INFLUENCING YOUNG ADULT SOCIAL AND PERSONAL IDENTITY THROUGH VIDEO-GAME NARRATIVES

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Abstract

At a time when young adults are building self-identity they are also connecting, in increasing numbers, via massive multi-player online role-playing video games (MMORPGs). Participation in online game playing communities requires assuming the persona of a game character. Young people spend many hours playing the role of a fictional character at the same ages at which developing social identities are influenced. The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of avatar identification on young adult's self-identity through analysis of game player's online communications. Using a qualitative, exploratory design blogs posted to the PlayStation Blog site were analysed for content discussing aspects of individual player's social identity and personal identity. Many players associated themselves with their avatars and avatar traits were often discussed in relation to a players' self-identity. In addition, multi-player social networks were found to impact players' feeling of social acceptance and group connection. We discuss the implications of these findings, both positive and negative, for the development of young people's self-identity and whether the dominant individual focus of games may ultimately influence the fragmentation of communities.

Keywords: Web-Based Communities, Avatar, Video Games, Self-Identity, Social Identity