

More Than Just a Combo of Slaps? Representations and Experiences of LGBT Gamers On and Beyond the Screen

Author #1

Name: Ben Light

Org: University of Salford

Country: United Kingdom

Email: b.light@salford.ac.uk

Although there is a growing body of work surrounding gender and digital games (Bryce and Rutter, 2006; Crawford and Gosling 2005; Yates and Littleton, 1999), the separate but related area regarding the sexuality of players has yet to receive a serious amount of attention (Bertozzi, 2009; Sunden 2008). In this paper, I wish to contribute to this area through an analysis of the representation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) themes and characters on and beyond the gaming screen. In order to do this, I analyse materials of and about gaming across a number of platforms. From this analysis it clear that LGBT issues and characters are engaged with in digital games in different ways. For example, such engagements can be socially exclusive, as with profile banning in the Xbox live community, socially inclusive, such as the possibility of gay marriage in the Temple of Elemental Evil and, instrumental, where 'sexy lesbians' are deployed for boys in Fear Effect 2. Moreover, even in cognisance of the fact that there is a large amount of guess work and labelling of characters, leading to the status of certain characters being contested, it is also clear that those who would self define as Lesbian, Gay, Bi or Trans are included – sometimes in the most unlikely of places. It is also clear that LGBT characters are included in periferal ways and as integral to the game. They can also have ludic value (as in Bully – Scholarship Edition) and narrataive value (as in GTA IV). Moreover, as with other aspects of digital gaming I hightlight instances of intertextuality (Crawford, 2006). For example, comparisons are made between developers actions with respect to character deployment ingame and the experiences of the LGBT community beyond the screen. I also demonstrate that LGBT gamers experiences of gaming spaces beyond game play can be safe, considered and humourous, but also subject to homophobia. I argue that this is a fruitful area requiring more research, even though, for those who identify as LGBT, including myself, sexuality does not necessarily figure in gameplay and their experiences on or beyond the screen.

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