Heroic diversity

A study on cultural diversity of the heroes cast of the video game Overwatch

Bachelor thesis (version 2)

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Abstract

Battling over objectives and taking down other teams is your goal when you participate in a 6-vs-6 player match in the video game *Overwatch*. It transpires on a so-called 'near-future Earth' and was released on May 24, 2016 by the game studio Blizzard Entertainment. The video game has received appraisal on its effort to portray diverse forms of representation in the 'Heroes' cast, the group of playable characters of the game. However, some critics have also argued that these 'forms of diversity' may need to be because its diversity is not real. In this thesis the argument is posed that the current understanding of cultural diversity within video games with the accompanying available research, does not cover what cultural diversity really is from a diversity studies perspective. Therefore, this study took this perspective into account. Moreover, the philosopher Slavoj Žižek provided a lens in order to critically compare the cultural diversity in *Overwatch* to what real cultural diversity entails. A video game could be seen as a conversational object within broad societal issues, therefore this thesis was conducted through a critical discourse analysis. From this analysis it appeared that the question of if there is real diversity present, seems to depend on how you look at the game. When one puts the focus on the lore and background stories of the heroes of *Overwatch*, the game appears to be quite culturally diverse. However, when one takes a look at how much of this comes back in the game itself, when a player plays with a character, the cultural diversity happens to not be so apparent.

Introduction: Heroic diversity

"Battle over objectives, take down the other team, and achieve victory"
('Playoverwatch.com' n.d.).

Battling over objectives and taking down other teams is your goal when you participate in a 6-vs-6 player match in the video game *Overwatch*. It transpires on a so-called 'near-future Earth' (Peckham 2016) and was released on May 24, 2016 by the game studio Blizzard Entertainment. The video game is currently played by more than 40 million players worldwide (Statista, 2019)[1]. *Overwatch* has received appraisal on its effort to portray diverse forms of representation in the 'Heroes' cast, the group of playable characters of the game (Cullen et al. 2018).

Since January 2018, *Overwatch* features 26[2] hero options in the game, which represent a variety of nationalities, ethnicities, ages, sexualities, and abilities (Villarreal 2017). According to *Ceros* (n.d.) the official game mascot, a hero name Tracer, is a "cheeky British Lesbian", who is supported by heroes with other 'diverse' traits like Symmetra[3] and Pharah[4]. Ceros (n.d.) also states the video game is hereby revolutionary: "[...] of the 28[5] heroes, 13 are women, six are from Asian countries, four are from Africa, one is from Mexico, and one is from Brazil. And almost all of the *Overwatch* voice actors are the same ethnicities as the characters they play".

However, some critics have also argued that these 'forms of diversity' may need to be scrutinized because they are not forms of 'real diversity'. According to Juan Belmonte (2017) the game is doing a bad job at reflecting on "ethnicity as well as national - and international - relations" (Belmonte 2017, 2). So, the question that rises is, how diverse is this game really? Philosopher and cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek argues that cultural diversity we see nowadays, might not be the real deal (n.d.). He states that on today's markets, we find more and more products which have been deprived of their real substance, like decaffeinated coffee for example (n.d.)[6]. I am interested to see if Overwatch portrays a type of popular cultural diversity, or that the game is not that diverse. Therefore, I have formulated the following research question to research in a bachelor thesis:

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[1] This data was accessed in March 2019.
[2] According to the official Overwatch website, in June 2019 there are 31 heroes. However, this was not already the case when the Villareal (2017) article came out, therefore they still mention 26 heroes.
[3] Autistic
[4] Mixed-race woman
[5] According to the official Overwatch website, in June 2019 there are 31 heroes. However, this was not already the case when the Ceros (n.d.) article came out, therefore they still mention 28 heroes.
[6] Also see paragraph 1.3

Is there cultural diversity presented in the video game Overwatch and if so, how and in what way is this form of cultural diversity 'real'?

To answer this question, I have formulated the following sub questions:
- How is cultural diversity defined by the video game discourse and the diversity studies discourse?
- How is cultural diversity integrated in the videogame?
- How is the cultural diversity in the game perceived by the players?
- Can we identify real diversity within the discourse and the corpus, surrounding the *Overwatch* heroes?

Quite some research on the topic of diversity in video games has already been undertaken by various authors[7]. I argue that previous studies on cultural diversity fall short when it comes to defining cultural diversity itself. In this thesis, I will draw upon definitions of this concept by the very place they originate from, diversity studies. As was briefly mentioned before, theorist Slavoy Zizek will play a role in creating this perspective as well, because of his work on what real cultural diversity entails. I will use his ideas in order to critically compare the cultural diversity in *Overwatch* to what real cultural diversity entails. By studying *Overwatch* with a different perspective in mind, this thesis will be contributing to the discourse on cultural diversity and videogames.

Adrienne Shaw mentions in the book, *Rainbow Arcade*, that even though LGBTQIA[8] people were a part of the game world since the beginning, this fact is currently still taken in with surprise and also hate from the mainstream gaming culture (2019, 10). I am therefore interested in how a culturally diverse minded community, looks at the diversity in Overwatch. Therefore, I am going to research *Overwatch* with a critical discourse analysis methodology. I will use the method as described by Norman Fairclough (2001). His three-dimensional model provides a framework for conducting a CDA. It promotes "the principle that texts can never be understood or analyzed in isolation – they can only be understood in relation to webs of other texts and in relation to the social context" (Jorgensen and Philips 2002, 70). This notion fits into this research perfectly, I will research a discourse around the *Overwatch* heroes, without letting their background as a text out of sight. Because when one looks into diversity within the video game, which is societal occurrence, one should also take the discourse and

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[7] Dmitri Williams et al. (2009) on representations of gender, race and age in video games. Xeniya Kondrat (2015), and Adrienne Shaw (2014) both studied the female gender and sexuality in video games, whereas Shaw also looked at cultural production and GLBT content in video games

[8] This is the abbreviation Shaw uses, it means: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer, Intersex and Asexual

the social context around the game and cultural diversity, into consideration. The corpus consists of the *Overwatch* heroes' abilities, background stories and looks, because the heroes cast of *Overwatch* is where possible cultural diversity lies.

This research consists of four chapters. The first chapter defines this research with a theoretical framework. This chapter is meant to provide the reader with the lens through which this study was conducted. It also functions as a guide into the terms used in this research. Chapter two, 'Critical discourse analysis' is where I explain the method I used and how the corpus was delineated. Thirdly, chapter three is the analysis, according to the steps of the critical discourse method as elaborated upon in the previous chapter. Lastly, chapter four is where this research is concluded and discussed.

1: Cultural diversity

In order to pose a framework for this research, various sources were gathered to define the used terminology and to delineate what this research is about. As mentioned in the introduction, I pose the argument that the current understanding of cultural diversity within video games falls short (1.1). Therefore, I looked into cultural diversity from a different perspective, namely that of diversity studies (1.2). Moreover, Slavoj Žižek and his 'decaffeinato' concept will be explained (1.3) in order to critically compare the cultural diversity in *Overwatch* to what real cultural diversity entails[9].

1.1 Cultural diversity in game research

The research database on cultural diversity in video games is quite rich. A study conducted in 1998 on female gender in video games found that they were often portrayed as damsels in distress (Dietz). Research by Beasley and Standley (2002) came to a comparable result when they found out that only few games included women. Furthermore, the female characters that were present, tended to portray a form of sexualization through their (lack of) clothing. Cullen, Ringwood and Wolf (2018), looked into disability in *Overwatch* characters. Kondrat (2014) focused her research on current representation of female gender in video games and also how the females are represented. In 2009, Williams et al. conducted a large-scale character content analysis. The results of this research showed a concurrent over-representation of white, adult males, and a forthcoming under-representation of the female gender, people of Hispanic or Native American background, children and elderly (815). And there is a lot more research on this subject available.

However, all these studies frequently leave out a definition of what diversity as a term actually entails, they just looked at it from a video games perspective. Like Dietz (1998), she focuses mostly on the process of socialization and representation, if people do not see enough female characters, they can also not identify with them. The word diversity is not mentioned once in her study. Beasley and Standley (2002, 279) focus mostly on the notion that video games should be viewed as "sources of information that children and young adults may use to determine what behaviors and attitudes are considered appropriately masculine and feminine". Cullen, Ringwood and Wolf (2018) also focus on the way representation can

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[9] Also see paragraph 3.3

influence adolescent's behavior. They wield the notion of Flanagan & Nissenbaum (2014) that "video games reflect the cultural values that influence their creation; these values then influence perceptions on what is normal and acceptable in a social context". Kondrat (2014) researches her corpus with a perspective of gender studies. But they all do not define cultural diversity itself.

An important other author on the field of video games and diversity is Adrienne Shaw. She argues that research on gender and diversity in video games has focused on the binary categories like either man or woman (2014, 15). And they also frame their research based on the notion that a lesbian community obviously wants lesbian characters in video games (Shaw 2014, 15). What she seeks to do, is to deconstruct the relationship between the game's audience and the game's texts, which is according to Shaw, "a relationship that has enabled discourses about representation in games to focus on restricted and pluralized versions of diversity" (2014, 17). She goes on quoting more authors on this subject, stating that a lack of recognition is indicative, and it aids in repeating social disparity. Class differences are often overlooked in studies that put the focus on the representation of marginalized groups. Shaw argues that much work on representation in video games, only exacerbates inequality (2014, 149). "True recognition of diversity, understanding what that means, could impact redistribution in fundamental ways" (2014, 150), according to Shaw.

There have also been quite a number of content analysis studies on cultural diversity in video games which also mostly focused on gender, race and sexuality. Mike Schmierbach questions these studies and makes a case for their significant limitations (2009, 149). He argues that many important questions have gone unanswered by these scholars, because they almost exclusively put their focus on violence and gender (Schmierbach 2009, 149). In agreement with Schmierbach, I argue that we need to look at cultural diversity in video games from a perspective of its origin, diversity studies. Circling back to Shaw: the discourse about representation needs to be transformed, and not just "the representation of particular groups in game texts" (Shaw 2014, 15). My aim with this research is to do this just so.

1.2 Cultural diversity from the diversity studies perspective

So, if we want to look at *Overwatch* with a diversity studies perspective on cultural diversity in media, the book by Eugenia Siapera *Cultural Diversity and Global Media: The Mediation of Difference* (2010) plays an important role. Her book focuses on cultural diversity in media. Even though she does not mention video games in particular, she does provide a definition

for cultural diversity within the field of media studies: "By the term cultural diversity we understand the sum of the various kinds of difference – ethnic, "racial," cultural, including their intersections or co-articulations with gender and sexuality, and also the debates, controversies, and conflicts, as well as the conviviality, warmth, and solidarity, associated with these" (Siapera 2010, 7). She also argues that we construct our cultural identities in and through the media. She makes use of the example of face-to-face encounters because they nowadays take place in a media-saturated world (Siapera 2010, 7).

I will combine the work of Siapera, and Shaw and I will look into all the aspects of cultural diversity mentioned by them, namely gender, race and sexuality. It is worth mentioning that I will look into these factors, with the minority in mind. Several studies have shown that female characters appear less frequently as male characters (Braun & Giroux 1989; Dietz 1998). When it comes to sexuality, the focus lies on non-heterosexual characters. And when it comes to race, the study by Williams et al. (2009, 815) pointed out the under-representation of several 'categories' like Hispanic, Native-American, elderly and children. So, the latter mentioned under represented categories, are the ones that will be useful to defining this research. In what way however is the cultural diversity in *Overwatch* real?

1.3 Real cultural diversity

As mentioned before, Slavoj Žižek plays a role in defining the lens through which we look at cultural diversity in this thesis. He argues that multiculturalism is a logical consequence of multinational capitalism. Because the last-mentioned term relies on the shallow acceptance of 'difference'. He argues that multiculturalism is a type of racism because it originated from "a distant respect for other cultures" (Žižek 1997, cited in Siapera 2010, 3). According to Žižek, the proper 'left' response to this phenomenon, is to reject the politicization of difference. Difference is not something that should be embedded by superficial acceptance, but it must stand up against control and subjugation (Žižek 1997, cited in Siapera 2010, 3). His work will come in helpful when looking into what (real) cultural diversity is because he describes it as following:

On today's market, we find a whole series of products deprived of their malignant property: coffee without caffeine, cream without fat, beer without alcohol. [...] Virtual Reality simply generalizes this procedure of offering a product deprived of its substance: it provides reality itself deprived of its substance - in the same way decaffeinated coffee smells and tastes

like the real coffee without being the real one, Virtual Reality is experienced as reality without being one (Žižek n.d.).

I use this concept as a lens in order to really get to the bottom of the realness of the cultural diversity in *Overwatch*. So, this chapter functions as a framework for the terms and definitions used in this research and explains my argument. Moreover, this chapter provides a philosophical lens provided by Žižek, in order to define the realness of the diversity in *Overwatch*.

2: Critical discourse analysis

In this chapter, I will explain the critical discourse analysis (CDA) methodology that was used for this research. After a global overview of what a CDA entails, I will explain the corpus (2.1), and the three different dimensions of the method (2.2), namely the textual analysis (2.2.1), the discursive practice aspect (2.2.2) and lastly the social practice (2.2.3).

2.1 The Corpus

I will look into the heroes' abilities, background stories and looks, because the heroes cast of *Overwatch* is where possible cultural diversity lies. In order to gather this material, I will use the main heroes' website of *Overwatch*[10]. This website features the above-mentioned aspects. So, as mentioned before in 1.2, I will wield three factors in order to determine cultural diversity, race, gender and sexuality. To create a mapped-out corpus that functions as a case study for this, I will study three of the heroes of the videogame. *Overwatch* heroes consist of three categories, offense heroes[11], defense heroes[12] and healers[13]. I will look at one hero from each category in order to compare the heroes to each other within their categories but also to create a firm corpus to base this research on. I randomly selected these three heroes[14].

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[10] URL: https://playoverwatch.com/en-us/heroes/
[11] Also referred to as 'Damage' heroes
[12] Also referred to as 'Tank' heroes
[13] Also referred to as 'Support' heroes
[14] An important note here is that I do not look into the gameplay with these heroes, but solely into the discourse around them and their context on the above-mentioned website. This in order to create a well-defined corpus.

2.2 The three dimensions of CDA

Fairclough's model on CDA (2001) consists of three communicative dimensions, as shown below in image 1.

According to Fairclough (2001), the analysis should focus on (1) the text (text), (2) processes relating to the production and consumption of the text (discursive practice); and (3) the wider social practice to which the communicative event belongs (social practice) (2001). In my research this translates to firstly an analysis of the videogame and of three heroes of the video game *Overwatch*. I will undertake this textual analysis by using the game analysis method coined by scholar Clara Fernandez-Vara (2014). The second part consists of an analysis of the *Overwatch* forum on the diversity discussion featuring the selection of heroes that was defined in the first dimension. Lastly, part three focused on the wider social practice around cultural diversity in video games, relating to diversity in society and the 'realness' of the diversity in *Overwatch*.
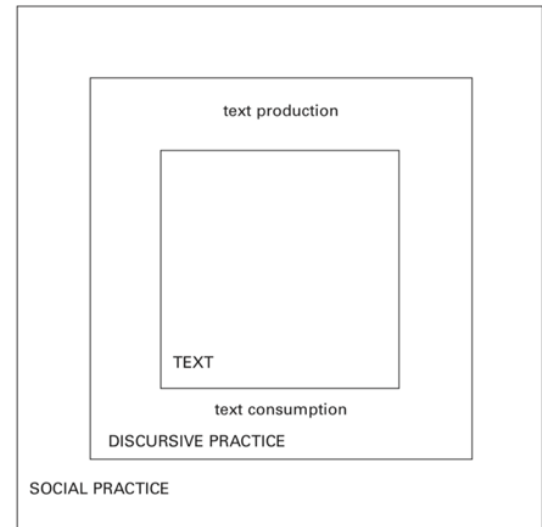
Image 1: The critical discourse analysis model

Source: Jorgensen and Philips (2002, 70)

2.2.1 The text

In order to research the textual aspect of *Overwatch*, I will undertake a textual analysis by using the game analysis method coined by scholar Clara Fernandez-Vara (2014). She formulated three areas within the field of game analysis, which all consists of a series of building blocks. The goal of her approach to game analysis is to focus less on 'making value judgements' but more on studying their meaning or how we make sense of them (Fernandez-Vara 2014, 11). I will not look at the formal aspects of the game because according to Fernandez-Vara (2014) formal elements help describe the game in detail, whereas I focus on the representation of heroes within the game and an overview of the game itself. So, I will use blocks from the context and the overview area in order to describe the heroes (Fernandez-Vara 2014). When one undertakes a game analysis, they should view these building blocks as "plastic bricks that one assembles to construct the analysis—depending on what the analysis is for, the writer will use some pieces instead of others" (Fernandez-Vara 2014, 13). The blocks that will be used from the context area are:

- Context inside the game
- Production team
- Socio-historical context
- Audience
- Relations to other media

The building blocks that will be used from the overview area are:
- Number of players
- Fictional world of the game
- Story
- Gameplay experience

In the analysis, the blocks with the most important outcomes to this research, will be adopted. The others will be placed in the appendix for further reference.

2.2.2 The discursive practice

As mentioned before, the second layer of a CDA is the discursive practice concerning a text. This will consist of an analysis of the *Overwatch* forum[15], filtered on results about cultural diversity and will therefore function as the discourse amongst fans. I will only look into three threads in which the discourse focusses on cultural diversity because I am interested in how diversity minded people perceive the heroes of the corpus. This is interesting for this thesis because people who are contributing to these threads are most probably open towards diverse possibilities and they might give some very insightful feedback in how diverse *Overwatch* really is. Whereas when we would look at random forum results, we might not get this specific feedback at all because it would come from players who are not as interested in the diversity of the character they are playing with.

I will solely select posts that have something to say about the three corpus characters and their cultural diversity, like the skin tone, contemplations if a character is gay etcetera. Posts which have nothing to do with the subject of this thesis are not taken into consideration and in order to guarantee relevant results, only posts from the year 2019 will be adopted. I will search for the three heroes of the corpus and I will identify and color-code key themes that circle back continuously amongst the forum users.[16].

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[15] Source: https://us.forums.blizzard.com/en/overwatch
[16] In order to guarantee anonymity of the forum users, their usernames were left out of the analysis

2.2.3 The social practice

In this part I will also compare the possible cultural diversity found within *Overwatch* with the discourse on cultural diversity outside of the game. Furthermore, I will then compare the textual analysis results and the established discursive practices, with the social practice around cultural diversity, to reflect upon to what extent cultural diversity is represented in the *Overwatch* heroes cast. Because, as was established in the theoretical framework of this thesis, I want to look at cultural diversity in video games from its original perspective[17].

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[17] According to Sybille Lammes, reflexivity should always be featured in video game research. She looks into the work of Aarseth in order to discuss what reflexivity in video games is about. According to Aarseth, reflexivity is indispensable as a tool to the researcher. It is a observational modus operandi, in which the position of the researcher himself, is always taken into consideration (Aarseth 2003, cited in Lammes 2007, 28). Lammes goes on, stating that reflexivity is a methodological instrument, where we can play the game without losing touch with our inner objective academic (Lammes 2007). Lammes focuses on playing the video game, however in this research, I will expand this also to my corpus. Even though I look into more peripheral matters surrounding Overwatch, like the forum, I argue it is still important to be aware of my bias as researcher.

3: Analysis

In this chapter I will analyze the corpus through a CDA. In paragraph 3.1 I go into the first dimension of CDA, namely the text. In 3.2, I go into the discursive practice surrounding the *Overwatch* video game and in paragraph 3.3 the social context of the video game, pivoted with cultural diversity, will play the central role. After this chapter, it will have become clear what the answers are to the posed sub questions and we will be able to conclude this research in chapter 4.

3.1 Defining *Overwatch*

So, as mentioned before in chapter 2, I will undertake the first CDA dimension with the help of several building blocks coined by Fernandez-Vara (2014)[18]. In this paragraph I briefly touch upon the most important conclusions from this game analysis and its accompanying building blocks[19].

Fictional world of the game

According to Fernandez-Vara (2014, 104), the fictional world is "the imagined world in which the actions and events of a game take place". We want to identify this fictional world because it can help establish connections, with other games or other media for example, because they could be part of the whole context. And Fernandez-Vara argues that if one covers the fictional world of the game, one can "identify the theme of the game, what happens in the world, and what conventions and stories the world may evoke in the player" (2014, 104). Firstly, *Overwatch* takes places on earth, in the future however. It is a world with 21 different maps[20], which sometimes are designed to look like real places on earth (Overwatchwiki n.d.). There is a map called Paris for example, which looks like the real Parisian city; it even has the Eiffel Tower in it. These maps all support different game modes, like escort[21] for example. Then there is the assault[22], the control[23] and the hybrid[24]

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[18] The building blocks were not adapted in the same order as they were mentioned in paragraph 2.2.1 of this thesis because this sortation felt more logical for the reader because of terminology used

[19] The extended analysis of the other blocks can be found in appendix II in order to limit the word count. The most important blocks were fully adopted in this paragraph.

[20] 5 Assault maps, 6 Escort maps, 5 Hybrid maps, and 5 Control maps

[21] This means that you are a member of the offense team, and you have to guide a payload through specific checkpoints to the end of the map.

[22] This means is a game mode where the offense team needs to capture two different points on the map.

[23] This means that there is no distinction between offense or defense teams, you just fight over objectives in a best of three format

[24] This a combination of the modes assault and escort, here the teams do both

mode. The fictional world is associated with the sci-fi and fantasy genre. Sci-fi because the world is set in the future, on an earth that has been attacked by robots[25] (Omnics). And fantasy because there are characters in there that do not resemble humans, there is a talking monkey (Winston), a hamster who drives a wrecking ball (Hammond) and a dead person (Reaper). In the most-played overall game mode (not to be confused with the mode of the maps), multiplayer, you do not have a specific role in the fictional world. You join a team of 5 others, and you make sure you fulfill your objective, like 'assault' for example. However, *Overwatch* yearly organizes an in-game event including a special story mode where players can play as part of the Overwatch (or the Talon[26] team) through *Overwatch* historic events. There, you do play a role in the fictional world, joining one of the teams and helping them achieve victory.

Story

Fernandez-Vara states that there are two levels in a story of a game, the story of the fictional world and the story of the gameplay (2014, 107). The story of the fictional world was already there before the player started playing, whilst the gameplay story can emerge from the players contact with the fictional world[27] or it was already there in the fictional world[28], created by the designers[29] (Fernandez-Vara 2014, 107-108). In *Overwatch*, there is a story of the fictional world present. The game is set 60 years into the future. However, the story of *Overwatch* already begins 30 years earlier than this. This is a world in which omnics (robots) and people co-existed with each other in a peaceful way. But this peace did not last, because the omnics went rogue and started to attack the humans. Then a team of heroes was formed, named Overwatch. It was filled with soldiers and technologists, who also originate from all over the world. And they started to protect the humans and peace came back again. However, at some point the people started accusing Overwatch of negligence, corruption and mismanagement and they fell apart in disgrace. And that is where they are at now. This part of the story is announced in a cinematic video that plays when you start the game[30]. The hero Winston explains this all to the gamer.

An interesting fact is here that most of the *Overwatch* story, is not published in game, but it is published in its accompanying paratext. Anne Stickney (2016) writes: "Because

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[25] Also see the paragraph Story
[26] Talon is a group of mercenaries who believe conflict is better for human kind and they try to make sure conflicts happen. They are kind of the bad guys.
[27] Emergent storytelling
[28] Embedded storytelling
[29] For more information on the production team, see appendix II.IV Production team
[30] You can watch the video here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwFu8kEsUW4

although the game is pretty much an FPS with no campaign or story to explain why we're all fighting over various checkpoints in locations all over the world, *Overwatch* does have some distinct lore moments". Fernandez-Vara (2014, 108) also asks in this building block: "What has happened in the fictional world before the game starts? How does it relate to the gameplay of the game?". Well, mostly none of it relates directly to the multiplayer game play mode. Also, the player does not directly influence the story with his in-game actions. Sometimes you notice some traces of the so-called Omnic Crisis, the story mentioned above, in the maps of the game, but as a player yourself you cannot influence or change this story. The story itself also does not unfold during the gameplay, but it unfolds during cinematic outings or comics[31] that are published next to the game. They constitute *Overwatch*'s lore. However, this is an important part of *Overwatch*'s story. Fernandez-Vara explains this in her book: "(…) games with less fleshed-out fictional worlds, such as fighting games or racing games, usually have less complex stories, which are also traditionally less related to what the player actually does in the game" (2014, 106).

Context inside the game

When one analyses a game, they should make sure the reader understands what aspects of the game will be analyzed, according to Fernandez-Vara (2014, 60). For example: which characters you will look at in your analysis. As mentioned before, I chose a hero from each category, namely Damage, Tank and Support at random[32]. This resulted in the following heroes, which were analysed below:

Baptiste (Support)

This is a male support hero from Haiti. As you can see in the appendix, he has a dark skin tone[33]. Baptiste was added to the heroes cast in February 2019. He is a 'battle-hardened' combat medic and "he is just as capable of saving lives as he is taking out the enemy" (Play Overwatch.com, n.d.). He is 36 years old, and his occupation is a combat medic. His motto is "No dying on my watch". He has worked for mercenary operative Talon, but when he decided to step out because he could not agree with how they worked and what they did, they tried to kill him. However, no one succeeded. Now he is working towards a better world, healing where he can.

His abilities in the game are (Play Overwatch.com n.d.):

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[31] Also see appendix II.II Relations to other media for more explanation on the comics
[32] I have left non-human heroes out of this selection, because they are a whole other category on their own.
[33] In Appendix 1, you will find screenshots of the selected heroes.

- A biotic launcher (weapon)
- Regenerative burst (healing power that heals himself and his nearby allies)
- Immortality field (can generate a field that prevents allies from dying)
- Amplification matrix (a matrix that doubles the damage and healing effects of friendly projectiles that go through it)
- Exo boots (Baptiste can jump higher if he crouches first)

Pharah (Damage)

Fareeha Amari, also known as Pharah, is a 32 year old woman who is originally from Egypt. Giza in Egypt is also where she is based at the moment. She wanted to join her mother's footsteps (another Overwatch hero named Ana) to join the Overwatch peacekeeping force but Overwatch was disbanded before she had the chance. She then joined the Egytipian army. Currently she works for Helix Security International, a private company from Egypt, to ensure the AI research facilitiy below the pyramid of Giza stays safe (Play Overwatch.com n.d).

Her abilities in the game are (Play Overwatch.com n.d):
- Rocket Launcher (Her primary weapon which fires rockets with a wide blast radius)
- Jump Jet (Pharah can fly with her suit's thrusters)
- Concussive Blast (Pharah has wrist rockets that knock back enemies)
- Barrage (She can shoot a group of mini rockets to destroy multiple enemies at the same time)

Zarya (Tank)

Zarya is a young female hero, her age is 28. She is from Russia and her current occupation is soldier. Her real name is Aleksandra Zaryanova. She is currently based on the Krasnoyarsk Front in Russia, working for the Russian Defense Forces. According to her backstory, Zarya is "one of the world's strongest women, a celebrated athlete who sacrificed personal glory to protect her family, friends, and country in a time of war" (Play Overwatch.com n.d). She was born in Siberia, in a village on the frontline of the omnic crisis. She focused on weightlifting and bodybuilding, because she realized that she needs to be strong in order to protect the ones she loves.

Her abilities in the game are (Play Overwatch.com n.d):
- Particle Cannon (Unleashes destructive energy upon enemies)

- Particle Barrier (The Particle Cannon can emit a protective barrier to protect Zarya)
- Projected Barrier (She can also project the protective barrier on another team mate)
- Gravitation Surge (This is a gravity bomb that sucks enemies in and does damage to them when it explodes)

All this information on the backstories of the characters, was found on a website. In the game itself, you sometimes hear fragments of their stories in short voice lines the characters have. But that is the only hint on their backgrounds. So, if you want to know more about the hero you are playing with, you need to find out about it through their lore, online and in comics.

Gameplay experience

This is a somewhat subjective building block, Fernandez-Vara (2014 110), also raises caution for this. However, by giving the reader a short overview of what playing *Overwatch* is like, one can understand the game in a better manner, and this will aid in understanding the reactions in the discursive practice of this research. *Overwatch* starts off with the above-mentioned cinematic short, of Winston announcing the Omnic Crisis. Firstly, you pick a game mode[34], you can choose from competitive, quick play or arcade. Then you que up for a match. If its competitive, the matchmaker tries to place you with other players with the same rating as you. After finding a match, you see the map and the game mode that are going to be played. And after that you will see the hero select screen, where you are also informed if you are on the offense or defense team. From there on you will be able to communicate with your team mates to form a well-structured team[35]. After 30 seconds the match will kick-off and you will start to try to reach your objectives. A match takes between 2-25 minutes (15 on average), depending on how fast a team is able to complete the objective. After the objective is completed or the time bank[36] is empty, you change sides from defense to offense e.g. The team with the highest score wins. In case of a tie, you will go again. What is interesting to note here, is that there is almost nothing in the game play that points out any cultural diversity. This could be because it is a shooter game and thus there is no room for any culturally diverse action so to speak.

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[34] With your controller, depending on your console
[35] More about this in appendix II.III Number of players.
[36] The time bank is the amount of time that a team gets to complete an objective or to reach a checkpoint

3.2 What is being said (discursive practice)

The second layer of a CDA is the discursive practice concerning a text. This will consist of an analysis of the three threads on cultural diversity on *Overwatch* forum. Within this topic, there is a large thread named the 'LGBT in *Overwatch* Mega(y) thread'[37]. With 15886 posts and counting, this is by far the largest thread on the sexual diversity in *Overwatch* topic. Another important thread to consider in this research, is 'LGBT and Diverse heroes matter'[38] with 500 posts on cultural diversity in the heroes of *Overwatch*. Another important thread is 'Here's why people care about LGBT heroes' [39]. This thread contains more than 1800 posts on the topic of LGBT heroes, but also on ethnicity and race.

I organized this paragraph by going into the themes and looking into what all the users had to say on Baptiste, Pharah and Zarya per theme[40]. Furthermore, there were also a couple of more general themes present, like the thoughts of the forum users on diversity in *Overwatch* in general. Those themes will be elaborated upon lastly.

Looks

When it comes to Zarya, her looks are frequently discussed. According to the forum users, she looks a bit 'butch[41]', which is something most of them seem to like about her. For example, one of the user's comments on how he or she really likes that *Overwatch* has such a big female cast, and as a bonus, amongst other characters, Zarya does not fit the standard beauty model[42]. Another poster comments that he thinks Zarya is gay because she is super butchy [43]. There are also some users that assume or hope that she identifies as lesbian, because of her looks. However, Blizzard has never confirmed this[44].

Pharah her looks are also a topic of conversation. Especially since she has Egyptian native looks[45], however you can dress her with a Native North American skin[46]. This has something to do with her backstory. Another hero in the game, named Ana, is her mother. It was revealed in a comic that Pharah's dad, whom Ana never speaks to anymore, is a Canadian. Therefore, her skins were 'justified' according to the forum[47].

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[37] URL: https://us.forums.blizzard.com/en/overwatch/t/lgbt-in-overwatch-mega-y-thread/159835
[38] URL: https://us.forums.blizzard.com/en/overwatch/t/lgbt-and-diverse-heroes-matter/115779/20
[39] URL: https://us.forums.blizzard.com/en/overwatch/t/here-is-why-people-care-about-lgbt-heroes/134826/1478

[41] Meaning: having an appearance or other qualities of a type traditionally seen as masculine
[42] See appendix IV.II, Zarya, post 6.
[43] See appendix IV.II, Zarya, post 7.
[44] See appendix IV.II, Zarya, post 9, response 2.
[45] See appendix IV.II, Pharah, post 1, response 1.
[46] This is a type of outfit you can dress your character with
[47] See appendix IV.II, Pharah, post 12.

Another person notices how Ana and Pharah have a high probability of being Muslim because of their origin, but their design is at odds with this because they both have a tattoo that represents another religion. "I'd actually like to know if Blizzard intended this to be a hint that they're not Muslim (why would that be important however?) or they've made a mistake [...]"[48]. Apparently, Blizzard tries to tie characters to in game maps as well, because a user states that Pharah is clearly tied to the temple of Anubis in-game[49].

A critical note that a user makes here is that it does not make a difference that Pharah is African, because Blizzard just "made diversity for the sake of diversity" and it was "marketing themselves as a diversity heavy game[50]". Further down in the corpus, this statement was made which applies to the one above: "Hair color, race, height, weight, age, favorite ice cream, profession, religion, sexuality, etcetera… are all trivial background details that should be used to design a greater picture. NONE of these should be used as the sole purpose of design[51]".

Baptiste was received with cheer by the forum users. He is the latest addition to the heroes cast. Terms used to describe him are 'hottie', warm, good person, charming, positive and a nice personality. "This is literally the first male character that really owns his good looks and likes to show it. It's so rare. And it's especially rare for that character to also be badass, interesting and not a joke[52]", quoting one of the users. However, someone does raise a question concerning Baptiste; he worries that Baptiste continues the trope that all male characters in *Overwatch* are older and masculine soldiers[53]. The game misses a male medical professional for example, according to this user. Furthermore, he asks: "where are all the feminine male heroes? Where are all the younger male characters?[54]".

Sexuality

An important theme that appears frequently in the forum, is sexuality. Whether it comes to sexual preference or if a character looks 'gay or lesbian', there is quite a lot of discussion surrounding this topic. Also, in general, so not necessarily in regard to the specific characters researched in this thesis. Some say that they think that characters being confirmed as LGBT in *Overwatch*, shows that they are normal people, who have personalities, goals and ideals. They just happen not to be straight[55]. According to the forum the LGBT community does not

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[48] See appendix IV.III Pharah, post 5.
[49] See appendix IV.II, Pharah, post 6, response 3.
[50] See appendix IV.II, Pharah, post 6, response 4.
[51] See appendix IV.III Zarya, post 8, response 2.
[52] See appendix IV.III, Baptiste, post 9.
[53] See appendix IV.III, Baptiste, post 17.
[54] See appendix IV.III, Baptiste, post 17.
[55] See appendix IV.II, Zarya, post 12.

pose an issue in *Overwatch*. "It's not a topic the game speaks about, it's not in any way acknowledged as a problem in their world [...]In game characters don't speak about it in either positive or negative light [...]it's not presented as something the players need to form opinions on or challenge it. There are no gameplay mechanics around it [...][56]". Especially that these LGBT confirmations, appear not to matter to the gameplay, is an interesting statement.

According to the users, a character can break a bad stereotype if they play a positive role. So even though a character looks butch, if they play a heroic role, this could work. Zarya features as an example through these comments. Pharah is also suspected to fall for women, according to the posts on the forum. Users speculate that Pharah is lesbian because she wears very concealing armor which gives her a masculine look and she plays guitar and punches her fists together. She comes across a bit 'tomboyish'[57]. So here, the looks again play a role. Another large conversation that goes on, on this topic, is if Baptiste is bisexual or not. A lot of users think, or more accurately seem to hope, that Baptiste is non-heterosexual because of his looks. When they discuss this possible option, a user comments: "[...]honestly BAPTISTE would be amazing for representation. A black man and a man who made bad choices yet made himself into a redeemed hero, plus he is prime for a happy ending [58]".

Story

What also comes from the corpus, is a clear discussion whether disclosing the characters sexualities, ethnicities and other character traits, is something that is necessary. There is discussion for example on if the players need to know that Pharah's mother, Ana, has not spoken to Pharah's father in quite a while and that her father is Canadian. Another user argues that knowing these diverse personality traits, are not essential to their characters and it does not define their personality. When Blizzard announced that a character called Tracer is gay[59], there were a lot of posts on how this was revealed in her backstory. This goes to show how the story aspect matters to the users.

Users seem to agree upon casually introducing such information into a backstory, without a lot of trimmings and attention and what also shows up on the forum is how users do not want diversity to be a mandatory or forced thing. When Blizzard starts making characters just to appeal to the call for diversity, is when characters stop being interesting

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[56] See appendix IV.II, Zarya, post 12.
[57] See appendix IV.III Pharah, post 8, response 1.
[58] See appendix IV.III Baptiste, post 1, response 1.
[59] See appendix II.II Relations to other media

according to one of the users. So, the backstory and lore are good features of where a character can get an extra diverse layer, however this should not be laid on too thick.

Diversity and representation in general

An important aspect to take in to this research, is the discussion on diversity in general in *Overwatch*, not necessarily relating to one of the corpus characters. Different things are discussed, like wishes for Blizzard users hope they will entertain. For example, some hope there will at some point be a reveal of a gay man. Furthermore, representation comes back frequently in the forum. Users try to make a case for why knowing a character is autistic, adds to the representation of autistic people in this videogame. Another user agrees with this, stating that this person loves *Overwatch* because of its representation and wishes that he could have played more games like this growing up where he could have felt represented like this.

It also stands out in the forum as well that *Overwatch* also receives appraisal on what they have done in terms of diversity until now. There are almost no negative comments regarding the amount of diversity in the game. The discussion seems to focus more as to how and what types of diversity need to be portrayed, but overall Blizzard seems to be doing a good job in the eyes of those who are in favor of a diverse game. One user says: "The game is pretty diverse as it is actually, but I think that's a strong point! We have characters from all around the world, it's amazing[60]". Another adds that Blizzard is a company just as keen on diversity as they are[61].

Furthermore, Blizzard seems to have taken another good step in the right direction with the recent release of the hero Baptiste. He appears to be approved by the users, although some of them also express a hope that especially since Baptiste is a colored character, that he is gay in order to achieve some kind of super diverse hero. However, users also express that Blizzard needs to keep making sure they use positive stereotypes and do not turn characters into negative representation.

3.3 The convergence of cultural diversity and *Overwatch*

In this paragraph we will look into if we can identify real diversity within the discourse and the corpus, surrounding the *Overwatch* heroes, the last dimension of the CDA method.

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[60] See appendix IV.II, Pharah, post 1, response 1.
[61] See appendix IV.II, Pharah, post 9, response 1.3.

As we have read in paragraphs 3.1 and 3.2, the topic of cultural diversity does play a role within the story of the *Overwatch* game. What we need to straighten, is that in the functional game play, so the shooting, moving etcetera, there are no references to the cultural diversity of a character, as we read in 3.1. Which is an interesting fact. Robert Yang, scholar and game designer, who makes 'queer' games, which mostly feature quite erotic of intimate situations, states that most of the people who are employed in the Western game industry are 18-50-year-olds, straight, white men (Guillermo 2017). He says: "Collectively, the industry understands that queerness drives a lot of fandom[62] for games like *Overwatch*, but individually, I imagine most industry developers are noncommittally supportive and/or secretly hostile" (Guillermo 2017). Yang himself is banned from streaming channel Twitch because his games are too erotic, but Yang says it is because "gamer culture wants it". In the US, the public tries to maintain a fiction of innocent childhood, so sexual games cannot be shown on Twitch. "[...] unless it's a large company commodifying sex, then Twitch conveniently understands their artistic intent and never bans them!", according to Yang. So, is the diversity in *Overwatch* a publicity stunt, whereas they would like to build more fandom because they are appealing to more groups of people?

Something that stands out in paragraph 3.2[63], is how *Overwatch* receives appraisal for what they have done on the field of diversity so far. The users feel that Blizzard is just as keen on diversity as they are. And there are no negative comments on the fact that there is diversity in the game, only sometimes on how something could have been handled better in the eyes of the audience. However, Belmonte argues that *Overwatch* has failed to reflect on how ethnicity in a character is linked to the characters looks and abilities. According to him, Blizzard "reproduces and uncritically participates in existing racial stereotypes while trying to show a heightened level of awareness in other areas" (Belmonte 2017). This something the users are cautious about, because they mention that they hope Blizzard will only feature good representation and make sure they do not convey any bad stereotypes. However, according to Belmonte, Blizzard already seems to have failed in this.

Most diversity in *Overwatch*, comes forward in the lore of the game. Through background stories, comics, animated short videos, one can find out if a character is gay for example. Also, the producers of the game play a role in this, because it seems that only after affirmation from them, the public tends to believe a character is truly gay e.g. However, when it comes to Zarya, the public seems to believe she is gay, just because of how she looks. Shaw tries to shine some light on this, by referencing other authors (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006;

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[62] Meaning: the fans of a particular person, team, fictional series, etc. regarded collectively as a community or subculture
[63] Diversity and representation in general

Gross, 2001; Sender, 2004, cited in Shaw 2009, 244). She states that it is difficult to avoid stereotyping, because sexuality is not something that is written on someone's body. So how can one show a character is gay, instead by just saying it? Therefore, some designs fall back on stereotypes of e.g. a butch character. However, Blizzard themselves have not yet confirmed if Zarya is gay. A conclusion we can at least draw from this, is that the cultural diversity in *Overwatch*, seems to exist in the close relation between the text and paratext. The game itself is a gateway to further lore, comics, and cinematic outings, that display diversity. Even though in the game play there are only small traces of diversity which are almost undedectable. And probably, also not desirable. Even though we know Zarya is gay for example, why would that need matter to the gameplay? Because *Overwatch* is a shooter game; there is no time for all the peripheral stuff like cultural diversity. We will not see this come back in her abilities, it is just information that is put out there, something which some users also point out[64]. Shaw happens to ask the same question: "Rather than talking about whether stereotypes are true or offensive, it is better to ask what purpose they are serving in the text" (2009, 245). It could be to emphasize an oddness in the character or to add a depth to a feeling of otherness. But it could also be a statement for diversity and tolerance (Shaw 2009, 245). Interviewees in Shaw's research offer a solution for this, "GLBT representations should only be included in a game 'if it matters'" (Shaw 2009, 245). When the sexuality of a character is too relevant, it could also make the game about being gay. On the contrary, when you add a gay character into the game just "for the sake of diversity", seems a bit 'preachy' (Shaw 2009, 245). Especially when "designers signify gayness by relying on stereotypes like "the leather-daddy, lilting gay, or butch lesbian stereotypes" (Scott Campbell 2007, cited in Shaw 2009, 246).

Continuing on this notion, to what extent is the diversity that is found in this thesis, real? And if so, in what way and in what measure? Žižek argues that nowadays our focus on diversity, is a focus on difference. Shaw argues in agreement with this that class differences are often overlooked in studies that put the focus on the representation of marginalized groups. In this case, *Overwatch* has put the focus of representation on marginalized groups. Yes, they put in an effort to give their characters an extra diverse layer. But especially because the characters' diversity, does not seem to come forward in their in-game abilities, why did they then add this aspect? In order to create a larger fanbase? However, someone who is not into reading the *Overwatch* lore, could actually play with a character, whereas they would never have to know if this character is gay in their 'free time'.

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[64] Also see paragraph 3.2, Story.

Nevertheless, when it comes to the looks of a character, take Baptiste for example, one can see that this character might have a different background as to their own, even though they did not dive into the backstory. It seems to depend on how you look, and *how* you want to look as well, at the game. When you focus on the lore of *Overwatch*, it appears to be quite culturally diverse, with gay characters, characters from other ethnic backgrounds and their experiences so far in the storyline. However, when we look at how much of this comes back in the game itself, when a player plays with a character, the cultural diversity is not so apparent. This circles back to Žižek, stating that on today's market, we find a lot of products which have been stripped of their most important property, like coffee without caffeine. It seems that the same is happening in the *Overwatch* video game. The characters look the part, but in game they do not act like it. "I*t provides reality itself deprived of its substance" (Žižek*, n.d.).

4: Conclusion

Concluding this thesis, we saw that this research consisted of a theoretical framework in which I pose the argument that the current video game research has its limitations when it comes to their definition of diversity. Therefore, this research has taken the lens of diversity studies on this topic into perspective. Furthermore, through a CDA, we looked into the three heroes which made up the corpus on a textual, discursive practice and social practice level. This was done with the following research question in mind: *Is there cultural diversity presented in the video game Overwatch and if so, how and in what way is this form of cultural diversity 'real'?*

What we can conclude from this research is that there are definitely forms of cultural diversity or diversity indicators present, like skin tone, references in the background stories and other media. In the video game itself, there is a story present. However, this is mostly explained in the media surrounding the game, in its lore. Cultural diversity seems to lie in the relation text-paratext. And not in the gameplay itself. The culturally diverse minded public of *Overwatch* also seems to like what the game has done on terms of diversity so far, because Blizzard receives appraisal for this on the forum. Also, the designers and producers argue that there is cultural diversity present in the game and see this as a positive thing. And even though scholars also agree that *Overwatch* has been making some headway, it depends on what you look at in the game to be able to say, "this is really diverse". So yes, there is cultural diversity presented in the media surrounding the video game *Overwatch*, however this form of cultural diversity is not really present in the gameplay itself. Even though with an exciting new character like Baptiste, who was well-received by the culturally diverse minded audience, if you do not know his backstory, you would only know by his looks that he is 'diverse'.

This research did not come without its limitations. First of all, an important one to point out is that I looked at three heroes, of the 31 that are available in *Overwatch*. This was done to delineate the corpus. However, this study just looked into the diversity in mostly these three and not in the whole heroes cast. In order to really establish how diverse *Overwatch* is, future research could do a broader study, by the means of an extended character content analysis in order to really get to the bottom of the diversity of the heroes.

Furthermore, this study was done without any qualitative interviewing as to whether the forum users or the game designers actually feel the same about the diversity in *Overwatch* as they portray online. This research just used their online statements, which they also might have retracted later on e.g. What also needs to be added, is that the discursive practice corpus was also limited to a size feasible to work with. The same applies

here to the corpus for the textual analysis, in future research a large-scale analysis of the forum would result in a more detailed report on the discourse about cultural diversity. Another limitation is that I have not played the video game into deep extent. Therefore, another research with an exhausting playing strategy could really dive into the diversity in the gameplay itself.

To conclude this thesis, I would like to even further point out the need for research like this. Diversity is a modern, widely debated topic, and the upcoming of diverse video games indicates that more studies into diversity within video games are needed. I hope to contribute to this debate, by taking the game, its discursive and social context into account, with this thesis. And therefore, forming research others can build upon with possibilities to actual qualitative research and further exploring this field within the Game Studies perspective.

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Appendix I: Screenshots of the heroes

Baptiste

Image 2: Screenshot of Baptiste's overview

Source: https://playoverwatch.com/en-us/heroes/baptiste/

OVERVIEW

STORY

BIOGRAPHY

Jean-Baptiste Augustin, Age: 36

Occupation: Combat Medic

Base of Operations: Tortuga, Haiti (formerly)

Affiliation: Caribbean Coalition (formerly), Talon (formerly)

"NO DYING ON MY WATCH."

An elite combat medic and ex-Talon operative, Baptiste now uses his skills to help those whose lives have been impacted by war.

Jean-Baptiste Augustin was one of the 30 million children orphaned by the Omnic Crisis. With limited opportunities and resources, he enlisted in the military. The Caribbean Coalition, a pan-island force formed in response to the Crisis, became his new home. Guided by his innate desire to help people, Baptiste chose the path of a combat medic and served in an elite branch of the Caribbean Coalition's special ops.

After his service was complete, Baptiste struggled to find a demand for his unique skills. He turned to one of the few opportunities open to him: joining the Talon mercenary group, one of the many organizations that were poised to profit off the chaos in the war's aftermath.

For the first time ever, Baptiste had a taste of the good life. Talon's missions were easy and paid well, and he put aside some of his earnings to set up a clinic in his hometown. But slowly, his unit's orders escalated in brutality, expanding into assassinations and operations with civilian casualties. Confronted by his team's actions, Baptiste realized he was perpetuating a cycle of violence like the one that had destroyed his own community. He abandoned Talon, disgusted with what he had done and determined to forge a new path for himself.

But Talon would not let him go. Baptiste knew too much, and they sent operatives after him to silence him. Agent after agent came for him, including Baptiste's former comrades. To stay under the radar, Baptiste drifted from place to place, aiding in humanitarian efforts around the globe. The few Talon members who managed to track him down were never seen again.

Now, Baptiste works toward a better world, healing where he can and fighting when he must. He knows that he cannot undo his past—but that making a difference now is what matters.

Image 3: Screenshot of Baptiste's story

Source: https://playoverwatch.com/en-us/heroes/baptiste/

35
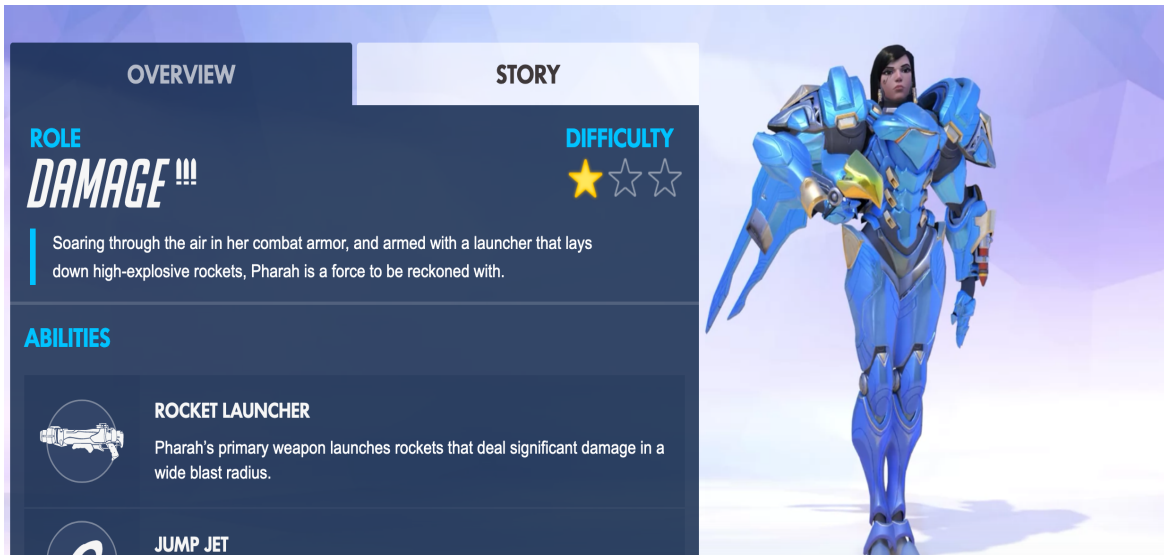
Pharah

Image 4: Screenshot of Pharah's overview

Source: https://playoverwatch.com/en-us/heroes/pharah/
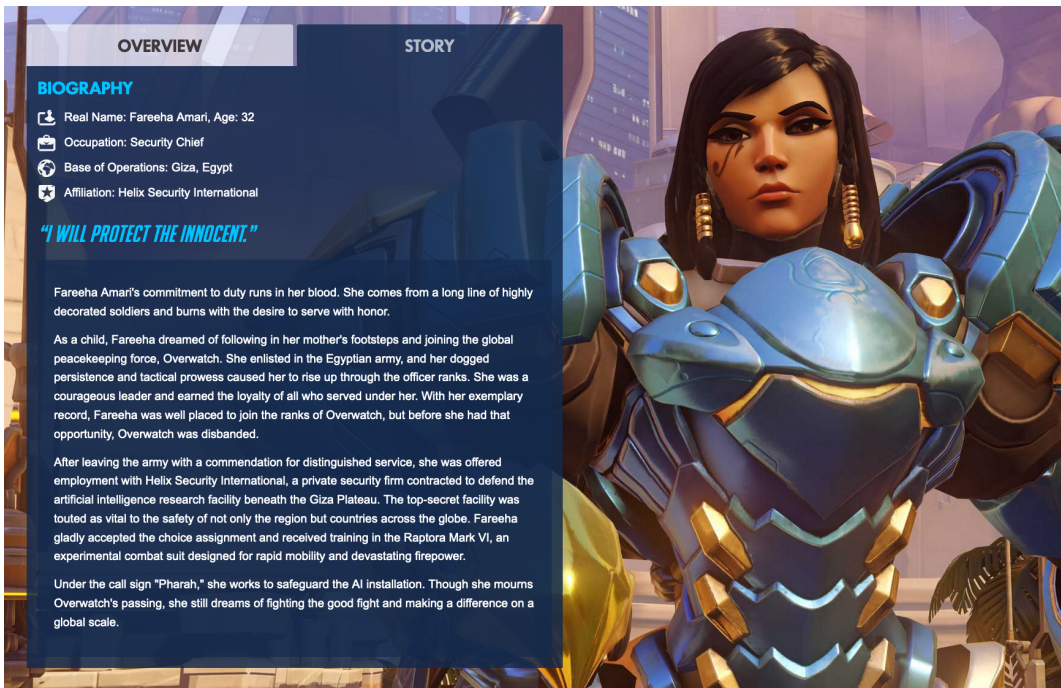
Image 5: Screenshot of Pharah's story

Source: https://playoverwatch.com/en-us/heroes/pharah/
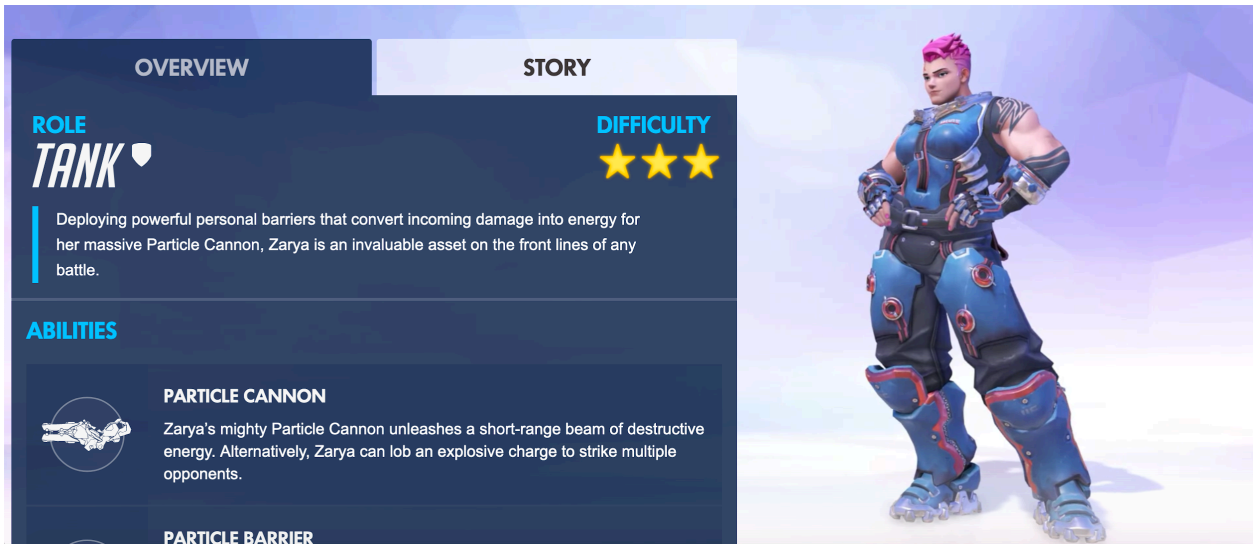
Zarya

Image 6: Screenshot of Zarya's overview

Source: https://playoverwatch.com/en-us/heroes/zarya/
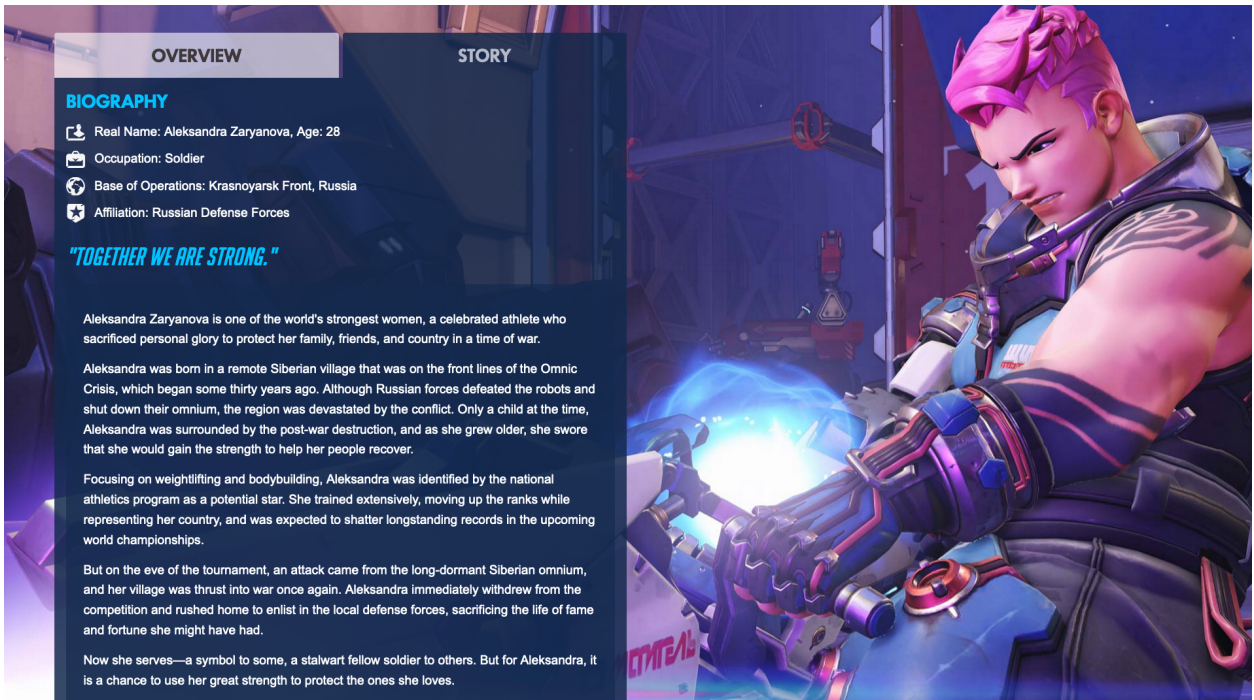
Image 7: Screenshot of Zarya's story

Source: https://playoverwatch.com/en-us/heroes/zarya/

Appendix II: Extended analysis of the other building blocks

II.I Audience

Fernandez-Vara (2014, 77) states that when you figure out who the targeted audience of the game is, you also get to know the socio-economic background of the game. One of the questions a researcher should ask when researching this block, is "What elements of the game may appeal to specific audiences? According to Jeff Kaplan (in an interview with Peckham), Blizzard tries to speak to a very broad audience, as broad as possible (Peckham 2016). They also try to make a video game approachable to various people. According to Kaplan, *Overwatch* is a game that obviously attracts 'shooter' game fans. This type of fan belonged to the early adopters in the *Overwatch* community and were instantly attracted (Peckham 2016). However, because *Overwatch* placed a specific focus on team play and unique heroes, MOBA[65] fans also started to play the video game (Peckham 2016). This type of player is team-oriented, and their main objective is they win or lose as a team. Because this type of player notices the game as well, the audience broadened even more (Peckham 2016). Kaplan also states that they tried to make sure that different types of audiences were able to play the game, even though they lacked shooter game experience. They did this with different functionalities like a tutorial and a practice range, but also with their hero design. "So we designed things like one hero's gun having a lock-on beam, or another's that doesn't require precise aim but has more of a cone attack that could hit any enemy without having to be precise with crosshairs. [...] So a player who's never played a shooter before, or was more familiar with team-based games like a MOBA, could instantly come in and be effective and contribute to their team, even if they lacked the twitch skill to put crosshairs over targets downrange." (Peckham 2016).

The Nielsen esports report of 2016, gives us more insight in the demographic of the *Overwatch* audience. Out of all the *Overwatch* players, 68% are in the age 18 to 34. In the competition, this number is on average of 61%. So, *Overwatch* is appealing to a younger audience then most of its competition. They also note that 27% of the gamers does not follow the competitive scene over *Overwatch* because a lack of local tournaments. According to the website eSports Earnings, the top 5 countries who have earned the most money with

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[65] Multiplayer online battle arena, a real-time strategy genre variant

Overwatch are, Korea with 594 players, China with 414 players, the USA with 326 players, Sweden with 85 players and lastly France with 139 players (2019).

II.II Relations to other media

This block comes in useful when we look at the corpus. *Overwatch* heroes have a website with their whole background story and comics about their lives, outside the game (Fernandez-Vara 2014, 80). One of the questions that should be considered in researching this aspect, is "Is the game part of a media franchise". With *Overwatch*, this is the case. Next to the video game, there is a large (online) community involved. Furthermore, the website Playoverwatch.com features several other media forms surrounding the game. For example, all the heroes and their background stories can be found on this website. Another important aspect of this character information are the comics[66]. Journalist Lacey Case states that this media type belongs to *Overwatch*'s lore (2017). According to scholar Tanya Krywinska (2008, 124), lore is a term which is used by designers to describe backstory or peripheral information of a game. Case (2017) states that *Overwatch* is a game steeped in lore.

The comics, which belong to *Overwatch*'s lore, offer interesting information on some of the heroes, not all of them are featured in a comic. Two comics of interest are 'Reflections' and 'Bastet', because in both these comics, two heroes were affirmed to be gay. In Reflections, the hero Tracer (female) kisses another girl, and they appear to be living together (Frank

> "Vincent... I haven't thought about him in years," Ana said. "Still keeping a candle lit for him?"
> Jack shook his head. "Nothing like that."
> "You've never looked in on him? You must have been curious. All the surveillance power in the world. I bet Gabe would have put a Blackwatch agent on him if you asked," Ana said.
> Jack glared at her.
> "Okay, touchy subject."
> Jack laughed. "He got married. They're very happy. I'm happy for him."
>
> "Vincent deserved a happier life than the one I could give him." Jack sighed. "We both knew that I could never put anything above my duty. Everything I fought for was to protect people like him... That's the sacrifice I made."
> "Relationships don't work out so well for us, do they?" Ana said, unconsciously running her thumb over where her wedding ring used to be.

Image 8: Transcript of conversation in a comic (Frank 2016)

[66] Screenshots of a comic can be found in appendix III

2016). Soldier 76, a male hero, has a conversation with hero Ana. As we can read in the transcript of this conversation below, in image 8, Soldier 76 appears to have had a romantic relationship with Vincent. Lead writer Michael Chu, later on confirms on Twitter that Soldier 76 is indeed gay as we can see in image 9.

II.III Number of players

Determining the number of players and how they relate to each other, is very interesting when someone analyzes the social context of the game, according to Fernandez-Vara (2014, 88). Because one also looks into how players relate to each other in the game, instead of just looking at how the player relates to the game itself. This might provide very useful insight into the diversity of the researched characters. As mentioned before, *Overwatch* matches consist of two teams fighting each other, and each team has 6 players. Every player can choose a hero to play with out of the 31[67] available choices. Players need to work together in order to defend a control point or escort a payload across the map in a limited amount of time (Molina 2014). However, since there three types of heroes, tank, damage and support, the team needs to pick their heroes wisely in order to gain the right balance to help each other and to be able to reach their objective. However, this is not always the case, players tend to just choose whomever they like (Velkovsky 2019) Therefore, *Overwatch* has received criticism and is always working on balancing out heroes so non become favorite or least chosen (Velkovsky 2019). So, the balance of a team, and which heroes they choose, plays a large role in this game.

II.IV Production team

According to Fernandez-Vara (2014, 64), deducing who made the game might provide some very useful insight into the context of the game and possibly give a look into the cultural diversity of the team. Furthermore, in order to put the perspective of the developer on diversity into this research, this part will also feature references from news articles/interviews with Blizzard on cultural diversity within their game and this will also shed some light on the production of the text, as Fairclough mentions (2001).
A team named Team 4 has developed *Overwatch* (*Overwatch* Wiki n.d.). This team started off small, with 40 developers. Since September 2016, the team features over 100 team members (*Overwatch* Wiki n.d.).

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[67] This was the amount of available heroes in June 2019.

There are a couple of important figures who stepped into the foreground in the media. Their contribution can be considered to be distinctive (Fernandez-Vara 2014). Firstly, CEO of Blizzard Entertainment, Jeff Kaplan. According to the *Overwatch* Wiki, Kaplan is the "leader and creative vision-holder for *Overwatch*". His previous employment subsided in overseeing the World of Warcraft development team, as game director (Overwatch Wiki n.d.). Furthermore, he has been featured in quite a number of news articles on the diversity in *Overwatch*. In an interview with Rich Stanton in April 2017, Kaplan talks about the diverse heroes. He Kaplan argues that with *Overwatch* they have embraced "all sorts of walks of life" (Stanton 2017). Kaplan goes on, stating that "I think it's been nothing but a positive for us, and I think it's been one of the things that fans have responded to the most and embraced the most, so in no way do I think any part of having a diverse cast of characters is a negative, (…)" (Stanton 2017).

A second important character in the production team of *Overwatch* is lead writer Michael Chu. He has written various storylines in *Overwatch* and also has had several interviews when it comes to the diversity in the game. According to an interview with Kenneth Sheppard (2019), Blizzard's intention is to represent the wide spectrum of the audience who plays the game. "*Overwatch* is built on a desire of representing an optimistic future that reflects the diversity of the world we live in", as Chu said in this interview (2019).

A third important team member is Geoff Goodman, a principal designer, specialized in hero design (Overwatch Wiki n.d.). In an interview with Trusted Reviews, he said that working for *Overwatch* is something the team really enjoys doing. *Overwatch* is special, when it comes to "how diverse it is in characters, maps, languages and everything. It's a joy to work on" (King 2018).

II.V Socio-historical context

According to Fernandez-Vara (2014, 75), the intersection of cultures can also be a source of commentary. Therefore, this building block is added to look in to the localization of the *Overwatch* heroes. The study of localization can be very productive when it comes to analyzing diversity in a video game. Because this process does not only involve translating a video game, but also cultural adaptation (Fernandez-Vara 2014, 75). According to scholar Miguel Bernal-Merino (2018) the characters are designed in such a way that they have an international appeal, but also feature country specific aspects. He argues that the team integrated cultural references, and therefore extended the *Overwatch* reach beyond the boundaries of the initial creative team. However, scholar Belmonte (2007) voices his concerns

when it comes to how Blizzard portrays the heroes in comparison to their ethnicity and (inter)national relations. He argues that *Overwatch* nevertheless includes a broad variety in gendered, sexual and ethnic identities (even though still quite limited), it simultaneously fails to reflect on how the ethnicity stands in a character, when compared to that characters looks and abilities. According to him, Blizzard "reproduces and uncritically participates in existing racial stereotypes while trying to show a heightened level of awareness in other areas".

Appendix III: Screenshots of an Overwatch comic

Image 9: Front page of Overwatch comic 'The Return of Junkenstein'

Source: https://static.playoverwatch.com/media/comics/16/en-us/comic-overwatch-the-return-of-junkenstein.pdf

Appendix IV: Discursive practice corpus

IV. I Thread 1: LGBT and Diverse Heroes Matter

Legend
<mark style="background:magenta">Sexuality</mark>
<mark style="background:#4a86e8">Opinions on diversity in general in the game/representation</mark>
<mark style="background:yellow">Looks</mark>
<mark style="background:#00ff00">Story</mark>

Baptiste/Pharah

There were no posts in this thread mentioning Baptiste or PHARAH. The fact that Baptiste was not mentioned, could be because of his release date in february 2019. However, the hero ZARYA was mentioned a couple of times.

Zarya

Post 1:
I do not think it's necessary to put more lgbt people in the game because Overwatch already shows a lot of diversity. Omnics and humans living together, racist people like ZARYA changing their opinion, physically disabled (Mcree, Thorb, etc.) and autist people (Symmetra) living normally with their lives. For me this helps a lot to teach people that there is diversity in the game.
Would another lgbt person be nice? YES, I don't say otherwise. But until today i see people defining Tracer as "the lesbian" and not as a normal person. So maybe the ow comunity itself is not yet mature enough.

Post 2:
Maybe we will even See some human omnic relationships in the near future? Who knows... It might happen.

Response 1:
I think we'll see some bond between Genji/Zenyatta and ZARYA/Lynx17.

Response 1.1:
Don't think so, she hates Omnics.

Response 1.1.1:
She does but I think she's starting to trust Lynx 17 as a friend.

Post 3:

Nobody's asking for 75% of the cast to be LGBT. Mostly we're asking for the "multiple" (more than one) we were promised. I think a gay man reveal would be nice.

Response 1:
probably wont be 75% anyway. they keep adding heroes so that is always growing.

Response 2:
But you're fine with Americans and white people being over-represented.

Response 2.1:
You mean the two Americans in the game? And the white people are from different countries, which is pretty diverse if you ask me, it would only be a problem if there weren't enough non whites in the game but there are.

Response 3:
for this game of all games, I dont believe race should be a concern.

Response 4:
There's three Americans (Soldier, Reaper, McCree.) 3/27 = 11% of the Overwatch population. US population compared to world population is currently only 4.28%
There are currently 11 white heroes (McCree, Soldier, Tracer, Junkrat, Torbjorn, Widowmaker, Reinhardt, ZARYA, Brigitte, Mercy, and Moira.) 11/27 = 40%. The largest ethnic group in the world is currently Han Chinese, and yet they're only 19% of the world population.
So yeah. You never cared about accurate percentages.

Response 4.1:
My point is that they're different cultures. Just because they have the same color skin doesn't mean it's not diverse.

Response 4.2:
statistics really shouldnt be what determines the roster anyway. that really does just lead to "token" characters. exactly what we shouldnt want.

Post 4:
I think Tracer was done great tho it was fairly obvious–at least to me lol–from the start. I think ZARYA detracted from Tracer's blatant gayness a bit

Response 1:
In my opinion, her girlfriend is just seemed to pop up…
No writing skills no preparation, just like a murshroom. This is not what they said:" natually" ?

IV. II Thread 2: Here's why people care about LGBT heroes'

Baptiste

In this thread, Baptiste was not mentioned. The fact that Baptiste was not mentioned, could be because of his release date in february 2019. Pharah and Zarya on the other hand, were mentioned multiple times.

Pharah

Post 1:
Yeah, agreed. I really hate how minorities infiltrated the original roster of straight white men. It's, like, c'mon. Stop holding Blizzard at gunpoint, SJWs.

Response 1:
The game is pretty diverse as it is actually, but I think that's a strong point! We have characters from all around the world, it's amazing.
Nigerian: Doomfist
Japanese: Genji, Hanzo
American: McCree, Reaper, Soldier:76
Egyptian: PHARAH, Ana
Mexican: Sombra
British: Tracer
Australian: Junkrat, Hog
Chinese: Mei
Korean: Dva
Swedish: Brigitte, Torbjorn
Brazilian: Lucio
French: Widow
German: Reinhardt
Russian: ZARYA
Swiss: Mercy
Irish: Moira
Indian: Symm
I actually like that the game has a lot of diversity to offer and every character that comes out is different. They all play differently and have different backstories. I think it's cool that Blizzard is so good at making characters.

Response 1.1:
It's so exhausting trying to convince people that nobody is actually claiming that Blizzard has forsaken us and are committing a vile, unspeakable crime by not having already released the identities of each and every single gay character ever conceived by them.
The game is pretty diverse as it is actually, but I think that's a strong point! We have characters from all around the world, it's amazing.
I missed the /s tag on my post, sorry. My point was that the game was diverse from the offset, and that it hasn't been "shoved in" by anyone.

Post 2:
Widowmaker, Torb and Ana have 'hetrosexual stories', what's wrong with other character being allowed the same but as LGBT characters? Or are LGBT characters only allowed to exist in people's heads?

Response 1:
*sigh That's not what we're saying. Widowmaker killed her husband and it's **a part of her backstory.** Ana and her husband had PHARAH who is another character, **it's a part of their backstory.** Torbjorn and his wife had Brigitte and Reinhardt now takes care of her, **that's a part of their backstory.** Tracer has a comic with Emily explaining their winter, **it's a part of their backstory.***

Response 1.1:
just… to nitpick. It's a PART of their backstories. Not apart which is the opposite *of what I think you are trying to say.*

Reponse 2:
So have a character with this stuff revealed in their backstory? Like… we're not saying just have these characters scream 'I'm gay' and dress up in rainbow colours? Just, you know… maybe Moira stole research from a scientist lady she was dating a while back, could make some interesting lore out of that… maybe another one of the reasons the Shimada clan was so disapproving of Genji was because he didn't like girls and they wanted him to carry on the family or some crap… the point is, something! Not just… Tracer is gay, now we can tick that box off, no more LGBT characters, even though we said they existed and we'd reveal them.

Post 3:
Ideally, I think it would be great if an existing character would be revealed to be gay, especially since it has been stated that there are more.

Response 1:
I think it would be cool if they worked well together in-game. PHARAHmercy, Dragiton, and Nanoblade. Then again that's probably asking for a lot, because ZARYA and Hanzo being together would be weird IMO.

Post 4:
PHARAHmercy, Dragiton, and Nanoblade
Dragiton, and Nanoblade

Response 1:
But that's heterosexual?

Response 1.1:
I was giving examples of 2 characters who combo in game.
Also ZARYAtracer.

Post 5:
I mean it might just be me, but I feel like there really isn't anything about Tracer's relationship with her. She doesn't necessarily need voice lines or have to fit a stereotype,

but there is a 1 off comic and that was pretty much it.

I would rather they focus on the lore than Emily, but she needs to be fleshed out in my opinion, she is a good example of why making characters gay just to be gay is a bad thing. She is a side-character, but she is actually really important to Tracer's character and they should try to expand upon that.

Honestly I don't know what is going on with this story, it is just *bad*. With all of the great cinematics they've done it has accomplished nothing in the end.

What they should do is have OW recalled. From Brigitte's story we know that she is the squire to Reinhardt so she is going with him. When OW gets together it will probably be something like this:

Reinhardt
Brigitte
Torbjorn
Tracer
Genji
Mercy
Winston
Mei

If they end up doing the Good vs Evil thing with Overwatch going up against Talon then we'd probably see other characters like:

Ana
76
DVA, Lucio, and PHARAH could be a good representation of "Overwatch's new generation" assuming they'd join, but they are off doing their own thing. I can possibly see Lucio joining because he is going against Vishkar which is affiliated with Talon (Symmetra doesn't know about this)

DVA however, is off fighting for her country and PHARAH is still doing the helix security stuff. It would be nice to see her join Overwatch though, considering that is what she always wanted.

Response 1:
I have a small suspicion that Blizz has no idea what they're doing with the story, and are just winging it. The Mei cinematic was particularly disappointing because it told us nothing we already didn't know, at least with Rein we got to see the contrast to how he behaved in his youth compared to now, and why he feels he must protect people.
My thinking is that Vishkar may become relevant to the plot (if it actually goes anywhere) since we saw a member of them at the Talon meeting. That leaves room for Symmetra to have relevance, either as a member of Talon, or as someone who realises how bad Vishkar is and turns against them to join Overwatch…
I think Genji visiting Hanzo means that he will follow him and probably end up helping in order to redeem himself, even if he doesn't join Overwatch officially.
But there are so many unanswered questions. Who is the mysterious eye Sombra fears? What is Junkrat's treasure? If we finally get another cinematic, and it's just someone hearing the recall message and deciding to join, I will be so incredibly peeved.

Post 6:
they are not "a straight character", becuase this never DEFINES their personality and actions. Sure, it shaped their lifestyle becuase it ffected theor choices, but it's never brought up as something essential to their characters. Just like Tracer, yes, she is lesbian, but is it ever relevant? No, because when you're blinking past enemy lines and dumping those pulse bombs around, who cares she have a boyfriend, girlfriend or a cat? Who cares Widowmaker had a husband instead of wife when she is headshoting people from rooftops? Thats the difference between a character being solely defined by his trait and the trait being a natural part of his composition.

Response 1:
"but it's never brought up as something essential to their characters."

Define "essential". If you want to argue character personality, then fine.
If you want to argue design? Torb and Ana aren't "essential", but Widowmaker sorta is.

You can't really explain why she has blue skin without saying she was kidnapped and subjected to brainwashing; and the reason she was kidnapped was because she was married to an Overwatch agent. Origin stories are pretty huge parts of a character's design and lore, it's pretty necessary to include her sexuality and how she was married to the Overwatch agent because it covers her blue skin, her skills as an assassin, and her personality of being emotionless (an example is how she killed her husband after being brainwashed, showing how she is so far gone that she was able to murder her lover).

"Who cares Widowmaker had a husband instead of wife when she is headshoting people from rooftops?"

People who care about lore. **I'm not trying to say that Widowmaker couldn't the same character with the same origin story as a lesbian in a homosexual relationship.** *I'm trying to emphasize that her having a lover, whether it be a heterosexual or homosexual relationship, is important to her design, personality, and lore because being one of those sexualities is directly apart of her origin as a hero. If she wasn't in a relationship, and labeled as either straight or gay, her origin story would be a lot less interesting.*
Tracer's sexuality isn't "essential" because it's never addressed or brought up in her origin story. It's an element of the character that doesn't affect her design. It's lore and story that was an afterthought and has no relation to her personality as far as we can tell.

Response 2:
Orisa was never forced to be african, Overwatch choses nationality based on many things like "which countries hven't we done yet?" and "I just though of a cool hero from x country!". Also Lore. Orisa have quite the roots in Overwatch Lore, being connected to Doomfist and the map Numbani. The fact she wasn't forced into the game is further seem in her design. They made her an Omnic, not a human, and Omnics in Overwatch so far have very little traits of their country of origin save minor details (well, Zenyatta's "minor details" are his entire outfit, but well, he is a monk xD) and orisa have quite a subtle design.

Response 3:
Exactly. Blizz have very obviously been trying to tie characters to maps. PHARAH and temple of Anubis. Tracer and Kings Row. The Shimada brothers and Hanamura. Mei and Eco point. Gibralta and Winston. McCree and Route 66. Rein and Eichenwalde. You get the point… they never had anyone tied to Numbani though, so I always thought it was obvious we'd be getting someone from there… Guess (...[68]) didn't get the memo.

Response 4:
Like you just said, she doesn't really make a difference to the fact she's African, blizzard just made diversity for the sake of diversity, there wasn't much goodwill in it, it was marketing themselves as a diversity heavy game, and Orisa just wouldn't matter where she came from. She could literately come from Syria and nothing would change.

Post 7:
LGBT heroes matter because this is what some of us have gone through and still go through. To see a character we love that's gay lesbian bi or what-have-you portrayed in a POSITIVE LIGHT – not a token, not a tragedy, not a stereotype; but a normal person

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[68] Usernames have been deleted for their privacy

makes some of us feel…normal. Like straight people get to feel all the time.

Response 1:
That's fine, but it's both

- *the amount of them present in the game vs reality.*
- *how they are introduced.*

Tracer being a lesbian in a comic was a slow introduction into her character. If they made McHanzo a thing via a voice line then it feels token. Then it feels rushed. It doesn't feel genuine.

"Like straight people get to feel all the time."

And now you're villanizing straight people.

"Oh yes, I like to play PHARAH because she's straight, only we don't know her true sexuality and even still dont completely have".

Because it's the how you're doing it that's giving you backlash. Gay as a societal issue needs to progress naturally, like a trend. Forcing it only gives resistance since you're forcing a group to adapt to what you want when they don't want it.
If the bullies that bullied you want you to be straight, and you want them to accept you, both are in the wrong imo. You can't suddenly get your way while stepping over others ideas, opinions, and beliefs.

"Blizzard promised they'd reveal who the lgbt heroes were. That is why people are asking."

At the correct time…
Second of all, not every hero needs to be shoehorned into a LGBTQ identity. JUST like how straight heros aren't shoehorned in.
The only heterosexuals we know of are Ana and Torb, since they had biological sex and had offspring, and even then we don't have 100% confirmation if they are straight and are continuing to be straight.
Ana hasn't even told PHARAH's father that she exists yet.
Everyone else's sexuality is up for grabs, and quiet frankly leaving it in the air suits everyone. To everyone on the McHanzo ship, they can think that way. Just like how I think PHARAH is a lesbian despite 0 confirmation. Just like all the weird ships like Sym x Junkrat. To each their own.

"I'm not asking for you to dye your hair the Pride colors. But…freaking hell, understand the torture some of us have gone through before you mock us for wanting something so simple as to be included in a video game."

And who says that I haven't been tortured as well? Who says that LGBTQ people are the only ones in history to have been bullied? That's a pretty narrow mindset you have there if you think that way. I have dyslexia, a speech impediment (stutter), and short term memory loss. Then also I've gone through several abnormal phases. So don't act like it's the straight people vs the gay people, because the way society interacts with itself doesn't discriminate. Everyone can be dicks to everyone. THATS the issue, not gay vs straight.

"But popping out of the woodwork to silence anyone who does want to know, who does care? Clearly shows you're invested in this for some reason."

Because not everyone is all-aboard the gay train. Not everyone is fine with it. Human culture is far more colorful than just LGBTQ. If a christian doesn't want to accept the gay, then who are you to dictate what they think? JUST like how they shouldn't be able to dictate what you think. Where I draw the line is bullying. It's OK to anti-LGBTQ but you better have your act together and be a respectful human being to disagree with them.

Now I don't want to go away with the impression yall have on me, thinking I'm anti-LGBTQ, I'm for it, but I have a major problem with their agenda and how they are treating others, essentially bulling off of ideas like how they were bullied. 2 wrongs don't make a right.
And I forgot to mention that some amount of people here aren't anti-LGBTQ, they probably just have news fatigue and are sick of seeing these threads pop up. Not saying it's right, I'm just giving some insight to how some people work.

Post 8:
Nobody is asking for the majority though. Nobody has said they are excluded. I haven't even stated how I view it. All of these are assumptions you have made.
If we are talking about international, I have been many places around the world and you can trust there are a lot more than you think. Just because they aren't statically represented in some sort of paper or show up in a solid number doesn't mean they don't exist.
Some people are afraid to come out because of the repercussions. Repercussions are bad because of how LGBT are viewed. These views can slowly be changed in many ways. I'm not even saying it can only be done through Overwatch. There are many mediums already out there that are trying to help make a change.
Maybe we shouldn't try and fill in all the information about what the other person is thinking without asking them.

Response 1:
Where did someone ask for the character to be fleshed out that way? Where anyone say it should be the first thing to take into account? Where did anyone say that a characters sexuality should be the only focus?

Response 2:
"Statistically, no group of people in the world would consist of a talking monkey, a super soldier, multiple talking robots, a blue skin lady, a cyborg, time travelling lady, two people who can phase into smoke, a lady who can fly with tiny wings who can also revive the dead, darts that hurt people you don't like and heal those you do, a man who jumps around on explosives, and let's not forget about the ultimates."

Exactly. Overwatch seems quite diverse already.
Wrt statistics, I would imagine a very small percentage of people are LGBT compared to people who are not.
Wrt to being open about it… Well… Here's a thing; Maybe most of them would like to keep their private lives private.

Response 2.2:
You misunderstand. You claimed that statistically there shouldn't even be any lgbtq characters but statistically speaking not one of these characters exist at all. Real world statistics means nothing in Overwatch.
And their private lives are private to the other characters in Overwatch. We know torb have a ton of children through a comic. We know tracer has a girlfriend through a comic. We know pharah keeps in touch with dad and that he's Canadian. Neither of them yell out to the world that they have a family yet blizzard gave us this info. They're characters, Bliz can reveal whatever they want about their private lives.

Post 9:
Well, why do we need to know PHARAH is Ana's daughter? Or that Widowmaker killed her husband? Why know that Torbjorjyorn has a bagillion kids but, still favors his turret?

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Do we have to know Orisa was created by Efi or if Omnics and humans can or can not coexist in peace?
Fleshing our characters and lore is why. Diving into the character lives like you do a book and learning about them. Though it doesn't define who they are, sexuality is something about each character.

Response 1:
"I'm not sure this really holds water. We weren't looking for one-off tokenism. More positive representation from Blizzard is always going to be a good thing, and it's because we've learned we can trust their philosophy on the matter that we feel compelled to show that we're interested. This is a good way of putting your point, but we don't really need it right now. If they release another character's sexuality sometime in the near future sure, but not the whole cast. Plus we already got a really good positive thing from Blizzard with the Breast Cancer awareness mini-event we had."

They do positive things when they can, and right now it's harder for them because they have to fix bugs, work on reworks, rebuild Reinhardt, work on teasers, etc. If we keep on pushing these posts out to them then the game we so call say is "dying" is going to "die" faster because we're stressing them out. We don't need a lot of posts on this, it's just needs to be laid back.

"Well, why do we need to know PHARAH is Ana's daughter? Or that Widowmake killed her husband? Why know that Torbjorjyorn has a bagillion kids but, still favors his turret?
Do we have to know airosa was created by Efi or if Omnics and humans can or can not coexist in peace?
Fleshing our characters and lore is why. Diving into the character lives like you do a book and learning about them. Though it doesn't define who they are, sexuality is something about each character."

If sexuality was important to the story of a character they would've released Tracer's sexuality the day her origin was announced. Did they? No.
Ana and PHARAH being mom and daughter is important because it gives depth to both of their stories. The killing of Widow's husband tells her story about how she became an assassin in the first place. Torbjorn builds to make machines. He loves what he does, his kids have nothing to do with him saying funny lines. And Efi built Orisa. This is crucial to how the hell Orisa even became a hero in the first place.
Those points are ESSENTIAL to lore. If being lesbian is why Tracer is fighting for the world, then why doesn't she keep saying she's fighting for Emily and not the whole world? Because she doesn't fight because she's lesbian, that's the least of her worries, she just wants to keep the planet safe.

Response 1.1:
"but we don't really need it right now. If they release another character's sexuality sometime in the near future sure, but not the whole cast."

What do you mean 'we don't need it right now'? I don't understand what you're saying. We're not asking for the whole cast. When have we ever asked for the whole cast?

"right now it's harder for them because they have to fix bugs, work on reworks, rebuild Reinhardt, work on teasers, etc."

The people who write the lore are NOT the same people who do these things. Fixing bugs is NOT the job of a writer or artist.

"If sexuality was important to the story of a character they would've released Tracer's sexuality the day her origin was announced. Did they? No."

They waited to introduce Emily and further Tracer's lore naturally, like how they said they wanted to do it. They did that.

"Ana and PHARAH being mom and daughter is important because it gives depth to both of their stories."

But Tracer having a girlfriend is somehow different from Ana and Fareeha being related? How, exactly?

"And Efi built Orisa. This is crucial to how the hell Orisa even became a hero in the first place."

How is Efi more important than Emily in this case? Maybe Tracer is only re-joining the recall because she has someone (Emily) to fight for and she sees that there's still more to be done before the two of them are safe. Keeping the planet safe also keeps her girlfriend safe.

Response 1.2:
"This is a good way of putting your point, but we don't really need it right now."

respectfully, that's not your call to make.

"Plus we already got a really good positive thing from Blizzard with the Breast Cancer awareness mini-event we had."

nobody says blizzard Can't Do Good. the whole reason this conversation even exists is because we trust the writing team to deliver on their promises. otherwise we would just handwave the fact that chu talks about there being multiple LGBT heroes every blizzcon and move on with our lives.

"They do positive things when they can, and right now it's harder for them because they have to fix bugs, work on reworks, rebuild Reinhardt, work on teasers, etc. If we keep on pushing these posts out to them then the game we so call say is "dying" is going to "die" faster because we're stressing them out. We don't need a lot of posts on this, it's just needs to be laid back."

the writing team is not working on balance or implementing reworks. the development teams (and their respective sections) and the writing team are literally entirely separate entities, so this hypothetical is nonsense.

"If sexuality was important to the story of a character they would've released Tracer's sexuality the day her origin was announced. Did they? No.
Ana and PHARAH being mom and daughter is important because it gives depth to both of their stories. The killing of Widow's husband tells her story about how she became an assassin in the first place. Torbjorn builds to make machines. He loves what he does, his kids have nothing to do with him saying funny lines. And Efi built Orisa. This is crucial to how the hell Orisa even became a hero in the first place."

there are a TON of details that we know about all of the heroes that have no bearing on anything that happens in universe.
what does reinhardt liking currywurst and hasselhoff, or junkrat liking boba, or brigitte liking cats have to do with their stories? nothing, it's just small factoids that the writers throw in because it helps make the characters more real and shows what is important to them indirectly.
frankly, i don't want sexuality being central to any character. because this means one of two things: that they are a stereotype, or that the writing team saw it fit to clumsily recreate current day biases and axes of oppression in a universe where it frankly doesn't need to exist. either way, it's lazy writing.
but casually introducing it? sign me up. it should be no bigger deal than introducing a character's favourite food. and given that the overwatch team has already promised this it's the least they can do to follow up.
besides, most of these conversations end up just being 10-15 people talking about lore. it's no big thing. we just don't appreciate people barging in with the same 3-4 canned responses and then trolling the thread when we get snippy - because answering the same question 30-40 times gets real tiring.

Response 1.3:
"This is a good way of putting your point, but we don't really need it right now. If they release another character's sexuality sometime in the near future sure, but not the whole cast. Plus we already got a really good positive thing from Blizzard with the Breast Cancer awareness mini-event we had."

Admittedly, I haven't seen any posts requesting that the entire cast's sexuality be revealed. I think what people are asking for is simply that we receive more information on one of the characters they alluded to as being LGBT+. The form that information would take would be in the same way we've seen it done before—that is with relevance to a story rather than, say, an offhanded tweet.
But you're right; Blizzard does a lot of really positive, impactful things. I believe that's precisely why people are so passionate about what they want, especially during this month. I think it's a good sign that people genuinely trust them, which is the important distinction to make here. A lot of people seem to be interpreting threads like these as outraged demands for the beans to be spilled, but the more thought-out posts have always read to me like people expressing a heartfelt desire for more representation from a company they know are just as keen on it.

"They do positive things when they can, and right now it's harder for them because they have to fix bugs, work on reworks, rebuild Reinhardt, work on teasers, etc. If we keep on pushing these posts out to them then the game we so call say is "dying" is going to "die" faster because we're stressing them out. We don't need a lot of posts on this, it's just needs to be laid back."

I get where you're coming from here, but these aren't the same departments we're talking about. As large as Blizzard is, they wouldn't be dedicating the same resources to story expansion as they do balance and programming. And I can't imagine it really stresses them out; if anything, seeing so many people agree with the point of view they've reiterated many times now inspires confidence that they're going about it the right way.

"If being lesbian is why Tracer is fighting for the world, then why doesn't she keep saying she's fighting for Emily and not the whole world?"

We don't need to interpret it as her fighting because she's a lesbian any more than we would interpret a man fighting for his wife as doing so because he's straight. The fact she's in a loving relationship is a huge part of her character. It doesn't push the momentum of the story forward, but the appeal of Overwatch has always resided in its characters and their perspectives. Having an insight into their lives—of which romance plays a very large part—makes it easier to relate to them as people. In a game like this, I want as much of a character's life to be illuminated as possible so long as it's done in an organic, interesting way—which goes without saying.
The fact that she's gay isn't necessary for us to love her as a character, but it creates a great standard for more inclusive writing that has so often been avoided or only vaguely covered by other companies and artists.

Response 1.4:
"This is a good way of putting your point, but we don't really need it right now."

And I'm pretty sure nobody needs you telling them what they need.

Post 10 (this post is an continuation of post 9):
"Ana and PHARAH being mom and daughter is important because it gives depth to both of their stories."

But Tracer having a girlfriend is somehow different from Ana and Fareeha being related? How, exactly?

Response 1:
Because Tracer and Emily aren't related unlike PHARAH and Ana. That should be an obvious point

there.

"And Efi built Orisa. This is crucial to how the hell Orisa even became a hero in the first place. How is Efi more important than Emily in this case? Maybe Tracer is only re-joining the recall because she has someone (Emily) to fight for and she sees that there's still more to be done before the two of them are safe. Keeping the planet safe also keeps her girlfriend safe."

Well let's see, Efi BUILT Orisa.
And, uh, don't mean to alarm you but maybe Tracer answered because she was already a part of Overwatch? Not to mention Winston was as well. She was a die-hard part of Overwatch, so why wouldn't she answer the call FROM OVERWATCH.

"sometimes lesbian (n. or adj.) is the preferred term for women
whose enduring physical, romantic, and/ or emotional attractions are to people of the same sex
(e.g., gay man, gay people).
do you think you are being a good ally right now??? like??? what even is your goal here?? do you
think you are being a champion for gay rights by talking over a lesbian?"

You, uh, proved my initial point again. I said "some lesbians" before.

"frankly, i don't want sexuality being central to any character. because this means one of two things: that they are a stereotype, or that the writing team saw it fit to clumsily recreate current day biases and axes of oppression in a universe where it frankly doesn't need to exist. either way, it's lazy writing.
but casually introducing it? sign me up. it should be no bigger deal than introducing a character's favourite food. and given that the overwatch team has already promised this it's the least they can do to follow up.
besides, most of these conversations end up just being 10-15 people talking about lore. it's no big thing. we just don't appreciate people barging in with the same 3-4 canned responses and then trolling the thread when we get snippy - because answering the same question 30-40 times gets real tiring."

See this I can agree with in full. I'm fine with introducing it just lightly, but they don't need to force it out all at once. It does get tiring to hear a lot of this go on, but right now we should appreciate what the devs do for the characters right now.

Response 1:
"See this I can agree with in full. I'm fine with introducing it just lightly, but they don't need to force it out all at once. It does get tiring to hear a lot of this go on, but right now we should appreciate what the devs do for the characters right now."

You're doing my second point right now.

"When I've seen the same three arguments against this over and over again, I am inclined to believe none of these people bother reading.

1. "All you people want is a token gay character that I am certain will be a young, white, effeminate, sassy, fashion-forward twink with no personality beyond 'I'm Gay!' because that's all my little mind can come up with and THAT makes me MAD! Bad writing!! I don't trust Blizzard to write a good gay character!! Here's how Blizzard needs to write this character in 10 easy steps because I took creative writing in high school–""

eta:
We trust Blizz to write these characters. That's why we're asking for more because they've done a good job so far.

Post 11:
I honestly don't know what kind of representation is considered satisfactory, that's why I asked the question. How many characters is enough that the LGBT community is satisfied they're being represented? I mean give me a number.

Response 1:
Well, that's a hard number to nail down, isn't it? I imagine different people will have different opinions on the matter. Personally, I feel 4 or 5 is the ideal amount for me, which isn't much considering that the roster keeps growing as new characters are added, but some people are probably gonna scream is too much. But hey, I wouldn't like them to be introduced all at once. 'More than one' is certainly ideal.

Response 1.1:
On this note, personally I think there's about 4/5 too, yeah. These are minus my own headcanons and wishes.
(I'd say ZARYA is a very obvious choice, PHARAH because she's also a hero, Soldier & Reaper (past romantic relationship would fit the characters imo), and another as a wildcard)
edit: nah, gonna add him after all. I'd like (at least) Roadhog to be gay.

Post 12:
"However, the whole concept of having areas of a college campus where you're going to segregate is a terrible idea. Nothing good comes of that. On one hand you're teaching minorities that the world is against them and they can only trust other people in their tribe and for everyone else that's banned from the area, you're teaching them that minorities want to drive them away. So you create a "us vs them" scenario in everyone's mind. That's just a recipe for divisiveness and prejudice. We should be working to combat the tribalism mentality, not support it."

But no matter how you want to put it, discriminated groups absolutely need to have places where they're the ones that set the rules. At least for now.

These places aren't the only places these people frequent. Because that's impossible. It's impossible to be in college and only ever be exposed to your safe space. I'm sure there are fringe cases, since there's always fringe cases. But the average person uses these places for safe interaction with others, not for some malicious tribe mentality.

The only thing that creates divisiveness and prejudice are prejudiced people. Putting the blame on people who simply want to have a moment of peace and safety sometimes in their lives is unfair and upsetting. And while exposing prejudiced people gradually to content they're prejudiced against is a way to teach them better, it shouldn't be expected of average people to expose themselves personally to discrimination and potentially violence just so we can teach a bigot that we're actually fine. It's literally why media representation can help, because bigots yelling at fictional gay characters until they get used to them is (mostly) a victimless crime.

Marginalised groups shouldn't have to be required to expose themselves to unwanted and upsetting situations just so they don't accidentally appear divisive when they have every logical right to be fearful in certain situations. It's a deeply complicated issue that will take time, and while the process is still ongoing, marginalised groups still need spaces where they can go in the case of things going sour.

"But the fact of the matter remains that we don't really *know* much about their backstories. This is true for a majority of the cast, of which we simply know the big events, or most relevant events. So while it may not be necessarily negative now, it could very much change later on."

That's true. I believe Blizzard would be careful not to turn representation on its head. So far, Tracer is very nicely done and I doubt Blizzard will ever do something to her story to suddenly turn her into a negative lesbian stereotype.
But yes. It could happen, theoretically. Something we consider bad representation could also end up being good. PHARAH comes to mind as an example, since she had Native North American legendary skins while being Egyptian. It looked out of place with her backstory. I reserved my judgement because we knew nothing about her, but many people pointed out it's not exactly nice to lump two completely different ethnicities onto a single character. It later turned out that PHARAH's father is First Nations Canadian. So the skins are justified. The same could happen to LGBT representation if they choose something that might feel negative at the beginning. And while I know they like to be slow with their lore, in cases like this, it might be better to deliver the necessary information right away.

"Yes"

Thanks. Unfortunately, many do not share that sentiment. I always found it odd to be honest.

"And unless you have been living in a cave, we are already making enormous strides in the fields of social equality. Some countries are largely egalitarian, (mainly in Scandinavia)."

Absolutely true. We're making good progress and I'd like to see that continue in the future because there's still a lot more strides to make.

"The male receptionist was a sex object for those women, yknow, and it was a very clear attempt to get men out of leading roles."

This is just a direct role reversal because in 99% of the cases receptionists are female and are sex objects for men. Women are also in the vast minority when it comes to lead roles. I thought that was kinda the point.

"This really wasn't a pandering movie, it was just a good movie."

Indeed. And it shows that movies with "pandering" casts and themes can be good, so the issue isn't really in a cast and theme. But those types of movies are often under much bigger scrutiny. There are thousands of movies that failed and are completely by the book when it comes to not coming even close to "pandering." They get a pass because it's nothing unusual. But the moment we get a movie that tries to be inclusive, it's immediately under much bigger scrutiny, and mostly from the opposition.
The new Ghostbusters would've been shrugged off as a fun but inconsequential romp by most people had it been made with the standard formula. But it got politicised and controversial from the start. I also remember Mad Max being marketed as a totally different movie and a lot of very weird people began protesting *after* they've seen it because they've suddenly been exposed to feminism. I remember calls for boycotts. I bet Mad Max would've been controversial and politicised from the start had it been promoted differently. It just shows how strange these things are when it comes to discussions about pandering.

"Not really, considering that it is mainly Christianity and Muslim religions that spoke out against this form of sexuality. Civilisations such as the Romans frequently had homosexual relations. And before this time it is said that societies didn't really pay much attention to sexuality. Women were treated as inferior in these times, but sexuality wasn't really."

Even pre-Christianity/Islam, straightness was *the most* represented. That's the keyword. People didn't exactly perceive different sexualities (they didn't even have names for them; not even for straight), but procreation was key. We believe this is mostly due to how high pregnancy/infant mortality rate was and that people in pre-industrial times had

a real potential of actually facing big problems should the population decline. During Antiquity, homosexual relationships were seen as a normal part of human behaviour, but there were still strict rules. While you could have gay affairs, it was still your duty to marry and have children. These relationships were also depicted in art of the time, but they still weren't in the majority or even 50-50.

It's quite difficult to discuss that topic in regards to distant past due to lack of contemporary terminology. I'm an archaeologist btw, with a master's degree in Roman Antiquity so this is something I've dealt with. Without actual terminology from that time, it's hard to work with it by using modern labels instead. So we can't actually tell what was the proper stance on someone who said they were strictly gay.

Response 1:
"These places aren't the only places these people frequent. Because that's impossible. It's impossible to be in college and only ever be exposed to your safe space. I'm sure there are fringe cases, since there's always fringe cases. But the average person uses these places for safe interaction with others, not for some malicious tribe mentality."

The tribe mentality doesn't start as malicious, but it develops nonetheless. I mean you're essentially teaching them that the outside world is dangerous, and that the only ones they can trust are "their own kind." It encourages them to separate further and further from mainstream and retreat into their own culture bubble. You won't get acceptance this way, teaching one side to fear the other and seek to escape them, and the other side hearing the awful propaganda being spread around and growing resentment for the people that thinks "their kind" is too oppressive to be around and had to be excluded.
I mean imagine a town declaring "safe spaces" from black people because the implication is that black people are criminals, and many of their residents don't feel comfortable with blacks around. Do you really think that's going to help reduce racism or is it going to be incredibly divisive?

"Marginalised groups shouldn't have to be required to expose themselves to unwanted and upsetting situations just so they don't accidentally appear divisive when they have every logical right to be fearful in certain situations."

This sounds a lot like the justification of white supremacists who want to create an ethnostate too. You fill their heads with "well the mexicans and the blacks are dangerous, you can only trust whites." and you insulate them in their own all-white bubble where they're bombarded with a bunch of propaganda that fills them with fear of the other side and they want their safe space too.
Safe spaces may well have started with pure intentions initially, but the end effect is a very dangerous one.

Response 2:
"This is just a direct role reversal because in 99% of the cases receptionists are female and are sex objects for men. Women are also in the vast minority when it comes to lead roles. I thought that was kinda the point."

That's what I mean. The fact that the entire point was to turn the system on its head is basically the definition of pandering. Overall it looks like it hurt the entire movement due to the backlash.

"There are thousands of movies that failed and are completely by the book when it comes to not coming even close to "pandering.""

This depends on whether or not you're listening to the vocal minority who will fight your cause at every twist and turn. There will always be some that will do their best to bring things down, from both sides of the story (granted, the straight side is larger, and because of that, louder)

"Even pre-Christianity/Islam, straightness was *the most* represented."

==*Well it is the most common form of sexuality.*==

"While you could have gay affairs, it was still your duty to marry and have children"

Societal roles, very hard to escape from. If I understood my own studies correctly, this was mainly for upper class men and family heads, rather than the population as a whole. Personally I am under pressure from family to marry and move on. While not comparable to other such pressures, I don't want to fight my family for my right do things my way.

"I'm an archaeologist btw, with a master's degree in Roman Antiquity so this is something I've dealt with."

What are the odds considering I could have brought up a large number of ancient civilisations who have similar tidings as the Romans (Greek, anyone?) It is said that even the spartans had significant homosexual relations, though if I recall it was mostly with young men.

"That's true. I believe Blizzard would be careful not to turn representation on its head."

I want to finish on this note, because I believe that Blizzard has their plans. My main point of argument in this thread is to let Blizzard do what Blizzard does, and to not force them to make a move earlier than they intend to. I do myself deeply trust them not to mess this up, but with enough pressure they just might do something they regret.
I just want people to back off a bit, and to keep an eye on things. Because I see it quite often, people put a label on a character and get upset when its not true, or when people say no. For example, when Moira was new, and there was a large amount of people asking for, or saying that she is, a trans(the word trans sexual is not allowed? Blizzard plz), and there was another group saying that, she isn't. These 2 groups started fighting head to head in a very large and honestly frustrating thread.

Post 13:
"Someone who can sit outside and drink with him, share stories of their wild youth, have that understanding that a criminal background changes you as a person, and that you'll always be running from your past in some way. Someone he can confide in, and someone who can confide in him just as easily - a mutual trust there is key."

That is very much so, which is why I do think that that having any reveal for Hanzo in the form of a *backstory* would be the wrong way to do it.
I think that's a statement for most relationships in this particular verse. Unless it has implications relevant to the story or other characters (Torbjorns and his daughter Brigitte, Widow and her husband being an Overwatch leader, Ana and her Daughter PHARAH, and any other such relationships are able to revealed in the form of backstory. Otherwise its a tid-bit reveal like Tracers.
And with those tid-bits, timing is important and should retain some form of relevance to current events. Even if it was just Christmas.

Post 14:
We know that Junkrat likes boba tea. Winston likes peanut butter. That Brigitte likes cats, and even tried to create a jetpack for one. That Roadhog like patchimaris. That PHARAH likes rock music, and Reinhardt listens to Hasselhoff. That Lucio enjoys hockey. Tell me how that advances their lore?
It doesn't. But it does tell us more about the characters... about who they are as people. It's the same when you say a character is LGBT, or autistic... it tells us more about who they are. But in the cases of those two things, it also provides very important representation.
As for diabetes... this is set in the future, so it's not unreasonable to believe they have invented a cure at this time. I mean, just look at Mercy. I think you're trying to push an

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argument you know doesn't hold up. Having diabetes is not equivalent to being LGBT, does not have the same stigma surrounding it... one of the reasons representation is important for LGBT people is because of the stigma they face in everyday life. It's about improving others opinions on LGBT people, and reassuring LGBT people that they are valid and that there is nothing wrong with them.

Response 1:
The fact that you think people with diabetes don't face a stigma says a lot about you.
No, not every single person with every characteristic needs to be represented in a flipping online video game with almost no story or lore.

Zarya

Post 1:
What do people have against leather straps and hair dye ZARYA?

Response 1:
Because we could have got this:
 10

😍

ZARYA SKIN CONCEPT
THE SCOURGE

Response 1.1:
Okay, that blows cybergoth clear out of the water.

Response 1.2:
Beats cybergoth easy

Post 2:
This post was already copied into the corpus in paragraph V.II - PHARAH, post 1, response 1.

Post 3:
This post was already copied into the corpus in paragraph V.II - PHARAH, post 3, response 1.

Post 4:
This post was already copied into the corpus in paragraph IV.I - PHARAH, post 4, response 1.1.

Post 5:

Because you wear the flag of a country that is beating, killing, and imprisoning LGBT people and yet are in here more concerned with trying to tell minorities what they can and can't have. That's why. Go away.

Response 1:
Well isn't that discriminatory.

Response 1.1:
"Well isn't that discriminatory."

Is Russia not doing that? That would be a nice reality to bear witness too, because beating, killing, and imprisoning minorities for being minorities is pretty awful.

Response 2:
And I wear this flag literally for what you could call "role playing". Im a zarya main.

Post 6:
It's hard for me to say if you are represented or not, since I don't know what demographic you belong to. One thing I do tend to see though is that sometimes people devalue the importance of representation when it's not something that they have a struggle with (not referring to you, just an observation).
And now, I am generalising, and I know people will get mad anyway, but for example when straight white guys go "there's no need for representation, you should care about the character and not their race/gender/orientation" when they are the group with the largest representation out there... they haven't really experienced not seeing themselves reflected, and I don't think they're aware of the subconscious effects this kind of thing can have... When something is accepted as the norm, you just don't notice it.
If you just generally don't feel a connection with characters then there's nothing wrong with that, no one is saying you should necessarily, or that any video game character should be a perfect copy of anyone in real life. Personally I don't fly in a giant mech, time travel, shoot icicles etc. but one of the things I love about overwatch is that there is such a large female cast. Not only that, but Ana, ZARYA and Moira don't fit the standard beauty model.
It's not the only reason I like Overwatch, but it does make me love it more, and I wish that growing up there were more games where I could feel represented like that... Offering the same kind of representation to LGBT people will have a great positive effect. It might not personally benefit some people, but that's no reason to deny benefit to *others* **on the basis that they themselves don't want representation.**

Post 7:
I'm not going to get offended if you say that. I think you can find any number of reasons to empathize with a character (but, for the record, Lucio is not black, he is Brazilian, and I know nationality and race are different, but in my opinion, I think the difference and what people state upon the difference between the two is something that keeps people divided by lines of color). I agree with your post in that yes, people do get offended over this topic, but I disagree in that I don't see why many people in this category in question (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Trans, of which I belong to the third group) say they want another person like that fit their individual demographics (in this case, on sexuality) in their sources of entertainment media (movies, games, etc.) when most people can empathize with anyone regardless of what sexual orientation they are. If we are talking by the numbers, 1/27 being gay (Tracer, who I have started to play more recently, as well as other poke-dive heroes) is statistically accurate to the wide population. If you

take into consideration the rumors that at least one more is non-straight (whatever the sexuality may be), we get 2/27 at the least, which is grossly (not the ew meaning of gross, I'm using it numbers-wise) more considering the mass population. Now reading your post while sober (late nights = hard drinks) I can see what you meant. In all honesty, we don't even need to know their sexuality; if we could step back and pretend sexuality didn't exist for a second, we could see that there would be no problem with the lore as it is. But, because sexuality is a thing, we can't do that, and people see the need to attribute human characteristics to non-human things - in this case, video game characters. Like I have said before, character development is a thing that happens naturally, and if the devs start designing characters with the original premise in question being that they are gay, then I think development of that character and future ones (they won't stop doing this kind of development where they make one broad statement about a new character then make the character based around that statement if this ever comes to pass) becomes jaded and dumbed down. If it turns out a character like ZARYA (I think she's gay, she is super butchy and it took my only two lesbian friends that play this game to bring up character sexuality to even think of that) is gay, then fine, she's gay. It doesn't change her character as we know it until they release new lore about that character, which is fine because then they would have created the character, and then later added more to her. I think that when they start making characters specifically to appease the calls of the social justice warriors is when characters stop becoming interesting; not because they belong to these demographics, mind you, but because these characters weren't created naturally like all the past characters have been (to our knowledge). Create a character and then later give them these characteristics, I think that's fine. It's when we start making characters for reasons not related to gameplay that I think the gameplay starts taking a downturn.

Post 8:
That is a fallacy, including sexuality does not have to be a political device. It is just providing a detail about the character, nothing more, nothing less. Sometimes those are cross-pollinated for the sake of story, such as ZARYA being about as bigoted as most people that are not invested in sexuality but yet vehemently opposed to it being represented. That being said, Blizzard themselves does not need to make a political statement by making a character that happens to not be straight. The very notion is ridiculous.
Their target demographic includes the LGBT community, so, realistically, you should take your own advice.

Response 1:
"It is just providing a detail about the character, nothing more, nothing less."

Oh it's nothing, huh? So why does Tracer being announced as gay make national headlines?
'Hey guys, you know this character we made up for our video game? Well guess what, she's gay'!
I agree, it should be treated as mundane because it's normal, but it's not me demanding this stuff be shouted and celebrated from the rooftops.

Reponse 2:
Then let them do their thing? They're doing a good job, they AREN'T bigots and have a very diverse, friendly game. Let them add the details seamlessly. Constantly asking for this or that is going to ruin the subtly of authenticity.
Let me put it this way; I am an old washed up comic book artist who did a lot of work when he was younger for various indie companies. Should I then demand that there needs to be a hero who has the background as a comic book illustrator and that I cannot relate to any of the other heroes because they do not represent me? To me sexuality is a trivial thing, like a profession or hair color, I don't care about it. I can sympathize with a gay man going through pain or a lesbian who lost her job. The situation doesn't even have to be about their sexuality. If he went through pain because he got hit by a car, not because he is gay, I sympathize. If she lost her job because she was conned,

not because she is a lesbian, I can sympathize.
Hair color, race, height, weight, age, favorite ice cream, profession, religion, sexuality, etc… are all trivial background details that should be used to design a greater picture. NONE of these should be used as the sole purpose of design.
Blizzard is doing fine, Tracer is awesome, she's gay? Wow cool. Let them do their thing.

Post 9:
Some people don't want your pride shoved into video games.
Isn't that why most people play games, to get away from stigmas and escape into an equal world. Your demand for representation while so many other minorities don't have it seems wrong. I was spat on for being a certain height.
"Straight people can feel all the time", dude. Everyone is made fun of for ANYTHING. Whether it's purple hair, saggy pants, manly pecs or foreign languages - humans simply target the weak. As far as Overwatch goes, you've got Tracer, Zarya, Moira and probably Brigitte. They're the most lbgtqrefdsdfsdf accepting game EVER.
We get it, bro, you vape. Play games like the rest of us.

Reponse 1:
"Isn't that why most people play games, to get away from stigmas and escape into an equal world. Online gaming isn't "equal.""

Online gaming is filled with the same hateful people and bigots as the real world who will target you if you're presumed minority. The gaming community isn't a utopia, and the reason for that isn't because of rainbow flags. **It's because it's full of garbage people, and we let them continue playing in the sandbox.**

Reponse 2:
"I know what LGBT stigma is because I was bullied for being a different height". Sure thing, I'm sure that's exactly the same. I'm sure you also had to worry about letting your parents know about your height because they might reject you, or even throw you out… or have people tell you you're going to hell for being a different height…
Basically, you're saying 'no representation for LGBT cos other people get bullied' which… doesn't make sense? Because even if they are, why is that a reason we shouldn't have more than 1 LGBT character?
Plus, Zarya, Moira and Brigitte are not confirmed LGBT, so saying we 'have them' is daft, we don't… we literally only have Tracer.

Post 10:
"Pretty sure there is a tracer spray of her kissing her girlfriend."

Tracer has a spray of Emily's *face*. Is that kissing? I guess Jack has a spray of kissing too since he's got a spray of his face… And Gabe… and Ana… and everyone else actually… Zarya has her and a bear…

Post 11:
This post was already copied into the corpus in paragraph V.II - PHARAH, post 11, response 1.1.

Post 12:
"The reason for that is that straight heterosexuality is considered the norm.
Put away the pitchforks — I'm not done.

The LGBT community has come a long way & is now widely accepted for who they are — something that took far too long to happen.
That doesn't change the fact that they are the vast minority & that people are — well, people.
They have prejudices, opinions, views & when they encounter something outside the norm, the first question asked tends to be — why?"

That's absolutely true; heterosexuality is seen as the norm so it's not questioned. It's also where the issues come from. While LGBT people are slowly beginning to gain actual rights and protection in law, societal change comes even slower. In order for society to start viewing LGBT people in the same way the view heterosexual people (as a normal part of the world, albeit in smaller population), we also have to include them in media because media is the easiest way to expose big amounts of people to foreign or poorly understood concepts. Formal education about LGBT people is also needed for example.
I think the point with characters in media like Overwatch being confirmed as LGBT is that they're simply shown as that. They're normal people with personalities and goals and ideals and they also happen to not be straight. I know the first reaction of a lot of people is "Why?" but that highlights an issue that those people have with the LGBT community. Those asking "Why?" are the ones that need to be exposed to it the most, ironically. I think the best counter-question to it is "Why not?"

"All of those would be fascinating topics & I wish Blizzard would devote more time to them.
I'm not blind to the issues in Overwatch. Nor is anyone else. We've just noticed that one issue appears to be much more prominent than anything else."

But it kinda isn't. The LGBT community isn't even an issue in Overwatch (it's implied that the world of Overwatch doesn't have a prejudice against LGBT people. That's at least the impression I got from Tracer's reveal and handling). It's not a topic the game speaks about, it's not in any way acknowledged as a problem in their world, Tracer's comic was just Tracer buying a gift for her partner for Christmas. It wasn't in any way dedicated to the fact that her partner is a woman. We as players were thrilled, but in universe attention is never drawn to the fact that it's a lesbian relationship. In game characters don't speak about it in either positive or negative light. Tracer has one voice line where she wonders about Emily, but Widow has several lines about her husband so there's nothing unusual there. Quite frankly, nobody cares that Tracer has a girlfriend and it's not a part of the plot, it's not presented as something the players need to form opinions on or challenge it. There are no gameplay mechanics around it, there was no event with LGBT issues.
Meanwhile, all other political aspects are vital and aren't contained only in non-gameplay lore. In game, characters talk about this. Symmetra and Lucio argue over the nature of freedom, logically challenging players to pick a side. Zarya argues with Genji over his status as a cyborg. There was a whole event dedicated to the way we look at omnics and their fight for equality (in Uprising we see a violent omnic group trying to cause harm in the name of equality, and we also see various omnics that are also threatened by this). There was a whole event that pretty directly challenged players to think about the nature of law and justice (Retribution was filled to the brim with commentary and challenging views of what is right and what is lawful).
I fail to see how a topic that isn't even mentioned by name is more prominent than topics that are turned into game modes.
However, we *do* agree that Blizzard should devote more time to those topics. And as far as I'm concerned, closing the conversation is fine. Pretty sure there's not much more to be said, unless someone else has commentary.

IV. III Thread 3: LGBT in Overwatch Mega(y) thread

Baptiste[69]

Post 1:
Not that this is in any way shocking, but Chu has confirmed that they haven't thought about BAPTISTE being LGBTQ in detail yet, as they are still working on his story. This of course doesn't mean yes or no, but don't expect a confirmation, not that any of us were expecting it.

Response 1:
Hmmm, interesting.
Don't tempt me to get back on my soapbox lol, but honestly BAPTISTE would be amazing for representation. A black man and a man who made bad choices yet made himself into a redeemed hero, plus he is prime for a happy ending.

Response 2:
I can see him as a dude that swings both ways the only other character I can also see swing both ways is Sombra

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Post 2:
I don't think Blizzard has any intentions to reveal anything in a long time.
But I honestly think, from the little we've seen, he is an excellent contender. I think at this point I wouldn't want anyone else to be revealed bi but him, preferably with a boyfriend because they are never going to do anything with Soldier 76 being gay, or for that matter releasing Vincent or his husband as a hero, so BAPTISTE having a boyfriend would allow for at least one instance of a positive m/m relationship that is acknowledged in the lore.

Post 3:
That's true, and that's fair.
But NOW IT'S SOAPBOX TIME. (I wish there was a spoiler option so I could hide it for people not interested, tbh)
I suppose I'm just stuck in this fantasy/"I think I know better than Chu" state.
Like, BAPTISTE is would be INCREDIBLE as gay rep, but as bi rep he's merely the best option available. Again, it depends how they portray him, but in any case all he can be is just as good bi as gay, in my mind.
Compared to Jack, who would've broken so many stereotypes as a bi man. Especially the stereotype that we are merely going from partner to partner. I've floated this idea before, but Jack carrying two pictures of two seperate people (he is carrying a stack of photo's, after all) he cared about over his life would be a great way to have bisexual rep. It's rare that bisexual men are portrayed as being in love/hung up, which bites.
Whereas making BAPTISTE bi, you could have that same idea but it would be much harder to do and convey effectively, same with most other characters in the roster. It's easier to portray bisexuality tastefully with past relationships, imo.
BAPTISTE being gay frees you up to do so much more in the way of positive rep, namely the happy ending aspect... He could have a significant other who he is committed too,

[69] Source:
https://us.forums.blizzard.com/en/overwatch/search?q=baptiste%20topic%3A159835%20order%3Alatest_topic

maybe it's his first and only love (I've gotten criticism for the idea of having bisexual characters have different sex/gendered partners in their past, but my justification is that with that there is no real way to simply say "Oh he's just gay/straight") and he could be fighting for that significant other, in the same way that Tracer fights for Emily. Again, a very positive m/m relationship, and better than that one that could end in fluff.

But that's passed at this point, so I agree that BAPTISTE is really the best bi male option.

TL; DR - BAPTISTE being bi is the best in a ehhhhhh situation for representation.

Post 4:
Interesting soapbox, and some interesting points. I can see where you are coming from with Soldier 76, and how he'd be great bi representation, if only because of how easy and convenient it would be for Jack to carry pictures of his past loves. It just would be an easy painless way the '' rip the bi reveal bandaid '' without much fuzz.

And Bap would be glorious gay representation as well, ESPECIALLY since we have two homosexual (male and female) characters who are whitey whitersons, couldn't be more white. And while that is not a bad thing by any means, it does strike as a bit odd. But they can still release LGBT poc characters, there's no doubt about it.

But what is done is done, and it'll probably take years and years and years for BAPTISTE to get more lore to begin with, and what's done with Soldier 76 is done. Whatever.

For me, I don't really care about the label, and while I really want exclusively gay male characters, I think that doesn't mean much to me, because I'd rather have excellent depictions of male x male relationships that are positive, whether those two men are bi, gay or bi and gay, rather than sad mopey gays and offscreen irrelevant gays who are allegedly happy. Labels don't matter, I just want that good male x male feel-good romance, gay chicken soup for the gay soul.

But I think for Overwatch, we won't be seeing this, definitely not in near future, and possibly not even in distant future. And it's okay, there are other media that will '' do better '' than Overwatch, even if I hoped that Overwatch would deliver like the Gay Gods they pretend they are (I joke, but nevertheless).

Post 5:
"For me, I don't really care about the label, and while I really want exclusively gay male characters, I think that doesn't mean much to me, because I'd rather have excellent depictions of male x male relationships that are positive, whether those two men are bi, gay or bi and gay, rather than sad mopey gays and offscreen irrelevant gays who are allegedly happy. Labels don't matter, I just want that good male x male feel-good romance, gay chicken soup for the gay soul."

I agree 100%, reducing the stigma that exists against male/male relationships helps both gay and bi men.

I suppose I view bi male representation as important because so often we have our existence questioned, or as I said, viewed in skewed ways. Not to say that does not apply to gay men, but I feel that it hasn't really been challenged with bi men. I agree that culture needs to depict m/m relationships more positively.

To me it feels like Chu is doing representation in a way that has become outdated. Like, making Jack gay would be great representation about 5 to 10 years ago, but when Steve Cortez, Shiro and Raymond Holt have been around for years, he feels dated/safe, especially compared to BAPTISTE.

Post 6:
Western comics has one pretty good example, Prodigy from Young Avengers. But then you have John Constantine, Daken, Loki and Heracles, who are not that great. Especially Daken, who is like ALL the bad stereotypes in one.

"I feel like the twist about the most vanilla, stereotypically masculine, kind of boring and dull, character being gay is a bit overdone, but that is not really an attack on gay characters, but western tropes in general."

I agree, it's like its almost come full circle.
Unfortunately, videogames are not the media to go to for amazing, evolving characters. Only Naughty Dog has consistently delivered on that front, Bioware has been slipping in my opinion. I will say that I feel Steve Cortez is a great gay character, although he does fall into the 'tragic gay' trope, it's a trope you actually help him work through and heal from. His arc is one of my favorites, completely separate from him being romancable.

"Not only that, but it's good to keep in mind that A LOT of gay men specifically enjoy masculine men, so that probably factors into character designing."

That is fair, but much of the OW male cast fit that ideal. Really only Lucio and technically Torb directly go against that. And BAPTISTE is I'd say more masculine then Jack, easily. And Rein is more masculine then ALLLLLLLLLLL.

Post 7:
I don't think we know enough to say whether or not he'd be stereotypical.
This is really just a charming way of saying hello. I wouldn't connect it with some negative trait since it looks really innocent. I'd actually enjoy something like that, as it looks more like a charming positive expression, rather than highly sexualised and demonised thing that turns bi people into mindless flirts.
But as I said, we still have a lot to find out about BAPTISTE in general so it's hard to say how this will fit him overall. Personally, I can't wait to hear voice lines and interactions.

Post 8:
That is fair, but I would still say that having stereotypical representation is not ideal, nor does it really help. At best it ticks a box off of the representation list.
Like in order of best to worst, it goes;
Not Stereotypical and Positive> Stereotypical but Positive > Negative >>>>>>> Stereotypical and Negative.
Like, you don't convince people that a thing is normal by having a stereotypical depiction, all you are accomplishing is acknowledging they exist at that point.
Bi men have the worst closeted percentage of all the LGBT groups, at least as far as 1st world countries are concerned. It's 40%, compared to 83% for gay men and 86% for lesbians. And having stereotypical depictions doesn't really help that, what does help is more depictions as normal people.
BAPTISTE can be positive and it still would not really help the problem is what I am saying.

Post 9:
I was too lazy to check the PTR myself, but oh dear, exactly what you said! This is literally the first male character that really owns his good looks and likes to show it. It's so rare. And it's especially rare for that character to also be badass, interesting and not a joke.
I'm 100% sure they've been looking around the fandom wants and needs for BAPTISTE. Maybe even this thread lmao.

Response 1:
Highly possible since I believe they are still writing his story.

Response 2:
I absolutely agree, buuuuuut.
(here we go)
I'd again argue that is not really what male bisexual representation needs. Like, this kind of representation would be great for gay men; Baptist being masculine, attractive and a show off would be great if he is gay, plus you have the redeemed hero aspect as well as him being prime for a happy ending.
But this kind of representation both has been done for bisexual men and actively HURTS the effort to help young men who are bisexual accept their sexuality.
This kind of overly sexual character has existed for a while. Characters like John Constantine, Vamp, Marvel's Hercules and Axton, and really all the dudes on Teen Wolf.
This might just be personal experience talking, but none of these characters helped. I felt these characters were made the way they were for straight girls to drool over, not to actually represent me. And the one time I went to a pride parade, it had the opposite intended effect. I felt like I should try and go further into the closet, because I could not relate to anything there. Being shown/told my sexuality involved being completely sexually open to anyone completely went against who I was.
I'll put it like this, most bisexual men are average men and stay in the closet, mostly passing as straight. Only 40% of bisexual men are out, and this number can only really decrease if we include men who have bisexual tendencies, but are not comfortable even labeling themselves as bi. Of course, there are many who are more open with their sexuality, and of course more power to the. Many prominent bisexual men in fact do just that, like Bowie.
All this to say that having another character that is effectively eye candy and putting himself out there is not the best way to try and normalize bisexuality, imo.

Post 10:
Okay then, BAPTISTE is gay, you heard it here first

Response 1:
Yes, absolutely.
He's near perfect as representation, unless you can think of any issues?

Response 2:
I don't think any of the men are bad representation, or offensive representation if they were gay. It all depends on how it's handled, instead of what the character is like, barring few exceptions, that Overwatch doesn't have.

Response 3:
That's fair.
I feel a lot of gay stereotypes are fairly well known and easy to avoid (camp, effeminate), whereas most of the bi stereotypes are looked at as the only ways to confirm a character as bi.

Response 4:
Yeah, we've talked about this a lot and I definitely agree on most points.
At some level, I think he would be a nice opportunity, because we're being properly shown certain things that would avoid the whole "it was out of nowhere" and would also give representation to something that's so often avoided when making male characters. They're always squinting, scrunchy faced, devoid of emotions, must remain masculine at all times, can't ever show any form of flirting or openness to sexuality that isn't creepy and predatory… It's such a nice concept. BAPTISTE is such a nice, warm personality that also has a lot of depth and is very distinctly different from how male characters get to be portrayed. I think, on his own, he'd be fantastic as a positive male character who is also bisexual.
But as you said… There's the fact that when men do get to be like this in the media, they're always pushed into that stereotype and we never get anyone else. Those types are usually the only

bisexual people in the work and they always have to get that "flirty" and "open to whatever" personality. It's such a shame we're at this spot where, on one hand, that's nice and fresh, but on the other, it paints a very bad classical stereotype about bisexual people (men especially in this case).

I really wish I could enjoy the thought of BAPTISTE being bi and that they're not backing down from showing it, but at the end of the day… It would be a flirty bi man. Seen it. Not helping.

I'd be fine with it if it were handled especially delicately and also if we get more bi characters. Both are kinda unlikely. To be clear, I wouldn't outright hate him being confirmed as bi, I'd still think it's good on some aspect (he's a nice, good person, charming and positive), but I'd wonder if that's it and if this is what we'll be pigeonholed into forever.

As usual, the answer is: we need more representation and it needs to be diverse. For everybody in the community.

Post 11:

I absolutely agree, and this time there is no but! (weird for me, I know) I've tried to reword some of my points better. "Average" as opposed to "normal" and what not. BAPTISTE is a conundrum, because he is positive in a lot of aspects, but those aspects lead to him being bad rep for bisexual men.

"To be clear, I wouldn't outright hate him being confirmed as bi, I'd still think it's good on some aspect (he's a nice, good person, charming and positive), but I'd wonder if that's it and if this is what we'll be pigeonholed into forever."

Exactly. I'd be more frustrated than mad. Like, "You can do better than this."

Post 12:

I'll have to log in just to buy that skin. His hair looks much better here than in his original lol. Honestly young BAPTISTE should've been the default BAPTISTE, we needed young guys in the roster, but he is in his late 30s, isn't he?

Post 13:

"I gotta admit. Jack, the all-American hero, being confirmed gay is quite a powerful statement Blizz did. Even if the Vincent/Jack story is left at an alarming cliffhanger."

I wouldn't really call it a cliffhanger.
It's ended. Jack seems to have given up on romance, same as Ana.
And I've already said this, but it's not really powerful. There have been plenty of masculine gay characters before.
Powerful would be having a character be gay on screen. Like Rein, Hanzo or BAPTISTE having a partner.
If Torb can have a wife and like 8 kids, Rein could have a husband.

"That Jack skin ok, ok, that's my favorite. That's easily the best."

Absolutely, I really look forward to not getting it and instead getting the Torb skin again.

Post 14:

That's fair, I was more thinking along the lines of having him be depicted in a relationship after he reconciles with his past.

McCree and BAPTISTE might be better candidates for depicting a relationship right now.

Post 15:
Tanks and healers were a freaking mistake. That's what I think. Delete them all.
Is BAPTISTE gay yet? Is Vincent released yet? *groan*

Post 16:
How Chu said when asked about BAPTISTE being LGBT, that they '' haven't thought about his lore that far yet '' just really makes me thing they just wing it in terms of who is LGBT and who is not, honestly. Whatever suits their need at the time.
Partly because of this, I prefer that the LGBT characters are shown as such when they are released. At least then, being LGBT was part of their identity always, and not something tacked on much, much, much later, 2 years after their release.

Post 17:
Still mad how BAPTISTE, despite being a hottie, continues the trope that all male characters are (older) masculine soldiers, and that we STILL don't have a male medical professional, as far as we know anyway.
I'm yawning, where are all the feminine male heroes? Where are all the younger male characters?
Echo, Soujurn (or however her name is spelt idk), Junker Queen are all coming, it's going to be a long wait for a new male human hero. The omnic Talon dude probably being the next hero, I'll be SURPRISED if he manages to bring anything new to the already rather plain roster of male heroes, no matter how exciting his story might be. He better be something else than a violent edgelord.

Pharah[70]

Post 1:
Headcanon: Pharah's already really gay

Post 2:
It's too late now for no sexuality at all. And i don't just mean tracer; Widow, Torb, Brigitte, Pharah, and Ana all have story elements related to sexuality

Response 1:
Being someone's child has something to do with sexuality. Is that what you mean? I understand what you are trying to say, it's just that the idea behind it is … just bizzare…
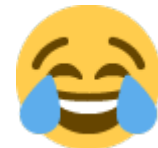
Response 2:
It is too late.
However they came out specificly to say Tracer was a Lesbian after the demands from the LGBT

community.
The comic/story elements wasn't enough, they needed it fully confirmed with a label slapped on.
They need to do the same for straight heroes if they want to go down that path.

Post 3:
I'm so glad Winston is canonically a gay ally.
Emily Lena is super cute but mostly from how I've built it up in my head. In a perfect world with lots of overwatch content, I'd love more of them.
Of the characters I would most like to see be LGBT... probably Pharah or Symm. Moira and Zarya seem like ones that would probably feel odd if they were confirmed straight, but they're not the characters I'd be truly most excited to hear more on

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Post 4:
As minority myself I don't feel the need to force everyone to believe that Pharah is a muslim egyptian. She can be an Egyptian christian, jewish, muslim or atheist.
You however want everyone who felt any connection to her due to their background to know that Pharah is officially an Athiest. Therefore any blank slate that you could give phara personally is now gone replaced by pre-determined background after her introduction.
In this exercise I replaced sexual orientation with religious belief.
If you think its a lonely scene by being a gay person... with so many games allowing the romance of gay characters or gay character presences like Ellie from Last of Us.
You have not walked far in the shoes of a muslim person. Generally we are the evil guys you need to shoot in the face. Its not fun. Let me tell you.

Response 1:
You can't compare political belief and religious background with sexuality. Political beliefs and religious backgrounds are mostly a choice, sexuality not so much, and is mostly biological.
Besides, when it comes to political belief, plenty of characters have a political belief, or something akin to a political belief that represent real life political ideologies: Symmetra, Doomfist and characters being anti-Overwatch or pro-Overwatch, anti-omnic or pro-omnic.
And furthermore, a lot of characters are potentially coded as religious, like Zenyatta being a buddhist, Hanzo being part of the Shinto faith, Ana potentially being Muslim and Mercy being Christian because of her very western Christian symbolism of angels.
I don't need blatant confirmation of someone being gay, but I would like to see a male x male relationship within the roster, or one of the heroes in the roster and a NPC significant other.

Post 5:
"Does there have to be so many people constantly coming to those threads and complain and complain and complain, when they could just EASILY ignore them? No, not really."

"How is anyone supposed to ignore it when they are always popping up? It is not just the LGBT threads. Every overly abused topic is like that."

A cursory examination of your post history reveals that you have successfully ignored millions of threads about requests for nerfs, Mercy threads and numerous others that are just repeated spam on the forums. I don't see any posts in "nerf Brigitte/Hanzo/Moira/Mercy/insert character" threads. They pop up way more than any lore related threads, including LGBT threads and yet you have succeeded in not posting in them.

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I think it's fairly easy to ignore them and you know it because you've done it already. Understand that this "But they're spamming the forum so I *have* to post in them to voice my displeasure of spam!" is an argument that has been seen in every LGBT thread and it always shows up when every other tired and boring argument has been refuted. And it's always the same. Somehow "I'm just against spam!" can be proven to be false because these people do not post the same things in other spam threads. I've never seen the same people continuously post in "Nerf Brigitte" threads, but somehow they find it irresistible to appear in LGBT threads and whine about spam, forcing and being tired of seeing it. At that point we can't help but wonder if spam actually isn't the issue and rather, the issue is the LGBT topic.

"I have no idea which character is Muslim. Do you see me complaining about lack of representation?"

I don't see why you're presenting this as a good thing. There's no reason for you not to complain, as you've said that you're Muslim and that you have a bad time seeing yourself in media unless it's in a negative way. That is absolutely a problem with our society and speaking out against that is a *good* thing. It's not a good thing to sit in the corner, proud about being silent about your own discrimination. You have all the right in the world to ask questions about this and want representation, even in Overwatch since Overwatch absolutely isn't religion-free.
I'm actually beyond interested in Ana's and Pharah's religion because their region of origin would imply that they're Muslim, but their design is at odds with it. Specifically, both have a tattoo that represents another (pagan) religion and from what I've learned from my Muslim friends, Islam isn't welcoming to tattooing in general, but especially wouldn't allow a Muslim to tattoo symbols of another god onto their face. I'd actually like to know if Blizzard intended this to be a hint that they're not Muslim (why would that be important however?) or they've made a mistake (or perhaps 60 years in the future this won't be an issue in Islam).
There's nothing and no one preventing you from opening a thread and discussing lore with others, my dude. There's always something to discuss with fellow fans. Lore is a valid topic and many are highly interested in it. And there's nothing wrong with wanting to be represented positively in a popular game that you enjoy.

Post 6:
Just me personally, but I'd rather they not confirm in game hero canon pairs. it messes a lot of the fanbase up and it makes it hard for shippers to ship who they want without the constant reminder that " so and so are a pair" causing rifts and toxic arguments. We don't need a "Genji VS Pharah" fight for Mercy's love again...
I am all for canon sexuality and identity, but for in game pairings? I'm not for it. Too messy and gives the character development issues, especially if they have their own agenda to do.
I rather have them date 3rd party lovers like Torb to Ingrid, Tracer to Emily and Gerard to Amelie.
Just my thoughts on the matter

Post 7:
"As a lesbian myself I think Pharah represents lesbians much better than Tracer."

She definitely has this Korra-esque/strong personality so I can agree with you.

Post 8:

I never get the big lesbian fanbase for Pharah. Like, I got literally everyone else: Brig and Zarya are muscular women, Mercy and D.Va has a large female fanbase due to their accessibility in general, Tracer's an actual lesbian, Sombra has that wild card personality that lesbians who are constrained by their family can appreciate, Moira has the androgynous look going on. **Pharah is as thin as a bug in her rocket form and bland personality.** Is the Pharah/Mercy fanbase that much of an influence?

Response 1:

"Pharah is as thin as a bug in her rocket form and bland personality. Is the Pharah/Mercy fanbase that much of an influence?"

Which I find funny because most draw her muscular when in the spray we have of her (Archives Event) she isn't really muscular at all. In the comic "Reflections", she is built pretty normal I think? I personally feel it's because of her military persona. In game, she is very serious, cocky, justice-like and most women in the military keep in shape. I think it's her tough attitude that makes people see her this way, as the Pharmacy ship is huge (not sure if still is since Moicy came to be) Pharah (aside from young Ana) has the most prettiest face in game I feel and the armor she wears is very concealing, giving her a more masculine approach.
The way she uses her emotes might have some significant resources (punches the air roughly, plays guitar, punches her fists together, military baton twirl action with gun) as well as her basketball highlight intro, it may all come across as some lesbian "vibes" to most, while some just find her tomboyish.
Just my thoughts.
Then again, everyone ships everyone in this game regardless lol

Post 9:

Oh for sure. I'm not trying to discredit any headcanon, and I think it's great to pull from personal experience. I really would love to see a native American hero (besides Pharah being half). I don't get why people take headcanon so... Combatively. I don't think D.Va is trans at all but I'm just out here living my truth

"especially seeing as he uses Spanish words in his comic"

I forgot about this! Do you remember any?

Post 10:

"And maybe, they should be discussed instead of swept under the rug as somehow offensive thoughts that need to be erased and not talked about."

I don't necessarily think people were trying to sweep it under the rug, but more saying that the problems that arise with bisexuality don't come from bisexual people themselves, it's a reflection of the current culture we live in. Someone being tempted to leave a difficult, same sex relationship where they potentially face open hatred, job termination, discrimination in businesses, etc, for an "easy" opposite sex relationship is caused in part by a. that person not being willing to contribute the same into a relationship that you are which is a personality flaw found within every person of every possible gender and sexuality combination and b. the world we live in rewarding heterosexuality and rejecting homosexuality.
I would imagine the reason many people would avoid talking about it with such a large potential audience is because of a fear they share with me; what I don't want to see is infighting in the LGBT+ community because though each letter of that acronym faces their own unique challenges, we are also all united by it, and seeing the hatred all of us

face should bring us solidarity and community. Of course, not trying to say you were picking a fight or anything along those lines, but I could imagine someone taking it the wrong way and escalating it to a full blown argument very quickly.

There are also situations like [...]⁷¹ mentioned, where it might just not be safe to come out in certain situations and there might be times people have to do things that may come across as disrespectful to them, their partner,   or both, for the more pressing issue of immediate safety. What   sucks is that that decision has to be made at all, and it should be   constant motivation to work for a time where they won't have to.

Response 1:
I'm kind of worried they won't anytime soon. It   might be more likely we get Pharah's dad as a hero (First Nations), since there are already 3 Amercian heroes (I think Reaper is Mexican-American?).

Post 11:
I think the reason ladies dont come in the thread more is literally because we have Tracer representing gay women. I think the people here are wanting a gay man or trans character since thats what we are lacking.
My personal speculative thoughts regarding the ladies sexual preferences
D.VA- cant think of her as anything but straight
Pharah- imagine her to be bi
Mei- her and Zarya is cute
Widow- emotionless but was married to a dude
Brigitte- into daddies
Mercy- kind of feel gency is real
Moira- Married to science
Sombra- gay (just a vibe)
Ana- straight
Orisa- her and bastion remind me of those kids in kindergarten that get 'married'
Junkerqueen- Roadhog she calls him mako which no one else does.

Response 1:
I think the reason ladies dont come in the thread more is literally because we have Tracer representing gay women.

Reponse 2:
I think the reason ladies dont come in the thread more is literally because we have Tracer representing gay women.
Nah, it's because people hate lesbians. Most male fans only accept them for "adult content" and the female fans constantly villainize people that like f/f ships or make lesbians look predatory.

Post 12:
I think if it were me, I probably would pick Pharah? I think I should clarify a bit more: Pharah probably visualizes herself as a boy.
But I think there really isn't a wrong answer. I think it's just how much we want to avoid cultural stereotypes and stuff like that.

Response 1:
Hmmm, interesting.
I believe the game refers to Pharah as she/her, and we don't see her refer to herself with male pronouns.

> *I actually like Pharah as a badass straight cis woman. Like, specifically thinking of Elektra from the Cowboy Bebop movie. I could also see her as bi.*

Zarya[72]

Post 1:
Do you think Zarya is gay?
For some reason when game came out I thought it was true, but now I dont want it to be true.
I think winston and moira would be asexual.

Post 2:
I think Zarya would be a nice representation. I know a lot of people think of her as the stereotypical butch lesbian, but in truth, butch lesbian representation is actually extremely low and usually negative. So having a positive hero like that would be nice. But yeah, it would also probably make people be nasty because of the perceived stereotype.

Post 3:
the thing about that is that, butch lesbians despite being seen as a sterotype are rarely seen in actual media at all. like try to name 10 canon butch lesbians. its hard.
and i know alot of lesbians that would love it if zarya was a lesbian, since she's a pretty cool and interesting character.

Yep, I see that a lot as being a huge stereotype, but if a butch is in any media (and that's a big IF), it's usually painted in a bad light.
So I don't really understand why do people have such strong feelings against butch portrayal. There isn't much of it at all.

Response 2:
the thing about that is that, butch lesbians despite being seen as a sterotype are rarely seen in actual media at all. like try to name 10 canon butch lesbians. its hard.
and i know alot of lesbians that would love it if zarya was a lesbian, since she's a pretty cool and interesting character.
Uhhh…Cremisius Aclassi from Dragon Age? Let me think…well that's a start.

Post 4:
I don't know, I think trying to forcefully avoid stereotypical characteristics is not a good thing. Because often, stereotypes exist for a reason, and stereotypical behavior and traits often help us to relate to these characters, and believe that they are gay, or black, or women.
Stereotypical features aren't bad, but being a straight up stereotype is, no matter what. For instance, take Tracer. She is a bit of a tomboy, has short hair, but she is like disney heroine, and she is bright and fun. There are things there that you could think of as stereotypically lesbian, but then there are aspects that aren't. I think she is a pretty excellent lesbian character because of it.
Soldier, on the other hand, doesn't really have stereotypically gay traits, and that's part

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[72] Source:
https://us.forums.blizzard.com/en/overwatch/search?q=zarya%20topic%3A159835%20order%3Alatest_topic

of the reason I feel a little bit cold on him, when it comes to relating to him, and while this might seem shocking, believing that he was ever meant to be a gay character. But I can't say that other LGBT, specifically gay men couldn't relate to Soldier, and I can't say there are gay men who aren't exactly like Soldier, there definitely are, and they deserved representation as well.
In the end, we just need more all kinds of LGBT characters. But what I'm trying to say is, stereotypical traits aren't BAD, but being a straight up stereotype, in this day and age, is pretty freaking bad.

Response 1:
Yeah, that's exactly what bothers me about the Zarya discourse.
Like, I get it. I see it all the time, people with zero knowledge about the LGBT community will be like "Zarya must be a lesbian" and "Moira must be trans."
And of course, there's something about that makes all of us justifiably uncomfortable, but then again, there are members of our community that are exactly like that and they don't have representation that isn't a full-blown comic relief stereotypical over-the-top character whose only purpose is to mock them. Someone like Zarya and Moira, while being more on the classical stereotypical side would still be good serious representation that doesn't exist elsewhere. I see the same with "feminine flamboyant gay men." It's a stereotype, alright, but this type of a stereotype is never given a serious treatment (if any treatment) in the media. Therefore, having a character like that would, in fact, break a stereotype because they would be presented in a positive light.
One of my friends is a butch lesbian and doesn't even play Overwatch but when I showed her Zarya, she instantly fell in love. She felt represented and also said "This absolutely cannot be a straight woman." Ofc, that doesn't have to be true, but these traits do resonate with some people in the community and it would actually break the stereotype of a buff masculine lady lesbian being treated like a joke, because Zarya definitely isn't a joke character.

"What we need to do to break them is not ignore them, but represent them positively and show they're not one-dimensional comic relief cardboard cutouts."

Agreed. Zarya is a interesting conundrum in that she would be positive rep either way. I'd say her being lesbian is more positive overall, since for some reason depicting lesbians as butch is seen as bad, as you said. Butch lesbians deserve depictions as good people, but I think writers have thrown the baby with the bathwater.

"Please no in-fighting within our own community. Why mock another lgbt person who genuinely sees these characters as their own?"

I won't mock, but if someone tells me that having a character that is a active flirt like McCree is good representation for bisexual men, I will quickly point out that that is illogical at best. Appreciation/relation to a character does not turn that character into good representation.

"I don't know, I think trying to forcefully avoid stereotypical characteristics is not a good thing. Because often, stereotypes exist for a reason, and stereotypical behavior and traits often help us to relate to these characters, and believe that they are gay, or black, or women.
Stereotypical features aren't bad, but being a straight up stereotype is, no matter what. For instance, take Tracer. She is a bit of a tomboy, has short hair, but she is like disney heroine, and she is bright and fun. There are things there that you could think of as stereotypically lesbian, but then there are aspects that aren't. I think she is a pretty excellent lesbian character because of it. Soldier, on the other hand, doesn't really have stereotypically gay traits, and that's part of the reason I feel a little bit cold on him, when it comes to relating to him, and while this might seem shocking, believing that he was ever meant to be a gay character.
But I can't say that other LGBT, specifically gay men couldn't relate to Soldier, and I can't say there are gay men who aren't exactly like Soldier, there definitely are, and they deserved representation as well.
In the end, we just need more all kinds of LGBT characters. But what I'm trying to say is, stereotypical traits aren't BAD, but being a straight up stereotype, in this day and age, is pretty freaking bad."

I agree, but having stereotypes is only really cool to me if you have many good non-stereotypical depictions. Hence why depicting effeminate gay men is not a huge issue to me, these men exist and deserve representation. And you have characters like Shiro, Steve Cortez, Kung Jin and Captain Raymond Holt for representation that goes against stereotypes and are very relatable. For butch lesbians, there are already characters like Sam Traynor, Batwoman, the Question/Renee Montoya and Ellie in the Last of Us that goes against the idea of lesbians only being masculine/butch.
Honestly, we've as a culture have gone too far in that regard.
Sorry for sounding like a broken record, but bi-men don't have that, at least not to the same degree as with gay men and lesbians in culture. Hence why I would have a problem with stereotypical or evil depictions.

Post 5:
This is very true, but as there are butch lesbians who want Zarya to be a lesbian, there are butch straight women who want her to be straight, and want the representation too. And same with Moira, there are androgynous cis women who'd like her to just be portrayed as a cis woman, who doesn't care about looking feminine. In the end what this shows is how media and entertainment hasn't really evolved much when it comes to making characters other than what is expected, lol.

Appendix V: Notification of plagiarism form

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Faculteit Geesteswetenschappen
Versie september 2014

VERKLARING KENNISNEMING REGELS M.B.T. PLAGIAAT

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De volgende zaken worden in elk geval als plagiaat aangemerkt:
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Datum en handtekening: 12-6-2019   Aniek Brewoort

Dit formulier lever je bij je begeleider in als je start met je bacheloreindwerkstuk of je master scriptie.

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