

Understanding the Impact of QPOC Representation in Video Games

Roger Smith, Adrienne Decker

School of Interactive Games and Media, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester



ABSTRACT

There is no question about the impact of video games in the lives and leisure time of people in the United States. The Entertainment Software Association's *Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry* [2] estimates that 42% of Americans of all ages play video games 3 or more hours per week, and for some, their exposure to video games rivals that of television exposure. Similar to television, video games reflect the white heterocentric normative ideals of the often hegemonic forces that create them. The impact of the absence of minorities in this form of media acts as a form of symbolic annihilation, or erasure that invalidates players who do not fit this matrix. The impact of this erasure has been explored along one of the axes of lack of diversity (gender or sexuality or race), but it is not often the case that the experiences of the people at the cross section of these categories is explored. In this work we are exploring people who cross these categories, Queer People of Color (QPoC) and their perceptions on the impact of lack of representation of people like them in video games has had on them. Through a mixed-methods study that involved an online survey and one-on-one interviews, we are uncovering information about people at the cross section of underrepresented races, sexualities, and genders.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, we used a mixed methods methodology that followed a convergent design approach to investigate the impact representation in video games had on members of the QPOC group [1]. The entire study is comprised of an online survey and sets of one-on-one interviews.

QPOC Representation in Video Games Survey

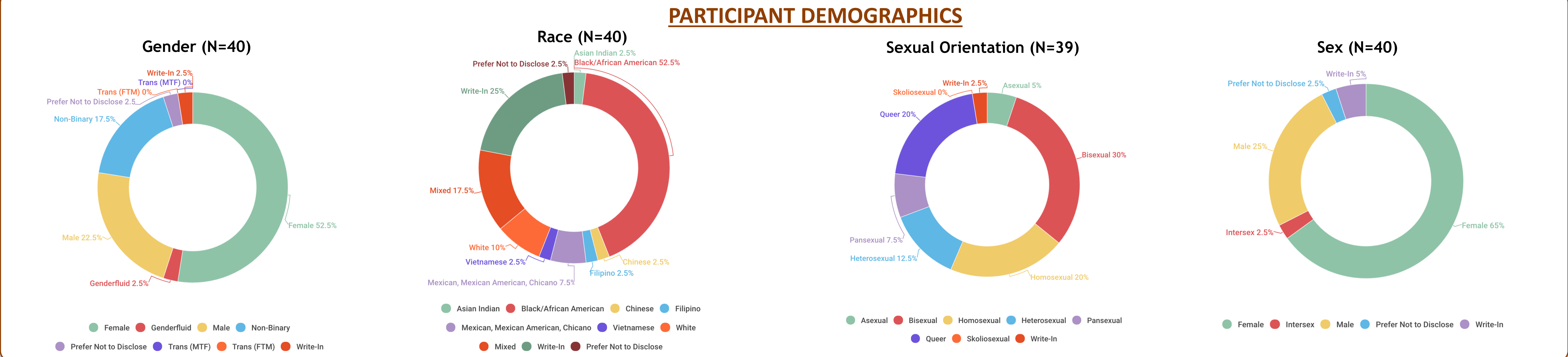
- Demographic information about their age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, and race/ethnicity.
- Likert-type responses to statements about QPOC representation
- Two open ended questions about identity and representation

Analysis

- Descriptive statistics for demographic and Likert items
- Qualitative data used a grounded theory approach (Tesch's approach) [1].

Inter-rater reliability

- Q1: 96.5% agreement (12 codes)
- Q2: 96.1% agreement (12 codes)



RESULTS

Likert-Type Question Responses (N=40)

Q1. Queer people of color are adequately represented in video games.
Q5. I am satisfied with the current level of QPOC representation in video games.

Q3. Viewing queer people of color (QPOC) in media has positively affected my perception of self.
Q6. Representation has/does affect how I perceive myself.

Q2. Representation of my identities (gender, race, sexuality, sex) in video games matters to me.
Q4. I notice when QPOC are excluded from media.
Q7. Representation has/does affect how others perceive me.

Qualitative Question 1: If you could only choose one of your identities to be represented in videogames (or media), which would you choose and why?

“I don't feel I should have to choose, but if I did I would choose race because my experience due to my race has shaped more of who I am. White people in my sexual orientation still sometimes embody the racism of their straight counterparts.”

“Intersectionality or bust”

“I wouldn't choose one, all of me is me”

“As a woman of color, I think that a combination of my gender and racial identity would be best to see represented in media. I like choosing just one identity can limit my ability to relate to a character.”

“I would like more queer black woman representation because while black women have gained more visibility, queer black women are often left out.”

“My blackness because it is more immediately present upon first impression.”

Qualitative Question 2: Can you give examples of how representation in videogames (or media) has validated any aspect of your identity?

“In Animal Crossing New Leaf (& Happy Home Designer) any character can wear dresses, skirts, or any hairstyle. Super comfortable playing as a character who's expression is no big deal (some npc's even compliment you on it). It's more comfortable and safe than real life.”

“HTGAWM just helped me realized that there are other people like me. (annalise, black, woman, bi)”

“To be honest I'm not very concerned with representation and validation. I know that I am an extreme anomaly and I've come to terms with the fact that I will probably never receive proper representation so I choose not to focus on it.”

“Seeing someone like me validates my life decisions, that they are social acceptable.”

“Games are a big part of contemporary culture, so knowing that my sexuality is not only known, but accepted and sometimes even celebrated by them is a huge deal. The main example that's in my head right now would be the Mass Effect trilogy, and how you can choose as a female character, to date another female character.”



<http://dread-mymag.com/imgs/custom/avatars/ve-caps-how-to-get-deep-with-murder-150x150-w80x80-2x.png>



CONCLUSION/DISCUSSION

- There is a desire for QPOC to be represented wholly, honestly, and responsibly.
- QPOC notice and do care when they are not represented.
- Feelings of invisibility and invalidation contribute to feelings of alienation in QPOC.

- Having strong queer characters of color may increase interest and diversity in the field while also giving QPOC positive representation which yields palpable effects.
- A common argument for continued white heterosexual representation in games is that those demographics make up most of the market, but why would QPOC be interested in the media itself if people like them are actively excluded?

FUTURE WORK

- Analysis of one-on-one interview data ongoing (6 1-hour interviews already conducted)
- Focus on one intersection of QPOC (e.g. queer latinas or bisexual black people) and study more deeply their feelings
- How QPOC can be represented well and how can designers build on existing positive representation
- How diversity in gaming can act as an instrument for creating a more diverse industry of game creators

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