"It was just a prank, Han!": Wendibros, Girlfriend Woes,
and Gender Politics in *Until Dawn*

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ABSTRACT

"It was just a prank, Han!": Wendibros, Girlfriend Woes,
and Gender Politics in *Until Dawn*

Rebecca Waldie

Horror video games utilize conventional stereotypes to replicate the hegemonic power structures of the cultures from which they are produced. Using the 2015 award-winning horror video game *Until Dawn* as a case study, the author unpacks the construction of hegemonic masculinity and interrogates the impact of traditionally marginalized traits such as race and mental illness against the idealized role of the white, male saviour stereotype using an intersectional content analysis.

The thesis begins with an exploration of the game studies literature around gender and marginalization before transitioning into a consideration of hegemony in horror media, including video games. From there, the author contextualizes R. W. Connell's conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity and combines it with Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectional lens. The literature is encapsulated in a summarization of *Until Dawn*'s characterization of masculinity, as determined by the theoretical framework provided, as a white (male) saviour archetype.

The author dedicates the three subsequent chapters to analyzing, via content analysis, the game's key forms of marginalization: gender, race, and mental illness In each chapter, the content of *Until Dawn* is dissected to determine to what degree each marginalized attribute impacts a character's ability to meet the game's metric for hegemonic masculinity. The game content considered includes visuals, dialogue, object access and usability, combat scenarios, and storyline.

Hegemonic masculinity, mental illness, and the appropriation of Indigenous culture must be critically analyzed; this research adds a necessary consideration of several problematic and harmful representations that are often overlooked in current game studies literature.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the honour of my mother, Wendy Waldie. She was my strongest champion and without her I would never have found the courage to pursue this degree. I made it here because of her and I wish she was here to see how far I've come thanks to her. Also, I would like to acknowledge the support and encouragement of my dad, Don, and my fiancé, Tim, who have both stood by me as I forged this new life path.

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Introduction

Video games occupy a large space in the consumable media landscape, necessitating the critical analysis of how video game content informs and reinforces societal norms. As the traditional target audience for video games is male gamers between ages 18 and 35, the construction of masculinity in the medium is especially important to consider. *Until Dawn* (Supermassive Games, 2015), like many horror genre media, relies on the use of specific character archetypes. Built into these archetypes are clear references to hegemonic gender conventions (Benshoff, 1997). Significant research on the representation of women in video games overall has been conducted (Sundén and Sveningsson, 2012; Shaw, 2014), yet in-depth focus on horror media specifically is substantially lacking with the past majority of research into horror video games avoiding discussion of societal hierarchies and marginalization. Due to the often problematic and harmful stereotypes utilized in horror media, it is essential to critically analyze horror video games to the same degree as other video game genres. This thesis seeks to do so using an intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991) lens to consider the impact of hegemonic power dynamics on the representations of masculinity.

In the horror genre, male characters are regularly categorized as protectors, while ascribing to specific stereotypes. These archetypes often rely on the underlying power structures from the society in which they are based (Och, 2015). Traits that are traditionally marginalized in hegemonic Western culture include gender, race, and ability. While there are many additional forms of marginalization, such as sexual orientation and age, *Until Dawn*'s character complement does not provide enough of a diversity in these other categories to allow for an extensive analysis.

I will instead focus on the permeation of white male dominance, mental ability, and protector imagery to demonstrate the ubiquitous nature of hegemonic masculinity in the game. My research in this thesis seeks to assess the degree of representation of hegemonic masculinity and the impact of gender, race, and mental illness on the construction of masculinity in *Until Dawn*.

Literature

Horror video game discourse is sorely under-developed in terms of hegemonic gender analysis. Game studies research into this genre focuses more on the aesthetic of horror (Perron,

2012, "Chapter 3") or the psychoanalytic study of fear (Perron, 2012, "Chapter 1"). While researchers are starting to utilize a cultural lens for the analysis of horror games (Kirkland, 2009, "Masculinity"; Kirkland, 2009, "Storytelling"), my research seeks to contribute to this expansion by bridging together three different areas of focus in a symbiotic way: gender in video games, horror media, and intersectionality through the consideration of the marginalization of race, appropriation of culture, and the stigmatization of mental illness.

Game Studies, Gender, and Marginalization

Gender representation is such a massive topic in video game studies as a whole that it becomes challenging to fully document the breadth of the discourse in the field. In studying the construction of identity in digital spaces, researchers find that more often than not societal biases and stereotypes are "merely perpetuated, reinforced, and (re)inscribed in, often, subtle ways within a new space or arena" (Massie, 2011, p. 263). The general consensus is that games have historically represented women in extremely problematic ways, often relying on stereotypes and tropes (Downs and Smith, 2009; Sundén and Sveningsson, 2012; Harvey, 2015; Shaw, 2015), not unlike the ways in which the horror genre approaches female characterization. These discussions focus most frequently on the sexualization (Downs and Smith, 2009) or feminization (Sundén and Sveningsson, 2012) of female characters through their interactions with male characters (Chess and Shaw, 2015), more often than not controlled by the player (Williams et al., 2009). Discourse on masculinity in video games is growing as recognition is given to the equally problematic representations of masculinity in media (Trinh, 2013).

Masculinity in video games is still substantially under-researched compared to femininity, and analysis specifically situated in horror game gender representation is equally under-developed. Ewan Kirkland's accounting of masculinity in *Silent Hill* provides a foundation for the deconstruction of masculinity in a horror video game. Kirkland's textual analysis unpacks the ways in which all components in a video game contribute to the representation of masculinity as correlated to the traits of "violence, conquest, and militaristic action" (Kirkland, 2009, "Masculinity", p. 178). As I address in my methodology discussion, textual analysis provide a much-needed comprehensive lens for understanding cultural impact in video games and Kirkland's assessment is a prime example of that. As I do, Kirkland also draws on horror media discourse from film, including the foundational work of Carol J. Clover, to ascertain the extent to

which conventional gender roles influence the construction of virtual gender archetypes (Kirkland, 2009, "Masculinity").

Hegemony and Horror

Relatively few authors have addressed horror video games specifically, compared to the whole of game studies literature. The primary author on horror video games is Bernard Perron, whose works have mostly touched on horror as a specific form of video game (Perron, 2012, "Chapter 1"), detailing the ideal foundation laid by video games' interaction and immersion for building truly terrifying narrative experiences (Perron, 2005). He speaks to the construction, or reconstruction, of horror spaces as virtual spaces (Perron, 2012, "Chapter 3") which contextualizes the translation of cinematic horror archetypical depictions into video games. Other authors in his edited works also contribute to documenting the adaptation of horror into video games (Rouse III, 2009; Weise, 2009). Rouse III considers how horror media serves a practical purpose of exploring moral issues around life and death (Rouse III, 2009), and how horror media viewers are traditionally men which correlated well with the conventional assessment that gamers were also predominantly men, leading to a logical cross-media evolution (Rouse III, 2009). Weise uses a more literary analysis, drawing on Carol J. Clover's assessment of horror media tropes, to analyze the adaptation of rhetorical devices and stereotypes in horror video games (Weise, 2009). Understanding the means by which certain aspects are adjusted to the medium establishes a necessity to consider horror media as a whole to better analyze the genre-based design choices within *Until Dawn*.

I rely on film studies discourse on horror and stereotypes, of which there has been a substantial amount, to inform my understanding of horror's construction of hegemonic tropes. Clover discusses gender roles in horror media specifically (Clover, 1989), focusing on the construction of protector-victim relationships (Clover, 1992) and *Until Dawn* relies quite heavily on that specific trope in the context of its narrative. The dynamic of these relationships posits that masculinity and protector status are intertwined while femininity and victim status are equally related (Clover, 1992). This understanding echoes the masculine active and feminine passive roles that Mulvey identifies as well (Mulvey, 1975) where the males are active in the form of protecting and the victims are passive through their reliance on protectors to determine their survival.

Any stereotype has some relationship to the hegemonic social structures from which it is born (Och, 2015), and often the stereotype perpetuates a specific constructed perception of a subgroup of people (King, 2013). Within horror media, several conventional stereotypes have developed, spanning a variety of marginalized categories (King, 2013). A major delineation in horror media archetypes is that of masculine and feminine roles (Lorber, 1998). Rarely will the horror archetypes engage in gender role reversal (Godwin, 2013) unless in a direct attempt to subvert the hegemonic representations that permeate the conventional dynamics (McCann, 2008). Some of the many horror tropes include 'the jock', 'the nerd', or 'the hero' for men (Klepek, 2015). Although these do not represent an exhaustive list of character stereotypes, each of the above are examples of frequent character types that are also present in *Until Dawn*.

Male archetypes are usually tied to the hegemonic perception of masculinity as the role of the protector, or the dominant, (Steele and Shores, 2015) as well as sexual prowess (Coulthard and Birks, 2015). The jock or the hero is usually perceived as capable of protecting those weaker than himself (King, 2009) and also as possessing the confidence to dominate women without the use of violence (Dill and Thill, 2007). Violence not used for self-defence or the protection of others is a trait reserved for the anti-hero, the deviant, the monster (Consalvo, 2003). A deviation of this understanding is the introduction of race which I will explore in more detail later on. The nerd characterization relies mostly on its lack of hegemonic masculinity either by appearing physically weaker and therefore failing as a potential protector (Luyt, 2015), or by demonstrating submissive tendencies to other males or females (King, 2009). Although the level of intelligence is often a trait that is considered in these categories, it is generally not tied to the nerd's perceived ability to succeed, as the nerd and the hero may both be smart, though decidedly separate on the masculinity spectrum. As Kendall observes, "Most depictions continue to reinscribe the nerd as marginalized and undesirable" (2007). Intelligence is not overtly linked to the degree of perceived masculinity (Steele and Shores, 2015), even if it may contribute to a character's ability to survive in a given situation.

Hegemonic Masculinity

In his consideration of R. W. Connell's initial work on hegemonic masculinity, Nick Trujillo summarized Connell's definition of the term as an idealized masculinity associated with "toughness and competitiveness" (Trujillo, 1991, p. 290) that led to a subjugated position for

women and homosexual men (Trujillo, 1991). Trujillo notes that R. Hanke determined the classification of a masculinity as hegemonic "refers to the social ascendancy of a particular version or model of masculinity that, operating on the terrain of 'common sense' and conventional morality, defines 'what it means to be a man'" (Trujillo 1991, p. 290). Connell and Messerschmidt re-define 'hegemonic masculinity' as the aspects of the term that have stood up to academic scrutiny and the areas which required reconsideration and redefinition (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). While they reject the previous understanding of a specific list of traits and attributes defining a rigid hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), they embrace the concept of fluid and multiple masculinities interacting and engaging with power structures beyond gender roles. An important distinction made is:

> Hegemonic masculinity was distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It [...] required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men. (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832)

Their re-conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity affords an understanding of subordinated masculinities that forms a foundation of my research.

Although not explicitly labelled as such in their paper, intersectionality is considered to influence the construction of some forms of subordinated masculinities, such as subjugation or feminization through the association with traditionally feminine qualities (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) and the positioning of women is not as rigid as previously defined either. This overarching intersectional fluidity reflects my understanding and assessment of hegemonic masculine construction in *Until Dawn*, where male characters are subordinated due to various marginalized traits and where, in some cases, women are seen as more dominant, a traditionally masculine trait, in relation to some of the male characters. Connell unpacks this further by assessing hegemonic masculinity as relational:

> The distinction between 'hegemonic' and various marginalized, subordinated or complicit masculinities (hegemony is always a relational concept) expresses the idea that the cultural dynamic of gender among men is also important in the overall politics of the gender order. (Connell, 2002, p. 90)

Hegemonic masculinity is definable through its relation to other masculinities, as well as a fluid gender hierarchy where masculinity could become so subjugated that is occasionally takes on a feminized position and femininity becomes more centralized by comparison. Traditional

definitions of hegemonic masculinity limited the relationship between male and female gender roles as static, so Connell and Messerschmidt's revised definition of the term becomes a pivotal concept for understanding the nuances of masculinity in my analysis.

Another important component of Connell and Messerschmidt's position is the concept of normal versus normative. By clarifying that "not all men might enact it" (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832), they establish that it is a metric measurement and assessment of normative expectations, societal conventions, rather than the reality of daily masculine life. These traits are uniquely defined within individual cultures relating to the various forms of marginalization specific to each culture. Trujillo notes five traits of American hegemonic masculinity: "(1) physical force and control, (2) occupational achievement, (3) familial patriarchy, (4) frontiermanship, and (5) heterosexuality" (Trujillo, 1991, p. 290). Connell and Messerschmidt's fluid understanding of hegemonic masculinity allows for the insertion and removal of traits according to social conventions (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Notable traits that permeate conventional masculine representations in media still include some aspects from Trujillo's list such as physical force and control, achievement, and heterosexuality, whereas research in gender intersections with race and mental illness have added additional considerations of white (Cammarota, 2011; Dines, 2015; Liu and Baker, 2016; Maurantonio, 2017; McIntosh, 2017) and mentally able (Goodwin, 2013; Barry, 2015; Ghoshal and Willkinson, 2017).

It stands to reason that this metric influences daily life for men, but as a social pressure of an unattainable goal rather than a reflection of average lived experiences (Kendall, 2000). This further emphasizes that idealization of hegemonic masculinity and how the average man, thus the majority of men, would not embody the definition of hegemonic masculinity so much as be held up to it in assessment. My analysis echoes this understanding, by virtue of the fact that the majority of the male characters in *Until Dawn* are demonstrated as failing to meet the dominant construction of hegemonic masculinity in the game.

My research argues that *Until Dawn* builds a specific hegemonic masculine archetype relying on gendered horror tropes and marginalization, resulting in an iteration of the idealized masculine character, the white (male) saviour. Through the use of intersectionality, I assess the impact of marginalized traits on the ability of the male characters to meet the game's depiction of ideal masculinity.

Intersectionality & Marginalization

Addressing marginalization requires me to be very specific about my positionality, especially as it relates to writing on white privilege, which I address at length in my chapter discussing race. A great starting point for presenting white privilege in a succinct way is Peggy McIntosh's *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*. She presents the issues of marginalization of race in clear situational points by considering the ways in which white privilege permeates daily interactions, social norms, and societal constructions. Her assessment of the inherent empowering of whiteness in North American culture situates race as unavoidably disempowered by extension.

To work with that piece, I include Kimberle Crenshaw's *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*. It bridges many issues of marginalization while also bringing in the vital discussion of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) which McIntosh touches on briefly but without significant depth. Myra Marx Ferree's chapter on intersectionality also highlights the breadth of discussion around intersectional feminist frameworks. In this chapter, she says:

> I share the critical view of intersectionality as a static list of structural locations and as leading to a problematic form of identity politics, but still content that only an intersectional analysis can do justice to the actual complexity of political power and social inequality. [...] Rather than identifying *points* of intersection, [the approach I adopt in this chapter] sees the dimensions of inequality themselves as dynamic and in changing, mutually constituted *relationships* with each other, from which they cannot be disentangled. (Ferree, 2009, p. 87)

This quote gets at the heart of the challenge in presenting and unpacking privilege. It supports nuanced consideration of intersectionality where 'points of intersection' are critically evaluated within the context of the presented situation that may or may not play out similarly in subsequent scenes. These texts provide an intersectional framework from which to consider how the use of race, culture, and ability in *Until Dawn* engage and support hegemonic gender roles through the fluidity of masculinity, and by comparison femininity, at any given point.

Video games literature on the racialized Other considers how race is often formed as a stereotype and decorative (Nakamura, 2008; Anonymous, 2015) including entire sections of trope categories around individual ethnicities as they are portrayed in relation to centralized white protagonists (Nakamura, 2008). Lisa Nakamura provides extensive research on the application of cultural appropriation to not only construct these archetypes but also perpetuate

harmful racialized representations that reinscribe misinformation of other cultures (Nakamura, 2008; Nakamura 2009). Otherness extends beyond race to include other forms of marginalization such as mental illness so while the expression of that marginalization – race, gender, mental ability – might differ, they still persist as forms of separating the person of power from those with diminished power. To that end, the use of intersectionality becomes pivotal in my analysis of the power dynamics at play in *Until Dawn*.

The White (Male) Saviour

One of the iterations of hegemonic masculinity arising from intersection of hegemonic male gender roles and race is the stereotype of the white saviour. It permeates many genres of media (Cammarota , 2011; "Reel Injun", 2010; Maurantonio, 2007), especially in video games (Dill et al., 2005) where it transforms into the white protector. Race is a vital element in this analysis and although the game contains almost exclusively white characters, the central storyline centres on Indigenous cultures while simultaneously undervaluing its characters of colour. Through its engagement with non-white race and culture, *Until Dawn* prioritizes whiteness repeatedly, giving weight to its superiority, at times requirement as a trait necessary to be a protector. A character can hardly be considered a strong male protector if he is a monster; scripted to be unable to protect another character in order to advance the plot; or simply a decoration without any agency or influence. Whiteness delineates those who can be from those who cannot be protectors in *Until Dawn* just as much as gender does.

The intersection of race with gender roles create a particular combination where women or people of colour may be less marginalized comparatively (McKay and Johnson, 2015) – and where women of colour are doubly marginalized (McKay and Johnson, 2015; Shome, 2015). However, the power implanted in the combination of being both male and white supersedes the power gained from a singular hegemonic attribute. The white male saviour takes on a role of leader (Liu and Baker, 2016), protector (McIntosh, 2017), and conqueror (Maurantonio, 2015).

The Structure of *Until Dawn*

Released in August 2015 by Supermassive Games and Sony Entertainment, *Until Dawn* is a PlayStation 4 exclusive horror genre video game that utilizes interactive narratives. While the majority of video games provide a combination of narrative mixed with interaction,

interactive narrative often describes a game that uses a very scripted, decision-based structure (Frasca, 2003). *Until Dawn* tells a partially predetermined storyline across ten chapters where the player's choices influence the relationships, situations, and survival opportunities of the characters. Player interaction in the game is divided into four forms: navigation, object interaction, decision, and combat. Although with so many forms of interaction the space may not seem very limited, the inputs are often extremely linear which in turn minimizes the variance in user input.

Starting with navigation, the player has the opportunity to move freely around a space, though physical barriers might define some spaces as smaller than others – a bathroom versus a three-story cabin, for example.

By extension, object interaction is also limited to specific objects that are predetermined to be accessible. The player is not able to select anything from a cluttered room to use but may simply examine those objects to which the developer has given significance by programming interaction into it. If a player picks up the item, the character may examine it to gain a piece of information and then return the item to its place. There are only a small handful of exceptions to this rule and those are weapons. If a player locates a weapon, the character may have the opportunity to keep the item for use at a later time. The decision to keep the weapon leads to the third form of interaction.

Decisions compose the majority of player engagement in *Until Dawn*. It is through decisions that the narrative is constructed. The game introduces a 'butterfly effect' mechanism, derived from the Chaos theory (Rouvas-Nicolis and Nicolis, 2009). The general concept is that an action in the present influences the future, changing the inevitable outcomes of the story (Rouvas-Nicolis and Nicolis, 2009). In *Until Dawn*, this design mechanic is referred to as the 'butterfly effect'. Examples of the implementation of butterfly effect and similar approaches to storytelling are present across a variety of media. Choose-your-own-adventure novels use reader decision to craft the narrative of the book. Movies (*The Butterfly Effect*, 2004) and television shows (*13 Reasons Why*, 2017; "The Butterfly Effect", 2008; "The Wish", 1998) also reference the impact of decisions throughout time, though often only allowing the viewer to witness the effect rather than engage in its implementation.

The butterfly effect in *Until Dawn* is the key component to its interactive narrative. Player decisions that are directly correlated to the butterfly effect are tracked in a separate menu

and the player is made aware that a butterfly effect choice was made through visual cues after the fact. These specific decisions will determine the major deviations in the narrative from vital dialogue conversations, friendship and relationship developments, and often the survival of one or more characters. The player is not made aware in advance which decisions will lead to which outcomes, or even which decisions are butterfly effect decisions, until after the decision is made, necessitating that the player navigate each decision carefully if seeking a specific narrative outcome.

Players may consult the butterfly effect menu to see the correlation between a previous decision and the resulting impact if it has come to pass (**Image 1**). Menu entries do not show upcoming decisions or the ramifications of current decisions until after each step has been completed or the corresponding storyline has ended. Thus players are not able to ascertain exactly how their decisions will impact the story until they have completed the game at least once. Decisions affecting relationships and characteristics are labeled 'status updates' in the game. While character trait changes do not affect the game narrative, they do offer a glimpse into the initial conceptual construction of each character's personality.

Image 1: The Butterfly Effect menu in *Until Dawn*.

Decisions that are not butterfly effect decisions are still influential, though in an auxiliary way. They often influence the strength of individual character traits, which are separate from the

preliminary labels assigned to the characters in their introductions, such as bravery or charisma and relationships with the other primary characters. These traits and relationships impact decisions and opportunities similarly to the butterfly effect but in a way that is not visibly tracked or documented. Relationship changes affect the storyline throughout and often influence situational options that could lead characters to their deaths prematurely. The nuances of these choices are less evident in a first or even second playthrough, but they become clearer as a player becomes familiar with the impacts and the influences of decisions on the plotlines.

Altogether, these player choices form the backbone of the interactive narrative, but their binary nature limits player agency. The player may only choose from the provided options, or occasionally choose to say or do nothing, though that option is not always available. The limited choices force the narrative to still follow scripted, predetermined paths while simultaneously empowering the player to build the narrative through choices and their resulting opportunities.

These opportunities may lead to the fourth and final form of interaction: combat. Occasionally throughout the narrative, the player will encounter combat scenarios where the controls are not selecting from a visibly binary decision but instead involve maneuvering a crosshair onto an on-screen target, using the game controller's analog stick, and pressing a button to use the weapon – firing, swinging, or throwing, depending on the weapon. The freeform nature of the aiming mechanic presents the user with a seemingly open agency experience, but the end results are still binary in terms of success or failure in the encounter. The narrative outcomes are predetermined, and it is only the player's success that is unpredicted in the interaction.

Gameplay itself is very fixed since the player does not choose his/her character at any time. The game is designed from a character point-of-view perspective that changes among all the primary characters, often rotating between several in any given chapter. Although there are eight distinct characters in the game, certain characters, namely Jessica and Matt, are destined for early, challenging-to-avoid deaths or minimal screen time even if they survive.

User interaction involves selecting from on-screen choices of dialogue options and action options. Action options frequently come with a timer forcing quick decisions. They are intermixed with several quick-time events (QTE), where specific buttons are displayed in rapid succession for the user to input, and the occasional combat scenario involving aiming and shooting a firearm within the allotted time. Player agency outside the above structure is limited

to exploring any open space available and interacting with static objects highlighted by the game at a given time. Some objects may only be available to players while a certain character is active or at a certain point in the storyline, and unavailable at all other times, so the player's agency is still fairly limited.

Understanding the inflexibility of the gameplay is important when considering the construction of masculinity within the game. For example, player agency could have significantly influenced character development if players had control over which characters they could play. The lack of character selection agency removes the potential for character preference to be a factor in the analysis. If a weapon is not available until the player has control over a certain character that is due to the game design and not player agency.

Game Storyline

The setting of the game is a remote mountain owned by the Washington family, though the game establishes that the mountain is sacred Indigenous land. In addition to the lodge, an abandoned mine and a derelict sanatorium are located on the mountain; all three structures are connected via subterranean tunnels. The mountaintop is only accessible by cable car.

Divided into ten chapters, the story follows eight main characters, four women (Ashley Brown, Emily Davis, Jessica Riley, and Sam Giddings) and four men (Chris Hartley, Josh Washington, Matt Taylor, and Mike Munroe). These characters are a group of friends who have returned to the lodge on the one year anniversary of the disappearance of Josh's twin sisters, Hannah and Beth. The non-playable characters (NPCs) include: the 'Psycho', an antagonistic sadist eventually revealed to be an alter-ego of Josh Washington; the Wendigo, a monster based in Indigenous folklore that transforms from humans who have cannibalized another human; the 'Stranger', an older man battling the monstrous Wendigo that occupy the mountain; and Dr. A. J. Hill, Josh Washington's therapist, though during gameplay he is simply an imaginary manifestation of the therapist Josh saw after the loss of his sisters. In the game, the Wendigo are born of miners from the abandoned mine on the mountain and Hannah Washington after she eats her sister Beth. The player interacts with Dr. Hill after the end of each chapter (except Chapters 7 and 9) through the form of first person (Chapters 1 to 5) and third person (Chapter 6, 8, and 10) therapy sessions. The content and player decisions in these sessions impact decorative and superficial aspects of the game but not the actual storyline.

Until Dawn is divided into a prologue and ten distinct chapters. After each chapter, except Chapters 7 and 9, there is a short therapy session segment. Additionally, there are after-credit cinematic scenes that are part of the story, and as such included in their applicable areas for analysis, but during these additional scenes the player may not modify or change any sequence of events. The prologue for the game serves as a general tutorial for the player to learn the controls for interacting within the space. The player controls Beth Washington throughout the prologue and the choices made serve no meaningful impact on any character relationships or survival.

During the prologue, all the main characters plus Josh's sisters, Hannah and Beth, are staying at the Washington cabin. Ashley, Emily, Jessica, Matt, and Mike play a mean-spirited prank on Hannah by leveraging her crush on Mike. In her embarrassment, Hannah runs off into the woods, quickly pursued by her sister Beth. The girls eventually become trapped on a cliff and fall to their deaths, though at the outset of the gameplay, they are presumed missing.

The main game continues one year later with the rest of the cast returning to the lodge on the anniversary of the sisters' disappearance. Josh Washington has invited his friends to help revive their relationships and try to move on from the tragedy. The storyline branches out as the player makes decisions. I have summarized the chapters in the following tables along with each playable character and notable story developments in order to provide a foundation of the overall plot.

Table 1.1: Prologue and Chapter 1 Summary			
Titles	**Character(s)**	**Notable Events**	**Deaths**
Prologue	Beth	・Hannah is pranked ・Beth & Hannah die (presumed missing)	・Beth ・Hannah
Prologue Therapy Session	Patient	・Dr. Hill meets with the player in first person perspective ・Player must respond to Dr. Hill's questions about a postcard ・Impact in game: 　・Responses affect the name of Chapter 1	
"Friendship" or "Momento Mori" 10 hours until dawn	Sam	・Discovers Indigenous totems to explain the prophecy mechanic to players (tutorial)	
	Chris	・Demonstrates how to shoot a gun (tutorial) ・References butterfly effect theory in conversation with Sam	
	Matt	・Emily asks/forces Matt to carry the bags to the cabin while she leaves to rendezvous with Mike	
	Ashley	・Ashley plays with a telescope and spies Emily & Mike being cozy ・Matt shows up and Ashley can choose to let him see Emily & Mike or not	
	Jessica	・Another combat tutorial that teaches the player not all targets need to be hit (tutorial) ・Jessica & Mike flirt throughout leading to Jessica on her back on the ground with Mike on top of her	
Chapter 1 Therapy Session	Patient	・Dr. Hill wants to assess the root of the player-character's anxiety ・The player answers 13 "this or that" questions where they receive a pair of images and select the one that makes them most anxious ・Dr. Hill startles the player halfway through and sets a metronome to encourage the player to pick faster and based on instincts. ・Impact in game: 　・Clown, Scarecrow or Zombie selected: a mannequin styled as the selected creature will be a decoration in Chapter 4's therapy session and will appear with a saw blade embedded in its head in Chapter 5's therapy session 　・Gore or Needles selected: object will be on Dr. Hill's desk starting in Chapter 2's therapy session, and in the case of needles, the Psycho will inject his victims rather than use gas to knock them out if the player fails to escape him 　・Cockroaches, Rats, Snakes, or Spiders selected: object will appear	

		in a jar on Dr. Hill's desk starting in Chapter 2's therapy session ・Crow selected: a crow will sit on the window sill during Chapter 2's therapy session	

Table 1.2: Chapter 2 and DLC Summary		
Titles	**Character(s)**	**Notable Events**
"Darkness" or "Jealousy" 9 hours until dawn	Chris	・Chris & Josh break into the lodge since the lock is frozen shut
	Matt	・If Matt saw Emily & Mike together, Mike & Matt argue, otherwise Jessica & Emily fight
	Mike	・Jessica & Mike head out to a guest cabin to be alone
	Sam	・Helps Josh turn the hot water on in the basement ・Potentially unlocks a future weapon (baseball bat)
DLC	Matt	・Matt & Emily flirt and discuss their feelings for each other
Chapter 2 Therapy Session	Patient	・Dr. Hill's office has the items the player previously selected decorating the desk ・Dr. Hill asks the player if they fear being isolated and then asks the player a series of questions to which they value most in a person: charity, honesty, or loyalty ・Impact in game: 　・Dr. Hill mocks the player in subsequent therapy sessions for failing to embody whichever trait they select as most valuable

Table 1.3: Chapter 3 Summary		
Titles	**Character(s)**	**Notable Events**
"Haunted" or "Isolation" 8 hours until dawn	Ashley	・Ashley, Chris, & Josh hold a séance using a Ouija board to "communicate" with Josh's sisters ・Josh leaves upset while Ashley & Chris investigate a clue in the library
	Mike	・Jessica scares Mike with a prank before they continue to the cabin ・If Mike does not antagonize Jessica throughout the chapter, she will undress for him ・Jessica is ripped through the cabin window by an unseen assailant
	Ashley	・Ashley & Chris head to the main level to investigate the library
	Chris	・Ashley & Chris hear a noise while investigating, leading Ashley to be pulled through a doorway with the door closing behind her ・Chris forces the door open and sees Ashley unconscious on the ground until he is knocked out by a masked attacker ・Ashley is shown being dragged off
Chapter 3	Patient	・Dr. Hill's office is dark and ominous

Therapy Session		• Dr. Hill asks the player to pick from a pair of images, again, only this time the player is picking which of the main characters they prefer, until the two that the player least likes are left • Impact in game: 　• If anyone but Josh is least liked: 　　• Dr. Hill defends the character 　　• A picture of the least liked character will appear in an optional clue with their eyes scratched out 　• If Josh is least liked: 　　• Dr. Hill asks the player to not judge Josh harshly due to Josh's struggles over losing his sisters	

Table 1.4: Chapter 4 Summary			
Titles	**Character(s)**	**Notable Events**	**Potential Deaths**
"Loyalty" or "Malevolence" 7 hours until dawn	Mike	• Pursues Jessica's kidnapper into the mines, with several QTE that determine Jessica's survival • Jessica, alive or dead, falls down an elevator shaft before Mike removes her from the mines • Mike presumes Jessica's death and chases her attacker	• Jessica
	Chris	• Wakes to find Ashley missing and follows clues to a shed where Ashley & Josh are shackled to a wall • Chris is forced to choose who to save when a rotating saw blade moves on rails towards the wall • Regardless of player choice, Josh is always the victim • Chris & Ashley flee the shed but run into Emily & Matt outside and tell them about Josh's death • Chris & Ashley decide to go back to the lodge for the others while Matt & Emily head to the cable car station to prepare for everyone's escape	• Josh (faked)
Chapter 4 Therapy Session	Patient	• Dr. Hill's office is decaying and decrepit • Dr. Hill accuses the player of not playing by the rules they claim to value (referencing the traits the player rated in Chapter 2's therapy session)	

Table 1.5: Chapter 5 Summary		
Titles	**Character(s)**	**Notable Events**
"Dread" or "Prey" 6 hours until dawn	Mike	・Mike follows tracks to the sanatorium and spies on The Stranger ・Mike potentially: 　・loses his fingers in a bear trap 　・gains a wolf companion
	Matt	・Matt & Emily discover the cable car inaccessible, decide to go to the fire tower, and radio for help ・On the way, they are cornered on the same cliff from the prologue by a pack of elk
	Sam	・Sam finishes her bath to find her clothes missing and she is promptly chased by the same masked assailant who took Ashley ・Sam may or may not escape being kidnapped
Chapter 5 Therapy Session	Patient	・Dr. Hill briefly remarks on the way the game is playing out ・The camera breaks away from first person and through a jump scare, Dr. Hill is confronted by the Psycho before the session ends

Table 1.6: Chapter 6 Summary			
Titles	**Character(s)**	**Notable Events**	**Potential Deaths**
"Psychosis" or "Vengeance" 5 hours until dawn	Matt	・Matt may sidle past the elk herd with Emily or use his axe to attack the elk, which leads to him falling to his death	・Matt
	Emily	・Alone or with Matt, Emily reaches the fire tower ・She may find the flare gun and either keep it or give it to Matt ・She will radio for help and receive confirmation that rescue is only possible at dawn ・The Wendigo cuts the tower mooring lines and the tower collapses into the mines below	
	Matt (if alive)	・Emily is hanging from a railing and Matt can try to save her though she always falls before he can reach her ・Matt jumps to safety though he may die from impalement on a meat hook afterwards	・Matt
	Ashley	・Ashley & Chris return to the lodge looking for Sam ・Several clues and optical illusions convince the characters that Beth/Hannah's ghost is haunting them for the prank in the prologue ・Ashley may find a pair of scissors ・Ashley & Chris' search leads them to underground passage	

| | Chris | • Chris & Ashley regain consciousness tied to chairs facing each other
• Chris has one hand free while both of Ashley's hands are restrained
• As saw blades descend above their heads, the masked assailant tells Chris he must choose to shoot either himself or Ashley and the scene goes black once a shot is taken or the time to choose runs out | |
| Chapter 6
Therapy
Session | (disembodied spectator) | • Dr. Hill berates the Psycho for his actions towards Ashley & Chris as the scene plays out on a series of monitors behind Dr. Hill | |

Note: the first visible partial row at top of page reads:

| | | connecting the lodge basement and the sanatorium
• If Sam was captured, they may find her, but both will be incapacitated before being able to rescue her | |

Table 1.7: Chapter 7 Summary			
Titles	**Character(s)**	**Notable Events**	
"Loss" or "Violence" 4 hours until dawn	Sam	• Captured or not, Sam will meet Mike where the mines meet the sanatorium basement • Sam changes out of her towel before she & Mike follow the sound of voices and burst into the room where Ashley & Chris are bound • Ashley & Chris are both alive as the gun has blanks • The masked assailant reveals himself to be Josh	
	Emily	• Emily survives her fall and explores the mine, potentially discovering clues exposing Hannah and Beth's deaths • Her section ends with her hiding from The Stranger	
	Chris	• Josh reveals that the events everyone experienced were all revenge pranks for what happened to his sisters • Mike knocks Josh unconscious, believing he killed Jessica for a prank • Chris & Mike restrain Josh in the shed back at the lodge	

Table 1.8: Chapter 8 Summary			
Titles	**Character(s)**	**Notable Events**	**Potential Deaths**

"Animus"
or
"Revelation"
 	
3 hours until
	Emily	• The Stranger confronts Emily and tells her to run
		• Emily is chased by the Wendigo where she may die two different ways:
		  • falling into an industrial meat grinder
		  • the Wendigo stabs out her eyes
			• Emily
			(two modes)

dawn		· If she survives, she is usually bitten by the Wendigo before escaping	

	Chris	· Emily (if alive) returns to the lodge to tell the others about the Wendigo
		· Chris & Mike abandon Josh to talk with everyone in the lodge
		· The Stranger forces his way into the lodge and explains the Wendigo's history on the mountain
		· Chris & The Stranger agree to go rescue Josh while Ashley, Emily (if alive), Mike, & Sam hide in the basement until the rescue team can come
		· Josh is gone when Chris & The Stranger arrive at the shed, so they head back to the cabin but The Stranger is decapitated by the Wendigo
		· Chris may die if he does not shoot the attacking Wendigo in time
		· If he successfully reaches the lodge, Ashley is at the door:
		  · if Chris chose to shoot himself and not Ashley, she will open the lodge door for him
		  · if he shot her, she will lock the door and he will die to beheading from the Wendigo
			· Chris (two modes)
			· The Stranger

	Mike	· Ashley, Chris (if alive), Emily (if alive), Mike, & Sam decide to rescue Josh to get the cable car keys so they can escape the mountain · If Emily was bitten, Ashley will notice it and the group will demand Emily leave, due to presuming she will become a Wendigo · Mike grabs a gun and must decide to shoot Emily or not · After deciding, Mike leaves to find Josh	· Emily
	Ashley	· Ashley discovers The Stranger's journal which reveals that Emily would not turn into a Wendigo along with several pieces of information about fighting the Wendigo · Sam decides they need to find Mike and tell him what the journal says about the Wendigo so the group goes into the underground passageway	
Chapter 8 Therapy Session	(disembodied spectator)	· Dr. Hill's office is populated with trees, reflecting a snowy forest at night · Dr. Hill is meeting with Josh, previously revealed in the game as the Psycho. · Dr. Hill blames Josh for failing to listen and states that it's Josh's	

		failure as a protector that cost Josh his sisters and caused injury to his close friends	

Table 1.9: Chapter 9 Summary			
Titles	**Character(s)**	**Notable Events**	**Potential Deaths**
"Despair" or "Karma" 2 hours until dawn	Mike	・Mike returns to the sanatorium, with his wolf companion if befriended earlier, and discovers several references to experiments on patients transitioning into Wendigo ・He is chased by several escaped Wendigo resulting in him causing an explosion to kill them or being pinned by a Wendigo and the screen going black	
	Jessica	・If Jessica is alive, a cinematic-only scene shows her waking up in the mines and finding a coat to wear if she is unclothed	
	Ashley	・The group descends further into the underground passageway ・Ashley hears a noise that sounds like Jessica and may investigate it: ・if she does, she may die to the Wendigo	・Ashley
	Chris (if alive)	・Chris falls behind and encounters the same voice Ashley does, leading to the same options where investigation may lead to his death at the hands of the Wendigo as well	・Chris
	Sam	・Sam tells everyone to return to the lodge while she goes alone to find Mike ・Sam may aid Mike in escaping a lingering Wendigo but Mike will eventually dispatch all Wendigo and explode the sanatorium if he has not already done so	

Table 1.10: Chapter 10 and Epilogue Summary			
Titles	**Character(s)**	**Notable Events**	**Potential Deaths**
"Repentance" or "Resolution" 1 hour until dawn	Josh	・Josh hallucinates his therapist, then his dead sisters, a giant pig's head, and then the Wendigo	
	Sam	・Sam & Mike locate the Wendigo's lair, next to an underground lake, where all the deceased characters' bodies are seen (except Emily if shot by Mike) ・They find Josh and snap him out of his hallucinations ・Josh gives them the cable car key and Sam will tell Josh that the Wendigo is Hannah, if all the necessary clues were found	

		・Sam leaves Mike & Josh to go prep the others for the cable car	
	Josh	・Josh follows Mike out of the lair and into the lake ・Halfway through crossing it, Mike is pulled under and Josh is confronted by Hannah as the Wendigo: 　・if Sam told him it's Hannah, he identifies her and she re-captures him 　・if he does not know it's Hannah, she will crush his skull ・Mike is shown hiding behind a rock after Josh encounters Hannah	・Josh
	Matt/Jessica	・If both are alive, they will meet in the mines and Jessica will follow Matt ・The Wendigo pursues them: 　・if either is dead, the surviving character has the same choices of hiding or running as they do when both are alive 　・if both are alive, Matt has the option to abandon the severely injured Jessica to the Wendigo ・Both may die to the Wendigo several times while fleeing	・Jessica ・Matt
	Sam	・Sam makes it to the lodge with Mike appearing moments behind her ・Any of the group (Ashley, Chris, & Emily) that are still alive run up from the basement with several Wendigo chasing them ・Hannah enters from the main level and fights with the other Wendigo, killing them ・Sam & Mike hatch a plan to burn the lodge down with the Wendigo inside: 　・if Sam makes a wrong move throughout this plan, she will die 　・if Mike is injured rescuing Sam and the plan fails, Ashley (if alive) or Emily (if alive) will die to the Wendigo 　・if Mike is injured rescuing Sam, he will die in the explosion he creates to save everyone else ・The explosion kills Hannah	・Ashley ・Emily ・Hannah (Wendigo) ・Mike ・Sam
During and After Credits Cinematics		・Police interviews will play through the end credits for any characters who survived ・If Josh survives, he is shown cannibalizing The Stranger's body in a post-credit cinematic where he is half-human, half-Wendigo	

Methodology

At the outset, I sought to understand the construction of hegemonic gender roles in *Until Dawn* by looking at how the game seemingly defines masculinity and femininity. Ultimately, however, my research focus shifted to deconstruct hegemonic masculinity in the game. Of necessity, my research questions also shifted to reflect this: How is masculinity constructed in *Until Dawn*? In what ways do traditionally marginalized traits impact this construction and how does this marginalization reinforce hegemonic gender roles?

My methodological approach consists of detailed content analysis of *Until Dawn*. I chose to stick solely to the content of the game rather than the discussions of players and the community in order to analyze the game design. I sought interviews with the game developers, Supermassive Games, and the voice actors of the protagonists. Only two of the voice actors, Brett Dalton and Galadriel Stineman, were available for interviews and I received no response from Supermassive Games.

Throughout *Until Dawn*, multiple identity markers intersect in a variety of ways to create a hegemonic hierarchy around the white, male protector. Content analysis is ideal for my methodology as it allows me to consider how the structure of the game and the construction of its characters engage with current hegemonic discourse. Alan McKee indicates that textual analysis allows us to consider a text as it is situated and consumed within the culture for which it is made (McKee, 2003). Elfriede Fürsich argues the value of textual analysis:

> [It] is generally a type of qualitative analysis that, beyond the manifest content of media, focuses on the underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of the text. Text is understood as a complex set of discursive strategies that is situated in a special cultural context (Barthes, 1972 [1957]). This type of analysis involves a prolonged engagement ('‘the long preliminary soak;'' Hall, 1975, p. 15) of the chosen text using semiotic, narrative, genre or rhetorical approaches to qualitative analysis (e.g., Real, 1996). This approach typically results in a strategic selection and presentation of analyzed text as the evidence for the overall argument.
>
> Textual analysis is often chosen by cultural media scholars to overcome the common limitations of traditional quantitative content analysis such as limitation to manifest content and to quantifiable categories. Textual Analysis allows the researcher to discern latent meaning, but also implicit patterns, assumptions and omissions of a text. (Fürsich, 2009, p. 240-241)

The game represents the text within my analysis, and I am analyzing its content to understand how it correlates to the Western social construction of hegemonic masculinity. As Fürsich says,

this game, like any other text, required a lengthy exposure to fully understand the content I was considering and its correlation to overarching hegemony constructions. Textual analysis provided the foundation for the cultural lens necessary for an in-depth assessment of hegemonic masculinity. In order to provide a thorough analysis, however, I introduce an intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991) lens to my reading of the content.

My methodological approach to textual analysis is based on Consalvo and Dutton's work on the methodology of qualitative study of video games (Consalvo and Dutton, 2006), as well as relying on foundational texts on video game analysis (Fernández-Vara, 2015; Perron and Wolf, 2008). I consider both primary and secondary characters, including antagonists. My analysis includes visual design, storyline, dialogue, objects with which a character interacts, both player-controlled and uncontrolled screen time, and combat – including forms of violence and modes of death. This approach is consistent with other textual analysis of video games such as Kirkland's work (2009, "Masculinity") and reflects the consideration of spatial and non-visual character identity elements when developing digital games (Solarski, 2017)

As an auxiliary addition to my methodology, I added interviews to the framework in the hopes of ascertaining the development process of the characters. Textual analysis, limited by the boundaries of the text's content, hinders my ability to determine which components of the content were conscious decisions and which might be coincidentally correlated to social norms. My intent was to establish what conscious decisions were made in development of *Until Dawn*'s characters and how those might have influenced the result in-game. The initial expectation was to include perspectives from the voice actors and Supermassive Games' development team, though regrettably, the majority of the former and the entirety of the latter were unavailable to participate in my research. Even though the response to participate was minimal, I included the two respondents with whom I did engage in order to inject as much understanding as possible to the development process. They each presented unique perspectives on the creation of their respective character's gender roles that helps unpack the underlying hegemonic construction within the game's development.

Through these means, I fully engage with all aspects of how the characters are constructed by the developer, allowing me to consider how each element contributes to the overall portrayal of hegemonic masculinity and marginalization.

Data Collection

Data collection for this research spanned eighteen completions of the game to maximize the contact with all aspects of the game and to document as many of the plot derivations as possible. An average playthrough of the game ranges between five and eight hours, depending heavily on the time spent collecting clues and the number of protagonists kept alive by the player. Access to exclusive download content (DLC) was obtained directly from Sony Development Europe in order to enable an assessment of all in-game content, which added ten to fifteen minutes to the game length.

For this research, eight playthroughs involved keeping all characters alive to understand the impact of survival on their storylines and on the overarching plot of the game; four focused on deteriorating relationships, one playthrough for each in-game couple, and early on-screen deaths to assess character reactions when relationships had soured; and five were used to document the various deaths available to the individual characters.

Finally, one playthrough was dedicated to measuring active and passive screen time of all primary characters. During active screen time, the character was player-controlled whereas passive screen time was when a character was visibly a part of the scene on-screen, but the player did not have control of him/her. As the data inevitably showed, the passive screen time in fact illuminated a larger disparity in screen time between corresponding male and female protagonists. This re-iterates the findings of Williams et al. in their 2009 study on male and female playable and non-playable characters (Williams et al., 2009).

Due to the flexibility of game-play styles and goals, this time-gathering playthrough did not involve any secondary tasks, such as the optional clue collecting mechanic, unless vital to keeping a main character alive. Exploration for exploration's sake was also avoided. Where possible, the 'speed walk' function was utilized during active screen time for all characters. The reasons for these decisions were to avoid artificially inflating a specific character's time on screen, ensuring that every character's storyline was realized fully and that no character was killed prior to the game's completion. While the times presented, detailed to the millisecond from my data, would vary slightly based on the playstyle of the individual player if replicated, they represent a fair approximation of the minimum potential screen time of each character if all survive until the end of the game. Any deaths would change the results drastically in many cases,

which is why I chose to dedicate one playthrough exclusively to timing.

The content gathering during the other playthroughs involved considering the dialogue of characters, clothing throughout the game, individual story arcs, role in the overall plotline, and the objects with which each character may interact. To gather information on the latter, a separate playthrough was dedicated to maximizing exploration and object interaction, sometimes returning to the same object multiple times as different characters, to determine which objects had limited access and to assess if the access privileged one gender.

Although most objects only served to illuminate one of the several backstories of the narrative, some objects were able to be picked up and used by the characters. I catalogued those objects based on their intended purpose in the storyline and documented the result of their use or non-use to assess their functionality as determined by the game. All usable objects obtained in the game fall into one of two categories: weapons, both ranged and close combat, and sources of light. It is important to note that an object's usefulness is almost entirely unrelated to a player's skill. Players may influence the potential for a character to obtain a tool, but the storyline will almost always have a set outcome for the impact of that tool.

Image 2: Chris firing a rifle at an enemy.

The notable exception to this general rule is the use of firearms and other ranged

weapons. In order to fire a gun, the user must align the crosshair on the screen using the controller's analog stick within the allotted time (**Image 2**). Failure to do so affects the results of the combat, ranging from a negative relationship development to the death of a character. When considering the effectiveness of a weapon in the game, user error was not included as a failure of the weapon since the potential existed for the weapon to function properly. Only situations where the game forced a weapon to fail were considered in these cases.

Thesis Chapter Structures

Throughout the subsequent chapters I will be exploring the most prominent forms of marginalization as they are constructed in the game. I begin with an overview of *Until Dawn*'s construction of gender roles and relationships.

In this first chapter, I analyze the breakdown of visual representation of character in terms of their gender roles and how their designs reflect these roles. I also consider the objects each character may access and how these items may or may not protect their bearer. Additionally, I explore the interactions between the women and men of the game with a particular focus on the main heteronormative couple, Jessica and Mike. As Jessica visually and verbally embodies the traditional 'sexy girl' stereotype, I compare and contrast her portrayal with that of her boyfriend, Mike, who is constructed as the conventional white male protector.

The second chapter explores the design of race and culture in the game. I initially focus on the two characters of colour, Emily and Matt, analyzing how they each separately, and their relationship together, embody problematic racial stereotyping. Attention is given to how the scenes featuring their relationship are only accessible via the purchase of premium content available exclusively via pre-order of the game. The chapter then shifts to consider how the appropriation of Indigenous culture serves as both antagonistic and as a core mechanic for the game through the incorporation of the Wendigo and mystical totem prophecies. I also focus on the challenging way in which *Until Dawn* utilizes its white characters to defeat the monstrous other and reclaim the mountain, re-engaging colonial ideologies.

Lastly, my third chapter analyzes how the game relies heavily on mental illness stereotypes such as the 'psycho-killer', insane asylums, and psychotherapy. The game problematically conflates mental illness with mental trauma, and roots both in a failure to protect

someone. I explore this development with the relationship between Ashley and Chris before considering the more advanced iteration of the 'Psycho'/Josh character. Throughout the story, the Psycho is constructed as a strong antagonist who is later revealed to be Josh. Post-reveal, Josh is depicted as weak and incapable, hindered by his mental illness and lack of medication. Adding to that construction is another troubling layer – after the end of almost every chapter, a horror-show style episode is presented wherein the player as Josh experiences "therapy" with Dr. A. J. Hill, who presents a terrifying, stylized depiction of a traditional healing process. Alongside the problematic invocation of the insane asylum trope, these constructions create a stigmatizing portrayal of mental illness: the protector as in opposition, in the case of the Psycho and the Wendigo, and its guardian, in the case of traumatized Josh.

With my conclusion, I seek to not only solidify my analysis, but to identify the areas of focus that deserve further examination, beyond the scope of *Until Dawn*, as my research offered insight into substantial gaps in the current game studies literature around particular forms of marginalization.

The Male Protector: Gender Analysis

Gender as a social construction permeates our media (Benshoff, 1997), drawing on stereotypes and existing power dynamics to reflect the society from which the media originates (Kendall, 2000; Kendall, 2011; Shaw, 2014). In video games, as in film and television, the lens through which characters are crafted and viewed skews heavily towards a male gaze (Mulvey, 1975; Downs and Smith, 2009; Shaw, 2015). Conventional gender roles are often reinforced through archetypical designs (Grimes, 2003; Karras, 2002; Sundén and Sveningsson, 2012). Additionally, our entertainment media frequently presents idealized depictions of hegemonic relationships reflecting the current normative standards (Ohl and Duncan, 2012). These relationship performances are articulated through correlations and comparisons, similar to those referenced by Connell, to craft gender hierarchies through the relationship between men and women around normative expectations (Connell, 2005).

Throughout this chapter I will be considering the intricacies of gender representation, with a specific focus on the influence of hegemonic and dominant masculinity, by analyzing various aspects of *Until Dawn*. These components include visual character design, individual storylines, dialogue, weaponry, and combat. While I will address several of the main characters' designs, I focus primarily on Mike and Jessica, as their relationship presents as the most straight-forward, and idealized, representation of traditional gender roles compared to the rest of the couples; neither Mike nor Jessica embody any additional marginalized traits beyond gender, in Jessica's case.

Character Tropes & Design

Table 2.1: Character Relationships and Traits				
Character	**Relationship**	**Traits**		
Ashley	Has a crush on Chris	Academic	Inquisitive	Forthright
Chris	Has a crush on Ashley	Methodical	Protective	Humorous
Emily	Mike's Ex	Intelligent	Resourceful	Persuasive
Jessica	Mike's New Girlfriend	Confident	Trusting	Irreverent
Josh	Hannah & Beth's Brother	Complex	Thoughtful	Loving
Matt	Emily's New Boyfriend	Motivated	Ambitious	Active
Mike	Emily's Ex	Intelligent	Driven	Persuasive
Sam	Hannah's Best Friend	Diligent	Considerate	Adventurous

Table 2.1: Character relationships and traits as presented in each character's introduction.

As the game's characters are first introduced, the game pauses to provide a brief profile of each individual via an on-screen overlay, highlighting their primary relationship within the

group and three key personality attributes (**Table 2.1**). These attributes serve little purpose, as there is significant overlap in some cases, such that perhaps they serve only to pigeonhole each character into a specific horror genre trope. For example, Chris is described as "humourous", guiding initial player impressions while his humour provides no benefit in-game.

Image 3: Matt wearing his letter jacket.

The clothing of the characters further serves to categorize them into archetypes such as 'the jock' (Kendall, 2011) or 'the sexy girl'. In stark contrast to the women in the game, all the men start out wearing loose-fitting clothing that primarily highlights their masculine nature. Mike, Josh, and Chris share similar clothing choices of baggy jeans and long-sleeved shirts with vests. The only man whose masculine identity is tied directly to his clothing initially is Matt, the jock (**Image 3**). Not only is he wearing sweatpants and a letter jacket in a freezing Alberta winter on a mountain top, but the game utilizes a conversation between him and Emily to highlight the importance of his jacket as it pertains to his relationship with women:

Emily: Where's my bag?

Matt: Huh?

Emily: My bag! The… the little bag with the pink pattern!

           The one I got on Rodeo! Matt, are you listening?

           Oh my god, don't you remember? Next to the

	Italian shoe place where I got the stilettos and you knocked over the rack while you were drooling all over that girl at the counter?
Matt:	Well, I mean, she was asking about my letter jacket-
Emily:	Right. Because she gave a shit about your "designer" letter jacket.
Matt:	Why do you hate my jacket?
Emily:	MATT I need MY BAG!

The context of the conversation allows Emily to emasculate Matt by mocking his masculinity directly, by questioning the quality of his clothing, and by implying his inability to impress a female sales associate with his masculine identification. Not only did the "girl at the counter" not "[give] a shit" about the jacket, according to Emily, Matt was a "drooling" klutz who embarrassed himself, a very different image than one of a star athlete with a letter jacket. She is discounting his ability to succeed as a man and challenging his sexual prowess.

It is also important to note Matt's role as the only male character of colour, being of African-Canadian descent, emphasizes the token minority trope. His categorical representation as a "meat for brains" jock stereotype also reinforces the inherent whiteness in depictions of intelligence within nerd culture (Kendall, 2011). Emily and Mike both proceed to call Matt names implying his lack of intelligence, reflecting his standing with regards to both male and female characters in the game. Matt's race continues to inform his character in several problematic ways throughout the game which I will outline further later on, though the foundation is laid at the outset through the design of his character's persona.

As the game progresses, clothing becomes an integral visual component of Mike's identity as well. After Jessica's kidnapping by the Wendigo, Mike chases after her into the snowy woods at night in nothing but a tank top, jeans, and boots (**Image 4**). Although he makes sure to grab a rifle, he does not grab any additional clothing, even though his shirt and coat are right next to him and the gun is in a display case across the room. The length of time he spends wandering the mountaintop in this outfit is significant, over an hour and a half. Eventually, the player is required to grab an army jacket, an obligatory action in order to advance through the storyline, and Mike's visual persona is transitioned from one masculinized stereotype, to another,

a rugged military man (**Image 4**) complete with shotgun, machete, and a handgun, which is provided immediately after donning the army jacket. Within two hours, Mike has evolved through two stereotypical male roles and has been inundated with weaponry.

Image 4: Mike wearing a tank top in the forest (L) and a military jacket (R).

In discussing Mike's transformation in this scene, his voice actor, Brett Dalton, identified the goal of that development was to reflect Mike's evolution to protector and leader:

> I think that there is an absence of leadership. There is a responsive reaction from a lot of people and it seems like he steps up. And in order to survive, [...] he assumes this leadership position. I guess he would be a protector, but he becomes a decision-maker when it seems like other people are more in the reactive position. So yeah, I would go with protector. (Dalton, 2016)

Mike's leadership role takes on the characteristics of protector out of necessity as he focuses on ensuring the survival of the other characters. Mike's confidence and competency as a leader is emphasized after he transitions. Where he was initially presented as a joking prankster, by the end of the game he has a serious demeanor with determination to protect those around him. This is most embodied when he draws a gun on Emily in Chapter 8 (**Table 1.8**) and decides if Josh lives or dies in Chapter 10 (**Table 1.10**). However, this elevation of Mike sets a standard of masculinity that serves to highlight not only Mike's status but also the lack of status attributed to the other characters in relation to Mike. The foundation for his role as the group's leader

throughout the game begins with his first scene in Chapter 1 (**Table 1.1**) where Mike's authority is challenged by Matt as Matt and Emily walk to the lodge. Mike rises to Matt's challenge and Matt inevitably backs down, establishing a hierarchy between the two characters and reinforcing the correlation between whiteness, leadership, and the role of 'hero' (Liu and Baker, 2016).

That situation is reinforced by the amount of screen time that Mike is given, 1:47:47.18 (**Table 2.2**), in comparison to the other male protagonists. By raising Mike up as the metric for a successful protector, marginalized male characters like Matt and Josh are shown to be beneath Mike. I explore individual characters' marginalization in subsequent chapters. Overall though, the female characters are presented as less capable and in need of protection compared to their male counterparts, rendering them also ineligible for protector status.

Table 2.2: Screen Time by Character				
Character	**Gender**	**Active Time**	**Passive Time**	**Total Time**
Ashley	Female	37:53.63	23:44.98	1:01:38.61
Chris	Male	34:48.79	1:02:22.58	1:37:11.37
Emily	Female	23:46.22	30:49.64	57:35.86
Jessica	Female	5:38.16	36:33.68	42:11.84
Josh	Male	3:52.03	36:53.61	40:45.64
Matt	Male	22:57.80	10:55.45	33:54.25
Mike	Male	1:14:22.65	33:24.53	1:47:47.18
Sam	Female	43:15.59	33:04.10	1:16:19.69

Table 2.2: Total, active, and passive time for each character.

For example, Mike's current partner Jessica is a stark contrast to him in almost every way. Jessica's initial visual design is not more exaggerated than the other female characters, though there are subtle differences between the prologue version of the character and the gameplay iteration that highlight her development as the "sexy girl" stereotype. In the prologue, she is shown wearing a modest sweater, long skirt, leggings, and loose pigtails. This design seems to reference a youthful innocence. By the present day in the game, a year after the prologue, Jessica has undergone a transformation to wearing form-fitting jeans, a midriff-baring top, and side braids. Her jacket is also cropped, partially showing her bare skin at the waist and she wears no hat, gloves, or scarf. Given her surroundings – a snowstorm on an Alberta mountaintop at night – her choice of clothing shows an emphasis on fashion and flaunting her physique. Other female characters, such as Sam and Ashley, wear thick coats and hats in the winter cold, though both also suffer from similar clothing designs that are less realistic and more stereotypically sexualized by accenting their bodies rather than presenting seemingly functional

winter clothing. Ashley's voice actor, Galadriel Stinemen, reflects on the body design of her character: "I know they used a pretty typical Barbie-type body on us. [...] It would have been nice to use our actual body types in the game, though that probably would have gotten it's [sic] own heat." (Stineman, 2017). Jessica's design is clearly aimed to present her in a sexualized way, contributing to her archetypical characterization as the "sexy girl". Dalton commented on the game's utilization of the "sexy girl" archetype:

> I wonder if that's just one of those things, going back to tropes, that is something that you almost have to have in a teen horror. [...N]o matter what, those two people literally go to that cabin in order to do what you – we all know – [...] it feels like maybe that expectation, certainly in the beginning. I think they do want the setup, and that is part of a full setup: a cabin in the woods, the girl, the guy get together. (Dalton, 2016)

Jessica's visual development is further played out in the storyline via her relationship with Mike, through which a player may progress to removing her clothing in an effort to seduce her. Her seduction plays a significant role in her survival, which I will explore later in this chapter, ensuring an unavoidable association between survivability for women and sexual promiscuity.

Storylines and the Priority of Masculinity

Gender roles in *Until Dawn* are initially fairly homogenous, based on each character's sex. However, as the story develops, the differentiation is less about the embodied gender of each character and more about the hegemonic gender roles of each character at a given time, reflecting Connell's understanding of fluidity in relation to one's surroundings (Connell, 2002). These roles are determined by various intersections of marginalization such as race and mental health. Through their storylines, Chris and Matt are emasculated and forced into passive, feminized positions. These transitions directly impact their ability to utilize weapons and to play the role of protector. I consider the emasculation of these characters fully in later chapters where I analyze the impact of race, in the case of Matt, and mental illness and trauma, in the case of Chris.

Mike is the only male character to maintain his hegemonic and dominant masculinized role, repeatedly rushing into dangerous situations and successfully protecting the female characters at any cost. He often takes control of the situation, leading the decision-making and seeking ways to save the female characters at varying points in the narrative, regardless of his feelings for them. First, he rushes after Jessica. Then, after believing her to be dead, he saves

Sam from Josh and comes to the aid of Ashley and Chris, solidifying his place as the dominant protector over the other males and contributing to Chris' emasculation; he is simultaneously a better protector of the women and the dominant protector of the men. He rushes back to the lodge when he sees Emily has returned and protectively holds Ashley if she chooses to let Chris die. In the safe room he has the opportunity to shoot Emily if she is bitten, seeing himself as the sole protector of the group. Mike is held up as the only true man of the group, even compared to Josh who is also shown as an aggressive male character.

Josh is portrayed in a weakened state once his identity as the antagonist is revealed and, like Chris, he devolves into a shell of himself, needing to be rescued by Mike in the mines. Sam aids in Josh's rescue, further demonstrating his lack of strength in needing to be saved by a woman. Josh's only weapons are his bare fists and his only combat is against abstract hallucinations.

However, the storyline between Mike and Jessica is the most telling in terms of gender roles and protector status. The player spends just over five minutes playing as Jessica throughout the entire game (**Table 2.2**), compared to the active screen time of other characters ranging from around twenty minutes to over an hour, though she is on screen for over half an hour. Due to this, Jessica's storyline is largely influenced through the player's gameplay as other characters. In terms of player agency as the character, she is the one with by far the least amount of agency in the game, regardless of how early into the story the other characters die. Jessica's lack of agency continues even during her passive screen time where she is often deferring to Mike to take the lead and make decisions. In Chapter 2, when Jessica falls down an opening in the underground mines, she waits for Mike to give her direction on how to escape, eventually leading to the player, as Mike, jumping down to help her.

Jessica is introduced in the game as Mike's New Girlfriend (**Table 2.1**) so even at the outset, her identity is tied to her male partner. Her position as Mike's replacement for Emily, who was previously her best friend, also immediately situates Jessica in direct conflict with another female protagonist, leading to a stereotypical altercation between the two women. The narrative will either result in a nasty verbal exchange about Jessica's body and perceived lack of intelligence or it will lead to a confrontation between the women's "protectors", Mike and Matt. If the men argue, both women are pushed to the background in a conflict that centralizes on

possession of Emily where Matt, her current boyfriend, objects to Mike's assertion of control over her. Jessica's role is even more minimized in that context as she is not the woman over which the argument takes place. Even though she is considered a main character, she is sidelined almost immediately as a focal point, highlighting her disposability.

After the confrontation, Jessica's interactions are exclusively with male characters, namely Mike and Matt. She spends nearly all of her subsequent screen time following Mike to a secluded cabin, while exchanging sexual banter with him. This trek takes up a substantial portion of two different chapters and comprises the majority of her overall screen time.

Due to the game's butterfly effect system each interaction the player has with Jessica as Mike determines the degree of intimacy the couple experiences once they are cuddling in the cabin. The entire journey to the cabin serves as an extended foreplay exchange between the player and Jessica. It is important to note that regardless of how little clothing Jessica has on at the time she is kidnapped, Mike's clothing does not change. He is always in a tank top and jeans during their intimate moment, whereas her body's exposure is entirely dependent on the player's actions, which later determine Mike's ability to seduce her.

If the player becomes her protector by immediately jumping down after her when she falls into the mine on the way to the cabin, rather than encouraging her to escape on her own, and if the player chooses to coddle her at every opportunity, the player is rewarded with Jessica removing some or all of her clothes. Although not explicitly presented as a reward within the interface of the game, the actions and striptease that Jessica performs characterizes this interaction as reciprocation for a job well done. The measurement of success is directly correlated to her sexualization. Her clothing is also directly associated with the status of her relationship with Mike so the better their relationship, the less clothing she will be wearing.

Her body is a literal prize to be won for the player, which is most poignantly realized by her visual representation during the cabin scene. Jessica's strip act, if the player is completely successful, comes with her sounding out mock strip club music as she does a dance for Mike while removing her clothes. She shows no hesitancy or inhibitions, engaging in self-eroticization (McKay and Johnson, 2015). Laura Mulvey's conceptualization of the male gaze in cinema highlights a consistency between the presentation of the female form in cinema and that of Jessica in *Until Dawn*:

[P]leasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy [sic] on to the female form which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. [...] Mainstream film neatly combined spectacle and narrative. [...] The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation. (Mulvey, 1975, p. 11)

Image 5: The various iterations of Jessica's clothing, dependant on player choices.

Jessica's disrobing and striptease present an opportunity for the player, as Mike, to take on an active male role, relegating Jessica to the passive female exhibitionist role, as Mulvey describes. The scene works to "freeze the flow of action" (Mulvey, 1975, p. 11) by pausing all previous fears of being attacked that caused the couple to sprint for the cabin in the end. Mulvey's correlation of this being a normal narrative reinforces the association of these active/passive gender roles as a societal convention within entertainment media. In this way, the game is presenting the player-as-Mike with an opportunity to enact hegemonic masculinity which results in Jessica's character reacting in an appropriately feminized manner. If a player fails to treat

Jessica as a delicate, fragile creature, the reward is either only partially realized or not at all (**Image 5**), often with Jessica objecting due to insecurities and a lack of self-confidence.

In a rarer variant on this storyline, the player is also able to unlock her partial nudity through guilt and shame. This is a more problematic depiction of sexualization. During the scene where she exposes a sensitive, self-conscious side in turning Mike down the player is given the option to reassure her or to dismiss her (**Image 6**). In the playthrough that was dedicated to deteriorating relationships, Mike was dismissive in this situation leading to a part of the storyline where he goads her into being intimate with him, as if he is owed a reward, ensuring that the player has the opportunity to receive her intimacy regardless of how well Jessica is treated leading up to this scene.

Image 6: Mike may choose to acknowledge Jessica's insecurities or dismiss them.

McIntosh's understanding of the violence of heteronormativity breaks down how scenes like Jessica's strip tease reinforce the subjugation of the white female body:

> For white women, heteronormativity obligates them to the cultural burden of reproducing whiteness and heteronormativity. Yep refers to this burden as 'compulsory heterosexuality.'[8] These obligatory roles weigh prominently on white straight women because we have access to the power of whiteness and the

protection of heteronormativity. So we must appreciate, respect, and recenter white heteropatriarchy. White straight women's bodies are violently obligated to whiteness and heterosexuality. (McIntosh, 2017, p. 163-164)

This often overlooked impact of heteronormativity on the bodies of white women highlights the inherent power dynamic that directs scenes like Jessica's. Even though Jessica might be self-conscious or hesitant, she feels pressure to present herself to her partner, Mike, in a way that adheres to heteronormativity. This also maintains the focus on Jessica's body rather than her individuality or personality. There is an inherent prize component to her design, that references the construction of white bodies in pornography where the white, blonde woman is seen as a trophy to be won (Dines, 2015) whereas non-white female bodies are sidelined. The fetishization of the white blonde as an idealized trophy (Ilyin, 2000) permeates Jessica's design. Again, *Until Dawn* echoes this practice in Mike's abandonment of the intelligent Emily for the less academically-inclined Jessica. The stereotyping of Emily as an 'intelligent Asian' is unpacked in my subsequent chapter on the game's marginalization of non-white races.

Irrespective of how intimate Mike and Jessica are, she will inevitably be kidnapped by the Wendigo and dragged through the woods. Mike's role then becomes that of a savior for Jessica and her survival depends directly on the player's ability to properly navigate the wilderness pathway in a timely manner. The margin of error allowed, however, is correlated to the degree of clothing she had on when she was kidnapped. Contrary to what may seem logical given the nighttime, snow-covered forest through which she is dragged, the fewer clothes Jessica is wearing at the time of her kidnapping, the more room is allowed for player mistakes during the QTEs, the higher probably she will survive, and by extension, the greater the strength of her relationship with Mike. If Jessica is fully-clothed at the time of her kidnapping, the player must execute the maneuvers flawlessly whereas if she is in her underwear, the player may make several mistakes and still succeed in keeping Jessica alive. Again, her body is a prize and it is also the means to her survival. This also doubles the importance of successfully seducing her in order to decrease the difficulty of saving, as well as reinforcing the correlation between protector and sexual prowess.

At the end of the dragging sequence, even if Jessica is alive, she falls down a mine shaft. Separated from Mike, she is ignored for a prolonged period of time in the game's narrative. She has only one short scene subsequent to that, lasting less than a minute, where she is shown in the

mines, clearly concussed. After getting up slowly, she locates an army jacket and puts it on as the scene ends. The jacket she finds mirrors one that Mike finds shortly before that moment. Since the jackets are nearly identical, and the scenes so close together, it seems a symbolic gesture that the jacket represents Mike's protection of her. Jessica is subsequently always shown clinging to her newly-found jacket much in the same way she grabs and clings to Mike earlier on in the storyline. The player has no actions or control in that scene so it serves a purely narrative purpose but the visuals again depict her in need of protection and lacking any agency to help herself.

Following that scene, Jessica is once more ignored for nearly the rest of the narrative until Chapter 10 where she faces one of her two potential death scenarios or eventual rescue at the end of the game (**Table 1.10**). If Matt survived, he will find Jessica. In this scenario she reverts to her previous role of follower. Jessica immediately becomes a secondary character in need of protection, with Matt playing the role of protector this time. As Matt, the player may choose to abandon her or save her on three different occasions in the five minute long scene. She becomes a burden to her protector, though if Matt is not present, she is fully capable of surviving alone. If Matt died, she finds a lantern and the player has control of Jessica for those additional five minutes. Her capability and agency are determined based on his presence. She is shown in a weakened and severely injured state, though her survival at all seems even more unlikely given the massive trauma she would have sustained being dragged through the woods and falling down a mine shaft while wearing nothing but her underwear.

Throughout her storyline, Jessica's body is paramount to her character's importance. Her sexuality and her passivity are also earmarks of her character. She is rarely given the opportunity to lead in any meaningful way, needing to rely on the protection of male characters, and the player's motivation to see her unclothed, in order to successfully survive.

Weaponry and Combat

The accessibility and functionality of weaponry are both heavily dictated by the narrative of the story, specifically pertaining to the character archetypes operating at a given time. It is impossible to separate the tools from the roles and genders of the characters. Throughout the game's narrative there are several instances of combat. Except for one optional situation the

combat involves weapons, so the weaponry available is extremely important to the overall narrative and to the survival of individual characters.

Here I differentiate between predetermined narrative developments that do not rely on user ability – there is no crosshair to aim – and actual combat scenes where users must aim to successfully defend themselves. The former, which I label as violent exchanges, are predetermined and inflexible. They occur through user choices in the story, but once the plotline is established by these choices the outcomes of the scenes are unalterable. The on-screen presentation is combat in the literal sense, but it differs from the in-game combat because the user has no control over the outcome – no opportunity to aim and no ability to ensure the weapon use is a success.

These scenes are important to categorize because, while violent exchanges happen for both genders, combat scenarios focus mostly on male characters. The player has actual control of weapons only when playing as a man in all but three out of at least twenty combat situations. Of those three scenes, one is a playful snowball fight tutorial and not true combat in defence of the character's life, and a second is an alternate, near inaccessible situation realized only after a long combination of several specific decisions. The third combat event comes in Chapter 10 when Sam can protect Mike from a Wendigo with a shovel. This scene has no impact on the survival of either character however as Mike will save himself if Sam fails to do so. Otherwise, the combat responsibilities rest solely with the male characters, forcing them to adhere to protector roles. Their exclusive possession of effective weaponry automatically dictates that they are the ones empowered to protect the women.

Most interactive objects in the game are only able to be examined and not used, with the exception of weapons and sources of light. Since object interaction is extremely rigid in the space by design, the objects available to a character reflect on their utility in the overall narrative. While males have routine access to several weapons, females are often given sources of light as their main type of object. To be clear, women do gain access to weapons on occasion (**Table 2.3**), but almost every instance is in a limited, non-combat capacity. Also, every weapon a woman gains is due to elective user decisions. For Sam to have access to a baseball bat, with which she defends herself while being pursued, the player must make specific choices several chapters earlier so the bat is laid out in advance. Ashley finds a pair of scissors to stab her

attacker only if the player wanders into a side room and moves objects off the scissors. Emily's access to the flare gun requires that the character explore the fire tower completely, and even still, upon finding the weapon, Emily is immediately given the choice to give it to her boyfriend, Matt. All the women, through the player, must actively search out weaponry to use in their individual, potentially fatal situations. Further, Ashley, Sam, and Jessica, are never able to access any form of ranged weaponry.

Table 2.3: Catalogue of Weaponry					
Character	**Weapon**	**Requirement**	**Combat Use**	**Outcome**	**Effective**
Ashley	Scissors	Optional	No	Increases violence against her	No
Chris	Pistol	Required	Yes	Affects relationship with Ashley	No
	Plank	Required	No	Disarm Mike or injure Josh	Yes
	Revolver	Optional	No	No significance	Not used
	Shotgun	Required	Yes	Kills Wendigo	Yes
Emily	Flare gun	Optional	Yes	Kills Wendigo	Yes
	Flares	Optional	No	Minimal delay of pursuers	Somewhat
Jessica	Shovel	Optional	Yes	No significance	No
	Snowball	Required	Yes	No significance	No
Josh	Josh uses one of two weapons as the antagonist but never while player-controlled				
Matt	Axe	Required	Yes	Kills elk	Yes
	Flare gun	Optional	Yes	Kills attacker	Yes
Mike	Hunting Rifle	Required	Yes	No significance	No
	Lighter	Required	No	Frees Sam	Yes
	Machete	Required	Yes	Kills Wendigo	Yes
	Revolver	Required	Yes	Escape Chapel. Kills Emily (optional)	Yes
	Shotgun	Required	Yes	Kills Wendigo. Blocks door from pursuers	Yes
Sam	Baseball bat	Optional	No	Increases violence against her	No
	Shovel	Optional	Yes	Disables or kills a Wendigo	Yes

Table 2.3: Catalogue of all accessible weapons, by character, documenting if the weapon is required to continue the game, if it is used in combat, the potential outcomes of successfully using the weapon, and whether it is effective.

Women being reduced to a utility/assistance role is further demonstrated by the usage of other non-combat objects. In Jessica's case, she has access to her cell phone for the purpose of taking a selfie with Mike (**Image 7**) and to play music on their trek to the cabin. Her only other useable objects are the aforementioned snowballs and lantern. The latter is only available to her if Matt does not survive to meet her in the mines. If he does, she does not have access to that object.

Image 7: Jessica and Mike take a selfie.

Jessica's character is repeatedly defined by her visual form. Her body and its exposure being the ultimate purpose of her role in the narrative is reiterated further in her available objects. Her phone is representative of the current superficial social media convention of taking selfies. The phone, by virtue of being in her pant pocket, then serves to transform Jessica's body into a component of the environment by being used as a passive source of music ambience for their adventure. The music plays softly throughout a substantial portion of their hike until she loses her phone in the woods.

Her other light source, the lantern, is used for less than 5 minutes, and it is only available in the most specific of circumstances. The lantern serves no other purpose in the game but to illuminate her surroundings. It is neither a weapon nor a form of protection as light is not a means of defence against the Wendigo.

The only guaranteed combat scene wherein a woman actually fights comes immediately before the game's climax as Mike is escaping the Wendigo of the insane asylum. Sam finds him wrestling with a Wendigo and grabs a nearby shovel to bat it off. It is the only moment that the player is required to fight as a female character, though the result will be the same as Mike is unable to die at this point in the story. This illustrates the disparity of weapon effectiveness in the hands of women versus men in *Until Dawn*: Sam's temporary protector role is rendered pointless

due to the invulnerability afforded Mike through his own protector status in the game's hierarchy.

Emily's combat situation in Chapter 8 (**Table 1.8**) is the rare, alternate scene mentioned earlier that requires an intricate series of player decisions spanning the previous 7 chapters in order for Emily to escape the Wendigo unbitten. When compared to the earlier description of the weapons Mike receives in one chapter, the hurdles Emily must overcome to have a functional weapon are significantly more challenging. Missing any of these steps results in the standard plot development where she is bitten by the Wendigo and later faces death at the hands of Mike. In fact, the violence that the women face is almost exclusively at the hands of male characters, namely Josh, whose degree of violence escalates when the women fight back. In part, it is his antagonist role that leads to his vulnerable isolation and subsequent high probability of death.

In all of the possible violent situations, the outcomes for the women are predetermined. That is not inherently negative; the game has a narrative to present, so only limited deviation can be accommodated. However, in no instance of a woman utilizing a weapon, with the exception of the one combat scene outlined above, does the weapon actually serve to protect her. In the cases of Sam and Ashley, the baseball bat and the scissors do not stop their attacker but enrage him. In Ashley's case, her retaliation results in physical abuse from her assailant. In both situations, the weapon does not protect them and does not help them escape. The weapons are essentially powerless in the hands of the women and if anything having a weapon only serves to negatively impact their circumstances.

Comparatively, the men are given ample opportunities to embrace the protector aspect of their masculinized roles by not only having access to several forms of weapons – most are notably required to advance in the game – but they also fight bare-handed. All of their weaponized scenes are actually combat scenes, many left to player agency with the lives of the characters at stake. Although emasculated as the story progresses, as men, Matt and Chris more easily access weaponry throughout the game than any of the women. Matt need not go through the cumbersome additional steps to obtain weapons as Emily does, and he is required to gain at least one weapon, the axe, in order for the narrative to continue. He also visibly and unnecessarily discards the axe if he survives, again highlighting the disposability of weapons used by men, regardless of race.

The game sets this precedent very early on, with Chris' introductory storyline at a shooting range near the cable car station in Chapter 1. Although the player is controlling Sam, as soon as the combat tutorial begins, control changes to Chris who demonstrates his proficiency with firearms as a way to impress Sam, complete with bragging and celebratory strutting – performing an appropriately masculine role as someone skilled in the use of guns. He leads the way for Sam, although she is as familiar with the space as he is, solidifying his role as a leader in relation to female characters from the beginning.

In Chapter 8, Mike and Chris restrain Josh in a shed but abandon him when they hear a scream. Chris is plagued with guilt for abandoning Josh and leaves to go retrieve him from the shed to protect him from the Wendigo. Chris is ambushed by the Wendigo and must run back to the lodge while defending himself with his shotgun. If Chris does not fire his shotgun fast enough or aim properly, he will die at the hands of the Wendigo. He is in control of his own survival and capable of defending himself.

Although Mike technically can't die until the final scene, his inability to perform his role of protector will result in severe injuries and the potential death of Jessica and a companion wolf, both relying on Mike for protection. Mike's future is not hanging in the balance, but others' lives depend on his ability to properly handle his weapons in combat situations. In the end, his capability to be protector and a leader are his major defining qualities. This reinforces Kirkland's findings that in horror video games, masculinity is linked with violence and militaristic action. Hegemonic masculinity as it is constructed in *Until Dawn* requires ability to utilize firearms successfully in order for a male character to survive the game, whereas women are not afforded the same defense capability; they are dependent on the male protectors since women do not have access to firearms.

The men's weapons are also easily discarded in many instances, further highlighting their over-abundance. In the fire tower scene, Emily effortlessly climbs the ladder with a large flashlight in hand, yet Matt discards the axe he has in hand before beginning his ascent. This theme of weaponry abandonment is carried further in the safe room scene where Mike has the opportunity to shoot Emily as he fears she will change into a Wendigo, continuing his role as the group's protector. Whether he does or does not shoot her, he places his handgun on the table before leaving the safe room to find a secure exit for everyone. The group eventually follows

him, and all the characters who survive the scene – Ashley, Sam, potentially Emily, and Chris, if he survives the Wendigo – walk past the loaded weapon without stopping to grab it. As a tool of protection, and the role of protector being squarely in the realm of masculinity, the only feasible person to take the weapon would be Chris, but at this point in the storyline he is completely emasculated and relegated to a feminized role through his reliance on Ashley for survival, so he is excluded from accessing weaponry by virtue of his story arc.

Dialogue

The dialogue in *Until Dawn* presents numerous examples of hegemonic masculine discourse. In all the conversations between two or more male characters, the words "bro", "dude", and "man" comprise a large portion of the commentary. It became unwieldy to document the frequency of these words so I selected a pivotal scene from Chapter 7 between Chris, Josh, and Mike as a case example, not only of the use of this terminology but also of the overtones of sexual dominance being a key component of the masculine identity. Mike confronts Josh when he reveals that Josh is the one who has been terrorizing the group and that he had recorded all of their torment.

> Josh: I don't think there's enough hard drives in China to count all the views we're gonna get, you guys.
>
> Mike: What are you talking about you asshat? Jessica IS FUCKING DEAD.
>
> Josh: What?
>
> Mike: Did you hear me?! Jessica is dead… and YOU ARE GONNA FUCKING PAY YOU DICK!!!!

Mike pistol whips Josh in the side of the head, knocking him out.

Mike ties Josh up and stands watch over him to keep him from harming anyone else. During this time, Mike lectures Josh about his unethical treatment of the women. As this is prior to Chris' emasculation, Chris joins in, punching Josh in the face if Ashley was assaulted in retaliation for using the scissors.

> Chris: Why did ya hit her man?! Why'd you have to fucking hit her?!

Chris punches Josh in the face.

Josh:	What are you talking about?
Chris:	You punched Ashley you piece of shit!
Josh:	I got so mad.
Chris:	You don't hit a girl. You just don't.

Chris and Mike are not only protecting the women, they're objecting to what they perceive as immoral treatment of Ashley and Jessica by Josh based on their gender. Nowhere does anyone object to a man hitting another man in these scenes, but both object to Josh's violence toward the female characters, referencing the convention that men should never hit women.

This conversation devolves further into the topic of male sexual performance as a defining characteristic of masculinity. Josh questions Chris' masculinity due to his passivity with Ashley and implies that Mike is more of a man because he has more success with women, referencing both dominance over passive males and a heterosexual lack of deviancy.

Josh:	"Ohh… Ashley… I never imagined in my wildest dreams that you liked me…!"
Chris:	Stop.
Josh:	You know what that sound is? It's the sound of never kissing Ashley, you pussy.
Chris:	Stop!
Josh:	Yeah, you know? You might as well let Ashley sleep with Mike. I mean, at least he's got some notches on his belt, you know? He'll treat (*thrusts*) her (*thrusts*) right (*thrusts*)! You're fucking pathetic, Christopher.

Sexual prowess is an overarching theme in many of the conversations between the men. Early in the game, Josh is discussing Chris' lack of initiative in trying to have sex with Ashley, drawing a parallel between men as hunters and women as prey.

Josh:	Ashley was looking pretty hot today, right? She's like a "sleeper hit" kinda gal, you know?... Now I just want to rip that parka right off her… make some snow angels. Right?

Chris:	Cut it out, man.
Josh:	When are you gonna take her to the bone zone?
Chris:	Sheesh… Like that could ever happen.
Josh:	Come on man. She practically spends her entire life with you as it is.
Chris:	Well, yeah, but we're like, friends-
Josh:	Listen dude. Look around you. Look at these beautiful mountains. Do you see any parents? I mean can you imagine a more perfect, ripe scenario, just dripping with erotic possibilities? You, and Ashley, alone at last… You've laid all the groundwork… you've been a perfect gentleman. Now you come in for the kill!

[If the player as Chris chooses AGREE]:

Chris:	Maybe you're right.
Josh:	You're a hunter, bro. No fear. No mercy. I mean she won't even know what hit her.

[If the player as Chris chooses DISAGREE]:

Chris:	I don't know, man…
Josh:	How can you NOT KNOW!
Chris:	But what if it's, like, weird… and what if she might not like, wanna be friends with me anymore if I try something like that.
Josh:	I mean weren't you just listening? You gotta buck up, bro. Grow a pair.

Each conversational option references dominance as a key component of proper masculinity. The man as hunter metaphor, the implication of lacking male genitalia, the implied lack of masculinity in hesitating, all establish a connection to hegemonic masculinity. Josh's continued barrage of sexual discourse throughout the game combined with his reveal in Chapter 6 as the Psycho construct a narrative of deviancy as part of his character that is further accentuated by his positioning as abnormal due to mental illness, addressed in a subsequent

chapter. The dialogue ties masculinity to sexual prowess in undeniable ways regardless of player choice, and this is simply one of several potential examples, including multiple game chapters where Jessica's and Mike's sole communication is sexual banter.

Female sexuality and its role in hegemonic social structures is also reinforced. From a dialogue perspective, Jessica's sexualization and passivity are once again the focal point of her character. Although her meandering conversation with Mike in the woods is laden with sexual innuendos, three key conversations take place outside this context that shed light on Jessica's character development: her snowball and cabin scenes with Mike and her altercation with Emily. These conversations are the essential, defining plot points for Jessica's character.

Beginning with her initial scene with Mike, this conversation comes at the conclusion of the snowball combat tutorial outlined earlier. Mike tackles Jessica and they proceed to have a sexually-charged exchange:

Jessica: No more!

Mike: Oh yeah, oh "more"! You're going down-!

Mike tackles Jessica to the ground

Jessica: Ahh!

Mike: Gotcha. It's done. Done city!

Jessica: So did I go down?

Mike: Uh, I don't think so.

Jessica: Mmm… I think you'd know so if I did.

This scene is important as it is the first scene in the game, and potentially the only one depending on the narrative of the game, in which the player really has control over Jessica. Notably, the above exchange happens with Mike pinning Jessica to the icy ground. Even though this is Jessica's main, and possibly only, scene of player agency, Mike still dominates her visually through his sexually dominant position. It is also the primary conversation that introduces her to the player. As much as the labels (**Table 2.2**) provide a context for each character, the individual introductory scenes present the initial framework of each character's archetype. In the case of Jessica – labelled in game as confident, trusting, and irreverent – it is clearly one of sexuality and flirtatiousness.

Contrasting her demeanor at the outset of the game with the various results in the intimate cabin scene is startling for a variety of reasons. Jessica is sexual at the beginning of the game and throughout her exchanges with Mike, but she's definitely written to be a willing and eager participant in the conversation. The myriad of ways in which their final cabin moments conclude adds complexity to her as a character but all of it is still centralized on her sexualization and her willingness as a prize to be wooed.

Jessica: I'm sorry… Ugh… I'm sorry, I think I'm a little freaked out and it's hard for me to like, keep this up, and-

Mike: What… keep what up?

Jessica: Look… I act all super confident and like a total sexy babe and everything but underneath I gotta be honest, I'm… really kinda insecure…

[If the player as Mike chooses REASSURING]:

Mike: Jess. You've got to be kidding me.

Jessica: What?

Mike: You have nothing to be insecure about.

Jessica: Oh, you have no idea-

Mike: Sure I do. You're just like me and everyone else. We're all insecure! But, you know how to handle yourself. You might call it a front but, it's real.

Jessica: Yeah. I guess I do.

Mike: Yeah. And that's super fucking hot.

Jessica: Really?

Mike: Yeah. Hell yeah it is.

Jessica: Come here. Maybe I know how to handle you, too.

Mike: I am definitely ready to be handled.

[If the player as Mike chooses DISMISSIVE]:

Mike: Oh come on.

Jessica: What?

Mike:	Don't give me all this scaredy cat little girl BS.
Jessica:	It's true.
Mike:	Sounds complicated.
Jessica:	Well maybe I'm complicated.
Mike:	Great.
Jessica:	What?!
Mike:	I thought you were a…- I thought you were a what-you-see-is-what-you-get sort of girl.
Jessica:	What's that supposed to mean? That I'm easy?
Mike:	No, no- I mean… Just that you're not… complicated-
Jessica:	Oh, Michael. You're kind of a dick, you know that? Part of me wishes you weren't so cute.
Mike:	And the other part?
Jessica:	Come here. Maybe I know how to handle you, too.

Regardless of her dislike for Mike, however, the situation ends up the same, where he still convinces her to make out with him. The player is still partially rewarded with access to her body, though she is more clothed if she is upset.

Mike's, and thus the player's, success at seducing Jessica is reliant on her passivity and deference to Mike on their journey. If the player chooses to be less helpful as Mike, by forcing her to rescue herself when she falls down an incline or scaring her into falling in a river, and she is, thus, forced to be self-sufficient, she is presented in a more weakened and less confident form in the cabin. Though throughout their walk she is equally as aggressive in her sexual banter with Mike, her demeanor completely reverses on the basis of her self-sufficiency. Her defining characteristic of 'sexual' overrides all other aspects and her previously aggressive nature disappears in this situation, only to return for one final moment, prior to her kidnapping. This final monologue takes place in all narrative iterations, no matter how successful the player was at seducing Jessica:

Jessica:	Those goddamned assholes probably followed us out here to fuck with us and just when we were getting down to business!

Jessica storms outside to the front porch of the cabin.

Jessica: HEY! YEAH! PRICKS! THAT MEANS YOU! I
             KNOW you're OUT THERE! The FUCK are you
             trying to do!? You want to ruin our fun THAT BAD?!
             Well GUESS WHAT? You can't! you can't ruin our
             good time! Because Michael and I are gonna FUCK!
             That's right! We are going to have SEX! And it's gonna
             be HOT! So ENJOY IT! Because I know WE'RE
             GOING TO!

She is essentially inviting the audience, both in and outside the game, to enjoy watching her have sex with a man she may have only moments ago said she didn't want to sleep with, simply to prove a point. Although in the game it is intended to prove the importance of her relationship with Mike, in the context of the gameplay, it's clear that it's also meant to exemplify her role as a sexual archetype rather than a rational female character.

Also on the topic of validating herself, both to the other characters and as an object of desire, Jessica's pivotal argument with Emily highlights the value of her body early on in the game:

Emily: Oh. My god. That is so gross. Are you trying to
             swallow his face whole?

Matt: Em…

Emily: Seriously can she be any more obvious? No one wants
             in on your territory, honey.

Jessica: Excuse me, did you say something?

Emily: Oh did you not hear me? Was your sluttiness too loud?

Jessica: Sounds like someone's bitter she didn't make the cut.

Emily: Yeah. It's all a big cattle call with that dreamboat.
             Congrats, you're top cow.

Jessica: Cuts real deep calling Miss Homecoming a cow.

Matt: H-hey, you're making everyone uncomfortable, Jess-

Jessica: Jealous much? Emily too frigid for you, too?

Matt:	Hey that's… that's uncalled… look-
Jessica:	Whatever. I don't give a crap what you think.
Emily:	At least I can think. 4.0, bitch, honor roll. Suck on that when you're trying to sleep your way into a job.
Jessica:	Who needs grades when you've got all the natural advantages you can handle.
Emily:	Oh please.
Jessica:	You couldn't buy a moldy loaf of bread with your skanky ass.
Emily:	Are you serious? Do you think that's insulting?
Jessica:	That bitch is on crack or something.

Through her commentary, Jessica centralizes herself as the metric by which both beauty and sexual fulfillment are measured. She questions Emily's validity on the basis of not only Jessica's own perceived value but also Emily's worth, determined by physical attractiveness and perceived sexuality. Again, Jessica's sexuality becomes her defining trait.

Discussion

In exploring dominance, sexual prowess, and protector imagery in *Until Dawn*, it is clear that their ubiquitous presence constructs a particular form of hegemonic masculinity – where men are mainly interested in women as sexual objects, seek to protect those women from threats, be skilled with firearms, be tough in how they appear and talk, yet not utilize violence against women, unless it is to protect the larger group. Relying on gender stereotypes necessitates the inclusion of certain attributes and the marginalization of others, such as race and mental illness which I will explore more thoroughly in the subsequent chapters. The problem persists in most forms of video games, but with the steadfast nature of horror genre media clinging to harmful stereotypes around marginalized groups, the need for a diverse and nuanced approach to character construction and player agency within those characters' stories becomes even more essential. With repetitive narratives and characters, developers are going to have to start eschewing the traditional tropes for revised iterations in order to create space in a saturated market and to appeal to an ever-expanding, diversified consumer base. The various areas

considered herein demonstrate that much of the masculinized identities within the game fulfill and exceed those of standard horror tropes through heavy-handed dialogue, emasculating storylines, weaponry, and combat. When considering gender, the use of horror tropes only serves to solidify the traditional characterization of hegemonic masculinity as a physically capable, heterosexual white male.

The interactive nature of the video game opens up the possibility to subvert these archetypes through player agency, but even then the structure of *Until Dawn* enforces a rigidity along gender lines that ensures the maintenance of these conventional masculine and feminine representations. The combination of imagery, dialogue, forms of death, and objects – access and effectiveness – enabled a deeper reading of the video game in terms of both the underlying power structures and the forms of marginalization. Although troubling depictions exist on the surface, the triangulation of methodologies in this hybrid approach brought to the forefront strong evidence supporting my research focus on the construction of hegemonic masculinity and helps to establish a more systemic issue with the forms of stereotypical representation within the game. The effect of marginalized traits on this construction extends in the subsequent chapters, but the content analysis of character design consistently supports my first research question of how *Until Dawn* constructs hegemonic masculinity. Through the design elements of the characters and idealized in the relationship of Mike and Jessica, the game reinforces hegemonic masculinity as a dominant, protector archetype, and, by extension, feminizes passivity and victimization.

In holding horror video games to the same level of critical analysis of other video game genres, the sub-genre can be pushed to re-consider these stereotypical depictions in lieu of more subversive and complex character development, especially in a genre already so full of potential for alternative story-telling.

The White Protector: Race Analysis

At the outset of this chapter, I need to acknowledge my positionality in this analysis. As a white researcher, my critical analysis of the racial and cultural representations in *Until Dawn* is primarily informed by scholars from within the cultures I am analyzing. Where possible, my priority is to amplify these voices and research rather than speak on behalf of cultures of which I am not a part. My analytical contributions draw directly from these researchers and my intent is to provide supplementary evidence within these established theories.

Table 3.1: Cultural Identities by Character		
Character Name	**Presents As In Game**	**Voice Actor's Self-Identification[1]**
Ashley Brown	White	American
Beth/Hannah Washington	White	Italian American
Christopher Hartley	White	American
Emily Davis	East Asian Canadian	Japanese-Irish American
Jessica Riley	White	American
Joshua Washington	White	Egyptian-American
Matthew Taylor	Black Canadian	Cambodian, Greek, Italian, Nigerian, Polynesian, Scandinavian American
Michael Munroe	White	American
Samantha Giddings	White	Italian-German American

Table 3.1: Character in-game cultural identities and their respective voice actors' identities.

In considering the relationship between race and masculinity in entertainment media, the representation of traditionally marginalized cultures is often relegated to stereotypes that put them in one of two positions: in conflict with white protagonists or in weakened states and in need of aid from the white protagonists. These commonplace archetypical relationships are called the 'Monstrous Other' (DiMarco, 2011; Lenhardt, 2016) and the 'White Saviour' (Kendall, 2011) respectively. By virtue of the design of these associations, non-white characters are prevented from completely fulfilling the metrics that define a male protector, reinforcing an inherent whiteness attributed to the role. I will consider each specific archetype as they play out in *Until Dawn* separately as each engages with uniquely different cultures with particular historical power dynamics informing their significance. Each non-white representation is limited to one or two iterations within the game: Black Canadian, as embodied by the character Matt; East Asian Canadian, as embodied by the character Emily; and Indigenous culture, through the monstrous Wendigo and the environmental design within the game. The nationalities of the two

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[1]Voice actor self-identifications were pulled from either official public relations pages for the actor or direct interviews with the press where the actor discusses their heritage.

characters of colour are confirmed through cast interviews with the game's voice actors that accompany the game as bonus content.

It is important to note that this list is comprehensive of all recognized non-white cultures within the game. While some of the characters marked as white are voiced by actors of colour (**Table 3.1**), this analysis considers exclusively the in-game character design. The issue of whitewashing of actors is not to be ignored but exists beyond the scope of this research.

Race as Weakness

Amongst the eight protagonists in the game, only two are characters of colour: Matt and Emily. In the prologue tutorial, Emily is dating Mike but for the remainder of the game, which takes place a year after the prologue, Emily and Matt are in an exclusive relationship while Mike has started dating Jessica. The stereotype of token minorities (Sutton, 2004; Thibodeau, 1989) comes into play as Emily and Matt are segregated into the "token minority couple" (Delgado, 2016; Cockerham et al., 1978). No context for the relationship changes are given throughout the storyline. Matt's opportunities to play protector are minimal and occur in only two optional combat scenarios whereas Mike is required to complete over ten combat scenes, with the potential for additional optional situations. Of Matt's two opportunities, one contributes to a very early potential death outcome for him relative to the other male protagonists, and the other relies on the charity of his girlfriend and their relationship status prior to that scene. Matt is also only seemingly protecting Emily in all his scenes with her, as regardless of Matt's actions, Emily survives for at least two more chapters before she can even potentially die. Matt's attempts at protection in both scenarios influence only his own survival, extremely precarious in its own right, and reflective of the common horror trope of killing off characters of colour first (Barone, 2013). Matt is present onscreen less than any other character including Jessica, and he ranks third from last after her and Josh for time playable by the gamer (**Table 2.2**), with Josh's position being due to the plot twist narrative of the Psycho antagonist. Matt is one of the first potential deaths in the game, again only after Jessica, and also one of the hardest characters to keep alive in terms of steps required to ensure he survives. While listed as a main character, his lack of screen and control time, his disposability, and his predetermined individual plot line sidelines him as almost a minor character in many ways. Matt's screen time is over an hour less than his

two white male counterparts, ignoring Josh who is off-screen for specific narrative purposes.

Emasculation by Emily

The relationship between Emily and Matt lays the foundation for Matt's emasculation and, subsequently, his failure as a protector through a combination of two racialized stereotypes: the brawny African-American male (McKay and Johnson, 2015) and the Dragon Lady (Ocampo, 2014). When the player first encounters the couple in Chapter 1, the conversation establishes Emily as the dominant partner as she directs Matt to carry her bags, even though the player is playing Matt at this point (emphasis added):

> Emily: Hey, could you take these the rest of the way?
>
> Matt: The bags?
>
> Emily: Yeah, just... all the bags.
>
> [If the player as Matt chooses PERSIST]:
>
> Matt: Em, I really don't think you should head back down the trail by yourself–
>
> Emily: Seriously?!
>
> Matt: It's cold out, and it's getting dark–
>
> Emily (sarcastically): **You're going to protect me from it being dark out?**
>
> Matt: I'll just leave your stuff here and come with you; Nobody's going to steal it.
>
> Emily: Matt, are you kidding me? You can't leave me alone for five minutes; you really think that little of me?
>
> Matt: That's not what I meant–
>
> Emily: Why can't you just listen to me; why do you have to question everything I say?
>
> Matt: I'm sorry, Em, I'm just trying to be helpful.
>
> Emily: If you want to be helpful, then you can help get everything to the lodge as quickly as you can, okay?
>
> Matt: Um... okay... fine. Whatever you want.

[If the player as Matt chooses AGREE]:

Matt: Alright... Fine... If it's so important. I guess I can pack

horse the rest of the way... but you owe me one.

Emily: Excuse me?

Matt: Well then, we're even, at least.

Emily: I'll think about it.

Emily's subjugation of Matt reinforces his perceived role as a subservient male character while simultaneously engaging the stereotype of brawny African-American male in a servant role (Dines, 2015; McKay and Johnson, 2015). During their interactions, Emily often questions his intelligence and highlights his physicality, emphasizing his position as the jock in the game. She continuously mocks Matt's intelligence and in turn sees his usefulness as a "pack horse". These perceptions are littered throughout her conversations with Matt wherein she refers to him as "meat-for-brains", "muscle man", and "doofus". Even during the times when they are affectionate, Emily reinforces her role as the dominant partner and Matt's brawn-over-brain persona:

Emily: And it's so nice to be here with you muscle man!

Matt: Ah, I'm not all muscle. There are some brains in here

too!

Emily: Well, you've got enough brains to like me, so let's see

that brawn.

These interactions also serve to personify Emily as the Dragon Lady archetype which pigeonholes Asian women as predatory and aggressive (Ocampo, 2014). Emily does not demonstrate any of these controlling tendencies in the prologue while she is dating Mike, her white boyfriend and the game's prototypical protector, but rather they surface only in her relationship with Matt, the game's only male character of colour. Through the construction of Emily as a Dragon Lady, the game positions Matt as subjugated by a female character from the first chapter onward while it does not affect the power dynamic between her and Mike, the idealized white male character. Her constant aggression towards Matt and her controlling tendencies with regards to his actions, such as directing him to carry her bags or chastising him for forgetting one of them, also reflect the conventional Dragon Lady trope (Wang, 2013; Zhou

and Paul, 2016).

In Chapter 6, Emily and Matt ultimately end up in an underground mine shaft after the fire tower they were in collapses (**Table 1.6**). The player controls Matt and has the potential to rescue Emily. While this is the first real opportunity for Matt to serve in the protector role, Matt's abilities are consistently ridiculed by Emily (excerpted and emphasis added for consistency):

Emily:	MAAATTT!!! OH GOD MATT HELP ME PLEAAAAASE!
Matt:	I'm comin'! I'm comin'! Em, this is pretty unsteady over here...
Emily:	Matt you've got to do something right NOW what are you WAITING FOR!?!?
Matt:	I'm thinking! Let me think!
Emily:	**Don't think, you idiot, just get me outta here!**

[If the player as Matt chooses SUPPORTIVE]:

Matt:	Emily... you're upset, you need to calm down, you're gonna be fine -
Emily:	Ugh, stop talking, I can't take it!
Matt:	Stop yelling at me and let me work this out, okay?

[If the player as Matt did not let Emily go "Find Sam" in Chapter 1 or defended Jess in Chapter 2]:

| Emily: | No you stop it! Why do you question every little thing I say! I'm goddamned sick of it! |

[If the player as Matt chooses JUMP TO SAFETY the first time]:

Emily:	Uh- Matt - Jesus -
Matt:	I'm just trying to find the safest way to get to you...
Emily:	**You idiot just get me out of here!**

In these excerpts, Emily's comments and Matt's reactions focus on Matt's intelligence. Emily's

repeated mocking of his intellectual shortcoming during a time of crisis where her own life is at risk presents a prioritization by the character to emasculate and reduce Matt's identity to that of a dimwit. Her consistent message is that Matt is incapable of saving her due to her belief that he lacks the intelligence to do so and that he, in fact, will get her killed because of it.

The repeated emphasis by Emily on intelligence, both in terms of her perception of Matt's lack thereof and her declaration of intellectual superiority over Jessica, combine Emily's Dragon Lady stereotype with that of the 'intelligent Asian' trope. Frequently in media, young Asian characters are portrayed as being overly studious (Aoki and Mio, 2012; Wang, 2013) and extremely successful academically (Reyes, 2004; Wu, 2008). Emily is even initially described as intelligent which she reiterates by using her position on the honor roll to insult Jessica in Chapter 2. Emily is characterized as a competent and assertive, if not frequently aggressive, woman, but with the exception of Matt, she still requires the protection of a male protagonist. Mike fills this role and her survival at times hinges on the player as Mike choosing to save her. For all that her racialized stereotyping empowers her to a position above Matt, subsequently feminizing his position in relation to hers, she is still not empowered enough to be an equal of the idealized white protector.

There are two scenarios which the player may unlock through specific dialogue choices during the rescue encounter in Chapter 6 (**Table 1.6**) where Matt takes on a more aggressive approach, though each highlights additional problematic representations of the couple's relationship:

> [If the player as Matt did not see Emily with Mike and chooses
> > INSULTING]:
> Matt: What the fuck is your problem?
> Emily: I- what?
> Matt: Why are you being such a bitch to me?
> Emily: I'm sorry, I didn't mean it, really...
> [If the player as Matt chooses INSISTENT]:
> Matt: **From now on, you either treat me like a person or
>   I'm out.** Get it?
> Emily: Yeah!

Matt: Say it.

Emily: What?

Matt: Say you'll treat me like a goddamned human being.

Emily: **I- I'll treat you like a person. Like a goddamned human being, okay?** You're a person! You're a person!!

Matt: Thank you.

[If the player as Matt saw Emily with Mike in Chapter 1 and chooses INSISTENT]:

Matt: Just tell me what's going on.

Emily: Nothing, Matt! God!

Matt: Just admit it!

Emily: I was confused.

Matt: So you fucked him...

Emily: Please... Matt, I'm sorry...

In these two dialogues, their relationship is brought to the forefront as one where Matt is not considered a human being by Emily, in the case of the first excerpt, and where Emily cheated on Matt with Mike, disrespecting Matt, their relationship, and rendering Matt as a second choice character to Mike, the quintessential protector character in the game. Matt also references this comparison:

[If the player as Matt saw Emily with Mike in Chapter 1 and chooses SUSPICIOUS]:

Matt: Is that why you still like Mike? **He's a thinker**.

Emily: Matt! I don't-!

As seen above, Emily holds Mike up as an intelligent and strong male protector that would be fully capable of rescuing Emily, where Matt is not. The game reinforces Matt's inability, as regardless of the choices made by the player, the scene will never result in Matt rescuing Emily. The tower will always collapse and Emily will always fall deeper into the mines with the debris. In fact, it is entirely possible that Matt dies before reaching the tower at all and thus the tower

collapse will take place without him. This scene simply serves to determine the relationship status of Emily and Matt, and to decide if Matt survives the mine or not. Depending on the player's choices, Matt may die at the end of this scene.

Minor(ity) Barriers

Another issue around the presentation of Matt and Emily's relationship is that of *Until Dawn*'s only downloadable content (DLC). The game is not long, with average playthrough times of about 5 to 10 hours depending on the player's familiarity with the game. Therefore any additional content is a major contribution to the storyline so the DLC presents an interesting point of consideration.

Unlike many video games with DLC, *Until Dawn* has only one form of DLC: a pre-order bonus. This is a common incentive to encourage consumers to pre-purchase the game for bonus content. Many games will provide additional content after the game's release that can be purchased or attained in various ways. However, *Until Dawn* has only pre-order content. In my time researching this game, it was exceptionally difficult to locate anyone who had in fact pre-ordered the game and thus had access to this exclusive content. The developers never opted to release it to the public at a later date and so only consumers who knew they wanted to gamble on a game from a relatively unknown developer, at the time, had this content. Through a long process of correspondence, I was able to request a copy of the DLC directly from the developer for my analysis. It was important to me that the game be available in its entirety for my research.

The DLC contains a single scene, running about 10 minutes in length that focuses solely on Emily and Matt's relationship. The scene takes place in Chapter 2, after the couple leaves the cabin to retrieve Emily's missing bag. While the scene itself contains no major plot moments or exciting fight encounters, it presents a very important perspective on the couple's relationship. Throughout the regular storyline, the player rarely, if ever, sees Emily be affectionate with Matt. There is seemingly no intimacy with him and the relationship can be construed as a cold and emotionless one, at least on her end, reinforcing her Dragon Lady position of power over him.

Where the DLC shines is that it shows the intimacy that is so sorely lacking in the main plot. Emily is sensitive, flirty, and engaged with Matt, not dismissing him:

       Emily: Matt...?

Matt: Yeah?

Emily: Thanks for helping me find my bag... I know I can be a little high maintenance.

Matt: I think we should start the weekend over. Right now. Clean slate.

Emily: Oh?

Matt: No arguing, no Mike, no Jess. Just you and me enjoying ourselves in all this nature.

Emily: Oh you mean, "Au naturel?"

Matt: Damn straight.

Emily: I can get with that.

Matt: What's so important in the bag, anyways?

Emily: It's just my undies. The lacy ones...!

[If the player as Matt chooses FLIRT]:

Matt: Well hell, we don't need those!

Emily: You don't want me to model them for you?

Matt: I'm just gonna rip 'em off anyways...

Emily: Maybe I want to show them off. Puts me in a generous mood.

Matt: Let's go get 'em.

[If the player as Matt chooses IMPATIENT]:

Matt: Well why didn't you say we were scooping up such precious cargo? Andale, andale!

Emily: Woah, nellie, didn't realize it was so important to you-

Matt: Didn't reali- Uhhh Hellooo? Why do you think I'm even on this silly trip?

Emily: Ohhh-kay. Well, now I know the secret to getting you to do what I want, when I want. Duly noted.

All of this emotion and context brings much-needed depth to a relationship that otherwise seems sterile and confusing. This content depicts a softer, humanized version of Emily, to contrast with her racialized portrayal in the main game content. By extension these conversations also add dimension to the characters individually, helping craft their identities and bring believability to them while offsetting parts of the harmful stereotypes they each embody.

This only serves to further highlight an issue with the design of these characters within the game. Hiding such compelling character and relationship development behind a rather impervious barrier not only limits the consumption of this content, but also places a priority on the relationships of the other characters, all notably white. The single relationship between characters of colour is blocked to a substantial portion of the player base, limiting its visibility to an overly antagonistic portrayal, and yet the other primary characters have their relationships and identities at the forefront of the game without any imposed limitations. By design, the characters of colour are rendered secondary, again, and essentially optional dressing for only the most devoted fan.

Minor(ity) Deaths

Matt's death in the mine is one of the more representationally problematic deaths in the game as Matt is dragged down a tunnel where he is ultimately impaled on a meat hook through his lower jaw and left to hang to death. The Wendigo is later revealed to be responsible for this death (**Table 1.10**) but the action of hanging a character contradicts the Wendigo lore presented later on in the game which stipulates that the Wendigo has a particular method for killing and consuming its prey (emphasis added):

> Stranger: Shh! Quiet! We gotta go. Right now.
>
> Chris: We gotta find Josh - he could still be out there!
>
> Stranger: Ha! **First, the Wendigo, he'll render you immobile.**
> **And then he strips the skin of your entire body,**
> **piece by piece. And then he keeps you alive and**
> **aware and feasts on your organs, one piece at a time**.

Notably, all of the other Wendigo murders in the game match this presented lore; Matt's is the sole death that does not. It is also the only death where the Wendigo utilizes something other

than its own hands to kill a character. The Wendigo supposedly consumes the flesh and soul of its victims so Matt's death also presents a disconnect with the Wendigo's motives as the creature would not abandon a food source.

Considering all of these outliers, and factoring the historical concerns around depicting a black man hanged to death, Matt's death raises questions of the role race has played in the construction of his character's storyline. While this can and should be addressed, for the purpose of this analysis, I am focusing on Matt's chances of survival rather than unpacking the forms of death more fully. I would be remiss to not acknowledge the issue, however, as part of a larger issue surrounding the way characters of colour and historical contexts are engaged.

Matt's other potential death is a scene in which he falls off a cliff after attacking an elk in Chapter 5 (**Table 1.5**). This death is only the second potential main character death in the story, though unlike Jessica's Chapter 4 death, Matt's death is determined entirely by his own actions, as a male character with access to weaponry. Matt's agency through his ability to protect himself categorizes him as a protector rather than the protected, though a weaker protector than his white counterparts. Another important note about this potential death is that it is only one of two potential deaths in the game that is not caused by a Wendigo or other protagonist. The other of these "environmental" deaths belongs to Emily, the only other character of colour. All of the white characters die at the hands of the Wendigo or as collateral damage from the actions of another protagonist. Only Matt and Emily can die to the environment. Along with Ashley, they are also the only characters who can die in more than one way.

As the other character of colour in the game, Emily's deaths can also be indicative of problematic representation. She is the character with the most potential deaths in the game, numbering at 4 various death scenes. As well, she is the only character that can be murdered by another protagonist, Mike (**Table 1.8**). It is this death that stands out as important to consider given its unique nature and the correlation of power between characters.

In Chapter 8, if Emily escapes the mines, she will hide in the basement with most of the remaining protagonists: Mike, Sam, Ashley, and potentially Chris; Matt and Jessica are presumed to be dead or in the mines during this time and Josh has been taken by the Wendigo (**Table 1.8**). During her escape, Emily has a substantially high chance of being bitten by the Wendigo, as the player decisions to avoid the bite require eight unique choices throughout

various chapters in the game and missing even one will still result in her getting bitten. Emily's bite will eventually be noticed by Ashley, leading the group to wonder if Emily will turn into a Wendigo. By this point, the narrative has already explained that humans become Wendigo by cannibalism but nonetheless Mike resumes his protector role (emphasis added):

> Mike: You can't be down here with us.
>
> Emily: What?!
>
> Sam: Mike!
>
> Mike: You gotta go.
>
> Emily: Are you kidding me?!
>
> Mike: **You're putting us *all* in danger**!

Mike then draws his gun on Emily, the woman he dated last year and romanced approximately six hours earlier, in order to get her to leave "voluntarily":

> Sam: Whoa!
>
> Emily: ...Okay...
>
> Sam: Whoa, whoa, whoa, Mike... calm down!
>
> Emily: You're going to shoot me? Mike... *me*?
>
> Mike: This is the safe room, Em!
>
> Emily: Please!
>
> Mike: **It's not safe as long as you're in it... Not for us!**
>
> Emily: No... Don-Don't do this!
>
> Mike: I'm really sorry...

As Emily cowers in a fetal position on the table, he presents her with the choice to leave the safety of the lodge basement voluntarily or he would shoot her. She refuses and the player must choose whether or not to execute Emily at point blank range:

> [If the player as Mike shot Emily]:
>
> Sam: Aah! Holy shit, Mike!
>
> Mike: Oh shit... oh shit... oh shit... Oh shit... what the fuck did
> I just do? Fuck... fuck... fuck, fuck, fuck... Okay, okay,
> it's over... It's over.
>
> Sam: God...

Mike: You guys are safe... you guys are safe. **It's a safe room guys.** I had to do it! I had to do it! You guys are safe... it's over.

Image 8: Emily's corpse neglected in the corner as the white protagonists remain safe.

Emily's death by shooting comes at the hands of a supposed white male protector and creates a challenging dynamic in terms of *Until Dawn*'s relationship with characters of colour. No other character dies directly at the hands of another, and simultaneously, one of the two characters of colour is presented as a big enough threat to the safety of the group, that the main protector character feels justified in shooting her, a woman he would in theory be obliged to protect. While the player can choose to not shoot Emily, the outcomes are relatively the same. Her death has no lasting impact on any of the characters, even the compassionate Sam who leans against the table on which Emily's corpse still cowers in fear (**Image 8**). Emily's disposability and pseudo-monstrous position, due to the Wendigo bite, in this scene encapsulates racialized weakness in the game as she is quickly transformed from a woman in need of protection to the monstrous other that the white, male protector must confront.

Protector Redemption

If Matt survives the fire tower's collapse and avoids the Wendigo, he is not seen until the final chapter of the game, and only then for less than four minutes, when he resumes the role of protector for himself, and potentially for Jessica, if she also survives to that point. Their interaction is awkwardly indicative of his inability to be a protector in that she is in a near catatonic state, barely able to walk or speak. Matt has the option to escort Jessica to safety, helping her hide from the Wendigo, or abandoning her to save himself. His survival is not tied to her, though hers is tied to him. Having failed in his protection of Emily, a higher-functioning woman, the narrative gives Matt a chance to protect someone who poses less of a challenge to his masculinity. In a way, he is only capable of protecting the weakest of the weak. Yet prior to her trauma, Jessica also emasculates Matt in a verbal confrontation, demonstrating she can dominate him as much as Emily can.

Matt fails to meet the hegemonic expectations of a protector in almost every instance, often relying on Emily's help or guidance even as she berates him as a failure. Once again, Matt's existence as a character of color informs a major component of this representation. Matt is the most vulnerable of the men, and arguably the hardest to keep alive even with the least amount of screen time, which engages the often overused stereotype of the disposable black character (Barone, 2015; Brock, 2011) and adheres to the hegemonic convention of limiting the role of protector and protagonist to white males (Williams et al., 2009; Dill et al., 2005).

Race as Monstrosity

As previously mentioned, *Until Dawn* situates its primary conflict as a battle of the protagonists versus a monstrous, mystical other: the Wendigo. The *Until Dawn* Wendigo is drawn from predominantly Cree mythology (Lenhardt, 2016) in reference to the game's location in Alberta, Canada, where Cree is the most populous Indigenous culture. Although recent research suggests that Western appropriation of the Wendigo usually utilizes the myth as a form of reflection on capitalist consumption (DiMarco, 2011) or colonial occupation (Lenhardt, 2016), *Until Dawn* seems to draw on the monstrous lore without such reflexive aspirations:

> From the outset we wanted to subvert the slasher genre and play with different genres in the same game. The Wendigo myth fits well with the game's location.

And it's the source of most shapeshifter legends. (Supermassive Games, October 22, 2015)

The creature served as a situationally suitable nemesis; the Wendigo is a foe of convenience rather than criticism of colonial occupation. Several in-game references are made to Indigeneity, and specifically uniquely Cree representation throughout the game: the Wendigo; the specific artifacts used to decorate the lodge and the mines; the various totem designs. However, in terms of the central conflict, a traditionally stereotypical narrative of white occupation of the mountain and the white saviour versus a monstrous other presents little room for subverting the usual power dynamic.

Throughout the game, several references are made to the ongoing conflict between the Washington family, who purchased the mountain and own the cabin which serves as the main setting for the game, and the Indigenous people who claim the mountain as ancestral land. The main source of knowledge regarding the historical conflict is a grizzled, white stranger, actually referred to only as 'the Stranger' in-game, who appears in the background throughout the storyline until Chapter 8 where he enters the cabin to provide "wisdom" to the young protagonists about the nature of their enemy (emphasis added):

Stranger:	You hold on to your horses. I don't take kindly to you kids coming up here to my mountain-
Mike:	Your mountain? I'm sure the Washingtons would be very surprised to hear that.
Stranger:	Heh heh. Well, this mountain don't belong to me, it's true. **But it don't belong to the Washingtons. This mountain belongs to the Wendigo.**
Chris:	Who?
Sam:	What's he talking about?
Mike:	What the hell's a Wendigo?
Sam:	Let's hear him out.
Mike:	Not like we have a choice.

Chris:	Well how do you kill it?
Stranger:	They don't like fire.

Chris: I don't like fire-

Stranger: They fear it, and it can kill them if you have to... See
            their skin is like... it's like tough armor unless you burn
            it off first.

Chris: That's gross... What are these things like? I mean, are
            they just crazy unpredictable or can you figure out what
            they're gonna do?

Stranger: Well... they adhere to some patterns... **like any
            animal... or human.**

Chris: If these things... Wendigos... are or were human do they
            still have some aspect of humanity in them?

Stranger: Well, they retain certain things.

Chris: I mean, is it really right to kill them? Maybe they can
            be cured or-

Stranger: **They surrender human rights the moment they eat
            one another. There's no cure. There's no
            redemption.**

Chris: I- I mean if they're still human... I don't know if it's
            right to hurt them.

Stranger: When you're staring one in the face... it's them, or you.
            Feel free to take the high route, you won't be on it for
            long.

At the outset this presents the Wendigo as a monstrous creature, once human but no longer and beyond redemption or saving. This creature that is based entirely in Indigenous magic is without humanity (Chapter 8, The Stranger). According to the game's lore, when white miners trapped underground resorted to cannibalism in the 1930s, the Indigenous Wendigo curse was triggered. The game presents these creatures as design to be killed and conquered by the white protectors (Byrd, 2015). In designing the Wendigo's monstrosity as larger than life through the use of Indigenous magic, the construction fulfills the traditional expectation of fear and danger in horror

video games (Perron, 2009). No reference to Indigenous protectors is made, though seemingly all of the original inhabitants of the mountain were driven off either when the sanatorium was constructed at the turn of the century, or later when the Washingtons purchased the entire mountain for themselves. There is no room for the other to be the hero, as the only representation of the other is as the "monster" (McKay and Johnson, 2015).

The Wendigo curse as presented in the game also suggests a weakness of the person who succumbs to it (emphasis added):

Stranger: Now I'm only going to tell you this once. It doesn't matter to me if you believe it or not. I got reasons I want to... Get it off my chest...

Mike: See? I told you! He's guilty as shit! Guilty of something!

Sam: Shh. Shut up Mike!

Stranger: There is a curse. That dwells in these mountains. **Should any man or woman resort to cannibalism in these woods the spirit of the Wendigo shall be unleashed.**

Mike: Oh Crap.

Indigenous lore is not extensively documented outside of Indigenous communities (Lenhardt, 2016; Keene, 2016) and thus it is not readily available for verifying. But researchers of the lore agree that Indigenous convention roots the Wendigo as a cannibalistic creation (Lenhardt, 2016; Thompson, 2015; DiMarco, 2011; Ferrera and Lanoue, 2004). However, the corruption of the person "going Wendigo", to borrow the phrase coined by Margaret Atwood in *Oryx and Crake* (2003), can be differentiated into a few categories including one wherein the victim is without fault and simply bound by circumstances:

In the first instance, the person going Wendigo is not at fault; he [...] is a victim of his environment. In the second and third instances, however, the character has participated in the scenario that has led to the emergence of the Wendigo, often succumbing to this cannibal state because of a weakened and/or corrupted state of mind. (DiMarco, 2011, p. 136)

The various situational birth forms of the Wendigo can be witnessed within *Until Dawn*, where miners in the 1800s and Beth Washington in present day were both trapped underground and

turned to cannibalism for survival. As will be discussed in my separate analysis of mental illness in-game, Josh's transformation into a Wendigo can be read as a direct result of his weakened mental state. In his case, the Wendigo transformation serves as a sign of weakness. The Wendigo's birth from weakness reinforces its position as an anti-protector regardless of the strength one gains after transforming. In essence, becoming a "monstrous other" supersedes any potential for protector status, even if the person was originally in a place of privilege, such as Josh as a white male character.

Race as Decoration

Beyond the monstrous, Indigenous culture serves as decoration and set dressing for the setting and the mechanics of the game. No explanation is given for the source of the Wendigo curse or the background of its existence just as no context or history is given of the Indigenous people who were presumably displaced from the mountain. Indigenous, in the context of the game, serves as a convenient decoration without any substance to justify it, leaving the representation of Indigenous culture vague and shallow. At the outset of Chapter 1, for example, Sam encounters a plaque on a stone, with a stereotypical depiction of an Indigenous man alongside a legend outlining a hierarchy that assigns meaning to colours used in Indigenous culture. For the player, this translates into a collecting mechanic – categorizing the various totems one finds throughout the game. Each colour is associated with a different potential outcome (**Image 9**).

Although Indigenous culture is often documented through community practices rather than conventional Western procedures such as published texts (DiMarco, 2011), research on the interpretations of colours in Cree culture, and the broader North American Indigenous communities, contradicts the information presented in the game's legend. Colours are infused with meanings (Gallegos-Cázares et al., 2014) of both a positive and negative valence while often being associated with the natural elements in which they are most prevalent. A key example of this contradiction would be the association of white with good fortune and luck in-game (**Table 3.2**) whereas in some Indigenous cultures, including the Cree culture depicted in *Until Dawn*, white is also associated with death, cold, and snow (Gallegos-Cázares et al., 2014). In the game, this double meaning would clash with the use of black to represent death. The

colours in-game more accurately reflect Western conventional colour associations. The table below outlines the colour hierarchy as presented in **Image 9**.

Table 3.2: Totem Colour Legend		
Colour	**Label**	**Meaning**
Black	Death	Black butterflies prophesied the dreamer's death
Red	Danger	Red butterflies warned of dangerous events
Brown	Loss	Brown butterflies foretold of tragedy affecting friends
Yellow	Guidance	Yellow butterflies offered visions to help and guide
White	Fortune	White butterflies brought dreams of luck and good fortune

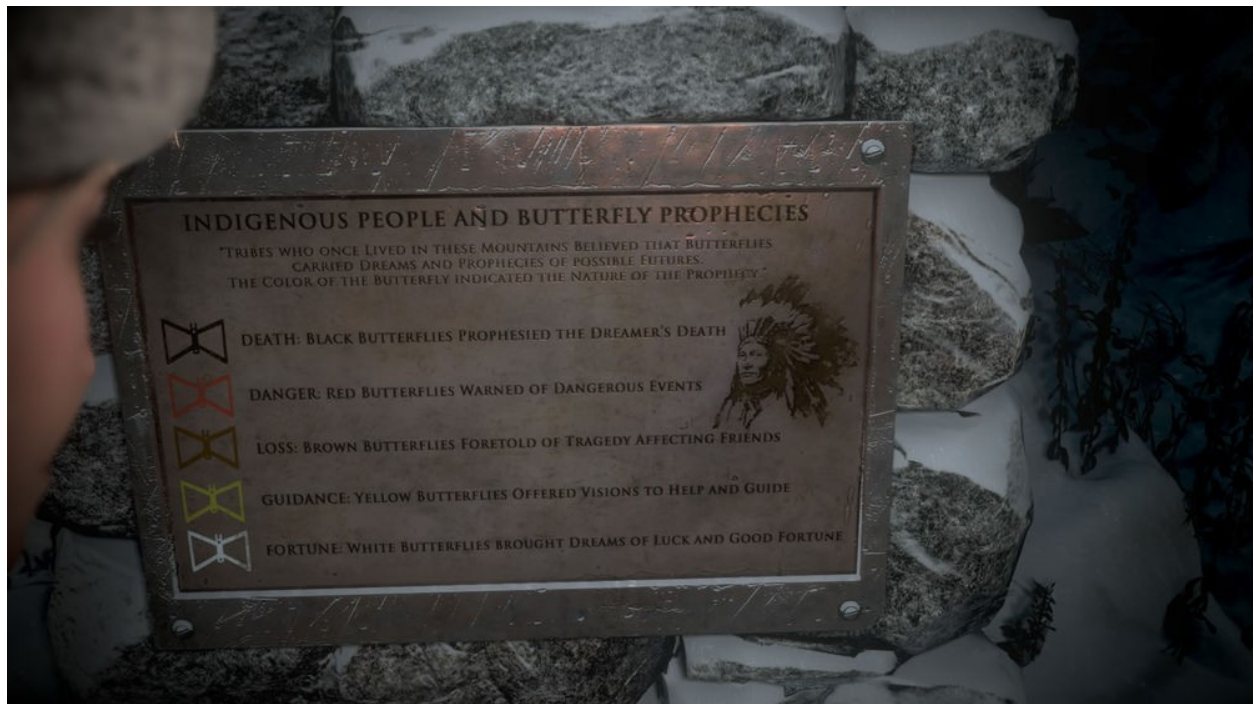**Table 3.2:** Totem colour legend as presented in-game.

Image 9: The legend of totem colours and their meanings.

Another point of consideration, though likely one overlooked by the developers in their development of the in-game totem pseudo-legend is the hierarchy in a totem pole. The conventional interpretation of the top of the totem pole being the most important is in fact a misappropriation by Western culture; in actuality the most important details, such as crests, usually reside at the bottom ("Totem Pole Designs and Meanings" n.d.). When applying that additional lens to the game's colour legend, the placement of the white label at the bottom places it as the most important colour in the totem hierarchy, as the butterfly colours on the legend correspond to the colours of the totem pieces characters may find throughout the game. Regardless of the potential for a racialized reading these meanings, the use of Indigenous culture

to carry Western meaning only further supports the decorative nature of Indigeneity in the game.

The trend of Indigenous decorations persists throughout the game as the only intact building, the Washington Lodge, is revealed to contain almost exclusively Indigenous representative artworks or artifacts. Items with which characters can engage are often based in Western culture, such as Hollywood memorabilia, but the stationary backdrop pieces are almost exclusively rooted in Indigenous culture. From oversized paintings of Indigenous people to relics and animal bone creations, the building is decked out completely in Indigenous culture. Even the separate, and distant, guest cabin comes complete with a Native American Symbols guide whose content explains the mystical nature of the various items adorning the main building. The fact that, besides the totem mechanic, that is the only Indigenous-related item with which characters can actually interact is telling in its subjugation and appropriation of the culture as simply decorative rather than engaged and empowered.

Totems

The totem mechanic is the final aspect of cultural appropriation in *Until Dawn* that will be discussed in this chapter. Totems in the game are optional – for the most part – clues that provide some form of prophecy based on their decorative colour and the aforementioned legend. The player will see a short 2 second video predicting a potential outcome for one of the characters in the game when the character examines the totem piece. Visions can range from potential death scenes, like Matt falling off of a cliff, to hints about clues that could help characters survive, as with a totem showing Sam where to find a clue that will allow Josh to survive. Although the characters are seen interacting with said objects, none make mention of experiencing the prophecies or having the knowledge gained from them; the totemic magic is reserved exclusively for the player's own benefit. The videos presented correlate to the colour markers listed in the butterfly legend (**Image 9**; **Table 3.2**). The descriptions in the colour legend indicate if the totem will provide a vision about the character who found it or another character.

Expanding upon the discourse of Indigenous cultural appropriation, there is a heavy colonialist overtone to the implementation of the totem mechanic. It is revealed in Chapter 8 that the totems found around the mountain are the creations of the Stranger, who is visibly a white man and repeatedly identifies himself as not of an Indigenous background by referring to the

Cree people as 'them' and 'they'. He speaks of having studied their ways and recreated their protective totems to keep the monsters at bay. The character directly admits to appropriating Cree culture to serve his own purpose, as there is little to suggest that totems were conventional tools to combat the Wendigo.

Additionally, the totems reinforce the "mystical native" stereotype ("Reel Injun" 2010). The stereotype often bends towards two extremes, the dangerous opponent or the helpful guide. *Until Dawn* essentially draws on both sides of this spectrum through the monstrous Wendigo and the guiding totems. Notably absent, however, is the presence of any actual Indigenous characters. All agency around the implementation of the totems, for example, falls to the non-Indigenous, predominantly white characters of the game.

Which extends to the final issue with these objects: the appropriation of Indigenous "magic". To be clear, I use these quotations not to question the existence of magic within Indigenous cultures, but instead to question how *Until Dawn* characterizes Indigenous magic. The game falls into an all too common practice of combining the concepts of Western magic fiction and overlays meaningful and reality-based Indigenous beliefs. This is not unique to *Until Dawn*, as Dr. Adrienne Keene writes about American, and in particular Native magic in the *Harry Potter* expanded texts (emphasis added):

> Rowling is completely **re-writing these traditions**. Traditions that come from a particular context, place, understanding, and truth. These things are not "misunderstood wizards". Not by any stretch of the imagination. [...]
>
> So Rowling has said multiple times that it takes a lot more skill to perform magic without a wand (Dumbledore does it at several points in the books), but points out that wands are what basically refines magic. Wands are a European invention, so basically she's demonstrating Eurocentric superiority here–**the introduction of European "technology" helps bring the Native wizards to a new level. AKA colonial narrative 101.** (Keene, 2016)

The problem of 'technology' presented here can be demonstrated by comparing two wizards of equal skill, one Indigenous and one European. Both are evenly matched when wandless, but the European will be more powerful when using a wand through the refinement of magic at the hands of European 'technology', while the magic of the Indigenous wizard remains unrefined. It is through the introduction of white augmentation that refines an Indigenous power and renders the European wizard more adept at controlling Indigenous power than the Indigenous wizard.

Keene is drawing to the forefront an issue that is reiterated in *Until Dawn*: the centering of the white cast as the protagonists who have the innate capability to engage with these Indigenous artifacts, rooted in real world spirituality, with a familiarity that can only be described as impossible. By replacing the Stranger's construction of these Indigenous artifacts for the European wand technology in Keene's example, a mirror occupation and appropriation of Indigenous culture emerges. The knowledge and insight needed to craft these totems are guarded within individual Indigenous communities making the likelihood that any of the non-Indigenous Stranger would even have access to such resources miniscule. That the main characters, also being from non-Indigenous backgrounds, have access to, and ability to use, these items is a marker of colonial appropriation of Indigenous power and a situating of the white main cast as the wielders of power. Even though the game structure allows for the cast to die at various points in the story, the white protagonists are often unable to die throughout the majority of the game, regardless of the amount of falls off of a cliff or ledge; their vulnerability to the land from which they draw on Indigenous power is severely limited to specific scenes. This is less true for the characters of colour who have multiple forms of death throughout various chapters in the game.

As a ludic mechanic of the game, collectibles serve a purpose of providing additional player engagement and interaction (Solarski, 2017) while allowing for narrative progression through information gathering. The totems in *Until Dawn* serve as tools for the player to gather additional information on which to base their future decisions. On the surface, this is a traditional, often used player interaction mechanic. However, the delineation of culture as decoration is reiterated through this mechanic as it is realized through Indigenous culture. This mechanic could have been implemented using any series of collectibles, but the depiction of Indigenous artifacts echoes the decorative nature of the images inside the Washington lodge. Indigeneity in this context serves as the deliverer of knowledge to the player while simultaneously rendering the power of Indigenous magic dependant on the wielding of its knowledge by the player, embodied by non-Indigenous characters in the game. The power of the Indigenous totem is only realized in the hands of the non-Indigenous characters who act upon its delivered wisdom.

Discussion

Until Dawn engages with race in variety of ways, all of them problematic in their own rights. The segregation and stereotyping of Emily and Matt, the latter's emasculation and predetermined failure as a protector, their symbolically problematic deaths, and the actual content-based barrier to access all content related to them highlight the classification of these characters as minorities, either through their value in the game or their seeming contribution to the progress of it. Emily and Matt are constructed along different, harmful stereotypes that preclude them from displaying traits that *Until Dawn* values in its protectors. Race is an important factor in this, more so for Matt than Emily, as she is already considered among those needing protection due to her gender, even though she is seemingly empowered by the combination of two stereotypes, the tough Dragon Lady and the intelligent Asian. Matt's by-design failure as Emily's protector and his easily disposable nature subordinate him in comparison to Mike; Matt is simply unable to measure up to the game's metric of the quintessential protector. Matt embodies subjugated masculinity (Connell, 2005) due to his race, reinforcing a harmful historical racialization correlating to traditional hegemonic power dynamics.

Then there is the aspect of Indigenous culture in the game. To round out this particular section of my analysis, I wanted to focus on why this component is so important to consider although it is seemingly disconnected from the concept of masculinity. Gender and race are constantly intersected as part of our social structures. Lisa Nakamura has written at length about the appropriation and stylization of cultural markers in video games as a way of reinforcing non-white cultures through Western stereotypes (Nakamura, 2009; Nakamura, 2008). How *Until Dawn* deals with the race of not only its characters but the surroundings informs how the game prioritizes traits it deems important for a protector. The repeated conquering and consuming of Indigenous culture, whether through combating Wendigo or co-opting sacred, private objects not meant for outsider consumption, imbues the game with heavy colonial imagery that further serves to highlight the superiority of whiteness. What is important here is to consider the voices and the messages of those on who this pedestal is built; to hear from those who have had to live with their culture being conquered in the real world, only to have it repeatedly re-conquered for entertainment in the digital. With that in mind, I have elected to have the final words of this

chapter be not my own, because as a white woman, my voice is not the important one in this discourse, but instead to amplify the voice of someone much more qualified than I to summarize all that is problematic with this systemic appropriation and the all-too-real harm it does. In reference to Rowling's appropriation of the 'Native-American skin-walker' belief, Keene states:

> So, this is where I'm going to perform what Audra Simpson calls an "ethnographic refusal," [...] I had a long phone call with one of my friends/mentors today, who is Navajo, [...] discussing how to best talk about this in a culturally appropriate way that can help you (the reader, and maybe Rowling) understand the depths to the harm this causes, while not crossing boundaries and taboos of culture. What did I decide? That you don't need to know. It's not for you to know. I am performing a refusal.
>
> What you do need to know is that the belief of these things (beings?) has a deep and powerful place in Navajo understandings of the world. It is connected to many other concepts and many other ceremonial understandings and lifeways. It is not just a scary story, or something to tell kids to get them to behave, it's much deeper than that. [...]
>
> What happens when Rowling pulls this in, is we as Native people are now opened up to a barrage of questions about these beliefs and traditions [...]–but these are not things that need or should be discussed by outsiders. At all. I'm sorry if that seems "unfair," but that's how our cultures survive. (Keene, 2016)

The Sane Protector: Mental Illness

While video games explore mental illness and mental trauma routinely, little literature focuses on how these representations reflect the current societal conceptions, and misconceptions, of mental illness. Most frequently, video games engage in the representation of mental illness in two forms: from a first person perspective to give 'insight' about 'living with' mental illness or with mentally ill characters as either companions or antagonists (Shapiro and Rotter, 2016). First person mentally ill characters rarely serve as standalone characters beyond an educational intent with the majority falling in the latter category as secondary or anti-hero roles.

Moreover, research into mental illness representations, especially in game studies, is woefully minimal. Unlike commonly-discussed forms of marginalization such as race and gender, dialogue around less traditionally acknowledged forms of marginalization remains mostly in the realm of non-academic discourse. In order to adequately address the issues around the stigmatization of mental illness in *Until Dawn*, inclusion of literature from game studies-adjacent fields such as film and television is required, especially given the pervasive use of traditional horror media stereotypes within the game.

In their analysis on the gaps in mental illness research in media, Stout et al. noted that in 1992 there was:

> a fairly consistent image of mental illness in the [television] media. Specifically, the media tended to present severe, psychotic disorders. Persons with mental illness were depicted as being inadequate, unlikable, and dangerous (Signorielli 1989) and as lacking social identity (Wahl and Roth 1982). [...] Even more consistent were depictions of violence and dangerousness associated with media images of mental illness. Signorielli (1989) found that 72 percent of characters with mental illness portrayed in prime-time television dramas were violent. (Stout et al., 2004, p. 565-551)

The authors note that since that initial analysis, there has been some progress in the representation of mental illness in media, though the overall majority still adheres to problematic representation. The overall construction of mental illness in media was extremely negative as "[c]haracters were depicted as physically violent and depicted negatively in the majority of occurrences" (Stout et al, 2004, p. 552-553).

Mental illness in *Until Dawn* is rooted in the stigmatization of mental trauma as weakness (Barry, 2015; Justice, 2014; Stout et al., 2004) and thus is oppositional to being a protector (Artz, 2015). Mental trauma in the game is related to a past *in*ability to perform the role of protector.

Through trauma, the characters of Chris and Josh are depicted as weakened, emasculated and, in Josh's case, are mocked for their failure to fulfill the role of protector to themselves or the characters around them (Dines, 2015). Josh's official diagnosis is unclear, though the game provides notes from Josh's therapist, Dr. A. J. Hill, as an optional clue (**Image 10**). Characters simply refer to Josh as 'insane' or 'off his meds'.
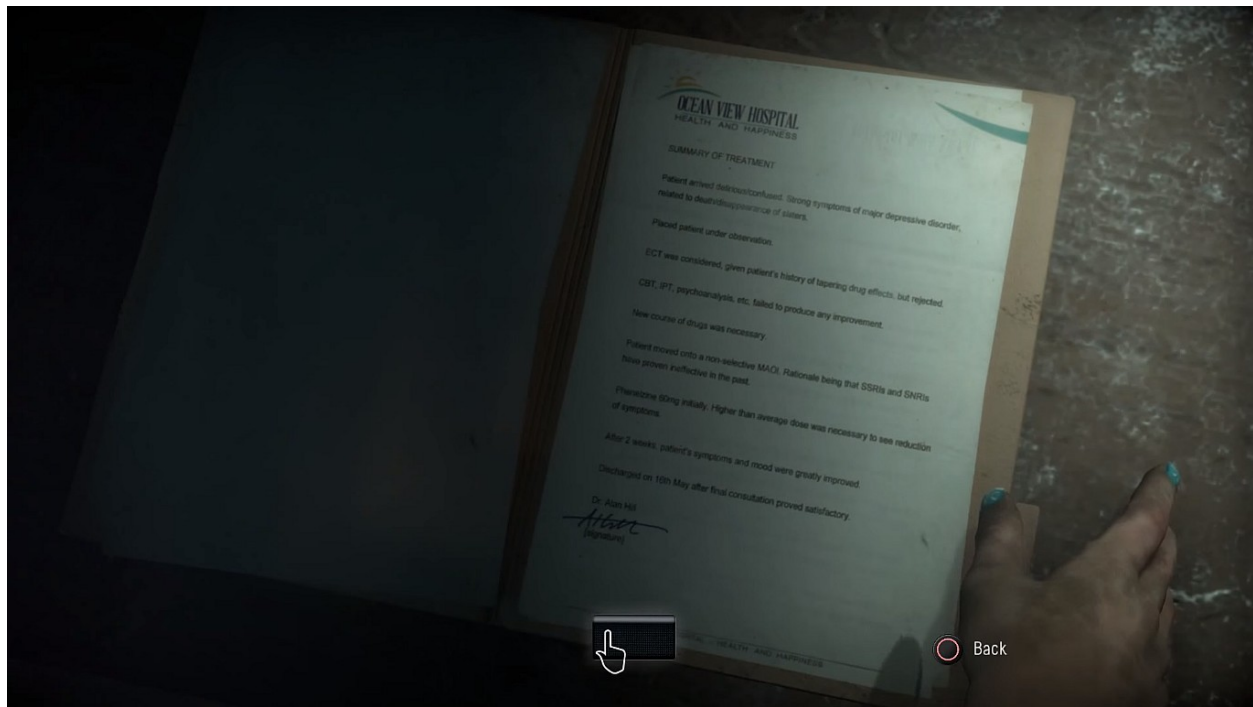

Image 10: Josh's psychological evaluation.

The stigma of mental illness is also directly correlated to underhanded manipulation in the game through the use of perverted traps by Josh as the 'Psycho' (**Table 1.4** and **1.6**) and the machinations of Josh's therapist, Dr. A.J. Hill, whose scenes appear after almost every story chapter. Psychology is used to torment and torture not only the characters of the game but also the player themselves in such a way that the psychological foundation of the game becomes inseparable from perversion and exploitation. This is a recurring theme in the societal conception of mental illness as deviant (Szasz, 2004; Goodwin, 2013; Issac, 2016) and in particular the construction of mental illness in horror media (Benshoff, 1997; Perron, 2012, "Chapter 2"; Pluto, 2015; Alexlayne, 2016).

Mental Illness as Weakness

The stigma of mental illness implies inability, a disadvantage that impairs the sufferer. It is considered a "sign of weakness" (Byrne, 2000, p. 65). Mental illness becomes a limitation or barrier to fulfilling a role or expectation. The prolific representation of impairment by mental trauma as a fault in a character in media reinforces this societal association of mental illness as a weakness (Najarian, 2007). While not all mental trauma leads to mental illness, and similarly not all mental illness is rooted in mental trauma, *Until Dawn* connects the two in such a way that mental illness is created from trauma. This implies an inherent injury component that further stigmatizes mental illness as a weakness (Goodwin, 2013) by crafting the mentally traumatized as victims (Lupack, 1995). Processing mental trauma is unique to individuals and a nuanced approach to its depiction is necessary to properly represent reality (Pluto, 2015; Byrne, 2000; Smith, 1999). Yet approaching mental illness in a nuanced way is rare in entertainment media, especially horror media where the reliance on fear and anxiety often leads to the impairment of a character for the sake of shock value (Goto, 2015; Quintero Johnson and Miller, 2016).

In *Until Dawn*, impairment associated with mental trauma is most notable in the case of Chris. Chris and Ashley have several intimate moments together, as a romantic pairing. Chris is presented with two separate instances to save Ashley's life (**Table 1.4** and **1.6**), though the first is a set-up in which Ashley is unable to die, unbeknownst to the player at the time. The second incident, however, forces Chris to choose between saving himself and saving Ashley. This scenario is once again rigged so neither character truly dies; however the choice determines which of two potential outcomes for Chris' survival at a later point in the storyline (**Table 1.8**) will be triggered.

After Josh is revealed, in Chapter 7, to have arranged both situations while posing as the Psycho, Mike and Chris detain Josh in a shed to protect the female characters from any further harassment. Josh's mentally ill state (**Table 1.7**) requires his segregation from the other characters, echoing the historical context for an asylum (Bogdan et al., 2012), culminating in the need for rescue from the monstrous Wendigo when Josh is kidnapped. Although previously fully capable of self-defense and agency while masquerading as the Psycho, Josh also takes on a feminized, passive role of victim after he reveals that he was the Psycho. The point at which the other characters and the player learn of Josh's weakened mental state is the moment Josh is

stripped of his active masculine role, correlating his victimization with his mental illness and echoing the conventional association of mental illness and weakness.

In Chapter 8, Chris volunteers to rescue Josh but Josh has already been captured. The Stranger loses his life in the attempt after a Wendigo corners Chris and him in the shed where Josh was being isolated. Regardless of player action or inaction, the Stranger is decapitated and Chris is forced to flee to the lodge. Chris' escape requires at least six QTEs where the player must shoot attacking Wendigos. However, Chris' ultimate survivability rests with Ashley, who determines if she will open the cabin door for him, thus saving Chris, based on the player's choice as Chris in Chapter 6 (**Table 1.6**). If the player has Chris shoot himself, Ashley will open the door, otherwise she will stand passively by as Chris is decapitated by the Wendigo. Even if Ashley grants him entrance, Chris' failure to rescue the weaker Josh and his inability to protect the Stranger from fatal injury renders him traumatized and his entire deportment shifts, baring striking similarities with the drastic changes Josh undergoes in the chapter prior.

Although Chris begins the game as a character without any mental instability, through the traumatic events of failing to save multiple characters – Josh in Chapter 4, the Stranger in Chapter 8, and potentially Ashley in Chapter 6 – Chris' mental state is shown deteriorating throughout the game. If Chris survives in Chapter 8, his demeanor changes into that of someone in mental shock, akin to shellshock and PTSD (Ghoshal and Wilkinson, 2017) from those who have survived combat (Hankir and Agius, 2012; Friedrich, 2016): distancing from close relationships, changing from extroverted to introverted and assertive to passive. Chris' mental trauma, though not formally diagnosed within the game, further crystallizes the association of mental trauma with victimization (Lupack, 1995). In being cast as a victim, the game strips away Chris' agency: he loses access to weapons and can no longer be controlled by the player, reducing him to the role of a passive character, a feminized role (Mulvey, 1975; Clover, 1992).

This is a pivotal example of a male character being explicitly weakened due to failure as a protector. While Chris has successfully defended himself on the way to the cabin and still has a loaded weapon with which he could plausibly continue to defend himself, his survival rests in the hands of a woman. His choice to shoot Ashley and save himself earlier on becomes the point at which he failed in his protector duties as he 'injures' a weaker character but not in defence or for righteous reasons (Artz, 2015; Consalvo 2003) but in order to save himself, and for that he is

killed, ironically by the equally monstrous Wendigo, the pivotal anti-hero of the game.

Alternatively, if Chris chose to save Ashley and shoot himself in Chapter 6, Ashley will open the door for Chris, allowing him to successfully escape the monster pursuing him. On the surface this seems as though his past success as a protector resulted in his survival, but looking back to the beginning of the scene where he failed to protect Josh and the Stranger, Chris is still deemed unfit to serve as a protector any longer. Ashley, a woman, is subsequently more empowered than Chris to protect others and Chris becomes a shell of himself moving forward. Chris immediately sheds his weapon and no longer contributes any meaningful form of dialogue or makes any decisions in the game. He trudges behind Ashley, his body language that of someone completely defeated and utterly broken. By comparison, in the tenth and final chapter, Jessica, who suffers extreme physical trauma, is still able to pick up a shovel in defense and possesses more energy than the traumatized Chris. Chris' weakened state renders him less capable than the female character with the least agency in the game, and who has endured much more extreme violence than Chris.

More noticeably Chris is no longer a playable character and, in fact, his future survival is tied exclusively to the decisions the player makes as Ashley. If Ashley chooses a path that will lead to her death in Chapter 9 (**Table 1.9**), Chris will follow without question and will also die. Chris is stripped of his player and character agency, wholly emasculated through the trauma of failing to protect those weaker than himself. The only other male character whose survival relies on the protection of others is Josh, a character similarly emasculated through mental illness and trauma. The game's message is clear – hegemonic masculinity has no room for mental trauma or mental illness.

Josh's storyline likewise exemplifies the correlation between weakness and failing to protect others. Josh's trauma is set during the tutorial prologue to the game where the teens are up at the cabin the year prior. Josh has passed out drunk in the kitchen with Chris when his sisters go missing in the woods and ultimately die. The player as Beth has the opportunity to "wake Josh" in order to get him to come along and help Hannah. If the player chooses this option, Beth learns that her brother is too drunk to be roused before heading out after Hannah alone.

Josh's guilt over his sisters' deaths leads him to seek therapy with Dr. A. J. Hill during

the year between the prologue and the current events of the game. Clues found throughout the story hint at the content of these sessions and the medical treatment Josh underwent (**Image 10**). Dr. A. J. Hill's presence becomes a significant factor as the game progresses but the impact of these interactions goes beyond Josh's role and will be discussed later on in this chapter.

The foundation of Josh's mental illness stemming from his failure as a protector is not only suggested throughout the game but explicitly laid bare in the final chapter where the player is subjected to Josh's psychotic episode wherein the imaginary reanimated corpses of his deceased sisters taunt him with his failures: "Why didn't you save us, Josh? Why did you want us to die?" (Chapter 10, Beth). These two lines are repeated and place the blame squarely on Josh's inability to fulfill his expected role as protector in the prologue. Notably, Josh functions as a seemingly competent male protagonist until his mental illness is revealed in Chapter 8. His ability to also be a hyper-aggressive male antagonist also vanishes at the moment of this reveal.

The impact of mental illness as weakness becomes apparent as Josh reveals himself as the Psycho in Chapter 7. In stripping away his mask, Josh also exposes his damning flaw of mental instability and loses several of the above attributes that had previously afforded him substantial privilege as a masculine character: he is no longer confident, as he is when speaking with Sam while they fix the water heater in Chapter 2; assertive, as he had been previously when advising Chris to make a move on Ashley in Chapter 2; or even coherent, as he had been in all his conversations with the other characters up to that point; he no longer has access to weapons (contrary to his access as the Psycho); and he requires the protection of Mike (**Table 1.10**). Mike, the prototypical protector, pistol-whips Josh immediately following the reveal and Josh is suddenly incapable of defending himself from this violence whereas in every prior conflict Josh as the Psycho had ruled victorious: incapacitating Ashley and Chris in Chapters 3 and 6 (**Tables 1.3** and **1.6**) and capturing Sam in Chapter 5 (**Table 1.5**). In fact, Josh is the only male to be harmed by a protector character, whereas, as previously established, women are routinely the targets of masculine – through rarely protector – violence. Josh loses all forms of weaponry and takes on a similar body language to that of Chris after Ashley saves in him in Chapter 8: a lethargic shuffle devoid of energy and purpose. Gone is the Psycho's aggression, replaced by Josh's weakened passivity.

Eventually Josh's emasculation, as a result of his weakened mental state, becomes

complete as his movements and direction are ruled entirely by the male characters around him. He comes to rely on Mike and Chris to protect him, first from each other and then from the Wendigo. In different iterations of the narrative Mike or Chris will threaten Josh's safety and the other must intervene, protecting Josh from violence and preventing the instigator from enacting harm against a weaker character. Josh's survival rests solely in the hands of Mike at the end of the game, not unlike the role the female characters throughout the game, correlating mental illness as another form of marginalization that prevents a character from being a true protector.

As the game's metric of the white, male protector, Mike, decides that Josh is beyond redemption and Mike abandons the weaker character in order to protect himself when faced with a Wendigo attacking the pair (**Table 1.10**). Josh is subsequently captured and either killed or dragged away to become a Wendigo. The scenario where Josh becomes a Wendigo is the result of the player as Sam finding two specific clues and informing Josh before leaving him in Mike's care. Josh's survival is labeled "a fate worse than death" by Dr. Hill, but ironically Josh's transformation into the Wendigo constitutes "survival" as the game offers an achievement trophy for all four male characters surviving which is only fulfilled if Josh becomes a Wendigo. In taking that classification into account, Sam becomes Josh's saviour, placing Josh as weaker than Sam, feminizing him. Emasculation through mental illness places Josh below Sam akin to Chris' emasculation by Ashley's protection.

The role reversals of Sam & Josh and Ashley & Chris present an interesting consideration in terms of the protector role within the game, as well. Both women are white women and, to an extent, could be considered white saviours in the maternal sense (McIntosh, 2017). Their temporary protector status is more akin to the ethics of care surrounding motherhood (Dubrofsky and Ryalls, 2014; Robertson, 2014) and care-giving for children (Shome, 2015). Chris and Josh's degrees of agency in the final chapters of the game are not far from that traditionally associated with children. Both require comfort and reassurance, in addition to physical protection. Ashley and Sam become Chris and Josh's default mother-figures, however temporary, and afford the men comfort beyond that of the basic protection offered by Mike. Although he and Sam both possess the information about Hannah that can save Josh, Mike never shares it with Josh. Where Mike derides Josh's weakened state, Sam offers compassion and care.

Mental Illness as Monstrous

Media have routinely engaged in the othering of mental illness (Stout et al., 2004), often to the point of equating mental illness with monstrosity (Shapiro and Rotter, 2016; Justice, 2014; Poseck, 2008). Bernard Perron summarizes Noël Carroll's definition of monstrosity in horror media, "Monsters are defined 'as abnormal, as a disturbance of the natural order' (1990, 15), 'as unclean and disgusting' (21)" (Perron, 2012, "Chapter 2" p. 42). This definition places the monstrous as outside of the normal and an unnatural occurrence. Based on Rosemarie Garland Thomson's concept of disability as 'freaky' (Garland Thomson, 1996), Elizabeth Grosz assesses the position of the 'freak' in relation to social perceptions:

> Freaks are those human beings who exist outside and in defiance of the structure of binary oppositions [...]. They occupy the impossible middle ground between the oppositions dividing the human from the animal [...]. Freaks cross the borders that divide the subject from all ambiguities, interconnections, and reciprocal classifications, outside of or beyond the human. They imperil the very definitions we rely on to classify humans, identities, and sexes --- our most fundamental categories of self-definition and boundaries dividing self from otherness. (Grosz, 1996, p. 57)

The 'freak'ing of disability relies on social constructions of normal and abnormal (Bogdan, 1996) and in turn attributes an otherness to the abnormal (Linton, 2006). Linton's analysis of normalcy considers how it forces disabled people to the category of other:

> *Normal* and *abnormal* are convenient but problematic terms used to describe a person or group of people. These terms are often used to distinguish between people with and without disabilities. In various academic disciplines and in common usage, *normal* and *abnormal* assume different meanings. [...] However, as the notion of normal is applied in social science contexts and certainly in general parlance, it implies its obverse—abnormal—and they both become value laden. Often, those who are not deemed normal are devalued and considered a burden or problem. (Linton, 2006, p. 167)

In *Until Dawn*, the monstrous is divided into two entities, the Psycho (Josh) and the Wendigo; these are ultimately combined in Josh's post credit survival scene (**Table 1.10**). The abnormal applies equally to the mythical Wendigo and the perception of mental illness. Both are set up as opposition to the protagonist; neither can be in the protector category due to their inherent abnormality (Artz, 2015).

The traits associated with mental illness in media are: "dangerous/aggressive, simple/childlike, unpredictable, failure-prone/unproductive, asocial, vulnerable,

dangerous/incompetent, untrustworthy, caring/empathic, and social outcast" (Stout et al., 2004, p. 552-553). None of these labels are positive and the ubiquitous association of such descriptors with mental illness perpetuates the stigmatization of such conditions. Several of the labels above are embodied by Chris and Josh to varying degrees, namely dangerousness, failure-prone, asocial, vulnerable, and socially outcast. All of these traits run counter to the prototype of the masculine, the protector, as constructed within the game. In fact, film and television media consistently correlate these anti-social traits with antagonist roles (Artz, 2015). Also, these characteristics do correlate to the definitions of monstrosity and monsters in horror media:

> First, they are threatening. They are dangerous in two ways: (1) physically by being lethal or by their power to maim, and (2) psychologically by destroying one's identity, morally by seeking to destroy moral order, or socially by trying to advance an alternative society[. ...] Second, the monsters are 'impure,' thus disgusting. Generated by an interstitiality, that is, a conflict between two or more standing cultural categories, the creatures transgress distinctions such as inside/outside, living/dead, insect/human, flesh/machine, and animate/inanimate. (Perron, 2012, "Chapter 2" p. 42-43)

Perron's analysis of the monsters in *Silent Hill* is similar to the representation of mental illness in entertainment media (Issac, 2016; Goodwin, 2013). The other, the dangerous, the abnormal are commonalities between both definitions so it is unsurprising that horror media would conflate the negative portrayals of mental illness with defining attributes of the monstrous. In considering that it also equates monstrosity with being disgusting, there is an implied cleanliness to the monster's opposition, the protagonist.

Stereotypes around mental illness are often expressed in popular media through antagonistic roles such as "the Psycho-Killer" (Issac, 2016, p. 5), a problematic term that stigmatizes those suffering from specifically psychopathic tendencies, though often extended to become an umbrella term for various forms of psychological disorders. This conflation is already inherently disturbing as it minimizes the nuances of severity of mental illness as well as erasing the variability with which individual conditions manifest. The equation of mental illness and menace in media, especially modern media, consistently situates mental health as 'normal' and mental illness as dangerous and problematic (Barry, 2015). Christopher Issac summarizes:

> Horror movies alone are hugely reliant on characters like Michael Meyers and Jason Voorhees, whose mental trauma is used as justification for their killing sprees. There is seldom justification for this other than assuming that anyone whose mental process

we do not understand could be capable of anything; therefore, they are terrifying. (Issac, 2016, p. 6)

Stereotypical mental illness, presented as the result of mental trauma, becomes the cause of the threat against which a protector must fight, creating a dichotomy in which the mentally ill may not perform the role of protector. Characters like Michael Meyers and Jason Voorhees are presented as 'psychos' against whom the protector must square off.

In *Until Dawn*, Josh plays the role of 'the Psycho' – a label provided by the in-game captioning, a derogatory pejorative term in itself. The Psycho is positioned as the anti-protector in many ways. He inflicts harm on weaker characters, choosing to almost exclusively target women. The times wherein he targets the men in the group is as part of their roles as protectors of their respective partners by using the female characters as pawns or bait to lure the protectors to his traps. The Psycho's harm is not for self-defense or for survival but instead with the intent to bring tragedy and anxiety to the victim, whereas a key attribute of a protector is the focus of violence directed only at antagonistic characters (King, 2009; Consalvo, 2003).

Image 11: Josh's post-credit 'survival' cinematic.

In some ways the Psycho fulfills the qualifications of a protector, beyond the physical characteristics of being white and male: he is aggressive; he is able to wield weapons and is rarely unarmed; he needs no protection to maneuver through the space; and he is able to control

and direct weaker characters through his traps. Meeting these characteristics, however, only defines him as a less subjugated masculine representation in *Until Dawn* when compared to the proto-typical protector, Mike. The Psycho is not able to be considered a paragon of masculinity due to his inherently antagonistic nature, which is based in his mental illness and subsequent inability to function as a successful protector.

It cannot be overlooked, either, that the only character specifically labeled as mentally ill by the in-game content, such as medical files and references to medication, can only survive as a monstrous other. Josh is written off as so mentally ill that he is unsavable and condemned to Wendigo status. Josh is shown mid-transformation after the credits (**Image 11**) and his half-Wendigo appearance bridges the two types of monsters in *Until Dawn*: the Indigenous other and the mentally ill. Josh becomes the amalgamation of mental and physical monstrosity.

Mental Illness as Abnormal

The final component of mental illness in *Until Dawn* is the representation of the institutions around mental health, namely that of 'the Analyst', Dr. A. J. Hill and the sanatorium space. Each contributes to the warped construction, and further stigmatization, of psychological disorders and the institutions that support them. The extensive use of psychology stereotypes in relation to these two representations situates mental illness treatment as a practice in containing the abnormal (Bogdan et al., 2012), while centering 'normalcy' (Linton, 2006); mental health is depicted as a dichotomy of sane or insane (Barry, 2015) when insanity is not, in fact, a medical condition (Goto, 2015) so much as a legal one:

> In the old days of asylum psychiatry, the connection between mental illness and legal incompetence was unambiguous. If a person was mad enough to merit confinement in a madhouse, then he was manifestly incompetent. Whereas if he was competent, then he was manifestly not a fit subject for incarceration in an insane asylum.
>
> After the second world war, [...a] new class of mental patients thus came into being—persons who sought psychiatric help, paid for the services they received, and were regarded as legally competent. [...] This development [...] contributed to the false belief that legal competence is a psychiatric issue, and confused the legal relations between psychiatrist and mental patient. [W]e lack objective tests for both mental illness and mental (legal) competence. Competence and incompetence—like innocence and guilt—are attributions, not attributes, judgments, not facts. That is why traditionally they are rendered by lay juries, not

professional experts. [...]The conflation of mental illness and legal incompetence entangles both patients and psychiatrists in Alice in Wonderlandish encounters. (Szasz, 2004, p. 79)

The use of the dichotomy of sanity and insanity, commingling medico-legal terminology (Gaughwin, 2005), emphasizes the division of mental illness from normalcy (Harpin, 2013; Rubin, 2006), an important segregation reinforcing the stigmatization of psychological conditions. This separation is not unlike the conventional discourse around criminality and rehabilitation. Looking beyond the associations with aggression and danger, the discourses around the institutions designed to rehabilitate the mentally ill and criminals are uncannily similar. The concepts of ability to integrate with society and of segregation for the rehabilitation process are present in both institutions even if the implementation of their representations is different. In both cases, the residents of each institution are portrayed as the monstrous threat to society (Dines, 2015; Goodwin, 2013). To be mentally ill is to be abnormal and Artz notes that in comparing heroes and villains, villains "almost exclusively exhibit antisocial behavior and violence" (Artz, 2015, p. 452), situating the mentally ill as a category external to societal normalcy and aligned with villainy.

In the case of *Until Dawn*, these rehabilitation mechanisms are conceptualized in the form of Josh's psychologist, Dr. A. J. Hill, and the derelict sanatorium in which Mike spends a large portion of time hunting the monstrous Wendigo. Both Dr. Hill and the sanatorium embody common stereotypes within horror media: the manipulative doctor and the insane asylum. As with most stereotypes, these contribute to problematic representations lacking the nuance to accurately reflect the diverse reality of mental illness and its treatments.

Until Josh's identity as the Psycho is revealed in Chapter 7, his therapy sessions with Dr. Hill are shown in first person perspective and Dr. Hill is directly addressing the player, breaking the fourth wall by referencing the game that is being played. Although the doctor's presence is seemingly due to Josh's mental illness, Dr. Hill's role in *Until Dawn* is to engage the player in a twisted fictional form of exposure therapy. Exposure therapy is a form of cognitive behaviour therapy that focuses on progressive exposure to a patient's anxiety triggers with the intent of normalizing the exposures and minimizing or negating the induction of anxiety (Beidel et al., 2017). In the game, Dr. Hill's role perverts that practice by taking the fears that the player expresses through the sessions at the end of each chapter and incorporating them into the

gameplay within future chapters or during subsequent therapy sessions. The exposure is rarely progressive, leaning towards shocks and jump scares. If the player, for example, indicates a fear of gore, Dr. Hill's office will have a gored rabbit on the desk in every session following (**Image 12**). The dialogue is even meant to minimize or mock the very fears that the player highlights: "Clowns... spiders... and needles. That's some combination. It sounds like a fun Friday night." (Chapter 1, Dr. Hill).

Image 12: Spiders and dissected animals decorate Dr. Hill's desk.

Dr. Hill's mockery and word-twisting goes beyond the visuals to express judgment over the player's values and decisions. In Chapter 2, Dr. Hill questions the player about which traits they value most in a person, asking the player to rank the following: charity, honesty, and loyalty. When asked if a player values honesty or loyalty, if the player chooses honesty, Dr. Hill says, "So you would rather tell the truth, even if it meant a negative outcome for a friend?" (Chapter 2, Dr. Hill). Dr. Hill's judgments persist throughout the sessions, deriding the player for being too lenient or rough with a character based on gameplay decisions within the chapters. His words judge the choices players make, calling into question their morals and values, and since the player is playing Josh (unknowingly) during these interactions, Dr. Hill's judgment extends to Josh's actions, reinforcing his patient's lack of morality within the context of the game.
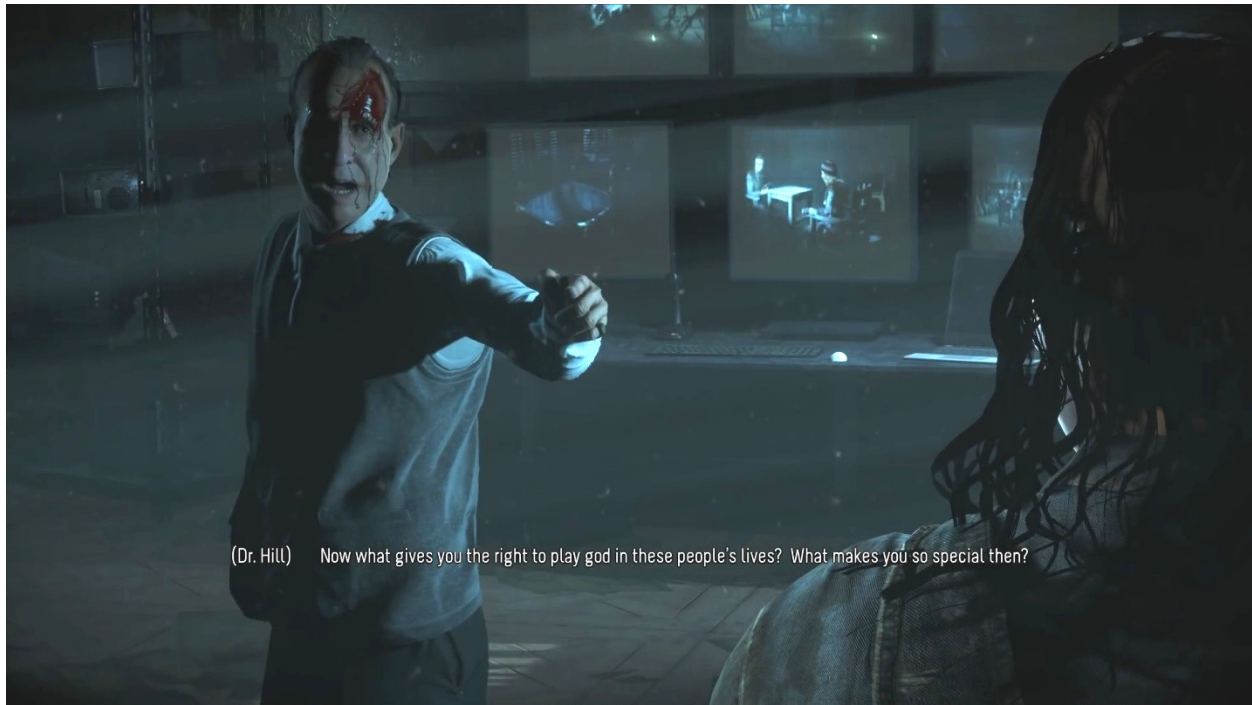
Image 13: Dr. Hill berating the Psycho.

At the end of Chapter 6, the sessions shift to third person perspective (**Image 13**) and Dr. Hill no longer addresses the player directly but instead focuses his dialogue first to the Psycho, in Chapter 7, and then to Josh, Chapters 8 and 10. During his single session with the Psycho, prior to Josh's identity reveal in Chapter 7, Dr. Hill is judgmental and hostile towards the Psycho :

> Dr. Hill: You have gone too far now. Don't you see? Huh?! Don't
> you see that this... torture porn has gone too far? Now
> what gives you the right to play God, in these people's
> lives? What makes you so special then? You're sick!
> You're a sick fuck! Now what the hell have you done to
> them? Huh? What the hell have you done to them, you
> psychopath!? Psychopath!

Dr. Hill berates the Psycho for his actions, challenging his choices and positioning the Psycho as the anti-protector, all the while tying it into the Psycho's mental illness, even going so far as to use problematic labels and stigmatizing language.

Once Josh is revealed as the Psycho, Dr. Hill's judgment is no less forgiving, confirming that the initial disdain in earlier chapters is intended for Josh, at least partially:

Dr. Hill: Oh Joshua. You should have listened to me. Because of your choices, people have died. I don't know which is worse… actively triggering events that lead to someone's death… or passively allowing tragedy to occur because you couldn't lift a god damned finger to help someone else…

Remember last year? Huh? How you left your poor sisters to die? You did nothing to help them! Paralyzed by your own self-centered fear while a real threat was closing in. No it's all about you, Josh! It's always all about you.

Your game has gone terribly wrong and your friends, like your sisters, have deserted you. You're all alone. Can you feel how cold your loneliness has become? Huh?"

Dr. Hill focuses in on Josh's failures as a protector, his inability to save his sisters and his friends, and challenges Josh's masculinity by rooting his failures in paralyzing fear. Even before the mental illness manifested, Josh's fear prevented him from being strong, leading to the inevitable circumstances he faces.

The sanatorium is an equally problematic, though arguably more distanced, condemnation of mental illness. Mike first encounters the sanatorium in Chapter 4 while attempting to rescue Jessica. It is believed to be a refuge for the antagonist who has been harassing Josh's family and who the sheriff wants to question in the disappearance of Josh's sisters. In subsequent chapters, Mike spends a large portion of time exploring the abandoned structure, uncovering clues to its purpose before it was abandoned. These clues lead him to uncover that the sanatorium housed miners who were injured in a mining accident several decades ago. The miners were the first to transform into Wendigo. The sanatorium's medical staff studied the miners extensively, to the point of restraining and experimenting on them

throughout and after their transition. By the time Mike arrives, the staff is long dead but their test subjects remain alive, having claimed the building as their own. This sets up the conflict of Mike versus the residents of the sanatorium, a not-so-different variant on the abandoned asylum stereotype. As Nixon defines it:

> Though the settings and contexts differ from game to game, the asylum, particularly the abandoned and decrepit asylum complete with minimal lighting, is a popular and frequently used setting for these thrillers. And, more often than not, the villains or enemies are the 'crazy' or 'insane' inhabitants of the asylum, out to do the player harm out of rage and an uncontrollable violence. (Nixon, 2013)

Although a sanatorium would often be the location for the treatment of chronic physical ailments and an asylum would provide treatment for the mentally ill (Bogdan et al., 2012), with early medicine's minimal understanding of mental illness, it was not uncommon for a sanatorium to also house mental illness patients (Harpin, 2013). With that understanding, the sanatorium in *Until Dawn* is congruent with the stereotypical definition of the abandoned asylum, including the association with 'insane inhabitants'. As those inhabitants are in actuality the miners transformed into Wendigos, the use of this stereotype further connects mental illness with monstrosity and situates it clearly in the realm of the abnormal.

Discussion

Through the various depictions of mental illness and impairment in *Until Dawn*, a portrait of stigmatization becomes abundantly clear. Josh's storyline is the strongest example of the direct correlation between mental illness and emasculation within the presentation of masculinity in the game. Josh's alter-ego, the Psycho, meets several requirements for a masculine character in the game, more so than some of the other seemingly 'good' male protagonists, and yet Josh's Psycho persona is limited by the underlying issue of his mental illness. His antagonistic actions are blamed on his mental state, situating him as the anti-hero as he performs violence on weaker targets (King, 2009) and engages in anti-social behaviours (Artz, 2015). This theory is only further confirmed by the rapid emasculation of Josh once the game reveals his mental state. The emasculation is less extreme in the case of Chris, but his weakened state is still rooted in the mental trauma of his failure as a protector. The white mother-figure saviours of Sam and Ashley

reinforce the subjugation of Josh and Chris' masculinities, indicating how some masculinities can be subordinated to other masculinities and even some portrayals of femininity if the right conditions are met (Connell, 2005). The feminization and victimization of mental trauma and mental illness marginalizes these attributes and codes them as not belonging to the idealized hegemonic masculine archetype.

The stigmatization of mental illness through the supposed authority figure of Dr. Hill comes from his progressively negative and abusive interactions with the player and Josh throughout the game. The associations Dr. Hill makes with being a "sick fuck" and failing to save Hannah and Beth seemingly position being a man with mental illness as being an anti-protector, negating any similarities with the protector stereotype in lieu of the emasculating impact of mental illness. Dr. Hill's accusations, paired with the problematic references to 'insane asylums', leaves mental illness mired in a stigma that limits and prevents characters from being 'normal' or capable by any definition let alone the hyper-masculine role of protector as constructed in the game. Insanity being a legal term rather than a medical one further conflates and correlates mental illness with criminality and its use as an umbrella term for all mental illness removes the individualized nature of those with these conditions creating a broad stroke category regardless of actual potential for harm or danger. The underlying messages of these stereotypes conclude that to be mentally ill is to be relegated to the monstrous or the helpless, but never to being the hero.

Conclusion

In many ways *Until Dawn* is a conventional example of the horror video game genre with its extensive use of traditional stereotypes and plot devices. Even though it presents a visually stunning experience, the essence of the underlying power dynamics leave a lot to be desired in terms of representation.

At the outset of this thesis, I proposed an intersectional content analysis of the game in order to unpack its representation of hegemonic masculinity. I sought to consider the impact of not only gender, but also race and mental illness on the game's conceptualization of masculinity, as embodied by the white, male, able-bodied protector archetype.

Beginning with gender, I analyzed the conventional gender roles as presented in the game through a focused analysis on dialogue, visual representation, weaponry, and combat. I paid particular attention to the prototypical hegemonic couple of Mike and Jessica, each a seeming on-the-nose construction of traditional gender roles: Mike the confident, powerful, capable protector, and Jessica, the quintessential sexualized blonde damsel in distress. With these hegemonic representations de-constructed, I moved onto other forms of marginalization.

My second chapter tackled the problematic presentations of race in *Until Dawn* with a spotlight on the only two characters of colour: Matt and Emily. I studied their relationship, especially Matt's emasculation at the hands of Emily and its impact on his capability as a protector, and I considered the impact of their representation as each relates to the white characters. Emily's death at the hands of Mike, the only protagonist-on-protagonist murder in the game, raised serious questions about the position of racialized bodies in relation to the central 'hero' character.

This chapter also explored the appropriation of Indigenous culture as both a monstrous other and a decorative overlay to the game. Through the inclusion of the Wendigo curse, rooted in Cree spiritual culture, the game references Indigeneity as a form of monstrosity to be defeated by the white saviour. The lack of any Indigenous characters and the only representations being artistic works in the house of a white family, marginalizes any non-monstrous Indigenous people to decoration for the story of the white cast's narratives. The overall antagonistic positioning and shallow utilization of Indigenous culture reinforces the concept of being lesser than the central, white characters, and limiting the protector role to only a white character.

Finally, in my third chapter, I examined the intersection of masculinity and mental illness. As a horror video game, *Until Dawn* draws on several problematic mental illness stereotypes that perpetuate the stigmatization of mental illness as weak, monstrous, and abnormal. Akin to the depiction of race, characters suffering from mental illness are rendered emasculated and enfeebled, often relying on stereotypically weak characters (women) to provide for and protect them, not unlike mother-figures. This is the case with Chris and Josh's weakened states wherein they require the assistance of Ashley and Sam, respectively, in order to survive.

The stereotypical imaginings of the insane asylum, the Psycho-Killer, and disturbing psychotherapy all contribute to the monstrous ideal of mental illness. Each in their own way present problematic constructions around mental illness and treatment; whether it is positioning a mentally ill individual as a 'psycho' or actually populating an abandoned sanatorium with literal monsters, the game consistently associated mental illness as a form of monstrous abnormality that would always be in opposition or seeking help from the titular protector characters.

Throughout this analysis, I sought to tie together an understanding of the nuances that go into, and more importantly do not fit into, the construction of a protector. With each intersection, a new piece of the protector archetype was defined, solidifying the conception of the protector paragon as a male who is both white and mentally well.

Research Framework and Analysis

My research sought to assess how hegemonic masculinity is constructed in horror video games using *Until Dawn* as a case study. I interrogated the impact of the marginalization of gender, race, culture, and mental health on the game's constructed masculinity spectrum.

Connell's conceptualizations of fluid masculinities (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) and gender hierarchies (Connell, 2005) on a spectrum in relation to each other (Connell, 2002), formulate the foundation for understanding hegemonic masculinity; not as a static list of attributes, but an idealized construction that few if any 'real' men can actually fit into. Common attributes that persist through the consideration of hegemonic masculinity include physical dominance and heterosexuality in addition to a gendered hierarchy in relation to women. With an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 1991), this thesis measures the impact of marginalized traits against the established hegemonic metric. In order to apply this method framework to *Until*

Dawn, I employed a comprehensive content analysis of data gathered from the game itself, as well as insights from a couple of the voice actors. Content analysis afforded me the opportunity to consider the implications of culture and societal conventions (Fürsich, 2009) on the lens through which the in-game material is coded as masculine and to what degree individual character masculinities are recognized in the game. After several data-gathering playthroughs, I possessed enough familiarity with the in-game content to unpack *Until Dawn*'s construction of hegemonic masculinity and its relationship with the aforementioned marginalized traits.

At the outset, *Until Dawn* builds a fairly conventional narrative that prioritizes the male characters as the active participants (Mulvey, 1975) while normalizing the passivity of its female characters, through the disproportionate active and passive screen times afforded to each character. Female bodies are fetishized and rendered erotic through the (male) player gaze (Mulvey, 1975).

As the story unfolds, women are routinely victimized allowing for some of the male characters to rise up as traditional protector archetypes. The exception to this protector progression is the role of Matt, who remains a subjugated male character thanks to problematic racialized stereotypes that positions him as subservient to his 'Dragon Lady' girlfriend, Emily. Matt's racialized portrayal as the brawny African-American male links his race with a subjugated masculinity, as he is shown to be weaker in relation to the other male characters, all of whom present as white in-game.

In tandem with the marginalization of gender and race, mental health is constructed as a form of weakness and abnormality. When compared to the digital embodiment of the game's idealized hegemonic male, Mike, characters that suffer from mental illness, or receive mental trauma during the game, take on feminized roles, situating themselves as weaker than even female characters in the game.

Although Connell and Messerschmidt identify that hegemonic masculinity is normative but not normal (2005), they maintain that the pressure of the metric is at play in the daily life of males, regardless of where they register in relation to the ideal. It is sufficient that there be an ideal against which individual masculinities may be assessed. In *Until Dawn*, the idealized hegemonic masculine character is Mike, and he embodies a trifecta of power and privilege: white, male, and able, while also reinforcing the conventional understanding of hegemonic

masculinity around physical prowess and heterosexuality (Trujillo, 1991). In comparison to this metric, characters that are lacking one or more of these qualities are relegated to feminized or subjugated positions of power.

Contextualizing Within the Literature

My research situates itself in a particular area of game studies, in the realm of horror video games. Perron, as a pivotal horror games researcher, informs the context of understanding the construction of horror in video games (Perron, 2009) while Kirkland lays the foundation for exploring the intersection of horror video games and masculinity (2009, "Masculinity"). *Until Dawn* as a case study for hegemonic masculinity in horror video games perpetuates not only the conventional interpretation of the term but does so through common horror stereotypes.

In the broader field of game studies, substantial research into gendered representations exists (Downs and Smith, 2009; Sundén and Sveningsson, 2012; Shaw, 2015), that considers a breadth of social issues such as sexualization (Downs and Smith, 2009), diversity representation (Shaw, 2015), marginalization (Sundén and Sveningsson, 2012), and even forms of subversion (Chess and Shaw, 2015). Generally, however, the focus has been on non-male avatars, particularly female characters and their treatment through the male gaze (Downs and Smith, 2009). Some preliminary exploration into masculinity in games has been conducted (Kirkland, 2009, "Masculinity"; Trinh, 2013) but the disparity of male character research to female character research is vastly skewed still (Williams et al., 2009).

In bringing an intersectional analysis of hegemonic masculinity, my research speaks to a couple of under-researched areas mentioned above: the construction of masculinity in video games, horror games in particular, and the relationship between marginalized traits and hegemonic masculinity. Through my consideration of marginalization and power dynamics, this research also contributes to the areas of research centred around the intersections of gender with race and mental illness.

Limitations and Future Work

As with any academic work, there are inevitable limitations to my thesis, most notably in the lack of participation from more of the voice actors and the developer, Supermassive Games.

Ideally, I would have heard from all of the voice actors in order to allow for equal representation of each character. While this would not necessarily impact the reception of the content for the purpose of content analysis, the perspective of those actively engaged with creating the content has the potential to inform the analysis of how the content choices were made. It would have been beneficial, as well, to ask the developers for their reasoning in selecting the location, Alberta, for their game when neither the actors nor the developer are located in Canada. Had Supermassive Games provided an interview, for example, I may have been able to ascertain which components of the appropriation of Indigenous culture were deliberate and which were coincidental to the need for collectible interactivity. Understanding the process that led to the problematic use of Indigenous culture as a backdrop might have afforded additional insight into how this game came to engage, and celebrate, these tropes rather than subvert them.

A final limitation also corresponds to where this work situates itself and where it could direct future research. There is a fundamental gap in game studies research surrounding mental illness and its incarnations in video games. This work relied heavily on fields of research external to game studies in order to critically consider *Until Dawn*'s use of mental illness but ideally the literature would have included more research on mental illness in video games. The intersectional nature of the research allows it to speak to gender studies and critical race theory but where both of those areas are permeated with discourse on representation and reinforced marginalization, the lack of in-depth mental illness analysis is a disservice to the understanding of intersectionality at a time when mental illness is at the forefront of many societal discourses. It is my hope that this thesis can contribute, even just slightly, to filling that gap in the hopes that more research will follow.

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