

Identity Quest: The Dice of Life

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1. Project Description

"Identity Quest: The Dice of Life" is an online multiplayer simulation game set within the expansive and detailed world of Dungeons & Dragons (D&D). Unlike traditional D&D gameplay focused on fantasy races and classes, "Identity Quest" centers on the human experience, intricately woven with the threads of real-world social identities and inequalities. Players embark on a journey through a familiar yet transformed universe, where the fantastical elements like landscape and lores serve as a backdrop to a deeper exploration of societal structures, privilege, and the impact of identity on life's opportunities and challenges.

The game will be held on a website so that players have access from different platforms. Upon entering the game, each player is randomly assigned a complex identity profile that mirrors the diverse tapestry of the human population. This profile includes factors such as nationality, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic background, with the probabilities of assignment reflecting current global demographics. The gameplay revolves around navigating this world and its challenges, leveraging a unique system of "chance of success" influenced by the player's identity.

Financial resources, represented through in-game currency, are the primary means by which players engage with the world. Money is earned, lost, and spent in various ways, but most notably through "life rolls" —periodic dice rolls that simulate life events and opportunities. These rolls are not random; they are fundamentally decided by the player's identity profile. Therefore, the amount of money won and the probability of success are directly influenced by the player's assigned identity,

drawing from real-world statistics on the success rates of various social and cultural groups(Samurai, 2023).

The game world is rich with opportunities for exploration, interaction, and advancement. However, it also presents obstacles and systemic biases that reflect those in the real world. For underprivileged groups, the game offers systematic support at the beginning stage to help jump start the game. Players later can participate in a variety of activities, from completing quests to forming alliances with other online players to engaging in political movements within the game to have a better chance of success. By integrating real-world data on demographics, inequality, and social justice issues into its gameplay, "Identity Quest: The Dice of Life" leverages the immersive and interactive potential of video games to foster critical engagement with social and cultural issues, exemplifying how play can be a powerful vehicle for exploring and understanding the complexities of human society.

2.Discussion

The game serves as a form of digital humanities scholarship. While humanities research pays attention to the record and interpretation of the human experience (Barber, 2016), the game offers integration of various mediums of record and multilayered narratives to challenge the conventional humanities scholarship that is conveyed by writing texts. When the words are presented in the texts line by line, the meaning expression process is linear. Although the thoughts in academic publications can be complex, diverse, and multi-dimensional, expressing them clearly and straightforwardly in such a linear way is challenging. This also can result in the reader's difficulties in understanding the initial arguments of the author. The medium of the publication in this way limits knowledge sharing. However, this game provides

the integration of “animation, audio, graphics, multiplayer games, music, narration, social media, video, Web publishing, and writing” (Barber, 2016) materials serving for locative narratives around a central argument, identity issues. In the game, the world is presented on a 3D map generally (see picture 1), and every click of the destinations on the map will bring the player to new places with new and various adventures. The arguments of what identities will bring to an individual’s life are intertwined within the multiple space configurations with the music, graphics, videos, and dialogues within it. Through this multilayered narrative approach, the diverse sub-arguments are unfolded and experienced by players, for example, how the individual takes part in social movements and influences society is in the Power Academy, how the government benefits minorities is presented in the Mystic Provision. In this way, the game conquers the narrative limitation in conventional humanities scholarship, offering a proper opportunity for the researcher to express subtle and diverse arguments while reducing the loss of re-creation in the writing process (Coltrain & Ramsay, 2019).



(picture 1, the map of the game)

This game also challenges the authority of humanities researchers in several dimensions by its interactive setting. It gives the game designer an opportunity to publish their own arguments through the game mechanism but not in a confirmed way. For example, this game introduces the statistical data in the real world into the game configuration to express the concentration on the influence of different identities on an individual's life. However, the interpretation of this data is nuanced and open to discussion. While the game designer sets parameters of the dice possibility based on it, it contains the designer's own interpretation. In this case, when the players experience the game, they can not only read the designer's argument but also generate their own arguments on it. They can also even challenge the authority of the designer's interpretation by their own choices, for example, by building a player alliance to impact the game politics setting, or by constructing the free trade markets to challenge the game finance setting, through which they will generate their own points of view of

the social construction beyond the game design. The experience sharing by players will also make them generate interpretations about identity issues different from the designer's initial arguments. In the meanwhile, how players choose to operate in the game to face the life possibilities brought from different identities will also inspire the game designer's new thoughts, forming a specific hermeneutic circle of the digital interactive scholarship.

Although this game challenges the traditional humanities scholarship by its multilayered narrative approach and interpretation circle in various dimensions, it sets rules and constraints to convey the specific argument. In fact, this game aims to persuade the players to reflect on social justice, privilege, and inequality by procedural rhetoric as Bogost (2008) suggests. It argues one's social identity significantly influences their life trajectory and achieves this by focusing on interrogating ideology. The "life rolls" constrain the possibility of the living resources strictly by the identity, while this possibility in the simulation game is according to the statistics of influence on individual success by diverse identities in the real world. In the meantime, the government provides benefits as the system assistance to the new players. Thus, systematic biases and obstacles in the real world are revealed in multiple forms by the game rule settings. A basic framework providing the environments for players' free experience and exploration of specific social identity issues is constituted by these rules in the game, which is the considerable configuration serving to impact the players set by the game designer to reflect on social privileges and inequality and their origins. Bogost (2008) also suggests another way of procedural rhetoric, which is to make explicit claims about the way a material or conceptual system works. This game here does not use it because it focuses on the

working principles of a complex system and shares the knowledge about them by influencing the player's game experiences. Instead, this game aims at inspiring the players to think critically about social issues and the reasons behind them with their game experience, which also embodies Flanagan (2009)'s notion of critical play by challenging players to engage with and reflect upon issues of social justice, privilege, and inequality.

Aligning with Flanagan (2009)'s argument, this game invites players to experience the world through perspectives different from their own, fostering empathy and a deeper understanding of the complexities of social identities. Other than inspiring the players' ideological reflection, this game also aims to intervene in the current situation where the computer cultural product industry lacks diversity (Flanagan, 2009). While commercial games are dominated by white, male, and other majorities, biases exist both in these products and their companies. "Identity Quest" as an artistic game reflects on this political issue to question the computer game industry and encourage much deeper discussion related to the game industry and social inequality. Other than intervening in the game industry, this game also fosters empathy and a deeper understanding of the complexity of social identity by inviting the player to experience much more beyond their own life. By responding to the game's challenges and opportunities, players are prompted to think about how their identities shape their experiences in the game and in real life. Activism and multiplayer interaction built into the game's mechanics allow players to experiment with strategies for social change and consider how collective action can impact social structures. This aspect of the game not only allows players to understand the dynamics of social change but also inspires them to think about how they can

contribute to social progress in their own lives. In this way, the game gives the players the affordance to critically engage in social and cultural politics and shows its potential to participate in serious social activities.

While Roland Barthes argues that the texts are not in the word lines but a multi-dimensional space, this game presents such a narrative possibility in the multimedia space contained in its 3D map and challenges the interpretation authority of the researcher when it serves as the digital humanities scholarship. The game also uses procedural rhetoric to reveal the social ideology by offering an environment for players to explore with constraint strategies focusing on identity issues. It uses the considerable hidden rules to persuade the players to reflect on how different identities influence one's life. By providing such an interactive platform, it not only allows players to experience and reflect on social privileges and inequality both in the game and the real world but also to participate in movements to change these unequal situations. Through this approach, the game achieves the goal of educating players to break stereotypes and empathize with the situations of others, while simultaneously encouraging more people to take part in the meaning creation together of the cultural products and thus impact the cultural products industry to make it more equal. All in all, the game challenges the cultural criticism and relates to the post cultural crisis in various dimensions, and provide a tool for players to understand the complexity of the human world in diverse ways.

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project link:

<https://www.figma.com/proto/miOfJNLkZri1a0DaY2muod/identity-quest?node-id=2004-142&t=8qFQNLi59v3tyRKS-1&scaling=min-zoom&content-scaling=fixed&page-id=0%3A1&starting-point-node-id=1%3A2&show-protocol-sidebar=1>