

# Girls and Assassin's Creed

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**Abstract**—Assassins Creed is one of the top selling video game franchises], as such it has a marked impact on the worldwide culture of gaming. As interaction designers we have to evaluate the impact that video games have on their users. One way that we can do that is by taking a more feminist approach; feminism naturally goes hand in hand with interaction design as it refers to fulfillment, identity, equity, empowerment and social justice. In this paper I evaluate the user satisfaction of female users as they play Assassin's Creed (An Action Adventure game) in terms of evaluating their levels of fulfillment, identity, equity and empowerment.

**Keywords**—video games; assassin's creed, feminist HCI; new media; user experience

## I. INTRODUCTION

Feminism refers to the social and economic equality between both genders. Many HCI researchers and practitioners often advocate for the 'user', where the design should reflect the user's designs, wants, and needs. Feminists have long since argued for polyvocality- that is allowing for multiple perspectives and varied voices to be heard [1]. We can see that feminism is a natural ally for interaction design. The six qualities of feminist interaction design introduced by Bardzell-pluralism, participation, advocacy, ecology, embodiment, self-disclosure can all be applied to the field of new media, in particular video games [2].

### A. Feminism and Game Design

Prior concerns raised in Game design include but are not limited to the portrayal of female and male bodies in video games and virtual reality [1,4,5,10]. The usage of traditional male and female bodies implies that character design is influenced by the characterization and presentation of gender. [2] However with 48% of gamers being female, but only 22% of game developers [14], we must ensure that the needs of the user are being met.

### B. Women as Tropes in Game Design

Female characters in video games have the double-edged sword of having their stories, or their bodies used to further the arc of the male protagonist. One trope is the 'damsel in distress' [17] where the female character is presented as being helpless, and in need of saving. A variant of this trope is where the death or rape of a female character first occurs, and now the male protagonist has to avenge her. These tropes can be damaging to both genders as they remove the autonomy of

the female character, which can be damaging to the psyche of male and female gamers [7, 11].

### C. Assassin's Creed

One of the highest selling game series Assassin's Creed, has a game called Assassin's Creed III: Liberation which features the series' first female protagonist, Aveline de Grandpre. This has lead gamers to ask why Assassin's Creed: Unity doesn't have any female playable characters in co-operative mode. To which Ubisoft creative director Alex Amancio told Polygon that "It's double the animations, it's double the voices, all that stuff and double the visual assets. Especially because we have customizable assassins. It was really a lot of extra production work" He went on to further say that the process of creating female avatars would require 8,000 extra animations. This statement lead Jonathan Cooper, the animation director on Assassin's Creed III to respond on twitter and say that "In my educated opinion, I would estimate this to be a day or two's work. Not a replacement of 8000 animations"[6].

The reason the Assassin's Creed series was chosen was because it's one of the few very popular games that has featured a female protagonist within its series. Currently Liberation has a 6/10 satisfaction rating [5] on Gamespot and Unity a 7/10 rating [9] based on reviews from Gamespot. With the storyline and gameplay being very similar, and the protagonists of both games being given similar abilities, what determines the difference between the level of enjoyment?

### E. Relevant Works

Gameplay refers to the overall experience of playing a video game not including factors such as graphics and sound. An important factor in measuring enjoyment of a game is how the game makes the player feel about himself or herself not just how the player feels about the game. There are many different player engagement questionnaires designed to measure the different factors that can lead to players feeling satisfied during play. Three of the more prominent ones are the Gaming Engagement Questionnaire (GEQ) X, Immersive Experience Questionnaire (IEQ) X, and the Player Experience of Needs Satisfaction questionnaire (PENS) X. Weighing all three against each other, it was decided to use the GEQ which is weighed on a five point system. This questionnaire was chosen as it allows for a measure of the gamers' satisfaction at all points of gameplay.

Implicit attitudes are actions or judgments that are under automatically activated judgment that happens without the person's awareness of it. The Implicit Association Test was used in this experiment as it's an effective tool for measuring social associative structures. The Implicit Association Test (IAT) measures attitudes and beliefs that people may be unwilling or unable to report as it measures the strength of associations between concepts (e.g., black people, gay people) and evaluations (e.g., good, bad) or stereotypes (e.g., athletic, clumsy). This is done to generate user data, and to determine whether or not the users have any pre-existing gender bias.

## II. METHODOLOGY

An initial sample of six participants was used to determine how they felt towards the game. The participants are ranged from senior high school graduates, university students, to full time workers; with an age range from 20-28. They were from different socioeconomic backgrounds from within and outside of Taiwan. They were recruited based on their level of interest in video games and action adventure games in particular, and range from casual to serious gamers.

### A. Harvard Implicit Association Test

The Implicit Association Test (IAT)[15] measures attitudes and beliefs that people may be unwilling or unable to report as it measures the strength of associations between concepts (e.g., black people, gay people) and evaluations (e.g., good, bad) or stereotypes (e.g., athletic, clumsy).

### B. Gaming Engagement Questionnaire (GEQ)

The GEQ [12] is split up into three sections; core, social presence, and post game modules.

### C. Talk through

The aim of this part of the experiment was to ask the participants to describe what they felt as they game was being played, in order to get a more in depth response.

#### Experiment description

The goal of this study was to understand if the ability to relate to the playable character's gender/ethnicity increases the gameplay satisfaction for the user.

#### Game system and controller

Unity was played on a PS4 and Liberation was played using either a keyboard or a controller on a PC system depending on the participants' level of comfort.

#### Training

The participants were given 5 minutes prior to starting the game to familiarize themselves with the controller and moving the character around. If they were able to complete the introductory mission they would be able to navigate well throughout the game.

## Procedure

The participants were asked to play Assassin's Creed Unity and Liberation for 30 minutes each. Before playing the games the participants were asked to complete the Implicit Association test. After playing the games they were asked to complete the GEQ. They were also asked to describe their feelings about the games before and after gameplay.

## III. RESULTS

Our results are based on the data gathered on the 6 participants who completed the questionnaire for each game.

### A. GEQ evaluation

TABLE I: TABLE SHOWING THE AVERAGE RESULTS FOR THE COMPONENTS OF THE GEQ CORE MODULE

Component	Average(Unity)	Average(Liberation)
Competence	2.16	2.5
Sensory and Imaginative Immersion	2.33	2.16
Flow	1.83	1.33
Tension/ Annoyance	2	1.8
Challenge	2.33	1.83
Negative affect	1.16	1.16
Positive affect	2.67	2.67

TABLE II: TABLE SHOWING THE AVERAGE RESULTS FOR THE COMPONENTS OF THE GEQ IN-GAME MODULE FOR UNITY VS LIBERATION

Component	Average(Unity)	Average(Liberation)
Competence	1.53	2.46
Sensory and Imaginative Immersion	2.33	2.38
Flow	2.53	2
Tension	1.78	1.88
Challenge	1.35	1.26
Negative affect	2.25	2.5
Positive affect	2.5	2.6

TABLE III: TABLE SHOWING THE AVERAGE RESULTS FOR THE COMPONENTS OF THE GEQ SOCIAL PRESENCE MODULE FOR UNITY VS LIBERATION

Component	Average (Unity)	Average (Liberation)
Empathy	1.05	2.94
Negative Feelings	1.33	2.86
Behavioural Involvement	1.72	1.72

TABLE IV: TABLE SHOWING THE AVERAGE RESULTS FOR THE COMPONENTS OF THE GEQ POST-GAME MODULE FOR UNITY VS LIBERATION

Component	Average (Unity)	Average (Liberation)
Positive Experience	2.1	2.55
Negative Experience	0.94	1.05
Tiredness	0.83	1
Returning to Reality	0.66	0.77

B. IAT evaluation

Participant	Test 1	Test 2	Game Preference
Female	Strong preference for European American	Strong preference for European American	Unity
Male	No particular preference	No particular preference	Liberation
Female	Strong Preference for African American	Strong Preference for African American	Liberation
Female	Slight preference for African American	Slight preference for African American	Liberation
Female	No particular preference	No particular preference	Unity
Male	Slight preference for African American	Slight preference for African American	Unity

IV. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

A. Discussion

In looking at the results accumulated so far, Liberation garnered more positive feedback from participants. Participants have rated it higher in the following factors: Competence, Empathy, and Tiredness. Unity ranked higher with participants for flow, and challenge. While those participants who showed a preference for European Americans enjoyed playing Unity more, where those who had no particular preference said they picked their preferred game based on the storyline and when looked at by gender it breaks down to a 50:50 ratio. While the results are inconclusive so far, gamers did appreciate being able to relate to their game character and storyline.

B. Conclusion

I believe that using a feminist perspective of evaluating this work is essential, as critique-based contributions will expose the unintended consequences of the design, thereby benefiting interaction design as it allows for a more universal assessment of the user. I believe that feminism can be far more useful than pointing out instances of sexism, it can also help us determine new approaches to studying users, as well as

coming up with new ways of designing. As an interaction designer, I hope that this research can help the community of HCI as well as the video game industry move forward in a new, more inclusive direction.

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