

Exploring Identity and Connection Through Role-Playing Games

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Introduction

Though the concept of identity has been thoroughly analyzed in the contexts of race, gender, class, and sexuality, other lenses, such as games, have not been used as thoughtfully. This study aims to explore the relationship between role-playing games and the people who play them in order to understand how one's identity is crafted using this medium and how RPGs impact a person's ability and motivation to form connections.

Methodology

Existing literature was examined in order to discern the current understanding of these topics and provide a framework for original research, and 6 interview volunteers (2 male, 2 female and 2 non-binary) were given a set of questions to respond to verbally or in writing. Responses were analyzed to identify themes relating to identity, connection and bonding within groups, and initiative for playing RPGs, especially the tabletop RPG, *Dungeons & Dragons* (D&D).

Conclusions

These results suggest that players enjoy RPGs that grant the opportunity to embody an extraordinary persona that resembles an idealized self. They are able to create from scratch and get into the headspace of an exciting and heroic person that they'd like to be. Such results also demonstrate that these idealized identities allow them to escape from reality while creating stories and making connections on their own terms because RPGs allow us to have greater control over factors of social interactions that we do not in "real life": such as the context of the interaction, our appearance, and other predetermined features of our person and presentation.

Background

The specific research question being asked was, "**What role do role-playing games (RPGs) and identity play in the way people seek connection and belonging?**" Now more than ever, RPGs have had a significant impact on many people's lives. Therefore, it is beneficial to explore the ways in which these games have shaped others' experiences and perspectives. Though this project drew from other disciplines, such as game studies, during the literature review phase, the original research was centered around a discussion of culture and identity.

Results

The interview results showed that most respondents found it easier and more enjoyable to role-play a character that had traits similar to their own personality but blown to more epic proportions. At the very least, they preferred to play more complex, 3-dimensional characters that had the opportunity to be fleshed out. They also indicated that they mainly used RPGs for escapism and social connection more than anything else. Respondents generally felt that certain RPGs, especially D&D, allowed them to meet new people and forge stronger bonds with them due to the fun environment and shared interest in the game.

References

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