



GAME NARRATIVE  
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# Don't Fear the Queer: Audiences Are Ready!

**Heidi McDonald**

Creative Director, iThrive Initiative



GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE March 14-18, 2016 · Expo: March 16-18, 2016 #GDC16





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# First Romance in Games Survey

- *Well Played Journal*, Romance in Games Issue, 2012
- *Epic Awesomeness: An Exploration of Play, Art, Love and Death in Video Games*, Chatham University, 2012
- GDC VAULT, Free to View: GDC Online, 2012
- GDC Poster session, 2013
- ONLINE, Free to View: Gotland Gaming Conference, 2013
- GDC VAULT, Free to View: GDC Europe, 2013



- 25% of female respondents identified as bisexual.
- Pew Research and 2010 US Census data both found that roughly 10% of the population identifies as LGBT.

# What's up with that?



# SurveyMonkey®

- Depends on honesty in self-reporting
- People can exit the survey without answering everything
- People could theoretically answer more than once
- I'm doing this as a passion project, and I don't have the same resources as a university

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# SURVEY OUTREACH

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## Conference Announcements



MIGS



## Special Outreach

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# Queer

Queer is an umbrella term for all sexual and gender minorities.



The queer flag

- ★ If a person is not straight and/or not cisgender, they can identify as queer.
- ★ Although “queer” was once used as derogatory, it has been reclaimed. However, if a queer person is offended by your usage of it, it is respectful to stop.

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## Respondent Demographics

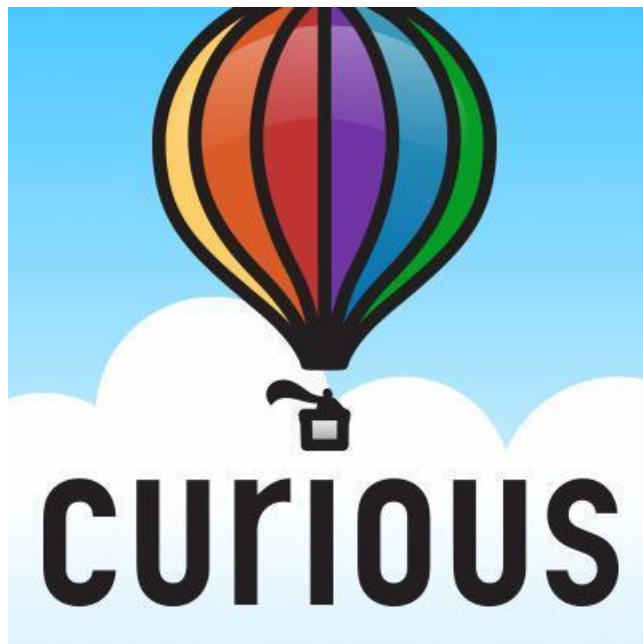


- 57% Queer
- 83% Born After 1980
- 83% of Queer Respondents are "out"
- 54% male, 38% female, 8% non-binary
- No significant difference in answers by location



## Second Romance in Games Survey

- *QED: The Journal of Queer Worldmaking*, June 2015
- *Deconstructing Barbie and Mortal Kombat*, coming in August 2016
- What makes a good game romance?
- Why might game romances not be satisfying?
- What is the role of romance in games?



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# What does game romance mean to you?



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Players at least  
want the option to  
play as their actual  
sexual orientation

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**Queer Respondent:**

"Zevran Arainai"

**Straight Respondent:**

"That flamboyant elf dude in Dragon Age 2"



How do you feel about  
romance content in games  
for a sexual orientation  
other than your own?



## Supportive:

- Great
- Awesome
- Fantastic
- Enthusiastic
- Excellent
- Important
- Should

## Mildly Supportive:

- Good
- Cool
- Fine
- Interesting
- No problem

## Neutral:

- OK
- Indifferent
- Don't care
- Doesn't matter

## Negative:

- Bad
- Uncomfortable
- No
- Shouldn't
- Gross



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# 55% of straight players are supportive

*"I'm not interested myself, but feel it's important to have a wide variety of sexual orientations available to players who want them."  
—Straight female.*

*"If a game claims to be a RPG and offers romances all orientations should be available. Otherwise it is not an RPG!" – Straight male.*

*"I encourage it. The more video games reflect real life in terms of personalities & sexual preferences the better. My preferences are not the only valid preferences that are out there."  
—Straight male.*

*"Love it. RPGs are ROLE PLAYING GAMES, e.g. not ME PLAYING GAMES. Sometimes I want to experience being a bisexual man-identifying character, sometimes an asexual genderqueer character." –Straight female.*



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# QUANTIC FOUNDRY



- Researchers of player behavior
- Sample size of 150,000 gamers
- Findings about player motivation

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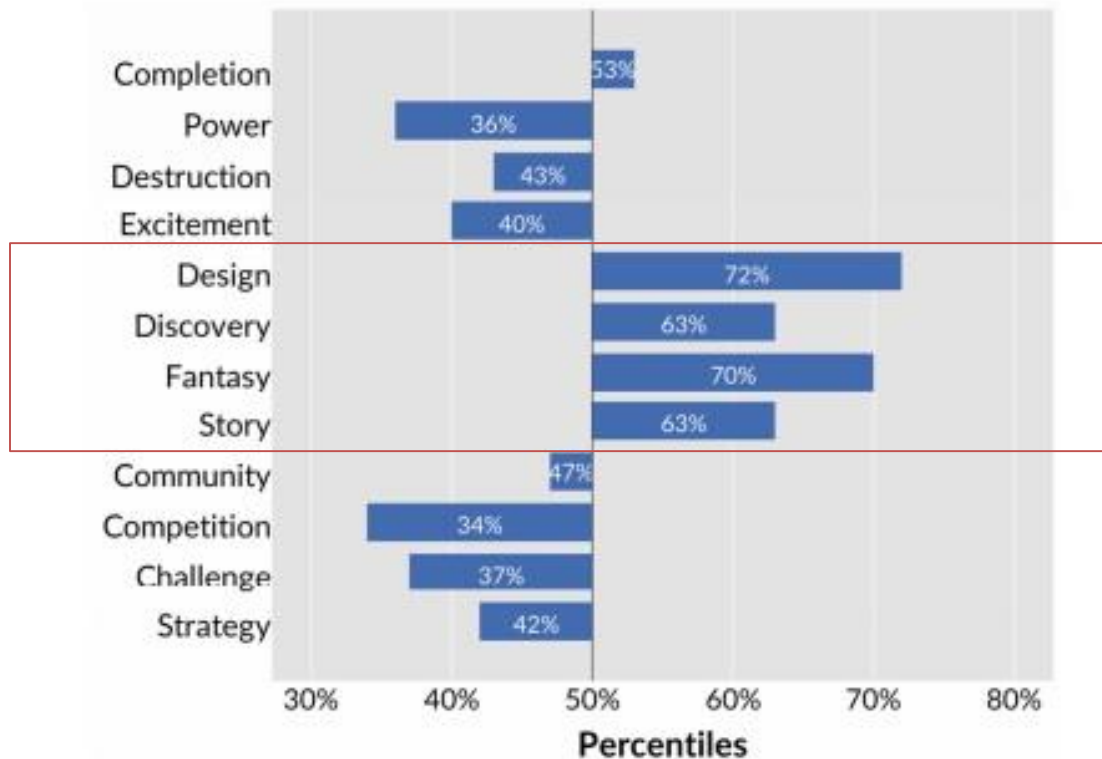
## OVERVIEW OF MOTIVATION MODEL



QUANTIC  
FOUNDRY



Action "Boom!"	Social "Let's Play Together"	Mastery "Let Me Think"	Achievement "I Want More"	Immersion "Once Upon a Time"	Creativity "What If?"
<b>Destruction</b> Guns. Explosives. Chaos. Mayhem.	<b>Competition</b> Duels. Matches. High on Ranking.	<b>Challenge</b> Practice. High Difficulty. Challenges.	<b>Completion</b> Get All Collectibles. Complete All Missions.	<b>Fantasy</b> Being someone else, somewhere else.	<b>Design</b> Expression. Customization.
<b>Excitement</b> Fast-Paced. Action. Surprises. Thrills.	<b>Community</b> Being on Team. Chatting. Interacting.	<b>Strategy</b> Thinking Ahead. Making Decisions.	<b>Power</b> Powerful Character. Powerful Equipment.	<b>Story</b> Elaborate plots. Interesting characters.	<b>Discovery</b> Explore. Tinker. Experiment.



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## The Creativity Group

### Design (Expression & Customization)

The Sims Series, City of Heroes, Animal Crossing, Guild Wars 2, Final Fantasy XIV, Dragon Age Series/Origins, Mass Effect Series, Monster Hunter, Pokemon, Elder Scrolls Series/Oblivion/Skyrim

### Discovery (Experiment, Explore, Tinker)

Elder Scrolls Series/Oblivion/ Morrowind/Skyrim, Fallout Series/3/New Vegas, Fable, Legend of Zelda Series/Ocarina of Time, GTA Series/V, Minecraft, Earthbound, Kerbal Space Program, Metal Gear Solid 3, Metroid Prime

## The Immersion Group

### Story (Plot, Narrative, Characters)

Dragon Age Series/Origins, Mass Effect Series/2/3, Persona 3/4, Tales of Symphonia, Xenogeras, Final Fantasy VIII/IX/X, Knights of the Old Republic, Fire Emblem, Kingdom Hearts Series/2, Planescape Torment

### Fantasy (Being Someone/Somewhere Else)

Dragon Age Series/Inquisition/Origins, Elder Scrolls Series/Morrowind, Dishonored, Mass Effect Series/2/3, Skyrim, Fable, Fallout New Vegas, Knights of the Old Republic, Journey, Legend of Zelda



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## Heidi's Data

### Top 5 Game Franchises Remembered for Queer Characters

1. *Mass Effect* (BioWare)
2. *Dragon Age* (BioWare)
3. *Elder Scrolls: Skyrim* (Bethesda)
4. *Fable* (Lionshead)
5. (TIED) *Jade Empire* (BioWare) and *Knights of the Old Republic* (BioWare)





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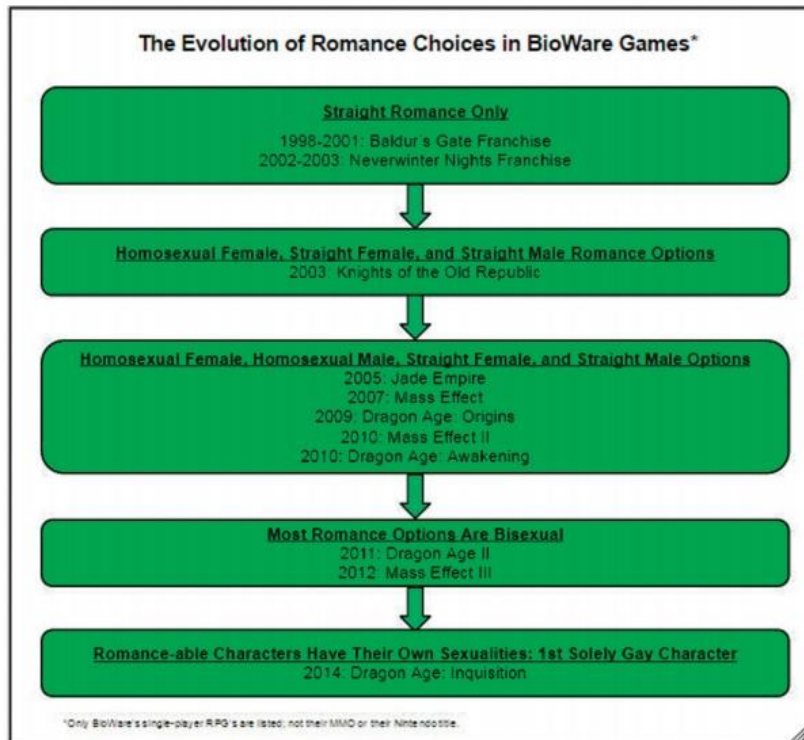
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Sera



Dorian



Krem

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## The Evolution of Romance Choices in BioWare Games\*



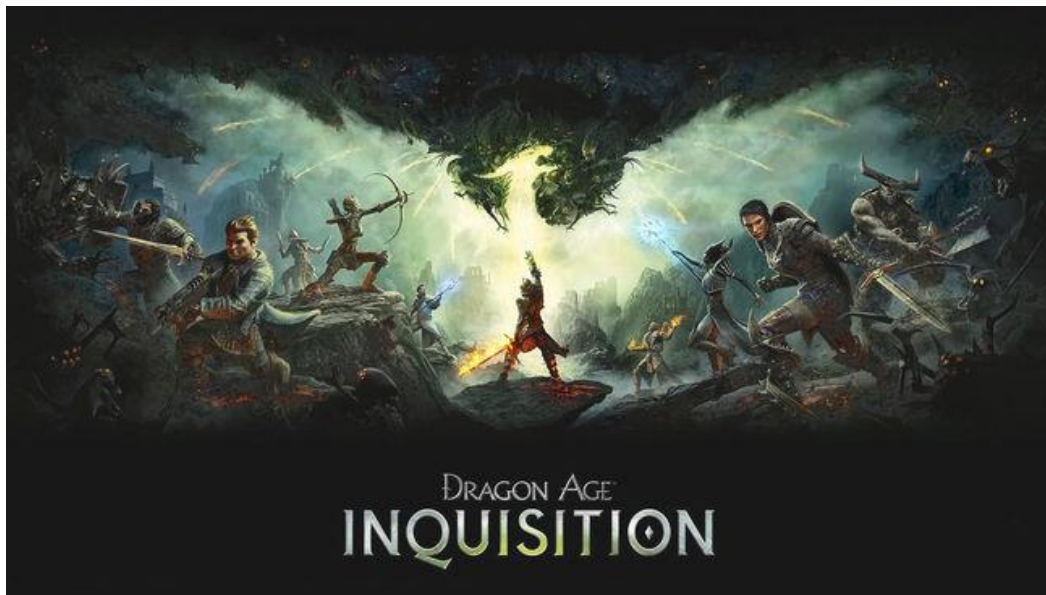
\*Only BioWare's single-player RPG's are listed; not their MMO or their Nintendo.



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## “Where We Are on TV” Report, 2014-15

- 3.9% LGBT characters on TV, up from 3.3% last year.
- 33 recurring LGBT characters on primetime broadcast series



The Danish Girl



Carol

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Laverne Cox



Mya Taylor

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"I don't care what happens,  
as long as they  
tell good stories...  
and they do."





"It is entirely fitting that gays and lesbians will appear unobtrusively aboard the *Enterprise*—neither objects of pity nor melodramatic attention."



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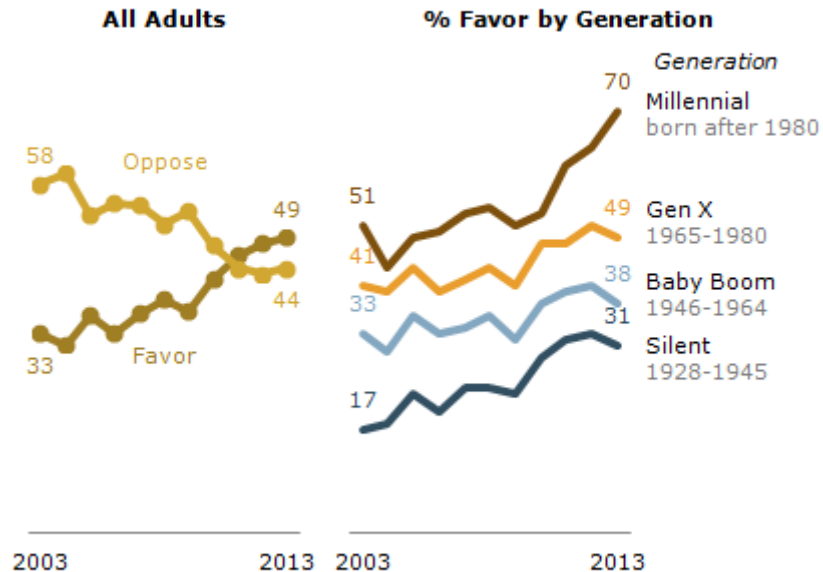
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## Growing Support for Same-Sex Marriage

*Allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally*



PEW RESEARCH CENTER March 13-17, 2013.

2003-2012 figures based on all surveys conducted in each year.

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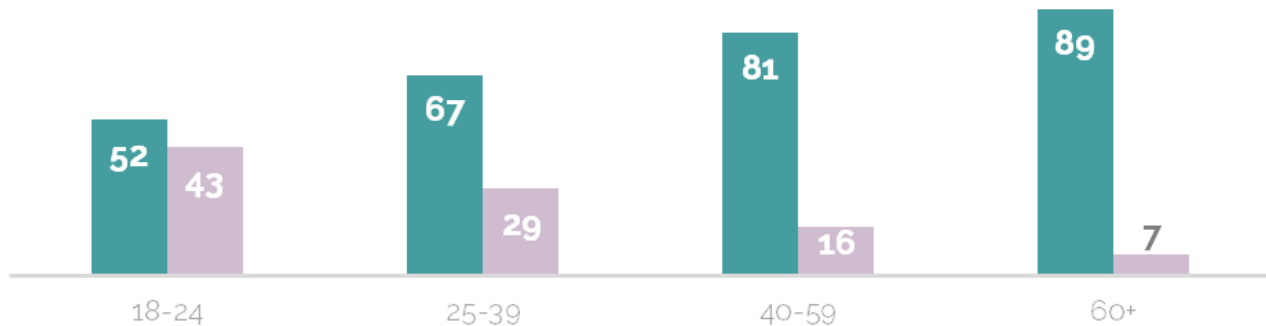
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## Shades of bisexuality by age

British adults were asked to place themselves on the Kinsey scale, ranging from 0 (completely heterosexual) to 6 (completely homosexual). %

- Completely heterosexual or homosexual (0 or 6 on Kinsey scale)
- Varying degrees of bisexuality (1-5 on Kinsey scale)



YouGov | yougov.com

August 13-14, 2015

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## Heidi McDonald's Romance in Games Data

- Romance is important to queer players!
- Queer players want more and better representation in their romance content
- Straight players don't mind!

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## Quantic Foundry's Player Motivation Data

- The overlap of the needs and the motivations of queer players suggests an opportunity.



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## Market Conditions

- With more acceptance comes less risk, and with more power, more responsibility.
- The market is changing!
- BioWare is making this change work for them.
- Queer money is just as green!





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## Cultural Conditions

- Queer people have been underserved, but now that we have straight supporters who will still buy and play games with both sets of content in it?



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ON THE TABLE IF YOU  
DON'T PAY ATTENTION  
TO THIS!**

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# Thank you!

Questions and comments will be addressed in the Overflow Room!

## **Special Thanks**

Tom Abernathy

Richard Dansky

Liam Esler

JJ Espinosa

Julie Haehn

Josh Kohn

James Pianka

Sheri Rubin

Nick Yee

iThrive Initiative

GayMerX Peeps!

#YouKnowWhoYouAre

My Mom

Schell Games

Simon Jasiewicz

The BeanBean

The CA's

...and the hundreds of queer gamers who contributed!



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