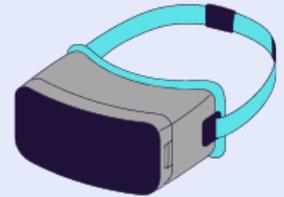
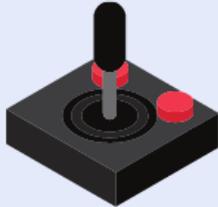
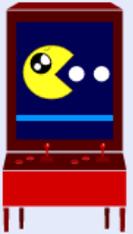


# Nostalgia in video games

Pixels from the past, projections of ourselves



ND Bowman @bowmanspartan  
Syracuse University, USA



Syracuse University  
Newhouse School of  
Public Communications

Newhouse Interaction Lab @ SU  
#NHixlab

## Defining a Medium

According to the **Entertainment Software Association 2023 data (US players)**:

- Average age? 32 years old (62% over the age of 18)
- Average time? 12.8 hours weekly
- 53% self-report as male
- 76% are played **intergenerationally**



# Defining a Medium

1961



1977



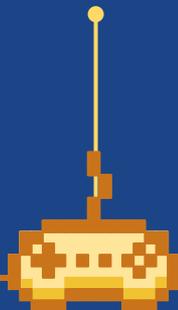
Me  
(41)

1983



Average  
gamer (33)

1990



1994



Most of my  
students  
(18-22)

Which one was  
your console?





# Defining a Medium



As the medium matures, so does interest in “original” content, as a common entertainment industry technique to **revive the familiar**.





## Defining a Medium



As the medium matures, so does interest in “original” content, as a common entertainment industry technique to **revive the familiar**.





# Defining a Medium



As the medium matures, so does interest in “original” content, as a common entertainment industry technique to **revive the familiar**.



Mat Piscatella

@MatPiscatella

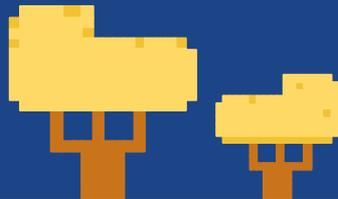
US NPD HW - The NES Classic was June 2018's highest unit-selling hardware platform, while the PlayStation 4 led the market in dollar sales. This is the first time a Nintendo Entertainment System console has led in monthly unit sales since NPD tracking began in 1995.

4:33 PM · Aug 1, 2018



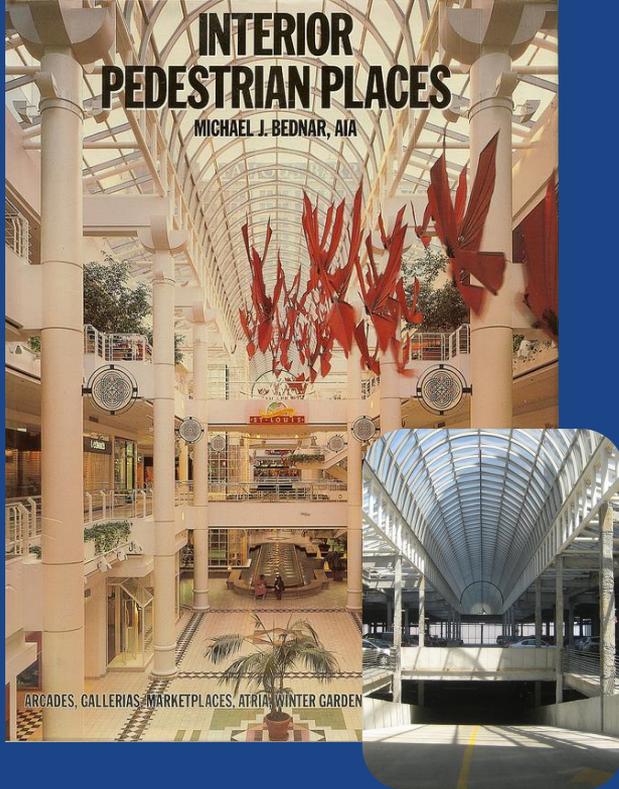


# Nostalgia, Defined





# Nostalgia, Defined



Nostalgia refers to those “predominantly **positive, social, and past-oriented** emotion” (Sedikides et al., 2015, p. 198).

Some use the word **bittersweet** to discuss a longing for a bygone past, as people “wallow in their memories” (Wulf et al., 2018, p. 61).





## Nostalgia, Defined



Nostalgia can be triggered through sensory experiences. **Which ones are you thinking about, below?**





# Nostalgia, Defined



Nostalgia is a pancultural phenomenon and **is highly social in nature.**

- Our memories tend to involve important people from our past.
- Recalling those people has short-term effects on our psychological well-being (i.e., feeling social support, feeling close to others, etc.)

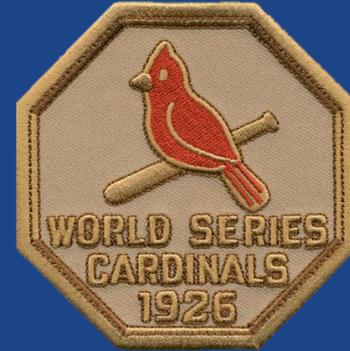


# Nostalgia, Defined



## Personal Nostalgia

Tied to personal and self-relevant (idealized) past experiences.



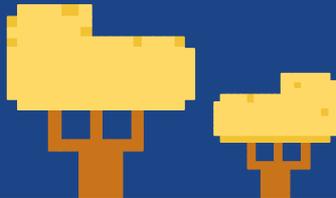
## Historical Nostalgia

Tied to idealizations beyond experience (e.g., past eras).





# Games and Nostalgia

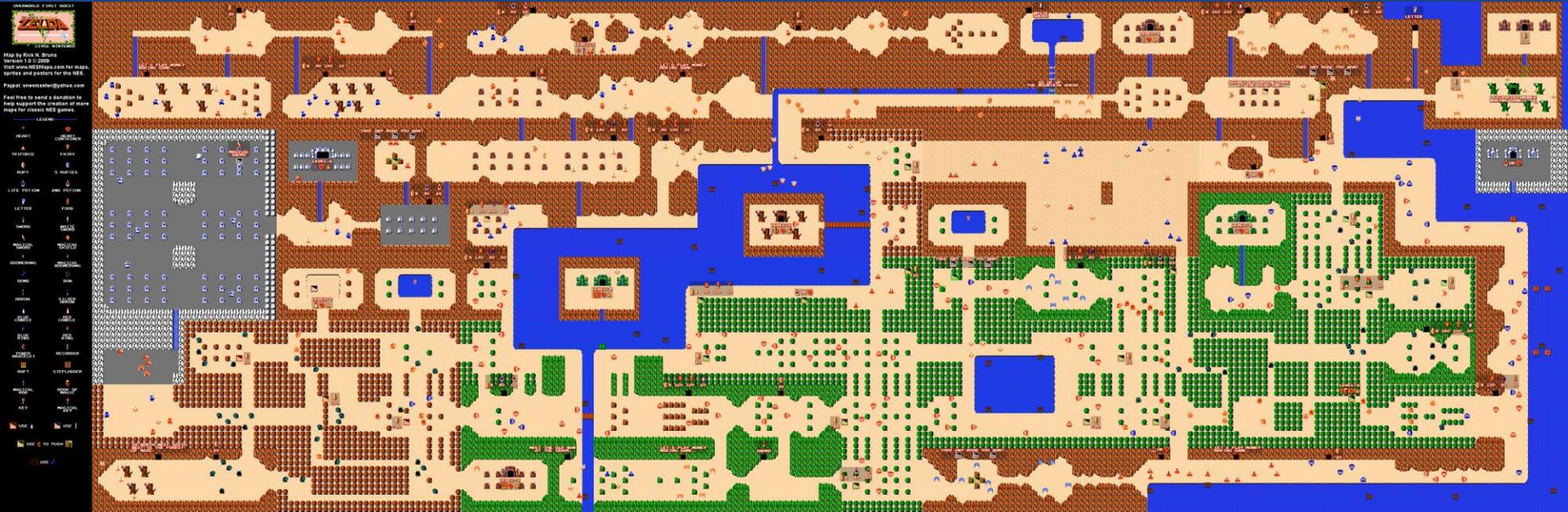




# Gaming Nostalgia



Gaming nostalgia could be unique insofar as players can return to personally relevant (and unchanged?) places from their past.





# Gaming Nostalgia



Games have a unique touch, look, and sound to them.



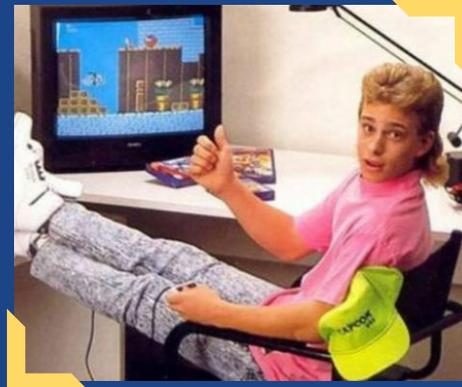


# Gaming Nostalgia



## Personal Nostalgia

“My dad died when I was 10 so [playing Mario Kart with him] is one of my best memories of him.”



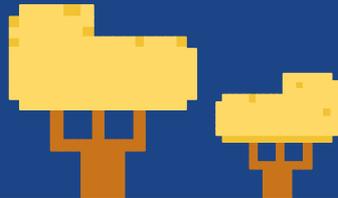
## Historical Nostalgia

“[My father] was the basic teen ... that would go to the arcade with his buddies for hours playing games.”





# Early Findings



# Early Findings

Past-oriented questions

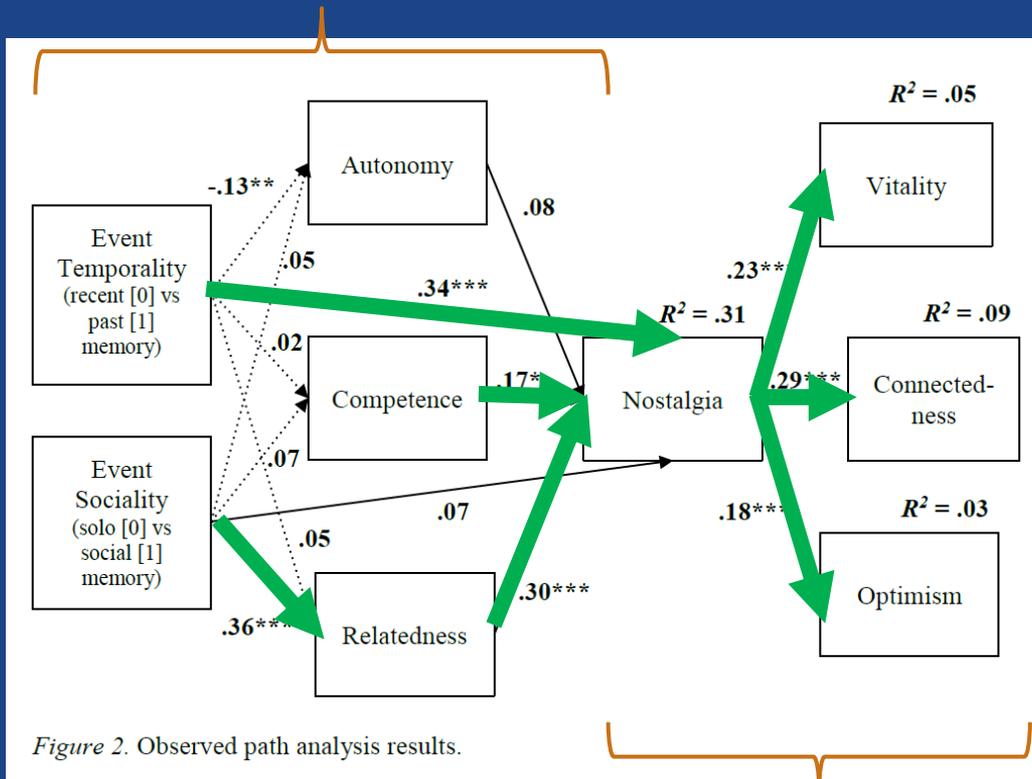


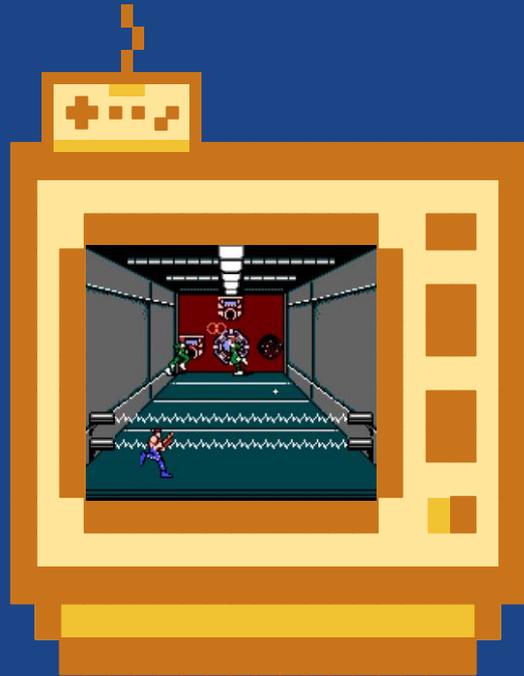
Figure 2. Observed path analysis results.

Wulf et al. (2020)

Present-oriented questions



## Early Findings



Key patterns of qualitative themes show that when recalling nostalgic gaming experiences (Wulf et al., 2020) :

- Enjoyment was mentioned 40% (cf. 16% for recent)
- Challenge mentioned 35% (cf. 5% for recent)
- Childhood was mentioned 28% (cf. 15% for recent)



## Early Findings



Looking deeper into **WoW Classic**, players discussed several themes (Robinson & Bowman, 2022)

- Nostalgia: “Wanting to finish what I started years ago”
- Sense of Place: “I just find something so familiar in it.”
- Social Presence: “The sense of community ... I’ve met a lot of really awesome people (including my boyfriend)”



# Early Findings



**Historical Nostalgia**

“What is this thing?”



**Personal Nostalgia**

“Ah. This thing.”



## Early Findings



Super Mario Bros.

Nostalgia didn't vary by controller, but the game was a high trigger of nostalgia and had (probably) been played on so many controllers.



Double Dragon II

Greater potential for historical nostalgia given that the game is **lesser known** and has a **unique control scheme**.



Once you get the hang of it, you'll be able to fight enemies from both the left and right side—without having to waste time turning around—just like a real martial arts master!

## BASIC MOVES

**TO MOVE**—Press the CONTROL PAD ARROWS RIGHT, LEFT, UP or DOWN. Or to move diagonally, press *in between* the ARROWS.

**TO JUMP**—Press the A BUTTON and B BUTTON simultaneously.

**TO PAUSE**—Press the START BUTTON.

**TO RESTART**—Press the START BUTTON again.

## THROWING PUNCHES

**TO PUNCH**—Press the A or B ATTACK BUTTON in the *same direction* you're facing.

- If you're facing left, press the B Button to punch.
- If you're facing right, press the A Button to punch.



## Early Findings

**Table 1.** Regression weights from hypothesized model test

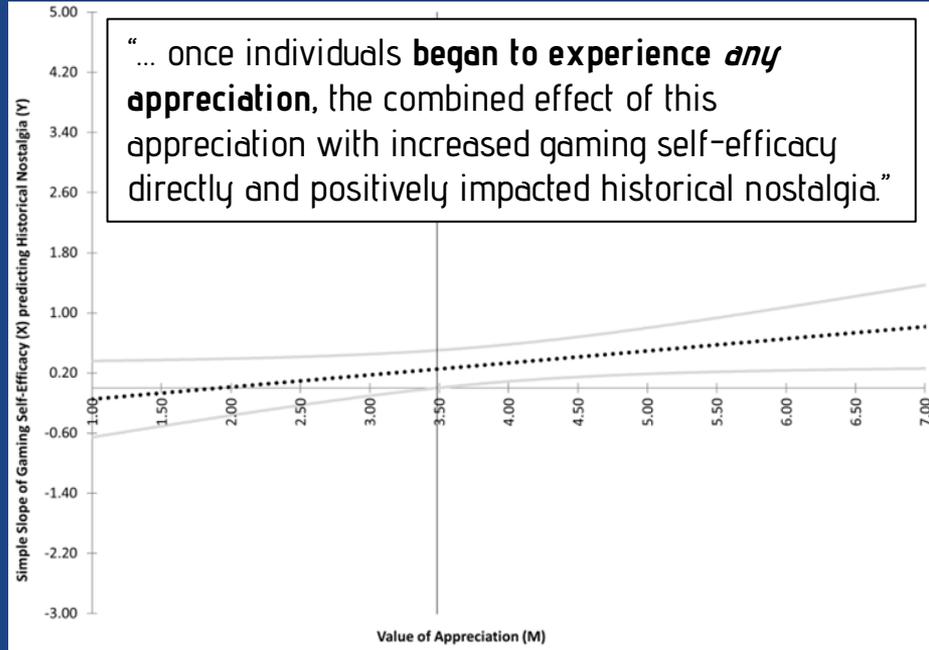
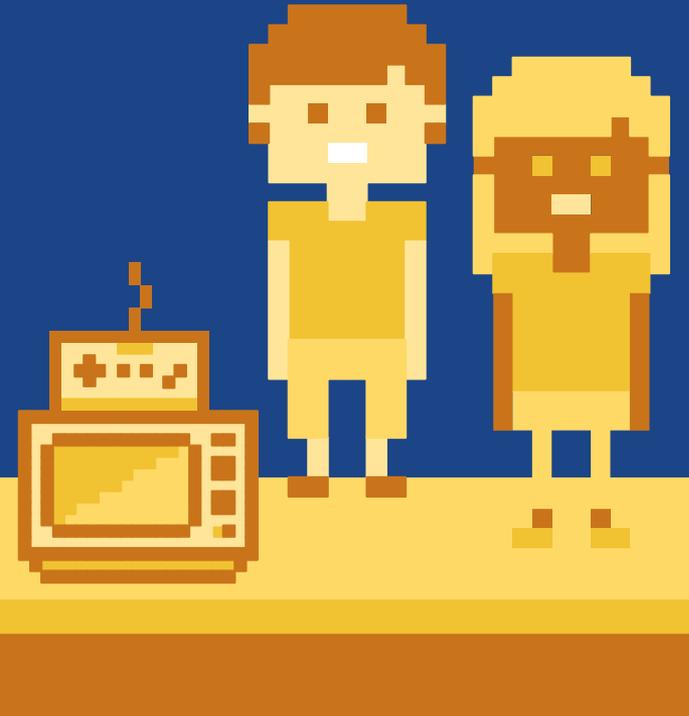
	Perceived Naturalness (m)			Historical Nostalgia (y)		
	$\beta$	sig.	95% CI	$\beta$	sig.	95% CI
Controller Assignment (x)	.26	.11	-.14, 1.3	.08	.69	-.47, .71
Perceived Naturalness (m)	-	-	-	-.14	.24	-.26, .07
Gaming Self-efficacy	-.04	.70	-.34, .23	.25	.02	.05, .50
Perceived Performance	.49	< .001	.40, .85	.15	.20	-.07, .34
Enjoyment	.16	.12	-.09, .78	.04	.74	-.29, .21
Appreciation	.13	.24	-.11, .44	.22	.07	-.01, .45

Standardized effects ( $\beta$ ) are reported. 95% CI based on 5000 bootstrapped samples.

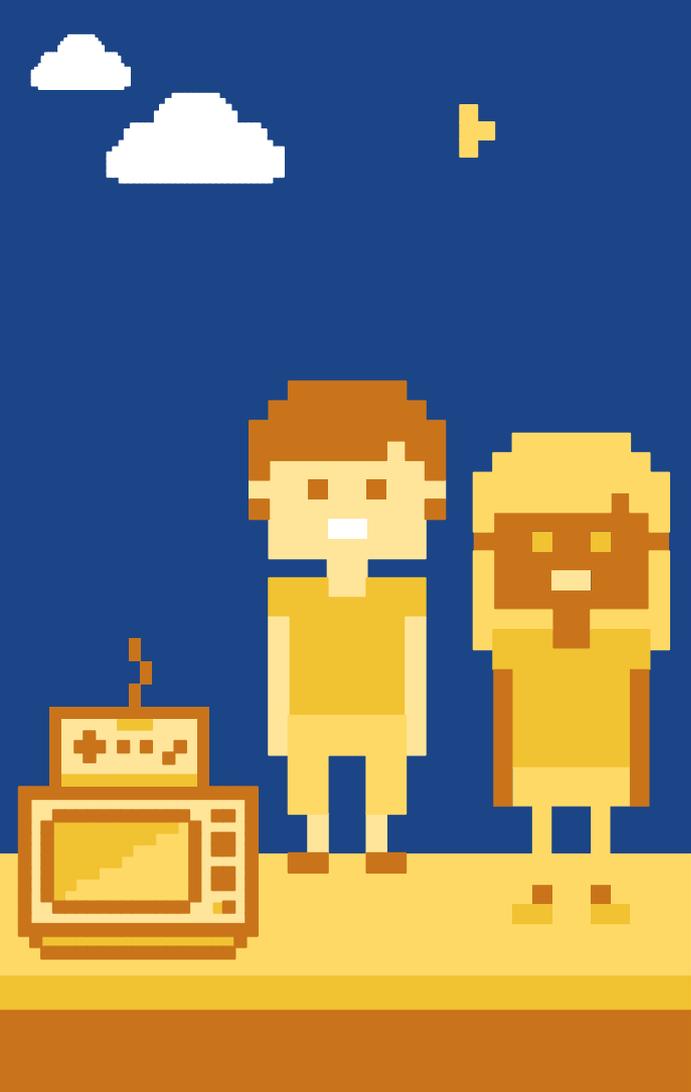
The short answer? **NEWP**. Just ... none of it.  
Controller didn't influence naturalness, and  
naturalness didn't influence historical nostalgia.



# Early Findings



# Early Findings



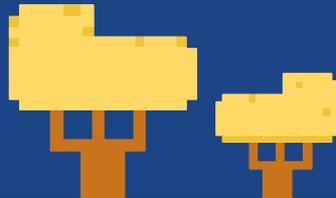
**Table 1.**

Emergent themes from participants discussing their experience with the retrogame.

Cluster	Theme (Frequency)	Definition
<b>Retrogames as unique experiences</b>		
	Retrogames (25)	Broad references to the characteristics of “older” video games, usually made as an implicit contrast to contemporary games.
	Simplistic Play (24)	Comments about the game as being “easy” compared to modern games.
	Gaming History (18)	References or thoughts about older video games, or the evolution of video gaming.
	Challenging (10)	Mentions of gameplay difficulty, often in contrast to modern games.
<b>Retrogames and important others</b>		
	Friends and Family (23)	References to important relational others (often parents and older siblings).
	Games “They” Played (18)	References to “others” who probably played these games in the past.
<b>Retrogames and the self</b>		
	Gamer Self-Identity (22)	Notes about the participant’s own history playing video games.
	Good ol’ Days (12)	Recollections of “easier times” in the past, broadly.

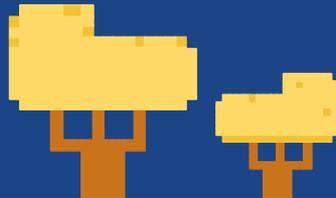


“The thoughts of the past that I was having did not relate to my own past because **I was born after games like these were popular.** ... I was wondering how he would have felt about this game and if he would have liked it.”



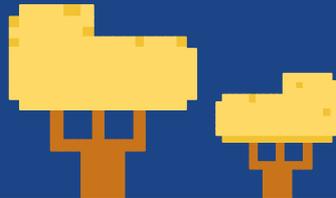


“I felt like I was playing a video game that would be in an arcade which I always wanted to go to when I was younger, but I never got to ... **[Playing this game]** makes me feel like I was born in the wrong era.”





Qs yet to be  
answered





# Qs yet to be answered



NINE YEARS OF SHADOWS



### RETRO EXPERIENCE

- Immerse yourself in a nostalgic pixel art world brought to life by traditional animation and modern lighting effects.
- Explore a vast and beautiful anime inspired universe that has been corrupted by darkness.
- Discover the mystery behind the curse that continues to plague the realm after 9 years.
- Venture inside the ancient colossal colosseum known as Tabo.



### UNIQUE GAMEPLAY

- Switch between elemental armors on the fly to strategically amplify your attacks.
- Control two characters at once and strengthen their bond to level up your abilities.
- Restore the colors of the RGB spectrum and gain mighty elemental powers.
- String together multiple elemental moves and traverse the map in clever and surprising ways.



### STUNNING PIXEL ART

- Dynamic lighting and colorful characters create a vivid setting awaiting a hero to explore it.
- The attention to detail in every hand-crafted scenery is a welcoming sight for metroidvania enthusiasts and newcomers alike.

## What about Metroidvanias and other retro-style games?



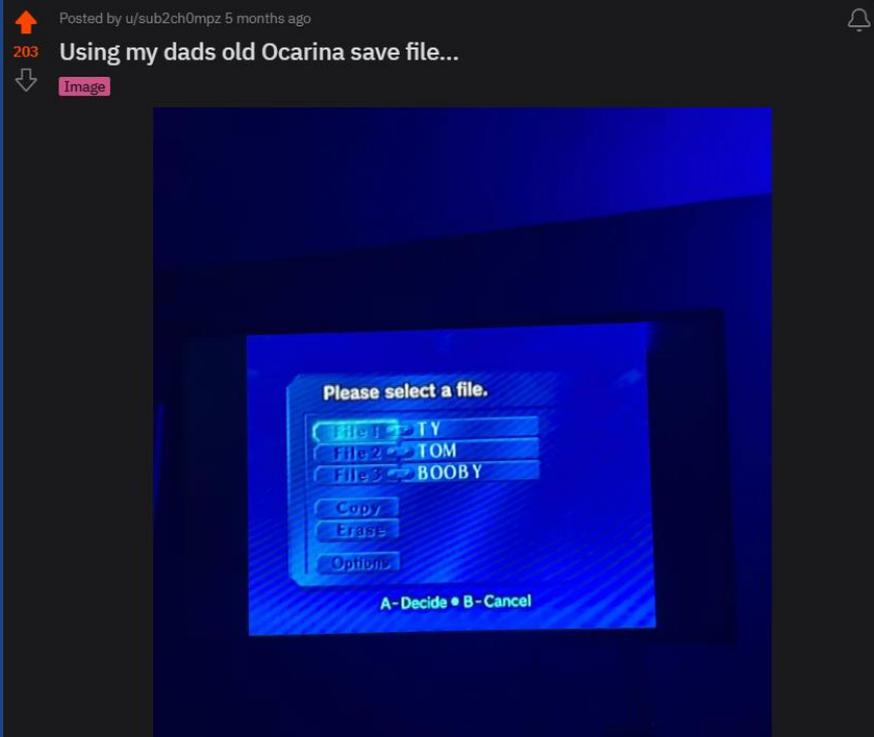
# Qs yet to be answered

Do retrogames have unique **mental models** breaking from modern games?





# Qs yet to be answered

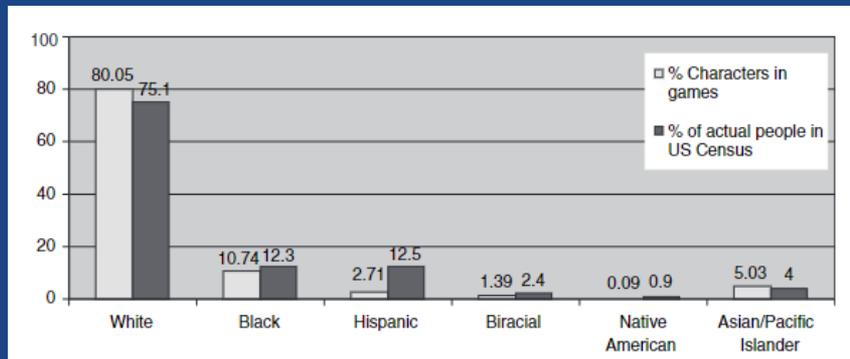
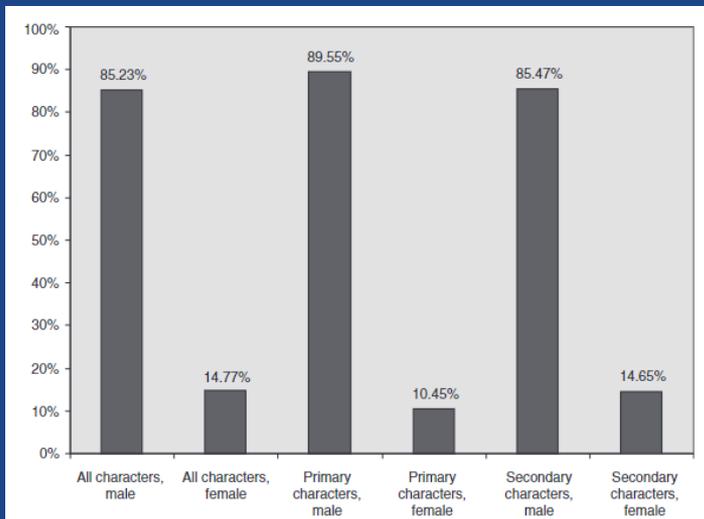
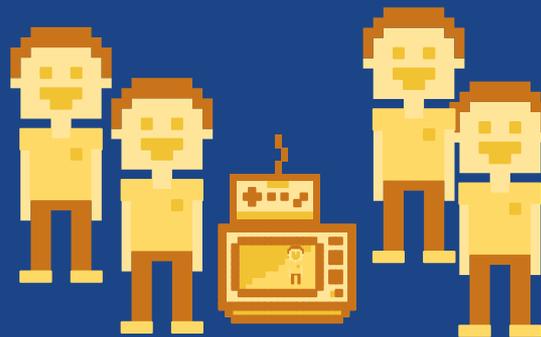


How might families share their gaming history?



# Qs yet to be answered

What (or who) exactly are we nostalgizing?



# Stay in Touch!



**ND Bowman**

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