

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The video game industry has seen improvements in how minority groups are represented, especially in AAA games, big budget games coming from large companies that have a bigger reach in the community due to their booming popularity and the players' familiarity with the franchise and the company itself. Representation of women has gone back as far as the 1990s with the release of the Tomb Raider series, introducing the formidable female protagonist Lara Croft exploring abandoned cities and fighting both human and supernatural forces in her adventures, which is then considered as one of the first steps towards women empowerment in video games (Harveston 2017). LGBTQ+ representation have also been more prevalent in both indie and AAA titles, as shown in Assassin's Creed Syndicate (2015) where, while it is implicitly suggested, Jacob Frye is a bisexual and shows attraction to both a woman (Pearl Attaway, later on his unnamed wife), and a man (Maxwell Roth). The Last of Us Part II (2020) also included protagonist Ellie as a lesbian involved in a relationship with fellow survivor Dina. In more recent years, there has been more attempts to portray disability positively, such as Lester Crest from Grand Theft Auto V (2013) that suffers from an unspecified disease which causes his motor skills to gradually become worse and forces him to wear a wheelchair most of the time, but this physiological setback does not affect Lester's intelligence as he is very knowledgeable regarding technology and holds the role as the team's strategist, and Auti-Sim (2013), a simulation game that

attempts to simulate autism through hypersensitivity towards audio cues with the objective of helping neurotypical people better understand the life of autistic people.

While the future for disability representation looks promising, there seems to be no room for disabled bodies, mentally and/or physically, in the first-person shooter (FPS) genre, moreso when they also fall into the category of survival horror. Most FPS games feature stories that take place during times of war and involve a cast of hardened soldiers from a military legionnaire, making it impossible to insert disabled characters because it is commonly known that a person needs to be physically and mentally healthy in order to join an army. Battlefield, Call of Duty, and Halo are a few instances of FPS games that all involve the protagonist in a war-themed plotline, and so far have little to no disabled characters appear in the franchise. What's even worse is that when an FPS breaks away from the typical warfare, it portrays physically disabled bodies as enemies, giving the players a sense of danger and illustrating them in a way that is grotesque and horrific. A large portion of survival horror games portray physically disabled bodies as these misshapen, grotesque forms and objects of horror (Carr 2014), such as Biohazard/Resident Evil, Dead Rising, The Evil Within, and many others. These games feature humanoid enemies that were genetically mutated into disfigured bodies and reanimated corpses with missing limbs, painting disabled bodies in a horrific light. DOOM Eternal (2020) has the player shoot through an army of demons in various misshapen forms that threatens the players' safety. In addition to the antagonisation and erasure of disabled bodies, majority of these games have

also participated in using derogatory language and negative stereotyping of the disabled community, one of the examples is seen in the *Borderlands* series.

Borderlands has been implementing derogatory terms to refer to enemy subclasses that possess a different body type than what is considered a normal “body” in the universe, and actively engage in detrimental stereotypes that are harmful towards individuals with physical disabilities. In the first *Borderlands* (2009) game, the game introduced an enemy subclass dubbed as ‘midgets’ for enemies with dwarfism, which is a slur often used to insult people of extremely short height. In its third downloadable content (DLC), it also introduced a new enemy type under the midget class labeled as ‘Crimson Shorty’ and ‘Mini Steve’, both terms that can also be considered slurs against dwarfism. The midget class makes a return in *Borderlands 2* (2010), increasing in type variety as the second game also introduced a new subclass known as “goliaths”, a derogatory term that refers to enemies with gigantism or atypically tall individuals. The game further reinforces its harmful portrayal of physical disability through character animations and appearance. As an example, shotgun-wielding midgets trip and fall over their own feet from the force of firing the shotgun and struggle to get back up before they advance on the player again. The enemies’ violent and aggressive behavior towards the player and the visual aesthetic that scales their size based on the player character’s height further enforces the antagonizing of the midgets and goliaths, which can be problematic towards disabilities in real life. While some of these enemies are friendly and would sometimes appear as harmless non-playable characters (NPCs), they are a minority compared to the abundance of savage

enemies in the game. Combined with how enemies are assigned as labels and not individual names, it also dehumanizes the individuals and ‘othering’ them from a normal ‘bandit’ subclass. This choice of labeling had been revised in the spinoff, *Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel* (2014), as the term ‘midget’ was no longer used to refer to atypically short enemies and instead replaced with ‘Li’l’ for the new subclass. Arguably, the term ‘little’ isn’t derogatory by itself but it can be viewed as demeaning towards individuals who experience dwarfism. It also illustrates how the game decided to focus on the characters’ physical disability to label them instead of their specialty or affiliation compared to other enemy subclasses.

The *Borderlands* series had received backlash from using these derogatory terms and for ridiculing dwarfism as a source of comedy in the games. Randy Pitchford, CEO of Gearbox Software publicly acknowledged in his Twitter that the label ‘midgets’ is offensive (Peel 2019) and the developers have released a statement that some enemy labels are changed in their newest game, *Borderlands 3*. They included multiple disabled NPCs in the main and DLC campaigns and provide them screen time as well as expanding on the context for their personality and behavior as the player traverses more of the game. An interview with one of the game developers in Gearbox revealed that the team wants to move away from the usage of terms that are considered ‘super sensitive’ towards certain minority groups for inclusivity, and their main reasoning for using certain terms is that they are ‘thematic’ labels that fit the aesthetic of the universe rather than as active slurs against minority groups (Jones 2019).

Borderlands 3 is the fourth installment in the Borderlands franchise released in 2019. It is an FPS game that belongs to the subcategory of ‘looter shooters’ where players typically gain weapons from defeating enemies instead of buying them from in-game shops with currency. These weapons are assigned different rarities and get stronger with various flashy effects and unique abilities based on their rarity, ranging from ‘white’ guns as the most common weapon dropped by enemies and ‘legendary’ guns that have a significantly lower drop rate. This mechanic diverges from the typical format of FPS games that gives players the same weapons from beginning to the end, because the random drop rate and the huge variety of weapons allow for a different player experience in each playthrough as players experiment with all the available guns given to them. Other than its unique mechanic, Borderlands 3 and the franchise as a whole is loved by its players for its quirky, colorful artstyle and its equally quirky characters in the setting of a barren wasteland. Its memorable cast includes four playable characters, all with their own defining characteristics, and a crew of NPCs that stand out with their own personalities, which is hard to come by in the FPS genre. Borderlands 3 also has a multitude of queer and disabled characters, hence why their cast is not only diverse, but they also represent various minority groups in society.

Typically, games that seriously address discrimination against minority groups come from small-scaled, independent game studios (Meints & Green 2019, 44). On the other hand, big budget games from large publishers insert minimal minority presence or use them for comedic purposes by openly ridiculing them. First-person horror games are often the culprits for discriminating minorities,

specifically physically disabled bodies. *The Evil Within* and *Dead Rising* are both big budget horror games featuring zombies and mutated creatures with disfigured humanoid forms, which sends a negative message that people with physical deformity are seen as grotesque and undesirable. *Borderlands 3* is chosen as the object for this thesis because it sets itself apart from other games in the FPS genre because it displays more inclusivity compared to fellow AAA games by having an assortment of queer, feminine, mentally and physically disabled characters that are mostly portrayed in a positive light and less discriminated against. Troughton (2021) explained that *Borderlands 3* is ‘oozing with queerness’ even before being introduced to the characters due to the vibrant colors and the neon aesthetic of the game, as well as its unrestrained approach to most things presented inside of the game. The franchise has also gone with a 1:1 ratio for the main characters’ gender since *Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel*, giving players two female characters from the available four to play with in each of their games (The Mary Sue 2014). *Borderlands 3* features Amara and Moze, who are not hypersexualized like the standard in most games with their heavy muscles and scarred bodies, and are portrayed as strong female characters with their offensive skillsets compared to the male characters. The implemented changes are apparent in the revised use of language that the game uses to refer to its characters, and the treatment of physically disabled characters that reside on planets outside of Pandora. With the expansion of the game world, different societal rules apply to different planets and moons in the universe, and the concept of disability is also viewed differently but in ways that do not discriminate against the disabled. Survivability in the predominantly harsh living conditions

becomes the inhabitants' priority compared to other aspects of living in a social group that the people hardly discuss about or impose restrictions against the physically disabled, as living in huge numbers prove to be an advantage against invading bandits and the wildlife.

Borderlands is also considered a cult classic in the FPS community due to its revolutionary looter-shooter mechanics that defined the subgenre and its diverse representation (Yu 2021), its decision to implement physically disabled characters as friendly allies and humanize them would heavily impact its massive player base, affecting their perception of real-life problems faced by minority groups that are similar to what is shown in-game. A portion of its player base also includes people from said minorities, hence why it is important for the game to give proper representation for them with accurate portrayal and empowering elements in order to assist in erasing the negative stigma surrounding minorities, specifically physically disabled individuals.

Previous studies of the Borderlands series have only reached the third game in the franchise, Borderlands The Pre-Sequel and have yet to elaborate on the evolution of the series regarding representation in Borderlands 3. Accessibility for disabled players through player agency has been discussed in Borderlands 2 (Meints & Green 2019), but has not yet been examined through the game narrative, while studies that focus on analyzing the narrative of Borderlands have yet to identify the representation of physically disabled bodies as most of the analyses discuss the portrayal of mental disorders through the characters of Borderlands 2 (Rotter &

Shapiro 2016) and the visible power relation between the antagonists and protagonists of the game (Tomczak 2019).

With reasons as stated above, this thesis aims to prove that *Borderlands 3* is a step up from its predecessors regarding representation of physically disabled bodies. It examines how the *Borderlands* series' stance regarding disability representation has shifted to become more inclusive and less antagonizing towards physical disabilities seven years after the second mainline series in *Borderlands 3* by altering enemy labels and including more NPC characters with physical disabilities that aid the player in their journey with explorable backstories and personalities in an attempt to humanize them and make them appear more relatable to players. The visualization of the characters also presents them in a way that does not perceive the disabled body as a disgusting form and their characterization fully brings them to life, making it easier for players to relate to their stories. These elements disprove the negative stigma surrounding disability, and reinforce the notion that disability is a mere social construct.

This research is a qualitative research on *Borderlands 3* using the narrative analysis method to examine how representation of physical disability is done inside the game through the narrative of its characters, how they are characterized, and their visualization to be compared with Shakespeare's social model of disability in order to identify any forms of discrimination that may be present in the *Borderlands* universe.

1.2. Statement of the Problems

From the background of the study above, the statement of the problems are as follows:

1. How does the in-game storyline of Borderlands 3 portray physical disability through characterization, visualization, and individual character development?
2. According to the social model of disability, does discrimination towards physically disabled individuals still exist in the Borderlands 3 universe?
3. Are there any differences on the treatment of various forms of physically disabled bodies in Borderlands 3? If so, what causes these differences in treatment?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

From the statement of the problems above, the objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To analyze the in-game storyline of Borderlands 3 that portrays physical disability through characterization, visualization, and individual character development;
2. To explore how physically disabled individuals face possible discrimination in the Borderlands 3 universe;
3. To identify whether there is a difference in treatment against various forms of physically disabled bodies in Borderlands 3, and what factors are causing any existing difference in treatments.

1.4. Significance of the Study

It is expected that, from this study, it will raise more awareness that discussing issues surrounding physical disability is just as important as mental disability issues and illustrates how accurate portrayals of physically disabled bodies that humanizes them instead of antagonizing them can absolve common stigmas and negative stereotypes surrounding the minority group. By demonstrating positive representation of physical disability in *Borderlands 3*, it would encourage other game developers to participate and construct more positive portrayals in their games and contribute to the cause of erasing discrimination against physical disability. In addition, this study is written in the hope that it may be useful in further studies regarding physical disability representation in various media forms, especially video games.

1.5. Definition of Key Terms

Disability: “The disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organization which takes little or no account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities.” (Shakespeare 2006).

Social model of disability: A theoretical model that believes in the idea that disability is a mere social construct formed by able society to make a division between those with fully functioning bodies and those with physical impairment, excluding the latter from full participation and creating an environment that oppresses and discriminates against people with disabilities. (Shakespeare 2006)

Representation: The description or portrayal of someone or something in a particular way or as being of a certain nature.

In-game narrative: “The narrative in games consists of the plot, sounds, music, atmosphere, dialogues, player choices and, of course, gameplay. It creates the overall impression of a game and allows the player to feel like part of a story.” (Stargame 2018)

Borderlands 3: “The return of the original looter shooter, packing bazillions of guns and an all new mayhem-fueled adventure!” (Gearbox 2020)

Eventually though, Troy was overcome with greed and started to think about the possibilities of outshining his sister and becoming recognized as his own person instead of simply an extension of Tyreen.

4.1.1.8 Shiv

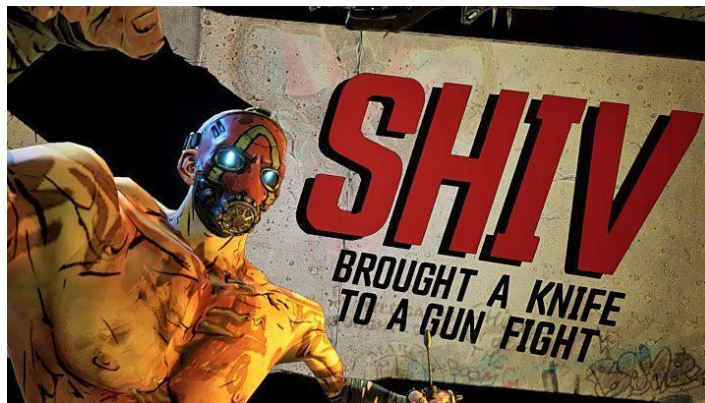


Figure 11. Shiv's introduction card

Shiv is the first boss enemy that Zane encounters at the beginning of the story. He is the COV follower that captured Claptrap and demanded to fight Zane if he wants to save the robot before Shiv and his band of psychos can disassemble him. Shiv proclaims himself to be the 'Holy Influencer' of the COV, as he was able to amass a large number of followers for the cult in a very short time.

Shiv is classified as one of the human mutant enemies, specifically a Badass Psycho. They are different from normal Psychos in that they are taller and larger from the usual mob of enemies, wielding big buzzaxes or clubs made of bones. Shiv is unique in that he wears a red Psycho mask, and he suffers from physical deformity from genetic mutations that is seen in the form of his shriveled left arm. It is left unexplained on how the genetic mutation came to be, but it is presumed to be similar

to the other Psychos in that it was a side effect from the Eridium radiation dotting the planet of Pandora popping up from the multiple attempts to open Vaults in the area.



Figure 12. Shiv's full body appearance

Shiv's depiction in the game portrays his genetic mutation as a disadvantage. During the boss fight, he is seen to be limping and would often lose his balance after swinging his cleaver to attack the player because of his different sized limbs. He also wields a screwdriver in his shriveled arm, but it proves to be useless when he attempts to attack with it because he could not reach through the distance. Instead, Shiv falls over because of the action, serving as body humor that makes fun of the negatives of having disproportionate limbs, placing emphasis on the fact that physical deformity limits a person's agility and movement.

4.1.1.9 Pretty Boy

Pretty Boy is the main villain of the DLC campaign 'Moxxi's Heist of the Handsome Jackpot', who tried to regain control of The Handsome Casino after it

was left for ruin once Handsome Jack died. He has been extorting people that are imprisoned in the casino after the lockdown and hunting down Timothy for his Winning Hand, a prosthetic hand that is grafted onto Timothy that would allow Pretty Boy access to the VIP Tower, which would also allow him full access to the casino.

Pretty Boy is a man afflicted with dwarfism, though it was unknown under whether he was physically deformed from birth, or an accident occurred and caused a genetic mutation to his body. There is little known about Pretty Boy's background prior to working in the casino. Before the casino went into lockdown, Handsome Jack forced him to work as a court jester in the VIP Tower whenever he visits the casino because Jack thought that Pretty Boy's face looked amusing.



Figure 13. Pretty Boy's full-body appearance

genetically mutated and have a condition called gigantism, where the body grows excessively and they appear to be larger than most people in the Borderlands. Other than their large bodies, goliaths also possess malformed heads where the skull is not protected by any skin and the lower jaw is completely absent. If the helmet is shot off, the goliath becomes enraged and it causes the skull to burst upwards, along with the spine that conjoins with the goliath's torso. Other than a change in appearance, it is noted that the goliaths also behave differently when they are enraged. A normal goliath speaks in a sluggish tone, putting emphasis on each syllable, while an enraged goliath would become harsher in tone and is able to form complex sentences unlike when they were calm. Goliaths are also part of the COV, and majority of the goliaths that Zane meets in his adventures are cultists with the exception of Agent Dee who is allied with the protagonists.

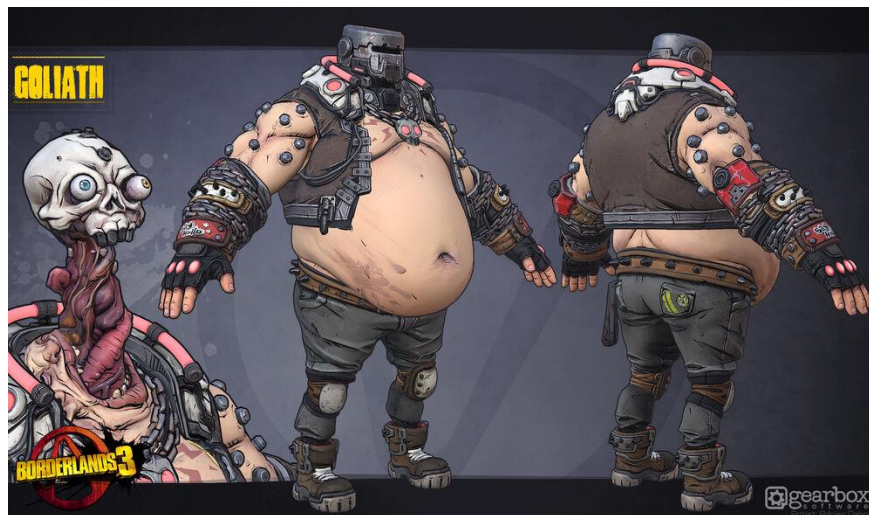


Figure 14. Goliaths' official concept art

While the term 'goliath' itself is not discriminative towards giant people, it is used to separate them from able-bodied enemies and categorizing them as a different subclass entirely, which shows a phenomenon of 'othering' giants from

the rest of society. There is also no significant difference between normal goliaths and significant goliaths that Zane meets in boss stages, as they are simple reskins and recolors from the typical goliath found across the universe, making the bosses unimpressible and easy to forget as they blend in with their normal counterparts.



Figure 15. *Left*, The Warden is essentially a normal goliath with a blue color palette; *right*, Billy the Anointed is a recolored version of a normal goliath with purple skin and a yellow skull

Gigantism is a rare physical condition that is not commonly found in society, both in real life and in *Borderlands 3*. According to the Barrow Neurological Institute, there has only been 100 reported cases of gigantism in the United States (Little, 2021). The latest media coverage of a giant was seen in the late 20th century featuring André René Roussimoff, nicknamed André the Giant who was a professional wrestler and an actor in *The Princess Bride*. Due to its rarity, able people find it very unusual when they come across giants and would often find them unnerving due to the sheer size of their body. This is reflected in *Borderlands 3* during the mission ‘Going Rogue’ on Eden-6. Zane gets to meet Agent Double Dee, one of the Rogues that works for Clay who is currently undercover as a COV cultist to obtain information on enemy movements. Originally, Dee’s appearance is the

same as goliaths, but in order to appear attractive and charm the cultists, he had to disguise himself as a slim woman with an able body. This implies that gigantism is not considered beautiful according to the beauty standards in Eden-6, showing their preference for able bodies and prosthetic users compared to disfigured bodies. Further solidifying this fact is that when Agent Dee tried talking with Zane, he should ‘slip into something more comfortable’ and used his disguise before properly conversing, meaning that he is aware most people find giants unnerving to interact with.



Figure 16. Left, Agent Dee’s original body with gigantism; right, Agent Dee’s disguise to blend in with the COV

4.1.1.11 Tinks

The designation of tinks is used to refer to mutant human enemies that have unusually small bodies, affected by genetic mutations from Eridium radiation that stunts their growth and causes dwarfism. Tinks is a shortened form of the word ‘tinkerers’, which refers to their occupation as the gadget maker and technical repairmen of the COV. Unlike the previous dwarf people in Borderlands 2, they are much more intelligent and have higher understanding on machineries, enabling

them to make autonomous sentries and turrets from scrap metal as weapons to be utilized by the COV. Their increased intelligence is shown in their appearance, having large heads disproportionate to the rest of their bodies and a wider cranium that implies their brains are larger in size compared to normal bandits.



Figure 17. Tinks' official concept art

Another version of tinks are seen in the form of NOGs, which are dwarf people employed by Maliwan as support for their troopers. They are distinct from their tink counterparts as they wear a large Maliwan helmet with a uniform, and they use technologically advanced equipment in combat, such as drones to attack their enemies or create shields for their allies. During the side mission *Technical NOGOut* in Promethea, Quinn reveals that the helmets worn by the NOGs are virtual reality visors used to deceive them into thinking that they are simply playing a video game and that they are unaware of their situation where they fight in real combat.



Figure 18. NOGs' full body appearance

Tinks and NOGs are highly discriminated and treated unfairly compared to other disabled bodies. Similar to goliaths, 'tink' and 'NOG' are not derogatory terms on their own, but their function of creating a division from normal enemy groups 'others' dwarves from the rest of society as well. In the COV itself, other cultists would use derogatory language and terms to refer to the tinks. Tyreen Calypso, one of the COV leaders, refers to the tinks as 'popcorn shrimp', likening them to a type of food that is similar to the dwarves in size. "... Ugh, I'm so hungryyy! I guess I'll...I dunno', leech a pile of tinks? They're like popcorn shrimp, but more...screamy." (Cold as the Grave)

NOGs are also used for entertainment and free labor in various societies scattered across the universe along with experiencing verbal abuse, among other things. During the side-quest *Technical NOGout* in *Promethea*, Zane meets Quinn, a scientist that was running experiments on a new grenade modification that would allow the resistance to hack the mind of NOGs, dwarf people with enlarged heads that are employed by Maliwan with large helmets and high-tech equipment used for

combat. Initially, Quinn says that he captured a few of them to be used as test subjects for the grenade, but when Zane returns to Quinn’s lab, the scientist accidentally reveals that he had been setting up a betting pool and utilizing the NOGs for illegal ring fighting. He calls his test subjects as NOGadors, designating them different names based on the different elements they were assigned during the past experiment: “... Listen, I CERTAINLY haven’t been pit-fighting reprogrammed NOGs for the locals to bet on, heh...Certainly not.” (Technical NOGout)

From Quinn’s speech transcript, it can be inferred that the local citizens of Promethea view NOGs, or dwarf people, simply as objects to entertain them. While one can argue that the Prometheans dislike all Maliwan troops and views this as revenge against the corporation for ravaging their planet, the NOGs physical appearance also plays a part as dwarf people have already faced discrimination in other regions in Borderlands. Quinn, even after being found out by Zane, still insists on working on further modifications of the NOGs and reopening his fighting ring despite accidentally murdering two of his NOGadors from his experiments: “... As for me, I’ll be continuing my NOG reprogramming efforts. The locals need SOMETHING to bet on, after all! [awkward laugh]” (Technical NOGOut)

Tinks are also held in captivity and used both as entertainers and free labor. Near the fairgrounds of Carnivora, there exists a location named ‘La Cage O’ Tinks’, where a large amount of tinks are imprisoned in cages, presumably to be used in Pain and Terror’s annual slaughter events held in the Carnivora, and the

large vehicle that they use to host the more entertaining acts which has the same name. Then, inside of the Guts of Carnivora, specifically in the Gutworks area, tinks are forced into labor as they work relentlessly to keep the vehicle running by continuously performing maintenance on the gigantic engine that keeps the Carnivora running.



Figure 19. La Cage O' Tinks, a settlement with small nooks and crannies filled with cages as living spaces for the tinks that were imprisoned by Pain and Terror

This mirrors the long history of dwarves being used as entertainment for people to spectate and laugh at. As discussed in Pretty Boy's analysis, dwarves are often used as court jesters by nobles. In the early 19th century, they were also bought by circuses and fairs as actual literal property and entertainers simply because they exist as 'adorable things' because of their peculiarly tiny bodies (The Guardian, 2019). Dwarves were also forced to breed together in order to produce more entertainers for the circus, thus solidifying the fact that fetishization of dwarfs has been prevalent in American culture for a very long time. Even in modern society, the objectification of dwarves still exists and they are used to provide entertainment for the able society. The Micro Wrestling Federation was founded in

2000 by Jack Hillegass, an able person, and they feature a cast of professional wrestlers under ‘five feet tall’. Micro Wrestling itself was created with good intentions, giving an opportunity for dwarves that find it difficult to get employed in the United States and fulfill their dreams of being athletes, which is impossible under normal circumstances. But it does not erase the fact that Micro Wrestling attracts large audiences not because of the performance, but because of the small bodies of the performers that make them entertaining to watch. In an interview with Cara Reedy, Hillegass claims that he is not exploiting the dwarf people for entertainment. He states that it is ‘impossible to exploit someone who loves what they are doing’ (The Guardian, 2019).

Based on the character analysis above, there are two major differences in how physical disability is portrayed in *Borderlands 3*:

1. Physically disabled characters allied with the protagonist (Zane Flynt) are portrayed in a way that humanizes them and makes them appear relatable for the players, meanwhile disabled characters that are categorized as enemies are discriminated against and receives unfair treatment compared to protagonists.
2. Physically disabled characters with prosthetics tend to be portrayed in a way that shows them as superior, strong, and humanized compared to characters that are identified with physical deformities.

With the two points above, we can conclude that majority of protagonists with physical impairment wear prosthetics and represents physical disability in a

way that sees them as equal, sometimes even superior, to able society, while majority of antagonists with physical impairment in the form of deformity and disfigurement are given unequal treatment that often dehumanizes and objectifies them.

4.1.2 Borderlands' Societal Views on Physical Disability

This section elaborates on how physical disability is portrayed outside of notable characters (playable and non-playable) in the Borderlands 3 universe, meaning it focuses on how different cultures and societies spread across the planetary system may have different opinions and treatment towards physically disabled bodies, with the intention of identifying any discriminative acts that may appear after comparing to the social model of disability. According to the model, a person, culture, or society is considered discriminatory if an action, law, or a set of norms hinders a disabled person's capability to fully participate in society (Shakespeare 2004). For example, the lack of accessibility for people with motoric issues in public spaces and facilities is considered discriminatory because it creates a physical barrier that prevents them from doing the same activities as the able society (PWDAustralia 2019). An equivalent act that interferes with disabled individuals and creates inequality between the abled and disabled in Borderlands 3 would then be considered discriminatory, as well as the usage of derogatory terms against disabled bodies.

Results find that ideologically, majority of societies in Borderlands 3 has the opinion that prosthetics and cybernetics are superior compared to a fully organic

human body. Prosthetics are revered in *Borderlands* because of two reasons, functionality and aesthetics. Cyberpunk media often depicts prosthetics as more than tools to replace an amputated limb, they have the ability to enhance a person's physical prowess through futuristic technological advancements (Pitts [2003] 2015, 151), if the individual can afford modifications for the artificial limb. The use of prosthetics was only introduced in *Borderlands 2* with disabled characters such as Sir Hammerlock, Gaige, Captain Scarlet, and Helena Pierce. At the time, prosthetics were only used as limb replacements, and technology in Pandora has yet to achieve the capability to significantly boost a person's combat abilities. Although, owning a prosthetic is considered as an achievement in Pandora, as it shows a person's resilience and their aptitude in surviving the various dangers in the planet, as mentioned in Sir Hammerlock's analysis. Prosthetic modifications only started making an appearance in *Tales from the Borderlands* with the introduction of Rhys Strongfork, who has the ability to access the ECHOnet and hack into electronic devices through his right arm, which is connected to his right eye and his cybernetic implants.

In some regions, prosthetics is also recognized as an object of aesthetic and considered as the beauty standard compared to fully organic bodies, such as the region where Amber was born in. She mentioned that body modifications, including the use of bionic limbs, is a widespread fashion trend that encourages people to switch from organic bodies to a cyborg body.

In relation to the superiority of prosthetics, there are many cases where a person's physical impairment is self-inflicted, and not caused from genetic mutations or a horrible accident. For example, Rhys first obtained his cybernetics when he was still a Hyperion employee and volunteered for an experimental surgery that offers high-tech prosthetics along with a set of cyberware that can be utilized for various functions. Ember's amputation was also voluntary because she chose to follow the beauty standard set by her society, which views bionic appendages as objects of beauty. Indirectly, populations in the Borderlands universe began adopting a more reckless lifestyle that makes them highly dependent on prosthetics. Sir Hammerlock lost his arm and his leg because he loved hunting, and Timothy Lawrence readily sacrificed his grafted hand to prevent The Handsome Jackpot from exploding because prosthetics are very accessible in Borderlands and it would be easy to find a replacement for his lost hand.

Self-inflicted impairment is a common theme found in cyberpunk media and post-apocalyptic settings, with most of them being connected to the need of constantly switching out prostheses or adding new bionic limbs in order to keep up with the latest technology and increase survivability in a dying world. Cyberpunk writers view the body as an 'accident' and they are fascinated by the ideas of body enhancement, showing the gradual process of how the human body has become less organic and more similar to machines with the constant addition of bionic limbs in the characters (McCarron 1995, 262). Often seen in these narratives is that people slowly become addicted to owning body modifications for functional and/or aesthetic purposes, going as far as to endanger themselves through illegal, black-

market surgeries in order to obtain prosthesis for a cheaper price. While self-inflicted impairment in *Borderlands 3* has yet to reach levels where the inhabitants can get addicted to prosthesis surgeries, it may happen in the future if cybernetic body modifications are made to be more accessible for a larger population across the in-game universe.

Further gameplay revealed that majority of societies in *Borderlands 3* is highly judgmental towards physically disabled bodies that suffer from deformity and disfigurement, especially bodies that are afflicted with gigantism and dwarfism. As established in the analysis of goliaths and tinks, they are seen as unusual body shapes and people would react differently based on the type of disfigurement. There's a tendency of able civilians being afraid of goliaths because of their towering body size and their violent outbreaks. Goliaths are also viewed as unnatural with their deformed heads that is very small compared to their giant bodies, and generally people are anxious about interacting with goliaths, even when they have a friendly disposition pre-*rage*. Tinks and NOGs have more difficult living conditions, because not only are they ridiculed in most societies in *Borderlands*, they are also seen as a source of entertainment for people to point and laugh at, as illustrated in Quinn's illegal NOG fighting ring and *Pain and Terror's* slaughter cages. They are also used and deceived for free labor, which was seen in the *Guts of Carnivora* where they are used for their intelligence in machinery for engine upkeep, presumably with no payment, and when Maliwan lied to the NOGs and told them to wear virtual reality visors that convinces them that the combat they are experiencing is only a video game. Other than the oppression of physically

deformed individuals, they are also victims of verbal abuse perpetrated by various factions and societies across the universe. Even inside of the COV, they are considered as fodder for Tyreen and test subjects for Troy to test out his anointing abilities. Goliaths and tinks are also excluded from able, civilized forms of society because their identity is synonymous to the COV cultists, as majority of goliaths and tinks are affiliated with the COV. The relation causes people to antagonize and exile them from participating in normal society in most locations. For example, Sanctuary III is the spaceship and headquarter of the Crimson Raiders, and as Zane explores the ship there are no disfigured bodies to be seen on board. In Promethea, Atlas employees comprise of able-bodied soldiers, and none of them are afflicted with gigantism or dwarfism.

The ‘othering’ of disfigured bodies and fetishization of dwarves have been ingrained for centuries in American pop culture. La Cage O’ Tinks was a location specifically made to be a living space for tinks, imprisoning and isolating them from the rest of able society. This reflects the use of dwarves for entertainment and how they used to be segregated from living among able bodies during the early 20th century in the United States. Midget villages were built in various states, miniature cities where average-height people were able to tour around the residential area and witness how dwarves live their daily lives (The Guardian 2019). They were not able to live peacefully, as they are constantly being used as entertainment simply by being themselves, and the ‘performance’ created by the people that exploit these dwarves led to a lasting obsession for the size of dwarves in America. Although now, midget villages are dismissed as urban legends and most sites that were

believed to be locations of the cities have been torn down, leaving no evidence of the exploitation of dwarves. There was a neighborhood in New Jersey dubbed as Midgetville where the houses were scaled down in size that, according to local myths and word of mouth, used to be the living quarters of Alfred Ringling and his diminutive circus performers (Attrino 2016).

Based on the results above, it can be concluded that society in the Borderlands universe considers physically disabled bodies with prosthetics to be superior compared to disabled bodies without prosthetics, especially physically deformed bodies such as dwarves and giants. Prosthetics have an empowering image, while disfigured bodies are seen as weak because of their deformed limbs, creating the assumption that they are less able to do the same actions as an able body. These assumptions by able society creates a division of social classes among physically disabled people, with prosthetic users as the upper class and disfigured bodies as the lower class. Furthermore, these notions that separate heroes from villains and prosthetic users from disfigured bodies are caused by two things: the character theory that distinguishes between heroes and villains and the transformation of physically disabled body images which highlights prosthetics as a product of the future.

4.1.2.1 Character Theory in Narrative: Distinction between Hero and Villain

Findings revealed that in Borderlands 3, physically disabled characters are portrayed differently based on their role in the main narrative of the game. If the

character is a protagonist, they are represented positively in the narrative, treated equally with able characters and the player is given a chance to learn more about the character through various side quests and in-game collectibles scattered around the game. If the character is an antagonist, they are represented negatively in the narrative, facing verbal abuse and discriminatory attitude from other characters and the majority of society. They are also used for comedic purposes through body humor and derogatory terms used against them. Other than that, they are made to be indistinct between other disabled characters with repetitive character design and a lack of depth to their characterization.

Borderlands 3's decision in preferential portrayal may be related to the character theory which divides characters in traditional forms of media containing narratives based on their moral quality and power (Bergstrand & Jasper 2018, 230). While video games are considered as a modern form of storytelling, the narrative in Borderlands 3 still follows contemporary tropes where a story includes three character archetypes: heroes, villains, and victims. In this context, Borderlands 3 only employs two archetypes, which are heroes and villains.

Hero characters are identified by several basic traits, which are strength, benevolent intentions to protect others, possess a source of strength that includes physical power, intelligence, or other technical skills, and a source of goodness that are mostly unconnected to physical strength (Bergstrand & Jasper 2018). Taking these traits into consideration, Zane Flynt, the main character, is a hero because of his good intentions to prevent the Calypso twins from destroying the universe.

Although initially he accepted the request because of the money offered by the Crimson Raiders, his heroic intent as a savior of the planets shows his status as a hero. Additionally, friends and allies of the main hero character, or any individual harboring the same benevolent goals are also considered as heroes, such as Sir Hammerlock, Rhys Strongfork, etc. In a narrative, the purpose of heroes is to demonstrate moral goodness and instill hope that anything can be solved with enough willpower and determination. The power of characters comes from the emotional reaction of the audience—in this case, the player—to create resonance in the narrative (Lynch 1998). Therefore, in order to invoke positive emotions that are linked to hero characters, they must be presented in a way that makes them likeable and solidifies their role as a hero character. Physically disabled characters affiliated with Zane (and Zane himself) are portrayed to be strong characters and are allowed glimpses into their old life because their goal in the narrative is to empower the player and make them appear relatable, specifically players that are also physically disabled. By finding characters that they can feel a connection with, it invokes a sense of confidence and sends a positive message to be proud of their identity as a physically disabled individual.

On the other hand, villain characters are identified by several basic traits, such as malevolence, possessing strength enough to pose a threat to society, rarely self-sacrificing, and dangerous forces of nature that are incapable of reasoning (Bergstrand & Jasper 2018). The Calypso twins are considered as villains because of their greed, wanting to leech the powers from the Vault monsters scattered across several planets, which could destroy the universe in the process. Additionally, they

have the ability of Sirens, which is considered the strongest race in the Borderlands universe. As with allies of heroes, any character that is affiliated with the main villains are also considered as villains, such as all the COV cultists, the Warden, Shiv, etc. Villains are created to oppose the hero, and in extension, the ideology that the hero is fighting for. When players see a threat to the existing status quo in Borderlands 3, it evokes intense negative emotions such as hate and fear, later transforming the sense of anxiety and frustration into indignation and purpose, and fear into anger (Gamson 1992, 29). These feelings are then reinforced and are vent out on outgroups, which are the villain characters (Tajfel & Turner 1979). This is why physically disabled characters that are affiliated with the COV or categorized as enemies are mostly portrayed in a negative light and are treated unequally compared to disabled hero characters. Borderlands 3 is also known for its harsh language and humorous banter between the heroes and the villains as part of their interactions amongst the combat portion of the game, often there would be certain voicelines from hero characters that mocks and jeers at the villains, including physically disabled villains.

4.1.2.2 Transformation of Disabled Body Image: ‘Prosthetic Aesthetics’

In Borderlands 3, physically disabled characters using prosthetic limbs is given an empowering image that paints them as superior when compared to disabled characters with disfigured bodies and non-prosthetic users. They are even considered to be more powerful than fully organic, able bodies, and more beautiful in specific regions.

This representation may be affected by recent changes in public opinion regarding the body image of physically disabled individuals who possess prosthetics. With the hype surrounding Paralympic events and its participants that uses prosthetics to compete in the games, there's various discourse surrounding the cyborg bodies of these Paralympians caused by the media attention. Oscar Pistorius was one of the first Paralympic medalists from the 2012 London Paralympics that garnered positive coverage in news outlets and mass media because of his stellar performance during the competition. He was dubbed as the 'Blade Runner' by the media because of his identity as a double amputee using carbon fiber prosthetic limbs to replace his missing legs (Tamari 2017, 26). Through Pistorius' success, it generated a public opinion that sees prosthetics as an attractive object, one that seems promising in the future. The disabled body is considered as a 'new' phenomenon that opens the possibilities for organic bodies, and how it can be fused with non-human entities to achieve the futuristic cyborg bodies often seen in cyberpunk media. Post-World War I prostheses focuses more on functionality provided improvements for bodily functions and became the basis for imagination of future bodies. It became an element of the 'New Man' trope that emerged with the boom of techno-fetishism, shaping the appearance of modern prostheses in Western countries from human-like models to a non-human, more machine-like design with advanced biomechanics (Tamari 2017, 31). They are popularized as contemporary sports technology by the Paralympians, and the portrayal of these athletes in the media puts heavy emphasis on the prostheses that they are using rather than the individual itself. The Paralympic cyborgs are perceived as a variation

of the ‘becoming body’, which is an extended type of a human’s living body. It represents an ideal version of the future ultimate body that is superior in every aspect to organic human bodies so often seen in sci-fi and cyberpunk media. The empowering image of an ultimate body often exposes synthetic bodies to heroic narratives highlighting the ‘self-made man’, where an individual’s personhood is determined by their survivability and personal capabilities. Because prosthetics have garnered an image of strength, the public image of disabled bodies with cyborg-like limbs have also shifted from someone that is weak to a person that is stronger than normal humans.

There is also the aestheticized disabled body as a form of beauty outside of the enhanced functionality of prosthetics. The prosthetics of a disabled individual is central to their identity, as it extends bodily boundaries that are fluid based on the presence of said prosthetic, and it opens various possibilities for their sense of identity. (Tamari 2017, 34). The appearance of Aimee Mullins in fashion magazines and films redefined the way beauty is seen by the general public. She shows off various designs of her artificial limbs provided by fashion designers that were interested in including the disabled body in their artistic endeavors. Her image illustrates the possibility of having disabled bodies appear more often in fashion magazines, challenging the traditional beauty standards and promoting diversity in aesthetics, opening up the opportunity for a new type of beauty which includes bionic limbs. This proves that organic ‘humanness’ is no longer most essential for a person’s beauty (Tamari 2017, 35).

However, futuristic looking prostheses are recognized differently between functionality and for aesthetics usage. Non-human, techno prosthetics are viewed as an object that is more fashionable and more refined in the public eye compared to conventional cosmetic prosthetics that is made to resemble human limbs more than robotic limbs. This perception may be caused by the ‘uncanny valley theory’, first suggested by Masahiro Mori in the 1970s. Apparently, humans have a tendency to feel negatively towards appearances and movements that are similar to humans, but not precisely human either. The sensation of familiarity and acceptance increases when people encounter human-like machines, however when they notice subtle imperfections in their movements and act that separates machines from humans, it shifts the familiar feeling to revulsion/strangeness/the uncanny (Tamari 2017, 35). In order to remove the uncanny feeling, then it is important for prosthetics to deliberately appear as artificial, futuristic, and machine-like as possible.

This explains why prosthetics in *Borderlands 3* is made to look futuristic and very robotic, both to avoid causing the uncanny feeling in players while fitting in with the post-apocalyptic theme of the game. It feeds into the techno-fetishism of humans and confirms the future possibilities of prosthetics that allows for better physical enhancements and a larger variety of body modifications that allows for more freedom in expressing their identity as a human without being limited by the constraints of their organic forms. Hero characters are also given prosthetics to fit the heroic narrative and to provide an image that empowers prosthetic users, portraying them as bodies that are superior above the abled society.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Body Modifications: The Fundamentals of Cyborgism

As shown in the analysis, prosthesis is one of the central elements in cyberpunk and post-apocalyptic fiction, with *Borderlands 3* fitting into the latter genre. The fictional work and real-life media highlights how prosthesis used by physically disabled people gives the opportunity for the construction of cyborg bodies in the future, an entwined identity between machine-like and organic limbs that is superior to fully organic human bodies through ability-enhancing modifications provided by advanced technology, creating a link between disability and how cyborgism may be the solution to absolving the social barriers excluding disabled bodies by fitting into the norm of technofetishism as portrayed in cyberpunk media through becoming a cyborg body.

However, this thesis argues that cyborgism is not advantageous towards the effort of reconstructing the image of the disabled body. People who partake in technoscience experiments engaging in unconventional body modifications are not people that are conventionally identified as disabled according to social standards (Duarte & Park 2014, 260). In *Borderlands 3*, majority of characters that are using prosthetics are not conventionally disabled before their surgeries, such as Zane Flynt, Rhys Strongfork, and Ember. Zane and Rhys took cybernetic limbs for the sole reason of enhancing their already able bodies, while Ember replaced her organic limbs for the sake of beauty. Additionally, the enhancements offered by future prosthesis in cyborgism presents the issue that disability can be ‘repaired’ by replacing the impaired organ with a synthetic one. Disability is, more often than

not, an issue caused by oppression from society that is not related to a person's physical deficiency, making it an issue that is too intricate to be repaired by prosthetics, and the notion of fixing physical deficiencies deviating from what is considered an able body goes against the values of equal social inclusion (Duarte & Park 2014, 261).

Several issues are also brought up by viewing the disabled body as a form of contemporary cyborgs through the use of prosthetic limbs. Discussion surrounding prosthesis and impairment specifically focuses on its usage to 'normalize' the person to what is acceptable according to social standards without considering the cultural experiences of the disabled person (Reeve 2012, 94). Moreover, from a realistic viewpoint, disabled people are one of the many groups that are considered to be economically lacking in society, as illustrated by the low employment rate of disabled individuals in the United States. High quality prosthetics are not usually affordable, meaning that improvements on technology does not equal improvement on the quality of life for disabled people (Reeve 2012, 95). It reinforces existing social hierarchies based on the relative worth from the cause of a person's impairment (Deal 2003), hence people with impairments do not automatically earn the right to choose the type and quality of the cyborg body that they want/need because it is determined by the economic status of the disabled person, the hierarchy of impairment, and various social statuses tied to a person's identity (Reeve 2012, 95).

4.2.2 “Class of Deformities” among Physically Disabled People

The difference in representation for physically disabled bodies in *Borderlands 3* brings up another issue outside of misrepresentation in media. By humanizing prosthetic users and dehumanizing disfigured bodies, it creates the assumption that they are different despite both forms of disability being afflicted by physical deformities all the same. It also sends a negative message that separates the two into different social classes, with prosthetic users occupying a higher, more superior class compared to disfigured bodies. This stigma is problematic because it can propagate more discrimination towards disfigured bodies, which have faced exclusion from society and unequal treatment for centuries. 80% of people with dwarfism admit that they have faced verbal abuse (Shakespeare, 2010), and only 17.9% of disabled people are employed in the United States based on a survey conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2020.

As mentioned in the previous section, positive discussion and media attention surrounding disabled bodies focused solely on the image of prosthetics as a futuristic product that symbolizes the possibility for a superior human body that combines organic entities with non-organic/machine-like limbs. As illustrated by the sudden buzz surrounding Oscar Pistorius after the London Paralympics, media narrative featuring the athlete portrayed him as a body that is always ‘under construction’, mimicking cyberpunk ideas that believes in the ultimate cyborg body with open systems and mixed connections with other identities (Tamari 2017, 31).

On the other hand, media depiction of disfigured bodies often portrays them as a grotesque illness that needs to be removed in order to return a sense of normalcy for the ‘patient’. News coverage on disfigurement typically focus on very extreme and rare forms of disfigurement that is hardly ever seen in other regions or countries, emphasizing on how grotesque the impact of the illness can be by documenting highly graphic footage of the disfigurement and the operation process to treat the disfigurement (Wardle et al. 2009, 126). It is similar to how horror games portray disfigured bodies, treating them as horrifying objects that are abnormal in the eyes of able society. Disfigurement is also portrayed as a condition to be pitied at instead of a condition that people should empathize with. 63% of analyzed news stories reporting on disfigurement would feature children with a patronizing and condescending narrative that does not allow the child to speak on their own experiences (Wardle et al. 2009, 126-127). The children are used to manipulate the emotions of the audience, and the reports often describe the disfigurement as a disadvantage that subtracts from a person’s beauty, implying that disfigured bodies do not fit into the beauty standards of society. *Borderlands 3* worsens the problem of inferiority of disfigured bodies with the discrimination and derogatory jokes apparent in the portrayal of disfigurement in the game when compared to the portrayal of prostheses users. It confirms the assumption made by the public, caused by mass media and other forms of media, that among physically disabled people, bodies with prosthetics are more superior compared to disfigured bodies, when in reality they are both equal in that they were both excluded from society because of their physical impairments.

4.2.3 Hypocritical Developer Opinion on Physical Disability

After the release of *Borderlands 3*, the social media team of Gearbox made a multitude of posts on its official accounts in Twitter, Instagram, and Steam Page to promote the video game and attract the attention of the public, as well as to inform its fans and players about any new changes made to the game or addition of new content. While the game itself humanizes disabled bodies in its narrative and attempts to bring positive attention about it, majority of the game's social media posts highlights able characters and it rarely ever shows pictures of disabled characters, with the exception of Zane Flynt as a main character and Sir Hammerlock because of his status as a central character in 'Guns, Love & Tentacles'. In the case of Sir Hammerlock, he is never mentioned in social media posts outside of promoting his DLC content from *Borderlands 2* and *Borderlands 3*. Additionally, the developers are highlighting his identity as a queer man more than his identity as a disabled individual, as he is often shown alongside Wainwright Jakobs as a couple to show the game's support of the LGBTQIA+ community. If a disabled character is ever showcased in *Borderlands*' social media, they are always portrayed ridiculously and used for comedic purposes. On November 30 2021, the *Borderlands* official Twitter posted a GIF of Rhys Strongfork electrocuting himself from a faulty connection with his neural port with the caption: 'The things we do for a good #CyberMonday deal...' (*Borderlands* 2021), referring to the hilarious stories of people in the United States desperate to get online deals during the Cyber Monday national holiday. The GIF shows Rhys' face contorted into an expression of pain and momentary confusion because of his reckless

decision, with the intention of amusing the audience because of Rhys' comical expression and gestures. Replies to the tweet show that most of the audience find the GIF hilarious and made comments relating to the arguably 'idiotic' action Rhys took.



Figure 20. Replies to Borderlands' official Twitter post containing the Rhys Strongfork GIF. Data from @Borderlands, Twitter. 2021.
<https://twitter.com/Borderlands/status/1465380089886085147>.

During Borderlands 3's second anniversary, September 31 2021, the official Twitter posted a video of COV cultists dancing with a caption announcing in-game events that will be held to celebrate the special occasion: 'It's #Borderlands3's second anniversary and we've got not one, but TWO simultaneous 48-hour events to celebrate! 1) Loot Monster Mayhem 2) Freebie's @ Maurice's Black Market. Learn more: 2kgam.es/BL3-2Years'. In the video, there are anointed and normal psycho enemies dancing accompanied with two tinks, one is a normal tink while the other is an anointed tink. The anointed tink is dressed more festively than the normal one, wearing glowing demon horns on top of his head with a provocative dance move, positioned at the front besides a normal psycho. This was probably done with the purpose of bringing the audience's attention to the anointed tink to witness its comedic movements, again showing how disabled bodies are used for

entertainment to promote content. All of the replies to the anniversary tweet congratulate the game for the special occasion, with no one commenting on the oddity of the tink. There can be two possibilities to the neutral response: One is that the players did not notice the dancing tink and thought the anniversary announcement was more important, and another is that followers of the Borderlands Twitter are already desensitized towards the objectification of disabled bodies, viewing it as something that is natural to be done by the social media account without seeing how problematic the action may be.

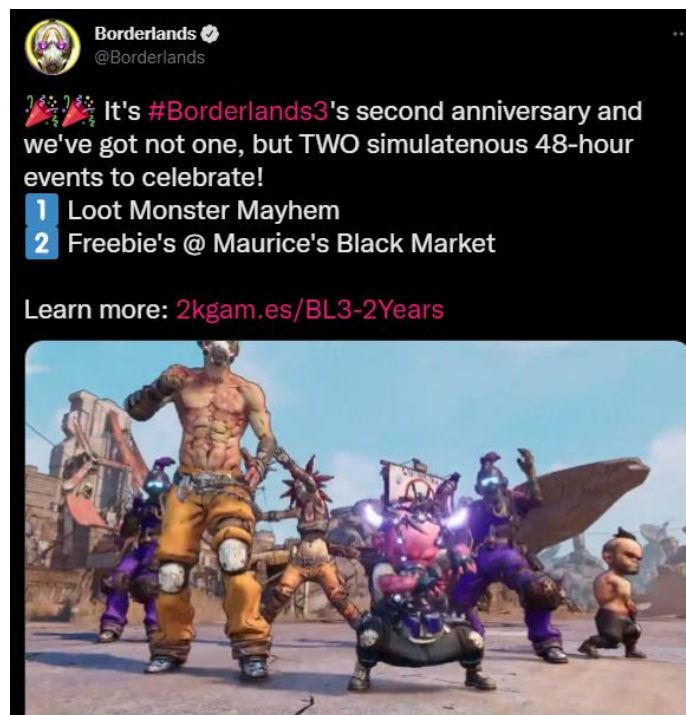


Figure 21. Borderlands’ official Twitter post celebrating the game’s second anniversary, with a video of dancing cultists attached. Data from @Borderlands, Twitter. 2021.

<https://twitter.com/Borderlands/status/1437445979851001858?s=20&t=tcmRUFi oIwjqtcpnqF3sFA>

It is also worth noting that none of the Borderlands Twitter followers identify themselves as physically disabled when leaving a reply, either because only

a small percentage of physically disabled people play the game, or because they are afraid to identify themselves as one due to Borderlands' long history of ableism behavior. This illustrates how Gearbox Software is hypocritical regarding their opinion towards physically disabled bodies in Borderlands 3, as it attempts to show positive images of physical disability through the game, but then demeans it and discriminates against disabled characters publicly in social media, sending a mixed message about their opinion regarding physical disability.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Physically disabled characters in *Borderlands 3* that are involved with the main narrative and labeled as protagonists are represented in a way that does not objectify them as an undesirable condition, humanizing them through various aspects that shows being disabled is not necessarily a negative identity. However, the game still makes a distinction between able and disabled bodies, particularly regarding the necessity of prosthesis for certain characters functioning to help with basic physical movements and not intended for body enhancements or modifications. If physical impairment truly is not seen as a problem in *Borderlands 3*, then physically impaired characters should not be needing prosthetics to integrate with able society. Nevertheless, the idea that prosthetics are seen as a symbol of strength and a ‘future body’ through prosthetic-wearing characters helps in erasing negative stigma surrounding the functionality and appearance of mechanical prosthetics that are worn by physically disabled individuals.

On the other hand, the game still perpetuates ableism language and attitude towards characters with physical disfigurement by employing existing harmful stereotypes of disfigured bodies for comedic and entertainment purposes, passing off derogative slang and discriminatory attitude as part of its ‘quirky humor’. It also illustrates how physical disfigurement is still excluded from majority of society and not as readily accepted by the public when compared to prosthetic users because of their ‘abnormal’ appearance. Unequal representation of different forms of physically disabled bodies in *Borderlands 3* may create a new problem instead of

solving an existing one, causing social inequality between prosthetic users and disfigured bodies without prosthetic. It encourages technofetishism in society and further affirming the widespread assumption that disfigured bodies are inferior in every aspect when compared to prosthetic users that are considered as prototypes for future cyborg bodies.

Suggestion for future researches regarding physical disability representation in video games should take into consideration the usage of Shakespeare's newer theoretical framework for the application of the social model of disability for media analysis in order to deeply examine the individual experiences of disabled characters as portrayed by the media and whether they reinforce or absolve the social barriers that were constructed by able society to oppress and exclude impaired people outside of a collective whole. The relation between cyborg bodies and disability is also an interesting connection that can be further explored through its portrayal in cyberpunk media and decide whether the future of body enhancements contribute to the inclusion of disabled bodies in able society.

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