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The Quest for Change: Writing Video Game Narratives to Battle Sexism

A Master of Arts Thesis

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Can video games be used to break down sexist attitudes and behaviours in their own community? This research investigated the intersection between narratives being able to inform users, games as highly immersive narrative sites, and how to deliberately design a game narrative with the goal of informing and building empathy in players about a social problem. This project investigated the question through several kinds of textual and field-work based research methods. First: a reflexive, auto-ethnographic exploration of the researcher's own position in the community, plus a review of current literature, and game-player interviews were combined to establish a contextual knowledge base about negative gendered concepts and attitudes in gaming. These elements were then used to inform the construction of a game narrative which sought to, while being a great game, expose sexist attitudes and behaviours, challenge gendered stereotypes, and stimulate empathy and understanding towards the 'other'. A portion of this narrative was turned into a playable game which was used to perform player testing, which revealed elements of how games create affect in users. These research stages were then combined to build a set of guidelines for use by other game developers; guidelines designed to suggest effective ways to shape game narratives which seek to break down sexist attitudes and behaviours within the gaming medium and community.

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You're offered a golden scroll. You open it. Inside, it reads:
Change for the Better can Happen, but you must Take Action. This is your Quest.

Will you take the scroll, and go on the Adventure? Or will you hand it back, and go back to your daily life? If you take the scroll, then read on. If you return it, close this document (or put away this paper), and go have a cup of tea.