

‘From where I stand, you're all legs’.
Expectation, Desire and Queerness in
Dragon Age: The Veilguard



> Introduction

We investigated the latest release in the Dragon Age series to ascertain whether games were meeting player expectations around queerness.

We examined the narrative, world and characters of Dragon Age: The Veilguard, released in 2025.

The aim of this comparison was to see if the game had met the expectations of the audiences, and for us to play Dragon Age at work.



› Dragon Age

Dragon Age is a long running fantasy roleplaying series developed by Bioware.

The series is famous for its character-driven narratives, and its significant inclusion of queer characters and queer narratives.

Dragon Age: The Veilguard is the latest in series.



> Literature

> Key Literature Points

Major Queer Areas of Research;



Queer Romances – The Dragon Age series is an early example of significant queer inclusion, and has an inherit background as a place where queerness is expected.

Queer Protagonists – Gaming narratives often portray queerness as a struggle and atypical.

Queer Realisation – How players realise queerness in games, especially in player-choice focused games.

> Assessment Metrics

Queer Romances – How have queer romances evolved, what do they look like, how do spaces deal with queer inclusion?

Queer Protagonists – What do queer stories look like? Do they include discussion of gender and sexuality? Do they fall into tropes and issues?

Queer Realisation – How do games facilitate queer realisation? Have they leaned into this aspect?



> PAX East

Data about queer expectations in games was collected between 2014–2019 (post DA:I release) at the PAX East video games convention in the Roll for Diversity Lounge.

Questions about relationships with games were asked over 3–4 days with participants able to fill out anonymous post it notes

Notes were analysed for expectations for positive representations of queerness of games (and reactions to negative representations) to develop a framework of expectations of queerness that we used to analyse DA TV



> Framework & Results

As part of our methodology, we processed the PAX data into generalised expectations, that we then categorised to form a wider understanding of the overall expectations of the audience.

We also associated each subcategory with relevant literature.

This formed the basis of the questions asked of DA:TV.

Main category	Subcategory
Gender representation	Diversity
	Equity
	Realism
	Pronouns
	Transgender representation
Sexuality	Diversity
Narrative	Fetishisation
	Stereotypes
	NPC reactions to queerness
	Role in story
	Personalities distinct from queerne
	Relationships as an option
	Happy endings
Character Creation	Voice
	Body shape
	Secondary sexual characteristics
	Accuracy
	Space to experiment

Main category	Subcategory	Expectation	Example quote/literature
Gender representation	Diversity	There should be diverse gender representation.	“A wide variety of gender identities!” (2019) <i>Brown & Partridge 2021; Condis 2014; Winter, J. 2022; Zabala, et al. 2024.</i>
Character Creation	Voice	Player character voice options should be varied and not tied to cis genders.	“A character creator is not just cosmetics, but rather the morals, voice, incite beliefs and can change depending on the narrative” (2017) <i>Valorozo-Jones, Caleb. 2021; Winter, J. 2022.</i>
	Body shape	Body shapes should be representative of the real world.	“Better female armor and more body types!” (2018) “Not enough diversity in body types” (2017) <i>Schaufert, B. 2018.</i>
	Secondary sexual characteristics	Player characters should be able to choose their secondary sexual characteristics independent of sex.	“ <u>allow</u> for trans characters when you get to design your own character.” (2014) <i>Levin, H. 2023; Llewellyn, A. 2022; Zabala, J, Zvelebilova, J and To, A.</i>



> Diversity of Sexualities

- Diverse Sexualities are presented in DA: The Veilguard in an overall positive way
- Characters have set sexualities – Bellara has a pre-established female love interest.
- Companion characters are also open to starting a relationship with the player character regardless of gender presentation.
- This fulfils the expectation, and having pre-established relationships also solidifies the representation of specific sexualities.



Diversity	A diversity of sexualities should be included (for NPCs) and expected (for PCs), including both romanceable and non-romanceable NPCs.	“Kaidan from Mass Effect being bisexual (first human character who's romanceable in the series to be bi)” (2014) “More genders, more sexualities, more options in RPGs and other story driven games” (2014) <i>Greer, S. 2013;</i> <i>Krampe, T. 2018;</i> <i>Schaufert, B. 2018;</i> <i>Vertosick, S. 2024.</i>
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> NPC Reactions to Queerness

- Companions and NPCs have fairly open approaches to both gender and sexuality variants.
- Some characters explain and show how this manifests within the game societies as well (Isabella, Iron Bull, etc.)
- Some aspects of DA:V and DA:I point towards less of an anatomical approach to gender presentation, and more a societal and personal expression as the first and foremost aspect of gender.



NPC reactions to queerness	Queerness to be normalised or treated in <u>an</u> sensitive, realistic, and/or justifiable way by other NPCs.	“Good character relationships & diverse casts” (2018) <u>Condis</u> 2014.
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> Character Creation

- Players are able to customise their bodies and appearances entirely separate from pronoun or transgender identity options.
- Players are able to declare a transgender identity regardless of body appearance.
- Additionally, these options do have applications later in the narrative.
- By separating these aspects, it lends more weight to the idea that gender presentation and physical presentation are considerably separate in the DA setting.



Secondary sexual characteristics	Player characters should be able to choose their secondary sexual characteristics independent of sex.	<u>“allow for trans characters when you get to design your own character.” (2014)</u> <i>Levin, H. 2023; Llewellyn, A. 2022; Zabala, J, Zvelebilova, J and To, A.</i>
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› Language Usage Inconsistencies

- DA:I and DA:TV use fictional terminology for gender / sexual identities.
- In DA:TV, real-world terminology for both sexualities and gender identities is considerably more prevalent.
- One key example where these two meet is Taash's storyline, in which "Non-binary" is used in tandem with "Aqun-Athlok", which is a Qun-based term derived from the game narrative.
- This creates some level of narrative-disconnect, in which grassroots language has been created and used, and the real world terms are used without that same explanation.



> Conclusions!

- Conclusion 1 – The key finding of this investigation is the prevalence of an approach that aligns with audience expectations to gender and sexuality in Dragon Age: Veilguard.
- Conclusion 2 – Approaches within the Dragon Age have created a almost-entirely fictional approach to gender and sexuality and is separate from real world expectations. This includes the presentation of third genders, transgender identities and same sex relationships. This approach also separates these identities from the issues they face in the real world, or approaches those issues through a different lens.
- Conclusion 3 – The Dragon Age series has created and used terminology in alignment with the lore of the world to describe sexuality and gender identities. This has changed considerably in Dragon Age Veilguard. Some modern terminology has been included in Dragon Age Veilguard, which warrants further investigation.

