Women of Color and Their Representation in Video Games

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the attitudes of college students towards the representation of women of color in video games. Participants were asked initial questions to understand their history with video games. Following these questions, participants were asked to view three videos either featuring female characters of color or featuring females as the leading role in the game. Participants tended to relate more to the female character that was not a woman of color. The importance of representation was brought up through participant reflections.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative methodology that followed a phenomenological design approach to investigate the representation of women of color in video games by participants. The method of data collection is a set of one-on-one interviews with the participants. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis.

Participants were asked preliminary icebreaker questions before watching three videos displaying female characters of color or a female in a lead or supporting role. These questions included:
- How long have you been playing video games?
- How frequently would you say you play video games?
- Do you enjoy all the video games you play?

The participants were then shown the video clips of game play or the game trailer from three different video games. The characters displayed included Sheva Alomar from Resident Evil, Lara Croft from the Tomb Raider series, and Aveline de Grandpré from Assassin's Creed III: Liberation. After the videos, the participants were asked more questions:
- Are you familiar with any of these characters or games?
- Which of these characters do you feel most women would feel represented by?
- Which of the three videos do you feel best represents you?

KEY FINDINGS

Looking at the second video, if her [Lara Croft] race was changed to match yours which you indicated as… what is changing in this game? If the character represented you, how are the characters traits and or the storyline changing?

"If they changed her race or something and maybe added like a bit more cultural aspects into it, then maybe I would be more interested in playing the game "

"I think that changing the race of Lara Croft um wouldn't necessarily mean that I would relate more to her activities or how she goes about doing things or her personality or what have you…"

"In my opinion, no. Um, Lara Croft could be anyone"

Which of the characters out of the three videos do you feel best represents you?

"none of the three necessarily"

"Well, video games are an escape. Um they don't… the characters in video games are not supposed to live normal lives. Um, you- you can make your character relatable, but the story and their experiences aren't going to be".

Anything you want to add?

"I enjoy um strong female protagonists, I'd like to see more in my opinion um I feel that they are very, they are very, they are underrepresented, but they are uh…, but they can hold interesting stories".

"I assume the identity of that person while I'm playing that game, but they don't have to be um just like me for me to play the game".

"I think that uh…that games are meant for fantasy".

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS
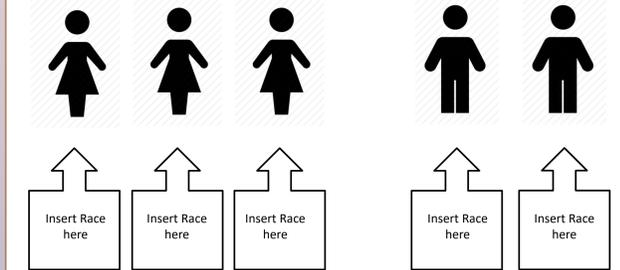
EMERGING ISSUES/QUESTIONS

- The demand for POC to be represented across all medias is growing so video games should be included in the conversation.
- Are we perpetuating the continued lack of representation by not making it a bigger deal?
- The gap between the amount of female gamers and male gamers continues to fluctuate, but could we close this gap with more inclusivity of women protagonists?

- The number one country that produces the most video game related revenue is a country of color. The numbers could be even greater with more accurate representation of people of color.
- Does this issue have importance? Do women and other people of color realize the lack of representation and if they do, do they care?

FUTURE WORK

- Conducting more interviews with a broader population of POC.
- Build an understanding of the relationship of persons with certain demographic characteristics and video games, especially those who contribute most to gaming revenue.
- Assessing attitudes towards authenticity in regards to video games.

REFERENCES