

DUELGBTQ

Brief Summary - (up to 600)

Duelgbtq is a video game about the power of authentic self expression. In a strange and whimsical castle, four protagonists come together to face bullies from their past. Through banterful dance battles, each protagonist invites their opponent to reflect on the harm caused by their past actions.

My game will create a safe space for LGBTQ youth and gamers of all ages to explore ideas around identity. Everyone who plays will be able to experience the power of words to both hurt others and build understanding of others who are different from you.

Why Is This a Big Idea? - (up to 2700)

A 2006 study conducted at the University of Toronto found that “Comprehending characters in narrative fiction appears to parallel the comprehension of peers in the actual world.” In reviewing this research, psychologist William Chopik from the University of Michigan elaborated, “fiction and stories do a lot of things for us, they

expose us to uncomfortable ideas . . . and provide us with the opportunity to take other peoples' perspectives in a safe, distanced way. In that way, fiction serves as a playground for exercising empathic skills." *Duelgbtq* is a virtual playground for people to exercise and practice empathy.

Lgbtq+ representation in entertainment has increased in quantity in the past few years, but not so much in quality. The majority of representation today continues to reinforce harmful stereotypes and use queer trauma as a spectacle, not often creating situations for characters to explore ideas around building hope and support for the community. It's also clear that lesser known identities (such as genderflux and cupioromantic identities) are rarely seen in media at all.

I will use the common gaming convention of character customization as a tool to teach about queer identities, through both showing and telling within the game. This ability to explore and have unique experiences based on each identity option you select is an opportunity I feel other games have missed.

Through personal connections and public data, it's clear to me that members of the lgbtq+ community face daily challenges to living their personal truths, and struggle to find support. The statistics for lgbtq+ depression and suicide correlates with what I hear everyday from my peers, from the stories of their past to the difficulties of the

present. I can't make every space in our country safe, but I know for sure I can make one that is accessible to many. I will make the game that we needed when we were growing up, and one that we can explore and appreciate as adults.

With my virtual playground, I will propagate a community of people from around the world who can come together online through streaming platforms and in person with friends to play *Duelgbtq*. It will create opportunities to not only discuss queer representation, but also the fantastical world lore within the game. This game is an introduction to a larger world and its characters; making it both a standalone story and a set up for future chapters of adventuring and self discovery.

What do you hope to accomplish, how will you do it, and when? - (up to 2700)

I will create a roleplaying video game complete with exploration, four main battles, one final boss battle, and lots of replayability. Though one run of the game may only be an hour or so, the customization will encourage new experiences when played more than once.

Why are you the right person to undertake this “Big Idea?” - (up to 1500)

When I was a closeted non-binary teen living at home, I found great solace in video games. My ability to roleplay as a character of a queer identity helped me explore and affirm parts of myself I felt unsure about.

Even though my non-binary identity wasn't often included in the video games that I played back in the 2010s, it was affirming to know there were people out there facing similar challenges as myself. If the challenges had been less vague and more specific to my own experiences however, there's no doubt in my mind that I would have accepted my true identity sooner. This is why, despite writing fantasy, I give my characters stories based on true events.

The protagonist's histories with their bullies will be inspired by interviews with people in my community. I'll search for honest stories about growing up queer, and the intersectionality of lgbtq+ identity with race, ethnicity, and nationality. As an Ashkenazi Jew, I know that intersectionality informs self identity. As a white American, I've had to learn about how BIPOC's intersectionality gets overlooked, and their stories silenced.

Although the four main protagonists have customizable queer identities, their appearance and culture can not be changed. I will encourage players to experience a

sense of connection and empathy with lgbtq+ characters whose stories of being bullied are most often ignored. *Duelgbtq* is a virtual walk in another person's shoes.

5 Portfolio Images (1000):

Waiting Room concept/aesthetic showcase

An architectural and aesthetic concept of *Duelgbtq*'s world. A combination of European medieval architecture and American queer neon camp, the goal is to recontextualize medieval futurism with a modern queer lens. A subgenre of fantasy, medieval futurism is often used to revisit ancient ideas of masculinity in a modern era, often excluding queer people and their histories from that exploration. I want to bring queer people into the main conversation of this genre: what does it mean to reinhabit ancient spaces with the ideas of the present? I want this aesthetic to highlight the exclusion and isolation of queer people throughout history.



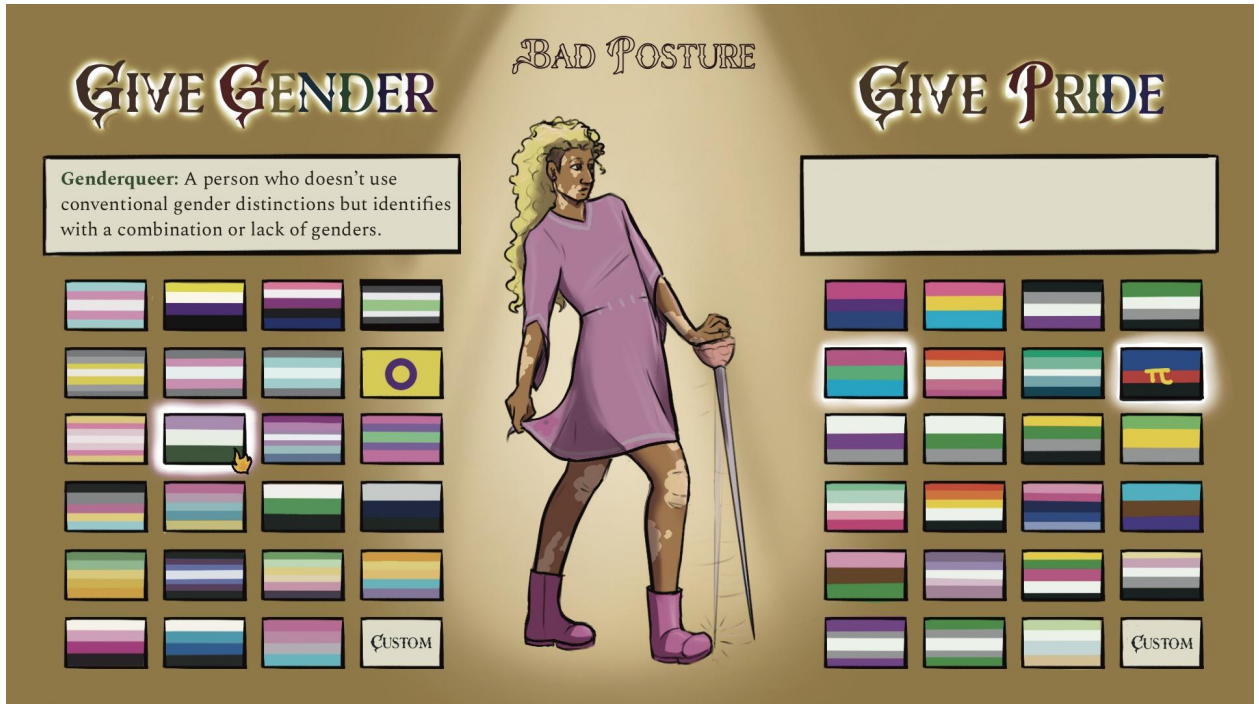
Gameplay concept

Duelgbtq will be over-the-top at all times, in every line I draw, and every line I write. My goal is to be fun above all else, to create an inviting space where darker story beats are sandwiched between bright moments of silly banter and unexpected game mechanics. In the dance battle arena, *the Qolosseum*, hand drawn animation will allow for some creative and crazy moves to be showcased, for example, the summoning of a glitter-farting unicorn. As we all know, combining dance and classical weapon fighting naturally results in magical energy attacks that slowly plant memories into the minds of your enemies.



Customization screen concept

The customization element will not only serve as a way to tell the player what various identity definitions are straight up, but will also affect gameplay that shows first hand how these identities affect characters' interactions with others and the world around them.



Memory unlocked

After landing enough epic dance moves, the enemy becomes affected by the magical energy and witnesses their past actions from the perspective of the protagonist. As you get closer to winning, bits and pieces of the memory reveal themselves, until the battle is won and the player gets to see the full memory. Upon reflection, the enemy realizes the harm of their actions and apologizes. They are now an ally!



Four main characters sitting together chatting

The four protagonists are named after their queer fashion staples, Tuxedo For No Reason, Indoor Sunglasses, Medieval Mullet, and Bad Posture. They will be able to talk to each other before going into battle, to illustrate their personalities and build the world of *Duelgbtq*.

