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Exploring Identity and Connection Through Role-Playing Games

Kylie Macchia

Anthropology

ABSTRACT

The concept of “identity” is very dynamic as it is not a natural characteristic that is biologically decided — rather, it is something that is culturally constructed and defined. Though identity has been thoroughly analyzed in the contexts of race, gender, class, sexuality, etc., 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 their ability and motivation to form connections. Existing literature was examined in order to discern the current understanding of these topics and provide a framework for original research, and interview volunteers 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. The 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, and that they mainly used RPGs for escapism and social connection. These results suggest that players enjoy RPGs that grant the opportunity to embody an extraordinary persona that resembles an idealized self. It is also demonstrated that these identities allow them to escape from reality while creating stories and making connections on their own terms.