
The Lack of Diversity in Video Games: A Forum Post

KRISTEN WONG

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For as long as I can remember, video games have been an integral part of my life. My brother first introduced video games to me in 2005 when I was about 11 years old. I remember sitting down at a friend's house, my brother placing a Game Boy Color in my hands, and playing my first video game ever: *Super Mario Bros. Deluxe*. I'm not even a huge Nintendo fan as of now, but I know that I sat there for hours tapping away at the little buttons, collecting coins, and stomping on Goombas.

Nowadays, I play on a regular basis. It relieves the stress from the day, but it also transports me to another world where I'm the hero of the story, where I can solve problems easily, I can buy whatever I want, I can do whatever I want, I can **be** whoever I want.

Well, be whoever I want as best as I can. Ten years ago, I never even thought about who my character was. It was simply that I was playing as that character, and that's that. But today, these ideals have changed drastically. I feel that it's partially due to the introduction of character creation games, or games where you can choose from several different protagonists. It makes people think about who they want to be in the game.

Does this character represent who I am? Is this character's personality representative of what my ideals, morals, characteristics are? Is this character **me**?

As video games continue to be produced, more and more people are thinking about representation in video games. It has been a hot topic in recent years because of events happening around the world pertaining to race, sexuality, ethnicities, gender and cultures. People are more aware of representation, especially if that representation is an accurate portrayal or not.

I used to not care about the gender, sexuality, or race of the character I was playing. But I do now. Why? As a female, Chinese-American, I've faced more prejudice than I care to admit here in America. When I was 4, I had a chair pulled out from under me at the local library because I was Chinese. When I was 10, a kid in my class made fun of me daily because I had squinty eyes and yellow skin. I can still hear "Ching-chong" in that mocking voice in the back of my mind. When I was 13, a middle-aged man called me a "chink" at the local supermarket. My older sister was so angry that she went to the aisle he was in and yelled at him. She was only 15.

Kids grow up feeling inadequate and like their lives don't matter just because they have a different skin color. They feel differently about boys and girls or because they're a girl and are told they can't do something. And then they see it in the games they're playing and think, "Well, I guess this is the norm. If it's like this in real life and in video games, I guess I should just accept it and move on."

And that's why representations of individuals in video games are so important. Pew Research conducted a study in 2007 and found that 99% of the boys they surveyed and 94% of the girls they surveyed played video games on a regular basis. That was in 2007. I can't even imagine what the numbers are today with all the modern technology in gaming, like Virtual Reality and new console releases. Children sit in front of the TV or monitor and play games for hours and what they

play is ingrained in their minds. The more realistic games become, the more it seems like what's portrayed in games is what reality is really like.

I can inundate this post with facts and statistics about how poorly video games show representation. I could show the statistics on how sex sells in the industry, or how games opt to not represent the LGBTQ+ community because it may take away from their sales, or how games portray minorities poorly and as stereotypical.

- A study was done in 2001 by Christina Glaubke for Children Now, a research center dedicated to improving children's health, education and well-being. It found that when video games do show diversity, they often incorporate stereotyped images and roles for people of color. Moreover, these people are rarely ever cast as champions, rescuers or heroes. Their portrayals often amount to nothing more than hyper-muscularized brutes, exotic fighting machines, or athletes displaying near-supernatural ability.
- Pew Research did a study in 2015 on minorities in video games. It showed that 100 Hispanics, whites and blacks were surveyed and asked if video games portrayed minorities poorly or not. While a majority of each group said they were not sure, it's clear Hispanics and blacks felt that video games portrayed minorities poorly the most, while whites were unsure. Minorities know their own culture and their own people. They know what accurate representation is, and what isn't.
- In 2009, a study was performed by Alexandra Henning, who examined children's observations of hypersexualized females. Henning found that, "Overall... all participants viewed the images in the female-stereotypic games as more negative than in the male-stereotypic games. This suggests that violent and aggressive images are viewed in more positive light than are sexually exploitive images by adolescents." Even adolescents think that sexual stereotypes of women are negative. Why do developers continue to do so?
- Adrienne Shaw wrote in *The International Journal of Communication*, "In some games characters are chastised and called gay if they do not display the proper interest in the opposite sex or if they hang out with LGBTQ people." Shaw offers an example of *Dragon Warrior III* in which it "features a sexual activity called puff-puff. In the game a woman NPC offers the male PC a puff-puff. If he refuses, she replies: 'Hmph! What?! Not another homosexual...'"

When I first asked Reddit questions about diversity, someone replied that they didn't think that the questions were fair without backup. Well, here it is. I could go on and on about the countless research, studies, and journals that coincide with the diversity issue in gaming, but this post has gone on for long enough.

Professor Edmond Chang of the University of Oregon stated in relation to sexuality in games, "Why and who does it hurt if they are in a relationship?" But, I think it's worth noting that this doesn't necessarily only pertain to relationships between two men, or two women. I think the real question is "Why and who does it hurt?" Why does it hurt to have a female warrior in full armor when she goes into battle? Why does it hurt to have a Hispanic protagonist in a game set in rural Kansas? Why does it hurt to have a black protagonist who isn't part of a gang? Why does it hurt to have a Chinese character who isn't good at kung-fu? Why does it hurt to have a lesbian character who has a story arc that doesn't focus solely on being alienated from the community because of her sexuality?

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Why do stereotypes exist or even matter? The world is fictional. We can be whatever we want to be. We can do whatever we want to. More and more, gamers look for diversity in gaming. It's starting to part from mainstream gaming. Why do developers continue to keep themselves cemented in the idea that only male white protagonists are the safe way to go?

I interviewed XiaoXu Yan, a video game character designer for Skill Check Games. He said, "At the end of the day, it's a business. It sounds bad, and games should be for fun, but the gaming industry is a business." And he's right; the game industry at the end of the day is a business.

So how can we have developers understand that, yes, it's a business, and you could potentially make more money if you give gamers what they want? In his interview, Professor Chang advocated bringing in women, minorities, and LGBTQ+ people into the gaming industry. Writers are the ones who write the stories, whether they are Asian, Hispanic, gay, or black. They have the power to change who the characters are in the game. If the industry is dominated by straight, white males, that's generally who the protagonists will be. People will write about what and who they can relate to. If they're not in the LGBTQ+ community, if they're not a minority, or if they're not a woman, they can't write a story that relates to those groups well. They can't help people to understand your point of view, or how you're tired of being sexualized as a woman, or how you're tired of being shown as a Latino who came to the states illegally. Make your voice heard.

Why does one race, or one gender, or one sexuality get singled out as the best or the worst? I think the simple answer comes from Yan, whose remarks can honestly cover all diversity topics: "I think it's interesting when we say race... as American, African, Chinese and so on. But I think: human race. There's one race."



Kristen Wong

Kristen Wong is a senior at the University of Central Florida and is double majoring in History and Journalism on the Print/Digital track. She's part of the Nicholson School's honor society, Lambda Pi Eta. She enjoys reaching out to the UCF community, getting to know them, and reporting for the NSC's news and media outlet, *NSM Today*, as well as the student-run *Central Florida Focus*. After graduation she hopes to continue writing for an Orlando-based news outlet.