VIDEO GAMES, CULTURAL ARTIFACTS, REPRESENTATION: DISCUSSING THE PRESENCE OF LGBTQI CHARACTERS

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ABSTRACT
The presence of video games in the homes of children, adolescents and adults has grown impressively since their insertion in the 1980s. Their technology evolved and has become increasingly realistic. In this space, the RPG game narratives for video games have become a space for learning, living and socializing among players. From the exploration of this virtual world we found several reports commenting on the inclusion of some characters identified as gay, lesbian, or transgender. Thus, understanding that video games are also involved in the formation of the identity and subjectivity of their players, we aim in this article to know more about how these characters are present in RPG narratives and what the players think about them. Therefore, we use, as sources of research, reports available on sites about video games that deal with the history of the character Cremisius Aclassi, from the Dragon Age: Inquisition series. The analysis is guided by a poststructuralist conception of cultural studies, comprehending such sites as cultural artifacts, possessors of a pedagogy, and also responsible for educating their players. From the analysis carried out in four selected reports it was identified that the issue of the inclusion of gay, lesbian and transsexual characters has been a matter of discussion among players. Thus, through the reports, we highlight the authors’ concern in discussing how this character was represented, and is considered in these discussions the importance of this character for representing a transsexual in video games making room for LGBTQI players to identify themselves.

KEYWORDS
Videogames; characters; transsexuality; cultural artifacts; queer theory.

START: introducing the research

Electronic games emerged in the social landscape between the 1950s and 60s as the arcade games, known in Brazil as fliperama games. Those were big machines that contained games produced from a digital interface and presented, even in their first issues, elaborate images and plenty of action for the entertainment of children, adolescents and adults. It was from the 1970s and 80s that video games were released for home use. The hardware sizes decreased and their visual interface gained more detail and quality.

Since its inception, technological advances made it possible for video games to achieve spaces and provide experiences close to reality for their players. From its predecessors, the arcade games, video games surpassed time and space barriers, becoming, with the advent

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of the internet, games that allow the sharing of experiences and virtual lives online. We can see in the evolution from the first Atari devices to the well-known Wii and PlayStation consoles that the gaming world is not about to lose its charm and potential.

It was in this context that the first studies on video games emerged in the 1990s. Since then, much of the research has been concerned with the possible negative effects of continuous exposure to scenes of violence, as in the case of one of the most popular games nowadays, *Grand Theft Auto* (GTA). Thus, over the past three decades, many studies have sought to measure these effects, presenting in many cases contradictory results. Examples of this contradiction are the studies by Eric Uhlmann and Jane Swanson (2003) who, after the analysis of a sample of 121 student players of the *Doom* game, indicated a relation between the increase on the players’ violence index and a high degree of violence in the game’s narrative. In contrast, a more recent study published in the Journal of Youth and Adolescence, conducted in the United States by scientists Christopher Ferguson and Cheryl Olson (2013), with 377 children in the age group of 13 years, indicated that violent games do not encourage or cause aggressive behavior in their players.

Gradually, studies on media and technology in the field of education enabled the look on video games to gain another focus. Thus, many studies have been developed in order to understand the possibilities of learning through video games, as indicated by the studies of James Paul Gee (2004) and Marc Prensky (2007).

In this article, we aim to observe another aspect that has gained ground in the virtual world of video games: the inclusion of transgender characters in role-playing games narratives.

**Strategy 1 - choice and game concepts**

This research is guided by the poststructuralist strand of Cultural Studies, understanding video games as cultural artifacts produced within a historical and cultural context, responsible for (re)producing and sharing meanings, teaching about genders, sexualities and bodies. In this sense, we assume the video games as participants in pedagogical processes, these processes being not only restricted to school spaces, but rather reaching various social levels.

Thus, according to Silva (2009, p. 139), “From the perspective of cultural studies, all knowledge, in that it constitutes a significance system, is cultural.” Thus, we believe that video games, being part of the culture, are interwoven in the educational processes and participate in the transformation of the identity and subjectivities of children, adolescents and adults.

For this author (2009, p. 140) the various bodies and cultural institutions, as videogames games here are understood, “Without having the explicit purpose of teaching, however, it is obvious that they teach something that transmits a variety of forms of knowledge that although are not recognized as such are vital in forging identity and subjectivity.”

Thus, when we understand video games as cultural artifacts, containing cultural pedagogies, we emphasize the idea that “The construction of gender and sexuality takes place through numerous learnings and practices, insinuates itself in very diverse situations, is undertaken explicitly or concealed by an endless series of social and cultural bodies” (Louro, 2008, p. 18). Also in this sense Louro states that,
Family, school, church, legal and medical institutions remain, of course, as important forums in this constitutive process. For a long time, its guidelines and teachings seemed absolute, almost sovereign. But how can we forget, especially in contemporary times, the seduction and the impact of media, soap operas and advertising, magazines and the internet, the social networking sites and blogs? How can we forget cinema and television, shopping centers or popular music? How can we forget the opinion and consumption polls? And yet, how can we escape the cameras and video monitors and the many machines that watch and meet us in banks, supermarkets and gas stations? We live immersed in their advices and orders, are controlled by their mechanisms, suffer their censorship. The propositions and contours outlined by these multiple instances are not always consistent or equally authorized, but are undeniably scattered everywhere and eventually establish themselves as powerful cultural pedagogies. (Louro, 2008, p. 18)

Recognizing the present cultural pedagogies in videogames games and understanding the transience of genres allows us to look for a character that breaks the socially established linearity between biological sex, gender and sexuality, as shown in the case of a transsexual character found in the narrative of a video game, and thus, to consider the multiple learnings that permeate the relations between the story of this character and the players.

In order to understand such relationships, we analyzed speeches and the statements of players in articles posted on websites about videogames and intended to discuss the matter in question. Thus, it was possible to perceive the relationship that has been established between the player and a transsexual character found in the narrative of a role-playing video game in the formation of these individuals’ identities.

We chose queer theory as a possible way to analyze the reports selected for this article, understanding that this theory “shows that identities are written through experiences culturally constructed in social relations” (Miskolci, 2009, 175). Thus, we assume queer theory as a fruitful area of discussion. For this theory the question is not to bring to the centrality those who today are marginalized, such as gays, lesbians, transsexuals, transvestites, but the non-assimilation of these identities. It is, first of all, to experience this position of being different and to enjoy it. In this sense, what matters to queer theory is to experience the difference and not seek the position of “normal” (Colling, 2004).

From this perspective, consider the presence of a transsexual character in a video game narrative, in which the game’s proposal is to address the issue intentionally, whereby queer theory:

[...] Seeks to break the binary logic that results in the establishment of hierarchies and subalternizations, but does not appeal to the humanist belief, however well intentioned, nor to the “defense” of stigmatized subjects, as this would freeze enunciatory places as subversive and ignore the contingent character of agency. The criticism on standardization bets on the multiplication of the differences that can subvert the totalizing, hegemonic or authoritarian discourses. (Miskolci, 2009, 175)

Thus, we understand it to be in queer theory’s interest to cause a shift in the way we look, producing breaks in what is established as natural, enabling the subjects to show the existence of other ways of seeing and being (Louro, 2013).
This perspective enables us to think about the discussions presented on the transsexual character Cremisius Aclassi in the reports analyzed, not in comparison and/or opposition to the other characters present in the same narrative of the game, but as a movement of extension of the video game space, which has been predominantly occupied by male characters in leading roles since its insertion in domestic spaces at the beginning in the 1980s.

Queer theory proposes subversion by the act of breaking the certainties, not by putting others in place, but by affirming the uncertainty, the not knowing in a possibility. More important than proposing a new form of knowledge, it is to propose a reflection on what can then be thinkable.

**Strategy 2 - drawing methods**

For the development of this research we used the Internet as an empirical field, carrying out searches with the following keywords: LGBT characters, LGBT games, transgender characters. From an initial survey of sites that discuss videogames games, we found 61 reports on sites and 6 reports on blogs talking about the subject. The material found contains discussions that tell the story of different characters that are remarkable for their uniqueness. The characters are gay, lesbian, transgender, often not identified as such by their creators, but somehow have characteristics and attributes that make them understood as such.

After reading and research in each of these 67 reports, it was identified a recurrence of discussions about a specific character, Cremisius Aclassi, a transsexual present in the narrative of the RPG video game *Dragon Age: Inquisition*. Thus it was considered interesting to analyze the reports that focused on how this character was built and interpreted by some player-authors of these reports. We consider it important to emphasize that the choice of analyzing the reports dealing specifically with this character was exclusively because he is considered the first transsexual character created at the request of players of the LGBTQI community.


Thus, the purpose of this article is to discuss what questions have been posed by the player-authors of these four reports, regarding the Cremisius Aclassi character’s presence in the narrative of the game RPG *Dragon Age: Inquisition*. 
It’s time to play with the concepts and data - Analysis

The construction of the character Cremisius Aclassi is presented in the reports “Building a Character: Cremisius “Krem” Aclassi” and “How BioWare Created Dragon Age: Inquisition’s Trans Character”. In these reports it was pointed out that the constitution of this character began during an event about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) representation of the video game production company BioWare, in which there were many conversations about the need to present a trans character in the narratives of games. One of the main requests of the players was “for a representation of transgender and/or genderqueer characters in a way that did not make them either a monster or a joke.”

Analyzing the content presented in the two reports above we can see the demand of the LGBT video game player community and the search for visibility of characters that represent gay, lesbian, and transsexual people more realistically, as pointed by the speech indicated earlier, so that these characters do not were monsters or jokes.

Thus, we considered relevant to go back to the statement of Pelúcio (2014, p. 34), as we understand that analyzing the reports that address the discussions on the character Cremisius Aclassi in video games allows us “therefore, to operate from deconstruction as a method capable to give us clues as to how some speeches come to establish truths about behaviors, bodies, people, institutions”. Thus, we believe it is a possible way of questioning this theme to understand what moves the character in question has caused in the players.

In the analyzed report “Dragon Age Inquisition’s Trans Character” we found the following statement from the author of the report: “The game does use some problematic language at times but I feel it is more to illustrate the setting and peoples’ ignorance. The game makes sure, though, in no uncertain terms that he IS a man and if you have a problem with that you can take it up with Iron Bull. It is a representation that is good for cis players who are ignorant or bigoted on the subject and it gives trans people a rare positive game example. “

Such statement allows us to understand the relationship that has been established between the character Cremisius Aclassi and the players once the presence of this character, in accordance with the author of the article, is seen as an opportunity to discuss and learn more about transgender people by the players, and, as indicated by the author, allow transgender individuals to feel represented in the history of this game.
For Bento, as we think of the presence of transgender individuals in different social spaces, a possibility arises to highlight “those discursive and bodily acts considered socially important to give life to the sexed-bodies” (2014, 63). In the author’s words:

Their stories interrupt the line of continuity and consistency of body, sexuality and gender that is supposed natural, while pointing the limits of the effectiveness of gender norms and open spaces to produce cracks that could potentially become counter-discourses and release the gender of the sexed-body. (Benedict, 2014, p. 63)

Through this proposition, understanding the presence of transgender characters in the narratives of video games constitutes a denaturalization space of genres considered socially “normal” in the characters of the games. We can infer that the story of these characters can allow players to problematize genres and their practices, understanding gender identities not as fixed forms, but as social constructions. Recognizing the transsexuality of the character Krem is also a way to break the linearity of the structures of video game characters, often imagined within the sex-gender-sexuality correspondence logic.

At another point, still in the article “Dragon Age Inquisition’s Trans Character” the author shows a small section of the game where the playable character is in a scene conducting a dialogue with other characters, and among them is the character Iron Bull, commander of a team of mercenaries which the character Cremisius Aclassi is part of. In this scene, it can be seen that during the game there are moments of dialogue in which the character’s transsexuality is discussed among the other characters.

The scene presented in Table 1 shows the dialogue of these game characters talking about Cremisius Aclassi (Krem). In the speeches it is presented the discussion of how the character Krem is identified by his boss’ people, indicating that he would be an Aqun Athlok, a subject born in a gender, but who lives as another. It is seen then that the chief Iron Bull does not indicate a problem with this fact, pointing out in his speech that “They [the Aqun Athlok] are real men, like you are (Krem)!”

Table 1: Dialogue about the character Cremisius Aclassi

| Source: Production of the authors |
From the scene presented above we can see that it is part of the game’s narrative to specifically address the issue of transsexuality. In this sense, we consider the discussions brought in the articles analyzed as possible approach spaces between the issue of transsexuality from the Krem character and the subversion of the social processes that standardize and classify genres, allowing to break with “the illusion of stable subjects, social identities and consistent and regular behaviors” (Miskolci, 2007, p. 7).

In the article “A Brief History of Transgender Characters in Video Games” the following statement is made on the character Cremisius Aclassi: “I was not feeling too positive about his portrayal. This was especially true after hearing that he was going to be voiced by a female voice actor, as that reminded me of the many trans women played by men in Hollywood movies. Overall though, from what I’ve read, he seems to be a fairly positively portrayed character and a definite step up from Bioware’s previous attempts”.

The statement given above shows us some important points about the relationship that has been established between the transsexual character in the RPG game Dragon Age: Inquisition and the players. Understanding that to become “part of the culture means to have passed through the gender differentiating mechanism, this taboo and reached both normative heterosexuality and a distinct gender identity” (Butler, 2003, p. 247), the fact that other social spaces, and here we refer to video games, present a transsexual character that breaks the biological sex - gender linearity, allows us to consider the small ruptures that have happened in the games as part of the defying to the compulsory standardization of gender identities in their quest for intelligibility.

From the above it would be interesting to highlight some aspects regarding the analysis undertaken in selected reports. Initially it is important to realize that the video game world has a fairly new history. Another unique aspect of this discussion, which gained visibility with the construction of the character Creisius Aclassi is the possibility of creating a space for dialogue between the LGBTQI groups and the creators of the games.

The concern to provide narratives that have gay, lesbian, transgender characters enables many players to feel represented. In this perspective we understand that the analysis of these artifacts is a way to understand how video games and their characters have contributed to the establishment of trans identities among players, participating in the subjectivity of these subjects, as well as ways to think of them and represent them in our society.

**Bibliographic references**


