

Understanding the Impact of QPOC Representation in Video Games

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Abstract—The lack of representation of diversity in media has been a long-standing and documented problem. Different types of media suffer from different problems with regard to representation. The games industry has been under fire for portrayals of women and underrepresented minorities for many years. Looking at the game industry as part of the larger technology and computing industry, which also has problems with lack of diversity in its workforce, we see that the problem is not just within the games, but also within the industry and community (Gamergate). The focus of this work is specifically on representation of a cross-sectional group of underrepresented minorities, Queer People of Color (QPOC) in video games. The term QPOC is derived from the term Person of Color (POC). It is used as a means of self-identification by members of the group to reject a single “master status”. To find out the impact that representation has, we surveyed QPOC about their experiences with representation in video games and solicited their opinions on how this representation, or lack thereof, has impacted them. Our survey showed that members of this group did not feel well represented, but were greatly influenced by the representations that do exist. We believe that one of the steps to solving the diversity problem in technology is to make sure that all groups feel welcome in the technology space. For games, working to make sure as many people as possible are represented is the first step in that inclusion.

Keywords— *diversity in video games, underrepresentation in video games, race, gender, sexuality*

I. INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of 2016, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences came under fire for the lack of diversity in the 2016 Oscar nominations, and subsequently in the membership of the academy itself [1]. The #oscarssowhite campaign sought to shine a light on the problem and provide a vehicle for those to voice their opinions about the situation [2, 3]. Similarly, we see discussion of this issue for television [4, 5] and for video games [6,7,8].

What is especially interesting about the discussion in video games is that it crosses into the discussion around diversity in the technology sector in general and specifically the lack of diversity in computing and computer science [9].

While it is clear that there is a lack of diversity in these areas of media and technology in many dimensions (gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic), we are still trying

to understand the impact this lack of representation has on the underrepresented groups and have yet to make significant strides in reversing the trends of underrepresentation in many of these areas. Our investigation focused on one specific subgroup and one specific form of media, Queer People of Color (QPOC) in video games, to begin to understand the impact of this underrepresentation on the members of this group. The term QPOC is derived from the term Person of Color (POC). It is used as a means of self-identification by members of the group to reject a single “master status” and is used as such in the context of this study [10].

It is our belief that in order to help achieve a more balanced workforce, we need to make sure that everyone can see themselves as part of the workforce. For computing in general, several have already championed this approach through the use of role models and showcasing high achieving members of the underrepresented population as a way to encourage others and show that they belong, particularly in advertising and recruitment materials [11, 12, 13]. For games, one of the best pieces of advertising and recruitment are the games themselves, so determining what representation exists and the impact it has can be a useful first step in determining how to help diversify the game industry itself.

II. BACKGROUND

A. Representation in Media

Williams [14] writes that media acts as a mirror for what imbalances exist in social policy, identity formation, and power. Cultivation theory supports this assertion in that television systematically shapes the worldview of the viewer. Television has proved to be so influential that some argue that representation now dominates reality [15], and that media images are now the most primary source of information by which world opinions and expectations are based [16]. Media has the tendency to reflect the white heterocentric normative ideals of the often hegemonic forces that create them. The absence of minorities in media acts as a form of symbolic erasure, which invalidates those who are excluded [17].

It has been established that representation in media affects people’s perception of race and gender. Martins and Harrison discuss how children perceive race and how media (specifically television) shapes their perception of race, gender and their perception of self [5]. Their longitudinal panel

survey concludes that television does in fact have the ability to affect self-perception in children and that white males extract largely positive messages. White males are typically portrayed as powerful, rational, and are abundant as opposed to white or black women and black males whose depictions are largely negative or nonexistent. They state that because of this, social identity theory suggests that white males are emboldened by the messages they receive from television, whereas the other aforementioned groups are likely to shape negative self-opinions due to reinforcement of negative gender and racial stereotypes. A similar study by Averhart and Bigler assessed whether or not white racism affects black children's racial attitudes and perception of self [4]. In this study, elementary school aged black children were asked to recall information from stories that was either consistent or inconsistent with cultural stereotypes of lighter versus darker complexioned black people. The children revealed a better memory for stereotypic information about skin tone.

A study on representations of gay men in television concluded that negative representations of gay men can contribute to decreased levels of social tolerance for homosexuality and increased levels of homophobia in American society [19]. It also found that positive representations of gay men have the ability to influence the beliefs related to gay males and with members of other sexually marginalized groups by reducing stigma and combating pervasive heterosexism [20].

In the same way these negative images reinforce negative stereotypes and create a sense of invisibility, positive representation of minorities has proven to inspire the people watching and challenge normalized negative depictions of people and Eurocentric standards of beauty.

In response to the topics of beauty and representation actress Lupita Nyong'o states "If you turn on the television and you are not represented on that television, you become invisible to yourself. And there was very little of myself that I saw on TV, or in the movies that I was watching, or in magazines that were lying around the salons or around the house. And so these are subconscious things. Yes, Western beauty standards are things that affect the entire world. And then what happens? You're a society that doesn't value darker skin" [21]. Nyong'o's quote echoes the core of what lack of representation does to underrepresented youths. The feelings of invisibility and the undervaluing of dark skin are not signature to her experience as a woman of color.

The leading actress on the television show *Jane The Virgin* explains how she deliberately turned down negative stereotypical roles of latinx people. "I definitely felt drawn to this kind of mission in my life. This was very particular to my experience growing up. I didn't often see Latinos portrayed in a positive light, but I saw them in my household. I knew it was possible, and I knew how I was affected by not seeing positive role models with my skin color. So, I thought I would use my art to change that and play positive roles that would let people see themselves differently" [22].

Based on these accounts from these actresses of color, it is apparent that ridicule and nonrecognition have effectively shaped how they view themselves and their careers. Finding

intersectional examples of other groups is even more difficult because they almost completely exist in the nonrecognition phase, however actors and actresses resolving to change media depiction, the emergence of initiatives such as Black Girls Rock (that are meant to uplift underrepresented groups of people), and online criticism of the absence of representation in media (such as #oscarssowhite) are indicative of a more fervent push for diversity and inclusion.

B. Representation in technology and technology workforce

In the computing workforce, policy and decision makers have concluded that there is a lack of diversity within the field of computing and that this lack of diversity contributes to product performance challenges [23, 24, 25].

The lack of diversity in the workforce actually starts much earlier, at the university level. There is an extremely low number of ethnic minorities that earn degrees in computer science in the United States. For example, the 2013 Taulbee Survey shows that while 41.3% of computer science Ph.D.s granted by U.S. institutions are earned by American citizens, only 12.9% are granted to ethnic minorities with 9.5% to Asians and 3.4% to all other minorities combined [26]. But, we actually see that the problem begins much before that when we look at the demographic information about the AP Computer Science Exam, given in high school. Looking at the 2013 exam, we see that there were 11 states where no Black/African American students took the exam and 8 states where no Hispanic students took the exam. Pass rates for minorities on the exam are also much lower than for whites [27].

In order to address this issue, efforts have been made to recruit and retain more students into the computing discipline through various outreach activities, some focusing primarily on the goal of broadening the participation of women and minorities [23] [28]. Perhaps the culmination of these efforts is the Computer Science for All initiative announced by United States President Barack Obama in January 2016 [29].

C. Representation in games and the game industry

The gaming industry is remarkably homogeneous. According to data from the IGDA's 2014 survey of workforce diversity, the typical game development professional is described as a white heterosexual male. Of the total respondents 79% were white and 86% were heterosexual [30]. White heterosexual male characters make up the majority of video game characters, seemingly reflective of those who create them, leaving little room for diverse main characters. Increasing diversity in the game industry would likely increase the number of diverse, well represented characters. Video game blogger Mark Barton states "[i]f GLBT individuals are involved directly in development, they can work against the stereotypes and ensure they're represented in a positive way" [31]. This statement can be applied to every underrepresented group in that, if they are invested in seeing positive representation, having a say in the development of the character can increase positive representation. It is not however solely the burden of underrepresented groups to increase positive images of diversity. Though these groups presumably have a better idea of what positive representation should be, diversity must be a global initiative.

LGBTQ developers, women, developers of color, and the intersection thereof have other obstacles to face before they insert their opinions into the industry. LGBTQ people must be comfortable with being “out” in an industry not too welcoming to non-straight people. Game designer Jeb Havens states “there was such a strong frat-boy heterosexuality among the industry people that it made me realize that even if there were gay people in the industry, they probably wouldn’t feel very comfortable talking about it” [32]. Gamers of color may potentially deal with the threat of casual racism. Allen, former employee at Rockstar Games states [33]:

I have been the victim of disparaging remarks about my racial heritage, I've had to check numerous people for overuse of racial slurs even in context of them being relevant toward cutscenes in games, and I have heard of terrible interactions between higher-ups and other people where there was clearly race-driven lack of respect.

These conditions would reasonably make someone hesitant when contributing ideas pertaining to the race of a character given the treatment of race in general in this particular workplace. The most infamous incident of overt sexism in the industry was the #GamerGate scandal. What began as an attack on one female game developer quickly snowballed into multiple attacks on women in the gaming industry resulting in notable female game developers and journalists being harassed and some even leaving the industry and fleeing their homes [34]. These attacks (from mostly white men) are only indicative of the ingrained and normalized violent attitudes towards women in the industry and game culture [35].

Discriminating attitudes are also experienced by underrepresented groups who play games. Games where players interact often have instances of hate speech. Women of Color (WOC) have experienced intersections of racism, heterosexism, sexism and even discrimination based on their command of English in online spaces [36]. This oppression results in ghettoization of these groups where they cluster with others like them or isolate themselves. This ghettoization prevents these players from fully experiencing the games they play.

Like other forms of media, representation in video games does affect those that engage with it. A study that analyzed the effect of racist images of minorities in the game industry surmised that developers should be more aware and held accountable for their work in addition to suggesting more diverse teams [7]. Another study on gender and racial stereotypes in popular video games by Yi and Peng reinforces that underrepresentation exists in terms of female characters. If they are present, their roles are stereotypical [8]. Yi and Peng suggest that these depictions may alter perception of women in children and that the stereotypes in the games reinforce cultural stereotypes in regards to women. Yet another study that focused on depictions of white and black people noted that blacks, despite their inadequate representation in videogames, were commonly depicted as violent [6]. The study then indicates that the presence of these images become normal through desensitization.

Studies on intersectionality and how it applies to the

depiction of women in video games was a rarer find. One study on women in videogames plainly stated that race was omitted due to lack of material. It did however mention that black women were often portrayed as abuse victims (a common media trope) and Latina women were virtually non-existent [37]. Intersectional feminism in relation to video games seems to be a more contemporary topic as modern sources of media have attempted to address the complexities pertaining to WOC who play video games. In an interview with the co-Director of Dames Making Games (a Toronto based non-profit organization for game jams and resources for women and non-binary people) the director stated that “Intersectionality is law! Any diversity initiative that enriches the goals of the privileged is not an initiative about diversity.” She emphasizes that women of every color and sexuality should be heard. Further, she encourages critique of media that frames diversity from a “painful perspective” where narratives of WOCs work are framed as harassment [38].

Adrienne Shaw, a prolific researcher on minorities in video-games has addressed issues with problematic representation, exclusion of underrepresented groups, and the coincidental intersection of these identities. In her research, she documents diversity vs. pluralism in minorities [31]. It is clear that video games (in addition to media in general) and its effect on race, gender, sex, and sexuality has been explored in each facet separately. However, a deliberate investigation of QPOC is not present. Given the examples of analysis based on separate instances of underrepresented identities, this study seeks to explore the effect of the lack of representation in video games on the intersection of these groups. Dealing with racism, homophobia, sexism and other oppression singularly has proved to be a harrowing experience. Imagine dealing with multiple spheres of oppression simultaneously.

III. 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 [39]. The entire study is comprised of an online survey and sets of one-on-one interviews. For this paper, we will be discussing the online survey only.

We created the *QPOC Representation in Video Games Survey*. We asked participants for demographic information about their age, sex, gender, sexual orientation. We gathered information about race/ethnicity using the US Census Bureau’s questions about race/ethnicity [40]. This information was gathered using a series of two questions:

- Are you of Hispanic/Latino origin?
 - Choices: No, not of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin; Yes, of Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano; Yes, Puerto Rican; Yes, Cuban; Yes, Other (fill in blank); Prefer not to disclose
- What is your race? (Able to select more than one)
 - Choices: White, Black/African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian Indian, Japanese,

Korean, Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Other Asian (fill in blank), Native Hawaiian, Guamanian or Chamorro, Other Pacific Islander (fill in blank), Other? (fill in blank), Prefer not to disclose

In addition to this demographic data, the survey required responses to questions indicating their level of agreement (using a 5-point Likert-type scale) with statements about representation of QPOC and aspects of that identity in video games. Following these Likert-type questions [listed in Table V], two open-ended questions were asked about identity and representation (see Section IV C).

Upon approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the request to participate was disseminated by posting the link to the survey on social media websites (Reddit and Tumblr) and passed on to Q-centers at other academic institutions. To gather the data, an electronic form of the survey instrument was created using the Survey Monkey online survey tool. To participate, subjects needed to click on the URL provided with the solicitation email/posting. Anyone with the URL could participate in the survey. No IP addresses or other identifying information was collected from participants. Only respondents who agreed to the letter of consent that appeared on the first page of the survey were able to complete the survey. The first question of the survey asked if they were 18 or over. If they were under 18, they were taken to a “thank you for your participation” page and not allowed to complete the remainder of the survey. The survey was open for responses from November 20, 2015 to January 31, 2016.

For the qualitative data, we applied a grounded theory approach to coding the data using Tesch’s approach. [39, pg. 198]. After two researchers together coded the first several answers for each of the qualitative questions, they independently coded the remainder of the answers based on the codes. After independent coding, the researchers reconciled their codes to determine inter-rater reliability of the coding. There was 96.5% agreement between the coders on qualitative question 1 (12 codes) and 96.1% agreement between the coders on qualitative question 2 (12 codes).

IV. RESULTS

A. Respondent Demographics

There were 50 recorded responses to the online survey. Upon analysis of the responses, 7 respondents did not indicate that they were 18 years old or older and 3 respondents did not complete the survey beyond some of the demographic information, leaving 40 responses to be analyzed.

Table I and Table II give the breakdown of respondents based on sex and gender. For purposes of our study, sex is indicative of the biological sex of a person, while gender is the way in which a person presents themselves to others. For both questions, an “other” free-response option was given so those who felt their answer was not represented in the choices could provide their answer to the question. For sex, 65% of the respondents indicated female. For gender, the percentage who

indicated female dropped to 52.5%.

Table III gives the information about participant’s sexual orientation. The most frequent sexual orientation indicated was bisexual (30%), homosexual (20%), and queer (20%).

Table IV gives information about the participant’s race. Over half of the participants identified black/African American as their race (52.5%), while 17.5% of participants indicated mixed race by writing in an answer. These answers were: White and Indigenous Mexican ancestry; Black and Chinese; Indigenous Mexican and White Mexican; Mixed race, black; Filipino and Chinese; Korean and White; and one answer that indicated mixed race, but not what mix.

B. Quantitative Results

We asked respondents to give their level of agreement with seven statements about QPOC representation in video games. Table V gives descriptive statistics about each of the statements. We can see from the responses that the respondents do not feel that QPOC are adequately represented, with 97.5% of the respondents indicating disagree or strongly disagree with a median response of strongly disagree to Q1. They are also not satisfied with the level of QPOC representation in video games [Q5], with 92.5% of the respondents indicating disagree or strongly disagree (median was in between strongly disagree and disagree), and no respondents indicating agree or strongly agree.

The respondents indicate that representation of their identities does matter to them [Q2], with 90% indicating agree or strongly agree (median was strongly agree). With regards to the personal impact of the representation of their identities in media, the respondents indicate that viewing QPOC in media positively impacts them. For Q3, 78.5% of the respondents indicated agree or strongly agree with a median answer of agree. Q6 and Q7 ask about how QPOC representation affects the respondents and how it impacts how others perceive them. Nearly all the respondents (90%) indicate agree or strongly agree (median was agree) that representation affects how they perceives themselves [Q6] and 87.5% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that representation affects how others perceived them (median was strongly agree) [Q7]. Lastly, the respondents indicate that they notice when QPOC are excluded from media [Q4] with 95% of the respondents indicated agree or strongly agree (median was strongly agree) and no respondents indicating disagree or strongly disagree.

C. Qualitative Results

For the first open ended question, “If you could only choose one of your identities to be represented in video games (or media) which would you choose and why?” (n=28) the respondents were split, with 14 responses indicating their gender, and 14 indicating their race/ethnicity. Five of the responses indicated their sexual orientation. Four responses indicated that they wanted both their sexual orientation and race/ethnicity represented. Three of the respondents indicated

TABLE I. SEX OF PARTICIPANTS (N=40)

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Female	26	65%
Intersex	1	2.5%
Male	10	25%
Prefer not to disclose	1	2.5%
Write-in answers: Nonbinary/Maverique, don't ask this, it's transphobic and sex essentialist, 1 (2.5%); they/them, 1 (2.5%)		

TABLE II. GENDER OF PARTICIPANTS (N=40)

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Female	21	52.5%
Genderfluid	1	2.5%
Male	9	22.5%
Non-binary	7	17.5%
Prefer not to disclose	1	2.5%
Trans (male to female)	0	0%
Trans (female to male)	0	0%
Write-in answers: Gender Queer, 1 (2.5%)		

TABLE III. SEXUAL ORIENTATION OF PARTICIPANTS (N=39)

<i>Sexual Orientation</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Asexual	2	5%
Bisexual	12	30%
Heterosexual	5	12.5%
Homosexual	8	20%
Pansexual	3	7.5%
Queer	8	20%
Skoliosexual	0	0%
Write-in answers: Gynesexual, 1 (2.5%)		

TABLE IV. RACE OF PARTICIPANTS (N=40)

<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0%
Asian Indian	1	2.5%
Black/African American	21	52.5%
Chinese	1	2.5%
Cuban	0	0%
Filipino	1	2.5%
Japanese	0	0%
Korean	0	0%
Mexican, Mexican American, or Chicano descent	3	7.5%
Native Hawaiian, Guamanian or Chamorro	0	0%
Vietnamese	1	2.5%
White	4	10%
Mixed	7	17.5%
Prefer not to disclose	1	2.5%
Write-in answers: Black British, 1 (2.5%); Central American descent, 1 (2.5%); Jamaican, 2 (5%); Middle Eastern, 1 (2.5%); Panamanian, 1 (2.5%); Puerto Rican, 3 (7.5%); South American, 1 (2.5%)		

that they did not want to choose only one aspect of their identity to represent.

We found eight responses that dealt with stereotypes, specifically respondents who no longer wanted to see stereotypical representations of their identities in games. Ten of the responses were coded under “visibility” which were responses that dealt with the idea that there were simply not enough examples in games at all. Three responses dealt with themes of discrimination and racism.

Seven responses were coded with “color” which were responses that discussed the color of their skin as being the aspect of their identity as being primary, or first seen, by others. Two responses indicated that their race/ethnicity was a key factor in shaping their identity. The code for sexual orientation shaping identity was added to our code set for completeness, but no responses were given this code.

For the second open-ended question, “Can you give examples of how representation has validated any aspect of your identity?” (n=24), we found that 12 responses actually gave a specific example from media that helped validate their identity. For five of those examples, the example was actually multiple examples, split to different aspects of their identity. There were seven responses that indicated that there were no examples of themselves in media and one additional response that indicated that they never noticed any examples.

Twelve of the responses indicated that seeing examples of representation improved their self-worth and self-image. Eight of the responses, seven of which overlapped with the 12 about improved self-worth, indicated that the representation allowed them to see themselves in the media, what we coded as “mirror”. The player could see themselves in the game/other media.

We tracked which aspects of identity were identified in the responses to this question. We looked for mentions of race/ethnicity (8 responses), sexual orientation (9 responses), gender (12 responses), and skin color or colorism (4 responses). We also kept track of which type of media was identified. There were 14 responses that indicated which type of media had the representation (games=9, television=6, film=1, comics=1).

V. DISCUSSION

We sought to investigate how QPOC felt about how they are represented in games/media and how representation impacts them. We found that nearly all of the respondents were concerned with representation, noticed when their identities were excluded and believe that portrayal of their identities affects how they perceive themselves and how others perceive them. Table V. illustrates this, revealing that respondents tended to cluster around the same answers – indicating dissatisfaction with the current portrayal of their respective groups. These statistical findings support past findings that representation does matter to underrepresented groups and has the ability to affect those who engage with that type of media [6, 7, 8, 19, 41].

TABLE V. LIKERT-TYPE QUESTION RESPONSES (N=40)

	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>
Q1. Queer people of color are adequately represented in video games	26 (65%)	13 (32.5%)	-	-	1 (2.5%)	1.425	Strongly Disagree
Q2. Representation of my identities (gender, race, sexuality, sex) in video games matters to me.	2 (5%)	-	2 (5%)	11 (27.5%)	25 (62.5%)	4.425	Strongly Agree
Q3. Viewing queer people of color (QPOC) in media has positively affected my perception of self.	-	2 (5%)	7 (17.5%)	14 (35%)	17 (42.5%)	4.15	Agree
Q4. I notice when QPOC are excluded from media.	-	-	2 (5%)	12 (30%)	26 (65%)	4.6	Strongly Agree
Q5. I am satisfied with the current level of QPOC representation in video games.	20 (50%)	17 (42.5%)	3 (7.5%)	-	-	1.575	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree
Q6. Representation has/does affect how I perceive myself.	-	-	4 (10%)	24 (60%)	12 (30%)	4.2	Agree
Q7. Representation has/does affect how others perceive me.	-	2 (5%)	3 (7.5%)	9 (22.5%)	26 (65%)	4.475	Strongly Agree

The more varied answers were in the qualitative responses. In response to question 1, 14 of the respondents indicated that if they could only choose one of their identities to be represented, they would choose race. Eleven of these respondents indicated that neither gender nor sexual orientation alone was sufficient. This means that QPOC are either not represented on any level of their identity or if they are, they exist as harmful stereotypes. Further, some who cited race in addition to or instead of another aspect of their identity explicitly did so because of whiteness. One QPOC chose race because "...White people in my sexual orientation still sometimes embody the racism of their straight counterparts." Other respondents add "...If a nonbinary person is put in a video game they are almost always every single time white" and "...It's hard for me to relate to a gay character because it's almost always white and that's something I can't relate to at all." One queer white respondent even explicitly stated that they chose gender because "...we all know there's enough white people in games." These answers point to issues with the hypervisibility of whiteness and how it is insufficient in terms of representing QPOC.

If these respondents had to limit their representation to one aspect of their identity, they would prefer racial diversity over queer white diversity. For some, this is specifically due to relatability, particularly with regard to race being a more significant factor in shaping their self-image. Perhaps this is because in some instances queerness can be concealed, whereas race is not easily hidden.

Those who chose a combination of race and something else, did not feel that race was sufficient. This was more often women and trans individuals. This is most likely due to the fact that they exist in more intersections of underrepresentation than males. Male respondents in this study who picked race more often picked race exclusively. It is the case that male-ness is often overrepresented and positively represented in media [42].

In addition to emphasis on race, there was a call for darker skinned representation in general – specifically by latinx respondents. One responded stated "Darker skinned latinxs, because I would like to see more dark skinned characters as

protagonists rather than villains" and "This is tough, I'm Afro latina, and a lot of people consider those separate identities but they're one in my experience. I would love for Latinos to be represented as separate from race. I want to see Black Latinos." These two responses could stem from the erasure of darker skinned latinx people from media and latinx culture and ultimately the negative depiction of darker skinned people in media and the tendency to display ethnic people with lighter skin over darker skin [43]. Gina Torrez, an Afro-Latina woman speaks on colorism in the community and media, stating that "When I became an actress I quickly realized 'the world' liked their actresses to look Italian, and not like me" [44].

Though this question suggested respondents should choose only one aspect of their identity to be represented, some defied this and refused to concede any part of their identity. "Intersectionality or bust" one respondent wrote plainly. Others similarly wrote that they felt they should not have to choose, all of their identities are indivisible and should be represented. This supports the sentiment that splitting the identities of QPOC will not accurately, honestly, or holistically represent them.

Question 2's responses were more varied than question 1. Despite this, most of the responses that cited an example stated that positive representation has empowered them and helped them understand themselves, a phenomenon that has been reported in other media studies [5, 19, 20, 41]. Only one respondent was able to give an example of a character that positively embodies all of their identities. "HTGAWM just helped me realize that there are other people like me. (Annalise, black, woman, bi)." The character this respondent is referring to comes from a fairly recent television show that features diverse and well-rounded representation. All others who were able to give examples gave split examples. This indicates that there were not enough QPOC in media (positive or otherwise) for the respondents to relate to.

Of the nine respondents to mention video games, four were able to cite specific video game examples. One addressed freedom of gender expression in *Animal Crossing*, another cited *Pokemon X* allowing players to be dark skinned, the *Mass*

Effect trilogy which has queer relationships in two of its games, and finally a gender ambiguous character from *Undertale*, named Frisk, partially representing a respondent. To its credit, the *Mass Effect* series allows the player deeper levels of customization, has attempted queer relationships, and has made steps to be more inclusive. *Dragon Age*, another franchise owned by the makers of *Mass Effect*, shares this attempted inclusivity [45]. The other examples at most seem like afterthoughts in the context of diversity, though they are steps in the right direction. Not gender-locking clothing and allowing players to appear dark skinned in games where the avatar is completely customizable is not laudable. Frisk was cited as the closest an agender respondent could get to representation. However, Frisk is simply gender ambiguous. On the subject of ambiguous representation one respondent states "...ambiguous representation is not representation." Another respondent states "it's not really representation when the creators meet the bare minimum and when you have to do the majority of the representation yourself." Both of these comments describe the types of "representation" provided by the latter two examples. Though somewhat meaningful, these examples seem more like concessions rather than attempts to be truly inclusive.

A common theme among different identities in both questions was combating stereotypes. This was especially prevalent among bisexual respondents who expressed discontent and even fear caused by media stereotypes. One respondent stated "I'm scared to come out in a lot of situations because the media portrays pan or bi girls as dumb and slutty and I don't want to be attacked." The stereotype most addressed by the bisexual respondents was that bisexuals are promiscuous. What is important here is that negative media representation has caused internalized fear in this respondent. This speaks to the influence of media on the perception of underrepresented groups and how people in underrepresented groups conceal or police themselves as result. Another respondent gave a similar response mentioning fear of "twofold violence" for being black and a lesbian. This further conveys the complexities of existing at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities.

The concept of colorism was brought up again in the question 2 responses. There is a tendency for those with lighter skin to be more readily represented, one respondent states representation of dark skinned characters prevented her from bleaching her skin to be accepted. This indicates a need for more dark skinned characters of various races and ethnic groups. Colorism is an issue prevalent in other cultures where darker skinned members of these cultures are marginalized and lighter skinned members are praised [43]. The respondent also states that this prevented them from bleaching to be "more appealing to the White gaze." White gaze is a phrase used to describe viewing people or things through a lens of whiteness, characterized by its power to objectify and normalize [46]. The idea of the white gaze is related to colorism, in that those who are lighter skinned are preferred by white people, who have a greater control over media. This concept of "gaze" by a majority group was addressed by a bisexual respondent who stated "there have been a few other shows where it is either heavily implied or outright stated that two women/women identifying characters have had relationships without it being

for the male gaze." This specifically refers to the depiction of women/women relationships for the "male gaze" or male consumption, which in this case would be fetishization [47]. This sentiment was shared by another respondent who felt bisexual representation was something people ticked "...off a fetish box." Both of these respondents address the issue "gaze" and how it is important to create representation that is not constructed for the gaze of majority groups, but rather an honest, well rounded representation of the group(s) to be represented.

There was one respondent who was not concerned with representation or validation in any media. They state "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." What this quote embodies is hopelessness. The respondent has given up on being reflected in media as a means of adaptation. This is a particularly dangerous mentality in the sense that if all QPOC, POC, women, or any marginalized group develop it, it would contribute to the symbolic annihilation of these groups. This in turn would not remedy the apparent negative consequences of exclusionary media. Invisibility not only damages marginalized groups self-worth, it is a chain reaction. It facilitates ignorance which feeds intolerance that ultimately culminates in injustice.

VI. CONCLUSION

Overall our findings reveal that there is a desire for QPOC to be represented wholly, honestly, and responsibly. Respondents addressed multilayered and nuanced issues stemming from combinations of their respective identities. These issues are related to misrepresentation and lack of visibility in media like videogames. We found that QPOC notice and do care when they are not represented. These feelings of invisibility and invalidation contribute to feelings of alienation in QPOC. If a QPOC cannot see people like them in games, they may lose interest in pursuing a career in this field or in games all together. It is probably not coincidental that there are both low numbers of QPOC in the videogame industry and almost nonexistent representation of QPOC in videogames. 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 research should focus on one intersection of QPOC. For example queer black people of color or perhaps bisexual black people. These demographics can be specified further to target a very small subgroup. This would allow researchers to draw more general results pertaining to that specific group and would yield potentially more consistent patterns in data given the shared identities. We look forward to analyzing the results of the in depth interviews with QPOC and their experiences with representation and media in general, which are the second part of this study to see what aspects of these issues can receive a deeper treatment with the analysis of the interview transcripts.

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