

NOBODY SUSPECTS A FEMALE INQUISITION:
GENDER REPRESENTATION IN VIDEO GAMES

HONORS THESIS

Presented to the Honors Committee of
Texas State University
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements

for Graduation in the Honors College

by

Natalie Ann Hays

San Marcos, Texas
May 2016

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Natalie Ann Hays

Thesis Supervisor:

Anne Winchell, M.F.A.
Department of English

Approved:

Heather C. Galloway, Ph.D.
Dean, Honors College

Dedication

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my parents, Chuck and Susan Hays, for always supporting me through no matter what. They've taught me that through perseverance and hard work I can achieve anything, but to also always remain humble and kind to those around me. I wouldn't be the person I am today without their teachings, and I'm forever grateful for that. I love you guys.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis advisor Anne Winchell for helping me through this thesis and all of the development that went into it. Thank you for pointing me in the right direction, and for telling me when to scale something back or make it larger than I originally thought.

I would also like to thank the Honors College at Texas State University for providing me the opportunity to write my thesis. I knew I wanted to write a thesis since my acceptance into the college, and now that dream is becoming a reality.

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Abstract

A developer can put women into a video game, but is it a fair representation of all the facets of their gender? Are they flat characters compared to their male counterparts, or are they dynamic individuals who are equally important to the narrative? My thesis will analyze female representation within the *Dragon Age: Inquisition* through gender and sociological perspectives. A video game fresh in everyone's mind, *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, is my object of analysis due to its popularity and relevance to current video game culture. Through my analysis of *Dragon Age: Inquisition* I have found that the women are designed to be more individualistic overall, and can be interacted with in both progressive and regressive ways. In analyzing *Dragon Age: Inquisition* as a cultural phenomenon I hope to gain insight into the representation of women in consumable media, and find an answer to the question of whether or not video games as a media are gaining or losing ground in equal and fair representation of the sexes.

Introduction

A developer can put women into a video game, but is it a fair representation of all the facets of their gender? Are they flat characters compared to their male counterparts, or are they dynamic individuals who are equally important to the narrative? My thesis will analyze female representation within the *Dragon Age: Inquisition* through gender and sociological perspectives. In analyzing *Dragon Age: Inquisition* as a cultural phenomenon I hope to gain insight into the representation of women in consumable media and find an answer to the question of whether or not video games as media are gaining or losing ground in equal and fair representation of the sexes.

Another question that's important to this thesis is why video games are an important media to study. Similar to how literature or film are consumable forms of media, so are video games. Video games are a wide reaching media with a total consumer population of one hundred and fifty-five million in the United States alone in 2015 (ESA 4). If so many people are consuming video games, then their content is worthy of study to understand why people are playing, and what is being sold to them as a product.

However, unlike other forms of media, video games are interactive with the consumer. The interactive characteristic of video games makes the consumer a player in how the story unfolds. In that way the player and video game influence each other. As video games are made the company has to keep the consumer in mind, while the consumer will buy games they are interested in or have heard a lot of buzz about. A video game thus can reflect current cultural trends and norms. Some of these could be attitudes towards minorities, politics, and gender. A single video game acts as like a snapshot of

the company, video game industry, and its culture of origin. When a video game gives the player agency, this influence increases.

Player Agency

Player agency is the avenue through which the person playing the game can project their personalities, wishes, and identities onto the characters. Imagine a blank slate in the shape of a person that somebody can write himself or herself all over, and that character is what gives the player their agency within a game. Player agency is important in many video games, but especially in role-playing or fantasy type games. These types of games will usually have some character creator that the player can use to make their protagonist. It gives the player most of the control without entirely changing the story.

Player agency is something almost unique to video games regarding popular media outlets. Video games allow the consumer to interact with the environment and participate in events outlandish or impossible in reality. Participation in impossible events and worlds coincides with the players' suspension of disbelief about the world around them. While they actively move about created worlds and fantasies, every choice they make is a reflection of themselves. Therefore, a video game character that the player can create to look like themselves or a version of themselves takes player agency to the level of near complete immersion.

Player agency not only refers to the appearance of the characters created by the gamers but also by how they act with other non-playable characters in the game. It connects back to the aspect of participation that video games possess. Often a role-playing game will have a branching dialogue tree between the player character and a non-playable character. A branching dialogue tree will contain several different responses that

the player can choose to say in a conversation. Usually, these options will have nice, neutral, sarcastic, curious and even aggressive or rude dialogue options for the player to choose from. Sometimes these choices lead to a romance between the player character and the non-playable character. These sorts of choices are usually universal across the sexes regarding abundance and answer choices. However, the same cannot be said for how the player character interacts with minorities in the video game.

Why *Dragon Age: Inquisition*?

Dragon Age: Inquisition is the object of analysis for this thesis for several reasons. It is a recently released game, with its official release on all platforms on November 18, 2015, in the United States. An Electronic Arts (EA) owned video game Company known as Bioware developed this game. Bioware, which has a main base in Edmonton, Canada; has numerous branches across America and is comprised of several multicultural teams and has developed many games since its founding in 1995. Its two biggest franchises are *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age*. Since *Dragon Age: Inquisition* is their most recent release, it better reflects the developers and their ideas in terms of current cultural beliefs.

Since *Dragon Age: Inquisition* is another installation in a franchise, a history of the game has already been established. It is the third major title in the series, leaving two games of story and previous history to build on. Several characters in *Dragon Age: Inquisition* are present in previous games, so their current design and narrative are comparable to the previous games, which in turn will reflect a different time in video game culture.

Dragon Age: Inquisition is also a completed game with several downloadable content packages. Downloadable content, also known as DLC, are small expansions to the original game that can add on to the gameplay or story that the player can buy.

Dragon Age Inquisition has three DLCs: *Jaws of Hakkon*, *Descent*, and *Trespasser*.

DLCs are always optional content available to the player, so the story can stand alone without them. For the sake of the study, the DLC will not be included beyond narrative reference and character design.

What makes *Dragon Age: Inquisition* most notable though is its gameplay and depth of player agency. The player can choose between two genders, male or female, and from there they pick their race: human, elf, dwarf, or qunari. Then they pick their class, or “occupation” in the game, such as a warrior, rogue, or mage. During the character creation process the player can visit *Dragon Age: Keep*, an online story builder, which revisits the events of the previous games so that the player can change the narrative to fit their liking in *Dragon Age: Inquisition*. This story builder includes who the past protagonists killed, loved, and anything that involved a major decision. The player can listen to a narration of events on the site, then save their “world state” and upload it to their new game in *Dragon Age: Inquisition*.

From their selections of gender, race, and class the game establishes the history of the character for the player. This history will reflect itself in several ways through gameplay. Non-playable characters (NPCs) will treat the player differently depending on their background, whether that is positive or negative. Sometimes this treatment is reflected in major story quests, and either gives the player an advantage or a severe disadvantage.

Another way in that the player character's personal history comes into play is through their dialogue. The dialogue in *Dragon Age: Inquisition* follows a branching path model, which diverges depending on what the player chooses to say. For example, an NPC could ask the player a question; then the player will have three options to choose from to respond. These responses vary from diplomatic, neutral, and aggressive in tone. Depending on which response the player chooses, the NPC's response will vary in both tone and what they will do next.

The NPCs in *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, much like its predecessors, have specific likes and dislikes. The player character could make a choice, and several NPCs could like that choice or dislike it. Their reactions are usually dependent on their background and general personality. That said, some characters could love or hate the player character depending on their interactions with each other. In turn, that could mean that the NPC could leave the player character, betray them, and even fall in love with them. The NPCs add to the immersion of *Dragon Age: Inquisition* and provide the player with better agency.

Bioware is known for creating games that stand apart from the rest of the industry because of the intensive writing that goes into them. *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, due to its depth, gameplay, and its relevance to current popular games makes it a perfect object for analysis. However to understand the events of *Dragon Age: Inquisition* a brief overview of its predecessors is necessary. Not only because it sets the stage for the main events in *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, but also because several characters reoccur and change over time by the time they appear in the game.

Chapter One: History and Story

The history of the *Dragon Age* franchise is expansive and available to the player through the events of the games and through historical data entries known as codex entries. Codex entries can be found throughout the games, but are not necessary for completion of the games. They do provide a history that is considered ancient regarding the game itself and hint towards past events that may or may not influence the narrative. In this case, codex entries will be left out of the history overview unless they pertain to the events of *Dragon Age: Inquisition*.

The storyline of *Dragon Age: Inquisition* will follow my play through of my female elf mage, Elliana. Since the game is new, there is no base or default character for the player to fall back on. The choice to play a female elf mage is a personal one, but the treatment of both elves and mages vary greatly in this game compared to the other races and classes.

Elliana's background as an elf mage makes her the Lavellan clan's first. She comes from a clan of Dalish elves who cling to the old ways of life before the elves were defeated and mostly enslaved by humans. As the first she is destined to become the clan leader someday. However, since the events of *Dragon Age 2* a religious conclave has been called to order in the southern region to bring peace between the circle mages and the Templars that rule over them after the mage uprising. As the clan first Elliana leaves her clan as a spy to better gauge what the humans to the south are doing. The title screen shows both mages and Templars traveling to a temple, only to see it explode at the start of the introduction. During the introduction of the game, she wakes up in the fade, the land of dreams and demons. She is shortly attacked by demons, but is aided by a strange

glowing apparition who pulls her to safety, and she makes her way out of the fade. Back in the world of Thedas, Elliana passes out surrounded by conclave soldiers, and a strange glowing mark on her hand.

Events of *Dragon Age: Inquisition*

Note: The following depiction of *Dragon Age: Inquisition* belongs to Bioware, and is retold to gain an understanding of the narrative.

Elliana wakes up in a jail cell and is frightened by the strange glowing mark on her hand, as she awakens two women walk in, Seeker Cassandra and Chantry Sister Leliana. In the explosion at the temple the Chantry's Divine, their religious leader has gone missing with dozens dead in the blast. A hole has been ripped in the sky between Thedas and the fade, allowing demons to walk freely into Thedas through this Breach. The only person found left alive at the blast was Elliana, which makes her the only suspect the chantry has for the blast. The mark on Elliana's hand might prove useful to sealing the Breach, so Seeker Cassandra takes her closer to the Breach in hopes that they might be able to seal it.

Along the way to seal the breach, Cassandra and Elliana come across several rifts, smaller versions of the breach, scattered around the landscape. At the first rift, they fight the demons coming out of it alongside Varric, a roguish dwarf author, and Solas, a runaway elf apostate mage. Solas explains that the mark on Elliana's hand should have the power to close the breach since it seems connected to the fade in some way. They continue along the path until they cross paths with Leliana once again and must make a choice to either take the mountain pass to save some spies or direct assault with some

soldiers in the valley. Elliana chooses to help the spies in the north, leaving the soldiers to fend for themselves.

As Elliana's party approaches the breach and the devastation it left behind, they have to reopen a part of the breach to seal it completely. The first attempt at closing the breach is a bust and Elliana passes out. However, they learn through reopening the breach that an unknown enemy had taken the Devine captive and that Elliana interrupted whatever ritual was going on. Thus explaining why she has a mark on her hand. However, this convinces many that she is the Herald of Andraste, the bride of the maker. Elliana wakes up in a small town called Haven, surrounded by awestruck survivors and soldiers.

Elliana follows a path to the main building of Haven and finds Seeker Cassandra, Leliana, and former Templar Commander Cullen arguing with a chantry Chancellor about whether Elliana is a threat or not, and if the breach can even close. Cassandra claims that it can and says the chancellor cannot stop them if they reform the Inquisition from hundreds of years before that's sole purpose is to protect Thedas from its greatest threats. With the mark on Elliana's hand, she is integral to the inquisition's reformation, and she is given pardon from any crimes she might have committed and is made an agent.

Their first move as the inquisition is to gain as much support from Thedas as possible. Chantry support is a solid way to start. Elliana and her party venture to the Hinterlands in the country of Ferelden to find one Mother Giselle, a chantry priestess who might give them the leverage they need to gain chantry support. Elliana aids her and the locals in the hinterlands fight off the mage and Templar uprising occurring in the area, and Mother Giselle is glad to help. She says that their best bet is to travel to Val

Royeaux in the neighboring country of Orlais and ask for chantry support, as they are meeting to appoint a new divine.

Upon the inquisition's arrival to Val Royeaux, the chantry greets the party with hostility and claim that Elliana is an imposter who has no claim to any divinity. Elliana agrees with them saying that she does not believe in the maker but her elven gods, and does not know what the mark stands for. As they argue, the Lord Seeker makes his appearance and assaults several chantry mothers while laughing at their situation. The Lord Seeker mocks any idea of allying with the inquisition and removes his Templar forces from Val Royeaux. With no allies to speak of yet, the Inquisition will have to rethink their strategy.

After the encounter, Elliana receives a mysterious message sent from the Friends of Red Jenny, a small grassroots organization that want to help the inquisition. The friend of Red Jenny, who especially wants to help the Inquisition, is the elf archer Sera, a crass delinquent. Elliana lets her join saying that having the back of a grass roots organization might keep the inquisition humble, to which Sera agrees. Before leaving the city, Elliana is approached by the head of the mage rebellion, Fiona. She invites Elliana to meet with her in the town of Redcliffe in the Hinterlands to discuss garnering mage support. It's something to think about, whether or not to side with the mages or Templars.

While in Val Royeaux a messenger delivers a message to Elliana from one Madame De Fer, who invites her to a party at her chateau. At the party, the Madame makes her appearance, and it's the head court enchanter for Orlais, Vivienne De Fer. Worried about what will happen to her fellow mages in this turbulent time, Vivienne

offers her support to the inquisition in any way possible. She too joins the party like Sera to travel with Elliana through her journey.

At this point, numerous potential members of the inquisition start to approach Elliana in hopes of sealing the Breach. A band of mercenaries led by a Qunari warrior spy named Iron Bull encounters Elliana at the storm coast and barter to join the Inquisition. A lone grey warden named Blackwall, a knight who fights against blights, can also be recruited in Ferelden. Inquisition agents are available for recruitment through various small quest lines separate from the main objective. While still small, the inquisition begins to grow.

Elliana must decide whether she will side with either the Templars or the Mages. Since she is a mage, the choice is obvious, much to the distaste of her Templar commander advisor, Cullen. Her party ventures back to the Hinterlands to the town of Redcliffe to meet with the leader of the mage rebellion. Their leader Fiona does not recount meeting the inquisitor before and claims that she didn't ask her to come to Redcliffe. In fact, the mage rebellion has allied with the mage-ruled country of Tevinter. The new leader, Alexius, promises aid to the inquisition. Elliana is discreetly given a message by his son during their meeting, asking to meet with him in the local chantry church.

A rift has opened in the church once Elliana and her party arrived, and a lone Tevinter mage named Dorian is fighting the demons off. With the demons defeated and the rift closed Dorian claims that Alexius is trying to murder Elliana for the mark in her hand. Alexius is working for the unknown villain who created the breach and planned to take her hand and give it to them in exchange for power. He has also somehow learned

how to manipulate time through magic and must be stopped before he goes too far.

Elliana is weary of this news but agrees to look into it with her advisors.

Spymaster Leliana states that there are passages from the sewers in which her spies could ambush Alexius' forces while Elliana distracts him during a meeting at Redcliffe Castle. While the other advisors feel like the plan is too big of a risk, they continue with it regardless. Once in the meeting, Elliana reveals that she knows Alexius' plan and that his forces are being murdered around them as they speak. In response, Alexius tries to attack Elliana, but Dorian blocks her. The attack launches forward in time a year and into a jail cell within the castle.

The world that Alexius transported them into is vastly different from the one they left. The castle is falling to pieces, and along the way of their escape they find former party members who are shadows of their former selves. One of them being mage rebellion leader Fiona, who is held in a cell and massive pieces of red lyrium are slowly killing her. Red lyrium is the toxic version of lyrium, which powers mages spells and helps Templars control mages. She says that since Elliana's disappearance Alexius and the villain have taken power over Thedas and the breach has almost swallowed the world. In doing so, they created an army of demons and killed the Empress of Orlais in their rise to power.

To get back to their time, Elliana and her party must defeat Alexius and retrieve an amulet that amplifies his powers over time. This proves to be no easy task, but after a battle where Elliana watches her friends sacrifice themselves to get her back to her time, she and Dorian are successful. They apprehend Alexius, and he becomes a prisoner of the Inquisition until they can figure out what they want to do with him. Elliana informs her

advisors of what their enemy plans to do shortly, and everyone agrees that swift action is needed to prevent the events from ever occurring. With Alexius gone, mage rebellion leader Fiona pledges her mages to the Inquisition, and Dorian also wishes to join the Inquisition as an agent. Elliana gives the mages equal standing in Haven as they plan another assault on the Breach.

The mages should give Elliana enough backup power to help seal the Breach, and with their support, the inquisition gives another attempt to saving Thedas. Elliana succeeds in sealing the Breach, and the Inquisition celebrates back in Haven over their victory. However, their celebrations are short lived as the rogue Templars led by their Knight Commander leader Samson wage an attack on Haven. In preparing for the assault, a young man attempts to enter Haven saying that he wishes to help. While he's strange, Cole enters Haven and begins to try and help anybody who needs aid. Elliana and several from her group attempt to aid inquisition soldiers defend themselves and save as many people as they can. Elliana and Commander Cullen come to the conclusion that if they can fire trebuchets at the mountain passes that they might be able to bury most of the Templars.

That plan proves to be a success until a dragon, presumed to be a blight archdemon, emerges from beyond the mountains. As it lands the enemy of the Inquisition finally makes his identity known, Corypheus. Corypheus is a darkspawn, which are evil beings that live beneath the surface of Thedas, and long ago he was one of the Tevinter Magisters who stormed the fade in hopes of entering the holy golden city. Now he plans to do it again, but he requires the mark on Elliana's hand to enter the fade. Corypheus has

effectively destroyed Haven, so Elliana fires one last trebuchet into the mountains behind Haven to bury it after seeing a signal fire that signals everyone's safe retreat.

It's a sacrifice that should have killed Elliana, but she makes it out alive after falling through a mineshaft. She wanders through the snow until the rest of the Inquisition finds her. While her advisors bicker over what to do next, Elliana's budding love interest Solas says that he knows where the Inquisition could go. They travel over mountain passes until they finally find their new stronghold, Skyhold.

Skyhold is a massive abandoned fortress set in the remote Frostback Mountains. It has everything the Inquisition could require from barracks for the troops to a throne room. At the inquisition's arrival to Skyhold Cassandra tells Elliana that the Inquisition needs a leader and that everyone has chosen her to be the Inquisitor. After a brief ceremony, the Inquisition returns to its operations, with two major plans in mind. They need to save the empress of Orlais from being assassinated and to stop the formation of a demon army. With several leads in mind, Elliana begins to search for the source of a demon army. Varric says that he knows someone who might have knowledge of what is happening and invites Hawke, the protagonist from the last game, to help the inquisition.

Hawke says that she's been trying to track the Grey Wardens, who have all but disappeared around the time of the Breach. She has a lead in the wardens who she thinks might know what is going on, but can't be sure until they meet with him. Hawke advises Elliana to meet her in Crestwood, a region in Ferelden, to track the warden. Elliana agrees to meet with her after she checks in on her agents within the Inquisition.

Before Elliana can track down the Warden with Hawke, she has to take care of a rift at the bottom of a lake in Crestwood. After draining the lake, closing the rift, and

aiding the citizens of Crestwood, Elliana can effectively track the warden. She and Hawke meet with the warden in a remote cave. The Warden, Stroud, claims that the grey wardens are disappearing because they hear the call. The call is what causes a warden to ultimately meet their death by traveling underground to face the darkspawn crawling within the deep roads. The only problem with the call is that it doesn't happen at the same time to every single warden, but rather at the end of his or her life. To stop themselves from heeding the call the wardens fled west into Orlais to the Western Approach. The Western Approach contains an old Warden fortress, and it is likely that the wardens are regrouping to better gauge their numbers.

At the behest of warden Stroud, Elliana, her party, and Hawke head towards the western approach. As the party makes their way towards the fortress they learn that the wardens might have promised the worst to the wrong people. In their fear of losing their ranks to the calling, the Grey Wardens have sought solace with Corypheus' forces. He has promised their protection from the calling if they only perform a single ritual, but what they don't know is that the ritual can turn them into demons under his control. Elliana and her party struggle to find the leader of the Wardens to warn her of what is going on and in the process encounter Corypheus' arch demon dragon.

In a brief battle with the dragon, Elliana opens a rift during a deadly fall from the walls of the stronghold, and her party including herself fall into the fade. Never has a mortal been trapped in the Fade and survived once there, but Elliana and her party are pressed to escape as soon as possible. What comes to their surprise is what appears to be the missing Divine in perfect health. When pressed about her condition she claims that

she isn't the Divine but doesn't mean the party ill will. Rather that she means to help Elliana remember what happened the day, the Breach opened.

Elliana begins to regain her memories from that day and finds out that she was just a bystander who heard a commotion and came to investigate. She had no hand in what happened to the Divine other than trying to save her from Corypheus. In the process, she grabbed an orb that Corypheus wielded, which then gave her the mark on her hand. After she had fallen into the fade the first time, the person who saved Elliana was the Divine herself who knew it was too late for both of them to leave. The Divine's spirit states that she wanted Elliana to survive because she had the best chance at saving the world from the Breach.

After Elliana regains her memories, her party is faced with escaping the fade, and to do so, they must defeat a fear demon. However, after it is downed a massive demon of unknown classification comes to attack the party, and Elliana must leave Stroud behind to cover their escape through another rift. With their return to Thedas Elliana demands that the grey wardens leave southern Thedas to protect the public from their possible demon possession. It also serves as a punishment for their treason against Orlais and Ferelden by turning to enemy forces for help. Blackwall offers to leave as well, but Elliana is sure that he is not possessed by demons.

With the threat of a demon army eradicated the inquisition must now turn their attention to the potential assassination of the Empress of Orlais. They speculate that the attempt will occur during a ball that is taking place at Halamsharal's winter palace in Orlais. If anybody were to betray the Empress, it would either be her former elf lover, Briala, or her cousin Gaspard, both of whom have previous personal grievances with

Empress Celene. Elliana's mission at Halamsharal is to flush out who plans to assassinate the Empress and get rid of them as soon as possible. As a Dalish elf, the court of Orlais sees her as a beastly and primitive person. Their approval of her begins with low standards and Elliana must impress the court if she hopes for them to believe any accusation she has in the future.

Under Elliana's investigation, she learns that Gaspard works closely with his sister, Grand Duchess Florianne. Gaspard claims that the newly appointed Ambassador Briala is a scorned lover of Celene, and will do anything to get her payback. Briala is nowhere to be found. However, there is a court mage that seems to be attracting a lot of attention ever since their appointment to the position. Elliana makes a point to investigate this new court mage since Corypheus could have placed them in that position to play the role of assassin.

While snooping through the court mage's possessions, the bell sounds for the first dance of the night and Elliana is expected to attend. On her way to the ballroom, a court mage stops her, former wild witch Morrigan. Morrigan traveled with the king of Ferelden and his wife during the last blight and has since had a son and moved around Thedas on her agenda. She states that her reasoning for joining the Orlesian court was to protect the Empress from danger. With the breach in the sky, Morrigan knew it was only a matter of time before someone took aim at the royalty within Orlais and Ferelden.

Morrigan cautions Elliana's moves forward because if she gains enough of the court's approval, they could believe anyone she accuses, and even then the Empress could still be killed. Once Elliana arrives in the grand ballroom, Grand Duchess Florianne pulls her aside for a dance. She asks for the details of her investigation and Elliana evades

her prodding advances. Nobody can know where she stands until she makes her accusation. All of the clues she has found so far point towards Ambassador Briala, and Elliana continues her investigation in the servant's quarters.

What she finds there does point to a servant uprising, but not an assassination plot exactly. After saving an elf servant from a mysterious attacker, Elliana learns that the castle elves want better treatment and that Briala might blackmail the empress to obtain that. However, it was never her intent to kill the Empress amidst her blackmail. Elliana then traces the steps of the attacker to find that she and her party have stumbled into a trap set by Grand Duchess Florianne. She was the one who planned to have Empress Celene assassinated and then her brother would take the throne and operate under her command. Florianne leaves Elliana to die, but her team's quick thinking lets them escape in time to save the Empress from being killed.

Elliana accuses Florianne of treason in front of the Orlesian court and suggests that Gaspard might have been a part of the planning. When Empress Celene confronts the inquisitor about her findings, Elliana gives all of the information she knows and tries to reconcile her relationship with Briala to ease tensions with the servants. Empress Celene pledges Orlais' forces to the aid of the Inquisition and plans to attend all major battlefronts as a sign of good will. With the assassination thwarted Elliana and her party wind down before returning to Skyhold. Before they leave, Morrigan offers her services to the inquisition in all future endeavors to help protect Thedas.

At Elliana's return, her advisors suggest immediate action against Corypheus' forces. They've noted that his forces are gathering in the Arbor Wilds in Southern Orlais, and they appear to be looking for something. Morrigan advises that they try to beat his

forces to whatever they are looking for first, but she believes that it might be a temple of some kind. The Inquisition launches a full assault on Corypheus' army in the wilds while Elliana and a small party venture as a forward party to gauge better what they are looking for in the Wilds.

The small Inquisition party encounters Corypheus' soldiers along their advancement, and also some unknown Elf soldiers. To their surprise, they find that Corypheus' has been pursuing the temple of the Elven goddess, Mythal. What he hopes to find there they are unsure of at the time but know that they must beat him to the temple. As they arrive at the front gates Corypheus' launches an attack, and is quickly defeated. However, his soul quickly moves to another person, a possessed grey warden, and turns them into him.

They can stall Corypheus' advance behind a magically sealed door leading into the outer sanctum of the temple. Morrigan theorizes that he must be searching for a relic known as the well of sorrows. The well of sorrows is said to contain the memories of all agents and protectors of Mythal. The well could potentially hold hundreds if not thousands of year's worth of history and memories of a race that has since been sold into slavery and exile. Morrigan urges Elliana and their party to hasten their efforts into the inner sanctum so that they might get to the well first because Corypheus could abuse that kind of knowledge if he were to obtain it.

Not far behind Elliana and her team are Corypheus' general, Red Templar Samson, and some of his forces. They blast their way through the temple and attempt to beat the Inquisition to the well. While Elliana and her party could follow their explosive path through the temple, she decides that following temple tradition through its trials is

required to pass through the temple. Even though the trials take more time, in the end, Elliana gains the trust of the guardians of the temple. They promise to lead her party through the inner sanctum. However, their leader claims that the well should not be left to squander, and says that he will destroy it. In a fit of outrage, Morrigan hurries past the guards to stop their leader, but Elliana travels onward to confront Samson and eventually Morrigan.

Towards the foot of the steps of the well, the party finally encounters Samson. He claims that his armor has an amazing power that the Inquisition cannot defeat. Little does he know that Elliana researched the material behind his armor and had a rune that will nullify its effects. His armor proves useless, but he battles her party and is quickly defeated. At the foot of the steps of the well Morrigan and the leader of the temple, guardians are fighting over the fate of the Well of Sorrows. Morrigan says that she will go into the well and absorb its knowledge to protect it if Elliana agrees. The leader of the Guardians admits that his people are a dying breed and that with the Well of Sorrows in jeopardy they have nothing to protect anymore. He leaves the decision to Elliana, who allows Morrigan to drink from the well.

As soon as Morrigan absorbs the knowledge of the well Corypheus attacks the party, and she exclaims that they must escape through a nearby Eluvian, a portal like a mirror used by the ancient elves. If they go through it the party could effectively lose Corypheus and leave him with nothing at the temple. Through there they are transported back to Skyhold where they plan their next attack.

At Elliana's return to Skyhold, Spymaster Lelianna informs her that Morrigan has rushed through her Eluvian after her son passed through it himself. She chases after them

both to find Morrigan distraught in the face. She has no idea why her son would run into the Eluvian, and is worried that something has happened. They finally find her son with Morrigan's mother, Flemeth. Flemeth is known as the witch of the wilds who has lived for many years by taking possession of her daughters. What neither Elliana or Morrigan knew was that she is the elven goddess, Mythal. Flemeth has housed her soul for thousands of years. Since Morrigan drank from the well and ultimately became a servant of Mythal, Flemeth was able to track her and her son down. Morrigan's son houses the soul of an old god, which is no secret to Morrigan. Flemeth desires her grandson's body to become both the vessel of the old god and Mythal.

She gives Morrigan a choice, either the boy leaves with her and Morrigan is free of Flemeth for good, or be constantly running from her. Morrigan says that she would give herself up if it meant that her son could be free of torment. Moved by her daughter's sacrifice, Flemeth decides to remove the old god soul of her grandson, but will be in constant pursuit of Morrigan.

Once Flemeth departs, Morrigan reveals that she had a plan to counter Corypheus' dragon that lets him resurrect himself in another person's body. She can shapeshift into a dragon and believes that she should be able to match its abilities. With that in mind, it is time to deliver the final blow to Corypheus and his forces, closing the breach once and for all.

The inquisition travels to the location of the Breach, the Valley of Sacred Ashes for the final battle with Corypheus. Immediately after encountering Corypheus his Dragon appears, and Morrigan attacks it as its equal. Corypheus raises the remains of the temple that once laid in the Valley into the sky and began to fight Elliana and her party.

The fight is useless until the dragon is defeated, and Morrigan fails to defeat it by herself. After downing the dragon, Elliana turns her sights to Corypheus and ends him once and for all. She takes the orb from his possession to use it to close the Breach, causing Corypheus to die watching all of his plans fail in front of him.

After he dies, Elliana finds the orb that gave her the mark on her hand shattered on the ground. Solas, now her former love interest, picks up the pieces of the orb and says that it was never meant to be this way. Elliana asks what he means, and all he tells her is that he did love her once and that it was real. When the rest of the inquisition arrives, Solas disappears. The Inquisition then returns to Skyhold to celebrate their victory.

Elsewhere, Solas meets with Mythal (Flemeth) to discuss what has happened. It is revealed that he is the elven god Fen Harel and that he had other plans for the orb before the Breach originally occurred. He apologizes to her and says that he hopes he can fix everything before he steals her soul and the old god's for himself, leaving Flemeth a husk.

Important Events after *Dragon Age: Inquisition*

Elliana does eventually learn of Solas' true identity two years after the events of *Dragon Age: Inquisition* in the *Trespasser* DLC. She loses her hand to the anchor, which Solas takes from her after she discovers whom he is, and the Inquisition formally disbands. However, Elliana and several former members of the Inquisition have vowed to hunt Solas down to stop his plans of destroying Thedas to create a new world.

Chapter Two: Feminist Analysis – Overview

Compared to other games in the industry, *Dragon Age: Inquisition* provides a large cast and a lot of flexibility for the player when it comes to making their character and their adventure. Thus, the player including how characters respond to situations, choices, and the inquisitor, influences a majority of the game. The player influences their experience created by the game's designers. These designers made the game knowing their demographics and target audience about current cultural outlooks on women and video games. *Dragon Age: Inquisition* excels in some areas of representation, including how the women are designed and represented within a group in terms of equal standing and power. There are areas in which is lacking, though, such as representations of romance and stereotypes.

The problems arise in areas where the designs are lazy, or where stereotypes are a too strong. While character designs are well done and reflect the personality of the character, unfair stereotypes can be pinned to certain characters and be seen as unjust. Characters such as Vivienne and Sera have had disjointed reception, largely due to cultural issues and predisposed prejudice of their race and sexuality. The grey areas of appropriate representation muddle the idea that this game is a perfect representation of women. *Dragon Age: Inquisition* is not without its faults.

Overall, its design and execution of female representation is fair, with nobody being overly sexualized. Character design is just, and most dialogue between female and male is fair. Both the positive and negative aspects are important to understanding the impact of the completed product, and what that means for female representation in video games.

Player Choice, the Inquisitor, and Gender Influence

Dragon Age: Inquisition includes an almost evenly split main character roster with six women and seven men, but how are they represented amongst their peers? While women are still the minority, the split is almost fifty/fifty. Many interactions are fair and equal, but female stereotypes are present in several characters, and not always in a positive light.

It depends mostly on the player, whom whichever gender they pick throws the gender dynamic one way or the other in the inquisition. However, how does changing the gender of the inquisitor influence the experience? Besides the obvious answer of appearance, how does the gender of the player character change the narrative?

Gender has less of an influence on the gameplay than the constructed backstory of the player character. For instance, Elliana is an eleven Mage from a Dalish clan to the north. Throughout the game, she comments more from her Elven background or Mage expertise instead of her gender. It also does not adversely affect the narrative if the player character is a woman. Rather, the race and class of the inquisitor affects the storyline, and often. In a way, that puts both men and women on equal standing, leaving other internal factors of the inquisitor to influence the narrative. On one hand this could be a lazy design flaw, but there are instances that suggest otherwise. One such instance does minimally include nods to gender between Cassandra and a female inquisitor. Cassandra highly approved of Elliana as the inquisitor and remarks about the impact that they will make on history. She states, “to be standing beside another powerful woman; it’s history in the making.” (Bioware). This is one of the few instances where the game refers to the players chosen gender, and positively. Otherwise, there is no difference between the genders, and this includes whether or not the inquisitor is male or female.

Dialogue options given the inquisitor are the same regardless of their gender; in fact, whole scenes look the same. Camera angle, lighting, voice inflection, and movements are the same. In major scenes, nothing about the inquisitor is sexualized, neither male nor female. While equal in that respect, it leaves to question whether or not this was intentional or another lazy design flaw of the game. It could be argued that each gender and race would move slightly differently, and it gets rid of the individuality of the character. Powerful poses that might be appropriate for say, a human male, render an elven female to look disjointed and elongated at times. The same pose could render the body size appropriately, but the game fails to do so with its given body models. Instead of leaving the inquisitor looking powerful as they should, they look awkward and anatomically incorrect.

Gender does come into play for romantic subplots, and can potentially bar the Inquisitor from romancing a companion due to their gender. However, this deals with sexual orientation and preferences of the companion characters. For instance, a female character cannot romance the companion character, Dorian, because he is gay, and this plays a big role in his plotline as a character. This goes the same way for a male character that wants to romance Sera; they will be barred from her romance because she is a lesbian. It has nothing to do with any sexism inherent in the game; in fact, it's the opposite.

If comparing the available romances, broken up by those available to male and female player characters, the breakdown is four male options to six female options. Female inquisitors have almost double the romantic options compared to the male, with three of those six not being a heterosexual relationship. Race restraints bar two out of the

six romances from the player. Example, Cullen can only be romanced if the inquisitor is either an elf or a human. In the case of my playthrough, my inquisitor could romance him. If she were a Qunari or a Dwarf, romantic dialogues would not be available between that inquisitor and companion.

Having more romance options provide much more flexibility for player narrative when it comes to the inquisitor, and adds on to the main story line. While not necessary to the story, a romantic partner does add extra scenes to the end and well into downloadable content. While all relationships matter within the Inquisition, romance is one that the player reinforces actively through their choices. For example, Elliana romanced the Elven Mage Solas and had a slightly longer story in regards to the relationship with him even after the main story of *Dragon Age: Inquisition*. Much of their romance has to deal with choice and consent, all of which the Inquisitor makes.

While a wide variety of romances are promising, they are not void of issues. More romances towards a female player character suggest that female players would be more inclined towards romance than male players. While it is an optional part of the game, so many options catered towards women leaves the impression that the game assumes that female players desire romantic subplots. If romantic choices were split evenly between the sexes, then the outcome might be different. But the assumption that women will always want to play romance leaves an unsavory view on that aspect of the game.

In the case of romances gender of the player character has the most influence. It's not in an up-front sort of way, but rather a behind the scenes influence. Being that if you are of a certain gender, it influences how characters view you romantically. Whether that

be finding the player character attractive, or not being interested in them in a romantic sense whatsoever.

Female Design and Presentation

How writer and game designer chooses to present a character reflects that character's background, personality, and influence. As such, it also reflects culture inside and outside *Dragon Age: Inquisition's* narrative world. For this study, character design will be considered fair if they are functional as well as accurate for the character's occupation and status. No two female characters have the same personality and backstory. Thus, their standards for fair design differ.

Each playable character woman's dress within the Inquisition is a representation of her occupation, backstory, and personality. For instance, Cassandra wears a suit of armor while Vivienne adorns herself in a mage's robe. Functionality as far as a woman's class goes is fair on a general level. However, comparing whether or not a suit of armor would protect somebody is required. A breastplate that emphasizes the female figure instead of the standard design is much more dangerous in combat and only usable in emphasizing the female form. Due to this, the main determinant of fair design will be practicality of the armor.



Beginning with the Inquisitor, her design almost exactly mimics her male counterpart in concept. However, the inquisitor's design changes depending on her race and her class, so the concept alone is just a starting point. As an elf mage, her attire largely consists of leather, robes/jackets, and light armor pieces. The beginning setting of *Dragon Age: Inquisition* itself lends to having all inquisitors fully clothed, as the base is settled in a snowy mountain range. As the player progresses through the storyline, the armor becomes more ornate and decorative in patterns. Even while the armor may become more elegant depending on the material, it remains practical. For Elliana, some armor is only available to her and other elves for wear. Elven armor displays more of the culture than typical armor that is found throughout the game and looks quite a bit different on a male elf than a female elf. This is one of the few cases in which a change in presentation of attire might be unfair. While a female elf is not sexualized, the change has no explanation in the narrative or elven history of *Dragon Age*. However this armor is

limited only to elves, so a comparison on how it looks on the other main characters cannot be made. Regardless, Inquisitor Elliana's clothing matches form with function, while still being able to be aesthetically pleasing if chosen to be that way.



Seeker Cassandra's garb tends to match the same functionality as the inquisitor's, but more suited to her needs and her personality. As a warrior, she needs to be well defended, which can happen in a variety of ways. Much of the armor available to Cassandra is either thickly padded like a gambeson, also known as a thick arming doublet, with elements of chain mail and light plating. As the game progresses, more heavy armor options become available to her and resemble more like a plate suit. If made the next Divine, she obtains a golden suit of plate armor in an expansion, which is the some of best armor available to her. While the armor she wears in the main portion of the game not only does not sexualize her but also accurately represented and functional, the

plate armor of the divine is not. For example, the concept art above displays the typical armor she wears throughout the game. The leggings and arms of the piece are presumably made of leather, with plate boots and studded leather gloves. Her chest piece is most likely a cuirass covered by leather or a thin cloth. According to Oxford Dictionary of Archeology, a cuirass is “A piece of armour designed to protect the torso. It comprised both breast and back armour...” (Oxford Reference). Overall, this armor, as well as most other options in the game, is practical, functional, and accurate regarding armor protection.

However, the plate armor available to Cassandra at the end of the game does not meet the same standard as most of the armor available to her.



The Divine’s armor adheres to and also breaks conventions of plate armor. A plate armor set contains many different set pieces. While it looks clunky and immobile, plate armor is constructed in such a way that it provides a good range of movement due to its many parts. The arms and legs of the Divine’s Armor are properly segmented and layered with chain mail, but the chest piece is where the problems lie.

When examining the chest piece, it should be noted that the entire torso section extends to a dropped waist position. While flattering, bending would be nearly impossible as the metal would cut into her upper thighs. The chest piece itself is also curved and shaped towards a woman’s body, including apparent breast cups to emphasize her figure. The problem with breast cups, as stated by Emily Asher-Perrin,

is that the armor would shatter the wearer's sternum if struck (Asher-Perrin). Overall, while this armor might be considered more physically appealing it does not serve its purpose as functional armor. For the most part, however, Cassandra's armor throughout the game is functional and matches her personality as a stalwart warrior of faith.



Sera's armor follows and reflects her background for the most part. As an elf that grew up in an underprivileged city environment as a rogue, her look is less put together. However, her debut design above shows that her armor still has a functional purpose. Her armor set comprises mostly leather and other forms of light armor. As an archer, there are pieces of armor and gear that are not required of a warrior but are for somebody wielding a bow. An archery wrist guard, or otherwise known as a bracer, is an example of such clothing. All of the armor that she wears has her equip with a wrist guard as pictured above in her release portrait.



Enchanter Vivienne's armor aims to represent nobility as well as the power of a masterful mage. Since mages are not real, there is no real historical reference to turn to to determine the accuracy of protection. With this in mind, the basic functionality of the armor will be considered in terms of what a mage does regarding *Dragon Age*:

Inquisition. Mages are akin to archer rogues in that their attacks deal damage from a distance. However, they lack the same versatility. While a rogue might be able to deal some damage short range by occupation Mages can only deal medium to long range attacks. Due to this, their armor is a lighter weight since they will not be in the middle of a fight, but rather on the outskirts of it.

In Vivienne's promotional art, her armor consists of a mixture of both cloth and leather pieces. The design of her armor reflects her high status in society, as well as her

sense of fashion. The armor reflects her personality, which is more feminine than the other playable female characters. While appropriate for her, some of the armor in which Vivienne wears still begs to question if it is appropriate for battle.



The armor in the above screenshot is one of many similar outfits that are worn by Vivienne. While the outfit would make sense in a royal court, its practicality about trekking across battlefields and heavy terrain beg to differ. However, it could be argued that feminine armor on a mage is different than a warrior or a rogue. Since they take fewer blows in battle, their armor does not have to be as heavy or function. Still, if a mage is dealing elemental attacks, their armor should protect them from said elements and simple cloth might not be able to provide that. Vivienne's armor might reflect her personality well, but its practicality within certain settings leaves something to be desired regarding fair representation.

Overall, most of the armor for the playable character women in the game tends to be functional and appropriate. Some still appeal to a feminine image, while others err on the side of unisex or masculine. There is a good balance of this, and none of the characters seem hyper-sexualized in any way.

Chapter Three: Sociological Analysis – Overview

Intersectional feminism looks at how other social issues such as racism; homophobia, transphobia, etc. affect the idea of feminism as a whole. Meaning that feminism not only fights towards equality of the sexes, but equality of race, gender, sexual preference, and many others as a whole. Feminism needs to address multiple issues alongside sexism, such as the treatment of women of color and members of the LGBTQA+ community. There are ways in which *Dragon Age: Inquisition* both excels and falters in intersectionality. While the game does include women of color and people who identify within the LGBTQA+, stereotypes can arise from some of the portrayals. Much of these stereotypes are influenced by current events, much like how social movements shape video game production.

Several social movements were in either in their beginnings or full swing during the production of *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, such as marriage equality for all and the beginnings of the Black Lives Matter movement. These as well as the personal influences of the development team shape certain aspects of the game. Most of these include the characters and how they are written and represented throughout the game. How the audiences receives the game can determine just how inclusive it actually was. From there, social movements continue to shape and influence through a form of interactive media.

However, there can be a disconnect between the audience and social progress depending on several factors. Target demographics can respond differently to the game than some of the smaller demographics. Social standards also influence the audience, especially when the standard does not always match with the idea of change. This is not always the case, but dissonance can occur, and prejudice can arrive from such.

Dragon Age: Inquisition overall attempts to rectify transgressions that other video games have left out of their narrative and their characters. Since there is an absence in most games on the market, gamers will be less inclined to expect it in a game. It is less of an issue with the game and more about the reception the game received.

People of Color Stereotypes and Culture Influence

Dragon Age: Inquisition has its created races that experience discrimination, but since they are not real they do not affect or relate to the audience in any way. Humans, as well as elves and dwarves, have similar skin colors and about the same amount of variety when it comes to the amount of skin tones to choose from.

Within the inquisition's main cast, there are two women of color overall. Ambassador Josephine and Enchanter Vivienne both have important and crucial roles within the Inquisition, both of whom serve as an example for two different kinds of leadership and involvement in the cause. Josephine serves a diplomatic role model in the inquisition while Vivienne has slightly more power outside of the Inquisition as Orlais' grand enchanter. Both women have a lot of control in various political circles and do not shy away from positions of power, especially enchanter Vivienne.

Vivienne as a character is bold, outspoken, and intelligent. All good traits to have in any companion, yet she ranks low in comparison to other characters. In Kotaku's

rankings of Bioware companions, Vivienne ranked in fortieth place out of fifty (Williams). In defense of her ranking, the website talks about how “you never learn about Vivienne herself – you only hear her opinions” meaning that her outspoken personality brings her down as a character within the game (Williams). Another character that is also outspoken, Seeker Cassandra, places far higher on the list than enchanter Vivienne. She places sixth out of all fifty Bioware companions, and the reason being that she has “faith” in the Inquisitor (Williams). Vivienne and Cassandra are not that different from each other in personality. They have a strong moral compass and will do anything to abide by it, regardless of appearances. While both of them are different classes and come from different backgrounds, it is difficult to say that these are the only factors when comparing the two characters.

What this does raise to question is why Vivienne is ranked so low compared to white women in the same series. In no way is it Vivienne’s written narrative that would make her lesser than any of the other female characters. Michael Deakin points out that Vivienne is described as “bossy and obnoxious” while characters of the same and different genders will have a similar personality (Deakin). This sort of interpretation of Vivienne pigeonholes her in the angry black woman stereotype and media trope. Even though the developers did not write her in any derogatory way to cause the development team to be at fault for this stereotyping, the audience of the game perceives her as such.

What causes an audience to turn to prejudice, either intentionally or unintentionally? The answer could be the same thing that influences stages of development, or a larger cultural movement and the subsequent reaction. The Black Lives Matter movement began in 2012 after the shooting death of Trayvon Martin and has since

gained momentum after numerous deaths of unarmed black youths (Blacklivesmatter.com). Around that time *Dragon Age: Inquisition* was in the early stages of development and Mike Sharkey at GameSpy.com reiterates, was “actively seeking fan input” for the game (Sharkey). While turning to the fans for input could have led to more inclusion of people of color, the process of development on this end cannot be known.

However, to say that the Black Lives Matter movement and other related movements had no influence on development at all would be neglecting some of the finer moments in dialogue within the game. As a mage, she faces imprisonment and control by Templars in the Circle, regardless of her social status. When she talks about this oppression she says, “I never worry, Darling. A leash can be pulled from either end.” Meaning that those put into positions of oppression can find a way to fight against a system, even within the system itself (Bioware). The Black Lives Matter movement fights back against a system that intentionally leaves black people disenfranchised and without power (Blacklivesmatter.com). The parallels between Vivienne’s oppression as a mage and the real oppression of black lives in America serve to push further the importance of Vivienne’s role as not a woman of color in power but to show that fighting against a power structure can be done from within the system itself.

Vivienne’s poor reception as a character could result from a larger social problem, which is the ingrained racism within Western society. While the interpretation that she is overly opinionated could be a pointed remark on her gender, when lumped with her race the stereotype worsens. Abrasive white women within *Dragon Age: Inquisition* such as Cassandra have a better reception, and as stated earlier are ranked higher than women of

color. It is a larger problem with society's perception of what is appropriate behavior for women of different races. White women have a privilege because of the color of their skin and do not get as unjustly stereotyped as women of color when voicing their opinion. Due to this, Vivienne is subjected to a predisposed stereotype constructed by western society.

While there are some small areas of racial representation in *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, it is far from equal. This could be in part due to the fantasy aspect of the game, which creates new races that do not exist and suffer from their prejudice within the created world. However, this is no excuse not to include more people of color to better represent them.

LGBTQA+ Stereotypes and Culture Influence

When it comes to representation of LGBTQA+ relationships, characters, and their struggles *Dragon Age: Inquisition* excels more than many games before it. With more queer romances than heterosexual ones, the game does its best to have healthy representations of all relationships. *Dragon Age: Inquisition* also includes representation of lesser-represented individuals, such as an openly transgender character as a part of the cast. While the game does a good job at being progressive in this sense, it is not without its faults in how it represents some of its LGBTQA+ female-identifying characters. Some of this is how the audiences perceive the characters, and partly with how the developers wrote the characters.

LGBTQA+ representation in video games is not unheard of before *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, however, it is hardly ever represented on a larger scale. Equal rights for all sexualities have been a fight in Western culture in America for quite some time, and rose

in the eighties and nineties and continues to this day. Marriage equality was a turbulent issue before the SCOTUS decision of 2015 to make gay marriage legal across the country and therefore was still an issue during the production of the game. In the world of Thedas, same-sex relationships are an accepted norm across many cultures, except for the country of Tevinter. Same sex relationships do not receive much discrimination at all unless it is related to Tevinter in some way, and are accepted and embraced by a vast majority of the world. As a game that can serve as an escape to a prospective queer player, a world that can provide what was at the time barred in most of the United States would be comforting and provide an avenue in which they could express that part of themselves.

Out of the main cast of characters, there are a total of four LGBTQA+ characters. Out of those four, two of them are female. Ambassador Josephine, who is bisexual, and Sera, who is lesbian. Both of these characters have issues in either their reception or in how their writers wrote them. While Josephine is indeed bisexual, it is never explicitly addressed within the narrative. This becomes a problem no matter if you romance her as a male or a female. If you play as a male inquisitor and romance Josephine, then it could be inferred that the relationship is heterosexual, ergo making Josephine straight. The opposite can be said for if a female inquisitor romances her, she would then be gay instead of bisexual. The problem with bisexuality that is not pointed out within the media is that it erases the identity of bisexuality itself. Instead, heterosexuality or homosexuality overshadows it even though it is neither here nor there. No character within the game addresses her sexuality; so it could be argued that instead of being bisexual then she is player-sexual, or whichever sexuality she needs to be to be romanced by the gamer.

The problem with Sera is not the fact that she is a lesbian, but rather how she is written as a lesbian stereotype. She's crass, abrasive, and impulsive, none of which are bad personality traits alone. The problem lies in how it plays into the stereotype of the angry lesbian. Jillian from Femhype.com elaborates on this trope stating, "The Psycho Lesbian trope (while an ableist label) is well-loved and immediately recognizable in popular media. Everyone knows all lesbians are angry, and all gay men are cheerful!" and it only adds to how the audience perceives Sera as a character (Jillian). In playing into this stereotype by writing her to adhere to it, the game makes it acceptable for the audience to view her negatively with little consequence. As the only strictly lesbian character available to romance in *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, her as an image for lesbian women leaves a poor interpretation of that demographic.

While it could be argued that both Josephine and Sera could play into the faults of either being player-sexual or the angry lesbian stereotype, to do so would be a lazy response to lazy design and writing. Other LGBTQA+ characters within *Dragon Age: Inquisition* are written in such a way that any fault on the character would stem from player prejudice. For example, Mage Dorian's history as a gay male growing up in Tevinter plays a major role in his narrative. His sexuality plays an integral role in his storyline, and his personality is deeper than any negative stereotypes against gay men. The issues with Josephine and Sera stem from inattentive design and possible influence from a writer's preexisting prejudice.

One area that dealt with well and usually ignored by multiple media platforms is that of transgender representation. Iron Bull's second in command of his mercenary band, Krem, is a transgender male who makes his gender explicitly known to the inquisitor and

the player alike. While the questions available for the inquisitor to ask Krem are a deal insensitive at times, the answers Krem and Iron Bull give intend to inform and educate the inquisitor, and therefore the gamer as well. Krem as a character himself is written with tact and sensitivity, and lack of any thereof on the inquisitor's behalf mirrors how society treats transgendered individuals in Western Culture.

Representations of LGBTQA+ relationships and individuals vary in being not very fair at all, to a good example for future video game characters to come. However, while not all representations are well done, it is a good area to start to improve. In being critical of where representation fell short, the video game industry can see where it can improve overall in how it represents LGBTQA+ characters.

Conclusion

In terms of gaining or losing ground regarding fair representations of women in a consumable media, there is no definite answer. There are areas in which *Dragon Age: Inquisition* excels, like how the women are armored, and how men within the video game world treat them. However, that doesn't mean the game is not without its faults. *Dragon Age: Inquisition* struggles in areas of intersectionality, and this might be due to its writing or how the gaming community has received it. If it is due to writing then there is much work to be done, including research, focus groups, and more attention to detail when it comes to sensitive subjects.

If the problem stems from the reception the game received from the video gaming community, then the problem is bigger than *Dragon Age: Inquisition*. Developers need to be more attentive in the content they create, but the video game players can learn to be

more receptive to social change. Continued exposure to these issues through consumable media can improve this, as well as personal exposure to social change within a culture. No matter the case, representation is important, and the more it can be improved the better the game can be in social progression.

As a consumable media, it is imperative that video games be aware of how they represent different groups. Not only does it serve as an archive for social values for future generations, but also it influences and is influenced by its audience. Video gamers have wide access to their favorite developers through social media, and can voice their opinions about narrative and development at any time. On the same hand, the product given to the video gamers causes their opinions to shift and change over time. This exchange can lead to games either becoming more or less progressive. Regardless, video games are a unique avenue in which the product can influence and be influenced by its consumer over a short period.

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