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**Cracking Birdo’s Egg: Applying Clark’s Stages of Representation to Transgender Visibility in Video Games**

Transgender representation has been on the rise recently in video games; from several titles including their first transgender character in their series, to portrayals becoming more and more respectful, this phenomenon is likely to be attributed to society becoming more and more accepting of LGBT identities in general. To explain this phenomenon, Cedric Clark’s stages of representation, a theory written in the 1960s, is applied. It was originally written to explain the rise of racial minority representation in media, but it is also relevant to transgender representation in media.
 The first of Clark’s stages is non-recognition. This is the complete absence or exclusion of the minority from the media or medium. No trace of the minority exists in the public medium, and the minorities start to clamor for representation.This stage represents the societal oppression and continued ignoring of minorities. Essentially, this is the absence of trans presence in our case.
 An example from very early on that represents this stage is Princess Peach from Super Mario Bros. There is nothing transgender about her, while Super Mario Bros had every opportunity to bring the issue to the spotlight. This isn’t to be accusatory; the public consciousness had not progressed so far at that point. This is how I chose to represent the first stage on my chart.

 The next of Clark’s stages is ridicule, where there is representation of a minority, but it is of a stereotypical nature. That is to say, the characters that make up the representation contribute to the construction of a (usually negative) stereotype. Ridicule is aptly named because it is the majority making fun of the minority.
 The character that best represents this stage from video games is Birdo from *Super Mario Bros. 2*. The English instruction manual states that “he thinks he is a girl.” While it’s not much to go off of, this makes Birdo one of if not the first transgender video game character. The reason I say this is the ridicule stage is because of the way this is represented, not respecting Birdo’s pronouns (she/her). This would be seen as a transphobic notion in the lens of transgender representation, making it a perfect example of the stage of ridicule.
 The third stage is regulation, in which the media tries to get the minority to align with the “right” side of society. This is not entirely necessary, and comes from deep seated bias and discrimination against the minority that assumes them to be amoral. For example, older shows where we began to see the trope of the “black cop” that always fights for good show this regulation. There is, I would also argue, a stage of attempting to achieve respect in a natural fashion or attainment of stage four, making it a slightly different version of stage three that is more transitional.
 This is a hard one to fit into video game representation,as is the nature of older video games involving trans characters. The character I chose to represent this stage is Poison from *Street Fighter*. The story of poison is an interesting one: it was seen as immoral to hit a girl at the time, which was obviously a problem for the fighting game genre. So, poison was made into a transwoman to “make it okay” (Henley). This doesn’t boast full acceptance of the trans identity in the medium; far from it, even succumbing to a type of tokenism. However, the reason I say poison represents this stage loosely is an evolution of the acceptance of the character’s gender. Over the years, poison has shifted from a token into a full trans icon, embodying the fight for respect of the identity.
 The fourth and final stage is one of respect. The minority in this stage has gone through the others to gain respect in the public eye and is being represented. While maybe not entirely accurately, there is a definite attempt to respect the minority. This is the hardest stage to reach, and while one of respect, still does not mean full acceptance.
 The character used to represent this stage is a recent one; Bridget from Guilty Gear. While treated and written as a crossdresser in earlier installments of this fighting game series, she was recently confirmed as transgender from dialogue in a DLC (downloadable content) for the latest entry, *Guilty Gear Strive*. Her treatment by the author is very respectful, and understanding of her deciding to be a girl in the narrative. This is why I have chosen her to represent the stage of respect, as she is currently, in my mind, the best trans representation I have seen in a video game.
 It’s hard to say what the future will hold for transgender representation in video games, but it is encouraging to see it begin to reach the final stage of Clark’s; respect. I would project that we will continue to see more and more cases in video games, and that while there will be some struggles against it for the foreseeable future, there is indeed hope for proper transgender representation in this medium.

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