

Research Presentation

COMP230

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Background

Depression is a common illness worldwide, with more than 300 million people affected. When long-lasting and with moderate or severe intensity depression is a health condition that can have a significant impact of someone's quality of life. At its worst, depression can lead to suicide. Close to 800 000 people die due to suicide every year. Suicide is the second leading cause of death in 15-29 year-olds[1].

The Issue

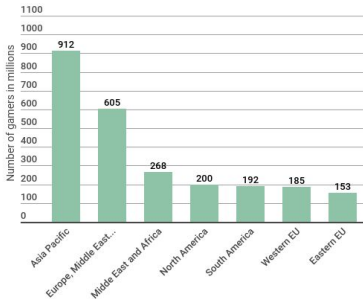
During this preliminary research it has been confirmed that there are no guidelines specific to the video game industry in regards to how suicide and depression are handled in video games.

Popularised guidelines do exist for portraying suicide in the news[2][3] and drama adaptations[4].

The drama adaptation guidelines match best with a video game environment and could possibly be implemented as guidelines for video games. However due to the artistic style, interactivity and immersion of video games it might be best to form more specific industry guidelines.

Importance

2016 Recorded Number of Video Gamers in Millions (by Region)



Sources: Newzoo; ICO Partners

Created by WePC.com

With over 2.5 billion people playing video games the ability for games to deliver a message players is dramatic. Video games have been proven to be able to cause positive health-related behaviour change[5]. Without suicide and depression being handled carefully in video games it's possible that they could be having a negative effect on the playerbase.

National Statistics

- ▶ 6,213 suicides in the UK and Ireland last year[6].
- ▶ In the UK men are three times as likely to take their own lives than women, and in the Republic of Ireland four times as likely[6].
- ▶ 19.7% of over 16's in the UK showed symptoms of anxiety or depression in 2014[7].

The Question

Should guidelines be put in place for video game developers to follow when portraying suicide/depression?

Research Avenues

- ▶ Is there any evidence that links game content to mental health conditions?
- ▶ Would guidelines be seen as restrictive?
- ▶ Are current guidelines for media followed?
- ▶ Is there a positive outcome that comes from having guidelines?

Too Restricting?

With games often being seen as an art form[8] there is a worry that developers will consider the guidelines to be restrictive. However as they are guidelines and not laws the presence of the guidelines will not stop developers from doing as they like, instead they will provide insight into good practice. Having the guidelines will at least urge the developers to think deeply about the consequences of the product they deliver.

Outcome

Having guidelines widely available to the development community could help raise awareness about the issue of depression and aid in continuing to remove the stigma surrounding the discussion of mental illness. While having this effect on the development community we can expect that these changes will trickle down into the gaming community.

Guidelines

Working together with charities that have experience in creating guidelines for the portrayal of suicide and depression in media[2][3]. Also bringing in Take This[9] a charity that helps provide support for those suffering with depression in the games industry to help make the guidelines specific to the industry.

References I

- [1] W. H. Organization, “Depression: Fact sheets,” accesed on 2018-11-06. [Online]. Available: <http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression>
- [2] W. H. Organization *et al.*, “Preventing suicide: a resource for media professionals, update 2017,” 2017.
- [3] J. Nepon, S. Fotti, L. Y. Katz, and J. Sareen, “Media guidelines for reporting suicide,” *Canadian Psychiatric Association Position Paper*, vol. 5, 2009.
- [4] Samaritans, “Drama portrayal: Fact sheets,” accesed on 2018-11-06. [Online]. Available: https://www.samaritans.org/sites/default/files/kcfinder/files/Factsheet_drama%20portrayal%20Feb16%20web.pdf

References II

- [5] T. Baranowski, R. Buday, D. I. Thompson, and J. Baranowski, "Playing for real: video games and stories for health-related behavior change," *American journal of preventive medicine*, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 74–82, 2008.
- [6] Samaritans, "Suicide statistics report," 2018.
- [7] J. Evans, I. Macrory, and C. Randall, "Measuring national well-being: Life in the uk - office for national statistics," accessed on 2018-10-05. [Online]. Available: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/measuringnationalwellbeing/2016#how-good-is-our-health>.
- [8] C. Pearce, "Games as art: The aesthetics of play," *Visible Language*, vol. 40, no. 1, p. 66, 2006.
- [9] T. This, "Take this charity website," accessed on 2018-11-06. [Online]. Available: <http://www.takethis.org/>