

“...to log on and always have queer Indigenous interaction...”: problems of representation for queer Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander gamers

Leandro A. Wallace

PhD Candidate, Department of Indigenous Studies, Macquarie University
leandro.wallace@hdr.mq.edu.au

Keywords

Queer, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander gamers, representation, resistance, public imaginary.

INTRODUCTION

Representation is a core analysis element for all screen media, videogames are not except from this approach. It can take very different forms, from looking into the extension of identities from individual players (Klimmt et al, 2009), moving into more complex understanding through some intersectional approaches (Hoch, 2020). However, most studies take as a starting point the ideas of the Gamer identity as the background for any conflict or lack of representation (Chess, 2020; Kivijarvi & Katila, 2021; Blom, 2023). Going deeper into this style of critiques coming from African American positionings that forward the difficulties and problematic representation that happen when mainting analyses only from privileged or partially privileged positions (Gray, 2023; Trammel, 2023). These line of thinking do not take away from shining light into practices being carried out that still work around the oppressing structures put into place and furthering change from within the space. Most of the highglited work is being carried out in the space of the US or Canada (see Gray, 2020; Mckenna et al, 2022). At the same time, common ideas of the importance of representation were confronted by seminal studies regarding sexuality and gender consderations (Shaw, 2014) and still carry weight into reflections representation has for gender and sexual diverse groups. While these works are of great relevance and give a good guide on movements and contestation approaches, they are based on a particular set of circumstances that encompass the US/Canada context.

Works highliting Indigenous perspectives, sovereignty and queerness in videogames, on an international level, have emerge in the last years (LaPensée & Emmons, 2019; LaPensée, Laiti & Longboat, 2021; Clapper, 2021; Laiti, 2021; Miner, 2022; Loban, 2023). This paper seeks to forefront the perspectives of queer Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander gamers, understood in a wide sense, as it relates to their perspectives on representation and character/avatar creation. This work intents to center Indigenous knowledges as they relate to gaming practices and experiences in the particular context of so-called Australia. In that sense considering historically simple and stereotyping representation, questions about its role as an integration and visibility tool emerge. It is not an element to be considered outside of public life and its considerable restrictions (Gossett et al, 2017). Through the critical scrutiny of the multiple elements that are entangled in the attempts of the Colonial Project of Gender and Sexuality (O’Sullivan, 2021) and the Modern/Colonial System of Gender

Proceedings of DiGRA Australia 2025

© 2025 Authors & Digital Games Research Association DiGRA. Personal and educational classroom use of this paper is allowed, commercial use requires specific permission from the author.

(Lugones, 2008) to continue functioning, problematizing representation needs to include not only an intersectional approach but pathways being constructed to disrupt those attempts. The possibilities of including complex representations as well as workings around the limitations presented by different videogames structures are some of the aspects discussed by the participants to the survey that informs the project from which this paper emerges. At the same time, considerations regarding the relationship with Communities enrich the discussions concerning the reaches and importance of representation in a wider sense. Reaching this perspectives can only happen by centering Indigenous worldviews and knowledges. By carrying out this practice we can approach particular practices of resistances within and across videogames.

BIO

Leandro Wallace (he/him/él) is a non-Indigenous PhD Candidate at the Department of Critical Indigenous Studies at Macquarie University, originally from Argentina, in Abya Yala. He works with Prof. Sandy O’Sullivan in their Project “Saving Lives: Mapping the influence of Indigenous LGBTIQ+ creative artists” focusing on experiences and resistances of queer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander gamers. In his work, he looks to connect the anti-colonial Indigenous practices and theorizing of both geo-political spaces: Abya Yala and the continent known as Australia. Leandro is also an Editor-member of the International Online Journal “EnGender!”, co-organizer of their annual Conference, and co-host and co-producer of the podcast “EnGender Conversations”.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to acknowledge the funding provided by the Project “Saving Lives: Mapping the influence of Indigenous LGBTIQ+ creative artists” run by Prof. Sandy O’Sullivan through the Macquarie University Research Excellence Scholarship, that enable for this research to take place.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Blom, J. 2023. *Video Game Characters and Transmedia Storytelling. The Dynamic Game Character*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Chess, S. 2020. *Play Like a Feminist*. Cambridge, USA: The MIT Press.

Clapper, J. 2021. The Ancestors in the Machine: Indigenous Futurity and Indigenizing Games. In Kim, D. & Koh, A. (eds.). *Alternative Historiographies of the Digital Humanities*. Punctum Books.

Kivijärvi, M. & Katila, S. 2021. “Becoming a Gamer: Performative Construction of Gendered Gamer Identities”. *Games and Culture*. 0 (0). 1-21. DOI: 10.1177/15554120211042260.

Klimmt et al 2009. The Video Game Experience as “True” Identification: A Theory of Enjoyable Alterations of Players’ Self-Perception. *Communication Theory*. 19. 351-373.

Gray, K.L. 2023. Killing the Black Body: Necropolitics and Racial Hierarchies in Digital Gaming. *Filozofski vestnik*. Vol. 44 (2). 181-198. doi: 10.3986/fv.44.2.08.

(2020). *Intersectional Tech. Black Users in Digital Gaming*. Louisiana State University Press.

- Laiti, O. 2021. *Old Ways of Knowing, New Ways of Playing – The Potential of Collaborative Game Design to Empower Indigenous Sámi*. University of Lapland.
- LaPensée, E., Laiti, O. & Longboat, M. 2022. Towards Sovereign Games. *Games and Culture*. 17(3). 328-343.
- LaPensée, E., & Emmons, N. 2019. Indigenizing Education with the Game When Rivers Were Trails. *Amerikastudien/American Studies*. 64(1). 75–93. <https://doi.org/10.33675/AMST/2019/1/8>.
- Loban, R. 2023. *Embedding Culture into Video Games and Game Design. The Palm, the Dogai and the Tombstone*. CRC Press
- McKenna, J. et al (2022). “You can’t be deadnamed in a video game”: Transgender and gender diverse adolescents’ use of video game avatar creation for gender-affirmation and exploration. *Journal of LGBT Youth*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2022.2144583>.
- Miner, J. 2022. Critical Protocols in Indigenous Gamespace. *Games and Culture*. Vol. 17(1). 3-25.
- Neill Hoch, I. 2020. Fill in the Blank. Customizable Player Characters and Video Game Fandom Practice. In Pande, R. (ed.). *Fandom, Now in Colors: A Collection of Voices*. 109-121. University of Iowa Press.
- O’Sullivan, S. 2021. The Colonial Project of Gender (and Everything Else). *Genealogy* 5, 3, 67. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy5030067>.
- Shaw, A. 2014. *Gaming at the Edge. Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture*. MN, USA: University of Minnesota Press.
- Trammel, A. 2023. *Repairing Play. A Black Phenomenology*. Cambridge, USA: The MIT Press.