

The Evolution of Women and Gender Representation in computerized RPGs: The Baldur's Gate Paradigm

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the evolution of gender representation and inclusivity of the Baldur's Gate series, comparing Baldur's Gate (1998), Baldur's Gate 2: Shadows of Amn (2000), and Baldur's Gate 3 (2023). The early games (BG and BG2) adopted a binary/traditional gender system with minimal character parameterization, following the technological limitations and societal norms of the late 1990s and early 2000s. The pronouns and the wording are strictly binary, and the female characters are often Hyper-sexualized, reinforcing traditional stereotypes while offering limited representation of diverse identities. In contrast, Baldur's Gate 3 marks a significant shift in mentality. The game allows the players to parameterize their characters, including non-binary pronouns, and gender-neutral expressions, with the freedom to design characters that go beyond the traditional gender roles. Female characters are portrayed with greater depth and diversity, moving away from hypersexualized depictions, although there are cases in which hyper sexualization exists, these are not prominent. This inclusivity extends to dialogue and interactions, fostering a more personalized and affirming player experience. This change follows an evolution in the gaming industry, which increasingly includes elements of diversity and representation in their games. The shift from the stereotypical binary norms in earlier games to the inclusivity of Baldur's Gate 3 highlights the franchise's adaptation to contemporary expectations.

Keywords

Baldur's Gate, Baldur's Gate 2, Baldur's Gate 3, Gender roles, Inclusivity, Diversity, LGBTQi, Video Games, RPG.

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INTRODUCTION

Video games are one of the most common ways for younger people to spend their time and research about the stereotypical representation of the genders has been conducted for years (Cassell & Jenkins, 2000; Winkel et al., 1987). This study aims to evaluate the level of inclusivity in video games, to help women challenge established stereotypes and provide LGBTQ+ individuals with positive, self-affirming experiences (McKenna et al., 2024). In a predominantly male-dominated industry, the few only developers and designers who identify as female (Kearns, 2024) often hesitate to express themselves, even when participating in research-related surveys (Tompkins & Martins, 2022). This lack of representation was evident in the early stages of the video game industry and was reflected in the content of the games produced. Studies show that in 1989, only 8% of the U.S. video game industry workforce was female, whereas, by 2021, this percentage had risen to 30%—a significant increase now reflected in the industry's products (Lynch et al., 2024).

Recently, the concept of player self-representation has become increasingly well-established (Carrasco et al., 2018). While there is an imbalance in the representation of people of color (Reza et al., 2022) and gender (Ivory, 2006), involving sexually suggestive content, video games such as Baldur's Gates 3 create a milestone and set an example for any future games.

Although there is no significant evidence that video games directly instigate violent attitudes toward female or LGBTQ+ individuals (Cross et al., 2024), the portrayal of female characters are fragile and are represented in overtly sexualized ways. This has been shown to harm women by promoting unattainable beauty standards (Ioannou, 2016). The video game industry has historically perpetuated stereotypes established by other media. Women are often hypersexualized, depicted with an emphasis on roles centered around family and children, and, when portrayed in the workplace, frequently subjected to sexual objectification (Shamim & Rafek, 2024; Lauzen et al., 2008; Coltrane & Adams, 1997). Older studies (before 2020) usually conclude that women and people of color are under-represented and are represented stereotypically in most video games (Wohn, 2011; Bristot et al., 2019).

After 2020, there has been a noticeable shift in the video game industry towards greater diversity, with more inclusive representation of characters, storylines, and perspectives. While there is still room for improvement, the patterns of representation of women in video games are changing (De la Torre et al., 2024). This shift started in the show business industry and gradually affected the video gaming industry (Heldman et al., 2016).

Therefore, this study follows the evolution of the three games of the Baldur's Gate brand, regarding Gender Roles and Inclusivity, and compares their features and progress.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender representation and inclusivity in video games have long been points of discord when the older games (mainly before 2020) approach was from more traditional

gender roles. In the 1980s and the 1990s, the gaming industry was primarily male-dominated. Most female characters were usually stereotyped and portrayed as secondary, hypersexualized, or in distress (Prescott & Bogg, 2011). These representations of women (Kondrat, 2015), alongside the absence of LGBTQI characters, contributed to a narrow view of gender identity in games (Látal, 2022).

The industry has though recently seen a significant change toward more inclusive representations. Popular games such as *The Last of Us Part I* and especially *Last of Us Part II* (2020) and *Cyberpunk 2077* (2020) introduce more women and LGBTQI characters, with storylines that allow same-sex relationships, romance and non-binary characters (Vázquez-Bouzó, 2024).

One notable development is the feature of character customization, where the players may choose gender identities, body types, and pronouns. This feature, particularly in role-playing games like *Baldur's Gate 3* (2023), provides a diverse experience, enabling players to create characters beyond the traditional male/female binary representation of older games (Larian Studios, 2023). Such games offer more complex, empowered female characters, and LGBTQI+ representation more integral to the storyline and not just peripheral or stereotypical.

Despite these advances, some of the challenges remain. While there is more diverse representation in character design, female characters are still over-sexualized, and LGBTQ characters remain underrepresented. More work is needed to ensure that all players, regardless of their gender or their sexual orientation, feel respected and represented (Devčić & Sabol, 2024).

Concluding, video games have made a shift toward inclusivity, reflecting cultural shifts toward diversity. The industry's growing attention to gender identity and representation in design and narrative suggests a positive trajectory for the future of inclusive gaming.

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AND HYPER-SEXUALIZATION

Before 2020 most video games seemed to under-represent women, 2SLGBTQI people, and people of color, at least, compared to the US population, while most default game characters would resemble white, male adults, creating an over-representation of these types of characters (Williams et al., 2009). Moreover, most female characters were stereotypically represented, often emphasizing over-sexualization (Bristot et al., 2019). The typical representation of women in video games used to be the typically thin, Caucasian woman, with a perfect body, an unrealistic depiction, that led to negative female body image, low self-esteem, and disordered eating behaviors (Gestos et al., 2018). The over-sexualization, especially of young girls, accompanied by the infantilization of adult women (Sidani, 2023) started and continued from the first steps of television and more specifically of Hollywood (Savino, 2024) to reach our days. In contrast, studies after 2020 show a significant shift in gender representation, focusing on physical characteristics and inclusive language and gender-neutral phrases (Stefani, 2022). Expressions like “a man of his word” or “a man of honor” are no longer commonly used in modern games.

The representation and inclusion of women will be one of the criteria used to analyze the Baldur's Gate series (along with LGBTQi people representation).

REPRESENTATION OF LGBTQI PEOPLE

The representation of LGBTQI+ characters in computer games has seen significant progress over the past decade, with more titles adapting to diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Historically, LGBTQI+ characters were either excluded, marginalized, or portrayed through stereotypes. However, modern games have increasingly focused on providing more nuanced and authentic depictions (Kilzer, 2022). Most users enjoy being given choices in the character creation of a game (Waked et al, 2024) even if this does not affect the capabilities of their character. While there are representations of transgender people in many popular games, at least since 1988 (Thach, 2021), only recently has the game industry taken serious steps to include marginalized groups in their games (Andriushchenko, 2024).

Many, mainly recent game players, choose same-sex romances, and non-binary pronouns, and interact with LGBTQI+ characters whose identities are integral to their stories (Larian Studios, 2023) and not such side-quests and isolated cases. Similarly, another iconic game, *The Last of Us Part II*, centers on Ellie's journey as a queer woman, navigating both her personal relationships and broader survival challenges (Vázquez-Bouzó, 2024). *Cyberpunk 2077* also expands LGBTQI+ representation by offering a range of romance options, including same-sex and non-binary relationships, further normalizing diverse identities in gaming (CD Project Red, 2020). As gaming continues to evolve, the push for inclusive, intersectional storytelling grows, contributing to a wider cultural acceptance of LGBTQI+ identities (Vázquez-Bouzó, 2024).

LGBTQi people's Representation and inclusivity will be the other criteria to analyze the Baldur's Gate game series.

ROLE PLAYING GAMES CHARACTER CREATION AND APPEARANCE

Before a Role-playing game starts, the players are asked to create their character, which works as their Avatar in the game. The Avatar is the representation of the players in the game (Li et al., 2013; Lim & Reeves, 2009). Avatars increase the self-awareness of players in games and can even change their behavior while playing (Rice et al., 2013). Depending on the game, the characters/avatars can have different abilities and skills. The players have many options depending on the game and the game system that affect the "build" of the character. Options such as Class, Race, Abilities, Skills, Feats, etc. appear in most RPGs (Bowman & Schrier, 2018). The option that most interests us, in this study, is Appearance. Appearance is the option that establishes the diversity of the characters. The players can parameterize the Appearance of their character by selecting features such as skin and hair color. In early computerized Role-Playing Games, the parameterization of the appearance of characters was limited due to technical limitations. The players could select their avatars from preset characters. Nowadays, the character parameters have improved and the parameterization can be very detailed.

The features most commonly parameterized in games are:

- **Face Shape**
- **Face Features**
- **Hair**
- **Eyes.**
- **Skin Tone.**
- **Body Type.**
- **Height.**
- **Voice.**

These features vary depending on the game. Technological development though has allowed the developers to include many options.



Figure 1: Baldur's Gate Character Generation menu (Larian Studios, 2023)

BALDUR'S GATE SERIES OVERVIEW

The Baldur's Gate game series is a significant milestone for the role-playing community, which changed the view of many games towards the Role-Playing Games, creating a legacy. The first two games are set in the famous Forgotten Realms (Faerun) universe. The series was introduced with Baldur's Gate (1998), developed by BioWare, and was followed by the famous Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn (2000) and its expansion Throne of Bhaal (2001). Both games introduce turn-based combat by implementing a pause system, when in combat, aligning with other games of the era such as the legendary Planescape: Torment, and allowing the players to form a party of distinct characters, with their background, dialogs and motivations. In 2012 the games were remastered with the release of an enhanced edition of the original games. The latest part of the series is Baldur's Gate 3 (2023), developed by Larian Studios and introduces the 5th Edition rules of Dungeons & Dragons, moving into the current era with an expansive world and complex meaningful dialogs, assisted by the evolution of the game technology and adapting to the contemporary trends.

Baldur's Gate (1998)

Baldur's Gate (BioWare, 1998; Keith et al., 1998) (BG) was released in December 1998 and it is the first part of the Baldur's Gate series. It is a computerized Role-Playing Game following the 2nd edition of *Dungeon and Dragons* rules (TSR, 1989), situated in the imaginary continent of Faerun. The player creates their character or selects from a set of pre-created characters. The main options of character creation are gender, race, class, alignment, abilities, skills, appearance, and name. Then, the players start the game as a standalone character or more commonly as part of a group of adventurers. The purpose of the game is to overcome opponents and traps in a heroic setting and finish the game.

Baldur's Gate 2: Shadows of Amn (2000)

Baldur's Gate 2: Shadows of Amn (BioWare, 2000; Mazurek, 2000) (BG2) is the second part of the Baldur's Gate series. Similarly to BG, Baldur's Gate 2 follows the 2nd edition of D&D rules within a heroic setting in the continent of Faerun. Follows the same options on character creations.

Baldur's Gate 3: (2023)

Baldur's Gate 3 (Larian Studios, 2023) is the latest part of the famous Baldur's Gate series. The game introduces the contemporary 5th edition rules of the *Dungeons & Dragons* (Wizards of the Coast, 2014) game set. The game is set one more time in the world of Faerun (Forgotten Realms). It offers the deep traditional narrative of the previous games, with complex, individual, and meaningful dialog, and the old tactical turn-based combat system (compatible with the D&D rules), like its predecessors. Players may control up to four characters, while they may even solo, with the option to select from pre-made characters or create their own unique parameterized character. The player's characters can be highly parameterized in the creation and beyond, allowing players to choose from a great variety of options such as their race, class, background, skills, overall appearance, name, and pronouns providing a highly personalized experience. Alternatively, the players can choose one of the default characters as their main character, each one unique with distinct motives, dialogues and background.

The game offers both Single-Player and Multiplayer modes. In Single-Player mode, players control the entire party and progress through the main campaign, making choices that affect the story's direction. Multiplayer mode allows players to join others in cooperative play, controlling different characters in the same party.

Baldur's Gate 3 combines classic RPG elements with modern technology to provide a richly detailed world, engaging storytelling, and dynamic character interactions. It offers deep customization options and supports diverse playstyles, setting a new standard in the RPG genre.

GENDER AND INCLUSIVITY REPRESENTATION IN BALDUR'S GATE GAMES

The three games of the Baldur's Gate series are discussed based on their Character Creation or character selection options Gender Stereotypical Representation and Inclusive Language.

Baldur's Gate

The original *Baldur's Gate* (Warnes, 2005) largely used neutral fantasy-language conventions, without overtly offensive language.

Character Stereotypical Representation

The player customization is simple, and the character can be either male or female. The player can then select an image of the character, from a collection based on the selected gender. It doesn't include elements like nonbinary pronouns or diverse identities. It is indicative that the Character Generation allows the user to select between two genders, male or female, even if this does not affect the statistics of the character. Some NPC interactions and character archetypes follow the stereotypical gender roles as they reflect common fantasy tropes from the 1990s. Even if the players select to pick a pre-created character, this character can be either male or female. The female characters appear with less clothing compared to their male counterparts, an element that contributes to the over-sexualization of women. The female characters appear with less clothing compared to their male counterparts, an element that contributes to the over-sexualization of women (Tabares, 2023), even if they wear the same armor as their male counterparts. This does not prevent the game from showing female characters as a heroic figure who can perform the same tasks as the male characters.

Inclusive Language

The game dialogues are rooted in the high-fantasy genre, based on the Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) lore. It uses a medieval-like tone with a mix of formal and colloquial expressions appropriate to its setting. The player character and party members are referred to in ways that align with binary pronouns ("he" or "she") and gender assumptions based on character creation choices. The romance options and interactions in the original Baldur's Gate use traditional gender roles (male or female).



Figure 2: Baldur's Gate Character Generation menu
(https://www.ign.com/wikis/baldurs-gate-enhanced-edition/Character_Creation)

Baldur's Gate 2: Shadows of Amn

Baldur's Gate 2 (Jørgensen, 2003) as its predecessor employs a neutral fantasy-language style, adhering to conventions that evoke a medieval setting. This approach is characterized by its use of archaic vocabulary, formalized sentence structures, and culturally neutral phrasing that aims to immerse players in a generalized medieval fantasy world.

Character Stereotypical Representation

Character Generation allows the user to select the Gender of the character between two options, male or female. There is no other difference between the two genders than their appearance in the game as in the original BG. Romantic relationships are limited to specific gender pairings. Male protagonists could romance female characters, while female protagonists could romance male characters. This approach reflects the difference between the two eras. The female protagonists continue to be represented with less clothing, even if they wear the same armor as the male characters.



Figure 3: Baldur's Gate 2: Shadows of Amn Character Generation menu (https://www.ign.com/wikis/baldurs-gate-enhanced-edition/Character_Creation)



Figure 4: Female Character Representation in BG2 (<https://www.reddit.com/>)

Inclusive Language

Like its predecessor, *Baldur's Gate 2* uses a neutral fantasy tone but also does not actively promote inclusivity. The pronouns follow strictly the binary stereotype based

on the character's chosen gender. BG 2 follows the norms of the original Baldur's Gate reflecting the norms of the era.

Baldur's Gate 3

Baldur's Gate 3 (Larian Studios, 2023) is built on the legacy of the early games while embracing modern RPG innovations and the norm of contemporary society. The game continues the series' tradition of deep storytelling and strategic combat, although the players can choose a more fluid combat system, based on the traditional turn-based mechanics based on Dungeons & Dragons 5th Edition rules (Larian Studios, 2023). The narrative features complex moral choices and a dynamic world, utilizing complex dialog and paths where player decisions have lasting consequences. Even the slightest differential can lead the game to a completely different outcome, making the game interesting even after multiple playthroughs. The game's language follows fantasy conventions, using rich dialogue and detailed character interactions, but its vibe moves close to our age.

Character Stereotypical Representation

Baldur's Gate 3 creates a very complex and innovative Gender system. The game allows the players to parameterize their character to a very high extent. The players are not obliged to select between two genders only, while this option is provided, but there is also the Non-Binary/Other option. By selecting this option for the players can parameterize the Appearance of their character to match their preferences, among other options. Additionally, after selecting one of the options the in-game dialogs are adjusted to match the choice of the player. This feature of Baldur's Gate 3 is a significant improvement over the older games of the BG series, as it validates the player's choices from their viewpoint and reflects these decisions through the reactions and perspectives of other characters.



Figure 5: BG3 Character Appearance (Larian Studios, 2023)

This innovation allows the players to select a character to resemble a specific gender or any other combination (Stanfill et al., 2024). The character's appearance

parameterization even allows the selection of the character's genitals, although they are not generally visible in the game.

The character's appearance provides a wide range of options:

- **Face Shape:** Adjusting the character's facial features (e.g., jaw, eyes, nose).
- **Hair:** Choosing the style, color, and length of hair.
- **Eyes:** Customizing eye color and style.
- **Skin Tone:** Selecting different skin colors.
- **Body Type:** Defining the body shape and size (e.g., muscular or slim).
- **Height:** Adjusting the character's height.
- **Voice:** Selecting a voice that matches the character's persona.
- **Additional Features:** Players can further adjust tattoos, scars, vitiligo, and other cosmetic features.
- **Genitalia:** The game also allows the customization of genitals, although these are generally not visible in gameplay.

In *Baldur's Gate 3*, female characters are presented with greater depth and diversity compared to earlier games in the series. Women in the game are shown as capable leaders, warriors, mages, and allies with their storylines and motivations. Women lead entire functions and possess important positions of power. The game includes a variety of female characters from different backgrounds, reflecting a broader commitment to diversity. Although the game is an improvement in female representation, some visual design choices, such as the over-sexualization of certain characters, still draw criticism (Larian Studios, 2023; Taylor, 2023).

A main character in *Baldur's Gate 3*, named Astarion has been described as gay, while the players can pursue romance with characters of all genders (Tomlinson, 2024). LGBTQi characters can be found in every location and community of the game, acting as protagonists and prominent personalities (Stanfill et al., 2024, May).

Inclusive Language

Baldur's Gate 3 represents a significant shift in video game inclusivity, setting a new threshold for character representation and player agency. Unlike its predecessors, the game actively moves away from the traditional binary gender framework that dominated earlier titles in the *Baldur's Gate* series. Instead of limiting players to male or female options, *Baldur's Gate 3* offers a different approach by allowing players to select a wide variety of pronouns, including gender-neutral and non-binary options and rich character parameterization to include any possible figure. This move demonstrates the game's commitment to reflecting the diverse identities of its player base.

One of the key features that promote inclusivity is the game's Dynamic Dialogue System, which adapts the in-game dialogues to pronouns chosen by the player during the player's avatar creation process. Non-playable characters (NPCs) acknowledge the player's character using the chosen pronouns, creating a more personalized interaction adjusted to the preferences of the player. Comparing this feature to the

older games of the BG series, the older games prohibited the player who identified outside of the binary gender norms from fully experiencing the game.

Moreover, the game's character customization system extends beyond gender, allowing the players to deviate from the appearance backstory of their characters that derive from the stereotypical roles or aesthetics. Players can select physical features, body types, and voices that align with their preferred identity, offering a more personalized role-playing experience. Inclusivity extends to romantic and social dynamics within the game. Characters of all genders and orientations can form relationships. These options follow them to the narrative, making diverse identities an integral part of the story.

Adopting these elements, Baldur's Gate 3 not only advances the representation of marginalized groups but also promotes a broader cultural shift within the gaming community towards inclusivity. The game's design emphasizes that diversity in gaming is not just a matter of adding new features but a holistic approach to creating a more inclusive and respectful environment for all players, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, or identity (Larian Studios, 2023).

RESULTS

After playing, creating characters, and studying other papers on the three Baldur's Gate games, Table. 1 was created. This table represents the results of research in a more organized manner and reflects the evolution of computer games concerning Traditional Gender Representation and Inclusivity.

The comparison of Baldur's Gate 1 (BG1), Baldur's Gate 2 (BG2), and Baldur's Gate 3 (BG3) reveals a significant evolution in both gender representation and inclusivity representation across the series.

BG1 and BG2 have many similarities, as both games share the 2nd edition of Dungeons & Dragons rules and offer traditional character creation. Both games allow the users to select only between the stereotypical male vs female options. These early games follow the typical fantasy language conventions, with some stereotypical gender roles present in character designs and interactions. Female characters are often depicted with more revealing clothing, contributing to the hyper-sexualization of women, though that does not exclude them from being powerful and heroic figures. The use of binary pronouns and gendered interactions reflects the norms of the late 1990s and early 2000s, with little to no space for non-binary or diverse gender identities (Lynch et al., 2024).

BG3 is developed by Larian Studios and is based on the modern 5th edition of Dungeons & Dragons rules, marking a shift from the BG1 and BG2 conventions. The game offers a broad range of character parameterization, allowing the players to create characters without a predefined gender. Unlike its predecessors, BG3 provides options for non-binary and gender-neutral people, inheriting the contemporary commitment to inclusivity in works of art. The character creation system also includes detailed adjustments to physical appearance, body types, voices, and even genitals, offering players a high degree of modification in defining their avatars. Moreover, BG3

incorporates dynamic complex and unique, in some cases, dialogue that adapts to the player's selected pronouns, ensuring a more personalized and inclusive experience compared with the binary pronoun usage in the earlier games of the series.

Under the prism of narrative and character representation, BG3 improves the depth and diversity of female characters, portraying them as capable leaders and warriors with their storylines and motivations, and not just peripheral and second grade individuals. The game also allows far greater inclusivity in romance, with characters of all genders and sexual orientations to form relationships, making diversity not just a cosmetic feature but an integral part of the game.

While BG1 and BG2 are products of their time, following the conventions of the 1990s and early 2000s, BG3 sets a new benchmark for inclusivity and character representation in the RPG genre. BG3 offers a much broader range of identities and choices for players, covering most options. This shift in narrative and design shows how the cultural change of our society reflects in the gaming industry, allowing a step towards greater inclusivity and personalization in RPG games to come.

	Traditional Gender Roles	Women Oversexualization	Appearance Parameterization	Inclusive Language	Gender Neutral Phrases
Baldur's Gate	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Baldur's Gate 2: Shadows of Amn	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Baldur's Gate 3	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

TABLE 1: BALDUR'S GATE GAME COMPARISON TABLE

DISCUSSION

The comparison of *Baldur's Gate* and *Baldur's Gate 2* in gender representation and inclusivity finds no significant differences between the two games and will be discussed and compared as one. Both games follow a binary approach to gender representation, requiring the player to choose between male and female options when creating a new character. These traditional gender roles, with no acknowledgment of non-binary or gender-neutral identities, prevent the selection of more diverse gender options. Moreover, neither game offers character customization beyond this basic selection. Therefore, the players cannot parameterize their character's gender appearance based on more diverse options. The earlier *Baldur's Gate* games did not offer character customization beyond a basic binary selection, which was partly due to the technical limitations of their time (the late 90s and early 2000s), constraining the developers in terms of memory and graphical capabilities.

However, *Baldur's Gate 3* leverages contemporary gaming technology to provide a detailed character creation system, allowing players to craft avatars that align with their identity and preferences, while allowing greater flexibility in defining a character's gender identity. This includes a variety of body types, voice options, and facial features that are not explicitly tied to gender norms, providing players with a more immersive and personalized experience (Bowman & Schrier, 2018). The players can customize their character's appearance and gender expression independently, and the game supports the use of non-binary pronouns, catering to a wider range of identities. Apart from their avatars' appearance, the players can customize their pronouns, even during the game, if they visit a magic mirror, available to their camp. This option provides insights into how diverse customization options enhance player immersion, self-expression, and satisfaction, particularly for marginalized groups (McKenna et al., 2024; Li et al., 2013). This level of inclusivity reflects modern values and an understanding of the diverse audiences that play role-playing games.

However, while these limitations may explain this binary approach, they also highlight how these games followed the dual gender approach as a trend of that age (Bowman & Schrier, 2018). A characteristic approach between BG1 and BG2 to BG3 is the representation of the Drow Elf Priestess of Lolth, Viconia. In the first two games, Viconia is represented as hyper-sexualized seeking only sexual contact with the players. On the contrary, Shadowheart, a Half-Elf Priestess of Shar is depicted as a more nuanced and deep character. This difference reveals how the portrayal of women in the *Baldur's Gate* series reflects and responds to changing societal norms and expectations in media and gaming (Lynch et al., 2024; Gestos et al., 2018). This includes a variety of body types, voice options, and facial features that are not explicitly tied to gender norms, providing players with a more immersive and personalized experience.

The latter approaches in gender representation are reflected in BG1 and BG2 as products of 1990s societal norms and industry trends vs. BG3 2020s inclusivity priorities, highlighting how evolving cultural attitudes and industry practices have influenced the inclusivity and diversity seen in *Baldur's Gate III* (Heldman et al., 2016; Prescott & Bogg, 2011).

The language used, in the first two games, is far from inclusive. That kind of language mainly relies on the stereotypical binary pronouns –he and she– attributed to the traditional male and female genders assigned to the player's chosen character. This approach excludes non-binary, genderqueer, or gender-fluid identities, and provides representation to players who do not self-identify according to the traditional gender roles - binary. Such choices followed outdated norms and missed an opportunity to move towards more progressive, inclusive language that could appeal to a broader audience. Additionally, such design shows how inclusive language and non-binary pronouns improve narrative immersion and demonstrate respect for player identities, fostering inclusivity (Stefani, 2022; Stanfill et al., 2024). On the contrary, *Baldur's Gate 3* takes steps to address this limitation by supporting non-binary pronouns and incorporating more inclusive dialogues while accommodating to diverse identities (Larian Studios, 2022).

A crucial comparison between *Baldur's Gate* and *Baldur's Gate 2* with *Baldur's Gate 3* in terms of inclusivity is the absence or presence of the LGBTQi character. In the first two titles, the absence of LGBTQi characters is apparent. All characters follow the traditional binary appearance and representation of either straight man or woman, ignoring LGBTQi or binary representations. On the other hand, BG3 includes multiple characters, represented as openly gay, lesbian, queer, or with other identities. Moreover, one of the Origin (main playable characters or companions) of the game the Vampire Spawn, Astarion, is depicted as openly gay, a fact that identifies the progression in LGBTQi representation, showing how *Baldur's Gate III* sets a standard for integrating diverse sexual orientations and identities into game storytelling (Kilzer, 2022).

This shift highlights a broader trend in the gaming industry toward embracing diversity and representation. While *Baldur's Gate* and *Baldur's Gate 2* reflect the norms of their era, *Baldur's Gate 3* demonstrates how the franchise has adapted to contemporary expectations, offering a more inclusive and welcoming experience for all players.

Table 2. in APPENDIX A, summarizes the evolution of the *Baldur's Gate* series as an industry trend and milestone in Female and LGBTQi Representation and Inclusivity.

CONCLUSION & FUTURE WORK

The evolution of the *Baldur's Gate* series regarding Women and LGBTQi representation and Inclusivity is apparent from the first steps in the new *BG3* game.

The role of women has been important and prominent in *Baldur's Gate 3*. Women are leaders and special members of their communities and can be adventurers and heroes. While traces of women's over-sexualization exist, there is a significant improvement in suppressing this phenomenon. More steps can be taken in this direction by changing in-game women's representation, adjusting the appearance of clothing/armor to match all male-female-non-binary/other, and avoiding dialogues that present women as naïve.

Baldur's Gate 3 sets a milestone by including multiple openly LGBTQi characters as main game characters (Origin) and using inclusive language. LGBTQ characters can be openly gay and accepted throughout the entire game universe. The introduction of an openly gay playable default character moves in the right direction, as recent studies explore how inclusive features in games positively affect players' self-perception, identity validation, and overall emotional well-being, particularly among LGBTQ+ players (McKenna et al, 2024; Wohn, 2011). By examining overlaps of gender, race, and class, *Baldur's Gate III* advances representation by portraying complex and intersectional identities that resonate with broader societal diversity (Reza et al., 2022).

The next step could be the introduction of an openly gay lesbian playable character or an additional diverse character like Karlach (Kilzer, 2022). Another innovation of *BG3* is the broad range of parameterization of the characters, allowing the players to create a character that matches them. The language can be characterized as inclusive, with gender-neutral pronouns and phrases.

Deepening the research in this field, quantitative and qualitative research based on players' input could provide us with valuable results, assessing the impact of female and LGBTQi representation and inclusive language on players. The next step of this research could include and assess more games from different genres and vendors, such as the comparison of the BG III game, as a benchmark for inclusivity in RPGs, with the most recent Dragon Age game (Dragon Age: Veilguard) and/or other games. This approach will encourage industry-wide adoption of similar practices (Passmore & Mandryk, 2018; Kondrat, 2015).

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APPENDIX A

id	Direction	Focus	Method	Example from BG	Outcome	Related Studies
1	Historical Analysis of Gender Roles	Shifts in female character roles and stereotypes.	Comparative content analysis	Hypersexualized Viconia (BG1) vs. nuanced Shadowheart (BG3)	Reveals how the portrayal of women in the Baldur's Gate series reflects and responds to changing societal norms and expectations in media and gaming.	(Lynch et al.,2024; Gestos et al.,018)
2	Impact of Technological Advancements	How tech-enabled inclusivity.	Technological and design analysis	Limited presets in BG1/BG2 vs. detailed customization in BG3	Demonstrates how advancements in game development technology have supported broader and more detailed inclusivity efforts in gaming narratives.	(Bowman & Schrier, 2018).
3	Player Agency and Representation	The connection between customization and inclusivity.	Player surveys and interviews	Customizable pronouns in BG3	Provides insights into how diverse customization options enhance player immersion, self-expression, and satisfaction, particularly for marginalized groups.	(McKenna et al., 2024; Li et al., 2013).
4	Comparative Study of LGBTQ+ Representation	Changes in LGBTQ+ character inclusion and narratives.	Narrative and character analysis	Absence of LGBTQ+ in BG1/BG2 vs. Astarion in BG3	Identifies progression in LGBTQ+ representation, showing how Baldur's Gate III sets a standard for integrating diverse sexual orientations and identities into game storytelling.	(Kilzer, 2022)
5	Cultural and Industry Influence	Societal and industry trends shaping game	Literature review and industry interviews	BG1 as a product of 1990s norms vs. BG3 reflecting 2020s	Highlights how evolving cultural attitudes and industry practices have influenced the inclusivity and diversity seen in Baldur's	(Heldman et al. 2016; Prescott & Bogg, 2011)

		content.		inclusivity priorities	Gate III.	
6	Language and Inclusivity	Evolution of dialogue systems and pronouns.	Dialogue content analysis	Binary pronouns in BG1/BG2 vs. dynamic pronouns in BG3	Shows how inclusive language and non-binary pronouns improve narrative immersion and demonstrate respect for player identities, fostering inclusivity.	(Stefani, 2022; Stanfill et al., 2024)
7	Impact on Player Identity and Well-Being	Effects of inclusivity on player experience.	Psychological impact studies (e.g., surveys)	Players exploring identity through BG3's customization tools	Explores how inclusive features in games positively affect players' self-perception, identity validation, and overall emotional well-being, particularly among LGBTQ+ players.	(McKenna et al., 2024; Wohn, 2011).
8	Industry Benchmark Analysis	BG3's influence on contemporary RPGs.	Cross-title comparative analysis	BG3 compared to Dragon Age or The Last of Us	Positions Baldur's Gate III as a benchmark for inclusivity in RPGs, encouraging industry-wide adoption of similar practices.	(Passmore & Mandryk, 2018; Kondrat, 2015)
9	Intersectionality in Representation	Examining overlaps of gender, race, and class.	Intersectional content analysis	Diverse backgrounds in BG3 characters like Karlach	Highlights how Baldur's Gate III advances representation by portraying complex and intersectional identities that resonate with broader societal diversity.	(Reza, 2022; Kilzer, 2022).
10	Player Reception and Community Dynamics	How inclusivity affects community engagement.	Social media and forum analysis	Community feedback on BG3's romance options	Explores how inclusive design fosters diverse and engaged communities, while also analyzing potential challenges in community discourse around representation.	(Tomlinson, 2024; Wohn et al., 2011)

Table 2: A summary of the evolution of the Baldur's Gate series as an industry trend and milestone in Female and LGBTQi Representation and Inclusivity