

Independent Project Proposal - Mia

by Mia Harries

Submission date: 20-Oct-2025 10:30AM (UTC+0100)

Submission ID: 265718563

File name: 50385_Mia_Harries_Independent_Project_Proposal_-_Mia_699522_1072243943.docx (3.23M)

Word count: 1625

Character count: 10879



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

BA (Hons) Computer Games Design

Independant Project:

Project Proposal ACCA6020

Mia Harries

Student Number: 2304406

Supervisor: Adam Head

October 15th, 2025

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Chosen Topic

“To what extent are real life cultures reflected accurately and respectfully through their character designs within video games with consideration towards stereotypes?”

Problem Rationale

The importance of character design within video games cannot be overstated, especially when considering cultural influences within the clothing and character's appearance. Personality and background are strongly reflected in design when showing cultural representation in a character, without it, they can lack visual storytelling which is vital for players.

In times like these, it's never been more important to accurately and respectfully display cultural representations. One key issue that arrives with this, is the reflection of stereotypes within design, too little and you lose narrative, too much and you border being disrespectful. Where is the balance?

Aims and Objectives

During this project, the primary aim will be to navigate the balance of accurate culture representation in video game character design, with consideration to both positive and negative uses of stereotypes. This will be achieved through designing a character portfolio/model and analysing both obvious and subtle cultural representation in design. This will be followed by an analysis of player feedback and preferences associated with cultural character design.

SMART Targets & Plan

- The specific aim will be to create a character design portfolio with multiple character and variations of cultural character design. Consider creating a 3D model of a well-received design within MAYA. [1]
- To measure accuracy of design and balance obviousness, the use of surveys and A/B testing [2] will be utilised to receive user feedback on set characters and their variations.

- Considering the time frame, the creation of a portfolio is achievable and further, if time allows it, the creation of a 3D model in MAYA [1] consisting of a survey approved, culture-based, character design.
- These objectives will support the report's focus on accurate and inaccurate cultural depictions in games, comparing character design styles, reviewing player and creator perspectives, and reflecting on how cultural elements are effectively implemented in character design.
- Given the time required for research, design, testing, and potential 3D modelling, setting weekly goals and milestones is essential. A GANTT [3] chart will help track progress and adapt to changing opinions during cultural design development.

Why this topic?

This topic is important to cover due to the need to understand the balance of clear cultural depiction in game character designs and what is excessive and stereotypical to players. The aim is to use the data learnt to better create accurate and respectful characters that players would appreciate within games.

Project Success

The project's success will be measured by researching and analyzing cultural character design, comparing it to real-world elements like clothing, tattoos, and traditions. Data will be collected using surveys and A/B testing [2], combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Secondary research will provide additional perspectives, collectively guiding the accurate, culturally respectful creation of character designs.

Deliverables

In this project, the following deliverables must be completed:

- Character Portfolio – The collection of characters from early designs to altered variations and final approved characters. Possibly including 3D Model of that character if time permits.
- Project Creation Report – The report on the character design process, inclusion of research both primary, secondary and later alterations that influenced character's cultural appearance.

- Final Product and Presentation - The presentation will display the final portfolio created, and 3D Turnaround of the design. It will showcase the research put into the topic and demonstrate the balance of accurate and respectful cultural influences into characters within video games.

Relation to the Literature Review and Resources

The research conducted will dive into the way character culture is dictated in games currently and explore different point of views regarding its expression. The information gathered from the literature review will influence design choices made in the practical project, and exaggerating character culture regarding aesthetics and readability. The surveys and tests will influence design further, supporting or denying the statements of the secondary research. Resources such as MAYA [1], Photoshop [4], and Procreate [5], Adobe Portfolio [6] will be needed and utilised during this project.

Ethical Concerns

Ensure the expression of culture does not border on overly stereotypical, possibility of offending individuals if cultures are represented incorrectly, research before design is crucial to avoid this.

What has already been done in the field?

Articles and Video Game Blogs:

As suggested in “Video games, internet culture and cultural heritage” [7], the article explores the importance of cultural representation in subtle ways like Animal Crossing Horizons [8] and how important it is to showcase cultural heritages in games.



[7]

Role-Play Games with Set Characters:

Games like Ghost of Yōtei [9] and Red Dead Redemption 2 [10] feature culturally significant protagonists whose designs reflect their heritage, background, and historical setting, offering players authentic insights into two distinct cultural contexts.



[9]

Character culture depicted in game world-building:

Games like 'The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim' [11] and Cyberpunk: 2077' [12] represent cultures of different characters are all reflected differently, despite being fictional, they maintain aspects of real-world culture in aesthetics.



[12]

Topic Familiarity

Throughout time at university practical experience has been achieved through previous portfolio, animation, and 3D modelling projects. These skills will translate helpfully and as a freelance artist, the practice in designing of cultural characters will be beneficial as the module progresses. Through playing story driven games, it's given understanding of diverse cultures and how they're portrayed accurately or stereotypically.

Literature Review

1. Discussion about the clear obliviousness and cultural insensitivity in Resident Evil 5 and how context is important to player perspective.

"10 times games got diversity right (and 10 they really didn't)," [13]

2. This article discusses the ethical considerations within character design and the implication of stereotypes within the design. The importance of accuracy is highlighted.

"Navigating ethical considerations in character design," [14]

3. An emphasis on the need for research in historical and cultural aspects relevant to game setting. Highlighting balance of cultural depictions without being overtly extreme in design.

"Embedding Culture into Video Games and Game Design: The Palm, the Dogai and the Tombstone, 1st ed" [15]

4. This discusses misrepresentation of cultures in games, and considerations and practices that designers can do during the game design process to add meaning and depth to culture accuracy.

"Analysing cultural heritage and its representation in video games," [16]

5. The article suggests, the main impact in character design is the costume and goes on to discuss culture and cross-culture character design that make visual sense to beholders.

“Cultural parameters of character design – a proposal of cross-cultural character design procedure for visual perception achievement,” [17]

6. The following article is a study on a group of students that play video games and showcases their views on cultural knowledge and sensitivity through the media of games.

“Video game and culture: A case study of EFL student players’ views on their acquisition of cultural knowledge and sensitivity,” [18]

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Independent Project Proposal - Mia

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

GENERAL COMMENTS

76/100

BA GAMES – PROJECT PROPOSAL – ACCA6020
INDEPENDENT PROJECT (5%)

Student – Mia
Harries
Mark –
76%

Intro / A&O (500 words)		
Project title; Identification of a specific problem to be investigated; Well-defined aims and SMART objectives; Explaining why this project is worth doing; Discussion of what the project needs to do in order to be a success; Description any deliverables that will be produced at the end of the project Excellent – specific, investigative, and directly ties to stereotypes, accuracy, and respect in character design. Identification of problem is well-articulated. This highlights the balance between visual storytelling and avoiding disrespect (e.g., "too little and you	40	32

lose narrative, too much and you border being disrespectful"). Ties into real-world importance of cultural representation in games, aligning with industry critiques of stereotypes. Strong justification (player appreciation, respectful designs). Success measured via surveys/A/B testing and comparison to real-world elements – practical and evidence-based. Clear and tangible: portfolio, report, presentation/3D turnaround. "If time permits" shows realism. Good primary aim, but make it one overarching statement: (For example: "To determine the optimal balance of cultural accuracy and stereotype avoidance in video game character designs through practical creation and player testing.") If using surveys for example, add a quantifiable success metric: e.g., "80% of survey respondents rate final designs as 'accurate and respectful' (scale 1-5)."		
Background to the Project (500 words)		
Description of how the work to be done by in the project relates to the work identified in the literature review; Discussion of any ethical issues raised by the project Identifying what has already been	40	28

done within the field; Topic familiarity; Brief literature review using appropriate sources – 6-8 journal papers and book chapters rather than just websites; Selection of relevant models & concepts Concise and relevant reflection of ethical/moral considerations – addresses stereotyping/offense, emphasizes pre-design research. Ties to project (e.g., surveys validate). There is an evident topic familiarity throughout the document, with an awareness of the elements needed to make the project a success. Good examples (Animal Crossing, Ghost of Yōtei – timely 2025 release with cultural focus, RDR2, Skyrim, Cyberpunk). Shows field progress in authentic designs. Potentially, some more articles/references of that regard could have been highlighted to further the evidence the justification of the project.		
Document Presentation		
Correct spelling, grammar and punctuation; Flow of narrative/fluency; Coherence; Word processed ; Correct use of referencing with bibliography; Strict word limit	20	16

There is a professional level of formatting and flow to the document with a clear narrative. Good use of headings and bullet points to streamline information and increase readability. IEEE Referencing has been used correctly throughout with a bibliography.		
TOTAL	100	76

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