

Senior Project - VRRB

A Videogame for Psychological Research into Race Bias

Senior Project: 2002-2003

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In light of high-profile incidents over the last few years in which police officers have impetuously and incorrectly shot unarmed African-Americans, members of the Department of Psychology began conducting research on racial bias in a law-enforcement setting. Their aim was to determine whether or not race plays any factor in these types of quick-decision situations commonly faced by police officers.

Preliminary experiments have shown significant results; however, the current experimental setup (a 2D video-game with popup backgrounds and targets) has drawn criticism from the policing community. Specifically, the police question the validity of results obtained from such an unrealistic presentation of policing scenarios. It was concluded that further experimentation is needed in a more realistic setting. A 3D First-Person-Shooter video-game would be an ideal setting for this study.

In this video-game, subjects encounter realistic-looking Caucasian and African-American targets in realistic policing-situations. Based on whether or not these targets are holding weapons and hostile, subjects must quickly assess the threat level and determine whether or not to shoot the target. Besides having this simple shoot/no-shoot option (the only option from the previous game), this new game also provides a higher level of interactivity with the target (e.g. issuing a verbal command). How quickly and easily subjects make decisions in conjunction with the targets race will help determine how much of a role racial bias plays.

The game, developed using the Half-Life Game Engine, simulates real life as closely as possible in hope of producing usable data on race bias in the real world.



Tutorial



Verbal Command



Weapon Drawn