D-ESL

Inclusive video game design ideas for a language course
Inclusion Guidelines when making a Video Game

Inclusive depiction of characters

Introduction

Representation in the media is how media portray certain types of people or communities. There are some groups that are underrepresented in most Western media. They include women, people of color, LGBTQIA+ people, people with a range of body shapes and types, people of non-Christian religions, and differently-abled people. There has been a steady increase in diversity in media, but progress has been long and slow.

Why are these guidelines needed?

Positive and realistic representation can help fight stereotypes that can be detrimental to individuals. Some people don't have the occasion to meet people from certain groups and spending time with characters in a game or show is the only way for them to rub shoulders with these people. Being exposed only to stereotypes can create misguided mental representations

while having realistic characters can help the public experience what others feel like and develop empathy.

Representation is also important to offer role models to everyone and let people figure out that what they experience is shared. Moreover, it can also diminish morbidity. Indeed, figuring out that you share a condition with a character can be a way to put a name on what you feel/experience and verbalize it or have a medical check to validate it.

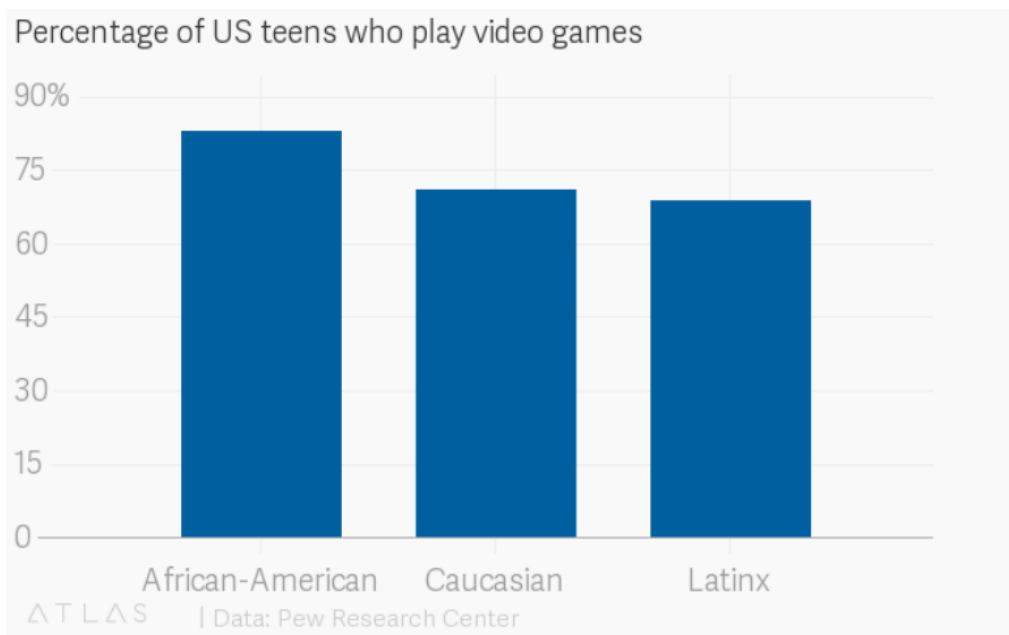It is important to think about these points because gamers are diverse while game creators are not.

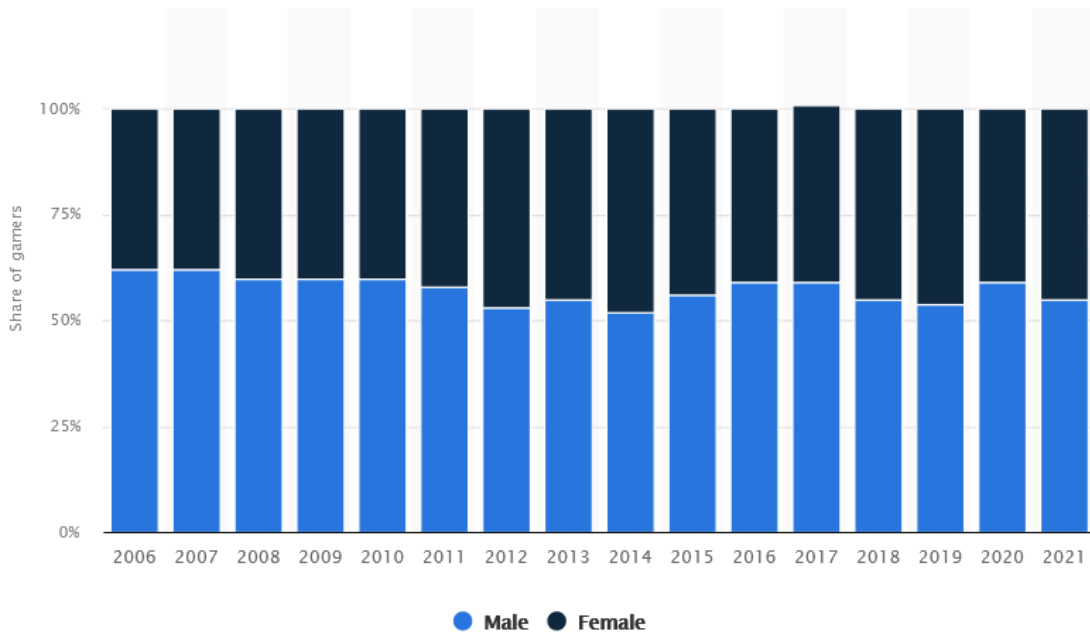Figure 1. Percentage of teens who play video games (source: qz.com).

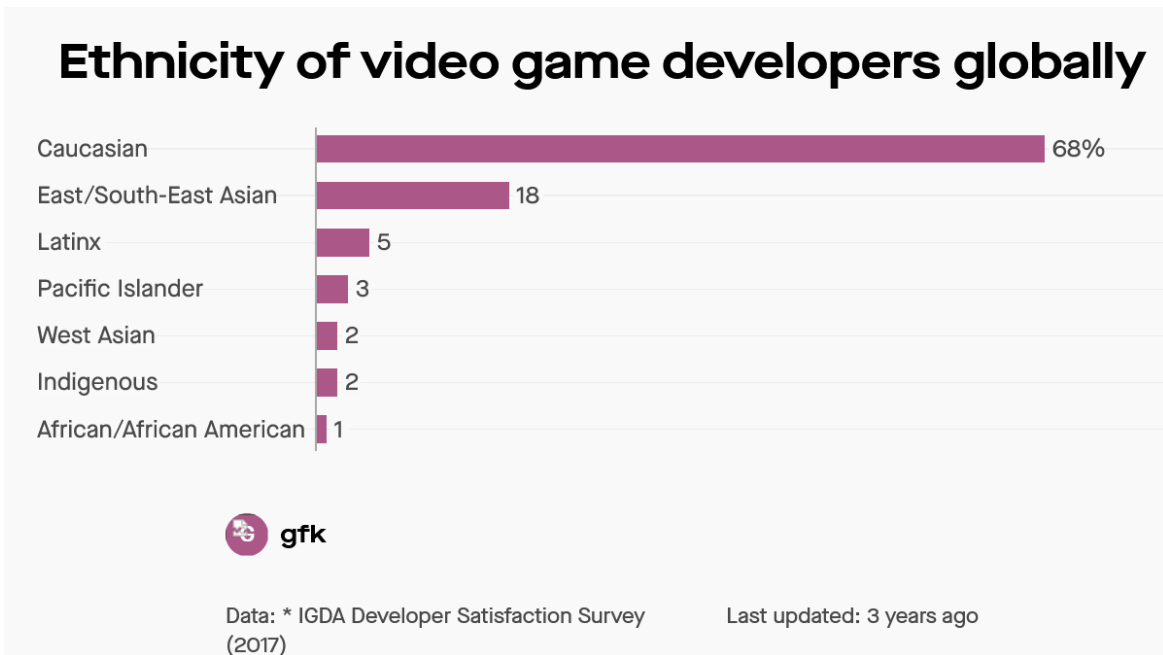Figure 2. Percentage of male and female players (source: qz.com)

Ethnicity of video game developers globally

Caucasian	68%
East/South-East Asian	18
Latinx	5
Pacific Islander	3
West Asian	2
Indigenous	2
African/African American	1

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Data: * IGDA Developer Satisfaction Survey (2017)   Last updated: 3 years ago

Figure 3. Ethnicity of video game developers globally (source: qz.com).

Guidelines

Points of reflection when creating a character

Figure 4. The "average hero" face type (source: gamerant.com)

In the paper "Race and Gender: A Look at Modern Video Games" Ross Orlando (2014) analysed video game characters from 2007 to 2012 and pointed out that:

- out of 61 characters, 45 were designated male and only five were female;
- white people make up 67% of characters, whereas black and Asian people make up only 3%, Latino people are only 1%, and Indigenous people don't appear at all;
- 45% of the 45 male characters exhibited very stereotypical masculine qualities, and 15% of all characters (both male and female) were hyper-sexualized as well.

When creating characters, make sure to check the following features to see if your cast is diverse and not based only on features you know (yours and stereotypes).

☑ Age

☑ Ability (Disabled/impaired)

- ☑ Body type
- ☑ Facial features
- ☑ Non-Western clothing
- ☑ Ethnic hair types
- ☑ Non-traditional family models
- ☑ Non-binary gender representation

Guidelines for writing about people with disabilities

Language

The words used to portray disabled people matter.

Be aware of the following guidelines:

- Emphasize abilities not limitations:
  - A person who uses a wheelchair vs. wheelchair-bound
- Refer to the person first, disability second:
  - A person with a disability vs. a disabled person
- Use neutral language
  - Don't use language that portrays the person as passive or suggests the lack of something (victim, invalid, defective):
    - A person who has had a stroke vs a stroke victim

- Emphasize the need for accessibility rather than the presence of disability
  - Accessible parking vs. handicapped parking
- Don't use condescending euphemisms
  - Differently-abled, challenged, special…
- Describing people without disabilities:
  - Do not imply negative stereotypes of those with disabilities. People without disabilities vs. normal, able, whole.
- Portray successful people with disabilities in a balanced, non-heroic way.

- Create balanced human-interest stories instead of tear-jerking stories

Characterisation and plot

Things to avoid in your story:

- Don't centre a character arc on disability, instead, create arcs for characters that happen to have disabilities.
- Let characters with disabilities have important roles or even the main role, like Professor Xavier in X-Men. Don't limit them to the "clumsy sidekicks".
- The character doesn't need to be "cured" or overcome their disability to be happy.
- Don't use the character's disability to make the player feel pity.
- Don't feel forced to "protect" people with disabilities, that can be felt as condescending. Once again, Professor Xavier is a good example.

Stereotypes to avoid

Avoid using the following stereotypes when depicting characters with disabilities:

- people who whine and want to die
- people who are heroic and overly courageous
- people who need the "able-bodied friend" to teach them life isn't over
- people who cure themselves through sheer force of will
- people filled with murderous rage and hate because of their disability
- people who become superhuman or superheroes and other classic simplistic views of persons with disabilities

Conclusion

The media we are exposed to impacts our vision of the world (hyperreality). Representation is important then because it can acquaint the audience with people they don't meet in real life. It

is important to treat depicted characters with respect but not condescendence and avoid perpetuating stereotypes in order to break misconceptions about certain groups of people.

Resources and references

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