

**You Could Have Saved Her: Representations of Violence Against Women in
Choice-based Games**

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Abstract for Masters

You Could Have Saved Her: Representations of Violence Against Women in Choice-based Games

Tamyres Lucas Manhaes de Souza

In this thesis, I investigate the research-question: How is violence against women being represented in choice-based games? This general research-question unfolds and more specific ones that tackle the different levels I analyze this subject. How do players experience these events? What role does player's agency play in this context? When examining the overlapping of game elements, I also inquire: what are the messages these representations are sending out to their target audiences, and do they reinforce hegemonic discourses on violence against women? To answer those questions, I do a textual analysis of choice-making games through case studies of the titles *Detroit: Become Human* (2018), *Beyond: Two Souls* (2013), *The Wolf Among Us* (2013). My goal with this study is to inquire how much these representations contrast or resemble those of news media. The findings of this research contribute to the discussion about the representations of violence against women in mass media.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	vi
List of Tables	ix
Introduction.....	1
Literature on Violence Against Women	5
Theoretical Perspective	9
Choice-Based Games	13
Methodology	17
Chapter 1: The Damsel and The Whore in <i>The Wolf Among Us</i>	25
Chapter 2: Powerful women rendered powerless in <i>Beyond: Two Souls</i>	49
Chapter 3: How could you let them die? VAW in <i>Detroit: Become Human</i>	73
Conclusion	98
Appendices.....	106
References:.....	117

List of Figures

Figure 1: Decision board in games developed by TellTale Games	14
Figure 2: Decision board in Beyond: Two Souls, developed by Quantic Dreams	15
Figure 3: Relationship status update in games developed by TellTale Games.....	15
Figure 4: Relationship status update in games developed by Quantic Dream.....	16
Figure 5: First encounter with Lily when she was glamourised as Snow White.....	28
Figure 6: In the examination room, the spell wears off, revealing Lily's true identity as a troll .	28
Figure 7: When examining Lily's body, Bigby finds marks of drug use in her legs.....	29
Figure 8: Beauty asks Bigby the reason why Lily was killed.....	31
Figure 9: In the first encounter with Faith, Bigby protects her from The Woodsman.	32
Figure 10: Faith is the first victim Bigby finds.....	33
Figure 11: Bigby learns Faith used to be a princess who was being molested by her own father	33
Figure 12: Snow learns Crane paid to have sex with Lily glamourised as Snow White.....	34
Figure 13: Bigby can choose between freeing the sex workers or killing Vivian	36
Figure 14: Entities are powerful and dangerous creatures from the Infraworld	49
Figure 15. Aiden and Jodie can combine their powers to heal wounds.....	50
Figure 16: Aiden and Jodie can combine their powers to channel objects, learning their history	50
Figure 17: Aiden's appearance as a purple glowing ball.....	51
Figure 18. Aiden's glowing purple cord connecting him to Jodie	51
Figure 19: Boy choking Jodie for no clear reason. Aiden attacks him to protect Jodie	53
Figure 20: Phillip slaps Jodie when Aiden breaks the rules	53
Figure 22: Aiden tries to kill Phillip for abandoning Jodie	54
Figure 21. Jodie is abandoned by her foster parents.....	54

Figure 23: Jodie has a romantic moment with a boy at the party	56
Figure 24: Jodie is bullied by teenagers at the party and locked in a closet	56
Figure 25: The game displays options shaking when Jodie is being sexually assaulted	57
Figure 26: Jodie has an emotional breakdown when trying to have sex	58
Figure 27: Jodie kisses Jay.....	58
Figure 28. When staying alive, Jodie can choose how to enjoy her life.....	59
Figure 29: Jodie only has the option "obey" when being "invited" to join the CIA.....	62
Figure 30: Jodie, as a baby, is taken away from Norah, her biological mother.....	63
Figure 31. At the end, Jodie must choose between "Beyond" and "Life"	64
Figure 32: When shutting down the machine, entities make Jodie relive her traumas.....	65
Figure 33: The user interface shows a list of urgent tasks	75
Figure 34: Flowchart shows narrative branches that were completed.....	75
Figure 35: Flowchart calculates the percentage of completion based on the unlocked paths	75
Figure 36: Interface shows relationship status update to show the consequences.....	76
Figure 37: Connor is an android detective who investigate Deviant cases and hunt them down.	77
Figure 38: Connor can identify substances by licking them.....	77
Figure 39. Markus has the power to convert androids to deviants	78
Figure 40: Markus calculates the successfulness of possible paths.....	79
Figure 41: Kara is a housemaid android owned by Todd Williams	80
Figure 42: Todd is a middle-aged overweight man who is violent and abusive.....	80
Figure 43. Alice is Todd's daughter. Later is revealed that she is an android	81
Figure 44. Kara finds Todd's antidepressant pills.....	81
Figure 45: Alice's drawings reveals that Kara wasn't destroyed by a car, but by Todd	82
Figure 46. Interface displays a wall to represent Kara's programming.....	84
Figure 48: Kara can die in many ways in this chapter.....	85

Figure 47: If Kara cannot stop Todd, he kills Alice	85
Figure 49: Zlatko captures deviants, resets their system, and sells them	87
Figure 50: If Kara chooses abandons Alice, players will get her bad ending.....	88
Figure 51: Border agent watches TV to decide Kara's fate.....	89
Figure 52: Kara and Alice survive after crossing the river	90
Figure 53: Alice, with her skin deactivated, is killed in the disassembly machine with Kara	90
Figure 54: Faith and Lily are victims of femicide in The Wolf Among Us	99
Figure 55: Jodie is a victim of violence against women several times throughout her life.....	99
Figure 56: In Davig Cage's games, white women are the "universal" sympathetic victim.....	100
Figure 57. The Crooked Man, Earl, Todd, and Zlatko are presented as abomination.....	102

List of Tables

Table 1: Decision board of Episode 1 of The Wolf Among Us.....	39
Table 2: Decision board of Episode 2 of The Wolf Among Us.....	40
Table 3: Decision board of Episode 3 of The Wolf Among Us.....	42
Table 4: Decision board of Episode 4 of The Wolf Among Us.....	43
Table 5: Decision board of Episode 5 in The Wolf Among Us.....	44
Table 6: Trophies available when playing only as Jodie in Beyond: Two Souls	66
Table 7: All available endings in Beyond: Two Souls	67
Table 8: Trophies available when playing as Aiden in Beyond: Two Souls	70
Table 9: All decisions in Episode 1 and 2 of The Wolf Among Us	106
Table 10: All decisions in Episode 3 of The Wolf Among Us	107
Table 11: All decisions in Episode 4 of The Wolf Among Us	108
Table 12: All decisions in Episode 5 of The Wolf Among Us	108
Table 13: Golden and Platinum Trophies in Beyond: Two Souls	109
Table 14: Silver Trophies in Beyond: Two Souls.....	109
Table 15: Bronze Trophies in Beyond: Two Souls.....	110
Table 16: Kara’s bad endings in Detroit: Become Human	112
Table 17: Kara’s good endings in Detroit: Become Human.....	113
Table 18: Actions that highly improve Public Opinion in Detroit: Become Human.....	113
Table 19: Actions that slightly improve Public Opinion in Detroit: Become Human.....	114
Table 20: Actions that slightly worsen Public Opinion in Detroit: Become Human.....	114
Table 21: Actions that heavily worsen Public Opinion in Detroit: Become Human.....	115

Introduction

Media study researchers have proven the perpetuation of hegemonic discourses about violence against women in mass media forms such as news, cinema and advertisements, where there's a dichotomy that separates female victims between the deserving and the undeserving of violence, and a focus on male abusers as the subjects of the narrative while the female becomes the object (Meyers, 1997; Jiwani and Young, 2006; Henricksen, 2018).

The representation of violence against women in video games has been studied by a few authors. However, most of the studies look at the effects of exposure to games that portray violence against women, striving to define how video games might impact a player's behavior (Beck, Boys, Rose and Beck, 2012; Breyer, Kowert, Festl and Quandt, 2015; Dill, Brown and Collins, 2008; Dill, 2009). Although Gutiérrez (2014) as well as Martinez and Manolovitz (2010) do a brief overview of controversial games such as *Custer's Revenge* (1982) and *GTA: San Andreas* (2004), they don't analyze deeply how the different elements of the game, such as character design, narrative and the mechanics, are combined to portray violence against women and to examine whether they reinforce hegemonic discourses. There's a lack of studies that focus on the depiction of violence against women in video games considering hegemonic frames. Early studies on gender portrayals in video games (Dietz, 1998) provide some insights into how those dichotomies identified in other mass medias might be at play in video games.

Most of the studies mentioned previously are more focused on identifying whether games portray violence against women and how it might influence player behavior. I am not interested in looking at how video games influence players' behavior because there are journalistic and political discourses, supported by research with flawed methodologies, that aim to blame violent behavior on video games used by public figures as a way to dodge criticism over social inequalities (Khaled Jr., 2018).

Here, I propose to investigate the narratives about violence against women in light of the dichotomies identified previously in other mass media. The analysis of the representations of this theme in digital games becomes relevant because there is a lack of studies that analyze the representation of violence against women considering game elements such as agency, narrative, mechanics and character design. This investigation allows us to understand the role of the player's agency in those stories. By examining the range of approaches in video games, I look at the patterns that are being reproduced in those narratives. I believe this research might contribute to the discussion on how violence against women is being framed in this medium.

In this thesis, I investigate the major research-question "how is violence against women being represented in video games?" in different levels. In the game design level, I look at how these events are built considering what choices were implemented to have impact in the story. In the discourse level, I look at whether these design choices reproduce hegemonic discourses on violence against women and what message they are sending out to these games targeted audiences. To summarize, my specific research-questions are as follows: how do players experience these events? What role does player's agency play in this context? What are the messages these representations are sending out to their target audiences?

Defining Violence Against Women

In this thesis, I investigate how violence against women is represented in video games. It can be represented in forms such as femicide, domestic violence and sexual violence. Before diving into the dynamics of gender violence, I would like to define such terms.

The United Nations¹ defines violence against women as:

Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (United Nations, 1993, “Introduction” section, para. 1).

The term femicide becomes relevant to this investigation because it is closely related to violence against women. Femicide is a term that refers to gender-based hate crime where there’s the murder of women in the context of domestic violence or as misogyny where there is aversion to the victim's female gender. However, the definitions may change depending on the cultural context. When using this term, I refer to the works of Radford and Russell (1992) which defines femicide as “the misogynous killing of women by men, motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure or a sense of ownership of women” (Corradi *et al.*, 2016, p. 977). With the use of this term, Radford proposes to investigate the killing of women “in the context of the overall oppression of women in a patriarchal society” (Radford, 1992a: 3). When people criticize the use of this term by claiming that men are murdered more frequently than women, the authors explain that men “are rarely murdered simply because they are men” (Radford, 1992a: 10). Radford highlights that femicide is perpetuated in societies marked by male dominance and female subordination, which is built upon “social and political construction of masculinity as active and aggressive and the social construction of femininity as receptive and passive” (Radford, 1992a: 8). For this author, femicide can take distinct forms such as racist femicide, the killing of black women by white men, homophobic femicide, the killing of lesbian women, transphobic femicide, the killing of trans women, marital femicide, the killing of women by their male partners, and femicide, the killing of women by a stranger. The author highlights that even when women die because of clandestine abortion or when there’s the killing of female babies and children because of their gender, the term should also be used to refer to those events (Radford, 1992a: 7).

According to Saffioti (2000), the term Domestic Violence refers to the violence committed by one person against another in a domestic context, such as intimate partner violence or violence against children or the elderly. It can take the forms of physical violence, sexual violence, psychological and economic abuse. The terms domestic abuse, family violence and intimate partner violence, are often used as synonyms. For Saffioti, Domestic Violence doesn’t determine who is the aggressor. It is used to address the violence that might also be committed outside home. She differentiates Violence Against Women from Domestic Violence by explaining the different processes of oppression. Violence Against Women excludes the violence committed against other genders. Domestic Violence doesn’t refer only to the violence committed towards women by their partners, but it can also refer to violence committed against children and teenagers regardless of their gender. In this research, I use the term Domestic Violence to address the violence committed against women in the domestic context.

The World Health Organization defines sexual violence as:

¹ *Violence against women*. (2017). Retrieved May 5, 2020, from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>

Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting. It includes rape, defined as the physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration of the vulva or anus with a penis, other body part or object.² (World Health Organization, "Introduction" section, para. 2).

I am investigating how violence against women in the forms of sexual violence, domestic violence or femicide, is being framed in video games. Considering the social and political construction of gender in patriarchal societies that perpetuate male dominance and female subordination, I want to understand how video games might be reflecting those processes when framing violence against fictitious women.

The Dynamics of Gender Violence

Feminist authors write about ways to deal with violence against women (hooks, 2015; Schechter, 1982). In "Women and Male Violence", Schechter (1982) proposes to see violence against women as an expression of male dominance since this type of violence is encouraged and supported by the ideology of male supremacy. Looking at the use of the term femicide, the work of Radford and Russell highlight the importance of seeing the gendering of violence. The killing of women because of their gender, as well as the other categories of femicide that target black women and lesbian women demonstrates the relevance of intersectionality. Recognizing this intersectionality, instead of seeing violence against women just as any other type of violence, allows feminist researchers to create strategies to deal with the peculiarities of such violence. The proposal of the use of the term femicide, in the 1970s, contributed to the reorganization of social structures with the purpose of fighting against patriarchal values that promote male domination and female subordination (Freeman, 1972).

In "Feminist Theory", bell hooks (2015) demonstrates how it's important to take intersectionality into consideration when addressing violence against women. She criticizes the contemporary feminist movement for not accounting for the complexity and diversity of female experience. The author highlights that although many women recognize sexism as a form of oppression, they are blind to other forms of discrimination such as racism and classism. By using the term white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy, hooks criticizes multiple facets of American culture and proposes solutions that take intersectionality into account. The author defends that feminist theory must transform itself to include the women at the margin. "Our emphasis must be on cultural transformation: destroying dualism, eradicating systems of domination" (hooks, 2015, p. 163). Although hooks also acknowledges that domestic violence perpetrated by men in the family can be seen as a form of male supremacy, she proposes to see it as any other type of violence "that occur between the powerful and the powerless, the dominant and the dominated" (hooks, 2015, p. 118).

The author explains that:

While male supremacy encourages the use of abusive force to maintain male domination of women, it is the Western philosophical notion of hierarchical rule and coercive authority that is the root cause of violence against women, of adult violence against

² World Health Organization. (2017) *Violence against women*. Retrieved May 5, 2020, from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>

children, of all violence between those who dominate and those who are dominated (hooks, 2015, p. 118).

Therefore, she advocates that we should see the fight against violence against women as part of the overall movement to end violence because it's the movement to end the belief system that supports not only sexist ideology, but other ideologies that promote group oppression. For her, to end violence against women means we need to first end this foundation.

When discussing the production of gender violence, Saffioti (1995) explains that "the enemy of women is not exactly men, but the social gender organization that is daily fed not only by men, but also by women" (Saffioti, 1995). She argues that with the support of social institutions in phallogocentric societies, such as the Catholic Church, male supremacy "has resisted the onslaught of renovating processes and has contributed to the maintenance of a terribly inequitable gender social organization" (Saffioti, 1995, p. 13).

Upon studying the power relations in violence against women, Saffioti (2000) proposes to look at domestic violence as a social problem that derives from a social gender organization that favors the masculine. In "Victimized Children: The Syndrome of Small Power" and "Gender Violence: Power and Impotence", she looks at the dynamics of gender performativity and capitalism to understand how gender violence operates.

In "All about Love", she problematizes the way masculinity by explaining that is presented:

as the ideal in patriarchal culture is one that requires all males to invent and invest in a false self. From the moment little boys are taught they should not cry or express hurt, feelings of loneliness or pain, that they must be tough, they are learning how to mask true feelings. In worst-case scenarios, they are learning how to not feel anything ever. These lessons are usually taught to males by other males and sexist mothers (hooks, 2000, p. 38).

hooks' works demonstrate the importance of looking at the dynamics of masculinity when analyzing violence against women. Although Saffioti (1995) does a broader analysis of the dynamics of gender violence, her work demonstrates that it's important to consider how men are socialized when she writes about the increase of men's violent behavior when they feel powerless for not being able to fulfill their male role as provider for the family.

Literature on Violence Against Women

The Representation of Violence Against Women in News Discourse

When looking at the ways violence against women is being represented in news discourse, I reference the works of Marian Meyers (1997) as well as Yasmin Jiwani & Mary Lynn Young (2006). In *News Coverage of Violence against Women: Engendering Blame*, Meyers analyzes both printed and television news coverages, focusing on news outlets in Atlanta. By combining qualitative textual and structural analyses, and interviewing advocates for female victims of male violence, she examines the role of news discourse in the process of “engendering the blame” where female victims are being framed as blamed for the violence that they suffered. She identifies that the virgin/whore dichotomization of women applies to communication about whether the female victims are innocent or guilty. She demonstrates that news coverage in American cities frames in distinct ways the criminal violence against women and men in which male aggressors are usually the subject of the story, having the focus on their troubles. She highlights that the usage of the term “tragedy” is a way to frame the male aggressor as a victim as well. Her main focus relies on the examination of what constitutes “newsworthy”, where the way stories are written and framed draws from traditional gender roles. She argues that those frames perpetuate traditional, inegalitarian male and female stereotypes that are rooted in male supremacist ideology. Her goal is to uncover the assumptions, ideologies and myths that underlie in it. The author highlights multiple factors such as culture, gender, race, socio-economic issues, journalistic routines, and reporter consciousness, which impact the way of writing news that report those crimes. She proposes that crime news should be re-examined considering the feminist perspective.

In *Missing and Murdered Women: Reproducing Marginality in News Discourse*, Jiwani and Young investigated print coverage of the missing women cases over a period of five years (2001-2006) that resulted in the largest-known serial killer case in Canada. Their main focus was the examination of the frames utilized by the mainstream media to talk about the female victims. Their goal was to highlight the discursive practices in framing Aboriginal women and violence against women as well as to emphasize the construction of a narrative that reduces the systemic violence perpetuated towards woman as the act of single troubled man. In their investigation, they identify diverse patterns among the print media coverage, demonstrating how hegemonic discourses about Aboriginality and prostitution operates in the process of reporting violence against women.

The authors call the overlapping of the gender and racial discourses that oppress indigenous women as the moral and racialized economy of representations. It is a process of differentiation that assigns values to people of color. The media differentiates the bad from the good woman as sex workers versus mothers, sisters and wives, which separates the ones who are deserving of violence from the others who need to be saved from troubled men. The racialized body as the one linked to criminality, violence and drug addiction which are marked as opposing the socially dominant values. This renders the racialized bodies as invisible and, therefore, ungrievable. As the authors quote Judith Butler, this is problematic because “without the capacity to mourn, we lose the keener sense of life we need in order to oppose violence” (Butler, 2004, p. XVIII).

At the same time, crimes committed by one person, like a serial killer, get more coverage than crimes committed by several people, like the cases of domestic violence. There is an effort in presenting the serial killer as a grotesque example of masculinity, rendering this act as being perpetuated by an individual rather than by the system. The killing of indigenous women is told through a morality frame, as like “Jack the Ripper”, where their deaths are used as a way to tell girls to not “go to bad neighborhoods”. Another frame that is used by the media to marginalize indigenous women is the horror of these acts. As a way to demonstrate this, the authors address a news headline that talks about a serial killer who was a farmer that fed their corpses to the pigs. The thought of consuming human remains when eating pork shifted the attention away from the women’s murders.

Both works identify a dichotomy in the way news media covers crimes involving violence against women. They explain that the news frames the female victims in two different ways: the good woman and the bad woman. The good woman frame is usually someone’s wife, daughter or mother who is the victim of a troubled man and, therefore, needs to be saved from him. On the other hand, the bad woman frame is often a sex worker who put herself in a dangerous situation due to her “lifestyle” and, consequently, she had it coming. Both frames reinforce traditional gender roles where the women who convey the patriarchal values of femininity are framed as the one who needs to be saved while the ones who don’t embody those values are seen as deserving of the violence against them.

Gender tropes in Video Games

As priorly mentioned, there is a lack of studies that are focused specifically on the portrayal of violence against women in video games. However, there is research that tackles gender portrayals in video games that could provide insights to this investigation. The study of gender portrayals and the representation of violence in video games conducted by Dietz (1998) demonstrates how female characters are framed by hegemonic discourses. In this investigation, the author does a quantitative analysis of 33 popular Nintendo and Sega Genesis video games. She identified that one of the most common portrayals of female characters consisted of damsels in distress that depended on the male protagonist and the violence against them, such as kidnapping, serves as a plot device to motivate the hero to start the journey. When female characters were portrayed as villains, they were often depicted as the evil seductress who “might try to lure the male away from his Violence and responsibilities, and when successful, results in his failure and demotion back to the beginning of the game” (Dietz, 1998, p. 435). She points out that not all female villains are depicted as attractive. She mentions Rita Repulsa and Madam Woe, villains of Mighty Morphin Power Rangers (1994), as examples.

To complement Dietz’s observations, I refer to Sarkeesian’s analysis of the *Damsel in Distress* (2013) and *Women as Background Decoration* (2014). When tackling the Damsel in Distress, Sarkeesian (2013) explains that:

As a trope, the Damsel in Distress is a plot device in which a female character is placed in a perilous situation from which she cannot escape on her own and must be rescued by a male character, usually providing the core incentive or motivation for the protagonist’s quest (3:24).

She highlights that these female characters are usually “a family member or a love interest of the hero – princesses, wives, girlfriends and sisters” (Sarkeesian, 2013, 3:47). Further,

Sarkeesian explains that the dynamics of this trope function as the subject/object dichotomy in which “subjects act and objects are acted upon” (Sarkeesian, 2013, 10:05). In the context of video games, the playable character fits the role of subject or protagonist while the damsel functions as the object where they “are being acted upon” (Sarkeesian, 2013, 10:31). As Sarkeesian points out, in these stories, the center of conflict relies on the dispute between the male hero and the male villain where the damsel functions as a prize or a goal to be fulfilled. Sarkeesian highlights that having the center of conflict placed on the kidnapping of a female character “works by ripping away the power from female characters... distilled down to its essence, the plot device works by trading the disempowerment of female characters for the power of male characters” (Sarkeesian, 2013, 17:19). Sarkeesian’s analysis of the damsel in distress highlights that the act of saving the damsel in distress in video games whose narrative is being told from the perspective of the male hero can be connected to performance of masculinity.

To complement Sarkeesian’s observations of the dynamics of the damsel in distress and the performance of masculinity, I refer to Waldie’s (2018) research, which investigates gender politics in *Until Dawn* (2015), a horror game with choice-making mechanics developed by Supermassive Games. In her thesis, she analyzes the dynamics of gender roles in horror games where “male characters are regularly categorized as protectors, while ascribing to specific stereotypes” (Waldie, 2018, p.1). The author explains that, in this game, the ability to protect female characters is what determines whether male characters fit the role assigned by hegemonic notions of masculinity³. Her findings demonstrate that endangering female characters serves to establish whether male playable characters convey notions of hegemonic masculinity.

Sarkeesian (2014) defines Women as Background Decoration as:

The subset of largely insignificant non-playable female characters whose sexuality or victimhood is exploited as a way to infuse edgy, gritty or racy flavoring into game worlds. These sexually objectified female bodies are designed to function as environmental texture while titillating presumed straight male players. (2:37)

In these series, Sarkeesian (2014) examines “how sexualized female bodies often occupy a dual role as both sexual playthings and the perpetual victims of male violence” (1:11). In the video games Sarkeesian analyzes, she demonstrates that there is the portrayal of sexual and domestic violence where these scenes “capitalize on female trauma for shock value” (Sarkeesian, 2014, 15:53).

Although Dietz’s, Waldie’s and Sarkeesian’s focuses weren’t on the depiction of violence against women per se, their findings demonstrate that the representation of violence against women could be connected to the performance of masculinity in video games. Moreover, their works also indicate that gender tropes such as the Damsel in Distress, Women as Background Decoration and the Evil Seductress might be corresponding frames to these dichotomies were already identified in other forms of mass media. When looking at these different gender tropes, we can see that there is a clear distinction on how female victims are framed.

A further academic investigation is necessary to understand how the subtleties of players’ agency might be reflecting the same discourse perpetuated in news media. Therefore, I commence this investigation with the following questions. How is violence against women being represented in video games? Does the dichotomy of the good and the bad women also apply to

³ According to Trujillo (1991), the term Hegemonic Masculinity refers to the idealized notion of “what it means to be a man”. These notions are usually related to “toughness and competitiveness” (Trujillo, 1991, p 290).

narratives of this medium? Does it serve to reassert traditional gender roles? How does player's agency reflect the social and power dynamics of violence against women?

Theoretical Perspective

Considering the extensive work analyzed in the literature review, we see that those authors were studying how discourse shapes the way violence against women is framed and perceived in news. Based on their findings, I see that it is necessary to use theoretical tools to analyze this theme that are linked to the concept of cultural hegemony which is a type of ideological domination of one social class over another (Bullock and Trombley, 1999). In Marxist philosophy, cultural hegemony is, according to Gramsci (1992), the domination of society by the ruling class through the manipulation of its culture, which consists in the production of beliefs, explanations, perceptions, values and customs that constitute a cultural norm. The norm is presented as a natural and universal fact, justifying and naturalizing social, political and economic status, instead of a social and artificial construction that benefits only the ruling class (The Columbia Encyclopedia, 1994). Within this concept, media and culture, such as digital games, films, literature, music, etc., are tools to communicate the norm. Therefore, within their narratives, hegemonic discourses determine what is within the form of the norm, framing what is within the norm as something natural. The authors that I will discuss in the following paragraphs study how discourse operates to naturalize the norm.

Gender and Racial Discourse

This investigation draws from Butler's theory of gender performativity (1993). Building upon the Foucaultian view of discourse and sexuality, Butler proposes a critique of the relation sex/gender, considering the idea of performativity. Gender is a social construct rather than biological and it needs to be constantly performed following a set of legitimized practices in order to categorize bodies. The discourse on the body, considering the theories of Foucault and Butler, is related to the production of subjects. Subjectivity becomes standardized because of the process of differentiation in which categories are created to determine what is legitimate from what is not. Therefore, labels such as male, female, heterosexual and homosexual become forms of identity that shapes people's subjectivity.

Just as Foucault examines discursive formation in the production of forms of sexuality and Butler in the category of gender as well as performative, Simone Browne (2010) investigates how discourse normalizes bodies through the category "race" through the process of epidermalization. To assign meanings to categorized bodies, discursive practices establish what it means to be black considering the white perspective. The racial discourse places white people as the norm, the legitimate, and black people as the outsider, the inhuman, uncivilized, the object to be traded. The discursive practices applied to convey the racial discourse are described by Browne as the narrative built upon the pseudo-scientific discourse, which she refers to as the scientific racism. The pseudo-scientific discourse utilizes false evolutionary theories in order to place black people not as humans, but as part of the fauna, which, as pointed out by Browne, naturalizes slavery. Black people are compared to animals and plants that are extracted from the fauna and commercialized by settlers. By denying the humanity of black people and marking blackness as commodity, the racial discourse aims to naturalize slavery through the categorization of race.

As we could see in the works of Foucault, Butler and Browne, discourse operates by the process of differentiation of bodies where the norm determines what is legitimized and what is not. Considering the notion that gender is a social construction and not biological, the norm

determines what it means to be a man or a woman in the industrial society which constitutes the gender discourse. In the works of Meyers as well as Jiwani and Young, we see that the dichotomies of the good/bad women or the virgin/whore, is how discourse legitimizes the women who are framed as inside the norm and outside of it. When Meyers highlights the importance of considering the categories of gender, class and race, she demonstrates how relevant it is to acknowledge the interdisciplinarity of discursive formation. Based on those findings, I propose to do a discourse analysis of the representation of violence against women in video games to understand how it might reflect the dynamics of hegemonic discourse on gender, class and race.

Concepts of Violence

The concept of Symbolic Violence functions in this context to expose how hegemonic discourses operate through the symbolic field. I believe the concept of Symbolic Violence will serve as a theoretical and analytical tool to understand how video games' approach to represent violence against women in the narrative might resemble or contrast the discourses of other mass media. Bourdieu (2005) addresses symbolic violence as a type of violence that instead of being inflicted against the body, it causes moral and psychological damage. Symbolic Violence operates through the constitution of beliefs in the process of socialization. People learn to position themselves in the social space according to the norm established by the dominant discourse. In this sense, Symbolic Violence manifests through the recognition of the legitimacy of the dominant discourse. The production of knowledge is the main medium where hegemonic discourse is legitimized because the oppressed spheres come to believe in the knowledge disseminated by the communication media, convincing the oppressed about the naturalization of their own oppression.

Symbolic Violence comes from the concept of symbolic power, which Bourdieu developed to account for the almost invisible forms of cultural domination that happens in the daily social practices to reinforce the social hierarchy through the production of knowledge. This power manifests through the symbolic systems which, according to Bourdieu, is composed by the language, art and religion, which builds up and reveals the symbolic power. Bourdieu explains that symbolic systems are responsible for symbolic productions, which function as instruments of domination.

In "Masculine Domination", Bourdieu (2003) explains how symbolic power acts in perpetuating discriminatory or injurious meaning or implications, asserting gender dominance. The author addresses the issue of "male domination" mainly from a symbolic perspective. For him, male domination would be a particular form of symbolic violence. By this concept, Bourdieu understands the power that imposes meanings, imposing them as legitimate, in order to hide the power mechanisms that support this domination. Building on the concept of Masculine Domination, Saffioti (2004) creates the concept of the Pedagogy of Violence to highlight that the way womanhood and manhood are constructed in the gender social organization naturalizes violence against women. She explains that the western notion of manhood is based upon the exercise of virility where, in order to be seen as a man, one must occupy and exercise dominant positions in society. In order to be dominant, one must subjugate the other. The exercise of virility results in the constant victimization and subjugation of women. In this context, the concept of Hegemonic Masculinity is built to address the set of normative practices that promote "subordination of women to men" (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). Although there

are other types and expressions of masculinity, what distinguishes Hegemonic Masculinity is the exercise of virility, that is, the need of constantly engaging in violence to maintain a dominant position in society.

To address the meaning of Symbolic Violence in Žižek's perspective, we first need to understand the differentiation of Subjective Violence and Objective Violence, as well as to study their relation to systemic violence (Žižek, 2008). In his book "Violence", Žižek explains that when we think of violence, we usually refer to "acts of crime and terror, civil unrest, international conflict" (Žižek, 2008, p.1), which are performed by an easily identifiable agent. To address the violence that we can identify the agent and most visible, he develops the concept of Subjective Violence. Moreover, the author highlights that, to end violence, it's important to investigate what lies in the background and enables such acts. He explains that Subjective Violence is usually perceived as a disturbance of what is considerate to be "the 'normal,' peaceful state of things" (Žižek, 2008, p.2). However, we usually don't perceive how normality is violent because it's what Žižek calls Objective Violence – an invisible violence which "sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent" (Žižek, 2008, p.2). When examining Objective Violence, Žižek describes two kinds of violence: the Symbolic Violence and the Systemic Violence. For Žižek, Symbolic Violence does not only refer to discourses that reinforce social domination as deeply study by Bourdieu (2003). Žižek emphasizes that this term also refers to a form of violence that operates through language by imposing "a certain universe of meaning" while excluding others (Žižek, 2008, p.2). What Žižek refers to as Systemic Violence is the social inequalities and injustices that are the consequences of capitalism.

In Žižek's work, we see that media plays a big role in perpetuating Symbolic Violence. When we revisit the works of Jiwani and Young (2006) as well as of Meyers (1997) with the lenses provided by Žižek's concepts, we see that the crimes that disrupt "normality" are considered newsworthy. These crimes, which are manifestations of Subjective violence, are usually perpetuated by male aggressors which are easily identifiable agents. However, as the careful investigation and analysis of these authors reveals, the way these crimes are reported by news media perpetuate discourses that frame which female victims are worthy and should be protected which is the symbolic violence that lies on the background. And the prejudice that female victims face might prevent them from turning to the authorities for help. The lack of police reports on these crimes, whether because the victims gave up from going to the police or because police officers' prejudice in investigating crimes within poor communities, influence how news report are built. By lack of reports, consulting prejudiced lawyers, interviewing family members who might have negative opinions about their related ones and by writing news reports that will catch reader's attention, news reports are shaped by systemic violence, and they reproduce symbolic violence.

In this thesis, I refer to systemic violence to address the representation of the social inequalities and injustices caused by what hook calls white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy system. I tackle violence against women as a form of systemic violence. I use symbolic violence to analyze what messages that video games are perpetuating when representing violence against women and whether they perpetuate discourses that reinforce male domination and female subordination.

Hegemony of Play

Drawing from the concept of Cultural Hegemony, Fron et al. (2007) develop the concept of Hegemony of Play.

We introduce the concept of a “Hegemony of Play,” to critique the way in which a complex layering of technological, commercial and cultural power structures have dominated the development of the digital game industry over the past 35 years, creating an entrenched status quo which ignores the needs and desires of “minority” players such as women and “non-gamers,” Who in fact represent the majority of the population (p. 309)

Their investigation of the history of pre-digital games demonstrates that the exclusionary production processes of video games as well as the propagation of cultural stereotypes of “gamers” and “non-gamers” function as cultural tools to disseminate hegemonic discourses within gaming culture. Their work successfully demonstrates how video games reflect those power and social mechanisms discussed previously.

Choice-Based Games

As mentioned earlier, I identified that there is a lack of research that investigates specifically how violence against women is portrayed in video games. Studies focused on gender portrayal in video games demonstrate that there might be similar dichotomies of female victims such as the ones identified in news media. Considering the broad existence of game genres, each one having its own characteristics and structures, it was necessary to choose a specific game genre to focus on. For this thesis, I have chosen to study choice-based games.

Choice-based or decision-based games are also known as “Choose Your Own Adventure” and called by some as “interactive movies”⁴. This genre is characterized by a structure that is focused on the player's narrative choices where these decisions will shape relationships and the rest of the story, generating different branches. The game is usually divided into chapters or episodes. Telltale Games and Quantic Dream are the game companies who are well-known for developing such game genres. The reason why I am interested in investigating the portrayal of violence against women in choice-based games is because of the conflicted relationship between agency and systemic violence.

Agency

Player's agency is a key term that refers to the interactive possibilities that video games provide players to make choices that will shape their experience. There are many scholars that study the dynamics of players' agency which can vary depending on the type of game. In this research, I will be using this term to analyze player's role in three choice-based games that I will describe further in this introduction. When studying choice-based games such as *The Walking Dead*, Stang (2019) argues that, specifically in this type of game, players agency is illusory because all the choices that players can make through the gameplay are pre-coded. In this investigation, this term allows us to understand that, when dealing with choice-based games, the pre-coded choices are designed by someone and decisions are being made by designers to create a set of different experiences that will communicate meanings that reflect the social dynamics of power and violence (Flanagan, 2009). As explained before, violence against women, as other forms of systemic violence, are perpetuated by social institutions and not individuals. However, how does a medium that is centered in players' agency represent an issue that cannot be resolved by an individual?

Meaningful and Meaningless Agency

When designing choice-based games, game developers not only need to define what choices are available in the game, but which ones will have consequences and trigger distinct narrative branches. However, no matter how complex the branching system can be, there will always be choices that have no consequences. Therefore, when designing choices, developers assign Meaningful Agency, that is, choices that have impact in the story, and Meaningless Agency, decisions that don't change anything. When assigning which decisions are designed to matter, game developers create structures to distinguish such decisions.

⁴ The usage of the term Interactive Movie is sometimes used to address choice-based games. However, this term has been criticized for not accounting for these games' specificities (Bogost, 2010).

I refer to Meaningful Agency to address choices that have outcomes in the game. My analysis is focused on the mechanics of choice-making. Here, I am not accounting for concepts of agency that are centered on the player's perception of the narrative. Therefore, when I refer to Meaningful Agency, it does not include the notions of Emotional Agency⁵ nor Dramatic Agency⁶.

Choice Boards and Narrative Branchings

At the end of each chapter or episode, choice-based games usually display a choice board which is a screen that shows the decisions made by the player. Some decision boards might show statistics, comparing the player's decision with the most chosen decisions. Other decision boards might focus on the completion of the chapter/episode, showing what choices were made and which narrative branchings were explored. These choice boards serve to incentivize players to play again and try out different choices to explore different outcomes. Narrative branchings that are unlocked by specific choice-combinations, will lead to specific game paths, which will trigger specific endings which can be interpreted as the “good ending” or the “bad ending” when players record playthroughs.

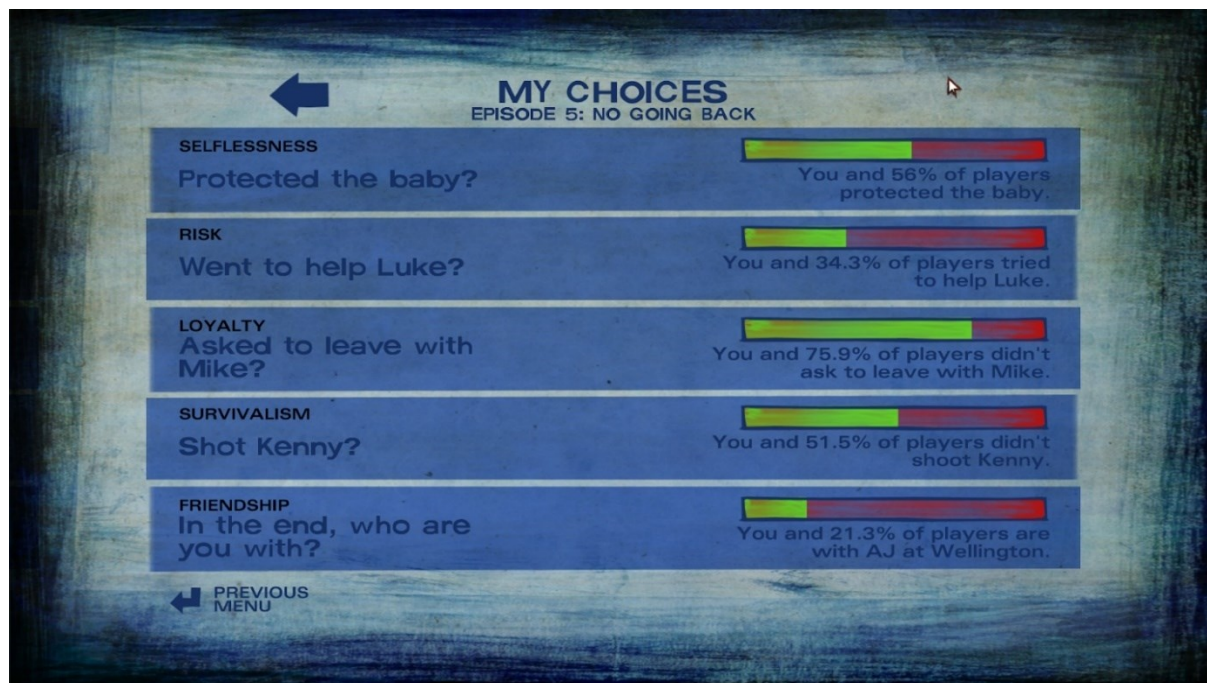


Figure 1: Decision board in games developed by TellTale Games

⁵ Emotional Agency is a concept created by Weir (2011) to address the type of agency that “is perceived by players when the choices made do not matter on a story level but are still emotionally impactful to players” (Kway and Mitchell, 2018, p.1).

⁶ Dramatic Agency is a concept created by Murray (2005) to address the experience when players get attached to playable characters and seeing these characters strive and survive the outcomes of choices makes players feel rewarded.



Figure 2: Decision board in *Beyond: Two Souls*, developed by *Quantic Dreams*



Figure 3: Relationship status update in games developed by *TellTale Games*



Figure 4: Relationship status update in games developed by Quantic Dream

Decisions and Relationships

Choices made throughout the game also serve to establish the moral compass of the playable character and shape how other characters perceive this character. Relationships between the playable character and non-playable characters can also be a way to highlight specific game paths. Depending on the game, improving or worsening relationship status with other NPCs might unlock specific endings or game paths. Nevertheless, choice-based games usually display visual cues when the playable character's decision is perceived as positive or negative by NPCs.

Game Paths, Endings and Trophies

Choice-based games usually deploy specific game mechanics to highlight game paths. Decision boards, narrative branchings, and relationship status are some of the elements that I have just covered. However, these games also assign trophies to mark progression in the game since choice-based games usually don't have a level system where a character's level increases as the player progresses in exploring the game world. Some games might assign trophies to the completion of chapters/episodes, regardless of players choices. Others assign trophies – which are usually categorized as bronze, silver, gold and platinum – to specific choice combinations and the successfulness in completing quick-time event challenges, which usually require players to press specific keys in a given order, frequency and rhythm. When choice-based games assign different trophy categories, the trophies serve to organize choices into hierarchies where some choices are more relevant than others.

Methodology

Discourse analysis

This thesis uses textual analysis through case studies divided into games that (1) portray this subject from the perspective of the victim, (2) of a witness, and (3) of a third party that can choose to engage in acts of violence. As a methodological framework, I refer to the work of Consalvo and Dutton (2006) to analyze gender representation regarding the player's choices in the narrative.

In "Game Analysis", Consalvo and Dutton (2006) propose a methodological tool kit for studying games using qualitative methods. They highlight that analyzing a game is not the same as watching a movie, it's important to account for the interactive elements that make up the video game. In the tool kit, they outline three major parameters to take into consideration in the game analysis: the object inventory, the interface study and the interaction map. This methodology of analyzing games allows me to interpret the game designer's intention. For example, looking at the list of trophies and achievements is a way to understand the paths in the gameplay that are encouraged and set as goals to players.

To do discourse analysis on video games, my investigation draws from the concept Procedural Rhetoric which is used by Ian Bogost (2010) to describe games as persuasive rhetoric tools that differ from other media such as books or movies for being composed by processes, a term that is mostly used in programming. This form of rhetoric is referred to by Bogost as procedural rhetoric. He defines it as "the art of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions, rather than the spoken word, writing, images, or moving pictures" (Bogost, 2010, p. ix). as well as "the art of using processes persuasively" (Bogost, 2010, p. 3). The procedural rhetoric is constituted as a particular way to communicate economic, political and social values through programming processes. The available options and their repercussions are conceived from an abstraction of real life to serve a purpose in the game narrative. In this context, game developers work in crafting laws that convey ideology (Frasca, 2003). To summarize, as Sicart (2011) explains, "the proceduralist discourse started as a ludological focus on how games can convey political messages" (Sicart, 2011, "The Proceduralists" section, para. 1). Therefore, procedurality is a key concept in game studies because it is both an ontological marker of computer games as well as the way discourses of ethical, political, social and aesthetic value are built in computer games (Sicart, 2011).

The selection criteria for the games investigated in this research is that they have the choice-based mechanic where the players' decisions shape the rest of the story. Those mechanics encourage players to try different narrative paths in them, which can indicate whether violence is represented as avoidable or not. Depending on the decisions that were made, a character might be murdered or saved, suffer sexual violence or not, etc. Understanding the cause-consequence of those decisions regarding violence against women could be the key to learn how games might be perpetuating discourses that blame the victim. Because this type of game allows players to "choose" different endings, unlike other media like movies or news, it might communicate what we think about this issue.

The focus of this analysis is on the representation of violence against women, its relations with systemic violence and the portrayal of female victims of VAW. I won't look at the players' decisions since it won't fit the scope of this investigation. I won't look at the impacts of video

games that portray violence on players' behaviors as well because there is plenty of research that tackles this topic. Based on the scope of this investigation, I inquire: How do games reflect or challenge popular beliefs about violence against women and who "deserves" it? How might games help us – or even hurt us- in presenting the idea that violence against women is just something that we can "choose not to engage with" in games or in society? Considering these criteria, I selected the following games as the object of analysis: *The Wolf Among Us* (2013), *Beyond: Two Souls* (2013) and *Detroit: Become Human* (2018).

I am interested in investigating how violence against women is represented in choice-based games because of the challenge of representing systemic violence in a medium that is built upon the concept of agency. When deciding which choice-based games would be investigated in this thesis, I chose to investigate games that not only portray violence against women in its different forms, but as well are developed by different companies. Instead of analyzing games that were only developed by Quantic Dream, I decided to also include one game developed by Telltale Games. My goal is to identify patterns across companies. Investigating games developed by the same company could indicate patterns specific to a writer.

In the following paragraphs, I describe the chosen games and the instances of violence against women. I also refer to the relevant literature that investigates these games.

The Wolf Among Us

In chapter 1, I analyze *The Wolf Among Us* (2013), an episodic graphic adventure game, that is, a video game released by episodes that constitute a continuous and larger series. This is a choice-based game developed by Telltale Games where a player's decisions determine the future of the story. In the gameplay, they can decide between dialogue lines and how the character solves the conflict. The game takes place in Fabletown in 1986, the fictional, clandestine community of Fables, fairy tales and folklore characters who moved to New York after losing their Homeland. The main conflict revolves around the precarious lives of these characters who lost their economic status after moving to New York, having to resort to crime and prostitution to survive in this new reality. The playable character is Bigby Wolf, the hard-boiled sheriff of Fabletown who used to be known as the Big Bad Wolf. He is trying to redeem himself from his bad past as the wolf in the fairy tales. He has the duty of maintaining order in the community, protecting the Fables from the humans as well as from themselves. Players can control his dialogue, choices and actions, having the agency to determine his personality and tactics. Player choices affect Bigby's relationship with other characters and lead to one of the three possible endings. Throughout 5 episodes, Bigby is investigating a series of murders of Fable's sex workers.

The academic literature that studies *The Wolf Among Us* is usually focused on discussions around emotional agency and meaningful decision making (Kway and Mitchell, 2018) as well as on the analysis of narrative branching mechanics (El-Nasr *et al*, 2019).

Jardine (2015) shares their "experiences of discomfort as a gamer sensitive to gendered violence" (Jardine, 2015, p.75) when playing *The Wolf Among Us*, *The Walking Dead: Season Two*, and *The Last of Us* – games that include the depiction of violence against women. In their article, they address this experience of discomfort to reflect on the policy-making that regulates video game consumption in Australia. Jardine's work aims to share their personal emotional impact as the player. They don't investigate how the mechanics of choice-making are built to generate such a negative impact. When encountering the murdered female character, who is later

revealed not to be Snow White, but one of the missing fable sex workers, Jardine states that: “It was a tired trope (sometimes called ‘Women in Refrigerators’): the murder and mutilation of a potential lover, giving the male protagonist motivation and the male player stakes” (Jardine, 2015, p.75).

Besides Jardine’s article, there is a lack of academic literature that studies gender portrayal and the representation of violence against women in *The Wolf Among Us*. Hence, considering the game portrays femicide and sex exploitation, I propose to analyze the representation of such topics in light of the concepts and studies described earlier.

Beyond: Two Souls

Chapter 2 analyzes *Beyond: Two Souls* (2013), an adventure game developed by Quantic Dream that is played from both third-person and first-person perspectives. This is also a narrative driven game whose mechanics are based on choice-making, where consequences of the player's actions shape the story, resulting in different endings. The game tells the story of Jodie, a girl who has a strange psychic connection with Aiden, a mysterious entity with supernatural abilities who has been with her all her life. The gameplay is divided into 24 chapters that follow both characters through eighteen years of Jodie's life, showing the range of challenges that Jodie had to face from having that connection with Aiden. The central conflict revolves around questions about life after death. I decided to include this game in my analysis because it includes a chapter where one of the protagonists might be the victim of a rape attempt, depending on the player’s choice. Violence against women is also present in this game in the relationship between Aiden and Jodie, where he displays aggressive and controlling behavior against his sister.

Academic work that examines *Beyond: Two Souls* is usually focused on the depiction of female protagonists (Morrison *et al*, 2018), immersion and gamer experience (Flamma, 2016), advances in motion capture technology and the implications of having a female character as the protagonist of a game (Cook, 2018).

Morrison *et al* (2018) analyzes the depiction of female playable characters from various games including *Beyond: Two Souls*. Among their findings, they identified that the perpetuation of common gender tropes is present, but having a female protagonist allowed these games to build more complex female characters. The authors identified that these female characters shared common characteristics: they all have powerful skills. These powers both allow these characters to save others while also making them cursed. Having these powers is what turns them into victims of discrimination and/or isolated from society for their “uniqueness”, that is, their otherness. Moreover, the authors highlight that, although this unique set of skills allows these characters to become powerful, these powers function in “traditionally feminine ways” (Morrison *et al*, 2018, p. 855), that is, their special abilities convey the traditional motherhood role as these skills are “not seen as developed or learned but innate to a woman’s consciousness” (Morrison *et al*, 2018, p. 855).

The authors point out that differently from traditional male heroes, these female characters did not attempt to resolve conflicts by engaging in violence. Instead, they used their sensitivity and intuition, abilities qualified by the authors as “feminine strengths”. The authors claim that having female characters as protagonists “subverted traditional narrative structures” (Morrison *et al*, 2018, p. 856) because it allows them to become more independent from male characters. However, the authors highlight when these female characters rely on help from male

characters in order to perform specific tasks, such as Jodie asking for Aiden's help to possess someone, their agency becomes limited.

Cook (2018) problematizes how gender dynamics are at play in *Beyond: Two Souls*. The author focuses his analysis on the chapter "The Dinner" where Jodie has a date with Ryan, a coworker from CIA and love interest. In this chapter, Aiden is not happy with Jodie's interest in having sex with Ryan. Aiden attempts to ruin Jodie's date. Players can choose to pursue Aiden's goal and ruin her date, which goes against what Jodie, the protagonist, wants. This dissonance, as pointed out by Cook, demonstrates how the game "discreetly bakes systems of gendered oppression into the very process of play" (Cook, 2018, p. 26).

The works of Cook (2018) and Morrison *et al* (2018) demonstrate how the depiction of female characters has evolved in comparison to the games Dietz (1998) investigated in the 90s. Moreover, their studies show the change in dynamics from designing female characters as non-playable characters to designing them as protagonists. Although their research points out the specific ways that gender discourse is embedded in games that feature female protagonists, their works do not focus on the portrayal of violence against women nor on how it is represented within the same game genre. Morrison *et al.* research games from different genres and Cook's analysis is focused on *Beyond: Two Souls*.

Building on the works of these authors, this investigation aims to study the portrayal of violence against women in choice-based games which allows me to account for this genre's specificities and identify patterns among games that have similar mechanics. Moreover, I believe this investigation can further the discussion on the representation of female protagonism and female agency in video games.

Detroit: Become Human

Chapter 3 studies *Detroit: Become Human* (2018), an adventure game developed by Quantic Dream played from a third-person perspective. It is a narrative driven game where players must make decisions whose consequences impact the course of the story. The gameplay takes place in the city of Detroit in 2038, where there was the insertion of androids into the work force to replace humans. The central conflict revolves around the rise of Deviants, androids who manifest human emotions and deviate from their programmed behavior. There are three playable characters: Connor, an android who is a police investigator that hunts deviants; Kara, an android who used to be a housekeeper that becomes deviant to save a little girl that was suffering domestic abuse; and Markus, an android who used to be a caretaker before becoming deviant and the leader of the android revolution. The game narrative revolves around questions of what makes us human, which is a common theme in android driven stories. To evoke questions of what defines humanity and whether androids can have humanity, as well as harness empathy towards Kara, Connor and Markus, the game constantly portrays acts of discrimination against these androids because of their identity. Those playable characters can die and the story continues without them. Therefore, there is no "game over" screen after a character's death.

Obmann (2020) investigates gender portrayals in games developed by Quantic Dream: *Heavy Rain* (2010), *Beyond: Two Souls* (2013) and *Detroit Become Human* (2018). Obmann's analysis highlights the patterns of female protagonists in games written by David Cage. She does a cross analysis to identify the patterns in regards to how female playable characters are designed. In her analysis she investigates (1) diversity, (2) passivity, (3) relevance, (4) ability and agency, (5) sexualized violence, (6) nursing roles, and (7) dependency. She identified that all

female characters are designed as “white, cis-female, young, able-bodied and (partly) explicitly heterosexual” (p. 153). The author also states that they are frequently portrayed as victims of violence against women in the context of having to escape male aggressors as “their actions are rather re-actions to other characters who are acting upon them” (p. 153). Having female characters reacting instead of acting places them in a passive role which contrasts with their male counterparts who usually fit the active role, whether as “active pursuers or even aggressors” (p. 153). In *Heavy Rain* (2010) and *Detroit: Become Human* (2018), where there are multiple playable characters, Obmann argues that female playable characters were often not relevant to resolving the central conflict of the story. The author explains that their actions almost don’t impact the story, only exerting “influence on a micro-level within their own sequences” (p. 153). Other times, they might act as sidekicks to support male playable characters with minor personal goals. In contrast, Obmann explains that male characters’ actions often determine the fate of other characters whether they are non-playable or playable.

When analyzing ability and agency, the author identifies that among the three female characters, Jodie, the *Beyond: Two Souls*’ protagonist, is the only one who has combat training and unique supernatural abilities. However, she argues that Jodie’s powers are not enough for her to defend herself in every dangerous situation. Instead, she often fits the role of a damsel in distress. Differently from Jodie, Aiden, her deceased brother who accompanies her throughout the game, has powers that allow him not only to protect her, but to control her romantic life. Both female characters from *Heavy Rain* (2010) and *Beyond: Two Souls* (2013) have similar linear storylines, only being able to make meaningful decisions at the end of the game. Obmann explains that Kara’s decision has more impact in comparison to the other two female characters as her choices might end her storyline prematurely.

When looking at sexualized violence, Obmann (2020) wrote that all games included that element. He explains that “nudity and violence can of course also be found in the male characters, however, they are nowhere near as consistent and – what’s more, sexually connoted and gendered” (Obmann, 2020, p. 154). Obmann (2020) identified that all playable female characters often fit the nursing roles. On the other hand, there are moments when male characters have the opportunity to fit such roles, but these moments tend to be short because the focus of their narratives tends to be on saving other characters. Finally, Obmann’s findings indicate that these female characters are written as dependent on their male counterparts, since a big part of their storyline and their identity is defined by their relationships with men. Kara is an exception to this observation, but the author states that Kara’s storyline is heavily dependent on the task of taking care of a little girl.

Obmann’s (2020) study of gender portrayals demonstrate the patterns in David Cage’s female protagonists. However, by focusing on games that were written by David Cage, Obmann’s analysis doesn’t aim to identify patterns among choice-based games. By doing case studies that include games that were developed by Quantic Dream and Telltale Games, the goal of this investigation is to investigate the larger patterns in choice-based games, not only David Cage’s games.

Leach and Dehnert (2021) analyze the portrayal of race, gender and sexuality in *Detroit: Become Human* as well as the game’s construction of racial identity and the female protagonist. Leach and Dehnert’s (2021) findings indicate that Kara’s role in the game conveys “normative gender stereotypes” (Leach and Dehnert, 2021, p.27) as her narrative branching is centered in decisions involving taking care of a little girl, surviving domestic abuse and other forms of

VAW. Moreover, the authors highlight that Kara fits the role of a loving mother as she demonstrates qualities that fit traditional concepts of motherhood and femininity.

Leach and Dehnert's analysis briefly tackles VAW. They study the chapter "Eden Club", when Connor can decide whether the female androids (deviants) who are sex workers in a night club can continue to live or should be killed.

These (possible) acts of violence against objectified and hypersexualized female androids reinforce the toxic masculinity that permeates video game culture. While the open narrative structure of *DBH* allows the player to make their own choices in these situations involving violence against female androids, the game's objectification and hypersexualization of these secondary female characters reiterates common tropes in the male-dominated video game culture, further normalizing such violence and its real-life consequences. (Leach and Dehnert, 2021, p.28)

Further, Leach and Dehnert investigate the chapter "Meet Kamski", when Connor meets the scientist who created androids and who used to be the CEO of CyberLife, Elijah Kamski. In this chapter, Kamski forces Connor to go through the Kamski Test, which identifies androids' deviancy. In this test, Kamski challenges Connor to kill one of his female androids, who in this scene is wearing a bikini. If he kills her, it means that he is still a machine who is following orders. If he doesn't, it demonstrates that he has developed empathy, and therefore, is closer to becoming a deviant. The authors point out that again, violence against women is portrayed as a means to define the protagonist's moral compass as he can decide whether female androids can live or die. Based on their work, I argue that this could already indicate that dichotomies of female victims are at play as we see that Kara is presented as a non-sexualized female character who fits the mother role and who consequently is portrayed as the woman who should overcome violence. At the same time, the sexualized female androids are framed as the victims whose lives and deaths only serve to determine Connor's moral compass.

Phillips (2020) looks into Quantic Dream's short film named "Kara"⁷, which was published in 2012 to illustrate what *Detroit: Become Human* would be when released 6 years later in 2018. Although the author doesn't tackle the game itself, her analysis of the short film provides insights for this study. In the short film, we see a robotic factory machine building an android. In this case, a white android woman named Kara. A factory worker instructs Kara to perform a series of tests to validate her functionality. At one point, Kara shows that she is self-aware, developing a conscience. The factory worker becomes troubled and starts to disassemble her. In an effort to continue to exist, Kara urges the worker to let her live, promising to do what is expected of her. As the operator continues to disassemble her, the climax of the video happens when she has only her head and torso left and she screams "I'm scared!". In this moment, feeling sympathy towards Kara, the operator decides to spare her with the condition that she behaves as she was programmed to. Crying, Kara thanks the operator and moves toward the platform to be put in a box. Phillips (2020) explains that the short film demonstrates "how an experience of uncanniness in technology is closely related to cultural expectations of identity: Kara only upsets the quality control technician once she deviates from her programmed performance of femininity" (Phillips, 2020, p.77).

Phillips (2020) highlights that in the script, it becomes obvious the intention of the narrative to build this connection as we see Kara speaking out loud the number of activities and

⁷ Cage, D. (Director). (2012). *Kara* [Film]. Sony Computer Entertainment.

abilities she has in her programming. A lot of these activities are performed by women in traditional roles such as housewives and secretaries. As the operator continues the tests, he refers to Kara by gendered nicknames such as “honey” and “baby”.

As the author describes:

The process of disassembly plays out as an unsettling but stereotypical sequence of sexual violence: the forceful removal of clothing, the restraint of limbs, the cutting up of her body into pieces, the begging and pleading and tears, the gratitude and promises of obedience in return for being released in one piece (Phillips, 2020, p. 78).

What makes Kara not wanting to conform to the operator’s expectations is when she realizes that she is “a sort of merchandise” (Phillips, 2020, p.79). The author also states that Kara’s demand for a name is designed to resemble the experience of black slaves. However, based on the works of Hazel Carby and Patricia Hill Collins, Phillips argues that Kara is an android who looks like a white woman because her design is based on the notion “of white womanhood as the universal sympathetic victim” (Phillips, 2020, p.79).

Investigating choice-based games

To gather the information from those games to answer the questions related to each chapter, I take notes and screenshots as I replay *Detroit: Become Human* and *The Wolf Among Us*, as well as play *Beyond: Two Souls* for the first time. After playing these games, I also look at videos of walkthroughs and fandom⁸ to make sure I’m not missing any details of the story or gameplay that could be relevant to my analysis.

My goal with this investigation is to compare the range of approaches to represent this theme in video games. Therefore, instead of analyzing one game in depth, I decided to look at 3 different games to understand how those approaches might contrast or resemble each other and identify patterns in the way the violence is presented. In each chapter, I investigate each game considering the following elements of analysis.

First, I analyze the player's agency and their role in those games, looking at how the story and the mechanics are built to convey the sense of agency. In the level design that involves scenes of violence against women, I inquire: who is the player's character? Are they playing as the victim? As the aggressor? As a witness? Do they get to choose? How much agency does the player have when playing as this character? What can they do and what can't they do? To answer those questions, I describe the overall story of the game, the specific plot of that mission/episode/chapter, the main character design and background, the locked options and how to unlock them, the available options and their consequences in the story.

Second, I look at how this violence is being presented to the player. After having covered what players can and cannot do in the level design and what choices make more impact in the plot, I inquire: What are the types of violence displayed verbally and visually in the games? Is it avoidable? Is it presented as an isolated problem? As part of systemic and structural violence? What are the paths or actions the game encourages players to pursue? To answer those questions, I describe the violence and compare it to the definition of the types of violence provided by Žižek, Bourdieu and Saffioti in order to classify what type of violence and how it is being

⁸ Also known as Wikia, Fandom refers to online encyclopedias whose pages contain specialized information about the games I am investigating.

represented. Moreover, I analyze what choices in the game lead to the violence and whether there is a path that doesn't involve the depiction of it. When looking at the possible paths in the level design, I investigate the trophies and achievements available to inquire what is encouraged or repressed by the game.

Further, I focus on how the victims of violence are being represented in the game. Based on the dichotomies problematized by Meyers as well as Jiwani and Young, I inquire: who are the victims of violence? How are they framed in the narrative? Are they framed as the bad and the good women? If yes, how are those figures represented in those games? Why was violence against women introduced in the story of the game? Do they reinforce traditional gender roles? To answer those questions, I describe the character design of the victims and look for the dichotomies identified previously in news media.

Finally, in the last chapter, after investigating each game separately, I analyze how these games' approaches resemble and differ from each other. My goal is to identify patterns reproduced among these different gameplays. By analyzing these patterns in the light of concepts and processes discussed in the specialized literature, I intend to inquire what are the roles of these games when portraying violence against women. I recap the observations and findings to inquire: How is violence against women being represented in those games? How are they reflecting the power dynamics of male supremacy? What are the challenges of portraying this topic in those games? To answer those questions, I use the concept presented in the theoretical framework as analytical tools to discuss the challenges of portraying topics such as domestic violence and sexual violence in video games. I also refer to the controversies involving *Detroit: Become Human* where the game was criticized for containing scenes of domestic abuse, *Beyond: Two Souls*, to illustrate people's perceptions of sensitive themes such as this one being portrayed in video games.

I am looking for game levels and scenes that show not only the violence suffered by the female protagonist but also by the female non-playable characters. My goal is to identify whether the discourses identified by the authors in the literature review also occur in the narratives of these games.

Chapter 1: The Damsel and The Whore in *The Wolf Among Us*

In this chapter, I investigate representations of femicide in *The Wolf Among Us*. As discussed previously, when analyzing the representations of violence against women in video games, I intend not only to look at how those representations might resemble patterns already identified in other forms of mass media, but also to identify the meanings and symbolism that the killings of female characters might carry in this narrative. Since these women are fictitious, their lives and deaths carry a symbolic meaning. For instance, a character that is killed might embody qualities that represent society's anxieties towards womanhood (Hedley, 1994; Hanson, 2010). On the other hand, a character who gets to be saved might have characteristics that reinforce traditional gender roles, being "a sort of avatar for a precious status quo that must be protected" (Ellis, 2018, 11:23). Therefore, my goal is to understand how the lives and deaths of such characters might reflect the dynamics of dichotomies identified by previous authors (Meyers, 1997; Jiwani & Young, 2006) as well as embody meanings that reinforce traditional gender roles.

Into the World of Fabletown

In this section, I contextualize the settings where *The Wolf Among Us* takes place and the major social conflicts in the plot. Afterwards, I analyze the representation of social class and class oppression in this context. The reason why I am turning to social class as a focus for analysis is that class also plays a big into how violence against women is represented (Meyers, 1997).

The Wolf Among Us is a spinoff series of the Fables comic book series. The narrative is centered on Fables, who are fairy tales and folklore characters. Most of them are talking animals, fairies, trolls, ogres, goblins, dwarves, witches, giants, dragons, and even humans. They are originally from the Homelands, their former magical land where most of the stories in the books were based on. After being forced to leave the Homelands, Fables moved to New York. The story takes place in 1986 in Fabletown⁹, a clandestine community of Fables who live in New York. Fabletown is situated in Bullfinch Street, located in the Upper West Side of Manhattan, and in a large farm, located in upstate New York.

When Fables move to New York, they must hide their true identity from *mundies*, that is, regular people. To change their appearance, they have to take Glamour, a magic potion crafted by witches in Fabletown's Business Office and available for purchase. Fables that don't comply with the rules and can't afford Glamour are sent to the Farm, a place for fables who cannot disguise their true identity. Non-Fables, that is, regular people, cannot enter the farm because of a magical spell that surrounds this location.

After moving to NY, fables lost their prior social status. Many of them used to be royalty in the Homelands or had the chance to live a simple life among nature. Their struggles with social class issues promoted by capitalist systems are the key conflict in this video game. Many have low paid jobs and are constantly being denied assistance from the Business Office, meaning they had to turn to other activities to make a living such as sex work, dealing illegal Glamour for Fables who can't afford the legal one, and incurring debts with powerful and dangerous loan sharks. The main arc of the plot involves the investigation of the murders of two Fable sex

⁹ Irvine, A., & Dougall, A. (2008). *The vertigo encyclopedia* (1st American ed). DK Pub.

workers who are members of this community: Faith, formerly a princess; and Lily, a troll and Faith's friend. The investigation reveals their murders were part of a bigger issue involving the corruption of Fabletown's Business Office and the dominance of the entire community by the clutches of Crooked Man, the puppeteer responsible for ordering the murders and who has been controlling interest over all businesses as well as people who owe him money.

Bigby: The Big Bad Wolf

In this section I do a design overview of the playable character Bigby. Further I analyze how much agency the game provides to players. Finally, I compare how a lack of agency might reflect the social dynamics of systemic violence.

The game's only playable character is Bigby Wolf, who used to be known as the Big Bad Wolf, the villain who appears in many fairy tales such as Little Red Riding Hood, Three Little Pigs, and Peter and the Wolf. He is the sheriff of Fabletown who has the responsibility of enforcing law as well as protecting Fables from mundies and vice versa. He is trying to redeem himself from his bad past when he used to harass and kill other characters in the fairy tales. In the game, we see Bigby's relationship with his roommate, Colin, one of the Three Little Pigs, where the sheriff tries to make up for the bad things done to him. However, regardless of risking his life for saving other characters as well as choosing to be more empathetic, Bigby still faces a lot of criticism from the community.

The players' agency when playing as Bigby comes down to choices of how to proceed in the midst of conflicts: being more pacifist and diplomatic to resolve the issues of Fabletown, demonstrating the change in his behavior; or being more aggressive and violent, reaffirming the vision of other characters about his work ethics and conduct. Regardless of the player's agency, Bigby faces social conflicts that go beyond the decisions one can make in the game. For instance, Bigby, as the only representative of Fabletown's "police", is not able to help and protect all Fables who are endangered or vulnerable. Consequently, he is blamed constantly for only acting to reinforce the law as well as favoring some Fables over others. The frustration of not having his effort and hard work recognized by the community illustrates the lack of agency he has as an individual amid the injustices and violence promoted by the corrupted system.

The Murders of Lily and Faith

In this section, I cover the representation of femicide in this game. First, I do a brief overview of the main plot events that are connected to the representation of the femicide. Further, I report the available meaningful choices that could result in the killing or the saving of those victims. Then, I analyze how the lives and deaths of those characters are framed in the game and whether there are the good/bad women dichotomies. Finally, I analyze how the killers of those women are framed in the game.

Throughout 5 episodes, Bigby and Snow White, the mayor's secretary who ends up becoming the new mayor in the end of the game, work together to find out who killed the sex workers. In episode 1, Bigby finds the bodiless head of a sex worker, the girl he met at the beginning of the episode whose name is later revealed to be Faith. The head was carefully placed at the entrance of the Woodland Luxury Apartments, Fabletown's government building. At the end of the episode, another head was placed in the same spot, although this time it was Snow White's. However, it turns out Snow White was alive and the head actually belonged to Lily, a

troll who was a sex worker that used illegal Glamour to look like Snow White when doing sex work for Ichabod Crane, the mayor and Snow White's boss. Both Faith and Lily had worked in The Pudding & Pie, a strip club in Fabletown owned by Georgie Porgie and Vivian, who were involved with the Crooked Man. Over the episodes, we meet Nerissa, Lily's and Faith's friend who also works in the club. She finds out a way to tell Bigby about the Ribbon spell. It's a ribbon that every sex worker has to wear and cannot remove. It prevents them from sharing information about their clients. If they try to remove it themselves or to disclose secret information, they are beheaded. Because of the ribbon, they are forced to work, taking away their choice of quitting. In episode 5, it's revealed that the Crooked Man ordered Georgie to kill those women by removing their ribbons. It was to make an example of them when they tried to blackmail one of the Crooked Man's allies to bargain for their freedom.

The killing of those women was not an outcome of the player's choices. Those events are pre-written and the murder investigations are what leads the story – it's not possible to save them. Since the murders are mandatory events in the game, there are no impacts in the gameplay involving losing trophies/achievements or game paths becoming unavailable.

We can see in the characters' dialogues how their line of work as well as how their lives and deaths were perceived by others. When Snow and Bigby are in a taxi, they say:

Snow: Seeing all this today... There are Fables that are struggling worse than I'd imagined. We pay so much attention to the residents of the Woodlands... You forget there's a whole community out there to serve. To have to turn to... prostitution. I wish there was more we could do.

This dialogue demonstrates that sex work is perceived in the game not as legitimate work, but as an alternative activity for those who can't make a living in "regular" professions. Other dialogue lines demonstrate prostitution is stigmatized in the game. When reporting Faith's murder, Ichabod Crane, the mayor, responds "Well, this is just wonderful. Not only is a Fable killed, but it was a Fable hooker to boot."

Ruberg (2018) explains that:

Of the many stigmas that surround sex work in twenty-first-century North America, the specific misconception that makes representations of sex workers in mainstream video games so pernicious is the denial of sexual labour as labour. In this discriminatory cultural narrative, sex work does not count as legitimate work (p. 6).

Considering Ruberg's words, we see that prostitution is not seen as a legitimate work in this game. Instead, it's used as a plot device to communicate Fable's class struggle and rise of criminality. Furthermore, the conflict of the narrative is not only based on the degradation of the economic conditions of these characters, but also by classism, that is, discrimination and neglect that they suffer from being of lower class. This becomes evident when Snow describes how Crane runs the office:

Snow: Right now, I'm the gatekeeper, making sure none of these disenfranchised folks are, as he puts it, wasting his time.

Lily

Lily and her sister Holly grew up in the Homelands together, but had a falling out shortly after moving to the mundane world. Aimless and increasingly destitute, Lily turned to prostitution, and now she's the second victim in an ongoing murder investigation. (TellTale Games, 2013, "Book of Fables Entry" section.)



Figure 5: First encounter with Lily when she was glamoured as Snow White

When investigating Lily's murder, we see the same process of marginalization when Holly, a troll bartender, looks for help after her sister Lily goes missing. In episode 1, Bigby is confronted by Grendel, a friend of Holly's:

Grendel: Only comes sniffing around this part of town when the rich fucks in the Woodlands need a shakedown. Ain't that right, Bigby.

Bigby: It's not like that.

Grendel: What I see is someone who wouldn't be here if I was the one needin' the law for some help. Holly's sister goes missing and no one gives two shits about her. Paperwork, waiting rooms, and that bitch Snow White looking right past me, then ushering me out the fuckin' door.



Figure 6: In the examination room, the spell wears off, revealing Lily's true identity as a troll

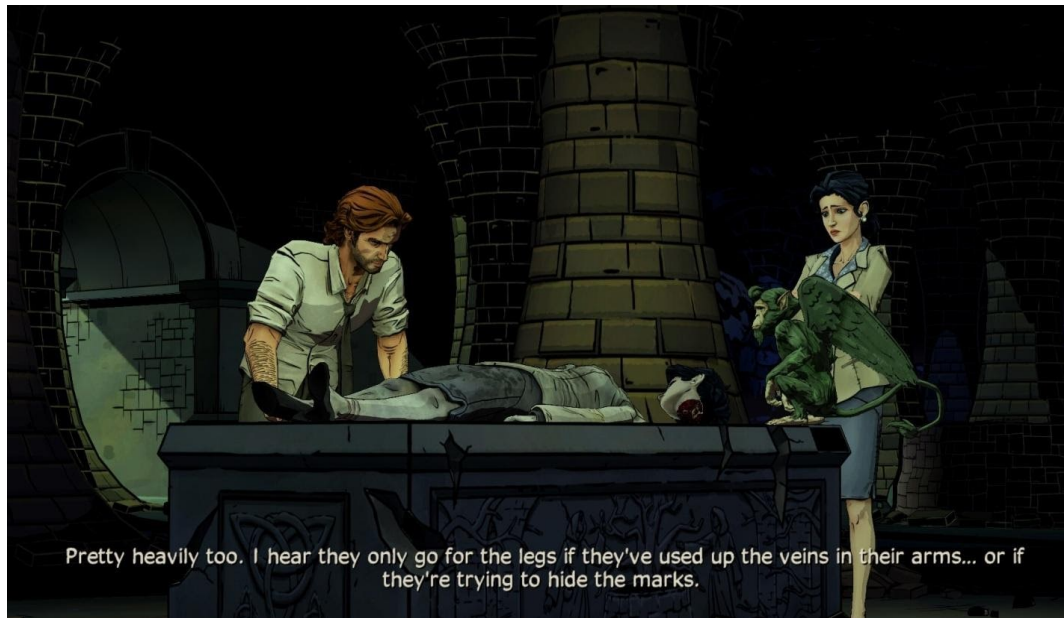


Figure 7: When examining Lily's body, Bigby finds marks of drug use in her legs

However, Lily's suffering was not only invisible because she was part of a poorer part of the community. She was also a sex worker and a Troll, who are not seen the same way as the Fables who look human. When the glamour runs out and Lily's true appearance is revealed, we can see the discrimination over the fact she is a Troll in Crane's dialogue: "Should've left them all back in the Homelands." After this dialogue, Bigby examines Lily's body. He finds she was also a drug addict.

In the examination room, they find drug marks on her leg, which could indicate she was a heavy drug user. Later when Bigby and Snow tell Holly about Lily's murder, it's revealed she was a victim of women trafficking:

Holly: She was lost here, in the city. She just got swept away by it. She was hooking. To pay down debt. It ate me up to see her that way. Eventually, the only people she owed were at her work, you know, that shithole club, The Pudding & Pie. The owner, Georgie, with all his fuckin' "fees", it's a crock of shit. It's how they kept her under their thumb, really.

Holly's dialogue reflects the narrative of victim-blaming when she lists her sister's poor life choices. Instead of focusing on the fact that her sister was the victim of women trafficking, the dialogue emphasizes Lily's choices. The omission on her disappearance, people blaming her murder on her poor life choices and the discriminatory comments about her race could resemble questions related to the moral and racialized economy of representations (Young and Jiwani, 2006) where the intersectionality between class, gender and race discourses renders violence against women of colour invisible. This combination resembles what Meyers points out: "The result is that the news draws on and reinforces stereotypes about African Americans and violence, drug abuse, and prostitution" (Meyers, 1997, p. 119).

By acknowledging the process that rendered Lily's death invisible, we understand the characters reactions towards the fact that Snow White was actually alive:

Grendel: Of course the dear Princess Snow fucking White is all safe and sound! Where were you when we reported this weeks ago, huh? Where are you when we ever fucking need you?! If you'd given one ounce of a shit about her, about any of us, she might've been saved! She might've been cared for!

Holly: It should have been you. It should have been you and it wasn't.

Bigby only started to investigate the murder when they thought Snow White was murdered - someone who appears to be white. The high visibility of Snow White and the invisibility of Lily reflects the social dynamics identified by Meyers (1997).

Representations of women as victims of violence are also tied to discourses of race and class as well as of age and any number of other signifiers of domination and inequality. Within news coverage of violence against women, male and white supremacist ideologies converge. White women are most likely to be covered by the news when they are victims of male violence, especially if they are middle- or upper class. Black victims of sexist violence, particularly if they have few financial resources, are simply not seen as newsworthy.” (Meyers, 1997, p. 119)

The invisible violence towards sex workers in this game is emphasized in Nerissa’s dialogue in episode 5 when she tells Bigby that she was the one who placed Faith’s and Lily’s heads on his doorstep. She explains it was the only way to get his attention:

Nerissa: People like us get forgotten all the time. The Crooked Man was counting on that. When we suffer, we do it in silence. And the world likes it that way. We just... fade. Like we never existed. I couldn't watch that happen to Faith or Lily. Nobody cares about us. Not really.

As pointed out previously by Meyers, the invisibility of the violence committed against these characters is due to the marginalization involved in their jobs as sex workers. However, in Lily’s case, the process of invisibilization is also due to the fact that she is a Troll. This becomes evident in episode 2 when Bigby is investigating the Open Arms Hotel, an establishment situated close to the Pudding & Pie where the sex workers have appointments with their clients. Bigby is surprised to meet Beauty¹⁰ working at the front desk. Since Bigby was previously informed that Lily last booked the room 207, he asks Beauty the last time she saw her. Beauty says: “Oh! Oh, yes, the, uh, the troll. I did see her. I mean, you know, we never really spoke, but... she came off a tad intimidating.” Beauty’s choice of using “intimidating” to describe Lily, a character who was also judged negatively simply for being a Troll by Crane, resembles the biased way black women are described. As Smith (2003) highlights: “We are perceived as modern day Sapphires (i.e., angry, threatening, intimidating, unintelligent, black, and female)” (Smith, 2003, p. 120).

Later, Beauty questions Bigby’s language when he refers to Lily as “a body” instead of “she”. Beauty reflects upon Lily’s murder and instead of blaming her for her poor life choices, she sees that any girl could have been the victim of this serial killer. However, instead of questioning the Fable citizen’s lack of support from her own government, her attention focuses on the monstrous mind of the serial killer.

¹⁰ Beauty is one of the main characters in the game. She is married to Beast and they are the well-known fables from the Beauty and the Beast’s tale.

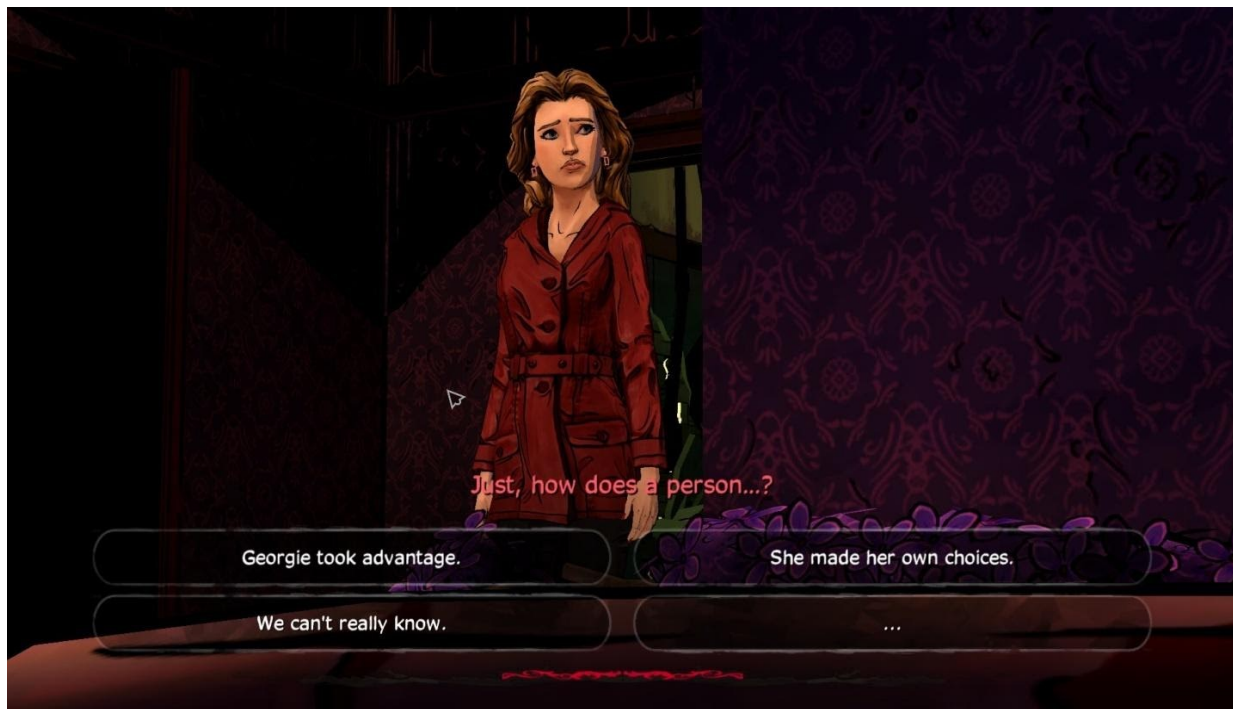


Figure 8: Beauty asks Bigby the reason why Lily was killed

When Beauty asks why Lily was murdered, there are a couple of answers Bigby can give her. He can blame Georgie, the strip club owner, for forcing Lily into compulsory labour: “Georgie took advantage of her when she was in trouble. He’s a real predator.” He can answer: “We can’t know the answer to that. Every situation is different.” Or Bigby blames her choices: “it sounds like there was a series of choices involved. I’m sure she’d have done things differently if she knew where things were headed”. Depending on Bigby’s dialogue, it can reinforce a victim-blame narrative.

Throughout the episodes, I argue there are many narrative devices that reinforce Trolls as a representation of non-white people. First, Crane’s and Beauty’s dialogue indicate that Lily was discriminated against for being a Troll. Second, in episode 2, when Snow offers to handle the funeral arrangements, Holly explains that there is a specific spiritual ceremony from Troll tradition.

Snow: Please, we can handle the funeral arrangements...

Holly: No, no it’s-- it’s a kind of-- it’s a formality with trolls. We burn our dead by sunrise or... I dunno. Some old world shit will fuck your soul up.

Burning the dead in funeral ceremonies is a common practice among non-Christians, “observed among Buddhists, Hindus and Jains from well before the start of the Common Era, and was later adopted by Sikh” (Arnold, 2016, p. 396). This ritual is considered to be a way to historically differentiate them from Christians and Muslims whose tradition of burying the dead was considered to be the norm. For them, the practice of burning the dead allows the soul to be at peace by leaving the body (Arnold, 2016). Therefore, the religious ritual Holly explains in the

dialogue can be interpreted as one of the narrative devices that reinforces Trolls as a representation of non-white people.

Lily is also represented as a drug addict and a sex worker, which is a common race stereotype that oppresses African Americans (Meyers, 1997). This would not be the first time trolls are designed within video game narrative to resemble people of color. As Monson (2012) points out, designing fictitious races to represent ethnicity serve to reinforce the notion that racial boundaries are determined by biology which naturalizes and justifies differences and inequalities. The process of assigning values to bodies based on their ethnic characteristics is called racial categorization or as epidermalization. In this context, Race is socially constructed through discursive practices that often involve the perpetuation of race stereotypes.

Faith

Faith, otherwise known as Donkeyskin girl, made it through the Exodus from the Homelands with the clothes on her back, her husband, and nothing else. She was once a beautiful princess, happily married to Prince Lawrence of a neighboring kingdom. Her life should have had a happy ending, but the mundane city of New York wasn't kind to her, or her marriage. With no money, Faith found herself turning tricks to make the rent for a cheap apartment on the outskirts of Fabletown. She had a difficult life, but she did what she could to survive in an unfamiliar world. (TellTale Games, 2013, “Book of Fables Entry” section)



Figure 9: In the first encounter with Faith, Bigby protects her from The Woodsman.

The first encounter with Faith happens in the prologue, when she was still alive. She was being slapped by the Woodsman. When Bigby gets between both of them to end the aggression, the Woodsman, drunk, attacks him. After the Woodsman is defeated, Faith looks for the money the Woodsman owed her without success. Later, it's revealed that the money belonged to Lily and, as a favor to her, Faith went over to the Woodsman's apartment to get it. In response,

Bigby offers some. In the middle of the first episode, Bigby finds Faith's bodiless head laying down in front of the Woodlands building.



Figure 10: Faith is the first victim Bigby finds.

When investigating Faith's murder, the first victim, we learn she wasn't always a sex worker. In the Book of Fables, it's revealed that her father committed incestuous sexual violence against her.

The story of Donkeyskin. There once was a great king with a beautiful queen. The queen grew ill and had her husband promise to only marry the most beautiful girl in the kingdom. After a long search, it became clear that the only women in the land that could match her beauty was... his daughter... Faith. She had a magic cloak made from the skin of her father's prized donkey... that would hide her beauty so she could escape his kingdom. Eventually she married a prince, who could see past the magic cloak and knew her true beauty... and they lived happily ever after (TellTale Games, 2013, "Book of Fables" section).



Figure 11: Bigby learns Faith used to be a princess who was being molested by her own father

After learning that Faith was married to Prince Lawrence, Bigby and Snow go after him because they suspect he might have killed her. When they arrive at his apartment, Bigby and Snow discover he was almost dead after attempting suicide. Depending on the player's choices, Bigby can save Lawrence if they decide to visit him first instead of going after the Woodsman, who is the other suspect. They find Lawrence's suicide letter where he reveals he wanted to end his life because he felt like a burden to Faith for having her worrying about him and checking on him. After telling Lawrence about Faith's murder, Lawrence mentions Georgie's name.

Further, the game's narrative reveals that neither Faith and Lily wanted to work for Georgie anymore. However, they couldn't simply quit their jobs because of the ribbon's curse, which would behead them. Since they didn't have the freedom to leave, Faith came up with a plan. She stole a picture where Crane is engaging in his sexual fantasy with Lily, glamourised to look like Snow White to comply with his fetish. Faith's plan was to use the picture to bargain for both their freedom and that of Nerissa's freedom¹¹. However, Nerissa, fearing the plan wouldn't work and they would be killed, tells Georgie the truth and begs for forgiveness for all of them. But because they were threatening Crane, who was later revealed to be one of the Crooked Man's allies, their plan didn't work, and neither did Nerissa's call for mercy. Faith and Lily had their ribbons removed, severing their heads from their bodies. In the end of the game, there's a plot twist, suggesting that Faith might still be alive¹².



Figure 12: Snow learns Crane paid to have sex with Lily glamourised as Snow White.

¹¹ Nerissa is the name of the character who used to be known as the Little Mermaid in the Homelands. She works at the Pudding & Pie as one of the sex workers. She helps Bigby to investigate the murders of Lily and Faith, who used to be her friends.

¹² In the last scene of episode 5, when Bigby is talking to Nerissa, she repeats the same thing Faith said in episode 1: "You're not as bad as everyone says you are." At the end, the game suggests that Nerissa might have been Faith all the time but disguised as her. This end is left open to interpretation and it's never confirmed.

The way Faith's murder is framed is completely different from Lily's. First, Faith's choices were never questioned by any character. When thinking about the reasons that led to Faith's murder, the narrative points to Georgie, the character who was sex trafficking Lily and Faith rather than questioning Faith's choices. In addition, the game frames Faith as a devoted and loving wife who became a sex worker to make a living for herself and her husband who was unable to take care of himself due to depression. Finally, because she dies trying to save her friends, she is framed as a hero. Based on the previous author's works (Meyers, 1997; Young & Jiwani, 2006), we see the reason why they are framed so differently is the fact that Faith has characteristics which reinforce traditional gender roles. As a former princess and caring wife, the act of becoming a sex worker is justified by her husband's mental illness. Her act as a rebellious girl who threatens powerful and dangerous people frames her as someone to be admired rather than forgotten like Lily. Race also plays a big role in the distinct ways the murder of these two characters are framed in the game. In this case, the fact that Faith is a white female character and Lily is the racialized one influences the way their deaths are perceived.

Who Killed Lily and Faith?

In episode 3, Bigby discovers that Crane was Lily's last client before the murder and that he was stealing Snow's belongings to craft a potion to make Lily look like Snow White for his sexual fantasy. Bigby and Snow discuss whether Crane is the murderer:

Snow: Bigby, I don't think he did it.

Bigby: What?!

Snow: Look at him. Do you really think this man murdered these women? He's not... he wouldn't be brave enough... Not to put his stamp on the world like that. He's a disgusting coward, not a murderer.

As we can see in the dialogue, murdering two women is framed in the narrative as an act of bravery. The narrative focuses on the murderer's profile, presenting male abusers as abominations of masculinity and "offering a psychological and individualized portrayal of their crimes" (Jiwani and Young, 2006, p. 901).

In episode 5, it's revealed that Faith and Lily were murdered by Georgie who received orders from the Crooked Man. In episode 5, when Georgie is dying from a stab wound, Bigby confronts him for murdering the girls. In the discussion, Vivian, who is Georgie's partner and also a sex worker, tries to defend him. When being accused of the murders, both Vivian and Georgie claim it wasn't his fault because he didn't have a choice. First, Georgie justifies his act based on being threatened by the Crooked Man.

When Bigby doesn't accept his justification for killing them, Georgie reveals why he couldn't have freed Faith and Lily from the ribbons instead of murdering them. To let them go, he would have to kill Vivian. In the scene, Georgie points at Vivian's ribbon and explains that she wears the original one.

Georgie: This is the original. The "Girl with the Ribbon". I'm sure you've heard the stories. Couldn't take it off, couldn't talk about it. She used her little purple ribbon to make more of 'em. To keep our girls quiet. To ensure "absolute discretion".

Vivian: You promised you wouldn't...

Georgie: All that magic is connected to this little thing. You remove hers... and the spell's broken. They're all free! But you know what happens to her? The same thing that happened to Faith.

This turns out to be a plot twist which serves to justify the killing of the sex workers, framing them as Georgie's moral dilemma of choosing to murder Faith and Lily or his lover. The narrative presents sex trafficking as part of Vivian's naive business idea that ended up being twisted by the Crooked man:

Vivian: You have to understand... nobody was supposed to die. When we built this place... it was just a stupid idea... a gimmick. "Discretion is our guarantee"... That's how it started anyway. This was supposed to be our place. We were gonna be in charge for once, and nobody would try to control us, or use us... That was the point. The Crooked Man showed up and everything just turned to shit.



Figure 13: Bigby can choose between freeing the sex workers or killing Vivian

After this dialogue, Georgie dares Bigby to pull off Vivian's ribbon and the game gives you this option. However, it doesn't make any difference because Vivian doesn't allow the player to do so. Regardless of the player's choice, Vivian ends up killing herself because of the guilt she feels for Lily's and Faith's murders. When Vivian says "Do you think I wanted to be this person? What I did to Faith and Lily... to all of them...", her monologue indicates she takes the blame for the murders.

In episode 5, we see how the character's dialogue aims to answer important questions. What happened? Who is the person responsible for the murders? Why were those female

characters killed? When responding to them, I argue that the attempt of the game to humanize Georgie reflects dynamics identified before (Meyers, 1997; Young & Jiwani, 2006). Instead of holding him accountable for his actions, Georgie is framed as someone who was doing bad things for the right reasons.

In this chapter, when Vivian reveals that she reproduced the ribbons so the other sex workers would be silent about customers' secrets and she blames the Crooked Man for the death of Faith and Lily, Vivian doesn't acknowledge that silencing them, just like she was silenced, is what put them in this situation.

Although it was Georgie who "pulled the trigger" when following The Crooked Man's order to kill Faith and Lily, I argue that their murder was not perpetrated by an individual, but by the social system. As it was explained previously, systemic violence is a term used by scholars to address the harm perpetrated by social structures caused to communities. According to Žižek (2008), poverty can be considered a form of systemic violence because it's perpetrated by capitalism, which is a system that profits from it. Without this type of systemic violence, the capitalist system cannot exist the way it is. Poverty and classism is what actually killed both characters. If the Fabletown business office had given support to the community, fables wouldn't have to look for jobs that were degrading. And at the same time, the Fabletown business office benefitted from this situation insofar as it was receiving money and favors from powerful figures who were offering those degrading jobs such as The Crooked Man and Georgie. Without poverty, Faith and Lily wouldn't need to submit to sex exploitation. However, a society without poverty would also mean that powerful politicians and businessmen such as Crane and The Crooked Man wouldn't profit from it. Therefore, this discourse, that aims to individualize the violence perpetrated by the social system, serves to maintain the current status quo.

Snow White

Snow White may seem cold, but this stems from her life of mistreatment and abuse back in the Homelands. After escaping assault and imprisonment, not to mention an attempt on her life, she married Prince Charming. It wasn't long before Snow discovered that Charming cheated on her with her estranged sister, Rose Red, and she divorced him. After the Exodus, Snow focused her attention on setting up a safe haven for Fables in the New World. She now serves as Assistant to the Deputy Mayor of Fabletown. (TellTale Games, 2013, "Book of Fables Entry" section)

Snow White is one of the main characters in the game who helps Bigby, the playable character, investigate the murders of two sex workers. Although she is well-known due to her past as a former princess, Snow works as a secretary for Crane, the mayor in the Fabletown Business Office. For years, she witnessed the process of marginalization of a part of the Fable community by a privileged upper class of fables who live in the Woodlands.

Throughout the 5 episodes, we see the tensions explained previously taking place in the social dynamics between Snow and Bigby. Over the chapters, there are multiple occasions where Bigby tries to protect Snow from the harsh social inequities and dangers in Fabletown. This becomes evident in episode 2, when it's revealed that Snow was safe after finding a corpse that looked like her:

Bigby: I just want you to be careful. I almost lost you once.

Snow: I'm not yours to lose.

The tension between Bigby's overprotective behavior and Snow's effort to get involved in the investigation, even when involving dangerous people, illustrates the conflict between the duality of being a former princess and a government agent. As it's described in the Book of Fables entry, this tension is framed as her cold personality which is an emotional scar left by years of abuse. Based on the tensions addressed previously, I argue that her "coldness" is not due to her traumatic past, but about the conflicts between the expectations of who she used to be and who she is now.

At the same time, Bigby's constant effort to keep Snow safe, even when it's against her will, can also represent society's anxieties towards women occupying spaces that used to be dominated by men. His overprotective behavior can be interpreted as a narrative effort to reinforce traditional gender roles. In this way, Snow's "cold" reaction towards him is not only a reference to her name, but also illustrates these tensions.

Snow's coldness is not only represented in her relationship with Bigby, but also in the way she handles social inequities as the new mayor. Although she can be empathetic when dealing with children or offer sincere consolation when contacting someone about the death of a relative, Snow seems to be blind towards Fable's class struggles. In episode 3, Bigby and Snow discover there are witches outside the business office that illegally produce and sell Glamour to make a living. In response Snow tries to burn down a witch's tree, destroying her method of income, because she was breaking the law. In episode 5, Snow sends Mister Toad and Toad Junior to the Farm because they can't afford Glamour. When investigating the murders of Lily and Faith, Snow believes that law enforcement and doing "everything by the book" is the way to solve the social inequities in Fabletown. When finding out that many fables owed debt to the Crooked Man or became sex workers, she questions why they didn't just get "regular" jobs instead of getting involved with a criminal.

This Character Will Remember That

In *The Wolf Among Us*, as in other games developed by Telltale Games, players' choices can have different impacts in the story. Decisions might improve or deteriorate the playable character's relationship with other non-playable characters. Their consequences might involve letting a character die or saving them. At the beginning of the game, this message is displayed: "This game series adapts to the choices you make. The story is tailored by how you play". To generate discussion among players related to what decisions they choose, there is a screen at the end of each episode displaying the choices made by the player in comparison with the ones made by the majority of all players. However, just a select group of choices are part of this decision board. Many dialogue options that take place throughout the episode don't make it to the board. In this chapter section, I look at the choices that were displayed via the board and see whether or not they were the key choices that are relevant to the discussion related to the representation of violence against women. All outcomes will be listed in the appendices. I won't cover the achievements in this game because they are only tied to the completion of the episodes. Players don't get achievements by making specific choice combinations. There are no trophies. As players progress in the game, they unlock entries in the Book of Fables regarding specific characters they encounter throughout the story. Those entries give information about these characters and their life changes when leaving the Homelands behind and moving to New York.

Episode 1: “Faith”

Table 1

Decision board of Episode 1: “Faith”

Decision	Choice A	Choice B	Choice C
Did you give Faith your money?	Did not give her money.	Gave her money.	
Did you tell Beast the truth about seeing Beauty leaving the building at night?	Tried to stay out of it.	Told Beast the truth.	Lied to Beast.
When investigating Faith's murder, where did you decide to go first?	Toad's apartment to check on him after receiving his distress call.	Prince Lawrence's apartment.	
What happened to Prince Lawrence?	Prevented Lawrence's Death.	Did not prevent Lawrence's death.	He died by his own hand.
Who is your prime suspect?	Prince Lawrence.	Woodsman.	Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum.
Who did you arrest?	Tweedle Dee.	Woodsman.	

Note. Decision board displayed at the end of Episode 1: “Faith” of *The Wolf Among Us*.

As table 1 indicates, 2 out of 6 decisions are related to the way Bigby develops his relationships. 3 out of 6 are related to strategic decisions regarding the investigation. 1 out of 6 regards the success or failure to save a character that can give players a clue regarding the identity of the murderer. The only decision that could relate to the theme of violence against women is about telling Beast about Beauty hiding in the front yard. As we will observe throughout the game, the choice of lying to Beast or telling him the truth is the only existing decision tree regarding this theme.

There are some dialogue choices that didn’t make it to the decision board that are related to violence against women. When Bigby and Snow are in the taxi going back to Fabletown Business Office after learning Faith’s true identity and encountering prince Lawrence, Snow shares her frustration about not being able to help Fables like Faith who turns to prostitution to earn a living. Bigby can support her by saying “You’re doing your best”, confront her by demanding “Do something about it”, point out that “Crane is the problem” or remain in silence. The only visual consequence of this dialogue is that Bigby’s relationship with Snow can improve or not. The message “Snow appreciated that” appears on the screen. However, regardless of making choices that might make Snow happy with Bigby or not, their relationship status doesn’t change nor leads to different outcomes. In the comics, Bigby and Snow ended up having a

romantic relationship which is something that the game capitalizes on with these visual clues although there aren't any decision trees related to that. Talking about corruption and systemic violence in the game serves as a plot device to make choices that give the illusion that Bigby's love life might improve if he agrees with everything Snow has to say without further reflection.

When Bigby is confronted by Grendel in the Trip Trap Bar about his negligence towards the poor part of Fabletown while defending the Woodsman, who is Grendel's friend, there are four decisions players can make. Bigby can criticize Grendel for backing up the Woodsman who could be considered one of the prime suspects at this point in the game. Bigby can question Grendel's choice of words when calling him a lap dog as a reference to his dedication towards Fabletown's upper class. Bigby can try to defend himself by saying "it's not like that". Bigby can also remain silent. Then Grendel criticizes Snow White for preventing him and other lower-class fables from getting support from public resources. However, because he called Snow a "bitch", the dialogue choices are focused on how Bigby will respond to it. Regardless of how Bigby chooses to respond, this dialogue will lead to a major fight scene that can either end by Bigby leaving after Grendel asks for a truce or him severing Grendel's arm even after he gives up on fighting. After the fight, even if Grendel still has his arm, all characters are scared of Bigby. When revisiting this scene, we know that Grendel was trying to get support from the Fabletown Business Office because Lily was missing. The same way that the range of decisions displayed in Snow and Bigby's previous dialogue revolves around Bigby's attempt to improve their relationship, the same happens in this scene. The marginalization of lower-class fables is dismissed in the dialogue options where all the options are related to defending Snow from being called a "bitch".

Episode 2: "Smoke & Mirrors"

Table 2

Decision board of Episode 2: "Smoke & Mirrors"

Decision	Choice A	Choice B
When Crane thought Snow was dead, how did Bigby respond?	Sympathized with him.	Accused him of not caring.
How did you interrogate the murder suspect?	Persuaded him to talk.	Forced him to talk.
Did you let Snow come with you to the Trip Trap?	Let her make her own decision.	Told her to stay.
How did you handle Georgie Porgie?	Didn't hit Georgie.	Hit Georgie.
When fighting against Beast's jealousy rage, did you keep punching him while he was down?	Didn't punch him a second time.	Punched him a second time.

Note. Decision board displayed at the end of Episode 2: "Smoke & Mirrors" of *The Wolf Among Us*.

As table 2 indicates, 2 out of 5 decisions are related to the way Bigby develops his relationships. 3 out of 5 are related to Bigby's tendency of relying on violence to resolve

conflicts or trying to redeem himself by being less violent. However, there is one decision in this episode that didn't make it to the board that is closely related to the theme. When telling Holly that her sister's body was found, there are a couple of dialogue decisions available. In this scene, when Bigby enters the bar, Jack, Holly's friend, confronts Bigby about his ineffective investigation since 2 fables were already dead and Lily was missing. In this dialogue, Bigby can either let Jack talk or throw him out. When telling Holly the bad news about Lily, players can choose to be direct with her, avoid telling her, be gentle with her or remain in silence. Regardless of what players choose, Grendel will yell at Bigby for the authorities' negligence towards the lower-class fables. Grendel's reaction leads to Holly's emotional meltdown. Amid this situation, Bigby can either say he is sorry, request everyone to give her some space, remain in silence or carry on with the investigation by asking her questions regardless of her emotional state. To comfort Holly, Snow gives her one of Lily's personal belongings. There are different ways Bigby can react. He can say it was a "good call", reprimand Snow by claiming that the object could be evidence, complain they don't have time for that or remain in silence. Further, Holly discloses the life that Lily was enduring. In that moment, Bigby can ask questions regarding the investigation. Afterwards, Holly explains that she needs to get Lily's body to burn it which is a practice specific to Troll tradition. Bigby can: let her have the body, say he is going to check with Crane, deny her request by claiming the corpse as evidence or remain in silence. Although the message "You promise Holly the Body" displays on the screen depending on players choices, this is not a decision tree. Regardless of what Bigby decides, Crane will get rid of the body to cover his secret. Even if the message serves to illustrate that it is a decision that matters, it doesn't even appear on the board of decisions.

The way Bigby treats Holly, Grendel and Jack, who are lower class fables, whether by being empathetic or being violent, is never highlighted as an important decision. It doesn't display these status messages. Most of those choices don't make it to the decision board. Moreover, they don't have consequences unless it's something visual like ripping off someone's arm.

Episode 3: "A Crooked Mile"

As table 3 indicates, 2 out of 6 decisions are related to strategic choices on how to conduct the investigation which involves what place to investigate first, to make a deal with certain characters in exchange for information, etc. 1 out of 6 choices involves engaging in violence or not by killing an NPC. 3 out of 6 decisions are related to how Bigby interacts with the community: by being helpful, respectful and empathetic towards the struggles of lower-class fables, or not. However, when we look at the scenes where he decides to interrupt –or not– the funeral and to burn –or not– the tree, their decision options might be interpreted not as Bigby's attempt to redeem himself in the eyes of the community.

When Bigby arrives at the funeral to tell Snow about the picture of Lily and Crane, the only difference in this scene (whether players choose to interrupt the ceremony or not) is Snow's dialogue: "Bigby, what the hell are you doing?!" Regardless of interrupting or not, Holly will be hostile towards Bigby because Lily's body was discarded by the Business Office. In this episode we discover that whether promising to give Lily's body back to Holly or not, the outcome is the same. The fact that the only difference in this scene is Snow's criticism towards Bigby's action demonstrates that the only consequence is Snow's disapproval. This is not the first time the game centers the conflict on Snow's perception of Bigby and the possibility of romance which is

something that gives players the false expectation that by making her happy, Bigby will develop a romantic relationship with her. This possibility is later reinforced in this episode when Bigby and Snow flirt, which gives the impression that the romance was a possibility since it happens in the comics. Some players have discussions in Steam's forum about this frustration¹³.

Table 3

Decision board of episode 3: "A Crooked Mile"

Decision	Choice A	Choice B	Choice C
Did you interrupt Snow's eulogy in Lily's funeral?	Didn't interrupt.	Interrupted.	
What place did you investigate first?	Trip Trap.	Crane's apartment.	Tweedles' office.
Did you offer Flycatcher a job in Fabletown Business Office in exchange for him leaving his current position working for the Tweedles?	Offered a job.	Didn't offer a job.	
Did you make a deal with Jack?	Decided to make a deal.	Decided not to make a deal.	
When Snow ordered Bigby to burn Greenleaf's tree after learning she was producing "illegal" Glamour, did you do it?	Didn't burn the tree.	Burned the tree.	
Did you kill Tweedle Dum?	Didn't kill him.	Killed him.	

Note. Decision board displayed at the end of Episode 3: "A Crooked Mile" of *The Wolf Among Us*.

When Bigby and Snow visit Aunty Greenleaf, the witch who had produced "illegal" glamour used by Lily, they learn that she has been supplying the Crooked Man. Snow demands Bigby to burn the tree to prevent Greenleaf from continuing to work for the Crooked Man. Bigby can choose to burn the tree or not as well as to hire Greenleaf to work for the Business Office in exchange for her not working for the Crooked Man anymore. If Bigby burns the tree, the game will display the message: "Aunty Greenleaf will remember that". If Bigby doesn't burn the tree, whether by claiming that Snow is not yet his boss or by pointing out that she wants to burn the tree because she is upset with Crane who benefited from the glamour produced by Greenleaf, the game will display the message: "Snow will remember that". Although this scene is not related to violence against women, it serves to demonstrate that the game focuses on the possibility of developing a romance with Snow.

Considering that in the same episode Bigby and Snow flirt and the consequences of choices related to violence against women are based on Snow's perception of Bigby's actions, I argue that Bigby is not choosing between what is right or wrong, but rather between what's best

¹³ Steam (2015). *Discussion on Snow and Bigby's social interactions in the game*. Retrieved June 26, 2021 from <https://steamcommunity.com/app/250320/discussions/0/530646080867467876/>

for the community or what will make Snow happy, feeding on the illusion that romance is a possibility with her.

Episode 4: “In Sheep's Clothing”

As table 4 indicates, 2 out of 5 decisions are related to strategic decisions in how to conduct the investigation: by which place to investigate first and how to react to the Crooked Man. 3 out of 5 regard Bigby’s relationship with other fables. Although the attempt at removing Nerissa’s ribbon is highlighted in the decision board, there are no consequences to this action. Whether the player tries to remove it or not, Nerissa won’t let Bigby do it. And while the game displays the message: “Nerissa will remember that,” it doesn’t impact the narrative. In this scene, Bigby learns that the ribbon prevents Nerissa from revealing what is going on. At this point in the game, that was not yet completely explained. The attempt serves to confirm that removing the ribbon will kill her. This action does not constitute an attempt to kill Nerissa, but the message displayed demonstrates that this choice is used by the narrative to define Bigby’s character in a particular way.

Table 4

Decision board of Episode 4: “In Sheep’s Clothing”

Decision	Choice A	Choice B	Choice C	Choice D
Did you send Colin to the Farm?	Didn't send Colin to the Farm.	Sent Colin to the Farm.		
Did you attempt to remove Nerissa's ribbon?	Didn't attempt to remove the ribbon.	Attempted to remove the ribbon.		
Which Crooked operation did you investigate first?	The Cut Above.	The Lucky Pawn.		
Did you send Toad to the Farm?	Didn't send Toad to the Farm.	Sent Toad to the Farm.		
How did you respond to the Crooked Man?	Tried to arrest him.	Agreed to talk with him first.	Lit a cigarette.	Threatened him.

Note. Decision board displayed at the end of Episode 4: “In Sheep’s Clothing” of *The Wolf Among Us*.

Episode 5: “Cry Wolf”

In table 5, choices are mostly related to the punishment of NPCs. 3 out of 6 decisions are related to how to punish the Crooked Man. There were plenty of options in how to do it: by killing the Crooked Man before the trial or after the trial whether by severing his head or throwing him down the Witching Well as well as to imprison him. If Bigby rips off the Crooked Man’s head, the game displays the message: “Fabletown is afraid of the Big Bad Wolf”. If Bigby throws him

down the Witching Well or locks him up, the game displays the message: “Fabletown will remember that”. The different messages demonstrate that Bigby’s actions do not raise questions about systematic violence, but about his internal conflict regarding his violent tendencies. Bigby's acts of violence such as killing and violently assaulting other characters are never questioned as the violence perpetuated by the state since he is an authority figure in Fabletown. In the end of episode 5, when Bigby expresses his feelings about the actions he has taken so far throughout the episodes, players can choose whether he thinks he did a good or a bad job as well as to consider that his choices have no impact whatsoever in the community. All of the dialogue choices regarding Bigby’s perception of his own actions demonstrates his lack of self-awareness regarding the impact of the violence. Whether by players' choices or pre-scripted events, he continues as the sheriff. The game presents police violence as the acts of an individual rather than a type of violence that is perpetuated by the social structure.

Table 5

Decision board of Episode 5: “Cry Wolf”

Decision	Choice A	Choice B	Choice C	Choice D
What did you do to Georgie?	Killed Georgie.	Left Georgie to suffer.		
Did you give the Crooked Man a trial?	Brought the Crooked Man back alive.	Killed the Crooked Man at the foundry.		
If you killed the Crooked Man, did you walk out of the Witching Well?	Stayed until the end.	Walked out.		
If you spared the Crooked Man, how did you punish the Crooked Man?	Imprisoned the Crooked Man.	Threw the Crooked Man down the Witching Well.	Ripped the Crooked Man's head off.	
Did you accept Toad son's gift for Snow?	Accepted TJ's gift for Snow.	Did not accept TJ's gift for Snow.		
What were your last words to Nerissa?	"I hope I've done some good here."	"I've made a lot of mistakes."	"None of it matters in the end."	Remained silent.

Note. Decision board displayed at the end of Episode 5: “Cry Wolf” of *The Wolf Among Us*.

There are no dialogue options whatsoever that present authority’s negligence towards lower-class fables and poverty as types of systemic violence that were the reason behind the rise of the Crooked Man which contributed to the killing of Faith and Lily. As the Crooked Man is punished, regardless of the method, Holly always closes this chapter by saying: “For Lily and Faith”. Once their murders are “revenged,” the conflict is resolved. Once again, the narrative

focuses on the killing of these two characters as being only caused by the action of an individual rather than by a corrupt system which victimizes marginalized people.

This Action Will Have Consequences

Based on the impacts on each episode and the choices displayed in the decision board, it's possible to observe a few patterns. First, most consequences are tied to choices regarding Bigby's conflict-resolution techniques. In these scenarios, most conflicts are based on the dissonance between Bigby's role as a law enforcer and as a member of the community who also struggles because of the same laws he has to enforce. Those conflicts are usually centered on the fact that Bigby has to follow orders that benefit the privileged section of Fabletown, which results in the discontent of marginalized fables who criticize Bigby's negligence towards them. Regardless of players' choices, whether choosing to resort to violence to solve conflicts, to remain in silence, to be mean-hearted, good-hearted or witty, the community will never be satisfied with Bigby's actions because they reflect a broken system. Their constant disapproval of Bigby's decisions isolate him.

Players might play the game with the purpose of redeeming Bigby's past and helping him to be accepted and included in the Fable community. However, this goal will never be completely fulfilled in the end. Bigby's limited agency can also be a result of Telltale Games' tendency to converge the range of distinct choices to a common outcome (Favis, 2015). Although Telltale Games are well-known for having almost linear storylines where most players' choices don't really matter, some players look at a character's choices as opportunities for role play where they make decisions based on their performance as that character¹⁴.

As analyzed previously, the meaningful choice consequences in the game are meant to explore Bigby's emotional conflicts. Although the central conflict is the murder of these female characters, the decisions that players can make revolve around Bigby's attempt to redeem himself from his past or surrender to his violent instincts. In other words, femicide serves as a background for the male protagonist to develop as a character. This becomes clear in the decisions regarding how to conduct the investigation. Decisions regarding treating the victim's family with respect such as letting Holly have Lily's body for the funeral or denying this request don't even make it to the decision board. Moreover, choosing to respect Holly's grief doesn't make any difference because, in the end, Crane throws Lily's body down the Witching Well anyways. Although player's agency is very limited in Telltale Games, there is a clear distinction between choices that matter and choices that don't matter. The decisions that make the difference in the story are usually related to killing or saving specific characters, the order of places players investigate, and how to punish the villain.

Class Oppression, Systemic Violence and Agency

As demonstrated before, the murders of Faith and Lily were not caused by someone, but rather by the social system. To summarize, systemic violence, in this case poverty and classism, is what supported the rise of powerful criminals such as the Crooked Man. Punishing and killing murderers does not end the femicide insofar as it is caused by systemic violence. The discourse

¹⁴ Reddit. (2015) *Explain your choices*. Retrieved June 26, 2021 from https://www.reddit.com/r/TheWolfAmongUs/comments/2cbtcb/explain_your_choices/

on punishment serves to direct the anger of the community in the search for justice to a “scapegoat” in order to protect the status quo.

In *The Wolf Among Us*, this discourse is embedded in the process of defining what choices should matter. The meaningful choices that define how the game ends take place at the end of episode 5 when the Crooked Man is judged by the Fable community for ordering Georgie to kill Faith and Lily. Players can decide to arrest him or kill him by throwing him down the Witching Well or by ripping his head off. Regardless of what players choose, punishing him won’t prevent future crimes from being committed because the reason why the Crooked Man became such a powerful criminal was due to the broken and corrupted system.

As a way to give this tale a happy ending, Snow White becomes the new mayor and promises to change the ways things are being handled. However, what is broken is not just the corruption and neglect of Crane's mandate. What the game represents, but fails to recognize, is the fact that the class oppression experienced by these characters will not disappear with a new mandate. In the course of the episodes, Snow White considers law-breaking as the main problem in Fabletown which could easily be solved by more or better law enforcement. Snow’s unwillingness to recognize Fable’s class struggles demonstrate that there’s a high possibility that this is not a happy ending at all.

At the end, one of the few meaningful choices players have is the method of punishment, but not how to prevent new powerful criminals from rising nor new femicides to be committed. On the other hand, another meaningful choice was to decide whether to reinforce the same law that sent Mister Toad and his son to the farm onto Colin, Bigby’s roommate who was also breaking the law by not using Glamour. The few moments players have agency in this game involve law enforcement and punishment.

As analyzed previously, the limited agency in this game can have multiple meanings. This is common among Telltale Games. It can be a way to represent systemic violence instead of a violence perpetrated by an individual which means it can’t be solved by one person. The lack of agency Bigby experiences, which is translated as the Fable community being constantly unhappy regardless of his decisions, is the same powerlessness we feel as individuals amid systemic violence. Moreover, as mentioned previously, the limited agency can also serve to differentiate what choices matter which highlights which subjects are more valuable to the game narrative over others. For example, treating the family of marginalized victims respectfully doesn't have any impact on the game play. But killing or saving a character makes the difference. These choices and consequences serve to value the punishment of an individual over the reform of social structures. To prevent more femicides from being committed in Fabletown, it would be necessary to “eradicate systems of domination” (hooks, 2015, p. 20) by ending belief systems that reinforce oppression that targets marginalized groups (hooks, 2015).

Telling a story involving femicide and other forms of systemic violence through Bigby’s perspective, who is a law enforcer and the male protagonist, the focus on the plot shifts from acknowledging the systemic nature of such violence to individualizing the violence. The murders of Lily and Faith must be revenged rather than serving to support the fight against systems of domination. The killer must be punished, and the system preserved. The violence perpetuated by Bigby is not seen as police violence, but rather as the acts of a troubled man who searches for redemption from his past.

No Happily Ever After

In *The Wolf Among Us*, there are some patterns in the narrative that were identified by previous authors (Meyers, 1997; Young & Jiwani, 2006) when analyzing the discourse on news media. There is the focus on the killer profile, seeing murders as the act of an individual instead of perpetuated by systemic violence (Jiwani, 2006). In some scenes, the killing of those women is seen as caused by their poor life choices, which was constantly pointed out by the fact that one of them was a drug user and both of them were sex workers. The likely murder of Snow White, a female character who is white and a former princess, was far more visible than the death of a troll sex worker. Faith, a white former princess who became a sex worker to support her depressed husband, is framed as a heroic rebellious girl who died trying to save herself and her friends. The lenses of class, race and gender rendered Lily as invisible. The way femicide is represented in this game points out the reproduction of dichotomies where female characters that are white, and reinforces traditional gender roles, are framed as deserving to be saved from dangerous men while those who are sex workers and racialized are framed as deserving of violence.

As previous authors (Hedley, 1994; Hanson, 2010; Ellis, 2018) have pointed out, when tackling the representation of violence against fictitious women, the protection of certain female characters over others serves to separate expressions of womanhood that should be protected from those that are demonized. I argue that distinguishing the good women from the bad women is part of the process of normatization where female bodies that reinforce patriarchal values of womanhood are considered part of the norm. In this scenario, video games as well as other forms of media that picture fictitious violence against women in their narratives operate to produce subjectivity of what a woman should be and not be. The constant reinforcement of traditional gender values is part of Symbolic Violence where sexism as well as other forms of group oppression are naturalized by the reproduction of this narrative in different forms of mass media and in regards with their own specificity. As we were able to see throughout this chapter, it manifests in players agency and game narrative in *The Wolf Among Us*.

Based on the analysis of dialogues and choices, I argue that the game tries to address the question of what we should do to end femicide, as a society. Through character dialogue, the game presents different approaches. Looking at Snow's dialogues, she represents the people who think that law enforcement will solve social inequities. For her, law-breaking is what resulted in Lily's and Faith's murders. Looking back at Beauty and Bigby's conversation, there is no option of analyzing their murders as being part of systemic violence instead of the act of an individual. Revisiting Holly's words about her deceased sister, she blames her sister's choices of getting involved with criminals. Although characters might have different points of views, there is no character dialogue that connects violence against women to class oppression and systemic violence. Throughout the 5 episodes, as we learn about the economic struggles of Fabletown and their debt to the Crooked Man, there are many events where characters talk about this situation. Mister Toad's inability to get Glamour for his family due to lack of income, Colin not being able to get it as well due to finance problems, Beauty and Beast alongside with other fables not having enough money to pay their bills. However, there is no character that clearly points out Lily and Faith's forced labour as the reason for their murders.

The challenge of representing violence against women is to account for the complexity and diversity of female experience. To portray women's oppression, it's important to acknowledge not only sexism, but also classism and racism (hooks, 2015). The ending of *The Wolf Among Us* with Snow White becoming the new mayor tries to give this story a happy ending. However, without ending the foundation of violence against women, which is constituted

by the “Western philosophical notion of hierarchical rule and coercive authority” (hooks, 2015, p. 118), most likely there won’t be a happily ever after. Without ending systems of domination that are constantly reinforced by white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy, which is the roots of all forms of group oppression and violence (hooks, 2015), violence against women cannot be eradicated. In other words, putting an authoritarian white female figure and former princess in charge won’t be the solution Bigby mentions in episode 5: “It's going to be different now... I promise... things like won't happen anymore. Not while I'm around.”

Chapter 2: Powerful women rendered powerless in *Beyond: Two Souls*

In this chapter, I propose to investigate the representation of violence against women in *Beyond: Two Souls*. Differently from *The Wolf Among Us*, *Beyond: Two Souls* provides a larger range of possible outcomes as well as trophies. Therefore, in this chapter, my analysis is more focused on choices, outcomes and paths. First, I examine separately the depictions of violence against women, looking at how those events were designed. Are they avoidable? Are they pre-scripted? Are they outcomes of specific combinations of choices? What choices are available to players? Which decisions have an impact in the story? Which don't? Finally, I analyze the discourse on violence against women by overviewing how the overlapping of game elements might reproduce hegemonic discourses.

Welcome to the CIA

In this section, I contextualize the environment where the game takes place and the main plot conflicts in which the playable characters play a big role. The game takes place in a contemporary American setting where the existence of spirits, entities [figure 14] and the *Infraworld*, basically the afterlife, are studied by the Department of Paranormal Activities (DPA) which appears to be closely related to the U.S. military and the CIA, both of which have autonomy over the use of DPA resources. The game is centered on questions about what happens after death.

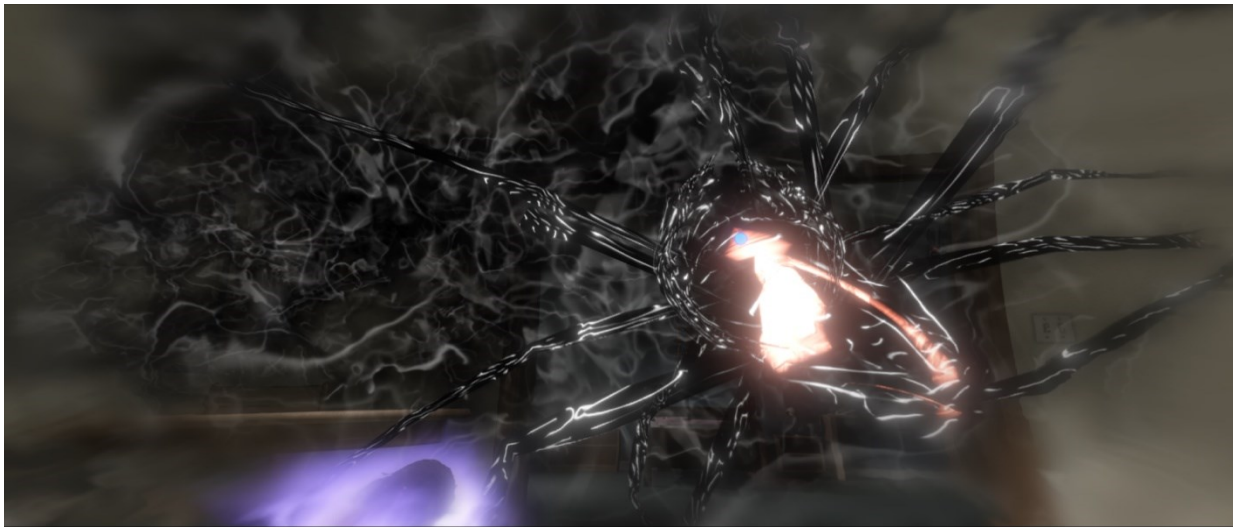


Figure 14: Entities are powerful and dangerous creatures from the *Infraworld*

Jodie and Aiden

There are two playable characters: Jodie and Aiden. Jodie Holmes, the primary playable character and protagonist, is a woman born with a strange gift. Since her birth, she has been linked to Aiden, a supernatural entity. Because of her connection to him, she goes through a series of traumatic events. When describing her relationship with Aiden, Jodie says: “I was born

with a strange gift, or what they called a gift. It was really a curse. It's ruined my life. It made me the person that I am today, a freak, a mistake, someone to hate.” Her gift consists of communicating with Aiden and other spirits, as a medium, and seeing things from Aiden’s perspective. When pairing her powers with Aiden’s, they can both heal people [figure 15] and see the past when touching certain objects or people [figure 16].



Figure 15. Aiden and Jodie can combine their powers to heal wounds



Figure 16: Aiden and Jodie can combine their powers to channel objects, learning their history

Aiden, who turns out to be Jodie’s deceased twin brother, is the game’s secondary playable character. Aiden is capable of demonstrating human emotions although Jodie is the only one who can communicate with him. Many times, Aiden demonstrates aggressive behavior towards people who try to hurt Jodie. In one of the early chapters of Jodie’s life, she describes him as “a lion in a cage.” He is depicted as a purple glowing energy ball [figure 17] with a large range of supernatural powers. He can levitate at any height; cross walls as a ghost; see people’s and objects’ auras, move or throw objects, fight other entities, choke people, possess people, –

although he is unable to make them speak– and create a force field to protect Jodie. Aiden is powerful, but his mobility is constrained by Jodie [figure 18], which means that he can't distance himself very much from her. They are linked by an ethereal tether, which looks like an energy line that connects them.

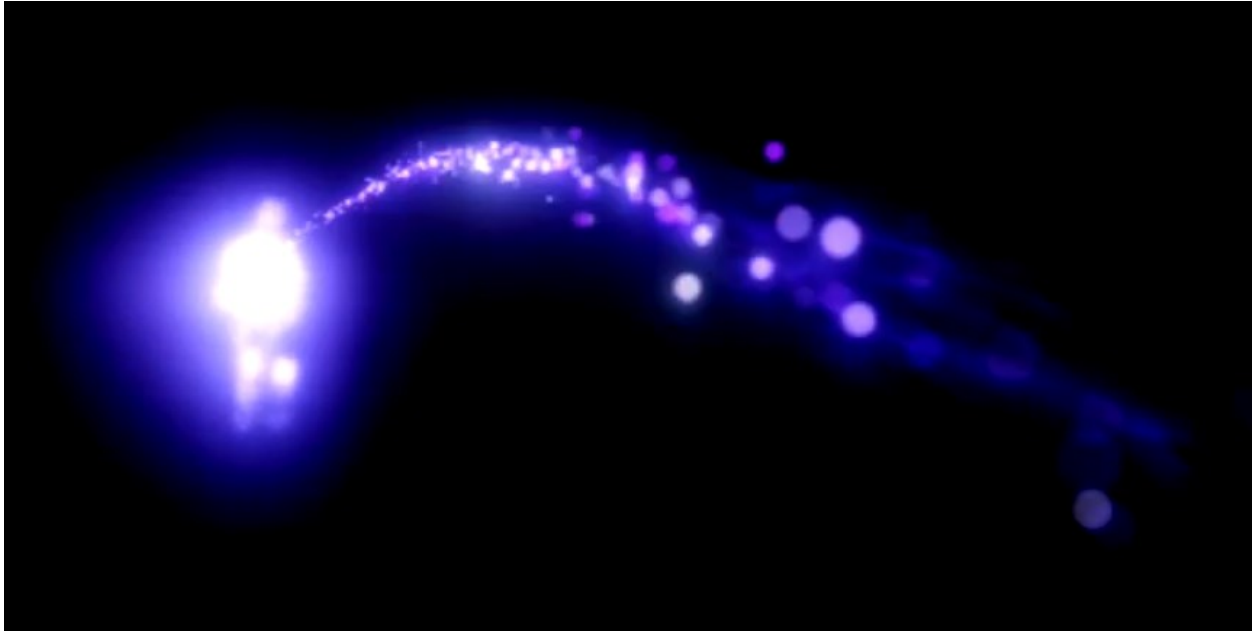


Figure 17: Aiden's appearance as a purple glowing ball



Figure 18. Aiden's glowing purple cord connecting him to Jodie

Throughout 24 chapters, we follow Jodie's life over 17 years (8-25 years old). There are two ways you can play. The game allows you to play the Original or the Remix order. In the Original play order, the chapters are played in the order that Jodie remembers after losing her memory in the prologue. In the Remix play order, the chapters are in chronological order. The

Remix order was introduced later when the game was released to PS4 and PC. To experience this game as it was originally intended, I chose to play it in the Original play order.

In the game mechanics, players will alternately play as Jodie or Aiden, sometimes combining their powers. Players are usually free to explore and choose to play as Jodie or as Aiden. However, there are times when players must play as Jodie to make dialogue decisions or to walk towards a destination. In other moments, players must play as Aiden to overcome physical limitations such as to get access to a locked room or to use his powers to protect Jodie. There are levels where players are required to combine both Jodie and Aiden's powers. For instance, healing people or absorbing people's or object's auras to visualize past events.

Instead of looking at all 24 chapters, which would be overwhelming, I intend to look at thematic clusters of chapters: Jodie's childhood; Jodie's sexuality; Jodie's career. Those clusters were organized based on chapters that are not only connected by a common theme, but are also shaped as well by choices and consequences from previous ones.

Jodie's childhood

Before joining the DPA, Jodie lived with her parents, who were later revealed not to be her biological parents. In this cluster, I describe the chapters *My Imaginary Friend*, *First Night* and *Alone*.

In *My Imaginary Friend*, the gameplay takes place in Jodie's family house. In this chapter we play through a series of events that illustrate Jodie's challenges of living tied to an entity and having a connection to the Infraworld. The chapter begins with Jodie waking up screaming after entities possess her toys. The next day, players can keep Jodie busy by playing with her dolls in her room, drawing, pretending to talk on the phone, playing with the mother's makeup, teaming up with Aiden to get access to certain objects such as the cookie jar and a box from the closet, hugging the mother, talking to the father in his office, etc. None of those actions have major consequences in the storyline. In this first part of the chapter, we learn that Jodie and Aiden have common sibling moments. It's revealed that Jodie has a close relationship with her mother. There are no meaningful interactions with her father, as he tries to keep her away from his office. In the chapter's second part, Jodie goes to play in the backyard, but she's warned to not go to the streets. She sees other kids playing with snowballs, and after finding a way to get access to the streets, she joins them. Playing as Aiden, the player then has to protect Jodie by choking the aggressor [figure 19]. The kids will then call Jodie a witch.

Her father interrupts the action and grounds her, yelling that "*I am sick and tired of your stories! Jodie, this time you're really gonna get it!*" and almost slaps her [figure 20] which causes Aiden to react aggressively by moving objects around the house. Afterwards, Jodie blames Aiden for her family hatred directed towards her. When Jodie is sent to her room, Aiden can sneak and see the parents' dialogue which reveals that the father is aggressive towards Jodie because he is scared of her powers: "*Susan, that thing... Is like an uncontrollable animal - we have no idea what it's capable of... We have a demon - living with us right under our own roof...*" In this dialogue, it's later revealed that they have agreed to take care of her, which means they are not her biological parents.



Figure 19: Boy choking Jodie for no clear reason. Aiden attacks him to protect Jodie

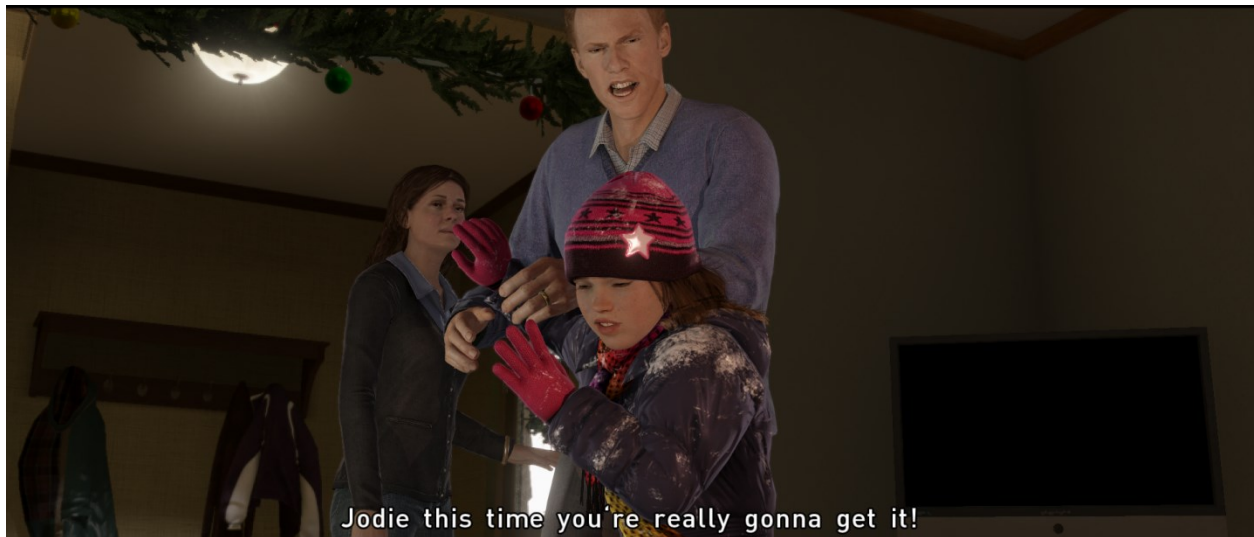


Figure 20: Phillip slaps Jodie when Aiden breaks the rules

Previously, in the *First Interview*, Jodie meets *Nathan Dawkins*¹⁵, a scientist who works for the DPA and studies supernatural events. In *First Night*, Jodie's foster parents leave her in the DPA to be studied by Dawkins and Cole, his assistant. Susan, Jodie's foster mother, says it's for a couple of days. Dawkins tries to comfort Jodie by saying that staying in the DPA gives them the chance to study what is going on and to find a way to protect her. The game doesn't give players the chance to protest. Jodie only answers: "*Nobody can protect me.*" Players can then spy on Dawkins and the parents. If they do, it's revealed the characters already knew each other and

¹⁵ Nathan Dawkins is a scientist in the Department of Paranormal Activities (DPA) who studies the supernatural. Although he supports and raises Jodie, later he is revealed to be one of the antagonists in the game. I contextualize Dawkins' and Jodie's dubious relationship in the next section.

they had a deal. Phillip, the foster father, chose to break the deal and abandon Jodie in the DPA, refusing to continue taking care of her.



Figure 21: Jodie is abandoned by her foster parents

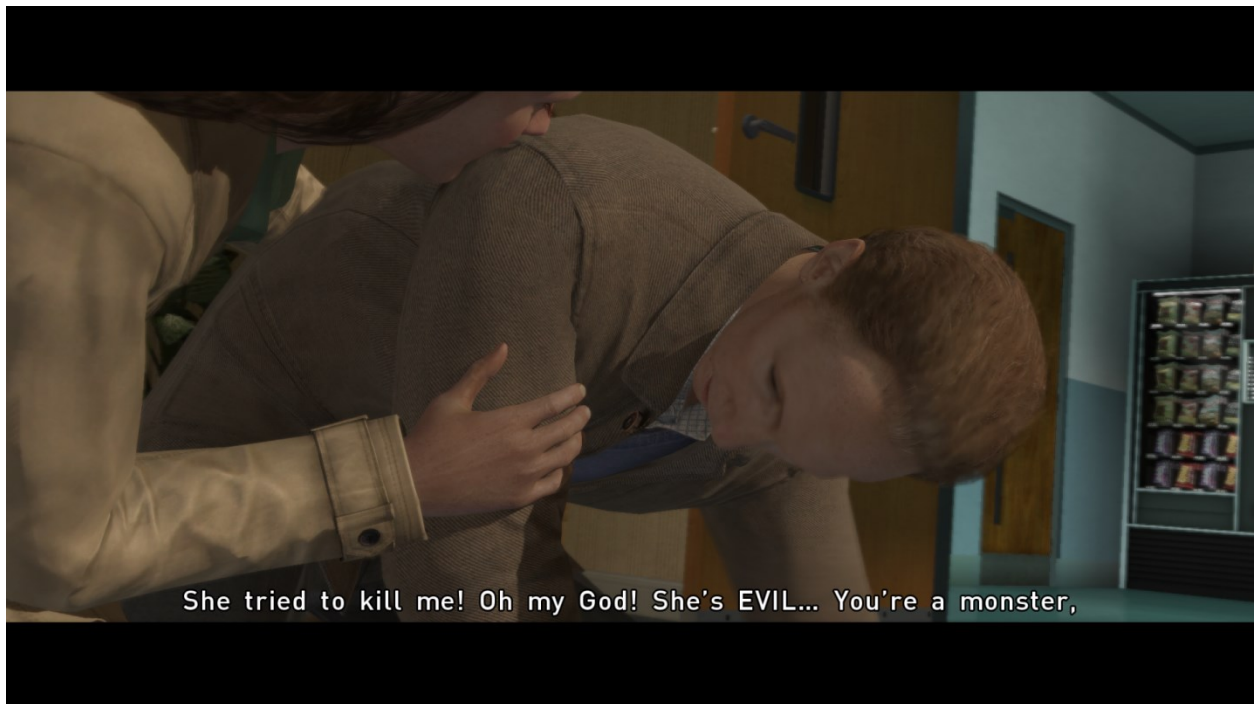


Figure 21: Aiden tries to kill Phillip for abandoning Jodie

Later, when Jodie goes to bed, she's attacked by entities again. Aiden is the only one able to protect her against them. In *Alone*, Phillip and Susan visit Jodie one last time before abandoning her [figure 21]. Phillip lies to her saying they need to move because they were transferred to another base. He makes the false promise to bring her with them one day once they have settled. As Susan says her goodbyes, Phillip keeps rushing her. The only action players can do in this chapter, as Aiden, is to choke or not choke Phillip once he leaves the room [figure 22].

At the end, Dawkins tells Jodie: “*I know how you feel. But you made the right decision.*” However, players were never given the dialogue choice of protesting the parents abandoning Jodie. After being abandoned by her foster parents, Jodie develops a close relationship with Cole and Dawkins in which they become like a family to her.

In this cluster, by looking at the trophies and choices available, we can observe a few patterns. In these chapters, most trophies are related to Aiden’s actions. Players can get the Trophies *Uncontrollable*, *Entities Apprentice* and *Not My Father* by choosing to engage in violence to protect Jodie. *Sorry* is the only trophy players can get that involves the decision of not trying to kill someone. When playing as Jodie, the only trophy players can get, which involves cooperating with Aiden, is *Teammates*. While players are rewarded when playing as Aiden, there is almost no reward when playing as Jodie. Players’ agency when playing as Jodie is limited in these chapters. Regardless of choices, Jodie will be a victim of child abuse and she will be bullied by other children in the neighborhood. Being abandoned by her foster parents and threatened by Phillip are pre-scripted events, and not outcomes.

When looking at the narrative, there are a few patterns in most chapters of this cluster. Chapters usually start with Jodie’s limited agency. In some, she may attempt to break free of control, in this case not obeying her mother by going to play with the children on the street. If she tries to do it, other characters will be violent towards her. In others, she will obey what she is told, but the entities will put her in trouble even when she is not breaking the rules. Other characters will punish her for something she didn’t do. In both scenarios, she is punished by the narrative. Moreover, violent and unfair treatment she receives gives Aiden the opportunity to be violent in order to protect her or to demonstrate discontent. Having child Jodie portrayed as a victim being constantly put through rough and unfair situations serves as a plot device with the purpose of motivating players to protect her when playing as Aiden and to violently punish the abusive characters.

Jodie’s sexuality

After joining the DPA, Jodie goes through some traumatic events during her teenage years that later impact her sexual life. Only at the end of the game is Jodie free to choose how to experience her sexuality and her life. In this cluster, I describe the chapters *The Party*, *Like Other Girls*, *The Dinner* and *Epilogue*.

In *The Party*, when Jodie is a teenager, Dawkins drops her off at a birthday party for the daughter of someone in the department. Although Jodie is hesitant, Dawkins encourages her to meet other teenagers and make friends. After the adults leave, the teenagers decide to break the rules. As Jodie, players can decide to get drunk, to smoke, to dance, to kiss a boy [figure 23], to be honest about Jodie’s life and to show her powers. Regardless of these decisions, the teenagers will bully her [figure 24]. Even the boy who Jodie can choose to kiss will mistreat her by calling her a “witch” and “slut”. They will end up locking her in a closet. There are four ways to end this chapter, with three of the four relying on Aiden using different types of violence. If Jodie takes revenge, regardless of the method, players can get the *Revenge* trophy. Jodie can also decide to just leave the house after Aiden unlocks the closet. These options will impact the way Jodie dresses in *Like Other Girls*. If she gets revenge, she will dress as a punk. However, regardless of which outfit she wears, all choices and consequences remain the same.



Figure 23: Jodie has a romantic moment with a boy at the party



Figure 24: Jodie is bullied by teenagers at the party and locked in a closet

In *Like Other Girls*, Jodie is a rebellious teenager who wants to hang out with her friends in a bar. She asks Dawkins and Cole for permission to go, but they, as father figures, do not allow it. After having her wish denied, Jodie teams up with Aiden to sneak out of the base. Aiden possesses Cole to get through the base with Jodie. To leave the base, players must be successful in convincing the entrance and the front gate guards. If they rush out of the base, Aiden will drive to the bar and leave Cole unconscious in the middle of a forest. Once Jodie is in the bar, there are a couple of actions players can do: go to the restroom, play pinball or play pool. If Jodie goes to the restroom, players can spy as Aiden on the two men, Earl and Frank, sitting on the bar. They talk about Jodie in a sexual way, claiming she is “looking for it”. Spying on them doesn’t unlock any new options in the storyline, but it provides players the chance to avoid sexual assault by choosing to leave the bar earlier. If Jodie doesn’t leave, those men will approach her and ask to join in the pool game. As Earl asks her a series of personal questions, she can lie, evade or tell the truth.



Figure 25: The game displays options shaking when Jodie is being sexually assaulted

At the end, regardless of how she answered the questions, Earl will corner her and get too close. She can discuss, by telling him she needs to go to meet her parents, repulse, by pushing him away, or slap his face and have her face slapped by him as a consequence [figure 25]. Regardless of player's choices, Earl will push her to the pool table and try to sexually assault her. She asks Aiden to help her. As Aiden, players can beat Earl and kill him. At the end of the chapter, if Jodie didn't leave the bar, Dawkins and the rest of the DPA team invade the place and find Jodie crying in the fetal position on the pool table. Dawkins hugs her:

Jodie: I just wanted to go out. Be like everybody else for once.

Dawkins: I know... I know... It's okay. It's okay.

This plot device, which consists of a female character becoming a victim of sexual violence to create an opportunity for the male character to save her from another male character, serves to perpetuate the discourse that purity is what defines the value of woman and that it's man's duty to protect it while being violent (The Take, 2020). In game narratives where there is the damsel in distress trope, the oppression the female character faces is not the subject of the story, but rather a plot device that "works by trading the disempowerment of female characters for the empowerment of male characters" (Sarkeesian, 2013, 17:39). Even though Jodie is one of the playable characters and is highly capable as the protagonist, the game disempowers her by putting her through traumatic events where the only solution is to rely on her brother's violence. As it was observed in other games that employ this trope, "no matter what we are told about their magical abilities, skills or strengths, they're still ultimately captured or otherwise incapacitated and then must wait for rescue" (Sarkeesian, 2013, 17:32).

In *The Dinner*, after working in the CIA for two years, adult Jodie has a special dinner with Ryan, a coworker and love interest, to celebrate her new apartment. In this chapter, Jodie will make an effort to have a nice date with Ryan: tidying the apartment, cooking a nice meal, and dressing up. Jodie expresses clearly in her dialogue with Aiden that she wants to have sex with Ryan. Because Aiden is jealous of Ryan, he tries to sabotage their date. He destroys Jodie's laptop so she wouldn't receive Ryan's email invitation to a date. Aiden keeps messing with the apartment by breaking a mirror, throwing objects and locking her out of the apartment. There's a moment when Aiden points a knife towards Jodie which looks like a threat. What defines the

way the chapter ends is whether Jodie was sexually assaulted in *Like Other Girls*. If Jodie was indeed a victim of sexual violence, they will exchange kisses, but she will stop Ryan before they can have sex. Then, Jodie has an emotional meltdown and Ryan leaves [figure 26].



Figure 26: Jodie has an emotional breakdown when trying to have sex

In *Navajo*, Jodie stays with a family while she is on the run from the CIA, who is hunting her after she decides to quit her job with them. In this chapter, she meets Jay, whom she can engage romantically depending on the player's choice [figure 27]. Unlike in *The Dinner*, in this chapter, Jodie's trauma doesn't influence her romantic interactions nor the ending with Jay.



Figure 27: Jodie kisses Jay

In *Epilogue*, the last chapter, after Jodie prevents the Infraworld from merging with the physical world, she is free from the CIA. At this very moment, players can choose different endings depending on the people they saved throughout the game. Jodie can enter the Beyond, an ethereal world, to join her deceased mother and Aiden. She can continue to live and decide how to go on with her life. Through this path, she can decide to be with Ryan, Jay, the people she met when she was homeless, or she can choose to be alone [figure 28]. At first, it seems that Jodie

lost her connection with Aiden, which made her feel miserable. However, afterwards, she discovers he is still with her.

Differently from the previous cluster, in teenage years and the young adult life of Jodie, players can get more trophies when playing as Jodie. When playing as Aiden, there are two trophies that reward players for protecting Jodie. In these chapters, players can also get 9 trophies when playing as Jodie. Among them, 4 are related to romance, 2 are related to choosing or not to engage in violence, 2 to being successful in quick time events and 1 in exploring the environment. In this cluster, Jodie's agency is mostly focused on her sexuality.

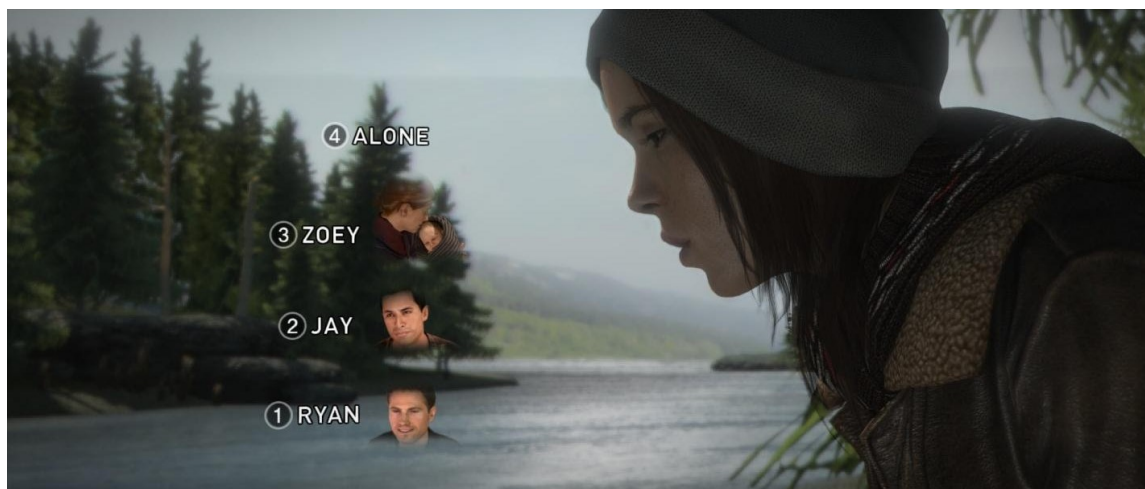


Figure 28. When staying alive, Jodie can choose how to enjoy her life

In *The Dinner*, Aiden attempts to control Jodie's sexuality by sabotaging her date with Ryan. From destroying her laptop to preventing her from getting Ryan's dinner invitation to literally pointing a knife at her, players can choose from a variety of options to ruin Jodie's plans. Aiden's jealousy and aggressive, controlling behaviour, is even rewarded by the game, being one of the prerequisites to the silver trophy *Uncontrollable*, which requires players to make evil decisions as Aiden.

As in the chapters that took place in Jodie's childhood, these chapters also contain similar dynamics. In *The Party* and *Like Other Girls*, Jodie tries to break free of institutional control over her life. In *The Party*, she tries to make friends outside the military base. In *Like Other Girls*, she attempts to hang out with her friends in a bar where she might suffer sexual assault. The assault can be avoided only if Jodie fails to run away or if she gives up and goes back to the military base. Moreover, if she suffers sexual violence, she won't be able to have sex with Ryan and get the trophy *In Love with Ryan*. On both occasions, she is victimized by other characters, whether by teenage bullies or sexual abusers, because she didn't obey various rules. Breaking or obeying the rules have different consequences in Aiden's and Jodie's gameplays. While playing as Aiden, players will be rewarded for being violent and breaking the rules. When Jodie is given the choice to break rules, Jodie will be punished for not following them – when playing as Jodie, players must 'obey' the rules to get trophies. This difference in gameplays highlights a very telling gendered double standard. At this point, we see that Jodie's victimization serves as a plot device to evoke strong emotions involving the protection of an endangered female character, allowing players to act as saviors and punishers. The trophies and meaningful choices available

revolve around the choice of whether to punish the aggressors as well as the appropriate methods of punishment.

When representing sexual violence within a choice-based game, one could argue that being sexually assaulted regardless of dialogue options is a sensitive approach since making it avoidable depending on how Jodie reacts to the aggressors could perpetuate victim-blaming discourse. However, the fact that Jodie becomes a victim of sexual assault because she chose to disobey her “father” to go out at night to a bar by herself could also be interpreted as reinforcing victim-blaming discourse.

To support this argument, we need to understand the meaning of victim-blaming and its relation to rape culture. According to The Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime (2009), victim-blaming can be described as the act of holding the victim responsible, whether partially or entirely, for the violence committed against them. The reasons for blaming the victim are usually rooted in patriarchal notions of gender roles (Olfman, 2009; Flintoft, 2001). For instance, victim-blaming discourse consists on the belief that someone could become a victim of sexual violence depending on their choices. Those false beliefs, usually referred as rape myths, could involve the female victim¹⁶ wearing certain types of clothes, certain sexual conduct, displaying behaviors that could be interpreted as a sexual invitation, consuming alcohol or drugs, or going to dangerous places. Rape myths are rooted in a sexist belief that frames female victims as the other, claiming that only misbehaving women are subject to rape, that is, that there are women who are deserving of sexual violence (Suarez, 2010; Lonsway, 1994; Herman, 1989). Rape myths are often brought to court to disregard the testimonies of female victims of sexual violence (Randall, 2010). According to Parenti (2005), rape myths are a manifestation of rape culture and they are usually perpetuated within daily life, reinforcing the stigmatization of victims. According to Thacker (2017), news media plays a big role in perpetuating rape myths. In their article, the author analyses how news coverage frames the victims of sexual violence after the trial. The author explains that “the largest part of the girl’s revictimization, however, occurred in the media during and after the trial. Much of the news coverage on the case expressed sympathy for the perpetrators” (Thacker, 2017, p. 3). As Meyers (1997) as well as Jiwani and Young (2006) already tackled before, Thacker’s analysis also indicates that, when covering the cases of violence against women, the media discourse aims to differentiate women who are framed as worthy of being saved from troubled men from those who are deserving of violence. As pointed out previously by those authors, the patriarchal notions of gender roles define which women are suitable for being raped.

When looking at the context where Jodie is the victim of sexual violence in *Like Other Girls*, we can see it reinforces a victim-blaming discourse. First, players are never given the choice of obeying Dawkins. The goal of the first part of the level is to leave the military base. If players fail, Jodie will be detained at the exit. Jodie will only be able to get to the bar if players succeed in deceiving the guard and if Jodie hides in a car when crossing the front gate. The only way Jodie won’t suffer sexual violence is if she leaves the bar before the assault can happen. The dialogue choices when being cornered by the abusers don’t change anything, nor does her choice of outfit. When looking at the choices and consequences, we see that the only reason she is being subjected to sexual violence is because she was successful in leaving the military base without being detected. Since rape myths frame the choices of the female victim as the reason why she

¹⁶ In this chapter, I often refer to the victim-blaming that target women, but authors argue that men can also be victims of sexual violence and, therefore, subject to victim-blaming discourses (Struckman-Johnson, C & Struckman-Johnson, D, 1992).

was raped, one could argue that, in this game, Jodie's choice of not complying with Dawkins orders is the reason she was almost raped. However, looking at Aiden's gameplay, we can argue that the reason why she wasn't raped, is because her ghost brother was there to defend her. At the end, her connection to another man is what ultimately saved her.

When looking at the consequences of this event in *The Dinner*, we see that Jodie is unable to have sex with Ryan because of her trauma, even after all her effort to get to that moment: cooking dinner, dressing up with a sexy dress and cleaning the apartment. In the scene, Jodie is kissing Ryan in bed. However, when he touches her, she is triggered. She has an emotional breakdown and cries. Ryan just leaves the scene.

Mardoll (2016) highlights the design choices of the game developers when deciding which game events can have an overall impact in the gameplay. She explains that while the sexual assault event has a huge impact in the rest of the game, other events such as failing to shut down a weapon of mass destruction have no consequences in the story. When Jodie fails to deactivate the weapon, the army destroys it. She argues that the game punishes players for being sexually assaulted in the game by denying Jodie the possibility of developing romantic relationships throughout the game. Mardoll's point highlighted the process I identified previously in *The Wolf Among Us*. By designing choices that have consequences in the story while others don't, the game designers clearly make a statement of which choices or events should matter over others.

Jodie & the CIA

When she becomes a young adult, Jodie joins the CIA, which is presented in the game as her choice. However, when she decides to quit her job after being manipulated into killing a local leader in an African country, who was not aligned with American economic interests, it becomes clear she was forced into this labour. In this section, I describe the chapters *Separation*, *The Mission*, *Hunted*, *Homeless*, *Norah*, *Briefing* and *Black Sun* to address the representation of violence against women and abuse during childbirth¹⁷.

In *Separation*, young adult Jodie is "invited" to join the CIA, leaving Dawkins, Cole and the DPA. Before being recruited by Ryan, who later becomes a love interest, Jodie was testing her abilities to channel object auras, allowing her to see memories embodied in them. In this chapter, the key decisions are to tell Dawkins the memories Jodie saw, to spy on Dawkins and Ryan as Aiden, to "accept" Ryan's invitation or to threaten him. If players decide to spy on them, they will find out this is not a regular job invitation. Jodie joining the CIA is one of Ryan's objectives. Despite Dawkins's efforts to keep Jodie in the lab, as he is relying secretly on her powers to see his deceased wife and daughter, and Jodie's emotional attachment to Dawkins and Cole who became parental figures in her life, the game doesn't give players the option to refuse the offer or to fight against the institutional dominance over Jodie's life.

Jodie: What am I? A toy?! Some kind of a "test subject"?! Did you ever just stop and think about what I want?

¹⁷ Abuse during childbirth, or obstetric violence, is being included in this investigation because, according to the World Health Organization (2017), it's also considered to be a type of violence against women. Although it's not only women who can give birth and who can become victims of obstetric violence, in this context I am considering the abuse that was committed against Jodie's mother.

Dawkins: Jodie, I know it's difficult but... you need to understand. This is a great opportunity for you.

If players decide to not obey Ryan, Dawkins emotionally manipulates Jodie to “accept” the offer. As Jodie is 18 in this chapter, her joining the CIA military school is a way the narrative mirrors the process of young adults leaving their parents’ home to go to university and be independent. However, as we know this is not Jodie’s choice as the interface displays the action “obey” in [figure 29], this is not the case. In this chapter there aren’t any trophies.

In *Welcome to the CIA*, Jodie is trained as a CIA agent for three years. In this chapter, there are not a lot of dialogue choices as it is focused on her physical development. Jodie learns how to fight and to team up with Aiden to take down enemies. Although there are no consequences for any choices that could be made in this episode, being trained by the CIA has a huge impact in Jodie’s life. Episodes that chronologically take place after she joined the CIA demonstrate that the training empowered her. Because of her fighting skills, Jodie is able to defend herself and others. The trophies in this chapter are related to the successful completion of quick time events.

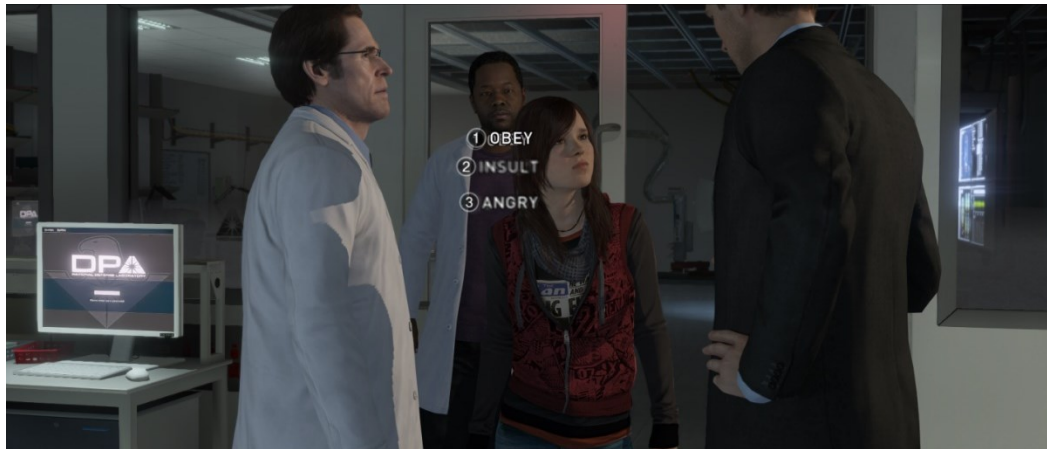


Figure 29: Jodie only has the option "obey" when being "invited" to join the CIA

This training becomes very important when Jodie goes to Africa to take down a warlord in the chapter *The Mission*. After she stops him, she finds out he was innocent, and that the CIA manipulated her to kill a local leader who would be a threat to American imperialism. This becomes personal as she discovers Ryan lied to her about this so she would follow the orders. This episode is focused on quick time events. Game paths are mostly related to players' abilities to make quick strategic decisions to overcome challenges in the warzone and being successful in quick time events.

When Jodie decides to quit her job, the CIA tries to hunt her down in the chapters *Hunted* and *Homeless*, and she ends up living on the streets and befriending other homeless people who help her survive the winter.

In *Homeless*, there is more diversity to the game’s narrative paths. Some of them are related to building relationships such as choosing to be honest about Jodie’s life and Aiden, being evasive, and helping other homeless people. Others involved choices of getting money honestly. There are also paths related to saving Jodie’s homeless friends from a building that was

on fire, choosing to engage in violence to protect a friend being beaten by thugs, and one path where Jodie attempts suicide.



Figure 30: Jodie, as a baby, is taken away from Norah, her biological mother

In *Norah*, Jodie finds out that her biological mother, Norah, is still alive and is being kept within a DPA psychiatric facility and that she and Jodie have the same abilities. With Cole's help, Jodie breaks in and finds her mother sitting in a chair, comatose. Using Aiden, Jodie finds out her mother was drugged to prevent her from using her powers and freeing herself. However, the drugs used are so strong that she is not able to regain consciousness. Players have the option of ending Norah's suffering or leaving her alive, but in a coma. In this chapter, it is also revealed that Aiden is Jodie's deceased twin brother who died hanged by the umbilical cord. After Jodie was born, Norah decided to keep her baby instead of giving it away to DPA agents [figure 30]. In the end, she attempts to break free and get back her daughter. Most paths are related to dialogue choices, exploration and killing or saving characters.

In *Briefing* and *Dragon's Hideout*, Jodie agrees to work with the CIA one last time in exchange for her freedom. She and Ryan infiltrate a secret base in Kazirstan to destroy a machine that can open a portal to the Infraworld. The goal of this mission is to prevent other countries from using the Infraworld as a weapon against the United States. In *Dragon's Hideout*, most game paths are related to strategic choices when infiltrating the base. However, two paths are related to romance choices with Ryan: Jodie can forgive him for lying to her or not and she can tell him she loves him.

Later in *Black Sun*, after the CIA doesn't honor their promise to stop hunting Jodie after the completion of her last missions, they try to drug Jodie the same way as Norah to prevent Jodie from leaving. However, Jodie escapes, due to the help she gets from Aiden, Ryan and Cole. It's revealed that Dawkins is trying to build a new machine to merge the Infraworld to their world. Regardless of Jodie's dialogue options, she can't convince him to let it go. After activating the machine, he kills himself when he sees that it will only destroy the world. After Jodie deactivates the machine, she is given the option to stay alive or go to the Beyond to be with Aiden and her mother. If players make this choice, Jodie will become like Aiden and connect herself to Zoey, the daughter of one of the homeless people Jodie helped to give birth. There are many paths in this chapter because it is the climax of the game. Jodie can accept Ryan's love declaration or not, take or refuse the CIA money, heal Cole when he gets hurt, convince Dawkins about the dangers of the condenser or just make him angry. Ryan might die in this chapter

depending on the player's choices. Jodie might be successful in deactivating the Black Sun or die trying. After deactivating it, she can choose to join Aiden in death or to remain alive [figure 31].



Figure 31. At the end, Jodie must choose between "Beyond" and "Life"

Differently from the previous cluster, in the chapters that portray Jodie's life as a CIA agent, the trophies are mostly focused on strategic choices, the success of completing quick time events and exploring the game's environment. After Jodie joins the CIA, the cycle where Jodie is frequently portrayed as a damsel in distress to reaffirm male domination is reduced. As she acquires fighting skills, she is able to defend herself. However, her agency is still limited when she is working for the CIA. In *Separation*, regardless of what Jodie chooses, she will join the CIA one way or the other. If you choose to threaten Ryan, Dawkins will emotionally manipulate Jodie to "accept the invitation", claiming this is a great opportunity. Although the narrative attempts to illustrate that this was a great decision for her career in *The Dinner* when she gets a big luxurious apartment, this was never her decision. In *The Mission*, Jodie is again manipulated to use her powers to take down a Warlord who turned out to be a local leader who was not bending over American imperialism. When Jodie quits the CIA and is chased, she is able to, again, make decisions regarding her sexuality and build relationships besides Ryan. In *Dragon's Hideout*, Jodie is once again forced into working for the CIA one last time in exchange for her freedom. In this case, players can't choose to do it, for it is a prescribed event. Only after the CIA is destroyed by the entities that Jodie has meaningful agency, which allows her to choose between 5 choices with distinct outcomes.

Dawkins and the Department of Paranormal Activities (DPA)

It is critical to highlight that Jodie spends most of her life being studied in the DPA. When looking at multiple game chapters, we learn the dubious dynamics of Dawkins and Jodie's relationship, which is important to discuss here.

Child Jodie meets Dawkins when he interviews her to learn how her powers are manifesting. Later we learn that Dawkins already knew Jodie since he was the one who took her away from her mother, Norah, and gave her to Phillip and Susan, DPA agents, who work in the same institution where Dawkins conducts his experiments with the Infraworld. Jodie being taken care of by those agents was part of the experiment to understand how her powers would manifest in a controlled environment, in this case, in a family home. When Jodie is abandoned by her

foster parents, Dawkins builds a relationship with her, becoming a fatherly figure to her alongside Cole, his assistant, who also knows the details involving Jodie's experiment. During the narrative, Dawkins' wife and daughter die in a car accident, and Dawkins learns that he can communicate with his deceased family when Jodie uses her powers¹⁸. This event changes the way Dawkins deals with Jodie's powers. He becomes obsessed with using them to get his family back.

To prevent Jodie from leaving the DPA, Dawkins emotionally manipulates her over a period of years to convince her that staying is the best choice. To do this, Dawkins pretends to be her father on several occasions. For example, he brings Jodie to her first party to socialize with other teenagers, and he prohibits her from having contact with the outside world because of what she could do with her powers. Without knowing about her connection with her mother and remembering that she was abandoned by her foster parents, who she believed were her biological family, she becomes an easy target for emotional manipulation. Like any other abandoned child, Jodie wants to be loved, and this is one of the ways the game's narrative takes away her agency. In the search for the unattainable family love, Jodie does what Dawkins wants. The emotional manipulation becomes clear when Dawkins asks Jodie to "connect" with objects that used to belong to his deceased wife and daughter. When Dawkins can't manipulate Jodie anymore, he drugs her to prevent her from getting in his way. After she is saved, Jodie will encounter him later, and if Jodie chooses not to be sympathetic to Dawkins' twisted reasons, Dawkins tries to kill her [figure 32].

Even though Dawkins is the main antagonist of the game, the narrative attempts to humanize him by giving him a reason that could be seen as legitimate for abusing Jodie for years. The process of humanizing male abusers by focusing on their troubled past is a pattern also identified in news coverage (Meyers, 1997; Jiwani & Young, 2006).

Portraying female victims as lacking agency is also a part of this pattern. (Meyers, 1997; Jiwani & Young, 2006) Jodie's victimization not only serves as a plot device to players to act as saviors, but as well as a way to reassert control over her life by institutions governed by powerful men.



Figure 32: When shutting down the machine, entities make Jodie relive her traumas

¹⁸ In this scene, Dawkins' wife and daughter possess Jodie and communicate with Dawkins to tell him they are in peace.

Meaningful Agency and Systems of Control

Table 6

Trophies available when playing only as Jodie.

Trophy	Type	Prerequisite
Never Alone	Silver	At the end of <i>Navajo</i> , kiss Jay and/or have sex with Ryan in <i>The Dinner</i> . To have sex with Ryan, Jodie cannot have been sexual assaulted in <i>Like Other Girls</i> .
Explorer	Silver	Find all the bonuses.
Perfect Soldier	Bronze	Complete most of the physical training successfully.
Fight Apprentice	Bronze	Win every fight whilst taking less than 5 hits.
Stealth Apprentice	Bronze	Complete all stealth training without being spotted.
Perfect Lover	Bronze	Cook a meal, clean the apartment, take a shower, wear the elegant dress and put on some music.
Casual Girl	Bronze	Order a pizza, watch some TV and wear something casual.
In Love with Ryan	Bronze	Sleep with Ryan.
Stealth Master	Bronze	Reach the cathedral without being seen.
Medicine Girl	Bronze	Perform successfully the entire ritual.
Not Just Sand	Bronze	Run from the sandstorm and took less than 3 hits.
Eye for an Eye	Bronze	Don't speak during the interrogation.
Agent 894732	Bronze	Tell the truth during the interrogation.
Convince Dawkins	Bronze	Help Dawkins see the truth.
Black Sun Down	Bronze	Deactivate the Black Sun.
Chose Afterlife	Bronze	Enter the Infraworld.
Chose Life	Bronze	Stay in the world of the living.

Note. Fandom (n.d.). *Trophies*. Retrieved June 26, 2021 from <https://beyondtwosouls.fandom.com/wiki/Trophies>

Table 7

All available endings and prerequisites.

Number	Ending	Prerequisite
1	Everyone Lives	Save all characters throughout the game ¹⁹ . Choose to join the Infraworld at the end.
2	Choose Life, All Alive	Save all characters throughout the game. Choose life at the end.
3	Choose Life, All Alive	Save everyone. Choose life at the end. During the Epilogue, choose to be with Ryan ²⁰ .
4	Choose Life, All Alive	Save everyone. Choose life at the end. During the Epilogue, choose to be with Jay ²¹ .
5	Choose Life, All Alive	Save everyone. Choose life at the end. During the Epilogue, choose to spend life with Zoey ²² .
6	Everyone Dies	Let everyone die ²³ . Choose beyond at the end.
7	Choose Life, All Dead	Let everyone die. Choose life at the end. Choose to be with Jay.
8	Choose Life, All Dead	Let everyone die. Choose life at the end. Choose to be with Zoey.
9	Choose Life, All Dead	Let everyone die. Choose life at the end. Choose to be alone.
10	Jodie Dies	To get this ending, Jodie must be killed by powerful entities in Black Sun.

Note. Fandom (n.d.). *All Endings*. Retrieved June 26, 2021 from https://beyondtwosouls.fandom.com/wiki/All_Endings...#1st_Ending.2C_Everyone_Lives

¹⁹ To save all characters means that players made choices throughout the game that saved these characters: Walter, Jimmy, Paul, Norah, Ryan and Cole. These choices could involve saving a character directly, like taking them out of a building on fire, being successful in quick time events or not making decisions whose outcomes lead to the death of a character.

²⁰ To be able to pick Ryan, there are a few extra prerequisites: he needs to be alive by the end of the game and players must have chosen romantic interactions between Jodie and him throughout the game. For Ryan to not die in the last chapter, Jodie must reason with Dawkins when they are close to the condenser. If she doesn't, Dawkins will shoot her and Ryan will step in front of Jodie, taking the bullet for her. In my gameplay, even when not getting the trophy *In Love with Ryan*, Jodie was still able to choose to be with him in the end.

²¹ To be able to pick Jay, Jodie must kiss him at the end of the chapter *Navajo*.

²² Zoey is the daughter of Elisa, a homeless woman who ran away from her violent boyfriend who threatened her after discovering she was pregnant. Jodie helps Elisa to give birth to Zoey in an abandoned building. Choosing to spend life with Zoey means Jodie will be reunited with the people she befriended when she was homeless.

²³ To get this trophy, players must make decisions that will lead to the death of these characters: Walter, Jimmy, Paul, Norah, Ryan and Cole.

Choice-based games work based on the limited narrative choices players can make throughout the chapters. Among all the decisions players can make, the game must define which ones are more important: whether by displaying a message such as “this character will remember that”; by designing how the events impact future chapters, by assigning specific trophies to a group of choices; by hierarchizing trophies in different categories such as bronze, silver or gold; by defining what are the key decisions that will lead to specific endings in the game. The overlapping of these game elements determines what I call Meaningful Agency, that is, the choices that were designed to matter.

My goal is to understand which overall choices were designed to matter in Jodie’s gameplay after having examined the different thematic clusters of chapters. To examine where the meaningful agency relies, I look at trophies, their categories and prerequisites as well as the endings and their prerequisites. In this analysis, I am not including the trophies related to Aiden’s gameplay. I am also not including trophies that can be achieved by combining Jodie’s and Aiden’s actions.

When looking at the trophies [table 6] that players can get when playing as Jodie, there are a few patterns. First, all trophies listed are located in chapters that take place after her CIA training. Second, 6 out of 14 trophies are related to her performance as an agent. This indicates that the CIA training empowered Jodie, allowing her to defend herself and develop her career as an agent, even though she was forced to join. Third, 4 out of 14 trophies are related to romance and the only silver trophy players can get in her gameplay also involves romantic interactions with two possible love interests. Although Jodie’s job is important, love also plays a big role in her story. Considering the events analyzed previously her sexuality also plays a big role in creating meaningful agency where she is not only rewarded for developing romantic relationships, but also punished (Mardoll, 2016).

In table 7, we see that romance also plays a big role in the game’s various endings. The endings determine how Jodie decides to live the rest of her life. She might choose Beyond and join Aiden in the Infraworld, becoming an entity just like him. She might choose to stay alone or live with other people, such as Zoey and the rest of her homeless friends, or Jay or Ryan, her two possible love interests. Among the 10 possible endings, 4 involve being in a romantic relationship. We can see again that romantic interactions play a big role in Jodie’s meaningful agency.

Moreover, we can also see that choices that shape the final endings, besides romance, take place when the institution that has been controlling Jodie’s life is destroyed and Aiden disappears. It is only after the entities destroy the CIA base and Aiden is “gone”²⁴ that Jodie is truly free to choose how to live her life.

The power that disempowers

Throughout the game, Jodie makes clear how her powers have put her into difficult situations: “I was born with a strange gift, or what they called a gift. It was really a curse. It’s ruined my life. It made me the person that I am today, a freak, a mistake, someone to hate.” After having played the game, I kept constantly asking myself: How come Jodie, the protagonist who has superpowers, is often portrayed as a damsel in distress? In other words, why is Jodie not empowered by having superpowers?

²⁴ In the last scene at the end of the game, Jodie is able to contact Aiden again.

As explained before, Aiden is an entity who is connected to Jodie and he has a large range of powers that are usually used as a weapon to hurt other people. Jodie's powers, on the other hand, cannot be used to fight others or protect herself, but only to communicate. The narrative often blurs the line between Aiden's and Jodie's powers. There are many moments when we see Jodie being blamed for what Aiden does. However, in the gameplay we can see clearly how differently their powers operate when we need to switch from one playable character to the other, or to combine their powers to heal or absorb object's auras to find hidden information.

When looking at other characters who share the same "gift", they all have one thing in common: they are all women. Norah, Jodie's biological mother, has the same power. Like Jodie, Norah was kept prisoner by the DPA to be studied. Also like Norah, when Jodie could not be controlled by the CIA anymore, she was drugged and put into a coma. Jodie however was saved by male characters.

The connection between supernatural powers and womanhood becomes even more evident if Jodie chooses Beyond at the end of the game. She will join Aiden in the Infraworld and become an entity. She will connect herself to Zoey, the daughter of a homeless woman she helped to give birth. This means that as Norah passed her powers to Jodie, Jodie passed her powers to Zoey. Since the DPA was destroyed by the entities, Zoey is able to live her life without being constrained as Norah and Jodie were.

There is a moment in the game when it's revealed that Jodie's biological father had the same powers. However, there is no scene or dialogue that provides details of how he lived with them. Was he restrained for his whole life like a lab rat being studied by scientists? Was he free to choose whether to leave or to stay?

Instead of having the ability to defend themselves and enjoy their powers, as we see mostly in superhero stories, both Norah and Jodie are victimized because of their own powers. In Jodie's case, the powers that others often claim she has are not even her own. Whether being blamed for what Aiden does or by being abused by cruel children, bully teenagers or sex predators, Jodie is constantly punished for having powers that are not even hers to use. Based on these observations, I argue that the powers in this game that are related to womanhood are designed to disempower them, instead of being a source of empowerment.

Punishment, Violence Against Women and Male Supremacy

Jodie's agency is not only limited by the lack of outcomes of her own decisions, but also by Aiden's agency. When looking at Aiden's playthrough [table 8], we see that most trophies are related to the choices of engaging in violence whether for protecting his sister, or for displaying controlling behaviors such as destroying her laptop to prevent her from having a date. Aiden's violence is usually directed to punish specific characters who are hurting his sister. Aiden can only become Jodie's savior and display excessive violence if Jodie is victimized. If Jodie were not portrayed as a damsel in distress in those situations²⁵, there would be no opportunities for Aiden to punish abusive men.

By looking at the trophies [table 8], we see that Aiden's violence is constantly rewarded and encouraged by the game. This is never questioned because it is always framed as an act of protection by punishing the men who tried to hurt Jodie. In the previous chapter, when analyzing

²⁵ As mentioned previously, Jodie is not always portrayed as a damsel in distress. But in this section, I am focusing on the moments she was victimized.

The Wolf Among Us, we were able to identify that discourse on punishment, that is, narratives that frame the punishment of male abusers as the solution for violence against women, serves to individualize systemic violence which is a way to protect the status quo. In the same way, Jodie's victimization also serves this purpose. Violence against women is used as a plot device to evoke strong emotions and to provide the opportunity for the male hero to display extreme violence without being questioned. However, both the hero's and abuser's actions depend on the same thing: women's lack of agency.

Table 8

Trophies available when playing only as Aiden

Trophy	Type of Trophy	Prerequisite
Uncontrollable	Silver	Always choose to be violent or evil as Aiden.
Entities Master	Silver	Always win battles against evil entities.
Somebody else?	Bronze	Play as Aiden for the first time.
Obedience	Bronze	Stop the experiment voluntarily.
Entities Apprentice	Bronze	Defeat the entities.
Sorry	Bronze	Forgive Phillip.
Not My Father	Bronze	Choke Phillip.
Revenge	Bronze	Knock teenagers unconscious and/or start a fire.
Cold Blood	Bronze	Choose to do nothing against the teenage bullies.
Together Forever	Bronze	Kill the three men who sexually assaulted Jodie.
Clean Job	Bronze	Complete the Embassy mission using only Aiden.
Possessive Spy	Bronze	Complete the Embassy mission by possessing the Sheik.
Aiden's Apocalypse	Bronze	Destroy the gas station, the church, the gun store and the helicopter.
Almost Too Easy	Bronze	Possess general and go to the containment shield.

Note. Fandom (n.d.). *Trophies*. Retrieved June 26, 2021 from <https://beyondtwosouls.fandom.com/wiki/Trophies>

The many ways the game reinforces male agency and female limited agency when portraying violence against women can be interpreted as the representation of male dominance. According to Schechter (1982), violence against women should be regarded as a manifestation of male dominance insofar as it's reinforced by male supremacy. However, hegemonic discourses still frame Jodie as a woman who should be saved from troubled men. According to what Meyers

(1997) as well as Jiwani and Young (2006) identified, non-white women and sex workers as well as other women who don't conform with traditional gender roles are framed by news coverage as the ones deserving of the violence. Jodie is a white female character who is the sister of the male playable character and whose agency heavily relies on romance with men. All these aspects endorse her in the frame of the "good woman" who is described by Meyers (1997) as the one whose characteristics reinforce traditional gender roles as well as benefits from hegemonic discourses regarding other intersectionalities. In those stories, those women are framed by the media as lacking agency and in need of being saved from troubled men. There is a focus on male agency whether the narrative tells the story of the male savior, who punishes violently troubled men or the abusive man who hurts women because he was betrayed, or has a tormented past (Meyers, 1997). Such as it was identified in news media that women are framed as having limited agency, even more considering events involving VAW, I identified the same process in *Beyond: Two Souls* as well.

Jodie becomes a victim of abuse because she wanted to escape the DPA's control. Jodie is constantly victimized because of her desire to build relationships and have a life outside the military base. Yet the game's narrative frames Jodie's will to live her life and build relationships as teenage tantrums.

This also happens when Jodie says that she doesn't want to join the CIA. Her frustration in not being heard is disregarded as a tantrum.

Jodie: You can tell the CIA to fuck off because I'm not going anywhere.

Ryan: Jesus! Listen up, Miss Holmes - I don't give a shit about your pathetic adolescent pouting, alright? You can rant and rave all you want but just shut your mouth and do as you're told.

The game frames the decision of joining the CIA in this dialogue as adolescent rebellion by providing the choices: Angry, Insult, Obey. The Obey option demonstrates this is not a choice, but an order. If the player has chosen to insult instead of obey Ryan's orders, Ryan will grab Jodie and force her to follow him.

Later, when Jodie decides to quit the CIA, they start to hunt her down. Now, however, she is able to defend herself and escape, though this is only possible because the CIA trained her to fight and to team up with Aiden, combining both their powers to be used as a weapon. This means that, although there are several moments where Jodie's agency is limited, there are others that demonstrate that the CIA training also empowered her. However, even when Jodie appears to have agency in the game due to her physical skills, the narrative frames her as a damsel in distress when she is drugged and put into a coma, rendering her completely helpless. Moreover, this event is not an outcome of any decision, it will happen regardless of Jodie's dialogue choices. The game doesn't allow players to choose a different path based on strategy that could lead to her not being drugged. To save Jodie, the gameplay relies solely on male agency.

Powerful women rendered powerless

After having looked at the Meaningful Agency, we were able to identify that violence against women is used in *Beyond: Two Souls* to victimize and disempower Jodie Holmes, the female protagonist. It functions as a plot device to evoke strong emotions. Players feel the urge

to protect the damsel in distress, even if that means to render powerful women powerless. The portrayal of sensitive themes such as sexual violence in *Beyond: Two Souls* does not only reproduce victim-blaming discourses, but it serves to punish Jodie by denying her to live and enjoy her sexuality. As Alexandra (2018) points out in the Kotaku's article, "David Cage Games Keep Treating Women Like Shit", imperiling female protagonists by turning them into damsels in distress, objects to be protected, in a degrading position involving violence against women seems that it was not just a pattern in *Beyond: Two Souls*, but also in *Heavy Rain*, another game developed by Quantic Dream and written by David Cage. In the next chapter, I will examine how this theme is represented in *Detroit: Become Human* (2018), a choice-based game also developed by Quantic Dream and written by David Cage. When looking at *Detroit: Become Human*, I want to investigate how hegemony is at play and whether the powerlessness of powerful women has become a pattern in David Cage's narratives.

Chapter 3: How could you let them die? VAW in *Detroit: Become Human*

In this chapter, I investigate the representation of violence against women in *Detroit: Become Human*, a game developed by Quantic Dreams and published in 2018, the same company who developed *Beyond: Two Souls*, published in 2013. Differently than its predecessor, *Detroit: Become Human* provides an even greater range of possible outcomes where choices can actually end prematurely the story of a playable character. Choices can culminate in the playable character's death or another outcome that would end their gameplay. This means that death can be an outcome in this game.

My goal is to examine how violence against women is represented within Kara's gameplay, one of the playable characters, to inquire the role of agency or the lack of it when representing systemic violence and how it might reproduce hegemonic discourses. To do that, my analysis will focus on choices and outcomes in Kara's branching and compare the dynamics of her gameplay to Markus' and Connor's, the other two playable characters. I won't look at trophies in this chapter since the trophies are mostly related to the completion of levels and not letting characters die. First, I describe the context of the plot and general game mechanics. Then, I briefly cover who Markus and Connor are, including the dynamics of their gameplays and their personal conflicts. Further, I examine Kara's storyline in depth, looking at the specific depictions of violence against women and how those events were designed. Are they avoidable? Are they pre-scripted? Are they outcomes of specific combinations of choices? What choices are available to players? Which decisions have an impact in the story? Which don't? Finally, I analyze the discourse on violence against women by overviewing how it's related to the representation of other forms of systemic violence.²⁶

Welcome to Detroit in 2038

In this section, I contextualize the place where the game takes place and the major plot conflict. The story occurs in Detroit in 2038 when technological evolution allows big companies such as CyberLife to design human-like androids, that is, machines that were created not only to look exactly as a human being, but to mirror human emotions as well.

According to the game's official website²⁷, Quantic Dream (2018) explains that:

Detroit: Become Human puts the destiny of both mankind and androids in your hands, taking you to a near and not-so-impossible future where machines have become more intelligent than humans. Every choice you make affects the outcome of the game, with one of the most intricately branching narratives ever created. ("Overview" Section, para. 1).

²⁶ *Detroit: Become Human* was criticized for being "a flawed depiction of race in America" (Seppala, 2018) by making analogies to Concentration Camps and Civil Rights as Political Allegory (Jones, 2018). In my analysis, I won't cover the misrepresentation of black and Jewish history in *Detroit: Become Human* because those topics are out of my scope. However, when tackling the representation of violence against women to inquire how systemic violence is portrayed in this game, I will consider the analysis of authors (Jones, 2018; Seppala, 2018; Melendez, 2020; Narcisse, 2018) who examined those subjects.

²⁷ Quantic Dream (2018) *Detroit: Become Human*. Retrieved June 26, 2021 from <https://www.quanticroad.com/en/detroit-become-human>

According to the same website, the game's key features involve mechanics of decision making in complex contexts with moral dilemmas, building your own narrative by making choices that will shape and produce unique narratives and exploring the innovative choice branching that includes the playable character's death as a possible outcome. The website invites players to "Enter a world where moral dilemmas and difficult decisions can turn android slaves into world-changing revolutionaries. Discover what it means to be human from the perspective of an outsider – and see the world through the eyes of a machine" (Quantic Dream, 2018, "Key Features" section, para. 1).

The game narrative explores the various ways technology has evolved and how it has impacted everyone's life. Companies are frequently increasing their android workforce because they are not only more efficient, but their labour is also cheaper than human labour which leads to increased human unemployment. Russia and the United States are disputing ownership of the North Pole because it contains many minerals that are used in the production of Thirium, the key ingredient of Blue Blood²⁸ and Red Ice²⁹. The narrative frames the economic instability that unemployed people are facing as the main reason why drug addiction and drug dealing are increasing social issues.

Coupled with that increasing tension, the game constantly portrays the increase of human violence against androids which is mostly the reason behind android deviancy. This is the plot's central conflict. When an android becomes deviant, it means they are deviating from their programmed behavior. In *Detroit: Become Human*, android deviancy often happens when an android is confronted with an unfair situation, whether by being threatened and abused by humans or by witnessing violence committed against others. At this moment, the android is confronted with the choice of becoming deviant, that is, they can decide if they will deviate from their original program or if they will continue to follow the orders determined by the humans. When an android becomes deviant, there is no going back. The game portrays this phenomenon by displaying a mental red barrier which androids can destroy to become free.

Due to the exploitation of the android's workforce, Detroit plunges into a crisis in which androids need to fight for their freedom. The narrative is divided between 3 protagonists who are androids created by Cyberlife: Kara, Markus and Connor. Each one of them provides a different perspective of this crisis where they make choices to survive while dealing with moral dilemmas. Their achievements will impact how the world handles the android revolution.

The lives of these androids are in your hands

In this section, I explain how the game works. *Detroit: Become Human* is divided in 32 chapters that alternate between Kara's, Markus' and Connor's gameplays. Sometimes players will play with more than one character in the same chapter. Differently from *Beyond: Two Souls*, players cannot choose to switch characters. The choice of playable character is pre-scripted in the game.

To conclude each chapter, there is a list of specific interactions and decisions that must be made [figure 33]. Players cannot leave a scene until the mandatory tasks are completed. When concluding a chapter, a branching outline is displayed which allows players to see how their choices shaped the narrative [figure 34]. Some chapters can have more than one possible ending. The system shows players their percentage completed for each chapter [figure 35] which

²⁸ Blue Blood is a liquid substance that powers androids' biocomponents which are similar to human organs.

²⁹ Red Ice is a fictional and illegal drug that is highly addictive which is said to be the cause involving user's bursts of rage and irrational thinking as well as deteriorating their health.

encourages players to replay and explore other possibilities. As mentioned previously, the playable character's death is a possible outcome of specific choices.



Figure 33: The user interface shows a list of urgent tasks

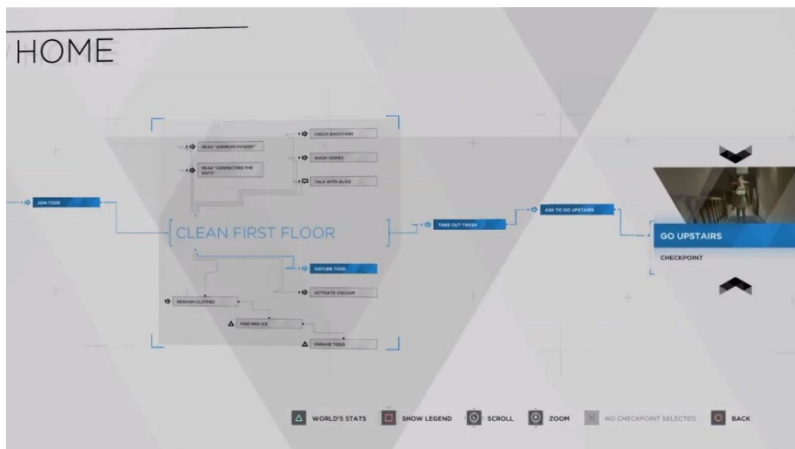


Figure 34: Flowchart shows narrative branches that were completed

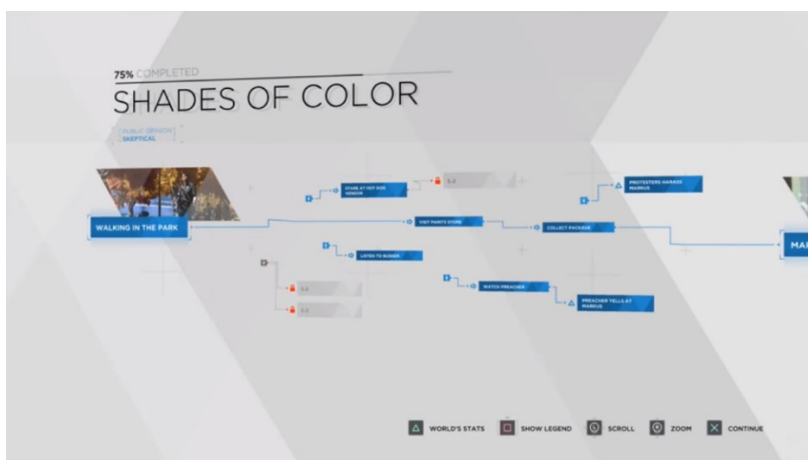


Figure 35: Flowchart calculates the percentage of completion based on the unlocked paths

When making choices, players' actions will influence their relationship status with non-playable characters [figure 36]. Character relationships are one of the ways the game highlights specific paths. For instance, deciding to be pacifist when conducting the android revolution might improve Josh's relationship status because he will always be appeased. However, being pacifist will lower North's relationship status because she will always defend decisions that involve violence. I won't focus on documenting status relationships in my analysis, but I will overall state the dynamics of the relationship status of specific NPCs.



Figure 36: Interface shows relationship status update to show the consequences.

Connor: the android who hunts androids

Connor is a RK800 android [figure 37] designed to be a detective and hunt down deviants. At the beginning of the game, he is assigned to Lt. Hank Anderson to specifically handle the cases involving deviants. At first, Connor's and Hank's relationship is conflicted because Hank sees Connor as a threat to his job as he was designed to replace human detectives.

Throughout the game, depending on Connor's choices, their relationship can improve as Connor learns the reasons why Hank is hostile towards androids and Hank learns why androids are becoming deviants. As their investigation evolves, Connor must report back to Amanda, an artificial intelligence designed by CyberLife to monitor deviancy. Connor's relationship with Hank and Amanda are how the game highlights the two main paths his gameplay can take. When encountering deviants and learning that all of them deviated after being subject to abuse for years, Connor might stick to his mission to hunt them down or to let them be free. When choosing not to hunt down deviants and picking dialogue options that indicate that Connor recognizes android individuality, Hank's relationship status will improve and Amanda's will lower. Choosing to hunt deviants down and stick to his program will worsen Connor's relationship with Hank and increase it with Amanda. In *Crossroads*, when Connor finds Markus, the other male playable character, he can decide to "become deviant" or to "stay a machine" and

try to kill him. This is a big decision in his gameplay and only happens towards the end of the game since his central conflict is the fear he has of becoming a deviant. Throughout the game, the way Connor conducts the investigation will impact not only the android revolution but the way he perceives himself and others like him. Connor's gameplay serves to give players CyberLife's and the police's perspectives of the android revolution.



Figure 37: Connor is an android detective who investigate Deviant cases and hunt them down



Figure 38: Connor can identify substances by licking them.

When playing as Connor, the game narrative is focused on explaining how android deviancy manifests. In Connor's gameplay, his specific level design dynamics involve Connor investigating crime scenes and interrogating suspects. His model has sensors and programs that allow him to identify people's identities as well as substances and analyze marks and wounds in the environment and in other bodies [figure 38]. When Connor chooses to spare deviants or engages in actions that will prevent him from succeeding in his mission, which involves understanding and ending deviants, this will increase his *software instability* which is a status specific to his gameplay that measures how close he is to becoming deviant. However, it's the player's choice of turning him into a deviant in *Crossroads*.

Markus: the leader of the android revolution

Markus is a RK200 android designed to be a domestic assistant and companion [figure 39]. Markus was a gift from Elijah Kamski³⁰ to Carl Manfred³¹. He starts as a domestic assistant who is sent to an android graveyard after becoming deviant. When fighting to leave the graveyard, Markus is reborn³², gaining new abilities from assembling parts of "deceased" androids. After he comes back from the dead, he decides to help other deviants, later becoming the leader of the android revolution. He can convert androids to deviants by touching or looking at them [figure 40]. In these moments, Markus claims to be freeing these androids.



Figure 39. Markus has the power to convert androids to deviants

³⁰ Elijah Kamski is the founder and former CEO of CyberLife. He is the scientist responsible for inventing androids.

³¹ Carl Manfred is a famous painter. He is paraplegic and takes medication regularly for a non-specified medical condition. He is an old man who lives in a mansion.

³² When looking at the biblical references in Markus' storyline we see that he is framed as the messiah of the android revolution.

His gameplay dynamics involve making decisions about how to lead the android revolution. He can make strategic decisions based on the percentage of success which is calculated by his software [figure 41]. His storyline serves to provide the perspective of the android revolution and how they are fighting against oppression. He can choose to either be pacifist or more violent when leading the deviants. His relationship with other deviants from his group are the way the game highlights these different paths.

If Markus decides to be more violent when leading the revolution, North, a possible romantic partner, will admire his actions. If Markus is more pacifist, North won't like it, but Josh will admire him. Simon responds positively if Markus makes choices that are less risky. Choices related to being more pacifist or violent don't affect Simon. Markus also has relationship status with the larger android community, named Jericho. It can vary from Leader, Admired, Respected, Neutral, Unpopular to Rejected. This status change depends on how effective Markus' decisions are for the android revolution. If he makes choices that damage the community, he can be removed from leadership. When looking at Markus's speeches, the way violence against androids is portrayed as well as the fact that the game takes place in Detroit, the game was criticized for making political allegories to the Civil Rights Movement, apartheid and slavery (Narcisse, 2018).



Figure 40: Markus calculates the successfulness of possible paths

Kara: the survivor

Kara is an AX400 android who is designed to be a housemaid [figure 41], which involves cleaning and cooking in the home of Todd Williams [figure 42], her owner, and caring for Alice [figure 43], his daughter. While Connor's gameplay provides the perspective of CyberLife and the police regarding the android revolution, and Markus' is focused on the administration of the movement, Kara's storyline serves to demonstrate the impact of the android revolution in the life of androids outside Jericho, the refuge for deviant androids. While Connor is hunting down deviants and reflecting on his own existence as a machine and Markus is freeing androids from "slavery", Kara is managing to survive in a world that only sees her as a machine.



Figure 41: Kara is a housemaid android owned by Todd Williams

In the chapter “The Opening”, Todd Williams, Kara’s owner, comes to pick her up at the store after they finish repairing her. The store staff asks Todd: “It was a bit difficult getting it back in working order. It was really messed up... what did you say happened to it again?” And Todd answers: “Huh, A car hit it... Stupid accident.” Due to the massive damage, Kara’s memory had to be reset.



Figure 42: Todd is a middle-aged overweight man who is violent and abusive.



Figure 43. Alice is Todd's daughter. Later is revealed that she is an android

A New Home

In *A New Home*, Kara returns to Todd's house after being away for a while. Most of the interactions in this chapter involve doing household chores such as cleaning the kitchen, tidying Todd's room, etc. In this chapter, Kara meets Alice, Todd's daughter, who is a shy little girl. Throughout the chapter, Kara can interact with Alice and improve her relationship status with Alice. However, it's not possible to do the same with Todd. Later, we learn that Alice's shyness is her defensive mechanism as she is always afraid and hiding due to her father's violent behavior.



Figure 44. Kara finds Todd's antidepressant pills

The environment reveals details regarding Todd's life. When taking the trash out, Kara will see the pile of bills and credit requests that reveal how Todd is able to afford the house. The taxi poster and the car plaques displayed on the walls show that Todd used to be a taxi driver. However, as he reveals in dialogue, he is currently unemployed. When listening to Todd on the

phone, it is implied that he is dealing the drug Red Ice to pay his bills. He lost his job to the self-driven cars and he blames androids for “stealing his job”. When cleaning his bedroom, Kara finds Todd’s antidepressant pills. The label specifies that it contains *tianeptine* and there is the “risk of behavioral disorders” [figure 44]. When cleaning the living room, we see Todd getting high on Red Ice when he inhales it with a pipe in the middle of the living room while watching TV.

As players advance in this chapter, we encounter several dialogues and scenes that indicate Kara and Alice are victims of domestic violence. When Kara turns on the vacuum cleaner, Alice starts to play with it. Todd reacts by screaming at Alice: “Alice! You better stop that right now! Why is she always pushin' me? Always pushing...” When Kara crosses the living room, being in front of the TV, Todd shouts at her: “Outta the way for fuck sake!” When Kara is doing laundry, she takes Todd’s clothes. With her android abilities, she scans them, finding that Todd’s clothes contain Red Ice. In response, Todd grabs her neck, choking her, while threatening her.

Todd: You shouldn't mess around with my stuff. It makes me nervous...

Kara: I'm sorry Todd...

Todd: You stay the fuck outta my business, unless you wanna piss me off... You wanna piss me off?

Kara: No, Todd.

When Kara asks Todd if she can start cleaning upstairs, he answers: “Do what you have to do but stop botherin' me.” After a couple of interactions with Alice, she will give Kara the key to a box that holds a family picture and Alice’s drawings. In the picture we see Todd with a little girl and a woman. However, we see Todd raising Alice alone. In these drawings [figure 45], we see that Alice draws herself bleeding and afraid of Todd. We also see in these drawings that Todd was beating Kara as well, severing her arm.



Figure 45: Alice's drawings reveals that Kara wasn't destroyed by a car, but by Todd

When Kara goes downstairs to report to Todd that she finished cleaning the house, she encounters Todd being aggressive towards Alice.

Todd: What are you doing?

Alice: I... I'm playing...

Todd: You're playing... I know what you're thinking... You think your dad's lowlife... Huh? Fucking loser?... Can't get a job, take care of his family? Don't you think I tried to make things work? But whatever I do, when someone comes along they just FUCK IT ALL UP! I know what you think of me... You hate me... You hate me don't you?... SAY IT! YOU HATE ME!

Alice starts crying.

Todd starts crying: God. What am I doing? I'm sorry honey, I'm sorry... I'm sorry... You know I love you, don't you?... You know I love you...

There are only three actions³³ whose consequences impact the next chapter. Both actions take place when Kara tidies Todd's and Alice's room. In Todd's room, she will find a gun in his nightstand if players explore the environment. In Alice's room, she can leave the window open to ventilate the bedroom, which will become a way to escape the house in the next chapter. When talking to Alice, if they have at least a neutral relationship status, Alice will give Kara a key to her box. If Kara opens the box, she will discover what is happening. Knowing this information will have an impact in the following chapter. Some of Todd's violent actions are consequences of specific choices while others are pre-scripted. For example, when washing the clothes, Kara will find Red Ice which will enrage Todd. When cleaning the bathroom, which is a mandatory task to fulfill one of the goals of the chapter, Todd will push Kara because she will be standing in his way on the hallway. Since cleaning the bathroom is mandatory, there are no choices regarding this action. Therefore, Todd's violence in this context is not a consequence of the player's choice.

Stormy Night

In *Stormy Night*, Kara is cooking dinner while Alice is looking through the window, worried, and Todd is napping on the couch. Todd awakes to have dinner at the dining room. Todd, who is high on Red Ice from the previous episode, is triggered by Alice looking at him.

Todd: What are you looking at?... What's your fuckin' problem? Not the life you dreamed of, eh? Maybe you think this is easy? Maybe you think it's my fault we live in this fuckin' shithole, my fault your fuckin' mother took off? "You should stop takin' drugs, Todd. Sometimes you really scare me, Todd." Fuckin' bitch took off without a word. Fuckin' whore walked out on me for a fuckin' accountant! It's all your fault!

³³ Playstation Universe. (May 24, 2018). *Detroit Become Human - A New Home Flowchart - 100% Walkthrough* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/stOtfSg-lMU>

Alice: Daddy, no!

Todd slaps Alice.

Todd: It's all your fucking fault!

Alice runs upstairs.

Todd: Get back here! Come back here! Come back here right now!

Kara tries to go upstairs.

Todd: You stay there! Don't you dare fucking move, or I'll bust you worse than last time.

This is the moment when Kara can become deviant and disobey Todd's command [figure 46]. If Kara becomes a deviant, there will be two goals: protect Alice, and reason with Todd. It's possible to do both of them. By looking at a flowchart of the game's choices³⁴, we see that when trying to reason with Todd, Kara can choose how to approach him: Calm, Determined or Understanding. Regardless of the way she approaches him, Todd will grab Kara by the neck and threaten her: "You stay out of this, or you'll be next." Therefore, reasoning with him doesn't have any impact in the game.

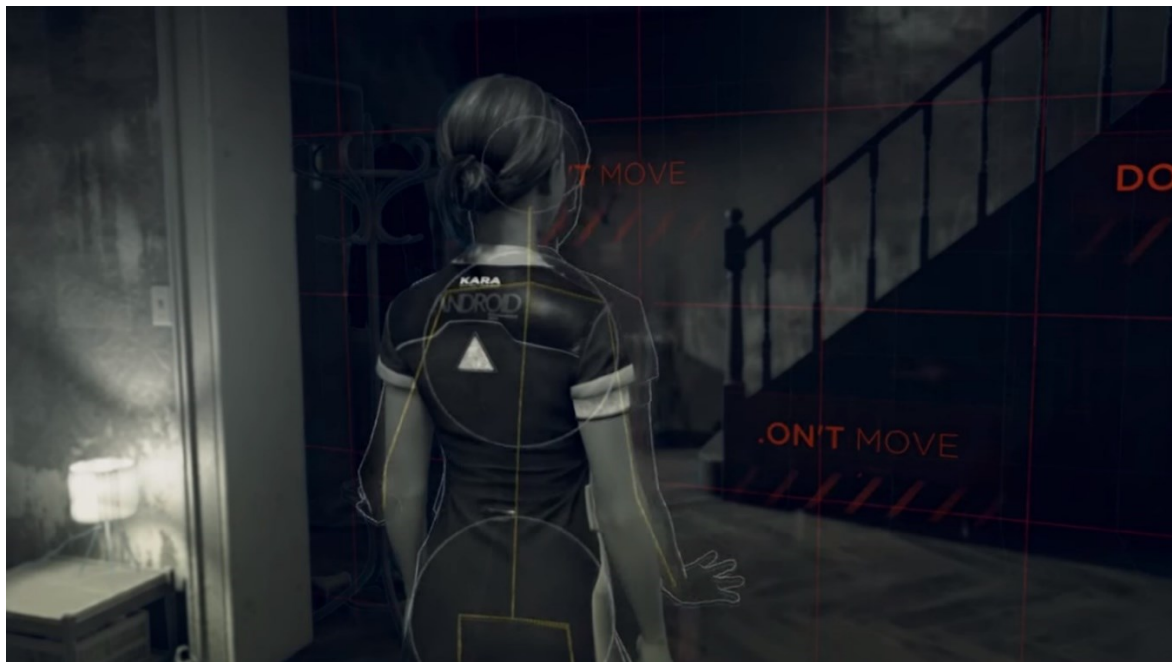


Figure 46. Interface displays a wall to represent Kara's programming

Depending on what the player chooses to do to survive, including options unlocked in the previous chapter as well on the success or failure of quick time events, there are many ways this chapter can end. Depending on the combination of those variables, Todd might kill Alice [figure

³⁴ Milk In A Wineglass. (June 19, 2018). 07 - KARA - STORMY NIGHT - 100% FLOWCHART - DETROIT BECOME HUMAN [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5pNE-8ab14&ab_channel=MilkInAWineglass

47] or Kara [figure 48]; Kara or Alice might shoot Todd, killing him; Kara and Alice might escape alive without having to kill Todd. If Kara and Alice manage to stay alive, regardless of killing Todd or leaving him alive, the public view will be negative. If Kara or Alice die, Kara's storyline ends. If Todd is left alive, they will encounter him in the chapter *Battle for Detroit*.



Figure 48: If Kara cannot stop Todd, he kills Alice



Figure 47: Kara can die in many ways in this chapter

Fugitives

If Kara and Alice manage to stay alive in the previous chapter, they will now be on the streets, trying to find a safe place to spend the rainy night. At one point, they meet a WR600 android who tells them about a safe place to stay, but it's located on the other side of town. Kara needs to find a way to keep Alice safe and away from the rain and the cold weather.

There are three different ways to complete this chapter: they can spend the night at the hotel, in an abandoned car at a parking lot or in an abandoned house. The challenge of this chapter is to keep Alice safe during the night and make her happy. To keep her safe in the hotel, which is the most comfortable place, Kara needs to steal clothes from the laundry to disguise them as human as well as money from the grocery store to pay for the room. Although staying at the hotel increases Kara and Alice's relationship status, stealing damages their relationship. To stay in the abandoned house, Kara needs to steal tools from the same grocery store to break in. Unlike stealing money, shoplifting doesn't damage their relationship. Staying at the abandoned building is not safe as they are threatened by another homeless android. To stay in the abandoned car is the choice that lowers their relationship status as it's the most uncomfortable one.

Regardless of where they stay, there will be a dialogue between them that serves to make players care for Alice.

Alice: Why didn't he ever love me? Why was he always so upset with me? All I wanted was a life like other girls. Maybe I did something wrong? Maybe I wasn't good enough? That's why he was always so angry. I just wanted us to be a family. I just wanted him to love me. Why couldn't we just be happy?

Kara: I don't know, Alice.

Alice: You'll never leave me, right? Promise you'll never go!

At this point, Kara can choose to promise or not which will affect their relationship. For the rest of the game, this is mostly the dynamics of Kara's gameplay: having to choose to make Alice happy and to keep her safe. Breaking the law and not respecting private property are decisions that usually damage their relationship.

On the run

In this chapter, Connor and Hank are investigating Kara's case. As they approach the location where she is hiding with Alice, Kara needs to find a way to run away from the police. This chapter features the two playable characters, Kara and Connor, and is divided between their gameplays. Differently from previous chapters, Kara needs to use her android abilities to scan the environment and hide from the police. The game mechanics heavily rely on the player's ability to decide how to navigate the environment without being seen. If Kara is seen, Connor will try to catch her. Confronting the police, which is constantly portrayed as an option in Markus' gameplay, is not an option in Kara's gameplay.

There are a couple of ways this chapter can end. Depending on where Kara and Alice spent the night, this chapter will start differently³⁵. If they stayed in the abandoned house, they have the chance of not being detected by the police. If they stayed in the abandoned car, Kara

³⁵ Basic & Casual. (July 18, 2018) *Detroit: Become Human – "On the Run" [100% Flowchart]* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/qhjJam0ETGA>

will be able to see the police arriving, allowing them to flee before the arrival. If they stayed in the hotel, they will only be able to see the police when it's too late. They will still be able to escape, but they will need to sneak by the police and reach a train without being detected. However, if they are detected at some point, Connor will be able to chase them until they reach the highway, where Kara and Alice or Connor might be killed.

Zlatko

In the chapter, Kara and Alice seeks Zlatko's help [figure 49] who claims to help deviants escape. When he reveals that he has been tricking deviants, he attempts to hack Kara to sell her. Kara must avoid being hacked and run away from Zlatko's servant, an android named Luther³⁶, who will chase and threaten her. Later on, Luther becomes deviant himself when he sees Kara and Alice's connection. Touched by their bond, Luther decides to not follow Zlatko's orders anymore. If Kara and Alice manage to stay alive³⁷, Luther will join them. From this chapter and beyond, Luther has the role of protecting Kara and Alice. For example, there are moments, such as in *Midnight Train*, where Luther can be "sacrificed", that is, he will be captured by the police or destroyed to assure Kara and Alice remain safe.



Figure 49: Zlatko captures deviants, resets their system, and sells them

Crossroads

In this chapter, there is the crossover between Kara's, Connor's and Markus' gameplays. Rose³⁸ told Kara about Jericho, the clandestine deviant community that lives in an abandoned ship, explaining that Kara can get false documents from Markus that will allow them to cross the

³⁶ Luther is a TR400 android who became a servant to Zlatko after being reset. He looks like a tall strong black man. The game was criticized for reproducing race stereotypes, depicting black men as big, strong, violent and scary (Alexandra, 2018).

³⁷ BlueGloss. (March 2, 2019). Detroit Become Human™ Zlatko Flowchart. [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/0nZaG8E546w>

³⁸ Rose is a black woman who sympathizes with the android cause. She helps deviants cross the border to Canada, the promised land where androids can be free.

border to Canada. Connor finds the location of Jericho and goes after Markus to kill him and end the android revolution. Markus is planning the next move of the android revolution before Jericho is attacked by FBI agents.

In this context, Kara finds out that Alice is an android and not a human child³⁹. Luther was trying to call Kara's attention to the fact that Alice is an android for a couple of chapters. Every time Kara would be worried about Alice's fever or hunger, Luther would try to warn Kara. She finally realizes that Alice is an android when she sees the light circle in Alice's forehead. When this scene happens, the game shows that in the first chapter, Kara had actually seen a magazine with Alice's model on the cover. However, for some unexplained reason, Kara removed that memory from her mind. At this point, Kara is confronted by this revelation where the player can choose to accept Alice as an android or to reject her, abandoning her. To evoke strong emotions on players regarding this choice, Lucy, a mysterious android who predicts the future approaches Kara and Alice, saying:

Lucy: She wanted a mom. You wanted a little girl. You needed each other to survive... In the end, what difference does it make? Do you love her any less now that you know she's one of us? Maybe that's what it means to be alive... Forgetting who we are to become what someone needs us to be. She loves you... She loves you more than anything in the world. She became the one you wanted her to be. Out of love for you.



Figure 50: If Kara chooses abandons Alice, players will get her bad ending

³⁹ When it is revealed that Alice is an android, the game leaves a lot of things unexplained. Was Alice already aware that she was an android? Why does Alice have physical needs? Were her needs designed to mirror the ones from a real girl to give the experience of taking care of a little girl? Or did she display them because she wanted to feel like a real girl? Did Alice become a deviant to be able to escape Todd's house with Kara? When did she become a deviant? Why did she try not to run away as the other android children we have encountered throughout the game? Many players claimed this plot twist did not make sense.

Battle for Detroit

In this chapter, there is also the crossover between Kara's, Connor's and Markus' gameplays. Considering Kara's storyline, there are two ways this chapter can start. She might be leaving Detroit with Alice or they might have been captured and sent to the Recall Center N°5⁴⁰.

If they manage to escape Jericho without being captured, they will have two options to cross the Canadian border: by bus or by boat. The ways that *Battle for Detroit* ends in Kara's branching⁴¹ demonstrate that she's only able to cross the border safely whether by bus [figure 51] or by boat [figure 52] if the public opinion is positive^{42,43} towards the android revolution [table 17]. As explained previously, the public opinion is a relationship status that can improve or worsen depending on character's choices. Android actions are broadcast on TV which affects public opinion. This status is what determines if Kara can get a happy ending in this branching.

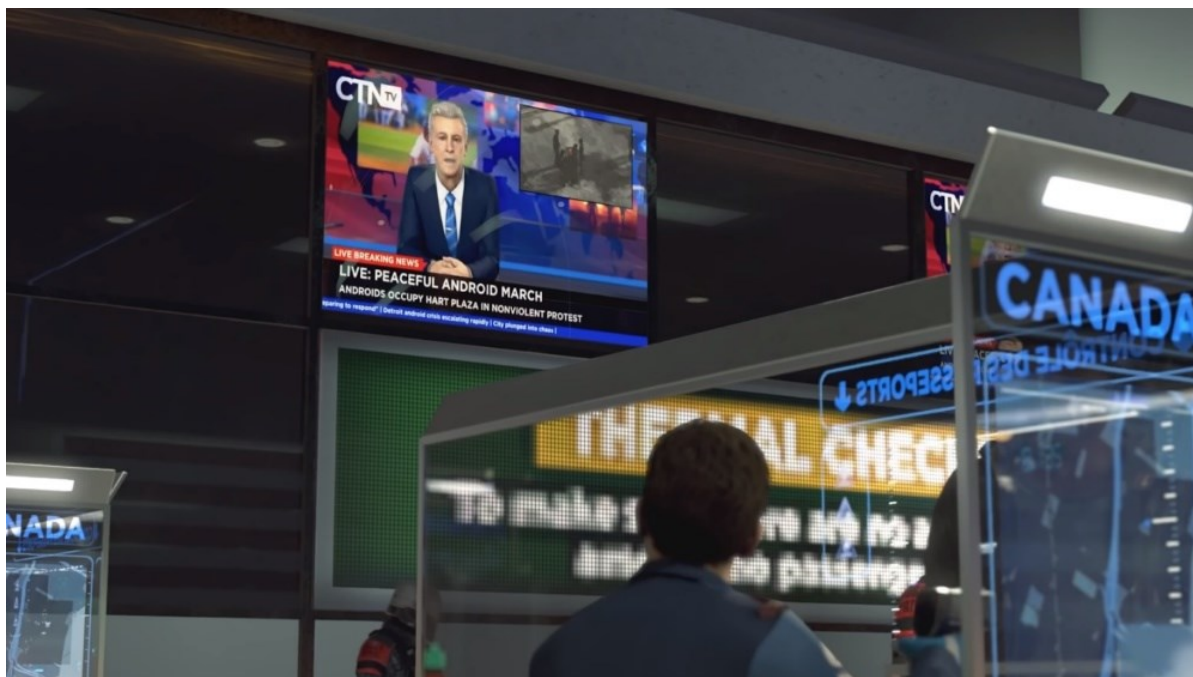


Figure 51: Border agent watches TV to decide Kara's fate

If Kara and Alice were captured by the police and sent to the Recall Center N°5, there are a couple of options to escape safely. Kara can choose to save herself and abandon Alice by hiding herself in a pile of discarded android bodies, which will lead to her bad ending described in *Crossroads*. Kara can be reunited with Alice and Luther, fighting their way to leave the camp

⁴⁰ According to the *Detroit: Become Human* Wiki, Recall Center N°5 is an extermination camp where androids are killed. It was created by the U.S. president Cristina Warren to shut down androids after the country became nervous following the android revolution. The wikia states that the center strongly resembles Nazi concentration camps and there were moments in the game where the Recall Center was called a camp. (Fandom, n.d.)

⁴¹ Manugames92. (July 13, 2019). *Detroit Become Human: flowchart of all chapters 100% complete* [Video]. YouTube <https://youtu.be/4uh60vFZf9k>

⁴² It's possible to get a good ending with Kara even if public opinion disapproves the android revolution. Kara and Alice can still escape the camp or the Canadian border if one of the male non-playable characters sacrifices themselves to save Kara and Alice. One of these male characters will create a distraction so Kara and Alice can sneak.

⁴³ When crossing the river by boat, public opinion does not interfere. However, they are only able to cross the river safely if they hide behind Luther.

and hiding themselves in a pile of discarded android bodies, which will lead to one of the endings where they survive. If Kara and Alice are unable to escape the disassembly machine [figure 53], which resembles Nazi gas chambers, they will be saved at the last minute by the androids from Markus' group if the revolution is going well. Ultimately, the android revolution can only succeed if public opinion is positive towards the android cause. Thus, the public opinion is one of the factors that determines if Kara can get a happy ending in this branching.



Figure 52: Kara and Alice survive after crossing the river



Figure 53: Alice, with her skin deactivated, is killed in the disassembly machine with Kara

When looking at the two branchings of Kara's story, we see that public opinion is what determines mostly⁴⁴ if she survives or not. Therefore, it's important to investigate what choices can affect public opinion and where these choices take place.

Death as a possible outcome

The mechanics involving death in the game manifest differently in Kara's and Connor's gameplays. In Kara's gameplay, there are a large number of ways she can die depending on the chapter. Since the game considers death to be a consequence of player choice, having many ways to die means that there are a larger number of choice combinations that will trigger this ending. This means that it's easier to die as Kara than to die as another character. In each one of those possible endings, Kara or Alice dying means the end of Kara's storyline. When they die, Chloe, the android displayed in the game's Main Menu, who interacts with players, says: "You let Kara and Alice die... How could you do that? You could have saved them... Remember, the lives of these androids are in your hands..." This is another plot device the game deploys to evoke strong emotions from players when portraying the death of female characters. This is meant to make players feel bad for failing to protect them.

In Connor's gameplay, death doesn't mean the end of his storyline. Each time Connor dies, he is replaced⁴⁵ by a *new* Connor from CyberLife to continue to conduct the investigation. Dying in Connor's gameplay can increase his "software instability" status because it means that he died trying to achieve his mission of hunting deviants. Having a high degree of software instability means that Connor is more likely to become a deviant. Having a low degree of software instability means that he will likely accomplish his mission. In Connor's gameplay, to die doesn't mean to fail the game. Dying is portrayed as part of his journey instead of being a failure.

Meaningful agency and public opinion

As explained previously, public opinion is a status in the game that is affected by the choices of playable characters. Public opinion usually improves if androids choose not to retaliate against human violence with violence of their own. It's this status that defines whether the android revolution succeeds. Therefore, meaningful agency in *Detroit: Become Human* doesn't rely only on the choices that prevent a playable characters' premature death, but also on which choices affect public opinion.

The public opinion levels toward androids are: supportive, sympathetic, indifferent, skeptical (initial), hostile, and hated. When looking at which actions that highly [table 18] and slightly [table 19] improve the public opinion, they are mostly related to Markus' gameplay. When looking at which actions slightly [table 20] worsen public opinion, they are more scattered among the three playable characters. When looking at the actions that heavily [table 21] worsen the public opinion, they are mostly related to Markus' gameplay.

⁴⁴Kara and Alice can still have a good ending if public opinion is not positive. However, the best ending where they reach their goal without having to ask male characters to sacrifice themselves to save them is only achievable if public opinion approves the android revolution.

⁴⁵ There is one death that can lead to the end of Connor's storyline. When choosing not to become deviant and continue to work for CyberLife, at one point the police will confront Connor on a rooftop. By choosing "Fight" and failing the quick time events, Connor will get a bullet between his eyes. This will lead to his final death because he won't have the chance to upload his memory so Cyberlife can replace him with a new Connor.

According to the *Detroit: Become Human* wiki⁴⁶, “Kara's actions can only decrease public opinion by a small amount with a total of four times. Connor can only slightly increase or decrease public opinion a few times” (Fandom, 2018, “Notes” section). Markus is the character whose actions most influence public opinion. Even though one could argue that Markus' gameplay is where mostly meaningful agency relies, there is also meaningful agency in Connor's gameplay because it can also heavily affect public opinion indirectly if he succeeds in his mission to end the android revolution.

When we look at Kara's gameplay⁴⁷, we see that most of the choices she makes are meaningless, that is, they have no impact in the story. There is no action that can be taken within her gameplay that will affect public opinion significantly. She can only get the good ending, that is, surviving and saving Alice, if public opinion is in favor of androids. It means that only if Markus or Connor succeed in leading the android revolution, Kara gets to live. Different from Connor's ending, where it's up to the player to interpret if succeeding in the mission or abandoning the mission are good or bad endings, Kara's ending is framed as good or bad because her one goal is to survive. Connor's goal might shift throughout the game depending on how he evolves as a character. However, Kara's goal of surviving does not change because she doesn't evolve as a character. There are no scenes of her reflecting on her role in the android revolution or on the violence inflicted upon her. What defines Kara's identity is not the way she reacts and reflects on her experience as a member of an oppressed group, but her role as a mother to Alice and her constant need of protecting her. As mentioned previously, Kara's storyline will end prematurely if she decides to save herself because she doesn't exist without Alice, even though Alice is an NPC and Kara is one of the protagonists.

Therefore, after looking at the gameplays of the 3 playable characters, we can identify some patterns. Heretofore, the way meaningful and meaningless agency is assigned is rooted in traditional gender roles. Kara, the only playable female character, can only get the good ending if she accepts the role of compulsory motherhood and men make good choices. Refusing to be a mother and saving herself will lead to an ending where she survives, but she doesn't have a reason to live. If the male characters make bad choices, there is a high chance that she will be killed. The good endings where Kara and Alice survive, even if public opinion is negative, are only possible if one of the non-playable male characters choose to sacrifice himself to save them.

Controllable helplessness

Violence against women is represented in this game mainly via Kara's gameplay. However, it is also depicted in other parts of the game. For this analysis, I will focus my attention on Kara's storyline and include Connor's first chapter.

Connor must save a little girl who is being threatened by a deviant in *The Hostage*. When looking at the depiction of violence against women in this scene, we see that putting a little girl in danger is a common plot device to evoke strong emotions from players. The girl is framed as someone worthy to be saved because she is female, white, a child and someone's daughter. As Meyers (1997) as well as Jiwani & Young (2006) have identified previously, the dichotomies when representing female victims play out according to their gender roles. If female victims

⁴⁶ Fandom. (n.d.) *Public Opinion*. Retrieved June 26, 2021 from https://detroit-become-human.fandom.com/wiki/Public_Opinion

⁴⁷ Manugames92. (July 13, 2019). *Detroit Become Human: flowchart of all chapters 100% complete* [Video]. YouTube <https://youtu.be/4uh60vFZf9k>

reinforce traditional gender roles, such as being someone else's daughter or wife, they are framed as helpless and worthy of being saved. Here, the game uses saving a white girl who is in danger as the player's goal and creates stress on the player to do so as a way of raising the stakes. If players fail the mission, it means a helpless little girl will be murdered.

We see the same dynamics of *The Hostage* play out in Kara's storyline. As we could see previously when investigating such storyline, the conflicts in her chapters are usually related to being put through what Alexandra (2018) calls *controllable helplessness*. When analyzing how female protagonists are portrayed in games written by David Cage (*Heavy Rain*, *Beyond: Two Souls* and *Detroit: Become Human*), Alexandra identified a pattern: Cage includes the depiction of violence against women to disempower female protagonists "in a fetishtisitic display of violence" (Alexandra, 2018, para. 6). In these instances, if players fail quick time events or don't make specific choices, these female characters are killed, sexually assaulted or lobotomized. Alexandra explains that in these scenes female characters "are sexually humiliated and assaulted. Often, these scenes do little to progress their stories should they live" (Alexandra, 2018, para. 7).

As described, we see this *controllable helplessness* at play in Kara's gameplay. When Kara has to escape Todd's house with Alice and defend herself, the game doesn't give Kara the same tools it gives other playable characters. For instance, Markus has enough physical strength to fight against Leo and only fails because the police shoot him. Even though Kara is an android and could be designed to be stronger than a human woman, she is unable to defend herself against Todd. While all three playable characters have the ability to scan the environment to identify unknown substances and details that could easily be missed by human eyes, the game doesn't give Kara the chance to scan blue blood on Zlatko's hand, which could quickly indicate that she was going into a trap. And finally, differently from Markus and Connor, Kara can't use the ability to calculate the percentage of success of certain movements, which could help her perform the best actions to fight or escape. When playing as Markus and Connor, players can succeed because of their extraordinary abilities. However, when playing as Kara, players can only succeed *despite* her fragility. The narrative constantly exploits Kara's fragility to evoke strong emotions. The central conflict of most chapters in Kara's story involves her victimization and desperation in saving herself from abusers. This controllable helplessness functions to take away Kara's choices or to provide choices that are meaningless. In this way, the game renders Kara as being constantly helpless.

Controllable helplessness is used to evoke strong emotions to make choices harder, and to raise the stakes for players. By displaying graphically violent scenes of Kara being murdered in many different ways, the narrative encourages players to feel guilty for failing to save her. The fear of failing and not being able to save her is used to motivate players to play again and explore different choices to keep Kara alive. We can see it when we look at how Chloe, the android at the game's start screen, reacts when Kara and Alice die, telling the player: "You let Kara and Alice die... How could you do that? You could have saved them... Remember, the lives of these androids are in your hands..." By raising feelings such as fear and guilt, the goal of depicting violence against women is to emotionally manipulate players.

Considering that Kara's helplessness is used to manipulate players, we see that Kara's fate serves to "highlight the value of player choice" (Alexandra, 2018, para. 13). By making bad choices, players will see Kara being killed in multiple ways. As we see many endings where Kara's body is displayed in situations that resemble real life social issues such as domestic violence, the game exploits collective trauma to raise the stakes of decision making, to build conflicts where making a choice is stressful and emotionally exhausting.

Moreover, violence against women is represented in the context of violence against androids, which are used as an allegory to marginalized identities. When looking at the events of *Stormy Night*, we learn that Todd used to have a wife who left him. However, when replaying this chapter after having finished the game, we know that he also bought Alice who is revealed to be an android in *Crossroads* and not a human child. In this scene, this information means that Todd bought two androids to replace the family he used to have. Differently from his human wife and daughter, Kara and Alice can't leave him because they don't have access to any support provided by the government since they don't have any rights. This is another way the game represents android as a marginalized identity. In this case, it's the overlapping of violence against women and violence against androids.

Fetishizing torture, implicit pedophilia and beating little girls

The depiction of violence against women in *Zlatko*, when Kara is captured, immobilized and tortured, was criticized for “fetishizing torture and demeaning women” (Jones, 2018, “Fetishizing Torture and Demeaning Women” section). Jones explains that depending on the choices you make, you will meet the remains of androids who were captured and tortured by Zlatko. For example, Kara can meet a naked burned female android who is wearing only panties. This tortured android is on her knees in the corner of Zlatko's room. She tells Kara that “He likes to play with us”. However, when looking at male androids who were targets of violence, their torture is not framed in a sexual context. Sexualizing female bodies who were victims of violence is a common trope in video games, as highlighted by Sarkeesian (2014) in *Women as Background Decoration: Part 2 - Tropes vs Women in Video Games*.

It is the collusion of violence done to women's bodies and the fact that it is often sexualized. The idea being that a dead woman is still inherently beautiful, even if her body has been maimed, her life stolen from her, something arousing still remains available for male consumption. (Sarkeesian, 2014, 3:25)

Framing violence against women as a plot device to evoke strong emotions is a common trope in video games. It can be done by displaying dead, mutilated female bodies, often sex workers, in a sexual context “to invoke a sexually charged creepy mood or edgy atmosphere” (Sarkeesian, 2014, 4:08) and to convey “just how harsh, cruel and unforgiving their game worlds are.” (Sarkeesian, 2014, 3:57). In *Zlatko*, the tortured android serves to represent Zlatko's perversion and cruelty.

It can also be done by endangering the damsel in distress, a female character that often reinforces traditional gender roles, that is, the woman who is worth being saved. This is a trope used throughout Kara's storyline as we have seen when analyzing the instances of controllable helplessness. However, it is also used in scenes where Alice is in danger. In *Zlatko*, if players fail to save Kara, she will become one of Zlatko's slaves too, and Alice will be taken away. Once we know that Alice is an android, this scene could be interpreted as Zlatko also turning her into one of his slaves as well, which some critics have condemned as implicit pedophilia (Jones, 2018). The game evokes strong emotions when it brings up the thought of leaving a helpless little girl at the hands of a sexual maniac. The guilt of letting Alice become Zlatko's sex slave is a way the game makes players play this chapter again in hope to save her. In this case, endangering the damsel in distress is also a plot device to evoke strong emotions with the purpose of raising the stakes of choice-making.

Detroit: Become Human as well as *Beyond: Two Souls* are games that use child abuse as plot devices to evoke strong emotions in players. We could see this clearly in *Beyond: Two Souls* when we play as Aiden to protect young Jodie from her abusive father. The same thing happens in *Detroit: Become Human* when we need to save the little girl who was being held hostage by a deviant and when we need to save Alice multiple times throughout Kara's storyline. The narrative constantly exposes Alice to threats such as violence, isolation and even pedophilia (Jones, 2018) to make players care for her and fear that she will be murdered. This is a pattern in David Cage's games (Alexandra, 2018).

Drugs, mental illness and obesity: The profile of male abusers

When looking at Todd and Zlatko, the two men who abuse Kara, we can see they have something in common: they are presented as abominations of manhood. Both abuse Kara, and are depicted as reprehensible obese men addicted to drugs. Zlatko has a South Slavic masculine given name⁴⁸ which can indicate that he is an immigrant or has foreign origins. Zlatko was designed to visually resemble Todd⁴⁹. They both have the same weight and height, birthday (September 21) and share the same hair color, and hair model⁵⁰. Todd was designed to look like Earl from *Beyond: Two Souls*, one of the abusers who sexually assaulted Jodie in the chapter *Like Other Girls*. Todd and Earl were also both played by the same voice actor, Dominic Gould, and they both share the same personality. Besides their appearance, they both can be killed the same way: by getting shot.

It is no coincidence that these characters struggle with drug addiction. In *Detroit: Become Human*, the consumption of Red Ice is connected to a societal increase of mental illness and economic instability due to unemployment. An in-game magazine article states that "Red Ice has become the drug of choice of Detroit's growing underclass." Later, the author explains that "analysts have pointed to Detroit's status as the epicenter of android production, suggesting the drug flourishes in the dissatisfaction caused by androids taking human jobs." Dr. Julian Carter, a sociologist consulted for this article, highlights that "poor men and women, desperate to make ends meet, are vulnerable to becoming users – or even dealers."

In the chapters *A New Home* and *Stormy Night*, the game narrative frames drug addiction and mental illness as the reasons behind Todd's violence. First, when cleaning the house, Kara learns about Todd's economic instability when she sees his pile of unpaid bills and declined credit application. Todd reveals in dialogue that he used to be a taxi driver and he lost his job because of self-driven cars. In the meantime, Todd displays all sorts of violent behaviors towards Kara and Alice, including yelling, pushing and choking. Then, when Kara goes to clean the second floor, she finds Todd's antidepressants which specifically states that there is a "risk of behavioral problems". Framing mentally ill people as violent and dangerous is a common stereotype perpetuated in video games. This insensitive portrayal of mental illness, as highlighted

⁴⁸ Fandom. (n.d.) *Zlatko Andronikov*. Retrieved June 26, 2021 from https://detroit-become-human.fandom.com/wiki/Zlatko_Andronikov

⁴⁹ Fandom. (n.d.) *Zlatko Andronikov*. Retrieved June 26, 2021 from https://detroit-become-human.fandom.com/wiki/Zlatko_Andronikov

⁵⁰ Fandom. (n.d.) *Todd Williams*. Retrieved June 26, 2021 from https://detroit-become-human.fandom.com/wiki/Todd_Williams

by game scholars⁵¹, only serves to stigmatize mentally ill people by framing them as abusers while they are most likely to be victims of violence⁵².

Earl, Todd and Zlatko also share another trait: they are all overweight. The few characters who are overweight in David Cage games are usually presented as villains or unsympathetic. Having these characters, who are abusers, portrayed as obese serves to stigmatize fatness because it associates being fat to being abusive. According to Todd Harper (2015), this is a common stereotype perpetuated by mass media where fat characters are frequently portrayed "as villainous/evil" (Harper, 2015, 8:10).

As Meyers (1997) as well as Jiwani and Young (2006) identified previously, we can see that when this game represents violence against women, the male aggressors are presented as abominations of manhood. These men are framed as abominations for being addicted to drugs, struggling with mental illness or the loss of economic stability, for being immigrants and overweight. As Jones (2018) criticizes, the game provides context to explain why Todd is abusive, the narrative frames Todd's class struggles as the reason behind his violent behavior which is a common trope when representing violence against women (Meyers, 1997; Jiwani and Young, 2006).

Players' agency, systemic violence, and the role of Mass Media

As seen before, what determines the fate of the android revolution is public opinion, which is directly influenced by news coverage of the androids' deviancy. The media reports the actions of androids, which impacts the way the public sees their cause. However, the game doesn't take into account that news coverage cannot be neutral in its expression.

According to the studies of Meyers (1997) as well as Jiwani and Young (2006), news coverage plays a big role in perpetuating hegemonic discourses involving violence against women. Some victims are framed as deserving of the violence for not reinforcing traditional gender roles. Race and class play a big role in defining how victims and aggressors will be framed. Considering their findings, we can argue that news coverage is not "neutral". The way news pieces are built rely on the report written by police officers and court cases, and the work of these professionals often marginalizes women and people of color. Therefore, the source of the news coverage material can never be neutral because the source material is biased.

The game depicts news coverage as neutral because it's a way to highlight the player's agency. When playing as Markus, his choices are reported by the news in a neutral way, that is, without media manipulating public opinion to disapprove of the android cause. In this context, without the reproduction of discourses that aim to oppress androids, Markus' actions have consequences in the system. If Markus' actions were always depicted as negative regardless of choosing to remain pacifist or to engage in violence, Markus' actions to lead the revolution would be meaningless.

However, when looking at the role of news coverage in reporting protests, Leopold & Bell's study (2017) demonstrates how the reports are built to manipulate the public opinion to disapprove of protesters. Their investigation of how news media reported the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in seven US-based newspapers reveals that the news media utilizes techniques

⁵¹ Ferrari, M., McIlwaine, S. V., Jordan, G., Shah, J. L., Lal, S., & Iyer, S. N. (2019). Gaming with stigma: Analysis of messages about mental illnesses in video games. *JMIR Mental Health*, 6(5), e12418. <https://doi.org/10.2196/12418>

⁵² Canadian Mental Health Association. (n.d.). *Violence and mental health: Unpacking a complex issue*. Retrieved April 11th, 2021 from <https://ontario.cmha.ca/documents/violence-and-mental-health-unpacking-a-complex-issue/>

to marginalize and racialize protesters. Considering their findings, we see that the neutrality of news media in the game when reporting protests doesn't correspond to what happens in real life.

In addition, the game also misrepresents systemic violence in other instances such as when representing police violence. This happens when Markus and the other androids find two police officers who destroyed androids after their protest in *Capitol Park*. Markus can kill the two police officers in retaliation or spare them. This is a way the game communicates that police brutality and violence perpetrated by an individual as equivalent which ignores the fact that police brutality is a symptom of structural racism (Stelkia, 2020).

Considering that the android revolution was designed to resemble the Civil Rights Movement (Narcisse, 2018), that in-game news coverage dynamics drastically differ from the oppressive ones in real life (Leopold & Bell, 2017). We see that the game clearly misrepresents systemic violence. Misrepresenting the dynamics of systemic violence while depicting it instead of emotionally manipulating players are strategies deployed in the game to craft decisions that are hard to be made while not criticizing the status quo. It shifts the conversation from reflecting on systemic violence and holding institutions accountable to individualizing systemic violence. By having Markus, an android messiah or the chosen one, leading the android revolution as the only hope to end oppression, the game frames movements to end group oppression as being the act of an individual. The game lets you play as a revolutionary who doesn't need to dismantle systems of oppression.

Video games as emotionally exploitative systems

In this chapter, I analyzed the dynamics of representing violence against women in this choice-based game. When analyzing meaningful agency, we identified that it mostly relies on choices that can result in a character's death, and on choices that impact public opinion. The choices that could improve or worsen public opinion regarding the android cause mostly take place in Markus' and Connor's gameplays. In this way, we can say that it's up to Markus to save Kara in the end because without a favorable public opinion, Kara will be killed regardless of her choices. Moreover, we don't see any other facets of Kara's identity besides her will to become a mother to Alice. These aspects render very gendered gameplay dynamics as we could observe in other games previously.

The representation of violence against women in this game serves to highlight the value of players' choice. Through graphic scenes of violence where Kara can be murdered in various creative ways, the game evokes strong emotions to make players on edge when making choices. The dynamics of representing VAW alongside the misappropriation of black and Jewish history (Jones, 2018; Seppala, 2018; Melendez, 2020; Narcisse, 2018) serve to craft decisions that are hard to be made by emotionally exploiting memories of collective trauma.

To craft edgy situations to emotionally manipulate players, the narrative includes depictions of Child Abuse, domestic violence and analogies to "Concentration Camps and Civil Rights as political allegory" (Jones, 2018, "Concentration Camps and Civil Rights as Political Allegory" section). The game exploits collective trauma to raise the stakes on choice-making. Having a character being killed by an abusive husband, sent to and murdered in a concentration camp, and being brutally killed by the police are ways the game crafts supposedly edgy situations to evoke strong emotions and emotionally manipulates players. This is done at the expense of marginalized groups who see their collective trauma and history being turned into a commodity.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I analyzed three choice-based games that included narratives of violence against women within their gameplays. In *The Wolf Among Us*, the main story is centered in the investigation of the murders of two sex workers. In *Beyond: Two Souls*, violence against women is scattered throughout 17 years of the female protagonist's life. In *Detroit: Become Human*, violence against women is mostly portrayed within the female protagonist's narrative branch.

In the context of choice-based games, violence against women takes place in very different settings. In *The Wolf Among Us*, we play as Sheriff Bigby, the famous Big Bad Wolf from Fairy Tales, in a modern late capitalist state. In *Beyond: Two Souls*, we play as Jodie, the female protagonist who has supernatural powers, and Aiden, her deceased twin brother and one of the antagonists, in a world where countries are researching the afterlife and weaponizing it. In *Detroit: Become Human*, we play as Connor, Markus and Kara, three androids who are navigating the increasing tensions between humans and androids in a close futuristic version of Detroit.

Although these are, indeed, very different contexts, I investigated how violence against women was represented considering the specificity of each setting and each character gameplay. Now that I have looked through these games' specificities, I inquire: how the representations of violence against women among these games resemble or differ from each other? What patterns do these games reproduce? Why are these patterns being reproduced? To answer those questions, I will first recapitulate and summarize how these games represent violence against women in character design and gameplay. By looking at these different approaches and how they might resemble each other, my goal is to identify patterns. Then, I will look into the specialized literature to understand why these patterns are being reproduced.

Dichotomies of female victims in video games

When looking at the design of female characters who were portrayed as victims of violence against women, there are a few patterns that we can identify. In *The Wolf Among Us* [Figure 54], Faith and Lily, two victims of femicide, were sex workers. Their deaths and the oppression they endured in life only became visible to the authorities when they thought Snow White was one of the victims. Throughout the game, the narrative gives us plenty of reasons to not empathize with these two sex workers. At the same time, the game raises the stakes of Bigby's investigation when it's presented the high possibility that one of the bodies belonged to Snow White.

In *Beyond: Two Souls* [Figure 55], Jodie is a victim of constant violence against women if she or her brother decides to break the rules. In Jodie's childhood, she becomes a victim of abuse because of Aiden's disobedience. In Jodie's teenage years, she is sexually assaulted for not obeying Dawkins, a scientist who acts as her father. Then she cannot enjoy her sexuality because of the trauma of sexual violence.

In *Detroit: Become Human*, Kara is constantly a victim of violence against women regardless of players choices. Kara and other characters such as Alice and the little girl in *The Hostage* chapter have something in common: they are white female characters who reinforce traditional gender discourse for being mothers and daughters. The tortured and mutilated female android that we find in Zlatko's mansion is not portrayed in the same way as Kara because this

burned android is wearing only panties and she is on her knees in a sexualized context, as a sex toy [figure 56].



Figure 54: Faith and Lily are victims of femicide in The Wolf Among Us



Figure 55: Jodie is a victim of violence against women several times throughout her life



Figure 56: In David Cage's games, white women are the "universal" sympathetic victim

All these different characters from very different settings have one thing in common: their suffering serves to communicate what a woman should be. If their behavior or sexuality deviates from the traditional gender expectation, they become a victim of violence as a way to punish them for not conforming to these expectations. Their suffering is silenced and their "poor life choices" are being constantly judged since they are blamed for the violence inflicted upon them. They are designed to establish how harsh and cruel the game world and its characters are. In this context, female victims are portrayed as background decoration (Sarkeesian, 2014).

However, if their position is compatible with traditional gender roles, they become the victim of violence who are framed as needing to be protected from troubled men by the male protagonist. In other words, these female characters become damsels in distress which is "a plot device in which a female character is placed in a perilous situation from which she cannot escape on her own and must be rescued by a male character" (Sarkeesian, 2014, 3:24).

What differentiates these female victims from the profile mentioned above is their relationship with the male protagonist or the position they hold in society. As Sarkeesian (2013) highlights, "traditionally, the woman in distress is a family member or a love interest of the hero – princesses, wives, girlfriends and sisters are all commonly used to fill the role" (Sarkeesian, 2013, 3:47). We see this pattern among the female victims from the three games. Snow White is not only a princess and holds a privileged position, but she is also Bigby's love interest. Even though there are moments when Jodie rebels against traditional gender roles and is punished for that, she is still Aiden's sister, Ryan's love interest and kind of Dawkins' adopted daughter. Kara and Alice are framed as mother and daughter. However, regardless of how powerful Snow White, the new mayor, Jodie, an FBI agent, Kara, an android with advanced programming and superhuman abilities, could be, they are rendered powerless. As Sarkeesian (2013) explains, "the Damsel-in-Distress trope disempowers female characters and robs them of the chance to be heroes in their own right" (Sarkeesian, 2013, 3:02).

As explained, *The Damsel in Distress* and *Women as Background Decoration* (Sarkeesian, 2014) are common dichotomies of female victims in video games. But as with other similar dichotomies such as *The Good and The Bad Woman*, *The Virgin and The Whore*; these tropes serve a common purpose: they convey what expressions of femininity are legitimized in society.

In other words, these dichotomies communicate the message that women should assume passive roles, even if they are protagonists of their own stories. When these female characters attempt to take active roles, whether is by disobeying authorities or by engaging in sex work to overcome poverty, they become victims of gender violence. Portraying violence against women to force female characters into passivity serves to legitimize male character's agency or, in other words, domination.

In the context of these games, hegemonic masculinity⁵³ manifests in the unbalanced way that meaningful and meaningless agencies are constructed within the gameplays of female and male playable characters. Here, the portrayal of violence against women serves to promote male dominance whether by showing the agency of bad men who torture women, who are seen as deserving of the violence, or by placing male protagonism as the only solution to ending women's oppression. For instance, in *The Wolf Among Us*, what differentiates Bigby from The Crooked Man is the reason why they engage in violence. While The Crooked Man uses violence to get what he wants, even if that means killing his own family, Bigby uses violence to protect women. In *Beyond: Two Souls*, while Phillip, Nathan, and Earl perpetuate violence against Jodie to fulfill personal goals, Aiden engages in violence against these male characters to protect her. In *Detroit: Become Human*, Todd uses violence to control Kara and Alice while Connor engages in violence to save the little girl in the chapter *Hostage*. In these games, violence against women functions to determine the male characters' moral compass. Each game's representation of violence against women furthers the existence of this dynamic. Therefore, here, the representation of violence against women is an expression of hegemonic masculinity.

Abominations of manhood

In mass media, the narrative usually portrays male aggressors as abominations when reporting or representing violence against women (Meyers, 1997; Jiwani & Young, 2006). Male violence is usually associated with mental illness as well as racial and xenophobic biases. The goal of representing male aggressors as abominations is to individualize the violence perpetuated by them, instead of holding the system accountable. When playing these games, we saw that the male characters [Figure 57] who victimized those women also fit this frame.

Having male violence being associated with criminality, drug addiction, mental illness, or being an immigrant are common stereotypes that mass media perpetuates (Meyers, 1997; Jiwani & Young, 2006). Presenting these male characters as abominations of manhood serves to individualize violence against women. Instead of criticizing the social structure that allows these men to victimize women, the narrative casts them as villains to make them an exception to 'normal' or acceptable manhood. Individualizing violence against women is a strategy to protect the status quo.

⁵³ Here I use the term hegemonic masculinity to address social practices that promote male domination by legitimizing discourses that reinforces women's subordination (Donaldson, 1993).



Figure 57. *The Crooked Man, Earl, Todd, and Zlatko are presented as abomination*

The dynamics of violence against women as well as of other forms of systemic violence were misrepresented in the games studied here. These narratives usually presented the cause of systemic violence as instead the actions of an individual whether that is a teenager who disobeyed her father, a mentally ill abusive parent or a heartless criminal. At the same time, these games present the solution as punishing these individuals whether by imprisoning or killing them. Another solution they present to end systemic violence is to find the chosen one who is capable of fighting against oppression. Creating monsters to be defeated by the male hero is a plot device that prevents the audience from reflecting on and criticizing social structures that are responsible for violence against women. In other words, presenting them as monsters only serves to protect and keep the status quo.

Pedagogy of Violence and Agency

Throughout the chapters, I inquired about mechanics of choice-making where game developers establish what choices will have consequences and what combination of choices will give trophies and lead to specific endings. In the context of choice-based games, players have the freedom to make decisions, but these decisions are always pre-coded. By highlighting some choices over others, game developers define what is Meaningful and Meaningless Agency in the story where players will make many decisions, but only a few choices are designed to matter.

When analyzing violence against women in the context of choice-making, we saw that, in every single one of those three games, VAW was always used to limit players' agency when playing as female characters to render these characters helpless, to punish either them or female NPCs for making the "wrong" choices. In *The Wolf Among Us*, Lily's choices were usually judged as the reason why she became a victim. In *Beyond: Two Souls*, Jodie would always be punished for breaking the rules. In *Detroit: Become Human*, Kara will have the bad ending if she

decides she doesn't want to be a mother or if players make the wrong choices that take place in the male characters' gameplays.

Meaningful agency, in the context of violence against women, usually relies on choices that can be made by male characters, rendering gendered game dynamics. While female characters would be punished for breaking the rules, male characters would be rewarded for being violent and rebellious. In *The Wolf Among Us*, choosing to be violent when playing as Bigby doesn't have any bad consequences in the story. In *Beyond: Two Souls*, players can only get specific trophies if they choose to be violent and evil when playing as Aiden. In *Detroit: Become Human*, when playing as Markus or Connor, players have the tools to choose to fight back and defend themselves.

Meaningless agency usually took place in the gameplay of female protagonists. In these instances of "Controllable Helplessness" (Alexandra, 2018, para. 6), the tragic fate that female protagonists endure in the hands of evil men is used as a plot device to raise the stakes of choice-making. Watching the playable character or a female NPC being sexually assaulted, being sent to a Concentration Camp, becoming a victim of pedophilia, domestic abuse or femicide, in very graphic scenes of violence are mechanisms the game deploys to put players on edge. The fear of seeing these characters becoming victims is what drives players to carefully assess their options and make informed decisions whether by watching other people's gameplays or reading online forums to make sure these characters will survive.

The studied game elements that constantly rely on male agency and limit female agency reproduce processes identified previously by other authors (Bourdieu, 2001; Saffioti, 2004), which are closely related to violence against women when considering the concept of male domination (Bourdieu, 2001) where it is constantly reinforced in quotidian social practices through subtle mechanisms. These mechanisms that assert male domination and devalue, and subdue womanhood are what Bourdieu (2001) calls symbolic violence. Based on these concepts, Saffioti (2004) tackles violence against women from the point of view of violence as a pedagogy. The pedagogy of violence is a concept developed by Saffioti (2004) to describe the process of naturalization of violence against women, which is related to how womanhood and manhood are constructed in the gender-social organization. Saffioti refers to the pedagogy of violence to explain that the way manhood is constructed is based on the notion of virility. To be a man, one must exercise dominance through social practices that involve demonstration of power and strength. These social practices that establish manhood rely constantly on the victimization and subjugation of women. By understanding that gender is a social construct that requires to be constantly performed within social practices (Butler, 1993), mass media plays a big role to reproduce and reinforce the notions of womanhood and manhood through gender discourse. And by privileging pedagogy of violence, these games portray violence against women to promote hegemonic masculinity, which is, in the context of the analyzed games, the form of masculinity that occupies dominant positions and resorts to violence to resolve conflicts.

Gender discourse in these choice-based games relies heavily on agency. Through defining what choices should matter, the games distinguish meaningless and meaningful agency. Both of them often overlap to limit the female protagonist's agency whether it is by not giving her choices, by giving her choices that have almost no impact in the game or by punishing her for the choices she makes. When comparing the dynamics of female and male protagonists' gameplays, we saw that the games often limit her agency to privilege male agency. Victimizing female protagonists serves as an opportunity for male protagonists to save them and be rewarded for it. Based on those observations, I argue that male domination is at play in these games

because they employ different game elements and plot devices to often empower male characters by disempowering female characters when representing violence against women, rendering powerful women powerless.

Should video games shy away from themes like domestic abuse?

When Quantic Dream released the trailer for *Detroit: Become Human* that featured Kara's gameplay, it caused a big controversy⁵⁴ for including scenes of domestic abuse. Among people who heavily criticized the game for tackling such a sensitive topic, Australian and British groups demanded the game be banned⁵⁵, claiming it was not appropriate for children and it was trivializing domestic abuse. This controversy raised a lot of questions involving the role of video games in society. Should video games not tackle adult themes and sensitive topics such as this one?

Alanah Pearce, IGN's host and video producer, recorded a video defending "Why Games Shouldn't Shy Away From Themes Like Domestic Abuse"⁵⁶. In this video, Pearce (2018) criticizes the idea that games cannot address adult themes because they target children as an audience⁵⁷. Pearce tackles common misconceptions about video game consumption as she explains that video games such as *Detroit: Become Human* are targeted to adults and, therefore, shouldn't be prohibited from addressing such themes as other forms of mass media, such as films and literature have been doing for a long time. After dismantling moral discourse around video games and their relationship with violent behavior in children and adolescents, other questions that are more relevant to the discussion emerge. Are these other forms of mass media doing a good job when representing violence against women? Are video games able to address this theme without perpetuating hegemonic discourses?

Based on this investigation, we can see that the way violence against women is represented in other forms of mass media is problematic, and many tropes and hegemonic discourses that are perpetuated by film and news broadcasts are also being reproduced in games. So, the question is not whether video games can address mature audiences, but whether choice-based games can represent violence against women without individualizing systemic violence.

The challenge of representing violence against women as another form of systemic violence in a choice-based game is the fact that an individual cannot fix a broken system. When we play choice-based games, we want to feel that our choices matter and that we can make a difference in society because we have the power to do it. Video games give us the feeling that we have agency in a designed virtual environment. However, by making us feel like we can solve this problem by being a hardboiled sheriff, a powerful FBI agent or a fearless revolutionary, video games also take away what makes these issues hard to be resolved: the broken system. When studying the dynamics of violence against women, we see that punishing the bad guy

⁵⁴Yin-Poole, W. (2017). *Detroit: Become Human under fire for controversial domestic abuse scene*. Eurogamer. Retrieved June 26, 2021 from <https://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2017-12-04-detroit-become-human-under-fire-for-controversial-domestic-abuse-scene>

⁵⁵GameCentral. (2017). *British and Australian child groups call for Detroit: Become Human ban*. Metro. Retrieved June 26, 2021 from <https://metro.co.uk/2017/12/04/british-and-australian-child-groups-call-for-detroit-become-human-ban-7131153/>

⁵⁶IGN (May 5, 2018). *Why Games Shouldn't Shy Away From Themes Like Domestic Abuse* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/94u1DM9mer8>

⁵⁷Associating video games to children is a common misconception because of a marketing strategy that the game industry used in the 80s to sell video games as boys' toys. However, this is not reality anymore considering that "the majority of games are rated T for Teen or M for Mature" (Warmuth, 2010). There is a discourse that associates video games to children's and teenagers' violent acts in real life, which has been proven wrong (Khaled Jr., 2018).

won't end this issue. To end violence against women, we need to "eradicate systems of domination" (hooks, 2015, p. 20) and that is only possible if we dismantle belief systems that oppress marginalized groups (hooks, 2015). It is only a collective effort that can end systemic violence. There is no hero that has enough power to solve this issue alone. To represent the dynamics of systemic violence, players would not get the satisfaction of having meaningful agency that being the protagonist provides them. When thinking about these issues, maybe we could say that the role of video games in representing this theme could be to let us live the fantasy where we can get justice for the oppression we suffer in our personal lives.

Appendices

Appendix A: Decisions and Outcomes in The Wolf Among Us

Table 9

Decisions in Episode 2: “Smoke & Mirror”

Decisions	Primary Outcome	Secondary Outcome
Arrest The Woodsman	(1) Bigby interrogates The Woodsman; (2) Bluebeard tortures The Woodsman if Bigby doesn't..	(1) Bigby can identify the troll corpse as Lily; (2) Bigby asks The Magic Mirror to see Lily and Holly; (3) During the trial, The Crooked Man accuses Bigby for misconduct.
Arrest Tweedle Dee	(1) Bigby interrogates Tweedle Dee; (2) Bigby can torture Dee; (3) Bluebeard tortures Dee if Bigby doesn't.	(1) Bigby learns Beauty is working for Dee. (2) Bigby confronts Beauty about new job. (3) During the trial, The Crooked Man accuses Bigby for misconduct.
Continue to beat down Grendel after he asks for a truce	Bigby rips Grendel's arm off.	Grendel appears for the rest of the game with only one arm.
(1) Investigate Prince Lawrence's apartment first; (2) Tell Prince Lawrence half-truth or lie about Faith's murder.	Prince Lawrence survives his own suicide..	Prince Lawrence mentions Faith worked for Georgie, a name also brought out by Holly. (2) Prince Lawrence goes to Lily's funeral; (3) Prince Lawrence goes to The Crooked Man's trial.
(1) Investigate Prince Lawrence's apartment first; (2) Tell Prince Lawrence the truth about Faith's murder; (3) Succeed in quick time event to prevent Lawrence from shooting himself.	Bigby prevents Prince Lawrence from trying to kill himself again.	(1) Prince Lawrence mentions Faith worked for Georgie, a name also brought out by Holly. (2) Prince Lawrence goes to Lily's funeral; (3) Prince Lawrence goes to The Crooked Man's trial.
(1) Investigate Prince Lawrence's apartment first; (2) Tell Prince Lawrence the truth about Faith's murder; (3) Fail quick time event to prevent Lawrence from shooting himself.	Prince Lawrence kills himself.	

(1) Attend Toad's distress call before investigating Prince Lawrence's apartment.	Bigby and Snow find Prince Lawrence dead.	
(1) Do not give money to Faith; (2) Do not buy whiskey.	Bigby can pay Nerissa after she helps him.	
(1) Give money to Faith	Bigby finds the money in Georgie's safe. He can take it back.	
(1) Tell Beast the truth about seeing Beauty leaving the building.	Relationship status with Beauty lowers.	Beauty treats Bigby coldy while Beast is more friendly towards him during his visit in episode 4.
(1) Lie to Beast about seeing Beauty leaving the building.	Relationship status with Beast lowers.	Beast treats Bigby coldy while Beauty is more friendly towards him during his visit in episode 4.

Note. Fandom (n.d.) *Smoke & Mirrors*. Retrieved June 22, 2021 from https://fables.fandom.com/wiki/Smoke_%26_Mirrors

Table 10
Decisions in Episode 3: "A Crooked Mile"

Decisions	Primary Outcome	Secondary Outcome
(1) Arrest Dee; (2) Torture Dee during the interrogation.	Dee appears for the rest of the game without his front teeth.	Dee has hostile dialogue.
Arrest The Woodsman.	There is extra dialogue when The Woodsman explains his release.	
(1) Arrest The Woodsman; (2) Torture The Woodsman during interrogation.	The Woodsman confronts Bigby.	Bigby can apologize.
(1) Arrest the Woodsman; (2) Tell Grendel and Holly.	There are slight dialogue changes.	
Trash The Pudding & Pie when interrogating Georgie.	Georgie is hostile towards Bigby when he visits again.	For the rest of the game, the objects that Bigby destroyed will remain destroyed.
Do not destroy the club	Georgie offers Bigby sex work for free.	

Note. Fandom (n.d.) *A Crooked Mile*. Retrieved June 22, 2021 from https://fables.fandom.com/wiki/A_Crooked_Mile

Table 11**Decisions in Episode 4: “In Sheep’s Clothing”**

Decisions	Primary Outcome	Secondary Outcome
Do not kill Dum.	Dum appears in episode 4.	
Kill Dum.	There is additional dialogue between Snow and Jersey Devil.	(1) Dee is hostile towards Bigby; (2) Georgie gives the gun to Dee in episode 5. (3) During the trial in episode 5, The Crooked Man accuses Snow for ordering the Dum’s death.
(1) Severs Grendel’s arm; (2) Do not kill Dum.	Snow Confronts Bigby about his violent acts.	Jodie and Aiden
(1) Investigate Crane’s apartment first; (2) Inform Snow about Jack stealing and pawning The Woodsman axe.	Bigby spends 8 weeks investigating this matter.	
Do not investigate Crane’s apartment first,	(1) Bluebeard burns Crane’s belongings; (2) Bluebeard beats up Flycatcher.	Bigby can question Bluebeard’s motivation for such violent acts.
Send Colin to the Farm	Colin appears in the truck in episode 5.	
Do not send Colin to the Farm.	Mr. Toad criticizes Bigby for not applying the law equally in episode 5.	

Note. Fandom (n.d.) *In Sheep’s Clothing*. Retrieved June 22, 2021 from https://fables.fandom.com/wiki/In_Sheep%27s_Clothing

Table 12**Decisions in Episode 5: “Cry Wolf”**

Decisions	Primary Outcome
(1) Kill Tweedle Dum in episode 4; (2) Kill The Crooked Man before the trial.	Snow criticizes Bigby for his violent acts.
Imprison The Crooked Man.	This leads to the ending where The Crooked Man is imprisoned.

Behead The Crooked Man.

This leads to the ending where The Crooked Man is dead.

Throw The Crooked Man down the witching well.

This leads to the ending where The Crooked Man is imprisoned.

Note. Fandom (n.d.) Cry Wolf. Retrieved June 22, 2021 from https://fables.fandom.com/wiki/Cry_Wolf

Appendix B: Golden, Platinum, Silver and Bronze Trophies in Beyond: Two Souls

Table 13

Golden and Platinum Trophies in Beyond: Two Souls

Trophy	Type	Prerequisite	Gameplay
BEYOND: TWO SOULS™ MASTER	Platinum	Collect all trophies.	Jodie and Aiden
All Endings...	Gold	Watch all endings.	Jodie and Aiden
Together Till the End	Gold	Finish game in duo mode.	Jodie and Aiden
Saved All	Gold	Save every character that was able to be saved.	Jodie and Aiden

Note. Fandom. (n.d.) *Trophies*. Retrieved June 22, 2021 from <https://beyondtwosouls.fandom.com/wiki/Trophies>

Table 14

Silver Trophies in Beyond: Two Souls

Trophy	Type	Prerequisite	Gameplay
The End	Silver	Uncover one possible reality.	Jodie and Aiden
Uncontrollable	Silver	Take every opportunity to be violent and break the rules.	Aiden
Never Alone	Silver	Start at least one romance.	Jodie
Entities Master	Silver	Win every battle against evil entities.	Aiden
A Better World	Silver	Let die every character that could have been saved and choose to join them in the Afterlife.	Jodie and Aiden
Explorer	Silver	Find all bonuses hidden in the environment.	Jodie

Note. Fandom. (n.d.) *Trophies*. Retrieved June 22, 2021 from <https://beyondtwosouls.fandom.com/wiki/Trophies>

Table 15

Bronze Trophies in Beyond: Two Souls

Trophy	Type	Prerequisite	Gameplay
Somebody Else?	Bronze	Play as Aiden for the first time.	Aiden
Obedience	Bronze	Stop the experiment voluntarily.	Aiden
Teammates	Bronze	Do 3 mischievous things.	Jodie and Aiden
Entities Apprentice	Bronze	Defeated the entities.	Aiden
Sorry	Bronze	Forgive Phillip.	Aiden
Not My Father	Bronze	Choke Phillip	Aiden
Revenge	Bronze	Teach the teens a lesson by knocking them unconscious, or starting the house fire.	Aiden
Cold Blood	Bronze	Don't show your powers or scare the teens.	Aiden
Together Forever	Bronze	Kill all three men who sexually assaulted Jodie.	Aiden
Portal Shutdown	Bronze	Shut down the condenser portal.	Jodie and Aiden
Channeling Master	Bronze	Channel all dead bodies.	Jodie and Aiden
Perfect Soldier	Bronze	Be successful in most of the physical training.	Jodie
Fight Apprentice	Bronze	Win every fight by not taking more than 5 hits.	Jodie
Stealth Apprentice	Bronze	Complete stealth training without being seen.	Jodie
Clean Job	Bronze	Shut down the monitor and finish the mission using only Aiden's powers.	Aiden
Possessive Spy	Bronze	Complete the mission by possessing the Sheik and only using him to complete tasks.	Aiden

Perfect Lover	Bronze	Cook a meal, clean the apartment, take a shower, wear the elegant dress and put on some music.	Jodie
Casual Girl	Bronze	Order a pizza, watch some TV and wear something casual.	Jodie
In Love with Ryan	Bronze	Sleep with Ryan.	Jodie
Stealth Master	Bronze	Reach the cathedral without being seen.	Jodie
Catch Me if You Can	Bronze	Escape the train without being captured.	Jodie and Aiden
Aiden's Apocalypse	Bronze	Destroy the gas station, the church, the gun store and the helicopter.	Aiden
Houdini	Bronze	Be captured all three times and escape each time.	Jodie and Aiden
Money to Eat	Bronze	Win enough money to buy chocolate.	Jodie and Aiden
Smart Thief	Bronze	Turn off the supermarket's security camera.	Jodie and Aiden
Miracles	Bronze	Look after Tuesday's unborn baby, heal Jimmy's withdrawal and let Stan talk to his deceased wife.	Jodie and Aiden
Medicine Girl	Bronze	Perform successfully the entire ritual.	Jodie
Not Just Sand	Bronze	Run from sandstorm without taking more than 3 hits.	Jodie
Eye for an Eye	Bronze	Don't reveal any information during interrogation.	Jodie
Agent 894732	Bronze	Tell the truth under torture during the interrogation.	Jodie
Almost Too Easy	Bronze	Possess general and go to the containment shield.	Aiden
Chose Afterlife	Bronze	Enter the Infraworld.	Jodie
Chose Life	Bronze	Stay in the world of the living.	Jodie
Convince Dawkins	Bronze	Help Dawkins to see the truth.	Jodie

Black Sun Down	Bronze	Deactivate machine.	Jodie
Two Souls	Bronze	Launch a scene in duo mode.	Jodie and Aiden

Note. Fandom. (n.d.) *Trophies*. Retrieved June 22, 2021 from <https://beyondtwosouls.fandom.com/wiki/Trophies>

Appendix C: Kara's endings in Detroit: Become Human

Table 16
Kara's bad endings

Ending	Chapter	Prerequisite
Kara dies.	Stormy Night	Fail to stop Todd; fail to run away from the house.
	On the Run	Fail to cross the highway.
	Zlatko	Fail to interrupt data corruption; fail to recover data corruption; fail quick-time events when running away from Zlatko and Luther.
	Crossroads	Choose to run while escaping from the soldiers at the end of the chapter.
	Battle for Detroit	Fail to sneak away from guards outside or inside camp; Choose to give up when crossing the river.
Kara survives, but Alice dies.	Stormy Night	Choose to remain a machine.
	Crossroads	Choose to leave Alice.
	Battle for Detroit (camp)	Choose to leave Alice. Choose to hide and play dead in the pile of android corpses.
	Battle for Detroit (boat)	(1) Dump all cargo; (2) Push the boat; Choose to go on without Alice after she dies; Choose to give up after she dies.

Note. Digitaltrends. (2021). *Detroit: Become Human endings guide*. Retrieved June 22, 2021 from <https://www.digitaltrends.com/gaming/detroit-become-human-endings-guide/>

Table 17
Kara's good endings

Ending	Chapter	Prerequisite
Kara and Alice cross the river.	Battle for Detroit (boat)	(1) Dive or hide behind Luther; (2) Dump the cargo; (3) Swim to the shore safely
Kara and Alice escape the camp.	Battle for Detroit (camp)	In case public opinion is negative, (1) Sacrifice a npc to create a distraction; (2) Escape camp without drawing attention. Have public opinion status as supporting the android revolution.
Kara and Alice cross the Canadian border.	Battle for Detroit (Canadian border)	Have public opinion status as supporting the android revolution. In case public opinion is negative, (1) Sacrifice a npc to create a distraction; (2) Cross the border without drawing attention.

Note. Game Guides. (n.d.) *Battle for Detroit – Kara I Detroit Become Human Walkthrough*. Retrieved June 22, 2021 from <https://guides.gamepressure.com/detroit-become-human/guide.asp?ID=45508>

Appendix D: Actions that impact Public Opinion in Detroit: Become Human

Table 18
Actions that highly improve Public Opinion

Character	Action	Chapter	Increase
Markus	Completing The Stratford Tower with no casualties.	Stratford Tower	Large
Markus	Choosing the "peaceful" option at the end of the speech in The Stratford Tower, but only if there were no casualties.	Stratford Tower	Large
Markus	Markus led a peaceful protest or Markus failed to deliver his message.	Capitol Park	Large
Markus	Choosing "stay" after standing your ground the first time, then choosing to disperse.	Freedom March	Large
Markus	Choosing "sacrifice" after the police fire unprovoked.	Freedom March	Large

Markus	When the police fire upon Markus's protesters at the start of the Battle for Detroit.	Battle for Detroit	Large
Markus	When soldiers surround Markus and the others around the barricade, Markus has the choice to kiss North or sing with Androids, it will unlock a sympathetic path and President Cristina Warren will order the U.S. Army soldiers to stand down. (Only unlocks if public opinion is "sympathetic" at least)	Battle for Detroit	Large

Note. Fandom. (n.d.) *Public Opinion*. Retrieved June 22, 2021 from https://detroit-become-human.fandom.com/wiki/Public_Opinion

Table 19
Actions that slightly improve Public Opinion

Character	Action	Chapter	Increase
Connor	Save the wounded cop.	The Hostage	Small
Markus	Choosing "abandon" after choosing "attack".	Freedom March	Small
Markus	Choosing "stand ground" when the police block the march.	Freedom March	Small
Markus	Choosing "stand ground" again when the police block the march.	Freedom March	Small
Markus	Choosing "peaceful" when approaching the roadblock at the start of Battle for Detroit.	Battle for Detroit	Small
Markus	Choosing "calm" when asking for the release of the androids at the start of Battle for Detroit.	Battle for Detroit	Small
Markus	Planting the flag in the barricade.	Battle for Detroit	Small
Markus	Sending a message to the journalists while in the barricade.	Battle for Detroit	Small

Note. Fandom. (n.d.) *Public Opinion*. Retrieved June 22, 2021 from https://detroit-become-human.fandom.com/wiki/Public_Opinion

Table 20
Actions that slightly worsen Public Opinion

Character	Action	Chapter	Decrease
Connor	Listening to the television in the break room after talking to Gavin.	Waiting for Hank	Small

Kara	Staying in the motel and seeing a news report TV about Kara's escape.	On the Run	Small
Kara	Turning on the TV in Zlatko if Kara was chased by Connor in On the Run or robbed the convenience store of its money.	Zlatko	Small
Kara	Watching the news in the car.	The Pirates' Cove	Small
Kara	Changing the radio channel at least 4 different times in the car (Only if Kara set fire to Zlatko's mansion during 'Zlatko')	The Pirates' Cove	Small
Markus	Completing The Stratford Tower with one or two casualties.	Stratford Tower	Small
Markus	Choosing the "determined" option at the end of the speech in The Stratford Tower, but only if there were no casualties.	Stratford Tower	Small
Connor	Choosing to "rush deviant" in Public Enemy.	Public Enemy	Small
Connor	Either of the following endings to Public Enemy: Connor and Hank survived. (If Connor was present) Connor sacrificed himself for Hank.	Public Enemy	Small
Markus	Choosing "provoke" when approaching the roadblock.	Battle for Detroit	Small
Markus	Choosing "accuse" when asking for the release of the androids.	Battle for Detroit	Small

Note. Fandom. (n.d.) *Public Opinion*. Retrieved June 22, 2021 from https://detroit-become-human.fandom.com/wiki/Public_Opinion

Table 21

Actions that heavily worsen Public Opinion

Character	Action	Chapter	Decrease
Markus	If you kill everyone in The Stratford Tower.	The Stratford Tower	Large
Markus	Choosing the "determined" option at the end of the speech in The Stratford Tower, but only if there was at least one casualty.	The Stratford Tower	Large
Markus	If the Capitol Park chapter concludes with the "Markus led a violent riot" ending.	The Stratford Tower	Large

Markus	Choosing to shoot or letting the androids shoot the police officers (Chris Miller and his partner) at the end of Capitol Park.	The Stratford Tower	Large
Markus	Winning the fight in Freedom March after choosing "charge" when the police block the march.	The Stratford Tower	Large
Markus	In Hart Plaza after Markus sends the humans a message.	Battle for Detroit	Large
Markus	After North plants the flag in Hart Plaza in Battle for Detroit - Markus Revolution if Markus is dead.	Battle for Detroit	Large

Note. Fandom. (n.d.) *Public Opinion*. Retrieved June 22, 2021 from https://detroit-become-human.fandom.com/wiki/Public_Opinion

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