

LGBTQ+ representation in video games

The Past, the Present and the Future

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This talk?

- Who am I?
- Why representation in games is important
- Representation in games:
 - The past
 - The present
 - The future



Who am I?

- Anna Högberg Jenelius
- Stockholm, Sweden
- She/They, Bi
- Game development for 11 years
- Valiant Game Studio





Stockholms
universitet



Talecore
STUDIOS



LION  BITE

VALIANT 
GAME STUDIO

Star 
Stable


DOUBLE
MOOSE

 **dino**
mite
GAMES

Pendula Swing



KreatureKind



A pause before we continue



Honor the memory of the lives lost in Oslo

Громадянство/ Nationality
УКРАЇНА/UKRAINE
Дата народження/ Date of birth
12 ГРУ/DEC 90
Стать/ Sex Ч/М Місце народження
АР КРИМ

FRANCE 24

Ukraine's trans community caught in crosshairs of war

f m t w r

Issued on: 30/06/2022 - 11:40 Modified: 30/06/2022 - 11:38

VICE World News

Trans People Stranded and Alone in Ukraine Following Russia's Invasion

A portrait of a young woman with dark hair, looking thoughtful. She is wearing a dark patterned top. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green foliage.

Solidarity with the people of Ukraine

Why this talk?

- Games are an absolutely amazing medium
- We reach billions of players around the world
- Games and gamers can do great harm, and also a great amount of good
- We can push the agenda of society at large

Gamergate

Harassment campaign

Gamergate was a misogynistic online harassment campaign and a right-wing backlash against feminism, diversity, and progressivism in video game culture. It was conducted using the hashtag "#Gamergate" primarily in 2014 and 2015. [Wikipedia](#)

Feedback



BUNDLE FOR UKRAINE

~1,000 works worth over \$6,500
Minimum \$10 donation
All proceeds to charity

RAISED: \$6,370,612.20 GOAL: \$6,000,000.00

| | | | |
|--------------|----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 106% of goal | 449,617 contributors | \$14.17 average contribution | \$9,000.00 top contribution |
|--------------|----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|

Representation matters

“It is estimated that 11 percent of young people ages 13–18 identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual¹ and nearly two percent identify as transgender,² a substantial, and growing population.”

<https://dream-wakers.medium.com/representation-matters-the-impact-of-inclusive-education-teaching-lgbtq-history-2b9ef95f546a>

- Everyone should be invited to play games
- Games should mirror their players, in a respectful way
- It can save lives



https://miro.medium.com/max/1400/1*zCKzBpel8MOe4t_yvirog.png

History of LGBTQ+ representation in games

Queer representation in games isn't good enough, but it is getting better

By Sam Greer published May 15, 2018



As a queer person who's been gaming pretty much all her life, it's blatantly obvious to me just how scarce the kind of representation I want, perhaps need, is in video games. 179. That's the number of commercially released games my search found that feature queer characters. It might seem a lot, but in the grand scheme of thousands upon thousands of released games, it's really not much. It's even less when you consider how few of those characters are even significant. Of those 179 games, only 83 have queer characters who are playable. And of those, only eight feature a main character who is pre-written as queer as opposed to them being queer as an option. Just eight.

History - The Bad



Final Fight

A [study](#) found that while 65% of all gamers have experienced “severe harassment” while playing online, of the LGBTQ+ gamers surveyed, 73% experienced harassment based on their sexual orientation. The toxicity of the online gaming community when it comes to the LGBTQ+ community is what causes [41% of queer gamers](#) to avoid certain games due to fear of harassment and for 35% to lie about their sexual identity while online.

<https://ucsdsdguardian.org/2022/03/06/toxic-gaming-culture-breeds-sexism-homophobia/>



Cyberpunk 2077

Ubisoft apologizes for homophobic slur in The Division 2's street art

Evidently a reference to a 1981 punk rock album

By Owen S. Good on April 12, 2019 11:00 am



KEYBOARD GENIUSES

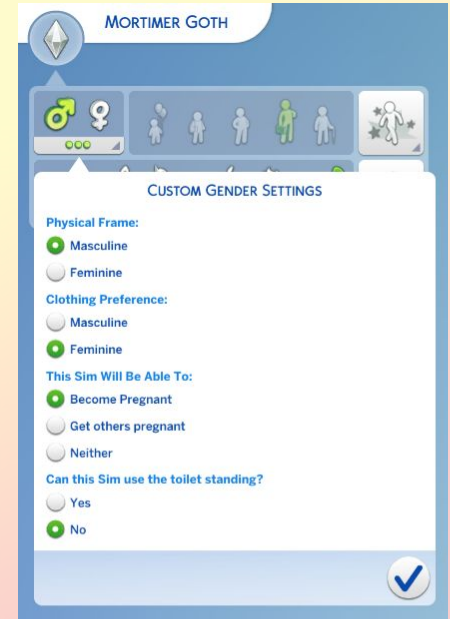
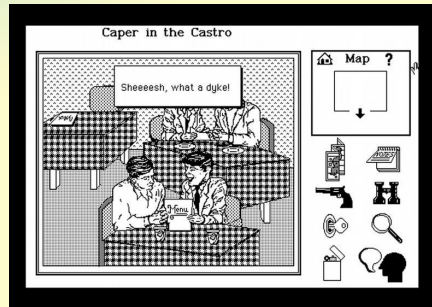
How *Persona 5* lets down its gay players

By Matt Gerardi

4/21/17 3:30PM | Comments (395)

History - The Beginnings

- Moonmist (1986)
- Caper in the Castro (1989)
- Fallout 2 (1998)
- The Sims (2000-)



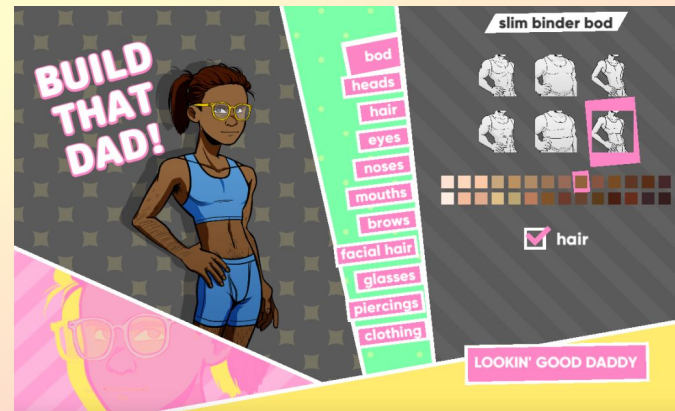
History - Progress

- Bioware games (KOTOR 2003 and onwards)
- Gone Home (2013)
- Borderlands (2009-) (*Pre-Sequel* 2014)
- Overwatch (2016)



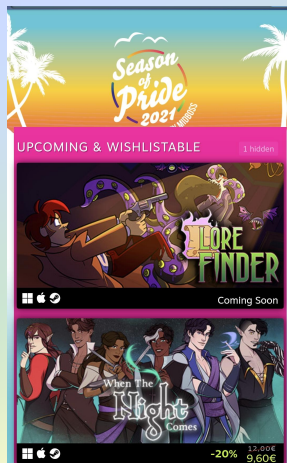
History - Recently

- Life is Strange (2015)
- Stardew Valley (2016)
- Dream Daddy (2017)
- Celeste (2018)
- One Night, Hot Springs (2018)



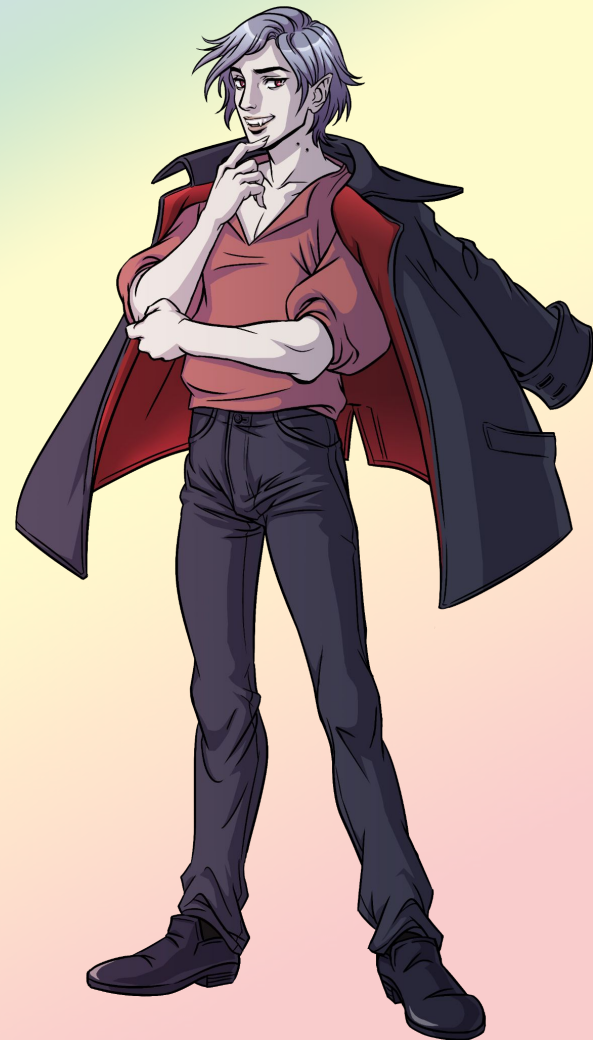
Today

- The Last of Us (2013/2020)
- Tell Me Why (2020)
- Boyfriend Dungeon (2021)
- Unpacking (2021)
- Pride events
- Etc



The trend

- Overall, more LGBTQ+ characters in games
- More are main characters
- More games specifically explore queer experiences
- On a whole, the representation is getting better
 - But there is still much more that can be done!

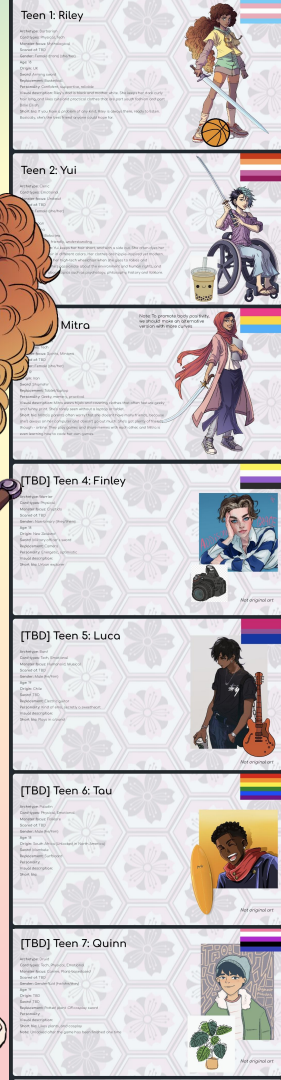


Future

- Games that expressly explore LGBTQ+ experiences, AND characters who just happen to be LGBTQ+
- Show happy on-screen couples that don't conform to the hetero norm
- More games that explore polyamory
- More representation of different gender expressions
- More ace and aro characters
- More top surgery scars
- Think about it even when it has no impact on gameplay!
- More inclusive, safe gaming communities

Example from KreatureKind

- Even if we end up without romance options
 - Thinking about gender expression
 - Thinking about preferences
 - Also, thinking about ethnicities, disabilities, etc etc
- Inclusive design
- Building a welcoming community

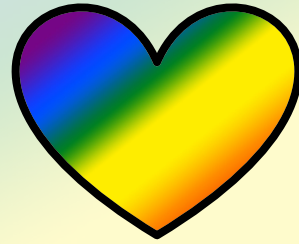


TL;DR

- Unsurprisingly, respectful LGBTQ+ representation in games has been rare historically
- Over the years, more and more positive examples have appeared
- There is still more room for improvement in the future
- Considering the state of the world, games taking the opportunity to be a force for good is more important than ever



Thank you!



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