopt blackness as expressed through hip-hop media is without question, but even the few studies that chronicle some manifestations of the phenomenon underscore that there is no single or easy answer to the question of why.

Cutler (1999) used a qualitative approach to study a single white adolescent informant named Mike for five years, starting when he was 15 years old. Her focus was on his adoption and use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and hip-hop slang, but she also rendered his social milieu and life circumstances. Mike attended an exclusive New York City private high school, listened to rap music, and dressed in hip-hop fashions, exhibiting codes in line with "stereotyped conceptions of gangs and African American urban street culture" (p. 429). However, his experience extended beyond mere posturing: Mike became involved in gang activity, engaged in violent altercations, drug use, and graffiti tagging until he was asked to leave his school. Eventually, he changed schools and attended college, and gradually scaled down his outward affiliations with hip-hop and use of AAVE

The author notes that AAVE, particularly when married to hip-hop slang, can express toughness, streetsmarts, edge, and experiences with violence. Cutler (1999)

discusses that Mike, unlike whites who adopt AAVE from living in black communities, is an example of what is pejoratively termed a "prep school gangster" and willfully opt-ed into "an essentialized version of urban black male youth culture...and worried about being labeled a 'wannabe' by his peers" (p. 435). Cutler (1999) also hints that his violent tendencies and attraction to the hip-hop ethos may have been a form of "acting out" in light of a turbulent family situation, but there is no evidence to source his appropriation to any narrow set of circumstances. Although Mike had a few black friends, Cutler (1999) cautions against the notion that hip-hop can produce a "cultural rapprochement between blacks and whites" (p. 435), as it is often enacted apart from the lived realities expressed by the music, and its adoption is usually ephemeral and performative.

    Bucholtz (1999) conducted an ethnographic study with a linguistic focus in a California high school organized according to "an ideologically defined black-white dichotomy that structures students' social worlds" (p. 445). The study focused on Brand One, a white adolescent male and his narrative about a racialized conflict he was involved in at school. Bucholtz (1999) unpacks the story with particular attendance to Brand One's use of what she terms Cross-Racial African American Vernacular English (CRAAVE), a hybrid speech style that forms "part of his projection of an urban youth identity in-fluenced by African American youth culture" (p. 445), part of a larger pattern observed where many students symbolically cross the school's racial divide through language, social practices, and "especially hip-hop" (p. 445). Bucholtz's (1999) analysis of Brand One's story led her to conclude that the "operative gender ideology" connects masculinity to physical power and violence and, in turn, the "operative racial ideology" links these qualities to blackness rather than whiteness (p. 455). The construction of a superior black masculinity allows white adolescents like Brand One to "disclaim their own structural advantages as members of privileged racial, class, and gender categories" (Bucholtz, 1999, p. 455). Like Cutler (1999), Bucholtz (1999) holds that cross-racial cultural affilia-tions and the use of CRAAVE do not necessarily lead to meaningful alliances and, rather,

"tends to keep the social order intact by preserving ideologies of race, gender, and language" (p. 456).

Sulé (2015) and Rodriguez (2006) each undertook qualitative investigation that focused on white college hip-hop fans. Rodriguez (2006) conducted interviews with mostly white college students over the course of twenty hip-hop shows. Many of the participants framed their affinity to the hip-hop scene as part of a left-wing political inclination. Rodriguez (2006) found that a prevalent colour-blind ideology lent the white audience members "the discursive resources to decontextualize cultural objects from the histories and experiences from whence they came" (p. 663-664). He notes that his subjects do not want to be black, but rather participate in insider knowledge and the "characteristics of blackness associated with being cool" (p. 649), and a colour-blind perspective allows them to move in a cultural milieu of blackness while avoiding guilt. In a similar vein, Sulé (2015) interviewed white male college hip-hop fans to discover whether their devotion to the genre promoted cross-racial interactions. Sulé (2015) found that some participants, despite their best efforts and intentions, were frustrated in their desire to access a racially diverse circle of friends. However, other participants' involvement with on-campus hip-hop clubs and activities led to meaningful interracial contact and friendships. Unlike Rodriguez's (2006) findings, Sulé (2015) explicitly states that her participants did not seem to adhere to a colour-blind discourse. Their consumption of hip-hop music and culture made participants cognizant of their whiteness, they experienced other cultural perspectives, and helped "spearhead campus diversity goals" (p. 222). She argues that the "mature stages of being a social justice ally entails having a complex worldview, understanding racial inequalities, engaging in meaningful relationships with racialized others, and challenging white privilege" (Sulé, 2015, p. 223). These positive findings are tempered by an acknowledgement that merely being a hip-hop fan does not necessarily precipitate prosocial values, and that there is still a prevalence of "white hip-hoppers [who] are the latest iteration of cultural profiteers" (p. 223). Unlike Cutler (1999), and

Bucholtz (1999), she found that involvement in a hip-hop community translate to meaningful cross-racial alliances. Albeit, this was observed on a college campus, rather than in high school or street settings.

Bennett (1999) employed ethnographic focus groups and interviews to examine the appropriations of hip-hop by working class white youth in Newcastle upon Tyne. Newcastle is a predominantly white community and thus an example of "localization" within the global hip-hip context, which Bennett (1999) characterizes as "the celebration of blackness in the absence of blackness" (p. 8). One faction he studied symbolically associated with African American culture and viewed hip-hop as an inextricably black form of music that transmitted relatable messages like pride of place of provenance. An understanding and appreciation for the black experience behind the music was linked to an "insider" status that garnered a cultural capital that separates them from more transient "hip-hop tourists." This group, who also adopted hip-hop dress codes, were occasional targets of public abuse in what the author called "deflected racism" for their apparent cultural and racial "betrayal." However, the attacks further unified the group in defense of their values in the face of the policed normative pressures from their community. Bennett (1999) also examined another group of local hip-hop artists who enlist the music's formal qualities, but deployed them to address local matters in their endemic "Geordie" dialect. Whether the music's blackness is embraced, or when enacted as a means to articulate a decidedly white local condition, both expressions articulate a facet of working class youth in Newcastle. The author concludes that hip-hip's global reach manifests in diverse local variations of production or consumption, and warrants to be studied as such.

Finally, Netcoh (2013) argues for hip-hop's potential to help white students interrogate their own whiteness and think critically about race, racial ideologies, and racial politics. However, the author warns that the mere consumption of the music and culture alone is "unable to communicate the intricacies of race to its white audience, and it may encourage colour-blindness and acceptance of injurious racial stereotypes in certain set-

tings" (p. 18). Netcoh (2013) references David Hayes' 2004 study of white adolescents in a Canadian rural community whose performance of hip-hop culture reinforced their predominantly white town's stereotypical view of blackness as characterized by "violence, crime, and poverty" (p. 13). Thus, hip-hop mitigated exposure to prevalent stereotypes of blackness, particularly at a distance from black people and communities, may lead white fans to "internalize and mobilize...their racial politics and attitudes toward black people" (Netcoh, 2013 p. 13). To illustrate some possible avenues of instruction, the study furnishes examples of how a critical media studies approach can be enlisted to analyze the music and biographical context of hip-hop artists at the high school and postsecondary level. Netcoh (2013) concludes that leveraging "out of school literacies" (p. 18) such as hip-hop can create opportunities to study and discuss race.

A few relevant trends surfaced from the literature. First, that ethnography is the most common methodology to study white appropriations, affiliations, and engagement with black culture via hip-hop. Second, engagement with hip-hop by white high school and college students, particularly in predominantly white communities, does not necessarily produce cross-racial affiliations, friendships, or meaningful understandings (Bennett, 1999; Bucholtz, 1999; Cutler, 1999; Netcoh, 2013; Rodriguez, 2006). On the contrary, an uncritical engagement with the music and contextual culture seemed to reinforce stereotypes. Thirdly, hip-hop music and culture retains its roots in African American urban culture in its global spread, but also finds highly localized expressions, and must be studied as such. Finally, teachers can leverage hip-hop music and culture with white students to potentially produce insights into their own whiteness, unpack racial stereotypes, and perhaps alter their "white imaginary" by developing a more nuanced understanding of racial politics (Netcoh, 2013). Thus, this ethnographic study can contribute to the paucity of literature by offering a highly localized view of how white, male Canadian adolescents who engage with hip-hop encounter, perform, and interact with race in *GTA V* with an instructional design informed by critical media literacy.

Sightseeing in south Los Santos: Hip-hop tourism in the place to be. Forman's (2002) in-depth analysis of space, place, and race in hip-hop foregrounds the preeminence of location in hip-hop music. The author writes that "spatial awareness is one of the key factors distinguishing rap music and hip-hop from the many other cultural and subcultural youth formations currently vying for popular attention. In hip-hop, space is a dominant concern, occupying a central role in the definition of value, meaning, and practice" (p. 3). These "spatial complexities" are not trivial or incidental to the music, but "central to all that emerges from it" (Forman, 2002, p. 24). Xie et al., (2007) also maintain that the "hood context becomes defining and central to the definition of hip-hop and more importantly, to who is hip-hop" (p. 457). The rap mantra to "represent" speaks to localism and placebound loyalties that musicians wear like a badge of honour to establish their hood-borne credibility (Forman, 2002). However, the hip-hop ethos makes it abundantly clear that the hood is black, dangerous, and inhospitable to white outsiders. The global dissemination of hip-hop through technology geographically dislocates its consumers from the music's inner-city roots, leaving them with "no means of physical participation…[and] a desire to experience the validating context of the culture is created" (Xie et al., 2007, p. 455). Dedicated white hip-hop fans arrive at a point where "owning the commodities of hip-hop...are not enough…[and] 'being there' becomes all-important" (p. 458). White fans can learn the lingo, memorize lyrics, buy expensive streetwear, and flash gang signs, but they are unable to access the places that embody the situated lifestyles that are integral to legitimate membership in the music's culture. This is why virtual ghetto tourism becomes a viable and sought after alternative.

For white hip-hoppers, *GTA*: *San Andreas* and *GTA V* are safe entry points to the fetishized hood, exotic destinations that provoke both fear and desire. *GTA*'s developers deliberately infused the games with pervasive hip-hop sensibilities that transmit "a consistent aesthetic 'feel' that ties together the game's visual design, characters, dialogue, cut-scene editing, musical content, and narrative" (Miller, 2007, p. 431). South Los San-

tos synthesizes media depictions of violent and forbidding black neighbourhoods which were once "a source of sublime terror and fear [and have] been transformed by hip-hop into an enticing landscape for tourism" (Xie et al., 2007, p. 456). Relevantly, Forman (2002) argues that a sense of place and immersive presence are not only established through topophilia, or a love or appreciation for a known environment, but also "exists alongside and often in tandem with one's experience of 'landscapes of fear'...which are capable of producing what might be termed topophobia" (p. 29). South Los Santos is not only a meaningful place that fulfills the desires of players who wish to visit the streets and neighbourhoods evoked by hip-hop, but it is also a site at the crosscurrents of fear and desire, which may deepen emotional connection with the place and, by extension, the game. Schwartz (2006) contends that players who become virtual tourists "accept game spaces to experience them, the abstracted and fantasy elements of the games become more real as well" (p. 315). Therefore, the sense of realism produced by the player's cultural and emotional investments with the place, in addition to the game's photoreal-istic graphics, may lend credence to the perception that South Los Santos is an authentic depiction of black lives.

Tourists, hip-hop stars, their white fans, and even *GTA* itself express paradox-ical instances of staged authenticity which can implicate the player-tourist in a mediated matrix where artifice projects an illusion of reality. Edward Armstrong identifies three "authentication strategies" in hip-hop: being true to oneself, claiming "local allegiances and territorial identities," and establishing a connection to "an original source of rap" through locale, style, or links to an established artist (in Hess, 2005, p. 374). However, these "strategies" — a term which in itself denotes a disingenuous approach — can collapse under the very authenticity they strive to express. First, rap artists tend to fol-low proven commercial formulae and associate themselves with gang activity, drugs, violence, prison time, and conflicts with racist and corrupt police. This script is often at the expense of testifying to more nuanced lived and political realities that remain invis-

ible when subsumed to lucrative tropes. Also, Miller (2007) notes that the celebrity and wealth enjoyed by popular hip-hop artists can entail retreating from their street-borne values, and committing the cardinal rap sin of "selling out." Thus, their authentic dedication to their roots is undermined by the understandable tendency to abandon the circumstances that authorized their success. As counterpoint, Miller (2007) forwards that "Commercialism and the co-option of stereotypes could be seen as just part of being a good hustler, making a living by any means necessary" (p. 430). Whether staged or genuine, what emerges is that authenticity is a central and sought after virtue of hip-hop, and it is intimately bound to and validated by stereotypical representations of the hood and violent black male street criminals.

White hip-hoppers' desire to temporarily enter and participate in the authenticity of the black hood can be framed as virtual tourism. Strain (2003) suggests that the search for authenticity is "the holy grail of tourism" (p. 3), where the tourist is impelled to find and connect with a simpler, purer, and more "real" life to counter the fragmented, mediated, and insulating effects of modernity. However, much like the spurious authenticating strategies in hip-hop, the highly commodified travel industry lead tourists to frequently mistake "a commercialized imitation of [authenticity] for the real thing" (in Strain, 2003, p. 5). Additionally, I would argue that *GTA V* exemplifies the "fragmented, mediated, and insulating" reality the tourist seeks to escape. Xie et al. (2007) theorize that real-world hip-hop sightseers are motivated to visit foundational neighbourhoods in places like Brooklyn and the Bronx on a quest for "the all-pervasive 'keepin' it real' authenticity tenet of hip-hop [that] drives tourists to want to have closer experiences with the context that produced the culture they wish to mimic" (p. 457). However, the temporary, safe, sanitized, and commercially motivated excursion to the hood is directly at odds with the values that lend the hood authenticity.

The ultimate tourist experience. For hip-hop fans, merely encountering locals can be insufficient, as they also express a desire to be the locals. Like offline destinations,

South Los Santos can attract player-tourists who seek "a validating authenticity...But there is a difference between the traditional tourists involved in the 'authentic gaze' voyeuristic gaze on the Other and that of today's hip-hop culture: the hip-hop tourist usually wants to be the Other (Xie et al., 2007, p. 457). Miller (2008a) also observes that *GTA* offers the "ultimate tourist experience: the player can explore an unfamiliar territory and culture while passing as a native" (p. 270). This desire to not only encounter, but inhabit the virtual other can be theorized as an extreme form of "demediated mediation," where a tourist is subject to the illusion that "certain types of experience can strip away the typical mediations that intervene in the experience of reality" (Strain, 2003, p. 3). Meaningful contact and interactions with locals is a hallmark of an authentic tourist experience. However, in a virtual destination, the identity tourist who controls an avatar and thus virtually inhabits the seemingly "demediated" other does not deepen the connection and achieve "the ultimate tourist experience," but rather collapses any prospect for authenticity by virtue of imposing their own will on the virtual other. This tension intensifies when playing *GTA* where, paradoxically, intertextual mediation is leveraged to produce the illusion of an authentic, gritty, and de-mediated reality which takes place entirely in the artifice of a semiotic artifact. In the quest for demediated "contact" the *GTA* player inhabits the seemingly authentic other, but only deepens their investment in a wholly scripted, inauthentic digital avatar that is unadulterated mediation, and thus achieves exactly the opposite of authenticity.

Perhaps part of *GTA V*'s colossal commercial success is due to the virtual hood completing the white hip-hopper fantasy that begins with music and videos, and is further accessorized by the adoption of corresponding codes such as dress, language, and gestures. The staged authenticity of the hip-hop inspired mise-en-scène of South Los Santos is a synthetic destination where the player-identity tourist might paradoxically seek an authentic black hip-hop experience through inauthentic means. As Xie et al. (2007) point out, the search for authenticity deepens and legitimizes the white fan's participation in

the music, and thus "[v]alidating meanings are constructed, and the hip-hop wannabe receives the official honorary stamp of approval gleaned from inhabiting, even for a brief time, the sacred hood of things (p. 457-458). In the literature reviewed, scholars noted that racially segregated communities that persist in the US and many cities around the world are inextricably tied to constructions of race, a condition that extends to the virtual world. Having agency within a mediated space that blurs the lines between reality and fiction, which is at once exotic and familiar, artificial and authentic, contributes to the sense of immersion or presence within the game. The feeling of being there is reinforced by, and, in turn, reinforces existing imaginaries, begging the question of how worldviews are formed and influenced by experiences in a game that offers the thrill of criminality by proxy, often tied to black inner-city neighbourhoods characterized by drug dealers, gangs, and trivialized violence, all of which are presented and experienced as plausible indexes of reality.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed literature that positions *GTA V* as a racialized spatial construct that comprises a place which situates and produces meaningful social activities. In the case of *GTA V*, the mediated cartography that is Los Santos presents a version of Los Angeles that intensifies geographic racial partitions, and fixes black communities according to hip-hop inspired stereotypes to produce a false sense of authenticity for the enjoyment of their white adolescent target audience. This, of course, is motivated by Rockstar's fiscal mandate to sell copies of the game and accumulate capital, at the expense of the black lives being (mis)represented therein. This dynamic can be conceptualized as a neo-imperial knowledge/power discourse where corporation replaces nation, the map and the navigable place are fused, and the formerly colonized other is commodified and bound in a narrow and pernicious field of representation for the consumption of the dominant subject.

Representations of black lives and black neighbourhoods in *GTA V* do not con-

stitute "objective knowledge," but conform to the media generated hood paradigm that perpetuate "imagined geographies," or, as Young (1995) frames it, an "ideological fantasy, with no necessary relation to the actual cultures that it supposedly described" (p. 2). The game ineluctably enmeshes African Americans in a discourse of inner-city decay, poverty, unemployment, crime, gangs, gunplay, loitering, and drugs. Clearly, this rendering is not wholly divorced from reality, but its lack of nuance and adherence to stereotype produces a "'perfected' version of racial logic" (Young, 2016, p. 358). The hood is thus a construct that, in turn, constructs racist discourse, which causes Paperson (2010) to lament that "the ghetto is not where black people live but rather where blackness is contained" (p. 10). Foucault (1973) frames this as a way in which a society contains the other, who "for a given culture, is at once interior and foreign, therefore to be excluded (so as to exorcise the interior danger) but by being shut away (in order to reduce its otherness)" (p. *xxiv*). This formulation may account for how historical colonial tactics of "exclusion, containment, and control" (Paperson, 2010, p. 23) are translated to a postcolonial diasporic fusion of the colony and the metropole. In the US, for example, the other is excluded and contained in the extensive carceral system, primarily populated by black males; this also applies to the ghettos that contain blackness, and to the prevalent media stereotypes that "fix" race in narrow patterns of representation, such as the recurrent trope of the black male criminal gangster who circulates between prison and ghetto. These modes of containment work in conjunction and mutually reinforce each other, and, much like Said's "Oriental other," the black other is "confined to fantasy" (Young, 1995, p. 3) with deleterious material consequences. Constructed racial imaginaries become "very real inequalities by colonialist and/or racist regimes and ideologies…[and] that racial classification may be at several levels a 'delusion' and a myth, [but] we need to remember that it is all too real in its pernicious social effects" (Loomba, 1998, p. 123). Imperial acts of representation are tantamount to and complicit with physical domination. The power to represent the other through the production of specific forms of knowledge robs the sub-

ject of their self-expressive "representational authority" while simultaneously distorting "the images and forms of knowledge about them'" (Nichols, 2010, p. 119). The prevalent narrative of criminalization of the segregated black American ghetto is reinforced by the white male creators and players of *GTA V*, in that the game normalizes media stereotypes that perpetuate negative images and self-image, which legitimizes disproportionate violence and law enforcement, with attendant incarcerations.

Little has been done to study or address this deeply troubling dynamic, and there is no empirical research that investigates how white adolescents engage with racialized spaces in *GTA V* or games like it. This is especially important when one considers that a dominant category may be interpellated into a discourse that may sustain discriminatory social practices. As outlined in the previous chapter, scholars are calling for changes in the industry, but fewer have advocated for pedagogical interventions. Furthermore, when white players, such as the participants in this study, inhabit almost exclusively white communities and have minimal contact with other races or ethnicities, their imaginary of the black other is shaped almost entirely from media, without real world references or counter narratives. Considering the pervasiveness of insular white communities in North America and the unrivalled popularity of *GTA V*, especially with white middle class adolescents, a problematic picture emerges. However, virtually nothing is known specifically about their views, reactions, attitudes, or engagements with race in the game, which only validates the importance of studying how white adolescents respond to racialized representations in video games. The studies that examined how whites adopt black codes, particularly by way of hip-hop, were largely ethnographic and quantitative, and generally yielded rich, situated data. Therefore, an ethnographic approach would be an effective means by which to gather localized data about the imbrications and crossings of white, male adolescent players who engage with race in *GTA V* within an insular white community.

Netcoh (2013) suggests that critical media literacy is a suitable instructional

approach that can leverage the racialized aspects of the game to help white adolescent boys think critically about their own whiteness, as well as the issues and consequences of power and representations of race and place in *GTA V*. This may help denaturalize the patterns inscribed by recurrent depictions of race in media, and become consequent on their interactions in the real world.

Chapter 6: Methodology

Introduction and Research Questions

The literature reviewed substantiates the value of conducting localized research to better understand how white adolescent males encounter and engage with representations of race in a seductive virtual urban environment like Los Santos in *GTA V*. As a teacher-researcher, I am also impelled to couple this trajectory of inquiry with a corresponding pedagogical investigation that implements an instructional strategy to support participants to reflect critically on their gameplay and consumption of problematic racial representations. These entwined objectives are articulated with the following research questions that will, in turn, inform my research design and methodology:

1. How do white adolescent males critically reflect on their engagements with representations of race and racialized places in *Grand Theft Auto V* when they investigate the game as co-researchers within a critical media literacy framework?

2. How do white adolescent males respond when encouraged to interrogate their own participation in a dominant racial category within the instructional context of the study?

In an attempt to answer these questions, this study's instructional design combines aspects of critical ethnography and participatory action research (PAR) to document, discuss, and analyze the behaviours and attitudes that were constructed when ten white male seniors played and studied *GTA V* in the context of a high school class. The student co-re-

searchers learned the rudiments of ethnography with a specific focus on autoethnography to help them think critically and reflectively about their gameplay, while gathering data on their interactions with the game. They played the game in their bedrooms, home offices, and basements, while time in class was spent reading, watching videos, writing, and engaging in roundtable dialogues. During the month-long unit, data was collected from classroom and gameplay footage, fieldnotes, social media posts, and the student-produced autoethnographies and counter-hegemonic media.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the role of the student co-researchers, and associated terminology. The second part outlines the methods employed and their suitability for the study, followed by a description of the study's setting, participants, and procedures. The final section details how data was collected, analyzed, and synthesized.

Reciprocation and Dialogue: Students as Co-Researchers

Partnering with students in a collaborative inquiry that valued process over product advanced both my research and pedagogical objectives. The adaptive, inclusive, and reflexive approach helped capture a localized and emergent story and encouraged students to reflect on their positions and behaviours with a view to adopting more equitable attitudes, actions, and practices. The study not only aimed to extract localized conclusions from the data, but also endeavoured to support the collective growth and learning of the student-teacher research community, who are "affirmed as participants, citizens and subjects" (Reimer & McLean, 2015, p. 87).

The inclusion of student voice and input during much of the process helped to "more accurately reflects the students' own experience than methods based on traditional questionnaires and interviews" (Reimer and McLean, 2015, p. 69). Fielding (2004) cautions that the teacher-researcher is ultimately in control of what is selected or suppressed in the final product and tends to construct that of the less powerful student-subject and "redescribe or reshape the language of the researched" and misrepresent the sentiments or

desires of the co-researcher (p. 298). For this reason, I was guided by Kincheloe's (2011) reminder that "the dignity of those being researched is revered when power is shared in both the application and production of knowledge about them" (Kincheloe, 2011, p. 92). Our reciprocal and dialogic relationship encouraged equitable participation and promoted critical reflection, while exposing and reinscribing classroom power structures. The approach moderated my voice as the more powerful teacher-researcher, a dynamic that was subdued but persisted even within the co-research model. Moreover, positioning the students as ethnographers also proved beneficial to the data collection process, as will be described in greater detail in this chapter's Autoethnography section.

Student-Participant-Research (SPR) & Teacher-Researcher-Participant (TRP). The hybrid roles performed by the study's stakeholders elude discrete assignations like "subject," "participant," "informant," "researcher," "teacher" and "student." The hyphenated terms "student-participant-researcher" (SPR) and "teacher-researcher-participant" (TRP) better encompass the operations of the roles they describe, and will be applied accordingly.

I was positioned as the teacher-researcher-participant (TRP), with the emphasis being on researcher rather than participant. Although the instructional/research environment strove for equity and a joint responsibility in carrying out the research, I played a significantly different role and held a different status than the SPRs. This is consistent with Fielding's (2004) conception of student co-researchers (as opposed to student researchers) where students contribute to the research design but, as teacher-researcher, I retain greater authority by function of my greater experience, deeper personal investment in the project, and expertise. It also acknowledges the reality that, as their teacher, I assess their work and issue grades and feedback, all of which sustain my institutional power/authority. This conditioned relationship is deeply ingrained in our classroom culture and could not, realistically, be suspended or ignored for the duration of the study. However, my class is small and intimate, and the culture of the independent school where I teach

is such that I have a close and conversant relationship with the participating students. Furthermore, my status as principal investigator is warranted because I am a doctoral student and originator of the study who largely analyzed and synthesized the data on my own. I have a much higher stake in the research and thus more motivation and investment than the SPRs. My role as participant stems from the reflective work I undertook during the study. Throughout, I examined my own assumptions, feelings, positions, and practices in my fieldnotes, which helped delineate my position, generate additional data, and occasioned me to reflect on and alter aspects of my practice.

As researchers, the SPRs made suggestions for adjusting the study's design, carried out fieldwork in the game and in paratextual contexts, reported on their positionality and experiences through fieldnotes and autoethnographic reflections, produced multimedia artifacts, and maintained an ongoing dialogue with me and their fellow SPRs. Despite their contributions, their role as "co-researchers" was subsumed to their more salient and dominant status as students and participants, thus accounting for the order of roles in the acronym.

A Hybrid Methodology: Participatory Action Research & (Auto)Ethnography

This section will review how participatory action research, ethnography, and autoethnography were combined to gather data and justify their suitability to respond to the research questions.

Participatory action research. The theoretical and methodological flexibility of the participatory action research framework (PAR) fits well with a study where the teacher-researcher conducts deliberately politicized work with students who also contribute to the research design. Jordan and Kapoor (2016) identify the key characteristics of PAR as non-positivist, openly political, ethically motivated by social justice, "embracing a broad spectrum of theoretical frameworks" (p. 139), and "an amalgam of methodological approaches" (p. 140). In practical terms, PAR makes provisions for teachers to conduct

research in their own classroom (Kincheloe, 2011) and encourages "collective know-ledge-producing practices" (p. 144) that invite students to participate as co-researchers. The approach is particularly well suited to localized, small-scale studies that include input from the communities where they are carried out (Jordan & Kapoor, 2016). Constituents are encouraged to collectively and reflexively interrogate hegemonic power structures, including those of the classroom, the school, and between teacher and students (Jordan & Kapoor, 2016; Kincheloe, 2011).

Placing PAR at the centre of a hybrid ethnographic framework was also useful to capture an emergent, fluid and actively developing research subject. Kincheloe (2011) highlights the flexibility of the approach when he notes that "[t]eachers who engage in critical action research are never certain of the exact path of action they will take as a result of their inquiry" (p. 89). This is particularly apt when the subject is conceived of as "[n]ot a unitary core self, but a matrix of subject positions" (Gale, 2014, p. 671) and is constructed "not in a permanent way, but temporarily, as points of departure for going elsewhere, becoming other" (p. 671). Even in conventional action research, Herr and Anderson (2005) state that the "premise of an evolving methodology is a virtual given" (p. 8), and St. Pierre (2016) contends that researchers in education are encouraged to "invent inquiry in the middle of things" (p. 7). PAR granted the flexibility to alter and/or restructure aspects of the research design while in progress — a crucial allowance to accommodate the input and adjustments proposed by the SPRs at various stages in the process. It also corresponded well with the ethnographic dimension of the study.

Action research is derivative of the ethnographic field (McTaggart, 1991), and the combination of the two approaches is well precedented in educational research (Bath, 2009; Tacchi, Slater & Hearn, 2003). The reflexivity that is integral to PAR is also a central feature of contemporary ethnographic practices and autoethnography, as will be elaborated in the subsequent section (Brown, 2015). Their common aim to observe and document a culture inclusive of the researcher facilitates their conjoined application.

However, the advantage of their hybrid implementation is to leverage the unique methodological features that each approach retains distinct from the other.

Ethnography

The ethnographic method offers a comprehensive and adaptable toolkit to document the nuances of complex emergent discourse. Ethnography in general, and autoethnography in particular, can capture the contradictions, ambiguities and contingencies of lived experiences that are often overlooked or compartmentalized to fit within a neutral and dispassionate tone of traditional scientific discourse of concepts, categories and typologies (Bochner, 2012). The method can shed light on the "messiness" of lived experience that characterized our provisional classroom culture as well as the SPRs' interactions with a complex and open world digital game like *GTA V*.

Video games are frequently studied with an ethnographic framework (Brown, 2015; Boellstorff, 2006; Boellstorff et al., 2012; Delwiche, 2006; Lammes and de Smale, 2018; Taylor, 2009). Brown (2015) argues that ethnography is a prevalent method to conduct research in virtual world and online digital games because of "reasons of embeddedness" (p. 78). The aim of ethnography is not to generalize results but, when applied to games, to "provide nuanced descriptions of the actions of players partaking in a particular type of play" (Brown, 2015, p. 79), while Miller (2007) states that many "ethnographers of popular culture now point to close work in particular locales as the literal grounds for their interpretive conclusions" (p. 405). These views correspond to and support the localized approach of the study as discussed in Chapter 3. The gameworld contexts are performative spaces where players become participant-observers that explore the norms, values, customs and practices in a culture "not of their making" (Miller, 2008a, p. 259). Ethnography can help capture gameplay that is situated, emergent, and localized.

Ethnographic work in digital games has been largely focused on massive-multiplayer games (MMOs) (Brown, 2015; Taylor, 2009). These open world games are popu-

lated by a multitude of avatars controlled by geographically dispersed players whose un-scripted in-game communication, practices, and behaviour constitute fertile ethnographic soil. However, in *GTA V*, players only interact with computer-controlled characters and environments rather than with other player-controlled avatars, as they would in *GTA Online*. Ostensibly, this does not seem to lend itself to the ethnographic convention of employing subjects, research associates, and informants (Miller, 2008b). However, Miller (2008b) frames single-player *GTA* gameplay as a type of ethnographic tourism and extols its potential for ethnographic fieldwork on three premises. First, single-player gameplay is not strictly a solitary activity because millions of other players partake in the game and share their experiences in online forums, discussion boards, and fan sites. Secondly, that disbelief can be suspended and in-game characters can be treated as real characters; a position echoed by Simon (2007). Finally, the game can be studied as an artifact to gain insights into the culture of the game's producers, consumers, and designers. This final point is also supported by Boellstorff (2006) who maintains that, anthropologically, games can be studied "on their own terms, trying to understand their cultures as coherent systems of meaning and practice in themselves" (p. 33). Similarly, Simon (2007) argues that "solo play represents an interaction of the player to the game as culture. That is, the player is interacting with sets of cultural representations, expectations, norms, etc... embedded in the rules, process and narrative of the game and the context of play." This becomes particularly significant during the study as the application of critical pedagogy and critical media literacy by the SPRs unearthed hegemonies and ideologies implicit in the game's production and design.

Miller (2008b) writes that if "if we look at *Grand Theft Auto* through this lens, we might conclude that Rockstar has produced a thought-provoking training simulator for imperialist ethnography" (para 22). She adds that the highly criticized early colonial ethnographic work can be ethically implemented to study the artificial walled-off "cul-ture garden" of a digital game. Miller (2008b) also adds that, because "the ethnograph-

er's subjectivity is the central organizing principle of 'the field'" (para 16), any cultural setting being studied is no less a conceptual construct than a digital game environment, which supports a reflexive approach like autoethnography to study a single-player game like *GTA V*.

Autoethnography. Autoethnography fuses the conventions of autobiography, memoir, and ethnography, to report on a culture or social milieu from an individual's embodied perspective (Bochner, 2012; Borchard, 2015; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). It is a personalized account that combines the outward look to culture and identity espoused by the ethnographer with reflexive introspection by the researcher to examine "the conditions of the culture in which the self is located" (Banks & Banks, 2000, p. 235). The method has been critiqued for being conjectural, narcissistic, self-indulgent, indistinguishable from a personal essay and lacking validity and rigour (Banks & Banks, 2000; Borchard, 2015; Sundén, 2012). That said, the criticism is significantly rooted in the methodology's outward lack of scientific objectivity, which becomes a questionable epistemological position. I reject a positivist stance in favour of a subjective approach that "emphasizes the utility of narratives and vocabularies rather than the objectivity of law and theories" (Rorty, 1982 in Bochner 2012, p. 157). This allows for the observation of the elusive complexities of a radically subjective fluid identity whose emergence defies essentialist and binary constructions. The delegitimization of positivistic objectivity authorizes the emotive, personal and subjective observations and responses that characterize some forms of ethnography and autoethnography. This perspective privileges "personal, poetic and political, rather than epistemological, justifications" (Barker & Jane, 2016, p. 37). In defense of the approach, Bochner (2012) questions "why data tend to be privileged over stories, variables over episodes, and typologies over concrete details and plot line of lived experience" (p. 158). Consequently, the data collected from this study will be used to shape into stories and construct narratives that emerge and coalesce from diverse sources.

Having SPRs undertake fieldwork that is synthesized and reported within an autoethnographic framework was an enormously beneficial way to gain insight into their gameplay experiences. First, the meaning of gameplay must be anchored in how the player frames and positions their own interactions with the game. This is supported by Squire (2008), who suggests that the "specific meanings of any play experience are negotiated within interpretive communities, which overlap and extend into broader cultural discourses. To understand the meanings of gameplay, within both open-ended and other forms of games, we can't just look at the rules; we need to look at players' performances and understand their understandings of them (p. 24). Moreover, Johnson and Vasudevan (2012) observe that media deconstruction activities often "fail to account for differential frames of reference, cultural histories, and personal experiences that make students' textual understandings distinct" (p. 35). This pitfall was significantly curtailed by encouraging SPRs to unfold their positionality through the course of surveys, fieldwork and their final autoethnographies. Secondly, games are designed for players which grants them some legitimate claims to the status of "natives" and culturally relevant agents of the environment they are simultaneously "invading" or "colonizing." Therefore, as the sole living actors in *GTA*'s in-game cultural sphere, they are not only valid ethnographic subjects, but also uniquely situated to conduct research on their own practices and behaviours which collapses the binary distinction between participant and observer. Brown (2015) contends that the separation of the researcher from the research in ethnography is unrealistic and unfeasible, and obfuscates the power dynamics that inevitably informs the work. Reflexivity can help mitigate the artifice of objective detachment, which is why it is a common feature of anti-positivist ethnographic practices. Autoethnography marks the most reflexive ethnographic mode, as the researcher is the research subject and thus "[a]cknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist" (Ellis et al. 2011, in Borchard, 2015, p. 2). Lammes and de Smale (2018) favour autoethnography

to undertake a postcolonial critique of gameplay because they see it as an effective means to better understand the embodied experience of gameplay. Finally, a reflexive appraisal of one's own gameplay can translate to real world changes by connecting gameplay to the player's life outside the game. For example, Borchard (2015), who carried out an auto-ethnographic study of his own experience with *GTA V*, reports that it occasioned him to consider how "my gameplay and life 'beyond' game are inextricably interconnected and mutually informing" (Borchard, 2015, p. 2). Similarly, Sundén (2012) wrote an autoeth-nography about being introduced to World of Warcraft by a lover and describes how the game inscribed itself on her mind and body causing her to "carry the field with me every-where" (p. 167). By desegregating the game from the physical world, the SPRs were occasioned to better connect their gameplay to their lives outside the game.

It is important to remember that an autoethnography produced by a high school student should not be held to the same standards and outcomes as those authored by a graduate student or a seasoned scholar. Fear and sensitivity to emotional, sexual, and psychological exposure is heightened in a high school setting. A gay student who has not come out to his peers or a student who likes to play video games while high on pot may be reluctant to confess these positions. Efforts were made to encourage transparency, and many SPRs shared some very personal experiences, but the confessional aspect of the form was mitigated by the setting and demographic. Secondly, Ellis et al. (2011) state that autoethnography distinguishes itself from autobiography because it is not merely telling a story, but it is a narrative supported by methodological and theoretical tools. The SPRs did not have the academic experience, focus, or resources to structure their work with a sophisticated scholarly framework. They were instructed in the bare-bones rudiments of critical theory, but most turned to "hegemonic masculinity" as their "theoretical lens," and their accounts careened towards the "naturalistic" end of the spectrum, which is still valuable since they are primarily research subjects. Finally, they were given the option to document their experience through diverse means, including video, pictures, and audio;

however, most chose to default to written accounts. The flexibility in response media allow for students "to describe and document issues and concepts in their own terms, with texts that might surprise or disrupt what projects and content are about" (Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012, p. 40). They are also more likely to provide more emotional insight, veracity and detail when empowered to articulate their stories through means where they feel capable and proficient (Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012), which often proved to be the case. The occasion for the SPRs to reflect on their gameplay through fieldnotes and videos with an emphasis on issues of representation was supported by an instructional design informed by a critical media literacy framework.

A Political Education: Popular Culture and Critical Media Literacy

The theories and practice of critical media literacy involve the examination and exposure of manifestations of authority, hierarchy, and power in culture. Garcia, Seglem, and Share (2013) define critical media literacy as a type of literacy that "includes different forms of mass communication, popular culture, and new technologies and also deepens literacy education to critically analyze relationships between media and audiences, information, and power" (p. 111). Critical media literacy also fits well with critical pedagogy in that Kellner & Share (2007) recommend it be carried out as a "participatory, collaborative project" (p. 17) between teacher and students. This not only poses a challenge to the authority of teachers, traditional academic disciplines and elitist scholarly institutions, but also demotes the privileged position of the printed book and the sanctity of canonical texts. The dissolution of the high/low, elite/mass cultural binaries legitimate the serious study of popular culture (Hall, 1996b), including but not limited to film, television, comic books, advertising, social media, and, of particular relevance to this research, video games. These texts retain a degree of sophistication that "necessitates sensitivity to different readings, interpretations, perceptions of the complex images, scenes, narratives, meanings, and messages of media culture, which in its own ways is as complex and challenging to decipher as book culture" (Luke, 1997 in Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 17). The

erasure of the distinctions between high and low texts has been criticized, particularly in regard to evaluating popular texts as commodities or aesthetic products (see Barker & Jane, 2016 for a good overview); however, this does not negate the political and pedagogical value of this line of study.

Popular symbolic cultural products are grounds of inquiry by which to examine the relationship between culture, power, knowledge and authority and the social context in which they are produced, consumed, and studied (Giroux, 1994; Hall, 1996). The use of popular media texts as valid sites of scholarly and pedagogical work mark "a radical shift in the construction of knowledge and the ways in which knowledge is read, received and consumed" (Giroux, 1994, p. 301). Supporters of critical media education contend that schools are ideal sites to interrogate media representations of the social world and "empower youth to both critically read and produce their own media texts" (Netcoh, 2013 p. 14). Media texts can be studied for how they reproduce dominant ideologies, but also for how they can be leveraged to produce counter-hegemonic in contestation (Borchard, 2015). This approach is important to foster critical thought around media consumption habits, but it also leverages relevant material for learning. The pedagogical integration of popular media texts in the curriculum helps instill a "sense of agency in students based on a commitment to changing oppressive contexts by understanding the relationships of power that inform them" (Giroux, 1994, p. 297). Critical media literacy, then, can be framed as political activism, particularly when it delves into interrogating power structures and into fostering awareness around important social issues such as race.

However, the deliberate political agenda of critical media literacy can be critiqued as a type of political indoctrination in a climate where teachers are encouraged to remain ostensibly neutral or undeclared in their political inclinations. Giroux (1994) addresses this issue by distinguishing between "political education" and "politicizing education." Rather than forwarding a dogmatic political agenda, a political education is informed by the principles of democracy, and aims to create an equitable, reflexive, and inquisitive

learning environment underscored by a sense of civic responsibility that interrogates oppressive forms of power. This political position is also what distinguishes critical media literacy and its interrogation of power and dominant ideologies from the relativist and apolitical notions that typically characterize media education (Kellner & Share, 2007).

The approach not only involves the analysis of cultural products and practices but, in the spirit of praxis, also encourages students to produce counter-hegemonic media and messages as artifacts of critical analysis to contend with issues of gender, race, class, and power. Having students analyze a popular video game like *GTA V* by means of this method offers the possibility for a teacher researcher "to take up the relationship among culture, power, and identity in ways that grapple with the complexity of youth and the intersections of race, class, and gender formations" (Giroux, 1994, p. 296). Students rework or respond to media texts, such as *GTA V*, to present a counter-narrative that empowers them as producers who can take action on the issues that they critique (Kellner & Share, 2007). This approach can empower marginalized or misrepresented people and groups, but it can also allow for a dominant group, like the white male adolescent SPRs, to critically reflect on broader social realities from a standpoint of actionable complicity. The study's instructional design follows the critical media literacy prescription that students should be exposed to critical readings, structured discussions and facilitate productions that reveal the potentially damaging implicit power structures and knowledge assumptions embedded in media texts (Luke, 1994 as cited in Kellner & Share, 2007). The method is multifaceted and can include a multiperspectival critical approach employing various technologies and yielding diverse responses, with the aim of transforming education and furthering democratic society. Everett & Watkins (2008) claim that the method is a "form of cultural resistance" (p. 158) that can "build new learning environments and modes of digital literacy" (p. 159). Modding, repurposing, and producing counter-hegemonic media have made "video games a form of culturally transformative play" (Everett & Watkins, 2008, p. 158). Some examples of media students can produce as a culmination of their

missions include, but are not limited to, machinimas, comic books, posters, screenshot photo albums, photo essays, PSAs, podcasts, and music.

The Setting of the Study

The school. The study was carried out at a small, all-boys independent day school located in the downtown core of a large Canadian metropolis. Physically, the school is nestled in a single city block in a leafy residential neighbourhood. It has limited outdoor facilities due to spatial constraints, and leases pools, fields, and skating rinks in the surrounding neighbourhood. The predominantly white student population hovers around 440 and is divided between a junior school (Grades 3-8) and a senior high school (Grades 9-12) which are housed in two separate buildings. Both sections of the school share the cafeteria, the gym, and co-participate in some school assemblies, but they generally operate as distinct and separate entities. The school runs a well-supported 1:1 laptop program and has a strategic commitment to innovation to stay competitive with other independent schools. Despite some curricular emphasis on the arts (particularly music), most graduates apply to and enter career-oriented postsecondary programs in finance, business, and engineering at top tier Canadian, US, and UK universities.

The school strives to foster a nurturing environment with a view to produce kind, courteous and socially responsible young men. To that end, faculty are encouraged to maintain close and friendly relationships with students. The faculty regularly meets to discuss student progress and teachers are generally knowledgeable of their students' social and familial circumstances. Teachers will have commonly taught students in multiple classes over the course of their studies and are heavily involved in extracurricular activities, which is a requirement to teach at the school. Faculty members coach, run clubs, chaperone service trips, participate in community service initiatives, supervise social events, and lead advisor groups, leadership programs, and outdoor education events. Finally, teachers are in close and regular contact with the students' families, and interact with them in a series of formal and informal curricular and social events throughout

the year. These conditions produce a culture where the barriers that typically separate the lives of teachers and students are much lower, and thus an atmosphere prevails that makes allowances for and encourages boys to be open and communicative. This aspect of the cultural context is vital to consider for this study, as it partially accounts for the willingness with which participants discuss problematic, controversial, and/or personal experiences while playing the game with me, their teacher.

The classroom. The classroom where the sessions took place was a small, ground-floor room at the extreme west end of the building. A single large window and fluorescent tubes combined to create a bright and variable blend of natural and artificial light. The room was primarily used by the English department, so the three bookshelves spread around the room included an assortment of novels, style guides, graphic novels, and other literature related books. The teacher's desk (where the camera was placed) occupied the north-east corner, beside the large north-facing window that overlooks a tiny field of artificial turf where the younger students like to play sports at recess. It wasn't unusual for the occasional soccer ball or football to hit the shatter-proof window during class. An interactive whiteboard and projector are mounted on the wall on the other side of the desk. Exemplary student work and English-themed posters decorated parts of the cream-coloured walls.

There were enough desks and chairs in the room to accommodate up to 25 students, and their arrangements alternated between rows or a horseshoe formation depending on the teacher's preference. Since there were only ten students in my class, most of the desks remained unused. Every session began with the SPRs rearranging their desks in a loose circle close to the front of the room.

Despite its most frequent use by several English teachers, the room also housed some French and business classes and, consequently, no teacher took ownership of the space. A scattered array of extra handouts, binders, workbooks, and other miscellany were dispersed in otherwise unoccupied surfaces around the classroom. This, along with

the haphazard and ever-changing arrangement of desks, lent the room an aura of transience and neglect. The cream walls, identical student desks and chairs and too-bright lights also wove in a subtle atmosphere of institutional sterility.

Participants

The study was carried out with a convenience sample of ten students enrolled in an elective Grade 12 class offered by the English Department entitled Literature in the Digital Age. The locally-developed course invited students to undertake the analysis of digital texts and included the study of video games, environmental storytelling, transmedia, hypertext, and interactive fiction. The class was in its inaugural year, which may partially account for its relatively low enrollment. Electives, especially in Grade 12, are often chosen based on word of mouth and this class was an unknown entity during the course selection period.

When surveyed, five of the participants said they took the class because they were in my Media Studies course the year before and wanted to continue along the same vein, four liked the subject matter, and one was forced to take it due to a scheduling conflict. All students in the class opted to participate in the study and understood that, as co-researchers, they would be involved in the investigative process.

SPRs by the numbers. Ostensibly, all the participants are white, upper middle class males who were either 17 or 18 years old at the time of the study. Eight identified as white, heterosexual males, one as a white male, and one never identified his race or gender. The demographic homogeneity of the group was a convenient coincidence, but also a reflection of the larger population of the school which is predominantly white, affluent, and male.

Seven of the ten students would continue to study humanities in university, which is non-representative of their cohort. A minority of every graduating cohort enter postsecondary humanities programs, while the majority take math and science courses to prepare

for consequent university programs in finance, computer science, engineering, pre-med, etc. Besides appealing to their interest in the humanities, the SPRs enrolled in the class may have seen it as a less rigorous option than taking science and math courses. The ten SPRs represent a range of academic achievement from some of the strongest students in the cohort to a few with inconsistent work habits who, despite being bright and capable, tended to fulfill the minimum requirements for advancement. All ten graduated in good standing and proceeded to attend Canadian universities.

The SPRs all reported active and fulfilling social lives, and only Carson stated that he does not really listen to music. The rest reported versions of listening to a variety of music, and nine specified rap and/or hip-hop as a preferred genre.

Gameplay histories and habits. All of the SPRs had played video games prior to the study. Nine stated that they played for "fun," "entertainment," or when bored. Decker and Davis also added that they like to experience and explore "new worlds," while Clinton specified that he liked to "experience scenarios in which I otherwise would not experience." Six stated that they played either "daily" or "several times a week," two played "several times a month" and two others reported that they played "rarely" and "never." Roy wrote that he played "rarely" because he was not allowed to own a console and Perth, who has played video games, including a previous instalment of *GTA*, said that he "never" played because he prefers face-to-face socialization. Only Milton, Joshua, and Davis identified as "gamers."

Seven of the participants played *GTA V* prior to the study, while two had played a previous version of the franchise. Roy, the sole SPR without direct experience playing any version of *GTA*, had watched a friend play through most of *GTA V*. In sum, all ten participants, including Perth, who has a limited interest in video games, had substantial exposure to at least one title in the *GTA* franchise. Participants were not selected for their experience playing the game, so the fact that they all had experienced some version of the game informally speaks to its prevalence with adolescent males.

Eight participants stated that they would continue to play the game after the study was over. One would no longer play because he had to return the console he borrowed to play the game, and Davis reported that he prefers to play other genres of games.

Foot off the gas. The study took place while the SPRs were in their last month of their graduating year, a unique transitional period that is characterized by a perceptible shift in attitude and mindset. They had all secured university acceptances, graduation was around the corner and they commemorated the imminent shedding of authority with the annual traditions of grad skip day and grad prank, two licensed ceremonial affronts to the powers that had governed them for most of their conscious lives. Most relevant to present purposes, as they approached the end, many reduced their efforts and dispensed with non-essential (not graded) work. Meanwhile, the workload at the end of the year is more demanding than ever with summative end-of-year projects and final exams.

Predictably, many SPRs reported a diminished commitment to school, but added that they felt stressed from the pressures of the mounting workload. Roy admitted, rather thematically, that he'd "kind of taken [his] foot off the gas," a sentiment shared by many of his classmates. In a post to the study's Facebook group, Clinton cites the tension between work and inertia as grounds for an assignment extension: "Biggest assignments and exams coming up. I feel like before the last few weeks I had sorta slipped in school because the marks had already been submitted to University *[sic]*, so I haven't been trying as much. But now I've had to pick it up so yeah it's been a lot of work *[sic]*." A more emphatic Joshua confessed that "At the moment I am very unmotivated and honestly very fed up with school for the most part (except [our class], obviously) mainly due to the fact that I have been accepted into university and have no reason to continue putting in a lot of effort." Elgin rarely completed his work at the best of times, and Milton generally did as little as possible to get by. Only Carson, Decker and Marlowe demonstrated consistent work habits to the end.

This end-of-school mindset impacted the study in a number of ways. First, the

SPRs were not deeply invested in altering the proposed research model. It was easier to adopt the existing framework than to think about how to change it. Secondly, many of their fieldnote activities were not completed at home, which led to a few instances of allotting time in class to update their notes. Thirdly, every student submitted a final autoethnography, but Roy's and Milton's were essentially a patchwork of unsynthesized notes they'd already written. Finally, as I will expand upon below, the counter-hegemonic media they were asked to produce was generally poorly executed or not completed.

Table 3.1: Summary of participants.

Name	Self-identified race	Self-identified gender	Hours of *GTA* played prior to study	Played any *GTA* games prior to study?	Hours of *GTA V* played for the study	How many video games played to date	How often they play video games	Self-identified "gamer"
Carson	White	"Male"	Yes (25-50)	Yes	8-10	6-20	Several times a month	No
Clinton	White	Hetero	Yes (25-50)	Yes	10	50-100	Daily	No
Davis	White	Hetero	No (0)	No	6	20-50	Daily	Yes
Decker	White	Hetero	No (0)	Yes	15	6-20	Several times a month	No
Elgin	White	Hetero	No (0)	Yes	25-35	20-50	Several times a week	No
Joshua	White	Hetero	Yes (100-200)	Yes	15	20-50	Daily	Yes
Marlowe	White	Hetero	Yes (50-100)	Yes	4-5	20-50	Several times a week	No
Milton	White	Hetero	Yes	Yes	15-20	6-20	Several times a week	Yes
Perth	N/A	N/A	Yes (1-10)	Yes	12	1-5	Never	No
Roy	White	Hetero	Yes (1-10)	Yes	15	6-20	Rarely	No

My Position

I have been a classroom teacher for 20 years and, in that time, have taught all ages between Grades 6-12. I am a second career teacher without formal certification who first entered the profession by accident when an unusual set of circumstances brought me to an independent co-ed school in South America, where I taught for two years. Following that, I moved back to Canada and have taught humanities to middle and high school boys at the same independent school for the past 18 years. I've played board games, card games and video games my whole life, with a preference for RPGs, MMOs, and strategy games. A few years prior to this project, I played *GTA V* for a few hours but did not particularly enjoy it and would not have played again if not for the study. *GTA V* is the only instalment of the franchise I have played.

I am passionate about the material I teach, and have always worked to maintain friendly, respectful, and genuine relationships with my students. In class, I freely share many aspects of my personal life, including my liberal political views, and anecdotes about my home life and youth that are not always flattering. I value and learn from my students, and have frequently changed my mind, my views, and my position based on dialogues with them. Consequently, my students tend to see me as open-minded and generally non-judgmental. This atmosphere, along with the culture of the school and the nature of the subjects I teach (literature and media), cultivate an environment where students, particularly seniors, feel comfortable discussing a wide range of topics with me, including drugs, alcohol, sexuality, and violence.

The study was structured to encourage equitable dialogic participation, and I informally observed that there was a better balance and distribution of oral contributions during our discussions; however, I am loud and my untempered enthusiasm for any given topic can lead to my dominating the content and direction of a classroom discussion. Even in the more equitable circumstances of the study, I continued to be a driving force in many of our conversations.

Although I identify as a white, heterosexual male, there are factors that complicate the implications of this identity. My parents immigrated to Canada from South America and divorced when I was six. My father is genetically half Jewish but non-practicing, and my mother is adamantly anti-religious, and thus I had almost no exposure to religion in my early life. Up until the divorce, we lived in remote mining communities in Guinea, Labrador, and Quebec, and I was variably exposed to English, French, and Spanish. I spoke all three in my youth, but none well, and thus never had a mother tongue.

After my parents separated, I was raised by a single working mother in a small townhouse and only saw my father on summer holidays and every second Christmas, so I had few immediate male role models. During this time up until middle school, I struggled with and even hated school and received very little support at home or from my teachers. That experience left me with a lifelong antipathy towards schools and formal learning, an attitude that persists and continues to guide my practice. My experiments in the last decade with technology, digital games, pervasive games, location-based games, and game design are impelled to make learning engaging, relevant, individuated, and dynamic. I strive to contribute to a vision of learning that I wish I had experienced when I was in school, and my doctoral work and this study are directly aligned with that trajectory.

Growing up, I never comfortably identified as "white" or even "Canadian." Due to my life circumstances, I inhabited diverse notions of nation, race, and language, and in every case related to these as an outsider, even in regard to English, whose language and literature has been the primary concern of my academic and professional life. My students, by contrast, outwardly represent the Canadian Anglo establishment by which I felt "othered" as the child of immigrants who were not university educated, spoke with accents, ate "weird" food and, especially in the case of my mother, did not abide by the protocols and codes of what I perceived to be normative "Canadian" behaviour. The lives of middle class white Canadians were the shiny, distant, and inaccessible reality on the other side of the glass; a privilege to which I felt I had no claim or possibility of partici-

pation.

I both reinforce and subvert masculine stereotypes. On one hand, I am tall, loud, watch sports, and abide by fairly traditional masculine hairstyles and dress codes. On the other, I'm communicative and comfortable opening up and articulating my emotions, I was a bookish kid who didn't play sports, I sit with my legs crossed, I write and read poetry, and I don't drive or have much of an interest in cars. I've never considered myself "macho" and, like many other aspect of my life, I both participate in and feel like an outsider to heteronormative masculinity.

As the gatekeeper of grades that are instrumental for university admissions, I wield authority over my students and, by extension, their families; however, a strong undercurrent of power runs counter to this. As a teacher in an elite independent school, I can be seen to operate in the tradition of the domestic tutor in the aristocratic household, where I am beholden to the parents who ultimately pay my salary. My students are aware that significant power rests with their parents, and they understand that they generally enjoy greater social status and mobility, better economic resources, and more life opportunities than their teacher. However, it bears emphasis that the prevailing atmosphere at the school is one of courtesy and respect and, in my years teaching there, I have rarely encountered an attitude of entitlement. Rather than resent my students for their apparent lives of privilege and establishment, I have only ever viewed them as well-intentioned young men making their way in the world and contending with the struggles, uncertainties, and insecurities that beset us all to varying degrees. I feel a genuine affection for the young people in my life, and have always tried to support them not only academically, but also socially and emotionally.

Procedures

Securing approval. I first met with the school principal to seek approval for the study in October, 2016, while I was in the midst of writing my research proposal. Under-

standably, he was hesitant to endorse an initiative that would deliberately expose students to a notorious, violent, and controversial video game. Fortunately, he was convinced by the value of the research, kept an open mind, and agreed to consult with other school administrators. He asked that I explain the project to the Headmaster, as well as solicit feedback from the Dean of Student Life and the Curriculum Leader. Over the next two weeks I argued my case with all levels of administration, all of whom were cautious but receptive.

Three weeks after the initial proposal, I was notified that I had formal approval to carry out the project at school as long as I fulfilled three caveats: 1) that all participating students meet *GTA V*'s recommended minimum age requirement of 17, 2) that the parents approve, and 3) that students be invited to opt in rather than opt out, and that those who opt out would be provided with a suitable alternative. All of these conditions were met.

I had already briefly introduced the premise of the study to the parents on our curriculum night in mid-September, and then informally provided more details to the families who attended parent-teacher interviews in November. In neither instance did I encounter any visible resistance, or even apprehension. The two families who did allow their sons to have video game consoles asked a few additional questions, but expressed their support. Overall, reactions ranged from what appeared to be indifference to a few expressions of enthusiasm for the project. In conversations with the SPRs, only three reported that they had any kind of discussion about the study with their parents before the informed consent forms were signed. Of those three, only Roy, whose parents are wary of video games, wrote that he had to "convince" his parents to allow him to participate in the study. The SPRs were all 17 and 18 years old and on the cusp of graduating from high school and departing for university, so the parents were not overly concerned, and presumably deferred the decision of participation to their sons.

The research committee approved my proposal in February 2017, and all pertinent documents were submitted to the Institutional Review Board at York University shortly

thereafter. Once it passed the IRB in April, parents were sent a formal letter [Appendix A] introducing the project, and an accompanying informed consent form. The letter outlined the project and extended an invitation to a face-to-face information night which, in the end, no parent requested to attend. SPRs were given the informed and minor consent forms [Appendices B & C, respectively] in class, which was read aloud and any outstanding questions were answered. The parents and SPRs all signed and returned the forms promptly and all parties agreed to participate.

Groundwork and preliminaries. Some preliminary groundwork was prepared during the two classes that led up to the formal launch of the study. I provided the SPRs with printed copies of my research proposal, outlined its aims and objectives, established the collaborative and open ethos of the project, discussed their role as co-researchers, and solicited feedback throughout. On the technical side, we gauged levels of proficiency to capture narrated gameplay footage, screenshots, and the use of the in-game cinematic feature that lets players produce films using *GTA V* characters and settings. The group approved of the plan for a closed Facebook group, whose operations will be described below. Finally, we determined how each SPR could gain access to the game and how many hours should be reasonably played per week during the study. Six SPRs already had the game on various consoles and PCs, while the other four either borrowed or bought copies. The two participants who didn't own consoles borrowed them from friends. In the end, the ten participants played *GTA V* on a patchwork of five different platforms, namely: PS3, PS4, Xbox 360, Xbox One, and PC.

Launch. The study took place from April 25 to May 25, 2017, and spanned twelve 75-minute classes that comprised a unit of study described as a critical analysis of *Grand Theft Auto V* as a media text. The writing, videos, annotated readings, Facebook group posts, and counter-hegemonic media produced by the SPRs were assessed to fulfill the provincial government's requirement for a summative activity worth 30% of their overall course mark.

The unit's design and delivery, however, were inextricably bound to its status as a research project. In their capacity as researchers, SPRs were consulted for feedback on assessment, course content, and research design. Graded instructional tasks such as keeping fieldnotes and writing autoethnographies doubled both as graded assignments and data-generating research instruments. I was more interrogative than usual, and the SPRs were asked to delve into and discuss aspects of their personal lives. Many of the readings focused on research as their subject matter, and the surveys, the ever-present camera, and the requirement to submit all work as data for further analysis kept research at the fore. The SPRs learned as much about research and attendant methods and theories as they did from positioning themselves critically while playing and discoursing on *GTA V*.

The twelve sessions. Each of the twelve classes followed a similar template: we sat in the haphazard circle of desks, read scholarly articles, and discussed a wide range of topics that broadly and narrowly connected to *GTA V* and/or the readings. The group was small enough that no hands were required to be raised to request participation, and conversation flowed naturally and respectfully with very few exceptions. The SPRs played *GTA V* at home, logging an average gameplay time of approximately 14 hours each over a 30 day period. Handouts, class outlines, announcements, assignments and copies of the readings were posted on our school LMS [Appendix I]. Each session, two SPRs volunteered to share note-taking duties. The notes were placed on a Google Doc and shared with me and their fellow SPRs. Every SPR took at least one turn taking notes, and a few generous souls volunteered twice.

Each session proceeded more or less along similar lines, but it would be helpful to highlight some specifics to lend a sense of the flow of readings and activities. What follows is a brief schedule that summarizes the key activities undertaken in each of the twelve sessions.

Class 1 (April 25): Introduced the study and administered the two parts of the preliminary survey [Appendices D & E]. Before completing the surveys, which consumed

most of the class, SPRs were asked to provide feedback on the questions and adjustments were made accordingly.

Class 2 (April 27): After ensuring that all surveys were completed and submitted, the SPRs were introduced to ethnographic methods by reading and annotating Hoey's (2014) "A Simple Introduction to the Practice of Ethnography and Guide to Ethnographic Fieldnotes." SPRs agreed to play one hour of *GTA V* and take fieldnotes or make a video on 10 minutes of play. At my request, Marlowe set up the Facebook group called "*GTA V* Study" and invited the others.

Class 3 (May 1): Only two SPRs had their fieldnotes/videos complete, while two did not have a chance to play the required hour because they had yet to obtain the game, so I gave them time in class to complete the fieldnotes. We spent about 40 minutes discussing their initial gameplay, and the end of the session was devoted to reading and annotating the ethnography article.

Class 4 (May 3): Most of the class was used to finish reading the ethnography article. SPRs discussed further gameplay experiences towards the end of the session. The first prompt was posted to the Facebook group [Appendix F].

Class 5 (May 5): Introduced the notions of hegemony, power and hegemonic masculinity with a *10 Minute Philosophy Video* entitled "Hegemony," Karetihi's (2014) "Hegemonic Masculinity in Media Contents," and a handout entitled *The Male Construction: Hegemonic Masculinity.* About 20 minutes of class time was devoted to discussing recent gameplay experiences by various SPRs. SPRs were asked to take fieldnotes on their gameplay with a focus on hegemonic masculinity. The second prompt was posted to Facebook.

Class 6 (May 9): Spent the entire class reading, annotating and discussing Borchard's (2015) "Super Columbine Massacre RPG! and *Grand Theft Auto*ethnography." The third prompt was posted to Facebook.

Class 7 (May 11): SPRs used the first 20 minutes of class to write fieldnotes on their last gameplay session before continuing to read Borchard (2015). Spent the last part of class discussing race, gender and sexuality. Assigned 300-500 words of fieldnotes on gameplay. The fourth prompt was posted to Facebook.

Class 8 (May 15): The first part of class was devoted to catching up with their writing. Spent the rest of the class completing Borchard's (2015) while discussing violence and identity. The fifth prompt was posted to Facebook.

Class 9 (May 17): Briefly outlined the structure for their final assessment and reviewed the requirements for their counter-hegemonic media assignment. We viewed examples of counter-hegemonic media, including *FF Gaiden: Alternative* and examples of how fans repurpose their own stories using *GTA V* screenshots. SPRs discussed how they like to roleplay in *GTA V* towards the last part of the session. The sixth prompt was posted to Facebook.

Class 10 (May 24): Many SPRs were absent and most of the class was used to discuss gameplay. The seventh and final prompt was posted to Facebook.

Class 11 (May 26): The session was spent reading, annotating, and discussing Leonard's (2003) "Live in your world, play in ours: Race, video games, and consuming the other." I clarified the requirements for counter-hegemonic media, and reviewed and solicited feedback on the post-survey.

Class 12 (May 30): During the final session SPRs worked on their autoethnographies and completed the two-part post-survey [Appendices G & H]. The session was cut short due to a "grad prank" parade in progress during class.

Data Collection

In addition to the classroom videos and SPR class notes, raw data was gathered from various other sources. These included pre- and post- surveys, Facebook group posts, my fieldnotes, the SPRs' fieldnotes, final autoethnographies, the counter-hegemonic

media produced by the students at the end of the study, and gameplay videos. Each of these elements will be explained in further detail in the section that follows.

Class videos and transcripts. Prior to the start of each class, I placed a camcorder on a low tripodon on the unoccupied teacher's desk, positioned to frame the improvised circle of desks that we arranged for each session. Seating wasn't prescribed, but we self-ordered into a loosely maintained seating plan with some variability due to late arrivals, absences, and capricious preferences. The position of the camera occasionally led to filming the backs of certain SPRs, which sometimes made it difficult to ascertain what they were saying, and impossible to observe their facial expressions. However, there was enough variation in the seating and camera position that it was rare for an SPR to be affected more than twice. After each class, I transferred the contents of the memory chip to a password protected folder and erased the chip. The videos were also backed up to a private YouTube account, which also housed the SPRs' gameplay videos. The final 30 minutes of classes 9 and 12 were not recorded because of a memory issue with the chip. The following summer, I wrote faithful and detailed transcripts for all recorded material.

Presurvey. The presurvey administered in the first class was divided into two parts. The first, a questionnaire entitled "Video Game Personal History Form" [Appendix D] was created on Google Forms and was used to gauge each SPRs relationship with video games in general and the *GTA* franchise specifically. The second part of the survey [Appendix E] posed open-ended questions about their life at school, social life, music preferences, etc. The SPRs had the option to respond to the second part in video or writing. Only three SPRs opted for video.

Fieldnotes and gameplay videos. SPRs were given the option to write fieldnotes or produce gameplay and response videos but, as in the case of the presurvey, a minority opted for videos. For the most part, the SPRs' fieldnotes were not extensive, and were generally fulfilled to the letter of the assignments. Gameplay videos were a challenge for those on consoles, as there is no easy way to film in-game, so most of the videos pro-

duced involved setting-up a separate camera and filming the screen where the game was being played. SPRs submitted all their fieldnotes and gameplay videos as they were being produced, and these were securely stored. I also took fieldnotes during the study, and included them in my analysis.

Facebook group. Since the study, Facebook has increasingly fallen out of favour with adolescents and has come under larger public scrutiny for its data sharing practices. However, our private *GTA V* Study Facebook group created a sprawling record of emergent discussions. In many ways, the group operated in the dialogic spirit of our irregular circle of desks and extended the conversation to social media. The site was filled with videos, screenshots, quotes, and memes, which invoked Paolo Freire's practice and recommendation to use culturally relevant artifacts to incite meaningful dialogue.

Formally, I posted 7 separate prompts [Appendix F] over a month that ranged from requesting that SPRs post screenshots with accompanying descriptions to inviting them to discuss a citation from a paper read in class. Most SPRs responded to most of the prompts for which they received points that would eventually account for 5% of their final grade. Informally, SPRs posted unsolicited videos and newspaper articles on subjects relating directly or indirectly to the game. These included interviews with hip-hop stars, *Game Theorist* videos, newspaper articles, and the infamous *Hugh Mungus* YouTube video. The free and equitable flow of information in the space emphasized "that participants are the ones with the knowledge and expertise and they are teaching each other and the researcher about their own reality" (Reimer & McLean, 2015, p. 76). Many of the posts were also referenced during in-class discussions.

Autoethnographies. At the end of the study, each of the SPRs wrote a structured 1,500 word autoethnography. They were provided with an outline of what to include and how to structure their final report, and were encouraged to draw heavily from their fieldnotes and cite scholarly sources. In most cases, the autoethnographies were a cleaned-up synthesis of their fieldnotes.

Every SPR submitted a completed autoethnography which was marked with a rubric and returned to them. They also submitted digital copies so that I would have records of their work for later coding and analysis. Unfortunately, Marlowe's digital file was corrupted and by the time I realized this and contacted him for a new version, he had sold his computer, had no backup, and couldn't find the hard copy. This was particularly unfortunate because he had submitted one of the richest and most detailed autoethnographies in the class.

Counter-hegemonic media. The completion of the counter-hegemonic media projects was erratic at best and, in the end, only six students submitted a viable final product. Decker was released from the activity due to having to undergo surgery in the final week of the study, while Elgin did not submit one at all. Roy and Perth simply sent unadulterated gameplay videos, which had nothing to do with the requirement of the assignment. Milton and Joshua collaborated on a short video which was clearly a rushed, last-minute effort. Clinton made an honest attempt to complete the task, but missed some of the requirements. Carson, Marlowe and Davis were the only three who submitted strong final products.

Most of the SPRs left this task to the very end when they were contending with final assignments for other classes and studying for imminent exams. Their grades in my class were sufficiently strong that they could absorb a low mark or an incomplete without endangering their university acceptance. It seems that in the guerilla spirit that characterizes the end-of-year scramble, this assignment was considered expendable. Most of them saved their efforts for the autoethnography and later expressed to me that the counter-hegemonic media felt like an "extra" that exceeded the work requirement typically expected from a summative project.

Post-survey. Like the presurvey, the post-survey was divided into a questionnaire on Google Docs [Appendix G] entitled "Post *GTA V* Study Survey" and a long answer survey [Appendix H] which they could respond to in writing or video. The former fo-

cused on addressing their gameplay throughout the study, while the latter interrogated some contextual considerations as well as their perceptions of what they had learned throughout the study. All SPRs completed all parts of the post-survey.

Data Analysis

My first step towards analysis was organizing all the data in secure folders on my laptop, and transferring as much as possible to Google Drive. I then spent several months reviewing and writing detailed transcripts from the classroom videos. While transcribing the video, I colour-coded sections according to the categories of colonialism, race, hegemony, masculinity, power, role-play, catharsis, violence, gender, distracted, co-researcher, drugs, alcohol, fashion, sexuality, and sexism. This was a loose scheme to roughly prepare the document for a more granular coding process once it was imported to NVIVO. I made the decision to keep all nodes (NVIVO parlance for coding categories or tags) initially independent of each other and wait until themes and patterns emerged before condensing ideas and categories into "child nodes" or "sibling nodes." This follows Basit's (2003) recommendation of "data reduction, condensation, distillation, grouping and classification" (p. 152).

I then imported all the rest of the data, including surveys, notes, Facebook posts and final assignments to NVIVO and coded each document with the existing nodes, while adding new ones when necessary. I took notes throughout the process, noting any emergent patterns and ideas. It was through this process that race and racialized places emerged as salient categories and became the focus of my data and analysis.

Chapter 7: A Tale of Two Cities: The Ins and Outs of Hostile Territories, Timbs, and Race Tourism

> *"Everybody has heard of South Los Santos, mostly because it gets shouted out so much in gangster rap. An economically depressed, predominantly African American area of the city, stigmatized in the media as a hotbed for drugs, crime and gangs, South Los Santos largely lives up to that reputation with long-term rival gangs Ballas and Families still warring over turf to*

this day. Pick the colour of your outfit carefully before visiting."

- Grand Theft Auto V digital manual

Introduction

In this chapter, I gather qualitative data to foreground some of the localized discourses and tensions that were documented and reported by the SPRs regarding their engagement with race and racialized places in *GTA V*. Excerpts from classroom transcripts, fieldnotes, Facebook posts, autoethnographies, and counter-hegemonic media were selected and organized according to themes that address the research questions. The literature review demonstrates that there is currently no research on how white adolescent boys engage with race in *GTA V*, one of the world's most widely played games, nor how these racial dynamics are critically addressed in a hybrid instructional research environment. Furthermore, it is important to stress that all the SPRs, with the exception of Carson, were hip-hop music fans, a topic that frequently cropped up in formal and informal conversations. Their interest in hip-hop directly and indirectly informed many of their racial interactions with the game. Finally, and relevantly, no work has explored how problematic connections between race and place are received by players who inhabit realistic urban simulations. The data presented in this chapter advances knowledge in all of these important areas.

The majority of race-related dynamics reported and observed involved interactions with in-game characters and places informed by black popular culture most commonly expressed through hip-hop music and media. Of the three playable characters, Franklin was the most popular, and his status as a black reformed gang member from South Los Santos frequently informed how they chose to play with him. Also, as discussed, Los Santos is a mediated cartographic artifact that maps urban spatial design according to a pronounced binary division between the white/safe/affluent north and the black/crime-ridden/poor south. These segregated virtual neighbourhoods became sites where the SPRs revealed and participated in the game's algorithmic patterns of territor-

ialization and mutual hostility, while also divulging their own impulses towards identity tourism and role-play in line with prevalent media racial scripts.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the game's racialized binary geography and how Franklin, a reformed black gang member from South Los Santos, and Michael, a prosperous white career criminal from Vinewood, were used as surrogates to probe racialized dynamics within the game. This is followed by a look at how the SPRs demonstrated a preference to dress their avatars in hip-hop and gang-inspired dress, despite *GTA V*'s vast fashion offerings. In some cases, their fashion choices in the game were an extension of their adoption of hip-hop styles in real life. The third section examines a series of self-directed experiments undertaken by the SPRs where they use both white and black playable protagonists to deliberately explore how they are treated differently by the police and by NPCs in different neighbourhoods in the city. The chapter ends with a brief section that reports on SPR observations about the race of taxi drivers and convenience shop owners in Los Santos.

Mutual Hostilities, Racial Polarities, and Forbidden Territories

Race and quality of life are dramatically contrasted in Los Santos along a north-south socio-spatial divide. Although the map includes some rural and natural hinterlands, small communities, and a few middle class neighbourhoods, the dominant and heavily trafficked northern and southern sectors of the city were the chief sites where SPRs spent most of their time. This section will look at how the physical layout of the *GTA V* map activates a binary racial dynamic characterized by territorial hostility and mutual exclusion that buttress the borders of a "cartography of containment" (Paperson, 2010). Playable protagonists Franklin and Michael respectively hail from the south and the north, and each is emblematic of the qualities and characteristics associated with their zones of provenance. These two avatars were the primary means by which players entered and explored the game's racially coded territories.

Michael De Santa (formerly Michael Townley) is a retired career criminal in a witness protection program who lives in Rockford Hills with his highly dysfunctional family. The community's winding streets, lined with walled mansions and luxury boutiques, are a fictional amalgam of Beverly Hills and Century City. Rockford forms part of the larger area known as Vinewood Hills that occupies the north of Los Santos. In a Face-

Figure 7.1: A home in Rockford Hills

book post, Elgin wrote that "While driving around the Vinewood Hills, it is easy to notice that most of the people driving nice cars and living in huge houses are white." Milton also observed the contrast with the poor south when he writes that in "[Vinewood] Hills, people drove much nicer cars than let's say near the dock or the airport [in the south], the types of vehicles changed drastically." Michael's domain is prosperous, safe and, aside from the occasional sighting of a visible minority, a predominantly white metropole.

On the other hand, the south side of the map is comprised of working class and poor black neighbourhoods with cramped housing, liquor stores, barred windows, abandoned lots, boarded [up] buildings, dealers and gangbangers loitering on corners, and graffiti decorates many a crumbling wall. In a short video where Clinton enters South Los Santos as Michael, he notes that "the South Side *[sic]* is predominantly lived in by African Americans. You can't see a single Caucasian walking around." Later, in a Facebook

post, Clinton also notes that the "hood" in the game is primarily black, and writes that "it is interesting how the game connects wealth to race, and to some extent is a valid critique of our society, especially LA."

Franklin, the sole black playable protagonist, grew up in South Los Santos and his backstory follows a familiar narrative: his father abandoned the family before he was born, and his mother suffered a drug-related death. He was raised by his grandparents, and an early life of petty crime escalated to more serious gang involvement and, eventually, prison. Upon release, he seeks to reform his life and find legitimate employment. When *GTA V* opens, Franklin is living with his aunt in a small house in Strawberry — an echo of Crenshaw District of South Central Los Angeles — and works repossessing vehicles for a shady luxury car dealer. Regardless of their prior progress with the game, the SPRs agreed to all start from the beginning and since Franklin is the first playable character, they all played Franklin.

Playing Franklin. For the SPRs, the predominantly black and economically depressed neighbourhood of South Los Santos was paradoxically hostile and alluring.

Figure 7.2: Clinton's post about Franklin's neighbourhood

In writing and discussions, they variably referred to the area as "the hood" [various], "the ghetto" [various], "the so called hood" [Perth], "the more poor part of the city," the "sketchier part of the map" [Carson], and "a bit sketchy" [Carson] and associated the zone with drugs, alcohol, violence, danger, and gang activity. Their ill-met incursions with Michael reinforced that whites enter the ghetto at their peril, a reminder that the SPRs themselves may also be unwelcome in the real-world "hood." Franklin, however, allowed them to experience the forbidden space as an insider and safely trespass into a

zone of fascination that is "simultaneously an exoticized site of the black Other, a horizon of cosmopolitan desire, and an idealized place of authenticity" (Paperson, 2010, p. 18). For the SPRs, Franklin became a digital action figure who could be outfitted in streetwear and gang colours, provoke police, support his gang in a turf war, and engage in criminal enterprises.

Of the three playable protagonists, Franklin was the most discussed, "screen-shotted," recorded, and written about by the SPRs during the study. This was partly due to his being the first available character to play; however, even after they could choose to play Michael or Trevor, they continued to gravitate towards Franklin. When asked to identify their preferred protagonist, six chose Franklin and four Trevor, the odd-ball and unpredictable psychopath who appears after about 15 hours of gameplay. Notably, none chose Michael. Carson speculated that "maybe why I don't like playing with Michael is because it's an upper middle class life," and later wonders "If I am drawn to play as Franklin because of his difference in lifestyle, are lower class black individuals interested in playing as Michael in *GTA V*?" Perth also explained that Michael wasn't as interesting because his life was too similar to his own.

This is a picture of of a piece of graffiti in Franklin's neighbourhood. This piece of graffiti represents the local gang that Franklin was a part of. This photo really represents the gang controlled areas in LS(Los santos) which is based of L.A who have a lot of gangs.

Figure 7.3: Roy's Facebook post depicts Franklin in his neighbourhood.

There is no easy explanation to account for why Franklin was the favoured protagonist. Presumably, he fed into their interest in hip-hop and the associated cultural milieu; however, when directly asked, none cited this as a reason for their preference. Davis maintained that Franklin is "a rich character. He's got a really funny friend. He also seems like a good guy. He cares about people and he helps people out all the time,"

and later added that "he had an honour code going." Roy said that "he's the most down-to-earth character and mentally stable." Marlowe commented that "He's a bit of a stereotype, but he's a bit more of a developed character than somebody like Michael." While Elgin also observed that "a lot of the characters are narrow stereotypes and Franklin is the only rich developed character in the game." Milton, Elgin, and Roy also like Franklin because they believe his unique "power" to slow down time while driving is more useful than Michael or Trevor's special abilities. Additionally, Elgin stated that, being the only black playable character, Franklin was the best character to roleplay as a gang member. Carson repeatedly stated and wrote that he was intrigued by Franklin's world because it was so different from his own, but also stated that "I found myself usually picking Franklin because he is 'tough and strong.'"

Despite interpretations of Franklin as a rich, complex, tough, "fun," and useful playable character, when asked whether playing Franklin helps provide insight into the real life of a black man, most recognized that he represents a limited perspective on black life. Elgin originally stated that Franklin wasn't a narrow stereotype, as reported above, but adjusted his view when probed: "It's a big stereotype, though. He's a gang member, he jacks cars and kills people, so I wouldn't say so. I don't know if there's a big difference between what it means to be black and being white around any other race. I think it just means he's human and the colour of your skin doesn't have anything to do with who you are other than how you develop a cultural perspective." Elgin's assertion about skin colour hints at a colourblind view of race that Rodriguez (2006) observed to be frequently held by white hip-hop fans. Davis contributed that "it kind of feels like a stereotype to make a black life into one thing. Because I feel like you can't do that for any kind of life. You can't say that all they do is go home and watch TV and smoke weed and there's a liquor store across the way and they live in a small like...there [are] just so many factors. It give you a sense of the broad idea of what it could be like, but you just don't live it, right? You're just viewing it." Carson responded "honestly, probably not. It's just a game. It

would be kind of shallow to say to a black person in real life that 'Oh I can relate to you because I played *GTA* as Franklin.'" In line with his classmates, Roy offered that "there's a lot of nuances that they would miss and I would disagree that it gives you insight into being an African American man." Broader perceptions of similar stereotypes were also reported in fieldnotes, where Perth writes that "every black person in the game is either impoverished or in a gang. While a small percent of the black population in America is impoverished or in a gang." He also adds that he sees the representations in the game as "Rockstar's way of mocking America." Clinton also observed that while playing "each African American person that I walked into came across as either a gangster, or a druggie" while, later in his notes, he adds that "most white men in this game are depicted as cocky Americans and that can be looked at as an insulting stereotype as well."

The SPRs' views on Franklin expressed an ambivalence that both celebrated the positive nuances of his personality, while recognizing that he is still a stereotype and not cleanly representative of the complexities of lived experience. Observations in their notes also indicate that the general perspective the game presents on blackness, and even whiteness, follow widely circulated stereotypes. I would add that it is important to keep in mind that these observations were made in an instructional atmosphere where they were provoked to think about how race was represented.

Franklin's home: High times in the hood. As the only black playable character, Franklin became a surrogate with which SPRs negotiated and exposed the racially and economically polarized world of Los Santos. Whether getting drunk and high in his "ghetto" home, participating in gang warfare, or trying to escape his past and integrate into the exclusive world of Vinewood, the SPRs played Franklin to blend into otherwise inhospitable black communities and, alternately, to "redeem" him through assimilation with the well heeled north. In all cases, racial dynamics were inextricably linked to geographic locations and neighbourhood spaces within the game.

Franklin's home in Strawberry, which Davis describes in his counter-hegemonic

comic as "smaller and run down and is in the middle of the ghetto," was referred to by every SPR in their writing and discussions. The small home is Franklin's "safe house" or home base at the start of the game, thus all players must inevitably access it. The home

Figure 7.4: A panel from Davis' counter-hegemonic comic featuring Franklin's home

is embedded in a mixed commercial and residential black working class community plagued by a high crime rate and gang violence between the Ballas and Families. Carson described being amused watching TV as Franklin and then "I walked outside to the driveway and got into Franklin's white car. I remember noticing that the car looked to [sic] quite expensive compared to the house he was living in with his mom [it is in fact his aunt]. I drove down the street and the radio was already playing rap music."

The neighbourhood fulfills many of the black ghetto stereotypes, including the easy availability of drugs and alcohol. When Franklin returns home at the start of the game, there is already a joint in the ashtray on the coffee table in front of the TV and beer in the fridge inviting consumption. This was the location where the SPRs most frequently reported undertaking voluntary in-game drinking and drug use. "Voluntary" because there are missions, such as "Grass Roots," where drug consumption is a mandated part of the mission narrative. Clinton, Joshua, Elgin, Milton, and Decker all reported that, while

playing as Franklin, they chose to consume alcohol and/or smoke cannabis while at his Strawberry home. When a player controlled protagonist drinks or consumes drugs in *GTA V*, the game alters the controls and visuals to replicate the effects of being drunk and/or high. Elgin and Decker tried to get as drunk as they could and attempted to drive in their virtually impaired state, while Carson and Joshua reported watching TV while impaired. Conversely, not a single anecdote emerged about spending time in Michael's spacious mansion, although it is accessible before the Strawberry home earlier in the game, and also embedded in the early narrative.

Outing an insider: A meaningful turf war. Clinton, Marlowe, Carson, Roy, Perth, Elgin, and Milton all shared stories about entering South Los Santos as Franklin and partaking in gang violence. Elgin provides a particularly evocative description of playing as Franklin in the midst of a neighbourhood gang war between the purple Ballas and green Families, a core narrative thread carried over from *GTA*: *San Andreas*. The layout of South Los Santos in both *GTA* titles share similarities, but the streets and neighbourhoods were altered and expanded for *GTA V*. In his autoethnography, Elgin describes his investment in the role and attachment to that particular neighbourhood, connections at least partially indebted to his having previously played *GTA*: *San Andreas*. "I parked my car in the driveway to the house that formerly belonged to *GTA SA*'s main character, CJ. I got out of my car and began to look around the area for similarities to the other game. I found that CJ's house was very similar, and the basketball court by Sweet's old house was still there too. After a nice rush of nostalgia, I was back, ready for blood." The nostalgia is connected to his prior experiences in the neighbourhood, marking Elgin's storied and layered relationship with this virtual location. The locale, and associated memories of previous gang conflicts, sets the emotional mise-en-scène for his enactment of his role as Franklin in gang mode, fighting off the Ballas encroaching on traditional Families territory. This poignant moment vividly reinforces how a virtual location can be an emotive and meaningful place that provokes memories and nostalgia precipitated by previous

experiences in that location (Forman, 2002). In this case, the emotive effect is achieved by an instance of mediated intertextuality which, as discussed in Chapter 6, informs much of *GTA V*'s urban design.

The emotional connections to place give way to feelings of aggressive territoriality that encourage gang violence. "During this gameplay session, I found myself pretending to be a gang member. This was partly because franklin *[sic]* is the only playable black character, and thus easier to project a "gangster" identity onto, but mostly due to the fact that I was reminiscing over the old days of playing *GTA*: *San Andreas [sic]*. While in this gang member mindset, I chose to go to the old setting of *San Andreas*. I purposely dressed Franklin in green, the colours of the Families Gang. In the current version of the game, the Front Yard Ballas have taken over Grove Street, which used to belong to the Grove Street Families, the gang that both CJ. and Lamar support. This role playing as a gang member actually made me feel quite territorial. I felt an urge to try and reclaim the stolen block with force."

Figure 7.5: A screenshot from Carson's video of Franklin getting his hair done at a high-end Vinewood salon

Elgin's narrative of his in-game gang activity yields valuable insights for analysis. First, the ties between blackness and gangs are so deeply inscribed, that Elgin sees Franklin as the only genuine option for him to project a gang identity, which in turn deepens the enactment and perpetuation of the stereotype. Elgin has a wide and sprawling interest in music, and his non-uniform dress style is aligned with skateboarding counterculture, but it's worth noting that his original pseudonym for the study was drawn from hip-hop jargon, he posted a number of hip-hop related media to the Facebook group, and discussed hip-hop music and artists almost to the exclusion of all other genres. So, his coup-

ling of gangs with blackness also draws from an ample hip-hop media context; however, he specifically cites *GTA*'s spatial intertextual narrative as a prime emotional incentive for his role-play. Finally, the meaning of place and his sense of attachment and belonging is such for Elgin that he feels "territorial" about the encroachment of an "invader" in his virtual neighbourhood. However, it is worth stressing that playing Franklin in his South Los Santos neighbourhood with an emphasis on his Families gang affiliation can cast Elgin as the identity tourist "invader" who infiltrates otherwise forbidden territory. Elgin is an outsider, masquerading as an insider to ward off outsiders that are in fact more insider than him. This spectacle, of course, is entirely a virtual hallucination enacted and internalized by Elgin, the only living participant.

In a case that reveres the impulse to play Franklin in order to assimilate in the neighbourhoods of South Los Santos, Carson created a counter-hegemonic video where Franklin abandons the life of crime and embarks on a legitimate career in the affluent north. The video is set five years after the events of *GTA V*, and Franklin now works as a successful and legitimate land developer. He lives in Vinewood, collects luxury sports cars, frequents artisanal coffee shops, cuts his hair at a high end salon, shops at expensive boutiques, and ends the day with a few rounds of golf. "Despite the stereotypes that he is tough, unintelligent and a thug, he was determined to change the view of himself, and everybody else's views of him," narrates Carson. The context of his success is, of course, the affluent and white world of Vinewood Hills. In the video, Franklin only briefly returns to his old neighbourhood once to have his car washed, and Carson states that he "feels uncomfortable" when he's back in the "ghetto side of Los Santos" and later echoes "he finds the ghetto streets to be a lot more uncomfortable and a lot less safe." Later, while Franklin has his hair cut in a luxury Vinewood salon, Carson narrates "Franklin sometimes feels guilty about spending so much money on a haircut, but he doesn't like going to the other barber shops in the ghettos of Los Santos." Carson marks Franklin's newfound success by having him assimilate to the lifestyle and values of the Vinewood locus

while simultaneously rejecting his old neighbourhood as the geographic zone coded by paralysis, immobility, crime, and failure. Carson "redeems" Franklin by having him participate in activities and inhabit locations coded for whiteness. There is prevalent media discourse and Western social conventions to account for this interpretation of success. However, the game allows little wiggle room for alternatives, such as the option to give back and improve their home communities, because its socio-spatial binary constrains success and failure according to a racially coded topography.

Elgin undertakes an immersive gangland adventure through Franklin, while Carson inversely restores him to legitimacy in a white-flavoured version of social success. Even Carson's attempts to undermine the stereotypical narrative of the black criminal led him to produce a well-intentioned but problematic counter-narrative that was limited by how the game allows the player to manifest the outward signs of status and prosperity. Despite the apparent polarities of how Elgin and Carson cast Franklin, both SPRs ineluctably mapped race, (im)mobility, crime, and success according to the pronounced, mutually exclusive, and binary geographic precincts imposed by the game's mediated cartography.

The distanced immersion of a ghetto safari. In contrast to Elgin's and Carson's divergent stories of assimilation, Milton and Joshua collaboratively produced a counter-hegemonic video that encapsulated the racially charged hostility and exoticism associated with the streets of South Los Santos for white trespassers. Entitled "Ghetto Safari," the video is an unsettling parody commercial that promotes a safari tour of South Los Santos. Produced on *GTA V*'s in-game filmmaking tools, Michael is costumed "as American as possible," as explained by Joshua, and he enters Franklin's neighbourhood in a monster four-wheel-drive safari truck accompanied by the "African Lion Safari" jingle as the announcer promises "over a thousand birds and animals running wild" while the truck is "sightseeing" in a downtrodden neighbourhood. A montage features a costumed Michael taking selfies with unhappy looking residents, while gang members

glare menacingly from the corners and, in the end, Michael shoves up to a bystander in green gang colours, who pulls out a handgun and shoots Michael dead. Notably, Joshua's comment that Michael was dressed "as American as possible" unconsciously associates true Americanism with the whiteness he seeks to emphasize in contrast to the exoticized blackness of the destination.

The ironic commercial was produced in the vein of the game's spoof TV and

Figure 7.6: Preparing for the ghetto safari

radio ads, and may have been partially inspired by *GTA V*'s "Hood Safari" mission where Trevor, who is white, joins Franklin on a neighbourhood drug deal that goes awry. The SPRs were not asked to write a reflection to accompany their counter-hegemonic media project but, after we viewed the commercial in class, I felt it was important to clarify their process and intention. Joshua led the conversation while Milton sat quietly by in tacit support of his collaborator. He described it as a criticism of "white boys" entering what they perceive to be dangerous and unwelcoming black spaces. He explained that it was "the most stereotypical thing to compare African Americans to animals, which they wanted to satirize." He said that it "relates to Colonialism" and that "the whole game is like a

safari," and that the player is an "outsider" entering the world of the game. The idea that
GTA V players enact a form of colonial tourism had been discussed in class in an earlier
session.

The all-terrain vehicle is required to both temporarily and securely "experience"
the inhospitable neighbourhood. A safari is a paradigmatic luxury tourist experience with
strong colonial overtones, and thus a highly suitable metaphor that captures the theory
and tenor of the study as a whole. Furthermore, it presents a salient example of Strain's
(2003) touristic "distanced immersion," as the truck affords the mobility to sightsee
with the protection to keep locals at a safe distance. When Michael leaves the safety of
the vehicle, it leads to his violent death. As an analogy, it suggests the notion of white
adolescents adopting cultural codes and temporarily inhabiting media representations of
black culture, but at a safe distance from real black lives and spaces. In this formulation,
media and the safari truck are one and the same: vehicles that grant a selective view of
an inaccessible and contested territory of desire. Milton and Joshua, who produced the
commercial, self-reported their attraction to hip-hop music, and each showed signs of
adopting black cultural codes, whether through language, music, genture, or dress.

The "Ghetto Safari" commercial highlights the stark division between the game's
racialized territories, and how there is no easy mobility between the mutually hostile
places. The polarized sectors are coded according to distinct stereotypes that reify notions
of white superiority and an African American underclass and, judging by the data, the
game constrains play accordingly. For example, the various reports of drug and alcohol
consumption in the game were exclusively located in Franklin's home in the south, the
only place these items are easily available early in the game; thus nudging an early tie
between drugs, alcohol, and "the ghetto." As Clinton points out, Franklin doesn't seem
to "belong" in Vinewood Hills, even after buying a house there, and Michael is general-
ly met with anger and violence in South Los Santos. The commercial reinforces that the
uncostumed white person enters the forbidden cultural space of the other temporarily and

at great risk, a belief explicitly echoed by Perth, Clinton, Davis, and Elgin. Conversely, Elgin enters South Los Santos as Franklin, where he dissimulates with it as an environmentally congruous gang member to fulfill his touristic desire for an authentic experience as he blends with the locals during his excursion to the exotic south. Throughout, the SPRs identified stereotypes, sometimes saw them as ironic critiques, and critically reflected on their own play; however, they also demonstrated significant lapses in awareness, and carried out gameplay that reenacted narrow media and hip-hop inspired scripts of blackness.

Gearing Up: Outfitting Franklin to Fit In

The fashion choices SPRs made for their avatars foregrounded an impulse to experiment with commodified representations of hip-hop styles and black fashions. As discussed in Chapter 6, South Los Santos is accessorized by an array of artifacts and in-game media to encourage immersion and role-play in a setting that converges media generated stereotypes of economically depressed, crime-infested black neighbourhoods. Players can choose from several rap radio stations, a range of SUVs and sports cars, weapons, jewelry, and interact with a cast of characters that includes drug addicts, drug dealers, thugs, and gangsters, all features of how the black ghetto trope is represented in popular culture. Players can choose from a vast range of outfits and fashion accessories that can be procured from home closets and retail clothing shops, and also alter their hair styles and facial hair at barber shops and salons. Avatars can be outfitted with formal tuxedos, hobo outfits, and everything in between; however, despite the broad selection, the SPRs gravitated to styles associated with hip-hop and black popular culture.

In some instances, they chose outfits to suit a role they wanted to play, for humour, or as a matter of personal preference. For example, Elgin dressed and groomed Trevor to look like Charles Manson in order to play as a serial killer, while Decker bought an expensive suit as Michael because it is an "integral part of my character's identity, and to an extent my own, to have a character that was well-dressed." Roy, fresh from

the barbershop as Trevor, delighted in blowing up a house "rocking a full redneck beard," and Joshua shared that he ironically dressed his avatar to look like a "normal dude" in a "shooting vest and a collared shirt and khakis," and is quick to add, "but he has automatic weapons," to the amusement of his classmates.

However, SPRs reported an overwhelming preference for fashions associated with hip-hop, rap, and LA street gangs. "I purposely dressed Franklin in green, the colours of the Families Gang," writes Elgin when describing a self-imposed mission to enter a "sketchy" neighbourhood and eliminate rival gang members. Later, he dresses Franklin "all black, except for the timbs (of course) [Timberland boots]" and described himself as "some sort of bank robber and gang member at the same time." Meanwhile, Joshua reported that he "logged in as franklin *[sic]*, he was wearing a grey wife-beater tank top, and a white snapback hat." Clinton writes that "At franklin's *[sic]* house, I tried on a few different outfits, some of these making him appeal more to black hip-hop culture, and others not so much. I then proceeded to leave franklins *[sic]* house, wearing a basketball jersey and a backwards hat." Decker also contemplates dressing like a hip-hop star when he says "I'd immediately try to look like Drake [a rap superstar]...with a hoodie and sweatpants on. To have the character look like Drake would be so funny." Finally, Milton describes a shopping expedition he undertook as Franklin: "When I arrived at the clothing store, I walked in and purchased him some clothing, and when I came out I noticed that I clothed him the stereotypical way of an African American, dressed in Timberland boots, baggy clothing, etc. I think I did it this way just because I thought it looked cool, not because I was playing as a black character." In every instance, the SPRs played as Franklin, and may have dressed him according to their conception of a black, partially reformed gang member from an economically challenged neighbourhood. What is clear is that they demonstrated a significant preference for hip-hop fashions and streetwear; however, Carson, who claims he is not concerned by fashion or brands in real life, preserved Franklin's default outfit and hairstyle.

Marlowe was the only SPR who reported dressing Michael, the affluent white protagonist, to look like a specific hip-hop star. He originally chose a pseudonym for himself based on the birth name of the rap artist, MC Ride, whom Marlowe admires. His gameplay notes, written a week into the study, describe his mission to alter Michael's appearance to resemble the rap star. "Tried to make my character look as much like MC Ride as possible, saw someone on Reddit doing the same thing. Went to multiple stores to find the right tattoos/haircut/clothes." Notably, during one of our discussions, Marlowe spoke disapprovingly of younger students at the school who wear expensive streetwear and hip-hop fashions and how it upsets him when "you see somebody in Grade 9 with their $900 Yeezys and droopity jeans and the gold chains." I was unclear whether the thrust of Marlowe's critique is that the 14 year-old has access to the substantial disposable income to purchase such expensive clothes, and/or that a young, white, insulated adolescent is inauthentically dressed like a gangster. In any case, there is a hint here of crosscurrents where a young man who closely assumes the identity of a rap star is put off by his younger peers engaging in similar behaviour, the difference being that Marlowe role-plays digitally, while the proverbial "niner" dresses the part in real life.

Timbs: Kicking it old school. Timberland boots, also known as "timbs" or "timbies," are a high-status fashion item among the SPRs because of the footwear's popularity with rap stars. On days when the SPRs didn't wear their uniforms, I noted that about half wore the rugged beige Timberlands, and a quick survey yielded that seven of the ten owned a pair, with Milton, Joshua, and Decker being the exceptions. Not surprisingly, they were also a popular fashion item in the game, where they are parodically named "Hinterlands." Franklin's outfit at the beginning of the game includes a pair of Hinterlands, but Clinton, Milton, Decker, Joshua, Roy, and Elgin reported returning to them throughout numerous changes of clothing. Elgin, for example, stated that "When Franklin gets his uniform change I always change back to timbs. Keep the timbs!"

I became aware of the importance of timbs in the third session, when Roy de-

scribed how he "eviscerated" another driver in a fistfight over a car accident. Elgin laughed at the story and wrung his hands with delight, throwing in "you timb stomp him!" I didn't understand the reference and asked them to explain.

Darvasi: What are the timbs?

Elgin: Like the work boots.

Decker: Timberlands.

Darvasi: Oh — Timberlands. [I nod my head]

Elgin: And he [Franklin] falls asleep in his timbs.

Decker: Team! [He playfully and affectionately mispronounces the name]

Elgin: Tee-ams. [He's moving around in his chair. He's excited. All his classmates smile and nod]

Darvasi: So what are the cultural, social associations?

Decker: Some guys in New York never take them off.

Elgin: Like inner-city people.

Decker: Like they'll be naked and still wearing their timbs. And if you scuff someone's timbs, they'll like murder you.

Elgin: There was a porn film where the guy just had his timbs on [class-mates laughs].

Decker: In the shower. [More laughing] They're not even filming the scene, they're just filming the timbs [pretends to point the camera at the feet of the actor] with the noise in the background…

In this brief discussion, timbs were positioned as a cultural symbol that, in the minds of the SPRs, blends power, violence, sex, and the mystique of urban street life. Seven of the ten SPRs owned a pair of Timberlands, and they were so esteemed that Roy shared an urban legend where somebody committed suicide when they discovered their

timbs were knock-offs. Joshua attests to their perceived ubiquity when he shared that "everybody wears them," and Roy adds that "lots of private school kids just go like timbs and grey flannels."

Despite their hip-hop clout, Timberland boots first appeared on the market in 1973

Figure 7.7: A screenshot of Decker as Franklin wearing "timbs"

and specifically targeted white New England construction workers. Citing Rob Walker's book *Buying It*, journalist Alex Leach (2015) writes that "the legend goes that the first 'urban' buyers of Timberland boots were New York drug dealers — guys who had to stand on the street all night and needed the best possible footwear to keep them warm and dry." Ever-keen to enhance their hustler credentials, the city's rappers followed suit, and soon the boot was everywhere." Timberlands circulated from rural blue collar, to urban black, and eventually landed with middle and upper class white adolescents who, oblivious to the boots' New England working class origins, prize them for their prestige in rap culture. This again equates African American culture with "cool," and directly connects

Timberlands with black gangster culture, an association that invests the boot with their high status among adolescent boys.

Addressing the power that rap stars have as cultural influencers, Decker states that "I think now cultural dominance is black males," and Elgin is quick to add "100%." Decker would later expand on this idea in his post-survey when he writes that "many of the categories have elements that are true, but the truth is far more complex, and it doesn't take into account the shift in culture. For example, Rap being the most prominent genre has made the African American community hegemonic in some aspects." In the classroom discussion, I push back and say "but, when you look at, for example, a senate. When you look at a table of CEOs — they're all white men." Decker responds, "some males, if they want to have power over everyone, they can be in a whitewash senate, but if they want to be huge cultural creators they look at these black guys and they're going to be like... they're going to be looking at people and start dressing like…" and Elgin chimes in with specifics: "the Gucci bag, the Louis belt. Yeah, face hats [hip-hop jargon for The North Face brand baseball caps]." Much like Timberlands, Elgin's list of luxury brands such as Gucci, Louis Vuitton, and Northface were originally targeted to older, wealthy, white consumers, but are now prized by the SPRs and their cohort for their association with popular rap and hip-hop artists.

The phenomena of consumer fashion items whose status are recorded as they migrate from one cultural-racial domain into another comes full circle when Davis, one of the SPRs who is least invested in hip-hop culture, seems unaware of Timberland's history or source of status among his peers when he writes that Franklin wears Timberlands "to blend in with the upper class white folk." He was under the impression that black men like Franklin are drawn to Timberlands as a white, upper class luxury item, unaware that it was in fact black rap stars who enlarged the status of the boot and popularized it among middle class white adolescents. Fashion is an important measure of the sway that rap and hip-hop media have with adolescent boys, and the influence is such that SPRs suggest

153

that black men hold a great deal of social and cultural power based on the influence and success of a handful of celebrities.

The Los Santos Race Lab: Racist Cops and Border Crossings

Within a year of *GTA V*'s release, online rumours circulated that the police in the game were racist and, unprovoked, are more likely to harass Franklin than Michael (Hernandez, 2015). *The Game Theorists*, a popular YouTube show that critiques and analyzes video games, conducted an informal experiment to test whether the cops in *GTA V* exhibited bias or racist tendencies. Characters were dressed in neutral clothes and brought "to three separate police stations all across Los Santos—Vinewood Station, Paleto Bay station, and South Los Santos station. Each character went up to the cops individually, and spoke to them five separate times in each of these police stations" (Hernandez, 2015). The producers of the video determined that Franklin, without provocation, was harassed almost twice as often by the police than the white and affluent Michael.

Tensions between police and black communities were high at the time of the video's release. The uprising in Ferguson happened a year earlier, and other high profile cases like Freddie Gray and Michael Brown were regularly making headlines. This atmosphere admitted the possibility that the developers were taking a subtle political jab at racially biased US law enforcement, which would gel with *GTA V*'s critique of US society. Carson encapsulates this mindset in his gameplay notes when he muses that "Similar to real life, the police and the law [in the game], control things and try to prevent people from doing certain things. There are a lot of questions about whether *GTA V* police are racist in the game, but Rockstar has claimed they are not. Does the game try to influence people's political views through law enforcement?" As Carson suggests, Rockstar Games vehemently denied that the police were coded to react according to race, and any observed patterns of racist behaviour were deemed coincidental (Hernandez, 2015).

All the SPRs had seen *The Game Theorist* video (which currently sits at almost

10 million views) and, unsolicited, Davis linked it to the Facebook group on May 15

as a matter of general interest (Figure 7.8). The video, and others like it, seems to have

inspired several SPRs to conduct their own copycat "experiments" to prod the game for

i found this video online which is done by this youtube channel called
"game theory's" he goes over a lot of the controversy. specifically in this
video he goes over if the cops are actually more aggressive against the
black characters in the game than the white ones. he goes into huge
detail and has alot of evidence to back up his claims. i found this video
very interesting even though he probably makes the most horrible jokes.

Figure 7.8: Davis' "The Game Theorists" video Facebook post

instances of stereotypes or racism. Many of these informal, self-directed investigations

were conducted in response to Facebook prompt #3 that tasked them to "Post a screen-

shot related to race and discuss the dynamic between you, the player, and the representa-

tion of race you have chosen to submit" [Appendix F]. The prompt did not call for an

experiment or a "test," nor had *The Game Theorist* video been discussed in class, but half

of the SPRs undertook an experimental approach. I was vaguely aware that they were

undertaking these experiments at the time, but it was not until I synthesized the data a

year later that I noticed their prevalence. Apart from the influence of the video, they may

have also launched these informal inquiries into how the game represents race and racial-

ized interactions because of their role as co-researchers. A few tested the police in the

game to see if they exhibited racist tendencies, while others explored the stereotypical de-

pictions of taxi drivers and convenience store owners, and how different races are treated

in different neighbourhoods.

Are LSPD cops racist? Inspired by *The Game Theorist* video and a widely held sense that police in the game were racist, several of the SPRs decided to further interrogate whether the LSPD officers exhibited racist or discriminatory tendencies, be it in slower response times in crime-heavy neighbourhoods, or variable treatment of the avatars depending on their race. Some SPRs merely reported on situations where the police had unfairly targeted them for being black.

During a May 11 writing sprint where the SPRs were asked to describe their most recent gameplay experience, Carson wrote about testing whether police were slower to respond to shootings in South Los Santos. He drove around Franklin's neighbourhood to see "what would happen if I started shooting people in the hood compared to the wealthier part of town. I saw three, what appeared to be, black men standing together. I pulled out a shotgun and shot one of them and immediately their *[sic]* became red dots on the map and this meant that they were now enemies. I killed two of them before the third one pulled out a pistol and tried to shoot me. I then shot that guy and drove away. The map was flashing and I got one star from the police [low priority crime] but they seemed to be a lot less responsive then if I shot people somewhere else on the map." Carson's method is far from rigorous, based more on instinct than hard data, but he concludes that police seem to give lower priority to shooting in "the hood" than in affluent neighbourhoods. If nothing else, even the desire to conduct the experiment indicates a suspicion and awareness of the possibility that police might discriminate according to race.

Clinton submitted a 30-second gameplay clip where Franklin deliberately approaches three officers outside a police station and casually stands in front of them waiting for a reaction. Within seconds they berate him, intimidate him, and then draw their weapons and tell him to drop to his knees. Eventually, they shoot him. The clip did not include narrative or context, but it was staged to gauge how, unprovoked, police react to Franklin.

In his May 15 notes, Milton wrote that "I saw a computer generated police chase, but while they were passing me, the cop tapped me and I got a star, I felt very frustrated because I didn't actually do anything this time, but I got in trouble for it, now this could have been because I was franklin *[sic]*, but there is no way to prove this." More of an

Figure 7.9: Screenshot of video where Clinton as Franklin stands near police

observation than a test, Milton suspects that his avatar is treated unfairly for his race, but can't ascertain this conclusively. Similarly, Roy relays an incident where he felt the police might have discriminated against him based on his race: "After I walked out of the hospital I stole a car but by doing this I got 1 Star. So I got out of the car and stood there but when the cops came I did nothing but they still shot me to death and I was confused by this because I didn't kill anyone but I died and was really confused." Roy laments the confusion and injustice of being shot while unarmed and trying to cooperate with the

arresting officers, a concept that is now less abstract than when he reads about it in the papers. On the other hand, Marlowe's May 9 notes describe a scene where he is arbitrarily shooting people from a rooftop and reflects that it was "hard to get 4 stars with Michael," meaning he felt the police were more lenient of his crime because his avatar was white. Each case reinforces the notion that the SPRs believed that the police in the game profile by race and vary their conduct accordingly.

In his fieldnotes, Marlowe states that "The Cops *[sic]* are more likely to go after Franklin then *[sic]* Michael. This is probably part of the game's ongoing parody of social issues, but I feel sad that I accepted it without question. According to the handout white males are the most privileged in society, and this is an example of that." Although Marlowe writes that he "accepts it without question," his reflection and subsequent thoughts indicate that he is in fact reflecting critically about discriminatory law enforcement, and links it to white privilege. Meanwhile, in a gameplay video, Clinton narrates an alternate explanation for the perception that the police might be racist: "I don't find any difference if I'm playing Michael or Franklin, whether it's a white guy or a black guy, everyone is usually pretty rude in this game. The police are sort of the same way. They don't really like...anyone." As Franklin, he navigates busy traffic on the highway as he escapes in a stolen police car: "You also get to certain people when you're in certain neighbourhoods." This last statement is unclear, but it likely means that the avatar's race determines how the character will be received in different sectors of the city.

Ostensibly, these examples indicate that many of the SPRs expressed an innate desire to probe the game's algorithms to determine whether LSPD officers are racist and, despite Rockstar's protests, the SPRs found some support for the hypothesis. There is certainly contextual support in the game for, as Davis notes in his autoethnography, a radio public service announcement by the LSPD warns citizens of Los Santos "to stay alert, afraid, and mistrustful of anybody who doesn't look like them." Although I did not take full advantage of these experiments, in hindsight, they present fertile pedagogical oppor-

tunities. First, it would have been thought-provoking to discuss why Rockstar might have coded the police for racist inclinations, but publicly denied it. Secondly, at the time, as now, there were several cases of US police officers under scrutiny for killing innocent or unarmed black men. It would have been beneficial to parlay the SPRs' strong feelings of injustice and confusion due to their mistreatment at the hands of virtual police to discuss the real-world occurrences of these discriminatory miscarriages of justice. This could also include a discussion as to why police and emergency service response times tend to be prolonged in black neighbourhoods versus their affluent, white counterparts.
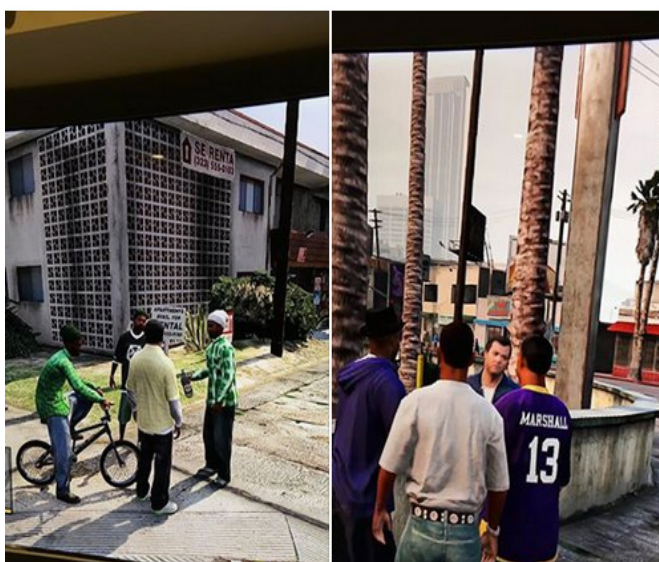
Figure 7.10: Perth's Facebook posts of entering South Los Santos as Franklin, then Michael

Hood switching. Like many of their classmates, Perth and Clinton each conducted informal experiments to gauge if there were differences in the way Michael and Franklin are treated on the streets of Vineland and South Los Santos. In both cases, they extended their findings about the racial territoriality and mutually exclusive neighbourhoods to the real world.

Perth compared how a group of black youth in South Los Santos first react to Franklin, and then Michael. In a May 10 Facebook post, Perth writes that "I went into the hood with Franklin first and approached several thuggish looking individuals. When Franklin approached them, they enthusiastically said 'Hey yo what's good man!' and didn't bother Franklin in the least." When Perth approached a similar group with Michael, "it was completely different as just being around them caused them to start harassing Michael, and ultimately fighting him. This shows their different in race *[sic]* and how being a white male in a primarily black neighbourhood will result in poorer treatment." Perth projects Michael's adverse experience in the South Los Santos neighbourhood to the real world,

tacitly ascribing the game credibility as a simulation of real life.

Clinton, a big hip-hop fan, also filmed a series of short fieldnote videos that examine how Michael and Franklin are treated in different neighbourhoods. In one clip, Clinton plays as Franklin and walks along an affluent commercial area in Vinewood, where he occasional stops to stand near a person or people on the sidewalk and an adjacent coffee shop patio. Each time, he is confronted aggressively and insulted. In a second video, he approaches several women and remarks "I notice usually when I'm a black guy interacting with women — especially white women — they're never really interested. And it's never really a friendly conversation," he narrates as he approaches women as Franklin, who all insult him and walk away. "So that's sort of interesting how that's portrayed." A minute later he walks close to a black woman, and she reacts like the white women did. Clinton concludes that, black or white, women on the street will respond badly to Franklin. In another video, he reverses the scenario and takes Michael to South Los Santos and approaches a group of three black gang members to measure their response. Without provocation, they quickly hurl insults, then punches, and finally bullets. Michael flees and, as he runs, he discharges an automatic weapon and kills his pursuers before continuing his exploration of the neighbourhood.

Clinton's fieldnote videos culminated in a short film that featured a more elaborate series of in-game neighbourhood encounters with Michael and Franklin. In the opening title card he writes that the aim is to explore how "the dominance of certain groups and ideologies is reinforced in the game...specifically looking at race." He chose Tupac Shakur's "California Love" for the soundtrack, which celebrates the superiority of the "west side" (west coast) Los Angeles rap scene and the lyrics include verbal gang posturing for the benefit of their "east side" rap rivals in New York. The song was also featured on the *GTA*: *San Andreas* soundtrack.

As Franklin, Clinton walks around a "lower class" (his words) South Los Santos neighbourhood and only encounters other African Americans, many who wear his green

Families gang colours. Franklin is not from this specific neighbourhood, but Clinton remarks that, "they don't seem to mind Franklin being there, because in this game it sort of shows that he belongs there." There were a few instances where Franklin was insulted or brushed off, but he was generally treated well. Clinton comments that "If I were walking around as Michael, however, it would be a little different." In a title card, he writes that Franklin's gang membership is a stereotype, and observes that the game "reinforces the ideology of white vs. black culture." He then takes a car and drives north to Vinewood, where he narrates that "even though [Franklin] has a house here at this point in the game [Franklin moves into a large, luxury home later in the story], he doesn't seem like he belongs." While he walks around as Franklin in the primarily white, affluent neighbourhood, Clinton points out that people seem productively occupied as opposed to the loitering rampant in South Los Santos, and concludes that "it's a huge critique of the racial dominance that occurs in our society."

Clinton reverses the formula to see how Michael is treated in wealthy Vinewood. Passersby do not react with the same level of acrimony as they did with Franklin, albeit Michael seems to linger less frequently to provoke a reaction. He then steals a car and drives to "the hood" to see "how people will react to a rich white man in a poor black neighbourhood." Predictably, he is verbally abused, pushed around and then punched where Franklin was mostly greeted warmly. "It was completely different as just being around them caused them to start harassing Michael, and ultimately fighting him," narrates Clinton, and he later concludes that "I'm not sure if this is racist, as much as it is an accurate depiction of the probably real Los Angeles...I do believe, to a certain extent, this would maybe occur in real life. Sorry, I don't think it's racist but the reality of it. It's a shame, but sorta true." This echoes a similar sentiment he expressed earlier in the video: "I don't think the way they show this is wrong, as in incorrect. I just don't think it has to be like that in the game to be amusing."

These casual experiments to gauge Michael's reception by predominantly black

communities support the idea that white middle class people like the SPRs are un-welcome in the exotic world of the ghetto. Perth and Clinton each explicitly stated that their experiences of racial hostility in the game are accurate representations of reality. Entering the space as Michael took on the air of an expedition that involved danger, adventure, and unprovoked encounters with violence. Although Franklin was also unwelcome in the white world of Vinewood, the insults did not tend to devolve into violence — unless the police were involved — as they did in South Los Santos. Clinton frames the dynamic in terms of belonging, and hints that the game's logic naturalizes Franklin's "belonging" in the ghetto and not in the well heeled white community in the hills. At the end, he states his view of the "hard truth" that the racially segregated and mutually discriminatory neighbourhoods in the game echo the reality of Los Angeles. However, he has no lived experience, nor furnishes proof for his position.

Convenience stores and cabs. Some of the SPRs' self-directed inquiries into racial representations extended beyond the white north/black south binary. Carson, for example, noticed that convenience store owners were all immigrants, while Milton conducted a test to gauge the ethnicities of Los Santos taxi drivers. Finally, Franklin is the only playable character permitted to buy the taxi company, which Marlowe sees as discriminatory.

In a May 10 Facebook post, and again later in his autoethnography, Carson wrote that "when going into the convenient *[sic]* stores around Los Santos, all the store workers are depicted as being immigrants" which he felt "adds another stereotype to the game." He observes that, after an extensive search, that the "cashier of the store in the desert, is the only non-Asian one." Carson also contributes to the informal experiments of Franklin's treatment in diverse settings, when he reports that he was addressed disrespectfully by the only Caucasian convenience store clerk in the desert. The clerk "implies that Franklin's not welcome by making remarks like 'Make it quick' or 'you're done now leave.' And I didn't experience that with any other convenient *[sic]* store workers or char-

Figure 7.11: Carson as Franklin entering the convenience store in the desert

acters other than Franklin." Milton set out to examine how taxi driver ethnicities were represented in the game. "I decided to look at the taxicab drivers, and how they varied between each other," he writes. "I thought that because *GTA* 5 is known for its stereotypical things, for example, the corner store owners being Asian, or that black people are in the bad neighbourhood." Milton explicitly states that *GTA V*'s fame for its stereotypical representations motivated his inquiry. "I tested it on around 5 taxicab drivers and they all were of the same ethnicity," he reported on a Facebook post. "I didn't know what ethnicity it was, maybe Indian or South American," he later elaborates in his notes, concluding that he was unable to find a white cab driver. Like his classmates, he also took the opportunity to gauge how the cabbies reacted to the three protagonists without specific provocation. "They said different things depending on the player I was using, but it didn't seem like it was discriminating against either or, except in Trevor's case." He goes on to explain that he thinks the cabbies verbally abused Trevor because he looked homeless and drunk.

In *GTA V*, players have the option to buy businesses such as a movie theater, seafood restaurants, cannabis dispensaries, or a golf course. Some of the businesses are available to all, while others are limited to certain protagonists. In his notes, Marlowe observes that Franklin is the only player allowed to purchase the Downtown Cab taxi company. He writes that this "relates to race because stereotypically taxi drivers are thought to be newly immigrated people from places like Africa or South Asia. Because the only non-white playable character is the only one able to buy this stereotypically non-white

job, this reinforces this racial stereotype." Although Franklin has other business options, including a golf course, Marlowe recognizes that a stereotype is reinforced by limiting the potential ownership of the taxi company to Franklin.

These smaller experiments and observations were dislocated from any particular sector of the city, but shed further light on how SPRs investigated racial stereotypes. Rather than place-race connections, these cases focused how certain races were linked to specific occupations, namely cabbies, cab companies, and convenience store clerks. Franklin was implicated in how he was mistreated by the only white convenience store clerk, and being the only playable avatar allowed to own the taxi business. In all cases, the SPRs connected the perceived in-game stereotype to the real world.

Conclusion

The data synthesized in this chapter foregrounds localized insights into how SPRs engage with race in their gameplay and critical interpretations of *GTA V*. Most of the racial interaction they reported was centred on playing with Franklin and sometimes Michael, encounters with the police, and they were generally carried out in South Los Santos, and less frequently, Vinewood. Throughout, they demonstrated some awareness of how the game deployed stereotypes, particularly in regard to how Franklin and other African American NPCs were represented in the game. In some cases, such as the "Ghetto Safari" commercial produced at the end of the unit, the SPRs demonstrated a sophisticated self-awareness of their status as identity tourists which they expressed in a tone reminiscent of the game's parody media. In almost all instances, their critical reflections directly referenced class readings, were provoked by in-class dialogue, or emerged through their guided writing, videos, and media production. However, at various points, the SPRs hinted at colour-blind views of race, saw a black man as the only realistic option to role-play as a gang member, associated "American" with whiteness, satirically connected African Americans with animals, posited a white luxury lifestyle as a means to redeem black poverty and criminality, and largely confined their in-game consumption

of drugs and alcohol to Franklin's home in South Los Santos. Moreover, the prestige they attribute to rap and hip-hop artists became apparent with the high status they ascribe to fashion items associated with the music, and also stated that being a black male is a form of hegemony and the apex of cultural power. Notably, this view, expressed by well educated and social justice oriented adolescents, may index a widely held belief that may subtly undermine the problematic elements of the racial status quo.

Many of their interactions with race were deliberately staged in the spirit of experimentation. They variably investigated to see if police were racist, how black Franklin and white Michael were treated in their own and each other's racialized neighbourhoods, and gauged the prevalent racial representations of cab drivers and convenience store owners. First, despite their designation as co-researchers, the investigative approach was self-motivated and influenced by their informal media consumption rather than my prescriptions. Rather than being co-researchers in the way I hoped they would be, they became co-researchers in a way that was meaningful to them. Secondly, in most of these instances, their interrogations can be seen as unique to the video game medium because they sought to probe *GTA V*'s interactive elements, or how the coded behaviour of the game — what Bogost (2008) terms its procedural rhetoric— responded to their play, whether that be racist police, white pedestrians, or black gang members. While implicit, these responses by the game's AI may be naturalized, but their self-directed ventures to expose these mechanical biases provoke a more critical reception of the game, which may help innoculate them from some of its pernicious consequences.

The data also revealed that their gameplay and informal experiments reinforced a sense of mutual hostility between white and black communities, and that members of one group were unwelcome by the other. I should add that the narrative campaign is more nuanced, and demonstrate many successful interracial alliances and relationships, such as the friendship between Michael and Franklin, but it seems that the algorithmic design of the open world is less inclusive. Several of the SPRs reported their sense that the neigh-

bourhoods in the game were realistic and, consequently, expressed that the racial tensions and aggression they encountered therein were also perceived to be accurate. Furthermore, the game's racial-spatial divide seems to impose a corresponding binary that affects how open world players might enact narratives with their avatars. In the case of Franklin, for example, I cited evidence where he either partook in the violent gang activity, drinking, and drug use endemic to South Los Santos, or was "redeemed" by assimilating to the codes of white wealth and affluence as dictated by Vinewood. These are extreme cases, but underscore that rather than allowing for a free exploration of alternative social possibilities, or supplying the creative resources to reimagine the status quo of racially segregated urban spaces, *GTA V* tightly constrains the connections of race and place and the social processes therein. As shown by the data, in-game locations can produce significant emotional attachments, including feelings of territoriality and nostalgia which validate the notion that virtual place, like their material counterparts, are invested with personal and social meaning. The perceived realism and the emotional connections to these virtual places are indicative of their capacity to persuasively shape worldviews and imaginaries, with potentially damaging consequences to the real world. *GTA V* constitutes and is constituted by a discursive field of knowledge/power that shape and reinforce corresponding "imaginative geographies," as palpably evinced by the SPRs' in-game enactments and subsequent productions.

Chapter 8: The White Mirror: Critical Reflections on Michael, Jimmy, Dreadlocks, and Django

> *"Everybody has heard of South Los Santos, mostly because it gets shouted out so much in gangster rap. An economically depressed, predominantly African-American area of the city, stigmatized in the media as a hotbed for drugs, crime and gangs, South Los Santos largely lives up to that reputation with long-term rival gangs Ballas and Families still warring over turf to this day. Pick the color of your outfit carefully before visiting."*
>
> —*Grand Theft Auto V digital manual*

Introduction

This chapter gathers data from various sources to explore some ways that the SPRs discuss their whiteness and contend with issues of cultural appropriation. This chapter builds on the previous chapter to provide views on how their gameplay was contextualized and interpreted in the instructional environment. As discussed, the SPRs inhabit what Bonilla-Silva et al. (2006) call a white habitus, or a mostly insular white community which characterizes much of their life in and outside of school. The first section forwards data largely based on in-class sessions where some SPRs discuss whether they feel any guilt or discomfort about their privileged lives. Next, I include segments to show how they saw Michael, the white playable protagonist, as reflective of their own status. The section concludes with evidence of some SPRs becoming aware of their status and privilege. The second part relates instances where SPRs expressed their views and opinions about cultural appropriation, followed by examples of they form their ideas about race based on the media. The final section reports on how several of the SPRs reflected on their tendency to adopt black culture through the lens of Jimmy, Michael's adolescent son, who plays video games, dresses in hip-hop fashions and whose speech is heavily woven with African American vernacular English (AAVE).

A Pedagogy of Whiteness

There were several documented instances, both unintended and by design, where the SPRs were occasioned to reflect on their own whiteness and whiteness in general. They observed how the game exhibited a disparity between white wealth and black poverty, but also extended their reflections to consider their own status and privilege. I was promoted to encourage these self-interrogations by a pedagogical approach that asks white students to consider the attributes and implicit advantages of their racial status (See, for example, Giroux, 1997; Kolchin, 2002; Leonardo; 2002; Murray; 2017; Rodriguez, 2002). Leonardo (2002) suggests that non-white and white students alike rarely engage in productive discourses on race, that curricula fail to "critique white domination," and that "whites invest in practices that obscure racial processes" (p. 144) which

entail "politics of undetectability" (Leonardo, 2004, p. 149). Also, Rodriguez (2000) advocates for whiteness education to extend beyond the classroom to informal learning spaces and the spheres of popular culture "where consciousness is constructed, identities are formed, and knowledge is produced" (p. 18), which supports the use of a video game to unpack whiteness. Foregrounding whiteness during the study made it visible and, rather than deploying the approach to provoke guilt (although I did probe for guilt), it was cast in the spirit of critical reflection about an important and often neglected component that is silently complicit in discriminatory practices.

Power failure: Mansions and the question of guilt. During a discussion on May 24 the SPRs were explicitly asked about their sense of being white and any relevant experiences that highlighted their attendant privilege. Unfortunately, Decker, Perth, Joshua, and Clinton were absent during that session. The conversation was spurred when I asked the small group if they felt any guilt associated with being white and upper middle class. Elgin was first to respond with "I would say a bit. Not really guilt, but knowing that other people aren't as lucky as I am, being born into such a good place, but I wouldn't say it's super guilty. Maybe a little bit. Noticing that other people don't have the same situation as me." Davis also volunteered that "the only times I feel guilty is when I forget how much I should be appreciating the situation I was born into...When we had the ice storm a few years ago, my house was out [power failure] for 9 days and it was in the middle of Bethany Hills [pseudonym for a prosperous neighbourhood], which usually comes up after 3 days. And I was sitting there and I was kind of enjoying that — not having anything to worry about — just sitting there reading my book by the fire and understanding that there's some people who live like this all the time. They don't have any internet, they don't have any central heating and that made me feel guilty for where I was, and it wasn't full guilt, but more understanding and appreciation of how lucky I really am to be in my house." Carson also shared that "in International Business we're reading about a sweatshop in Bangladesh that blew up and all these people got killed. If I'm seeing that kind

of thing and then you automatically relate yourself to it, and I think what are the chances that you could be that person or those people and you're more fortunate maybe because your parents got a better job or your ancestors are more fortunate, but yeah. So in that scenario I think about it, but not on a regular basis." Milton forwarded an example of the older brother of one of his classmates: "[he] makes blogs on YouTube about his lifestyle and buying nice clothes and people comment saying 'you're just using your dad's money — it's your dad's money' so he made a segment in his blog that said you can't control where you are born, so if you're born into a family and you're helped to get to success, why would you not take it? You can't control it. And they work for their money — well that's what he said, but his parents put him into a position where he could succeed. That's just what I think." Marlowe answered that "in terms of white guilt... white privilege... I don't feel all that guilty about where I am, but I sometimes feel that people at this school are kind of assholes the way they walk around and flaunt their wealth… especially the Grade 9s. Walking around in $300 shoes…" Milton quickly adds "no, not $300 — that's a cheap brand." Marlowe qualifies, saying "I mean the stupidly expensive clothes."

Some SPRs reported experiencing instances of being conscious of their privilege, with Elgin, Davis, and Carson specifically admitting to instances of discomfort. These were all related to moments of awareness when contrasted with abstract others in implied conditions of destitution. With the example of his classmate's brother, Milton implied that he is fortunate to be born into his circumstances and would be foolish not to take full advantage of them. Marlowe stated that he does not feel "all that guilty," which may (speculatively) imply some guilt, but he expressed a dislike for the ostentatious flaunting of wealth. In every case, their observations emphasized economics and wealth to the exclusion of race, and they did not directly link their circumstances to race, although the question was framed as such.

Later in the same conversation, Davis and Roy discussed how their houses and neighbourhoods, when compared to those of friends from lower income families, caused

some tensions when their affluent status was brought to the fore. Roy, who plays community basketball, discussed the awkwardness he felt in Grade 9 when he invited his teammates, many of whom were black, for a BBQ at his family's mansion in Bethany Hills: "I do have some friends who live up near Commerce Court [pseudonym for a shopping mall] in government housing and I had a BBQ over the weekend and I invited... all the guys that I kinda play basketball with and… and, um, I talked to my mom about this because I felt a little weird you know, at first, when I first thought of the BBQ, but my mom said that she felt the same way because she went to Fieldstone [a public HS] and my mom grew up in Bethany Hills in a massive, massive house and her friend would come over and they were from the Midgarden or whatever [middle class neighbourhood] and see this massive house and um, but I kinda felt the same way. These guys come from [makes air quotes] "the jungle" [an informal but common nickname for the neighbourhood she refers to] area of [the city] and... driving into my neighbourhood filled with mansions." I asked whether he felt more guilt or embarrassment and Roy responded with, "I think more embarrassment side, but my mom told me not to think about it, because thinking about it would make it real and even worse, so I put it out of my mind and the BBQ was good, so…" Davis shared a reverse experience, where he visited friends away from his Bethany Hills community, and was struck by their small homes. "I have a bunch of friends who are middle class or lower to middle class and going to their houses I'm like, 'wow, I'm so used to going to big, big houses in Crestwoods or Bethany Hills' [affluent neighbourhoods] and it's interesting to go to this smaller house in Midgarden and see that it's much smaller. I don't know, maybe I'm a bad person for saying that — I don't feel bad for the people. That would be worse, right? [uncertain]" A few moments later he adds "and I feel bad for thinking that people aren't equal at that exact time. 'Cause everyone is equal, right?" He quickly qualifies with "should be." These final two cases connect the discomfort felt by Roy and Davis to the contrast between their spatial environments and those of their friends and acquaintances. They

both live in what amounts to a gated white community, and their examples incarnate the prevalent real-world connections between place and affluence, and the tensions produced when territorial boundaries are crossed, a circumstance that is echoed and amplified in *GTA V*. In this sense, Roy's example is most pertinent because many of his BBQ guests are black and live in government housing, but neither he nor Davis frame their experience as a function of race — theirs or others'. Each case highlights their physical and, to some degree, social insularity.

The Michael connection. There were also several reported instances where *GTA V* gameplay, and particularly the character of Michael, provoked the SPRs to make connections to their own social and racial status. In his fieldnotes, Decker, who in his autoethnography stated that he is part of "one of the most fortunate groups on the planet," writes that when he cruises around as Michael, "Franklin's neighbourhood is not appealing to me, as the mediocrity and poverty doesn't make for a fun gameplay experience. I don't think this speaks to my privilege, as I enjoy driving around downtown where there are lights, and people, and tall buildings." Clinton entered South Los Santos as Michael and eventually shoots and kills three black men after being harassed by them without provocation. In reference to this incident he wrote that "this makes me feel a bit racist as a white man with complete power over a black man, and shooting them at point blank with no defence really. This is a perfect example of a rich white man with more power than the lower class black men. While I was playing this, I felt that I had power over them." In his May 9th fieldnotes Perth describes Michael as "a middle aged affluent white man with a family, living in the hills in Los Santos. Michael's character is white therefore being a dominant figure in society because of his race." Later, during a May 15th class discussion about power in the game, Perth comments that "[*GTA V*] makes you see how you're different from the various characters in the game and how we're similar to Michael because we're white and affluent, except we don't do those crimes." In his final reflection video, Carson also draws a connection between himself and Michael: "I'd probably say that I'm

probably closer [longish pause — hesitates to make this identity connection] to like a Michael character in real life. Not that like I'm like a bad person, but our school, people in our school are obviously a lot more privileged, and we are middle to higher class in society and we like the lifestyle that Franklin would live in *GTA*. It would be like nothing close to what any of us do, 'cause he lives in a small house, he lives in the ghetto, he's a gang *[sic]*, he's black — like I can't relate, really, to that, and I think the game is trying to bring you into that perspective and that's what intrigues you." As discussed in the last chapter, when polled about their favourite playable character, six of the ten chose Franklin, and none chose Michael, whose lifestyle, race, and status most resembles their own, which goes some way, albeit speculatively, to validating Carson's claim about players being attracted to a life unlike their own. However, in all these extracts, Michael is an icon on which they project their racial and social position of power, privilege, and status.

I feel it is important to couch the SPRs' responses to the question of guilt with a few contextual considerations. First, the question was put to them without preparation or forewarning. It came up naturally in conversation, and they were not given time to think about a question that was likely uncomfortable and may have never been asked of them in the past. I spent years in their company and know them all to be kind, well intentioned, and thoughtful. However, this does not change the fact that they hold dominant social positions with little exposure to diverse lifestyles and circumstances, a condition that is not uncommon in North America. They have been acclimated to a world of wealth, privilege, luxury homes, and opportunity, and, through no malice or ill intent, anything other largely remains an abstract concept. This is exactly why it is important, if not crucial, to prod at their views and force them to think about their place in the world, and the implicit assumptions they hold about it. *GTA V* proved an influential, relevant, and dense cultural artifact by which to provoke reflections on whiteness, especially considering the racial insularity of the SPRs' school and community, where most had little access or exposure to nonwhites outside the media.

Growing awareness. Excerpts from their post-survey responses, autoethnographies and counter-hegemonic media produced close to the end of the study yielded evidence that some SPRs became mindful of their own privilege. I should stress that the post-survey [Appendices G & H] did not specifically ask about race, but only to report on what they felt they had learned, so discussions of race were voluntary. In his post-survey video, Carson said that "...even just like asking questions about, like, feeling guilty [in the class discussion] or anything about being like a privileged middle upper class, um, like, a white teenager. So yeah, I'd actually say that my perspective about myself did change a bit — just thinking about how, like, as a teenager who's white, and yeah how video games like *GTA*; how it draws you into that, and I think, I'm just — I don't know how much I changed, but I think I'm just, I'd be more aware of stereotypes of just race." In his post-survey video, Clinton stated that "I've always sort of understood [about] white male dominance, and you see in the game that it's a huge stereotype. But, first thing, I don't think it's all true, but the way our society acts, it's kind of accurate. That's just the way it is I guess. So I guess I've sort of become more aware of that." In his autoethnography, Davis writes that "*GTA* shows the prejudices of the upper class white character with lots of money who lives in the nicest house money can buy. *[sic]* versus the black character who lives in a bungalow in the ghetto with a liquor store directly across from it. *GTA* has a lot of what Antonio Gramsci's called "common sense," this being the idea that "common sense" tells us that black people live in the ghetto and are poorer and white people live in rich homes." In each case, the SPR attributes the critical study of the game with an increased awareness about social and cultural advantages enjoyed by whites generally, and themselves in particular. In the last excerpt from Davis, he cites Gramsci to underpin his assertion about the status quo of unequal racial-spatial divisions being naturalized by the game.

Davis also produced a counter-hegemonic comic that warrants closer attention. The comic relates a story that contrasts the asymmetrical lives of Michael and Frank-
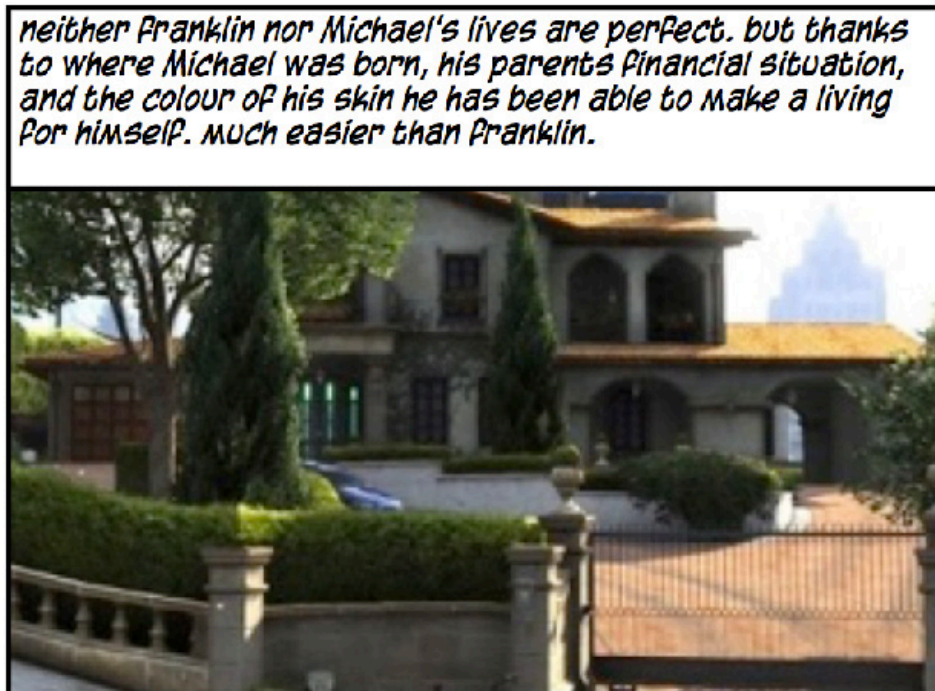
Figure 8.1: A panel from Davis' counter-hegemonic comic about Michael and Franklin

lin, starting with their early days in school. Franklin grew up poor, fell asleep in class from being kept awake by his parents' fights, had no parental support, was negatively influenced by his friends, and was "treated like he was a waste of space." This led to his dropping out of school and embarking on a life of crime that ended in prison. By contrast, Michael was well supported with private tutors and teachers who loved him, which led to a financially successful life. Davis writes that "neither Franklin's or Michael's life are perfect. But *[sic]* thanks to where Michael was born, his parents' financial situation, and the colour of his skin, he has been able to make a living for himself. Much easier than Franklin." He later adds, as Franklin looks longingly at a basketball court while in prison, that "Franklin always thought that he could have been a basketball player but everyone took him down the wrong road." On one hand, the project demonstrated that Davis exhibited an unresearched understanding of some root challenges and disadvantages that contextualize Franklin's trajectory and, inversely, Michael's inherent advantages. Davis linked both circumstances to race; however, Franklin's missed avenue of opportunity is tied to basketball, which plays into the narrow discourse of black males succeeding as either rappers, gangsters, or athletes (Leonardo, 2002).

Appropriations: "Dear White People", Dreadlocks, and *Django Unchained*

We'd touched on cultural and racial appropriation in passing, but the issue erupted into an impassioned discussion at the end of the seventh session on May 11. We were discussing the inclusion of LGBTQ characters in *GTA V* when Decker brought up the general issue of appropriation and questioned whether white artists are entitled to tell black stories. His line of argument was inspired by "Dear White People", a political comedy series on Netflix about the frictions encountered by black students on a US Ivy League campus. Elgin, Joshua, Marlowe, and Davis each contested elements of Decker's argument on various grounds, but their polemics were carried out in the spirit of exploration rather than from a standpoint of firmly held opinion. The discussion is valuable to review in detail because it is the most explicit sustained discourse on race undertaken by the SPRs, and it also illustrates the significance force of media in shaping their views.

"Do you have the right to tell a black man's story?" The discussion began while we were reading an article in class and Decker referenced an episode of ""Dear White People"" where Quentin Tarantino's Django Unchained is criticized for its stereotypical portrayal of black characters. He referenced a conversation in the show that questions Tarantino's right to tell a black story, and parlayed it into a critique of *GTA V*: "["Dear White People"] was written by black writers and black characters who are saying that no matter how many people Django kills, no matter how many slave masters he kills, it does not give Quentin Tarantino the right to make such a stereotypically black character and to tell stories about races that literally aren't his. And I was thinking that, in this game, I know that a lot of the time they maybe comment on those stereotypes and perhaps being satirical or making a social commentary. I wonder if they have the right to do that? It's got white developers and it's like do you have the right to tell a black man's story or stereotype?"

Elgin, who likes to experiment with style, music, and has a wide range of interests in film and literature, frequently questions the boundaries of cultural appropriation.

He challenged Decker by arguing that Django Unchained is just a story, and that people should not be restricted from telling the stories they want to tell. "Ok, ok. I kinda thought the same thing," responded Decker. "But the point that "Dear White People" made, first of all, whenever you're having this discussion, we have to realize that we come from a class that hasn't been oppressed. So, for example, to see our story told by someone else of a different class, we don't feel insulted and we don't feel angry because there's no real oppression that's happened... when people see themselves misrepresented, it's deeply upsetting. Especially if it's coming from systemic racism or systemic oppression."

Elgin, now joined by Joshua, rebutted that many people now considered white have suffered oppression, and raise the examples of Jewish and Irish immigrants. Joshua added that "everybody gets oppressed at some point in time. Recently, it hasn't been white people." Decker responded with "but if you're still facing systemic racism, and you see, like for example, a character such as Lamar [Franklin's gang member friend in *GTA V*] represented by what the white man feels... like, even though it is a stereotype and what they're commenting on is stereotype, I just wonder if they have the right to do that."

Davis entered the fray with the suggestion that the film should be interpreted as a white perspective on black characters and experiences, and thus should be forgiven for not deceiving the audience as to the white origin of the story. "So, maybe seeing through Tarantino's eyes allows them to see how the white people see it so that they can get two sides to the story." Decker, however, disagreed and maintained that "it's still told through the eyes of a black person," meaning the film is anchored in the perspective of the black protagonist. Elgin countered again with "it's just a story," but before he could elaborate, Decker responded with "yeah, but the community that's actually feeling the effects of the racism are saying that 'we actually don't like this,' and we as white males are saying 'there's no problem;' don't you think that we have a responsibility to be like 'maybe we should let them tell these stories and we don't have a right to,' like."

Later in the conversation, Elgin questioned the limits and boundaries of cultural

appropriation when he states that "when I hear people saying 'ooohh, cultural appropriation is a really bad thing,' I say, 'what kind of car are you driving? What kind of clothes are you wearing?' Dreadlocks are like something that just happens to your hair naturally. If there's no such thing as cultural appropriation, we wouldn't have had as much progress made, because we need cultures coming together to make stuff and…" Although a bit convoluted, Elgin implied that progress in history owes a great deal to intercultural exchanges. He continued with: "I don't see how it could be such a bad thing. Oh you're having dreadlocks, but some black women actually straighten their hair, which is like a white thing, or they're like wearing Italian clothes, or driving a Japanese car."

After some back and forth, Decker summed up that "their main point is, like a lot of the frustration right now, [is because] there are things that are racism and discrimination in our culture that we don't acknowledge. That are so intricate, and so damaging, that we as a culture don't acknowledge." He continued with examples of how there are subtleties to racism that can be easily overlooked: "it's so intricate, that if you haven't lived it or haven't experienced it you can't truly comment on it with the same veracity. For example, like cops. Some people say that black people talk to cops a certain way because they have this mindset [points at head]. But cops naturally, like systematically, profile people because of their race. That's something that's a severe issue, you can't make an argument that black people commit more crimes — because they should be treated with the same respect and they should have the same policy. And there are more intricate things like people saying, like in social situations, like there's a huge issue in college campuses with people touching black people's hair and saying 'Oh I love your natural African hair.'" Marlowe questioned the frequency and gravity of the "hair touching" problem, wondering if it's a prevalent phenomena or just "four or five weirdos." Clinton shared an anecdote that his teammates liked to touch the hair of the team's only black player, and later added that his black teammate "admits that he feels like he's treated differently."

Decker also mentioned that white kids singing along with a song using the "N" word is a problem as well. He argued that "you can't say 'it's in the song, so what's the problem with me saying it?' It's so much more intricate than we can know, and that's the point." Although he doesn't explicitly mention it, this was also a central plot point in an episode of "Dear White People". Decker's observation prompted Elgin to recall a situation where he was at a party where a group of white girls were chanting the "N" word as they sang along to a popular rap song. Despite Elgin's skepticism about cultural appropriation, he said the scene made him feel uncomfortable, stating "I was like 'what is going on here' – it didn't feel right.'" Joshua added that "It's too early to start normalizing words like that," meaning that racism has not been overcome, and thus certain words continue to be invested with discriminatory power. I complimented him on his use of the word "normalizing" and his classmates happily applauded before we returned to the reading.

White guys with dreadlocks. This fertile discussion produced some important insights. First, it was provoked by and largely centred around media. Our study of the game and that session's reading of Borchard's (2015) article on Super Columbine Massacre RPG and *GTA V* raised questions about whether white artists and creators have the moral licence to tell black stories. Decker mounted a confident defence of his position based on his viewing of "Dear White People", and advanced the idea that African Americans, as a historically oppressed minority, are subject to different circumstances and considerations from dominant white groups, a view which runs in direct opposition to a colour-blind ideology. This was countered by some push-back from Elgin and Joshua, who are skeptical of cultural appropriation.

The bulk of the discourse was centred on Django Unchained and Tarantino's right to tell a black man's story, but as Decker observed early on, this same question can be asked of the creators of *GTA V*. A week later, Decker researched the game's creators on his own accord and reported back to me: "I Googled Rockstar's core development team

and they're all white. Around 30 — look to be awkwardly dressed [smirks]. Certainly a type." I respond that 30-something white males are representative of the industry as a whole, and he responded "all the stuff they're talking about — I'm like 'woah — where's your experience in that?'" His assertion clearly builds on his previous misgivings about *GTA V*'s white developers being qualified to tell black stories, demonstrating an insightful and sophisticated critique of the game, the industry, and media at large.

Secondly, the informal but impassioned debate was also the most significant outward dialogue about cultural appropriation. Rather than wholly dismissing it, Elgin and Joshua questioned its boundaries, each conceding a limit at the use of the "N" word. The discussion was briefly resurrected two weeks later on May 26, when we read Leonard's (2003) critique of white players controlling black avatars. During a pause in the reading, Joshua asked "do you consider that a bad thing though? Wanting to experience something different? The tone I'm getting from this article is that it's bad that people want to experience black culture." After my brief and ambivalent response, Joshua continues, "I saw this thing...maybe it's on Reddit or something. It's this person trying to tell this chef that he couldn't cook this certain food because…[garbled]." Elgin interjected with: "Cultural appropriation." Joshua smirked and added "you wanna DNA test all the chefs now? I found that... I don't know." Davis ambiguously piped in with "white guys with dreadlocks!" The class bell rang before the discussion could go any further.

During the two sessions where the SPRs debated cultural appropriation and its limits, there was a conspicuous absence of any discussion of white adolescent boys adopting hip-hop codes and fashions, likely the case of cultural appropriation that was most relevant to most of the SPRs. As Clinton writes in his fieldnotes in a conclusion derived largely from his milieu, "Many Caucasian upper middle class males will attempt to embody a sort of 'gangster' persona to appeal more cool to others." My sense was not that, for most of the SPRs, this was a deliberate omission, but I leave the possibility open that some of them may have sidestepped a topic that would shed light on their problem-

atic appropriation of hip-hop inspired codes of blackness. Although this crucial topic went largely un-discussed in public, a few addressed it significantly in their writing, as will be shown in the next section.

Mediated Experiences with Race

During the discussion about cultural appropriation, Decker challenged his classmates with ideas drawn from "Dear White People" to critique Django Unchained and, ultimately, *GTA V*. This was a significant instance of how SPRs rely on media to form and substantiate their opinions and beliefs. The literature review established that *GTA V* is a mediated cartographic artifact that references and inheres a wide gamut of media, which fits well with near ubiquitous influence of media on the 21st century adolescent (Deuze, 2011). In this section, I offer further glimpses of how, throughout the study, media was referenced by the SPRs to forward their views on race.

In one classroom exchange, Roy illustrates how hip-hop media is sourced to authenticate the "realism" of *GTA V*. When asked whether Franklin could provide insights into the reality of life as a black man, Roy stated that "[t]here's a lot of nuances that [*GTA V*] would miss and I would disagree that it gives you insight into being an African American man. I think, to my knowledge, the only thing that is correct [makes air quotes] is that there's so many liquor stores in ghettos in the United States." I ask him how he knows this is correct. "That's a good question," he responds, stumped. Elgin laughs and jumps in with: "21 Savage [rap artist], 'No heart [song],'" a hip-hop music video where a liquor store features prominently. Roy ignores him and eventually referenced a documentary about "this guy from the Watts neighbourhood in LA and he talked about how they were destroying our community...ah…[exaggerated finger point] HIS community and destroying libraries and not giving them funding and the liquor store's been there for 50 years and how it's been destroying the community for that amount of time so…" Whether accurate or not, Roy's sense of the prevalence of liquor stores in black neighbourhoods are entirely derived from media.

SPR projections of the future of race were also reliant on media. In one session, we addressed the consequences of skin colour, spurred by a broader discussion about how Franklin is treated in the game. Elgin brought up an episode of South Park where the characters travel through time and discover a world where all races have blended into a homogeneous skin colour. In support of Elgin, Roy added that he saw a *National Geographic* episode where "they predicted that in the future there would be a lot of mixed race marriages" resulting in a homogeneous race/skin colour. A few moments later, Elgin added that "yeah, but I feel if that happens, people are going to find other reasons to judge each other. I don't know; eye colour, that could be a thing — like if you have brown eyes clearly you're a gang member or something…" Davis builds on Elgin when he immediately cites a Rick and Morty episode where discrimination follows the lines of "you have one horn or two horns." Again, media fiction and non-fiction supply the substance for their thoughts about race.

In addition to more cohesive discussion, scattered references to race drawn from diverse media sourced peppered conversations among the SPRs. In defense of Vice Media, which Elgin dismissed as "click-bait," Perth discussed a Vice documentary about "Chiraq," the nickname for Chicago invoking Iraq to account for the high degree of violence and subsequent trauma experienced by black communities in the city. Later, in the same conversation, Elgin asked if we were familiar with the US version of the UK show Shameless, which he said was entertaining but unrealistic because it portrayed a white family from Chicago's south side, which he thought was realistic. In another discussion about white supremacy, Josua offered the example of the "hyper-American" villain in Far Cry 4: "He's got the beard. He's got the American flag and he's got the shotgun." As in the case of his "Ghetto Safari" video there is an implicit equation of whiteness with being American, although it is worth remembering that Joshua is Canadian and may be referring to a widely circulated trope of the "typical American." To follow through with a reference he made in a class discussion, Elgin posted an episode of Viceland's The Therapist

on the Facebook group where hip-hop artist Waka Flocka Flame shares how anger helped him deal with the death of his two brothers and a conflict with a rival rapper.

In all of these cases, ideas and theorizations about race and racialized neighbour-hoods were derived from media. At no point, from any discussions or documents, did they mention or discuss having a lived experience with racialized neighbourhoods, or even having read about them. Media was their only and exclusive point of reference.

Approximating Jimmy: An Uncomfortable Look in the Mirror

Michael De Santa's teenage son Jimmy can be read as a parody of the game's core adolescent male consumer. Jimmy lives with his family in a luxury home in the city's exclusive Rockford Hills neighbourhood, and provides comic relief as a directionless, pot-smoking adolescent who listens to rap, dresses in hip-hop fashions, and plays violent video games in his bedroom while unleashing a barrage of toxic obscenities. When he meets Franklin, who he seeks to impress, Jimmy tries to connect with him by adopting an affected African American parlance. As a white affluent adolescent who plays video games and performs blackness as a style, Jimmy became a sort of funhouse mirror where several SPRs saw slightly distorted images of themselves. Once they became aware of their affinity with Jimmy, some SPRs proceeded to interrogate their own impulses to adopt and perform blackness, particularly as it is represented in hip-hop music and media.

We first discussed Jimmy in the context of "acting black" a week into the study in the May 9th session, and many SPRs went on to expand on the topic in their writing and videos in the weeks that followed. For example, in his autoethnography, Davis identifies Jimmy as a parody of his peer group: "[Jimmy] is weak, fat, plays video games and is so-ciety's idea of me and my classmates, the upper class white children *[sic]*. He has every-thing […] a nice house with a pool, all the games he could want, a good education, but he wants to be cool so he tries to be like franklin *[sic]* such as how kids these days listen to rap and wear gangster clothes. Michael's son gets tattoos and constantly wants to hang

out with Franklin so he can be cool like him. The Black *[sic]* culture is what Michael's son wants, but cannot ever be part of, and seeing myself and my classmates represented in this way is a big eye opener for me because a lot of us do consume different cultures and dress and talk like different cultures. Which is why *GTA V* is such a good parody on our western society." Surprisingly, Davis is one of the few SPRs who displayed little to no outward affinity or interest in adopting hip-hop codes and only listens to "some rap" among many other preferred genres. Also notable is that Davis is also in the minority of self-proclaimed "gamers" in the group, but he had not played *GTA V*, nor did he particularly enjoy it once he did. Regardless, he states that reflecting on Jimmy was an "eye opener" that occasioned greater awareness of his peers' patterns of cultural appropriation.

"I never thought I was that guy." Joshua and Clinton stood out as the two SPRs who most closely associated themselves with Jimmy. Initially, they each distanced themselves from the idea that they shared characteristics with a character who is clearly intended as an object of ridicule, but subsequent writings and discussions expressed a growing willingness to explore their connection with Jimmy, and their own inclination to adopt African American codes.

In his May 15 notes, which were written without a specific prompt, Clinton states that "jimmy *[sic]* attempts to associate himself with hip-hop culture, which is mostly associated with African American culture in los Santos *[sic]*. This is most likely a major critique on the privileged youth of today's society." This is Clinton's first recorded comments about Jimmy, which he relays in a detached, third-person voice. However, Clinton plays video games, primarily listens to hip-hop, and he fits the description of Caucasian "upper middle class male" he ascribes to Jimmy and his like. A few weeks later, the SPRs discussed how they related to the various characters in the game and Clinton offered "um, Michael, Franklin and Trevor — the three of them are very different characters — like all different status, anyway, I'd probably most relate to... I'd have to say Jimmy because (he chuckles) — I'm sure that everyone else…" Clinton openly identifies with Jimmy and,

before he was interrupted, was about to generalize the comparison to "everyone else," presumably meaning his peer group. His nervous laughter suggests he felt awkward about the admission, which may have induced him to normalize his behaviour by couching it as common among his peers.

In the post-survey, Clinton reluctantly conceded his alignment with Jimmy. A question on the final survey asked, Did your perspective change about yourself during the course of the study or the writing of your autoethnography? [Appendix H] Clinton responded, "yeah, a little bit. I guess because I'm able to see what a type of guy I am *[sic]*, just because I see where exactly I fit in in the game — as Jimmy, even though I don't want to admit it. I don't see where else I would fit in, because I am sort of an upper middle class white boy who listens to hip-hop, plays video games, which I never thought it was a bad thing, but it sure is, uh, sort of depicted that way in the game and I never thought I was that guy, but I guess so." He never articulates why it's "a bad thing" other than he shares patterns of behaviour with a character who is portrayed in unflattering terms. Tracking Clinton's comments over the course of the month mapped a growing acceptance and eventual acknowledgement of his own propensity for adopting elements of black culture.

"Am I just like Jimmy?" Joshua is an experienced and dedicated gamer who played many of the *GTA* titles prior to the study. During discussions, he was considered an authority on the game by his classmates, and often spoke up to give advice, tips, or insider knowledge, especially to the less experienced players. Like Clinton, Joshua only gradually came to acknowledge that he shared characteristics with Jimmy. His first recorded comments were in response to a general question I posed about what they thought about Jimmy "acting black." Joshua was the first to respond with "a lot of people do that, I think." With this statement, he locates the behaviour outside of himself but, like Clinton, it might indicate a need to normalize his own behaviour as acceptable due to its wide social practice. A few minutes later he adds that "Jimmy is in a different scenario from most

of us, I think. His dad's like this criminal…" Again, he distances himself from Jimmy

by emphasizing a key point of departure. The "I think" he adds in both cases indicate a

fissure of uncertainty, giving his statements a tentative, speculative and exploratory qual-

ity. He seems to inch closer to acknowledging his relationship with Jimmy when, about

20 minutes later, he states "that's what Jimmy was — a criticism of the people playing

it," which presumably includes him, as one of the most experienced and knowledgeable

GTA players. The distance that Joshua maintains in his initial statements may be due to

the public context in which they were uttered. Also, it seems that it had not occurred to

him that he and Jimmy had anything in common until that moment, so he may have been

processing as he spoke.
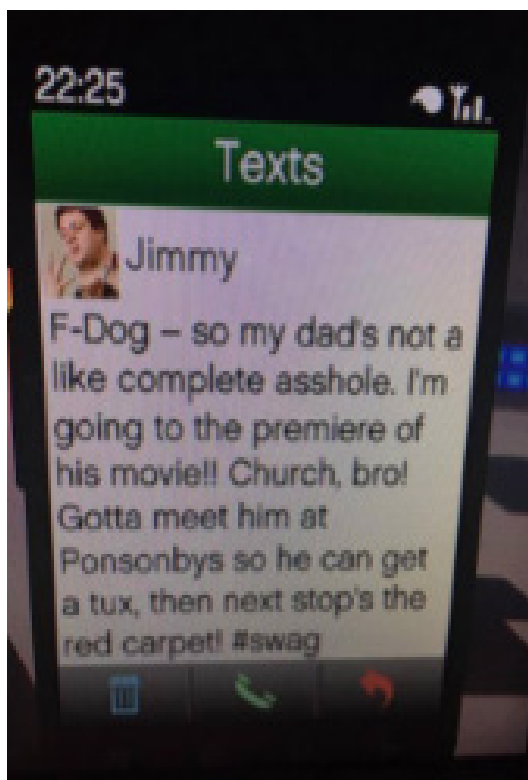
Figure 8.2: Joshua's Facebook post about Jimmy

The next day, on May 10, I posted Facebook prompt #3 [Appendix F] which read: "This challenge will focus on race. Post a screenshot related to race and discuss the dynamic between you, the player, and the racial representation you chose to submit." In response, Joshua posted a screenshot and de- scription that examined the relationship between Franklin and Jimmy. His post links acting black to being "cool" and, in the comment thread below the post, he adds that Jimmy is "also holding up a gang sign in his profile picture, the

common 'west side' sign, this can be seen in everyday life." Although I am not entirely

clear on what he meant by "this can be seen in everyday life," I assume from the con-

text that he suggests that it is common to encounter people — presumably middle class

adolescents — who playfully flash "west side" gang signs. I recorded six instances in a month where an SPR flashed a gang sign in class, and it was ironic or playful in every case.

Finally, his description of Jimmy being "uncomfortable" with Franklin may be a projection of his own discomfort, as he suggests in his notes from the following class. He chose to explore his similarities to Jimmy in a free write activity where they could reflect on any topic related to their gameplay. Unlike his previous public statements, Joshua seemed more willing to dig into his connection with Jimmy in the privacy of his notes: "Jimmy, being essentially the same as me on paper (white, straight, male) raises some questions about my own life, am I just like jimmy *[sic]*? I do many of the same activities as Jimmy, while being (hopefully) less of a screw up than him. I can see the same relationship in my own life between younger kids (grade 7/8) talking to me, they usually try and act cool to try and validate their "friendship" with me. Having little contact with black people, I fear I will do this same thing when I am put in a scenario like jimmy *[sic]*, my lack of contact doesn't result from any kind of prejudice, but rather the environment that I am in." Joshua acknowledges the paradox that he appropriates codes from a group with which he has no direct contact, and fears he will mismanage communication in a social encounter.

Joshua and Clinton were two of the game's most experienced players but, prior to the study, they had not seen Jimmy as a parody of themselves. This blind spot may result from an involuntary reluctance to acknowledge shared traits with such an unappealing character, and may also stem from embarrassment to outwardly accept an "inauthentic" component of their identity. It might also relate to a dynamic I brought up in class, where they "play the character of Franklin and temporarily forget that you're a middle class white guy and then you're annoyed by Jimmy who wants to be black while you're pretending to be black…" Elgin immediately responded with "Exactly!" In any case, Clinton and Joshua were not specifically tasked to reflect on their relationship with Jimmy, but

chose to engage with the topic voluntarily and repeatedly after it had been introduced, undertaking unguided introspection.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I gathered a mosaic of fragments from discussions, writings, videos, comics, and social media posts to render an imperfect image of how the SPRs perceive their socially advantaged position, and how their critical interactions with the game and the corresponding instructional context led to greater (self) awareness. Those SPRs who discussed their privilege showed a significant disconnect from other socioeconomic strata, showing they could not be more removed from the world depicted by South Los Santos. Roy's story about inviting his black teammates to his BBQ was invaluable in that it was the only tangible anecdote that imported a real life example of how the world of black economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods collides with the apex of privilege. His ensuing anxiety and embarrassment marks the profound abyss that separates the metaphoric white north from the metaphoric black south. The transcripts, writings, and productions I sample in the second half of the chapter are not proof that lives were transformed, or views permanently altered, but indicate the value of creating a space to critically reflect on media as a means to unpack the self in relation to the other. None of the SPRs were affected in the same way, but each clearly grew from the experience. Carson awoke to the presence of racial stereotypes in *GTA V*, of which he was previously unaware after over one hundred hours of gameplay. Davis explored the roots of racial inequality that accounts for a life of black criminality. Decker carried out a sophisticated dialogic critique of whether whites, including the developers of *GTA V*, have the right or qualifications to tell African American stories. Elgin explored the boundaries of cultural appropriation, and the instructional apparatus applied to the game led Joshua and Clinton to a critical self-examination. Throughout, the SPRs relied on media to form and express their views on race.

Chapter 9: A Few Messy Stories: A Discussion of Results and Conclusion

Introduction

Grand Theft Auto V is a cultural phenomenon that continues to leave its mark on a generation of impressionable adolescents. Its overtures and undercurrents of misogyny, racism, and violence are problematized by irony, narrative sophistication, complex characters, and open world play, where users can hunt for peyote, search for treasure, scuba dive, or play a round of golf. *GTA V* is both a cultural artifact as well as a vast virtual field of cultural production where every player has a unique experience according to their unique disposition.

Millions of adolescent boys spend hundreds and even thousands of hours in the virtual city of Los Santos, but little is known about how they interpret their actions and encounters, nor are they provided support by which to critically process their interactions. Schools outright reject contentious games, and busy parents are usually in the dark about the content of the games their children play. This study reports on some results on perceptions of and interactions with race when *GTA V* was included in a high school media literacy unit in a class of white adolescent boys, the primary consumers of the *GTA* franchise. Since there are no relevant empirical studies of *GTA V* and no precedent for its use as a learning artifact in a formal school setting, the research design, instructional design, and data collected mark some first investigative steps to render a vision of how to better contend with a complex and influential cultural product like *GTA V*.

The results presented in this final chapter respond to two questions: 1) How do white adolescent males critically reflect on their engagements with representations of race and racialized places in *Grand Theft Auto V* when they investigate the game as co-researchers within a critical media literacy framework?; and 2) How do white adolescent males respond when encouraged to interrogate their own participation in a dominant racial category within the instructional context of the study?

To address these questions, I synthesized and organized the results according to five broad thematic categories, including the connections between race and place in the virtual city of Los Santos; the effects of the SPRs' appreciation for hip-hop on their interactions with representations of race in the game; the advantages and disadvantages of enlisting the SPRs as co-researchers; how media was found to influence SPR attitudes and discourse; and some evidence of what they learned with particular attention to race. I conclude this chapter by outlining the study's limitations and making recommendations for future instruction and research.

Interpretation of the Findings

A Place for Race: The Hip-Hoppy World of South Los Santos

The racially segregated neighbourhoods circumscribed by *GTA V*'s mediated cartography accounted for the bulk of in-game race-related data reported by the SPRs. Most reported race-related interactions that involved African American characters, whether Franklin or any other NPCs, took place in either the black neighbourhood of South Los Santos, or its white counterpart in Vinewood. The exceptions were racialized encounters with the police in various sectors of the city, and Carson's description of the ill-treatment Franklin received by a white convenience store clerk in the hinterlands.

In their fieldnotes and videos, Clinton, Milton, Carson, Elgin, Perth, and Joshua each observed that the neighbourhoods in the south were black, poor, and dangerous, while the north was primarily white and affluent. This was a baseline indication that the connection between place and race was explicitly noted by six of the SPRs without direct prompting. Their self-directed experiments to gauge how Michael and Franklin were received from their own versus each other's neighbourhoods were also predictably dependent on location and exposed mutual race-based territorial hostility. Furthermore, Joshua and Clinton's "Ghetto Safari" commercial also reinforced the idea that white "Americans" are endangered when they enter a black neighbourhood, and Carson's redemptive

narrative for Franklin involved embracing the white north with a complete rejection of the South Los Santos neighbourhoods.

There was also evidence presented that players can develop affective attachments to places in the game. Elgin described feeling nostalgia and territoriality when he returned to a site which he had accessed in a previous instalment of *GTA* which indicates the potential for the production of meaningful emotional connections with virtual locations. Like Elgin, I associate certain regions in World of Warcraft where I spent significant time with pleasant memories that also fill me with nostalgia. The locations in Los Santos are not only warped indexes of LA and other urban realities, but also constitute locations tantamount to real places that produce real emotional connections in and of themselves. This can be positive and deeply engaging but, as may be the case with *GTA V*, players can become emotionally invested in representations of places that produce and reinforce problematic worldviews. Elgin's emotional attachment and corresponding sense of territoriality is woven in a gangland narrative, and perpetuates the sense that it is normal for black people to live and partake in violent altercations in poor, crumbling, and crime-infested neighbourhoods, while the discriminatory policies and practices that have disenfranchised black communities remain invisible. Situating wealth, affluence, and legitimacy as endemic to white communities, and emotionally reinforcing the opposite for black communities may contribute to the naturalization of the unacceptable status quo.

As reported, Franklin was the SPRs' preferred character, and their play with him was diverse and not necessarily stereotypical. He was used to hunt, parachute from a helicopter, ride a bicycle down a mountain, and cruise along the seashore listening to talk radio, to name a few reported activities. However, whenever Franklin was in South Los Santos, players tended to engage in the stereotypical behaviour of a black gangster. They consumed drugs and alcohol in his home in Strawberry, frequently linked the neighbourhood with liquor stores, dressed him in gang colours for turf wars; he was repeatedly

involved in gunfights, and Carson, Joshua, Elgin, Perth, Milton, and Roy all described listening to hip-hop while to South Los Santos. Also, numerous Facebook screenshots featured Franklin in streetwear, armed, or standing in front of or near gang-related graffiti. Additionally, half the SPRs commented or observed that Franklin did not seem to "belong" in the white north. These all indicate a tendency to align their play according to the recurrent gang/hip-hop tropes while in the virtual ghetto.

A few SPRs explicitly stated that the place-based racial hostility they encountered in the game accurately reflected the real world, which lends credence to Leonard's (2006) concerns about representations in the game producing "ghettocentric" imaginaries, and Goldberg's (1993) discussion about how discriminatory social spaces are "made to seem natural, a given, by being conceived and defined in racial terms" (p. 185). The SPRs exhibited in-game behaviour that corresponded with or reacted to the clear correlation between race and place, where gameplay and interactions with the game assumed a racialized character in accordance with location and setting. Racialized communities are a problem that plague cities across the Americas and around the world, and the game takes that reality and "perfects" it by discarding nuance in favour of a cartographic representation that ironically parodies but also reproduces stereotypical media projections. The game generates a discursive field of knowledge/power where millions of white adolescent boys only access these neighbourhoods in the game and, without a lived counter narrative, might naturalize their depiction as "realistic," as in the cases of Perth and Clinton.

Destination: The hip-hop fantasy playground. Most of the SPRs listened to hip-hop music, expressed admiration for hip-hop artists, and were knowledgeable and conversant of a wide range of hip-hop and rap media. The phenomenon of white adolescents' consuming and adopting commodified media representations of black culture is well documented (Bennett, 1999; Bucholtz, 1999; Cutler, 1999; Giroux, 1994; Hall, 2006; Hayes, 2004; Hess, 2005; Miller 2008b; Rodriguez, 2006; Sulé, 2015) and, in line with these findings, the SPRs regularly employed phrases, gestures, styles, and/or ref-

erences associated with blackness. Nine of the ten participants listed rap and/or hip-hop as a preferred music genre, with Carson as the exception. Also, when choosing pseudonyms for the study, two of the ten SPRs selected names pulled from the hip-hop lexicon, including a rap star's birth name. I was informally lobbied to listen to specific hip-hop artists, and rap music was a frequent topic of SPR conversations. In many cases, it was clear that their actions and interactions in the game were an extension of their desire to adopt and participate in selective elements of popular media projections of black life. It is also worth repeating that the SPRs were not selected for their love of hip-hop, but were a sample of convenience, which is indicative of the genre's reach with white adolescents.

Hip-hop was the music genre that was most listened to within the game. Only four of the 20 radio stations play hip-hop, and two of those four are mixed with other music genres. However, most of the SPRs stated a preference to listen to hip-hop while playing, and it even appeared in their counter-hegemonic media. Clinton used 2Pac's "California Love" as the theme song for his final video, and rap could be heard playing in the background in a few of Roy's and Perth's fieldnote videos. It should be added that every character has a default radio station, and Franklin's is a hip-hop channel; however, it's easy enough to turn the dial, which most chose not to do. Carson, Elgin, Clinton, and Roy explicitly stated a preference for listening to hip-hop while in South Los Santos, and in a telling connection between rap and antisocial behaviour, Carson wrote in his autoethnography that "music sometimes influences what I do in the game... if rap is playing on the radio I may feel like acting more reckless and doing violent things."

Fashion was a common way that the SPRs expressed their appreciation for hip-hop within the game. They outfitted their characters with Hinterland boots, the in-game parody of Timberlands, while Clinton, Milton, Marlowe, Elgin, Decker, and Roy all noted that they chose to dress Franklin in clothes and accessories that align with either gangs and/or hip-hop, including snap-back caps, hoodies, baggy shorts, too-long basketball jerseys, and various types of jewelry and accessories. Marlowe was the only SPR to dress

a white avatar in a hip-hop style, whom he outfitted and tattooed to resemble MC Ride, a black alternative rapper. Both Milton and Clinton associated dressing their characters in hip-hop fashions as "cool," which supports Rodriguez's (2006) findings that white fans associate hip-hop with being cool.

Police brutality, the injustices of law enforcement, and an oppositional relationship with police are staple themes in hip-hop music and media (Forman, 2012). Milton, for one, stated that he developed a negative view of police from watching hip-hop videos, while Carson wondered whether "the game [tries] to influence people's political views through law enforcement." Although technically avoidable, *GTA V* makes it difficult to evade conflict with the police, and every SPR reported multiple altercations with law enforcement. Clashes with the police were often flavoured by race, most obviously when their experiments gave credence to the belief that the police in the game are racist, and several SPRs expressed confusion and frustration when they felt unfairly targeted by law enforcement. Deliberately inciting the police into chases and gunfights were described by seven SPRs, and Elgin shared his enjoyment for "getting revenge on corrupt cops."

Franklin's ambivalence. As discussed in Chapter 7, those who liked to play Franklin offered a host of reasons for their preference, none of which had to do with race, his connections to gangs, or any aspect of his persona that could be related to hip-hop. Upon further interrogation, a number of the SPRs recognized that elements of his personality aligned with stereotypes, and that playing Franklin was not indicative of being a black man in the real world. However, most of their voluntary drug and alcohol consumption was in Franklin's home in South Los Santos and, despite a wide array of fashion choices, he was frequently dressed in gang colours and clothing and accessories aligned with hip-hop music, and he was the only avatar used to partake in gang activity. Elgin explicitly stated that Franklin was the most realistic option to role-play as a gang member. Despite some nuances to their perception of and play with Franklin, he was the primary means by which they enacted racialized actions and play according to recipes forwarded

by the hip-hop script.

Ultimately, there was a great deal of ambivalence in regard to how Franklin was perceived by the SPRs, which may reflect the ambivalence in how he is depicted in the game. Despite the clear disadvantages of his circumstances, Decker and Elgin both expressed the view that certain black men like Franklin are culturally dominant because of the power and influence of hip-hop artists, which may be another reason why the SPRs preferred to play Franklin over the other avatars. They admired his nuanced, funny, and "noble" personality, but also recognized that he was a stereotype. At various points in their discussions, videos, and writings, most of the SPRs observed and admired Franklin's muscular frame and physical prowess. He was referred to as "tough," "muscular," "large," and "aggressive," and Marlowe even speculated that there were clues that he took steroids. In one instance, Perth captures the fear and admiration that characterize some white adolescents' views of black men when he describes Franklin as "aggressive and... extremely muscular. These qualities make him a feared member of society, yet looked highly upon." This view of Franklin substantiates commentators like Barrett (2006) and Leonard (2006) who find a recurrent media and cultural emphasis on black corporeality as sexualized and aggressive, foregrounded in a games landscape where black men are almost exclusively represented as gangsters or athletes. Fear, aggression, intimidation, power, sexual prowess, and physical strength are all qualities frequently projected by gangster rap artists, all of which can produce fear and desire, insecurity and admiration.

A licensed rebellion: Cannibalistic consumptions and hip-hop tourism. Forman (2002) discusses the importance of place — particularly urban black neighbourhoods — as central feature of hip-hop music, and South Los Santos was consciously constructed to evoke the streets that pervade rap songs and videos. Throughout the study, the SPRs entered South Los Santos as hip-hop tourists to enact scenarios and actions aligned with the salient tropes of the genre. Their interactions with black characters and spaces were

steeped in a matrix of apparent contradictions, that offer glimpses on the wider phenom-
enon of white boys adopting black codes via hip-hop and rap media. They exhibited a de-
sire to infiltrate and assimilate to racialized spaces that they also indicated were otherwise
hostile to whites. Their views and engagements with the "hood," its inhabitants, and its
artists are bound in tensions of fear and desire, repulsion and admiration, familiarity and
exoticism, freedom and constraint, enclosure and exposure — all manifest in their ten-
dency to access the other through the equally paradoxical mediated practice of distanced
immersion.

There may be some truth to Carson's and Perth's speculations that, in playing the
black gangster, they desire to experiment with a life wholly unlike their own. The SPRs
are constrained by the concentric disciplines and pressures of school and home. They
must wear uniforms, perform in an academically competitive environment, labour under
the pressures of university placement, fulfill a demanding program of extracurricular
activities, and outwardly present as polite and courteous "gentlemen." They inhabit a
white habitus (Bonilla-Silva et al., 2006), or an almost exclusively white social milieu,
and are insulated from a wider world which they only tend to access through mitigated
media windows. This may be why they yearn for and romanticize the apparent "freedom"
of the drop-out black gangsters who hustle, rap, and live the "real" and authentic life of
the streets in defiance of all authority. They are taunted and baited by music that paints
the streets as places where, as Dr. Dre raps, "cowards die and the strong ball." Much like
the adventure stories of past centuries, visions of survival in the liberating wilderness of
rap's "Wild Wild West" — the LA urban jungle — offers adolescents a perceived escape
from the restraints of civilization and the highly governed lives of white middle and
upper class adolescents. Like the forests, jungles, and islands of earlier tales, the hip-hop
inspired wilds of South Los Santos are an open world proving ground inhabited by exotic
others where a young man can test his mettle and validate his worth. The profound irony,
of course, is that the virtual space of South Los Santos could not be safer, the codes of

"authenticity" adopted from popular black rap artists are disingenuous, and their perception of the freedom, power, and social insubordination transmitted by black rappers are directly at odds with the broader black realities of marginalization, disenfranchisement, limited opportunities for education and employment, incarceration, stigma, and social immobility. The SPRs are a dominant group who, surprisingly, project idealizations of dominance, power, and freedom onto the disenfranchised other based on media-based knowledge conceptions produced mainly by white males. They seek to absorb the power they perceive in white mediations of the black other through the appropriation of constructed cultural codes, which entails a form of domination through absorption. In accordance with the paradoxes and reversals that characterize this postcolonial dynamic, the colonizer merges with the proverbial cannibal to gain the power of the other through their consumption.

The image of the rap gangster as the ultimate social rebel also resonates with rebellious adolescent impulses. Tricia Rose writes that "white teenage rap fans are listening in on Black *[sic]* culture, fascinated by its differences, drawn in by mainstream social constructions of Black *[sic]* culture as a forbidden narrative, as a symbol of rebellion" (in Rodriguez, 2006, p. 660). In many ways, hip-hop and *GTA V* by extension are the commodifications of rebellion, providing a ready-made aesthetic that facilitates a safe and acceptable performance of antisocial behaviour; a culturally licenced performance of rebellion. Decker, for one, who would only address a real police officer in the most courteous of terms, writes "I murdered four police officers. This was viscerally satisfying, as I feel it represented the rebellion against strong authoritative presence in my life." More to the point, blackness, then, is disembodied from reality to become a commodified repertoire of symbolic resources that are consumed and expressed to fulfill adolescent searches for authenticity and enactments of rebellion, achieving exactly the opposite of each. However, as Hall (2006) points out, even when the black experience is misrepresented by popular culture "we continue to see the experiences that stand behind them" (p. 473),

which highlights the importance of addressing and reflecting on these issues in formal instruction.

At Home in the Mediapolis

The SPRs' relationship with hip-hop and how that informs their *GTA V* gameplay, and general attitudes and behaviours regarding race, points to the central role of media in their lives. Throughout the study, the SPRs referenced media in their discussions, writings, videos, and social media posts as context and inspiration for their in-game activity, to substantiate their political views, and to contribute material for debate and discussion. Although I shared articles, videos, and ideas to support the instructional and research objectives, the SPRs' discourse was much more reliant on popular media, music, YouTube videos, and diverse *GTA* paratexts. It became apparent to me that the SPRs live in media, where their "lived reality cannot be experienced separate from, or outside of media" (Deuze, 2011, p. 140). This is even more significant with the realization that *GTA V* and the "mediapolis" of Los Santos is an immersive media artifact whose layered mediality is constructed and referential of a wide array of media. Furthermore, diverse media sampling and pop culture references are the backbones of hip-hop and rap. Thus, *GTA V* gameplay and hip-hop both mirror and contribute to the mediated world in which they live.

Film, TV shows, documentaries, music, video games, and social media were frequently referenced and embedded in SPR discourse, particularly in our class discussions. Marlowe states that playing with his dog Chop in a field near the Vinewood sign (a parody of the iconic Hollywood sign) reminds him of Sting's "Fields of Gold" video; a horror movie called The Babadook was described to illustrate Davis's reluctance to kill animals in *GTA V*; Roy referenced Paul Bart: Mall Cop to illustrate a humorous take on hegemonic masculinity; and Davis enlisted Bill Nye and The Office to discuss how gender is on a spectrum. Roy told us about "ghost guns" or guns without serial numbers, which he learned about on *National Geographic*. Perth, Decker, and Elgin would often

play music or argue about various rap stars and songs before the formal commencement of class, and a range of bands and music, from Lady Gaga to Vaporwave, peppered class discussions. An incomplete list of games mentioned by the SPRs include Madden, NHL (or "chel"), NBA2K, Starcraft, Bioshock, Saints Row, Civilization, Skyrim, Mafia III, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, Call of Duty: Black Ops, and numerous *GTA* franchise titles. Reddit, YouTube and Facebook were all used as sources of information on topics ranging from feminism to the productive value of anger. During a conversation about ethnography Marlowe shared a Reddit article "about somebody who did ethnography on memes that are used on those pro-Donald Trump sub-Reddits. And the person found that the meaning behind them was similar to Nazi propaganda."

The SPRs also cited media and pop culture for inspiration for their gameplay. Milton said he felt like James Bond in a gameplay session when he jumped a ramp to escape the police. As Elgin prepared to rob a jewellery store with Michael, he remarked that he felt like "I was actually in a Quentin Tarantino robbery movie. The only thing missing was 'Stuck In The Middle With You' by Stealers Wheel." Elgin also remade Trevor to resemble Charles Manson so that he could role-play as a psychopath in the game. Decker cited the Denis Villeneuve film "Sicario" and his previous experience with *Mafia III* as his inspiration to role-play as a hitman in *GTA V*. Roy said that when he destroyed a meth lab with Trevor he felt like he was in an action movie. These scattered examples furnish some empirical support for Vanolo's (2012) contention that "every game experience is fully mediated by the cultural perspectives of the player. Gangster films, crime movies, other video games and pop culture in general play a fundamental role" (p. 292).

A poignant example where racial discourse was entirely informed by media was the conversation discussed in Chapter 8 where Decker drew heavily from "Dear White People" to contest Tarantino's right to tell a black man's story in *Django Unchained*. A Netflix series furnished the critical lens by which to frame the critique of a blockbuster film. This argument was originally deployed by Decker to question whether the makers of

GTA V had the right to tell a black man's story, but it also led to a wider debate between the SPRs about cultural appropriation. This is one of numerous examples where they draw from media to sculpt their views and opinions. Online player forums and *The Game Theorist* videos influenced their in-game race experiments, viral YouTube videos shaped their views on feminism, Reddit provided the substance by which to critique other posts on Reddit, and *National Geographic* and "Rick and Morty" helped them project a future of race.

The degree to which the SPRs enlist media should not be surprising in light of reports of average weekly rates of teen media consumption exceeding 60 hours (Common Sense Media, 2015). Consequently, Deuze (2011) submits that "life lived in, rather than with, media can and perhaps should be the ontological benchmark for a 21st-century media studies"(p. 137). The author also states that, by virtue of its ubiquity, the degree of media's reach and influence is invisible and that "people in general do not even register the presence of media in their lives" (p. 143). The study not only made the reach and influence of media in general, and *GTA V* in particular, exceedingly apparent, but also highlighted the need for a more robust engagement with media and digital literacy in Western schools. Secondly, that media must not only be the target for critical inquiry, but that teachers and researchers would benefit from enlisting diverse media to provide the theoretical and critical underpinnings from which students conduct their critiques. The use of *GTA V* in this study shows how woefully out of step our schools are with a reality governed by media. I advocate, for example, that the traditional English class would be better recast as Communications to better reflect the skills, texts, and issues that affect the present and future of our youth, all of which have dire political implications.

Playing Co-researchers

As discussed earlier, despite their status as co-researchers, the SPRs' role as researchers was not equal to mine in scope, commitment, or investment. As a whole, their contributions to the research and instructional design were scattered and minimal. Some

examples of their input include that they agreed by consensus to a circular arrangement of desks to facilitate dialogue during each session; they decided that a private Facebook group was the ideal online communication platform; they suggested minor changes to the pre- and post-survey questions; and pushed back on the requirement to annotate scholarly articles. The SPRs also decided that, regardless of their prior experience playing *GTA V*, they should all start from the beginning of the game's campaign. Early in the study, when I prepared them for their co-research role, I wrote in my notes: "I discuss how they should challenge me or "call me out" to reshape the research as we go through, but they are docile (or don't know how to propose an alternative) and largely remain subdued by laptops, phones, senioritis, and rarely challenge my voice." Despite their limited contributions, the SPRs' participation in the project as co-researchers was ultimately productive, largely for unintended reasons.

The self-directed informal experiments they conducted to "test" the game's AI for racial bias were a valuable and unplanned contribution. The loose design for these experiments was drawn from widely circulated YouTube videos, and not conducted with rigour, but their approach and findings yielded rich data, and point to one way to include student-researchers in game-related studies. The vast paratextual landscape that contextualizes most video games offers resources that researchers and instructors can leverage in any number of creative ways to help frame a study's design. For example, researchers and teachers can leverage ancillary media that is relevant to the co-researchers, such as *The Game Theorist* videos, to help meaningfully connect them to the project.

Furthermore, the SPRs did not take fieldnotes and videos in situo as often as I would have liked, but they produced valuable data nonetheless. Perth, for example, reported in the conclusion of his autoethnography that "it's unlikely that I take notes as it's difficult to play and write, and even when I am presented with the opportunity (such as a death), I will wait rather than use that time to write." Later he adds "even though I played the game this many times, only a few sessions were recorded on paper. The reason for

this was because during my gameplay sessions, I felt no motivation to pick up my laptop and write down what was happening." This is a single SPR's account, but it pointed to a wider pattern I observed. Once they were in gameplay mode they became reluctant to take a break for the "work" of note-taking. Most of the diverse platforms and computers they used to play did not easily lend themselves to be recorded. However, they still produced substantial notes and videos which offered valuable glimpses into how they played at home, as opposed to the clinical research environments that characterize many studies in the area. Additionally, the culmination of their notes and observations in their final autoethnographies were rich sources of data and a final opportunity for critical reflection.

Positioning the SPRs as co-researchers was most profitable from the instructional perspective. First, this was their first exposure to the methods and practices of academic research. They learned to distinguish between qualitative and quantitative methods, read scholarly articles, became acquainted with the broad issues and practices of ethnography, and developed a grasp of how theory and methods inform research. They also put into practice a basic cycle of observation and note gathering which was synthesized in a cohesive final product. When asked an open-ended question about what they felt they had learned, almost all SPRs included some mention of the research process itself. In the post-survey, Roy stated that "I feel like I learned a lot more about this kind of research. Although I participated in a few research studies before, kind of the more academic research was interesting to participate in, and I really enjoyed the whole process and learning, and reading these scholarly articles." Similarly, Carson wrote that "I learned about autoethnography as a whole, as I did not understand it before this study. I also learned how to properly conduct a study of a game when there was not a similar...project done before." Davis credits the classroom research for his improved understanding of *GTA V*: "If it were not for playing the game in a research environment I may not have picked up on all the subtle pokes and prods at society." Inviting the university-bound SPRs as co-researchers, exposing them to the basic tenets of investigative practices, and making

the research process transparent proved a valuable learning opportunity.

Finally, in accordance with Lammes and de Smale (2018), I found autoethnography a beneficial instrument to capture the localized fragments of the "messy stories" that emerge from the player-game circuits. As a practising teacher, I am encouraged to use autoethnography again in the future as an authentic and meaningful assessment. If effectively deployed, autoethnography combines the benefits of research, memoir writing, reflection, self-awareness, and social and emotional growth. This approach would build on the inspirational uses of student ethnography discussed by Heath (1983), which engaged struggling black students with their wider community to further their science education. Finally, the study was packed into a month, and the first eight days were significantly devoted to preparing them for their anthropological endeavours. Ideally, their training as researchers could be carried out as an entirely separate unit so that they could hit the ground running for the active research phase of the project.

Despite the bumps, enlisting the students as co-researchers was positive and productive. I would advocate for it as useful practice for classroom research, and I would refine my deployment of the model in future iterations. I was also left convinced and excited by the immense potential of conducting ethnography and autoethnography to capture data in virtual environments, particularly because it presents benefits to both research and instruction.

Eyes Wide Open: What they Say they Learned

Every SPR reported that *GTA V* was a productive and useful inclusion in the school curriculum, which is not surprising considering their enjoyment of the game, but what did they learn? In addition to my observations, I thought it would be helpful to give some insight into what they felt they learned from the experience. This section will review some of their self-reported views forwarded by the SPRs on what they learned during the course of the study.

Tuned in to issues of race and society. Several SPRs reported that they were occasioned to reflect critically on race in particular and social issues in general. In his auto-ethnography, Milton wrote that "[t]his study made me think a different way, I got to see things like racism and sexism first hand. I now realize that throughout society, it seems that we are drifting farther apart rather than together, and that we are moving farther from equal rights. The many examples of this in *GTA 5* is part of the reason that I came to these realizations." Notably, Milton considers his virtual experiences as a "first hand" view of discrimination. Davis also stated that studying *GTA V* "opened up my eyes to many issues and made me see the world from many other directions. It has allowed me to see prejudices a lot more clearly by allowing me to play as a black character and feel the injustice they feel from society." David also equates his experiences as a black man in the game as a realistic portrayal that more deeply sensitized him to social inequities. In a Facebook post, Clinton questions the productivity of including racial stereotypes in the game, and believes they are only justifiable for political ends: "*GTA* is a fairly good representation of power, racial prejudice, and political inequalities in our society....I think that the social and racial inequalities in the game are unnecessary unless the video game is attempting to depict inequality as a critique on our society."

Excerpted from a post-survey response, Carson, who was one of the SPRs who logged over 100 hours of play prior to the study, described how his views on race evolved:

> I think my perspective changed a bit with regard to race because...
> for example, like, there's very few black characters in the game that
> I found in the wealthy side of the town, or of Los Santos and there's
> no like white guys that are in a gang — or very few of them that I saw
> were in the ghettos of Los Santos. And, once again, those [are] stereo-
> types. I didn't actually think about that at all before I played the game.
> I didn't think about when I got to Franklin's house and I looked around
> and everybody was black and they looked like, basically, thugs, and
> I didn't think about when I got out of Michael's house I didn't think
> that oh everybody's just here is white. I was kind of blind to that.

Carson is reserved and rarely volunteers to speak in class but, to my surprise, he

recorded a long and involved post-survey response that clearly indicated that the study had proven transformative in terms of his view of the game, but also in regard to his notions of race and gender. He was in my media studies class the year before, where we had studied gender and masculinities and touched on race, but it was clear that this experience had delivered a more profound impact. His longer response was, by far, his most exuberant and genuine submission in the two years he was my student. It may have also been liberating to have the option to create a video or audio response instead of only writing, which may have constrained him.

Without specifically delving into race Perth and Elgin also attributed the study to their increased sensitivity to social and political issues. Perth wrote that "the most relevant thing I learned...was how issues in the game are relevant in today's society. Of course, every player notices what's going on in the game and thinks it's a joke, but the issues shown in the game are exaggerated versions of what's happening right in front of their eyes." Counterintuitively, Perth highlights how a critical contextualization of the game produced a greater awareness of issues in his immediate reality. Finally, Elgin states he that he became more aware of "the role power has in our lives, alongside violence, sex, and money. Also, through analyzing the game during class discussions, I have come to the conclusion that the game serves as a sort of mirror to society. One that is held up in their faces with a little 'fuck you' carved into the glass." A crass but evocative image that endorses the value of a dialogic approach.

Better attuned to the game and media. The SPRs also recounted how they became more mindful and better attuned to otherwise unobserved aspects of the game. Joshua shared that "I definitely view the game differently when playing for the study, I always have my eye out for things to bring up in class or write about, but while I am playing for fun most of the funny encounters slip right past me, as I am too focused on the game." Perth wrote that he was previously aware of the game's controversy, "but I was not aware of all of the hidden things inside the game. Exploring signs of racism,

sexism, and more helped me understand what *GTA V* was trying to portray to its players."
Carson also confessed that "before the study started I was not as attentive to the *GTA* 5
environment... during the study I would look at small details and notice subtler things."
In each case, the study seems to have made them more astute observers of the in-game
environment.

Some SPRs also stated that the experience made them more critical consumers
of the politics of representation in media at large. Roy shared that the experience "has
changed me. I'm definitely more aware... of race and violence in... everyday media than I
was before. And it's opened my eyes a lot, which was great, and you can kind of see how
racist the world is." Joshua also attributed his participation in the project to a more gen-
eralized awareness of how media bears consequence on society: "One viewpoint of mine
was drastically changed by this study[:] I now see that improper representation in media
isn't only about what is happening on the screen, but how that projects stereotypes and
holds back real change." Although it was not my deliberate intention, these statements
indicate that learning about issues of representation in a single medium can translate to
more general critical consumption of media.

The media mirror. The study also occasioned reflection on themselves, their
privilege, and their propensity to adopt elements of commodified of black culture. For
example, the class discussion documented in Chapter 8 captures how Roy, Elgin, Davis,
Carson, and Marlowe were encouraged to articulate whether they felt guilt about their so-
cially advantaged position. Davis's final comic showed how Michael's social position and
race furnished him with clear social advantages over Franklin. Clinton and Joshua, who
initially saw Jimmy as a spoiled rich white kid who plays video games and acts like he's
black, gradually realized that they themselves were the targets of the game's satire, which
precipitated significant self-reflection. Joshua confessed that, "[h]aving little contact with
black people, I fear I will do this same thing when I am put in a scenario like jimmy *[sic]*,
my lack of contact doesn't result from any kind of prejudice, but rather the environment

that I am in." Carson states that "Not that I'm, like, a bad person, but our school, people in our school are obviously a lot more privileged, and we are middle to higher class in society and we like the lifestyle that Franklin would live in *GTA*. It would be like nothing close to what any of us do, 'cause he lives in a small house, he lives in the ghetto, he's a gang *[sic]*, he's black — like I can't relate, really, to that." Sulé (2015) claims that recognizing one's own whiteness is a precursor for interracial relationships, and a precondition to unpacking one's own whiteness and privilege. The critical instructional context brought the SPRs' own whiteness and privilege to the surface which provoked some to become more self-aware. This type of reflection about themselves or others is a step forward; however, it seems a poor substitute for lived contact and exposure. Sulé (2015) cites several studies that find "that interaction among racially diverse peers facilitates openness to diversity, cross-racial understanding, and future engagement with diverse others… and that students with more diverse friend groups are more likely to interact cross-racially outside of the comfort of their closest friends" (p. 213).

The data indicates that the SPRs become more aware of issues of race as well as broader social issues, better attuned to the game itself, generally more aware of how media represents various groups, and were occasioned to reflect on their own privileged social position. It seems some implications of *GTA V*'s social parody were lost to the SPRs until foregrounded during the study. Also, the line between realistic representation, and exaggeration, misrepresentation, stereotype, or parody remained blurry for some, even at the end of the study. If nothing else, it is encouraging that the study seemed to provoke a previously uninterrogated awareness of race, society, media, and themselves.

Limitations

This study was constrained by a number of limitations. First, because I initially explored a variety of topics, both the instructional and research focus on race could have been better targeted. More detailed questions pertaining to race could have been included in the pre- and post-survey, and the discussions, fieldnotes, autoethnographies,

counter-hegemonic media and Facebook posts might have exclusively contended with race. Also, the connection with hip-hop only emerged over time, and was not deliberately addressed in early data collection.

Secondly, player-game interactions are highly individuated, especially with a game as large and flexible as *GTA V*. The SPRs played an average of 14 of hundreds of possible hours and, after the initial missions, undertook free play. Each SPR had a different prior experience with the game and they played on a variety of platforms. This, along with the localized character of the research under circumstances that are largely not reproducible, limits the generalizability of the findings. Since no two SPRs reported similar experiences, perhaps what is generalizable is that any observed patterns must be contextualized within the reality of diverse gameplay.

Thirdly, the data that was self-reported by the SPRs is not verifiable. This includes their verbal and written descriptions of their play at home, and their reports on their own growth and learning from the experience. Aside from issues of accuracy and credibility, the data was also affected by intended and unintended omissions. Each SPR produced about a page of notes for every 1-2 hours of play, which likely omits most of what transpired. In one case, Elgin and Decker briefly referenced a gameplay session they undertook together, looked at each other conspiratorially, and said they could not share the details because it was "too inappropriate." There may have been any number of feelings, events, and views that the SPRs were unwilling or reluctant to share in a school context with their teacher. Finally, the dialogic format fomented free and open conversation, but SPRs like Clinton, Carson, and Milton are generally more reserved and less likely to participate. Conversations were often dominated by Elgin, Decker, and Joshua, which skewed the data from the classroom transcripts accordingly.

Fourthly, as a qualitative researcher, my own biases and impositions shape the final selection and organization of data. I made my best effort to preserve the voices and intentions of the SPRs, but I also decided what data to keep and discard, which inevitably

affected the results. For example, based on my analysis of the data, I decided to focus the study on race, but it could also have addressed gender. Since the SPRs were long graduated and departed when I made the decision to address race, they had no say in the matter.

Finally, the SPRs were a small sample of convenience whose homogeneity proved useful and appropriate for the study. A judiciously selected larger sample size would have produced richer and more diverse data.

Recommendations for Future Instruction

The study began with a broad scope that narrowed. I have no doubt about the potential and suitability of using a game like *GTA V* for instruction, but much about my approach could be modified and refined. Initially, we set out to explore diverse aspects of the game including, gender, masculinities, race, violence, hegemonies, and some ideological aspects. Entire courses could easily be developed around any one of these topics with many stones still left unturned. Each topic was supported by readings, videos, and discussions and, in addition to this, the SPRs were grounded in the basics of research, ethnography, and autoethnography to prepare them for their role as co-researchers. Needless to say, that is a dense and ambitious curriculum for a 30 day enterprise. The approach did expose the SPRs to a mass of information, much of which they had never encountered before, and certainly planted many seeds that may take root as they ascend to university and beyond. However, based on my experience, I have a number of recommendations that may prove useful for future implementation.

First, considering the hurdles that must be cleared, it is highly unlikely that *GTA V* or the like will make its way into too many classrooms in the near future. Instead of actively implementing the game, a better approach is for an instructor to offer it as an option within a general media literacy unit. For example, if the class is examining how women are represented in media, the instructor might invite students to analyze how women are portrayed in the media of their choice, including *GTA V* or other video games. That way

the school in not actively pushing the game, or inducting new players, but rather, encouraging existing players to think critically.

Second, as implied above, it would be more productive to focus instruction on a single topic, rather than conduct a general survey of identity politics, especially in such a narrow span of time. Based on this study, I have some ideas about how I would implement a unit that looked at race in *GTA V* or other games that similarly depict black lives. The significance of the connections between race and place only dawned on me when the unit was almost over, and became even more pronounced when I synthesized and analyzed the data, so it was not robustly addressed in the instructional design. In the future, I would put a great deal more emphasis on examining representations of racialized spaces. I might, for example, provide background material about the history of corrupt and racist practices that produced segregated black and white neighbourhoods. Additionally, the game could be read through a lens where depictions of gangs and racialized ghettos could be contextualized with considerations of how discriminatory criminalization, incarceration, and social immobility directly affect black men and women, their families, and their communities. Some ancillary resources might include Eve L. Ewing's Ghosts in the Schoolyard, the various documentaries about the Yonkers housing crisis such as Show Me a Hero, the policies and circumstances that produced housing projects like Watts in LA, and Ava Duvernay's film 13th about private prisons and incarceration. Also, the genuine frustration expressed by the SPRs for being unfairly targeted by the police when playing Franklin could be parlayed to discuss regularly reported injustices enacted on black men and black communities by law enforcement.

Third, more time would be devoted to prepare students as researchers. I would introduce at least one school of critical theory in some depth, or have students research a framework they would like to pursue. This would not be out of step with senior IB and AP English or Capstone classes, and the approach could be supported by a text like Deborah Applebaum's *Critical Encounters in High School English*. As I mentioned, I

found the autoethnographic form useful, and I would implement it again, even if the class did not involve the investigation of a video game. However, I would provide more scaffolding for their fieldnotes and, once again, offer the options to record them as video and audio. The counter-hegemonic media was also promising and, despite a few SPRs mailing it in, the ones that were done well clearly made an impact and yielded rich data. In the future, I would give them more time, more technical support, and ask that they write reflections on their process and intentions.

Finally, I will continue to leverage and expand my use of media in general, be it digital games, films, streaming services, online videos, online forums, and social media as texts for consumption and models for production. It is crucial that teachers keep current with the rapidly changing media landscape and employ its evolving and multiplying forms to enhance their practice.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study opens a multitude of paths for future research. *GTA V* is not merely a video game, but a complex interactive cultural artifact consumed by tens of millions of users that persuasively projects contentious worldviews. I was surprised to discover that, considering its magnitude and influence, there is close to no available research or even much scholarly commentary on *GTA V*. The few elements this study has touched on point to the vast potential *GTA V* and the like offer to undertake exciting, relevant, and important work in the areas of game studies, education, social anthropology, sociology, neurology, geography, media studies, psychology, computer science, race studies, gender studies, political science, and cultural studies. Online rumours are swirling about the imminent release of *GTA V*I, which promises to be larger in scope, more technically advanced, more immersive, and will likely draw even larger audiences, which will offer additional research opportunities.

More specifically, this work has highlighted the need to investigate and better

understand how racialized urban spaces function in sophisticated games and virtual environments, how these might influence those who play in them, and how pervasive and persistent enactments in these places are consequent to culture and society. Furthermore, most of the studies that focus on player responses to racial stereotypes are qualitative or mixed, based on brief gameplay sessions, carried out in clinical settings, and only measure for short-term and immediate responses. There would be an enormous benefit to carrying out large-scale, longitudinal, qualitative and mixed methods studies that gather robust data on how players of diverse backgrounds engage with race in games, and how their long-term attitudes and behaviours are affected. Intersectional research might span minority groups, girls and women, LGBTQ, and other political groups, not only in terms of gameplay, but also on how these same groups might benefit from corresponding instruction, particularly since they are often the ones being narrowly and perniciously represented. It would also be valuable to better understand how play with games like *GTA* transpires in "natural" rather than laboratory settings. Although I was financially limited, a future iteration of a similar study might consider a ubiquitous implementation of gameplay video and audio recording technology, and a more structured method to encourage participants to take notes during play.

Additional evidence-based support for the use of video games in schools would also be beneficial. What we typically categorize under the mantle of "video games" includes everything from computer Solitaire and Minesweeper to massive multiplayer virtual environments. There is a need to better articulate different types of games, different types of play experience, and how each can contribute to specific learning goals. I see the work reported here as a form of activism, not only because I address issues of race and appropriation with a dominant group, but also for setting a precedent of justification for the inclusion of controversial games in the curriculum. More academic work that validates this approach will help align stagnating schools with the genuine and relevant needs of contemporary youth. Investigations in this area would benefit from scholar-teacher

partnerships, action research, and student co-researcher models. We must seek to better understand how powerful games affect impressionable children and adolescents, but also work to support the critical consumption of games and media in general.

White adolescents adopting black codes and mannerisms, largely by way of hip-hop media, is a widely reported phenomenon (For example, Bennett, 1999; Bucholtz, 1999; Cutler, 1999; Giroux, 1994; Hall, 2006; Hayes, 2004; Hess, 2005; Miller 2008b; Rodriguez, 2006; Sulé, 2015) and a near cultural cliché, but strikingly understudied. There is a paucity of empirical evidence to account for its prevalence, which presents exciting possibilities for research.

It is also clear that there is a need for much more work to validate an increased curricular inclusion of media studies, media literacy, and digital literacy. As demonstrated by the SPRs, our society increasingly lives in media (Deuze, 2011), and it influences everything from self-image, to consumption habits, politics, and governance. The West is saturated in media, but very little Western curricular space is devoted to the study of media, nor are teachers and instructors adequately trained to carry out adequate programs (Garcia et al., 2013). Additional research in this area, particularly in university education programs would benefit pre-service and in-service teacher training, and national and local policy addressing curriculum and instruction.

Conclusion and Final Thoughts

This project connected me more deeply to the young people with whom I spend my days and years, and furthered my belief that our education system and the society from which it springs are broken, which has hardened my conviction to do something about it. It seems that segregation, exploitation, and bondage never ended; they only changed their shape and vestments.

There is an entire chapter that I omitted from this dissertation in order to keep the length manageable. In brief, it was a series of micro-autoethnographic moments from

the study that highlighted how, despite my desire to foster an equitable environment, as an agent of the university and the school, I was complicit with coercive tactics to mine data from and exact control over the SPRs. That chapter revealed that discursive systems of knowledge/power can overwhelm our best intentions, and that deeply ingrained and invisible forces shape our behaviour, which distantly validates that racism exists without racists.

The research also made me aware of myself as a teacher. I spent countless hours reviewing and transcribing video footage and became cognizant of my subtle enactment of power, and how my loud voice and unbridled passions can sometimes overwhelm my students. I noticed that there is a submerged level of communication between students — a currency of facial expressions, body language, and code words that they have developed to sustain a parallel discourse to what transpires on the surface. I saw arms folded when a young person felt diminished, or a dropped face after a student felt they'd said something unintelligent. "Reviewing the tapes" is a practice in professional sports, which I have now found useful for my practice.

This work has in some ways achieved the opposite of its intention. I am more aware of race than ever, aware that I have a different history, more aware of the distance between myself and others, more aware and thus more distanced from the lived reality of race and, when I encounter a person of colour, I am even more conscious now of our differences. The clarities and entanglements of theory have made race more prominent in my day to day thinking, and as a lifelong pedestrian and runner who engages in the life of my street and neighbourhood, I now encounter race and the racialized other with even more scrutiny than prior to my scholarly work in the area. This is perhaps the downside of the work: that awareness becomes awareness. I feel it is impossible to recapture the prelapsarian innocence of my early childhood in Guinea, where I was wholly unaware of race; those early days before the matrix of power-knowledge that designates racial frontiers inculcated the hard cartographic lines that separate me from my neighbour, self from

other, from the fellow inhabitants of my community, from my fellow human beings. As I write this, I am deeply saddened. Yes, on some level this work is activism, but I must also acknowledge that it is also a form of "cultural labour," a product for an academic institution publicly committed to the work of diversity (Murray, 2018).

This project revealed fragments of what transpired from the convergence of a controversial game that depicts a virtual city, a classroom of ten white students in an elite boys' schools in a real city, and an instructional framework that encouraged the critical examination of the politics of representation, of the other, and of ourselves. Initially, it cast a wide net inclusive of gender, masculinities, political ideology, and violence, any of which might have been the subject of this final report. However, the data that was generated regarding race proved the most fertile and compelling, particularly because it is the most understudied of all these crucial topics. My findings highlight certain lines of trajectory from the "magic network of assemblies" (Lammes & de Smale, 2018) that loosely converged during a month in disparate times and locations. This was an experiment of collisions and hybridities between virtual and real, formal and informal, teacher and student, researcher and subject, black and white, classroom and home, metropole and colony, dominant and subjugated, education and entertainment, freedom and constraint, and theory and practice, to name a few. These terms mark overlapping spectra of virtually infinite data from which, through a process of selection and suppression, I constructed a few "messy stories" about how knowledge/power discourses were shown to circulate within this particular arrangement of elements. My hope is that I and others will tread along some of the paths opened here and proceed with the intention of making life better for individuals and communities.

References

Aarseth, E. (2007). Allegories of Space: The Question of Spatiality in Computer games, In A. Dieckmann, & P. Russell (Eds.), *Sauerbraten: The world is a cube* (pp. 152-171). Basel, Switzerland: Birkhäuser.

Aizenberg, E. (1992). Borges, postcolonial precursor. *World Literature Today, 66*(1), 21-26.

Akmal, H. & Coulton, P. (2018) Using Heterotopias to Characterise Interactions in Physical/Digital Spaces. In C. Storni, K. Leahy, M. McMahon, P. Lloyd, & E. Boehmia (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Design Research Society Conference 2018* (Vol. 1, pp. 269-278). Limerick: Design Research Society.

Aliakbari, M., & Faraji, E. (2011). Basic principles of critical pedagogy. *2nd International Conference on Humanities, Historical and Social Sciences IPEDR* (Vol. 17, pp. 78-85)

Baerg, A. (2009). Governmentality, neoliberalism, and the digital game. *Symploke, 17*(1), 115-127.

Banks, S. P., & Banks, A. (2000). Reading "the critical life;" autoethnography as pedagogy. *Communication Education*, *49*(3), 233-238.

Barker, C. & Jane, E. A. (2016). *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. London, England: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Barrett, P. (2006). White thumbs, black bodies: race, violence, and neoliberal fantasies in Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas. *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, *28*(1), 95-119.

Bartel, C. (2015). Free will and moral responsibility in video games. *Ethics and Information Technology, 17*(4), 285-293.

Basit, T. (2003). Manual or electronic? The role of coding in qualitative data analysis. Educational research, 45(2), 143-154.

Bath, C. (2009). When does the action start and finish? Making the case for an ethno-

graphic action research in educational research. *Educational Action Research,* *17*(2), 213-224.

Bayeck, R. Y., Asino, T. I., & Young, P. A. (2018). Representations of Africans in Popular Video Games in the US. *Journal For Virtual Worlds Research*, *11*(2).

Beckett, A. E., Bagguley, P., & Campbell, T. (2017). Foucault, social movements and heterotopic horizons: rupturing the order of things. *Social Movement Studies*, *16*(2), 169-181.

Behm-Morawitz, E., & Ta, D. (2014). Cultivating virtual stereotypes?: The impact of video game play on racial/ethnic stereotypes. *Howard Journal of Communications, 25*(1), 1-15.

Behm-Morawitz, E., Hoffswell, J., & Chen, S. W. (2016). The virtual threat effect: A test of competing explanations for the effects of racial stereotyping in video games on players' cognitions. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, *19*(5), 308-313.

Bennett, A. (1999). Rappin' on the Tyne: White hip-hop culture in Northeast England – An ethnographic study. *The Sociological Review, 47*(1), 1-24.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. London: Routledge.

Bhagat-Kennedy, M. (2018). Nation after world: Rethinking "the end of postcolonial theory." *Interventions*, *20*(3), 335-344.

Bijvank, M. N., Konijn, E. A., & Bushman, B. J. (2012). "We don't need no education": Video game preferences, video game motivations, and aggressiveness among adolescent boys of different educational ability levels. *Journal of adolescence, 35*(1), 153-162.

Blair, E. (2009). A further education college as a heterotopia. *Research in Post‐Compulsory Education, 14*(1), 93-101.

Blakely, K. (2007). Reflections on the role of emotion in feminist research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods (6)*2, 59-68.

Bochner, A. (2012). On first-person narrative scholarship: Autoethnography as acts of meaning. *Narrative Inquiry, 22*(1), 155-164.

Boedeltje, F. (2012). The other spaces of Europe: Seeing European geopolitics through the disturbing eye of Foucault's Heterotopias. *Geopolitics, 17*(1), 1-24.

Boellstorff, T. (2006). A ludicrous discipline? Ethnography and game studies. *Games and Culture, 1*(1), 29-35.

Boellstorff, T., Nardi, B., Pearce, C., & Taylor, T. L. (2012). *Ethnography and virtual worlds: A handbook of method*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Bogost, I. (2008). The rhetoric of video games. In K. Salen (Ed.), *The ecology of games: Connecting youth, games, and learning* (pp. 117-140). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Bogost, I., & Klainbaum, D. (2006). Experiencing place in Los Santos and Vice City. In N. Garrelts (Ed.), *The culture and meaning of Grand Theft Auto* (pp. 162-176). Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.

Bonnett, A. (1997). Geography, 'race' and whiteness: invisible traditions and current challenges. *Area, 29*(3), 193-199.

Bonilla-Silva, E., Goar, C., & Embrick, D. G. (2006). When whites flock together: The social psychology of white habitus. *Critical Sociology, 32*(2-3), 229-253.

Borchard, K. (2015). Super Columbine massacre RPG! and Grand Theft auto-ethnography. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708615614018.

Bourgonjon, J. (2014). The meaning and relevance of video game literacy. CLCWeb: *Comparative Literature and Culture, 16*(5), 8.

Breger, C. (2008). Digital digs, or Lara Croft replaying Indiana Jones: Archaeological tropes and 'colonial loops' in new media narrative. *Aether: The Journal of Media Geography, 11*, 41-60.

Brock, A. (2011). "When keeping it real goes wrong": Resident Evil 5, racial representa-

tion, and gamers. *Games and Culture, 6*(5), 429-452.

Brown, A. (2015). Awkward: the importance of reflexivity in using ethnographic methods. In P. Lankoski, & S. Björk (Eds.), *Game Research Methods* (pp. 77-92). Halifax, CA: ETC Press.

Brown, A. (2018). *How video games are fuelling the rise of the far right.* Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/mar/12/video-games-fuel-rise-far-right-violent-misogynist

Bucholtz, M. (1999). You da man: Narrating the racial other in the production of white masculinity. *Journal of Sociolinguistics, 3*(4), 443-460.

Burgess, M. C. R., Dill, K. E., Stermer, S. P., Burgess, S. R., & Brown, B. P. (2011). Playing with prejudice: The prevalence and consequences of racial stereotypes in video games. *Media Psychology, 14*(3), 289-311.

Burrill, D. A. (2006). Check out my moves. *Social Semiotics, 16*(1), 17-38.

Burrows, V. B. (2008). The heterotopic spaces of postcolonial trauma in Michael Ondaatje's "Anil's Ghost." *Studies in the Novel, 40*(1), 161-177.

Camangian, P. R. (2013). Seeing through lies: Teaching ideological literacy as a corrective lens. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 46*(1), 119-134.

Campbell, C. (2018). *Gaming's toxic men, explained.* Retrieved from https://www.polygon.com/2018/7/25/17593516/video-game-culture-toxic-men-explained

Carr-Chellman, A. (2012). Bring back the boys. *Learning & Leading with Technology, 39*(7), 12-15.

Casarino, C. (1995). Gomorrahs of the deep or, Melville, Foucault, and the question of heterotopia. *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory, 51*(4), 1-25.

Cenzatti, M. (2008). Heterotopias of difference. In M. Dehaene & L. De Cauter (Eds.), *Heterotopia and the City: Urban Theory and the Transformations of Public Space* (pp. 75-85). New York, NY: Routledge.

Cicchirillo, V.J., & Appiah, O. (2014). The impact of racial representations in video game contexts: Identification with gaming characters. *New Media and Mass Communication, 26,* 14-21.

Cicchirillo, V. (2015). Priming stereotypical associations: Violent video games and African American depictions. *Communication Research Reports, 32*(2), 122-131.

Cilliers, J. (2013). Power, space, and knowledge: theological-aesthetical perspectives on Michel Foucalt's contribution to post-colonial theory. *Scriptura: Journal for Contextual Hermeneutics in Southern Africa, 112*(1), 1-13.

Chan, D. (2005). Playing with race: The ethics of racialized representations in e-games. *International Review of Information Ethics, 4,* 24-30.

Chawla, D., & Atay, A. (2018). Introduction: decolonizing autoethnography. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies, 18*(1), 3-8.

Collins, R. L. (2011). Content analysis of gender roles in media: Where are we now and where should we go? *Sex Roles, 64*(3-4), 290-298.

Common Sense Media. (2015). *The common sense census: Media use by tweens and teens.* Retrieved from https://www.commonsensemedia.org/research/the-common-sense-census-media-use-by-tweens-and-teens

Connell, R. W. (2005). Growing up masculine: Rethinking the significance of adolescence in the making of masculinities. *Irish Journal of Sociology, 14*(2), 11-28.

Crawford, L. (1996). Personal ethnography. *Communications Monographs, 63*(2), 158-170.

Cutler, C. A. (1999). Yorkville crossing: White teens, hip hop and African American English. Journal of sociolinguistics, 3(4), 428-442.

Darvasi, P. (2016). Empathy, perspective and complicity: How digital games can support peace education and conflict resolution. Mahatmi Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development/UNESCO.

Davis, T. (2010). Third spaces or heterotopias? Recreating and negotiating migrant iden-

tity using online spaces. *Sociology, 44*(4), 661-677.

De Castell, S., & Jenson, J. (2005). Videogames and digital game play—The new field of educational game studies. *Orbit, 35*(2), 17-19.

De Castell, S., Jenson, J., & Taylor, N. (2007). Digital games for education: When meanings play. *Intermédialités: Histoire et théorie des arts, des lettres et des techniques/Intermediality: History and Theory of the Arts, Literature and Technologies, (9),* 113-132.

De Cauter, L., & Dehaene, M. (2008). The space of play: Towards a general theory of heterotopia. In M. Dehaene & L. De Cauter (Eds.), *Heterotopia and the city: public space in a postcivil society* (pp. 87-102). New York, NY: Routledge.

Dehaene, M., & De Cauter, L. (2008). Heterotopia in a postcivil society. In M. Dehaene & L. De Cauter (Eds.), *Heterotopia and the city: public space in a postcivil society* (pp. 3-9). New York, NY: Routledge.

Delwiche, A. (2006). Massively multiplayer online games (MMOs) in the new media classroom. *Educational Technology & Society, 9*(3), 160-172.

Deskins, T. G. (2013). Stereotypes in video games and how they perpetuate prejudice. *McNair Scholars Research Journal, 6*(1), 19-36.

Deuze, M. (2011). Media life. *Media, Culture & Society, 33*(1), 137-148.

DeVane, B., & Squire, K. D. (2008). The meaning of race and violence in Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas. *Games and Culture, 3(*3-4), 264-285.

Dietrich, D. R. (2013). Avatars of whiteness: Racial expression in video game characters. *Sociological Inquiry, 83*(1), 82-105.

Draper, K. (2019). *Video Games Aren't Why Shootings Happen. Politicians Still Blame Them.* Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/05/sports/trump-violent-video-games-studies.html

Dyer, R. (1988). White. *Screen, 29*(4), 44-64.

Edney, M. H. (2007). Mapping empires, mapping bodies: Reflections on the use and

abuse of cartography. *Treballs de la Societat Catalana de Geografia, 63,* 83-104.

Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: an overview. *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung, 12*(4), 273-290.

Entertainment Software Association. (2016). *Essential facts about the computer and video game industry.* Retrieved from http://essentialfacts.theesa.com/Essential-Facts-2016.pdf

Entertainment Software Association. (2019). *Essential facts about the computer and video game industry.* Retrieved from https://www.theesa.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019-Essential-Facts-About-the-Computer-and-Video-Game-Industry.pdf

Everett, A., & Watkins, S. C. (2008). The power of play: The portrayal and performance of race in video games. In K. Salen (Ed.), *The ecology of games: Connecting youth, games, and learning* (pp. 141-166). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Faubion, J. D. (2008). Heterotopia: an ecology. In M. Dehaene & L. De Cauter (Eds.), *Heterotopia and the city: public space in a postcivil society*, (pp. 43-52). New York, NY: Routledge.

Ferguson, C. J. (2008). The school shooting/violent video game link: causal relationship or moral panic? J*ournal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling, 5*(1□2), 25-37.

Ferguson, C. J. (2010). Blazing angels or resident evil? Can violent video games be a force for good? *Review of General Psychology, 14*(2), 68-81.

Fielding, M. (2004). Transformative approaches to student voice: Theoretical underpinnings, recalcitrant realities. *British Educational Research Journal, 30*(2), 295-311.

Forman, M. (2002). *The 'hood comes first: race, space, and place in rap and hip-hop.* Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Foucault, M. (1973). *The order of things: An archaeology of the human sciences.* New York, NY: Vintage.

Foucault, M. (1978). Nietzsche, genealogy, history. In J. Richardson, & B. Leiter (Eds.), *Nietzsche* (pp. 139-164). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. New York, NY: Vintage.

Foucault, M., & Gordon, C. (1980). P*ower/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M (1984) Of other spaces: Utopias and heterotopias. Architecture, Mouvement, *Continuité, (5),* 46-49.

Foucault, M. (2003) *Society must be defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975– 6.* London, UK: Allen Lane.

Foucault, M. (2008). Of other spaces* (1967). In M. Dehaene, & L. De Cauter (Eds.), *Heterotopia and the city* (pp. 25-42). New York, NY: Routledge.

Frankenberg, R., & Mani, L. (1993). Crosscurrents, crosstalk: Race, 'postcoloniality' and the politics of location. *Cultural Studies, 7*(2), 292-310.

Frasca, G. (2003). Sim sin city: Some thoughts about Grand Theft Auto 3. *Game Studies, 3*(2).

Freire, P., & Macedo, D.P. (2014). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Fron, J., Fullerton, T., Morie, J. F., & Pearce, C. (2007). The hegemony of play. In *Situated Play: Proceedings of Digital Games Research Association 2007 Conference* (pp. 1-10). Tokyo, Japan: The University of Tokyo.

Gabbiadini, A., Riva, P., Andrighetto, L., Volpato, C., & Bushman, B. J. (2016). Acting like a tough guy: Violent-sexist video games, identification with game characters, masculine beliefs, & empathy for female violence victims. *PLoS one, 11*(4), e0152121.

Gale, K. (2014). Action research and the assemblage: Engaging Deleuzian pedagogy and inquiry beyond the constraints of the individual and the group in education

settings. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education (QSE), 27*(5), 667-681.

Galloway, A. R. (2007). StarCraft, or, balance. *Grey Room, 28,* 86-107.

Gandy, M. (2012). Queer ecology: Nature, sexuality, and heterotopic alliances. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 30*(4), 727-747.

Garcia, A., Mirra, N., Morrell, E., Martinez, A., & Scorza, D. (2015). The council of youth research: Critical literacy and civic agency in the digital age. *Reading & Writing Quarterly, 31*(2), 151-167.

Garcia, A., Seglem, R., & Share, J. (2013). Transforming teaching and learning through critical media literacy pedagogy. *LEARNing Landscapes, 6*(2), 109-124.

Garner, S. (2017). Surfing the third wave of whiteness studies: Reflections on Twine and Gallagher. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 40*(9), 1582-1597.

Gaver, B., Dunne, T., & Pacenti, E. (1999). Design: cultural probes. *Interactions, 6*(1), 21-29.

Gee, J. P. (2003). *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy.* New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Geyser, H., & Tshabalala, P. (2011). Return to darkness: Representations of Africa in Resident Evil 5. In *DiGRA Conference, 6.*

Gandhi, L. (1998). *Postcolonial theory: A critical introduction.* New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Giroux, H. A. (1994). Doing cultural studies: Youth and the challenge of pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review, 64*(3), 278-309.

Giroux, H. A. (1997). White squall: Resistance and the pedagogy of whiteness. *Cultural Studies, 11*(3), 376-389.

Giroux, H. A. (2004). Critical pedagogy and the postmodern/modern divide: Towards a pedagogy of democratization. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 31*(1), 31-47.

Giroux, H. A. (2009). Paulo Freire and the politics of postcolonialism. In A. Kempf (Ed.),

Breaching the colonial contract: Anti-colonialism in the US and Canada (pp. 79-89). Dordrecht, UK: Springer.

Goldberg, D. T. (1993). R*acist culture: Philosophy and the politics of meaning.* Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Goldberg, H. (2013). *Criminal mind: The reclusive genius behind the Grand Theft Auto franchise*. Retrieved from https://playboysfw.kinja.com/criminal-mind-the-reclusive-genius-behind-the-grand-th-1479684025

Gottschalk, S. (1995). Videology: Video-games as postmodern sites/sights of ideological reproduction. *Symbolic Interaction, 18*(1), 1-18.

Goodwin-Smith, I. (2010). Resisting Foucault: The necessity of appropriation. *Social Identities, 16*(5), 587-596.

Gordon, J. (2003). Hybridity, heterotopia, and mateship in China Miéville's "Perdido Street Station." *Science Fiction Studies, 30*(3), 456-476.

Gosling, D. (2014). Teaching and learning projects as 'heterotopias.' *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning, 2*(1), 25-48.

Gourlay, L. (2015). Open education as a 'heterotopia of desire.' *Learning, Media and Technology, 40*(3), 310-327.

Granic, I., Lobel, A., & Engels, R. C. (2014). The benefits of playing video games. *American Psychologist, 69*(1), 66-78.

Grinberg, S. M., & Machado, M. L. (2018). School in the (im)possibility of future: Utopia and its territorialities. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 51*(3), 322-334.

Grubb, J. (2018). *Grand Theft Auto V is just 5 million copies away from 100 million in sales*. Retrieved from: https://venturebeat.com/2018/05/16/grand-theft-auto-v-is-just-5-million-copies-away-from-100-million-in-sales/

Günzel, S. (2008). The space-image: interactivity and spatiality of computer games. In S. Günzel, M. Liebe, & D. Mersch (Eds.), *Conference proceedings of the philosophy of computer games* (pp. 170-190). Potsdam, Germany: Potsdam University Press.

Hall, C. (2002). Histories, empires and the post-colonial moment. In I. Chambers, & L. Curti (Eds.), *The postcolonial question: Common skies, divided horizons* (pp. 74-86). New York, NY: Routledge.

Hall, S (1995). The whites of their eyes: Racist ideologies and the media. In G. Dines, & J. M. Humez (Eds.), *Gender, race and class in the media* (pp. 18–22). London, UK: Sage.

Hall, S. (1996a). Cultural studies and its theoretical legacies. In D. Morley, & K. H. Chen (Eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies* (pp. 262-275). New York, NY: Routledge.

Hall, S. (1996b). For Allon White: Metaphors of transformation. In D. Morley, & K. H. Chen (Eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies* (pp. 286-305). New York, NY: Routledge.

Hall, S. (2002). When was 'the post-colonial'? Thinking at the limit. In I. Chambers & L. Curti (Eds.), *The postcolonial question: Common skies, divided horizons* (pp. 248-266). New York, NY: Routledge.

Hall, S. (2006) What is this 'black' in black popular culture? In Chen, K. H., & Morley, D. (Eds.). Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies (pp. 468 - 478). Routledge.

Harrer, S. (2018). Casual empire: Video games as neocolonial praxis. *Open Library of Humanities, 4*(1).

Harris, D. (2007). Race, space, and the destabilization of practice. *Landscape Journal, 26*(1), 1-9.

Harley, J. B. (2009). Maps, knowledge, and power. In G. L. Henderson, & M. Waterstone (Eds.), *Geographic thought: a praxis perspective* (pp. 129-148). New York, NY: Routledge.

Hayes, D. (2004). Fear of (and fascination with) a black planet: The relocation of rap by white non-urban youth. *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies, 12,* 63-82.

Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life and work in communities and class-rooms.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Hess, M. (2005). Hip-hop realness and the white performer. *Critical Studies in Media Communication, 22*(5), 372-389.

Hernandez, P. (2015). *Someone actually tried testing out if GTA V cops are 'racist.'* Retrieved from https://kotaku.com/someone-actually-tried-testing-out-if-gta-v-cops-are-ra-1691180811

Herr, K., & Anderson, G. L. (2005). Designing the plane while flying it: Proposing and doing the dissertation. In K. Herr, & G. L. Anderson (Eds.), *The action research dissertation: A guide for students and faculty* (pp. 70-88). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Hetherington, K. (1997). *The badlands of modernity: Heterotopia and social ordering.* Hove, UK: Psychology Press.

Hickling-Hudson, A., Matthews, J., & Woods, A. (2004). *Disrupting preconceptions: Postcolonialism and education*. Flaxton, QLD: Post Pressed.

Higgin, T. (2009). Blackless fantasy: The disappearance of race in massively multiplayer online role-playing games. *Games and Culture, 4*(1), 3-26.

Hitchcock, P. (1993). The othering of cultural studies. *Third Text, 7*(25), 11-20.

Hobbs, R., & Jensen, A. (2013). The past, present, and future of media literacy education. *Journal of Media Literacy Education, 1*(1), 1-11.

Hook, D., & Vrdoljak, M. (2002). Gated communities, heterotopia and a "rights" of privilege: A 'heterotopology' of the South African security-park. *Geoforum, 33*(2), 195-219.

Hope, A. (2016). Educational heterotopia and students' use of Facebook. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology, 32*(1).

Huggan, G. (1989). Decolonizing the map: Post-colonialism, post-structuralism and the cartographic connection. *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature,*

20(4), 115-131.

Humphreys, M. (2005). Getting personal: Reflexivity and autoethnographic vignettes. *Qualitative Inquiry, 11*(6), 840-860.

Jaffe, R. (2012). Talkin' 'bout the ghetto: Popular culture and urban imaginaries of immobility. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 36*(4), 674-688.

Jansz, J. (2005). The emotional appeal of violent video games for adolescent males. *Communication Theory, 15*(3), 219-241.

Janzen, M. D. (2005). Researcher as learner, participant as knowers: An ethnographic snapshot of women sharing knowledge in a rural Ugandan culture. Unpublished manuscript, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada.

Javangwe, T. D. (2016). Colonial heterotopia as metanarrative in white Rhodesian writing: A post-millennial reading of Peter Godwin's 'Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa.' *Journal of Literary Studies, 32*(3), 129-139.

Jenkins, H. (2004). Game design as narrative. *Computer, 44*(53), 118-130.

Jenkins, H., Purushotma, R., Weigel, M., Clinton, K., & Robison, A. J. (2009). *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Jenson, J., & De Castell, S. (2010). Gender, simulation, and gaming: Research review and redirections. *Simulation & Gaming, 41*(1), 51-71.

Jenson, J., & Hébert, C. (2017). Developing serious pedagogy for serious games: Digital game-based teaching in K-12 schools. In *DiGRA 2017: The 10th Digital Games Research Association Conference.*

Jocson, K. M. (2013). Remix revisited: Critical solidarity in youth media arts. *E-learning and Digital Media, 10*(1), 68-82.

Johnson, E. & Vasudevan, L. (2012). "Seeing and hearing students' lived and embodied critical literacy practices." *Theory into Practice, (51)*1, 34-41.

Johnson, P. (2006). Unravelling Foucault's 'different spaces.' *History of the Human Sci-*

ences, 19(4), 75-90.

Johnson, P. (2013). The geographies of heterotopia. *Geography Compass, 7*(11), 790-803.

Jordan, S., & Kapoor, D. (2016). Re-politicizing participatory action research: Unmasking neoliberalism and the illusions of participation. *Educational Action Research, 24*(1), 134-149.

Kain, E. (2016) *'GTA V' has sold 70M copies, now where's that single player DLC?* Retrieved from http://www.forbes.com/sites/erikkain/2016/11/02/gta-v-has-sold-70-million-copies/

Kain, E. (2019) *Putting Grand Theft Auto V's 110 million copies sold into context*. Retrieved from https://www.forbes.com/sites/erikkain/2019/05/14/putting-grand-theft-auto-vs-110-million-copies-sold-into-context

Kareithi, P. J. (2014). Hegemonic masculinity in media contents. In *Media and gender: A scholarly agenda for the Global Alliance on Media and Gender* (pp. 26-29). Paris, France: UNESCO.

Kaiser Family Foundation. (2010). *Generation M2: Media in the lives of 8- to 18-year-olds*. Retrieved from https://www.kff.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/8010.pdf

Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2007). Critical media literacy, democracy, and the reconstruction of education. Media literacy: A reader, 3-23.

Keogh, B. (2014). Across worlds and bodies: Criticism in the age of video games. *Journal of Games Criticism, 1*(1), 1-26.

Kimmel, M. S. (2010). *Boys and school: A background paper in the "boy crisis."* Stockholm, Sweden: Fritze.

Kincheloe, J. L. (2011). Meet me behind the curtain. In Key works in critical pedagogy (pp. 85-99). SensePublishers.

Knight, K. T. (2017). Placeless places: resolving the paradox of Foucault's heterotopia. *Textual Practice, 31*(1), 141-158.

Kohn, D. (2002) Addicted: suicide over Everquest. Retrieved from https://www.cbsnews.

com/news/addicted-suicide-over-everquest/

Kolchin, P. (2002). Whiteness studies: The new history of race in America. *The Journal of American History, 89*(1), 154-173.

Krause, M. B. (2013). "A series of unfortunate events:" The repercussions of print-literacy as the only literacy for talented boys. *Gifted Child Today, 36*(4), 236-245.

Kumar, S., & Parameswaran, R. (2018). Charting an itinerary for postcolonial communication and media studies. *Journal of Communication, 68*(2), 347-358.

Kushner, D. (2002). *The biggest, baddest, wildest in the world returns — in full 1980s neon.* Retrieved from http://www.davidkushner.com/article/vice-city/

Kuchera, B. (2014). *It's time to leave the brothels and strip clubs behind when real victims fuel your narrative.* Retrieved from http://www.polygon.com/2014/2/27/5453202/its-time-to-leave-the-brothels-and-strip-clubs-behind-when-real

Krüger, S. (2018). Facing Fanon: Examining neocolonial aspects in Grand Theft Auto V through the prism of the machinima film Finding Fanon II. *Open Library of Humanities, 4*(1), 12. DOI: http://doi.org/10.16995/olh.177

Lammes, S. (2010). Postcolonial playgrounds: Games and postcolonial culture. Eludamos. *Journal for Computer Game Culture, 4*(1), 1-6.

Lammes, S., & de Smale, S. (2018). Hybridity, reflexivity & mapping: A collaborative ethnography of postcolonial gameplay. Open Library of Humanities, 4(1), 1-31.

Langer, J. (2008). The familiar and the foreign: Playing (post)colonialism in World of Warcraft. In H. Corneliussen, & J. W. Rettberg (Eds.), *Digital culture, play, and identity: A World of Warcraft reader* (pp. 87-108). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Lather, P. (2008). (Post)Feminist methodology. *International Review of Qualitative Research, 1*(1), 55-64.

Latorre, Ó. P. (2015). The social discourse of video games analysis model and case study: GTA IV. *Games and Culture, 10*(5).

Leatch, A. (2015). *How the Timberland boot became an icon of hip-hop style.* Retrieved from https://www.highsnobiety.com/2015/08/06/timberland-boots-hip-hop/

Lefebvre, H., & Nicholson-Smith, D. (1991). *The production of space.* Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

LaFever, K. L. (2012). Foucault's heterotopia and pedagogical space. *Didactiques, 2*(1) 70-80.

Legg, S. (2007). Beyond the European province: Foucault and postcolonialism. In J. W. Crampton, & S. Elden (Eds.), *Space, knowledge and power: Foucault and geography* (pp. 265-289). New York, NY: Routledge.

Leonard, D. J. (2003). Live in your world, play in ours: Race, video games, and consuming the other. *Studies in Media & Information Literacy Education, 3*(4), 1-9.

Leonard, D. J. (2006a). Not a hater, just keepin' it real: The importance of race- and gender-based game studies. *Games and Culture, 1*(1), 83-88.

Leonard, D. J. (2006b). Virtual gangstas, coming to a suburban house near you: Demonization, commodification, and policing blackness. In N. Garrelts (Ed.), *The meaning and culture of Grand Theft Auto: Critical essays* (pp. 49-69). Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc.

Leonard, D. J. (2009). Young, black (& brown) and don't give a fuck: Virtual gangstas in the era of state violence. *Cultural Studies? Critical Methodologies, 9*(2), 248-272.

Leonardo, Z. (2002). The souls of white folk: Critical pedagogy, whiteness studies, and globalization discourse. *Race ethnicity and education, 5*(1), 29-50.

Leonardo, Z. (2004). The colour of supremacy: Beyond the discourse of 'white privilege.' *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 36*(2), 137-152.

Lipsitz, G. (2007). The racialization of space and the spatialization of race theorizing the hidden architecture of landscape. *Landscape Journal, 26*(1), 10-23.

Lofus, T. (2004). *"Grand Theft Auto" back with a vengeance.* Retrieved from http://www.nbcnews.com/id/6399463/ns/technology_and_science-games/t/grand-theft-

auto-back-vengeance/

Loomba, A. (1998). *Colonialism / postcolonialism: New critical idiom (3rd ed.)*. London, UK: Routledge.

Lotherington, H., & Jenson, J. (2011). Teaching multimodal and digital literacy in L2 settings: New literacies, new basics, new pedagogies. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 31,* 226-246.

Lou, J. (2007). Revitalizing Chinatown into a heterotopia: A geosemiotic analysis of shop signs in Washington, DC's Chinatown. *Space and Culture, 10*(2), 170-194.

Luke, A. (2012). Critical literacy: Foundational notes. *Theory Into Practice, 5*1(1), 4-11.

Lvakhiv, A. (2011). Cinema of the not-yet: The utopian promise of film as heterotopia. *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature & Culture, 5*(2).

Madison, D. S. (2012). *Critical ethnography: Methods, ethics, and performance (2nd ed.).* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Magnet, S. (2006). Playing at colonization: Interpreting imaginary landscapes in the video game Tropico. *Journal of Communication Inquiry, 30*(2), 142-162.

MacDonald, E. (2017) *Newzoo's 2017 report: Insights into the $108.9 billion global games narket.* Retrieved from https://newzoo.com/insights/articles/newzoo-2017-report-insights-into-the-108-9-billion-global-games-market/

Marinelli, M. (2009). Making concessions in Tianjin: Heterotopia and Italian colonialism in mainland China. *Urban History, 36*(3), 399-425.

Markey, P. M., Markey, C. N., & French, J. E. (2015). Violent video games and re-al-world violence: Rhetoric versus data. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture, 4*(4), 277.

Martino, W. (2012). 'Undoing' gender and disrupting hegemonic masculinity: Embracing a transgender social imaginary. In B. Down, & J. Smyth (Eds.), *Critical Voices in Teacher Education* (pp. 125-138). Amsterdam, Netherlands: Springer.

McGrath, L., & Reavey, P. (2013). Heterotopias of control: Placing the material in ex-

periences of mental health service use and community living. *Health & Place, 22,* 123-131.

McNamee, S. (2000). Foucault's heterotopia and children's everyday lives. *Childhood, 7*(4), 479-492.

McTaggart, R. (1991). Principles for participatory action research. *Adult Education Quarterly, 41*(3), 168-187.

McWhortle, L. (2005). Where do white people come from? A Foucaultian critique of whiteness studies. *Philosophy & Social Criticism, 31*(5-6), 533-556.

Mendieta, E. (2004). Plantations, ghettos, prisons: US racial geographies. *Philosophy & Geography, 7*(1), 43-59.

Meyers, M. (2019). *'Gaming disorder' deemed an official illness by World Health Organization*. Retrieved from https://www.cnet.com/news/world-health-organization-deems-gaming-disorder-an-official-illness/

Miller, K. (2007). Jacking the dial: Radio, race, and place in "Grand Theft Auto." *Ethnomusicology, 51*(3), 402-438.

Miller, K. (2008a). Grove street grimm: "Grand Theft Auto" and digital folklore. *Journal of American Folklore, 121*(481), 255-285.

Miller, K. (2008b). The accidental carjack: Ethnography, gameworld tourism, and Grand Theft Auto. *Game Studies, 8*(1), 147.

Mitchell, T. (Ed.). (2000). *Questions of modernity (Vol. 11)*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Monson, M. J. (2012). Race-based fantasy realm: Essentialism in the World of Warcraft. *Games and Culture, 7*(1), 48-71.

Moore, R. (2016) *15 most controversial games in history.* Retrieved from http://screenrant.com/most-controversial-video-games-ever/?view=all

Morley, D. (2015). Cultural studies, common sense and communications: The infra-ordinary, the interdisciplinary and the particular. *Cultural Studies, 29*(1), 23-31.

Mou, Y., & Peng, W. (2009). Gender and racial stereotypes in popular video games. In R. E. Ferdig (Ed.), *Handbook of research on effective electronic gaming in education* (pp. 922-937). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

Mukherjee, S. (2015). The playing fields of empire: Empire and spatiality in video games. *Journal of Gaming & Virtual Worlds, 7*(3), 299-315.

Mukherjee, S. (2018). Playing subaltern: Video games and postcolonialism. *Games and Culture, 13*(5), 504-520.

Mukherjee, S., & Lundedal Hammar, E. (2018). *Introduction to the special issue on post-colonial perspectives in game studies.* doi.org/10.16995/olh.309

Murray, S. (2017). *On video games: The visual politics of race, gender and space.* London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Murray, S. (2018). The work of postcolonial game studies in the play of culture. *Open Library of Humanities, 4*(1).

Nash, C. (2002). Cultural geography: Postcolonial cultural geographies. *Progress in Human Geography, 26*(2), 219-230.

Nakamura, L. (1995). Race in/for cyberspace: Identity tourism and racial passing on the internet. *Works and Days, 13*(1-2), 181-193.

Neely, B., & Samura, M. (2011). Social geographies of race: Connecting race and space. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 34*(11), 1933-1952.

Nelson, C., Treichler, P. A., & Grossberg, L. (1992). Cultural studies: An introduction. *Cultural Studies, 1*(5), 22.

Netcoh, S. (2013). Droppin' knowledge on race: Hip-hop, white adolescents, and anti-racism \education. *Radical Teacher, 97*, 10-19.

Nichols, R. (2010). Postcolonial studies and the discourse of Foucault: Survey of a field of problematization. **Foucault Studies, (9),** 111-144.

Nishi, N. W., Matias, C. E., & Montoya, R. (2015). Exposing the white avatar: Projections, justifications, and the ever-evolving American racism. *Social Identities,*

21(5), 459-473.

Odin, J. K. (1997). The edge of difference: Negotiations between the hypertextual and the postcolonial. *MFS Modern Fiction Studies, 43*(3), 598-630.

Olson, C. K., Kutner, L.. A., & Warner, D. E. (2008). The role of violent video game content in adolescent development: Boys' perspectives. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 23*(1), 55-75.

Olson, C. K., Kutner, L.. A., Warner, D. E., Almerigi, J. B., Baer, L., Nicholi II, A. M., & Beresin, E. V. (2007). Factors correlated with violent video game use by adolescent boys and girls. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 41*(1), 77-83.

Omi, M., & Winant, H. (2008). Once more, with feeling: Reflections on racial formation. *PMLA, 123*(5), 1565-1572.

Palladino, M., & Miller, J. (2011). Glasgow's Doulton Fountain and postcolonial heterotopia in "There's the Bird that Never Flew." *Safundi, 12*(3-4), 407-423.

Paperson, L. (2010). The postcolonial ghetto: Seeing her shape and his hand. *Berkeley Review of Education, 1*(1), 5-34.

Passmore, C. J., Yates, R., Birk, M. V., & Mandryk, R. L. (2017, October). Racial diversity in indie games: patterns, challenges, and opportunities. In *Extended abstracts publication of the annual symposium on computer-human interaction in play* (pp. 137-151). ACM.

Passmore, C. J., Birk, M. V., & Mandryk, R. L. (2018, April). The privilege of immersion: Racial and ethnic experiences, perceptions, and beliefs in digital gaming. In *Proceedings of the 2018 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (p. 383). ACM.

Patterson, J. (2013). *Constructions of violence and masculinity in the digital age.* Research-publishing.net. Voillans, France: La Grange des Noyes.

Pels, P., & Salemink, O. (1994). Introduction: Five theses on ethnography as colonial practice. *History and Anthropology, 8*(1-4), 1-34.

Persson, A., & Richards, W. (2008). From closet to heterotopia: A conceptual exploration of disclosure and 'passing' among heterosexuals living with HIV. *Culture, Health & Sexuality, 10*(1), 73-86.

Peters, M. A., & Humes, W. (2003). Educational futures: Utopias and heterotopias. *Policy futures in education, 1*(3), 428-439.

Petit, C. (2013). *City of angels and demons.* Retrieved from http://www.gamespot.com/reviews/grand-theft-auto-v-review/1900-6414475/

Phillips, R. (2013). *Mapping men and empire: Geographies of adventure.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Polasek, P. M. (2014). A critical race review of Grand Theft Auto V. *Humanity & Society, 38*(2), 216-218.

Razack, S. (Ed.). (2002). *Race, space, and the law: Unmapping a white settler society.* Toronto, CA: Between the Lines.

Redmond, D. (2006). Grand Theft Video: Running and Gunning for the U.S. Empire. In Garrelts, N. (ed). *The Meaning and Culture of Grand Theft Auto: Critical Essays. London*: McFarland & Co

Reimer, K. E., & McLean, L. R. (2015). Taking note: Engaging students as co-researchers. *Radical Pedagogy*, 12(2), 68-92.

Ribbens, W., & Malliet, S. (2015). How male young adults construe their playing style in violent video games. *New Media & Society, 17*(10), 1624-1642.

Rodriguez, N. M. (2000). Chapter one: Projects of whiteness in a critical pedagogy. *Counterpoints, 73,* 1-24.

Rodriquez, J. (2006). Color-blind ideology and the cultural appropriation of hip-hop. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35(6), 645-668.

Ross, T. L., & Collister, L. B. (2014). A social scientific framework for social systems in online video games: Building a better looking for raid loot system in World of Warcraft. *Computers in Human Behavior, 36,* 1-12.

Ruch, A. W. (2012). Grand Theft Auto IV: Liberty City and modernist literature. *Games and Culture, 7*(5), 331-348.

Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.

Said, E. W. (1989). Representing the colonized: Anthropology's interlocutors. *Critical Inquiry, 15*(2), 205-225.

Sanford, K., & Madill, L. (2006). Resistance through video game play: It's a boy thing. *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation,* 287-306.

Sarkeesian, A. (2014). *Women as background decoration (part 1) – tropes vs women in video games* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://feministfrequency.com/video/women-as-background-decoration-tropes-vs-wome

Schick, C. (2000). 'By virtue of being white': Resistance in anti-racist pedagogy. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 3*(1), 83-101.

Schwartz, L. (2006). Fantasy, realism, and the other in recent video games. *Space and Culture, 9*(3), 313-325.

Searle, K. A., & Kafai, Y. B. (2009). Boys' play in the fourth space: Freedom of movements in a tween virtual world. Breaking new ground: Innovation in games, play, practice and theory – *Proceedings of DiGRA*.

Shackley, M. (2002). Space, sanctity and service; the English Cathedral as heterotopia. *International Journal of Tourism Research, 4*(5), 345-352.

Shaw, A. (2012). Do you identify as a gamer? Gender, race, sexuality, and gamer identity. *New Media & Society, 14*(1), 28-44.

Sheridan, J., & Longboat, R. H. C. T. S. D. (2006). The Haudenosaunee imagination and the ecology of the sacred. *Space and Culture, 9*(4), 365-381.

Sheridan, J., & Roronhiakewen "He Clears the Sky" Dan Longboat. (2014). Walking back into creation: Environmental apartheid and the eternal—Initiating an Indigenous mind claim. *Space and Culture, 17*(3), 308-324.

Shome, R. (2016). When postcolonial studies meets media studies. *Critical Studies in*

Media Communication, 33(3), 245-263.

Singh, G. (2006). San Andreas: Agency, Movement, and Containment; or, How the West is (Frequently) Won. *Aesthetics of Play: Online Proceedings.*

Šisler, V. (2008). Digital Arabs: Representation in video games. *European Journal of Cultural Studies, 11*(2), 203-220.

Smit, B. H. (2013). Young people as co-researchers: Enabling student participation in educational practice. *Professional Development in Education, 39*(4), 550-573.

Sobolewska, E., Smith, C.F., & Turner, P. (2009). Auto-ethnography: problems, pitfalls and promise. HCI Educators.

Spivak, G. C. (1985). The Rani of Sirmur: An essay in reading the archives. *History and Theory, 24*(3), 247-272.

Squire, K. (2005). Toward a Media Literacy for Games.*Telemedium, 52*(12), 9-15.

Squire, K. (2008). Open-ended video games: A model for developing learning for the interactive age. *The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth, Games, and Learning,* 167-198.

Squire, K. (2011). *Video games and learning: Teaching and participatory culture in the digital age.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

St. Pierre, E. A. (2016). Untraining educational researchers. *Research in Education, 96*(1), 6-11.

Steinkuehler, C. (2007). Massively multiplayer online gaming as a constellation of literacy practices. In B. E. Shelton, D. A. Wiley (Eds.), *The design and use of simulation computer games in education*, (pp. 187-215). Salt Lake City, UT: Sense Publishers.

Steinkuehler, C., & King, E. (2009). Digital literacies for the disengaged: Creating after school contexts to support boys' game-based literacy skills. *On the Horizon, 17*(1), 47-59.

Steinkuehler, C. A. (2006). Massively multiplayer online video gaming as participation in

a discourse. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 13*(1), 38-52.

Sternheimer, K. (2007). Do video games kill? Contexts, 6, 13-17.

Steyaert, C. (2010). Queering space: Heterotopic life in Derek Jarman's garden. *Gender, Work & Organization, 17*(1), 45-68.

Strain, E. (2003). *Public places, private journeys: ethnography, entertainment, and the tourist gaze.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Stuart, K. (2013). *GTA 5 review: a dazzling but monstrous parody of modern life.* Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/sep/16/gta-5-review-grand-theft-auto-v

Sulé, V. T. (2015). White privilege? The intersection of hip-hop and whiteness as a catalyst for cross-racial interaction among white males. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 48*(2), 212-226.

Sundén, J. (2012). Desires at play: On closeness and epistemological uncertainty. *Games and Culture, 7*(2), 164-184.

Tacchi, J., Slater, D., & Hearn, G. (2003). *Ethnographic action research: A user's handbook.* New Delhi, India: UNESCO.

Taylor, A., & Richardson, C. (2005). Queering home corner. Contemporary Issues in *Early Childhood, 6*(2), 163-173.

Taylor, N., Jenson, J., & De Castell, S. (2009). Cheerleaders/booth babes/Halo hoes: Pro-gaming, gender and jobs for the boys. *Digital Creativity, 20*(4), 239-252.

Taylor, T. L. (2009). *Play between worlds: Exploring online game culture.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Topinka, R. J. (2010). Foucault, Borges, heterotopia: Producing knowledge in other spaces. *Foucault Studies, (9),* 54-70.

Trahar, S. (2009, January). Beyond the story itself: Narrative inquiry and autoethnography in intercultural research in higher education. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (Vol. 10, No. 1).

Trend, D. (2007). *The myth of media violence: A critical introduction.* Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Triana, B. (2015). Red Dead masculinity: Constructing a conceptual framework for analyzing the narrative and message found in video games. *Journal of Games Criticism, 2*(2), 1-25.

Tuan, Y. F. (1979). Space and place: humanistic perspective. In Philosophy in geography (pp. 387-427). Springer, Dordrecht.

Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. Decolonization: Indigeneity, *Education & Society, 1*(1).

Twine, F. W., & Gallagher, C. (2008). The future of whiteness: A map of the 'third wave.' *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 31*(1), 4-24.

Uddin, N. (2011). Decolonising ethnography in the field: An anthropological account. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 14*(6), 455-467.

Urbach, H. (1998). Writing architectural heterotopia. *The Journal of Architecture, 3*(4), 347-354.

Vanolo, A. (2012). The political geographies of Liberty City: A critical analysis of a virtual space. *City, 16*(3), 284-298.

Whalen, Z. (2006). Cruising in San Andreas: Ludic space and urban aesthetics. In N. Garrelts (Ed.), *The meaning and culture of Grand Theft Auto: Critical essays* (pp. 143-161). Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc.

Wiggins, B. (2016). Race and place at the city limits: Imaginative geographies of South Central Los Angeles. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 39*(14), 2583-2600.

Williams, D., Martins, N., Consalvo, M., & Ivory, J. D. (2009). The virtual census: Representations of gender, race and age in video games. *New Media & Society, 11*(5), 815-834.

Worth, F. (1993). Postmodern pedagogy in the multicultural classroom: For inappropriate teachers and imperfect spectators. *Cultural Critique, (25),* 5-32.

Xie, P. F., Osumare, H., & Ibrahim, A. (2007). Gazing the hood: Hip-hop as tourism attraction. *Tourism Management 28*(2), 452-460.

Yaeger, P. (2007). Editor's column: The end of postcolonial theory? A roundtable with Sunil Agnani, Fernando Coronil, Gaurav Desai, Mamadou Diouf, Simon Gikandi, Susie Tharu, and Jennifer Wenzel. *PMLA, 122*(3), 633-651.

Yang, G. S., Gibson, B., Lueke, A. K., Huesmann, L. R., & Bushman, B. J. (2014). Effects of avatar race in violent video games on racial attitudes and aggression. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 5*(6), 698-704.

Yee, N. (2008). Maps of digital desires: Exploring the topography of gender and play in online games. In Y. Kafai, C. Heeter, J. Denner, & J. Sun (Eds.), *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat: New perspectives on gender and gaming* (pp. 83-96). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Young, H. (2016). Racial logics, franchising, and video game genres: The Lord of the Rings. *Games and Culture, 11*(4), 343-364.

Young, R. J. (1995). Foucault on race and colonialism. *New Formations,* 57-57.

Young, R. J. (2009). What is the postcolonial?. *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature, 40*(1).

Appendix A: Introduction Letter for Parents

The following letter was sent to parents to formally advise them of the study and invite them to an information session.

Dear Parent,   April 12, 2017

I am contacting you regarding research that will take place in your son's ETS4U Studies in Literature class between April 24th – May 23rd, 2017. The study, which will be the subject of my doctoral dissertation, will endeavour to better understand how male adolescents conceive of gender, race, and violence in the widely played commercial video game, *Grand Theft Auto V (GTA V)*.

If your son takes part, he will be a participant-researcher during the project, meaning he will not only be a subject under observation, but he will also contribute to the research design and data gathering. This will involve reading scholarly articles, keeping notes and video logs, and producing multimedia artifacts in response to his gameplay experience. The objective of the study is not only to shed some light on how adolescent boys relate to the popular game's content through a critical lens, but also to see how the process of partaking in the study itself might make your son a more mindful and critical consumer of interactive media. The tasks he will carry out will not only be in line with the aims and content of the course, but he will also have the unique opportunity to actively contribute to a university-level research project. Your son's participation in the project is entirely voluntary, and a suitable alternative will be provided if he does not participate.

The research proposal has been reviewed and approved by York University's Institutional Review Board and all levels of administration at [school]. Along with this letter, I will provide you and your son with formal consent forms outlining the specifics surrounding your son's participation in the study. I am also available to address any questions or concerns at all times. I will host an information evening on **Thursday, April 20th, 2017 at**

5:00PM at [School]. If you are unable to attend, I'm also happy to address any issues or questions by telephone or email. Please email me ([email address]) or return this form to let me know if you are able to attend the information evening or not so that I can prepare accordingly.

Yes, I will attend the information evening. There will be ____ of us attending.

No, I will not be able to attend the information evening.

Thank you for your interest and support.

Sincerely,

Paul Darvasi

English Department

[School Name]

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Grand Theft (Auto) Ethnography Parental Consent Form

Date: February 2017

Study Name: *Grand Theft (Auto) Ethnography: How Adolescent Boys Critically Engage with Race, Gender and Violence in the Mean Streets of Los Santos*

Researcher: Paul Darvasi, Doctoral Candidate, Faculty of Education, York University

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this research is to better understand how adolescent boys respond to playing *Grand Theft Auto V* when they are positioned as co-researchers in an auto-ethnographic critical inquiry.

What Your Son Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: As a co-researcher, your son will participate in the research design process, including vetting the pre and post video questions, creating missions, partaking in round table discussions, and choosing the type of media with which he will produce a critical autoethnographic response. Throughout the process, your son will play selected in-game missions in *Grand Theft Auto V* and create critical media artifacts encapsulating his experience.

Benefits of the Research: As a junior co-researcher, your son will learn the rudiments of research and contribute to a doctoral research project. This will include learning the basics of ethnographic observation and critical theory. He will also become a more savvy media consumer as he will critically interrogate representations of gender, violence and race in a prevalent video game.

Risks and Discomforts: I do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your son's participation in the research. Your son will be 17 at the time of the study and thus meets the game's ESRB Mature 17+ rating; however, he will be exposed to the violent content in *Grand Theft Auto V*.

Voluntary Participation & Withdrawal from the study: Your son's participation in the study is completely voluntary and he may choose to end his participation at any time, for any reason. If your son refuses to participate or chooses to withdraw from this study, this decision will not affect his relationship with the researcher/teacher, Royal St. ███████████████ its staff, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event your son withdraws from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

Confidentiality: All information your son supplies during the research will be confidential, and your son's name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. All data produced about or by your son will be collected by a trained researcher from York University, and all physical research data will be safely stored in a locked cabinet, while digital data will be stored in password protected documents and a secure server. Your son will select an alternate name to ensure that his real name does not appear in the data. At the conclusion of the study, data will be stored for two years and

then destroyed. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law. Any paper copies of records such as signed consent forms will be maintained in a locked cabinet in the locked office of Paul Darvasi.

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Paul Darvasi either by telephone at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ You may also contact his supervisor, Dr. Jen Jenson at York University, either by telephone at ▮▮▮▮ extension ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or you can reach the Graduate Program in Education Office at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I_____, consent that my son may participate in *Grand Theft (Auto) Ethnography*, conducted by Paul Darvasi. I have understood the nature of this project and wish for my son to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature_____   **Date**_____
Participant's Parent/Guardian

Signature_____   **Date**_____
Principal Investigator

For research-purposes only, I ...

☐ **Agree** my son can be video taped   OR   ☐ **Do NOT Agree** to let my son be video taped

☐ **Agree** my son can be interviewed   OR   ☐ **Do NOT Agree** to my son be interviewed

☐ **Agree** my son can be photographed   OR   ☐ **Do NOT Agree** to let my son be photographed

Appendix C: Minor Assent

Grand Theft (Auto) Ethnography Minor Assent Form

Date: February 2017

Study Name: *Grand Theft (Auto) Ethnography: How Adolescent Boys Critically Engage with Race, Gender and Violence in the Mean Streets of Los Santos*

Researcher: Paul Darvasi, Doctoral Candidate, Faculty of Education, York University

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this research is to better understand how you respond to playing *Grand Theft Auto V* when you assume the role of co-researchers in an auto-ethnographic critical inquiry.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: As a co-researcher, you will participate in the research design process, including vetting the pre and post video questions, creating missions, partaking in round table discussions, and choosing the type of media with which you will produce a critical autoethnographic response. Throughout the process, you will play selected in-game missions in *Grand Theft Auto V* and create critical media artifacts encapsulating his experience.

Benefits of the Research: As a junior co-researcher, you will learn the basics of research and contribute to a doctoral research project. This will include learning about ethnographic observation and critical theory. You will also become a more savvy media consumer as you will think about representations of gender, violence and race in *Grand Theft Auto V*.

Risks and Discomforts: I do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research. You will be 17 at the time of the study and thus meets the game's ESRB Mature 17+ rating; however, you will be exposed to the violent content in *Grand Theft Auto V*.

Voluntary Participation & Withdrawal from the study: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to end you participation at any time, for any reason. If you refuse to participate or choose to withdraw from this study, this decision will not affect your relationship with the researcher/teacher, Royal St. George's College and its staff, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

Confidentiality: All information you supply during the research will be confidential, and your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. All data produced about or by you will be collected by a trained researcher from York University, and all physical research data will be safely stored in a locked cabinet, while digital data will be stored in password protected documents and a secure server. You will select an alternate name to ensure that his real name does not appear in the data. At the conclusion of the study, data will be stored for two years and then destroyed. Confidentiality will be

provided to the fullest extent possible by law. Any paper copies of records such as signed consent forms will be maintained in a locked cabinet in the locked office of Paul Darvasi.

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Paul Darvasi either by telephone at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or by e-mail ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ You may also contact his supervisor, Dr. Jen Jenson at York University, either by telephone at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ extension ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮), or you can reach the Graduate Program in Education Office at (416) 736-5018. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I_____, consent to participate in *Grand Theft (Auto) Ethnography,* conducted by Paul Darvasi. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature_____   **Date**_____

Participant

Signature_____   **Date**_____

Principal Investigator

For research-purposes only, I …

☐ **Agree to** be video taped   OR   ☐ **Do NOT Agree** to be video taped

☐ **Agree** to be interviewed   OR   ☐ **Do NOT Agree** to be interviewed

☐ **Agree** to be photographed   OR   ☐ **Do NOT Agree** to be photographed

Appendix D: Presurvey Questions

This was the presurvey questionnaire administered in session one.

Video Game Personal History Form

1. Please write your ALIAS and your AGE

_____

2. Do you play video games? If so, what video games do you like to play?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. How often do you typically play video games?
Mark only one oval.

◯ Daily

◯ Several times a week

◯ Several times a month

◯ Several times a year

◯ Rarely

◯ Never

4. How many different video games in any format have you played to date?
Mark only one oval.

◯ None

◯ one - five

◯ six to 20

◯ 20 to 50

◯ 50 to 100

◯ over 100

5. **How long are your typical gameplay sessions?**

Mark only one oval.

- ( ) Less than an hour
- ( ) 1 - 2 hours
- ( ) 2 - 5 hours
- ( ) 5 - 10 hours
- ( ) More than 10 hours

6. **What video game platform do you use? (Choose all applicable options)**

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Console
- [ ] MacBook Laptop
- [ ] Phone
- [ ] PC
- [ ] Other: _____

7. **Describe the main locations where you play video games. This could be your bedroom, living room, classroom, etc. Please describe if the location changes if you play alone or with friends.**

_____

8. **I play video games (choose all applicable options):**

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Alone
- [ ] With friends in person
- [ ] With friends online

9. **Do you consider yourself a "gamer"? Why or why not?**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

10. If you play video games, what qualities do you look for in a game?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

11. Do you think video games are harmful? Why or why not?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

12. Have you played any titles in the Grand Theft Auto (GTA) franchise prior to GTA V?

Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes

◯ No

13. If yes, which title(s) from the GTA series have you played?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

14. Approximately how many total hours do you think you have devoted to the entire franchise PRIOR to GTA V?

Mark only one oval.

◯ Never played

◯ 1 - 10

◯ 10 - 25

◯ 25 - 50

◯ 50 - 100

◯ 100 - 200

◯ More than 200

15. **Have you played GTA V?**

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

16. **Approximately, how many total hours have you played GTA V?**

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Never played
- ◯ 1 - 10
- ◯ 10 - 25
- ◯ 25 - 50
- ◯ 50 - 100
- ◯ 100 - 200
- ◯ More than 200

17. **How often did/do you play GTA V?**

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Never played
- ◯ Once
- ◯ Every day
- ◯ 2 - 4 times a week
- ◯ Once a week
- ◯ 2 - 4 times every two weeks
- ◯ 2 - 4 times a month
- ◯ A few times a year

18. **If applicable, describe a memorable experience you have playing GTA V.**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

19. ** Do not answer if you HAVE played GTA V** If you have never played GTA V, describe a memorable experience you have playing any other GTA game.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

20. ** Do not answer if you HAVE played any GTA game** If neither of the above questions are applicable, describe a memorable experience you have playing any video game.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

21. Who benefits from GTA (V), if anybody?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

22. Who is harmed from GTA (V), if anybody?

_____

Appendix E: Long Answer Presurvey Questions

This was the long form presurvey questionnaire administered in session one. Participants had the option to respond to these as videos or in writing.

Please respond to the following question in a video, audio, or written document.

1. Please state or write your alias, age, and today's date.

2. What time do you wake up?

3. Describe yourself in 100 words or more.

4. Describe your relationship/feelings toward school.

5. Describe yourself as a student.

6. Why did you take ETS4U (Studies in Literature)?

7. How do you spend your time outside of school? What activities, hobbies, organizations, do you take part in? These might include informal socialization, video games or listening to music, etc.

8. What type of music do you listen to? What books, TV shows, films or other media do you consume?

9. Why do you play video games?

10. How would you describe the role video games have in your life?

11. Respond to the following only if you have played any of the *Grand Theft Auto* games.

12. What is your history with *GTA*? How did you start playing? Did your parents approve/know what your were doing?

13. If you have played *GTA V*, describe the game. If you have not played *GTA V,* but have played *GTA Online* or another title in the franchise, identify the specific title and describe the game.

14. Why do you like to play *GTA V*, (or another title from the franchise)?

15. Is there anything you do not like about *GTA (V)*?

16. Is there anything about *GTA (V)* that you feel might be harmful?

Respond to the following only if you have NOT played any of the *Grand Theft Auto* games

17. Why haven't you played any of the *GTA* games?

18. What do you hope to gain from this experience (researching/playing *GTA*)?

Appendix F: Private Facebook Group Prompts

The following are the 7 discussion prompts posted throughout the study on the private Facebook group.

Facebook Prompts

#1: Post a *GTA V* screenshot (it must be yours) accompanied by 2-3 sentences explaining its significance. 1 point for the screenshot and post. Offer expires 48 hours after the times-tamp on this post.

#2: Post the artifact that you produced (screenshot, etc.) and discuss why you think it represents power in the game. You have 24 hours from the time of this post to complete this.

#3: This challenge will focus on race. Post a screenshot related to race and discuss the dynamic between you, the player, and the racial representation you've chosen to submit. Ideally, you'll focus on Jimmy or Franklin, but you may choose anything you like. Please write 100-200 words for full points.

#4: Post screenshots and comments in response to the following: "*GTA*'s representations of stereotypical hyper-masculine male protagonists also contribute to and reinforce sexist stereotypes and aggressive attitudes towards women (Gabbiadini et al., 2016). Trevor, Franklin and Michael, the three playable characters in *GTA V*, embody the most common mainstream portrayals of masculinity: assertiveness, dominance, being in control, physic-al strength and social power. Besides rage and anger, there is little to no overt expression of emotions linked to vulnerability such as sadness, fear, anxiety, and empathy. Com-munication tends to be physical rather than verbal, and conflicts are resolved through

action and violence rather than patience and dialogue. These male role models inform identities and influence how boys and men should behave in society and how they should interact with girls and women (Gabbiadini et al., 2016). These suggestible stereotypes may perpetuate attitudes and behaviours that can be damaging to both men and women."

#5: Post a screenshot or gameplay video that 1) challenges traditional notions of hegemonic masculinity, OR 2) demonstrates power, but not based on money, weapons or muscles, OR 3) includes Jimmy, OR 4) how an ideology operates in the game (neoliberalism, capitalism, hegemonic masculinity). Choose ONE TOPIC, discuss it, and relate it to your life. Aim for 200-300 words.

#6: Post a quote from "Super Columbine Massacre RPG! and Grand Theft Autoethnography" that you found valuable, provocative or noteworthy and comment on two quotes that have been posted by other members of the group. This will not count as an FB challenge point, but it will count as one of your article readings.

#7 Please comment on the following quote: "Antonio Gramsci's idea of hegemony underscores the connection between video games as a racial project and social, racial, and political inequalities. Gramsci argues that, as ruling groups attempt to consolidate power, "they must elaborate and maintain a popular system of ideas and practices, which he called 'common sense,'" ultimately garnering consent for their rule (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 67). Video games, in disseminating stereotypes, in offering bodies and spaces of colour as sites of play, and in affirming dominant ideas about poverty, unemployment, crime, and war, contribute to the consolidation of white supremacist power. Ultimately, the images and ideologies offered through games elicit individual consent for structural policies, thereby legitimizing White hegemony"

Appendix G: Post-Survey Questions

Post GTA V Study Survey

Post Study Survey

*Required

1. Please write your ALIAS and AGE *

_____

2. Had you played GTA V prior to the study?
   If so, approximately how many hours did
   you play before the study? *

_____

3. How many total hours did you play GTA V
   since the commencement of the study? *

_____

4. Did you play more than you would have because it was for school/the study? Please
   elaborate. *

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. Will you continue playing after the study is over? *

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

6. Do you feel that playing GTA V was in any way harmful to you? If so, why? *

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. Do you feel that playing GTA V was helpful or positive in any way? If so, why? *

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

8. Do you think it is productive/useful to include a game like GTA V in a school curriculum? *

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. Did playing the game at any point feel like a task because you had to do it for the study/class?

_____

10. Approximately how many GTA V missions did you complete during the study? *

_____

11. Early in the study, many of you noted you would kill people, but not animals in the game. Was this your position? Did you end up killing any animals in the game? If so, please elaborate. *

12. Why do you think you are more willing to kill "people" than animals in GTA V? *

13. Have you felt remorse about an act or acts you have committed in GTA V? Please explain. *

14. Did playing the game at any point feel like a task because you had to do it for the study/class? *

This was the post-survey questionnaire administered in session twelve.

Appendix H: Post-Survey Long Form Video and Written Questions

This was the long form post-survey questionnaire administered in session twelve. Participants had the option to respond to these as videos or in writing.

Post-Study Questionnaire

Please respond to the following question in a video, audio, or written document.

1. Please state your ALIAS and AGE

2. How would you describe your academic life over the last month? Please discuss your degree of commitment to school, time spent on studies, level of engagement, etc.

3. How would you describe your social/personal life over the last month? This might include your general mood, level of socialization with peers, relationship with parents, etc.

4. Do you feel the last month has been different from other school months? If so, why?

5. What do you think are some positive elements (if any) about the GTA V study you participated in?

6. What do you think are some negative elements (if any) about the GTA V study you participated in?

7. What would you have changed about the way the study was carried out?

8. Did your perspective of the game change between the beginning to the end of the study? If so, how?

9. Did your perspective change in regard to race, gender, violence or political ideology? If so, how? Please elaborate.

10. Did your perspective change about yourself during the course of the study or the writing of your autoethnography?

11. Did your perspective on hegemonic masculinity change over the course of the study?

12. Please describe what you feel you have learned during the study. Be as elaborate as possible.

13. Is there an expectation you had going into the study that did not transpire and thus disappointed you?

Appendix I: Learning Management System Discrete Class Agendas and Resources

The following are screenshots of each session's agenda and resources as they were posted on the school learning management system.

Session 1 Intro, Survey and Preliminary Video Questions (April 25)

+ Add Content Block | Unpublish   Manage Page

Session 1 (April 25)

Agenda:
- Set-up Camera
- Intro to study: Grand Theft (Auto) Ethnography
- Status as co-researchers
- Set-up circular seating configuration, or something of their choice
- The research group will review the questions for the preliminary video and the survey
- Set-up YouTube channel

Assignment #1: Respond to the survey and create the preliminary video (video/audio/document) in response to the questions.

Notetakers: Darvasi
Video: Yes - entire session

Study Proposal

This is the final version of the research proposal as it was submitted to the ethics committee.

GTAV Research Proposal V1.pdf

Preliminary Video Questions

Preliminary Questions for GTA Study.docx

GTA Pre-Survey

GTA Pre-survey

Session 2 Intro to Ethnography & Autoethnography, Group Forum and First Play Session (April 27)

+ Add Content Block | Unpublish   Manage Page

Session 2 Agenda

- Ethnography/Autoethnography
- Purpose of the Facebook Group/Forum
- Set-up Facebook Group (or the like) - share resources like Wise Crack, etc.
- How data will be collected and protected

Assignment #2: Begin with the first mission and play one hour. Take "thick description" field notes on any 5 - 10 minutes of play. The fieldnotes can be written or in video form. Co-researchers are also invited to record or take screenshots of the 5 minutes. **Remember, describe your gameplay setting, what happens in the game, and how it makes you think or feel.**

Notetakers: Darvasi
Video: Yes

A Simple Introduction to the Practice of Ethnography and Guide to Ethnographic Fieldnotes

Attached you will find a document that provides a good overview of ethnography.

Intro to Ethnography.pdf

Session 3 First Gameplay Debrief & Ethnography Article (May 1)

+ Add Content Block   □   ⊚ Unpublish   ⚙ Manage Page

Session 3 Agenda   ⚙

- Gameplay Debrief
- Ethnography/Autoethnography
- Grading for the project?

Homework: Free play.

Notetakers: ▮▮▮▮
Video: Yes

Drag content blocks here to fill this column.

Session 4 Ethnography Article/Gameplay Debrief (May 3)

+ Add Content Block   □   ⊚ Unpublish   ⚙ Manage Page

Agenda   ⚙

- Collect any outstanding data
- Continue reading intro to ethnography article
- Look at evaluations system suggestions:

Assignment: Play for 1 hour and retrieve an artifact that represents some function of POWER in the game. Could be a short video (1 minute or less), a screenshot, a sound bite, etc. It must be significant and you should be able to defend its relationship to power.

Notetaker: ▮▮▮▮▮
Video:

Drag content blocks here to fill this column.

Session 5: Hegemonic Masculinities (May 5)

+ Add Content Block   **Unpublish**   **Manage Page**

Agenda ⚙

Agenda

- Discuss 15 minute writing session from last class.
- Discuss mark breakdown for unit
- Define hegemony and discuss relation to power
- Review hegemonic masculinity handout #1
- Read "Hegemonic masculinity in media contents"
- Discuss artifacts

Assignment: Write 300 - 500 word personal response that ties your gameplay experience to hegemonic masculinity (will count towards your grade).

Note taker: ▮▮▮▮▮

Video: Yes

Introduction to Hegemony ⚙

We will watch the attached video to introduce the idea of hegemony

🔗 Introduction to Hegemony

Handout and Article ⚙

Please find the article and the handout attached below.

📄 gamag_research_agenda_kareithi.pdf

📄 The Male Construction - Hegemonic Masculinity.docx

Session 6 - Reading and Autoethnography

+ Add Content Block   **Unpublish**   **Manage Page**

Agenda   drag to move   ⚙

Agenda

- Select a class note taker
- Check-in on forum posts and shore up missing work
- Collect and discuss 300 - 500 word personal responses
- Read "Super Columbine Massacre RPG! and Grand Theft Autoethnography"

Assignment: Read and annotate/note-take on "Super Columbine Massacre RPG! and Grand Theft Autoethnography". Will be submitted for evaluation next class.

Note taker: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Video: Yes

Grand Theft Autoethnography ⚙

Please find the autoethnography article attached.

📄 Grand Theft Auto Autoethnograohy.pdf

Session 7 Continue Reading Autoethnography & Positionality

+ Add Content Block

Unpublish   **Manage Page**

Agenda ⚙

Drag content blocks here to fill this column.

Agenda
- Select a class note taker
- Check-in on forum posts and shore up missing work
- Continue reading "Super Columbine Massacre RPG! and Grand Theft Autoethnography"

Assignment:

Note taker: ▮▮▮

Video: Yes

Session 8 Autoethnography Article

+ Add Content Block

Unpublish   **Manage Page**

Agenda ⚙

Drag content blocks here to fill this column.

Agenda
- Select a class note taker
- Check-in on forum posts and shore up missing work
- Continue reading "Super Columbine Massacre RPG! and Grand Theft Autoethnography"

Assignment: Post on FB according to the challenge.

Note taker: ▮▮▮

Video: Yes

Session 9 Counter-Hegemony and Deconstruction

+ Add Content Block   ⊡   ⊙ Unpublish   ✿ Manage Page

Agenda   ✿

Agenda

- Select a class note taker
- Check-in on forum posts and shore up missing work
- Discuss Counter-Hegemony
- Review Final Assessment Outline for the study
- Watch videos and writing sprint

Assignment: 1) Film 10 minutes of your gameplay & 2) Write 300 words + about the filmed gameplay (#1) with a focus on GENDER or RACE or POWER or POLITICS & IDEOLOGY.

Note taker: ▮▮▮▮▮

Video: Yes

Examples of Counter Hegemonic Media   ✿

Below you will find links to creative uses of GTA V, including some good examples of its use as counter hegemonic media (particularly example #1: FF Gaiden: Alternative).

- ⊖⊝ Preview of FF Gaiden: Alternative
- ⊖⊝ GTA V Photo Essay
- ∞ GTA Subreddit as Art
- ∞ Dear Anna - Story Created with GTA V Stills

Session 10 Open Session (May 24)

+ Add Content Block   ⊡   ⊙ Unpublish   ✿ Manage Page

Agenda   ✿

Agenda

- Select a class note taker
- Check-in on forum posts and shore up missing work
- Watch videos and writing sprint

Assignment: FB Challenge #7 and Final Project

Note taker: ▮▮▮▮▮

Video: Yes

Racial Threat Hypothesis   ✿

- ⊖⊝ Racial Threat Hypothesis
- ⊖⊝ Colorblind Racism

Stereotypes   drag to move   ✿

- ⊖⊝ Do Video Game Stereotypes Hurt Men?

GTA V Clips   ✿

- ⊖⊝ Trevor Meets Denise

Session 11 "Live in Your World, Play in Ours" (May 26)

+ Add Content Block   🗗   ⦿ Unpublish   ⚙ Manage Page

Agenda ⚙

Agenda
- Select a class note taker
- Check-in on forum posts and shore up missing work
- Review questions for final survey and questionnaire
- Read parts of "Live in Your World, Play in Ours" Article
- AOB

Assignment: Work on Final Project

Note taker:
Video: Yes

"Live in Your World" Article ⚙

📄 Leonard_LiveinYourWorld.pdf

Session 12 Final Surveys, End of Study (May 30)

+ Add Content Block   🗗   ⦿ Unpublish   ⚙ Manage Page

Agenda ⚙

Agenda
- Collect autoethnographies and counter-hegemonic media
- Check-in on forum posts and shore up missing work
- Complete final survey and questionnaire
- Final thoughts about AE and the CHM.
- AOB

Note taker:
Video: Yes

Post GTA V Study Survey ⚙

Please complete the following survey
🔗 Post GTA V Study Survey

Video/ Written Survey ⚙

📄 Post Study Video Written Questions.docx