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Virtual game boys: an examination of Black male cyberbonding play as navigation of a Hispanic Serving Institution

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ABSTRACT

This critical qualitative study uses education journey maps (EJMs) as undergirded by critical race theory to examine how three Black male collegians use *cyberbonding play* to navigate the geographies of racism while attending a Hispanic-serving Institution (HSI). Sociospatial dialectic is applied in concert with educational journey mapping to center participants in a collaborative research process. Education journey maps (EJMs) created by participants explained the multidimensional value of contextualized counter-cartography narratives to understand the benefits of engaging in play across physical and virtual geographies. Each EMJ was created by participants using: (a) constructive prompts; (b) continual access; (c) genuine reciprocity; and (d) expressed authentic gratitude (Annamma, 2018). Unfurled digital and physical spaces yielded two emergent themes that comprised *cyberbonding play*: 1) "Get what you came for!"; and 2) User Friendly. Study findings inform how Black male collegians purposefully use *cyberbonding play* while in pursuit of degree attainment despite college geographic hostilities.

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Racism; black collegians; critical race spatial analysis; Hispanic-serving institution

Introduction

How African American students experience being Black while attending predominantly white institutions (PWIs) has been thoroughly researched during the past 50 years about a variety of topics to include the value of peer bonding and faculty mentors support toward Black male student persistence (Brooms & Davis, 2017); avoiding antiblackness (Hotchkins, 2022); retention impediments (Love, 1993); and sense of belongingness (Strayhorn, 2009). Further ontological nuance explains that Black collegians are grossly impacted by not only blatant racism (Smith et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2007), but also racial microaggressions to include institutional enslavement legacies (Garibay et al., 2020; Mills, 2020; Morales, 2021; Stanton et al., 2022). Pierce et al. (1977) was the first to define racial microaggresions as coupled to racism: "The chief vehicle for proracist behaviors are microaggressions. These subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal ex-changes, which are 'put downs'of blacks by offenders" (p. 65). Although the taxonomy of racial microaggression has evolved to include Indigenous and people of color, who also experience microassualts, microinsults, microinvaliations and environmental (Sue et al., 2007), it is important to acknowledge that when the phenomenon occurs it is tantamount to *everyday racism* (Essed, 2002).

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To disaggregate by gender, Black male collegians, who desire degree attainment from Hispanic-serving community colleges (HSCCs), also endure antiblackness, racism as intellectual rejection, presumed ownership of intellectual and material property created by Blacks, where psychological warfare occurs and institutional spaces are unaccepting of their suffering (Abrica et al., 2020; Bukoski & Hatch, 2016; Smith et al., 2020). Serrano (2022) confirmed the abovementioned research by finding that student demographic underrepresentation, a lack of Black faculty and inevitable exposure to racial microaggressions have an adverse impact on Black male collegians who also attend Hispanic-serving Institutions (HSIs), but can be mitigated when culturally congruous communities are found where a sense of community and affirmation is fostered, which is framed as campus racial microclimates that positively influences degree conferral (Serrano, 2022).

The navigation of racist college campuses by Black male students has unfurled in variety of activities to include being engaged in social change movements, joining historically Black organizations, participating in leadership roles with students of color, practicing cyberactivism, involvement in community giveback and recreation participation *as play* (Patterson & Dorwart, 2019). While Patterson and Dorwart (2019) found that Black male collegians engaged in intramural team play to provide a sense purpose, which aided in navigating campus hostilities, Lindsey's (2012) attributed enhanced self-confidence, an increased sense of accomplishment, and communication leadership skills during recreational activities. Previously, Lindsey et al. (2009) found that participating in campus recreation positively influenced retention and continued enrollment of Black men specifically attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Although the studies discussed the relevance of navigating campus through recreational sport *as play*, none explicitly broached the value of virtual videogaming *as play*; specifically within the context of recreational sources for student engagement, involvement, or participation. This critical qualitative study applies educational journey mapping (EJM) to examine how three Black male collegians used virtual gaming as *cyberbonding play* to enhance belongingness through academic and friendship engagement, which facilitated their navigation of the geographies of racism at a Hispanic-serving Institution (HSI).

Review of the literature

Defining space

How space is presently constructed in the literature is largely influenced by Lefebvre's (1991) framing of the production of space as a social and economic process that is created through interactions, relations and social actions where spatial practice, representations of space and representational space are differentiated. Specifically, spatial practices are daily routines that give spaces identity; representations of space are visual confirmations of imaginations about space (e.g. maps or policies); and representational space considers how users of spaces experience moments in time. In offering a critique of Lefebvre's (1991) spatial framing, Molotch (1993) stated that "A space is thus neither merely a medium nor a list of ingredients, but an interlinkage of geographic form, built environment, symbolic meanings, and routines of life" (p. 888) where people fight to establish how reality is constituted. Massey and Massey (2005) situated space as the "dimension of multiple trajectories, a simultaneity of stories-so-far," which not only validate the narratives of people who experience spaces, but also confirms that space is more than a three-dimensional surface. Finally, Soja (1980) reimagines space and social interactions as "dialectically inter-reactive, interdependent; that social relations of production are both space-forming and space-contingent (insofar as we maintain a view of organized space as socially constructed" (p. 211) and representative of a socio-spatial dialectic.

In the same way that organized space is socially constructed (Soja, 1980), race too exists as a social construction where whiteness is property and possesses a value that has historically never

been afforded to people of African descent in the Americas (Harris, 1993). To illustrate, within predominantly white campus environments, where these social constructions are coupled (i.e, space and race), white people are afforded "unearned benefits" (Giles & Hughes, 2009, p. 693) in academic spaces. In examining the arc of space as consequential geographies for incarcerated girls of color with dis/abilities, Annamma (2016, 2018) used educational journey mapping to confirm that purposeful injustice occurs across topographical, physical and political dimensions where the carceral state violently dis-located participants within public schools to incarceration. Although participants understood they occupied a space of temporary incarnation, as a result of being identity targeted (i.e. race, gender and ability) by the state, they rationalized sensemaking (Karikari & Brown, 2018) as a need to avoid recidivism despite knowing historically the school-to-prison pipeline serves the purpose of the carceral state—to maintain order by enacting purposeful punishment (Foucault, 1977). Additional research frames both historically and predominantly white institutions as a spatial locale for anti-Black violence against Black students (Mustaffa, 2017; Mwangi et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2007) in the past and present.

Therefore, the primary purpose of this study, how participants construct their realities is central to how the definitions of space are applied (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey & Massey, 2005; Soja, 1980) as it pertains to racial and gendered treatment, mobility across physical and virtual "digital" spaces, and environmental interactions.

The act of play

The concept of being at play varies across a wide range of K-20 research that is defined as a self-selected, self-directed activity where interactive narratives are performed (Bergen et al., 2013). Solitary play occurs when participants are alone (Lillard et al., 2013) while social play is engaged within a group setting (Li et al., 2016). According to Chapman (2016) and Pasco (2003) boys develop a desire to play competitive sports while young where they create brotherly bonds and learn expectations about 'men-like' engagements (Harris & Harper, 2015). In effort to combat notions of hegemonic masculinity that male-specific competition reifies, Bristol (2015) suggested that video games and graphic novels can be used as points of critical deconstruction. Despite the context of play it is clear that "Black boys understand the Black male body is not afforded the same patriarchal and hegemonic masculine privileges as their white male counterparts. Instead, they are subjected to and not protected from patriarchal and hegemonic white male violence" (Bryan, 2019, p. 8) and as a result are unsafe from the effects of racism.

When (re)imagining how Black boyhood can look Dumas and Nelson (2016) suggested that "memories of a rich, meaningful boyhood—and the experience of having our boyhoods acknowledged and embraced—serve us as Black men throughout our lives, and keep us connected to creativity, wonderment, and play" (p. 40). As it pertains to the latter, Bayeck (2020) investigated the meaning of video gameplay, which occurs within a digital space, with Black African immigrant college students and found that engaging in videogaming served to relieve stress, support cultural identity and helped participants adjust to living in the United States. The overarching video game player literature frames the desire to play as connected to a need not only meet the psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness and competence (Przybylski et al., 2010), but also to connect socially and engage with friends while practicing leadership in digital spaces where participants can control outcomes not realized in real life (Ferguson & Olson, 2013). Huang et al. (2015) found that playing videogames served to maintain relationship with old friends while facilitating the meeting and development of new friendship, which increased self-esteem and self-concepts. Finally, research about video game play rationales for young adults indicated that participants who engage in play do so to experience a sense of enhanced personal relationships (Osmanovic & Pecchioni, 2016) while meeting emotional and psychological needs, especially with college students (Greenberg et al., 2010).

Moreover, the secondary purpose of this study was to apply the critical qualitative method of education journey mapping (Annamma, 2018), as grounded in critical race theory, to map how participants navigated the geographies of racism at their HSI by using *cyberbonding play*, which is defined as the act of building protective alliances through the exploration of multiple contexts where participants are informed about how to navigate digital and actual world settings.

Theoretical or conceptual framework

This critical qualitative study is situated within the context of a racist campus ecology, which allowed for the utilization of a methodological application that elucidates how Black male collegians purposefully interacted in digital spaces to inform how to navigate physical spaces within a Hispanic-serving Institution (HSI). Education journey mapping (EJM) (Annamma, 2018) was applied as undergirded by critical race theory to frame the responsive phenomenon of *cyberbonding play* as central to academic and friendship engagement of participants. This study acknowledges that critical race theory (CRT) has been used as a methodological tool to explain how Black students, faculty and administrators endure the nefarious unfurling of racism within college settings and beyond by creating spaces for holistic growth (Garcia et al., 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Stanton et al., 2022). The creation of EJM explanations, by grounding the narratives in CRT tenets (Howard, 2008), provided a historic underpinning for understanding why participants perceived a need to use digital spaces as outlets of learning how to navigate their HSI. Participants undergraduate dealings with racism are informed by CRT tenets: 1) racism is endemic; 2) meritocracy, the legality of neutrality, colorblindness and objectivity are falsehoods; 3) opposes ahistoricism; 4) centers the experiential knowledge of when people of color through counterstorytelling; 5) operates as interdisciplinary; and 6) attempts to remove intersectional oppression (Howard, 2008).

In this study, mapping and space were considered as tools applied to facilitate "resistance, to reveal, organize, and share counterstories" (Rubel et al., 2017, p. 646) to interrogate unequal relations amongst people within power structures (Elwood & Mitchell, 2013), specifically the study site HSI. Subsequently, the EJM process allowed for reconstructing data across physical and digital spaces to not only map the geographies of racism that participants traversed, but also to explain two specific perspectives: (a) how racism informs the academic, social and digital space wayfinding of male collegians of African descent, due to a lack of research (Bayeck, 2020; Guillory, 2020); and (b) how study participants performed *cyberbonding play*, through the use of digital space navigation strategies, to determine and avert physical space boundaries on their HSI campus (Mustaffa, 2017; Stanton et al., 2022).

Research Design and Methods

This qualitative critical study used education journey mapping (EJM) (Annamma, 2018) to explain how three Black male collegians navigate the geographies of racism experienced at their HSI by applying sociospatial dialectic (Soja, 2010), which examines how space and social processes influence each other to center participants lived experiences in a descriptive process that is tantamount to portraiture. The applied EJMs process explained the multidimensional value of contextualized counter-cartography narratives (Vélez & Solorzano, 2016) offered by participants to elucidate the benefits of engaging in *cyberbonding play* to navigate the geographies of racism, which was achieved through approximately 10 to 13 hours of individual (i.e. two hours each) and group deconstructive participant analysis (i.e. three hours each) that yielded visual detailed renderings of each student's college trajectory and sense of wayfinding.

Data sources

Study Context

Cotton University (CU) is a Hispanic-serving Institution (HSIs) located in the Southwestern part of America. Since 2016, five racist incidents by white students occurred on campus despite general messaging about being a "more diverse campus" due to anticipating being awarded HSI status. CU was a segregated historically white institution (HWI) until 1961, yet was recently awarded HSI status in 2019, where less than 6% of self-identifying Black students (Data USA, 2019) attend.

Participants

A total of three Black male collegians participated—two self-identified as African American and one as a first-generation Nigerian American immigrant. Purposeful sampling criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2018) was used: (1) CU undergraduate; (2) involved in e-sports games and intramural teams; and (3) self-identifying as a male of African descent.

Data Collection and Analysis

The process of educational journey mapping (EJM) is explained and applied below, per the Annamma (2018) protocol: (a) constructive prompts; (b) continual access; (c) genuine reciprocity; (d) articulating complex positionality; and (e) expressed authentic gratitude. In order to allow for the rendering participant's EJM's a constructive prompt used:

> *Map your college education journey from when you started until now. Include people, places, spaces, obstacles, and opportunities. Draw your relationship with playing video games and college, where it overlaps and separates. Include what works and/or doesn't work for you. Use various colors to show different feelings, use symbols like lines and arrows or even words. These are just recommendations. Be expressive. If you don't want to draw you use a visual like a Venn diagram. We will discuss what you create afterwards.*

To ground rendered data in an understanding of experiential sensemaking students participated in a "cartography clinic" (Annamma, 2018) that nuanced the historic legacy of Black people making maps to avert the geographies of racism from the Underground Railroad (Siebert, 2019) to Negro Motorist Green Book (Green, 1940), which aided in explaining how maps are made and the importance of research themes, outliers and mapmaking. After drawing their individual EJM, which was the primary form of data collection as combined with individual interviews, participants conducted a map gallery walk of completed EJMs where they began a data analysis process that consisted of note taking about potential themes across shared EJMs. Each participant then described their narratives and posed questions of each other about the use of digital space as overlapped with physical places and times until an overarching phenomenon was communicated, *cyberbonding play*, which consisted of two emergent themes: 1) "Get what you came for!"; and 2) User Friendly. This data-gathering sequence served as in-depth member checking (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to allow for challenging my interpretations and their personal accounts. This collaborative data analysis process provided unique thematic perspectives that I initially missed, which speaks to the necessity of centering participants' counter-cartography narratives. Therefore, their contribution to the method of EJMs illuminated the "how," processes, for navigating the "where," digital spaces and the physical HSI campus.

Results

The educational journal mapping (EMJ) process allowed for an articulation of sociospatial perspectives (Annamma, 2018) that informed an understanding of the racism students identified, endured, and averted. The EJMs shared were multi-dimensional counter-narratives about the overlap of digital and physical spaces where *cyberbonding play* occurred. *Cyberbonding play* is

defined as the act of building protective alliances through the exploration of digital and physical play contexts where participants are informed about how to navigate virtual and actual world settings. In this study, racism at a HSI adversely impacted the mobility of Black male collegians in ways that inhibited their engagement opportunities, which led to using *cyberbonding play* as a form of holistic bridgebuilding across digital and physical spaces, places and areas that situated them between solitary and social play (Li et al., 2016; Lillard et al., 2013).

Navigating The Digital

Participants sketched the digital dimensions of their educational paths by expressing knowledge about the benefits of gaming concerning the necessity of strategically navigating first-person shooter games (i.e. Fortnite, Call of Duty Halo) and sports simulation video games (i.e. Madden and NBA2K). In this virtual dimension spaces, people and places have a digital human likeness where Black maleness either survives or dies in the former, while in the latter non-lethal victory or defeat are an option. Participants illustrated uncertainty, including anxieties and joy, as central to the visualization of their EJMs, which provided insights about life lessons learned and ultimately friendship building through protecting each other. Uncertainty encapsulated both the depth and breadth of their interactions with education concerning perceived impediments and supports, which subsequently impacted successes and failures. "In Fortnite we plot in real time to assure the team win. The goal is for us to survive the game. So much of what we do in there [game] is done out here, you know protect each other" (Franklin).

The life lessons learned by engaging in videogame play for Franklin's EJM (Figure 1) are described by his personal overlap with powerlifting and college life as a source of replenishment and safety:

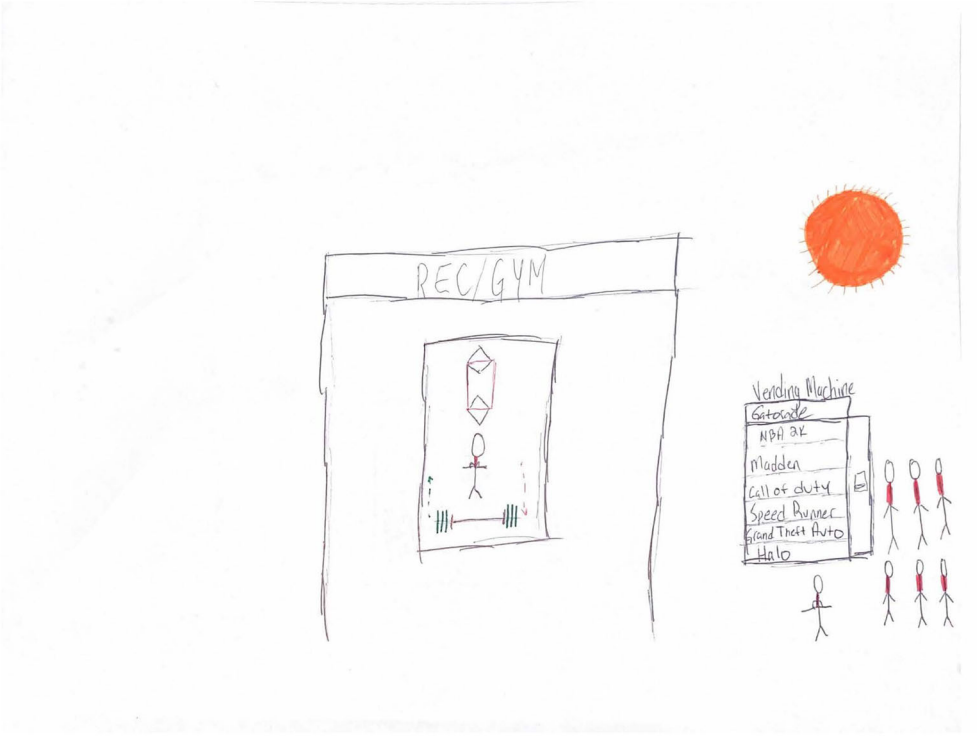

Figure 1. Franklin's Educational Journey Map.

Franklin: When lifting weights sometimes you need to take breaks so I put a vending machine outside of the gym so my Gatorade to life has been playing games so I have the different flavors of Gatorade, which represent the videogames I play. Playing helps me replenish myself. I use the game to escape CU. I purposefully put the vending machine outside of the gym to separate it from campus, it is my safe space. It is full of never-ending sources of distraction, relief, preparation and calmness that lead to my being grounded in a place [CU campus] where I am not always comfortable While playing any of the games I feel capable of enduring whatever because I have my friends by my side and they only want the best for me. Although I play by myself, I love playing with them!

AAA: So how are the sun and people connected to your using videogames (Pointing to the EMJ) and how is it connected to your perception of the campus climate?

Franklin: The sun lights my path so the people I walk with can see our where we are headed, it symbolizes better days when I am comfortable with these people, in and outside of the game. CU can be hostile one day then quiet the next so I am purposeful with where I go, who I speak to and when I am on campus.

Franklin placing himself in the gym alone represented his loneliness, being separated from his parents who reside in New York, NY and how he views himself as a result to experiencing on campus racism, which is why he lifts in isolation to strengthen both his body and mental resilience. Furthermore, he discussed the Gatorade videogame vending machine analogy as tantamount to a place of essential connectedness when finding himself lost. Participants applied similar sensemaking (Karikari & Brown, 2018) as an act of Black life-making to name "the ways Black people pursued education as a pursuit of freedom" (Mustaffa, 2017, p. 712) to emancipate themselves from the anxiety caused by anticipating racist interactions.

Despite holding a heightened awareness about attempting to avoid being physically alone, participant's described the use of counter-cartographies to locate, reconstruct and redefine the value of bonding. Specifically, participant's EJMs overlapped concerning the explanation of achieving Black male wholeness to focus on producing spaces, places and areas where cultural authenticity unfurled unimpeded. These actions were foundational to practicing *cyberbonding play*. Leon (Figure 2) did this in his counter-cartography:

Leon: I modeled my college career like God of War [Game] so I stayed to myself, went to class and got on the game afterwards, which helps me be successful academically. I'm on the Dean's List, people need to know it because some don't believe Black men are smart like that. The football is for Madden [Game], I met Franklin there. The Black bodies have Black faces. Going to a HSI you learn a lot about white people, but also interacting with them allows opportunities to work together and explain what it means to be completely Black, to break the stereotypes and to reset the perspective about Black people.

AAA: Why is it important to reset the perspectives?

Leon: Resetting is important because Black men I know are viewed as only athletes, non-intellectuals and standoffish campus. When I am on the game with my guys we talk about having a louder voice in class and orgs. In Call of Duty [Game] there are a lot of racist people playing, and hearing their comments prepares you to interact with white people outside of the game who need their minds changed about who we are …

In the description of his EJM, Leon re-centered his idea of what it means to be seen as authentically whole in his Black maleness. Specifically, while on the CU campus Leon's counter-cartography included his intellectual prowess (i.e. Dean List), athletic participation (i.e. intramural sports), co-curricular Black student organization participation (i.e. leadership engagement) and gaming worth (i.e. virtual existence), each of which impacted his access to educational pursuits.

Sociospatial dialectic (1980, 2010) informs the act of engaging in *cyberbonding play*, which is visualized in participant's EJMs and explained by the space specific value of intersecting social reality and embodied experiences (Futch & Fine, 2014). Each EJM allowed for Black male collegian gamer players to recognize the geographies of racism, digital and physical, that influenced their educational and social paths. The geographies of racism as stated by participants counter-cartographies were multilayered around the ubiquitous nature of space limitations, a lack of direct access to the fullness of their college experience and a digital, albeit physical nexus that led

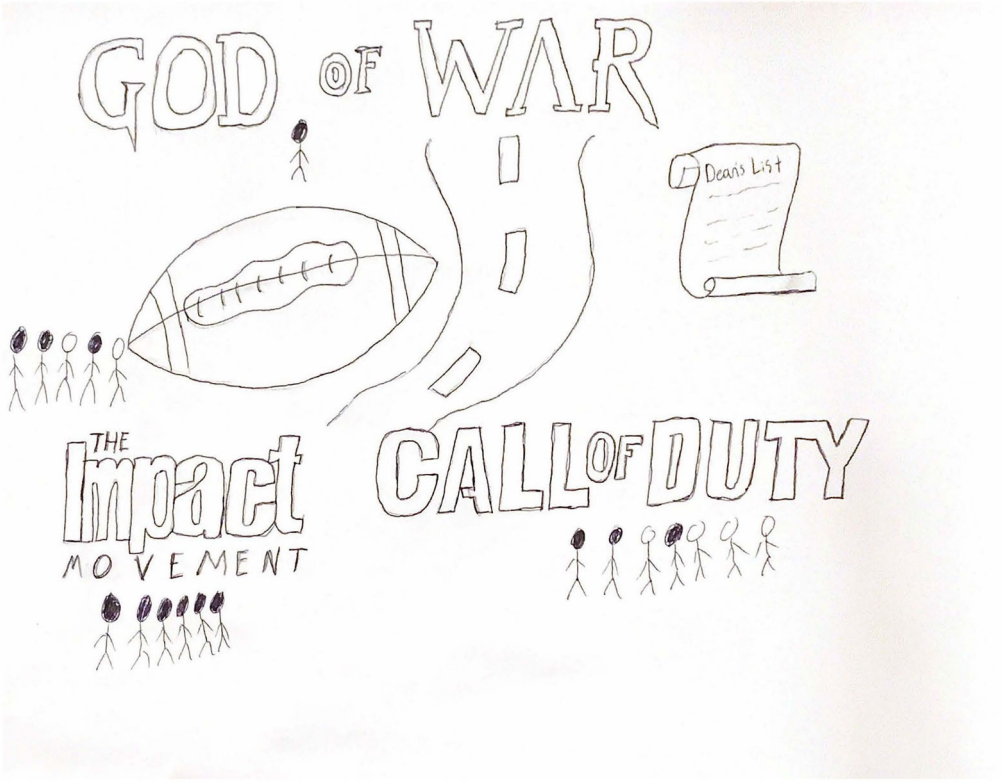

Figure 2. Leon's Educational Journey Map.

to limited learning opportunities due to participants wanting to avoid racial traumas (Mwangi et al., 2018; Stanton et al., 2022).

Navigating The Physical

Participants described how they experienced racism within a variety of learning contexts by illustrating the physical dimensions of their EJMs and in doing so, they discussed the "act of winning" as relevant in terms of the process of navigating CU supports and impediments. Winning was also reflected in individualized participants' achievements and failures to explain their relationship to and with the CU campus. Leon explained "there are potentially dangerous places you avoid in the game and on campus like fraternity circle after 10:00p. In this climate of civil unrest you don't want to get caught out here alone since white Greeks might do anything." Furthermore, each participant described examples about how traversing the CU campus was learned from videogame interactions that taught participants applicable life lessons. Jerome spoke about in-class interactions: "certain professors are condescending to Black male students, so I am wait until study group to ask questions about the lectures and learn there. Call of Duty has taught me one important thing, being patient equals winning."

Jerome further explained "In Call of Duty we are shooting for each other, helping each of us make it through the maps without taking any fatalities, which is a must! Same on campus because them threats are real and have consequences." Leon elaborated "Not in a Beyonce way, but formation is crucial in order to win. We study together, we play together, we teach each other and learn about how to get these degrees. We fail, but we win!" In his EJM, Franklin explained how racism on campus was the reason that he repeatedly spent time alone in the

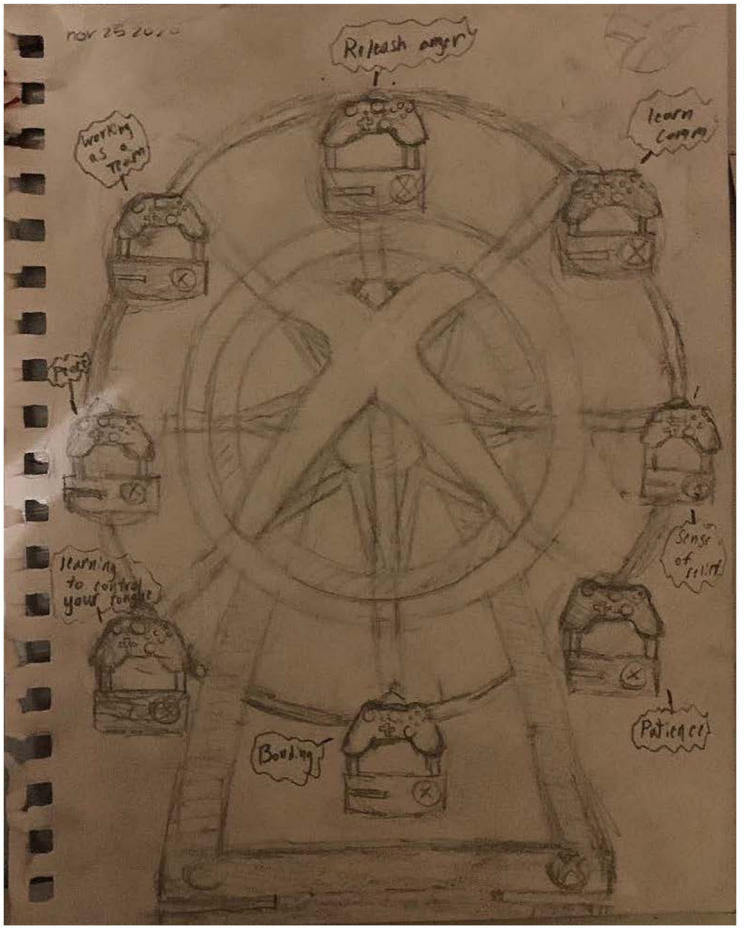

Figure 3. Jerome's Educational Journey Map.

gym, which he equated to losing due to often being physically separated from his peers, but despite this type of loss, he was also mindful that emotional losses adversely impacted his academic outcomes due to being "too angry to study" at times. These examples speak to how the CU physical spaces informed participants ability name and denounce deficit majoritarian narratives of themselves while visually explaining the overlap of their multilayered virtual and education trajectories (Futch & Fine, 2014), which were actualized by unpacking each EJM.

Jerome used his EMJ (Figure 3) to describe how he maneuvered between and betwixt the physical and virtual worlds of CU.

> Jerome: Each one of the joysticks represents how the game helps me release anger, better communicate, and teaches me patience after I go through something out there [real world].
>
> AAA: Explain how each joystick works.
>
> Jerome: I get a sense of relief while playing the game, it helps me forget my problems and how bad we [Black men collegians] get treated here, but also playing with people who support me makes it easier to be on campus.
>
> AAA: What's the difference between easier opposed to hard and why?
>
> Jerome: I have made a lot of friends on the game, bonded with other brothers who understand me, know my pains and are dedicated to making us all better. Sometimes it is hard to be here because of the

> professors and peers who make racist comments or don't purposefully include you during class, which leads to working as a team with other Black men in like our study groups. Strength in numbers is real.

Jerome's counter-cartography provided elucidation about how CU affected his state of being and internal feelings about existing on campus, which would have been impossible without his connectedness to other Black male collegians within his gaming community. This finding confirmed the research of Bayeck (2020), Przybylski et al. (2010) and Ferguson and Olson (2013) that framed videogaming as a source of stress relief, cultural identity support, friend networks and a space to meet the psychological needs of autonomy; however, the findings of this study extend the utility of "playing" as necessary for the transfer of learned knowledge to be used toward averting sources of racialized trauma on HSI campuses.

Spatial markers (i.e. classes with condescending professors) discussed by participants in this study were clear representations of perceived boundaries established by racism to limit their intellectual and physical mobility (Annamma, 2018; Giles & Hughes, 2009) of campus. Furthermore, participants understood these limits as an all-encompassing phenomenon existing throughout the CU campus, which they explained during the map gallery walk exercise as the reason for not labeling individualized spaces as racist. Moreover, participants were able to capture the duality of boundaries in exclusive and inclusive terms by constructing them as either unifying or divisive depending on the EJM context. To this point, Black male-centered events (e.g. *The Talk* hosted by the CU Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Equity) represented the former while National Panhellenic sorority gatherings (e.g. Cotton Antebellum Masquerade Ball) were indicative of the latter. The physical dimensions of participant's EJMs illustrated how geographies of racism impacted their psychological, physiological, and behavioral responses and impeded their navigation of CU.

Mapping the Geographies of Racism

Study findings explained how three Black male collegians use *cyberbonding play* to create digital spaces of solitary play (Lillard et al., 2013) and physical social play (Li et al., 2016). EJMs created counter-cartographies that showed how participants strategically collaborated to creatively traverse simultaneously threatening spaces in similar ways found in previous research (Mwangi et al., 2018; Serrano, 2022; Smith et al., 2007), but by using digital spaces. In fact, the knowledge learned in digital spaces informed how participants interacted with white professors and white peers while existing in CU physical spaces. Applying participant's EJMs further showed the vacillation required to continually switch paths across digital and physical dimensions to show when, where, why and how racism served as a point of trepidation in their educational trek. The process of purposefully evoking *cyberbonding play* is rather relevant as it shows the malleability of Black male collegians to expand their ontological view into digital spaces where what is learned informs epistemological understands of the physical world that they also construct themselves as occupying, which advances previously mentioned research about what it means to proactively move beyond coping with racism to constructing the necessary merger of digital and physical spaces to succeed in college.

I too, like Annamma (2018) argue that EJMs provide a robust methodological tool for centering the counter-cartographies of Black men collegians. Finally, I learned that our group collaboration in this explorative research process, creation of EJMs and analyzation of digital and physical spaces allowed participants to construct themselves as multidimensional students who now better understand how *cyberbonding play* is an act of thriving that ultimately leads to degree attainment while creating livelong friendship bonds in HSI learning environments.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributor

Bryan K. Hotchkins is an assistant professor of higher education at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, TX. His research focus on how organization climate, context and culture shape leadership performance while examing how leaders navigate the geographies of racism, implicit bias and identity-based trauma.

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