

Queer Representation in Video Games

With 2.5 billion gamers worldwide, it makes good business sense to diversify content and improve queer representation in video games to increase appeal to the market base. Though many gamers identify as queer or LGBTQ2SIA+ they have not always been able to find themselves reflected in the characters they use or the stories in each game.

In 2007, Stanford University started a research project that focused on The Proteus Effect on gamers. The Proteus Effect is when people in virtual environments, such as video gamers, begin to exhibit, or adopt, characteristics of their online avatars. At that time, the research was centred around physical characteristics and mannerisms, but has long since evolved into a central study on sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression.

It is of note that the original focus of the study determined a strong correlation between choices of avatars and subsequent changes to physical appearance and behaviour. Nick Yee and Jeremy Bailenson, the study's heads of research, wrote, "Who we choose to be in turn shapes how we behave. ... our avatars come to change how we behave."

It stands to reason that as queer people see more representation, this builds confidence and legitimizes identity. All humans need to find authentic characters in games and literature to identify with and relate to. There is a clear correlation between authentic queer characters and the impact on the LGBTQ2SIA+ community. When reality often fails to provide genuine role models and representation, the virtual world becomes a haven. The difficulty that so many young people face when coming to terms with their identity is amplified when there is limited, if any, access to support and role models. Engaging in a virtual world can allow for exploration when the real world may not.

More and more developers are including LGBTQ2SIA+ roles and character choices when developing avatars and games. "*Stardew Valley*" and "*LongStory*" have options for players to pursue queer relationships or use nonbinary pronouns. "*Gone Home*" contains a coming out story that evolves organically throughout the game. Jacob Frye from "*Assassin's Creed Syndicate*" is bisexual, and in fact, has no female love interest. "*The Sims*" has same-sex relationships and marriages programmed into the system. Ellie, from "*The Last of Us Part II*", is not only a lesbian, but the story handles her coming out story, as well. Lev, from the same story, is a young trans man, who has been rejected from his community, and fights for recognition and acceptance. Even the new Harry Potter game, *Hogwart's Legacy*, includes transgender characters and allows players to mix and match voices, clothing, and dormitories.

The above are just a tiny sampling of the queer content that the gaming world offers. That said, even when games have queer representation, it is often subtle, not connected to the main storyline, or occurs in minor characters. Making these representations optional does not go far enough to normalize and legitimize the LGBTQ2SIA+ community. It continues to be a work in progress.

If you are looking for games that include queer representation, check out the following article. Please note that the article is evergreen and is constantly being updated and verified.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_video_games_with_LGBT_characters