Indigenous Representations and the Impacts of Video Games Media on Indigenous Identity

By

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Abstract:

This thesis analyzes and discusses the complexities of digital representations involving Indigenous peoples through video games. Connecting both Game Theory and Native Studies, I analyze how digital games incorporate identity, culture, and relationships in diverse and intellectual ways and provide new spaces for Indigenous agency and semiotics. Beginning with an analysis of several historical and negative representations of Indigenous peoples, I then compare those tropes to projects within today's environment and mainstream video game companies, independent companies, and educational service providers. I assert that while some digital media representations of Indigenous cultures are stereotypical and problematic, others facilitate a sense of cultural continuance and survivance. Lastly, some video games display both stereotypical and cultural continuance within them.

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Introduction

Indigenous identity is a complex combination of relationships based in notions of culture, spirituality, and community. However, as younger generations rely more on digital platforms, traditional forms of identity creation are often challenged as technology changes the means in which these relationships form. Digital representations take influence from a long history of misrepresentations of Indigenous peoples through generations; from art, wild west shows, Hollywood's television and movies into newer pop culture formats like comics and graphic novels. There are, for example, several complexities that arise within digital relationships. These include; issues of disconnection (from land, communities, and "reality"), struggles to maintain ties to culture through mediums like language, and the temptation in digital platforms to oversimplify Indigenous peoples and reduce them to stereotypes. Still, non-Indigenous – and now Indigenous – writers and creators of comic books, film, television, and video games are now telling stories incorporating and representing Indigenous nations, communities, and cultures as they stake out sovereignty in digital spaces.

With the rise of digital platforms amongst Indigenous young people, an increasing number of artists are using video games to reincorporate the essential relationships necessary for the cultural and political survival of their nations. These expressions re-create the values and relationships within the physical connections Indigenous peoples share with the world around them but also construct positive characterizations of those ties – suggesting a re-building and re-envisioning while, at the same time, a challenge to the historical and harmful tropes and stereotypes that plague Indigenous peoples. Reviewing how Indigenous images in popular

culture have been understood will provide some context for understanding how these images are being changed or maintained in digital media.

A seminal place to begin is Robert Berkhofer's 1979 book; *The White Man's Indian*, which details the origins of European romanticization of North America Indigenous people in the arts. As Berkhofer states, primitive descriptions of Indigenous peoples "postulated people dwelling in nature according to nature, existing free of history's burdens and social complexity felt by Europeans in the modern period, and offering hope to mankind at the same time that they constituted a powerful counter…" (72). In their annual volumes called *Relations*, for example, depictions of primitive Natives were largely romanticized by French Jesuits, to attend and gain wealth, ensuring that the Jesuits continue their expansion into the New World. Mainly French artistic depictions of Indigenous primitivism of the New World sprouted the Noble Savage as a, "fundamentally romantic focus on the relation to man and nature was at the very center of primitivism from the beginning" (Berkhofer 72). Artists sought to evoke feelings of sympathy from their viewers for the vanishing Indian while at the same time romanticize them as uncivilized and deficient. These initial images of the "Noble savage," created by the Jesuits for political purposes, became a template for generations of media to follow.

The Western genre continued to expand alongside Dime Novels, cheap literature that sparked global interest in circus-like events. *Buffalo Bill's Wild West Shows*, for example saw Indian performers act out primitive representations during their performances for white audiences throughout Europe. As Berkhofer argues primitivism and the romanticization of Indigenous peoples shares similarities with ethnic stereotypes. These images reinforce stereotypes that distort representations of Indigenous peoples. John Brigham's concept surrounding ethnic stereotypes describe them; "as generalizations, concerning trait attributions,

made about the members of an ethnic group" (206). Additionally, Tim Shaughnessy in his journal article *White Stereotypes of Indians* summarizes Brigham's findings surrounding generalizations of ethnic groups efficiently as;

> [Stereotypes] are factually incorrect; they are products of a "faulty" or illogical thought process; they are characterized by inordinate rigidity; they are derived from an inadequate basis of acquisition, such as hearsay; they are consensual beliefs within a culture, perhaps implying a lack of individual thought; they serve a rationalization function for ethnic prejudice; they ascribe to racial inheritance that which may be cultural acquisition and they serve as justifications for prejudicial or discriminatory social practices. (20)

Similarly, Gordon Allport defines stereotypes as either favorable or unfavorable images with an exaggerated association that justifies conduct towards that category (Adare; Cornelious). Mainstream media formats often use these images distilling representations into generalized, one-dimensional caricatures of ethnic stereotypes and produce unnuanced (and often unfavorable) views of cultural traditions, cultures, and communities. Stereotypes have profound and lasting impacts, resulting in an imposed and "ultimately unwanted" (Adare; Shaughnessy) impression that becomes an "authentic," definitive impression.

Regarding Indigenous representations, dehumanized images become forged in "the "colonial mindset" and a "falsely superior [Anglo-American] 'we' versus [Indigenous] 'them' perspective" (Adare 17; Marshall 101). This mentality becomes the basis for viewing geography. Indigenous peoples become holders of the geographies that non-Indigenous peoples seek and desire to expand upon. As Sierra explains; "the ideology of racism against Native Americans developed in colonial times to justify the physical destruction of Native peoples and nations, in order for Europeans to take over their [First Nations peoples'] lands" (Adare 20; Slapin 2). This mentality "others" Indigenous peoples, justifying genocidal acts and beliefs that led to the continuous removal of Indigenous communities from U.S. lands (Adare 20).

Land and geography often accompany stories of who discovered it, who belongs and who does not. In the initial impressions of colonial settlers, for example, stories were constructed to reinforce and justify the forceful removal of Indigenous people. As Cornel Pewewardy explains,

> The colonizer's falsified stories have become universal truths to mainstream society and have reduced indigenous culture to a cartoon caricature. This distorted and manufactured reality is one of the most powerful shackles subjecting Indigenous peoples. It distorts all indigenous experiences, past and present. (17)

The outcome of this is miscommunication, misunderstanding, and "dysconscious racism," what Adare calls a set of beliefs that "unconsciously accepts dominant white norms and privileges" (Adare 17; Pewewardy 257). Dysconscious racism is an uncritical habit of the mind, in which attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs construct the justifications of inequalities and exploitations by accepting the existing order of things given (Adare; Pewewardy). This one-dimensional and political frame, therefore, provides the basis for romantic and exploitative images of Indigenous peoples in movies, television, comic books, and, finally, video games.

As technology continues to grow, smaller, more independent media formats continue the Western cliché, but because of the accessibility of digital media outlets like the internet or social media, game producers can reach for a broader audience with a smaller budget. Video games media share comparable approaches to other digital media distribution options, as they too can rely on social media to gain an audience and the internet deliver the product. Games like *Westerado: Double Barreled* and *Mad Dog 2: The Lost Gold*, discussed in detail in Chapter 2, follow similar Western Savage representations seen in other media forms, can now be acquired online through streaming services, whereas previous generations of media content required their audiences to purchase their products physically from a store making them more accessible with less parental supervision. Characters, locations, and themes for Indigenous people as always are transferred from previous visual mediums into every new media form. However, the open

platform of the internet provides an opportunity for Indigenous peoples to use newer, popular, and accessible forms of media to counteract said tropes and go further, even preserving their cultures.

Scholars express that video games can explore diverse ways of preserving and revitalizing cultures. As Beth Lameman, Jason Lewis, and Skawennati Fragnito describe, "the fluid, open, and networked characteristics of modern digital media make it particularly useful as a tool for Aboriginal storytelling…" (1). Additionally, Loretta Todd, Cree/Métis filmmaker and Director of the Aboriginal Media Arts Lab, shares similar viewpoints on digital media and its impact on Aboriginal storytelling suggesting that cyberspace offers a reversal of narratives that return to oral traditions (Todd 1996). Lameman et al. (2010) go further to suggest that digital media has a unique impact on Aboriginal storytelling in that

> due to the radical decrease in the costs of the means of production and distribution, video games and virtual worlds present Indigenous people with a powerful opportunity to widely (or narrowly) communicate stories in which we shape our own representation. (1)

More and more Indigenous youth involve themselves with each generation in the process of sharing and creating their community's stories through the medium of video games. Youth involving themselves in digital media in many ways is a response to tropes and stereotypes established over generations of tropes in popular video games but they also appreciate the opportunity for modern expressions of cultural aesthetics and nationhood that digital media can offer. The complexities that result in these digital representations – and how they overlap and compete for attention – is one of the main interests in this thesis.

The first chapter will discuss why the format of video games is critical to examine through a combination of both Native Studies theories and Video Game Theory. Both areas of

academic research explore identity, culture, and relationships that contribute to a unique viewpoint at the intersection of both fields of study. This methodology will provide a lens to understand that video games are a different medium in which to deliver Indigenous representations and sovereignty due to the ability of end users to critique content in widely sharable ways and even develop their own game content as compared to previous popular forms of pop culture like television, comics, movies, or graphic novels. Here I establish an approach towards game media studies that is comparatively similar to the ways Indigenous relationships operate. Using media theorist Robert K. Logan as a starting point, discussions surrounding how this new media ecology embraces not only traditional stereotypes, but also the study of Indigenous language, culture, and technology. Language, culture, technology, and media behave like living organisms as they emerge, evolve, propagate their organization and interact with each other in a media ecosystem" (Logan 1). This living aspect makes room for more Indigenous approach to media theory.

Haudenosaunee artist and critic Steve Loft argues in *Coded Territories*, that video games suggest a theory of "cosmology": "a model of media ecology based in the epistemologies, histories, traditions, communication systems, art, and culture of the Aboriginal people of Turtle Island" (xvi). As Loft explains, media cosmology "embraces an Indigenous view of media and its attendant processes that incorporate language, culture, technology, land, spirituality, and histories encompassed in the teachings in the four directions" (xvi). Video games provide Indigenous peoples access to a media landscape that provides an opportunity to realize and visualize structures of Indigenous thought. Media cosmology is, therefore, a theory that encapsulates how some Indigenous video game developers are now speaking to, with and representing their communities.

Within video game design, developers must link meaning within ideological worlds. The term ideological according to Kurt Squire, "tries to capture that they are built according to theories of how the world operates (implicitly or explicitly). Every game makes value judgments about what is and is not important" (29). One significant example that follows Squires' discussions is shown through the game *Never Alone*. While this game will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 3, *Never Alone* is an excellent example of a game trying to capture an ideological world through display representations including; communities, forests, seas, icebergs, and the spirit beings that infuse them through the game's design all incorporate portrayals similar to the lived landscapes of the people that youth will know and identify with. These are conscious decisions that suggest complexities and specific aesthetic, intellectual, and culturally-centered choices.

The opening chapter also suggests that meaning-making within game theory involves two essential aspects of the game itself. The first is, "the learning cycle of a player developing goals, reading game space for information, taking action in the game world, and then reading games for feedback" (Squire 30). Moreover, the second is, "the social experience of participating in particular game communities" (Squire 30). Squire makes the argument that learning through gameplay is centered on creating knowledge that challenges certain student-centered notions of learning. Meaning making within video games acts along multiple "planes" which successfully transmits material and knowledge to the player in an educational and empowering way. Michael Nitsche in his book; *Video Game Spaces; Image, Play, and Structure in 3D Game Worlds* provides five insights regarding what different planes of gameplay are available in video games and how a gamer interacts with these geographies. The first plane of the game is within the space (the game engine, or software platform selected to render the graphics, frame the physics of the

game and its animation, and deliver sound scripting; and the hardware interface known as the console, platform, or mobile device on which the player plays the game). The second is the game that unfolds on the screen (what the player sees and hears), and the third plane is the game within the player's mind (thought). The fourth plane is the actions that are occurring in the real world (button presses and control stick movements), and finally, the fifth plane is the social plane (playing games cooperatively). All planes are essential to meaning-making, but especially the third plane that involves personal experiences, real-life past events, and real-life relationships can all play a significant role regarding how the player interacts with the characters in the game (Nitsche). This a critical place to look at Indigenous representation then, for both process of meaning-making between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ideas, desires, and visions are forged on these planes. These can be positive (as discussed in Chapter Two in the *Skins* games, *Never Alone*, and to a certain extent *Assassins Creed 3*) but can also reify long-standing Indigenous stereotypes also discussed in Chapter among games *Westerado: Double Barreled* and *Mad Dog 2: The Lost Gold*.

Chapter Two uses the Indigitalgames.com blogging site, which I began in 2017, to provide examples that illustrate the complexities of Indigenous representations in video games. During the initial development of the site, there was an emphasis towards developing an archiving space that resembled digital blogging sites, and social media applications to archive representations of Indigenous peoples in video games. The Indigitalgames.com blog was created to show the complexities and other factors that contribute to descriptions seen in video games throughout the decades. Initially, blog entries were planned to examine images similar to those seen in other media forms that portrayed similar tropes that contribute to harmful representations.

Those media types include things like Hollywood Indian movies, western themed Television shows and western Comic books.

Researching for the site revealed that there were multiple types of representations involving Indigenous people that didn't follow well-traveled tropes (as found in the "Noble Savage" or "Hollywood Western" genres) from diverse genres of video games. Simply put, not all representations of Indigenous peoples wore headdresses and threw tomahawks. This discovery encouraged me to examine other images/tropes seen in video games and how the larger Indigenous community were addressing these. Additionally, Indigitalgames.com also tries to repeat some of the successes that projects like *AbteC* and the *Skins* workshops have which embody principles of re-asserting real aspects of Indigenous identities in digital media. More detail on the history of the Skins project will be discussed alongside *TimeTraveller*, and *Never Alone* as key examples towards Indigenous digital sovereignty in Chapter three.

Chapter two concludes with a discussion of popular Indigenous representations in the video game *Assassins Creed 3*. *Assassins Creed 3*, developed by the mainstream video game company UbiSoft, shows the complexities that emerge when a non-Indigenous video game company brings in Indigenous consultants to build a game around their culture. *Assassins Creed 3* provides an interesting case study as on first glance the game appears to repeat well-traveled tropes and stereotypes but introduces complexities in the genre found in how the game developed, the overall gameplay, and the main character. While *Assassins Creed 3* reinforces harmful Indigenous masculine tropes, the inclusion of Indigenous consultants resulted in aspects of traditional language, practices, and community relationships – suggesting a game that is not easily cast away. Video games, are a sophisticated media in need of critical and nuanced approaches that examine the multiplicity of representations.

Chapter three discusses pivotal digital projects that teach about Indigenous cultures and history. These projects include; AbTeCs *Skins* project and *TimeTraveller* machinema. The *Skins* project is a pivotal project initially developed by AbTeC. Out of the numerous workshops, there have been four *Skins* projects that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter three. The *Skins* games are essential learning tools built within a workshop environment that designs video games and virtual environments. These workshops use a multitude of design tools that promote various formats in which to encourage positive images, representations, and experiences in Indigenous video game development. The Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace (AbTeC) was initially created by Mohawk artist Skawennati Fragnito and Jason Edward Lewis in 2005 as a means to stake out Aboriginal determined territories within cyberspace. Recently, this project has expanded into larger, youth-focused video game developing retreats and these workshops continue to grow into more diverse online Indigenous social-media communities through an educational and general interest level similarly seen in the independent game online environment. In this chapter, I also suggest that the field of Indigenous video games and digital media is expanding, with mediums like the *Placeholder* project and other gaming workshops in New Zealand emerging today. Incorporating forms like virtual reality (a format that attempts to fully envelop players into environments through the use of headsets that immerse players into the game world), projects such as these show the desires that multiple Indigenous communities have to expand their cultures, traditions, and identities into the digital environment.

The concluding section of my thesis points to how Indigenous communities use video games, highlighting the importance of learning from the evolution of video games media and where Indigenous communities can contribute to positive representations of Indigenous people. I

argue that using examples like *Skins* workshops will assist in continuing digital sovereignty for Indigenous communities.

Chapter 1 Learning from Digital Gaming Environments

All games have a defining narrative thread, intended to grab the interest of the player and compel them to keep playing the game. These narratives privilege particular stories and teach consciously or unconsciously while also carrying the power to reinforce or undermine stereotypes. What the AbTeC projects and video games like *Never Alone*, and *Assassins Creed 3* have in common are the design choices and ideas behind the story, characters, environments, and even soundtracks necessary to immerse the player into that world without distortions or stereotypes. In the *Skins* projects, Aboriginal storytelling became the most important aspect of the workshops and incorporated the telling of these stories through community members as well as discussion of ethical Aboriginal storytelling techniques and the specific roles the stories play within Indigenous communities.

Ethical storytelling within Indigenous communities has always been a process seen as an essential tool to preserve the legitimacy of traditional knowledge and culture. As Thomas King discusses in: *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative:*

> There is a story I know. It's about the earth and how it floats in space on the back of a turtle. I've heard of this story many times, and each time someone tells the story, it changes. Sometimes the change is simply in the voice of the storyteller. Sometimes the change is in the details… But in all the tellings of all the tellers, the world never leaves the turtle's back. And the turtle never swims away (1).

King discusses that stories, more specifically oral stories are those personal or individual experiences can shape, reshape, reconnect or reimagine aspects of the story themselves. Oral stories are used to instruct, and depending on the desired lessons, certain aspects of the story will be emphasized to highlight them accordingly thus ultimately, changing the story over time.

Storytellers have the opportunity to pass on sacred stories to the younger generations, to continue the preservation of the traditions and histories of their peoples.

The sacredness of stories as told by Louise Profeit-LeBlanc in “Stories Have Their Way With Us” is that

> storytelling, like other art forms, is an involvement with the sacred. An artist, as a creator, depends upon assistance and blessings from the Creator. Whatever their discipline, artists are involved in the process of bringing the unknown… in the world of knowing. This is a connection with a mysterious life force from another dimension: one that inspires the development of certain techniques and styles or sounds within one’s work as an artist (Profeit-LeBlanc 2004).

Profeit-LeBlanc describes that there is a connection between the mysterious life force of another dimension, one that would inspire the development of individual sounds, styles or techniques within an artists' work. This connection is the unique aspect of traditional storytelling, which involves in many ways voices of the past, voices of the present and voices of the future all incorporated in one way or another within that particular story. The importance of storytelling within these workshops were to attempt to

> immerse students in the rhythms, textures, and performances of the stories while simultaneously showing them how those stories are structured. An understanding of that structure is central to the ability to transform it, to remediate it from an oral form into a playable form. (Lewis 66)

Understanding the importance of the transition between formats ultimately provides the groundwork for embracing new technologies as potential tools for cultural expression. What this begins to show is the importance of storytelling to the close relationship that digital media has with cultural preservation. One aspect that may assist in that transition is the discussion of network links between the known and the unknown.

Cree/Metis artist Ahasiw Mskegon-Iskwew in his article; “Nehiyawewin & Virtual Reality, Talk Indian to Me (Part Two)” explains how Indigenous languages can add additional

dimensions to story-telling, in this case, assisting us to make a connection between the known, the unknown and the unknowable. As Mskegon-Iskwew discusses;

> In Cree Language, Nehiyawewin, metaphor, and metonymy are not simply pointers to similarity. They describe the threshold of transformation and shifting states of being… In Cree culture, language and any creative act of communication are reflections of our awareness that, despite its depth, we have a meager, perhaps minuscule… understanding of the complex new forces and beings that surround, shape and extend beyond human knowing. (par.1)

What Ahasiw argues here is that the understanding of the unknown regarding new media and the effects that it may have on the ethical representations of communities or culture is still something in its infant stages. These ethical infancies show that the lack of community education in media technologies correlates to a lack of the potential opportunities that games can provide to the community at large. The key is to find a way to traverse that gap between the known (natural/human) to the unknown (artificial/digital) worlds. Video games have a more significant opportunity to connect the physical and the unknown through the multiple formats that the media itself uses to create a world in the digital space.

Video games continue to produce opportunities for Indigenous communities at large. However, similar to tropes of other popular media involving Indigenous peoples, tropes as Jodi Byrd describes that "temporalize" and "rehearse" invasion, requiring a latent Indigeneity that "continues to both inflect and haunt video games in their narrative and ideological similarities to new world travelogues" (qtd. in Hearne 19). Byrd concludes that video games create a "contest of signs" that result in the "relinquishment of sovereign indigeneity" because "it remains the platform through which the encounter with the other becomes intelligible within the terrains of new worlds" (qtd. in Hearne 19). Byrd's work echoes the invasive/destructive qualities that theorist Gerald Vizenor has argued ultimately disconnect Indigenous identity through a "mainstream representation." As Vizenor explains; "the most romantic representations of natives

are the advertisements of cultural dominance, not the natural sources of motion and sovereignty" (Vizenor 5). As Ying- Wen Yu analyzes of Vizenor's work in her essay: *Playing Indian* in the compilation*; Survivance Narratives of Native Presence,* Vizenor uses Jean Baudrillard's theories on simulation to scrutinize how Indians are represented, suggesting that "Simulation is a product of contemporary consumer culture and imperialistic western science and philosophy, especially ethnography. In the consumer society, desires, which are stimulated by dominant cultural discourses, mandate human needs" (Ying-Wen Yu 89, 93). People's perceptions of simulations, therefore, code what desires they use when relating to the world (Ying- Wen Yu).

Video games use multiple depictions of "Indians" to fulfill gamers' desires and reinforce tropes of Indigenous peoples that often distort and harm Indigenous identity. They most often collapse complexity and reinforce a "melting pot" mentality embodying what Vizenor posits as an "absence of the real natives and the simulation of tragic primitivism. Natives, on the other hand, are the actual stories of motion and presence" (Ying-Wen Yu 92). Vizenor uses Rene Magritte's painting, "Ceci n'est pas une pipe (this is not a pipe)" as an example of a simulation, suggesting that the images we perceive, regardless of the media, are not actual natives but a simulation without a "real" reference. Magritte intended his painting to show the difference between conception and representation. Comparatively, Vizenor uses this example to explain the differences between the stereotypes and the real (Ying-Wen Yu). Ultimately, the world created becomes that of simulated images, revolving around desires, posing as the "real." As the boundary between simulation and reality begins to blur, Baudrillard explains in *Precession of Simulacra*; "It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reproduction, nor for even parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for real itself" (Baudrillard 2). Video games

follow similar patterns of "real" that continue to dimish Indigenous identity in mainstream popular culture.

Still, video games possess the potential to place players into stories involving at least a sense of Indigenous peoples. Similar to Indigenous cultures, for example, video games do not just rely on one single contributor to tell their story; the media relies on characters, environments, and non-playable characters, all of which need to be equally represented through interactions to immerse players into their worlds. Video games offer an immersive experience which does, on some level, resemble similar patterns and experiences songs, stories, and ceremonies offer. Like video games, Indigenous cultures rely on the formation of relationships through experience to reinforce cultural, geographical, and psychological ties within their communities. Every game encompasses not just a single plotline but a combination of multiple factors, planes, and interactions that determine the overall story.

Video games borrow many aspects from various other forms of media. Media like television, music, and books all contribute to the ability of the video game medium to become as immersive as it can be. However, individually there are considerable constraints that are involved with these individual forms of media. For example, with books or novels, the reader is required to read the real words that are on the page. For information beyond what is in a book, the reader must attempt to pull out data from beyond the words, ultimately reading between the lines. According to Steven Johnson "reading is not an active, participatory process; it's a submissive one. The book readers of the younger generation are learning to "follow the plot" instead of learning to lead" (20). What Johnson suggests is that books are a fixed linear path that requires the reader to follow that linear path compared to video games, especially open world games like *Assassins Creed 3* and platform games like *Never Alone*, which mainly rely on

multiple interactive gameplay mechanics and collectibles to enhance storytelling within the game.

Multiple interactive forms of gameplay mechanics require that the player process what the game presents in a different way. Video games, as Johnson explains; "…force the player to make decisions. Novels may activate our imagination, and music may conjure up powerful emotions, but games are for you to decide, to choose, to prioritize" (41). It is not what the player is thinking about when playing the game; it is ultimately the way the player thinks that the experience is important. With multiple forms of media encouraging the player to explore the virtual world instead of being on a fixed path, this way of exploring is what drives the player to proceed within the game. Exploration thrives on what the player should interact with, whether it is non-playable characters within a city, fighting a monster, completing the main story or side quests that may provide the player with new weapons, gear, money, or background information beyond what the main story may provide.

Advancing within video games requires the player to think differently about planning and strategizing according to the multiple paths that he or she could take. Johnson describes this idea of interactivity in the game as providing the player with two different ways, probing and telescoping. Probing, as Johnson describes is a process that "involves a nuanced form of exploration as well, one that often operates below conscious awareness" (43). There are explicit rules within every game; within *Never Alone* there are rules like, do not fall into the ice water, run away from the polar bears or other enemies as well as the pause menu providing essential goals that the player must advance the story. Comparatively in *Assassins Creed 3,* players must explore the environments to obtain useful items or complete specific missions that will unlock

the relationship and history of Ratohnhaké:ton and his community. Also, the player must skillfully maneuver or sneak through areas without alerting enemies.

Johnson suggests that because the world is a virtual world, the computer is constructing a world as a whole with light, social relations, weather, and ecology. These aspects are considered the "physics" of the game. These aspects assist the player to "telescope" or to manage multiple tasks to achieve their goals.

According to Johnson, telescoping is the "mental labor of managing all these simultaneous tasks by the way in which the objectives nests inside one another… it's about constructing a proper hierarchy of tasks and moving through tasks in correct order" (54). This theory could be argued to allow the player to focus on immediate problems as well as maintaining a long distance view of the games overarching goals. The balance required for the player to achieve both immediate and long-term goals is essentially often described as "probing."

Video game scholar James Paul Gee discusses this idea of probing and breaks it down into a four-part process. This process is called the; "probe, hypothesize, reprobe, rethink" cycle. The first part involves "the player to probe the virtual world (which involves looking around the current environment, clicking on something, or engaging in a certain action)" (Johnson 45). For example, in *Never Alone*, the player must interact with different types of boxes, levers, and switches to solve the various puzzles throughout each level. However, the player must decide and sometimes weigh the strategies that are involved with puzzle solving as some outcomes will result in either Nuna or the Arctic Fox dying, requiring a restart of the level. In *Assassins Creed 3*, Ratonhnhaké:ton must contribute to his traditional Mohawk community by hunting. Hunting is shown early on within the game's main storyline as the player must work with other N.P.C.'s

(Non-Playable characters) to catch various types of wild animals such as rabbit, deer, fox, and beaver.

The second probing cycle requires the player to reflect, as they must form a hypothesis about what something might mean in a useful way. Things like texts, artifacts, objects or actions are all different areas that the player must encounter while probing. For example, in Chapter 3: Nuna's Village, Nuna, and the Arctic Fox begin to advance into areas where multiple steps are required to solve a platform puzzle while being attacked by "little spirit people." The player needs to trick these little spirit people to throw rocks down from a higher platform onto a "see-saw" type platform. Ultimately, the player must strategize their actions to overcome the puzzle in front of them. While in the hunting missions of *Assassins Creed 3*, the player is shown early on in the game that Ratonhnhaké:ton hunting animals are an important factor not only for acquiring items to upgrade abilities and weapons but also as a spiritual act for the character. After every hunt, the game plays a mini cutscene depicting Ratonhnhaké:ton kneeling before the animal and beginning an honor prayer before acquiring the animal. Additionally, hunting contributes to the player's overall attributes, leveling up as the player hunts and crafts items they require to pass objectives or goals.

The third cycle requires the player to reprobe the environment with that hypothesis, seeing what the effects will be. Using the example given Chapter 3: Nuna's Village, the player must decide how to get the little spirit people to throw the boulders to the proper side of the "see-saw" usually meaning they must go to one side and wait until a rock is thrown and quickly move away before being hit. The player would see this plan working and would then repeat this until the platform raises to the desired height. During the side missions in *Assassins Creed 3*, if the player continues to overhunt, or kills animals not needed, Ratonhnhaké:ton will have a dialogue

with himself, insisting that he focus only on the animals he needs and to be more respectful towards his environment and what he consumes. Additionally, while acquiring animals, the player will notice that each animal will have multiple parts available to them during hunting. For example, if the player gains an elk, the player would receive elk meat, pelts, or a heart. Depending on the gender of the animal, the player can obtain elk antlers. The player has the option, depending on what the player chooses to do with the materials collected, to craft numerous amounts of items from them. For example; pelts can be used to make bear pendants, water drums, wolf necklaces, and moccasins. The meat can be used to make smoked or salted meat, whereas the antlers and hearts can be combined to create a remedy to help Ratohnhaké:ton gain abilities or cure ailments. Additionally, Ratonhnhaké:ton can give these items to his fellow N.P.C. community members. Ultimately, showing the player the options that Ratonhnhaké:ton has to build up himself or his community with the items he acquires from the animals in the area.

With the final cycle, the player would either rethink his/her path or accept this hypothesis to move forward. After the player repeats this process of throwing rocks will eventually allow the characters to jump to the higher platform and retrieve a key item needed to advance the story. What could be argued is that probing allows the player to interact with the environments often seeking out the limits of the video games environment. But as demonstrated through the cutscenes that follow Ratohnhaké:ton's hunting and over-hunting, game responses to probing can also be opportunities to educate players concerning cultural concepts.

Video games provide the opportunity for the player to build up their skills and knowledge about the puzzles and the environment that the game gives them. The most effective learning occurs when the player is at the outer limits of their ability, which requires the player to begin to apply their knowledge acquired during the "probing" and "telescoping" cycles from previous

chapters and puzzles to a new task. If the environment that the player moves into becomes too easy or increases in difficulty too fast, then a disconnection can occur between the environment and player perhaps leading to a loss of interest in the game. However, if the environment increases along-side the player's skills, the player will continue to be engaged within that environment. Scholar James Paul Gee describes this process as the "regime of competence." In his article titled "High Score Education," Gee describes this phenomenon as, "each level dances around the outer limits of the player's abilities, seeking at every point to be hard enough to be just doable… which results in a feeling of simultaneous pleasure and frustration." (1). In addition to Gee's theory of regime of competence, there is another theory that helps explain the importance of player skill and the difficulty that they face in an area.

Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi's theory of flow argues that humans prefer to engage in a pleasant state of "flow" when their abilities match the challenges in a perfect way. This experience of flow represents different ways including the transformation of time; either time would pass at a very quick rate, or at important moments be drawn out (second of "normal" time in a game lasting much longer). The loss of self-consciousness, the concentration on the task at hand (forgetting about everything around), challenging activities that require skills (often goal oriented with rules), and clear goals and feedback. Csikzentmihalyi suggests that a game that establishes their own rules, rewards, and objectives absorbs the player to reach their desired goal. However, for this to be successful, the game needs to perfectly balance challenge with frustration of the player's skills. If the game is too easy, the players will get bored. If the game is too hard, the player will become frustrated and quit the game. For this reason many game designers today offer multiple levels of game difficulty for players to chose from.

Another example is Jane McGonigal's variation of Csikzentmihalyi's flow theory in her book *Reality is Broken.* McGonigal states; "games make us happy despite being hard work because we prefer rewarding interaction to being entertained passively. With games, flow can be experienced immediately" (41). Immediate experiences connect to a series of intrinsic rewards offered by games. These rewards are broken down into four sections. In the first section as McGonigal describes, "we crave satisfying work… means being immersed in clearly defined, demanding activities that allow us to see the direct impact of our efforts" (49). The second section describes the craving for experience or the hope that we are successful in the game. This idea comes from the player wanting to feel powerful in their own lives and show off what skills allow them to complete difficult tasks. The third section involves social connections. This section consists of the need to share experiences and build bonds, which most often is accomplished by doing things together. Finally the fourth stage deals with the craving for meaning. This section deals with the idea that players want to be a part of something that is larger than themselves the desire to see things unfold on epic scales.

Throughout both *Never Alone* and *Assassins Creed 3*, gameplay and exploration of environments heavily rely on challenging the player's skills to continue the player's interest to explore the game. James Paul Gee expresses the need to explore as one of the essential learning principles built within video games. He defines his Regime of Competence Principle as ensuring that "the learner gets ample opportunity to operate within, but at the outer edge of, his or her resources, so that at those points things are felt as challenging but not "undoable" (209) . Game developers use this principle to balance the game's challenges, making levels or environments seem "balanced" incentivizing the players to try again when or if they fail. For example, In *Never Alone*, the challenges and the puzzles the player must overcome include tasks like

climbing on spirit ledges. To beat the puzzle, the player must use both characters to work together to accomplish the task. For example, to maneuver the spirits, the player uses the spirit fox to move the platform to let Nuna climb up, then moving the platform over to the desired area that Nuna needs to go. The next puzzle would include multiple platforms that Nuna would have jump across using the fox spirit several times to achieve the goal. This idea of flow incorporates the player's skill level when it comes to interacting with both characters. Some players may instantly solve the puzzles provided; however, others may struggle a few times before solving them. Hunting or attacking a well guarded Templar in *Assassins Creed 3* or solving puzzles within *Never Alone* contributes similar challenges for the player to continuously improve their skills while engaging increasingly difficult challenges in the game.

Gee's theory of "regime of competence" can be seen throughout *Never Alone* as the introductory levels push the player to learn to use both characters to move platforms and climb cliffs. As the level progresses, the game introduces aspects such as high storm winds that require players to time their jumps to jump over large gaps. Additionally, another example of the game is solving time-based puzzles, where a giant polar bear is chasing the characters or running along a sinking iceberg. The obstacles become more challenging, resulting in the player becoming more engaged in how they play the game. Engagement is not only done through challenging gameplay, but it is also essential that the characters the player interacts with be as complex and interesting as the environments and puzzles with the game presents them with.

Character designs are another essential aspect when it comes to player immersions. Steven Poole in his book *Trigger Happy* describes good player character design as;

> one that the player, because of a fulfilled combination of dynamic and iconic criteria likes… since the character is under our control, if we like them we must

> feel somehow protective, and anxious lest we cause the character harm through our own manual inadequacy. (262)

Building a good character for the player to play will result in a powerful motivation for playing the video game well. For example, having Nuna be a small, young girl and the Arctic Fox being a young animal, the player learns early on of the struggles that drive Nuna and the fox, and therefore drive the player to continue their story successfully to attempt to save them from their dangerous environment. These dangers are demonstrated from the very start of the game through the destruction of Nuna's community by a massive snowstorm, resulting in many people dying. She is then set on a quest to find the origin of and end of the storms.

Assassins Creed 3 also demonstrates impactful character designs in an open world setting, where the player is shown Ratonhnhaké:ton as a younger child. The player is forced to witness the Templar's destruction of Ratonhnhaké:ton's community, giving the player the understanding of the characters struggles throughout the main story of the game as well as setting up a credible and personal enemy. Having the player continue to explore the environment before the destruction of Ratonhnhaké:ton's community reinforces the player's connection to the main character and their relationship to the environments, communities, and animals. The destruction of their communities at the start of these two games depict Ratonhnhaké:ton as well as Nuna as underdogs being forced to overcome such obstacles to survive. Character designs are an essential tool that creators use to connect a player to a character, but can also join multiple players as well. Having good character designs is necessary to good game design.

Another central idea behind good game design is the concept of amplification. This idea describes amplification as players doing small actions that would result in more significant consequences. Amplification relies on players input and sensory experiences. Small actions with

bigger impacts make the player feel more engaged in the overall story and allow them to retrieve narratives not directly given to the player (Poole). For example, in *Never Alone Foxtales*, there is a significant emphasis on the player battling a large mouse boss character as he runs through the partly thawed Alaskan environment. Nuna and the Fox travel within these thawed environments, often through the same tunnels as the mouse. As they traverse the tunnels, they access new areas to explore. The current of the stream flowing through these tunnels break down the environment and reshape where the player needs to travel next. *Assassins Creed 3* uses amplification as well; however, rather than reshaping the environment physically, it achieves this via interactions of the N.P.C.'s in the communities the player explores. During the majority of the main story within *Assassins Creed 3*, Rahtonhnhaké must examine the surrounding environments searching for his father Haythem Kenway who Conner will later learn destroyed his home village.

The idea of games have been around for many generations. However, the idea of the way to play games and interact in digital media shares values in similar ways. Johann Huizinga discusses the idea of play in *Homo Lundens; a study of the play*- element in culture, at their base games are "irrational." Although he begins to discuss that games; "are central to the formation of culture… underpins all forms of ritual, and even religion itself" (Poole, 285). Poole discusses Huizinga's theory stating; "games have been torn from their organic place at the heart of community… the eternal need for play has sprouted once more in radical, electronic form…" (286). Independent workshops like *Skins* that work with younger generations of Indigenous youth help them to incorporate the values of traditional communities, culture, and traditions into digital environments returning these games to the heart of the community. The need for play is still essential for the games to be successful. However, the disconnection from culture that arises

from digital media like video games continues to diminish as more workshops, or machinima projects like the *TimeTraveller* explore the options for recreating historical and cultural presence in the space video games use to tell stories that incorporate positive cultural, and traditional stories and images of Indigenous peoples.

While larger open-world video games can rely on the social interaction between players, there is also high demand for video games that require multiple players to control different characters at the same time. Whether structured co-operatively or competitively, this style of gameplay has occurred since the infancy of video games. Usually, most video games that have a multiplayer style gameplay pit each other against one another expecting to fight, race or compete in some aspect. However, with *Never Alone*, Upper One Games developed the multi-player mode of the game to be a co-operative experience in keeping with Indigenous cultural values. Thus, enhancing the importance of social co-operative roles, and diminishing the competitive roles constructed through other examples of multiplayer gaming such as *Mario Kart*. Co-operative gaming roles in *Never Alone* re-establishes the importance of a balanced system of responsibilities in video games that is comparable to the importance of balanced roles and responsibilities in Indigenous communities.

Pivotal roles and responsibilities establish culture, community, and traditions of Indigenous peoples in their community. For Indigenous communities to continue, co-operative relationships built upon equal input is essential. Without men, women, elders, and youth upholding their responsibilities, communities would lack essential survival necessities through difficult instances of their lives. Balanced roles within Indigenous communities ensure the successes of future generations that continue to build the community and continue that path forward. When comparing Indigenous cultures to the co-operative game mechanics in *Never*

Alone, similarities involving equal roles and responsibilities are essential to achieving the goals of the game. Without balanced input, the games puzzles, challenges, and enemies would not be overcome, leaving the player in a motionless state, lacking the ability to achieve. It is pivotal that *Never Alone* use co-operative gameplay experiences instead of a competitive gameplay experience as a teaching tool as the game shows the player that every role has its own responsibility within the community and not everyone or everything can handle all the communities tasks. *Never Alone* has cooperative mechanics that symbolize the importance of balanced roles and responsibilities in Indigenous communities to achieve success.

Throughout this chapter, there have been examples that display how video game frameworks can be used to immerse the player in or teach them about Indigenous cultures in a positive light. Workshops like *Skins* empower Indigenous youths to create, program, and produce video games that tell the traditional stories of their communities. These independent, almost "grassroots" developers approach the development of Indigenous video games in a community manner, allowing younger generations to not only create a space through game development but also create additional opportunities to connect the media in video with other formats. Game components like audio, voicework, and, visual design engage multiple community members, from elders to youth, where all contribute to the Indigenous identity of the games. Various contributing formats allow the community to expand its knowledge of digital formats positively. Video game projects like these will enable the player to immerse themselves into highly detailed, designed and culturally accurate environments to explore and to bring out information that is not necessarily provided to them directly.

Chapter 2: Complexities of Representations and Simulations in Digital Media

Virtually since inception, video games have most often reinforced harmful tropes surrounding Indigenous peoples. Most involve portrayals of characters, environments, and stories that reenact images found in Hollywood movies, television series, and comic books. Throughout generations, pop culture media has framed the Othering of Indigenous cultures, traditions, communities through representations now known as the "Noble Savage," "Red-Skinned Redeemer," and the "Bloodthirsty Savage." These tropes/stereotypes first gained popularity through dime novels throughout the United States. Created often "for a mass audience, these cheap, lurid, "penny dreadfuls" featured Indians, pioneers, detectives, scouts, and cowboys locked in inevitable conflict (Francis 88). These novels relied on forces of "civilization" (such as Royal Canadian Mounted Police) usually as protagonists preparing the unknown for non-Indigenous government, laws, and colonization by removing Indians as obstacles to "progress." These popularly-enjoyed expressions laid the groundwork for later stories in digital media.

Jacquelyn Kilpatrick explains that the innovation of movies and television broaden and create similar destructive, Othering scenes portrayed in wild west shows and paintings depicting real First Nations peoples "displaced by the Hollywood Indian, a cinematic creation springing directly from the ubiquitous images of the old bloodthirsty and his alter ego, the noble savage" (qtd. in Adare 27). As digital media expanded into video game media, it carried over "Othering" scenes that comparatively displaced Indigenous imagery. Annette Taylor adds to this, stating that; "television, for the most part, has eliminated distinctions among real Native American peoples and cultures... The overall message, whether in a turn-of-the-century or doomed and

assimilated Indians always abandon their people"(qtd. in Adare 27). These tropes were perfect for incorporation into video game media as the format became increasingly more popular throughout the decades. As video games rely on popular culture tropes of Indigenous peoples continues, there became an increasing amount of games incorporating them into their games. The increasing number of games using this trope led to the to the construction of an archiving site designed to address these tropes.

Indigitalgames

Using these principles as a platform for discussing stereotypes in video games, I created Indigitalgames.com, an online blogging project that chronicles the multiple examples of negative portrayals of Indigenous peoples and provides detailed explanations of games using Native American tropes and stereotypes. The goal of Indigitalgames.com was to promote conversations on how games reinforce harmful characteristics involving Indigenous cultures, traditions, and communities. Focusing on what categories appear most frequently, each blog example examined a form of negative representation that limited and restricted positive Indigenous portrayals. The negative descriptions take their inspirations from earlier media that disconnected essential relationships between Indigenous communities, environments, and traditions. Stereotypes like the Bloodthirsty Savage and the Mystical Shaman trope all follow patterns that are described by Taiaike Alfred that are discussed later on in this chapter which include the violent, drunk, absentee, and the Noble Savage. Thus reinforcing stereotypes that continue to diminish essential issues within the community that strengthens positive Indigenous identity. Negative representations in each video game depict these stereotypes that disconnect Indigenous

communities from mainstream society. Disconnecting or "Othering" of a culture that diminishes Indigenous cultures as less than non-Indigenous communities.

Noble Savage and the Savage

As discussed in the introduction with Robert Berkhofer's work and the Jesuits, the image of the "Noble Savage" and the "Savage" have been around a long time. Entering the twentieth century, the image of the"Noble Savage" presented Indigenous cultures, traditions, and communities as inferior to non-Indigenous society. The Noble Savage is a character that supports the white man, offering aid, rescue, and spiritual comfort even at the cost of his own life or status in his tribe to do so (Adare 26; Bird 249-250). He saves the white men from 'bad' Indians and thus becomes a 'good' Indian. Good Indians also lose their subjectivity, becoming part of the White person's story (Adare 26; Bird 249-250). From the initial representations, savage stereotypes have evolved into the inferior, uneducated, no-good, thieving Indians who "had no civilization until Europeans brought to them and had nothing to contribute to Europeans of to the growth of America" (Adare 27; Mihesuah, Strickland and Kilpatrick). The focal point surrounding the image itself was to turn them into the Noble Savage or even into the good Indians that within civilized society became the stereotypical white savior (Adare 27; Friar, Friar, Kilpatrick and Strickland). This depiction of the Native Americans as the Noble Savage follows similar characteristics of the civ/sav, and dehumanization narratives. The civ/sav narrative is rooted in the romantic movement, where artists and writers sought to evoke feelings to their audience, touching on a multitude of feelings. Feelings of "fear, mystery, devotion, despair, exaltation, pity, sentiment, all were to flow from pen or brush onto paper or canvas and thence to the audience" (Berkhofer 87). With the addition of rugged, untamed, scenery,

nonliterate people served as additional features used to reinforce the artists desired feelings. As both the noble savage and the savage Indian make an “Ideal subject for American high culture” (Berkhofer 87). The artist presents the idea of the North American wilderness within tales of “tortures, vengeance, escapes, and ambushes of Indian warfare aroused a variety of emotion of the most romantic sort” (Berkhofer 87). Romantization allows the White artist to begin to shape the noble savage into vanishing characters cemented in the past.

One of the significant characteristics placed on the Noble Savage was that of a nation that was rapidly vanishing. Native American nations portrayed the image of a diminishing nation as the westward expansion of the colonial empire. This diminishing characteristic would create a nostalgia that would represent Indian peoples as individuals stuck in the past, As Berkhofer explains; “the nostalgia and pity aroused by the dying race produced the best romantic sentiments and gave that sense of fleeting time beloved of romantic sensibilities” (Berkhofer 88). Fear that the Indian nation is dying prompted artists to capture the image of the noble savage before it disappeared. It is important to note that intellectuals characterized both the "wild" Indian and the "noble" Indian relics of the past. Native Americans were the dying race that could either die fighting against the White society (obstacle) or through maintaining their affinity to a rapidly disappearing natural landscape similarly disappear themselves.

Another example that prompted the desires to capture the Indian imagery was the Noble Savage image. One variation of the Noble Savage trope define the Indian as someone that would die for white settlers during wartimes. Similar to the “wild” Indian, the Noble Savage is on a lower social level in society compared to the Whites. Through their actions, “the noble Indian deserved White sympathy for his condition and his passing, but his way of life no less than that of the ignorable savage…” (Berkhofer 91). Many of the characteristics of the “real Indians”

popularized “western” themes of modern culture. With the increased popularity of contemporary art as colonial expansion continued west, modern art would turn to formulas that were successful before dime novels of the 1800’s; the Western theme adopted these tropes and transitioned into the cinema media format. Western themes were brought into video game media from cinema sharing resemblances of plains, deserts, and mountains to depict the transformation that white settler colonization had through western expansion in North America. The genre also relied on characters that reinforced the tropes that encouraged the removal or restriction to reservations of Indigenous nations within North America.

In this genre, there are three main types of characters; these include “the agents of civilization, such as the townspeople, settlers, especially the schoolmarm. The outlaws of the Indians, and the hero, who frequently represents some blend of both sides” (Berhofer 97). The hero, who is a Christian, is usually tasked with resolving the conflicts between both sides, most often solved by violence. The villains portray simple characters, which relate to the savage as the Indian villains base on the stereotypes of the Indian savage. These representations include examples like the bloodthirsty savage who often portrays a crazed, vengeance-seeking or just at the expense of innocent Whites (Berkhofer). Thus, the Western presented the Indian as the master of the wilderness, perpetuating the traditional White imagery of the Indian.

The Western format of Indian representation began to reach global audiences throughout the early 20th century, with *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show* being the most popular. The show displayed essentialized Plains Indians, along with horses, skin tipis, and feather headdresses. The shows would assimilate all Native cultures into a universal image of what an “Indian” looked like. Like those in the popular Dime Novels, the Indians were the bloodthirsty, aggressive, torturers of innocent captives. Daniel Francis describes the Wild West Show as; “dramatic

entertainment, offering non-Native urban audiences a chance to see their fantasies about the American West brought to life" (107). It is important to note that Buffalo Bill and other showmen did not urge their audiences to consider Indians to be individuals or communities propelled into American- defined human progress in such a way that they should merit any treatment different from what they were receiving (Francis). The characterization of Indian people as savage obstacles to progress popularized in the Wild West Shows would continue to negatively impact Indian images throughout all media as the narrative transitioned from a traveling entertainment act to Hollywood movies, television shows, toys, and ultimately to the digital environment of video games, some specific examples of which will be discussed below.

Mad Dog 2

Mad Dog 2: The Lost Gold, an arcade, light gun game from the mid-1990's, exemplifies the "Noble Savage" trope in video game design. During the mid- 1990's, arcade light gun games became a highly popularized genre in many arcades around the globe. For the most part, these games were short in length but pushed the player's reflexes and hand-eye coordination with densely populated levels, and a limited number of lives to complete the course, urging the player to spend large numbers of quarters in arcades around the globe. One series of light gun shooters is the *Mad Dog McCree* games. Developed by American Laser Games, the *Mad Dog McCree* series placed players in the shoes of a silent protagonist, often referred to by non-playable characters as merely "stranger." The setting of these games mainly revolved around locations that closely resembled Hollywood Western movies, television shows, and comics. Environments like saloons, mines, jailhouses, and most notably Native American camps where game designers expected players to shoot and kill multiple enemies throughout each stage. Native American

characters were the primary gun fodder in the second game of the franchise; *Mad Dog 2: The Lost Gold* (1992).

In *Mad Dog 2: The Lost Gold*, players must track down a wanted outlaw, Mad Dog, as well as eliminating anyone who associates themselves with Mad Dog's gang. In addition to the group, the player also has to fight banditos and renegade Indians throughout other branching storylines. After the player passes the tutorial section of the game, they have a choice between three guides: Buckskin Bonnie, the Professor, and Shooting Beaver. Image 1 by Laser Games (1992) outlines the characteristics of Shooting Beaver.

Image 1; Players first interaction with Shooting Beaver.

The player first meets Shooting Beaver when some outlaws are in the processes of hanging him just outside one of the town barns. The first interaction the player has with Shooting Beaver is directly after the player saves Beaver from the outlaws. Beaver thanks the player for saving his life and explains that he can help the player track down Mad Dog. This interaction similarly resembles scenes in famous western movies where the Native American character who assists or helps the main protagonist in the film often faces near death experiences to provide the

viewer to feel empathy towards the said character. In other words, this is the epitome of the "Noble Savage."

After defeating the outlaws, Beaver takes the player into the “wilderness” where the player must kill the renegade Indians that continue that block their path to the lost mine and unknown amounts of treasure. Both Shooting Beaver and the renegade Indians share similar visual and verbal features in this game. For example, both characters wear the famous single feathered headpiece, buckskin leggings and a variety of beaded clothing pieces that resemble spaghetti western tropes of the savage Indian. Every enemy Indian follows similar motions that

resemble plotlines from these Western films. As the player traverses the wilderness, enemy Indians will shout and come onto the screen, wearing brightly colored beadwork garments with faces painted in customary movie warrior designs.

Images 2 and 3; display the outfits that are worn by the Native American characters as well as the layout of the Indian village that the player must travel through.

In a light shooter game, gameplay relies on quick hand-eye coordination as players are given mere seconds to shoot enemies. After every enemy in the location is defeated, a cutscene plays followed by a transition to the next level. Each level has its own unique setting, revolving around western themes, but more importantly, the characters are entirely separate and unique to each location. For example, before the branching paths, the player is in a small town, where the

population is only white men and women. However, as the player continues to progress, they are introduced to the wilderness and the savage Indian. Enemy characters themselves are entirely separated from each other, emphasizing the wildness aspect that only evil characters reside outside of town.

Throughout Shooting Beaver's branching path, the player goes through the wilderness which includes swamps, hills, valleys and finally through the renegade Indian village. The most notable setting in this branching path is, of course, the Indian village. The village itself depicts several teepees in the middle of a meadowed territory where enemies continue to spawn for the player to shoot. The characters in this section fit the usual Noble Savage tropes mentioned previously. Nothing about said tee pees incorporates the traditional or significant meanings of them. They are used only as a prop to reinforce the uncivilized Native American image.

Mad Dog 2: The Lost Gold relies heavily on popular western movie stereotypes of savage Native Americans as an enemy for the player to gun down and exterminate. Furthermore, it includes Shooting Beaver as the "Noble Savage" character that further reinforces the tropes of Hollywood Native American images, disconnecting Indigenous people from civilized nations. Another point is that this game reinforces the impact the player has on eliminating "enemy" Native Americans. Because this game is a light gun shooter, the player must physically point the gun controller at the Native American enemies to kill them. This genre and way of playing the game puts the player in a position of power and dominance over those non-playable characters. The game legitimizes the conquest of the wild west reenacting this experience for player as they defeat enemies from the wild west and overcome the wild savages that dwell in the forests and mountain locations. To complete the game is to ultimately kill the savages that hinder the

expansion of civilized society throughout the west. The light gun game mechanic in *Mad Dog 2: The Lost Gold* puts players in the role of a colonizer protagonist; the player must remove all enemies, which means the extermination of the Native American rebels that are in their way.

Opposite of the Noble Savage is the Ignoble Savage or the more popular representation the Bloodthirsty Savage. In his quest for blood vengeance, the Bloodthirsty Savage is a heathen who is treacherous, hostile, and "utterly incompetent to cope in any way with the European or Caucasian race" (Coward 4-6; Kilpatrick 2). "In this context, the Indian becomes the "Other" over whom the European and Euro-American settlers must gain "psychic as well as physical control" (Adare 27; Kilpatrick 3). The Bloodthirsty Savage portrays characteristics seen in multiple video games throughout the decades as will be discussed below.

Westerado and the Savage Indian Trope

Video game development within the independent scene has seen an exponential rise in recent years as smaller companies rising through digital platforms that allow direct download of content like PC Steam, the PlayStation store, and ID @ Xbox. Each of these platforms gives opportunities for smaller companies to push into mainstream video game markets as each platform becomes more popular with gamers as the years and technology advance. Ostrich Banditos, a five-person studio, built upon and retooled the 16bit western game of the early 1990s and re-introduced *Westerado* in 2015 to mainstream markets for Xbox One and Windows PC. *Westerado* uses and plays with Native American stereotypes in numerous ways throughout the game for both comedic and violent effect.

Capitalizing on the popularity of games like the 2009 release *Minecraft* that returned players to the blocky graphic environments of the 1980s and 1990s, *Westerado: Double Barreled*

combines the 16-bit art styles with the complex narrative storyline of an adventure game to create a unique story-driven game. Throughout the game, the player takes control of the character Gunslinger who is on the hunt for his family's killer. The game requires the player to explore the entire environment of *Westerado: Double Barreled* searching for clues, talking to or assisting townsfolk to gather more clues about the murder. Depending on choices the player makes, portions of the story fall off as some missions require the player to attack a Non-playable character (NPC), which cancels that NPC's story progression mission. Having multiple unique story progression paths encourages the player to replay the game multiple times to uncover every type of playable character, outfit, or weapon in the game.

One particular quest line that spawns from this type of progression is interactions with the Native Americans. As the player explores the world of *Westerado: Double Barreled*, NPC's in the major town in the games will ask the player to help them retrieve items that are outside the limits of the town and that the NPCs are too afraid of the Indians to retrieve for themselves. The player will then venture out East of the town, where a group of Native Americans resides. Upon entering the village, the camp depicts many Native American stereotypes including favorite garments that the Native NPC characters wear (buckskin clothing, the single feather in the hair), and the chief of the village wearing a full feathered headdress. In addition to the buckskin clothing, all Native American characters also have red war paint branded across their exposed skin. The village also displays numerous teepees similar to those in Hollywood Western movies as well as, totem poles which is another famous symbol used by non-Indigenous peoples in popular media that in actuality originates far from the plains where they are often shown. These images do not depict a specific Native American culture. Instead, they illustrate an amalgamation of what people imagine Native American cultures to be. What *Westerado: Double Barreled*

displays to the player is the same Hollywood stereotypes seen when Native Americans are depicted in media set in a 19th-century western space. The image depicted below of the Native American village is a pivotal example of non-Indigenous developers trying to enhance their Indigenous characters by appropriating visual stereotypes of Indianness regardless of the national tribal identity of origin as a way to provide visual cues to non-Indigenous players that these characters are, indeed, authentically Indigenous.

Image 4; details the layout of one of the Indian villages the player interacts within the game.

The player then has the option to either assist the Native Americans to take over the fort or kill the chief and report back to the soldiers that are just west of the village. If the player chooses to assist the Native Americans, then the player must first rescue all the trapped bison that are being detained by the local townsfolks first to gain the trust the of the village. Upon returning from that task, the player is told to travel across the mountains to meet up with another Native American village to join forces and attack the fort.

Similarly, the second village repeats the representations of Native Americans used in the first village including totem poles, teepees and stereotypical NPC garments depicted previously.

After the player completes their interactions with the second village, the story then takes the player to outside the fort where both chiefs are united and begin to attack the fort. The soldiers have similar visual features to civil war soldiers with the square shoulders and blue outfits. Once the player kills the soldiers, the Native American characters then proceed to attack the neighboring town, that the player previously explored. After defeating the townsfolk, the player receives a tomahawk that replaces the gun as the primary weapon.

Image 5 and 6; display the battles between the Native Americans and the American Soldiers.

Westerado: Double Barreled plays with famous Western themes throughout the primary story mode of the game. The player can choose to assist the Native Americans in their quest to destroy the nearby white settlers, reinforcing the "savageness" imagery that western movies use to justify killing the Native Americans. What is notable about *Westerado: Double Barreled* is that the player has the option to either kill the Native American savages or to work alongside the Native Americans to take back the settlement and most notably the land that the settlement is on. The choices are important to note because of the period that the game set in. The American concentration of western tribes onto reservations with American soldiers removing Indigenous communities from the lands to expand the colonial conquest through the use of military force. Having the option to take back settlements and even more importantly the forts in *Westerado*

changes the way we think about colonial conquest. Ultimately, the player has the option to decide whether to re-inact of to oppose colonial expansion into the west.

Science Fiction, Mysticism, and Wendigos in Until Dawn

The "Western" is not the only genre that reinforces negative Indigenous representations. Science Fiction, as a genre, has also adopted the common tropes of the noble and ignoble savage through similar "othering" of Indigenous peoples. The genre follows patterns that use Native American oral traditions and spirituality as foundations for alien/science fiction/horror stories. Further, in many cases, Indigenous peoples are replaced with aliens who are depicted with many of the same features- especially the noble/ignoble binary. As Macdonald, Macdonald, & Sheridan (2000) describe in *Shape-shifting: Images of Native Americans in Recent Popular Fiction* their description of "Othering":

> Just as Indians were perceived as monstrous savages, so aliens may be monstrous and savage beyond human experience: ripping, tearing, cannibalizing. And just as Indians assisted settlers and made them welcome, so some aliens are drawn as welcoming and kindly ETs, odd by mainstream standards but somehow benign… The same type of embedding occurs in stories of alien fighters/warriors, alien contact for trade, alien magicians/shamans, alien romances. (245)

"Indians" could be replaced with "aliens" in most westerns, and aliens with Indians in most science fiction, with very little alteration of the central plot– as seen in the recent film and graphic novel *Cowboys and Aliens*.

Another dominant contributing trope continuing to restrict representations of Indigenous cultures, communities, and traditions is through mystical and Wendigo tropes. These tropes share

similar relationships with the Bloodthirsty Savage and the Noble Savage as these tropes distort mystical or traditional ties of Indigenous communities to their past to accentuate either the noble or bloodthirsty traits of the savage in question. In video game media, mystical knowledge or Wendigo stories are often used as historical lore within the game to explain for the demonic setting that the game takes place within. Wendigo, a term originating among Anishinaabe communities in reference to a dangerous winter cannibal spirit with a heart of ice, in film and games, base their identity on greed or consumption of human flesh and are usually geographically and narratively separated from their community of origin. Later this chapter, will examine examples that explain some of the important traditional and cultural significance the Wendigo holds for specific Indigenous communities.

In the Supermassive Games' 2015 release for PlayStation 4, *Until Dawn*, players must face these beings as antagonists that the player must conquer to fight their way out of a remote cottage in the northern Alberta winter. Shape-shifters are a part of many First Nations cultures and have become popular plot devices in recent popular literature- especially the subgenre of horror/science fiction. Macdonald et al. (2000) describe shape-shifting as;

> a human being changing into another living creature- for example. The shamanistic idea of the Lakota Sioux warriors shape-shifting into buffalo or wolves to enhance hunting skills and to honor the animal hunted… In general, it carries the idea of metamorphosis, of transformation from one form to another, or to some degree, becoming the other, sharing point of view and lifeway (xiv-xv).

The game *Until Dawn* uses trickster transformation to reinforce a character that disconnects trickster and windigo beings from the essential lessons their presence in Indigenous oral tradition conveys interrupting intergenerational transmission of this way of knowing.

Until Dawn is a 3rd person horror game, where players must explore the environment, using quick-time button presses to acquire clues and avoiding enemies. The horror adventure game set in an isolated cabin in the northern mountains of Alberta, Canada. In the game, you take control of 9 friends Josh, Jessica, Sam, Emily, Mike, Ashley, Matt, Chris, and Beth, who return to Beth's family cabin one year after a tragic event. Throughout the game, the player controls multiple characters between chapters, often exploring both new and familiar surroundings previously examined. The main story revolves around the teenagers, as shortly after reaching the cabin, something or someone begins to hunt them down. Every interaction, dialogue choice and button press or button miss press impacts the character's path through their portion of the story.

The "butterfly effect" as the game describes it early on, is the primary mechanism that revolves around the player's choices and weaves them into multiple possible story arcs. Every choice the player makes shifts the story into another direction. For example, if the player decides one character should be killed or accidentally fails a chase scene, where button combination completions are required to see a character safely cross a dangerous section of the level, the player will lose a piece of the story that only that player can acquire. Ultimately, the substantial impact of player choice on the story is an essential mechanic that keeps the player emotionally invested in ensuring every character contributes to their portion of the game.

The story involving the playable characters is not the only story told, however. As the player explores the mountain environment, they will find side story tidbits revolving around the previous residents living up on the mountain. The game describes the mountain as having a checkered history detailing that in 1893, "the Cree" were the original inhabitants on the mountain. Upon colonial expansion, Tin and Radium were discovered in the region causing a

massive mining boom. After a lack of maintenance, a devastating structural collapse trapped 30 miners in the intricate tunnels of the pit. After numerous days of surviving on only a small stream of water, 12 miners resorted to cannibalism. Eventually, rescuers found the miners and placed them into the recently built Blackwood Asylum, where the miners would slowly turn into cannibalistic creatures. Then these creatures disappear from the historical record until the early 1990s, when American movie mogul Bob Washington purchased property near the asylum and built a vacation home on the site where his daughters, Beth and Hana often visit. At the start of the game, they who invite their high school friends to the cabin during school vacation and cannibalistic hijinks ensue.

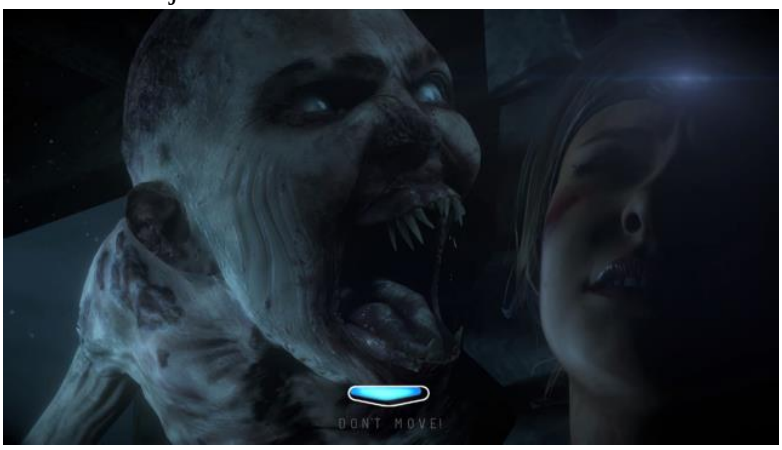


Image 7; displays the image of the "Wendigo" that human characters transform into through the game's story.

Until Dawn uses multiple examples of negative representations of Cree people in both the primary and side missions in the game. The Wendigo depicted in the game are based on legends that describe a creature or monster who transforms from a human into a cannibalistic monster. The story states that anyone who ate human flesh would run the risk of being possessed by the Wendigo around the Blackwood Mountain. During a playthrough, if the player finds the "Strangers Journal," it describes that the Cree believed that the Blackwood Mountain was sacred land. As mining began to disrupt the sacred grounds, the Wendigo was released. The sacredness of the land to the Cree people is in another hidden collectible: Melinda Washington's Native

American Letter, where she writes to Dr. C.J. Swaffham an official at the Race and Ethnicity Department in Vancouver. The letter reads:

> *Thank you for your response. It's good to know that the tribe still feel an attachment to the land here, even if we have a few unfortunate problems (graffiti, people sleeping in the outbuildings). This is their ancestral home. I have made contact with the descendants of the tribe and intended to make a donation to their elder council. Healing the wounds of the past won't be easy, but I feel it's a step that is necessary.*

The attachment that once solidly connected the Cree nation to the Blackwood Mountain region would dissipate as a result of the destructive measures of mining in the area.

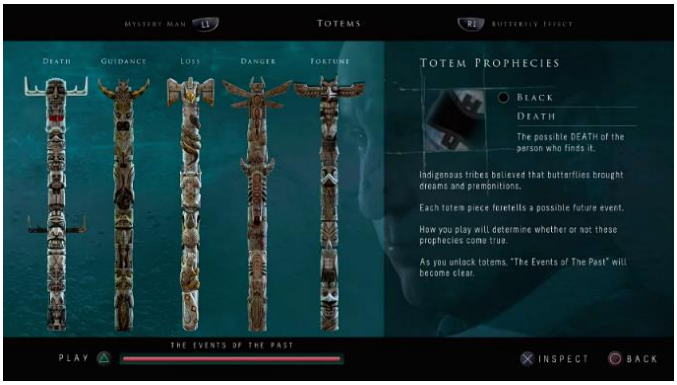
Over consuming resources is also described as another symptom of transforming a person into a Wendigo. Basil Johnson argues in; *The Manitous The Spiritual World of the Ojibway,* that overconsumption of an individual rather than supporting his/her family can also contribute to the Wendigo becoming stronger. He discusses that;

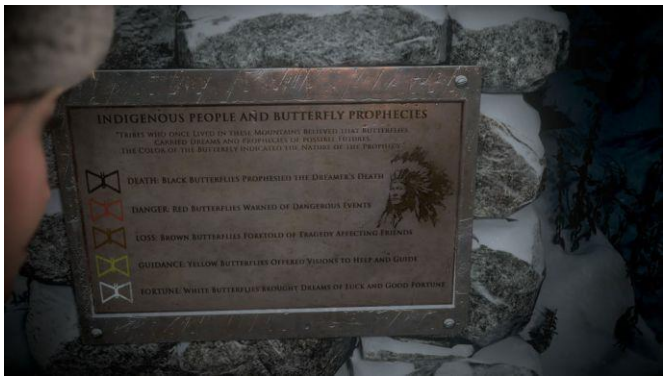
> There is nothing more harmful in humankind's inclination to rest, play, celebrate, feast, and pursue hobbies. The trouble is that some people don't know when to stop and appear not to care, because nature, or Kitchi-manitou, has endowed them with slightly more than is good for them: appetites, passions, and desires that dilute their talents, common sense, and judgment. It doesn't take much. A fraction too much or too little of anger, envy, or lust is enough to create an imbalance in a person's character to impair his or her judgment and weaken his or her resolution. (223-224)

Johnston describes the rapid western colonial expansion, similar to the development mentioned in the game, as a crucial contributor to the survival of the Wendigo entity. He explains that; "profit, wealth, and power are the ends of the business. Anything that detracts from or diminishes the anticipated return, whether it is taking pains not to violate the rights of others or take steps to ensure that the land remains fertile and productive for future generations, must, it seems, be circumvented" (Johnston 237). When exploring the miner's story clues, the player would learn the history of the miners themselves and 1952 mine collapse. A journal presented in the game as

a clue also provides information about the miners' slow transition into Wendigo's as some resorted to cannibalism. Interestingly, game designers did not use greedy resource extraction leading to the unsafe conditions that collapsed the mine as another symptom leading the miners to turn into Wendigo's. Instead, only the idea of resorting to cannibalism set the Wendigo transformation into play.

Another example of Indigenous images used in *Until Dawn* is the totems that are scattered throughout the environment for the player to acquire. There is a total of thirty different totems to collect, divided among six different types: death, danger, loss, guidance, and fortune. These totems are explained to the player to be Indigenous beliefs that signify prophecies that appear in the form of a butterfly whose color, relates to the various meanings behind them. After acquiring a totem, the player receives a mini cutscene depicting a future event, allowing the player the opportunity to avoid danger or follow a specific route. Acquiring all 30 totems gives the player an additional movie called: *The Events of the Past*, that depicts "The Stranger" character talking about his grandfather, who both devoted their lives to protecting the mountain from the Wendigo. During this short cutscene, The Stranger describes his grandfather protecting the mountain from Wendigos and keeping them contained except for one, The Makkapitew. Although the grandfather gave his life to capture the Makkapitew, he unfortunately, was not successful. The Stranger then explains that he took over his grandfather's duties to protect the mountain from the Makkapitew, and as the main story of *Until Dawn* begins, The Stranger hunting the Makkapitew transitions into the first chapter of the game, where players see him trying to protect two of the main characters.





Images 8 and 9; show the multiple totems that the player can collect throughout their story progression. Each color represents a different "vision" that the player will receive upon collecting a piece of the totem

Until Dawn plays with an iconic 1980's horror movie trope setting, the remote cabin, to tell a story of isolation, desperation, and revenge. The mystery surrounding the Wendigo is based solely upon the fear surrounding nonhuman actions like cannibalism rather than a multitude of factors that could change a person into a Wendigo like gluttony, cannibalism, or consumerism as Johnston described. Consuming is not only displayed through the Wendigos but also through the resource extraction that initially brought attention from non-Indigenous peoples to the area. Resource consumption, especially mineral extraction, is a temporary destructive process. Once the desired minerals diminish, the area is left not only "valueless," but damaged and potentially poisoned with mining waste products. Consuming content plays a similar aspect within games media, as once the player finishes the story of a game, the likelihood that the player will return is diminished as there is nothing left for them to discover. When non-Indigenous game companies use images like "Wendigos" or mystical imagery, they omit important Indigenous cultural lessons that leave the player uninformed about how to relate to the images. As a result, the player only takes from the game what it displays as initial interaction and does not think about what the images contribute to the digital environment or narrative story as a whole. The depiction of wendigoes as a "mythical" or non-human entity completely dissociates the creature from its

human origins. The game uses Wendigoes as creatures that only transform through nonhuman actions (cannibalism) and not those of greed and selfishness- in this case of massive resource extraction.

Assassins Creed 3

Video games particularly rely on stereotypes of Indigenous men as violent and hyper-masculine. A prime example is in the game *Assassin's Creed 3*, where the player controls a character named Desmond Miles, who uses a futuristic device called the Animus to travel back in time to fight the Templars, an organization trying to run the world by eliminating free will. Desmond uses the Animus to live out one of his Native American relatives during the American Revolutionary War period. This relative is named Connor, or his traditional name Ratonhnhaké:ton – a half-English, half-Mohawk man (whose mother was an Assassin and father is a Templar). It is important to note here that the gameplay in the *Assassins Creed* series is universally similar in every entry of the series. The player is tasked to explore and interact with a vast open world environment, while taking narrative quests from NPCs as well as building and upgrading the abilities and skills of the main character. The player must skillfully plot out a plan to attack and kill the enemies (Templars) to continue their progression through the main story. Although the overall game mechanics in *Assassins Creed 3* does not necessarily differentiate itself from other games in the *Assassins Creed* series, the game's story depicts overall character relationships that reinforce Indigenous stereotypes. Fundamentally, in *Assassins Creed 3*, the Indigenous central character Connor is killing Templars who are non-Indigenous characters playing the roles of colonial leaders. Therefore, whom you kill as a Mohawk character reenacts early colonial tropes of the "savage" Indian even though the series comes with the expectation

that the main historical character will be a killer, and has previously depicted non-Indigenous characters in the central role.

Ratonhnhaké:ton also struggles with the absence of his father before the destruction of his village and completes his teen years without either parent. While parental loss in a consistent storyline of the main character, throughout the *Assassins Creed* series, it is impactful that *Assassins Creed 3's* depiction of the absent father figure is similar to the experience colonial brought on by European settlers during the early conquest of North America.

Conor embodies a sense of warriorhood in *Assassin's Creed 3* even as the character also reinforces many stereotypes involving Indigenous men and violence. For instance, Ratonhnhaké:ton must build up an army that helps him continue his search throughout the Americas for his father, Haythem Kenway. Kenway, early on in the game, finds, burns down and kills Ratonhnhaké:ton's community. This portion of the game is a pivotal section that attempts to get the player to develop sympathy (similar to the Noble Savage image I discussed earlier on in this chapter) towards Ratonhnhaké:ton and his community. Before the destruction of the community, the player interacts with several of the NPCs who live in the Mohawk village through main story missions, side quests, and collecting missions that encourage the player to explore and create relationships in that community. Another example that reinforces a sympathetic reaction is when the player experiences the harsh relationships between colonial settlers and young Indigenous community members. This example poignantly when Ratonhnhaké:ton is still a young child, and views his community destroyed by his father and his colonial empire, he must kill everyone involved.

Within the world of *Assassins Creed 3*, events create sympathy for the Indian character through Indigenous deaths (often while trying to save a white protagonist), assisting white

characters throughout “wild” territory, protecting a white woman from the other “savages,” and the character’s origin. The best example of this is shown through Ratonhnhaké:ton as a child early on in the game. The player is forced to travel through the entire village where they hear the desperate screams and cries of Ratonhnhaké:ton’s fellow community members while it burns. After following a linear path through the village, the player is then forced to interact with Ratonhnhakés:ton’s mother pinned down within their burning longhouse, resulting in the character being forced to leave his mother to escape the house alive. After the destruction commences, a cutscene plays where the antagonist Haythem Kenway and his group of colonizers destroy the village to continue to preserve their hold on the resources they desire. Seeing the destruction transitions Ratonhnhaké:ton into a violent, bloodthirsty savage as he then partakes in a journey to assassinate everyone responsible for his community’s destruction.

Hyper-masculine “warrior” images associated with the bloodthirsty savage trope differ significantly from traditional expectations of Indigenous manhood. Stereotypes of violent Indian men in video games also contrasts with aspects of traditional warriorhood as Sam McKegney discusses with Taiake Alfred in *MaculIndians*. McKegney interviews Alfred, originally from the Kahnawake Mohawk Territory, to discusses the influences of dominant media stereotypes such as the drunk, the absentee father, the hyper-masculine tough guy, and the warrior on Indigenous youth today. In the interview, Alfred mentions the idea that stereotypes represent someone else’s agenda. Alfred states that to justify “the violence of conquest you needed a powerful opponent, so you created this image of the Native as a violent warrior, the classic horseback opponent. And then you had all of these other things that were created completely out of context…” (Alfred 79). One way Alfred agues to counteract that trope and to give it meaning again is to put the image back into proper context, which is as a part of the family (Alfred). Alfred explains that for

Indigenous men to counteract the stereotypes that dominant media portrays, they must reconnect to family structures. Alfred argues that stereotypes show them only having one responsibility (violence) rather than the many non-violent roles men have in family structures. He states that responsibilities "to the family- to the parents, to the spouse, to the children (or nephews, nieces, or whatever, or even just youth in general)…there are responsibilities that come with that, as opposed to just serving the one responsibility, which is as the foil for white conquest in North America" (Alfred 79).

Alfred goes into detail as to why this idea of only warrior responsibilities is harmful to Indigenous men, stating that that because many Indigenous men put themselves in roles that only focus on directly engaging the violent side of being a man; "they haven't constructed a role for themselves because they haven't really been put back into the proper context because the communities are still reeling from conquest" (Alfred 79). Many Indigenous men are still acting out the roles seen in Hollywood Indian (violent, drunk, absentee, noble savage), resulting in a need to re-shift priorities and pride to benefit their families. Ultimately, mainstream media depictions of Indigenous men are anti-family, and to rebuild the Indigenous man, and by extension the Indigenous community, there needs to be a reconstruction of pride within the family role.

The roles that Alfred discusses are complex and interconnected roles held within the five Iroquois Confederacy clans during pre-colonial times. As Jon Parmenter explains in his book *The Edge of the Woods*, "the imperative of clan exogamy among the Iroquois, which banned marriages between men and women of the same clan, provided a means for extending kinship relations over a geographical area" (xl). The boundaries for clans and nations did not stay within a specific clan; these boundaries intertwine through multiple nations and kinship ties built upon

matrilocal social organizations. Adult men had responsibilities to "the communities of their wives and those of their parents, as well as to those into which their sisters had married, given their role in educating and socializing their sisters' sons (who shared their clan identity)" (Parmenter xl-xlii).

Throughout *Assassins Creed 3*, the main character deals with his "warriorhood" by lashing out, assaulting and killing people responsible for his mother's death, continuing to address the pain of loss through violence. The character never looks at his actions as destructive within the community he makes. Often, Ratonhnhaké:ton pushes his new community and the "real" world, even further, apart as the player progresses through the game. For example, as the player assassinates more and more of his enemies, Ratonhnhaké:ton becomes more notorious, with the result that the NPC characters that he interacts with become less likely to work with him. The player then must use more violent acts to obtain essential items or ultimately become a wanted criminal in the larger cities. While notoriety is an expected game mechanic of the series, again, this trait when applied to an Indigenous character perpetuates rather than combats stereotypes. The community that Ratonhnhaké:ton creates is one where all share similar desires to kill every Templar (who are British colonizers) and to obtain an abundant amount of wealth. The community is not family or even one of nationhood; it is formed in the image of the colonizers.

The significance of the absentee parent image within *Assassins Creed 3* is another impactful trope placed upon Indigenous men today. Years of colonization has reshaped and disconnected many Indigenous peoples from the importance of culture, community, and land-based relationships. What the character Ratohnhaké:ton depicts is a similar representation to what many Indigenous communities see within younger generations. Many youths are still being

affected by colonially implemented policies that destroyed many of their ancestor's community ties. One could say that Ratonhnhakés:ton's community diminished quickly, whereas real removal processes are still occurring through resource extraction, plans that relocate Indigenous communities away from their lands, separation of Indigenous families through child and family services, or the continuous portrayal of young Indigenous peoples incarcerated. These tropes stem from the constant intergenerational removal processes that the federal government implemented over several generations. Additionally, the absentee image is something that many Indigenous communities continue to struggle with as Indigenous people battle with the struggles of absent fathers in their family structures.

One example of the impacts of absent males in Indigenous communities is McKegney's interview with Janice C Hill Kanonhnsyonni. Kanonhnsyonni, a member of the Mohawk Nation, discusses with McKegney the effects of absent males of the young men in her community. In the interview, Kanonhnsyonni discusses that raising her two sons while they were young was a significant responsibility for the males in her community. As a single parent, the roles of men in her family structure were uncles, grandfathers, communities members. In the interview, Kanonhnsyonni discusses the absence of men taking on the roles necessary to teach young men to become responsible men in her community. Kanonhnsyonni explains;

> The unfortunate thing is that most men in our community don't know these things either, and there's been a whole range of reasons why that's happened. It goes back probably to contact or maybe even before that when our communities were not healthy. More recently, men aren't learning those roles themselves because there's nobody to teach them, or very few people to teach them, which goes back to the residential school era. (17)

Kanonhnsyonni describes the importance that men have in family roles and that her community continues to struggle with a lack of responsible men involved in their community.

Additionally, during Llyod L Lee's interview project where he interviewed 30 Diné men to better understand the impacts of contemporary male perspectives in the Diné community. Through Lee's interviews, many Diné men acknowledged that Diné men do respect women. However, this argument revolves around the men's age. Lee uses one of his interviewees (Scott) who mentions that "it depends on age. He feels older Diné men are very respectful to women, but that younger men are losing their cultural identity, picking up a "new" culture, not knowing their relations, and displaying aggressive behavior toward women" (Lee 218). Scott mentions things like domestic abuse stemming from drugs, alcohol, or a lack of discipline as some of the reasons why Diné men would not value women. Similarly, Frank, who was also interviewed by Lee also shares similar ideas of Diné men discussing that;

> some men will respect the Navajo women, but there are those who don't-because of the lack of understanding of the values of K'e and the clans. If we understand the values of a Diné woman, then the abuse can be lessened. But if we don't teach this to our children then when will this disrespect of Diné women stop? (218)

Kanonhnsyonni's and Alfred's interviews both surround Indigenous male absentees in respective communities follow similar paths as young Indigenous men grow up with the lack of positive Indigenous men within their families. This occurs not only at a family level, but also at a community level resulting in a lack of Indigenous men carrying essential teachings on the proper ways to respect and serve their families and communities and pass them on to younger generations.

Ratonhnhaké:ton's experience of family and community fit in this context, we see a young man lacking any chances to establish those relationships with the community members surrounding him, and lacking examples of a positive relationship as an Indigenous man in society. The only father figure in the game comes recently after Ratohnhaké:ton's community is destroyed through the character Achilles Davenport, a Carribean and British Assassin who lives

outside Ratohnhaké:ton's community. Upon meeting, Achilles begins to train Ratohnhaké:ton to become a better assassin. It is only after years of training with Achilles, a non-Mohawk adult male, that Ratohnhaké:ton develops the ability to become an assassin and fulfill his duty to protect his community's land from the Templars. The argument here is that there are no positive adult male Mohawk roles to teach Ratohnhaké:ton about his role within the community, and how he as a man has a responsibility to uphold.

Throughout this chapter, there have been several examples of video games depicting harmful tropes representing Indigenous cultures, traditions, and communities. Often shown as a tool that reinforces the othering of Indigenous peoples, these examples not only use favorite Western themes to continue the diminishment of said cultures but also continue to reinforce an othering mentality into newer forms of media. Games like *Until Dawn* use spiritual or Wendigo representations as a means to essentialize the significance of Indigenous traditional and cultural ties to sacred stories. Such distorted and negative depictions remove the importance of spirituality from Indigenous nations as intended the government intended when implementing policies such as residential schools and the 60's scoop and casts spiritual relationships as negative, and injurious, keeping young Indigenous peoples from re-joining their cultures or entering mainstream Canadian society.

Additionally, video games such as *Mad Dog 2: The Lost Gold* continue the trends of favorite Western-themed movies, depicting Indigenous peoples through both the Noble Savage and Savage trope. Visually, these tropes follow patterns seen in Hollywood Westerns depictions of Indians (Headdresses, buckskin clothing, and war paint) but it is important to note that within video games these tropes are only intensified through actions the player must pursue to reach the next story mission. Activities within *Mad Dog 2: The Lost Gold* that ask the player to attack a

Native American village, completely removing the Indian "threats," defending a "civilized" community in *Westerado* from an imposing Native American army. Each trope requires the player to either kill the "savages" or as the "savage" kill the non-Indigenous characters, ultimately recreating the destructive removal process of Indigenous peoples through the colonial expansion into the West.

Video game companies that are composed of a majority of non-Indigenous game developers using Indigenous cultures, traditions, and communities to flesh out their games are engaging in acts of appropriation in service to media stereotypes. However, what these developers are doing is only using one or minimal amount of aspects that Indigenous communities use to reinforce essential relationships to the environment, the animals, and beings in their specific area. In the game *Until Dawn*, the developers use the "Wendigo" NPC as distorted by non-Indigenous popular culture that the player must discover, but also overcome and defeat removes the important lessons and traditions that Indigenous communities have concerning the Wendigo. The Wendigo as depicted lacks the cultural aspects that tie the entity to a community, location or region. The game only uses the Wendigo's cannibalism to display the Wendigo as a dangerous, horrifying entity. To just depict the Wendigo as devoid of the lessons its stories conveyed in oral traditions suggests that Cree/Anishinaabe cultures only consist of stories emphasizing savage tropes. That only non-Cree, White characters can defeat the entity, freeing the Cree peoples from the tortures of the Wendigo. Ultimately limiting the relationships of Indigenous peoples when these tropes or images continue to identify Indigenous cultures, communities, and traditions for a mainstream, non-Indigenous audience.

However, harmful tropes surrounding Indigenous peoples were not the only Indigenous representation in video games, as Indigenous game developers use video games to address and fight these tropes through constructing positive images of Indigenous peoples, cultures, traditions, and communities. Indigenous video game developers are engaging in telling their communities' stories to create a counterbalance to mainstream video games and media interpretations of what Indigenous communities, cultures, and traditions are within the digital media format. The next chapter will focus on the strategies that many video game developers have implemented to reinforce positive Indigenous representations within video game media.

Chapter 3: Creating Relationships Through Digital Environments, and the Complexities of Indigenous Video Games

As technology continues to grow and expand interest globally, Indigenous video game creators interested in pursuing and expressing their cultural, traditional, and community stories grow as well. The previous chapter provided examples of some of the harmful tropes non-Indigenous video game developers have used that distort and essentialize the images and identities of Indigenous peoples through reinscribing negative representations like the Noble Savage tropes seen in other pop-culture media as well as appropriating representations of important beings or entities like the Wendigo completely devoid of cultural context. However, as more interest in providing a positive representation of Indigenous peoples through video games emerges, there are still issues concerning how, who, and what contributes content to the game. Problems surrounding Indigenous communities working with non-Indigenous video game developers to share their stories with a mainstream audience come to light as some elders feel that this interaction harms the validity of the relationships between the community and their culture. Famous video game developers like Ubisoft who used Mohawk culture in their popular franchise *Assassins Creed 3*, consulted with Mohawk community members to tell a story that revolves around a Mohawk character during the American Revolution. Complex games like *Assassins Creed 3*, create massive cinematic storylines, and vast open world environments that often leave out smaller intricacies of items, peoples, and communities in the game world that diminish relationships especially involving Indigenous peoples.

Although the efforts of corporate game developers to present more positive Indigenous images is appreciated, Indigenous communities are also interested in working with video game developers to positively and adequately construct digital environments that not only provide

accurate images to the public, but also ensure their culture, history, and traditions will be passed on to their own youth. These smaller projects, often overshadowed by mainstream video games, want to reconstruct positive themes surrounding Indigenous communities, cultures, and traditions. Indigenous owned companies such as; AbTeC, and Upper One Games both use different methods to create positive Indigenous representations. Each of these focus on a collective approach to sharing knowledge surrounding specific Indigenous communities, cultures, and traditions that not only distinguish their projects from other Indigenous themed video games but also begin to change the narratives that many mainstream media outlets (movies, television, comics) have created over several generations. However, as AbTeC and Upper One Games are smaller, independent developers attempting to change video game descriptions of Indigenous people, they must access large-scale audiences through multiple digital delivery formats. One of the games mentioned, *Never Alone*, reached a larger audience interested in more accurate digital depictions of Indigenous identity through not only releasing directly to game console streaming services but also by distributing the game as an app for phones and tablets.

Upper One Games developed *Never Alone*, also known as *Kisma Innitchuna* as a puzzle platform game with the Cook Inlet Tribal Council. The council originated from functions as a non-profit organization, constructed from regional corporations of the Alaskan Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971. These regional corporations "were organized quickly and began to invest their funds in a wide variety of economic enterprises" (Prucha 370), therefore, councils viewed digital media as a platform to support financially through this agreement. During the initial development of the project, the council consulted with E-Line Media, which develop educational video game media. The council then created a for-profit games studio called Upper

One games, being the “first Indigenous-owned video game developer in US history” (Matos 2014). *Never Alone* features two main characters; Nuna, a young Alaskan girl and a fox, who has befriended Nuna. The story itself is an Alaskan traditional story about an eternal blizzard. Never Alone initially started as a process in which Gloria O’ Neill, President, and CEO of the Cook Inlet Tribal Council, approached Native leaders, artists, and storytellers, one of them being Ishmael Hope. During this meeting, O’Neil’s message to the individuals making the game was that “this project needed to be an equal collaboration with Native people, not only because it was ethically responsible, but to make a better video game” (Hope 2014). *Never Alone’s* impact on video game storytelling is an essential step towards addressing how to implement sacred stories within this media. One essential aspect that Never Alone implements in the game is the Scrimshaw art style. In *Never Alone*, every chapter of the game begins with a cutscene that introduces the player to the chapter’s overarching story as well as new characters, environments and events delivered in the traditional scrimshaw art style through stop-motion photography.

Image 10; Displays the Scrimshaw artwork in Never Alone

Scrimshaw is a type of artwork that involves either scrollwork, engravings, or carvings on bone or ivory. Usually, designs within these artworks depict stories involving people, places, events, and beings, often told by the artist that created the piece. Scrimshaw can be comparable to other traditional art pieces that share conventional stories like beadworks, wampum belts, and Haida carving. The reason that these different types of art styles are essential to their communities is not just the stories that are told within the art form, but also that the style is so localized that it can be used to pinpoint where the item has come from. Additionally, the depiction of local animals on the pieces of art can also directly link the works to specific locations. Images of seals, polar bears, arctic foxes, and whales allow the artists to incorporate their territory into a piece of artwork that may be removed and placed in another location.

As video games like *Never Alone* display their effects on independent gaming development, comparing their products with those produced through youth-focused projects developed by AbTeC such as *Skins* will demonstrate the new platforms for Indigenous peoples to construct a framework for digital sovereignty that allows a reference point for constructing positive Indigenous identities in communities.

Never Alone and Assassins Creed 3

Creating ethical representations of Indigenous culture is done in multiple ways. One example of ethical storytelling within *Never Alone* is through the creation of the characters themselves. As previously mentioned earlier on in this chapter, in *Never Alone*, the player plays the game as Nuna (girl) and the Fox. However, the original Kunuuksaayuka story features a young boy. Upper One Games approached Robert Nasruk Clevland, who was the Inupiaq storyteller responsible for the game's story, to ensure proper and ethical procedures for any changes. For the story to have ethical representation in the game, Clevland asked that the original Kunuuksaayuka story be recorded before the start of development to reassure that the important lessons in the story would not be lost or diminished while translating the story into video game format. It was through Cleveland and his daughter Minnie Gray, the official consultant for the community, that the developers received permission to make changes to the story to better express it in game format. One example of that change was through the addition of a female character Nuna. Female characters were underrepresented in video games and have been mainly "hyper-sexualized" through the decades of Indian representations within video games. Hyper-sexuality is something that shares similarities with Western-themed cinema (Western Cowboy and Indian movies). The involvement of consultants like Clevland and Gray for the main story of

Never Alone directly confronted tropes like hyper-sexuality of Indigenous women throughout mainstream media to allow stories of strength, power, and community strength that comes from a female character. The way that Clevland and Gray approach the main story of *Never Alone* is something that Upper One Games used when they decided to create an expansion story involving Nuna and the Fox in another adventure involving traditional Alaskan stories entitled *Foxtales*.

Foxtales adds a smaller story within the world of *Never Alone*. Upper One Games once again worked closely with the Cook Inlet Native community in Alaska to fulfill the responsibilities of ethical storytelling. One way they would achieve this is working with the family of Willie Pank Goodwin Sr., who was the father of one of the lead story developers Ishmael Hope. Foxtales follows the story of "The Two Coastal Brothers" as Willie Panik Goodwin Sr tells it. Interdependence displayed between brothers shows a similar relationship that Nuna and the Fox have. A representative of Upper One Games explains "The interdependence between the two brothers in this traditional tale was compelling because in many ways it reflected the interdependence between Nuna and the Fox" (Upper One Games 2015). Panik goes on to explain that one of the brothers is an excellent hunter, while the other is a great swimmer. To defeat the main antagonist, the two brothers must work together, using their talents together to achieve their goals (Upper One Games).

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Indigenous consultants also worked alongside UbiSoft to ensure that the video game *Assassins Creed 3* upheld their community's values. During the first year of development, Ubisoft decided that to ensure factual accuracies of Connor's culture and traditions, the team needed to work with Mohawk cultural consultants. Additionally, Ubisoft worked with the Mohawk community surrounding Montreal for assistance in translating, singing, and voice acting. One of the Indigenous consultants is Thomas Deer, who was a part of the

Kanien'kehá:ka Onkwawén:na Raotitiohkwa Language Cultural Center, helped steer the company in a direction that positively depicted his community's cultures, and traditions. Deer played an essential role in what or who made it into the game. For example, Ubisoft wanted to incorporate ceremonial false face masks into the game. However, Deer informed the company that any visual depictions of these masks would be offensive. Additionally, Deer advised the team about the types of clothing, jewelry, and traditional songs to exclude from the game. (Newman) Deer's role as an Indigenous consultant shows that non-Indigenous companies working in collaboration with Indigenous communities can positively represent Indigenous cultures, traditions, and communities. This collaboration between Deer and Ubisoft created opportunities for the game to immerse the player into a world that positively reinforces Indigenous cultures.

Skins Project:

Collaboration between Indigenous people and mainstream game development is still in its infancy stages, whereas collaborations within independent game development is something that has been building since the late 1990's. These smaller, community-based projects initially reintroduced historical events surrounding Indigenous cultures using digital platforms. Building from historical projects like *Cyber PowWow*, community culture based game projects like *Skins* work with Indigenous communities to incorporate positive representations into video games.

The *Skins* project has its origins in Cyber PowWow, an online art gallery and chat room that Jason Edward Lewis and Skawennati Fragnito established in 1996 as an Aboriginally determined space on the internet to display and discuss original visual and written work created for the digital environment on the Palace platform. In 2005, Fragnito and Lewis migrated their

online sovereign community to AbTeC, headquartered in the Indigenous Futures Cluster at the Milieux Institute for Art, Culture, and Technology at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec, and then re-framed it as an "Aboriginally determined research-creation network whose goal is to ensure Indigenous presence in the web pages, online environments, video games, and virtual worlds that comprise cyberspace" (AbTeC website).

Fragnito and Lewis would construct three main goals to define Aboriginal engagement within new media formats; 1) the creation of original artwork that addresses the future of Native people on this continent. 2) Educating Aboriginal youth in new production technologies, emphasizing the integration of Indigenous storytelling techniques and stories. 3) developing a direction where Indigenous youth can move from new media consumption to new media development, ultimately bringing that production and development knowledge back to their Indigenous communities. Today, AbTeC is an award-winning educational platform funded through grants and private donations seeking to construct the foundation, the sovereign space to bring together Indigenous artists, technologies, and academics to discuss creation and research strategies. Two game-related outcomes came from these discussions, the Skins Workshops on Aboriginal Storytelling and Video Game Design, which has been shared with Indigenous youth in urban centers and on reservations since 2006, and the *TimeTraveller* machinima project which re-creates important Indigenous historical moments in a virtual environment with interactive characters.

The goal of the *Skins* project as Lameman, Lewis, and Fragnito describe as a "workshop to a pedagogy that integrated North American Indigenous cultural frameworks into the design of video games and virtual environments. Skins provides instruction in digital design, art, animation, audio and programming within a context of Aboriginal stories and storytelling

techniques" (1). The project's pilot workshop was with Mohawk youth at the Kahnawake Survival School, where students developed interactive environments based upon traditional stories from their community (Lameman, Lewis and Fragnito). The project's process required the students to

> reflect on how they knew these stories, who had told them, and which stories were appropriate for such remediation. In the process, AbTeC found that the discussions about these stories in the context of technical skills development provided substantial motivation for both further inquiries into the stories and greater participation in the skills development." (1)

The *Skins* Workshop on Aboriginal Storytelling and Video Game Design sought to integrate both Indigenous stories and storytelling techniques into the video game production process and to involve Indigenous youth as producers of media. Ultimately, they hoped to encourage the youth to experiment with ways their communities could use media as a tool for preserving and advancing their culture and languages. To date, this workshop has involved students primarily from Fragnito's home community, Kahnawake Mohawk Territory, in the development of four games. The workshops titled Skin 1.0-4.0 all followed the same processes with young Indigenous artists recruited to begin development for each project.

The first project titled *Skins 1.0: Otsi:! Rise of the Kanien'kehá*:*ka Legends* took place at the Kahnawake Survival School from September 2008 to June 2009. The game they designed revolves around several Kahnawake tales to create a narrative about an Iroquois hunter on a mission to stop the Flying Head from destroying the hunter's village. The participants designed a multiple level game which involves players interacting with the Flying Head's origin story through to the eventual interaction of the Iroquois hunter's elders. In each of the levels, the player interacts with a creature or multiple creatures from a different Kahnawake legend; such as the Monkey Dog, Hoof Lady, and the Tree People. However, the group decided, because of the

lack of time, to only focus on one level during this workshop. This level begins with an elder discussing the way that the Flying Head originated, as a consequence of the village to listen to the elders, which results in the hunter having to fight his way through a horde of Tree People to get back home. Once there, the hunter must fight against the Flying Head to save his community. Due to the lack of time, the workshop was only able to construct one level during their initial workshop, however, this level alongside characters, environments would transfer into the third project.

The second project titled, *Skins 2.0: The Adventure of Skahión:ati: Legend* of the Stone Giant originated at the Skins Summer Institute which took place from July 16th to 19th, 2011 at the Concordia University in Montreal. This game tells the story of an arrogant young man who had a reputation in his village as an individual who likes to boast. One of the elders in the village wanted to teach Skahión:ati a lesson in humility, so he sent the young man to fight the Stone Giant. The Stone Giant is a being that has caused the community hardships by making all the fish in the surrounding rivers disappear. With the vast differences in strength, the young man attempts to trick the Stone Giant to chase him back and forth across the river. Doing this, however, causes Skahión:ati to drop his ax, which the Stone Giant then picks up and tests the sharpness of the ax by licking the blade. Skahión:ati witnesses the Stone Giant do this and remembers of what an elder told him -that if Stone Giant's saliva gets onto something, it will make that item invincible. The Giant then threw the ax away, splitting two large boulders in half, allowing Skahión:ati an opportunity to recover the ax. After realizing what he has done, the Stone Giant begs for Skahión:ati's mercy, promising that he will leave the village alone.

Skins 3.0 took place at Concordia University in Montreal from March 2012 to July 2012. The project titled *Skahión:ati: Rise of the Kanien'kehá:ka Legends* combined both stories into

one larger four-level video game. In this game, the player meets Skahión:hati as a brash, young man who desperately wants to get out of his village. The young man is sent on a mission to fight the Stone Giant. Later on, after defeating the giant and becoming a better fighter, he is again sent out to overcome the zombie-like Tree People. Finally, after overcoming both enemies, the man begins his quest to beat the Flying Head boss.

The fourth and final Skins project took place again at Concordia University in Montreal from May 27th to June 14th, 2013. During development, the workshop put together multiple goals for the game's story. They decided to launch a new game in which the main character would be a strong, educated Mohawk woman and that the story should be set in the modern day, to avoid the typical Native stereotypes.

This project, titled, *lenién:te and the Pacemaker's Wampum* follows the heroine, lenién:te returning home from University with a newly acquired Archeology degree. She is suddenly visited in a dream by a bear spirit. The spirit tells her that there are evil wrongdoings nearby and that she is the only one that can set things straight. With a combination of University intelligence and traditional knowledge that has been passed down from her grandmother, lenién:te avoids the security guards (enemies in the game) and begins to solve increasingly difficult puzzles. Solving puzzles ultimately leads her to reach an ancient artifact the Peacemaker's original wampum. However, the evil professor steals the wampum to use it for his immortality. The only way in which lenién:te can stop the professor is through rediscovering her culture and returning the artifacts stolen from her community.

The first three projects centered on the Otsi and Skahión:hati's characters that have appeared in traditional stories within the Kahnawake community. Otsi is said to represent the consequences of not listening to the elders in the community, whereas the Skahión:hati is

something of a trickster, continually being or causing trouble for himself and others. Lenién:te's story, in contrast, represented some of the more contemporary issues many Indigenous peoples face when it comes to the imbalance between University and traditional education which is a constant struggle in modern society. Many Universities still wrestle with perceiving Indigenous knowledge and the methods used to transmit it to the next generation as equally valid when compared to Eurocentric ideas of how to value and transmit knowledge. The Peacemaker's Wampum presents the player with the idea of imbalances in the representations of the University professor character as an evildoer, only interested in selfish gains of immortality.

Indigenous themed video games rely on programming tools and the format itself to portray "accurate" depictions of Indigenous identity which include; storytellers, traditional, and cultural items. The accurate style of storytelling could attempt to shift the perspectives of negative mythical narratives of Western culture. This idea is similar to what Ross Dunn describes as the "patterns of change." Dunn's argument according to Squire is that; "students should understand the processes that pull people together (trade, networks, religion, and culture) or create differences (geographical isolation, political units, or culture)" (112). Dunn argues that instead of teaching a slew of civilizations, like Egypt, Rome, and Renaissance Europe, instead engage the students by organizing learning through participating in answering new questions.

The process of engaging exciting questions can be directly linked to games like *Never Alone* and the multiple *Skins* workshop games as they don't retell history through the Western colonial lens. Instead, they retell culture, and as they tell stories they individualize and identify the communities behind the games. *Skahión:ati: Rise of the Kanien'kehá:ka Legends* provides a different take on Indigenous histories within that game's story which offers important character lessons. Some examples of this include things like the young warrior being too loud and brash or

thinking that he knows more than what the people in the community may know. The character's way of thinking presents a way of thinking around unequal representations of knowledge between the two parties involved. The character lacks respect for his community, resulting in the community forcing the young man to take on the Stone Giant and Flying Head. The idea of an individual's knowledge or thinking about being better than multiple ways of thinking presents itself through the characters' relationship with their community. *Never Alone* shares similar views as those of the *Skins* project with the emphasis and involvement of non-human characters providing numerous ways of thinking. Some examples of interactions between the player and the environment include things like the winds and animals. These ways of thinking provide educational teachings through the environment that encompass the importance of interacting with communities compared to solely only through human interactions. The four Skins projects were not the only project to emerge from AbTeC; another important game-based project based in Indigenous history rather than cultural stories is *TimeTraveller*.

The *TimeTraveller* project combined the interactivity of video games with the cinematic experience of the film. The story followed a young Mohawk man in the twenty-second century, who was adrift in a high-tech society that ultimately cut him off from his ancestors. To address this, the man uses a newer form of technology called the *TimeTraveller* to revisit some of the significant events of the First Nations people of Turtle Island. While traveling throughout different time periods, Hunter participates in some historical events to understand how he can incorporate traditional practices into his modern lifestyle. The series spans ten episodes in which Fragnito provides locations, eras, and individuals from several different cultures, to present multiple different Indigenous perspectives on historical events from the past. These events include: an Aztec festival in 1490, the Minnesota Massacre of 1862, the Oka Crises of 1990 and

the occupation of Alcatraz in 1962. Fragnito uses these historical events as stepping stones for reimagining actual past events from the Native perspective to create a fantasy future, at the Manitouahbee Intergalactic Pow Wow in 2112, where the "current" setting of this story takes place. It is important to note here that *TimeTraveller* differs from *Skins* as Fragnito solely developed *TimeTraveller* while the Skins games were a communal effort with Mohawk youth. Historical events told through *TimeTraveller* reconstructs Indigenous histories that mainstream educational materials historical education materials. The *TimeTraveller* project begins to address the imbalance of historical education through generations of misguided educational materials.

An example of this imbalance is the politicized nature of historical education in both grade school and university curriculums. The main argument is whether or not "to teach history as narratives in which evidence is mobilized to make arguments as heritage (myth or fiction)" (Squire 111). Universities in North America promulgate the idea of a whole and inevitable Western civilization that unifies Greco-Roman law, free-market capitalism, and Protestant Christianity. These "values" were then used to enculturate U.S. immigrants during westward expansion into Indigenous territory. "Even when people talk about "Western culture" today, they usually cherry-pick which part counts as "civilized": Greece's government is good, but its religion and sexual practices are bad" (Squire 111-112). The same can be said for the study of Indigenous history within the grade school education system as well. Many of the social studies/ Canadian history courses revolve around outdated material that describes initial meeting of Europeans and Indigenous peoples as positive and benevolent. Grade school History or social studies classes gloss over Indigenous "ways of life," comparing them to Eurocentric roles and responsibilities and use this to assimilate, to undermine essential relationships, community structures, and ways of life that differentiate Indigenous nations from early European settlers.

Examples of this include depictions of acts of savagery, simplistic speech, and even violent simple minded lifestyles within each Indigenous community. Cultural stories and history created within the "Western Culture" ways of thinking involves devaluing any culture that does not share the similar practices that Western civilizations value.

The *TimeTraveller* series is a niche media genre called machinima. Machinima is the combination of the use of real-time video game engines and their virtual worlds to create cinematics in a video format. In short, one could think of machinima as a movie made from a video game. This style of media usually does not include any representations of the story of the actual game. Instead, it creates its own story. Creators repurpose technology to take characters and settings of those games and create their personal stories. Fragnito's interest in using modern technology (video games/ internet) is to use the massively multiplayer online game titled Second Life as a platform to allow her to create the *TimeTraveller's* world within it to tell Indigenous stories.

Both projects allow Indigenous digital artists to incorporate Indigenous identity into newer forms of digital media. *Skins* incorporates Indigenous cultures into video games through community development and *TimeTravller* places Indigenous historical events into the machinima format. Both reconstruct how to view Indigenous cultures and histories respectfully through the use of technology. However, there are still some struggles within these projects. For example, AbTeC has yet to start on their third and final goal for young Aboriginal people to "move from new media technology consumption to production to development and bring that production and development back to the reserve" (Fragnito & Lewis 2005). The argument made here is that there is a continuous need for Indigenous youth to work alongside elders and storytellers in order to grasp the full potential of digital media without having to worry about

some of the consequential factors that may arise within the founding processes of game development after students leave the workshop and continue developing digital media in their respective communities.

As technology continues to advance and become more accessible for communities, projects like the *Placeholder* project developed by Interval Research Corporation and The Banff Centre for The Performing Arts, use tools such as virtual reality to create opportunities to establish communities within the digital space through the use of social interactions as one of their focal points. Constructing positive representations for Indigenous peoples continue to grow at a global level.

Placeholder Project

One project that encompasses the impact of digital space is the Placeholder project. The *Placeholder* project was a research project for narrative action in virtual environments. The projects focus was locations as Brenda Laurel, Rachel Strickland, and Rob Tow describe the location in "the vicinity of Banff National Park in Alberta, Canada- the Middle Spring (a sulfur hot spring in a natural cave), a waterfall in Johnston Canyon, and a formation of hoodoos overlooking the Bow River" (Laurel, Strickland and Tow). The Placeholder project uses three-dimensional video graphics, spatialized sound and words, and simple character animations to construct campsites that could be visited by two remote participants using head-mounted displays (Laurel, Strickland and Tow). People could interact with the environment by walking, speaking and using their hands to touch objects. Throughout *Placeholder,* players were able to leave Voice marks, bite-sized voice clips throughout the environment that other players could interact with or discover. These Voice marks took inspiration from the pictograms or trail signs

that people leave in natural settings while exploring. *Placeholder* allows the virtual landscape to accumulate its definition through messages and storylines that players leave behind. Ultimately, the production team hoped that project would foster new ways of engaging in narrative play.

One main objective of *Placeholder,* as Strickland describe's was to;

> experiment with capturing actual places- in the attitude of landscape painting or traditions or documentary cinema, for example- using video and audio recorded on location as the raw material for constructing the virtual environment. It must be emphasized that we were not concerned with achieving a high degree of sensory realism- something bristling with polygons and MIPs that might induce a perfect audiovisual delusion of sticking your head in a "real" waterfall… What we have really set out to capture or reproduce is just the simplest "sense of place." (Strickeland, par.8)

Additionally, Rachel uses Architectural scholar Christian Norberg-Schulz's book *Genius Loci,* to reinforce that there are two levels for articulating structures of a place (Norberg-Schultz). The word "genius loci," a Latin phrase for "guardian spirit of a place" whose presence accounts for the life of the place and determines the characters or essences that share similar concepts amongst indigenous cultures around the world. (Laurel, Strickland and Tow) Norberg-Schulz argues that Spatial Organization, or Knowing Where One Is Here as space that it denotes three-dimensional organizing of elements that define a specific place. This organization may also correspond to landscapes and even transportation routes. The spatial organization of a place influences how people position themselves in the environment to find their way around, and how they avoid getting lost (Norberg-Schultz).

Additionally, the second structure of a place is the character or knowing that one is here. The second structure includes specifications such as atmosphere, weather, lighting, and time that ultimately links the presence with the character (Norberg-Schultz). The "structure of place" as Christian describes it is something that many Indigenous communities mention when describing

relationships with the land, animals and the beings around their communities. All of these provide a framework, connectivity, and ultimately identity for Indigenous communities. However, concerns surrounding the increasing implementation of digital media raise questions as to who or what is representative of community traditions, and cultures.

As technology continues to innovate, generating more opportunities for people to expand ideas and expectations on how to develop a digital space that positively reinforces culture, identity, and tradition, digital space becomes a priority many communities must venture into. However, digital space is still in its infancy, often lacking useful frameworks for roles and responsibilities for Indigenous communities. This section of my thesis will discuss one project that uses digital tools similar to those that Skins use to construct positive representations within Indigenous communities outside North America as well as what factors impact whether needed frameworks that ensure positive roles and responsibilities for Indigenous communities in the digital environment continue to exist. Digital space carries the potential to reinforce language and culture regardless of where the youth live. The potential of constructing projects similar to Skins is recognized globally. Indigenous communities in New Zealand, for example, share similar desires to incorporate their cultures into the digital environment.

SimPa Project

SimPa is a Māori focused project that aims to provide Māori stories in 3D game worlds. The project recognizes that Māori culture is essential to identity, community, and cultures in New Zealand. Mann et al. explain that "the project will assist in the creation of 3D game-based Māori digital content so that distinctly Māori voices, stories, and cultural content can be encouraged and promoted" (165). This project benefits from both technology and culture, which

Mann et al. refers to as Iwi digital content looking to achieve this through active engagement and participation. The Māori digital content aims to develop a structure that resembles the Maori culture in games development. To create structures using the SimPa program that further develops a new subject area, ultimately training digital storytellers (Mann et al.).

During the project, participants learned about ceremonies and traditions, the environment, people and finally the history from Rūnka elders who were experts in Māori oral history and local knowledge (Mann et al.). Using the SimPa toolkit, students worked alongside Rūnaka members and supervisors to create "GamePa," a virtual environment. During development, the participants created landscapes, environments, and include cultural specific activities such as food gathering. The importance of the Māori game workshops are key to the New Zealand Government's Digital Strategy to use technology; "to connect people to the things that matter most to them, express our creative talents, celebrate the unique culture of Maori, and strengthen our links to our South Pacific neighbors" (Mann et al. 166). Ultimately, digital technology presents the potential to include all peoples and communities regardless of geographic location.

SimPa brings together two essential aspects of stories and computing. By combining the two, the project provided multiple benefits that could not be achieved otherwise — benefits that include an increase in Maori recognition, values, and access to history involving the Rūnaka people, the provision of a unique narrative tool, and the provision of a virtual meeting space on an international level in their own landscape (Mann et al.). Similar to the Skins project, the workshop followed identical objectives that encouraged youth to work alongside elders to develop games fostering Māori oral and traditional relationships.

As mentioned earlier in this Chapter, the *Skins* workshops proved a great success in developing a curriculum to engage Indigenous youth to create digital spaces for their

communities. After the workshops concluded, they found that in addition to the normal class hours, many of the students actively spent large amounts of time enrolling in additional workshops. These workshops included "programming, art, design, writing, audio, and image production" (Lameman et al. 7). These workshops demanded teamwork and leadership from each participant and required each student to manage time, critical thinking and cultural reflection skills. The workshops gave AbTeC's essential information on remediating stories and storytelling techniques of Aboriginal peoples. During the first *Skins* project, the workshop met the majority of their objectives. Stories implemented within the game came alive for the students in telling and discussing them, resulting in an engaging game. The students were able to create their own story, and ultimately, transform their narratives into a game space and gameplay (Lameman et al. 2010).

Additionally, another important outcome from the workshop was that the

> Kahnawake youth are interested in integrating that stories they know from their communities into new media formats. They are respectful of the stories but are creative about imaging how they might be modified or expanded-where appropriate – to accommodate new media forms of telling. They are capable of translating those stories through the complex development process necessary for creating a digital game or environment. (19-20)

The educational tools that AbTeC developed for the Skins project are available for free online from the AbTeC website that allowing communities to continue to conduct workshops that include play, storytelling, and game designs. Even if the community lacks technology, these workshops still occur (Lameman et al. 2010). Projects like *Skins* display pivotal frameworks that engage Indigenous youth in continuing their relationships not only with their community, but with development tools that can preserve their culture through audio, programming, and art design amongst others.

Conclusion

Digital media can reshape the way people perceive cultures and communities as younger generations of people continue to explore this media as technology advances with every generation. Digital technology is an interest for many Indigenous communities who wish to pursue ethical ways of including their cultures into newer forms of technology. However, perceptions surrounding physical space come into question as more Indigenous communities begin to rely on digital space for connecting with their members in an era where land-based education is considered increasingly important. As younger generations of Indigenous peoples move away from their traditional homelands in more significant numbers, reliance on digital media to stay connected with family and cultural heritage back home increases. Messaging, however, can consistently change within digital spaces as more input from people sharing similar backgrounds, experiences, and relationships is shared. For many communities, this becomes a concern when representations within digital media become intertwined with traditional roles and non-traditional associations. Joshua Meyowritz describes this in his book *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior*, as "the change in the information characteristics of traditional groups lead to two complementary phenomena: the decreasing importance of traditional groups ties and the increasing importance of other types of association" (131). Connectivity through digital media for Indigenous communities raises concerns as many feel digital space assimilates communities and traditions. It is up to them to re-establish the importance of community roles and responsibilities through digital media to rebalance what potential disconnection may arise while incorporating digital space into physical spaces.

Roles and responsibilities can continue to resemble those of natural communities if input and relationships continue to be reflected similarly within digital spaces. Reconnecting people physically removed from their communities through digital space is essential, as technology can quickly bring individuals back to their respective communities. It is important to note that because physical presence declines within Indigenous communities with every generation, roles of elders and youth can still preserve the importance of relationships through contributions in digital space. Knowledge can again be passed down, and relations can always be upheld using technology. As Meyrowitz explains; "electronic media affect social roles because they bypass the communication that once made particular places unique. More and more, people are living in a natural (or international) information system rather than a local town or city" (146). Reconstructing relationships within Indigenous communities through digital media allows families to reconnect that are separated by physical space. However, concerns arise as aspects of identity become harder to simulate within digital media outlets that involve larger, multi-ethnic groups, which incorporate more substantial inputs from people that undermined or underestimate essential aspects of a particular culture.

Relationships within the digital realm have considerably more identity issues compared to physical ones. Part of the problem, as Meyrowitz describes, is that "the integration of social spheres does not simply give people new places to play their old roles; it changes the roles that are played. As place and information access become disconnected, place-behaviors and activities begin to fade" (148). Within physical connections, roles of elders or community leaders become tied to community presence. These social spheres reinforce the importance of continuing roles and responsibilities, tying individuals back into their culture. Using digital games, social media sites, blogs and even digital phone channels like *Skype, Zoom, Discord,* or *Line,* youth can now

reconnect and often teach older generations to harness these technological gifts as tools for reinforcing positive relationships. What digital media achieves is significant, as on the one hand they can strengthen roles and responsibilities of older people in the community, but can also change how to address challenges that result from being physically distant from their community. As technology continues to develop and expand concepts of space, people use this space as an opportunity to inform and to connect over vast distances.

Additionally, technology is used to explore ideas and values that otherwise would not be accessible in the physical area. As Eric Gordon explains;

> local space is defined by a users ability to locate information flows… local information acquisition, once regulated to the sidewalk conversation, church meetings, town halls, is not potentially extended to the internet or mobile phone… In each case, they are privy to local information without setting foot in the physical space to which information is accessed, in a networked society. (26)

Local space can be restructured in Indigenous video games as a definite form only if these relationships are upheld and respected. Video games present information to a multitude of different generations that play them. For comparison, books have confidently separate age groups according to the complexities of the material, whereas digital media like video games allow the more adult-oriented content to be more readily accessed for younger generations. Gordon describes this by saying "a child's age was once a prime determinant of what he or she knew. Very different types of children were exposed to similar information because they were in the same age group. Now children of every age are presented with "all-age" social information through electronic media" (qtd. in Meyrowitz 151). An "all-ages" information system dissolves the restrictive order placed on written information, as the specific or adult-focused content is more accessible in this platform. Information in digital media consistently shifts and changes depending on who or what factors contribute within them. Multiple aspects of Indigenous

imagery portray the complexities facing identity, culture and traditional values when describing what makes an Indigenous person Indigenous. However, it is through workshops like *Skins* or *SimPa* that focus on constructing positive educational strategies that address the shifting changes in digital environments.

Conclusion: The Digital Path Moving Forward

Mainstream media has evolved over generations of representations of Indigenous people in digital media. Media representations of the 20th century reintroduced the primitive and Noble Savage tropes through popular media outlets designed to either diminish or romanticize Indigenous identity. Generations later, pop-culture media has evolved through generations of technical advancements incorporated into digital environments. However, those similar tropes were not left behind in Dime Novels and popular Western movies; they continued to "evolve" with technology through the internet, video games, and virtual reality. Newer forms of digital media construct non-linear, multiple media-incorporated environments that construct environments allowing for vast opportunities for reinforcing negative stereotypes.

Video games heavily rely on incorporating multiple media formats to enhance the game's environment, story, and characters. However, video games like *Mad Dog 2: The Lost Gold*, and *Westerado: Double Barreled* use Indigenous tropes as the focal point in their games in ways that reinforce romanticization seen in Hollywood Western films. Both of these games are even more problematic as they require the player to act violently towards Indigenous people *Mad Dog 2: The Lost Gold* requires the player to physically point a gun controller at the Native American characters and shoot them to proceed through the game, and *Westerado: Double Barreled* allows the player to choose to kill or assist the Native American characters. Both games share a similar relationship with reinforcing a violent removal of an Indigenous community or reinforcing violent actions on said communities. Not only do negative tropes stick to Indigenous images from Western-themed media, but also through scientific, spiritual/mystical representations as well. *Until Dawn* uses mystical entity tropes that appropriates Wendigo representations of

Indigenous mystical beings into their game. However, non-Indigenous game developers assume all Indigenous communities have the same traditional and cultural representations of said entities. All three games are examples of non-Indigenous game designers reinforcing harmful tropes of Indigenous people.

Yet, opportunities to assert digital sovereignty are giving Indigenous communities the tools to push back against these tropes. Video games have established themselves as a pivotal format for future generations of Indigenous communities as digital media becomes more and more a platform for the preservation and delivery of traditions, cultures, and identity. However, placing Indigenous knowledge and traditions into video game ecosystems respectfully is complex, requiring developers to implement complicated rules and responsibilities that Indigenous peoples must follow when creating digital content. Frameworks for responsible implementation have already been constructed through the *Skins* workshop, allowing Indigenous communities complete digital sovereignty over their identity.

Workshops like the *Skins* and *SimPa* are expanding rapidly at a global level, reaching into remote regions often restricted from acquiring outside technologies. Game workshops allow all generations of Indigenous community members to participate in transitioning their traditional knowledge into digital projects and platforms so as to incorporate as much authenticity into the game as possible. Combining multiple inputs from community members creates the community's identity in the digital space. These workshops are made more accessible to smaller, remote populations that can use the workshop tools with little or minimal amount of investment, as the majority of the game developing tools can be easily accessed with minimal technology virtually anywhere with an internet connection. Also, providing educational lectures and training for students opens up opportunities for Indigenous youth to learn about the various media forms

included in video game media. This connectivity allows the community to create and maintain an identity. Having these opportunities allows for Indigenous communities to counteract the generations of negative Indigenous representations that diminished culture, traditions and identity.

Mainstream video game companies that use tropes involving Indigenous peoples only restrict and reduce the essential relationships between all forms of media in the game. These tropes widely generalize and dissociate Indigenous cultures and the crucial links to their respective communities. Games like *Assassins Creed 3* and *Never Alone* take the essential steps that connect the necessary framework that provides Indigenous youth insight towards positive Indigenous representations. However, unintentional tropes based on character motivations or even the games overall gameplay mechanic can that hinder responsible representation. Projects like Indigitalgames.com continue to construct frameworks to analyze representations of Indigenous people and provide opportunities for Indigenous people to examine and counteract tropes that otherwise will continue to define Indigenous cultures, nations, and traditions in digital spaces. Further development into newer media forms like virtual reality, requires further research into the viewpoint of the gamer who becomes wholly immersed, coming physically closer in the digital space. With workshops like *Skins* continuing to expand into more isolated Indigenous communities, the restructuring of Indigenous identity continues to grow in the digital world and will continue to develop across the globe.

List of Images:

Image 1; Laser Games, 1992. *Mad Dog 2: The Lost Gold.* Shooting Beaver. Accessed on 25th September 2018.

Image 2; Laser Games, 1992. *Mad Dog 2: The Lost Gold.* Accessed on 25th September 2018. https://www.old-games.com/screenshot/7871-6-mad-dog-ii-the-lost.jpg

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Image 7: Supermassive Games, 2015. *Until Dawn.* Wendigo Sam 2. Accessed on 25th September 2018. http://until-dawn.wikia.com/wiki/File:Wendigo_Sam_2.png

Image 8: Supermassive Games, 2015. *Until Dawn.* Totems. Accessed on 25th September 2018. http://www.neoseeker.com/until-dawn/walkthrough/Totems

Image 9: Supermassive Game, 2015. *Until Dawn.* Butterfly Prophecies. Accessed on 25th September 2018. http://until-dawn.wikia.com/wiki/Totems?file=ButterflyProphecies.jpg

Image 10: E- Line Media, 2014. *Never Alone*; Scrimshaw. Accessed on 25th September, 2018. https://callumhonoursproject.wordpress.com/2015/12/11/case-study-never-alone-kisima-ingitchuna-2014/

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