Assignment 3

Point of View Essay

Representation in Games

keystroke

Contents

Thesis Statement

Representation as a tool for promoting diversity and inclusiveness: Some view representation in games as a means of promoting diversity and inclusiveness, ensuring that players of all backgrounds, identities, and experiences are represented in games.

Discussion

Argument 1: Representation is Good for Marginalised People

Most people play video games, as the Digital Australia report (Interactive Games & Entertainment Association 2022) found, 2/3rds of Australians alone play video games, with 46% of them being women. Despite this almost equal split across genders with players, women make up only 32% of characters across AAA games (Haines 2019), with especially women of colour being severely underrepresented.

Haines (2019) also found that women are more likely to be put into passive roles, roles that exist to support the main character such as providing quests or as goals for the player. This lack of representation and type of representation has been found to have a negative effect on the underrepresented groups, as Gestos et al. (2018) found that self-

efficacy and self-objectification in women were negatively effected as a result of the lack of positive representation in video games.

Gestos et al. (2018) also note in their conclusion the lack of research relating to the effect of how women are represented in games. As woman make up over half the general population and are still underrepresented in games and research on them, it may be reasonable to extrapolate similar effects to other marginalised groups.

The first AAA game to feature a playable, canonically trans character was 2020's *Tell Me Why* (Don't Nod 2020; Kosciesza 2023). Gay representation has largely been relegated to Bioware-like RPGs, where the player may have the option to seek out these relationships, but notably the canonical version of this character never does. An exception to this is *The Last of Us Part II* (Naughty Dog 2020), in which one of the playable characters, Ellie, is canonically a lesbian, with this information factoring into the story and not just hidden in some lore dump.

Argument 2: Representation is Good for Everyone Else Too!

Representation has not only been found to help the marginalised groups being represented, but also to the general population as it can promote and normalise acceptance and understanding of these groups. Choosing not to engage with representation can end up not being neutral, and actually having the opposite effect, re-enforcing harmful stereotypes and encouraging harmful behaviour.

While poor representation has been found to have a negative impact on how women see themselves, it has also been found that it has an even larger effect on the sexist attitude of men and how they objectify female content (Gestos et al. 2018).

This kind of negative stereotyping can have an even larger effect on how racial groups are perceived, with Burgess et al. (2011) finding that after exposing participants to violent video games featuring black characters, "participants were faster at classifying violent stimuli". This result is unsurprising considering the same analysis found that non-white men are more likely to be portrayed as violent, thugs, or using guns in video game covers. Dill et al. (Dill et al. 2005) also found that middle-eastern men were vastly overrepresented as targets, even before the September 11th attacks.

Counter-Argument: Ughhh but work?? and like, i dont want to make a political statement or something???

"Some people" have argued that they don't want developers to focus on inclusivity because it takes effort as well as runs the risk of making their games "political". This came to a head in 2014 with the Gamergate harassment campaign; a widespread conservative backlash to feminist critique of games (Chess and Shaw 2015).

This is a false dichotomy. Games as art are inherently political, and leaving marginalised groups out of games isn't neutral, it's negative as shown by previous arguments. Some games may try to avoid this by having non-human characters, however even then they need to be aware of what coding those characters may have.

It doesn't take much more work to reflect diversity in games either, it doesn't take more effort to make a character black instead of white, or gay instead of straight. Often times, it takes more work to artificially limit how diversity can be expressed than it is to just leave it in, as seen during the early development of The Sims (Jackson 2019, July).

One might argue that while larger studios have the resources to focus on diversity, and they certainly do, it's unrealistic to "force" these expectations onto smaller studios. Yet, these smaller studios are where most representation comes from, with games like Celeste (Extremely OK Games 2018) sharing their developer's stories in this unique medium.

Conclusion

Games are another medium for marginalised groups to share their stories and make themselves heard by the dominant culture. They are also played and enjoyed by a wide variety of cultures, ethnicities, genders and sexualities, contrary to the myth that the "gamer" is straight, white and male.

Despite this, large game studios consistently underrepresent these communities, including people from them who work on the games themselves. This is harmful not only to the communities, who suffer from a lack of relatability and role models, as well as harmful attitudes towards themselves as a result, but also to society at large. It can feed into negative worldviews and stereotypes, as well as just depriving us of a diversity in stories.

There are some people who may argue that this kind of inclusivity takes too much work and makes things political, however it is often more work to remove common aspects of every day life than to include them in your game. Deliberately leaving women or minorities out of a game is just as much of a political statement as leaving them in.

Games are made to connect people, and they can't do that by leaving some of us out.

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Self-Assessment

Marking Criteria	No effort on the set requirement 0 points	Minimal effort achieved on the set requirement 1 point	Moderate effort achieved on the set requirement 2 points	High effort achieved on the set requirement 3 points
Argument 1 is distinct and provides clear support for the thesis statement and point of view.	Component missing from the final submission.	Arguments may not be clear or supportive of the thesis. Arguments may not be clearly distinct from each other.	Arguments are relevant, supportive of the thesis and clearly distinct.	Arguments are relevant, supportive of the thesis and clearly distinct. Arguments clearly extend beyond material covered in class.
Argument 2 is distinct and provides clear support for the thesis statement and point of view.	Component missing from the final submission.	Arguments may not be clear or supportive of the thesis. Arguments may not be clearly distinct from each other.	Arguments are relevant, supportive of the thesis and clearly distinct.	Arguments are relevant, supportive of the thesis and clearly distinct. Arguments clearly extend beyond material covered in class.

Argument 3 is distinct and provides clear support for the thesis statement and point of view.	Component missing from the final submission.	Arguments may not be clear or supportive of the thesis. Arguments may not be clearly distinct from each other.	Arguments are relevant, supportive of the thesis and clearly distinct.	Arguments are relevant, supportive of the thesis and clearly distinct. Arguments clearly extend beyond material covered in class.
Reasoning process is sound.	Lack of evidence, or connection between statements and evidence missing. Expects reader to fill in details.	Evidence not directly related to argument, or logical fallacies present.	Viewpoints and evidence relevant to the thesis statement. Argument builds from evidence to reach valid conclusion.	Argument is clear and demonstrates clearly relevant evidence support-ing/opposing the thesis statement. A logical pattern for argument is employed.

Conclusion/Discussion of arguments and counter-argument demonstrate understanding of the topic and address the thesis statement.	Component missing from the final submission.	Discussion and exploration of the arguments and counter-argument show a basic understanding of the topic material.	Discussion and exploration of the arguments and counter-argument is persuasive and shows a researched understanding of the topic material.	Discussion and exploration of the arguments and counter-argument is highly persuasive and show a thoroughly-researched understanding of the topic material beyond what has been covered in class. Conclusion does address the thesis.
Appropriate resources used as supporting evidence including **at least 5 references** (not including images) plus **at least 2 examples from games.**	Component missing from the final submission.	May not meet minimum required number of sources. Resources are present but may be used inconsistently, not strong evidence of the discussion or of a low quality or credibility.	Required number of sources met and present throughout. Resources generally support the discussion but may be of mixed quality or not always used effectively.	Required number of sources met and present throughout. Resources are of a high quality and provide strong support and evidence for the discussion.

(Not for self assessment) Realistic self assessment.	Self-assessment lacks reasoning or justification.	Reasons provided do not relate to rubric criteria, or only provide surface level conformance.	Accurate assessment but key issues identified are not resolved.	Relevant self-assessment, including actions taken to improve submission.

Overall Comments

I went out of my way to use recent academic sources to support my arguments, which was a bit hard at times as there aren't that many recent articles covering this specific issue, as one of the sources I used found out for itself. Both arguments are closely linked, which is why some articles were used to support both.

I suppose the main thing to talk about would be the counter-argument, which is certainly a bit straw-man-y. While there are "arguments" against representation in games, they are rooted in bad faith and I have never seen a legitimate one. I feel it would be more disingenuous to try and prop up one of these bad-faith arguments with no academic support than to "go off" as I did, hence why I did it and I'm fully willing to eat the marks I'll lose because of it.

No screenshots because I don't feel they were required to support my thesis.

The way games and especially representation in them is talked about is usually so riddled with misinformation, myths and just plain ol' bad faith that I didn't want to engage it on its ground, though there is an argument that I may have done that by playing defence too much.

Either way, the topic is incredibly important and needs to be discussed more, however Gamergate really was a horrible event that hampered discussion and continues to hamper it even to this day, with how it gave rise to the modern alt-right and all that. `</soapbox>`

Sorry for the run-on sentences, hopefully we're not graded for the grammar in our self-assessment comments.