Creating Your Fantasy Self
An Analysis of Ethnicity in Character Creators in Computer Fantasy Role-Playing Games

Faculty of Arts
Department of Game Design
Authors: Ylva Ljungqvist, Frida Svensson
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Program: Game Design & Graphics
Supervisors: Jakob Berglund-Rogert, Masaki Hayashi
Examiner: Ernest W. Adams
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Abstract

This thesis examines whether character creators in fantasy role-playing games allow players to create ethnically diverse characters. We studied eight games following a procedure to record perceivable data about the available options, and conducted interviews. The results show that options for minority ethnicities are usually either very few and lack variation or are non-existent. All the interviewees answered that they were generally dissatisfied with the options given to them in character creators and could rarely make a representation of themselves. This highlights the need to diversify the options in order to not exclude players.

Key words: Character creator, representation, ethnicity in video games, fantasy, RPG.
Abstrakt

Denna avhandling undersöker om karaktärsskapare i fantasy dator-rollspel tillåter spelare att skapa karaktärer av etnisk mångfald. Vi studerade åtta spel efter bestämda riktlinjer och samlade information om de tillgängliga alternativen, och genomförde intervjuer. Resultaten visar att alternativ för minoritetsetniciteter är vanligtvis antingen mycket få och har ingen variation eller är helt obeintliga. Alla de intervjuade svarade att de var allmänt missnöjda med de alternativ som ges i karaktärsskapare och kan sällan göra en representation av sig själva. Detta belyser behovet av att diversifiera alternativen för att inte utesluta spelare.

Nyckelord: Karaktärsskapare, representation, etnicitet i spel, fantasy, rollspel.
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1 Introduction

Fantasy games are a way for the players to be whomever they want and create any character they want, offering more or less extensive character creators. A character creator is the part of a game where the player customize the character they play as. The player chooses the class, the race and the appearance of their character. However, as Payne (2014) noted in an article, character customization gave the feeling that many ethnicities were being actively ruled out, since many fantasy games often offer little to no ethnic variation.

This study is a comparative analysis of character creators in a selection of fantasy computer Role-Playing Games (RPGs) and Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs). RPGs are games in which the player assumes the role of a character, to some extent designed by the player, undertaking quests in a fictional setting focusing on storytelling. MMORPGs involve a large number of players in an online world that continues to exist while individual players are offline. We collected data of the human races and examined whether the character creators allow representation of different ethnicities.

By following a defined procedure we gathered relevant perceivable data from the character creators, which is the base of our analysis, and conducted a series of interviews with people of different ethnicities to include opinions from those it directly affects. These interviews will add different perspectives and valuable insight to what players want versus what is offered, when analyzing the results from the data.

We have chosen games from the fantasy genre since the issue of the erasure of ethnic minorities is often strongly present in those (Higgin, 2009). The games that this study will examine are developed in North America and Europe, including Russia: Allods Online, Dragon age: Inquisition, Guild Wars 2, Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning, Neverwinter, Rift, The Elder Scrolls Online and World of Warcraft.

When we use the term race, we mean it in a virtual setting inside a RPG system where characters, nations and cultures are products created by game developers, with clearly designed differences such as biological appearance and abilities. But while racialized social systems in real life are a fact, biological determinism to define human groups into different ‘races’ is a social construct (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), so instead, we say ethnicity when we refer to real life.
2 Background

2.1 Character creators

In many RPGs the player is given the option of creating the playable character and chooses class, race and customize the appearance. These character creators feature different ranges of options and while they all have different layouts, they usually contain categories such as skin tone, hair, facial features and accessories. More extensive character creators can also include more features such as body customization, voice selection, and more detailed options in previous categories. (Fig. 1, 2)

Fig. 1, World of Warcraft, which is less extensive with few categories.

Fig. 2, The Elder Scrolls Online, with more extensive and detailed customization.
The most common way of viewing and selecting options is sliders (Fig. 3) which are most frequently used in all character creators. It is not uncommon for games to only have sliders. Triangular graphs can sometimes be found as an option for changing the face or body, and it morphs the model between three different shapes (Fig. 4).

Another way to show the available options is the use of preview images. In a similar way, color palettes can be used to show the offered colors (Fig. 5).

There are more ways to display options, and many games do it differently, but this is how most character creators are structured.

The character is made of a 3D model, also called mesh. A texture is applied to the surface of the mesh to add color, surface textures and other details.
2.2 Previous work

When creating a personal character players tend to make the character more similar to an ideal self than to their actual self (Bessière, Seay & Kiesler, 2007). They suggest that being able to act through a character closer to an ideal self may create positive real-life changes and increase individuals well-being. This is supported by a study done by Bessière, Kiesler, Kraut, & Boneva (2010), which showed that the use of internet for entertainment, such as online games, resulted in a reduction of depression over time. The game world gives players the freedom to create successful virtual selves, but at the same time, the player’s identification with the avatar is crucial for the entertainment experience (Trepte, Reinecke & Behr, 2010).

Trepte, Reinecke and Behr (2010) report in their study that a higher similarity between player and avatar leads to increased identification with the avatar, and as identification is expected to increase media enjoyment, it can be concluded that avatar-player similarity leads to media enjoyment. This would mean that if the player cannot create a character that properly resembles them, some enjoyment is lost. While characters that are dissimilar to oneself also allow for identity play (Kafai, Fields & Cook, 2007) and players might identify with dissimilar characters as well, studies show that players find gaming scenarios more entertaining when they can create characters that are more in accordance to their own appearance (Trepte, Reinecke & Behr, 2009).

2.3 Representation in Media

As Brooks and Hébert (2006) write, media has a central role in what represents our social realities and how the audience perceives and constructs social identities. The consumption of White-dominated mass media is a serious topic since it leads to the erasure and stereotyping of other ethnicities (Good, 2009). It is therefore important to examine how the media represents and portrays different ethnicities, and games are no exception as they are becoming a dominant media form, which is why this study was made.

In an annual report from Entertainment Software Association (2015) it is stated that 26% of game players are under 18 years. Games then play an integral part in shaping one’s perception of real life multiculturalism, and a lack of good representation of some ethnicities while elevating other, will reflect the real world and reinforce stereotypes (Higgin, 2009). For example, in a study done by M. Burgess, Dill, Stermer, S. Burgess and Brown in 2011, which examined video game magazines and video game covers, it was concluded that minority ethnicities are underrepresented and often portrayed with stereotypes. The study also showed that having stereotypes in games makes the player unconsciously develop prejudice towards specific real-life ethnicities (Burgess et al, 2011).

Audiences, regardless of their ethnicity, are clamoring for more diverse content, and studies show that they want more ethnic representation (Siegemund-Broka, 2015). Minorities make up about 40 percent of the U.S. population (2015 Hollywood Diversity Report) which makes the underrepresentation of ethnicities stand out even more. The Hollywood Diversity Report argues that the fault lies not on the audience but on the agencies, networks and studios, who have a central role if anything is to change. It is stated that producers and writers “must finally accept the notion that having diverse voices and perspectives in the room actually increases their odds of success” (2015 Hollywood Diversity Report).
In RPGs, the players are often put in situations that require them to interact in different social situations with various fantasy races and people, and sometimes make decisions. Fantasy as a genre blends cultural signifiers to create an entirely different world, but they still have originary meaning that cannot be discarded. So while these people and nations are fictional, they still take inspiration from cultures and racial identity formations in the physical world (Higgin 2009). As such, Afrić (2009) claims that by going through countless social interaction situations, RPGs teach us multiculturalism and tolerance, and thereby we gain knowledge about social structures, cultures, ethnicities and nations and their interactions.

Therefore, when one sees a race called “human” within a MMORPG and it is westernized as well as White with different shades of color for diversity (but nothing too Black), a powerful assertion is made. This assertion is that humanity will only be understood within the fantasy world if it is primarily coded White (Higgin, 2009).

Many fantasy settings have a vague historical European aesthetic. However, using that as an argument to not include an ethnically diverse cast of characters is invalid, as there has always been a variety of ethnicities in Europe, as seen in both art (Gates, 2010), historical records (Van Sertima, 1993), findings (“Vindolanda Tablets Online,” 2015), and countless other sources.
3 Purpose

If a player’s real life ethnicity is not represented, and if they are not able to create a representation of themselves, their enjoyment of the game will not be as great as it could be (Trepte, Reinecke & Behr, 2009). When creating a game with a character creator, the developers have an opportunity to include all possible players, and give them a chance to be able to create and play with a character that they feel similar to.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine whether in fact developers seize this opportunity and give players the option of creating characters of several ethnicities. While there is also an issue with how fantasy races are often coded with real life ethnicities, this thesis will focus on the human races and their customization in terms of ethnicity. The races we are examining are the ones that are labeled Human in-game, or in the case of several playable human races, described as human by the developers. The main questions we will look into are these:

*How many options does the player have in order to create a range of ethnically diverse characters? Do character creators generally allow players to create a representation of themselves?*

By developing a procedure to collect relevant perceivable information from the character creators, we learned how much they offer and analyze what they allow the player to create. We also conducted interviews with players who had experienced games with character creators in order to understand what they found aggravating and useful in character creators. Through the study and interviews, we could identify which aspects are important when creating ethnically diverse characters, and what needs to be expanded upon.
4 Method

4.1 Target Games

The games we selected to examine are fantasy RPGs, developed in North America, Europe and Russia, and released in recent years, that have character creators where the player can customize their character by, at a minimum, customizing different faces, skin tones, hair and accessories:


The games were chosen due to their high production value and their financial and commercial success. While there may be more games that fit the criteria, this thesis has limited the number to the games listed above.

4.2 Procedure

In order to study the games and be able to compare the character creators, we developed a procedure that was used to collect data. It needed to cover all areas but still be flexible enough to be applicable to all games, and to make the data reliable. It is intended to be extensive enough to be objective in its purpose, which is to collect the relevant perceivable data available. The procedure was designed with the selected games’ character creators as well as previous knowledge in mind, and is focusing on these categories: presets (a predesigned set of customization options), skin, hair, facial features and body. Since the procedure is very extensive, some categories will not apply to every game. For example, if a character creator
does not offer any presets or does not let the player customize the body, those categories are not applicable and will not be answered. Similarly, some games might have further options, or some special option unique to that game. With that in mind, some of the categories are designed to allow deviations.

The hair textures are divided into four different categories; N/A (Not applicable), straight, wavy/curlly and afro textured. Not applicable include all hair styles where the hair texture cannot be determined, such as bald and buzzcuts short enough to be of any hair type. Afro textured includes cornrows, dreadlocks and the like.

In addition, a category named “Noteworthy things” is left open to note any additional feature or something that stands out and is unique to a particular game, but would perhaps not be specifically covered under any other category.

For the facial features we developed a visual template with markings where the biggest and smallest measurements start and end. It will ultimately be an approximation, but this way it is possible to see how far the character creators let the player push the features, without applying any personal judgement. They are not meant to be an indication of how any real life ethnicity does or “should” look. The facial graphs show the minimum and maximum range of the fictional races in the games, and thereby the allowed variety of face customization.

Using the template that was created for the procedure, screenshots were put on top of it with low opacity and then blue lines were used to mark out where the biggest or widest measurements were, and red lines where the smallest or thinnest measurements were. (Fig. 6, 7) It was important that the screenshots aligned correctly or it could produce faulty results. This is something that needed to be done separately for each game, taking into consideration how the different character creators work. For example, in Dragon Age: Inquisition, the top of the skull would always remain constant even though the face shape and the eye position would change, meaning that if the screenshots were aligned so that the top of the skull was on the same place on the template, the measurements would accurately show how the player could push the features. With every game a new fixed point on the head needed to be found in order to align the screenshots correctly.

*Fig. 6, Widest nose width measurement on male in Dragon Age: Inquisition.*

*Fig. 7, Smallest jaw size measurement on female in Dragon Age: Inquisition.*
Some games have color palettes showing skin tones and hair color, making it easy to pick the colors. For the games that have no palettes and used a slider instead, the colors were sampled by selecting the midtones. Midtones are the middle tones of an image, the color that is in-between the lightest and the darkest color. After picking the midtone, it was important to paint it next to the area it was sampled from and make adjustments if necessary, to make sure it is matching (Fig. 8). It is ultimately an approximation of the colors, and it could naturally result in small variations in the hues if it is done by different people. However, with enough caution it provides a reliable representation of the available colors if a color palette is not featured in the character creator. After getting the correct colors, they were placed in a modular palette template that could be customized to the correct number of colors (Fig. 9).

![Fig. 8, Skin tone sample from Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning](image)

Fig. 8, Skin tone sample from Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning

![Fig. 9, Color palette template](image)

Fig. 9, Color palette template

Following is the procedure that was used in this study to collect data:

**Races:**
List playable races with short explanation if needed. (e.g. Bosmer (wood elf), Nord (human))

**Presets:**
List number of presets.
Are the face presets customizable or completely locked?
Is any specific feature (e.g. complexion) locked to each preset face?
How many are white, how many are POC (People of color)?

**Skin:**
Take screenshots of the skin colors. If no visual representation of the colors exist: take the midtone color from screenshots, compare to the screenshot so that it is the same. Make a color palette.
List every race with their respective skin colors.
List number of complexions and what they are.
Hair:
List number of hairstyles.
How many of those are: straight, wavy or curly, afro textured (afro, cornrows, dreadlocks, etc.)
How many of those are: short (above ear), medium (to the shoulder), long (below shoulder)?
How many of those are updos?
List number of eyebrow options.
List number of beard and stubble options
List number of hair colors. Collect hair color the same way as skin color.
Are there different options for male and female? What?

Facial features:
How many and what facial features can the player change? (Jaws, cheeks, neck, ear, eyes, nose, mouth, brow, etc.) And how? How far can the player push the features?
List number of eye colors.
To gather data on facial features: Change all sliders (or other) to middle. Take screenshots from front and profile. Move one slider at a time to far left and right, and take screenshots for each slider of the extremes in both directions. In case of preset faces, do the same for the preset with biggest and smallest measurements.

Collect variables on at least these features:
Front: Eye height/width, nose width, mouth height/width, cheekbone width, jaw and chin length/width.
Profile: Brow width, nose length, mouth length/position, jaw and chin length, ear height/width.

To depict data: Place the cross in the middle of the face, or find another constant point. (Middle point: between the eyes on top of nose bridge or the top of the skull.) Make sure the positions are constant. Mark where the extremes are in different colors.
Check the range of the features of non-human races. Take screenshots of extremes.

Body:
What can the player change? (Length, weight, musculature, etc.)
How can the player change it? (Sliders, triangle graph, presets, etc.) If presets, how many?
Are there any options for body markings? How many, what is it? (Warpaint, tattoos, etc.)
Additional options?

Noteworthy things:
Anything unusual or otherwise interesting.

4.3 Interview design

In order to gather opinions on what people think about ethnicity in character creators, we sent out an online survey to a number of people. The only requirement was that they had played games with character creators. Since many interviewees were at different locations, the interviews were conducted through an online survey, consisting of twelve questions with free text answer fields, and they were encouraged to leave longer answers about their thoughts and experiences with character creators. The interviewees were of a wide variety of ethnicities, the criteria for inclusion was that they had played games with character creators. In some cases,
we would ask acquaintances to refer the survey to applicable interviewees, so we would reach more people. The interviews are qualitative research on a small sample, and not intended to be statistically representative of the population of players. They were conducted in order to find out if any common issues would surface as an incentive for further research.

Following are the questions included in the survey. Question 1-10 were obligatory to answer, question 11 was optional.

1. Describe your race/ethnicity and cultural background.
2. Name every game with a character creator that you have played.
3. Of the games you listed, which is your favorite character creator and why?
4. What kind of character do you usually want to create? Yourself, an idealized character, a character completely different from you, or other?
5. Do you feel that you generally can create a representation of yourself?
6. Which game(s) do you experience has the *most* options to create a representation of yourself? What are those?
7. Which game(s) do you experience has the *least* options to create a representation of yourself? What are those?
8. Is there any option that you often feel is missing, or any options that are there but lacking in variety?
9. Is there any option that you often are content with, that do not necessarily need to be expanded upon?
10. In a game where there are also several fantasy races, what are your thoughts about having one playable human race that can be customized into different ethnicities, versus having several separate playable human races that each are a default ethnicity? (I.e. a Black human race, a White human race, etc.)
11. Do you have any other thoughts, concerns or input regarding ethnicity in RPGs with character creators?
5 Results

5.1 Game data

Full data result in Appendix A.

Games that offer body customization:
*Allods Online, The Elder Scrolls Online, Guild Wars 2, Neverwinter, Rift.*

Games that do not offer body customization:
*Dragon Age: Inquisition, Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning, World of Warcraft.*

*Fig. 10, Human skin tones.*
Fig. 11, Male hair textures.

Fig. 12, Female hair textures.

Games that only offer preset faces with non-customizable facial features:
Allods Online, Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning, World of Warcraft.

Games that offer customizable preset faces:
Dragon Age: Inquisition, Guild Wars 2, Neverwinter, Rift.

Games that do not offer any presets:
The Elder Scrolls Online.

Allods Online, The Elder Scrolls Online and World of Warcraft randomize the features when entering the character creator.
Facial feature graphs:

*Dragon Age: Inquisition:*

*Fig. 13, Male human. Fig. 14, Female Human.*
The game with the biggest differences between the smallest and widest measurement. The player is able to create very different faces with this range of customization.

*The Elder Scrolls Online:*

*Fig. 15, Male Breton. Fig. 16, Female Breton.*

*Fig. 17, Male Redguard. Fig. 18, Female Redguard.*
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Fig. 19, Male Nord.  
Fig. 20, Female Nord.

While every race has small differences in the face shape, the customization range is minimal, especially for females. Male Redguards are offered slightly more range than the others.

Guild Wars 2:

Fig. 21, Male Imperial.  
Fig. 22, Female Imperial.

The player is mostly able to change nose size, mouth size and eye size, while the face shape stays relatively the same.
*Neverwinter:*

Fig. 25, *Male Human.*
The male has a slightly bigger range to customize the chin and jaw. Otherwise both genders have the same range for the features.

Fig. 26, *Female Human.*

*Rift:*

Fig. 27, *Male Mathosian.*

Fig. 28, *Female Mathosian*

Fig. 29, *Male Eth.*

Fig. 30, *Female Eth.*
The males have a slightly bigger range than the females, as well as being more flexible in shaping the jaw and profile.
5.2 Interviews

Complete interviews in Appendix B.

A total of 11 people answered the interview questions through the survey. They were of a wide range of ethnicities, identifying as for example White, Black, Persian, Latino/as, mixed, among others.

All of the interviewees who identified as something other than White stated that they could generally not create a representation of themselves. Only one of them answered that there was one game in which they could.

Hair was specified as a category that severely lacked options by all of the interviewees. Many of them elaborated by saying that if there are options other than straight hair textures, they are always limited to the same styles:

“I understand it is the most difficult thing to render, but I’ve yet to see a game really blow me away with the hair options offered. Sometimes it is frustrating because the existing options COULD have been very good, but they have something awkward about them…”

“If I want to create a black character, there will often be no curly hairstyles (natural), or other identifiable facial features.”

“HAIR.HAIR HAIRHAIR. All the options given are literally ALWAYS straight, or maybe straight hair with weak little curls. [Dragon Age Origins], [Dragon Age 2] and [Mass Effect] had NOTHING resembling black hair, absolutely nothing. The lack of variety is really infuriating, especially since you can SEE how much effort went into other parts of the game.”

“Hairstyles are often few and weird, in a negative sense of bad and weird.” (sic)

“Black, female, hair styles are appalling. It’s like no one has ever seen a black woman unless she has a fro, a short fro, cornrows or is bald.”

The majority of the interviewees brought up skin tones as an issue when discussing features with lacking options:

“[...] other games are mostly limited to white European features (straight nose, thin eyebrows, thin lips, straight hair), and their choices in skin tone tend to be 7 different shades of white.”

“The darker skintones are often not as well made as the lighter tones I feel and are more of a halfassed piece of muddy brown or green and thus feel less appealing to chose.” (sic)

“And, while I understand that skin tone is difficult to pull off - Coal, Chocolate, Sand just isn’t enough.”

Out of the six interviewees who had played Dragon Age: Inquisition, four of them thought that it had the most options to create a representation of themselves due to its generous facial feature customization.
Concerning the question of one versus several playable human races, the overwhelming majority thought that having more than one human race makes it easier to implement racism and stereotyping. Two of them were partial to both options.

Several mention body customization as disappointing and that they find it important to offer more diverse body types.

Other notable comments:

“There needs to be far more diversity and far more options for non-white defaults, because the lack of things like darker brown eyes, ethnic hair etc is telling in that the designers of the character creator just don’t even think about ethnic characters existing in that world.”

“Oftentimes there are only token options for non-white characters. There will be only a single asian skin-tone and eye-shape option, for example.”

“I spend most of my time trying making my likeness which is usually impossible.”

“One of the most important aspects of representation in RPGs is the marketing. A developer can spend millions on a top-notch [character creator] with excellent race and ethnicity options, but if the game’s marketing department sells it to the public by using a white male protagonist on the box then it all amounts to nothing. Teasers, posters, cinematic trailers, and gameplay demos need to feature the [character creation] options and show a diverse range of player characters.”

“Something like adding more diverse hair types and textures wouldn't take much time, no more than everything else they do, but it would do such a long way to showing that they cater to ALL gamers.” (sic)

“Most [character creators] still reflect the whole white=default thing, even if they try not to. That's something that still needs to be changed.”
6 Analysis and Discussion

By comparing the interview answers and the gathered information from the examined games, we could see what was coveted versus what was offered and analyze how ethnically diverse the character creators are.

6.1 Skin tones

When looking at the available options of skin tones for the human races in every game (Fig 10), it can be seen that although they often offer a large number of skin tones, many of them are very similar and a lot of them feel redundant. They do not provide a wide variety and most of them offer only a few skin tones of a darker shade, but many do not seem to want to go “too dark”, while having several variations of lighter skin tones. The two or three top rows of colors in Rift looks near identical, and it feels unnecessary to have that many options if there is such a minimal difference, instead of widening the range to a few more lighter and darker shades. The game with the widest variety is Guild Wars 2 that not only has one or two dark skin tones, but several different very dark tones that are varied in both hue and value. It becomes extra apparent when comparing the tones to the other games, most of whom seems to reach a certain value where they stop, Allods Online being the poorest example since they simply chose to exclude all darker skin tones.

But the most noteworthy aspect of the Guild Wars 2 skin tones is that out of all the examined games, it is the only game that has light palms and soles on the darker skin tones (Fig. 31). It shows that they had different ethnicities in mind and actually took care to accurately portray the different skin tones, instead of just doing darker variations of a light skin tone. In many of the other games, it often looks as if they have taken the initial texture of a light skin tone and just changed it to gradually darker shades and made no actual effort in making it look realistic. It feels as if this was the case with for example Allods Online and World of Warcraft. There is no variation in the darker shades and in Allods Online, their darkest skin tone can be another games lightest. Even though they have such a light shade, they still feel like darkened copies of the lighter skin tones and it can be seen in game. They look desaturated and unnatural and not as thought through as the lighter skin tones.

Some of the interviewees noted that darker human skin tones often looks washed out, muddy and not as good looking as lighter tones, and that there often is only a few token skin tones for different ethnicities, while having a wide selection of light tones. While there may be time or budget constraints that prevent developers to create every skin tone from scratch, and while most games can not include every possible shade of skin tone, since it is mentioned by all the interviewees as an issue it is clear that it is imperative to put effort in the textures, and to offer variations for all types of skin tones.

An example on how to solve hue variations in skin tones are present in The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim (Bethesda Game Studios, 2011), in which they offer additional color for parts of the face, such as cheek, nose, forehead and neck. These are shades of red, brown and gray, and...
are put on top of the previously chosen skin tone, in addition to complexions, to add further variation. Although it means that there will be more options to go through, it is one possible solution to allow more detailed customization without having to add extra skin tone hue variation on the same skin tone value.

6.2 Hair

A majority of the interviewees brought up hair as a category they are frustrated with. The frustration is about the fact that there are so few hair styles other than straight textured, and that it is always the same few. And when looking at the data results, all the games show that little or no effort has been put into including different hair textures. The majority of the hairstyles are always straight textured and offer a wide range of different styles that the player can choose from. In the cases where afro textured hair is included, only a small collection, often with few differences, is offered. Dragon Age: Inquisition offers the largest number of afro textured hairstyles compared to their total number of available hairstyles, with 28%. World of Warcraft and Allods Online are last with 0% each, and the game third to last is Rift with 4%. Although 28% may look good in comparison, the hairstyles offered in Dragon Age: Inquisition have little variation and are not allowed the same range of different styles as the straight textured hairstyles (Fig. 32). As one interviewee answered: “[Dragon Age: Inquisition] was a complete disappointment in this arena too. There were varying hair types, but everything resembling black hair was basically... six versions of the same short hairstyle.” The Elder Scrolls Online has a smaller percentage, at 17%, but the available hairstyles are different from each other and give the player a wider variety to choose from (Fig. 33). It stands out in that regard, since while the majority of the games try to include more hairstyles than just straight, we got the feeling that these hairstyles were added as token options, to which they could point at if the game is criticized for not including more ethnicities.

Fig. 32, Dragon Age: Inquisition.

Fig. 33, The Elder Scrolls Online.
There are also not a lot of curly or wavy hairstyles, which are often an even smaller number than afro textured ones. Hair can be tricky to render realistically, especially in a game where the character can have a lot of different helmets and armor, where different parts of the mesh will cut through itself in unrealistic ways. From a technical point of view, straight hair texture might be somewhat faster to make, but every single curl in a curly hairstyle does not need to be modelled individually, just like every single hair strand in straight hairstyles do not. Especially with the simplified style that most of the examined games have, through textures, 3D models and a little time and effort, a skilled graphical artist can easily give the illusion of the character having curly or wavy hair; some of the games even have good examples of this (Fig. 34-36).

Fig. 34, Guild Wars 2.  
Fig. 35, The Elder Scrolls Online.  
Fig. 36, Rift.

It would not be particularly difficult to take some of the time spent on yet another straight hairstyle and make more varied and differently textured hair options for people of all ethnicities. There needs to be more variety, since the results show so few options for hair textures other than straight and since hair was a category that most of the interviewees were noticeably frustrated with. As one interviewee puts it: “It's like no one has ever seen a black woman unless she has a fro, a short fro, cornrows or is bald”. When only one or two token curly or afro textured hairstyles are offered, it shows that while they are able to include more of them, they chose not to.

6.3 Facial customization

Allods Online, World of Warcraft and Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning do not offer any facial customization and only have preset faces. Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning has limited options but still provides different facial structures and appearances with their faces, allowing for moderately different characters. But Allods Online and World of Warcraft mostly offer different complexions than actually different faces. The males have options for some varieties of wrinkles and various degrees of angry expressions but only slight differences in facial features. The females have even less differences in facial features than males, with their preset faces mostly consisting of the same face but with different eyebrows, eye color and lips. We find it reasonable to conclude that simply applying a darker skin tone on these presets, produces a result that is lacking in terms of portraying different ethnicities.
Of the eight examined games, three of them randomize the character’s features or presets every time the player enters the character creator, ensuring that every option has a chance to be seen by the player and to show different combinations of features which the player might not have thought of. The other five games have different presets of available character features, which are determined by the developer. This means that, depending on what the developers choose, some options may not be showcased the same way as others. In Neverwinter, out of the 12 available presets for male humans, four of them are arguably of another ethnicity than White. In this way the developers have to choose the ethnicities’ visibility, and more often than not it is not evenly distributed. For this reason, having the features randomized is the better option. Half of the examined games have an option to randomize the features.

When it comes to customizable facial features it is clear that Dragon Age: Inquisition excels in that area, as the space between the blue and red markings are wider than any of the other examined games (Fig. 13, 14), and the male and female characters all different races each have a fairly equal range. While pushing every slider to their extremes gives the character distorted proportions, by allowing the features to be pushed that far it ensures that the player is able to create very different characters with very different features. It strives to make sure that no type of facial feature is left out. Out of the examined games, it gives the most range to customize the facial features. Two thirds of the interviewees who had played Dragon Age: Inquisition favored it because of its generous facial customization. It shows that, even though pushing the extremes makes for unusual faces, a generous range of facial features is preferable since it gives a bigger freedom to create a set of diverse characters.

When comparing the other examined games with facial feature customization, it is quickly noticeable that they more often than not offer little to no variety when it comes to different features, and especially so for female characters (Fig. 15-30).

Worthy of note however, is that Neverwinter, The Elder Scrolls Online and Rift provide different facial textures when changing face preset or face type in the triangle graph or in different complexions (Fig. 37). While none of them offer a very generous range of feature customization, the different types of textures help define features and form the appearance of different bone structure, in addition to skin complexion, even if the mesh only has minor differences. So if a game has limited options in the facial feature customization, for whatever reasons, by adding additional face textures there are still ways to offer further variety.

6.4 Body customization

Many of the interviewees brought up body customization as a category they wished would be expanded upon. Of the examined games, five of them offer different degrees of customization. It varies from only the option of changing the character’s height in Rift, to
customizing every individual body part in *The Elder Scrolls Online*, which also offers the option of creating a relatively fat character, something that we consider rare in games overall. In response to what their favorite character creator was, one interviewee answered: “Star Wars: The Old Republic because it had diversity of body types that gave me the ability to play as a fat character, which was the first time I’d ever encountered that as an option and not made to feel like it was a joke option.” With body customization, in comparison with facial customization, there is more to keep in mind in terms of animation, clippings of the mesh, and often several armor pieces that need to fit. It is understandable that body customization is usually limited since it takes a lot of resources. However, more effort in that area would be appreciated because overall there is a desire among the interviewees to be able to create a character with a body type other than the idealized hero physique, which is a fit and muscular build. If developers decide to add a more advanced body customization and they include the ability to make more varied body types it would help in being able to create more diverse characters.

### 6.5 Human races

A subject worth discussing is whether or not to have several human races, each coded with a different ethnicity, or to have only one fully customizable human race. Out of the examined games, *Rift, Allods Online, The Elder Scrolls Online* and *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning* have two or more different human races, while *World of Warcraft, Dragon Age: Inquisition, Guild Wars 2* and *Neverwinter* each have one race presented as “Human”. Higgin (2009) talks about how having a determined Black human race will help strengthen the presence of different ethnicities in the game world. A few of the interviewees are on the same track: “It will help to "normalize" various ethnicities instead of everyone choosing a "default" white human and then making "exotic" character variations.” But the majority of the people interviewed had a negative stance about having several human races, stating that it would be an easy way to implement racism and stereotyping, dismiss the need for characters of color in the game world, and for the player base to ignore the non-White playable characters. “The differences are too complicated and ultimately too marginal for it to represent any significant dynamics among different human races.”

Higgin (2009) also mentions the idea of disrupting the notion of race as geographically and biologically fixed. An interviewee touches the subject too: “[Humans] often hail from different continents or countries, have different cultures and standards. I enjoy games in which the [character creator] differentiates this as a function of deeper immersion for the player. That's not to say that I think skin-tone and ethnicity would be similarly monolithic within those factions.” It would be interesting then to see a RPG where race and culture are not one and the same, where for example the player would first choose the culture, to which abilities and the like are linked, and afterwards the race and ethnicity. It would help prevent the creation of stereotypes, and would also mirror real life history, where people from all cultures have traveled all over the world throughout the ages. Similar concepts can be seen in science-fiction, for example the Federation in the *Star Trek* franchise, or in the *Stargate* franchise, where The Ancients are a humanoid species that always features people of all human ethnicities. This would naturally present another set of development challenges, but it would interesting to see an attempt in the fantasy genre.

Having several human races does not mean diverse ethnicities, as seen in *Allods Online*, which has two human races, both coded White and European. Having only one human race
does not mean it can be customized to all ethnicities, as seen for example in *World of Warcraft*. That means that developers need to *want* to include different ethnicities, as everything in a game has been designed. And audiences, regardless of their ethnicity, are clamoring for more diverse content, and studies show that they want more ethnic representation (Siegemund-Broka, 2015). It would not make sense to not allow that full representation in all genres, and in character creators.

Some of the character creators are taking care to be inclusive in one or two areas. *The Elder Scrolls Online* has a relatively large selection of differently textured hairstyles. *Dragon Age: Inquisition* provides a lot of range for facial features. *Guild Wars 2* has a big selection and variations of dark skin tones, even taking care to lighten the palms and soles for a realistic appearance. However, none of the examined games have this wide range in *all* categories. If a game provides a lot of options for dark skin tones, it does not have hairstyles or facial features to match. If a game gives the player freedom in the facial features, it falters in skin tones and hair styles. Overall, there is a desire and need to diversify the options, and as seen in the results, nobody wants *fewer* options when creating a character.
7 Conclusion

Most of the examined games are very extensive and cover a lot of options in different categories. But none of the games offer proper representation for people of a wide range of ethnicities. Some of the games excel in one area, taking care to offer either a wide range of hairstyles, skin tones or facial customization, but if they do they falter in other categories. More often than not, only a few token options for non-White ethnicities are available, and those are usually the same few.

Although the need and want for more diverse options exist, this need is not met. As the non-White interviewees answered, they can never make an accurate representation of themselves in today’s character creators, even in games we have not examined. But adding a few more dark skin tones, a few more hairstyles that are not straight textured, and providing either a few more preset faces with different facial structures or allowing a wider range of facial customization would go a long way to include more players since these are categories that matter most to them. They do not need to be expensive additions; it is rather a question of diversifying the available options. Time spent on yet another light skin tone and straight textured hairstyle could be used to create a more equal number of diverse options. It is time to disrupt the notion of White as the default and recognize the player base for the ethnically diverse group that it is.

7.1 Future studies

For future studies, we recommend a large scale quantitative survey about the subject to provide more statistically meaningful results. A bigger sample size of games would be needed for further examination in order to make a larger assessment of the subject matter. Similar research could be done on games with character creators in other genres to see if this issue is prevalent across genres or is exclusive to fantasy games.
References


Vindolanda Tablets Online [Website]. Available from: http://vindolanda.csad.ox.ac.uk/ [29 April 2015]

Games


Appendix A
Game data.

Allods Online
AstrumNival, Mail.ru Group

Races:
Kanians (Human), Elves, Gibberlings (Small feline), Pridens (Feline with human face), Xagadanians (Human), Orcs, Arisen (Undead humanoid).

Presets:
Kanians - 11
Xagadanians - 11

Are the face presets customizable or completely locked?
Locked.

Is any specific feature (e.g. complexion) locked to each preset face?
Can only change skin color.

How many are white, how many are POC?
N/A

Skin:
Kanians:

Xagadanians:

List number of complexions and what they are.
N/A

Hair:
List number of hairstyles.

Kanians - Male: 11, Female:10
Xagadanians - Male: 11, Female:13
List number of eyebrow options.
N/A

List number of beard and stubble options.
Kanians - 12. Locked with eyebrows.
Xagadanians - 9

Hair color:
Kanians:

Xagadanians:

Are there different options for male and female, for different races? What?
Every customizable feature is different for each race, both male and female. The exception is that hair color and skin color is the same for both sexes in each race. The “Facial features” means facial hair for males and jewellery for females.

Facial features:
N/A

Body:
What can the player change? (Length, weight, musculature, etc.)
Length and musculature

How can the player change it? (Sliders, triangle graph, presets, etc) If presets, how many?
Presets.
Kanians - 12
Xagadanians - 12

Are there any options for body markings? How many, what is it? (Warpaint, tattoos, etc)
N/A

Additional options?
N/A
Noteworthy things:
Has a randomize option.

Dragon Age: Inquisition
Bioware, EA

Races:
Human, Elf, Dwarf, Qunari (large elven-like with horns).

Presets:
List number of presets.
There are 5 head presets for each race and gender.

Are the face presets customizable or completely locked?
Customizable.

Is any specific feature (e.g. complexion) locked to each preset face?
No.

How many are white, how many are POC?
Male: 2 white, 3 POC.
Female: 2 white, 3 POC.

Skin:
List number of complexions and what they are.
Male: 24, Female: 15

Smooth faces, wrinkles, freckles, different sized pores, facial contours and a combination of them all.

Hair:
List number of hairstyles.
28

Male and female hair textures

- Straight
- Wavy
- Curly
- Afro
- Textured
List number of eyebrow options.
23

List number of beard and stubble options
58

Hair color:

Facial features:
How many and what facial features can the player change? (Jaws, cheeks, neck, ear, eyes, nose, mouth, brow, etc) And how? How far can the player push the features?
Ear size and position, earlobe size, cheekbones and cheek shape, brow size, forehead, eye shape and size, eye rotation, position and spacing, eyebrow style and position, eyelash style, inner iris color, outer iris color, nose shape and size, nose position and bridge size, bridge position, nose tip size and position, nostril size, broken nose, mouth shape, width and position, lip thickness, jawline and size, jowls, chin size and shape, double chin, adam’s apple.

List number of eye colors.
Color wheel of all possible colors for outer and inner iris.

Human:
Male human: Female human:

Body:
N/A

Noteworthy things:
Can change the voice.

The skin tones (and other colors) show a slightly darker shade in the character creator, due to poor lighting.

The Elder Scrolls Online
Zenimax Online, Bethesda Softworks

Races:
Breton (Human), Orc, Redguard (Human), Altmer (High elf), Bosmer (Wood elf), Khajiit (Feline humanoid), Argonian (Reptile humanoid), Dunmer (Dark elf), Nord (Human), Imperial (Human).

**Presets:**
N/A

**Skin:**
Breton:

[Skin color swatches for Breton]

Redguard:

[Skin color swatches for Redguard]

Nord:

[Skin color swatches for Nord]

Imperial:

[Skin color swatches for Imperial]

*List number of complexions and what they are.*
7 age complexions (wrinkles)
Complexion and face definition changes along with face type.

**Hair:**

*List number of hairstyles.*
24

**List number of eyebrow options.**
20

*List amount of beard and stubble options*
Breton - 23
Redguard - 22
Nord - 23
Imperial - 23

*Hair color:*
Breton:

Redguard:

Nord:

Imperial:

Are there different options for male and female, for different races? What? Most races share hair styles with the exception of 2-5 styles. All races have the same beard types, just more or less of them.

*Facial features:*

How many and what facial features can the player change? (Jaws, cheeks, neck, ear, eyes, nose, mouth, brow, etc) And how? How far can the player push the features? Triangular graph for face type (Heroic means a square face, soft means a circular face, angular means a triangular face) plus faint textures.

Forehead slope, cheekbone size and height, jaw size, chin size and height, neck size, eye size, angle, separation, height and eye squint, eyebrow height, skew and depth, nose shape, height, width and length, mouth height and curve, lip fullness, ear size, rotation, height and ear tip flare.

List number of eye colors.

20
Breton:
Male Breton:                                           Female Breton:

Redguard:
Male Redguard:                                         Female Redguard:

Nord:
Male Nord:                                              Female Nord:

Imperial:
Male Imperial:                                         Female Imperial:
Body:
What can the player change? (Length, weight, musculature, etc.)
Body type, torso, chest, gut, waist, arm, hand, hip, posterior dimensions (butt), leg, foot.
How can the player change it? (Sliders, triangle graph, presets, etc.) If presets, how many?
Triangular graph for body type (muscular - large - thin), color palette for skin tone, sliders for the rest.
Are there any options for body markings? How many, what is it? (Warpaint, tattoos, etc)
Additional options?
Complexion, scars, tattoos, warpaint and scarification.

Noteworthy things:
The player is able to customize the body to a relatively large extent. Has a randomize option. 
Can change voice.

Guild Wars 2
AreaNet, NCsoft

Races:
Charr (Feline), Human, Norn (Large human), Asura (Small troll-like), Sylvari (Botanical humanoid).

Presets:
List number of presets.
Male: 11, Female: 18
Are the face presets customizable or completely locked?
Customizable

Is any specific feature (e.g. complexion) locked to each preset face?
Complexion, makeup, facial expression

How many are white, how many are POC?
On class select only:
White male: 6, female: 5, POC male: 2, female: 3

Skin:
List number of complexions and what they are.
N/A

Hair:
List number of hairstyles.
Male: 24, Female: 23

List number of eyebrow options.
N/A

List number of beard/stubble options
11

Hair color:

Facial features:
How many and what facial features can the player change? (Jaws, cheeks, neck, ear, eyes, nose, mouth, brow, etc) And how? How far can the player push the features?
Eye angle and size, iris size, eyebrow thickness, placement and angle, nose length, base width, bridge width, nose height at tip and bridge, mouth width, upper and lower lip width, chin length, jaw width, cheeks, head size and width. Charr and sylvari ears.

List number of eye colors.
31

Human:
Male Human: 
Female Human:
Guild Wars 2 provides preset faces with locked complexions, and the ability to alter some of the facial features giving the means to slightly alter the preset faces. This means that in some cases, the player cannot for example necessarily have the widest mouth with the widest nose, etc. Some males have fewer options than females (eyes, jaw, cheek).

**Body:**
*What can the player change? (Length, weight, musculature, etc.)*
Height, musculature.
Male: 7, Female: 10

*How can the player change it? (Sliders, triangle graph, presets, etc) If presets, how many?*
Slider for height, presets for musculature

**Noteworthy things:**
Human races have lighter palms and soles on darker skintones.

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**Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning**
38 Studios and Big Huge Games, EA

**Races:**
Almain (Human), Varani (Human), Ljosalfar (Elf), Dokkalfar (Elf)

**Presets:**
*List number of presets.*
5 per race.

*Are the face presets customizable or completely locked?*
Locked

*Is any specific feature (e.g. complexion) locked to each preset face?*
Can only change skin tone, eye color and makeup.

*How many are white, how many are POC?*
Almain - White 2, POC 3.
Varani - White male: 4, female 3. POC male 1, female 2.

**Skin:**
List number of complexions and what they are.
N/A

Hair:
List number of hairstyles.
Almain - Male: 14, Female: 15
Varani - Male: 17, Female: 17

List number of eyebrow options.
N/A

List number of beard and stubble options
11

Hair color:
Are there different options for male and female, for different races? What?
Male and female have different hairstyles.

Facial features:
N/A

Body:
N/A

Noteworthy things:
N/A

Neverwinter
Cryptic studios, Perfect world
**Races:**
Human, Half-orc, Dwarf, Drow (dark elf), Menzoberranzan Renegade (dark elf) (Additional race that can be purchased), Wood elf, Moon elf (Additional race that can be purchased), Sun elf, Half-elf, Halfling, Tiefling (demon), Dragonborn (dragon humanoid) (Additional race that can be purchased), Metallic Ancestry Dragonborn (dragon) (Additional race that can be purchased).

**Presets:**
List number of presets.
Both genders have a set of 12 face presets.

Are the face presets customizable or completely locked?
Customizable.

Is any specific feature (e.g. complexion) locked to each preset face?
No.

How many are white, how many are POC?
Male: 8 white, 4 POC. Female: 7 white, 5 POC.

**Skin:**

![Skin color palette]

List number of complexions and what they are.
Each gender has either 5 or 6 face shapes which complexion is locked to. Each face shape has 3 different complexion types. Young, rough and aged.

**Hair:**
List number of hairstyles.
Male: 36, Female: 49
List number of eyebrow options.  
Male: 9, Female: 12

List number of beard and stubble options.  
19

Hair color:

Are there different options for male and female, for different races? What?  
Males and females share some hairstyles.

Facial features:  
How many and what facial features can the player change? (Jaws, cheeks, neck, ear, eyes, nose, mouth, brow, etc) And how? How far can the player push the features?  
Head size, width, height and depth, neck length, eye size, height and spacing, brow width and height, nose width and height, bridge width and depth, nostril size and height, nose length, mouth width and height, lip fullness, jaw width and height, cheek size.

Additional option of choosing what the iris will look like. The total options are 20.
The options include different pupil sizes, blind, hurt and having these on the left or right eye or both.

List number of eye colors.
Human have a wide range of colors.

Human:
Male human:                      Female human:

Body:
What can the player change? (Length, weight, musculature, etc.)
Chest, shoulders, waist, arms, hands, legs and feet.
The player can change the length of limbs, so they can control the height of the character.
Options for limbs include: Width, depth, length, bulk, thickness and size.

How can the player change it? (Sliders, triangle graph, presets, etc) If presets, how many?
3 preset body types. Toned (default), heavy and slim. Use small preview images.
Change body options with sliders.

Are there any options for body markings? How many, what is it? (Warpaint, tattoos, etc)
No.

Noteworthy things:
N/A

Rift
Trion Worlds

Races:
Mathosian (Human), High elf, Dwarf, Eth (Human), Kelari (Elves), Bahmi (Fantasy race,
Human appearance with purple/blue skin).

Presets:
List number of presets.
6 full body presets for each race.
Are the face presets customizable or completely locked?
Customizable.

Is any specific feature (e.g. complexion) locked to each preset face?
No

How many are white, how many are POC?
Mathosian - Male: 3 white, 3 POC. Female: 2 white, 4 POC.
Eth - Male: 0 white, 6 POC. Female: 0 white, 6 POC.

Skin:
Mathosian:

Eth:

List number of complexions and what they are.
6 different facial structures. Some races add wrinkles.

Hair:
List number of hairstyles.
Male: 13 Female: 12
All males have a bald hairstyle while females do not.
List number of eyebrow options.
Male: 13 Female: 12
All male have an option for no eyebrows.

List number of beard and stubble options
Mathosian - 10
Eth - 13

Hair color:
Mathosian:

Eth:

The player can decide a base color and a highlight color.

Are there different options for male and female, for different races? What?
Different options for males and female. Females of both races share some hairstyles. Same for males.

Facial features:
How many and what facial features can the player change? (Jaws, cheeks, neck, ear, eyes, nose, mouth, brow, etc) And how? How far can the player push the features?
Eye scale and rotation, nose size and tilt, mouth size.

List number of eye colors.
Both races have a range of different shades of blue, green and brown.

Mathosian:
Male mathosian: 

Female mathosian:
Eth:
Male eth: 
Female eth: 

Body:
What can the player change? (Length, weight, musculature, etc.)
Height

How can the player change it? (Sliders, triangle graph, presets, etc) If presets, how many?
A slider.

Are there any options for body markings? How many, what is it? (Warpaint, tattoos, etc)
No

Noteworthy things:
Can buy new hairstyles, hair colors and skin colors in-game.

World of Warcraft
Blizzard Entertainment

Races:
Human, Dwarf, Night elf, Gnome, Draenei (fantasy race, human appearance, blueish skin and horse legs), Worgen (werewolf), Orc, Undead, Tauren (bull/cow humanoid), Troll, Blood elf, Goblin, Pandaren (panda humanoid).

Presets:
List number of presets.
Only have face presets.
Male: 12, Female: 15

Are the face presets customizable or completely locked?
Completely locked.

Is any specific feature (e.g. complexion) locked to each preset face?
Expression, eye color and sometimes makeup color is locked to preset faces.

How many are white, how many are POC?
N/A

Skin:
List number of complexions and what they are.
No complexions.

**Hair:**
List number of hairstyles.
Male: 12, Female: 19

List number of eyebrow options.
N/A

List number of beard and stubble options
Male: 8

**Hair color:**
Are there different options for male and female, for different races? What?
Males and females have different options.

**Facial features:**
N/A

**Body:**
N/A

**Noteworthy things:**
Has a randomize option.
Appendix B
Interview survey answers.

1. Iranian and Persian.

2. Dragon Age, Mass Effect, Skyrim, Ragnarok Online

3. Skyrim. It has a wider range of choices in addition to allowing me to somewhat control my character's weight.

4. It depends on what the game's story is. I like to have my characters be different from each other. Sometimes it's best for that character to be idealized, other times a simple character who is just trying to get by would work.

5. Almost never.

6. Again, Skyrim. The other games are mostly limited to white European features (straight nose, thin eyebrows, thin lips, straight hair), and their choices in skin tone tend to be 7 different shades of white.

7. Dragon Age, Ragnarok Online, and Mass Effect, for the reasons listed in 6.

8. Definitely weight. Skyrim is the only CC I've ever played with that did anything about weight, and even then it was limited to muscle mass but not fat.

9. Absolutely not. There is always room for improvement, especially in representation.

10. I'm more partial to the second option, of playing various default ethnicities. It will help to "normalize" various ethnicities instead of everyone choosing a "default" white human and then making "exotic" character variations.

1. White Australian (English/Irish ancestry)

2. Dragon Age, Mass Effect, Star Wars: The Old Republic, The Sims, Age of Conan, Aion, Warhammer Online, World of Warcraft, Saints Row, Guild Wars

3. Star Wars: The Old Republic because it had diversity of body types that gave me the ability to play as a fat character, which was the first time I'd ever encountered that as an option and not made to feel like it was a joke option

4. When I was younger I liked to create versions of myself. Now I much prefer to create unique and diverse characters to reflect a much bigger world

5. No, not accurately. Most character creators offer an option for face customization but body customization is very rare

6. Star Wars: The Old Republic and the Saints Row franchise offer the best options because of their body customization options. In both, I am able to create a fat character to be the hero/player character, and that's important to me.
7. Probably Mass Effect had the most disappointing character creator I've encountered in recent years- the skin tones were very limited, the hair styles were unengaging and there was no variety allowed in body styles. As a character who is a female soldier, we should have had the option to play as more muscular body types instead of the very skinny options we had.

8. Body customization in general is very lackluster- usually the options are limited to height, if anything. And most of the time, selecting a 'larger body type' for a female character just indicates larger breasts, with no significant changes to her physique otherwise. She's always still a physically desirable hourglass shape.

9. Not really. There's a lot of opportunity for improvement across the board, specifically to approach the character creator from a non white default.

10. I immensely dislike it. It's an easy way to implement racism, and to dismiss the need for characters of colour with excuses like 'it's not logical for them to have traveled here'. In a fantasy setting, the modern construct of race and racial politics would not have any bearing, and it shouldn't be used.

11. There needs to be far more diversity and far more options for non white defaults, because the lack of things like darker brown eyes, ethnic hair etc is telling in that the designers of the character creator just don't even think about ethnic characters existing in that world.

1. I'm Latina, Mexican to be specific.

2. Dragon Age Origins, Dragon Age 2, Dragon Age Inquisition, Mass Effect 1, Mass Effect 2, Mass Effect 3, Fallout 3, TES: Oblivion, TES: Skyrim, Rock Band

3. Dragon Age Inquisition because it really took advantage of new technology to give much more control. Instead of a few set presets you could scroll through it gave me sliders and color wheels, which added a lot more options. It insured that almost anything I could imagine, I could make.

4. I tend to create a character that is both idealized and different from myself overall. That is, the end result tends to look nothing like me, but definitely has elements of my appearance. (I always tend to give the same eyes, the same cheekbones, etc.)

5. I definitely believe I could in Inquisition. Less so with other games that tend to exclude any kind of extra weight on characters or have a narrow selection of facial features.

6. Dragon Age Inquisition had a huge number of options that I felt would capture me well, particularly in regards to my ethnicity. I have a yellow based complexion and a button nose that I usually don't see in character creators, but noticed here.

7. Games that rely on a set number of noses, mouths, etc. with no options to really refine them. I've tried many times to make different characters in Mass Effect, but they always come out looking the same because there is such a narrow range of features and proportions to work with. Skyrim as well, I feel, could have taken advantage of the character creator a little better.
While there is certainly a very wide range of races and characters to make, I feel the humanoid characters were lacking in a lot of available features.

8. Hair. I understand it is the most difficult thing to render, but I've yet to see a game really blow me away with the hair options offered. Sometimes it is frustrating because the existing options COULD have been very good, but they have something awkward about them... like overly blunt bangs or mullet proportions.

9. In the last few years I've noticed face shape/bone structure tends to be covered pretty well in all the games I've played. Makeup as well usually works very well for me.

10. I feel both options have their merits, but if I had to choose I would prefer to have a single human race that can be customized to resemble different ethnicities. I think this removes a lot of the pitfalls of too closely associating a fantasy race with a real one (which often descends into negative stereotypes, appropriation, etc). However, there are certainly ways for it to be done well so I'm open to both kinds of games.

11. I feel like the gaming industry has made huge strides in this regard, and I hope it continues moving in that direction. What I think is very behind, however, is the marketing for games with character creators. Of the infinite possibilities you could have, it's a shame that only white male characters are ever used in marketing materials. But overall, I am excited to see more games and companies embracing this progress.

1. White, first generation Italian-American.


3. Skyrim and Inquisition. Because they offer a variety of playable races and genders, as well as detailed, high-quality customization options (for the most part).

4. I prefer to create a wide variety of characters that do not always look or sound like me. This includes female and male characters, and those that do not fall into the binary. The option to portray non-idealized body types is important, as is quality rendering of non-white skin tones, and the availability of non-white hairstyles.

5. Yes, generally.

6. Skyrim, ESO, and Saints Row offer larger body types. This is the only factor that puts those CCs ahead of other games that I enjoy more (like the Mass Effect and Dragon Age series).

7. Typically FPS and Adventure games do not offer in-depth CCs. Call of Duty, Halo, Bioshock, Uncharted, Tomb Raider, Portal, MGS, Borderlands, The Wolf Among Us, and many others are played as fixed characters within the world of the game. If you have a choice, it is between one of several un-customizable characters.
8. Oftentimes there are only token options for non-white characters. There will be only a single asian skin-tone and eye-shape option, for example. If I want to create a black character, there will often be no curly hairstyles (natural), or other identifiable facial features. Additionally, it's rare to see body sliders in most CCs, so you are invariably stuck playing a character with an idealized slim or muscular build, regardless of what you're trying to create with their face.

9. Facial scruff is well-represented in CCs. I do not need another beard slider.

10. It depends upon the lore, I think. In most fantasy settings the human race is usually not monolithic. They often hail from different continents or countries, have different cultures and standards. I enjoy games in which the CC differentiates this as a function of deeper immersion for the player. That's not to say that I think skin-tone and ethnicity would be similarly monolithic within those factions. Every group has its disparate elements, and the CC should reflect that.

11. One of the most important aspects of representation in RPGs is the marketing. A developer can spend millions on a top-notch CC with excellent race and ethnicity options, but if the game's marketing department sells it to the public by using a white male protagonist on the box then it all amounts to nothing. Teasers, posters, cinematic trailers, and gameplay demos need to feature the CC options and show a diverse range of player characters.

1. Middle Eastern of Syrian decent, born there spent most of my childhood in Sweden until my mid-teens which where spent in Syria, enrolled in a boy public school for three year before returning to Sweden and continuing studying in a Swedish communal school. This has largely influences my perception of the world around me. I identify as both Arabian and Swedish switching back and forth between cultural convention without realizing it. to sum it up ethical values tend to be middle eastern my while moral values are largely western. they do overlap a lot though.

2. I'll only mentions that onesi spent a significant amount of time on.
   - The Mass Effect games.
   - Dragons Dogma
   - Guild wars 2
   - Eve Online (old character creator)
   - Dragon Age
   - Skyrim
   - Fallout 3

3. None, I spend most of my time trying making my likeness which is usually impossible.

4. I try to create my likeness realize it isn't possible. go with whatever I have, switch gender and make someone pleasant to look at. I rarely create characters that intentionally look unlike me.

5. Nope, some features of my face come close but it never matches on the whole.

6. Dragons Dogma allows the player to define body type in a relateable way. their Facial Editor has plenty of options but never really gets close to what I perceive myself to look like.
7. Monster Hunter.

8. nope

9. Most facial Editors always initially seem to cover all the bases until tested out.

10. With some Exception, physical performance is the difference that seem to be the only tangible one among real human races and these aren't always visually apparent although they might be culturally defined. The differences are too complicated and ultimately too marginal for it to represent any significant dynamics among different human races. One would have stretch realties both limiting the ways these humans races are able to express themselves in a gameworld while magnifying other traits. this can easily leads to Stereotyping, Orientalism, Racism etc. in process of creating a set of races that audience find relatable and easy to understand and label which equates to navigating a cultural minefield. EVE online plays with these ideas a little bit and avoids scrutiny through bundling together different culturally perceive Human races into the same Faction.

1. I'm black, and from Trinidad and Tobago.

2. - Dragon Age Origins
   - Dragon Age II
   - Dragon Age Inquisition
   - Mass Effect

3. Dragon Age Inquisition, probably! It was the most detailed, with the most choices in race, the best range of skin tones and hair types. Not perfect, but definitely the most satisfying out of the bunch.

4. It depends! I never attempt to create a character exactly like me, but (and this especially applies to my first play through of a game) I do tend to give the character a lot of the same physical features as me. It can also be fun to create a character completely different from me, but I usually save that for the second or third play through, and I always give them SOMETHING that I see in myself. A nose like mine, hair like mine, (not that that's sjkfhsdj ever really possible lol) skin my mine, etc.

5. Not really. To a certain extent. But if I had to go with yes or no it would definitely be no.

6. Again, Dragon Age Inquisition. I especially appreciated the darker skin tones, and being able to add scars and stuff, which I have a fair few of. Mass Effect isn't bad either, but definitely not as good.

7. Dragon Age II. I distinctly remember being appalled that THAT was the darkest that skin got, and the hair options seems even more limited than they were in Origins. Eventually, I got so frustrated that I ended up just going with the default Hawke, which I ended up regretting.

8. HAIR. HAIR HAIRHAIR. All the options given are literally ALWAYS straight, or maybe straight hair with weak little curls. DAO, DA2 and ME had NOTHING resembling black hair, absolutely nothing. The lack of variety is really infuriating, especially since you can SEE how
much effort went into other parts of the game. DAI was a complete disappointment in this arena too. There were varying hair types, but everything resembling black hair was basically... six versions of the same short hairstyle.

9. Uh, eyes I guess. (Eye colour, that is. Eye shape could definitely be more expansive.)

10. I think I prefer the former, having one playable human character that can be customised. Story-wise, I think it tends to work better, or just appeals to me more. Also I'm pretty active in fandom, and in the second scenario, I would have to deal with fandom ignoring the canon non-white playable characters, which I already have to deal with everywhere else. Also, I just really like have the option to customise my character, even in instances where I can't customise them completely to my liking.

11. More representation is definitely needed. It's obviously something that's possible, when you look at all the effort and work that goes into graphics and backgrounds and whatever else. So there needs to be a desire to provide that representation, people who care about it. All the games I've played with CCs are form Bioware, and honestly, they're shown that they DON'T care, and it's pretty disheartening. Something like adding more diverse hair types and textures wouldn't take much time, no more than everything else they do, but it would do such a long way to showing that they cater to ALL gamers.

1. Persian by native, swedish by birthplace. I identify myself as both a Swede and Persian.

2. The Sims (entire first tier of the series) The Sims 2, The Sims Medieval (with expansion ), World of Warcraft, Dragon Age, Tera, DC online, Little Big Planet (unsure if counts), Warhammer online, Guild Wars, Rift.

3. DC online! I get to customise my toon not only in facial features but also customise the colours and patterns of the wardrobe.

4. Mostly an image of myself. an enhanced version of both my good side as well as evil.

5. Cosmetically, no. Not in all games. The darker skintones are often not as well made as the lighter tones I feel are more of a halfassed piece of muddy brown or green and thus feel less appealing to chose.

6. Tera had the most tools, which made me rather want to tweak my character features and experiment more with those options before I'd start creating _me_. The Sims (first tier of the series) allowed me to download and apply mods, which helped me a great deal when I did try to create _me_.

7. Any game with a fixed model library for me to chose from. Those premade models are usually dull or non-relatable to! From my list of games, I would

8. Maybe more hairstyles for both genders. Hairstyles are often few and weird, in a negative sense of bad and weird. And skintones, to have less gritty brown shades and maybe skins with scars or bithmarks would be nice to have. Who doesn't love a fictive scar and how pretty aren't freckles and bithmarks...

Facial hair!!!! we need more!
9. Eye colours. I usually get cool options for eye colour, but I barely notice or care to look for the eye colour when I game. C:

10. I generally dislike the premade options for ethnic models. They are often half arsed and slightly more racist than they need to be. I must more prefer to be able to customise my own toon from scratch, though singular facial features, such as nose shape and mouth etc, are a welcome addition in a library of sorts - because sometimes you already have an image of your character in mind.

11. Body type adjustments, height, body shapes, no boobplates. Otherwise, idunno...think I covered most of it :)

1. Mixed, Afro-carribian

2. Mii Maker
Mass Effect
Street Football - and I can't remember the full title
World of Warcraft
Skyrim
Saints Rom
Secret World
Conan
2nd Life

3. Street Football. Because is was insanely detailed. Aimed more at "Urban Youth," the range of hair styles/skin colour was astounding. In fact, we were looking at the game to port it, and we never, actually, got into the game - it kept crashing. But I spent more than an hour, just making characters.

4. I generally make female characters - so different. And black, and then I suffer at hair, so they generally start bald.
The end point, however, is generally "Storm" from the X-Men. Black woman with matching glow eyes and hair. WoW, my female undead was zombie Winona Ryder, my male elf was Gay Pirate. I think I have a set ideal - designed to break the game - person of colour, appropriate hair and skin tone - and then design to fit the game.

5. No. I'm mid-toned, grey haired. I pass as lighter than I am but have thicker lips. I'm older than the "idealised character" - so I should be wrinklier, and more hollow eyed, apparently. My Mii captures the sense of me, and people who know me can see me in it, but it's not how I look.

6. FIFA Street Football

7. Cartoony ones. So WoW isn't designed to create realistic people

8. Hair styles. Black, female, hair styles are appalling. It's like no one has ever seen a black woman unless she has a fro, a short fro, cornrows or is bald. And, while I understand that skin tone is difficult to pull off - Coal, Chocolate, Sand just isn't enough.
9. Options for white people. :)

10. Single Human. Once you start going down the path of separate races within humanity, you get all sorts of casual racism - from terrible accents, to stereotypical voudou belief systems.

11. I think that this is such a deep subject - because I think that race is more than just at character creation. But the ability to see "me" in a game is double edged. GTA San Adreas let me gang-bang. And that game was put into the hands of a more middle class, white audience, and that stopped me playing. The Racial Tourism was a step too far.

1. White, Swedish
2. Guild Wars 2
   Elder Scrolls: Skyrim
   World of Warcraft
   Mass Effect
   Fallout 3
   Fallout New Vegas
   Dragons Dogna
   Sims 2, 3, 4
   Soul Calibur
   Dark/Demon souls
   Wii several (Mii)
   Several Xbox kinect (Similar to Mii)
   (More but do not remember)

3. Sims 3/4 You can change everything! 4's is generally better but in it they have removed the option from 3 to change texture and colour of clothing/hair.

4. Myself.
   Then someone totally different but not perfect.
   I never just make one. More like 5-10 ;)

5. Yes.


7. Fallout 3/New Vegas, Mass Effect, No matter what you change in mass effect the girl always has a big frog-like mouth and in Fallout all women have similar faces and a slight mustache

8. Slim lips that are realistic and pretty. Gender neutrality. Everything needs more hair options.


10. "One playable human race that can be customized into different ethnicities" YES.
Also, you should be able to do that to the human-like fantasy races as well. Not all elves need to be white.

1. I'm half Finnish half Egyptian born and raised in Sweden. I feel most at home in Swedish culture although I have a very multi-cultural family.

2. Skyrim
   The Elder Scrolls Online
   Dragon Age Inquisition
   Dragon Age Origins
   Oblivion
   Rift
   Final Fantasy Reborn Realm

3. Probably Dragon Age Inquisition. I like when you're able to create characters that look real, I don't like when they look too perfect or artificial. For me it's important to create a character with an appearance that seems to have an interesting personality. That's why I like the character creation of DA Inquisition because you're able to create a character with flaws.

4. I usually make a character similar to myself, however, a different me. Not idealized, but just different. Or I'd make a character completely different from myself. I usually try to create a character based on how I imagine my character's personality, backstory etc would be.

5. No, not really. It's usually due to my darker skin color or my high nose. Because of this I tend to like those games that has a better range of different looks in the character creation.

6. Skyrim or Dragon age Inquisition, even though they are not the easiest to maneuver. But both have lots of room for improvement, none of them are good on the body section of the character creation.

7. Maybe Final Fantasy Reborn Realm. You are only able to create perfect looking characters with japanese ideals

8. Options and varieties on flaws such as dark under-eye-circles, wrinkles etc. Variations of body shapes! varieties of hair styles. Almost all games lack the option to make a mixed race character.

9. No not really.

10. I prefer having one playable human race that can be customized into different ethnicities. Like in the world of Dragon Age.

1. I'm from Argentina, of mostly European background and partly indigenous. I self-describe as white Latin American.

2. Mass Effect trilogy, Dragon Age franchise, TES: Skyrim, Fallout franchise
3. Skyrim has a good range of skin color and hair options, but it's not possible to customize the body, which sucks.

4. A character completely different.

5. Not at all.

6. Hmm possibly DAI, for its facial features options.

7. All. Mostly because none let you customize the body type.

8. Body type customization. Other non-white hair types.

9. Probably the ears.

10. Don't like the latter, because they usually rely on stereotypes when separating ethnicities.

11. Most CCs still reflect the whole white=default thing, even if they try not to. That's something that still needs to be changed.