

Video games, more often than not, have constituted the means of which I can preserve and explore my identity in the ambiguity of my gender, sexuality, and expression of such. I always had video games while growing up; the trope of using video games as a method of escaping reality was always attractive and effective to me despite not fully understanding how it worked. I just kept playing video games. After all, what could the real world offer that was better than a virtual one? Not much, unfortunately. But does this always apply to the same extent? And what did this mean for me—queer and all—in how I instigated “le voyage pour trouver soi-même?”

Unbeknowingly (though, at times, quite obviously), playing as characters from various different stories and identities allowed me to explore various aspects of my own identity not particularly accessible in reality; this sentiment only grew stronger if I had personally created the character (which was done relatively often). At the heart of this appreciation for video games was the desire for an unbound freedom evolved by countless experiences that juxtaposed the fantastic worlds with the ever less-satisfying reality.

Do I then reject my reality and invest myself into engaging with a virtual one? Perhaps more often than I'd like to admit. I mean, I certainly don't pick things up and stuff them into a physically impossible inventory as I do as in video games. Instead, I am continually growing more engaged in the environment surrounding me—as any other individual does—with a rather large influence being from the media I take in. The emulation of selfhood through video games allows me to conversely make decisions with an added sense of awareness and consequence. However trivial it may seem, the reflection of human interaction with others or an environment represented in video games has opened up opportunities to know myself more than I would without them.

For the most part, video games showed me how to be authentically myself in a virtual world where implications of identity would not be imposed upon me in the way that reality does so. From character building to character interaction to character development, these aspects of storytelling in relation to not only the character, but to the player themselves has continually deepened the understanding of a person's psyche and their personality (at least in my experiences). During the period in which I was very uncertain about my identity (and certainly in denial in some regards), I allowed myself to make decisions that reflected my morals and ethics without feeling these societal judgements placed on me. I created characters seemingly out of whim yet did not realize how much they were extensions of myself—how much they were actually pieces of me that I wanted to grow into something I aspired to become. It's human nature to strive to be better than oneself, and seeing how one can evolve bits and pieces of themselves through this medium can prove to be self-ameliorating in many ways than one.

Of course, this wouldn't have been possible without the rise in LGBTQ+ themed games ever so demanded by a growing LGBTQ+ audience alongside positive representation. The formula for creation and self-insertion in video games hasn't changed except for elaborating upon the system or series of which it is included. On the concept of world building, the smaller

pieces and mechanics that surround the story—side characters, quests/objectives, and the overarching narrative(s)—only broaden this experience with more opportunities to showcase the narratives and experiences of marginalized individuals. As such, the once seemingly invisible LGBTQ+ figures in video games have become more prominent and accessible to a larger audience. Characters can make or break the entire experience, and seeing that some of the most memorable characters are highly relatable (specifically having a shared or relatable queer identity) makes the experience more rewarding. Instead of pixels or polygons on a screen, they were human—vessels of flesh and blood and scars and hopes. The trials and tribulations that they faced were irrevocably real to me. Hell, I've been through so many similar things that they have been through; I have felt their pain, their joy, their love, and their loss. What makes positive representation in video games and their characters so fantastic is that I can see myself in them; suddenly, a concept or idea or identity makes sense, and I can be content knowing that I can find myself amongst the places where I am constantly absorbing knowledge not found but was lying in wait for someone to find it.

So, yes, I guess one could say I'm a tad addicted to video games. And yes, one might say that I'm just be your everyday geek who never really does anything productive. But considering all they have offered and all that they have taught me about myself, about the world, about life and love and death and sacrifice and ecstasy and so much more...

I just might offer them a controller as well.