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Depictions of sexual minorities in games. Case: Your Royal Gayness

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| Abstract | | |
| <p>The purpose of this thesis was to examine how sexual minorities are represented in video games and compare those depictions with the characters in Your Royal Gayness, a kingdom management game released by Lizard Hazard Games in early 2018. Additionally, the study examined and evaluated the processes used to design the characters, stories and game mechanics in relation to LGBT issues.</p> | | |
| <p>The goal was to gain a deeper understanding on how to design and implement interesting and well-rounded LGBT characters and examine the state of LGBT portrayals in games. To understand the subject in a larger context, the history of queer video game characters was discussed briefly. Due to many of the game releases originating from Japan or the United States, the differences between the LGBT depictions of both countries were compared and assessed.</p> | | |
| <p>The creation process of Your Royal Gayness was introduced. Special focus was given to character design over other aspects such as world design or game mechanics, as the focus of the thesis was on sexual minorities. Different methods of creating diverse characters were identified and character design was explored through examples from the game.</p> | | |
| <p>The success of LGBT portrayal in Your Royal Gayness was assessed by examining various types of feedback the game received after its release. User reviews from the game distribution platform Steam were examined and analyzed to gain a broad understanding of how well the LGBT issues were handled in Your Royal Gayness, as well as the overall success of Your Royal Gayness as a humorous management game. Patterns and common themes of the feedback were identified and categorized.</p> | | |
| <p>Finally, the contents of the whole thesis were summarized and analyzed to provide insight into the best practices to create an LGBT friendly game.</p> | | |
| Keywords | | |
| Character design, sexual minorities, LGBT, video games, game design, game industry | | |

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GLOSSARY

AAA game: A game made by a large studio with a sizeable number of employees and an extremely large budgets.

Asexual: A person who does not experience any sexual attraction, or experiences sexual attraction very rarely.

Cis, cisgender: A person who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth. Literally means "On the same side"; the opposite of trans.

Game player: The more neutral term "game player" is used instead of "gamer" due to the divisive nature of the word.

LGBT: An acronym based on the words "Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender". Sometimes written as LGBT+, GLBT, LGBTQAI, or other letter combinations to include more identities. In this study, LGBT refers to all sexual and gender minorities.

Queer: A word to describe a person who is part of a LGBT+ minority.

Nonbinary: A person who does not identify as a man or a woman.

Pansexual: Similar to bisexuality, a pansexual person is attracted to both their own and other genders.

Visual Novel: A type of game that focuses on story and text. Visual novels often have static character sprites and choices that lead to branching story paths.

1 INTRODUCTION

The current state of video games is such that many game players who are part of a minority have never seen a character that they can identify with due to their resemblance in the game. The majority of video games feature white, cisgender male protagonists. In a 2001 study Heintz-Knowles et al. (2001) examined gender representation in games and found that 73 percent of the 874 characters included in the study were male, and only 12 percent are female. According to another study 59.53% to 76.6% of the video game characters studied were white (Williams 2009). This indicates that video games are homogenous when it comes to the diversity of the characters.

According to Williams (2009), the presence of a group serves as a maker for members of said group to know they carry weight in society. Thus, it is important that underrepresented minorities get to see characters that resemble them. Video game developers need to achieve a better understanding on how to handle issues regarding sexual orientation and gender expressions. While the main focus of this thesis is on sexual minorities, it also touches on gender related issues -- the "T" in the LGBT.

One of the motivations for the creation of Your Royal Gayness was combating the issues above. The original idea for the game was "A prince who has to come up with excuses to avoid marriage because he is gay" but it quickly grew more complex and deeper. The humorous nature of the game remained, but serious themes were built around it. The process of turning a silly little game idea into a relatively complex video game required much thought and deliberate planning.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the process of creating a video game with queer themes and identify useful methods to create great LGBT characters. To gain a deeper understanding about the subject, previous depictions of LGBT characters and the history of LGBT games are discussed. The thesis briefly goes through the first queer video game characters from the 1980's to modern day. The differences between the West and Japan are compared due to the most relevant game titles coming from The United States of America or Japan.

The creation process of *Your Royal Gayness* is introduced, focusing on the LGBT aspects of the game but also exploring other parts of the game briefly to give the reader a better understanding of the game. Methods for creating well-designed and sensitive portrayals of queer characters are identified and analyzed.

Finally, to evaluate the success of the techniques used during the development process user reviews from the game distribution platform Steam are reviewed and analyzed. The result is a list of best practices for game developers who wish to create a LGBT friendly game.

2 SEXUAL MINORITIES IN GAMES

Historically, depictions of LGBT characters were few during the beginning of the video game era in the 1970's and 1980's. However, they were not nonexistent; rather, the depictions that did exist were often stereotypical or humorous in nature. Nintendo's guidelines in the 80's "included rules that said no releases on a Nintendo system could include references or displays of any kind of illegal or non-medicinal drug, blood and graphic violence, stereotypical language, religious symbols, profanity, political references, or "sexually suggestive or explicit content.'" (Gaming Bus 2012).

Queer relationships are often seen more sexual in nature than heterosexual relationships and deemed "Not suitable for children" even if the content itself is very innocent and harmless. For example, in 2017 the video content platform Youtube flagged many informational LGBT videos as inappropriate for children despite the content itself being purely educational and suitable to all audiences. (Hunt 2017). In 2013 the Russian government passed a law banning "gay propaganda" in an effort to preserve traditional family values and to protect children from gay influences. (The Guardian 2013; Luhn 2015). Similar attitudes were most likely the reason why it was difficult to portray gay characters in Nintendo games in the 1980's under Nintendo's guidelines on prohibited content.

2.1 Previous depictions of sexual and gender minorities in games

Some of the earliest explicitly queer characters in games included Birdo, a transgender dinosaur-like character from Super Mario Bros. 2 (1988) (Figure 1) and Poison, another transgender character from Final Fight (1989) (Figure 2). However, in both cases the American releases removed mentions of their gender (Grosso 2019). Japanese game releases have historically been more diverse than their American counterparts when it comes to gender and sexuality, as seen from the fact that most early depictions of queer game characters came from Japan (Gaming Bus 2012).



Figure 1. Birdo, as depicted in Mario Party 9. (Nintendo, 2012)



Figure 2. Poison from Final Fight. (Capcom, n.d.)

As time passed and understanding of LGBT issues increased, queer characters became more common and more well portrayed. At the end of the 1990's and start of the 2000's there were several games that explicitly mentioned or portrayed queer characters.



Figure 3. Vamp from Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty. (Konami Computer Entertainment, 2001)

Some of the most high profile games from the turn of the millennium that portrayed queer characters are Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty (2001), where a bisexual vampire Vamp (Figure 3) was mentioned to have a sexual relationship with Scott Dolph, a bisexual navy commander; Persona 2: Innocent sin (1999), where the player can choose two boys named Tatsuya and Jun to enter a relationship (Grosso 2019); and The Sims (2000), where characters can enter relationships regardless of gender.

2.2 Differences between the West and Japan

Despite the earliest queer game characters originating from Japan, Japanese titles seem to currently have more problematic LGBT portrayals than Western titles. For example, Persona 5 (P-Studio, 2016) included two minor characters who are gay men. The characters were used as a joke, exhibiting very stereotypical gay mannerisms and flirting with the presumably heterosexual male main characters (Figure 4). Recent AAA titles made by Western game studios tend to be more sensitive with LGBT issues, as including extreme gay stereotypes would cause a backlash.



Figure 4. Effeminate gay men harassing the main characters in Persona 5. (P-Studio, 2016)

Japan has a history with the "boys love" genre of games, which depict homosexual relationships but are targeted towards straight female audiences and often include stereotypical portrayals of gay relationships – although recently, the genre has started shifting towards more nuanced and realistic depictions of gay male relationships (Olsen 2017). In Western countries it has become more common to include queer relationships in games that are not inherently about romance, which has resulted in characters whose personality or appearance are not defined by their sexual orientation. Examples of these kind of characters are Ellie from *The Last of Us* (2013) (Figure 5), Clementine from the *Walking Dead* game series (2012-2019) (Figure 6) and Soldier:76 from *Overwatch* (2017) (Figure 7).



Figure 5. On the foreground: Ellie from *The Last Of Us*. (Naughty Dog, 2013)



Figure 6. Clementine and AJ from Walking Dead: The Final Season. (Telltale Games, 2019)



Figure 7. Soldier:76 from Overwatch. (Blizzard Entertainment, 2017)

2.3 Representation of lesser-known sexual and gender orientations

Despite recent advancements in the portrayals of LGBT characters, there is much room for improvement in both Western and Japanese games. Not all sexual and gender minorities receive the same amount of representation. The most well-known sexual minorities, gays, lesbians and bisexuals, are comparatively much more well represented than some of the “less mainstream” sexual orientations.

For example, there are very few asexual characters in games: In a brief questionnaire conducted by the author, a group of game players including several LGBT people and their friends were asked whether they remember ever coming

across an asexual character in a video game (Figure 8). Only 30,8% of them answered yes – while this may seem like a relatively large percentage, it should be noted that due to their better than average interest LGBT issues, the people in the group were much more likely to have encountered an asexual character than the game player population as a whole. Thus, it is likely that a very small percentage of all game players have encountered an asexual character. However, due to a small sample size of 17 people no definite conclusions on the subject can be drawn. Further research on the subject is required but it is outside the scope of this thesis. (Appendix 1).

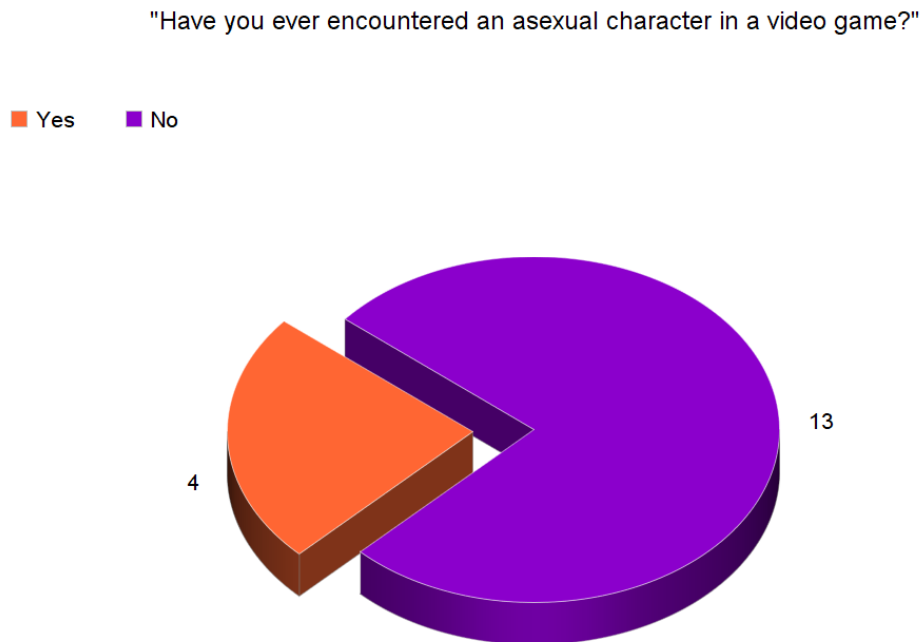


Figure 8. Have you ever encountered an asexual character in a video game?

2.4 Effects of stereotyping

LGBT people often face discrimination based on their sexual or gender orientation, including but not limited to harassment and violence. This can have a very negative impact on the mental health of an LGBT individual (American

Psychological Association, 2008). Media affects how we perceive the world, so seeing negative stereotypes about a group of people may result in negative attitudes towards said group (Perse 2001). Thus, seeing stereotypical depictions of queer characters may reinforce negative views about LGBT people, and in turn cause mental or physical harm to them. That is why it is important to create media that depicts diverse, well written characters.

3 YOUR ROYAL GAYNESS

In Your Royal Gayness the player takes on the role of Prince Amir who must rule his fairytale kingdom while his parents, the king and queen, are traveling. Amir is gay, but the surrounding culture is not accepting of homosexuality, so the player needs to be careful when making decisions regarding to the kingdom.

Your Royal Gayness was created in a span of approximately one and a half years. The development team consisted of game design students from South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences and various freelancers. None of the team consistently worked on the game full time due to other responsibilities like school or a day job. Many of the team members joined the team because they were interested in LGBT issues, so the design team was very diverse when it came to different sexual orientations and genders.

A Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign was created to fund the development of the game. The campaign was successful, raising slightly over 7000 dollars and the funds were used to pay the writers and commission music tracks for the game, among other things. The game was originally scheduled to be released in 2017 but it took until January 2018 to finish the game.

3.1 The world of Your Royal Gayness

The game is set in the world of Terra Iris, a fantasy world with 4 prominent kingdoms: Amir's kingdom Al-Marahij, the gothic vampire kingdom Obsidia, the Viking-inspired kingdom of Gnuppverjahreppfell and the elven kingdom of Aeroth. Most of the game is set in Al-Marahij, where Amir rules over the kingdom

in his parents' absence. Al-Marahij is heavily influenced by Arabic culture and the stories of One Thousand and One Nights, as well as popular culture media such as Disney's Aladdin (1992). The setting was chosen for several reasons. A medieval fantasy setting felt overused and bland and the development team wanted to feature people of color in the game since most game protagonists are white (Williams 2009). Additionally, most western people are familiar with the One Thousand and One Nights -inspired setting, allowing the developers to create strong and instantly recognizable imagery.

The other kingdoms were also chosen based on recognizability, as most people are familiar with tropes associated with vampires, Vikings and elves. The goal of this kind of approach was to let the player enjoy the game and the world without barraging them with world building lore. A "library" section was included in the game so players could read more about the world if they wanted to, but none of it is information that is required to play and understand the game.

3.2 Queer characters and themes in Your Royal Gayness

Your Royal Gayness features many queer characters, most notably the protagonist Prince Amir. Amir has three royal advisors who help him rule the kingdom. One of them is the Spymaster, the second-most prominent LGBT character in the story. Spymaster Seraph is nonbinary and identifies as a pansexual. The game also features various other LGBT characters, such as the bard Bashir who is gay, and princess Roxanne who is lesbian.

The game features several game mechanics related to Amir being gay. The most notable is the Suspicion meter, which represents how close others are to finding out that Amir is not heterosexual. The meter goes up when the player does things that are deemed unmasculine or gets caught trying to flirt to a prince who is not gay, among other things. The meter goes down when the player expresses interest towards women, drinks a magic potion or acts in especially masculine ways. It should be noted that masculine behavior affecting the meter is not based on the developers' prejudice; rather, it is an attempt to simulate how absurd the standards of heteronormativity are.

Another very important game mechanic is coming up with excuses to turn down princesses who wish to marry Amir. He must try to be convincing so that the princess does not suspect he is gay. The excuses are composed of three parts, each related to a subject that the princesses can like or dislike. The goal is to choose excuse options that include subjects that the princess does not like, such as spiders, cleaning or music.

Amir's three advisors know of his sexual orientation and support him: Drakemaster Magda, Spymaster Seraph and Court Wizard Barry (Figure 9). It was very important to the developers that Amir did not have to struggle alone. He is closeted, which can be very painful emotionally, but he has trustworthy people supporting him. The advisors are sworn to protect and assist Amir but the relationships go beyond that of an employer and employee. The advisors are almost like family to Amir.



Figure 9. Amir's advisors. From left to right: Spymaster, Court Wizard and Drakemaster. (Lizard Hazard Games, 2017)

When it comes to secondary characters, both Bashir and Roxanne are queer characters that the player will encounter if they play the game in a certain way.

Bashir is a young bard who sings glorified songs about Amir if the player makes a lot of altruistic or 'good' choices. Bashir is in love with Amir and the player can choose to have Amir run away with Bashir at the end of the game, abandoning his kingdom. Roxanne, a princess from Obsidia, appears if the Suspicion meter reaches a certain point – almost full. She initially enters the castle like any other princess, requiring Amir to come up with excuses to avoid marriage. However, after the excuse is finished, Roxanne reveals that she is a lesbian and wanted to meet Amir because she heard he might be gay. She asserts that Amir should get engaged to her so that both of them could get rid of unwanted suitors. The player gets to choose whether they want to make the deal or not. Either way, Roxanne and Amir stay in touch via letters, and the content of those letters changes depending on if the deal was made or not. Roxanne becomes an important friend for Amir who does not have many queer friends.

3.3 Creating diversity and avoiding pitfalls

The development of *Your Royal Gayness* was not without problems when it came to LGBT issues. Sometimes it is difficult to notice problematic aspects of the game when working on it closely for long periods of time. For example, in a series of events involving Spymaster, Amir wanted to find out their 'real name'. For the development team Spymaster's name Seraph was an alias in the same way as 007 is for James Bond. However, with Seraph being transgender, for anyone outside the development team it came across as Amir trying to find out Seraph's 'deadname' – the name that they used before their transition. This is considered extremely rude and inappropriate by people aware of LGBT issues.

The developers hired a freelance sensitivity reader to proofread the game's story script. The sensitivity reader's responsibility was to point out any content that had problematic portrayals of minorities, which they did. The story script was promptly changed to be more sensitive of trans issues: Amir still tries to find out Seraph's old name, but Seraph tells Amir that it is inappropriate.

4 CHARACTER DESIGN METHODOLOGIES

Three prominent character creation methodologies that were used when creating characters for Your Royal Gayness have been discussed previously, two of which are relevant to this study: Randomization and Trope Subversion. The randomization method consists of creating lists of physical, psychological and social aspects, and then creating a game system that picks random attributes for each randomized character. The trope subversion method consists of identifying common character tropes and subverting them with opposing or otherwise different or surprising qualities. (Loikkanen, 2019.)

The Randomization technique was used when creating princes for the other fairytale kingdoms. Some of the princes are gay, and potential love interests for the playable character, Amir. The princes are created randomly from parts such as different bodies, hairstyles, outfits and so on - not unlike a paper doll (Figure 10; Figure 11). They also have randomized personalities, likes and dislikes.

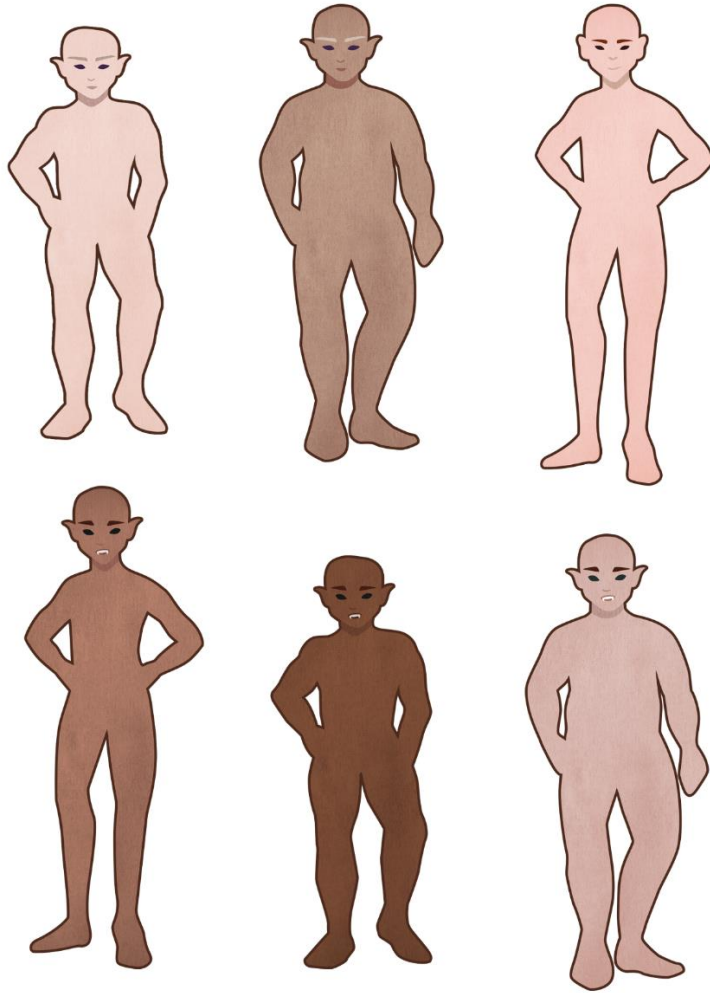


Figure 10. Some of the base prince sprites from Your Royal Gayness. (Lizard Hazard Games, 2018)



Figure 11. Some of the prince outfits from Your Royal Gayness. (Lizard Hazard Games, 2018)

The Trope subversion method was used when creating many of the main cast of Your Royal Gayness. Gay men are often depicted with feminine mannerisms and a love for fashion. While these are perfectly fine personality traits to have, it was important to the development team that Amir was designed in a way that does not reinforce potentially harmful stereotypes. He is not very interested in fashion and does not have a good taste in clothing, and his personality was intentionally left somewhat ambiguous and basic so that the player can relate to him better.

The two methods have different strengths and weaknesses. Randomization allows the developer to create an extremely large amount of different characters, creating a lot of diversity. On the other hand, the characters tend to end up bland. When manually creating custom characters, it is possible to show their personality through their appearance, such as clothing, posture and facial expressions. However, it takes much longer to create a large cast of characters than with the randomization method. (Figure 12)

In addition to these character creation methodologies, many general principles of design apply to designing LGBT characters. However, most of them are outside the scope of this study. The study will focus on the design methods and principles that are the most relevant to the subject.

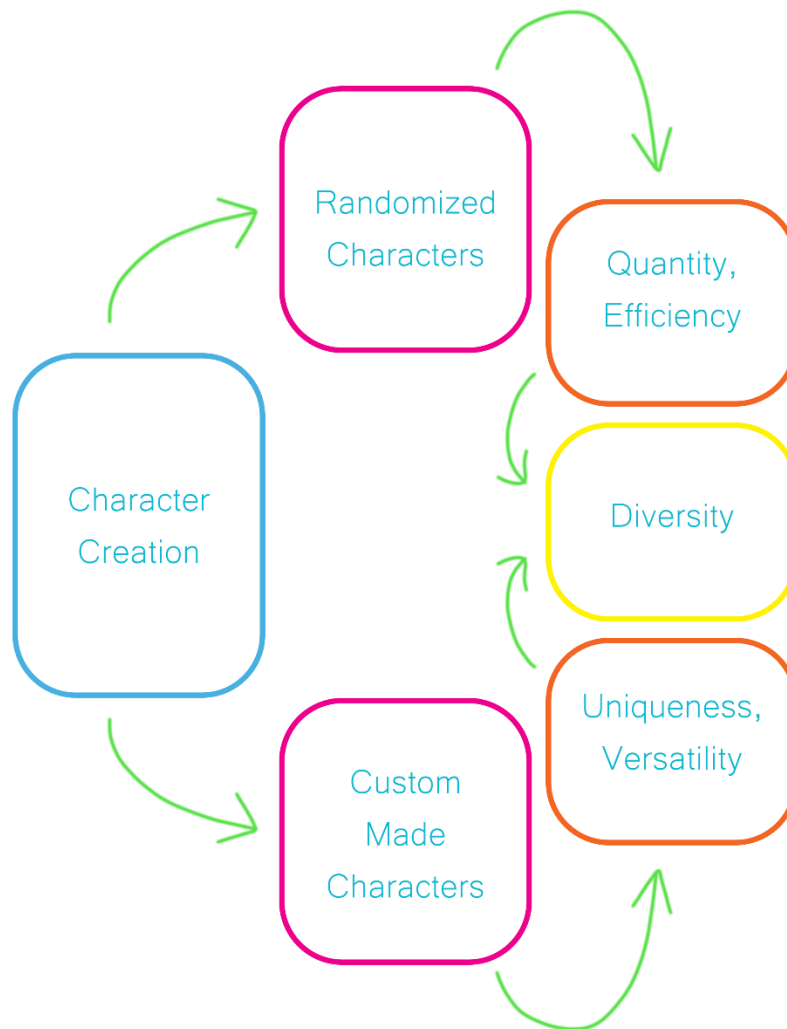


Figure 12. The benefits of custom-made characters and randomized characters. (Loikkanen 2018)

4.1 Visual design of LGBT characters

According to an art director from Rovio Entertainment, it is more important for game art to be functional than technically impressive. “Good game graphics contribute to all functional areas of a game, and great game graphics manage to look beautiful while doing so.” (Kysenius 2013) Visual character design is all about communication: conveying information about the character and a world through the visuals. A great character concept requires the artist to have an extensive visual library which to draw ideas from. The artist should also understand the wider context of the imagery they use to get ideas from. Otherwise the character concept may convey meanings that are different from the artist’s intentions. (Rassä 2018.)

When creating character concepts for queer characters it is important to be aware of stereotypes about LGBT people, especially the negative ones. As discussed earlier, stereotypical depictions of characters are harmful, so the artist must be careful when drawing character concepts. The Trope Subversion method can be used, but the artist may also simply forgo adding elements that are stereotypical. For example, bisexual and pansexual people are often thought of as promiscuous and lustful (Mint 2006), so great care was taken to distance the Spymaster from these stereotypes (Figure 13). They were given clothes that are reminiscent of a stereotypical spy: A long jacket with a tall collar and an overall formal style. Stereotypes and tropes can be useful in design if they are used correctly: visual stereotypes help us understand the context of the design. (Ask, n.d.)



Figure 13. Spymaster from Your Royal Gayness. (Lizard Hazard Games, 2018).

A few more examples of characters utilizing visual stereotypes are The High Priestess, Barry the Court Wizard and the Farmer. The High Priestess is dressed in a Greek-style dress to match the visual stereotype of a priestess, highly inspired by the Muses and Megara from *Hercules* (1997), a film which is familiar to most people living in western countries. Barry wears an extremely stereotypical wizard outfit: A blue robe, pointed hat and a wand with a star at the end. The farmer woman wears hick-like clothing: A straw hat and overalls. These visual stereotypes help players instantly recognize the occupation and background of the characters.

Character visuals can also be used to convey information about the world. Bashir the Bard, a young gay man from a faraway country, wears different style of clothing than any of the other characters, inspired by traditional Asian clothing. (Figure 14)



Figure 14. From left to right: Farmer, Bashir, Barry and the Priestess. (Lizard Hazard Games, 2018)

The outfits of the royal family are influenced by their culture as well. The King wears clothes that are heavily inspired by middle-Eastern traditional fashion. Amir's main outfit was designed in a similar way. However, the Queen's outfit is inspired by Indian traditional fashion in addition to middle-Eastern influences as it is established in the game that the Queen originally comes from another country and moved to Al-Marahij to marry the King. (Figure 15)



Figure 15. Amir's parents, the King and Queen. (Lizard Hazard Games, 2019)

It is important to note that creating a great queer character requires the same design process than creating any kind of interesting and well-written character. Their queerness is just one part of their character, and while the experiences of LGBT people differ from those of a cisgender heterosexual person, their sexual orientation or gender identity do not completely define them. When creating a queer character, the designer must think of the character as a person first, and part of a sexual or gender minority second. This approach allows the designer to create interesting and diverse characters who are not bound by their sexual identity; rather, it is an added layer of complexity and depth on top an otherwise well-designed character.

Intersectionality should also be considered when creating a LGBT character. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, intersectionality means “the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups”. In other words, a gay person who is also black has different experiences than a gay person who is white due to the discrimination a person of color may experience due to their ethnicity. A person may be privileged in some areas of life and experience discrimination in others, and this applies to characters as well.

4.2 Analysis of the character design in Your Royal Gayness

For the most part, the character visuals in Your Royal Gayness were extremely successful. Players who reviewed the game on the game distribution platform Steam praised the visuals (Your Royal Gayness user reviews). The fairytale book inspired, whimsical art style was cohesive and worked well with the subject of the game. The user interface and the backgrounds match the style of the character sprites, which is very important. Mixing completely different styles rarely looks good – Consistency makes for a visually pleasant game (Sweetman 2013).

The decision to randomize the princes and princesses of the other kingdoms was criticized by some, as it resulted in bland characters whose personality traits did not affect their visual design (Your Royal Gayness user reviews). The strengths and weaknesses of randomization were discussed earlier in this thesis, and the Steam reviews on the game validate the theory. For some users it would have been more interesting to have custom love interests; the benefits of the randomization are only apparent if the player plays through the game multiple times. Users who only play through the game once or only partially play it through do not benefit from the randomization much. For them, custom love interests would have provided a better experience.

5 ANALYSIS OF FEEDBACK

5.1 Steam's review system

Your Royal Gayness is available on several platforms, the most prominent of them being Valve Corporation's game distribution platform Steam. Steam features a user review system where individuals who have purchased or received a free copy of the game can write a review that is displayed to other users on the game's store page. The user writing the review must choose whether they would recommend the game or not and write their reasoning behind their decision. In an effort to discourage developers from leaving positive reviews on their own games or asking friends or associates to do so, the reviews that were written by users who purchased the game are given more value than reviews left by users who received the game as a gift. Steam users can also see whether the game was bought or gifted, so the review system is adequately transparent. Steam users can also upvote or downvote the reviews based on their perceived usefulness. (Steamworks Documentation 2019)

5.2 Analysis of user reviews on Steam

Your Royal Gayness has 67 user reviews. 48 of them are reviews that are taken into account in the rating that Steam gives each game. The ratings for game titles on Steam range from "Overwhelmingly positive" to "Overwhelmingly negative"

and are based on the percentage of the paying customers who have left a positive review. The user reviews that are based on gifted games can be seen by users, but they do not affect the rating of the game. The more recent reviews are given more weight than the older ones. (Steamworks Documentation 2019)

The user reviews were read and analyzed to gain a better understanding of the success of LGBT portrayals in *Your Royal Gayness*. The goal was to evaluate the usefulness of the methods that were used when creating the LGBT aspects of the game, such as the relevant game mechanics and queer characters. Even though LGBT portrayals are the focus of this thesis, general feedback about the game is also reviewed, as it affects the player's attitudes and thoughts about the game as a whole, including the queer themes. The general feedback is also helpful to understand the reviews that mention LGBT aspects, as some of the issues with the LGBT content are tied to technical issues within the game.

To understand whether the reviewers based their reviews on the inclusion of LGBT content or not, the reviews were sorted into 4 categories: Positive reviews that mention LGBT content, positive reviews that do not mention LGBT content, negative reviews that mention LGBT content and negative reviews that do not mention LGBT content.

To count as a LGBT mention, the comment needed to refer to LGBT issues, not simply mention dating or a boyfriend. The acronym LGBT did not need to be included in the review; the deciding factor was the apparent intent of the review. Understanding the intent of a review is a subjective experience, so the data should be treated as more of an approximation rather than exact numerical data. However, in most cases LGBT or gay issues were explicitly mentioned, so the data is reliable despite some subjectivity.

65 of the 67 reviews were analyzed and sorted into the aforementioned four categories. The missing two are either due to a human error or Steam's algorithms: it is possible that not all reviews were listed because they were written in a different language or were downvoted too much. (Figure 16)

Your Royal Gayness reviews & do they mention LGBT issues

■ Positive with LGBT ■ Positive, no LGBT ■ Negative with LGBT ■ Negative, no LGBT

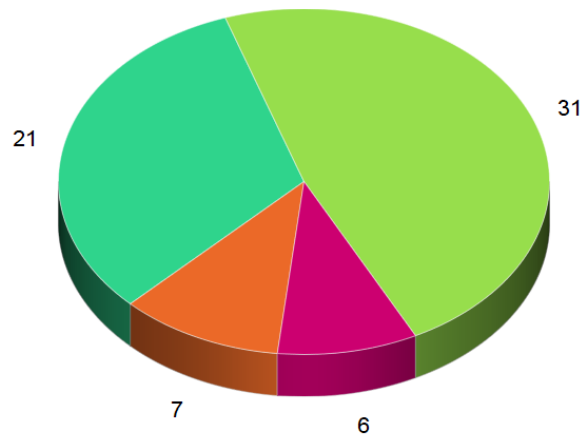


Figure 16. Your Royal Gayness reviews and mentions of LGBT content.

It should be noted that the context of the mention was not evaluated: some reviews that were positive mentioned LGBT issues in a negative context and vice versa. For example, many reviewers enjoyed the game but did not appreciate the way in which LGBT issues were handled in the game. Some liked the LGBT aspects but disliked the game mechanics. None of the reviews were negative purely based on the fact that the game includes queer content. It is unlikely but possible that such reviews existed but were reported to Valve as hate speech and removed.

5.3 Contents of the feedback

The largest causes for negative feedback in the reviews were bugs and inadequate resource management balancing. When Your Royal Gayness was released, it contained several game breaking bugs that caused error messages that would repeat every single in-game day. Many players had to start a new game because of the bug. It was also difficult to gain certain resources in the game, especially Loyalty.

Username amasour writes in their review:

“RESOURCES - This system is SUPREMELY frustrating because you can't really do much of anything, and most of it does not matter anyway. My biggest complaint is that money and happiness are way too easy to get, and loyalty is impossible. Doing nothing but putting your spymaster on garnering loyalty, and picking practically all the options that further get it, you still barely manage to cobble enough together to fully complete just one law path, and obviously you are meant to go with the equality path.”

Username Necrogenius also left a negative review, criticizing the resource management system:

“RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: This seems to be on the weak side. There honestly should be more to do, there are days when I just skip over this because the only thing you can control are your three advisors. You have personal skills you can work on, but only on the weekend. Thus, they go up very slow. I also have no idea what good they do in game.”

Username Ren gave the game an overall positive review, but had suggestions on how to improve the game:

“In terms of improvements, I think this game just needs a little more polish to make it sparkle (just like Barry did)! Fixing the minor bugs and graphical glitches is a good start, though it does not affect how much I love the game. The only other concerns I have are balancing out the resources management and making the relationships with the princes deeper.”

Username Raven listed pros and cons in their review:

“Pros:

- *The art style is nice and the characters and backgrounds are drawn well.*
- *The main characters have interesting backgrounds and quirks.*
- *The events and speeches are very humorous.*
- *The events are randomized, so playing it multiple times can lead to new story parts.*

Cons:

- *The resource balancing is off.*
- The loyalty, which is the most important, is almost impossible to get, but is needed for the things that matter most, the laws.*
- *The character skills are funny, but because you can only train them on the weekends, they almost don't increase over the course of the game.*
- *The play time is quite short, especially considered the price of the game.”*

As seen from the reviews, players thought resource management was a major issue in the game. The game uses the Loyalty of Al Marahij's nobility as a “currency” to pass different laws, including ones that give you resources daily, and a special “Equality” category that allows the player to ban discrimination of minorities and eventually legalize gay marriage. As LGBT issues are at the centre of the game, players were unhappy that it was so difficult to gain enough loyalty to pass the laws. Many felt forced to spend all their Loyalty on the Equality category and ignore all the other possible laws.

Considering the state of the game at launch, negative feedback about these matters was completely understandable and to be expected. Many of the issues mentioned in the reviews have since been fixed. The amount of Loyalty that is gained from each relevant choice was increased, and the cost of laws was decreased.

Another complaint was that players wanted the game to focus more on romance and dating. This was most likely due to the subject matter: most games with LGBT themes are romance games, such as the BL games genre discussed earlier in this thesis. Additionally, the marketing material of the game may have

influenced perceptions and expectations. The game was never meant to be a dating simulator, but many users perceived it as such.

Username Necrogenius writes:

“THE LOVE INTERESTS ARE BORING. You can invite them to events, but... it's just honestly not interesting. There's no real "romance" or "plot" to them, just... do you get along with this guy? Okay cool, he's your boyfriend now. In fact, I didn't even know this one dude WAS my boyfriend until I tried to get some info on another dude and Spymaster was like, "yoooo not gonna help you cheat, G" basically, and I was just like WAIT WHAT HAPPENED HOW? Also, for a dating-sim type game? Some of the prince sprites are just recolors of the other, or the heights are adjusted. I wanted to see some GORGEOUS DESIGNS, and I got... what I got. The PRINCESSES, however, THEY are designed BEAUTIFULLY and it's incredibly not fair. I feel like more effort could have been put into it.”

Necrogenious' review also ties into the other problems of the game: The dating system was initially buggy, so date events appeared much more rarely than intended, causing players to feel extremely disconnected from the love interests. More dating events were added to the game in a patch, and they were set to appear more often.

Zack314 wrote a snappy review:

“I'm glad I paid 15€ to support "gay gaming", but

- 1) There is no gameplay*
- 2) There is no romance*
- 3) There is no story*

Concept is nice, execution is awful :-/”

Username Jenjoou somewhat enjoyed the game, but seemed to have expected a dating simulator when purchasing the game:

“Cute game with a sweet message of acceptance. I absolutely love the art and the advisors are fun. But this is not a real dating sim. The dating options are

randomized and so you can't truly get to know them and the relationships lack intimacy.”

Username Teumessian Fox wanted the romance aspect of the game to be more meaningful:

“1) Where your royal advisors are fully fleshed out, your romances have the personality of wet cardboard. Additionally, visually, the princes are basically palette-swapped, and as far as I can tell. Their interests and dislikes are auto-generated, and none of them have very distinct personalities. I found myself most disappointed and uncaring about what had the potential to be the most fascinating aspect of this game.”

Adoxographist warned other users not to expect the game to be a dating simulator:

“This game is really charming and cute!

It seems like a lot of people are disappointed in the game because they maybe had been expecting more of the standard romance based visual novel? If you're looking for dating sims, this is probably not going to be your cup of tea. It's a lot more resource management based!

But if you like games where you can see how the choices you make affect the stories you see, you will enjoy it!”

When reading the reviews, it is apparent that more time and effort should have been put into the dating aspect of the game, but even more importantly, the marketing material and the game’s store page should have been clearer about the type of game Your Royal Gayness is. The focus on the game is on stories and resource management, and when developing the game the developer team failed to understand that the game’s subject matter and name might lead customers into thinking of it as a romance game. As a game, Your Royal Gayness is somewhat unique and does not fit perfectly into any established game genres, which makes it interesting and fresh but difficult to market and inform people about. The words “dating simulator” were never mentioned in the game’s marketing material and it was never explicitly marketed as a romance

game, but due to people's preconceptions of the visual novel -type of games many were disappointed after their expectations were not met.

5.4 Reviews on the LGBT content of Your Royal Gayness

Username Tonio4316 thoroughly enjoyed the game and the LGBT content:

“This game was amazing to play through. Not only do the characters feel real but the art style really matches the game well. I would highly recommend this game to someone who likes a cute story while still having some serious LGBT+ themes thrown into the mix.”

Username amasour disliked the Suspicion meter game mechanic:

“MARRIAGE/ROMANCE - I HATED the 'are you acting straight enough' meter. It was gross. I don't know why not a single person on the development team went 'maybe this perpetuates stereotypes/might hurt people who face this very real fear of getting disowned/beaten/killed if they don't act straight enough.' And there was no romance at all. Like, one prince showed up, but I couldn't impress him because I didn't have enough Nerve.”

The reviewer seemed to interpret the purpose of the suspicion meter differently than the developers intended. The suspicion meter was never supposed to be a positive element: its purpose was to be commentary on the same exact things that the reviewer mentioned. Some LGBT people do have to live in fear of being identified as a homosexual, and the purpose of the Suspicion meter was to both simulate such a situation and act as commentary. The developer team believed it would be more powerful to let the player to experience the fear of being outed – in a safe, fictional environment - rather than just to write a story about it. Still, the criticism in the review is not misplaced: queer people living in a similar situation as Amir may find the game hurtful or triggering traumatic events.

V.lar12 wrote a somewhat humorous review:

“PROS:

Whimsical story and funny, colourful characters

Pleasant, creative art style

Surprisingly realistic dating system: you can end up with all the handsome guys being heterosexual and all the gays not liking you. Just like in real life! Yaaaay!

Cheaper than your gay-friendly therapist”

WesSchneider found the game enjoyable and mentioned the LGBT aspect of it:

“A fantastic LGBTQ fairytale with tons of spot-on, well-considered mini-parables. A charming world, adorable art, and great writing. Overall, a fantastic way to spend an afternoon with your favorite-beau or gay-bestie!”

LGBT issues can be incredibly personal. Every queer person’s experiences are different and therefore there is no one correct way to address them. However, there are ways that are objectively hurtful or harmful.

Since the game has a lot of humorous elements, it can be difficult to also include serious or difficult subjects tastefully. The matter is highly subjective, as demonstrated by how differently – for example - amasour and Tonio4316 felt about the subject. Tonio4316 enjoyed the game and its LGBT themes, while amasour thought they were badly executed.

Overall, Your Royal Gayness is not without flaws when it comes to LGBT representation, but it does a decent job avoiding the worst pitfalls. The characters are treated with respect even though the game is humorous in nature. At the very least, it is apparent that the development team did not have malicious intentions when creating the game and its queer characters as none of the reviews claim that the game is homophobic or intentionally hurtful. Rather, the ones who disliked the way in which LGBT issues were handled asserted that the development team does not understand the subject well enough.

To read the full reviews discussed in this chapter, see Appendix 2.

6 ANALYSIS RESULTS

Throughout this thesis different methods of creating a game with interesting and believable LGBT themes and characters were discussed. The success of these elements in *Your Royal Gayness* was reviewed in order to identify good and bad practices and methods.

The most prevalent takeaway seems to be that to create great LGBT portrayals the designers must have a broad understanding of both media tropes and LGBT issues. To avoid creating queer characters that perpetuate harmful stereotypes the designer must first know what those stereotypes are. For example, if the designer knows that gay men are thought of as effeminate, they have many ways to approach creating gay characters that don't reinforce the stereotype.

They can use the Trope Subversion method and create a gay male character who does not understand fashion, as was done in *Your Royal Gayness*, or avoid including feminine traits altogether. If the designer decides to create a character with stereotypical traits, they must think very carefully about how they will portray those traits: after all - to continue with the same example - femininity is not an inherently negative trait, but it is often used in ways which are stereotypical and harmful.

Without a broad understanding of media tropes and LGBT issues the designer might accidentally create an offensive portrayal while having good intentions. Homosexuality is a very sensitive issue so creating a portrayal that everyone appreciates is impossible, as seen of the extremely varied user reviews about the subject. However, while there aren't answers that are absolute, there certainly are practices that are better than others. The designer's task is to identify the best approaches and utilize them in their game correctly. A diverse development team and dedication to strive to learn more about LGBT culture and portrayals makes this task much easier.

As seen from the user reviews of *Your Royal Gayness*, even a team composed of many LGBT people can make mistakes when creating LGBT content. The suspicion meter was the subject of criticism in some reviews, as well as the wording of some of the effects of the magic potions. The incident with Seraph's

deadname proved that even with a diverse team of developers, it is still very beneficial to hire a sensitivity reader to proofread the story of the game for insensitive portrayals of minorities.

Another somewhat surprising takeaway is that the technical side of game development can affect the way LGBT portrayal is experienced. In *Your Royal Gayness*, problems in the code of the game affected many things, including how often the player would see events including Amir's boyfriend, which in turn affected the player's perceptions of the LGBT content. Thus, the developers of LGBT games should focus not only on the characters and the story, but also testing the technical aspects of the game thoroughly before the launch.

The development of a game shouldn't end on launch day. User reviews are very useful feedback based on which the developers can improve the game through content patches and bug fixes. It is possible to adjust and improve the portrayal of queer characters based on the reviews, especially if the problems are tied to technical issues like in *Your Royal Gayness*.

7 CONCLUSION

The goal of this thesis was to identify and evaluate methods to create games with positive LGBT portrayals. It succeeded doing so within a limited scope: Many methods were analyzed and reviewed based on user feedback. The methods and insights gained were mostly basic, but they should prove especially useful to developers who are not intensively familiar with LGBT issues. The reliability of the methods was tested throughout the development of *Your Royal Gayness*, and further supported by the data from the user reviews. Some approaches used were proven questionable, such as simulating the experience of being closeted through game mechanics. However, many users enjoyed the mechanics, so the data is somewhat convoluted, and experimental mechanics related to the LGBT experience should be explored more in game projects to gain more data on the subject.

The results of the thesis were insights into the best practices of creating a LGBT friendly game. They were explored in more detail in the analysis results section, but a brief summary of them is as follows:

1. A broad understanding of LGBT tropes in media is required.
2. A deep understanding of negative stereotypes related to minorities helps avoid depictions that are harmful.
3. Two useful character creation methods to create diverse characters are the Trope Subversion method and the Randomization method, which were tested during the development of Your Royal Gayness.
4. Mechanics related to the LGBT experience should be explored further.
5. It is beneficial to have a diverse development team and use the services of a sensitivity reader.
6. Technical issues and bugs in a game can affect the LGBT portrayals negatively.
7. If there are issues with LGBT representation after the launch of the game despite the developers' best efforts, they should be fixed in a patch.

It is very likely that there are more lessons to be learned from the development of Your Royal Gayness and the feedback it received but they are not within the scope of this thesis. Further research on the topic is required to cover the subject of the thesis in more depth, but overall the thesis covered the subjects that were set in the beginning successfully and resulted in useful practices for LGBT game design and development.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1/1

A brief study about the prevalence of Asexual characters in video games was conducted by the author on the Discord messaging platform. The questionnaire was sent as a message on a “server” (essentially a chatroom) dedicated to video games and finding people to play games with. All of the users in the chatroom were “pinged” (mentioned in the message) to notify them of the message. The questionnaire only included one question: “Do you remember encountering an asexual character in a video game?”. Out of the over 70 game players that the message was sent to, 17 answered. 13 of the answers were negative and 4 positive. The individuals participating in the study were not necessarily representative of game players as a whole, as a large number of the members of the group were part of a sexual or gender minority, and thus more likely to have sought out games that include queer characters. It is fair to assume that the percentage of positive answers would be much smaller among the general game player population, but further research on the subject is required to draw any concrete conclusions. It is also important to remember that there was no time limit included in the question, so a negative answer means that the participant never encountered a single asexual character despite having played a large amount of games during their lifetime. Every participant was part of a dedicated gaming chatroom, so it is safe to assume that everyone who participated in the survey has played tens or hundreds of different games prior to the survey.

Appendix 2/1

amasour

Not recommended

I really wanted, and tried, to like this game, but overall it was frustrating and disappointing.

RESOURCES - This system is SUPREMELY frustrating because you can't really do much of anything, and most of it does not matter anyway. My biggest complaint is that money and happiness are way too easy to get, and loyalty is impossible. Doing nothing but putting your spymaster on garnering loyalty, and picking practically all the options that further get it, you still barely manage to cobble enough together to fully complete just one law path, and obviously you are meant to go with the equality path. There's no time or resources enough to do all the others. Also, it's supremely tiresome and juvenile that the tax laws are all shaming. Like, you do need taxes to run a country, grow up. As to the weekend stuff - ?????????? The first play through, none of it matter at all. The second play through, apparently I should have focused on nerve (the stupid, anachronistic shopping option) because the need for it came up twice and mine was too low.

MARRIAGE/ROMANCE - I HATED the 'are you acting straight enough' meter. It was gross. I don't know why not a single person on the development team went 'maybe this perpetuates stereotypes/might hurt people who face this very real fear of getting disowned/beaten/killed if they don't act straight enough.' And there was no romance at all. Like, one prince showed up, but I couldn't impress him because I didn't have enough Nerve. Then I finally found time to spy (which, creepy much?) on one of the many copy/pasted with different colors princes, and then at the end of the game I wound up married to some dude I'd never met during my play through. Fun!

SPYING - I can get this was intended to be cute, but mostly it just came off creepy. Also, it was completely fricking pointless. You're so busy trying to get enough loyalty to do just three laws that there's no time for spying AND IT DOES NOT MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO ANYTHING. None. Zilch. Nada. I spied once during my second playthrough and it made no difference to who I married, and I never needed it for the princesses.

POTION MAKING - no idea what this was for, it made no difference to anything

IMPROVE RELATIONS - why bother telling my advisors to do this? Everything seems to increase just fine on its own through the course of the game.

WEEKENDS - the increased were so incremental, and you could improve things so rarely, ultimately they're pointless.

GAMEPLAY - THERE IS SO MUCH WASTED TIME. This game would have been so much better if loyalty hadn't even been something assigned to Seraph. Ever single freaking day it's 'we had a peaceful dinner' or 'nothing happened today'. You know what would have been fun? If in the morning you did audiences, in the afternoon you met with nobles and such to schmooze them for the loyalty and international relations, and in the evening you attended parties where you had to avoid princesses and flirt with princes. THAT would have been an engaging game. Instead it feels like most of the time and opportunity for things is wasted, and so many elements are just flat out useless, to the point they could be removed and literally nothing would change.

Like, the only thing that is interesting in this game is managing the kingdom, and even that gets frustrating at times because of the awkward system. The avoiding the brides is pointless. There's no romance line at all that I can find. And the characters all seem flat, a little too OTT, or weirdly self-insert and a little too perfect.

Appendix 2/2

Necrogenius

Not recommended

I participated in Kickstarting the game, and I have been excited since that day to play this game. However, I have more grievances than positive things to say. I'll outline them for you. I personally don't recommend the game, however, if the following won't keep you from enjoying the experience, please go ahead the

purchase the game. The creators did their hardest and deserve credit for that, if nothing else. Also note, I only went 40 days into the total 60. I stopped there due to my issues with gameplay. (I am also attempting to make this as spoiler-free as possible)

- RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: This seems to be on the weak side. There honestly should be more to do, there are days when I just skip over this because the only thing you can control are your three advisors. You have personal skills you can work on, but only on the weekend. Thus, they go up very slow. I also have no idea what good they do in game. Is it making me more attractive to some of the love interests? Do I get extra coin or soldiers during the decision-making process? If so? I can't tell. So it almost seems pointless. There are laws you can pass, and I feel like I've wasted my nobility influence passing some of the laws. It only gets you a LITTLE money or a LITTLE happiness and I don't feel it's worth it since it seems to be so difficult to obtain these nobility points. It feels like the other law are meaningless and you should concentrate all your focus onto making gay marriage legal. Also, you can get influence and raise relations with the other countries... been doing that this whole time. I have no idea what it's actually good for. Is there some sort of war at the end? I'm this far into the game; why haven't I learned anything about that yet if there is? If the influence is doing anything for me gamewise I WANT TO KNOW, because WHY ELSE SHOULD I CARE?

- SPYING on ROYALTY: You have the option to spy on either the princes or princesses. You can find out what the princes like so you can get with them, or spy on the princesses so you can deflect them properly when they come to ask for your hand. The spying on the princesses thing seems almost pointless. Once you got the rhythm, and the princesses sort of hint at the kind of answers are good for them, you can pick them right off the bat pretty easy. Getting info on the princes' is more important, which leads me to the next segment....

- THE LOVE INTERESTS ARE BORING. You can invite them to events, but... it's just honestly not interesting. There's no real "romance" or "plot" to them, just... do you get along with this guy? Okay cool, he's your boyfriend now. In fact, I didn't

even know this one dude WAS my boyfriend until I tried to get some info on another dude and Spymaster was like, "yoooo not gonna help you cheat, G" basically, and I was just like WAIT WHAT HAPPENED HOW? Also, for a dating-sim type game? Some of the prince sprites are just recolors of the other, or the heights are adjusted. I wanted to see some GORGEOUS DESIGNS, and I got... what I got. The PRINCESSES, however, THEY are designed BEAUTIFULLY and it's incredibly not fair. I feel like more effort could have been put into it.

- ON THE SUBJECT OF ART: When I saw the mock designs and some screenshots, I liked what I saw. I really like the backgrounds and the menu screens. Very nice and polished looking. The actual people, hm, I'm not 100% sold on it. I like the designs of some of the people in game, sure, but... I don't know. It just does not FIT with the story it's trying to tell. This is more of a personal opinion, but when I'm playing a dating sim-type game, I want to be heavily into the character via looks or story, which leads to...

- WHERE IS YOUR LOVE STORY? There is none. Out of what I saw, you just... try to date a guy (my date didn't work out so, alas), and... I honestly don't know. Didn't get that far. I'd love to see more people's reviews on this. But I honestly didn't care. They didn't seem interesting. You know who did seem interesting? Spymaster. And you can't date them! Alas. Especially since you get some great cutscenes with them, I'm just... disappointed you don't get the same courtesy with your romance interests (now, if I'm wrong and after you're boyfriends some AWESOME STUFF HAPPENS, please let me know). But even so, that seems backwards. The getting to know you should be important. The game would have been more efficient with less princes, and more time spent on a "route" with them.

As I helped to kickstart the game, I paid a different price for what it is selling for on Steam. I unfortunately have to say that I don't believe the game is worth the price. I was disappointed at the mechanics and how they were utilized, and it all seemed to sort of fall apart the more the game went on. There were some good things: the humor in some of the writing, your relationship with your advisors...

but it didn't even come close to overwriting the flaws I saw in game, which is why I am not recommending it.

TL;DR:

If I had to give it a rating, 3 out of 10. While there is heart put into this game (most made clear in the writing and design of the main cast), it falls short and has many flaws in its mechanics, the love story aspect, and saps the joy out of finding romance. I ended up finding that I was just concentrating on trying to make my kingdom run smoothly... but eventually, on day 40, for me, even that fell short.

Appendix 2/3

Ren

Recommended

When I noticed this game on the upcoming tab I immediately began waiting for its release, and it's finally here! Similar to games such as Long Live The Queen, Your Royal Gayness is a game where you must manage your resources and affairs in order to keep your kingdom happy and find the love of your life, without getting caught of course. I enjoyed the simplicity of the game mixed with the beautiful graphics and good use of the Renpy engine, and I can forgive its small bugs considering it was released just today. So, here's a rundown:

Pros:

- Absolutely beautiful art style
- Interesting characters such as Barry
- Glitter wizards
- Fun story and choices
- Interesting prince/princess mechanics
- Events are fun and I love the advisor's reactions
- Lots of lore

Cons:

- Bugs (for example, on the potions tab there is a number in the top right corner)
- The heterosexual potion hardly declines your gayness, could use a little bit more (that sounds so strange to type)
- Some of the sound effects can be repetitive or too long
- Some problems with transitions (for example, after sleeping it cuts to the next screen, perhaps a fade transition would be good)
- Minor graphics glitches (such as character text bubbles remaining on the next screen, etc)
- Some of the prince designs look a bit too similar, and even when I spy on them I'm not 100% of which choices I should make
- Resources could use a little more balancing

I'm also not sure about this, but I think one of the princes has been duplicated as he appeared twice on my Princes tab. In terms of improvements, I think this game just needs a little more polish to make it sparkle (just like Barry did)! Fixing the minor bugs and graphical glitches is a good start, though it does not affect how much I love the game. The only other concerns I have are balancing out the resources management and making the relationships with the princes deeper. I wish that I could interact with other princes more than just spying on them and inviting them to balls, I wish that I had options such as writing letters to them to improve relations between them and I (or even our kingdoms). Or perhaps giving them a bit more personality to make me want to start spying on them in the first place, rather than just going by which design I fancy most. Even just something small, like chatting to each of the princes when you are finally made ruler at the beginning of the game would be nice.

But again, these are all minor suggestions. So far I love the art style and gameplay, and the speed of the game seems well. If I need to update my review once I play more I shall do so, but for now I really love what the devs have done with this game and I recommend it if you like games such as Long Live The Queen without being too technical about management and strategy.

Raven

Recommended

It's a cute little game with lots of humor and interesting characters.

I like it a lot, but I think there are still a few things the developers need to improve considering the balancing.

Pros:

- The art style is nice and the characters and backgrounds are drawn well.
- The main characters have interesting backgrounds and quirks.
- The events and speeches are very humorous.
- The events are randomized, so playing it multiple times can lead to new story parts.

Cons:

- The resource balancing is off.

The loyalty, which is the most important, is almost impossible to get, but is needed for the things that matter most, the laws.

- The character skills are funny, but because you can only train them on the weekends, they almost don't increase over the course of the game.
- The play time is quite short, especially considered the price of the game.

I think most of the Cons can easily be fixed by simply increasing the ruling time from 60 days to maybe 120 or so. This would give the possibility to gather more resources (especially royalty) and see more of the events. 'Cause some of the game mechanics only show if you actually hit certain events.

E.g. One of the character skills was needed to impress a prince that visited me. But this only happened in my second play through, so in the first one it seemed kinda pointless to improve the skills. Same goes for the relationships with other nations. I guess there are events where it matters, but they didn't happen in the two play throughs I had.

But as the developer team seems eager to improve the game, I'm sure they'll fix those flaws in some time and make the experience even better :)

Appendix 2/5

Zack314

Not Recommended

I'm glad I paid 15€ to support "gay gaming", but

- 1) There is no gameplay
- 2) There is no romance
- 3) There is no story

Concept is nice, execution is awful :-/

Appendix 2/6

Jenjoou

Not Recommended

Cute game with a sweet message of acceptance. I absolutely love the art and the advisors are fun. But this is not a real dating sim. The dating options are randomized and so you can't truly get to know them and the relationships lack intimacy.

Most of the game play is just giving your 3 advisors assignments each day and dealing with minor emergencies. I don't regret my purchase but I have no desire to replay it.

Appendix 2/7

Teumessian Fox
Recommended

I backed Your Royal Gayness on Kickstarter, so this is a review for that version of the game I received. I am going to be up front that while I *am* recommending this game and enjoyed my playthrough, it is not without its flaws.

THE GOOD

- 1) Prince Amir is sweet, and his three advisors are very well fleshed out. They're unique and charming and have enjoyable characterizations. Much love for Seraph, Magda, and that kooky lizard wizard Barry.
- 2) Although there might be a lot to unpack with the setting of Al-Marahij and its relationship or exoticism of the real Arab world—I find the universe this game takes place in captivating overall. Besides the type of One Thousand and One Nights hometown, there's also a gothic vampire city, a Riveldell-inspired elvish town, and a Viking/Game of Thrones-ish town. Your love interests are pooled from these places, and you also manage your relationships with these towns as a diplomatic ruler. The world is colorful and interesting.
- 3) I find the daily audience viewings to be a lot of fun. I reloaded my game a few times and it seems to be randomly generated at some capacity, and your actions seem to sometimes have long-term effects on the story. Minor spoiler: some of your decisions throughout the game result in a text follow-up about how certain characters/scenarios are doing at the end of the game.

THE BAD

- 1) Where your royal advisors are fully fleshed out, your romances have the personality of wet cardboard. Additionally, visually, the princes are basically palette-swapped, and as far as I can tell. Their interests and dislikes are auto-generated, and none of them have very distinct personalities. I found myself most

disappointed and uncaring about what had the potential to be the most fascinating aspect of this game. I ended up with a boyfriend, who I had 1-2 special events with, but by the end of the game he sort of just phased away, and there was not any follow-up about my relationship with him at the end. I feel like there might be ways to push the relationship further (marriage?), but with all the other management, that process eluded me. It's not intuitive how to make your relationships succeed, nor is there really any incentive to.

2) Management phase. It's incredibly boring. You basically tell your advisors to go out and increase resources or better your relationships with the other cities. There's a lot of laws you can pass, but with my play-style I tended to constantly appease "the people" and anger "the nobles," so by the end I was about to pass about three laws out of 12 or so. I believe the gay-related laws might have a bigger impact on the game, but I was struggling to get enough resources to pass them.

Since this game was built on Ren'py, it might have limited options with what the base program can do, but each time the management phase came up I groaned. It would be amazing if this game were something like the classic Princess Maker 2, where you had other skills you could build in a more active way. You DO have options to increase these other variables like "Talent" or "Nerve", but only on the weekends. I had a couple of unique events where it seemed I needed more Nerve to succeed, but because the weekend events to increase those stats are so rare, I failed both. Overall, something about the resources felt very asymmetrical.

3) There are princesses who come to your castle to propose to you randomly, and you make up goofy sentences to scare them off. This is a TERRIBLY boring mechanic. It's cute/funny once or twice, but afterwards I DREADED these events. They don't really add anything to the game. You can make your Spymaster, Seraph, spy on the princesses to find out their dislikes to easier scare them away, but I rarely did that because Seraph is also the person you need to increase your noble ranking to pass laws.

There's also a curious meter for being in the closet, that I always kept low. I'm not sure what happens when you max out, or how that overall affects gameplay. I'm not sure there's enough replay value to get me to try to max it up to find out what happens...

4) The game can be buggy, with the mildest infraction being clunky transitions and visuals, and the most severe being a game-crash that made me re-do an entire in-game week. I wish the save-system was more intuitive and that a quick-save option was part of the GUI.

5) Overall, the non-Audience mechanics are boring and quickly become repetitive. I wish there were more unique or special events at night, or chances to travel abroad and visit the other cities, or just ANY way to engage with the rich world surrounding Prince Amir. There seems to be dungeons you can trap people in, but because I played benevolently, my dungeons were completely empty my entire gameplay.

I feel like there are probably a handful of other plotlines and secrets to discover, but because I was so bored by the end, I don't necessarily want to *replay* the game to discover them.

Overall, I'd say give Your Royal Gayness a chance. We need more queer games (I'm biased), and I like the ideas and thought process behind this game. It's worth playing once (although I'm not sure it's \$15-worth-it)! I wish it just was executed in a more interesting and less clunky way. Hopefully the devs will see some of these reviews and do an update patch, because this game has a lot of potential.

Appendix 2/8

Adoxographer
Recommended

This game is really charming and cute!

It seems like a lot of people are disappointed in the game because they maybe had been expecting more of the standard romance based visual novel? If you're looking for dating sims, this is probably not going to be your cup of tea. It's a lot more resource management based!

But if you like games where you can see how the choices you make affect the stories you see, you will enjoy it!

The main problem is that the game is pretty buggy at the moment. There are some bugs even that make it impossible to finish the game! But luckily, the game itself is quite short (took me 60min to get through one playthrough). It might be better to wait till the bugs get cleaned up to give it a go!

Appendix 2/9

Tonio4316

Recommended

This game was amazing to play through. Not only do the characters feel real but the art style really matches the game well. I would highly recommend this game to someone who likes a cute story while still having some serious LGBTQ+ themes thrown into the mix.

Appendix 2/10

v.lar12

Not Recommended

Disposable therapy for LGBTQI+ people

I really wanted to give this game thumbs up, but I had more issues than positive moments with it. Regrettably, I cannot recommend it.

This review might contain some spoilers – so watch out!

PROS:

- Whimsical story and funny, colourful characters
- Pleasant, creative art style
- Surprisingly realistic dating system: you can end up with all the handsome guys being heterosexual and all the gays not liking you. Just like in real life! Yaaaay!
- Cheaper than your gay-friendly therapist

CONS:

- Lack of replayability: in 5 hours I finished the game twice and I was disappointed to discover that I got all the same quests in a slightly different order.
- Shallow and unbalanced management system:
 - Implementing new laws will only get you in trouble. They require nobility points, which are hard to get and easy to lose. If you try, for instance, raising taxes to give poor kids education, bonuses will cancel themselves out. So don't even bother. Focus on the 'Equality' tab. Equality laws make everyone happy; no exceptions. Easy, huh?
 -
 - Personality traits are not connected to the management system at all. Sometimes (rarely, very rarely) they come in handy in the dialogues. That's it.
 - Spying becomes pointless rather quickly – as soon as you figure out how princesses' brains tick to effectively drive them off. (It took me the entirety of the first playthrough though. Well. Yeah.)
- Bugs: broken questlines, UI issues, uneven loudness of background music
- Rather pricey for the game that short

TL;DR: cute, whimsical and harmless little game, which lacks any depth to it. If you are into that thing, I suggest you grab it on a sale.

Appendix 2/11

WesSchneider
Recommended

A fantastic LGBTQ fairytale with tons of spot-on, well-considered mini-parables. A charming world, adorable art, and great writing. Overall, a fantastic way to spend an afternoon with your favorite-beau or gay-bestie!