

"YOU MUST DEFEAT SHEN LONG TO STAND A CHANCE":  
STREET FIGHTER, RACE, PLAY, AND PLAYER

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## ABSTRACT

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The “fighting game,” a video game genre that pits a player’s character against a computer or second player’s character in a tournament-style fighting match, was established as a viable and popular genre with the video game *Street Fighter II* in 1991. That game established most of the conventions of the genre that are still in use today, including the tendency to have multiple characters coming from a variety of world locations as the central figures of the game’s narrative. *Street Fighter II*, subtitled *The World Warriors*, and the series it spawned, which includes over 25 titles in less than 20 years, can be used as an effective example in which to delve into the meaning of playing video games. In this study, I plan to use the Street Fighter series as a site to investigate four different aspects of gaming and games. First, what does it mean to play a game? How is this different from consuming other media and how does the Street Fighter series in particular organize play? Second, from where do the images and narratives of race in Street Fighter come? What does the media history of Street Fighter tell us about how Street Fighter considers and creates racial discourse? Third, what complications arrive when these images and stories become playable within a game? What role does the player have in shaping game ideology, and what role do games have in shaping player ideology? Lastly, what do the players themselves have to say about their experiences with Street Fighter, and how do those responses better illuminate our understanding of race and play? By combining all four aspects, this project seeks to understand Street Fighter in order to understand larger concepts of race, play, and player.

To Kirk Lawrence, the best Player 2 anybody could have ever known.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER I. THE DELIBERATE WARRIOR: ISSUES OF GAMES LITERACY	
IN STREET FIGHTER .....	17
Battles Invalidated: The Failings of Traditional Narrative Understandings of	
Street Fighter .....	18
Deliberation vs. Attention: Consuming Street Fighter .....	24
Ryu Is Not Ken: Street Fighter Narrative Informing Street Fighter Gameplay .....	33
The Synthesis of Narratology and Ludology .....	41
CHAPTER II. STORY AND GRAPHICS: RACE AT PLAY IN IMAGE AND	
NARRATIVE .....	44
An “Other” Selectable Self .....	45
Us, You, and Them: East Asian, the White West, and the Monstrous Other .....	51
CHAPTER III. THE RACE GAME: WHY PLAY MATTERS .....	79
The Mitigation of Prowess .....	81
“Versus” Matters .....	86
Winning and Losing the Game of Race .....	88
CHAPTER IV. THE FIGHTER’S VOICE (IS LARGELY SILENT): A (FAILED)	
ONLINE ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF STREET FIGHTER	
PLAYERS.....	96
Who Plays This Thing Anyway? .....	97
Methodology .....	99

Results .....	102
The Players' Responses, Both Dismissive and Informative .....	105
Player Complicity in Video Game Ideology .....	110
Is the Black Zombie Black? .....	112
CONCLUSION .....	116
REFERENCES AND ILLUSTRATIONS .....	122
APPENDIX A. ETHNOGRAPHIC SURVEY .....	128
APPENDIX B. SURVEY RESPONSES.....	133

## INTRODUCTION

Fingers tap on buttons. Eyes dart across the screen. “Watch this,” someone whispers to his friend. The moment is tense. The combatants never waver, their wrists flicking the joystick deliberately, strategically. The game music changes, becomes faster. Finally, the game announces “K.O.!” The defeated player steps away from the machine, eyes slightly downcast. A member of the waiting throng advances to the machine, inserts his coins, and quickly slaps the “start” button. “A new challenger!” the game announces.

*Street Fighter II*, a 1991 arcade release from Osaka-based Japanese game company Capcom,<sup>1</sup> wasn’t the first fighting game, but it was the first fighting game that truly mattered. Fighting games are defined by a few generic conventions, all of which were popularized by *Street Fighter II*. Combat is a player-versus-player affair, with the emphasis on competitive play. There are multiple characters from which to choose, many of them differing widely in speed, power, and play style. The winner of each player-versus-player match earns the right to continue playing on the machine, fighting against computer AI-controlled opponents or further human challengers. “Expert players could continue on one coin, while lousy players kept feeding the machine in hopes of victory. [...] This loser-pays model was so successful that it was [adopted] not just by *Street Fighter II* developer Capcom, but by the entire Japanese gaming industry.”<sup>2</sup> When imported to the United States, this model remained. These conventions have carried over into fighting games on home consoles, and competitive play has moved out of the arcades and into the realm of online matches over Internet connections. In February 2009, *Street Fighter IV* debuted in the United States on Microsoft’s Xbox 360 and Sony’s Playstation 3,

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Ashcraft with Jean Snow, *Arcade Mania! The Turbo-Charged World of Japan’s Game Centers* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2008), 92.

<sup>2</sup> Brian Ashcraft with Jean Snow, *Arcade Mania! The Turbo-Charged World of Japan’s Game Centers* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2008), 93.



becoming an instant hit with 2 million copies shipped worldwide.<sup>3</sup> The popularity of the Street Fighter series is evidenced by its proliferation (more than 25 titles have been released over a 20-year period), its translation into other media (multiple animated series based on the games have been released in Japan, and two Street Fighter feature films have been produced in English for a worldwide audience), and even its influence on the way game machines were designed.

“Nintendo designed the Super Famicom home console controller with six buttons just so the company could release *Street Fighter II* in homes.”<sup>4</sup>

The importance of Street Fighter within the realm of video games—economically, culturally, and architecturally—marks it as a series of texts ripe for investigation. This project aims to dissect Street Fighter in four distinct contexts: games literacy, images and narratives of race, race and prowess, and the understanding of these factors by the game-playing community. Though they will be separated for the purposes of the organization of this project, the four contexts overlap and intersect with each other continuously. I further contend that all of these aspects must be considered within the context of a Japanese text made for a world audience. Street Fighter, as evidenced by its popularity in the West and the way it has been remodeled and recreated in Western popular culture, is something of a hybrid text, representing a Japanese popular consciousness that has been heavily influenced by domestic and international media. Street Fighter trades in visual stereotype, but these stereotypes are often linked to depictions of physical prowess and discourses of power that have some small capacity for empowerment of the stereotyped peoples. Additionally, I argue that all visual and narrative elements of Street Fighter

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<sup>3</sup> David Jenkins, “Capcom enjoys bumper year as sales jump over 10%,” *Gamesindustry.biz*, May 8, 2009, <http://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/capcom-enjoys-bumper-year-as-sales-jump-over-10-percent>.

<sup>4</sup> Brian Ashcraft with Jean Snow, *Arcade Mania! The Turbo-Charged World of Japan’s Game Centers* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2008), 96.

must be understood in the context of the complexities of gameplay and the player communities whose commercial and critical feedback drive the evolution of the series.

### **The Tangled Web of *Street Fighter* Texts**



The *Street Fighter* series comprises five main game sub-series, along with several side-series. Chart I shows the chronology of the main series, grouping same-sub-series games together. Chart II does the same for side-series. The “series” name is the one I will be using throughout this project to refer to the specific sub- or side-series, while the US title will be the way I refer to the particular game within that sub- or side-series. There are numerous home console and handheld adaptations of the games listed, and if they are discussed they will be given series chronological and technical context as they are introduced. Dates and titles have been gathered from Insertcoyne.com.<sup>5</sup>

The five main sub-series are connected together by narrative and gameplay strains, sharing a large number of characters (most importantly Ryu and Ken, who appear in all of the main series’ titles). However, they don’t follow each other chronologically in terms of narrative progression. *Street Fighter* is meant to occur first, followed by *Street Fighter Alpha*, *Street Fighter II*, *Street Fighter IV*, and finally *Street Fighter III*. The non-linear narrative, as well as multiple series within the same narrative being released during the same time period (as is evidenced by the release of two *Street Fighter III* titles between the release of *Street Fighter Alpha 2* and *Street Fighter Alpha 3*) further complicates the understanding of the series as a continuing narrative.

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<sup>5</sup> “Street Fighter Timeline,” Insertcoyne.com, <http://www.insertcoyne.com/sftl/timeline.html>.



**Chart I – Street Fighter Main Series Chronology and Titles**

SERIES	DATE		
		TITLE	TITLE
Street Fighter	1987	<i>Street Fighter</i>	<i>Street Fighter</i>
Street Fighter II	1991	<i>Street Fighter II: The World Warrior</i>	
	1992	<i>Street Fighter II'</i>	<i>Street Fighter II': Champion Edition</i>
	1992	<i>Street Fighter II' Turbo</i>	<i>Street Fighter II': Hyper Fighting</i>
	1993	<i>Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers</i>	
	1994	<i>Super Street Fighter II X: GrandMaster Challenge</i>	<i>Super Street Fighter II Turbo</i>
	2008	<i>Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix</i>	
Street Fighter Alpha	1995	<i>Street Fighter Zero</i>	<i>Street Fighter Alpha: Warriors Dreams</i>
	1996	<i>Street Fighter Zero 2</i>	<i>Street Fighter Alpha 2</i>
	1998	<i>Street Fighter Zero 3</i>	<i>Street Fighter Alpha 3</i>
Street Fighter III	1997	<i>Street Fighter III: The New Generation</i>	
	1997	<i>Street Fighter III: 2<sup>nd</sup> Impact Giant Attack</i>	
	1999	<i>Street Fighter III: 3<sup>rd</sup> Strike: Fight For the Future</i>	
Street Fighter IV	2008	<i>Street Fighter IV</i>	
	2010	<i>Super Street Fighter IV</i>	

The side-series share many gameplay elements and characters, however they differ in key ways and include many extracanoncal narrative crossovers with other media universes (Marvel Vs.,

SNK Vs.), dynamic changes in art style (*Pocket Fighter*), or elements of 3D gameplay (the EX series) that the main series' games (even the graphically 3D *Street Fighter IV*) lack.

**Chart 2 – *Street Fighter* Side Series Chronology and Titles**

SERIES	DATE	 TITLE	 TITLE
<i>Street Fighter: The Movie</i>	1995	<i>Street Figher: The Movie</i>	
Marvel Vs.	1996	<i>X-Men vs. Street Fighter</i>	
	1997	<i>Marvel Super Heroes vs. Street Fighter</i>	
	1998	<i>Marvel vs. Capcom: Clash of Super Heroes</i>	
	2000	<i>Marvel vs. Capcom 2: New Age of Heroes</i>	
SNK Vs.	2000	<i>Capcom vs. SNK: Millennium Fight 2000</i>	
	2001	<i>Capcom vs. SNK 2: Millionaire Fighting 2001</i>	<i>Capcom vs. SNK 2: Mark of the Millennium 2001</i>
	2003	<i>SVC Chaos: SNK vs. Capcom</i>	
Tatsunoko Vs.	2008	<i>Tatsunoko vs. Capcom</i>	
Street Fighter EX	1996	<i>Street Fighter EX</i>	
	1997	<i>Street Fighter EX Plus</i>	
	1998	<i>Street Fighter EX 2</i>	
	1999	<i>Street Fighter EX 2 Plus</i>	
	2000	<i>Street Fighter EX 3</i>	
<i>Pocket Fighter</i>	1997	<i>Pocket Fighter</i>	<i>Super Gem Fighter Mini Mix</i> (later <i>Pocket Fighter</i> )
<i>Capcom Fighting Jam</i>	2004	<i>Capcom Fighting Jam</i>	<i>Capcom Fighting Evolution</i>

As plainly can be seen from the number of fighting game titles released involving the Street Fighter characters, what “is” Street Fighter goes far beyond a single game, or even a single series of games into a matrix of interconnected releases. To make matters even more complicated, many titles have similar names, as do sub- and side-series. To help differentiate between talking about a Street Fighter game series instead of a specific game within that series that has the same name, the games, when they appear in this project, will be italicized. When referring to a series, I will use the names on the above charts, without italics. The phrase “Street Fighter” will refer to the overarching, multi-text game series, while the italicized “*Street Fighter*” will refer to the first game of that series.

Additionally, there is the matter of the names of a few Street Fighter characters. In the original Japanese version of *Street Fighter II*, there were four boss characters: M. Bison (an African-American boxer), Balrog (a Spanish cage fighter who uses a claw as a weapon), Sagat (a Thai kickboxer, and the chief villain of the first *Street Fighter*), and Vega (dictator of a small Southeast Asian country). For the US version, three of those names were shifted, ostensibly because they felt “M. Bison” as a black boxer’s name was too close to “Mike Tyson” to be legally safe.<sup>6</sup> The boxer became Balrog, the clawed cage fighter Vega, and the dictator M. Bison. For the purposes of this project, the US names will be used when referring to these three characters. Anecdotally, many Street Fighter players use “Boxer,” “Claw,” and “Dictator” when discussing these characters in order to avoid confusion.<sup>7</sup> The only other character with a name change from Japanese to US version is the Japanese Gouki, the evil brother of Ken and Ryu’s master Gouken, who was renamed Akuma in the United States. While there is very little

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<sup>6</sup> Tyler Wilde, “Street Fighter Week: The Evolution of Ken and Ryu,” GamesRadar.com, <http://www.gamesradar.com/f/street-fighter-week-the-evolution-of-ken-and-ryu/a-2008031383931724090>.

<sup>7</sup> “Boxer, Claw, Dictator...,” GameFaqs.com Street Fighter IV Forum, <http://www.gamefaqs.com/boards/genmessage.php?board=943709&topic=47575348>.

concrete evidence why this change was made, many players speculate that because the character is supposed to be possessed by a demon-like power, Capcom USA used the Japanese word *akuma*, meaning devil or demon, to name the character, thinking it would be a more fearsome-sounding moniker for an American audience.<sup>8</sup> In this project the name Akuma will be used to refer to this character.

## **Organizational and Methodological Strategies**

### **Games Literacy**

The first part of this project is concerned primarily with the idea of “literacy” as evidenced by the player’s progression through the *Street Fighter* series’s different titles. Narrative is inconsistent in the *Street Fighter* world, with some sequel games being a re-engineering of the same narrative as the previous game. For example, *Street Fighter II*’s first sequel, *Street Fighter II Championship Edition* has no changes to story or motivation for the characters. Instead, it is a sequel solely in gameplay terms. *Street Fighter II* featured eight playable characters plus four non-playable “boss” characters. In *Championship Edition* those four previously-unavailable boss characters became part of the playable roster. Additionally, *Street Fighter II* did not allow players to pick the same character, perhaps for narrative reasons as a character could not conceivably face off against himself if the game bouts were meant to represent fights within the game’s narrative. Due to player demand, however, Capcom chose to remove this limitation in *Championship Edition* and all subsequent *Street Fighter* titles. If players wish to use the same character, those characters are simply rendered in different colors in order to differentiate the “player one” and “player two” versions present on the game screen.

These “gameplay” sequels, which advance the experience of the game independent of narrative,

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<sup>8</sup> “It’s Too Bad (don’t complain about me whining),” GameFaqs.com Street Fighter IV Forum, <http://www.gamefaqs.com/boards/genmessage.php?board=943709&topic=41359122>.

complicate the understanding of games and the expectation of “sequel” that comes from books and films.

Additionally, there is the contentious issue of “hero” in the *Street Fighter* series that. The original 1987 *Street Fighter* game had no qualms about casting a definitive hero. If a player entered the game alone, he would play as Ryu, the Japanese karate fighter. This was the only character available in a one-player game. If a second player challenged the first player, the second player had no choice but to play as Ken, the American karate fighter who was Ryu’s identical counterpart in all facets except look and name. Both characters had the same attacks, speed, power, and abilities. Only Ryu interacted with the narrative of the game, as Ken could not complete the series of fights that were available exclusively to Ryu in single-player mode. However, *Street Fighter II* introduced the generic convention that the player could choose the character he or she wished to play, and enact that character’s narrative through the game. This created competing narrative strands, some of which contradicted each other. Therefore, when a new game did advance the narrative of *Street Fighter* in addition to the gameplay, the game creators had to choose to ignore many of the possible endings to the previous game. For example, *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*, the final game released in the *Street Fighter II* sub-series, had seventeen playable characters. With the release of *Street Fighter IV*, set chronologically after the events of *Street Fighter II*, Capcom decided that Akuma was the victor of the tournament in *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*. This bracketed out the victory narratives of the sixteen other characters.

These contradictions in narrative create the need for a new literacy for fighting games that exists as a combination of both narrative and gameplay. Neither truly dictates the understanding of the *Street Fighter* series, and the two may often be in competition for a player’s

attention. Complicating these intersections further are the advances in technology that allow more graphical detail. The visual language of *Street Fighter* advanced from game to game without necessarily changing gameplay or affecting (or being affected by) narrative. Video games differ from film, music, books, or most other traditional media entertainment choices in their need for the consumer to deliberate, to encounter choices and make decisions in order to experience the game. Some of these decisions are instantaneous and incited by simple instructions, such as the basic movement of an avatar via a control stick. Others require more consideration and have a significant impact on the individual game path a player takes, such as choosing a particular character in *Street Fighter IV*. The interpellation of the games' ideology is dependent on constant decisions and actions by the player. This deliberation is in stark contrast to what traditional entertainment media requires, which is wholly attention. For a film to be understood, one must watch it, not play it. Investigation of how basic interpellative processes change when a video game is played is necessary to understand later discussions of racial and power discourse. Part one of this project aims to organize the experience of playing *Street Fighter*, understanding a text that in many ways defies traditional strategies of comprehension. This new literacy can be extrapolated to other fighting games (and other video games) and is key in framing further discussions of the elements of *Street Fighter*.

### **Images and Narratives of Race**

Leading off a discussion of race, ethnicity, and nationality, the idea of Ryu as a consistent image of Japaneseness can be formed, primarily focusing on his transformation, both as a narrative element and a playable system, from the early games in the series to the current *Street Fighter IV*. While Ryu as a storyline character has the chance to interact with any of Street Fighter's multitude of other fighters, he is chiefly associated with Ken and Akuma. These



characters share visual markers with Ryu, such as their mode of dress and the types of moves they perform. Additionally, they are situated in the narrative in such a way that they are reflections of Ryu. Ken is the most clear of these, as he is Ryu's American counterpart, and has existed as a cohort of Ryu within Street Fighter since the very first game. Akuma was added later to be the "evil" side of Ryu. The investigation of Ryu as a symbol of Japaneseness, and the characters that seem to revolve around him, is important because Ryu is the only character that appears in every single Street Fighter game. He is the only constant. Additionally, every Street Fighter game has been developed by a Japanese design team and published by Japanese game giant Capcom. Though it is a product for a global marketplace, its origins are wholly Japanese, and an investigation of Japaneseness is key to understanding it.

Once the Japaneseness of Street Fighter has been established, it is possible to move on to the depictions of other races, ethnicities, and nationalities. Critical race theories come into play in this investigation, looking primarily at the depictions of Caucasians and "base-whiteness" in Street Fighter as well as the specific cases of characters like Balrog (the aforementioned boxer), Blanka (a Brazilian beast-man), and Dhalsim (an Indian "yoga master" who can stretch his body), who stand as some of the more cartoonish racial depictions within an admittedly cartoony Street Fighter universe. These images, however, are not original to Street Fighter, and their popular culture antecedents (such as vintage American animation and the Hong Kong action film *Master of the Flying Guillotine*) can be investigated as possible international influences on Japanese conceptions of the Other. The character of Fei Long also plays a large role in this discussion as a Bruce-Lee-like representation of a Hong Kong kung fu star. Also notable is the lack of a South Korean character in Street Fighter, an oversight which will soon be remedied in 2010's *Super Street Fighter IV*. The political relationship Japan has with China (and to a smaller

extent South Korea) will be used to frame many of the Far East Asian ethnic images in the Street Fighter series.

### **Race and Prowess**

In many ways the discussion of race is caught up in discourses of prowess, a term which requires (and shall receive) its own investigation. The third section of this project focuses primarily on this interaction, but also the discourses of prowess involved in gameplay and avatarism (the process of having a player embodied within a game world by a game character). The Street Fighter series gives the player many choices of characters to be his or her fantasy stand-in within the game world, but narrative and community factors can influence the amount of power that any one character possesses within the game's story and within the players' community. As a competitive game with multiple selectable characters, ideally *Street Fighter IV* (or any Street Fighter game) would place characters on an equal footing in order to allow for balanced play, but this balancing is an act that exists both within the game and within the players who play it. A further complicating factor is player skill and player goals, which can subvert both narrative and community ideas of power distribution among characters and players.

Additionally, each character's physical prowess is intertwined with the audience's understanding of martial arts. The placement of Ryu as the ultimate stoic Japanese karate warrior exists as a contrast to Ken's flashy American fighting style, Zangief's powerful Russian wrestling, or Chun Li's lithe and quick Chinese martial arts. As a fighting game series, Street Fighter differentiates its characters not by a question of "can they fight?" but by a question of "in what way do they fight?" Fighting and physical prowess is a given, but style matters, and is informed and shaped by the same shared international popular culture and political/cultural ties that shape the depictions of race, ethnicity, and nationality. In the world of Street Fighter, all

characters of all races and genders are powerful, which subverts traditional white patriarchy, but the manner in which their power is expressed can reaffirm base-whiteness and male supremacy, relegating them to oppressed positions, even within a world where all have power.

### **Ethnographic Component**

The fourth and final section of this project focuses on the way player communities parse out the messages of the Street Fighter games. Through a survey administered on three video game websites, including sites dealing with both general-interest gamers and fighting game enthusiasts, gamers can have their say on the issues at hand. However, their comments must be framed within an understanding of the complicit nature of video game interpellation, and the anxieties that come with the on-screen enacting of a game's ideology. Video games, as a media of deliberation, require a commitment on the part of a player to allow the game to define the parameters of play. If the game demands the player kill Enemy A or Enemy B to pass Level X, the choice to kill neither enemy is the choice to fail the game, and thus end the experience of playing. The game may lead the player to a realm of multiple decisions and give the player a choice of several pre-defined ideologies to enact, refusal to enact any ideology in a game is never an option the game allows. It is simply the option to not play. Therefore, gamers are complicit with the enacted ideologies of a game on a far deeper level than with other media. Upon seeing a film, a viewer has the option to discard the ideas present in the film if they do not match the viewer's own. The film exists as a whole document outside the viewer's own self. Games are not built this way. Games as an experience are built in concert with the player. The game gives the player a path to follow, but that path cannot be followed without the player's consent. Therefore, the process of playing a game is internalized to a much higher degree than watching or listening. Deliberation creates links between the player's action (pushing a button) and the

game's ideology (punching a man in the head) that the attention paid to a film does not. Because of this link, players tend to personalize any attack against games as an attack against themselves.

The video game community on the Internet tends to view their hobby as being constantly under attack, and rightfully so. In the wake of the Columbine massacre, many pundits were quick to pin the blame on games such as *Doom*.<sup>9</sup> The Grand Theft Auto series, and especially the player's option to kill prostitutes, has been a popular news item for nearly a decade.<sup>10</sup> Video games are situated in the public consciousness much like rock 'n' roll once was, as the youth corruptor du jour. Reluctance on the part of game players to assume an academic project will present them fairly is not only unsurprising, it is expected, especially considering the cultural forces at work in the playing of a game.

Ethnographic research on the Internet is a difficult proposition, and much of the final section of this project will deal with the difficulties faced in getting gamers, as a community, to open up to the process. Much of video game fandom on the Internet is performed under the auspices of website forums owned either by game companies (in the case of the official Capcom forums) or large publishing corporations (in the case of Gamespot.com). Sometimes, those corporate structures make connecting with gamers in a traditional academic context difficult-to-impossible. Not only are the gamers themselves wary of an academic project about their hobby but the corporate powers see a posted academic survey as a nuisance, or in the worst-case scenario, spam. The story of my ethnographic research is not just the story of what gamers told me, but the story of my difficulty even reaching those gamers.

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<sup>9</sup> Mark Tappan and Becca Kita, "The Columbine Tragedy: A Sociocultural Perspective" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Moral Education, Minneapolis, Minnesota, November 19, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Samhita, "Grand Theft Auto: Prostitute killing is a big hit," Feministing.com, April 29, 2008, <http://www.feministing.com/archives/009097.html>.

The overall goal of this project is to bring together the disparate strands of media literacy, race, power, and community in order to understand how players might read *Street Fighter* as a video game text. “You must defeat Shen Long to stand a chance,” Ryu taunts in the original US version of *Street Fighter II* after defeating an opponent. “Shen Long” in that sentence represents many things. It is a cultural miscue: in translating the Japanese kanji for Ryu’s *shoryuken* (“rising dragon punch”), the localizer simply put in the Chinese equivalent of the *shoryuken*, “Shen Long.”<sup>11</sup> Many players at the time misunderstood this “Shen Long” as a person instead of an attack.<sup>12</sup> But the statement remains a catchphrase for the series. Players recite it to each other in a taunting manner after a win. Shen Long became an April Fool’s joke when game magazine *Electronic Gaming Monthly* ran a fake code, along with doctored screen shots, purporting that Shen Long was a secret boss, and Ryu’s teacher, in *Street Fighter II*, only reachable after a nearly-impossible series of in-game feats. This “news” was propagated to other countries, and a Hong Kong comic book adaptation of *Street Fighter II* even included Shen Long in its storyline.<sup>13</sup> The character’s popularity, even as a hoax, influenced the design of the real version of Ryu’s teacher, Gouken, and the method by which the player accesses him in *Street Fighter IV* (as an alternate boss after a difficult series of in-game feats).

The discourse of Shen Long, really a very small part of the overall picture of *Street Fighter*, illustrates how many elements are at play in the building and understanding of this text. A cultural misunderstanding led to a racialized conception of a character that was realized both in the US (within a magazine joke) and abroad (within a comic book) as a character of immense

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<sup>11</sup> “Shen Long,” Fightingstreet.com, <http://fightingstreet.com/folders/variousinfofolder/shenglong/shenglong.html>.

<sup>12</sup> “プロジェクトマネージャー：塩沢夏希,” Capcom-fc.com, <http://www.capcom-fc.com/sf4/2008/04/41.html>.

<sup>13</sup> “Shen Long,” Fightingstreet.com, <http://fightingstreet.com/folders/variousinfofolder/shenglong/shenglong.html>.

power and physical prowess. Community demand led to the inclusion of a character whose narrative status and gameplay interaction mirrored the mythos of the hoax. Race. Prowess. Community. Gameplay. To say that these interactions are complex is an understatement, yet this project aims to metaphorically defeat “Shen Long,” if it is to stand a chance.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **The Deliberate Warrior: Issues of Games Literacy in Street Fighter**

## **Battles Invalidated:**

### **The Failings of Traditional Narrative Understandings of Street Fighter**

Video games challenge traditional concepts of media literacy in a way no form of entertainment text has before. To approach video games in the same way one would any other text is to misunderstand the unique features of video games which makes them, well, games. A film, music recording, or book is meant to be “consumed” in a very different way than a video game. Even explaining the measurements of one of these latter objects is relatively simple. A film or music recording has a time associated with it. When viewed from beginning to end, *Titanic*, the theatrical cut, will always be 194 minutes long. The title track of Michael Jackson’s *Thriller* is five minutes and fifty-seven seconds. While time is not an adequate way to measure a book, word count is. Every English copy of William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* should, if it is an unabridged copy, contain 30,666 words in the same sequence. These media have a consistency in their consumed form that video games lack due to their interactivity and the nonlinear, open-ended experiences they offer. We could, of course, measure video games in data. A certain game might be 4.1 gigabytes of code and files. However, this measurement does not have a value relative to the experience of consuming a game the way runtime or word sequence do for consuming a film, piece of music, or book. A movie is finished when its runtime is over. A book is finished when the reader has read all the words. While a reader may skip around in a book, rereading their favorite passages or a DVD viewer may fast-forward or rewind, these are actions that are unprompted by the media that is being consumed. The vast majority of video games invite modality of experience, offering multiple paths to experience the game, or at the very least, a level of interactivity that varies the experience based on the desires of the player. While unique experiences are available with any form of media, it is not intrinsic to that media’s



construction the same way it is with video games (with notable exceptions, like the Choose Your Own Adventure series of books). Video games, on the whole, embrace “incompleteness” in a way that these other media, constructed in a consistent sequence if not always consumed as such, cannot and likely should not.

However, “finishing” a game is a contested concept. A role-playing game like *Final Fantasy XII*, released for Playstation 2 in 2006, has a very linear narrative path for the player to follow with the characters he controls and can be “completed” without experiencing all of the possible enemies, items, locations, or battles the game has to offer. Likewise, a game like *Bejeweled Blitz*, a web-based title available since 2009 on the Facebook social networking site, “finishes” in two minutes. In that time, players experience the only basic “act” of gameplay: switching colored gems to make horizontal or vertical lines of at least three like-colored blocks. However, the game’s goal is not to complete, but rather to compete. High scores are displayed to any linked Facebook accounts. Through this, the goal of the game changes from “score as many points as you can” to “score more points than your friends.” Assuming that the player’s skills and the skills of the player’s friends improve—or, as is common with these types of games on Facebook, the scores are reset—this game would never “finish” as long as the spirit of competition remains.

*Final Fantasy XII* represents a style of gaming in which narrative is explicitly tied to progress. As a player completes tasks and improves her game skills, that player views more and more of the game’s linear narrative, unfolding the story in much the same way a movie would (through non-interactive “cut scenes”) and leaving the “game” elements to battle and exploration. This type of game, often called a “J-RPG” (Japanese Role Playing Game) is the genre which most embraces traditional narrative and story formats from previous media types,

though it still requires of the player a level of “game” in order to “earn” that story. *Bejeweled Blitz*, however, does not tie progress to any narrative, but rather to high scores and competition with other players. In his *Half-Real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*, Jesper Juul explains his title.

Video games are *real* in that they consist of real rules with which players actually interact, and in that winning or losing a game is a real event. However, when winning a game by slaying a dragon, the dragon is not a real dragon but a fictional one. To play a video game is therefore to interact with real rules while imagining a fictional world, and a video game is a set of rules as well as a fictional world.<sup>14</sup>

While in this statement Juul does not make the point that some games are less focused on narrative and more focused on rules (*Bejeweled*) than others (*Final Fantasy XII*); he *does* make the point that games exist in a world where narrative and rules coexist, and depending on the game genre, narrative progression may be a focus for the player or it may not.

Street Fighter games exist in between *Final Fantasy XII* and *Bejeweled Blitz*. There are small narratives that are completed within some of the game modes. Usually, the part of a Street Fighter game that focuses on the player’s progression with his or her chosen character through that character’s particular narrative is called “Arcade Mode.” This references the fact that the default single-player mode in the arcade versions of Street Fighter games (and nearly all fighting games) is set up as a series of battles (some against random characters, some against set characters) that bring the player-chosen character to his or her particular narrative conclusion. However, it would be inaccurate to claim that this “mode” is the meat of a Street Fighter game. Street Fighter games are at their heart about competition between human players, not competition against the computer’s artificial intelligence (AI)—the programming that dictates how game-controlled aspects behave. In fact, the individual characters’ narratives are in conflict

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<sup>14</sup> Jesper Juul, *Half-Real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2005), 1.

with each other. *Street Fighter II* allowed the player a choice of eight characters from which to choose—game avatars with different sets of moves, speeds, “life” totals (the amount of damage the character would need to take before dying), damage levels (the amount of “life” an attack can take away), and sizes. Later games offer even more choices (*Street Fighter IV* has twenty-five characters, and *Marvel vs. Capcom 2* has fifty-six). The majority of Street Fighter games are built around the concept of a “tournament” that the playable characters choose to enter for various reasons. The plot for *Street Fighter IV* is as follows. (For reference, Shadaloo [also spelled Shadowloo, Shadalaw, or Shadowlaw] is the evil organization which sponsored the second World Warrior Tournament.)

Since the second World Warrior Tournament an evil corporation known as S.I.N. has risen in power. Now, Seth, CEO of S.I.N., has arranged another world wide fighting competition to draw in the greatest combatants from across the globe. News of the tournament spread quickly and old faces rise to challenge the world’s strongest once more, while new fighters strive to prove their worth. Seth’s aim for the competition is unknown but the company’s project BLECE, said to be S.I.N.’s ultimate weapon program, is rumored to be at its core. To further complicate things, reports of Shadaloo activity has been springing up all over the world and many of the stories somehow involve S.I.N.<sup>15</sup>

This plot positions *Street Fighter IV* as a direct narrative sequel to *Street Fighter II*, which occurred during the second World Warrior Tournament. However, this set-up also highlights the difficulties with understanding the Street Fighter series as a whole narrative. As mentioned, *Street Fighter II* featured eight playable characters, all of whom would, at the conclusion of their single-player narrative, win the second World Warrior tournament. However, the set-up for *Street Fighter IV* does not have any of the original eight playable *Street Fighter II* characters winning the second tournament, but rather positions Akuma as the winner of that event.

At the conclusion of the second World Warrior Tournament, it seemed that Shadaloo, one of the most vile crime syndicates the world has ever seen, had finally met its end. The

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<sup>15</sup> Capcom Entertainment, Inc., *Street Fighter IV Training Manual* (Digital Release, PDF Format, 2009), 5.

leader of the evil organization, M. Bison was defeated at the end of the tournament by the fearsome Akuma and the remaining members fell into shadow or the hands of Interpol.<sup>16</sup>

Akuma was introduced in *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*, the fourth sequel to *Street Fighter II*. Capcom, the company behind the Street Fighter series, began a trend after *Street Fighter II* that they have continued to this day. Instead of releasing a “true” sequel to *Street Fighter II* in the wake of its success, Capcom released several sequels that functioned more as updates and expansions. Each game maintained the same narrative premise—the second World Warrior Tournament, held by Shadaloo—while introducing new characters and gameplay tweaks. *Street Fighter II Championship Edition* added the four boss characters (Balrog, Vega, Sagat, and M. Bison) as playable characters (complete with their own narrative paths). *Super Street Fighter II* introduced four more new characters, and finally *Super Street Fighter II Turbo* introduced Akuma, who despite not existing within the series at the onset of *Street Fighter II* functions as the “winner” of the narrative first introduced in that game.

This is to say nothing of the Street Fighter III series (which takes place after *Street Fighter IV*) or the Street Fighter Alpha series (which takes place between *Street Fighter* and the *Street Fighter II* series). These series’ releases overlapped, complicating an already fractured and nearly-incomprehensible narrative further. The point is this: the player’s actions in a Street Fighter game have no real influence on the movements of the games’ overarching narrative, and in fact can be invalidated by the next narrative sequel. A player who plays through *Street Fighter II* with the character Chun Li, a Chinese Interpol agent, will see her avenge her father’s death by defeating his murderer, M. Bison, and taking him into custody. However, as evidenced by the set-up for *Street Fighter IV*, these events did not happen. Chun Li did not win the second World Warrior Tournament, as that distinction belongs to Akuma. A veteran Street Fighter

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<sup>16</sup> Capcom Entertainment, Inc., *Street Fighter IV Training Manual* (Digital Release, PDF Format, 2009), 5.

player knows these invalidations of narrative progress are bound to happen, and accepts them, perhaps even happily.

Street Fighter exemplifies the sort of plot complications that have prompted some games studies scholars to eschew narrative altogether. In the first issue of *Games Studies*, Jesper Juul—the aforementioned author of *Half-Real*—made a case for the study of games to concentrate more on rules and less on fiction.

My point is that: 1) Games and stories actually do not translate to each other in the way that novels and movies do. 2) There is an inherent conflict between the *now* of the interaction and the *past* or "*prior*" of the narrative. You can't have narration and interactivity at the same time; there is no such thing as a continuously interactive story. 3) The relations between reader/story and player/game are completely different - the player inhabits a twilight zone where he/she is both an empirical subject outside the game *and* undertakes a role inside the game.<sup>17</sup>

He follows that with:

Using other media as starting points, we may learn many things about the construction of fictive worlds, characters ... but relying too heavily on existing theories will make us forget what makes games games: Such as rules, goals, player activity, the projection of the player's actions into the game world, the way the game defines the possible actions of the player. It is the unique parts that we need to study now.<sup>18</sup>

Juul's own work has retreated a bit from his initial privileging of design over narrative as the useful tool for understanding games. *Half-Real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds* was published four years after his *Game Studies* article, and takes narrative (the "fictional worlds" of the subtitle) and tries to synthesize that with issues of design (the "real rules" of the title). His bias is still somewhat visible in the fact that rules are the "real" aspect of video games, not stories. While the real/fictional dichotomy makes for a good title, the use of "real" validates rules in a way that positions "fiction" as a stand-in for "fake."

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<sup>17</sup> Jesper Juul, "Games telling stories? A brief note on games and narratives," *Games Studies* 1(1), July 2001.

<sup>18</sup> Jesper Juul, "Games telling stories? A brief note on games and narratives," *Games Studies* 1(1), July 2001.

Despite his love of systems over stories, Juul does highlight some very good reasons why narrative cannot fully explain video games and why video game stories work differently than other entertainment media.

Three important reasons for describing games as being non-narrative: 1) Games are not part of the narrative media ecology formed by movies, novels, and theatre. 2) Time in games works differently than in narratives. 3) The relation between the reader/viewer and the story world is different than the relation between the player and the game world.<sup>19</sup>

While I would argue that these do not make games inherently non-narrative, he makes good points as to why traditional approaches to narrative cannot be used to understand games. Parts one and two of Juul's statement have already been covered in regards to *Street Fighter*. 1) *Street Fighter* and games in general cannot be consumed in a traditional linear fashion the same way as movies, novel, and theater. 2) *Street Fighter* games feature concurrent, overlapping, conflicting narratives which may or may not be carried over from game to game. Point three brings me to an important note on the understanding of video games vs. other entertainment media.

### **Deliberation vs. Attention: Consuming *Street Fighter***

Juul's third point illuminates a difference between a story (the narrative of traditional entertainment media) and a game world (the narrative of a video game). A reader or a viewer consumes a story as a single entity. Even with the ability to pick and choose sections of these stories, the story itself remains singular and contained. A game world, however, cannot be consumed as a single entity, but rather must be explored from a vantage point. Often, that vantage point is from an avatar character. In *Street Fighter*, one can choose to play as Guile, an American G.I. whose best friend was killed by *Street Fighter II* ultimate baddie M. Bison, and experience the world of *Street Fighter* through Guile's experience in the game world. Guile is

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<sup>19</sup> Jesper Juul, "Games telling stories? A brief note on games and narratives," *Games Studies* 1(1), July 2001.

not a true “avatar” in the sense that the term is typically used. Often in video games, “avatar” refers to a player character that is a stand-in for the player. Sometimes avatars are blank slates, doing almost solely what the player chooses. For example, in the role-playing game *Fallout 3*, the player avatar, dubbed the “Vault Dweller,” can be male or female, black or white, tall or short, fat or thin, all at the whim of the player during initial character construction. The Vault Dweller has no name, and makes no narrative decisions on his own. He does have relationships the game sets forth—a father who abandons him, a post-apocalyptic underground vault full of friends and enemies, and later an entire post-apocalyptic Washington, D.C. to explore—but the player makes the decisions of how the Vault Dweller treats these characters, or how he speaks to his father when they are reunited. The Vault Dweller, while being somewhat forced along a set narrative path, interacts with that path as the player sees fit. The character is supposed to be embodied within the game as the Vault Dweller. The Vault Dweller acts as a “me.” When referring to actions within the game, the player can substitute his own personal pronoun for the Vault Dweller’s actions. For example, describing my own experiences with the game, I might say to a friend, “I went into a town called Megaton and talked to the sheriff. He was rude to me, so I blew him up with a grenade launcher. But then the townspeople got angry at me and they all started shooting at me and I died.” This short-handing of “I” as the character I control is a common rhetorical aspect of discussing video game play.

Guile does not serve this same “me” function. He can be referred to as “I” if the player chooses, of course, but Guile is not the player existing in the game world. The player controls Guile, but Guile does not embody the player fully within the narrative. Guile has his own personality, his own friends and foes, and his own set story. His appearance and decisions, in terms of narrative choices, are not within the player’s control. The player simply controls Guile

in fights, and is rewarded with a concluding story when he defeats his final opponent. The story does not unfold for the player from Guile's point of view as much as the player chooses to use Guile to see Guile's part of the story. Guile acts as a controllable action figure. Just as the G.I. Joe Duke figure has a back story shaped by cartoons and comic books, so does Guile. The game comes with how the player employs Guile. However, all the moves that Guile performs, and the narrative he follows, are Guile's, not the player's. This illustrates how game world interaction is not only different from story consumption in traditional entertainment media, but also varies between game genres. However, in both these cases, the actions of the player lead directly to the consumption of the game as a narrative. In both games, the player is constantly making decisions. In *Fallout 3* those may be moral decisions or they may be simpler decisions, such as which weapon to use to attack a mutant scorpion. In *Street Fighter IV*, those decisions with Guile are the moves used—when to block, when to strike, when to attack from up close or further away, when to jump—and in fact the decision to choose Guile as a character in the first place (as there are twenty-four other, different characters in *Street Fighter IV* that the player could have used).

These decisions contrast starkly with those required of a reader/viewer of traditional entertainment media. A reader must only read a book's words in sequence in order to consume the book in the proper way. A film viewer must only keep his eyes on the screen and his ears open to the soundtrack in order to properly take in the movie. However, a player must constantly make decisions in a game. In the case of *Street Fighter*, she must choose a character and then make hundreds, perhaps thousands, of small decisions in a row in the course of fighting an opponent. The first four seconds of a fight could be as follows: up-right on the joystick to jump, press hard kick, press small punch, press small punch, hold down on the joystick, press medium



kick, release down on the joystick, forward on the joystick, down on the joystick, down-forward on the joystick, hard-punch to perform a special move, finishing the combo. This sequence can be interrupted by an opponent's move, or it can be varied for different situations. And similarly complex choice-strings must be performed dozens and dozens of times over the course of a single match, which may last no more than three minutes.

To play a video game is to constantly deliberate, enacting choice after choice and then reacting to the effects that choice has in the game world. To read a book or watch a film is to exist in a state of attention, taking in the words, sounds, or images as they come in a set, largely-standardized sequence, based on the construction of the media. A video game cannot be properly consumed without deliberation, and a film or book cannot be properly consumed without attention. Thus, even more than interactive vs. non-interactive (as there are certainly non-interactive elements of a video game, though they lead to and influence later decisions for the most part), video games and traditional entertainment media are separated by a deliberation/attention dichotomy. As David Meyers puts it in his essay *The Video Game Aesthetic: Play as Form*, "Reading a book—and other forms of related aesthetic experiences, such as viewing a film—demand some measure of solitude and passivity; play, on the other hand, demands some measure of precisely the opposite."<sup>20</sup> Video games, of course, are play within a system of rules; a sort of demanded play. Deliberation fits the "activity" of play in two ways. Video games are an activity, as in a hobby, but they also force players to actively situate themselves in the world of the game's rules. Rules bring demands to games, separating them from more free forms of play (imaginary tea parties or imaginary wars between action figures, for example), which are equally "active" but without the rigid structure of systematic game

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<sup>20</sup> David Meyers, "The Video Game Aesthetic: Play as Form," in *The Video Game Theory Reader 2*, ed. Bernard Perron and Mark J.P. Wolf (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 45.

rules—though it is important that we not forget the societal rules and hegemonic norms that often dictate such “free” play.

By situating gameplay as a mode of deliberation instead of attention, it becomes very important for a player to be able to communicate with the video game system. After all, if decisions are needed in order to consume the media, then the media must have some method of receiving the player’s decisions in order to continue the process. The myriad of devices used to communicate with video games are collectively referred to as “controllers.” Controller design varies depending on which machine is in use, and some games may have proprietary controllers that come packaged with that specific game—for example, the guitar and drum controllers that come with *Rock Band* or the skateboard controller for *Tony Hawk Ride*. There is a divide between the default controllers for PC games (games played on a home computer) and console games (games played on a dedicated game machine such as an Xbox 360 or Playstation 3). PC games default to the keyboard-and-mouse combo that is the standard input device for Windows, Linux, and Mac GUIs (graphic user interfaces). In this way, a player plays a game in a remarkably similar way that she browses web pages or writes documents. However, there are many players that use console-style controllers that are inserted into the computer through USB (universal serial bus) ports, replicating the console experience.

“Console-style controller” refers specifically to controllers that mock the design of the Xbox 360 and Playstation 3 controllers, which are nearly identical in layout and function. Both systems’ controllers feature four face buttons arranged in a diamond, two analog 360-degree movement input sticks (one on the right, one on the left) that can be pushed down to function as additional face buttons, a digital input pad on the left side (under the left analog stick), and four buttons on the shoulders of the controller, two on the left and two on the right. This design is an

evolution of the controllers of the original NES (Nintendo Entertainment System), the first game system to be a hit all over the world, though that system had only the digital input pad and two face buttons. As games became more complex, the additional face buttons and shoulder buttons became necessary (as with the Super Nintendo Entertainment System, the NES's successor). The addition of three-dimensional graphics led to the inclusion of analog sticks for 3-D movement (added with the Nintendo 64, the Sega Dreamcast, and the Sony Playstation).

Street Fighter games have traditionally favored a joystick controller, even in home versions. "Joystick" refers to the arcade-style controller that uses an upright stick for digital movement, as opposed to the pad used for digital movement in a traditional console controller. Because Street Fighter games, even those with 3D graphics such as *Street Fighter IV* or the Street Fighter EX series, occur entirely on a 2D plane, a digital input is preferred, and many players feel the joystick allows for more accurate control of the character's movement. The vast majority of games in the 16-bit era (lasting from the very end of the 1980s until the release of the Sega Saturn in 1994) were made with sprites, a graphic format

that functions like small dots of digital paint on a canvas (monitor). The digital canvas is a grid,



Here you can see the evolution of the console controller (top to bottom) from NES (1985) to SNES (1991) to Dreamcast (1999) to Playstation 3 (2006).

and a single cell in that grid is referred to as a “pixel.” Traversing a game environment built like this is more simple with digital movement, which reads inputs as “on” or “off”—like the 0’s and 1’s of binary code. A joystick could, if desired, allow for analog movement, which allows for both a full 360 degrees of directional input as well as degrees of intensity in those movements: a slight push to the right differs from a harder push. However, this sort of movement does not serve a grid-based environment as simply and efficiently as an 8-way (left, right, up, down, and all diagonal movements) directional input does. Analog movement is more necessary when games want to recreate 3D spaces, where the subtleties of movement are necessary. The *Street Fighter* series, even when it upgraded the graphics to three dimensions, kept the gameplay in two dimensions. Even as other genres—and even some other fighting game series—embraced 3D environments and gameplay, the *Street Fighter* games continued to design for 2D play, and the joystick proved the most effective navigational tool for this style of play. The joystick also harkens back to the arcade cabinet design *Street Fighter II* popularized, recreating the “pure” experience of the series. However, joystick controllers do not come standard with game console purchases, and a player can spend anywhere from sixty to several hundred dollars for a high-quality joystick.

Why are the details of control and controllers important? Because these devices are the manner in which deliberation is manifest in the game world. And if deliberation is the mindset which allows a player to properly consume a video game, then the controller is their cyborg-prosthetic extension into the game. In her *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Donna Haraway defines a cyborg as “a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. [...] The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two

joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation.”<sup>21</sup> The idea of Haraway’s cyborg existing as both “imagination and material reality” dovetails nicely with Jesper Juul’s description of video games as “half-real.” With the “half-real” paradigm, Juul’s rules are the reality—though they are not material—and the game’s fiction is the imagination. It seems that while deliberation is the mode of the mind for proper consumption of video games, cyborg is the mode of the body. This deliberative cyborg consciousness is obtained when the mind addresses decisions within the game world and synthesizes choice into the movement of the body with the controller.

If the body is key to the experiencing of video games, then the pleasures of video gaming must lie in part within the body, and thus an understanding of video games (such as *Street Fighter*) can arise from looking at those pleasures. *Street Fighter*, in its onscreen representation, is about the collision of bodies with other bodies and body-produced projectiles. Ryu, arguably the central figure of *Street Fighter* and inarguably the most commonly-appearing character, has the ability to use his *hadouken* attack to throw *ki* (spirit) energy from his hands towards the enemy. The Indian yoga master Dhalsim, who first appears in *Street Fighter II*, can expel small flames that shoot across the screen. Occasionally, characters use kinetic energy to throw objects at their opponents. Cody, a transplant from Capcom’s *Final Fight* series of games, appears in *Street Fighter Alpha 3* and can throw knives at the enemy, while *Street Fighter III*’s Ibuki can throw *kunai*, or ninja throwing-daggers. In both these cases the thrown objects only appear when the player wishes to perform the move using a set joystick/button combination. These moves are referred to as “special moves” because they require more than a simple button press to perform. All attacks in *Street Fighter* represent danger and damage in the *Street Fighter* game world, but

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<sup>21</sup> Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto,” in *The Cultural Studies Reader 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, ed. Simon During (New York: Routledge, 1999), 272.

special moves are on the more skill-testing side of that spectrum. For the most part, they have an advantage in power or range over normal attacks, but require a great knowledge of strategy (to understand the direction in which the special move attack is likely to go or the range which it requires to hit the opponent) and game input commands. David Surman describes the moment in which a special move is performed as “characterized by two pleasure registers; first in viewing the spectacular representation of the special move and secondly in a sense of reward or gratification—a confirmation of the player’s successful mastery of the videogame control inputs.”<sup>22</sup> This second reward comes from a connection of body and mind, the deliberative choice traveling through the body, inputting the commands in the controller, and being manifested by the chosen character, filtering back through the player’s eyes in the form of spectacle.

Capcom’s executive director Noritaka Funamizu notes that the control commands for the special moves were designed to correspond to the image of the referent body in motion. [...] As such, there is a performative correspondence between player actions and the representation of action in the on-screen character.<sup>23</sup>

It is in this performance that *Street Fighter* is consumed and enjoyed. It also allows the player to understand the game.

All [controllers] are designed to provide a more or less straightforward coupling with the constraints inherent in the biological human body, and as such they provide affordances, such as lifting, grasping, and pushing. When coupled to a properly programmed game system, however, they also provide a mapping functionality that allows us to perform a wide range of actions in relation to that game system and its virtual environment. Importantly, this means that the combination of controller and game system provides

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<sup>22</sup> David Surman, “Pleasure, spectacle, and reward in Capcom’s *Street Fighter* series,” in *Videogame, Player, Text*, ed. Barry Atkins and Tanya Krzywinska (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 210.

<sup>23</sup> David Surman, “Pleasure, spectacle, and reward in Capcom’s *Street Fighter* series,” in *Videogame, Player, Text*, ed. Barry Atkins and Tanya Krzywinska (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 211.

both *physical affordances* and *intentional affordances*, the latter often designed to yield a sense of augmented embodiment.<sup>24</sup>

These affordances, as described by Andreas Gregersen and Torben Grodal in “Embodiment and Interface,” are the key to translating the response to the deliberation questions that games pose.

Video games work as a continuous loop of choice required by the game world made action by the player’s body, registering as an event in a virtual space, prompting the player into more action. The concept of cyborg manifests both in the player’s bodily connection with the controller and her mental connection with the actions onscreen and her controlled character (the physical and intentional affordances). However, for there to be pleasure in the *playing* of video games, these two affordances cannot be considered separately. The pleasure of viewing and the pleasure of controlling are produced by the *same action*. Street Fighter is spoken in the hands, the eyes, and the brain, but this combination is a single language. “Gameplay” as a term describes both the way a game is played (the player picks a Street Fighter character and fights other characters until she meets the boss character and defeats him, completing that single play-through) and the act of consuming a game. However, this conclusion that gameplay—the cyborg act of consuming media of deliberation through bodily interaction with a controller in a feedback loop with visual spectacle—is at the core of understanding Street Fighter leaves many of the same questions that Jesper Juul’s initial assessment of game studies raised. If the core of experience and understanding Street Fighter is in gameplay, what use is there in narrative?

### **Ryu Is Not Ken: Street Fighter Narrative Informing Street Fighter Gameplay**

Having spent dozens of paragraphs telling the reader why game narratives are improper tools for understanding games, and having made the case for gameplay (used now as a shorthand

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<sup>24</sup> Andreas Gregersen and Torben Grodal, “Embodiment and Interface,” in *The Video Game Theory Reader 2*, ed. Bernard Perron and Mark J.P. Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2009), 69.

for the combination of experiences in cyborg hybridity, deliberation, player control, and spectacle) as the key to understanding Street Fighter, let me now explain how narrative works in key ways to illuminate gameplay and create the necessary framework for the spectacle produced in Street Fighter gameplay to be enjoyed. There are three key ways in which this happens.

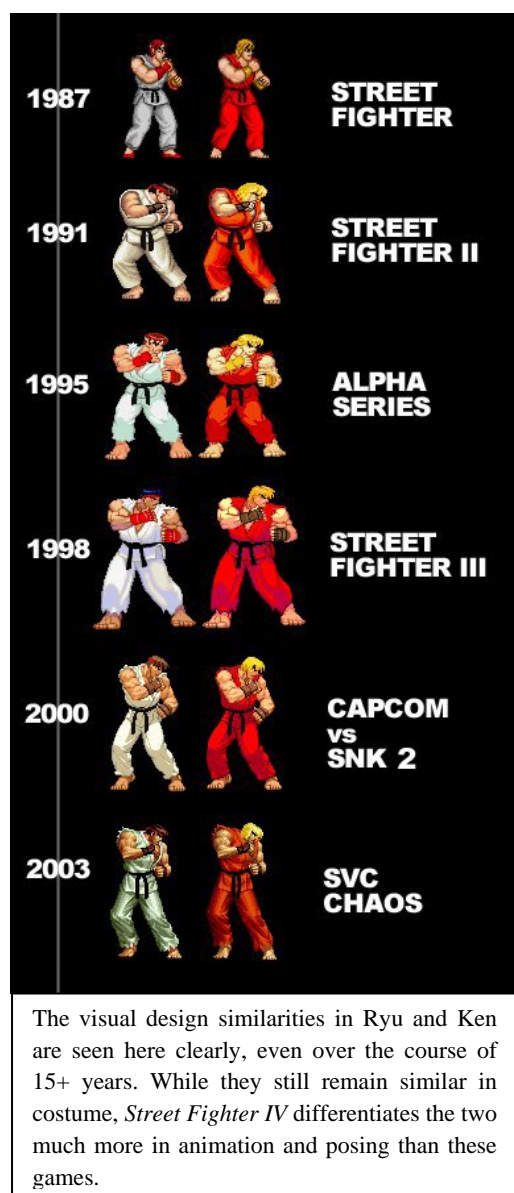
1. Character, as expressed through a combination of visual design elements and narratives, is used as a signifier for gameplay elements and expected play style.
2. Micronarratives frame and motivate single-player modes, allowing a game that is built on a concept of competition between player-fighters to also be enjoyed as a solo experience.
3. Story functions as a context for game rules, utilizing the same concepts in narrative that are built into gameplay.

In these ways, narrative combines with gameplay to create the half-reality that Jesper Juul's speaks on in his book.

In our discussion of the role of character and narrative as a signifier, we can begin by comparing Ryu and Ken as characters within the Street Fighter narrative. Ryu and Ken are the only characters to be playable in every game bearing the name "Street Fighter," and Ryu has been playable in every Vs. series game (Marvel Vs., SNK Vs., and Tatsunoko Vs.) and *Capcom Fighting Jam*. *Shoryuken* (literally "rising dragon fist," a jumping uppercut), *hadouken* ("wave motion fist," a fireball attack) and *tatsumaki senpuukyaku* ("tornado whirlwind leg," a spinning multi-kick) are the three special moves that Ryu and Ken can perform in *Street Fighter II*, and they remain as special moves through every sequel and sub-series in which the two are present. Whenever Ken and Ryu appear alongside each other in a game, the controller input for each character to perform these special moves is identical. These inputs have never changed in the history of the series, and initially, in *Street Fighter* and *Street Fighter II* (as well as *Street Fighter II: Championship Edition* and *Street Fighter II Turbo*), they produced the exact same attack regardless of whether the player was using Ryu or Ken: same animation sequence, same



range, and same amount of damage if it connected. In gameplay terms, at this point in the series (the first four of several dozen games), the characters were *exactly the same*. They only could be



differentiated by visual design and narrative. Even the visual design was nearly identical (and has largely remained so), with the style and color of Ken and Ryu's hair and the hue of their *gi* (karate uniforms), gloves, and shoes the main differences. If the *only* understanding of Street Fighter were in physical and intentional affordances, the presence of both of these characters was a needless redundancy.

However, character is important in Street Fighter, and the similarities of Ken and Ryu are important aspects of their characterization. Their similarity in play style connects them in narrative, gives a focal point for marketing the game, and helps shape the spirit of competition with which the game is designed. As mentioned above, Ryu and Ken played identical in the first four Street Fighter games. Even as they began to differentiate in play style (Ken became

more of an aggressive character, with wider range on his *shoryuken* and multiple hits on that move as well as the *tatsumaki senpuukyaku*, while Ryu became more of a counter-attacker, with greater power to his single-hitting *shoryuken* and *tatsumaki senpuukyaku*), Ryu and Ken play similarly. The two characters move at the same speed, and many of their non-special moves

(single-button presses) have the same timing and range. Their visual similarity references their gameplay similarity. This is also explained in the narrative, as both Ryu and Ken learned under the same master, Gouken. When Gouken became a playable character in *Street Fighter IV*, he employed many of the same motions in performing his special moves. Down, down-forward, forward plus punch as an input command produces fireballs for all three characters. Down, down-back, back plus kick produces a spinning kick attack—though Gouken’s is vertical while Ryu’s and Ken’s is horizontal. Gouken’s narrative connection to Ryu and Ken, as well as his physical similarities—he is a great deal more muscular than his students, but he also wears a *gi*—signifies his connection to the gameplay styles of Ryu and Ken.

The same signification process that realigns the visual and narrative connections between Ryu, Ken, and Gouken with their gameplay styles and special move inputs allows the player to make assumptions, often correct, about the nature of playing a character based solely on their physical and narrative cues. Chun Li’s small-in-relation-to-the-other-characters size and her prodigious thighs—eroticized in some fan art—telegraph her high movement speed and kick-centered offense. Zangief’s huge body and pro-wrestler background indicate that his main offense will be in-close, where he can throw and hold his opponent in devastating moves like the spinning pile-driver. Occasionally, a character’s body will be in direct contradiction to his or her play style. *Street Fighter IV*’s Rufus, for example, is a corpulent butterball, but has high speed and odd-angled attacks. However, his unexpected style is explained in his narrative, where he is positioned as a rival-in-his-own-mind of Ken’s, proclaiming his “unorthodox kung fu” to be the real deal, compared to Ken’s *shotokan* karate, a traditional and well-respected martial art. In the narrative none of the other characters take Rufus seriously or consider him a “true” fighter, just as a player first witnessing his visual design will not necessarily “know” how he fights.

However, Rufus is the exception that proves the rule. By the time *Street Fighter IV* was released, the franchise was over twenty years old, and it had been nearly a decade since the last *Street Fighter III* title. It is not too much to assume Capcom knew the semiotic relationship between visual character design and play style, and knew their consumers expected the easy correlation to continue. Rufus was their chance to bring something unexpected to their audience.

Another way in which narrative interacts with gameplay is in the stories that Arcade Mode play-throughs tell. Arcade Mode is the one-play mode by which the player defeats a series of foes (often anywhere from eight to twelve) culminating with a boss battle, after which the player's character has "won" the game. In *Street Fighter IV*, a short cel-animated segment (as opposed to using the in-game 3D graphics engine) precedes the first match of any character in Arcade Mode, setting the stage for that character's motivations in entering the third World Warrior Tournament. Later, after several battles against random opponents, a set opponent will appear. This opponent has narrative ties to the player's character and this battle is often referred to as a "Rival Battle." Mexican *lucha libre* wrestler El Fuerte faces off with his Russian wrestling counterpart Zangief or Ken confronts his "rival" Rufus. The battle is preceded by a cut scene (a section of the game where there is no player control involved) in which the two characters exchange words. This cut scene, unlike the introduction segment, is rendered using the game's graphics engine. Finally, after defeating the final boss Seth, the player is allowed to view their chosen character's ending (which is cel-animated in the same style as the introduction segment). These three pieces of non-interactive storytelling function as virtual landmarks, as well as giving the player's character a narrative reason for his or her fight, and thus a justification for that character's inclusion in the game's roster. These small story segments can be referred to

as “micronarratives,” a term coined, in relation to video games, by Henry Jenkins in *Game Design As Narrative Architecture*.

Narrative can also enter games on the level of localized incident, or what I am calling micronarratives. [...] None of them last more than a few seconds; [...] contemporary game designers might call them “memorable moments.” [S]ome memorable moments in games depend on sensations (the sense of speed in a racing game) or perceptions (the sudden expanse of sky in a snowboarding game). [...] Even games which do not create large-scale plot trajectories may well depend on these micronarratives to shape the player's emotional experience. Micronarratives may be cut scenes, but they don't have to be. One can imagine a simple sequence of preprogrammed actions through which an opposing player responds to your successful touchdown in a football game as a micronarrative.<sup>25</sup>

These emotional experiences—the experience, for example, of seeing Akuma confront his brother Gouken in anticipation of a fight-to-the-finish—are not available to the player solely through gameplay. The fight itself can be played out an infinite number of times through gameplay, with varying results, but the build-up typically exists more in a confrontation of the player vs. the computer AI (in the case of a one-player version of the fight) or a player vs. another player (in the case of a two-player variation) than the confrontation of Akuma and Gouken as characters. However, the micronarrative makes this particular confrontation in one-player Arcade Mode have slightly more weight than the hundreds of thousands of other Akuma/Gouken battles that have occurred in other multi-player modes. It gives the players a motivation to care about the outcome of their in-game actions and their victory in the virtual contest.

In a two-player battle, the motivation is very clear. There is a sense of competition, of proving one's worth against another human opponent, of measuring one's skill against another's. This has far-reaching social consequences if that opponent is a family member, friend, or

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<sup>25</sup> Henry Jenkins, “Game Design as Narrative Architecture,” in *First Person*, ed. Pat Harrington and Noah Frup-Waldrop (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 125.

acquaintance. Anecdotally, my chief experience with *Street Fighter II* was on the SNES home version. My usual opponent was my older brother, whose skill I quickly surpassed with practice. The natural sibling rivalry we had motivated my desire to win, victory becoming all the sweeter due to his four-and-a-half-year advantage on my age (and thus, ability in most things). In addition to my brother, some of my childhood *Street Fighter II* memories center around sessions with my brother and the children of a French Air Force officer who was friends with and a co-worker of my father, a professor and administrator at the Air War College on Maxwell Air Force Base. These two children, whose names I sadly don't recall, had ages that matched up roughly with my brother and me, but their lack of English skills (and our lack of French skills) kept communication to a minimum. However, all four of us spoke the language of *Street Fighter II*. The motivation to play (and win) then became a social one, to create relationships with strangers who were, at the time, truly strange to me. All of the thrust of playing came from without—from the social dynamics of multiplayer games. Single-player modes in fighting games offer precious little to compensate for the loss of these outside factors. The micronarrative nuggets are all they can muster. The success of these micronarratives in offering a correlative emotional experience is questionable, but the intent is clear.

The final function of narrative that relates to gameplay in Street Fighter games is a context in which rules can be applied to the game world. For example, the context of nearly every Street Fighter game is a fighting tournament. A default Street Fighter match is played in a best two-out-of-three format (though this can be changed in the game options menu of most home versions of Street Fighter). This format makes sense both as a competitive mode between players, as the best-two-out-of-three (or best three-out-of-five, best four-out-of-seven, etc.) format has long been used in contests, both formal and informal. Additionally, it makes sense

within the game world. If the characters are fighting in a tournament, such rules would be in place to determine a winner. This structure is sometimes challenged in the fighting game genre, and exists more as a generic convention than a correlating game-world rule for narrative rules. For example, *Time Killers*, a relatively unsuccessful 1992 arcade and 1996 Sega Genesis fighting game, allows for player characters to dismember or decapitate the opponent mid-round, the latter instantly ending the round. However, assuming that was the first victory of the best-two-out-of-three for the dismemberer/decapitator, the opponent reappears for the next round whole, unmarked, and having possession of his or her head. This places the narrative (dismemberment/decapitation in the first round, and thus death) and the systematic rules (best two-out-of-three rounds) at odds.

This would also explain why a *Street Fighter* game ends when it ends. If the goal is simply to defeat opponents, the battles should continue as long as there are still unbeaten opponents. While this was the case with the earliest *Street Fighters*—*Street Fighter II* randomly-ordered battles with the eight playable characters before moving onto a set Balrog, Vega, Sagat, M. Bison progression towards the end—later versions of the games featured rosters much, much larger than the 12 characters featured in *Street Fighter II*. (Need I remind the reader of the 50+ characters of *Marvel vs. Capcom 2*?) Therefore, to make sure a single Arcade Mode playthrough was not too arduous, a set number of victories led to a final confrontation, and a victory in the final confrontation led to being crowned champion. Just as the characters “wins,” the player “wins.” Just as the character must prove itself against the rest of the rabble to challenge the boss, the player must prove herself against the rest of the (AI-controlled) rabble to challenge the (AI-controlled) boss.

## The Synthesis of Narratology and Ludology

Much of early game studies was centered around a false dichotomy; a schism that need not have been. Assessing this dichotomy, Ian Bogost writes in *Unit Operations*,

What is the relationship between the study of games (ludology) and the study of narrative (narratology)? This “ludology vs. narratology” debate has played itself out in many public and private forums. [...] “Ludology vs. Narratology” may be a nice shorthand for the tension between rule-based systems and story-based systems, but *narratology* is a somewhat vague contender in this prize match. [...] Ludology has been characterized by its coverage of the unique features of games, and narratology in the traditional sense of the word is the study of narratives across media, including oral and written language, gestures, and music. Interestingly, this variety of narratology is much more similar to ludology than its detractors may acknowledge. [...] The study of the formal properties of narrative or games, then, is quite different from studying the expressive output of either form.<sup>26</sup>

The current thinking, and my own, is that narrative and gameplay are part of a larger holistic approach to video game criticism. (Juul’s newer, combined approach in *Half-Real* is proof of that, after his earlier, staunchly pro-ludology stance.) While video games may be only understood when considering gameplay, they can only be felt when also considering narrative. Bogost’s reference to “expressive output” refers to player experience, and player experience of any game is a combination of both narrative and gameplay, and how the two speak to each other.

Put simply, video games cannot be about narrative *or* gameplay; they must be about both. Narrative frames and contextualizes gameplay while gameplay is the structure upon which narrative is built. I have contended since sentence one that games, as media, are an inherently different experience than other media, and the intricacies of gameplay, the navigations and decisions that video games demand of their audience in order to be properly consumed, set apart “playing a game” from “watching a movie” or “listening to music.”

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<sup>26</sup> Ian Bogost, *Unit Operations* (Cambridge, Massachusetts MIT Press, 2008), 67-8.

My insistence that there is something *fundamentally different* in playing a video game is, of course, an argument on the phenomenological nature of media consumption. In “The Poetics of Electrosonic Presence: Recorded Music and the Materiality of Sound,” Jeremy Wallach begins his discussion of the nature of a music recording with this:

I had intended this project to be an exploration of a seemingly innocuous question: should music recordings be analyzed as “texts” or as “performances”? I had come to the following conclusion: music recordings are neither texts nor performances. Music recordings are *music*.<sup>27</sup>

It is important to maintain basic truths as simply and overtly as Wallach declares with “music recordings are *music*.” Video games are not interactive movies (even if some market themselves as such). Video games are not playable stories; they are not virtual sports; they are not a simple modification of any previously-existing media or cultural experience (though their aesthetics are certainly influence by previously-existing media). Video games are *video games*. I suppose I feel the need to say this for reasons similar to Wallach’s. “I say that recordings are music—nothing more, nothing less—to counteract the tendency to view them as pseudo-music, as pale substitutes for authentic musical experience.”<sup>28</sup> I say that video games are video games—not more than other media, but not less—to protect them from the analytical strategies of film and literature that, while useful as starting points in the analysis of video games, cannot ever hope to speak to the *video gameness* of video games. I do not aim to claim video games as somehow more complicated or intricate than film, literature or music. I simply hope to make the case that video games are *fundamentally different* from other media, and need their own set of theoretical frameworks to be analyzed. These frameworks, I believe, must be built in accordance with an

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<sup>27</sup> Jeremy Wallach, “The Poetics of Electrosonic Presence: Recorded Music and the Materiality of Sound,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 15(1) (2003), 34-5.

<sup>28</sup> Jeremy Wallach, “The Poetics of Electrosonic Presence: Recorded Music and the Materiality of Sound,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 15(1) (2003), 35.



understanding of the deliberative nature of video game consumption. Wallach states that his essay “has made the modest suggestion that recorded music should be examined as a phenomenon apart from performance and that its fundamental nature is rooted in sonic (that is, audiotactile) experience.”<sup>29</sup> This chapter makes a similar suggestion that video games, and especially the Street Fighter series, should be examined as distinct phenomena, not simply “story” or “rules.” Playing Street Fighter occurs both within and without story and rules, shaped by both software and community. If we are to understand games, we must look at how these aspects interact, not how they separate themselves.

By considering the ramifications of gameplay on narrative in Street Fighter and vice versa, as well as the way both synthesize and follow either the same or parallel tracks of player experience, we arrive at a fuller understanding of what playing Street Fighter “is.” Playing Street Fighter is an experience social and solitary, physical and representational, systematic and mythological, existing in a space in which the body and the machine become one. “Video games epitomize a new cyborgian relationship with entertainment technologies, linking our everyday social space and computer technologies to virtual spaces and futuristic technologies. Games both rely on and thematize a contemporary sensibility and fantasy.”<sup>30</sup> Video games, and Street Fighter in particular, are not only new media, but new territory: a space—not inherently utopian, but democratic enough for a utopian hope—that challenges and changes the traditional media literacy we have come to know with books, movies, and music.

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<sup>29</sup> Jeremy Wallach, “The Poetics of Electrosonic Presence: Recorded Music and the Materiality of Sound,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 15(1) (2003), 54.

<sup>30</sup> Martti Lahti, “As We Become Machines: Corporealized Pleasures in Video Games,” in *The Video Game Theory Reader*, ed. Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron (New York: Routledge, 2003), 158.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Story and Graphics: Race at Play in Narrative and Image**

### An “Other” Selectable Self

*Street Fighter II*'s full title has a very significant subtitle that is often ignored when its name is invoked: *The World Warrior*. While *Street Fighter* presented player character Ryu with an international cast of villains and rivals—Brit punk Birdie, Chinese kung fu master Gen, etcetera—the first game in the twenty-five-plus game *Street Fighter* series ensured that those characters were solely controllable by the computer's AI. With *Street Fighter II*, however, Osaka-based game company Capcom expanded the roster of player-selectable characters to eight (and eventually seventeen by the release of *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*). It is this design choice which can be pinpointed as Capcom's smartest decision and the reason *Street Fighter II* so outperformed its predecessor, becoming one of the better-selling game franchises of all time.<sup>31</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, these changes focused the play even more on the characters being at odds whether through narrative means or simply the instruments of two competitive players. The series plays upon the rhetoric of conflict to present the game characters as suitable, and roughly equal, challengers to one another. Naturally (since *Street Fighter II* is *The World Warrior*) race, ethnicity, and nationality become connected to the conflicts of the game, both within the game world and outside of it.

*Street Fighter II* made these racial, ethnic, and national connections quite clear, and framed the gameplay around an idea of a worldwide fighting tournament, fought in locales as varied as “a Brazilian dock, an Indian temple, a Chinese street market, a Soviet factory, [and] a

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<sup>31</sup> Capcom's internal figures place the series as having sold twenty-five million home units as of May 2008, though that number is now significantly higher with the success of 2009's *Street Fighter IV* and 2010's *Super Street Fighter IV* on Xbox 360 and Playstation 3. It is unknown whether these figures include the Marvel Vs. and SNK Vs. series and some other titles listed in the first chapter. Chris Roper, “Capcom Releases Lifetime Sales Number,” *Ign.com*, May 23, 2008, <http://ps2.ign.com/articles/876/876333p1.html>.

Las Vegas show palace.”<sup>32</sup> Each character was connected to a particular “stage”—a video game term for a particular game world locale, sometimes synonymous with “level”—in such a way that no matter what character the player chooses, it is her computer-controlled opponent who has “home field advantage,” as all battles are fought on that opponent’s stage. For example, whether the player chooses to play Zangief the Russian wrestler or Chun Li the Chinese detective, if that



player is facing off against E. Honda the sumo wrestler in one-player mode the battle will take place in E. Honda’s stage—a cartoony, neon-soaked Japanese bathhouse that also happens to house the large circular rope that traditionally indicates a sumo wrestling ring. The player’s journey to this location, rife with very specific imagery invoking both the fighting style and ethnicity of the opponent, is prefaced by a short two-dimensional animation of a plane flying from one location to another on a map of the world. For example, if the player chooses Blanka, the Brazilian beast-man, and the first

opponent is E. Honda, the plane will fly from Brazil to Japan to indicate that Blanka is journeying across the world to fight E. Honda and prove his abilities in the Second World

<sup>32</sup> Mary Fuller and Henry Jenkins, “Nintendo and New World Travel Writing: A Dialogue,” in *Cybersociety: Computer-Mediated Communication and Community*, ed. Steven G. Jones (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995), 62.

Warrior Tournament—the narrative conceit of *Street Fighter II* that is the impetus for all the characters to fight each other.

This set-up—having the computer-controlled opponent fight in his or her native land, with a background displaying both character as well as national cues—is repeated throughout most the series’s sequels. Additionally, the idea of a tournament of international combatants has a long history in East Asian media, specifically the martial arts film genre. Leon Hunt writes in “‘I Know Kung Fu!’ The Martial Arts in the Age of Digital Reproduction,”

*SF2*’s International Martial Arts Tournament and its global cast of characters suggest that the cinematic model for the [fighting game] was *Enter the Dragon* (1973). [The] film revolves around a tournament organized by an Evil Mastermind. [...] The tournament structure allows narrative to progress *through* a series of fights; the climactic Hall of Mirrors would make an effective game level. The three heroes anticipate the racial-cultural inclusivity of fighting games: Chinese Lee (Bruce Lee), white American smoothie Roper (John Saxon) and African-American Williams (Jim Kelly).<sup>33</sup>

Video games’ connections to *Enter the Dragon* are no mere conjecture. In the Double Dragon game series—a side-scrolling beat-‘em-up game in the style of Capcom’s *Street Fighter* sister series *Final Fight*—there are generic white and black enemies named “Roper” and “Williams,” respectively. Dhalsim, *Street Fighter*’s Indian yogi with stretching limbs, directly recalls the Yoga Master character from 1975’s *Master of the Flying Guillotine*, another Hong Kong martial arts film centered on a fighting tournament. Additionally, Hunt connects fighting video games, and particularly *Street Fighter II*, to not just East Asian martial arts films (usually from Hong Kong) but also Japanese *anime* (animation) and *manga* (comics). The idea of a *ki* (spirit) energy blast as the offensive weapon of a martial artist has existed in very evident form in Japan since the 1970s, but was most wildly popular with the emergence of the *Dragon Ball* (1984) *manga*, the story of an alien named Goku who comes to earth, grows up to become the planet’s most

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<sup>33</sup> Leon Hunt, “‘I Know Kung Fu!’ The Martial Arts in the Age of Digital Reproduction,” in *ScreenPlay: Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces*, ed. Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), 198.

powerful warrior (and staunchest defender), and battles baddies with *ki* attacks that can (and do) level entire mountains. Lastly, Hunt connects *Street Fighter II* to American “blockbuster” films, with their over-the-top visual spectacles and angst-ridden heroes. Guile, *Street Fighter*’s American G.I., certainly fits this bill and recalls Rambo and Charles Bronson, among other American movie heroes, with his quest for vengeance upon M. Bison (*Street Fighter II*’s ultimate evildoer, a third-world dictator), who killed Guile’s army friend Charlie.

It is appropriate to place the discourses of race and nationality in *Street Fighter* in the context of these three media traditions: Hong Kong, Japan, and the United States. Hong Kong, both under British and Chinese jurisdiction, has been a center for East Asian popular culture production, exporting to all its neighbors and the rest of the world. The US, with its presence in Japan since World War II, has long been influential in Japanese popular culture. However, *Street Fighter*, as a video game series, is a Japanese product, to be sure. Though several American adaptations of the source material exist—the Jean-Claude Van Damme live-action film, a USA Network cartoon—they are adaptations working from a set of texts created by a Japanese development team and situated in a particular set of media influences that are uniquely Japanese in their make-up. *Street Fighter* exists, in terms of its media precedents, as a combination of Japanese *anime* and *manga* tropes, Hong Kong martial arts narrative structures, and the American aesthetic of spectacle. However, these three strains (before *Street Fighter II* and especially during its development) are not separate popular culture influences existing entirely on their own, but rather have been influencing each other for decades. Hunt echoes Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in calling this process “remediation,” and quotes the definition by Bolter and Grusin as a process whereby media “appropriates the techniques, forms, and social

















significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real.”<sup>34</sup>

While *Street Fighter* remediates these traditions, fighting games like *Street Fighter* are remediated in the very same films, comics, and cartoons, and those films, comics, and cartoons are remediated in each other. These media traditions have long been intertwined, as evidenced by Hong Kong martial arts movie legend Jackie Chan (now an American film star) borrowing *Street Fighter* characters for a fantasy fight scene in his 1994 *manga* adaptation *City Hunter*. In the film’s sequence, Jackie transforms into E. Honda and then Chun Li (the Chinese character of *Street Fighter II*, but also a girl) to fight his opponent, who has transformed into the most American *Street Fighter* character, Ken. Here we can see the blurring of lines of these three media traditions: Hong Kong action star fighting American character from a Japanese video game. *Street Fighter*, and indeed almost the entire fighting game genre, exists at this crossroads.

It is from this spot where the discussion of race, nationality, and ethnicity must occur. This chapter will attempt to unfurl the way race is presented in *Street Fighter*. Part of that project is simply to look at the images that *Street Fighter* presents for the player to consume. As described above, nation and race are intrinsic (and seemingly conflated in a characteristically Japanese fashion) to the conflicts present in *Street Fighter*. Fighters fight in and for their countries, and represent a view of race and nation that may or may not be flattering. For the purposes of this chapter, I am concentrating on the seventeen characters of the *Street Fighter II* series, whose names and characteristics are listed on the chart on the next page. I examine those characters in terms of three categories: the East Asian, the White Western, and the Monstrous Other.

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<sup>34</sup> Jay Davis Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, (Cambridge, MIT Press. 2000), 18.

<b>Street Fighter II Series Characters</b> (ORGANIZED BY FIRST APPEARANCE AS A PLAYABLE CHARACTER)			
<i>Street Fighter II</i>			
			
Blanka (Brazil)	Chun Li (China)	Dhalsim (India)	E. Honda (Japan)
			
Guile (USA)	Ken (USA)	Ryu (Japan)	Zangief (USSR)
<i>Street Fighter II Championship Edition</i>			
			
Balrog (USA)	M. Bison (Thailand)	Sagat (Thailand)	Vega (Spain)
<i>Super Street Fighter II</i>			
			
Cammy (UK)	Dee Jay (Jamaica)	Fei Long (Hong Kong)	T. Hawk (USA)
<i>Super Street Fighter II Turbo</i>			Akuma (Japan)



## Us, You, and Them:

### East Asia, the White West, and the Monstrous Other

As stated previously, *Street Fighter* must be read as a Japanese text, but it must also be read as a text that has been influenced by popular culture from the United States and Hong Kong, and this is very present in the images of East Asians that appear in *Street Fighter* games, particularly the characters of Hong Kong (separate from China when the franchise began), China, and Japan. These characters—Fei Long the Bruce Lee look-alike, Chun Li the undercover Interpol agent, E. Honda the sumo champion, and Ryu the stoic karate master—can be traced back to film and cultural types that have existed in imported and domestic Japanese popular culture for decades before *Street Fighter II*. All but Fei Long were present from the beginning of *Street Fighter II*, and all were codified very strongly as “good guys.”

E. Honda—a *yokozuna* (sumo champion)—is probably the easiest of all the *Street Fighter* characters to “read.” *Sumo* is the national sport of Japan and has very strong connections with history and culture and markers of Japanese identity. Marilyn Ivy connects *sumo* with *kabuki* theater, perhaps the most “Japanese” of traditional Japanese art forms, in *Discourses of the Vanishing*.

*Sumo* is the wrestling counterpart of *kabuki*: both were immensely popular urban entertainment forms of the Tokugawa period, both have contemporary prestige as traditional Japanese performances (although *sumo* attracts vastly larger crowds).<sup>35</sup>

E. Honda strengthens that connection by wearing *kabuki*-style face paint. To a Japanese, he is composed of multiple historical and cultural signifiers: national sport, traditional theater, and everyday Japanese life. His body is *sumo*, his face paint *kabuki*. His stage, viewable in the image several pages above, is a stylized *senjo* (bathhouse)—this is easily understandable by the

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<sup>35</sup> Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 221.

*hiragana* character *yu* that can be seen on the left of the screen. This *hiragana* character is a stand-in for a *kanji* with the same pronunciation which means “hot water” and is visible at any public bathhouse in Japan. Additionally, within this *sentō* there is a circle on the ground that is meant to graphically represent the *tawara* (rice-straw bales) of a *sumo dohyō* (match ring). These images speak directly to a Japanese understanding of Japanese life for a Japanese audience. They represent both “common” life (the *sentō*) and a historically and culturally important activity (the makeshift *dohyō* of *sumo*). *Sentō* are commonplace, as any urban and most suburban or rural neighborhoods will have one. Meanwhile, *sumo* tournaments (*bashō*) happen only six times a year, and only in the largest urban centers—three times in Tokyo, and once each in Osaka, Nagoya, and Fukuoka.<sup>36</sup> *Sumo* takes place in an environment of pomp and tradition, while the *sentō* is a place to relax and take care of daily tasks like bathing and washing both bodies and clothes (as many *sentō* also function as laundromats). In this way, E. Honda’s environment recalls all facets of Japanese society: the ordinary and the extraordinary.

But what of his image? E. Honda, like most characters in *Street Fighter*, is cartoonish. His deep stance—knees bent at almost 90 degree angles, back hunched—does recall the *sumo* body, but the *sumo* stance is meant to be maintained only for a short period of time as most *sumo* matches last only a few seconds. E. Honda instead maintains this stance even when walking, shuffling his feet sideways like a crab. Even the markers of his *sumo* costuming are somewhat garish. While E. Honda does wear the *sumo mawashi* (belt) while fighting—consistent with what a real *sumo* would do—he also wears his *kensho-mawashi*, a ceremonial apron that is only worn in real *sumo* on ceremonial occasions. E. Honda’s out-of-place, yet real, aspects are emblematic of how *Street Fighter* treats semiotic markers of race and culture. The game tends to

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<sup>36</sup> “Sumo,” Japan-Guide, <http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2080.html>.

stick as many signifiers as possible to a character, not necessarily worrying about context. In *Street Fighter IV*, the Mexican character El Fuerte is both a *lucha libre* (free form) pro wrestler and a cook who searches for spicy food. Spicy Mexican cuisine is a legitimate international signifier for Mexico, as is *lucha libre* pro wrestling. Separate, they make sense and feel “real,” but mashed together, just as E. Honda’s Japanese signifiers are mashed together, they come off as comical and exaggerated.

Many of Street Fighter’s visual cues come from *anime*, a medium known for its over-the-top visuals in which a character can spontaneously change size, produce objects like hammers from out of nowhere, and fling other characters to obscene heights (usually ending in a smash flash and “ping!” sound). This physical logic—or, really, lack of logic—is best dubbed “hyperphysicality.” The hyperphysical is very present in video games, as well as the action movies, martial arts films, and cartoons that inspire them. Looney Tunes, The Three Stooges, Chinese *wu xia* tradition and martial arts films, and myth allow for hyperphysicality. This tradition of hyperphysicality works in Street Fighter to explain many of the available attacks. E. Honda, for example, has a “super move” in which he propels himself across the screen in a straight line, striking the opponent with the crown of his head. There are several hyperphysical aspects to this attack: the leg strength it would take to launch his body such a distance, the lack of an appropriate arc to the attack, and the belief that somehow striking with the crown of one’s head would not also do severe damage to oneself. However, Honda’s attack makes perfect sense in the tradition of both anime and martial arts cinema, particularly a subset of films known colloquially as “wire-fu” that use digitally-removed harnesses and wires to allow the performers to perform insane leaps and far-reaching moves.

Honda represents both Japaneseness with his multiple—if somewhat incongruent—Japanese signifiers, and the remediated, combined popular culture tradition within which *Street Fighter* is formed. Jackie Chan—the biggest martial arts box office star of all time in Hong Kong—very appropriately chooses E. Honda as one of his transformative personas in the *City Hunter* movie scene described in this chapter’s introduction. E. Honda is “Japanese” in visage, but simply pop culture in construction—he recalls Japan through his image and supposed profession but is a product of a hybrid, international popular culture aesthetic. This hybrid nature is also applied to Chun Li and Fei Long, the non-Japanese East Asian characters that exist in the *Street Fighter II* series. Chun Li is an inherently international figure—she is, after all, an agent of the International Police—and is the other character Chan portrays in *City Hunter*. Chun Li is an appropriate choice for Chan to become when living in this video game fantasy, not just because of the comical aspects of his gender reversal or because she is ostensibly Chinese, but because she represents a connection between China (her ethnic marker) and Japan (the site of her production as a character), two countries whose shared history is far less than amiable.

Japan’s connection to China goes back many, many centuries, and is documented at least as early as the sixth or seventh century A.D.<sup>37</sup> Among other traits, the cultures share a writing system, called *kanji* in Japan. Yet one of the greatest national traumas in recent Chinese history is the Nanking Massacre, also known as “The Rape of Nanking” thanks to a bestselling nonfiction book of the same title. The Nanking Massacre was a period of Japanese occupation of then-Chinese capital Nanking in 1937 and 1938 and occurred during the Second Sino-Japanese War, an Asian precursor to World War II. However, it was in many ways a hidden atrocity. The government of Japan did not publicly apologize for the events of the Nanking Massacre until

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<sup>37</sup> Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946), 49.

1995, several years after the release of *Street Fighter II*. However, the larger tensions between China and Japan, many stemming from this particular event, constituted a palpable political discourse in East Asian relations, particularly starting in the 1970s, when Japan became an economic power and thus a more desirable trading partner for China. Additionally, Western influence in Hong Kong and postwar Japan has meant that the West has always acted as a mediator for and maintained a vested interest in Chinese-Japanese relations. It is in this political tension as well as the remediated hybridity of culture that Chun Li and Fei Long are positioned.

Therefore it is only natural that Chun Li is an international figure, and Fei Long physically recalls one (Bruce Lee, the American-bred Hong Kong movie star). Their internationality also sells these characters to a Western audience by taking them out of a foreign context and into an international cross-cultural context. Within this hybrid remediated culture, Chun Li and Fei Long both step out of a “kung fu flick” for a Western audience; the semiotic nodes are easy to understand and consume. It’s not different for a Japanese audience (though the anxieties of Japanese nationalism toward China/Hong Kong are vastly different from those of the West). Chun Li recalls any number of characters from Shaw Brothers movies or Golden Harvest productions, many of which saw extensive play in America on “grindhouse” theater screens or weekend-afternoon local television. This “chop-socky” tradition works along with the largely *anime*-based tradition of hyperphysicality to bring to American audiences a view of the East that is a familiar form of exoticism. While the tropes are very un-American, they are nothing new and nothing jarring for the Western casual consumer of Eastern popular culture. Even E. Honda, while using plenty of visual signifiers whose names may be unknown by most Westerners, uses ones whose Japaneseness, even to a Western audience, is unmistakable. There is very little chance of any player with a working knowledge of the world and a history of

consuming Eastern popular culture mistaking E. Honda for anything other than Japanese or Chun Li for anything other than Chinese. Both also trade in notions of authority: E. Honda as an authoritative image of Japanese nationality, and Chun Li as an agent of international law enforcement. This cultural and judicial authority is written into the images of their bodies, and transferred to their race. In *Street Fighter*, the East Asians are, almost wholly, the “good guys.” E. Honda is an affable sporting superstar, Chun Li an international cop with a sharp sense of justice.

Meanwhile, Fei Long not only looks like Bruce Lee, but in the game narrative, he functions as Bruce Lee. Within the world of the game, the character is a martial arts film star, and his form—shirtless, long black pants, shifting forward and back, thumbs and pinkie fingers loose—is unmistakable. As mentioned, Bruce Lee exists at a crossroads of East and West. He is American and Chinese, a Hollywood film star and an international film star. He also manages to recall myths of the epic hero. The biographical movie of his life, *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story*, places him as a hero struggling with a dark fate, overcoming physical and emotional obstacles. He eventually succumbs, but not before triumphing with the creation of a masterpiece, *Enter the Dragon* (which we’ve already established as integral to the construction of *Street Fighter* and the fighting games genre). Fei Long brings with him all the semiotic values that Bruce Lee does: transnationality, triumph over adversity, and a star quality.

I propose that East Asians in *Street Fighter* function as an “Us.” By “Us” I mean the focus on what *Street Fighter* is and means and how it is played is inextricably East Asian, and *Street Fighter* (being a Japanese product) embraces East Asianness as an expression of self. The fact that the Chinese characters of the game are not domestically Chinese, but rather both exist as figures positioned in international discourses, paints East Asianness as relevant, international,

and commodifiable—all adjectives that could also describe Street Fighter. While East Asianness in Street Fighter is steeped in its own traditions and its visual difference from the West, there is no “primitiveness” in these characters of the sort that is usually indicative of Orientalism—Edward Said’s process by which white Western discourse produces Eastern subjects as “savage” and “exotic.” Auto-Orientalism often occurs when an Eastern country wishes to sell itself to the West, though the convoluted and very region-specific imagery of Street Fighter (particularly in the case of E. Honda) points towards that not being the case with the series. It could be said that Western tastes dictate the images of East Asianness in Street Fighter but that would be understating the strength of homegrown media traditions of Japan and China/Hong Kong and their continued influence on Western media. Images of East Asianness in Street Fighter are not “Other,” but rather “Self.” They are warped through the lens of popular culture, media tropes, and remediation, but they remain “us.” This is not to say that there is no othering present in Street Fighter—there most certainly is, and I will discuss it in this chapter. Simply put, the othering present in Street Fighter is located in very specific locations and characters, none of whom come from East Asia or the White West.

If East Asia is “Us,” the White West is “You.” Street Fighter comes from East Asia, but speaks directly to the White West in terms that it knows have already been established by the remediated hybrid traditions of shared popular culture experiences. It also speaks to the West, through the characters of Ryu and Ken, on issues of Japaneseness and Americanness. Ryu’s Japaneseness can be codified in his body, like Honda’s: his black hair, cut simply in a *sarariiman* (business man) style; his subdued facial expressions; his white *gi* (karate outfit) and red gloves matching the colors of the Japanese flag. However, another way Ryu enacts Japaneseness is through his relationship with Ken, his narrative rival and American counterpart. Ken is many

things Ryu is not: flashy, distracted, boisterous. These character traits, as written on these two fighters, can be extrapolated onto the narrative countries of their origin, as long as this characterization is considered to be from the Japanese perspective. Ryu functions as the ultimate Japanese warrior—while it is difficult to place him as the “hero” of the Street Fighter series due to the expansion of the game’s playable roster since the original game and Ryu’s narrative defeat at the end of *Street Fighter II*, it is easy to place him as the central figure due to his importance in marketing and his continual presence in any game even tangentially Street Fighter-related. As David Surman puts it, “The image of Ryu has become paradigmatic of not only the Street Fighter series, but of the Capcom company in general, particularly its arcade sector.”<sup>38</sup> However, Ryu’s existence—and by extension his Japaneseness—is tied to an international life: a friendship/rivalry with Ken, encounters with other fighters the world over, and a desire to prove himself as the “World Warrior.”

However, the fact that so much of the character of Ryu is relatable and entwined with the international world and the character of Ken shows that while the Japanese still claim homogeneity, there is a subtle and slow movement away from those claims. Japanese homogeneity is still an important part of the nation’s cultural history, but its cultural present has begun to open up facets of Japaneseness to non-Japanese. The current high-level *sumo* wrestlers are a perfect example. Recently retired Asashoryu, winner of 25 of 44 sumo tournaments held between November 2002 and January 2010, is a native Mongolian as is his stable mate Hakuho, who won 12 of the 19 tournaments in that time period that Asashoryu did not. Since March 2006, only two tournaments have been won by wrestlers of Japanese ethnicity. *Sumo* is Japan’s national sport, and while the dominance of the sport by non-Japanese is not exactly celebrated, it

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<sup>38</sup> David Surman, “Pleasure, spectacle, and reward in Capcom’s *Street Fighter* series,” in *Videogame, Player, Text*, ed. Barry Atkins and Tanya Krzywinska (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 209.



is accepted. Additionally, there has been an emergence of mixed-race celebrities such as baseball pitcher Yu Darvish (half Iranian), actress Rie Miyazawa (half Dutch) and TV host and commercial spokeswoman Becky (half British). So while the historical importance of Japanese homogeneity may remain, the contemporary importance of maintaining the nation's homogeneity is changing. Japan is a country with strong historical ties to China and Korea and strong post-World War II ties to the United States. The hybridity of Japan since the 1980s, politically and demographically, with both the promise and anxiety such a change entails, is the modern Japaneseness.

In *Discourses of the Vanishing*, Marilyn Ivy discusses the possibility of the Japanese Imperial line originating from Korea:

To show how the most authoritative interior sign of native Japaneseness is originally foreign points to an essential alienation at national-cultural core. While the emperor may merely be the most spectacular and at the same time the most banal example of this alien interiority, the entire national-cultural fantasy of Japan—and indeed of any nation—must form itself around such foreign irritants.<sup>39</sup>

Homogeneity as a claim can only exist as a response to an “other,” and in many ways, Ryu functions as a similar figurehead to the emperor. He is shown within the narrative as having an extreme amount of power, perhaps some that is even divinely bestowed upon him. He is, in many ways, a banal symbol: a fighting everyman. His life does not extend beyond the fight, just as the emperor's life does not extend beyond the palace. It is then necessary to use Ken to reinforce the “national-cultural fantasy” inherent in Ryu. Ryu and Ken are extremely similar in their fighting styles, having trained with the same master since their preteen years. They know the same combative maneuvers, including the *shoryuken*, *hadouken*, and *tatsumaki senpuukyaku*. Because they are so similar, their differences are magnified. Ryu is stoic, but more so in the face

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<sup>39</sup> Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 24.

of Ken's passion. Ryu is restless and alone, contrasting Ken's comfortable family life and expected child. Ken is a funhouse mirror version of Ryu, the "foreign irritant" around which Ryu's Japaneseness is situated. The laudable, very Japanese traits of determination and self-reliance are made more prominent by the inextricable connection to the exact opposite features in a friend and rival.

Additionally, it is no coincidence that these friends and rivals come from two nations whose histories in the last 50-60 years have been linked not just by trade, cultural exchange, and economic rivalry, but by postwar military. Ryu's rivalry with Ken mirrors the rivalry of Japan with the United States. In many ways, Japan is embracing its previous enemy, one who devastated and occupied it. The creation of that nation, the United States, as a rival occurred as a very real economic and cultural moment in Japan during the time the *Street Fighter* and *Street Fighter II* games were being developed. This may seem antithetical because of the friendly nature of the Ken/Ryu relationship. However, by making this relationship not about victory and defeat, but rather a mutual maturing into powerful entities, the narrative of *Street Fighter* allows Japan to engage the United States without threatening it. Japan can compete with its previous enemy, the one who destroyed it, without provoking further destruction. The discursive space between "rival" and "enemy" allows for safety. An enemy must be defeated and removed. Ryu and Ken have no desire to defeat or remove each other; they simply wish to prove who is greater and better in a competitive but supportive context. This discourse allows Japaneseness the freedom to move on from the trauma of its destruction at the hands of the United States without removing the aggression it must feel against the enactor of that destruction. Through Ryu and Ken, Japan can still fight America. It can still beat America. But neither of these aggressive reactions leads to any real damage or destruction. Recalling the idea that Ryu represents much

of what the emperor of Japan represents, Ryu is a very postwar figure. He is not a divine aggressor. His power is not enacted in seeking revenge or in the acquisition of the power of others. Instead, Ryu seeks to improve from within without upsetting the harmony of the world around him. The current status of the emperor of Japan is similarly not one of a divine military leader, but rather a symbol of a strong history and culture. Ryu is an evolution of that symbol. He is that domestic symbol given agency in an international world. He has the ability to embrace his previous enemies, learn from them, fight with them and against them without threatening them on a level of all-out war. He is the economic and cultural capital that has been gained by postwar Japan, due in large part to its symbiotic relationship with America.

This, then, casts Ken as a very important figure, and it could be argued that *Street Fighter* speaks to the White West in a very deliberate way. Before, I stated that East Asia functions as “Us” in *Street Fighter*, but the *Street Fighter* series, and *Street Fighter II* in particular, has enjoyed a tremendous success in the West, which is not accidental. *Street Fighter* does not do a very good job speaking “about” Americanness—there are no relationships with traditional notions of the American dream, or the melting pot, or many other national-cultural fantasies in which the United States is involved. This is due to *Street Fighter* being a Japanese product. But it is a product which speaks to Japan’s relationship with a conception of the West that comes from the East’s experience and fully demonstrates that there is a shared popular culture tradition of remediation that informs *Street Fighter*. The East is “Us,” but the West is “You.”

While Ken directly connects this “You” to the “Us” represented by Ryu, Guile the American G.I. can be connected directly to both the postwar Japanese experience with American occupation and a narrative mirroring of the “Us” that is Chun Li. Guile is a veteran of an unclear war—initially it seemed he was a Vietnam vet, but that wouldn’t work with his apparent age, as

he was far too young—and gets involved with the World Warrior Tournament in order to root out M. Bison, the evil third world dictator/crime syndicate boss (Bison’s motivations are rewritten in later games) who killed his friend Charlie. Chun Li’s motivations are similar. Her father was killed by M. Bison, and she, too, seeks revenge. At the same time, both characters are representatives of Louis Althusser’s Repressive State Apparatus: Guile representing the military and Chun Li representing the police (an international police given its authority by the nations that support it). So both characters’ actions can be codified as personal (revenge for the killing of loved ones) and political (punishing a man who has overstepped the pervading laws of society).

Guile is a character ripe with remediated cultural imagery that may or may not register as intended by the Japanese designers of the Street Fighter series. Guile seems to come largely out of imagery from Vietnam or “one man army” films such as *Rambo: First Blood Part II* or *Commando*. Additionally, his gravity-defying blonde flattop springs from an *anime* tradition of physically impossible hairdos. In the first American-made *Street Fighter* live action film (starring Jean-Claude Van Damme), Guile is the main character. In many ways, this casting makes sense—Guile’s story is mostly separate from that of Ken (the other American hero character, whose narrative is tied up with Ryu) and can easily be rewritten and recapitulated as a generic American good-guy soldier, though his status as such in the Street Fighter video games is very much in question. While Guile is a very “American” character (and thus, arguably, is an important marketing image for selling the Street Fighter series in America), he is far less crucial if we remind ourselves of the Japaneseness of Street Fighter. Guile performs his Americanness and his whiteness differently than Ken, and thus is not integrated into the core Street Fighter universe in the same way. In fact, Guile was for many years dropped from the active roster of

the Street Fighter series, making no appearances in the Street Fighter III series and not appearing in the Street Fighter Alpha series until *Street Fighter Alpha 3* (which returns every single character from *Super Street Fighter II*). He shares this distinction with many of the other core *Street Fighter II* characters outside of Ryu and Ken (who appear in every game with “Street Fighter” in the title) as well as Chun Li (who features prominently in almost as many Street Fighter games). Though he shares many narrative traits with Chun Li, he is not allowed to be “Us” as she is. In regards to his importance in the narrative and imagery of the Street Fighter series as a whole, Guile functions more as an acquaintance than a friend, jumping in and out of the world of Street Fighter. He can do this, because his representation of American identity, unlike Ken’s, is not tied directly to the core Japanese identity embodied in Ryu. Guile and Ryu coexist within Street Fighter, but are not truly connected. Guile’s concerns—justice and revenge—connect him to Chun Li and not Ryu. And while Chun Li is “Us” as expressed above, she is not the masculine Japanese face of “Us” that Ryu represents. E. Honda represents some of the imagery and cultural history of Japan but less of its psychological mindset. In that same mold Guile represents (to the Japanese) less the ideals of America—that is Ken’s domain—and more the look.

Guile and Ken speak to different spaces of Japanese discourse on American identity, one kept at arm’s length (Guile) and one embraced (Ken). The American military has had a strong presence in Japan since World War II, partially in Yokosuka Naval Base 30 kilometers south of Yokohama but primarily in Okinawa, where over half of the approximately 47,000 US troops are stationed as of May 2010.<sup>40</sup> Within the past two decades, there have been several cases in which a US serviceman stationed in Okinawa has had a rape charge levied against him, but none as

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<sup>40</sup> Malcolm Foster, “US, Japan agree to keep Marine air base on Okinawa,” Yahoo! News, May 28, 2010, [http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20100528/ap\\_on\\_re\\_as/as\\_japan\\_us\\_military](http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20100528/ap_on_re_as/as_japan_us_military).

controversial as the 1995 gang rape of a 12-year-old girl by three US marines, a case that is brought up every time a new allegation surfaces. A 2008 rape case involving a 14-year-old junior high student once again rekindled resentment from that 1995 case, “which eventually led to the 1996 agreement by both countries on a large-scale relocation of the U.S. bases in Okinawa, including the transfer of the Marine Corps Futenma Air Station within the prefecture.”<sup>41</sup> It should be noted that Guile’s appearances in the *Street Fighter* series predate this key 1995 incident, and he was temporarily removed from the series after 1994’s *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*, not appearing again until 1998 in *Street Fighter EX* and *Street Fighter Alpha 3*. It is unknown whether or not this temporary exile was related to that 1995 rape case. (It seems unlikely; a different US military character, Charlie, appeared in 1996’s *Street Fighter Alpha* and 1997’s *Street Fighter Alpha 2*.) However, despite Guile’s first appearances predating the incident, the tensions that led to the political firestorm that followed were almost certainly brewing for decades. Despite these strains of resentment, Guile remains a hero character. His motives are pure, he is given a working relationship with Chun Li (another character placed squarely in the realm of heroism), and was even the central character for the first live-action film adaptation. Guile thus represents both a trust in and a fear of white Western power, particularly military/martial power.

Cammy, the only white Western female of *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*, has a convoluted back-story that mirrors the same fears the Guile character evokes.

Cammy was created to be a soulless assassin for M. Bison, but after becoming aware of herself she left Shadaloo. [...] She awoke with amnesia at the doorstep of the British paramilitary government organization, Delta Red. Through her work with the government organization, she encountered Bison in the second World Warrior

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<sup>41</sup> Kaho Shimizu, “Okinawa rape case sparks resentment,” *Japan Times*, February 13, 2008, <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20080213a1.html>.

tournament and her memories returned. After the defeat of Bison and Shadaloo, Cammy returned to her Delta Red teammates ready to live her own life.<sup>42</sup>

As evidenced by this background, Cammy has a much sharper is-this-person-good-or-bad narrative position than Guile. While Guile represents a real-world anxiety associated with the American cultural image of a soldier, Cammy represents a discourse of mistrust of white Western Repressive State Apparatuses that is wholly fictional. However, her image also represents desire, the voracious appetite that Japanese have for Western culture. There is the same veneer of sexuality applied to Cammy that is applied to Chun Li but to a far greater degree. While Chun Li's design allows her strong and muscular legs to be shown quite prominently, Cammy's buttocks is the center of her sexuality, including a "win pose" that the character strikes after victory. In this animation, upon defeating her opponent, Cammy turns away from the "camera" of the screen, revealing her barely-covered butt, looks coyly over her shoulder, and gives the players a thumbs-up. Thus, Cammy is both feared (as she is an ex-assassin) and desired (as a sexual object), just as the West is feared and desired.



Cammy's win pose.

In a way, many of the anxieties represented in the Guile and Cammy characters are more readily available to decode in another, more vicious character. Vega, a beautiful Spanish cage fighter whose pride leads him to protect his face with a shimmering and menacing white mask, fights with a weapon (a rarity in the Street Fighter universe, where hand-to-hand combat is the norm): a claw. Vega represents both desire and fear through his design. He is beautifully elegant (desire) and palpably dangerous (fear). With the mask covering his face and the claw covering his hand, Vega steps out of the relatable, heroic Western white mold and into a whole

<sup>42</sup> Capcom Entertainment, Inc., *Street Fighter IV Training Manual* (Digital Release, PDF Format, 2009), 29.

new category of Street Fighter character. He is both man (and a beautiful example of one at that) and monster, with an inhuman visage and bestial claw. Vega is the White West that is even less embraced than Guile. In order to reconcile this mistrust, he is given the identity and attitude of a monster (as Vega very much enjoys slicing victims with his claw). While the “Us” of Street Fighter is East Asian and the “You” is white and Western, there is another group worth discussing which can be used to categorize the rest of the characters in Street Fighter. Vega is a bridge to that group: the Monstrous Other.

Let me take a moment to frame this Monstrous Other. “Us” and “You” are understandable in terms both of Street Fighter’s portrayal of race and its market interests. The main audience for Street Fighter both as marketplace product and as a cultural media object is a hybrid of East Asian and Western. Therefore it could be said that when Street Fighter speaks on race, it speaks to East Asia (again, “Us”) and the West (again, “You”) in its most broad, stereotyped form. However, if Street Fighter wishes to represent a second- or third-world economic-ethnic identity—or any marginalized non-white Western people—it does so through a haze created by the prejudices, stereotypes, fears, and desires that have long been evident in the remediated popular cultural history upon which Street Fighter draws. The Monstrous Other of Street Fighter is a very specific mix of Others. The Monstrous Other owes some of its composition to the aforementioned concept of “Orientalism.” Said’s framing of ideas about the Orient as coming from an institutional position that creates the Orient as a stark contrast to the West—a line of thinking where the West is normal and the East is different<sup>43</sup>—is certainly important in explaining why the Monstrous Other is neither Us nor You in Street Fighter’s discourse. However, it is also important to note that, to the West, Japan itself is part of the

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<sup>43</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), 273.



Orient as Said described it, a place of mystical thinking and exotic people. However, Japanese cultural history and everyday life is perfectly normal to the Japanese themselves. While Japanese have long seen Orientalist images of themselves in media, they also have a strong media production culture, both in terms of domestically-targeted media of “real” Japaneseness (television and film drama chief among them) and internationally-targeted media that plays more into expected stereotypes (video games among them). This conflict—between the authenticity of the culture one has lived and the knowledge that said culture has often been reduced to Orientalist stereotypes outside Japanese borders—explains the mixed cultural messages of a character like E. Honda. Honda exists as both authentic and stereotypical. While there is true and valid cultural history written onto his image, it is exaggerated and made stereotypical due to market demands and the influence of Orientalism in the remediated media culture that spawned *Street Fighter II* in the first place.

Orientalism has not entirely dictated the imagery and presentation of Asianness in *Street Fighter*, but it has realigned it with a white Western aesthetic. The Orientalist influence on *Street Fighter* does not induce the Japanese to make themselves Other, but instead reframe the discourse on race present in a game with a Western ideology powered by white privilege. Additionally, as Richard Dyer describes in his book *White*, (Western) whiteness has long been a “default” racial setting.<sup>44</sup> The discourse on race is controlled and sustained by Western white thinking, which is present as part of a package of ideologies that influenced the creation of *Street Fighter*. This works hand-in-hand with Orientalism. White is a “default,” a “non-raced” mode of living, “just” human: “unmarked.” Dyer argues, “There is no more powerful position than that of being ‘just’ human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of

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<sup>44</sup> Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 2.

humanity.”<sup>45</sup> This is why the White Western must function as “You” in Street Fighter’s discourse on race. For the product to have resonance, or even power, it must speak to this pervading racial ideology, one that actively marginalizes the nation in which Street Fighter is produced.

The Monstrous Other—neither “Us” nor “You”—allows both the racism inherent in Dyer’s default whiteness and Said’s Orientalism to combine with the powerful cultural-historical rhetoric of Japanese homogeneity. The idea of a racially homogenous Japan is highly ingrained in the national concept of Japan. “The modality of nationalism that emerged in the context of post-Restoration Japan was one that idealized cultural and racial homogeneity as the foundation of the nation state.”<sup>46</sup> In a way, Whiteness-logic, Orientalism, and a discourse of homogeneity share a common enemy: the rest of the world. Japanese disavowal of a racial relationship to the rest of Asia—an idea losing steam, it should be noted—allows a bit of “oh, but they don’t mean us” in the presentations of savage racialized imagery common in the shared media history that influences Street Fighter. Much of the reassertion of Japanese homogeneity shares a distinctly white Western ideology, one that Japan used as a model in the Meiji period for modernizing the country. The molding of the Monstrous Other allows Japan to create the same power in crafting and selling the exotic that Dyer’s Whiteness and Said’s Orientalism allow the White West. This selling of the Other (necessarily Monstrous in Street Fighter, due to the exaggerated nature of the genre) creates an Other that is neither East Asian nor White Western; as game objects that are both playable (thus, controllable) and destructible (thus, marginalized).

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<sup>45</sup> Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 2.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Weiner, “‘Self’ and ‘other’ in imperial Japan,” in *Japan’s Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity*, ed. Michael Weiner, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 1.

The Monstrous Other in *Super Street Fighter II Turbo* is represented in several different characters: the aforementioned Vega, Blanka the Brazilian man-beast, Dhalsim the Indian yogi, Zangief the Russian wrestler, T. Hawk the Native American tribal chief, Dee Jay the Jamaican musician, Balrog the African-American boxer, Sagat the Thai kickboxer, M. Bison the third-world despot, and Akuma the otherworldly martial arts master. In her article “Eating the Other,” bell hooks expands on Orientalism by further investigating the desire that the West (which is mirrored, for the purposes of this discussion, by Japan) has for the Other—the non-white, non-Western. She recalls overhearing a conversation in which some white males at Yale discuss their plans to find and have sex with as many girls of different ethnic backgrounds as possible.

To these young males and their buddies, fucking was a way to confront the Other, as well as a way to make themselves over, to leave behind white “innocence” and enter the world of “experience.” [...] Getting a bit of the Other [...] was considered a ritual of transcendence, a movement out into a world of difference that would transform, an acceptable rite of passage. The direct objective was not simply to sexually possess the Other; it was to be changed in some way by the encounter.<sup>47</sup>

Of course this is a problematic line of thinking, and hooks convincingly argues it as such. Sex in this case acts as one of many modes of, as hooks’s title states, eating the other—that is, consuming that which is feared and made savage, incorporating it into oneself and thus conquering it. In her article, hooks uses multiple examples in which the Other is consumed: fashion, film, music. Play, in this case in a video game, allows some of the same transference of power as these other consumable media, and can act as a similar rite of passage, a highly problematic bridge to the experience the Other offers.

A common method of coding someone as the Other—black, Thai, Indian, Brazilian, Russian, Native American—and making him or her seem radically different is making his or her size far different from that of a normal human. This is particularly evident in Zangief, Sagat, and

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<sup>47</sup> bell hooks, “Eating the Other,” in *Black Looks* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 23-4.

T. Hawk. Though made less jarring by the cartoon aesthetic that the *Street Fighter* series already employs, these three characters possess a size that dwarfs even the *sumo* wrestler E. Honda.



A height comparison, showing how monstrously huge T. Hawk (far left) and Zangief (second from left) and impossibly broad M. Bison (second from right) are compared to the “average” Ryu (right.). Game graphics are from the *Street Fighter Alpha* series.

Assuming Ryu is slightly less than six feet tall, these characters could be among the tallest humans in the world, maxing out at well over seven feet each. Even M. Bison, while not terribly tall, is muscular and wide-shouldered at a level to which Ryu

cannot compare. Granted, these are visual changes that evolve within the artistic styles the games employ. However, there is a consistency to these portrayals into the modern *Street Fighter IV* iterations of these characters.

*Street Fighter* utilizes these visual differences to a high degree in order to differentiate the “normal” bodies (Ryu, Ken, Chun Li, Guile, Cammy) from the monstrous ones. Two of the most “monstrous” bodies in the game series belong to Blanka and Dhalsim. Blanka, who is covered in yellow and green fur, is a literal monster. The connection he has to Brazil, and thus to the Amazon, works in a historical othering process using the jungle—a place codified by Western culture as mysterious, bestial, and teeming with natural beauty. The jungle-man trope is present in everything from *The Jungle Book* to *Tarzan* to the forgettable Tim Allen family comedy *Jungle 2 Jungle*. However, in the case of Blanka, the inclusion of Brazil as his country of origin has specific significance given domestic Japanese ethno-political discourse. In the 1980s, prior to the 1991 release of *Street Fighter II* that included the first appearance of Blanka, two significant events in Japan affected the national conception of immigrant factory workers:

first, “the arrival of the dramatic bubble economy in Japan which meant that Japan was experiencing a shortage of unskilled labor, especially in construction and manufacturing companies”<sup>48</sup> and second, “a systematic government policy which gave a special preference to *nikkeijin* [ethnic Japanese born in other countries] over other foreign workers due to their blood-privilege.”<sup>49</sup> Ethnic homogeneity had always been an important cultural signifier to the Japanese, both as a nation and a people, and “*nikkei* workers from Latin America were seen as an excellent solution because they were ethnically Japanese.”<sup>50</sup> Additionally, “policy makers hoped and believed that *nikkeijin* workers would understand Japanese culture, could speak some Japanese, and would behave according to Japanese customs and values.”<sup>51</sup> While many minority groups are often at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder, Japanese-Brazilians were an exception. “Most Nikkei Brazilians live in a higher socioeconomic status than the majority of the Brazilian population.”<sup>52</sup> Despite their relative success as an ethnic group in Brazil, for Japanese-Brazilians factory work in Japan was a much more lucrative prospect than lower-paying jobs with greater cultural capital in Brazil. However, in Japan their minority status, a relative benefit in Brazil, became a detriment.

Once they immigrated to Japan, their social, cultural, and socioeconomic status were drastically changed from a “positive” to a “negative” minority status. In addition, because of their low-status occupation in Japan and their migration history, many

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<sup>48</sup> Hitomi Maeda, “Elements and degrees of SI: A case study of Nikkei Brazilian immigrants in Japan,” *Educational Research for Policy and Practice* 5(2) (October 2006), 196.

<sup>49</sup> Hitomi Maeda, “Elements and degrees of SI: A case study of Nikkei Brazilian immigrants in Japan,” *Educational Research for Policy and Practice* 5(2) (October 2006), 196.

<sup>50</sup> Hitomi Maeda, “Elements and degrees of SI: A case study of Nikkei Brazilian immigrants in Japan,” *Educational Research for Policy and Practice* 5(2) (October 2006), 196.

<sup>51</sup> Hitomi Maeda, “Elements and degrees of SI: A case study of Nikkei Brazilian immigrants in Japan,” *Educational Research for Policy and Practice* 5(2) (October 2006), 196-7.

<sup>52</sup> Hitomi Maeda, “Elements and degrees of SI: A case study of Nikkei Brazilian immigrants in Japan,” *Educational Research for Policy and Practice* 5(2) (October 2006), 197.

Japanese have negative perceptions, hold certain stereotypes, and possess prejudices toward them.<sup>53</sup>

Thus Blanka's monstrosity is a particular Japanese othering, a very specific construction that can be read as a reaction to a perceived assault on Japanese ethnic identity. Japanese-Brazilians looked Japanese, lived among the Japanese, but were far less Japanese, culturally, than, for example, Korean-Japanese immigrant families whose Korean cultural history had more in common with Japanese cultural history than the *nikkeijin* Brazilians. Before this period of time in Japanese history, the Japanese were not confronted with such a conundrum.

Blanka is a character created out of this particular set of anxieties. While *Street Fighter* is a cultural object constructed from multiple cultural histories, the creators of the game remain Japanese, and this is an example of a Japanese discourse on race that does not translate to the West (or even the rest of the East). It should be noted that despite his bestial appearance, Blanka is given a somewhat pitiable narrative, casting him as an orphan lost to the jungle who is finally able, after the second World Warrior tournament brings him fame, to reunite with his mother. Later, in *Street Fighter IV*, Blanka is associated with Dan, a comedy character, and made to be more cartoonish and less savage. The discourse of Blanka within *Street Fighter* manages to both cast the Brazilian as a toothy, animalistic Other and then effectively "defang" that same threat by transforming the hairy beast into the furry sidekick.

Dhalsim, meanwhile, is an inhuman character easily traceable to the Hong Kong film *Master of the Flying Guillotine* (1975), a sequel in the *One Armed Boxer* series which, like *Street Fighter* and fellow influential film *Enter the Dragon*, has a narrative based in part around a fighting tournament. The character in the film appears in several scenes, but is never given a

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<sup>53</sup> Hitomi Maeda, "Elements and degrees of SI: A case study of Nikkei Brazilian immigrants in Japan," *Educational Research for Policy and Practice* 5(2) (October 2006), 197.

name, and is referred to in the Internet Movie Database as simply “Yoga Master.” Both characters’ control of their limbs, stretchy beyond reasonable belief, is attributed to their powers of Yoga. Additionally, Dhalsim has the ability to levitate (though only in the narrative, not in gameplay), teleport, and breathe fire. Dhalsim’s particular monstrosity might be traced back to India as an enemy in World War II. Indian soldiers, fighting alongside British and Australians, battled the Japanese in Singapore. Additionally, Japan attempted to invade India at Imphal in a bloody conflict and resounding Japanese loss that is largely ignored in Western accounts of World War II<sup>54</sup>. The fire that Dhalsim breathes is not entirely out of Street Fighter’s game world logic. Seemingly-magic projectiles are nothing new to the series’ characters as



(Left) “Yoga Master” in *Master of the Flying Guillotine* (1975)  
(Right) Dhalsim in *Street Fighter IV* (2009)

evidenced by Ryu and Ken’s *hadouken*, a move which has been used in marketing and illustration as a visual signifier of the series’s visual style as a whole. However, Dhalsim’s association with Yoga is ethnically specific and his appearance—necklace of shrunken skulls, eyes without pupils, primitive rag-like clothing—casts him as both mystic and savage. The skulls, in particular, are a symbol (possibly unintentional) of Kali, Hindu goddess of creation and destruction. Kali is often seen as one of the more violent and bloody deities in the Hindu tradition, and is associated with blood sacrifices and modern “blood cults.”<sup>55</sup> Add in his inhuman movements and you have another creation of the Monstrous Other, a character

<sup>54</sup> Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World At Arms: A Global History of World War II*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 641.

<sup>55</sup> Alex Perry Atapur, “Killing for ‘Mother’ Kali,” *Time*, July 22, 2002.

seemingly unconnected to the larger narrative of the Street Fighter universe. Strangely, his monstrosity is at odds with some of his narrative overtones, which cast him as a village patriarch whose intentions are to help local children. (However, as discussed before, consistency in portrayal has not been the Street Fighter series's strong suit.)

While Ken, Chun Li, Ryu, and Guile are given relationships and histories with other characters—motivations that weave them into the fabric of the world of Street Fighter—the narratives of characters like Blanka and Dhalsim are self-contained. Blanka fights to find his lost family. Dhalsim fights to bring some wealth back to his village in order to help his fellow citizens. While these are causes that are almost inarguably “good” or “noble,” they are also extremely bare-bones, one-note, and work to marginalize the characters. This is also true with the motivations of characters like T. Hawk (regain his people's land), Dee Jay (fight to “find his rhythm” and make new music), Balrog (make money), and Zangief (create Russian national pride—at the end of *Street Fighter II* he does a “traditional” Russian dance with an animated Mikhail Gorbachev). While sometimes tangentially related to the big baddie of the series, M. Bison, these characters, both visually caricatured and marginalized within the narrative, don't have any real weight or importance in the overall scheme of Street Fighter's fictive world. These characters are othered not only through their appearances—T. Hawk, Balrog, and Zangief are among the larger, more brutish-looking fighters while Dee Jay wears bling and shakes maracas<sup>56</sup> after a victory with a silly grin on his face—but also through their relative unimportance. The stakes for which they fight are less stitched into the narrative world. This effectively makes them significant only for their appearance, as their actions are neutralized by the game's casting.

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<sup>56</sup> Dee Jay is Jamaican, but is given a strange combination of African-American, Caribbean, and Central American traits. This could be seen as similar to the way that East Asian signifiers (particularly Chinese, Korean, and Japanese) tend to get conflated in Western culture.



T. Hawk becomes “the Native American” (in Asia, the “Red Indian”), not a character fighting for his people. Balrog becomes “the black boxer,” not a man with a desire to get rich quick. Meanwhile, Ryu and Ken are defined by their relationships to each other, Guile and Chun Li by the deaths of their loved ones and quests for revenge. They are more fully drawn, more fully real, because they are “Us” or “You,” not the Monstrous Other.

In fact, the only othered characters not given short shrift by the series’s narrative are Akuma, Sagat, and M. Bison, and that can largely be attributed to their relationships with the already-established Us and You. Akuma, Sagat, and M. Bison both share one of the most dehumanizing physical characteristics (also given to Dhalsim), eyes without pupils. Additionally, they are given the outsize physiques of T. Hawk and Zangief, with Sagat being extremely tall and M. Bison being impossibly broad-shouldered. They are Other because they are evil, “bad guys” through and through. Sagat functions as the boss of *Street Fighter* while M. Bison fills that same role in *Street Fighter II* (with Sagat acting as the penultimate fighter of that game). Akuma, meanwhile, first appears as a “secret boss,” a character you only get to fight if you perform particularly well in all other battles. Their importance is contingent on their being eventually defeated, but there must be some larger stake in their defeat (unlike T. Hawk *et al*, whose defeats do not signify a great victory, but a routine one). Akuma, Sagat, and M. Bison’s othering is a byproduct of the game’s imperative to give the player a desire to defeat these villains—they must appear awful because the player must feel as if he or she destroyed some great evil.

However, while Akuma’s evil makes him a Monstrous Other, he occupies an interesting space that also speaks to Japaneseness. In the narrative, Akuma is a character who once was like Ryu. Akuma trained alongside Gouken (who is Ryu’s teacher and Akuma’s brother) but was

consumed by the *Satsui no Hadou*. The *Satsui no Hadou* is a “dark power.” Ryu accidentally unleashes this power from inside himself during the climactic battle with Sagat in the original *Street Fighter*. This creates a *shoryuken* (“rising dragon fist”) attack so strong that, upon connecting, it creates the gigantic scar across Sagat’s chest—a visual marker of defeat that is carried into Sagat’s appearances in *Street Fighter II*, the *Street Fighter Alpha* series and *Street Fighter IV* and provides Sagat’s narrative motivation. The *Satsui no Hadou*, a term that can be translated literally as “Wave of Murderous Intent,” is a power within Ryu that makes him strong, but overcomes him. It comes from a place of rage and hatred, and is all-consuming: it destroys the user’s will as well as the opponent’s body. Akuma is the embodiment of the *Satsui no Hadou*, a character who has already succumbed. Akuma acts as a mirror version of Ryu, and this mirror status is presented in its most direct form as an alternate version of Ryu in *Street Fighter Alpha 2* and *Street Fighter Alpha 3*. This Ryu, named simply “Evil Ryu,” depicts the change in his abilities once the *Satsui no Hadou* has overtaken him. *Street Fighter Alpha 3* allows the player to follow a storyline thread with this version of Ryu. Within this specific narrative, which has been bracketed out of the overall narrative of *Street Fighter* as currently evidenced in *Street Fighter IV*, Evil Ryu faces and defeats all his opponents, finally coming face-to-face with Akuma. Upon defeating Akuma, Evil Ryu is overcome with the power of the *Satsui no Hadou* and essentially becomes a new version of Akuma: a fighter whose sole purpose is destruction and who can only be brought peace by being destroyed.

Akuma represents a wicked inversion of all the things for which “good” Ryu stood. Dedication to the *dou* (way) of martial arts has given way to obsession with being the best fighter in the world. The strength to defeat one’s opponent has been replaced by the desire to kill one’s opponent: the literal “murderous intent” of *Satsui no Hadou*. Most of all, the self-control of a

spiritually balanced fighter has been crushed and remolded into a character who is a slave to lust; lust for battle, lust for destruction, and lust for power. This inversion can be read as a manifestation of the horrors enacted by the Japanese during World War II, as well as the fears of having horrors enacted upon them. In *Shocking Representation*, Adam Lowenstein investigates post-World War II consciousness in Japan through cinema. He sees the combination of “demon” and “human being,” a combination well-evidenced in Akuma, as a conflict between the situations of “war responsibility” and “war victimization,” a discourse which has defined Japan since World War II. When contextualizing this for the 1964 horror film *Onibaba*, Lowenstein puts forth the following:

The film [...] insists that neither war responsibility nor war victimization can be the exclusive province of “ordinary” Japanese subjects or the “extraordinary” Japanese elite. In fact, the samurai’s first words to the old woman, “Don’t be afraid. I’m a man, not a demon,” return with the old woman’s final cry of “I’m not a demon! I’m a human being!” [...] In this manner, war responsibility emerges as intertwined between victimizer and victimized, upper class and lower class, male and female, to complicate the very notion of demarcating “demons” and “human beings” in the face of Hiroshima.<sup>57</sup>

Ryu and Akuma reenact this neurotic discourse. In *Street Fighter IV*, Ryu exists as a human being still fighting the siren’s call of the *Satsui no Hadou*. The previous, now-bracketed narrative of Evil Ryu acts as a reassurance that Ryu, the most Japanese of all *Street Fighters* and the most prominent, is “not a demon.” He is a “human being.” However, Akuma is still present, and acts as a warning against a desire towards power for power’s sake and “murderous intent.” The narrative and visual interplay between these characters addresses innate Japanese anxieties about their historical role as aggressor, victimizer, and later victim. Akuma can be a warning against returning to the mistakes of the Divine Emperor and Ryu can remain a symbol of

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<sup>57</sup> Adam Lowenstein, *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 89-90.

Japanese heroism, but through their interactions the series addresses not just the hero's power, but also his burden. With Akuma, "Us" admits its own ability to be the Monstrous Other.

The reliance on physical stereotyping and narrative marginalization of non-East Asian, non-White Western characters within the Street Fighter series could lead to the games being seen as out-and-out racist. This is somewhat true. The games certainly trade in stereotypes, and privileges certain ethnicities in their narrative construction, but these actions did not originate in Street Fighter. Rather, they are reflections of the remediated cultural history within which Street Fighter was created. The same stereotypes that appear in Street Fighter appear in action films, martial arts cinema, and *anime*. Thus while Street Fighter certainly doesn't attempt to correct any of the legitimately insulting racial and ethnic stereotypes that the game presents, it did not create those stereotypes either. Additionally, it is not solely in the presentation of race that the racial discourse of Street Fighter is formed. While the design and narrative elements do marginalize certain characters, because these characters are playable game objects, player interaction and choice weigh heavily in the presentation and their value as playable objects often defy their narrative importance. While narrative and visual design in Street Fighter delineate the characters as Us, You, and Them, they are all equally playable. The image of race is not the only factor in understanding the place of race in Street Fighter.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **The Race Game: Why Play Matters**

While the previous chapter's discussion of image and narrative in understanding the discourse on race that *Street Fighter* creates, we must go back to that simple truth: video games are *video games*. The entirety of what race means does not exist solely in narrative and image. Key to my discussion of how identity is negotiated in *Street Fighter* is the concept of prowess. Characters in *Street Fighter* are not just defined along lines of race and nationality, but also codified by the ways in which they utilize their fighting ability, and the ways players utilize each character as a playable object. Each character in *Street Fighter* must be considered a legitimate threat to all opponents (otherwise the player would be setting herself up for failure). Simultaneously, *Street Fighter* games allow for differing play styles and strategies to maintain the generic conventions of the fighting game; conventions established by *Street Fighter II* itself. A character who relies on speed, like Chun Li, exhibits prowess very differently from the character Zangief, who relies on slow, powerful blows. These differences in fighting style and ability connect to the discourses of race and nationality. Prowess does not simply lie in the game narrative and imagery—it also lies in the media traditions in which *Street Fighter* trades, and the completive nature of *Street Fighter*'s gameplay. Prowess is informed by race but is defined differently, reshaping stereotypes to be emblematic of strength, though these emblems can be highly problematic.

This chapter will investigate the way that race is related to play. In the first chapter, I described playing *Street Fighter* as a cyborg experience in which one's virtual self and real self communicate ceaselessly and (ideally) seamlessly. How does this act of playing another race or nationality complicate issues of identity not just within *Street Fighter*, but within the player? What anxieties are prevalent in this play? Is it possible to separate *Street Fighter*'s characters' discourses on race and nation with their status as played objects?

### **The Mitigation of Prowess**

Prowess is the concept which in many ways subsumes narrative and visual markers of race, but also organizes them in service to gameplay. In the first chapter of this project, I explained some ways in which narrative informs gameplay and frames it, explaining game rules via narrative context. Narrative, though, does not define gameplay, as games do not occur simply in the diegesis of the game, they occur in and between players in the real world. In *Street Fighter*, race has a similar relationship with prowess as narrative does with gameplay. Expectations of character prowess stem from the stereotypes present both in *Street Fighter* and the remediated sources from which it pulls. These stereotypes, as explained in the prior chapter, are organized by racial and ethnic expectations derived from a shared cultural context through a Japanese lens. However, for the characters' prowess to be understood, this cross-cultural construction must be filtered once again, through the process of play and competition that is arguably even more intrinsic to the *Street Fighter* experience than the long popular culture history it echoes and continues with its images and narrative.

Prowess, as I choose to use it in this discussion, refers to individual characters' value as fighters, both in terms of the expectation of their skills and the way those skills should be employed as well as the hierarchy created by placing these characters as playable objects in a competitive gaming environment. Prowess is not simply fighting style; Ryu and Ken both practice the same martial art, but their prowess is formulated differently. Prowess is not simply the game's internal pecking order; M. Bison and Akuma, despite being "boss" characters, do not have an inherently higher level of prowess than any of the other characters. Prowess is not based solely the skill of a player, though certainly a character's relative prowess among players in a certain play group will be (and should be) determined by their experiences of success and failure

with and against particular characters. Finally, prowess does not mirror race in such a way that the various bigoted histories described in the previous section are simply reenacted in the respective prowess of the othered characters; rather, prowess in some ways uses those oppressive images and narratives as sources of martial strength. The value of prowess comes from a combined view of the characters of *Street Fighter* both as characters in a story and playable systems.

How are these values informed and partially molded by race and ethnicity? In an odd way, prowess needs racial and ethnic connections in order to have a sense of authenticity. While the vast majority of maneuvers in *Street Fighter* are hyperphysical (as mentioned in the discussion of the E. Honda character), the visual and technical aspects of their attacks reference real-world martial arts. Ryu's karate attacks are real ones—axe kicks, straight punches—even as his *anime*-style fireballs betray any sense of reality. This is true of the vast majority of *Street Fighter* characters. They represent, in their motions, real-world styles of fighting. These are not only remediations of martial arts and action cinema, but of martial arts with cultural histories and cultural values granted far more cultural validity than popular entertainment. While discussing *Tekken*, a fighting game series by Namco which began releasing titles several years after *Street Fighter II* and cultivated a more realistic aesthetic, Leon Hunt comments on Lei Wulong—a character who enacts the Five Animal Shaolin style of Chinese kung fu.

Lei Wulong's Five Animal Shaolin style is less 'authentic' than the moves documented in 1970s martial arts films, and draws instead on the *idea* of [animal] attacks. [...] The hard and the soft, the external and the internal, describe the difference between meeting force with force and yielding/flowing in order that opposing strength is used against itself. Such principles—fundamental to Chinese martial arts—mean very little in digital space



except as aesthetic surface. Their importance in *Tekken*, however, is in distinguishing Lei's fluidity from the more aggressive styles of [other fighters].<sup>58</sup>

While I agree that a martial arts styles do serve as ways of differentiating fighters from each other—a job in which race, ethnicity, and nationality also play a key role—I must disagree with the assertion that these martial arts mean “very little in the digital space except as aesthetic surface.” In considering prowess, they mean a lot. The real-life martial arts, connected so strongly to certain racial, ethnic, or national identities, present themselves in the *Tekken* series as well as the *Street Fighter* series as signifiers meant to enable play. Understanding of the martial art a character in the game is meant to represent gives the player invaluable knowledge about how that character will react and what sorts of strategies will be most effective. For example, armed with the knowledge that Zangief is a wrestler, a player can assume the play style will be somewhat slow but strong and possess many grab and throw attacks, as wrestlers are wont to do, body-slamming and suplexing each other into submission. Sure enough, Zangief rewards the player's cultural understanding by being exactly that, a slow character with powerful grab attacks. The representations of martial arts, when present, mean almost everything in defining the way the digital spaces of the *Street Fighter* series are navigated. They create the expectation of play style, which is part and parcel to understanding a character's prowess. In play choice, one understanding or desire can flow to the other. Imagining a player named “Richie,” it follows that if Richie both knows about wrestling and knows Zangief is a wrestler then he will also know the expected play style for Zangief. Conversely, if Richie wants to play a character that is slow but powerful with grab attacks, he will look for a character that is a wrestler (the other expected choice would be E. Honda, the *sumo* wrestler). A player having this knowledge and the desire

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<sup>58</sup> Leon Hunt, “‘I Know Kung Fu!’ The Martial Arts in the Age of Digital Reproduction,” *ScreenPlay: Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces*, ed. Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), 202.

to use the knowledge is part of the prowess of Zangief—the combination of the character’s martial art and the player’s skill in enacting that martial art through the machinations of gameplay.

While “martial arts” is often only applied to Eastern hand-to-hand combat styles—perhaps an Orientalist product of the West trying to mystify and exoticize combat in the East as an “art,” something above simple fighting—I aim to use it here simply to mean “fighting style.” This allows me to include boxing, professional wrestling, and even the hand-to-hand combat taught by the U.S. military (enacted by Guile) as martial arts. And through racial, ethnic, and national stereotype, these fighting styles become expected and emblematic of the nations from which they come. While this is not always true—Blanka is a key exception, as his unpredictable “beast style” has nothing in common with, for example, Brazilian *jiu jitsu* or *capoeira*, two of Brazil’s national fighting styles—it is true often enough that predicting the combination of martial art with race/ethnic/national identity in a new character is exceedingly easy. The newest Street Fighter release, *Super Street Fighter IV*, features a character whose ethnic origin is Korean. The national fighting style of Korea is tae kwon do. Thus, it follows that the producers chose to have the character implement this style of fighting (though in a very hyperphysical *anime* manner). It could be argued that these “natural” pairings are simply a product of Street Fighter’s tendency to stereotype, and that’s a valid argument. There is no reason why a South Korean woman couldn’t learn the Russian martial art *sambo*, or the Israeli *Krav Maga*. However, for the remediated world of Street Fighter to make sense, these stereotypes persist. Knowledge of martial arts (and martial arts cinema, and action films, and *anime*) tempers the expectations of Street Fighter’s character organization by essentially placing the shortest path between real-world knowledge and in-game playability.

In this way, *Street Fighter* remains “authentic.” Characters styles represent their nationality and vice-versa. Let’s say the above were to be the case and a pairing of a martial art from one part of the world (*Krav Maga*) were to be placed on a character from another part of the world (New Zealand). Stereotyping allows the player to accept a martial art/nationality pairing without needing narrative explanation. This is problematic, but also true due to the stereotypes’ understood basis in the remediated cultural forms that preceded *Street Fighter*. However, if the stereotype is significantly broken, and if a character’s form does not follow in an expected racial/ethnic/national mode, a burden is placed upon the narrative. Our imaginary *Krav Maga*-practicing Kiwi (no such character exists in the *Street Fighter* games) would—unfortunately, as it belies a comfort with casual stereotyping—need a narrative history that explains how someone in New Zealand learned *Krav Maga*. Ken has this narrative history, as his Japanese style of fighting and similarity to Ryu needs an explanation that Ryu himself does not. This is evident by the fact that Ken is given a far greater context than Ryu. Piecing together the storylines from several of the games, we can come to the conclusion that Ken comes from a wealthy family and has a wife, Eliza, and a son, Mel, and his relationship with Ryu is a result of Ken’s father having sent Ken to Japan to train in the martial arts and gain some discipline. This is a far more highly constructed justification for Ken’s abilities than Ryu requires. Ryu is simply a Japanese martial artist, therefore his skill and interest in the Japanese martial arts is naturalized. Ken’s must be narrated. This would also be true for our imaginary *Krav Maga* New Zealander. Coupling the martial art with the country of origin (or association) allows a character to be “real” without a story that creates that “realness.” Perceived prowess stems partially from that authenticity, believing that character to be a legitimate master of his or her martial art. While this authenticity can be achieved with story elements, *Street Fighter* is not a game meant to tell a

story, but rather a game meant to be played in competition, and these martial stereotypes are the sometimes regrettable shortcuts the game takes in order to legitimize each character as a martial threat.

### **“Versus” Matters**

Prowess is formed partially in the understanding of martial skill, which is linked to race, ethnicity, and nationality. However, the other side of that coin lies in the nature of Street Fighter’s play. As stated before, Street Fighter is primarily a game meant to be played in competition, be that competition against the AI-controlled enemy in single player modes, friendly competition either in person or on-line, or more serious tournaments that involve cash prizes and relative acclaim. Very few games outside of massively-multiplayer online (MMO) games such as *World of Warcraft* fail to offer a single-player experience (and even MMOs can be played without necessarily interacting with other players, though they may be in the game world). However, there are certain games which frame competition as the key element of gameplay, as opposed to exploration (finding things within a game) or task competition (overcoming a specific obstacle in a specific way). For some games, racing or sports simulations, competition is born of the nature of the act that is being represented in the game. A racing game without competitive races simply would not be simulating races, just as a football game without competition with other teams would not be representing football. Other games, and the Street Fighter series is among these, are competitive because of a choice in game design by the game developers. The 1<sup>st</sup>- and 3<sup>rd</sup>-person shooter genre (games like *Halo*, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare*, and *Gears of War*) offers intricately designed competitive multiplayer as an equal component to a single-player experience that is more exploration- and task-focused. Real-time strategy games (*Starcraft*, *Age of Empires*) are constructed similarly. However, in the cases

of both of these games, the multiplayer elements are often played under a separate context from the single-player “campaign modes.” The divide is not as apparent in *Street Fighter*. While some home versions of the series’ games (*Street Fighter Alpha 3*, for example) have offered a “campaign mode” of sorts, and there are often smaller task-oriented modes in which the goal is to perform a certain intricate set of moves in order to receive an in-game prize, the bulk of the *Street Fighter* series’ single-player experience is placed in the same context as multiplayer: one-on-one competition, with the goal being to reduce the opponent’s life meter to zero. It is in this context that the player side of prowess is developed. In competition, players create an understanding of the *Street Fighter* characters as “good” or “bad” in gameplay terms. The question that is answered through play is “How can I win the game with this character?”

Certainly, different player motivations (many of which will be discussed in the final chapter of this project) can modify the answer to the “how can I win” question. But a player’s understanding of a character is shaped as much by his understanding of the character as a playable object implementable to a goal as it is by understanding the representations of race, ethnicity, or nationality in that characters’ image and story. Thus, it follows that the stereotypes and problematic imagery of *Street Fighter*, already run through a hazy filter of remediation from film and *anime*, are further compounded by the competitive nature of the game in which they appear. Prowess matters to race (and race to prowess) because in the name of prowess, allowing the player to understand how to win, every character in the game is given the capacity to “beat” every other character. Every character, in the hands of a skilled player, has the agency to win, despite any socio-cultural oppression that might be evident in that character’s racial, ethnic, or national construction. In addition to being true of race, ethnicity, and nationality, it is also true of gender (Chun Li can beat anyone even though she is a girl), age (Gen, a kung fu master

introduced in later Street Fighter games, can beat anyone even though he is very old), class (Dhalsim can beat anyone despite being impoverished), and motivation (characters framed as “good” or “evil” are both equally capable of beating any other character).

Street Fighter develops and establishes very specific narrative signifiers for its characters as a way of expressing to the player how the game is meant to be played and why it is being played. These signifiers utilize race, ethnicity, and nationality in ways that are highly problematic. However, somewhat ironically, within the very system that these problematic images are applied lies the means for players to subvert them. The game must give every character—no matter “Us,” “You,” or “Them”—the opportunity to be the best, to end up on top of the heap by the very nature of the game’s generic construction. In this way, the game’s imperative to express prowess in every character (for every player) gives the player a method, albeit a limited one, by which he or she can reject the game’s ideology. Game worlds are complete, but game-playing does not occur solely in the game world. Games occur between players, and even within players’ minds, areas that are not necessarily colonized by the games’ ideology (though there seems to be considerable anxiety that they are). While Street Fighter may be rife with problematic racial imagery, the nature of play allows for those problematic images to be somewhat subverted due to the imperative of prowess. The player must have the capacity to win regardless of narrative or visual markers that would create a hierarchy of social power within the game world.

### **Winning and Losing the Game of Race**

Prowess complicates the Street Fighter series’ discourse on race, but certainly does not excuse any of the remediated racist discourses that inform some of the depictions of races and ethnicities in the game. Action cinema, martial arts films, and *anime* have never been

particularly socially conscious. However, what *Street Fighter* offers that those forms do not is the playability that informs prowess, and it is that playability (and its intersection with race, ethnicity, and nationality) that must be investigated. Returning to Mary Fuller and Henry Jenkins, who were briefly quoted before in this project, we can see their casting of games like *Street Fighter II*—games that feature varied if somewhat perfunctory international locales—as virtual travelogues. According to Fuller, “not only space but culture is being consumed, used and also used up as local cultures from India to Las Vegas shrink into a procession of ornamental images.”<sup>59</sup> While Fuller and Jenkins’s observations of *Street Fighter II* are extremely outdated (forgivable, given their publication fifteen years ago) and sadly seems to be far less knowledgeable on the subject it discusses than a reader would hope<sup>60</sup>—this idea of consumable space is valuable. It is valuable to look at video game play (and video game gameplay) as consumption. I have argued previously in this project that video games demand a specific mode of consumption very unlike other media consumption. Therefore, video games must be viewed in a unique context because of their modality and the creative and competitive spaces they create. However, video game consumption is not simply of image (or represented spaces, as Fuller and Jenkins claim) but goes much deeper to a supposed consumption of authentic culture due to the ability video games have to embody symbols of those cultures. This capability of games exists despite the lack of “realness” to their realness. Many cultural qualities represented in games are done so unfairly or incorrectly. However, this embodiment is through play and manipulation of the objects that represent these cultures, and that action (the manipulability and playability of

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<sup>59</sup> Mary Fuller and Henry Jenkins, “Nintendo and New World Travel Writing: A Dialogue,” in *Cybersociety: Computer-Mediated Communication and Community*, ed. Steven G. Jones (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995), 62.

<sup>60</sup> Chiefly, the article attributes *Street Fighter II* to Nintendo, even though it was a Capcom title available on multiple platforms (Super Nintendo, Genesis, PC) and in arcades. The article generally conflates all video games into “Nintendo” in a way similar to Southerners calling all soft drinks “Coke.”

games) a very strong connection between player and played culture forms; a connection that is both democratizing and problematic.

Ben Chapman, writing under the handle “AwesomeExMachina,” writes on Destructoid.com in a humorous editorial about his “latent racial bonus” in fighting games.

Put a Native American character in my hand and I will tear your face from your skull. [...] My friends were sure this was no coincidence. It wasn't some random chance I was unrealistically capable with this character of all the characters. I was a witch. A digital shaman. They were sure it had something to do with the fact that I myself was a Native American.<sup>61</sup>

Though this fun piece is hardly academic in nature, it speaks to a relatable experience that players have within the process of identification with a game character's supposed cultural background. From a pure ludological stand-point, race doesn't matter. T. Hawk, the Native American character in the *Street Fighter* universe, is simply a set of movements and inputs meant to perform a task within the game rules' architecture. However, Chapman's humorous insistence on his latent racial bonus proves that these cultural signifiers embedded in game character do matter to players, and players are aware of their presence. A forum topic posted by a user dubbed “El\_Twelve” on popular *Street Fighter* strategy website Shoryuken.com, “Martial arts and stereotypes in *Street Fighter*,” mentions that the connections to real martial arts—and the cultures from which they sprung—adds considerably to his enjoyment of the game. Referring to the new *Super Street Fighter IV* characters Hakan (a Turkish oil wrestler) and Juri (a South Korean tae kwon do practitioner), both of whose move sets are based in real martial arts, El\_Twelve writes,

They had some original character designs [in *Street Fighter IV*], but I'd rather see one of the hundreds of amazing real martial arts or even movie fighting styles in a game, than

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<sup>61</sup> Ben Chapman, “My Expertise: Latent Racial Bonus,” Destructoid.com, February 12, 2010, <http://www.destructoid.com/my-expertise-latent-racial-bonus-162855.phtml#ext>.



some generic stuff the animators made up. [...] I hope that game designers will continue to use real martial arts in fighting games to come.<sup>62</sup>

In his statement, El\_Twelve also mentions the “movie fighting styles,” of the remediated cultural forms that have informed the fighting aesthetic of the Street Fighter series. These two examples may prove nothing conclusively, but they do suggest that to players, culture matters, and thus race, ethnicity, and nationality matter. (Additionally, knowing that players themselves think about race in these games justified my decision to pursue ethnographic research with this project, as illustrated in my final chapter.)

Since these factors do matter, how then does the fact that a player *plays* a character of a certain culture (instead of simply *seeing* that character) affect the process of consuming the game’s admittedly muddled (and prowess-informed) racial ideology? To once again return to a previously-quoted scholar, bell hooks’s “Eating the Other” is extremely useful as a jumping-off point. In her summation of the article, hooks states,

I talked to folks from various backgrounds about whether they thought the focus on race, Otherness, and difference in mass culture was challenging racism. There was overall agreement that the message that acknowledgement and exploration of racial difference can be pleasurable represents a breakthrough, a challenge to white supremacy, to various systems of domination.<sup>63</sup>

The Street Fighter series, even with its marginalization of the other, does contribute to this challenge to white supremacy. Street Fighter represents not only a pleasurable experience of “eating” (in this case, playing) the other, but a powerful one. In deference to the need for every character in the game to have prowess, fighting games like the Street Fighter series not only allow a space for the enacting of Chapman’s concept of “latent racial bonus” (another example might be a Chinese-American girl beating up the white boys with Chun Li)—which reinforces to

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<sup>62</sup> El\_Twelve, “Martial Arts and stereotypes in Street Fighter,” Shoryuken.com Forum, March 29, 2010, <http://www.shoryuken.com/showthread.php?t=230308>.

<sup>63</sup> bell hooks, “Eating the Other,” in *Black Looks* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 39.

some extent cultural pride, however inexact the signifiers of that culture—and El\_Twelve's representation of "real" (read: authentic) remmediated cultural traditions, but also a space in which race can be played against one's body. A white person can play a black person, or vice-versa, or dozens of other combinations. In any of these game world embodiments, the goal is to showcase one's prowess (shared between character and player), and thus the image of the racialized character, whether oppressive or not, is made momentarily powerful in the act of playing.

David Leonard likens the process of playing a different race to a long history of cultural tourism.

Video games contribute a "package of ideas" about race, nation, and gender, generating pleasure as they transport people through imagination, virtual cross-dressing, and ethnic sampling. Just as whites headed uptown to Harlem during the Jazz era, just as well-heeled and gentrified suburbanites travel to exotic foreign lands, video games offer its players the ability to experience and try the forbidden.<sup>64</sup>

There are obvious benefits and problems with this approach. The veracity of a virtual world's version of race should always be questioned. It is just as important to take video games to task for where they come up short as it is to laud them for trying in the first place. Video games, not just Street Fighter, have yet to prove themselves adept at presenting race without relying on tired tropes. "In effect, video games are inexpensive version of sex tours to Southeast Asia or the Caribbean because they offer a virtual sampling of the 'dark continent' and dark bodies."<sup>65</sup> Hooks shares that "the over-riding fear is that cultural, ethnic, and racial differences will be continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate—that the Other will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten."<sup>66</sup> This statement is complicated somewhat,

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<sup>64</sup> David Leonard, "'Live In Your World, Play In Ours': Race, Video Games, and Consuming the Other," *Studies in Media & Information Literacy Education* 3(4) (November 2003), 5.

<sup>65</sup> David Leonard, "'Live In Your World, Play In Ours': Race, Video Games, and Consuming the Other," *Studies in Media & Information Literacy Education* 3(4) (November 2003), 5.

<sup>66</sup> bell hooks, "Eating the Other," in *Black Looks* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 39.

though not fully, by *Street Fighter*'s multicultural remediated history. After all, and this cannot be stressed enough, despite the preponderance of Western influences on *Street Fighter*, the series is and remains a Japanese product at its core, and Japanese values inform the kernel of *Street Fighter*'s ideology to a degree greater than the white Western influences, both generic and historical in Japan, that are part of the history of the culture within which the game was created. Despite being a game that makes clear the lines between "Us," "You," and the Monstrous Other ("Them," sometimes in the most pejorative sense), *Street Fighter* is a system in which cultures both embraced and feared have the agency to "win" a series of battles that happen with and upon signifiers of those cultures. *Street Fighter* hardly offers a peaceful narrative solution to racial, ethnic, and national conflicts. Within the game diegesis, conflict is only resolvable by martial engagement. However, the act of playing *Street Fighter* does offer some positive solutions to these conflicts by placing these disparate cultures on an even ludological playing field. Just as chess does not necessarily favor white's chances of beating black despite white moving first, *Street Fighter* games do not necessarily favor any character's chances of defeat or victory over another by the rules of the system. Instead, it is up to players to choose the hierarchy, to prove their mettle, in whatever player/character racial/ethnic/national combination they choose. To borrow from hooks, this is a system that "makes resistance possible."<sup>67</sup> We cannot, however, accept these images, or this system, "uncritically."<sup>68</sup>

In that spirit, there is further consideration that should be taken on the nature of (as it were) "Playing the Other." In his "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," published just before the release of *Street Fighter II*, Cornel West outlines a view of modern critical and artistic thought centered on "difference."

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<sup>67</sup> bell hooks, "Eating the Other," in *Black Looks* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 39.

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Distinctive features of the new cultural politics of difference are to trash the monolithic and homogeneous in the name of diversity, multiplicity, and heterogeneity; to reject the abstract, general, and universal in light of the concrete, specific, and particular; and to historicize, contextualize, and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting, and changing.<sup>69</sup>

West claims that while this method is not new, the way difference is contextualized is somewhat novel. Additionally, West illustrates that any resistance to a system will often come from those who are privileged within that system. The produced criticisms

are distinct articulations of talented (and usually privileged) contributors to culture who desire to align themselves with demoralized, demobilized, depoliticized, and disorganized people in order to empower and enable social action and [...] enlist collective insurgency for the expansion of freedom, democracy, and individuality. This perspective impels these cultural critics and artists to reveal [...] the very operations of power within their immediate work contexts. [...] This strategy, however, also puts them in an inescapable double bind—while linking their activities to the fundamental, structural overhaul of these institutions, they often remain financially dependent on them.<sup>70</sup>

In an odd way, being a game has somewhat, though certainly not fully, freed Street Fighter from this particular constraint. While West seems to be commenting on far more pointed and high-minded artistic and critical statements than the ideology that a game series like Street Fighter puts forth, Street Fighter (and video games in general) are certainly part of the new discussion on West's cultural politics of difference. However, unlike an academic work, a news media piece, or a presentation of conventional art (film, music, visual, etc.), games have the opportunity to create a space in which all comments are made not solely by the system, but also by the user's choices within that system.

In this way, a game has the capacity—a capacity not realized with any Street Fighter game, but certainly hinted at in the deconstruction I have been pursuing—to be both a market

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<sup>69</sup> Cornel West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," in *The Humanities As Social Technology* 53 (October 1990), 93.

<sup>70</sup> Cornel West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," in *The Humanities As Social Technology* 53 (October 1990), 94.

product and a platform for comment without necessarily being caught in the double-bind. This statement may sound needlessly utopian, but I don't mean for it to be. Games have not reached this state, and I'm not sure they ever will. However, I hold cautious optimism about the racial space of games like *Street Fighter*, where race is real and selectable and means something, once those games divorce casually oppressive racial or ethnic stereotypes (which, again, it must be noted, *Street Fighter* fails to do). This space holds the same promise, and same anxiety, that Walter Benjamin saw in mass media's destruction of the aura. When Benjamin states that "the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition"<sup>71</sup> I prefer to reads "detaches" as "frees." Just as mass production has the capacity to help lead to a democratization of culture, games (along with much of new media) have the capacity to help lead to a democratization of identity. Naturally, this will lead to new and varied anxieties and cultural difficulties, and *Street Fighter* is hardly the site which validates my hope for the form. However, the machinations and cross-cultural experiences inherent in playing *Street Fighter* point towards a changed way of experiencing culture and a changed mentality on the totality of culture that, while it must be handled with care and critically examined, should be acknowledged. To understand *Street Fighter* is to understand that these categories—remediated racial/ethnic/national martial histories, prowess, elements of play—have very strong, very real ramifications on the modern experience of identity. We are past the point of no return with "Playing the Other," and it benefits us as much to see the possibilities of improvement as it does the shortcomings.

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<sup>71</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Visual Culture: Experiences In Visual Culture*, ed. Joanne Morra and Marquard Smith (Routledge: New York. 2006), 117.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **The Fighter's Voice (Is Largely Silent): A (Failed) Online Ethnographic Study of Street Fighter Players**

### **Who Plays This Thing, Anyway?**

Since the early stages of planning this project, I knew that I required an ethnographic component to round out the research and allow the players to have their own say on the issues that I was discussing. While I am confident that my own research and analysis are valid and well-applied, I also believe that games, which have such a strongly-developed community culture (especially fighting games, which require interaction with other players to be properly experienced) are only fully understood in the act of play. Therefore it is not only wise but necessary to get reactions from those who play in order to develop a holistic view of any game's cultural impact. Logistically, it was difficult for me to connect with players face-to-face. While I considered traveling to a fighting game tournament and interviewing players in the field, but knew that would only give me a view of the most competitive, most dedicated players. While those players are a valuable source for opinions on the games in question, the players also represent only a small percentage of all purchasers and players of the Street Fighter game franchise.

The vast majority of players would be considered “casual” (playing for fun, with friends or random people online, not dedicating themselves to obtaining high levels of skill) instead of “competitive” (using the game as a platform for competition and seeing the game as a site of skill-testing). This is true with almost any game with a multi-player competitive element. A small percentage of players sink hundreds or even thousands of hours into play and practice over years in an effort to climb the leaderboards (online rankings) of the game, while the others may only spend a few dozen hours over the life of the game in multi-player modes, only dipping their toe into the competitive atmosphere through player-vs.-player gaming. With fighting games, the “hardcore” (dedicated) competitive players tend to be slightly more common than in first-person

shooters or strategy games, simply because the single-player experience of a fighting game has less depth to it than that of a first-person shooter or strategy game—it is both a failing and a strength of fighting games that they prize player-vs.-player above all other forms of play. Street Fighter games not only structure competition in terms of objective goals that can be ranked—such as overall wins, win percentage, or a variable ranking system based on the strength of competition faced, all of which are present and tracked in the current versions of *Street Fighter IV* and *Super Street Fighter IV*—but also in social competition, competition in the moment, facing and beating an opponent. Any game can have ranked competitive elements; the earliest arcade games had high scores, and even adventure games (which tend to be about completion as opposed to point-scoring) could be ranked by the time in which it took to complete the game. However, these elements of competition are not based on the interaction of players with other players, but the interaction of the player with the game system. This social competition, different from high scores and speed runs, forces any player to cause another player to fail in order to succeed. An article by Peter Vorderer, Tilo Hartmann, and Cristoph Klimmt, “Explaining the Enjoyment of Playing Video Games: The Role of Competition,” states that with this kind of competition “it is likely that the individual’s *self-esteem*, as well as the *individual’s mood* have changed in accordance to the ongoing evaluations and social comparisons.”<sup>72</sup> Additionally, the researchers come to the conclusion that “the user’s feeling to play against an opponent likely evokes a social-competitive situation that should be especially capable to engage and to involve the user.”<sup>73</sup> This is true of both the casual and competitive player, and these experiences are part of what I was hoping to understand from gamers’ own voices. Additionally, I sought to gauge

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<sup>72</sup> Peter Vorderer, Tilo Hartmann, and Christoph Klimmt, “Explaining the Enjoyment of Playing Video Games: The Role of Competition,” *ACM International Conference Proceeding Series* 38 (2003), 4.

<sup>73</sup> Peter Vorderer, Tilo Hartmann, and Christoph Klimmt, “Explaining the Enjoyment of Playing Video Games: The Role of Competition,” *ACM International Conference Proceeding Series* 38 (2003), 8.



players' understanding, reactions to, and emphasis on the racialized images and narratives of the Street Fighter series.

My expectation in this research was to find that players who identified themselves as casual were more involved in the narrative and visual aspects of Street Fighter, and more likely to have opinions on the impact of the racial imagery on the play experience. I assumed that players who presented themselves as more "competitive" in their motivations for play would be more likely to view the characters of Street Fighter simply as game objects to be mastered and employed in competition against other players. I expected these players to have less interest in the narrative and visual histories of the characters, and less to say about the impact of their racialization. In both cases, I assumed players would use the cliché of "it's just a game" to explain away any sour taste the casual racist stereotypes of the game might leave in their mouths. In some ways, I was proven right in all my expectations. However, in the process of research I encountered a set of variables that realigned my ethnographic observations and made this section of my project less about Street Fighter and more about the reaction that gamers have to video games being held up for cultural criticism.

### **Methodology**

Due to my desire to reach a wide variety of player-types, restrictions on travel, and budgetary restraints, I chose to use Internet forums as my main mode of distributing a survey that asked questions about the process of play and race in *Street Fighter IV*. I chose *Street Fighter IV* as the main focus of the survey due to it being the most recent iteration of the Street Fighter series and its healthy sales. The surveys were conducted in October of 2009 via video game sites gamespot.com and kotaku.com (which are large and popular corporate videogame news/reviews sites) as well as shoryuken.com (an independent enthusiast site which serves as the nexus for

competitive fighting game players on the Internet). Gamespot.com and kotaku.com would, ideally, garner the casual player, while shoryuken.com would allow me to interact with the competitive player.

I crafted the survey with four sections. Reproduced here is part the survey, minus the Human Subjects Research Board-approved preamble, that I posted to gamespot.com, kotaku.com, and shoryuken.com. I am including only sections with questions which I feel need to be justified or, in hindsight, criticized. The complete document, as posted, is available in the appendix, as are all survey results and my italicized comments revealing my reasoning behind including the specific questions. The entire first section is meant to establish how the players identify themselves, and also corroborate whether my expectations (casual players from gamespot.com and kotaku.com, competitive players from shoryuken.com) would hold true. It also helped to establish their general gaming interest, whether the player was a specialist player who only played certain genres of games, and whether he or she was experienced or a novice with *Street Fighter IV*.

## **Section II: Impressions of *Street Fighter IV***

### **4. What characters do you hate to fight against? Why?**

This question could have been omitted, but I included it intending to help the survey seem more personalized and “fun.” I expected a larger number of responses from a wider group of players than I eventually received. This question is not particularly conducive to garnering responses that would inform my research, and likely should not have been included.

8. Are there any characters you don't like because you find them offensive or off-putting? Why?

This question might have been better suited as a follow-up to questions five and six in section two, as it flows naturally from the questions about national and racial depictions.

Question seven does follow the same line of questioning, and the order was a mistake.

### **Section III: Play Choices**

6. Do you feel any characters in *Street Fighter IV* are difficult to use? If so, does this make you want to play with those characters more, or less?
7. If you existed as a character in *Street Fighter*, would you be more likely to play as yourself, or more likely to play as one of the fictional characters? Why?
8. If you play other genres of video games, what does *Street Fighter* (and fighting games) give you that those other genres don't, and vice versa?
9. If you could change anything about *Street Fighter IV*, what would it be?
10. Describe to me the perfect *Street Fighter IV* character, as you imagine it.

These questions were meant to explore the nature of avatarism when the avatar's elements, both narrative and functional, are not influenced by the player but simply manipulated by them. I wanted to allow the players to perhaps give some comment on how design could or could not change to improve and innovation within the genre. However, the responses to this section left a lot to be desired, and the seventh and tenth questions especially resulted in some very confused comments. Avatarism, while important to some of the commentary I made with this project, was not necessarily a good topic to include in the survey.

Overall, the survey should have been tailored more specifically to issues of race and the intersection of race and play, as that was the subject that truly formed the backbone of this project. A smaller, more focused survey would have likely been more appealing to respondents, as it would take less time to fill out. It would also allow respondents to more fully engage with the topic upon when they were commenting instead of moving from topic-to-topic, perhaps lacking a sense of cohesion. A sharper focus might have lead to sharper answers.

As part of the process of posting the surveys, I looked over the terms of service for all the websites as well as their forum posting rules. I saw nothing in my project that would have been considered a violation of their standards for posting. However, as a show of good faith, I contacted various forums heads and site editors for the professional sites (gamespot.com and kotaku.com) as well as the forum administrator for shoryuken.com. A response from shoryuken.com came relatively quickly, okaying the posting of my survey. However, a response never came from either gamespot.com nor kotaku.com regarding my initial e-mail about the project.

I expected to get anywhere from 10 to 30 responses from each website. My expectation was not that the results would produce any useful quantitative data, but rather that the responses would give me quotes from players that could illuminate the way those players feel about the game they play. Reviewing the terms of service again on kotaku.com and gamespot.com, I could see no reason why my posts would not be acceptable, so I went on to post on all three sites. On kotaku.com, the community system is based on “comments”—posts in response to an article that the website publishes. I chose two recent Street Fighter-centric articles and posted my survey as a comment in each. For gamespot.com and shoryuken.com forum systems were already in place and I created new topics in each that included the survey. Full text of these postings can be viewed in the appendix.

## **Results**

The shoryuken.com posting was relatively successful. There was immediate attention, and the thread spawned a discussion that I will outline later. I received a dozen valid responses within a few days. However, the postings on the other sites were not greeted as readily. After receiving one response on kotaku.com, my comments were “disemvoweled,” a process that involves a site

administrator removing all the vowels from the post's text, rendering it incomprehensible but leaving it visible (as a sort public shaming). Additionally, concurrent with the disemvoweling, my account's ability to post comments was revoked. An appeals form was available to file along with this action, and I used it to ask why my post and account had been treated in such a manner, mentioning that I did not see anything in the terms of use of the site that would have made the comment undesirable, why I was not given any options besides being banned, and also why my prior messages about the project were ignored. Their response, unsigned and from an e-mail address listed as "Gawker Media Comments," was as follows:

The moderators and editors of Kotaku operate the site based on their terms, not on yours. No amount of disclaimers supplied by you can change the methods that moderators will use to prevent the spamming of the comments section with unnecessary content. The moderators can't be forced to waste their time sending you an email instead of just disemvoweling a comment that you should have known wasn't kosher to begin with. The moderators aren't required to ask you to not do something that you shouldn't have thought was okay to do in the first place.<sup>74</sup>

The logic, then, is that any content deemed "unnecessary" can be removed at the discretion of the site's moderators, and that the status "unnecessary" or "spam" is applied by the that same discretion.

I was extremely surprised by the reaction of kotaku.com, and doubly so by the tone of the e-mail I received in response to my appeal. This is a site where "I'd hit that" as a comment in a thread about a female video game character is considered completely "necessary"—at least vis-à-vis the application of rules that do not remove said comment—yet an academic project, properly documented, is considered "spamming" and a nuisance, one that I "should have known wasn't kosher to begin with." That is a highly disturbing reality. I received a distressingly similar response from the forum administrators of gamespot.com. The post was removed and my

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<sup>74</sup> Gawker Media Comments, e-mail to WareSFThesis@gmail.com (my project e-mail address), October 3, 2009.

account banned almost immediately, before any responses were able to be received, and I received a form e-mail informing me that I had been banned due to “SPAM/Advertising.”<sup>75</sup> (This was especially ironic considering that other postings about “information for school projects” with far less professional presentations remain a common topic on the gamespot.com forums.) I appealed that process just as I did the kotaku.com banning, but a response to the appeal did not come until early April 2010 (after a banning that occurred in October 2009), far too late to allow me to restart the research, and even then the banning was upheld with a simple form letter that informed me my petition had been denied.

In a way, though, being banned from both of these sites—banned for being an academic and attempting to use (in the spirit of fair-use) their community space for that purpose—taught me as much about the video game-playing community on the Web as dozens of survey responses would have taught me about Street Fighter players. The common thread between kotaku.com and gamespot.com is that these sites, despite being popular destinations for the video-game playing community on the Internet, are for-profit, professional ventures. While it would be very easy to check up on my project by contacting my university’s HSRB or my advisor and learning that it was, indeed, a legitimate academic venture—I am a little sympathetic to the idea that my survey might be mistaken for very cleverly-designed spam, though it would have been extremely ineffective spam, as it did not require any personally-identifying information, not even an e-mail address—it is simply easier (and more cost-effective, I suppose) to delete any content that does not fit the expectations for the forums. These forums are not for a community of players, but for a community of customers of the websites (and more specifically customers of their advertisers). The academic context in which I presented myself on these forums painted me as anything but a

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<sup>75</sup> Gamespot Support, e-mail to WareSFThesis@gmail.com (my project e-mail address), October 2, 2009.

customer; I was a critic. Therefore, my value to their version of “community” was not nil, it was negative. I was introducing an element that was less controllable and less profitable than those controlling the forums would have desired.

Thus, it is a weakness of my research in this project (and Internet research in general) that connecting with any group can be done more readily through places like shoryuken.com: an enthusiast website that would be sympathetic to an academic project, and more importantly would take the time and respond to e-mails about said project. Now, had my goal been to speak only to a certain type of Street Fighter player—the type that would frequent a website like shoryuken.com, dedicated to strategy and competitive play—the inaccessibility of gamespot.com and kotaku.com would not have posed a problem. However, I had ideally envisioned a wider swath of player-types responding to my project. While I see research on the Street Fighter tournament player being very valuable, my intent with the ethnographic research component of this project was to simply accrue some opinions and observations from all of the different types of Street Fighter players. Unfortunately, that did not happen. However, the experience of doing this research led me to consider Street Fighter—and video games—in a way I had not initially planned, which is informed both by my rejections and the reactions of those who did respond to the project via the shoryuken.com forums.

### **The Players’ Responses, Both Dismissive and Informative**

In the end, the only responses to the project were from shoryuken.com members, and thus must be taken as coming from a specific subset of Street Fighter players and not from Street Fighter players as a whole. However, there are two sides to the experience of posting the survey on shoryuken.com. While I received an expected number of useful, measured responses, there was another data set entirely that sprung from the survey’s posting. In order to maintain the

spirit of the forum and give the thread a topic to be discussed instead of simply asking for responses to the survey, I included a simple discussion question for the users to use as a jumping-off point. I essentially asked for a popular critique of the value of cultural criticism of video games. “What sort of things in games do you think need to be looked at? Do you feel like it benefits games if they're studied with the same rigor literature and film are?”<sup>76</sup>

The public responses in the thread contrasted very sharply with the responses to the survey that I received by private forum message or e-mail in terms of tone if not content. While it seemed many posters and respondents had similar ideas about the way race works in *Street Fighter*—disavowal, as expected—the posters in the thread took a confrontational stance, openly mocking academic thought, while the respondents saw fit to push a similar discourse but with a much higher level of decorum. Compare user “pherai” commenting “yeah you must really be reaching to do race studies in a video game”<sup>77</sup> to a 23-year-old male Caucasian respondent saying, “Umm, a lot of the characters are stereotypes, but that's in the interest of making the game fun and it's lighthearted imo.”<sup>78</sup> Both are essentially claiming that an investigation into the meaning and impact of race in *Street Fighter* is not necessarily in the spirit of the game—and gamers’ tendencies to fail to conceive of the game from outside the “play” aspects is understandable, as the medium does not have the critical history that film or music does, which normalizes critical thought on and within those media. However, the public comment by pherai, or user “Demon Dash,” who responded, “Like the others said, this survey is irrelevant [*sic*] to my

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<sup>76</sup> WareSFthesis, in “A Master’s Thesis Project About Street Fighter and Fighting Games,” Shoryuken.com forum, October 5, 2009, <http://shoryuken.com/showthread.php?t=211023&page=1>.

<sup>77</sup> pherai, in “A Master’s Thesis Project About Street Fighter and Fighting Games,” Shoryuken.com forum, October 5, 2009, <http://shoryuken.com/showthread.php?t=211023&page=1>.

<sup>78</sup> Response #03



interests,”<sup>79</sup> involves an active, blanket dismissal of the entire process of thought that would engender the question, as opposed to an answer to that question which suggests the question is unnecessary. It is a small but important distinction. Interestingly, almost as soon as the mocking of the project began, so too did a smattering of resistance to that mocking. User “polarity,” after thirty posts of largely derisive comments, posted with “itt [in this thread]: srk [shoryuken.com] doesn’t ‘get’ cultural criticism, exactly no one is surprised.”<sup>80</sup> The final response to the thread, posted ten days after its creation, was by “HazeandFire” and simply stated “Race not part of street fighter.”<sup>81</sup> Intentionally or not, this user summed up the discourse of the vast majority of game-players when issues of race enter into discussions of video games: a flat denial, and a refusal to engage the issue in any meaningful way.

Overall, I could probably say that my research was disastrous. I do not feel like I gained a lot of perspective on what gamers actually think about race and play and Street Fighter. As that was my stated goal with the project, I must consider the project a failure. However, as I re-examined my experience, I realized that the simple fact that I had so much difficulty in obtaining any real comment on the issues at hand was indicative of a certain cultural climate around games. One of the better responses I received was from a 24-year-old white male. His answers indicated that he took the survey seriously and considered his answers carefully. To the question of racial depictions, he answered this: “Many of the characters can be considered racial stereotypes, but I think they are all presented in a comedic way rather than being offensive or

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<sup>79</sup> Demon Dash, in “A Master’s Thesis Project About Street Fighter and Fighting Games,” Shoryuken.com forum, October 5, 2009, <http://shoryuken.com/showthread.php?t=211023&page=1>.

<sup>80</sup> ploarity, in “A Master’s Thesis Project About Street Fighter and Fighting Games,” Shoryuken.com forum, October 5, 2009, <http://shoryuken.com/showthread.php?t=211023&page=2>.

<sup>81</sup> HazeandFire, in “A Master’s Thesis Project About Street Fighter and Fighting Games,” Shoryuken.com forum, October 5, 2009, <http://shoryuken.com/showthread.php?t=211023&page=3>.

insensitive.”<sup>82</sup> This same line of thinking is mirrored in an 18-year-old white male’s response of “That’s a trick answer. Basically every character could be considered terribly racist or stereotyped on their own, but since EVERY character is like this, it balances out and becomes overall not offensive.”<sup>83</sup> Perhaps the most ironic reiteration of this discourse is from a 26-year-old male who refused to give his race and reposted his survey responses in the public thread because he thought his responses were funny. His comment on race in *Street Fighter* is printed here exactly as written.

The SF series in general has been built on racial stereotypes, I mean fucking Zangeif drinks vodka with Gorbochaff (or however you spell that motherfucker with a red wine stain on his foreheads name) and does that russian arms crossed knees all the way bent and kinky dance for his ending in SF2. Shits all fuckin racist. But no one cares, cause its not offensive racist.<sup>84</sup>

So the discourse is that yes, there are racist, problematic depictions within the game, but somehow, those depictions don’t matter.

My experience in attempting this ethnographic survey taught me about the nature of online ethnographic research and about the subjects of that research. The first lesson has to do with the commercial nature of video games. It is difficult to get a “mainstream” response to games as texts, because the mainstream game player is caught up in corporate and capitalistic structures that would see academic intrusion as at best a nuisance and at worst a threat. Initially I considered conducting interviews with *Street Fighter* players whom I directly encountered while playing the game over the Xbox Live on-line game service that is integrated into the Xbox 360 version of *Street Fighter IV* (a similar service called Playstation Network is integrated on the Playstation 3 version). I chose not to do this because of time constraints, but had I gone forward

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<sup>82</sup> Response #10

<sup>83</sup> Response #06

<sup>84</sup> Response #05

I could imagine some of the same pitfalls that I encountered with [kotaku.com](http://kotaku.com) and [gamespot.com](http://gamespot.com). None of those areas are sites of protected speech. Although I examined the terms of service for all of them and considered myself in the clear, in the end the choice of how to enforce those terms of service agreements fall in the hands of the corporate entities running those sites and services. It does not matter if I was treated fairly by [kotaku.com](http://kotaku.com) or [gamespot.com](http://gamespot.com), because in the end those sites do have the right to limit what I can say within the confines of that particular corner of the Internet. The sites' decisions are questionable only philosophically, not authoritatively. This is a serious hurdle for online ethnographic research, and sadly one that will tend to push researchers to the fringes of the Internet, where powerful corporate structures are less stitched into the communities that the researcher wants to investigate. These sites are more easily accessible and have fewer rules—the digital frontier is far easier to infiltrate as an academic than the digital metropolis. If I were to reimagine my thesis project, I would likely have made this chapter, and my ethnographic research, center on tournament players, and would be more interested in community dynamics, organization, and how players maintain these groups of dedicated, seriously competitive gamers. Through this, though I could not completely divorce myself from the commercial influence on the community—it would be impossible to do so when investigating any mass market product—I could at least lessen it. In this way, the research would focus less on the player's ideas about the topic at hand, and more on the players themselves. However, that was not my project. My project was to find how players think about the racial depictions in *Street Fighter*. And what I found, the other piece of information I learned from this research, is that players justify it and dismiss it. While that hardly illuminates my initial question—what do these things *mean*—it does beg the question: Why do players think this way?

### Player Complicity in Video Game Ideology

The answer lies in the way that the interpellation of ideology differs within games as opposed to other traditional media. First, let us return to the idea of video games being media of deliberation. Within video games, choices must be made in order to experience the medium. A refusal to make these choices results either in “losing” the game, or the game simply stalling in its presentation, moving neither forward nor backward (nor, as games typically are better equipped to be described non-linearly, in any direction). If a Street Fighter player chooses to never touch the controller during a match, is she playing the game? It could be argued that she is playing a meta-game, reimagining the context of what “player” means, but that information is only valid outside of the game world. Inside the game’s diegesis, a non-responsive player is simply a non-entity.

Therefore it is not unreasonable to assert that a game’s ideology is inculcated *in the act of play*. To illustrate this, I refer to the 2007 game *Bioshock*. *Bioshock* is a dystopian first-person adventure game; it uses first-person shooter mechanics in a more exploratory manner than most first-person-shooters. The player’s avatar character, Jack, is involved in an Ayn-Rand-inspired dystopian undersea society, Rapture. Part of the player’s in-game mission is to hunt the Little Sisters, mutated girls who hold ADAM, a powerful substance that can increase Jack’s in-game abilities. However, once a Little Sister is cornered, the player has an option of taking only a small amount of ADAM from the Little Sister—returning her to her original human state, effectively saving her—or taking the full amount of ADAM from the Little Sister—killing her in the process. The choice of whether or not to act in self-interest—a cornerstone of Ayn Rand’s objectivist philosophy—is at the heart of the save-or-kill option with Little Sisters. The game takes a three-pronged approach to this decision, given to the player over a dozen times over the

course of the game. If the player saves every Little Sister, killing none, the “good” ending is revealed at the end of the game, where Jack dies peacefully with the now-grown Little Sisters he saved sitting gratefully by his side. If the player kills all the Little Sisters, the “bad” ending depicts Jack as the leader of a new Rapture hell-bent on power, as it steals an armed nuclear submarine. If some Little Sisters were saved, but some were killed, the same events occur as the “bad” ending, but the narration has a sad undertone in this “neutral” ending, as opposed to the angry one presented in the “evil” ending.<sup>85</sup> As Lars Konsack puts it,

*Bioshock* investigates the ethics of *greed is good*. The game expresses a plain criticism of Ayn Rand’s fantasy as a nightmare in which *greed turns out not to be good*. By re-examining it through ethical criticism based on player actions and asking the player to reflect on his actions, the game stands out from the rest.<sup>86</sup>

This last sentence is key. The ideological message, that greed is not good, is only espoused *through the process of player choice*. Yes, a spectator watching someone play the game could glean the same set of ideological impressions, but only if he or she understood that the game’s ideology is in response to the choices made by the player. All three endings essentially condemn Ayn Rand’s objectivism, but do it in concert with player choice: the player has created the way in which the game will interpellate them. The player enacts the process of creating the game’s discourse.

How does this inform our viewing of the reactions to discussing race and *Street Fighter*? In many of the responses to my survey, both within the thread and in private, players made an attempt to explain to me why the stereotypes in the *Street Fighter* series were not “offensive.” However, I very pointedly chose not to use the term “offensive” when asking about the way race was portrayed in *Street Fighter*. Instead, I chose to use “unfair.” Yet the responses contained

<sup>85</sup> All three *Bioshock* endings are viewable at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3nBbo-uyZo>

<sup>86</sup> Lars Konzack, “Philisophical Game Design,” in *The Video Game Theory Reader 2*, ed. Bernard Perron and Mark J. P. Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2009), 40.

comments such as a 26-year-old white male opining “Street Fighter definitely uses racial stereotypes in thier [*sic*] characters but since they seem to cover most races it doesn't bother me.”<sup>87</sup> There is this expectation that somehow, since the entire game is built largely on stereotypes, it is “fair” and “not offensive.” Now, I wholeheartedly disagree with this assessment. Within a white patriarchal society, stereotypes about minorities are much more powerful and damaging than stereotypes about those in power (as the stereotypes tend to justify the current power scheme). However, I want to suggest that the need that some game players have to justify the way race is presented in Street Fighter most likely arises from the anxieties that are produced by video games demanding an active role in the presentation of their ideologies.

### **Is the Black Zombie Black?**

A more controversial game than *Street Fighter IV* in terms of race is *Resident Evil 5*, published by Capcom (who also publish the Street Fighter series). *Resident Evil 5* is an action-adventure game that features a white military avatar character (Chris Redfield) fighting hordes of zombie characters in a fictional African country. Naturally, the large majority of these zombie characters have the bodies of poor, rural blacks. *Resident Evil 5* sparked controversy even before it was released (and in fact non-black zombies were added to the game in response to the controversy). An argument began to brew on various video game websites. The argument boiled down to the image of a white man killing rural Africans versus the idea that these Africans are not raced because they are, in the flow of the game's narrative, parasite-controlled zombies. On [mtv.com](http://mtv.com)'s MTV Multiplayer videogame sub-site, noted technology journalist for *Newsweek* N'Gai Croal stated, “The point isn't that you can't have black zombies. There was a

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<sup>87</sup> Response #08

lot of imagery in that trailer that dovetailed with classic racist imagery.”<sup>88</sup> “Aethyr,” a commenter on kotaku.com responded “They’re zombies. They’re supposed to be creepy. Just because they’re all lurky and moany and, oh right, black, does NOT mean the [developers of the game] are racist. The [...] game takes place in Africa.”<sup>89</sup> The question of racism in the minds of the game’s defenders became one of intent vs. interpretation. However, this defense does not actually counter N’Gai Croal’s assertions. Croal is not accusing Capcom or the *Resident Evil 5* team of promoting racism or using the game as racist propaganda. He is simply stating that there is a very definite sense of “other” among the black African villagers in this game due to the way those villagers are presented. One of Croal’s most quoted comments, that “clearly nobody black worked on this game,”<sup>90</sup> is a statement not on Capcom and *Resident Evil 5*’s intentions, but on the game company’s inattentions: inattention to matters of race and racial history in crafting the images and narrative of the game. The concern with products like *Resident Evil 5* is not of their insidious racist nature, but of their cavalier racial attitude. Croal seems to expect that Capcom has a duty to be aware, not progressive. The expectation of racial awareness seemed too much a burden to those players who did not appreciate Croal’s comments or my ethnographic project.

The argument Aethyr makes, one echoed by many players, including the ones from shoryuken.com who responded to my survey, is that the nature of games lends itself to paint race in broad strokes and that, somehow, this fact forgives the broad strokes that games use to paint

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<sup>88</sup> Tracey John, “Newsweek’s N’Gai Croal On The ‘Resident Evil 5’ Trailer: ‘This Imagery Has A History,’” MTV Multiplayer, April 10, 2008, <http://multiplayerblog.mtv.com/2008/04/10/newsweeks-ngai-croal-on-the-resident-evil-5-trailer-this-imagery-has-a-history/>.

<sup>89</sup> Aethyr, “How can we possibly...,” commenting on Brian Ashcraft, “‘Clearly No One Black Worked On This Game,’” Kotaku, April 10, 2008, <http://kotaku.com/378535/clearly-no-one-black-worked-on-this-game#c5137951>.

<sup>90</sup> Tracey John, “Newsweek’s N’Gai Croal On The ‘Resident Evil 5’ Trailer: ‘This Imagery Has A History,’” MTV Multiplayer, April 10, 2008, <http://multiplayerblog.mtv.com/2008/04/10/newsweeks-ngai-croal-on-the-resident-evil-5-trailer-this-imagery-has-a-history/>.

race. This line of thinking refuses to even consider why a game featuring a Western white protagonist with technologically advanced weaponry killing poor, rural (zombie) Africans would be problematic. Why must they die? They are zombies. Why is the white guy killing them? He is the hero. This line of thinking completely ignores the cultural history on which these images are trading and the system of white patriarchal power that makes them so easy to consume.

And why must players make these arguments? Why must they ignore race? Because there is an idea, widely unspoken, that if games are racist then playing the games is also racist. That may seem illogical (and it largely is), but it goes back to the process of interpellation in games. Game ideology demands action on the part of the player. However, games are not fully open systems. In fact, they have very carefully constructed rules and borders within which the player is allowed to play. In the case of *Resident Evil 5*, a player literally *cannot properly play the game unless that player enacts the killing of (zombie) black Africans at the hands of a white western soldier*. It simply cannot be done. There is no option to choose not to kill at least some of the enemies and complete the game. Therefore, it is a relatively easy jump from the game's ideology to player complicity in that ideology. This is a problem unique to games. Because games require player action to present ideology, players have a difficult time separating the game's ideology from their own. This is not to say that "if you play *Resident Evil 5*, you are a racist." Instead, "if you play *Resident Evil 5*, you are enacting the very racially problematic ideology of *Resident Evil 5*." However, that is a nuanced and difficult-to-reconcile difference, and the easier response is simply to justify away any problematic content in the game, so that it may be played without anxiety.

I am not claiming that video games with racially problematic imagery make players racist. That would be alarmist and ridiculous. However, I am claiming that the nature of play



and the anxiety that comes with complicity in the enacting of games' ideology is likely the cause of a lot of the discourse about race in games. The desire, nay, need, to dismiss these problems does not come from players not caring about the issues, but more likely from players caring about their hobby. The need to keep play "safe" in the eyes of the world in order to keep play accessible drives players to dismiss the ill effects of play—even if these ill effects are often far overstated in the news media. We see this discourse of "but it's just a game" in gendered toys, other video games (especially violent ones), hyper-competitive youth sports, and multiple other fields that involve play. Play is largely seen as something separate from "real life," which is problematic in itself and leads to a real difficulty in investigating it on a grassroots ethnographic level. I did not get what I hoped to get with my online ethnographic component of this project, but I certainly had the discourse of race in *Street Fighter* illuminated for me, even if that light only shone on the brick wall of denial.

## CONCLUSION

In ending this project, I must admit some of my biases. I believe fully that it is imperative to give video games the chance to become a medium of critical and intellectual importance. I believe just as popular music and film have become integral parts of the humanities academy, so too will video games. I have had video game experiences that have come as close to sublime as any from any film I have ever viewed or novel I have ever read. Playing the puzzle-platform game *Braid* struck the same emotional chords in me as reading Haruki Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. Both deal with themes of loss and the illusion of the complete understanding of reality. I do not compare them to claim games as art (as I do not see any real value in making such an argument), but to emphasize, if only personally and anecdotally, that video games *matter to the people who play them* and *matter in the same way as other forms do that have already been deemed intellectually worthy*.

The present state of game studies seems to be very much about defining games and differentiating them from other media. I, of course, seek to further that goal in this very project. It is necessary, but it is not the future of game studies. The future of the discipline, in my view, lies in concentrating on how games speak to a modern way of living so effectively, how they can and should be employed as tools or as art, why their differences matter, and what ideas they can communicate more readily than other media. There is no doubt that video games are dangerous territory; *ideas* are dangerous territory. Thus the focus should not be on *that* something is dangerous but *why* something is dangerous. My goal with this project was not simply to state *that* Street Fighter has an objectionable discourse on race, but *why* it has an objectionable discourse on race; not to condemn it, but to better illuminate the ways that ideas are understood within Street Fighter.

On the outset I stated my desire to “understand Street Fighter.” I do not claim to have fully met that goal. I believe that I understand Street Fighter better, and have recognized some key considerations for the further investigation of Street Fighter. Even though this project focused solely on the Street Fighter video games, in its meager length it could never hope to fully investigate every game of even that limited series. Additionally, the references in the text to numerous films, television programs, and other properties indicate that “Street Fighter” as a concept extends far beyond the realm of games. However, despite its limited scope, I do feel this project has made some important points regarding the direction that scholars should take and the issues they should consider when studying games. To summarize:

1. Games must be studied as played objects, not as interactive narratives. Interactivity is not the essence of a game, gameplay is. This differs from interactivity in that gameplay demands of the player a deliberative stance within the context of a game world, while interactivity is simply a user’s ability to communicate with a device/medium. (There is an essential difference, for example, between an online order form, which is interactive, and a video game, which has gameplay.)
2. Gameplay has its own rules of communication which must be taken into account when examining a game in order to truly understand the game. Street Fighter’s joystick and game pad interface is as much a part of “the game” as its characters or game rules.
3. Video games are a medium which demands a certain amount of human-machine hybridity. This hybridity (i.e., cyborg consciousness) is a source of both anxiety and freedom.
4. Image and story are important in understanding a game’s discourse, but only in the context of play.
5. It is imperative that we consider not only play, but players, though there are pitfalls in doing the kind of broad-reaching ethnographic research that I originally envisioned when I began this project.

Street Fighter is a complicated text for multiple reasons. The constant sequels and fractured narrative make it difficult to “read” even if (unwisely) ignoring gameplay or players. The play

experience differs drastically between single-player and multi-player play. There are a multitude of aspects of playing Street Fighter that this project did not attempt to investigate. I offer another list, this one of various projects with Street Fighter that I believe would be valuable. Some of these project types have been pursued or are currently being pursued, though not with Street Fighter, and using Street Fighter as the jumping off point for those investigations may prove valuable in showcasing some important aspects that are not as evident in other game types.

1. An ethnographic investigation of serious tournament players—if I had used these players as the basis for my ethnographic research instead of trying to reach a broader base, I believe that I would have gotten a more helpful sample. These groups have their own community dynamics and ideas about why and how Street Fighter should be played and the inquiry would likely result in some fascinating observations about the motivations of playing video games, the line between game and sport, and what it means socially and psychologically to be extremely skilled at a video game.
2. The Japanese perspective—this project was written in the US by an American whose ideas and theoretical framework largely derive from an American system. Since I have made a point on more than one occasion in this project to remind the reader that Street Fighter is a Japanese product, it follows that the Japanese might have something to say about Street Fighter. A cross-cultural collaborative project about Street Fighter would not only help us understand the games better, but may provide some interesting avenues to discuss the cross-cultural exchange between Japan and America that has become, in the last 30 or so years, increasingly egalitarian. While America once exported a large portion of its culture to Japan and Japan exported very little to America, the continued popularization in America of Japanese video games, *anime*, “cute” culture, and Japanese popular music has begun to balance that import-export equation. Street Fighter could be an excellent site from which to comment on this phenomenon.
3. Gender—I make very little comment on gender within this project, but gender is far from absent in fighting games. What do the portrayals of female characters in Street Fighter say about feminine strength? An ethnographic project with female players of fighting games would also be helpful in order to avoid any consensus understanding of Street Fighter to be solely based on patriarchal views.
4. On-Line Culture—How have video games/fighting games/Street Fighter helped defined the modern on-line culture in which so much of the first world lives, and how are they/it defined by it?

The above are weak points in my own analysis of Street Fighter, but have the depth and relevance to be projects unto themselves.

The goal of this project, indeed of my young career in academia, is to understand those phenomena and media which are often intellectually dismissed yet vitally important to the daily lives of so many people. This is the legacy of the department in which this project formed and was executed, Bowling Green State University's Popular Culture program. Ray B. Browne, the founder of the program, writes in *Against Academia* that "The development of [Popular Culture as an academic discipline] has been a kind of class-action suit against conventional points of view and fields of study in the Humanities."<sup>91</sup> If that is the case, let this project be my opening statements to the jury. I intend to prove that video games matter in ways which are unique. Video games contain deep meaning, and deep problems, configured in ways which require a new set of academic tools and skilled workers to utilize those tools. The field needs champions. The term "game" itself has overtones of juvenile fancy, of "nerd" culture, of inconsequentiality. The preponderance of occasions in our culture when a phrase like "it's just a game" or "she's just playing games" is used to dismiss the importance of an act or object is staggering and disheartening. Games—formal or casual, commercial or personal, academic or romantic—are an integral aspect of human communication, and the intersections of game with moving image, Internet connectivity, and identity-building (just to name a few) are ripe sites for cultural investigation and understanding, identifying both new problems and new solutions. Attempting to understand Street Fighter has raised as many questions as it has answered, and I feel that fact justifies my enthusiasm for video games as a field of study.

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<sup>91</sup> Ray B. Browne, *Against Academia: The History of the Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association and Popular Culture Movement 1967-1988* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Popular Press, 1989), 1.

So have we defeated Shen Long? Probably not. We never stood a chance. Street Fighter as a cultural node is more than just games. Street Fighter is the culture from which it was created, and the influences on that culture. It is the players who dedicated thousands of hours of their lives to mastering it, the conversations those players have about it, the art they draw of the characters, the videos they post of their performances. Street Fighter is the comic book, film, animation, t-shirt graphic, or bed sheet set based on the games. It is a whole host of multimedia products that remediate not only the influence of the original games, but remediate each other, influencing its own creation like the World's Serpent of Norse mythology eating its own tail. I do not presume to think that this project has solved Street Fighter, but I hope earnestly that it begins a conversation which leads, if not to *full* understanding of how video games create meaning, to a *better* understanding of how video games create meaning. Even though this particular game is over, let's press continue.

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### Page 29

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### Page 46

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### Page 50

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### Page 65

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### Page 70

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Page 73

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**APPENDIX A**  
**ETHNOGRAPHIC SURVEY**

Hello, gamers!

My name is Nicholas Ware. I am a Master's student in the Popular Culture department of Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, OH. As my thesis project I am doing an analysis of the *Street Fighter* game series in terms of its depictions of race and power, the interplay between the two, and their relationship with gameplay.

Part of my project is to gather opinions and information from the game-playing community in an effort to include some perspective from gamers themselves in addition to my own cultural theory and opinions (both as a gamer and an academic). In order to accomplish that, I have decided to post the following survey about *Street Fighter IV* in several web forums of video game sites around the Internet. I am looking for volunteers to fill out this survey to inform my research. If you could, I would really appreciate you answering the questions. They are very open-ended, and as much information as you could give would be appreciated, as your opinions can help shape my project (and, indeed, that is the intention). This is your chance, as a gamer, to have your opinion involved in an academic project, which benefits the legitimacy of video games as an area of study. Your risk of participating in this study is minimal, as your identity will be kept mostly confidential (see below for more information on confidentiality). If you're participating in this project on a public computer, please remember to clear browsing history and cache.

NOTICE: Please either use a private message in this forum or an e-mail to WareSFThesis(at sign)gmail.com to respond to the survey. By responding to this survey, you are consenting to allow use of the information in this research project, including quoting your answers. If quoted in the project, you will be identified by demographic information (age, region, race, gender) and the site from which you participated in the survey. This is the only risk to your confidentiality. All original responses will be kept private, and there is a chance your answers will not appear in the final project. All answers may contribute to tables of raw data collection, though these will have no individual identifiers. You are in no way required to give me your name or e-mail address (if you respond via private forum message) in order to participate in the survey, and that is to protect your privacy. Respondents must be 18 years of age or older. If for any reason, you wish to withdraw your answers after completing the survey, simply contact me and let me know. You will be removed immediately from the project.

I really appreciate any and all responses to this survey. It will help me a lot with my thesis. Thanks so much for your time! If you have any questions about participation rights, you may contact the BGSU Human Subjects Research Board Chair at (419) 372-7716 or hsrb(at)bgsu.edu. Other questions about the project can be directed to the project advisor, Dr. Jeremy Wallach, (419) 372-8204 or jeremyw(at)bgsu.edu.

**Section I: Demographic Information**

1. What's your age?
2. What's your gender?
3. What's your race?
4. What's your nationality?
5. On which website did you find this survey?
6. How many years have you played video games?
7. What are some of your favorite games and game genres?
8. What is your skill level at *Street Fighter IV* (1 to 5, 1 being the least skilled, 5 being the most skilled)?
9. How many hours of *Street Fighter IV* do you play, on average, per week?
10. Do you play *Street Fighter IV* online?
11. How much of your play is casual, and how much is competitive? Please use percentages.  
(For example, 65% casual, 35% competitive.)
12. Other than *Street Fighter IV*, what *Street Fighter* games have you played?
13. Have you ever played in an off-line *Street Fighter* tournament (not just *Street Fighter IV*)?

**Section II: Impressions of *Street Fighter IV***

1. Does *Street Fighter IV* have a single hero? Why or why not?
2. If you answered yes to the question above, who is the single hero? Why?
3. Do you feel that all *Street Fighter IV* characters are equally powerful (not in gameplay terms, but within the storyline)? Why? If not, who do you feel is more powerful and less powerful?



4. What characters do you hate to fight against? Why?
5. Do you feel any countries in the *Street Fighter IV* world are over-represented? Under-represented? Why?
6. Do you feel that any of the ways race is depicted in *Street Fighter IV* are unfair? Why?
7. Do you understand the *Street Fighter IV* storyline? Is it important to you to understand the story? Why?
8. Are there any characters you don't like because you find them offensive or off-putting? Why?
9. Do you think of *Street Fighter IV* as a Japanese product? Why or why not?

### **Section III: Play Choices**

1. What is your main goal when you play *Street Fighter IV*?
2. What character(s) do you most like to play with when you play *Street Fighter IV*? Why?
3. When you choose a different character other than your favorites, what is your usual reason for doing so?
4. Do you think it is more impressive to be able to win with any *Street Fighter* character most of the time, or a single *Street Fighter* character every time?
5. What kinds of players do you usually play against when you play multiplayer *Street Fighter*? (e.g. friends or random people online, etc.; casual or competitive, etc.)
6. Do you feel any characters in *Street Fighter IV* are difficult to use? If so, does this make you want to play with those characters more, or less?
7. If you existed as a character in *Street Fighter*, would you be more likely to play as yourself, or more likely to play as one of the fictional characters? Why?

8. If you play other genres of video games, what does Street Fighter (and fighting games) give you that those other genres don't, and vice versa?
9. If you could change anything about *Street Fighter IV*, what would it be?
10. Describe to me the perfect *Street Fighter IV* character, as you imagine it.

#### **Section IV: Additional Comments**

Please add any additional comments you may have about *Street Fighter IV* and the *Street Fighter* series in general.

Thank you so much for your participation!

## **APPENDIX B**

### **SURVEY RESPONSES**

(All responses reprinted here exactly as received.)

**RESPONSE #01****Section I: Demographic Information**

1. 28
2. M
3. Caucasian
4. British
5. Kotaku
6. Over 20 years
7. Beat-em-ups, (short) JRPGs, TBS, 2D ShMUPS
8. 4.5
9. 7
10. Yes
11. 75% Casual, 25% Competitive
12. SF2, SF2 Turbo, SF2 Championship Edition, SSF2, SSF2 Turbo, SSF2 Turbo Revival, SSF2' (linked arcade mode), SF3, SF3 Third Strike, SFA, SFA2, SFA3, SFA3 Upper, SFEX, SFEX2, SFEX2+alpha, SFEX3.
13. Only unofficially.

**Section II: Impressions of Street Fighter IV**

1. There is no single hero, everybody has their own reason to be there.
2. n/a
3. According to the storyline shown in the cutscenes, Gouken and Akuma are leagues more powerful than the others. Theoretically, having no formal training, Rufus should be the weakest when fighting the more professional martial artists.
4. Online, Ken and Sagat. There are loads of characters, yet everyone plays as the two characters easiest to get good with.
5. Under-represented with regards to what? In terms of target markets, they've pretty much covered all of their main bases.
6. No
7. The story is second only to the game itself. I'm a big fan of the series, and have numerous books both on the story and technical side of the games. It's the nearest thing I have to following a soap-opera...
8. No
9. Yes, but only in so far as I think of my monitor as a Japanese product, my car as a British product, and my lightbulbs as a Chinese product. Everything comes from somewhere...

**Section III: Play Choices**

1. I like to get better than I was before the day before. Some of it is learning in the brain, some of it is learning in the muscles.
2. Offline or casual, all characters. For ranked online, Blanka - not many people play as Blanka, it often catches people out.
3. I sometimes chose Ryu if the opponent picks Sagat first. He's too much hard work when using Blanka.
4. Anybody can get good at one thing, the best people can use any character.

5. Random / friends online.
6. Zangief's controls are comparatively difficult, and C.Viper is shockingly weak. It doesn't mean I don't enjoy using them though.
7. A SF Character version of me, or customisable content version of me? I wouldn't make a version of me out of an editor, but if Capcom designed a full SF character version of me with cutscenes illustrating my none-stop life of computers, then I'd be interested to see what their take on me would be. I'd still probably play with the other characters just as much though - I can't see why me being an extra character would change that...
8. SF is part strategy-based, part twitch-based gaming. I have ShMUPS when I want more twitchiness, and RTS games when I want more strategy.
9. Blind character selection online, so your character choice doesn't influence your opponent's. The match-finding system is one of the worst I have ever used, and it drags this part of an otherwise fantastic game don't to a tortuous nightmare.
10. They've done a pretty good so far, I'm happy with the existing ones, thanks...

(Section IV left blank.)

**RESPONSE #02****Section I: Demographic Information**

1. 19 soon 20
2. M
3. White
4. American (Parent is hungarain immigrant).
5. Shoryuken.com
6. 17-18
7. Fighting Games, FPS, RTS.
8. 3/5 I'm not a top player, but I'm not some random scrub.
9. Currently 8 or so because my major competition is out of town for the semester, normally more like 24-30
10. No.
11. My casual is competitive. I don't entirely know how to answer this question
12. Competitively: SF4, SSF2T HD Remix, SSF2T, Street Fighter 3: 3rd Strike. Casually: SF Alpha, SF Alpha 2, SF Alpha 3, SF2: World Warrior, SF2: Champion Edition, SF2: Anniversary Edition (The one with all the games put together, not positive if that's the correct name), SF3: New Generation, SF3: 3rd Strike, SF2: Champion Edition and various chinese romhacks of SF2: Champion Edition like SF2 accelerator and SF2 rainbow edition.
13. Of course. SF2: Super Turbo, 3rd Strike, and SF4.

**Section II: Impressions of Street Fighter IV**

1. Yes.
2. The player is because they experience their own story in the way they choose.
3. No. Gamefaqs has a good thing about this.
4. Characters like Gen that are overly flashy yet completely inefficient and the people that tend to play them are arrogant about
5. No, not really. I don't think about this stuff when I play.
6. Hilariously so. Japan just doesn't understand not being racist or something. Balrog, the mike tyson ripoff says "my fight money" as he gets knocked out on SF4. On SF2 he's a screaming maniac who's stage is a casino. On SF3: 2nd Impact, Sean, the black Ryu-alike character's intro sequence is him throwing a basketball and his stage is the scene of a crashed watermelon truck. All the black people in the games aren't able to fight "properly" unless they're boxers. Elena fights weird, Sean fights weird, Birdie fights weird and is a thug. Balrog and Dudley are boxers. Dhalsim is a "weird" indian who uses yoga to stretch his arms, very racist character. Zangief is a gigantic brutish drinking russian who is always wearing red. Ken, the american, is much like Ryu, a "good guy", yet he's kind of a rich "douchebag" character because he's american. The first korean character Juri who is to be introduced in SSF4 in 2010 is said to be "evil" (Korean characters on the other japanese games are often criminals or villains. Hwoarang on Tekken is a criminal.). T. Hawk is a giant native american yet he's said to be from Mexico. People at the arcade joke that Balrog's stage on SF2 (the casino) is T. Hawk's. Guile is a militaristic ultrapatriotic american with the flag tattooed on BOTH arms, originally made to appeal to american audiences in World Warrior. El Fuerte.... his moves are called things like "quesadilla

bomb", need I say more? Ryu, being japanese is hard-working and always practicing. Elena is from africa and therefore fights all weird.

7. SF4 does not have an understandable storyline. I don't play the games for that.

8. I hate the fatty characters because I don't like fat people.

9. Of course, it has some very anime-like production style and the abundant racism. The user interface is very old-styled, Japan seems conservative with this sort of thing compared to american developers.

### Section III: Play Choices

1. To have fun by playing my best and giving my opponent a good competition.

2. Sagat because I enjoy characters that control space very well. "zoning".

3. Ken, because of his goofy mixup game. Not very often though.

4. Single character every time.

5. Friends. Highly competitive.

6. Yes, Sagat is difficult to use because everyone knows who he is and how to fight him because he's considered by many to be the best character. He's tall so anti-airing is very difficult as your opponent reaches you sooner on jumpins. For his primary offense, the tiger knee you have to know how to space it very well for it to be safe. He has some very very weak ranges, he makes up for this with the ability to control what range he is at very well. When played perfectly, he is an incredible character, but not easy to play.

7. It depends on what moves I would have. The moves are independant of the personality in some ways.

8. good local competition.

9. Make the rounds end quicker. I hate this stuff where one guy wins 20 seconds in basically but then there's another 79 seconds of running away on the 99 second timer.

10. Define perfect? Perfect for me or perfect as in top tier. Perfect for me would be a ken that isn't low tier like on the current game. Perfectly top tier would be someone like Magneto on Marvel or Toki on HNK, able to kill you every time off a single jab.

(Section IV left blank.)

**RESPONSE #03****Section I: Demographic Information**

1. 23
2. Male
3. Caucasian
4. American, currently living in Japan.
5. SRK
6. Probably about 15.
7. I love fighting games, that's why I'm here.
8. 3 I guess. I'm not bad, but there's room for improvement.
9. It was like 15, now it's probably down to like 5.
10. Yes.
11. Not sure what you mean here, I'm always trying to win...
12. Hyper Fighting, Super Turbo, Third Strike, Alpha 3, vs. games (probably doesn't count)
13. Not for SF, but for other fighting games.

**Section II: Impressions of Street Fighter IV**

1. In terms of the storyline, yeah I think so.
2. The storyline focuses on Ryu. Obviously the game itself isn't Ryu-centric since you can pick anyone you want and they all have their own stories if you feel like indulging in that, but if you're talking about overall game narrative, he's been the driving force for a while now.
3. Within the story, Ryu's supposed to be the most powerful iirc.
4. Sagat, because he's too good.
5. I was always surprised that there weren't any Korean characters. Japan and America are more represented than other places, but I wouldn't say "over-represented".
6. Umm, a lot of the characters are stereotypes, but that's in the interest of making the game fun and it's lighthearted imo.
7. No, and no. Fighting game storylines are pretty much always bad, and it doesn't effect playing the game anyways.
8. Rufus is too fat.
9. Yes, because it comes from Japan.

**Section III: Play Choices**

1. I like trying to improve my skills.
2. I like Honda, because I like sumo and I feel comfortable and have generally good results when I play him. I try to play Fei Long sometimes, but he's terrible, so I usually quit.
3. Sometimes I'll pick other characters who I'm not good with if I'm playing against my girlfriend, or just for fun.
4. I hate counter-picking, and really respect people who stick with their characters through good and bad matchups.
5. Online, or with friends locally. We take it seriously, and try to improve, but SF4 isn't my main fighting game, so I wouldn't describe it as strictly competitive.



6. Both of the characters I use are supposed to be difficult to win with, but out of the two of them, I have a much harder time using Fei Long, which makes me go back to Honda after I lose enough.

7. Another character. It's about escapism.

8. Fighting games are a high-stress genre of games. It's one on one, and the only thing that's going to keep you from winning is your own skill. It's very rewarding to get better and to win against people who you perceive as skilled, but on the other hand, it can fry your nerves sometimes if you take it too seriously. Also it can take up way too much of your time if you're really trying to get good.

9. I'd get rid of focus cancels.

10. Mike Haggar.

(Section IV left blank.)

**RESPONSE #04****Section I: Demographic Information**

1. 27
2. Male
3. Hispanic (South American from Ecuador)
4. American
5. Shoryuken.com forums
6. about 13 years
7. My main Genre is fighting games (marvel vs capcom series, tatsunoko vs capcom, Naruto, Bleach DS, Soul Calibur, Arcana Heart, Blazblue), others include RPG (non-turn based), Action, Adventure, Racing (burnout mostly), and that's about it.
8. I dont play SF4
9. I don't play SF4
10. I don't play SF4
11. Casual: 90% Competitive: 10%
12. Bleach DS, Naruto Gekitou Ninja Taisen 4, Bloody Roar series, Arcana heart, Marvel vs Capcom, Marvel vs Capcom 2, X-Men vs Street Fighter, Marvel Super Heroes vs Street Fighter, Street Fighter EX2, X-men Next Dimension, Gundam Battle Assault 2 and 3, Rival Schools, Project Justice.
13. No, never played in a tournament at all

**Section II: Impressions of Street Fighter IV**

1. I don't think so because everyone is worth playing as at least once or twice. Then you just look to main up to 2 different characters.
2. n/a
3. I have no personal though on this really. So i dont know who is Powerful and who isn't.
4. Zangief: why? because grabs are hard to get out of lol
5. I have no view on this
6. No I dont think so. SF has always had a variety of characters.
7. Storylines are cool, but fighting games don't benefit very much from them.
8. N/A
9. I always thought that Capcom was a japanese company

**Section III: Play Choices**

1. I don't play SF4 seriously
2. I just play with Akuma if i ever play the game at all
3. trying new things
4. yeah, some characters can be hard to get used to
5. a wide variety of players. some are cocky, some are friendly, and some just don't care much.
6. some of the commands for specials like the super flash kick are a pain in the butt to execute. I wish they would change the command.
7. Id play as myself because i like to stand out
8. hard to say, all the games I play give me the replay value i always look for. so they are all ok to me.

9. add a tutorial mode
10. I dont know right now

#### Section IV: Additional Comments

I play the marvel vs capcom series mostly due to their ease in adaptation (my ability to adapt to the game) and executing specials don't feel like more of a chore than actual gaming.

**RESPONSE #05****Section I: Demographic Information**

1. 26
2. M
3. None of your fucking business.
4. American
5. Shoryuken
6. 18
7. RPG: Final Fantasy Tactics, World of Warcraft, Diablo2, Warcraft3, Dark Ages of Camelot  
FPS: Halo, CS: Source, Call of Duty 4  
Fighting: CvS2, ST, MvC2
8. 4.5
9. Less than 1
10. No
11. 100% Casual
12. World Warrior, Championship Edition, Hyper Fighting, Super Turbo, Capcom vs. Snk, Capcom vs. Snk 2, SF3:3rd Strike, xmen vs sf
13. Yes.

**Section II: Impressions of Street Fighter IV**

1. Yes and no. The obvious protagonist of the series is Ryu, so you can say he is the hero of the series. But players can strongly identify with a different character, and regardless of if that character is the hero of the series, it is the hero to them.
2. Already fucking said that shit, wtf redundant.
3. No. Because the storyline is made to make others look stronger or weaker. I dont give a shit who is more powerfull storyline wise. That shit is there for flavor.
4. The ones that are top tier that I dont pick.  
Because they are usually dominant and easy to use.
5. Who gives a shit?
6. Not in 4, not really. But the SF series in general has been built on racial stereotypes, I mean fucking Zangeif drinks vodka with Gorbochaff (or however you spell that motherfucker with a red wine stain on his foreheads name) and does that russian arms crossed knees all the way bent and kicky dance for his ending in SF2.  
Shits all fuckin racist. But no one cares, cause its not offensive racist.
7. No, because I havent looked at the SF4 storyline one fucking bit, that shit dont concern me. All I care about is good gameplay, storyline is pretty much a bonus.
8. Yeah, theres a bunch of characters I dont like, but thats mostly for playstyle reasons. Like T.Hawk, fuck that guy.  
His moves are all stupid, and his normals suck.
9. Made by japanese people right?  
Protagonist is a japanese dude?  
Sure, why the fuck not?

### Section III: Play Choices

1. To win.
  2. I like to play many characters, because shit is a boring turtle fest and I have to switch things up to keep it interesting.
  3. Cause im really fucking bored, or I want to try out something new.
  4. Every time.
- Nobody fucking wins everytime.
5. MULTIPLAYER?
- Theres a fucking single player mode?
- You mean that shitty time sink between playing real competition? I play any and everyone, I prefer top players, because they make you better.
6. Less. Because Fei Long sucks ass.
  7. Cause I can shoot fucking fireballs out of my hands?
- I mean sure I got instant win moves because I know how to choke people n shit, and can KO people of similar size in 1 hit, but id rather be E.Honda. Because id be a big fat motherfucker with moveries and fatness that will beat your motherfucking ass bitch. Plus I stole Sakura's underwear after I sleep raped that bitch and donkey chopped that slut in the back of the head, and I wear that shit as a trophy.
8. Good consistent gameplay that doesnt require a huge time investment.
  9. Its engine. I dont fucking like it.
  10. E.Honda with a safe ass splash, his f+RH knocks down like it does in other games, c.fierce linking off of MP slaps, a better super and ultra, 720.

### Section IV: Additional Comments

Street Fighter 4 sucks.  
SF3 and CVS2 are better games.

**RESPONSE #06****Section I: Demographic Information**

1. 18
2. Male
3. Caucasian
4. US
5. SRK
6. 12
7. RPGs, Shooters, RTS, Fighters
8. 3
9. 20
10. Only occasionally
11. 10% Casual, 90% Competitive (Most of my time is in training mode, so I'll file that under competitive)
12. Super Turbo (vanilla and HDR), Third Strike
13. Yes

**Section II: Impressions of Street Fighter IV**

1. No. There are several characters working individually for the same, overall good goal.
2. N/A
3. No. Akuma/Gouken could easily be considered the strongest. M. Bison is up there. Then you have Ryu/Ken and maybe Sagat. The rest of the characters fall into the same pool past there.
4. Any character with a reversal special move that has invulnerable frames (such as ryu/ken shoryuken). SF4's reversal system is so lenient they can mash these moves out of anything they please.
5. No to the first, but I think some middle east countries deserve a fighter
6. Not really, but that's a trick answer. Basically every character could be considered terribly racist or stereotyped on their own, but since EVERY character is like this, it balances out and becomes overall not offensive.
7. I understand pieces, but the story doesn't matter to me. I am in it for the gameplay and competition.
8. Not particularly
9. Yes. Mostly because of the iconic fighter Ryu in karate gi and headband.

**Section III: Play Choices**

1. To win!
2. Balrog and Chun li. Both fit my balanced style of offense/defense rather well, and both are charge characters, which means I don't need to move the joystick alot to do their moves. I am much better at pressing buttons than I am with the joystick
3. It is usually because I know SOMETHING with the character that is fun and I will take a break from my mains to do that
4. One all the time. Knowing a character 100% is a hundred times more work than 90%
5. Local players from the arcade or friends online

6. Yes, there are a few. It's always tempting for the 'flash' factor of knowing a difficult character. But most of them are heavy on the joystick motions, which my awkward left hand can't keep up with.
7. Would depend entirely on gameplay.
8. Pure 1-on-1 competition. It's a test of both players knowledge, dexterity, and ability to read the others mind. Not only that, but the genre allows to be deficient in one area but make up for it by excelling in the others.
9. Shortening the reversal window, removing the plinking effect, and removing the srk shortcut
10. A charge character with a projectile and good number of defense and mixup options. In other words, overpowered =D I don't care what they look like, could be a toaster and I'd still pick them.

#### Section IV: Additional Comments

I enjoy Street Fighters simple style the most. Character designs seem basic, but just work so well. This is alot less distracting from the real game, which is just red and blue hitboxes

**RESPONSE #07****Section I: Demographic Information**

1. 18
2. Male
3. White
4. American
5. Shoryuken.com
6. ~13
7. Fighting(Street Fighter), Platform(Mario), Zelda. anything good actualy.
8. N/A, No PS3/360/Good Computer. I play SF3:3S on GGPO, skill level 1 probably (lol)
- 9.N/A, I'm not sure how many hours of SF in general I play.
10. N/A, I play A SF online(SF3:3S)
11. 100% Casual, never been to a tournament in my life.
12. Street Fighter III: Third Strike: Fight for the Future
13. No

**Section II: Impressions of Street Fighter IV**

1. Yes
2. Ryu, because he is in every SF game and crossover fighting game ever.
3. No. Obviously Akuma, Seth, Bison are stronger in the story than Sakura, Dan, etc.
4. N/A
5. Over: Japan because they made the game. Under: All that have no representative.
6. No. Every character is equally stereotyped.
7. Yes, Yes. Without a decent story, I can't get into any form of fictional entertainment media.
8. No.
9. Yes. Capcom USA owns the liscense (Last I checked), but Japanese people programed and designed it.

**Section III: Play Choices**

1. Win
2. N/A, in 3S I play Remy
3. I don't usually
4. Winning with a character you barely play is more impressive.
5. Random online
6. N/A
7. Someone else, because I can't fight at all
8. A more competitive nature, greater depth, a less defined goal to achieve that would make me stop playing
9. Make myself own it, probably change the graphical style
10. I haven't even played 1/3 of all characters from SF games, so I wouldn't know whether certain elements have been done before and how good the result was. I am also just not really sure.



#### Section IV: Additional Comments

SF is my favorite in the genre. I think I could play it forever. No matter how much I lose, it stays fun and I just want to keep going.

**RESPONSE #08****Section I: Demographic Information**

1. 26
2. Male
3. White/Caucasian
4. United States
5. www.shoryuken.com
6. Since I was a young kid. Around 21 years.
7. Fighting games (Street Fighter 4, Blazblue, Super Street Fighter 2 Turbo, Street Fighter Alpha 3, Street Fighter 3: Third Strike)
8. 3(I'm an average hardcore player)
9. 15
10. Yes
11. If by competitive you mean Tournament play then about 5 percent (only one tournament in my location a month or so)  
If by competitive you mean "Playing to beat the other person" then 100% of the time.
12. Street Fighter II - The World Warrior  
Street Fighter II' - Champion Edition  
Street Fighter II Turbo  
Super Street Fighter II - The New Challengers  
Super Street Fighter II Turbo  
Street Fighter Alpha 2  
Street Fighter Alpha 3  
Street Fighter III: 2nd Impact  
Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike
13. Yes

**Section II: Impressions of Street Fighter IV**

1. I guess not. I don't really pay attention to the story very much.
2. Because there are 25 characters.
3. M.Bison (Dictator), Ryu, Gouken, Seth and Akuma would probably be the most powerful characters storyline wise.
4. Blanka, his playstyle is a perfect counter to my playstyle
5. It doesn't matter to me.
6. Street Fighter definitely uses racial stereotypes in thier characters but since they seem to cover most races it doesn't bother me.
7. I understand the basics of the storyline. I don't believe the storyline is important at all since it's a two player competitive game
8. No
9. Yes, because it was made in Japan

**Section III: Play Choices**

1. To become a better player and win

2. Balrog and Gen. When I first picked up SF4 I played all the characters until I settled with Balrog. I stuck with him because he just seemed to click with my personal playstyle. I also play Gen who has great cross ups and mix ups, something I feel Balrog is lacking in his game.
3. Playing other characters gives me a better idea of their strengths and weaknesses. It can really help me to get into the mindset of the person playing the character.
4. Since the point in competing in tournaments is to win I would say the latter.
5. I mostly play friends but I do play random people online occasionally.
6. Yes, some characters are easier to use than others. The second question is difficult for me to answer since I play both Balrog (who is considered one of the easier characters to learn) and Gen (who is considered one of the more difficult characters to learn. So I guess both is my answer.
7. Well I probably wouldn't be a very good character because I'm a white male of average height and weight with no special powers. So no, I'd stick with the characters that can throw fireballs out of their hands or dash punch across 20 yards in less than a second.
8. One of the main reasons I'm attracted to fighting games is the fact that it is one on one. There are no teams to blame your loss on and no random items, stages or spawns appearing to add to the luck factor. Just two players in a static environment with equal access to all the characters.
9. More characters, stricter reversal timing and wake up autocorrection.
10. I have no clue, I'm not a game designer. But to be honest a "perfect" character would completely ruin the game making all other characters obsolete.

#### Section IV: Additional Comments

It's a great fighting game series.

**RESPONSE #09****Section I: Demographic Information**

1. 25
2. Male
3. Caucasian
4. Finnish
5. SRK.com
6. 20 years
7. Fighting games, shoot em ups, point and click, adventure, puzzle
8. Hard to judge something like this yourself so i'll put 1
9. 2 max
10. sometimes yes
11. 100% casual
12. All of them at some point, Most i have played though is Super Street Fighter 2 Turbo and Third strike
13. No i have not

**Section II: Impressions of Street Fighter IV**

1. (Left blank)
2. Ryu is the main character
3. I dont pay attention to storyline that much
4. I hate playing against players not characters in most games but in st i hate fighting against Honda since Blanka is my main.
5. Japan is obviously over-represented
6. No i don't since its a fictional game with a certain art style
7. No
8. No
9. Sure it is since its developed by a Japanese company

**Section III: Play Choices**

1. Win
2. Bison since he has solid footsies
3. If i like to play it
4. Winning is winning
5. random, people online
6. Yes and yes
7. I will not answer this
8. player vs player aspect
9. remove srk shortcuts
10. Sagat

(Section IV left blank.)

**RESPONSE #10****Section I: Demographic Information**

1. 24
2. Male
3. White
4. Unites States citizen
5. Shoryuken.com
6. 18-20
7. Fighting games: Guilty Gear, melty Blood, Arcana Heart  
RPGs/Strategy RPGs: Valkyria Chronicles, Demon's Souls, Fallout 1  
FPS: Halo 1, Doom, Call fo Duty 2  
Strategy Games: Rome:Total War, Shogun:Total War  
Third person action: Ninja Gaiden 2
8. Three
9. 6-10
10. No
11. 5% casual, 95% competitive
12. I have played all of them, but I played them very little other than Street Fighter 4.
13. no

**Section II: Impressions of Street Fighter IV**

1. It is my impression that Ryu is meant to be the singular heroic character in the storyline, though it has other characters who might be more appropriately be classified as heroes since their main goal is to defeat the villain M. Bison, whereas Ryu seems more interested in simply perfecting his art.
2. Ryu is presented as the most "noble" and powerful character, with a stong warrior's spirit and code of honor, though he doesn't seem to do much in the way of "heroic" acts.
3. Withing the storyline it is suggested that some characters are stronger simply by the fact that they can channel forms of enery, which is often supposed to be a result of perfecting their skill at martial arts, such as Ryu/Ken/Gouken/Akuma. Other characters are represented as being less skilled, such as Dan and Sakura, or simply don't have any notable abilities beyond being good at their fighting style, such as Balrog and E Honda.
4. I do not like to fight against Zangief or any of the characters who have charge-type commands for their attacks, as the matches tend to be more defensive and uneventful. I do not like to fight the "shoto" class characters like Ryu, Ken, and Akuma for much the same reason.
5. America and japan have a large number of representatives compared to many other countries.
6. Many of the characters can be considered racial stereotypes, but I think they are all presented in a comedic way rather than being offensive or insensitive.
7. I have a vague understanding of the street fighter storyline but I don't feel it is important. If I feel that a fighting game has a worthwhile story I will usually learn all that I can about it, but Street Fighter is not one of those franchises.
8. I don't like most of the returning Street Fighter 2 characters, I find them to be dull and uninspired in design or slightly amusing at best. I especially do not like Ryu and Ken, as they have almost no attributes that I would look for in an interesting character.

9. I do, because Japanese games tend to have a very recognizable style about them, even if the visual design is more western or neutral. The fighting game community is also closely tied to ideas of Japanese culture, because Japan is host to the best developers and players of the genre.

### Section III: Play Choices

1. My main goal while playing is to win the match using the style and tactics that I enjoy, even if they are not the most efficient.

2. I mostly play as Rufus because his character design amuses me and I find his offense-based fighting style to be more interesting than the more defensive style that many Street Fighter 4 characters encourage. He also can be used more effectively without learning extremely difficult combos.

I also play as Rose, as she is the character I started playing Street Fighter 4 as, but she is a fairly weak character so I changed to Rufus. I enjoy using her ranged attacks and she is fairly quick.

3. I rarely play other characters unless I am teaching someone how to play or as a joke.

4. If someone could win consistently with many characters that would be more impressive than doing it with a single character, as they would have mastered a larger set of skills.

5. I play with other competitive players in my city.

6. There are a number of difficult characters in Street Fighter 4 such as C. Viper and Gen. I generally try to avoid difficult characters unless I really enjoy playing as them, since I like to play a wide variety of fighting games and do not have the time to practice with a lot of difficult characters. Typically, the more I like a game, the more willing I am to play a difficult character in that game.

7. I would rather play as an interesting fictional character than a dull one based on a realistic character such as myself. I am not one of the people who feels it is necessary to relate to the character onscreen in order to enjoy playing as them.

8. One of the biggest benefits of playing fighting games is that they provide constant gameplay with the exception of loading screens between matches. Once the game starts, there is no time spent waiting for something to occur in the game, or walking from one location to another, or sorting through an inventory screen. Fighting games also have a more obvious learning curve, and time spent practicing will yield more immediate and obvious improvements than in any other genre.

Fighting games do not, however, allow the player to interact with the game's world in any meaningful way or progress through a long and complex adventure. They also typically do not provide any sort of cooperative mode to play with friends.

9. I would remove most of (if not all) old cast of characters and start from scratch, with the exception of the characters that are new to Street Fighter 4

10. A character who fights with heavy attacks, preferably mostly punches with a few kicks, but still moves fairly quickly and has a dash that can go under most projectiles. Visually it could be anything interesting, like a female character in a World War II-style German officer's uniform.

### Section IV: Additional Comments

I feel that Street Fighter as a franchise is a rather poor representation of the genre, but still a legitimate competitive series. I just feel that it has rather unimaginative characters and slower, less complex gameplay than other games in the genre.

**RESPONSE #11****Section I: Demographic Information**

1. 30
2. Penis
3. Chicano
4. Chicano
5. Shoryuken.com
6. 25 yrs.
7. SF:Third Strike, PacMan, Lumines (top games I enjoy). Genres: action rpg, fighting, racing, side scrollers, puzzle
8. 2.75
9. Maybe half an hour
10. No
11. 90% Casual; 10% "I want to destroy you" mindstate
12. Third Strike, HD, Turbo, World Warriors, Champion Edition, Alpha Series, Some Super and Super Turbo, tiny bit of EX
13. Nothing official, No. Weekly Tourney at local arcade: once or twice.

**Section II: Impressions of Street Fighter IV**

1. SF4 does not have a single hero. To choose a character, you become that character. All their weaknesses and strengths become buried into your mind and reaction time. You play from their shell in order to dominate any competition that falls your way. To state there is a single protagonist in the whole history of Street Fighter is limiting and blind since all people who partake in the competitiveness of the genre become their own warrior, hence their own hero within their search for victory.
2. I answered "No".
3. Storyline: Bison (US) = Bad Guy. So everyone is trying to destroy his reign by playing his game. The characters are then only personified by the skill level of the person attempting to beat the computer. Therefore characters are only as equal, in terms of storyline, as the person who is lending their imaginations to taking down the Shadowloo dynasty. The written bylines given to pixels are only for a shallow history of who it is you are choosing but in no way determines whether you'll be successful at reaching the end screen playing as that character.
4. I don't hate fighting against any character.
5. No, under or over representations of country origin were decisions made by the developers. I don't personally feel being discriminated against and could care less; they should add more martians. However, I can see the connection with not being able to find a representation of your perceived self on the selection screen and that may bother some people. I'm use to it - societal "norms" are slanted for easy digest and mass consumption. Besides, the exploitation of what I would consider me is not something I would desire to witness.
6. No. Like I stated, development teams had meetings after meetings to decide their creation's characters. I only choose to participate at the competitive, skill-building level. I don't care about SF's storyline.
7. Yes, I do. Story is not important. I've only played to defeat the AI initially and then whoever I had a chance to play on a face to face level. The draw of the game aren't the cheesy endings but

spawn of making the gameplay second nature to defeat whoever believes their second nature is stronger. Once that competitive atmosphere is created with those desiring to improve, then, and only then, does the psychology of human nature takes precedence.

8. I find none of the characters offensive. Balrog (US) might be seen a bit stereotypical though. Same could be said for Fei Long, T-Hawk, and perhaps Dhalsim.

9. If the game was developed in Japan, then it is a Japanese product. If it was a collaboration with its United States subsidiaries, than it is a bi-country product under the same corporate umbrella.

### Section III: Play Choices

1. To win.
2. Abel. He is the character that I've practiced with most and feel comfortable with his flow of movement.
3. I want a change of pace in my playstyle.
4. Impressive? Neither. I don't care about the personal choice of the player. Only if the match was worth playing or even watching is what is at stake.
5. I currently only play casual face-to-face matches with a sibling.
6. All characters are hard to learn to full potential. If I wanted to excel with a certain character because of their feeling due to their movement, I would do so.
7. If I existed as a character, my ass would be kicked with the first jab... I don't throw fireballs and can't jump a couple stories with every leap. So, Fictional, for the win within Street Fighter games.
8. Street Fighter gives an intense psychological puzzle that requires massive experience to get ahead in in a very condensed period of time. Competition!
9. Asking me to change anything in SF4, is asking me not to play SF4. I prefer Third Strike dynamics, only because I've played that game the most seriously of any from the SF volumes.
10. I imagine no perfect character; only characters with flaws that overcome those flaws with their strengths.

### Section IV: Additional Comments

As far as Street Fighter in particular being studied, it could only be done so far from casual play. Films and other creations are subjective pieces that can be analyzed with a plethora of perspectives but unless those same perspectives play (not observe) Street Fighter at a serious and live (face-to-face) level, it cannot be fully understood. To onlookers, it is a series of button presses to quickly suck the life down of the opponent, which is true. What they don't see, or rather, what they don't feel, is the love/hate to dominate within the arena; especially if they reach an understanding of the nuances found within the micro moments of each towering second that passes and the pressure to overcome your flaws.



**RESPONSE #12****Section I: Demographic Information**

1. 18
2. Male
3. Black
4. American
5. Shoryuken
6. 11-ish (yes, since I was 7 or so)
7. Favorite genre is definitely fighting games. Favorite games are any fighting games, plus any Resident Evil game.
8. 4 or so? I'm pretty new, but I think i'm good.
9. 9-10 hours
10. Yes, often
11. 80% casual and 20% competitive
12. A little Third Strike, I've played most all of them at least once
13. Yes, quite a few

**Section II: Impressions of Street Fighter IV**

1. No, i guess. There are plenty of good guys, and a lot of them > Ryu. So there.
2. N/A
3. For the most part. Excluding some ppl who are obviously weaker than the rest, like Dan or Sakura. Or Zangief. =)
4. Vega and Honda. Their whole point is to be annoying.
5. Japan gets a lot of love, but that's only natural. Australia is pretty under-represented though imho.
6. Black people. Why are they all so big and dumb? (I see you, Boxer. And you, Dee Jay) Dudley was pretty stereotypical too.
7. I get it. I just like to know my game's story is all.
8. I find most of the females to be off-putting. It's so sexist how they can't take a punch at all. I'm not sure if I actually care, or I'm just mad cuz all I play is girls.
9. Well, it did come from Japan as far as I know, so...

**Section III: Play Choices**

1. To win with style. 🤪
2. Viper, easily. I love her, she's one of two characters who I don't find boring to use. The other being Chun-Li. She's so flashy and cool/fun.
3. Chun-Li. I like to use her now and again just to mess around. For fun, y'know.
4. Single char all the time
5. Friends, and also people who I've gotten in touch with to help me with my game.
6. Viper. Easily the toughest in the game. It kinda attracts me to her (I like high learning curve characters). I could never play Zangief because he's EZMODO.
7. Viper. She's way cooler than I could ever be. Plus I'd get KO'd after one hit by Zangief. (Although she goes down after only like 5)
8. A real sense of skill and accomplishment when I win. Plus, a sense that I'm really improving

and that I have things to work towards (namely, high level play and doing well in tournaments)

9. More content, maybe cooler art style, and make it feel like they *really* put some love into it.

10. Viper. Nuff said.

(Section IV left blank.)