"Call Me by My Name": Analysis of the Strategies of Bisexual Erasure and Stereotyping in Video Games

"Llámame por mi nombre": análisis de las estrategias de erosión y estereotipación de la bisexualidad en el videojuego

"Me chame pelo meu nome": análise das estratégias de erosão e estereótipo da bissexualidade no videogame

2

Carlos Ramírez-Moreno

Loyola University (Spain)

Research technician in the Department of Communication and Education of the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences of the Loyola University Andalusia.

crmoreno@uloyola.es
orcid.org/0000-0003-1048-6326

Abstract

Bisexuality continues to be an invisible orientation, even within the LGBTQ collective. While its representation in video games has been scarce and ambiguous, other media has marked it by a series of stereotypes common for this collective, outside and inside fiction. Through a qualitative content analysis of 98 bisexual characters from video games, a categorization of the main strategies of erosion and stereotyping of bisexuality is proposed, in order to deepen the quality of its representation and the characteristics that make video games a unique medium for this purpose.

Resumen

La bisexualidad sigue siendo una orientación invisibilizada, incluso dentro del colectivo LGBTQ. Su representación en el videojuego ha sido escasa y ambigua, mientras que en otros medios ha estado marcada por una serie de estereotipos habituales para el colectivo, fuera y dentro de la ficción. Mediante un análisis cualitativo de 98 registros de personajes bisexuales en los videojuegos, se propone una categorización de las principales estrategias de erosión y

estereotipación de la bisexualidad, con el fin de profundizar en la calidad de su representación y en las características que hacen del videojuego un medio singular para este propósito.

PALABRAS CLAVE:

Bisexualidad, Representación, Videojuegos, Estereotipos, Sexualidad.

Resumo

A bissexualidade continua a ser uma orientação invisível, mesmo dentro da comunidade LGBTQ. Sua representação no videogame tem sido escassa e ambígua, enquanto em outras mídias tem sido marcada por uma série de estereótipos habituais para o coletivo, fora e dentro da ficção. Por meio de uma análise qualitativa de 98 registros de personagens bissexuais em videogames, propõe-se uma categorização das principais estratégias de erosão e estereotipagem da bissexualidade, a fim de aprofundar a qualidade de sua representação e as características que tornam o videogame um meio único para este fim.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Bissexualidade, Representação, Videogame, Estereótipo, Sexualidade.

1. INTRODUCTION

Bisexuality has been recognized as an invisible orientation in various spheres including the media, the LGBTQ community, sexology, psychology, and psychotherapy (Barker & Langdridge, 2008; Olvera Muñoz, 2017). This invisibility has also been linked to a high rate of mental disorders among people identified as bisexual compared to heterosexual and homosexual orientations (De Barros, 2020; Nelson, 2020). According to Olvera Muñoz (2017), "within sexual minorities, bisexuality is considered a minority among minorities [...], it must be hidden through various political, economic or cultural apparatuses with the aim of maintaining the social order of sexuality" (p. 36).

This phenomenon has been exhaustively analyzed by Yoshino (2000), who, based on a study of American popular culture, elaborates the theory of an "epistemic contract of bisexual erasure" applicable both to the media framework and to legal, political, and cultural spheres. The four points that make up Yoshino's theory are: 1) bisexuality suffers greater invisibility than homosexuality, an invisibility that finds its root in a process of social "erosion"; 2) said erosion occurs due to the interest shared by two dominant groups (those identified as heterosexual and homosexual, that is, monosexual people) to make bisexuality invisible; 3) both groups share common interests for the stabilization of sexual orientation, for maintaining sex as the dominant measure of differentiation and for defending the norms of monogamy, and 4) said pact of erosion affects the process of accepting bisexual identities in the public and private spheres.

Yoshino's (2000) starting point (that bisexuality is the invisible identity of the entire LGBTQ spectrum) has been shared by various later authors (Barker & Langdridge, 2008; Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009; Domínguez Ruiz, 2017; Olvera Muñoz, 2017; Harman, 2019; Nelson, 2020). All of them consider bisexuals to be invisible in relation to both heterosexuals and homosexuals. For Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell (2009), "Bisexuality is fundamentally unsettling to the hegemonic institution of heterosexuality and its queer counterpoint, homosexuality, and is

therefore ultimately ignored by both" (p. 298). This continued symbolic erosion is justified by the assumption that bisexuals are a minority, despite studies suggesting that plurisexuals represent 50% of non-heterosexuals (Madison, 2017).

The scant representation of bisexuality in the media is related to the performative difficulty of orientation itself. This difficulty is linked in turn to the interstitial nature of bisexuality, explained by the heterosexual matrix of Judith Butler (1990). Broadly speaking, the Butler matrix considers everyone to be heterosexual until proven otherwise, which significantly affects non-monosexual identities. Due to the social importance given to sex and gender when determining the sexuality of the individual, the Butler matrix explains, for example, that the assumption of a "feminine" bisexual woman attracted to a "masculine" man does not go beyond be a mere entelechy, since both are going to be interpreted by default as heterosexual both in the media and in public life.

Table 1

Heterosexual Matrix (Butler, 1990).

Gender ⇒	Male	Female
Sexual orientation ⇘		
Sex ⇓		
Man	Heterosexual	Homosexual
Woman	Homosexual	Heterosexual

As Harman (2019) suggests, "bisexuals regularly become defined based on who they have chosen as a partner instead of their overarching sexual identity, in turn creating more invisibility for the group" (p. 557). This phenomenon causes what Alarie and Gaudet (2013) correctly define as the impossibility of achieving "authentic" bisexuality. For many people, one can only be bisexual if they are equally attracted to both sexes, something that rarely happens in practice.

Thus, the bisexual is often marked as indecisive or confused, and society hopes that sooner or later they will end up recognizing their "true" monosexual orientation.

1.1. STATE OF THE ISSUE

Contrary to the video game, the literature dedicated to the study of the representation of bisexuality in novels, films and television already has a long tradition (White, 2001; Diamond, 2005; Alexander, 2007; Barker & Langdridge, 2008; Medina-Rivera; 2014; De Barros, 2020; Nelson, 2020). In the case of the novel, it has been pointed out that "there is a new generation of writers who express homosexuality in a much more open way, but who at the same time condemn the bisexuals as indecisive or frustrated beings who does not fully understand that in reality, they are homosexuals" (Medina-Rivera, 2014: pp. 149-150). In this sense, the belief that bisexuals (especially males) are protohomosexual is still widespread today (Alexander, 2007; Alarie & Gaudet, 2013). James (1996) regrets the frequency with which some media texts in which bisexual characters appear are appropriated from homosexual and queer perspectives, as reflected in the cases of the cult film *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005) (Alexander, 2007; Barker & Langdridge, 2008) or the most recent *Call Me by Your Name* (Luca Guadagnino, 2017).

Diamond (2005) points to a growing representation of sexual freedom and homosexual relationships in North American films and television fiction. In turn, Meyer (2010) suggests that "queer visibility on television has increased, including representations of bisexual identities" (p. 367). In contrast, it has been pointed out that plurisexuals are often characterized poorly and through harmful stereotypes (Nelson, 2020) and that bi-representation in the media has often been "sensationalized, brief, uneven, and

unexamined" (Hutchins, 2007 cited in Alexander, 2007: p. 116).

As for video games, some quantitative studies have shown that the explicit presence of LGBTQ characters is still scarce, and that most of these are represented as NPCs (non-player characters) whose sexuality is only known if the user plays several times and in specific conditions (Shaw & Friesem, 2016; Utsch et al., 2017). This has meant that much of the research on LGBTQ representations has focused on the mechanics and little on the narrative, due to the scarcity of characters designed from a genuinely LGBTQ perspective (Utsch et al., 2017). Returning to Shaw and Friesem (2016), "Although games with same-sex romance options allow for players to make their avatars homosexual or bisexual, the backstories of these characters rarely suggest they are" (p. 3883).

The extensive quantitative analysis carried out by Utsch et al. (2017) reveals that gay characters are the most frequent (38%), followed by lesbians (21%) and bisexuals (20%). In addition, the presence of bisexuals has remained low until the 1990s, when visibility began to grow until it reached its peak at the end of the first decade of this century. In general, gay characters lead representation across all genres, although the study points to a balance between the three main orientations in RPGs and shooters (Figure 1).

Thus, we see how the history of bisexuality in the video game is closely linked to the history of LGBTQ representation, although it also retains its own peculiarities. In general terms, the absence of characters from this group continues to be very pronounced. According to a recent study by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (2021), only 0.03% of a sample of 27,564 video game characters were identified as LGBTQ. In addition, bisexual characters present a series of added challenges that are reproduced both in other media and in the day-to-day life of the non-monosexual group. The work of making the video game more visible has left us with very positive moments, but it also still faces a series of important challenges linked to the needs and demands of part of the bisexual community.
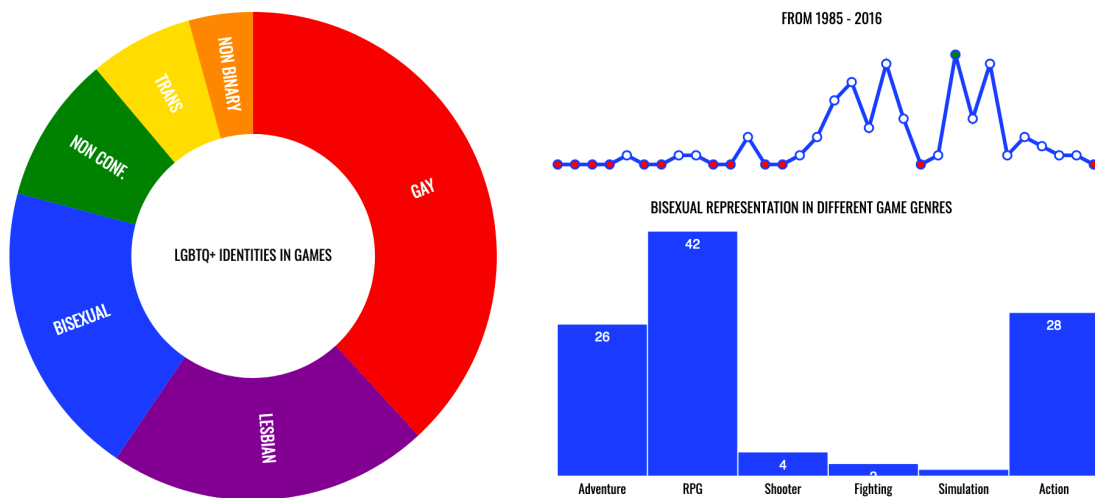
1.2. HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This literature invites us to make two assumptions in relation to the still limited knowledge about the representation of bisexuality in video games. In the first place, we consider that bisexuality is a doubly invisible orientation, due not only to the lack of representation that this group already supports outside the video game, but also to the complexity of including explicit signifiers in a medium where the control of the narration often falls on the player. This means that bisexuality is increasingly relegated to queer readings that may not meet the needs of a group that has expressed its desire for greater explicit recognition within the medium (Nix, 2018; Bevan, 2021).

Secondly, when bisexuality is explicitly represented in the video game, a series of traits are common, inherited from other media, whose categorization has been the objective of this study. These two interrelated phenomena must be addressed so that bisexual orientation achieves greater recognition outside and inside the video game.

The first assumption has already been addressed in a significant way by Shaw and Friesem (2016) and Utsch et al. (2017). These studies have put into practice quantitative methodologies to draw conclusions about the volume of representation of bisexuality in the video game. The results have been published in an extraor-

"Call Me by My Name": Analysis of the Strategies of Bisexual Erasure and Stereotyping in Video Games

Figure 1

Representation of bisexuality in video games (Utsch et al., 2017).

FROM 1985 - 2016

BISEXUAL REPRESENTATION IN DIFFERENT GAME GENRES

LGBTQ+ IDENTITIES IN GAMES — GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, NON CONF., TRANS, NON BINARY

Adventure	RPG	Shooter	Fighting	Simulation	Action
26	42	4			28

dinarily useful database: LGBTQ Video Game Archive (https://lgbtqgamearchive.com/). Less has been written about the quality of this representation. To what degree does bisexuality in the video game reproduce the same stereotypes and traits present in media such as novels, movies, or television? How does the nature of the video game affect the construction of bisexuality? Why are some patterns repeated and not others? The importance of these questions has been advanced by Shaw and Friesem (2016), when they point out that "Quantitative research could complement qualitative research in analyzing patterns in representation and how they have or have not changed over time" (p. 3886).

2. METHODOLOGY

As Castelló (2008) argued, any methodology for analyzing identity construction processes must include prior theorizing about the referent under study. In our case, it means finding an answer as clear as possible to the question: how do we identify bisexuality in the video game? This issue, as Alarie and Gaudet (2013),

Harman (2019) and Nelson (2020), among others, have already advanced, does not have an easy solution. The reasoning requires a pause, perhaps briefly, on the difficulty that bisexuality encounters in being represented outside and inside fiction. People who fall under the so-called "bisexual umbrella" often lack the appropriate nonverbal signifiers to express their orientation to strangers (Hayfield et al., 2013). The bisexual's need to identify verbally is a mechanism that arises in response to the absence of a stable "bisexual display" (Hartman, 2013).

The notion of *bisexual display* refers to how a plurisexual identity can be evident beyond sexual activity or behavior. According to Hartman (2013), "A bisexual display involves using the accoutrements of gender, as well as more direct visual and verbal cues, to project a bisexual identity through interactions with others under current societal norms and expectations" (p. 43). However, there are no clear signifiers of bi/plurisexuality, and those that do can be difficult to articulate (Harman, 2019; Nelson, 2020). In this sense, Meyer (2010) comments that bisexual characters in fiction rarely "come out of

the closet". Instead of betting on clear signifiers, their sexuality is introduced in a casual and ambiguous way, which only reinforces hegemonic discourses about heterosexuality and homosexuality "as valid, nondebatable identities" (Meyer, 2010, p. 380).

This problem was already evidenced by Shaw and Friesem (2016): "In many cases, games do not explicitly define these characters' sexualities, and the process of untangling implied sexuality is a contentious one" (p. 3880). Utsch et al. (2017) point out that there is a fundamental difference between explicit and implicit representations of sexual orientation. While the first leaves little or no room for interpretation of the character, the second falls exclusively on the reading of the text. A prominent case is the character of Ellie from *The Last of Us* saga (Naughty Dog, 2013-2020), whose homosexual/bisexual orientation has been the subject of analysis and discussion by fans since the launch of *The Last of Us: Left Behind* (Fandom, 2014; GameFAQs, 2014).

With these considerations, we have opted for a definition of bisexuality that is as limited as possible, but without forgetting the "volatility of meanings" that Castelló (2008: 189) points to when designing a content analysis of an identity nature. We therefore understand bisexuality as sexual or romantic interest, or the ability to have sexual or romantic interest, towards people of more than one sex and/or gender. This definition tries to reconcile the proposals of Gagnon et al. (1999) and Flanders et al. (2017), including the notions of both biological sex and gender identity. This does not mean that said inclination should be represented to the same degree in the text, but it does mean that there should be sufficient evidence to interpret that the character follows or has followed this behavior at some point.

Having detected the obstacles of the investigation, and reached a definition of the object of analysis, we have given way to the design of the work methodology. To do this, we turned to Flick (2015), who proposes three qualitative research perspectives, each with its own theoretical positions and data collection and interpretation techniques (Table 2). The proposed objectives have led us to embrace the second perspective, characterized by constructionism as a fundamental theoretical position, a data collection method based on the collection of documents (video games with the presence of bisexual characters) and an interpretation method based on the qualitative content analysis (Table 2)

This qualitative content analysis has been carried out adopting what Flick (2015) calls a "social representation theory" (p. 42). Thus, we have started from the theoretical concepts (the general) towards the media texts (the particular) to reach some conclusions, following a deductive logic. Due to the limited resources available for this work (both logistical and extension), which in any case should be seen as a first approach to a field of study still in its infancy, we have worked directly on the LGBTQ Video Game Archive database, specifically on the category of bisexual characters. This category, made up of 98 entries (N = 98), has been the sample of our analysis.

Although the database is an incomplete work and does not yet include all the characters identified as bisexual, it does collect information on the vast majority, which is why it has been extremely useful documentary work to start our investigation. Starting from our own categorization of the main mechanisms of erosion and stereotyping of bisexuality (Table 3), we have analyzed the sample extracted from the LGBTQ Video Game Archive, in order to find

Table 2

Perspectives in qualitative research (Flick, 2015).

	Approaches aimed at subjective points of view	Description of the creation of social situations	Hermeneutical analysis of the underlying structures
Theoretical positions	Symbolic interactionism Phenomenology	Ethnomethodology Constructionism	Psychoanalysis Genetic structuralism
Data collection methods	Semi-structured interviews Narrative interviews	Discussion groups Ethnography Participant observation Interaction Log Collection of documents	Interaction Log Photography Films
Interpretation methods	Theoretical coding Content analysis Narrative analysis Hermeneutical methods	Conversation analysis Discourse analysis Document Analysis	Objective hermeneutics Deep hermeneutics

out to what extent the video game promotes or distances itself from these traits.

3. RESULTS

3.1. BISEXUALITY AS A PHASE/CONFUSION

The first of the images that have been identified reflects bisexuality not as a stable identity, but as a stage from which a monosexual identity will emerge sooner or later (Barker & Langdrid-

ge, 2008). Because plurisexual people are often interpreted as half-straight/half-homosexual, rather than as having an independent orientation, the belief that bisexuality is temporary and illusory persists (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Nelson, 2020). In this sense, the bisexual is accused of being either a confused heterosexual (image more commonly associated with women), or a repressed homosexual (image more commonly associated with men). This trait is linked to the conception of being bisexual as someone in a permanent state of confusion in relation to their feelings.

Although this stereotype has appeared frequently in other media, especially in adolescent characters such as Ramona Flowers from *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World,* Willow Rosenberg from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* or Blaine Anderson from *Glee,* we have not found explicit examples in the analyzed video games. It is the players themselves who, through matching mechanics present in many role-playing games, often build their own stories and interpret their own games in a bisexual key. And it is they who ultimately have the authority to decide the sexual orientation of their character.

3.2. BISEXUALITY AS AMBIGUITY/FUN

Something more frequent is the image of the bisexual as an individual who intentionally plays with ambiguity and has fun crossing the limits, without ever defining themselves or letting society define them. Several authors have highlighted in this sense the media importance of the so-called *bisexual chic* (Gagnon et al., 1999; Klesse, 2018; Stechschulte, 2020), a popular trend among some artists of the seventies and that continues today as a form of measuring sexual fluidity, especially among young people (Gagnon et al., 1999). The representation of this fluidity has cultivated an image of bisexuality as

a decision that can be made at any time, rather than as a stable identity. This trait also entails the consolidation of a series of adjectives commonly associated with bisexuals, in fiction and outside of it: ambiguous, indecipherable, frivolous…; people who, ultimately, "have fun" playing with their orientation. This behavior, a priori beneficial to sexual freedom, ultimately continues to be linked to heteronormativity, "because the individual eventually defers to powerful heterosexual norms, their 'openness' serving as evidence that bisexuality is a fictitious concept rather than a valid identity category." (Meyer, 2010, p. 371).

This trait can be seen with remarkable assiduity in Japanese video games, where bisexuality is rarely made explicit and instead is played with indefinite character, sometimes as comic relief for the action. Let's think about the character of Bartz Klauser in *Final Fantasy V* (Square, 1992), which feels attracted to his partner Faris shortly before discovering that he is a woman in disguise. Even so, he maintains an interest in her throughout the adventure, which has been a reason to interpret the hero as implicitly bisexual. It is also common for Japanese video games to associate homosexuality/bisexuality in men with femininity. The mannered features of Bartz Klauser in *Dissidia: Final Fantasy* (Square Enix, 2009) seem to indicate, again, the intention of the developers to mark his orientation. Other characters who have fallen into this stereotype are Zelos, from *Tales of Symphonia* (Namco, 2003), Yusuke Kitagawa, from *Persona 5* (Atlus, 2017) and *Persona 5: Dancing in Starlight* (P Studio, 2018), or Vamp, from *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* (Konami, 2001). Likewise, the introduction of transgender and genderqueer characters, such as Excellus and Libra, from *Fire Emblem: Awakening* (Intelligent Systems, 2013), has been another of the strategies of Japanese video games to present bisexuality

in a hidden way. Although this representation is a positive sign of sexual fluidity, it also implies a negative association between sexual orientation and gender identity, something that particularly affects the bisexual community.

3.3. BISEXUALITY AS INFIDELITY/PROMISCUITY

Various authors have agreed to point out the stigma that surrounds bisexuals as promiscuous, irresponsible, and untrustworthy people (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013). As Yoshino (2000) explains, the threat that bisexuality symbolizes is not only quantitative — "they can leave you for twice as many people"— but especially qualitative —"they can leave you for someone with whom you cannot compete"—. This, says the author, generates constant anxiety in the bisexual couple:

> It is not that one's bisexual partner can leave you for twice as many people, but that she can leave you for a different *kind* of person. The anxiety is aroused not by rivals who might also offer what you possess, but by rivals who might offer what you do *not* possess. (Yoshino, 2000, p. 421)

This promiscuity appears, in turn, linked to the confusion and lack of maturity with which bisexual people tend to be associated (Diamond, 2005), incapable of being tied to a monogamous relationship. Although less frequently than in other media, video games have also used this feature to characterize bisexual characters. One of the paradigmatic cases is that of Reaver, antagonist and villain of *Fable II* (Lionhead Studios, 2008) and *Fable III* (Lionhead Studios, 2010). He is a seemingly immortal character who has amassed a fortune, first through piracy and later, in *Fable III*, through the Industrial Revolution. Bisexuality, far from being

significant for the plot, is used to accentuate the amoral and libertine traits of the character, who seems designed in the image and likeness of the iconic Lord Byron. Through his personal diaries and some scenes of his, we learn that Reaver is fond of having multiple sexual encounters, sometimes simultaneously, with men and women alike. Added to this promiscuity is a total lack of empathy towards people, whom he can execute in cold blood without his pulse trembling, which is why it also fits with the two traits that we will see below: perversion and sociopathy.

Other bisexual characters, although they are not explicitly represented as promiscuous, allow a reading in this sense. An interesting case is that of Rachel Amber, from *Life Is Strange: Before the Storm* (Deck Nine, 2017). The co-star of the *Life Is Strange* prequel is at times insinuated and at times portrayed as secretive, enigmatic and, to some extent, manipulative. On the one hand, Rachel maintains a romantic relationship with Chloe Price, for whom she seems to have sincere feelings. But as the plot progresses, we discover that Rachel leads a double life involving at least two other people: Frank Bowers, a young drug dealer, and Mark Jefferson, the main perpetrator of the crimes in the game. The biggest conflict between Chloe and Rachel stems from the deception she is subjecting Chloe to, hiding her intimate relationship with Frank from her. The reasons, however, are not entirely clear, and it could be a manipulation by Rachel towards Frank with the intention of getting his money and escaping from Arcadia Bay with Chloe. These circumstances, in addition to other signs present in the game such as rumors and graffiti that point to Rachel's promiscuity, have drawn an enigmatic, confused, and deceitful bisexual character. At times, she recalls the inscrutable Laura Palmer from *Twin Peaks*, a series with which *Life Is Strange* maintains an evident transtextual relationship.

3.4. BISEXUALITY AS PERVERSION/HYPERSEXUALITY

Hypersexuality has been recognized as another of the common stereotypes of bisexual people (Madison, 2017; Klesse, 2018; Nelson, 2020). This has generated a canonical image of the bisexual as an individual who enjoys sex for sex's sake and who practices all kinds of fetishisms. As Yoshino (2000, p. 420) suggests, "Bisexual desire is seen not as a completion, but rather as an excess." Bisexual insatiability has been associated with the idea of having sex with more than one partner at the same time. In this sense, the male gaze has resignified much of the bisexual representation in an attractive way for the straight cis men, that is, favoring bisexuality among women so that men can participate while preserving their heterosexual orientation. Madison (2017) gives the example of an article published in *The Guardian* (Browne, 2014) entitled *Make up your mind! The science behind bisexuality.* The main image of the article shows a young boy posing in bed with a cigarette and surrounded by two sleeping girls, one on each side, in a clear post-coital attitude that invites us to question: who is really the bisexual in the image? Following De Barros (2020), "bisexual women tend to be depicted using their same-gender attraction as a 'tool' to get what they want, or the depiction is done in an oversexualized manner meant to draw male attention" (p. 106).

This male gaze on the bisexual object of desire, common in film and television, has permeated video games on occasion. In *Fear Effect 2: Retro Helix* (Kronos Digital Entertainment, 2001), the mercenary Hana Tsu-Vachel, who in the

first part of the saga establishes a relationship with the mercenary Glas Royce, appears linked to the hacker Rain Qin, implying her bisexuality. Although the relationship was not shown explicitly in the game, the advertising left little room for interpretation (Figure 2), falling into the fetishization and hypersexualization of the protagonists' behavior. The couple would reappear, this time confirming their relationship, in the third part of the saga: *Fear Effect Sedna* (Sushee, 2018).

Figure 2

Hana y Rain, from Fear Effect 2:
Retro Helix (LGBTQ Video Game Archive, 2015).

More broadly, the theme of perversion has encompassed male and female bisexual characters alike. The hypersexualized image of Zagreus, protagonist of **Hades** (Supergiant Games, 2018), and his circle of gods rescued from Greek mythology once again emphasizes the celebration of bisexuality as an uninhibited and insatiable orientation. Nor is the resource of the love triangle between the Greek hero and his companions Megera and Thanatos lacking in the work of Supergiant Games, a recurring figure that perpetuates promiscuity as a distinctive feature of bisexuals.

Sometimes, the perversion has ended up leading to sadism, especially in antagonists and villains. Added to the insatiable Reaver are characters like Volgin from *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* (Konami, 2004), Peter Dreyfuss from *Grand Theft Auto V* (Rockstar North, 2013), Mileena from *Mortal Kombat 11* (NetherRealm Studios, 2019), Tharja from *Fire Emblem: Awakening* (Intelligent Systems, 2013) or Morinth from *Mass Effect 2* (BioWare, 2010). In all of them, implicit or explicit bisexuality is used to highlight the amorality, perversion and hypersexuality of these characters.

3.5. BISEXUALITY AS A MENTAL DISORDER

Taking the two previous traits one step further, bisexuality has also served to highlight the sinister, deviant, and perverse nature of certain characters. The works of White (2001) and Alexander (2007) have dealt with the cases of Frank Booth in *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1986), Mike in *Mike's Murder* (James Bridges, 1984) or the criminals of *American Commandos* (Bobby A. Suarez, 1985) as paradigmatic examples of this feature, very common in the Hollywood of the eighties. "Drug kingpin, serial killer, SM practitioner, sex deviant, and gender outlaw. This iconography of human evil has the effect of eliciting […] biphobia" (White, 2001, p. 43). We are talking about a trait that raises the promiscuity and perversion seen before to enter the field of sociopathy; a stereotype that, surprisingly, is more common than it seems in video games.

We start with several characters from the *GTA* saga. On the one hand, Eddie Low, from *Grand Theft Auto IV* (Rockstar North, 2008), is an NPC that appears in random encounters and is described as a serial rapist and murderer who was

"Call Me by My Name": Analysis of the Strategies of Bisexual Erasure and Stereotyping in Video Games

sexually abused as a child. After the protagonist, Niko Bellic, does various errands for him, Eddie tries to assassinate him. The player can then end his life and put an end to the crimes, even though Niko had ignored multiple hints of Eddie's psychopathy when he was helping him dispose of the bodies of his victims. Bisexuality reappears in *Grand Theft Auto V* (Rockstar North, 2013) twice. The aforementioned Peter Dreyfuss is joined by the co-star of the adventure Trevor Philips, a sociopath victim of abuse who finds pleasure in any sexual practice, regardless of the gender of the other person. Although Trevor shuns the bi-label at all times, which would position him as a repressed homosexual in a world where testosterone is necessary for survival, his behavior, his lewd comments, and the information we have about his background suggest bisexuality or corrupted pansexuality; very typical of the Rockstar company.

Another successful video game from the developer, *Red Dead Redemption* (Rockstar San Diego, 2010), insists on this pattern through the villain Vicente de Santa. De Santa is a captain in the Mexican army and works under Colonel Agustín Allende to put down the revolution led by Abraham Reyes. De Santa is portrayed as a cruel, abusive, and sadistic man who flirts with women and men, having a special inclination for young boys like Quique Montemayor, an effeminate boy who acts as the captain's servant. After De Santa's death, Abraham Reyes comments that "many kids will finally be able to sleep peacefully in their beds".

The perversion associated with bisexuality has also made its way through the historical video game, with the appearance of the infamous Marquis de Sade in *Assassin's Creed: Unity* (Ubi-

soft, 2014). The paraphilias with which bisexuals tend to be associated appear linked to a psychological damage characteristic of this class of characters. One of the earliest examples of a bisexual protagonist, Curtis, from *Phantasmagoria: A Puzzle of Flesh* (Sierra Entertainment, 1996), is a paradigmatic case of the frequency with which fiction has treated bisexuals as people with traumatic pasts that have deviated them from the good path of monosexuality. In *Phantasmagoria,* Curtis is portrayed as a young man who has just been released from a psychiatric facility after undergoing electroshock therapy due to an atrocious childhood. Although he is in a non-monogamous relationship with Jocilyn, he ends up hooking up with Therese who, in turn, introduces him to the local BDSM scene. Eventually, he becomes attracted to his friend Trevor, who dies shortly after Curtis tries to kiss him.

Recently, some video games have addressed bisexuality as a factor linked to some type of psychological disorder from a more emotional point of view. *What Remains of Edith Finch* (Giant Sparrow, 2017) and *Night in the Woods* (Infinite Fall, 2017) have sensitively addressed the fact that bisexuals show greater signs of depression, anxiety, suicidal behavior, delinquency, and drug use than other members of the LGBTQ collective (Kaestle & Ivory, 2012). In the first, Lewis, the eldest of the Finch brothers, is portrayed as a young man with mental health problems and drug use who ends up taking his own life at the canning factory where he works. Despite the stereotypes used, Giant Sparrow's work invites reflection on the circumstances of Lewis's death and what we could have done

Table 3

Erosion strategies and stereotyping of bisexuality.

Trait	Characteristics	Representative cases
Bisexuality as a phase/ confusion	Denial of bisexuality as a stable identity Bisexuality as temporary and illusory Confusion about feelings	
Bisexuality as ambiguity/fun	Bisexuality as "appearance" Ambiguous, indecipherable, and frivolous personality Association with femininity	Bartz Klauser *(Final Fantasy V, Dissidia: Final Fantasy)* Zelos (*Tales of Symphonia*) Yusuke Kitagawa *(Persona 5: Dancing in Starlight)* Vamp (*Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty).*
Bisexuality as infidelity/ promiscuity	Generation of distrust Confusion and immaturity Irresponsibility and lack of commitment in relationships	Reaver (*Fable II, Fable III*) Rachel Amber (*Life Is Strange: Before the Storm*)
Bisexuality as perversion/hypersexuality	Bisexuality as a source of insatiable desire Male gaze that eroticizes bisexuality among women	Zagreus (Hades) Hana (Fear Effect 2: Retro Helix) Volgin (Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater) Morinth (Mass Effect 2)
Bisexuality as a mental disorder	Stereotype of the "bisexual male killer" Bisexuality as a symptom of emotional trauma Association between bisexuality and depression	Eddie Low (GTA IV) Curtis (Phantasmagoria: A Puzzle of Flesh) Lewis (What Remains of Edith Finch) Mae Borowski (Night in the Woods)
Bisexuality as a risky practice	Bisexuality as a "bridge" between the hetero and homosexual worlds	Trevor Philips (Grand Theft Auto V)

to prevent it. For her part, Mae Borowski, the protagonist of *Night in the Woods,* is an anthropomorphic cat who returns to her hometown of Possum Springs. During the adventure, it becomes clear that the pansexually oriented Mae suffers from depression and anxiety, struggling to reemerge from a dissociative disorder that makes her life feel meaningless. Mental health issues are everywhere in *Night in the Woods,* but in a natural and not necessarily dramatic way that helps normalize diversity, rather than using it to capture player interest.

3.6. BISEXUALITY AS A RISKY PRACTICE

Finally, the non-monosexual collective has often been seen as a dangerous "bridge" capable of carrying sexually transmitted infections (STIs) between the heterosexual and homosexual "worlds". Through a study of the treatment of bisexuality in the medical literature over two decades, Kaestle and Ivory (2012) found that more than 20% of the publications used the metaphor of the bridge, thereby associating bisexuality with promiscuity. White (2001, p. 43) has observed that the rise of the "bisexual male killer" in Hollywood cinema finds its roots in the association of bisexuality with AIDS in the dominant social and political discourses of the 1980s. Again, this trait does not act separately, but in relation to other stereotypes, such as polygamy and promiscuity, behaviors that increase the feeling of threat and the erosion mechanisms of bisexuality. This feature has not been explicitly detected in video games, although it is possible to read certain characters such as Trevor Philips and Eddie Low from the perspective of the "bisexual male killer" proposed by White (2001).

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The content analysis carried out allows us to draw a series of conclusions, as well as raise new questions for future research. In the first place, we see an irregular translation of the most common stereotypes of bisexuality to the video game. Of the six proposed traits, two have hardly been represented: bisexuality as a phase or confusion and bisexuality as a risky practice. Of the remaining four traits, we note a significant presence of bisexuality as ambiguity among Japanese games, while the other three, closely linked to each other, are spread more between titles of North American and European origins. In this sense, we can conclude that bisexuality tends to be more implicit in the Japanese video game and more explicit in the Western one. Bisexuality from the Japanese point of view appears more linked to other traits such as femininity, cross-dressing, and often serves as comic relief for the plot. By contrast, bisexuality is treated more seriously in North American and European video games, which leads to both negative (Eddie Low, Rachel Amber, Trevor Philips...) and positive (Lewis Finch, Mae Borowski) stereotyping.

In general, the analysis has allowed us to see that bisexuality is not as subject to prejudice as in other media, especially cinema and tele-

vision, where numerous examples of the traits listed are not lacking. Although this encourages us to think that video games, given their short history, have been more quickly aware of the demands of the LGBTQ community, they do not eliminate one of the main problems pointed out by numerous authors: the generalized invisibility of sexual diversity in this medium. It is then a matter of relativity. The presence of stereotypes associated with bisexuals is not as significant as in other media because the number of explicitly LGBTQ characters in video games is still minimal (Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, 2021). We will have to wait, therefore, for bisexuality to be more explicitly present to obtain better results.

We must insist on the question of explicitness. We have verified how in many of the cases recorded by the LGBTQ Video Game Archive, bisexuality is confused with the freedom, if not indifference, shown by players to engage in romantic and/or sexual relationships with NPCs of any gender; but bisexuality is not part of the narrative of these characters at any time. This form of representation, called "playersexuality" (Tierney, 2020), has become a shortcut to introduce bisexuality without taking sides for it. This freedom, although it favors the perception of a fluid sexuality controlled by the player, simultaneously erodes the stability of disputed identities, such as bisexuality, which would benefit from a greater unequivocal representation free of interpretations.

With these conclusions, we want to commit ourselves to continue developing the issue of bisexuality in video games through new approaches. It is urgent to broaden the focus of text analysis to the context and work from the point of view of reception, engaging in conversation with the players to better understand the meaning that these representations have for them. Only in this way will we be able to provide the analysis of LGBTQ content with the necessary instruments to answer questions that are often overlooked when we study representation: for whom is representation important? How is it received and in what context? These are some of the questions that we want to address in future works.

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