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Untitled Chores: The Game

Acrylic, Mixed Media, Collage

If everything were to be so simple there would be no need for creativity. My idea for this project was to create a concept for a 2D video game. This piece was a process, conveying the idea of everything being part of said process. No matter how small or large the project seems, the truth is that it's always the task of getting from point A to point B. I was working with materials that I wouldn't normally use such as old newspapers and matte gel to create a textured canvas to paint. Additionally, I put color-coordinated newspapers onto round canvases for a unique look. I was inspired by 2D RPG visual novels like *Omori*, *Friday Night Funkin*, and *Stardew Valley*, driving me forward to create my own hypothetical game. My comics elective was also a great contributor to my ideas, by learning the process of storytelling and narrative I managed to incorporate these concepts into my final project. I wanted to show exactly what goes into making something original, something you love and can call your own. This artwork portrays the hard work that goes into creating something bigger. How sketches can turn into full ideas with depth, background, and a story. One day, I hope to make this piece into a real game or graphic novel.

Stereotypes and Characters throughout Multimedia



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OS49

Writers Note: Stereotypes are infused in our culture. This paper will focus on the stereotypes within animated movies, 2D games, and 3D video games. Providing context and depth as to how character design and stereotypes are interconnected in our modern-day media. Today's entertainment sources are powerful tools that are used to portray a narrative and are a prime outlet for most generalized stereotypes.

I. Overview

Almost everything is built up from assumptions and interpretations. Stereotypes are a type of assumption based on previous judgments that are applied to a person or a group of people. Stereotypes exist in many forms and are present in our media and entertainment, some forms in which these stereotypes are concentrated are in animated movies, 2D video games, and 3D video games. These categories all have something in common. They all have characters that were designed with purposeful stereotypes embedded. So I pose the question, what would the definition of “good character design” be if stereotypes never existed? This is a difficult question to answer considering that stereotypes are deeply embedded in our society and way of interpreting. However, we have defined specific stereotypes throughout the decades and placed them into categories. These categories help us differentiate and understand each type of stereotype. However, it is easier to discriminate and hold prejudices against people who cannot change certain aspects of themselves, such as race or gender. These stereotypes are easier to back up and push forward to support a claim. Therefore, among the many, gender and racial stereotypes are the most recurring in our media.

II. Gender and Racial Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are assumptions that people make based on their gender identity. Those assumptions can be positive or negative but rarely have an in-between. Humans survive by guessing and predicting, and these cognitive abilities are used to understand what humans see and experience. By associating certain aspects, feelings, and perceptions with the world around them, humans avoid dangerous situations. However, assumptions are applied to other humans too. More specifically, assumptions based on gender and what that means. When those gender assumptions become widespread and agreed upon in a certain society or community, they become stereotypes. This point was well emphasized by Nazlı Bhatia, author of *“Changes in Gender Stereotypes Over Time: A Computational Analysis,”* in their article they state, “Stereotypes, in turn, matter because they influence perceptions and behavior of both evaluators and targets of stereotyping... people evaluate the performance of men versus women differently and in accordance with stereotypic expectations.” (Bhatia) Gender stereotypes are seen in the workplace, men and women are treated differently because of people's ongoing perception of both genders and their association with certain characteristics and skill sets.

On the other hand, the author of *Think Unto Others: The Self-Destructive Impact of Negative Racial Stereotypes*, S. Christian Wheeler says that “stereotyping has emphasized the cognitive efficiency that stereotyping affords social perceivers. In addition to minimizing effort, this processing efficiency permits the stereotype holder to devote cognitive resources to other activities” (Wheeler). Corporate spaces, for example, prioritize efficiency, so turning to stereotypes when in need of judgment is effective and beneficial to corporate offices in the long run. Interviewers rely on these gender stereotypes when conducting interviews, they need to make quick decisions on whether or not to hire a person based on previous experiences and

societal norms. More often than not, however, these judgments are harmful, discriminatory, and don't reflect the truth.

Another prevalent stereotype that is significant in today's culture is racial stereotypes. As stated by Jennifer L. Berdahl, author of *Prescriptive Stereotypes and Workplace Consequences for East Asians in North America*. mentions, "We pursue the idea that racial stereotypes are not only descriptive, reflecting beliefs about how racial groups actually differ but are prescriptive as well, reflecting beliefs about how racial groups should differ" (Berdahl). Racial stereotypes divide people because they set a perspective that certain people are not the same as others and act differently just because of an underlying factor. This leads to the perception that everyone should be divided into groups and should stay in their groups which are based on other people's judgments and biases. Furthermore, This sort of thinking fuels discrimination and prejudice that is seen in today's society as well as the belief that race dictates the person they will become.

III. Stereotypes and Multimedia

Societal stereotypes have influenced the media and our perception of what normality looks like. Generalizations are portrayed in modern media and entertainment because they are used to get the point across in a film, movie, or show. Therefore, stereotypes have also been deeply embedded in character creation. Every character that has ever been written can be associated with some sort of stereotype even when the correlation is presumed to be unintentional. This was well said by Phil Turner author of "Is Stereotyping Inevitable When Designing With Personas?", who writes,

A stereotype is a cognitive structure containing our bias. It is quite clear that for many designers to create a user representation is, very likely, to create a stereotype. The

psychological availability and ‘cognitive economy’ of stereotypes make stereotyping almost inevitable” (Turner). Certain aspects of the character are judged and generalized. Most characters start as a stereotype and then are later developed into better characters with motives, flaws, strengths, and abilities. That's because stereotypes are easily understood and could be relevant to a larger audience. While creating a character the artist needs to know about how they want this character to be perceived, the easiest way to achieve that goal is by using stereotypes to illustrate a point, cause, or event.

Character design is centered around perception, so stereotypes play a critical role in that. If stereotypes were to change, then the character designers would adapt to the new perspective of said stereotype to incorporate newer, changed stereotypes. To further illustrate my point, an article written by Alice Eagly titled “*How Do Stereotypes Form and Can They Be Altered?*,” states that “if enough members of a stereotyped group manage to break into new fields... prevailing stereotypes about them would likely change” (Eagly). If enough people change the status quo, then the stereotypes will also take new forms. However, they will only change, not disappear. Changed stereotypes will create a new “norm,” a more diverse one with more representation. Harold J. Leavitt, an editor of *Readings in Managerial Psychology*, says “With more experience, it is presumed, most people of goodwill are likely to revise their stereotypes.” (Leavitt) With that said, they will still be considered stereotypes. The same can be said with character design, the more representation and diverse interpretation of characters the more our perceptions will change. A new normalization of assumptions will be adopted. Tropes in the media will change. However, stereotypes will never fully disappear, they will adapt to the diverse characters created and will still be embedded in the media we consume.

IV. Case Studies

Lady and the Tramp

Lady and the Tramp is a classic 2D animated movie. Its story is centered around a cocker spaniel named Lady who lives with wealthy owners. You follow her story as her life changes and she ends up on the streets being protected by a stray dog named Tramp. Essentially it turns into a love story between the two dogs. Nevertheless, at a certain point in the movie, two Siamese cats are introduced and from their portrayal in the film, it is clear that they were designed specifically with certain stereotypes in mind. It was based on negative stereotypes of Chinese people and their appearance. This stereotype is the only thing defining the cat characters making them flat characters with no depth other than a common harmful generalization. They are more like a caricature rather than a character.

Life is Strange: Before the Storm

In the category of 3D game representation I chose *Life is Strange: Before the Storm*. This is a 3D story-based option game where you choose between options that will affect the story's end. This game specifically follows the life of a 16-year-old girl named Chloe Price and her experiences at home, school, and other social situations. In this game, Chloe Price is exactly what the character designers wanted her to be. She's an American pale-skinned girl, with short dyed blue hair, known for being hot-tempered, your typical school delinquent who will stand up to whatever is bothering her. A typical emo girl. All of these assumptions can be drawn from her design alone. The designers took what was stereotypically associated with strong female character traits and designed her to fit the narrative. This is a modern stereotype that is presented. The stereotype is that a strong girl is rebellious and does not conform to societal rules. It suits the

story's purpose quite nicely but based on character design alone, this design is on the nose and gives the viewer the details right away.

Friday Night Funkin' HD

Friday Night Funkin is a 2D animated rhythm game that is centered around the main character, Boyfriend, and his girlfriend. It's story-based and tells a narrative through its techno-like songs and beats. This game is a prime example of "good" intentional character design. The intention was to include aspects that focus on discovering BF as a character rather than viewing him as a placeholder, forming a connection between the player and the character. Focusing on the character of BF. He is a white guy with blue hair. A rapper with a humorous personality. He is a canonically short male main protagonist who rap battles his enemies. The character design lets us know that he is confident in himself and his abilities while fighting for his girlfriend. Short male characters are not typically associated with confidence in 2D games. The stereotype that men should be tall and well-built is being countered in this game. He doesn't fit the typical narrative. He doesn't act like it's a weakness and tries to compensate for his height with his rapping skills. The purposeful design of his height isn't treated as a flaw or drawback, instead, they use it to enhance his characteristics and abilities. It gives us a representation we normally wouldn't see in other media. It creates a new "normal" within the game that players can resonate with. This makes BF a character that has depth to him which opposes initial impressions. The designers give him a personality, relatable struggles, and thoughts.

Omori

Omori is a 2D game with 3D elemental graphics incorporated into its gameplay. The story follows a boy named Omori, a black and white colored character who experiences the world differently. The player witnesses a story about Omori's life. In this game, Omori's friend is a kid named Basil, he has a pale complexion, chin-length blond hair, and teal eyes, he wears a flower crown and is shy, pastel, and soft presenting. Throughout the story, he is quite the pushover and has a strong moral compass. However, as the player is soon to find out, Basil is an assistant in staging a suicide. The character design is compelling because it is very deceitful to the viewer. The designers use a modern stereotype of a shy boy who likes plants and can do no wrong, reversing the typical gender norm of a girl being timid while the guy is tough and masculine. The reason this is a good design is that Basil does not only play into that stereotype, he is well-rounded and has a personality that reflects other characteristics not associated with that stereotype. The creator provides depth to his character through a stereotype making the narrative much more intriguing.

V. Conclusion

All in all, to answer the question, what would the definition of "good character design" be if stereotypes never existed? Stereotypes will continue to exist within our society. They will evolve, change, and adapt as the generations grow, but they will always exist. Stereotypes are deeply embedded in human history because it was primarily used to make decisions and judgments. So erasing stereotypes, especially in the way we design characters will be next to impossible to achieve. Nonetheless, continuing to strive to revise old negative stereotypes is a

way to change how certain people are viewed and how they are treated. In the end, it provides a wider range of representation.

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