

Decentralising Queer Game Studies: The British Situation

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Following the emergence of queer game studies as a field in its own right, we argue that it stands to benefit from a more regionally specific approach than has typically been seen up to this point. We firstly provide an overview of the reasons behind expanding queer game studies to include matters of regionality and secondly, we present the case study of the UK in relation to queer games and games studies.

We begin by summarising early and key moments in the development of queer game studies, moving into the present where we see a proliferation of work within the field in academia, public debate, and production, with an increasing diversity of concerns and questions. We then move on to talk about regionality in game studies, providing an overview of the British context and making a case for the importance of disrupting its conflation with the North American context. Here, we lay out the specifics of the British context and what this lends to the experience of making, playing and researching games, and queerness in games in particular. This paper will be of interest to those engaged in queer game studies, with a focus on regionally mediated pleasures and complexities in queer play and games research.

In recent years, there has been a steady increase in research at the intersection of games and queerness, echoing the increase in LGBTQIA+ representation within games, and the challenges that increased representation brings within game cultures. Developing from a general research sensibility, into an established field, queer game studies centres the emergence of queer subjectivities in games (Ruberg 2019), expanding beyond representations of LGBTQIA+ identities (Chang 2017), and exploring games and play through the lens of queer theoretical frameworks and embodied experiences (Harper et al. 2018; Pelurson 2023; Ruberg and Shaw 2017).

At the same time, recent developments in the field of game studies have highlighted the relevance of regionality and locality in the experience and culture of video games as well as their research (Liboriussen et al. 2016; Švelch 2018). This paper applies

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theoretical frameworks of regionality to queer game studies, looking at the British context, which in itself has considerably grown in the last two decades, as shown by Wolf (2015), Crawford, McCallum-Stewart and Ruffino (2018), and Webber (2020), and in which our own experience as queer researchers and players is situated.

To contextualise the relationship between the situated experience of the UK context and queer games studies, we focus on two specific moments in queer British life, which have conditioned the experiences of queer players and designers based in Britain. We begin by reflecting on the 1988-2003 Section 28 legislation, which prohibited local governmental bodies from ‘promoting homosexuality by teaching or by publishing material’ (Iglkowski-Broad 2025.), considering its intellectual and cultural impact (Freshwater 2009) and legacy (Gaian 2023; Glass 2022). We then follow this thread into contemporary attitudes towards queer and gender diverse identities in Britain (Pearce et al. 2020), with a view towards the qualities and strategies that characterise the British anti-gender movement, which are mobilised towards the curtailment of queer articulation and social participation (Butler 2025). In so doing, we establish the character of our environment of play, historically, politically and legislatively, laying the groundwork for our own reflexive exploration of this space as queer game scholars based in UK.

Having broadly established the character of the British queer environment and its barriers, we ask each other where we sit within this context, what pleasures and challenges we find in moments of queer play and queer games research, and reflect on where this sits in relation to a field of study that is centred within North American urban locales.

This paper foregrounds the opportunities and complexities of applying theoretical frameworks of regionality to queer game studies. Although we focus on the British context, we make a case for a broader move to highlight regional specifics in queer game studies globally. In doing so, we believe that this delivers critical and strategic value, both broadening the voices represented by the field, beyond dominant North American-centric approaches, and offering further opportunities to respond effectively to local challenges, given current rapid changes in the political circumstances and public debates around queer identities.

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