

Establishing a Language of Diversity: Preliminary Findings

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Keywords

representation, diversity, sexuality, gender

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In response to the increased influence of independent game developers (Anthropy 2012) and interest in queer game content (Gravning 2014), queer game studies is becoming a noteworthy field of research. Studies examine the production of queer games (Harvey 2014; Shaw 2009), the response from players (Chang 2015; Condis 2015; Pulos 2013; Sundén & Sveningsson 2012), and queer representation within specific game titles (Consalvo 2003; Greer 2013; Youngblood 2013). More recently, an holistic analysis of all games featuring queer representation commenced (Shaw, et. al. 2017).

As we share conversations about diversity and representation, it is imperative that we also have a shared language—or understanding of language. Studies focused on the impact of diversity and representation in games often assume an understanding of relevant terms and concepts, or allow participants to establish their own. Shaw (2014) encountered this phenomenon in relation to definitions of ‘identification’ in the interviews in *Gaming on the Edge*. She found that different sources and fields—and therefore interviewees—defined identification differently and as a result, she allowed participants to define the term in their own ways. However, in addition, Shaw (2014: 69) also worked to find the ‘tying thread’ between these definitions to locate the shared understanding between participants.

We conducted an inductive survey in 2017 (Queerly Represent Me 2017) and the preliminary findings revealed a similar lack of shared understanding between participants. We established an additional inductive survey in 2018, and are using the data from these two surveys to address the following research questions:

RQ1: When asked about representation and diversity in games, what are the implied definitions of ‘representation’ and ‘diversity’ that individuals hold? Are these definitions

accurate? What cultural phenomena are encouraging commonalities between definitions, particularly frequent misconceptions?

RQ2: What are the working definitions of key terms in the area of diversity and representation for people who play games, and what misconceptions about the field do they communicate?

- i. Marginalisation
- ii. Tokenism
- iii. Diversity
- iv. Representation
- v. Historical accuracy

R3: How do explicit definitions differ from implied definitions determined through context?

We used theoretical sampling to frame the open-question qualitative and closed-question quantitative questions in both surveys. This allows us to reposition our research approach over time, rather than repeatedly exploring the same questions with participants. Despite surveys or questionnaires typically being a deductive research method, theoretical sampling allows us to examine inductions via a social constructivist methodology, and we have used several methods to analyse the resulting qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative responses have been manually coded using a constant comparative approach, and we have assessed intercoder reliability using a random subsample of responses that both researchers were assigned to.

Our 2017 survey featured a total of 6,010 participants and we used two questions from this survey to gauge their implied understanding of terms

- 1) Do you consider it important to represent diverse identities in games?
- 2) While considering your answer to the previous question, please explain why / why not.

The first of these questions received 5,708 valid responses, while the second question received 5,050 valid responses (see Appendix 1).

Responses to “Why?” or “Why not?” did not always directly relate to the initial question, with participants speaking freely about representation and diversity in games more broadly. The coding categories that resulted (Appendix 2) revealed each participant’s primary concern regarding diverse representation in games, as well as participants’ lack of shared understanding of language. Despite using similar terms, context revealed that participants were referring to marginally—or sometimes significantly—different concepts.

These results informed the creation of the 2018 survey, which had three sections: an open qualitative survey asking participants to define terms in their own words; a series of 31 statements on a Likert scale based on the trends revealed by our qualitative coding of the 2017 responses; and open qualitative questions about the privileged and marginalised identities with which participants identified. The 2018 survey received 414 responses; 396 were deemed valid using the previously established code book (Appendix 2).

Our qualitative coding of Section 1 of the 2018 survey remains incomplete, but preliminary findings reveal diverging definitions of key terms. To continue having conversations about representation in games, these discrepancies need to be explored and addressed.

Assumptions and misconceptions are further explored through the 31 statements in Section 2 of the 2018 survey. We included several statements to measure each factor to ensure consistency and provide a more robust understanding of participants' attitudes. In addition, reverse-keyed statements were designed to reduce the effect of social desirability in responses. This is particularly pertinent, as several respondents contacted researchers directly to communicate that these questions were 'loaded' or had a 'right answer', indicating their feeling that they were being pressured to respond to statements in a particular way due to the connotations and wider societal discourses surrounding each statement. Many statements from the 2018 connect directly to categories identified in our qualitative data from the 2017 survey (Appendix 3). Additional statements sought to determine the assumptions and misconceptions about the game industry that our participants had.

Due to the nature of inductive research, we are not attempting to use these statements to generalise or make inferences about how all people feel about representation and diversity in games; however, these responses do reveal information about the lived experiences of the individuals who participated in our survey and the wider discourses that their statements represent.

Our preliminary results—which we will share at the conference—also provide opportunity in future to use non-parametric tests, as data is not normally distributed. As the conference approaches, we will be qualitatively coding the definition information provided in Section 1, dedicating more time to reverse scoring and factor analysis/loading for our 31 statements in Section 2, comparing results to the categories revealed in our coding of 2017 survey data, and conducting comparisons with more detailed, coded demographic data.

BIO

Jessica Zammit – Jessica Zammit is a tutor in statistics and research methods, and an MPhil (Psychology) candidate. Her primary research focus is the area of language, memory, and cognition. She is the primary data analyst for Queerly Represent Me, a database and resource hub for games featuring queer content.

Dr Alayna Cole is a sessional course coordinator and lecturer in Serious Games at the University of the Sunshine Coast. She holds a doctorate in Creative Arts (Creative Writing) and has broad research interests, but is primarily focused on creating and analysing narratives that improve diverse representation, particularly of gender and sexuality. She is currently researching the representation of queer identities in games from the mid-1980s to present.

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