

FACTSHEET

Representing disabilities in video games

Although the representation of disabilities in video games has improved in recent years, there is still very limited research and attention given to this important topic (Currys PC World, 2019, Shell, 2021).

Video games and disabilities

Representing disabilities in video games reflects the diversity of the real world (Parlock, 2020, Sherer, 2020). Video games can be used to help raise awareness and educate people about disabilities, as long as they offer an accurate representation of the disability, whether it is physical or mental (Brody, 2020). Moreover, more players can come to understand the variety of disabilities and the representation of disabilities can serve as a powerful tool for identification (Gibbons, 2015; Dix, 2016).

The lack of characters with disabilities in video games can be explained by the fear of the developers to present those characters in a stereotypical way (Dix, 2016; Currys PC World, 2019; Shell, 2021).

Video game characters with disabilities

According to the analysis of 108 video game trailers by Shell (2021), many characters with disabilities are predominantly secondary, non-playable characters. However, in many cases, they have an influential role which indicates that despite the low representation of characters with disabilities, they are an important part of the story. In addition, according to the same research, characters with disabilities were portrayed as the protagonist in more cases which opposes the stereotypical view of characters with disabilities as the “villains”.

When characters with disabilities are represented in video games, they are more likely to have physical than mental disabilities.

Physical disabilities often include a missing limb, burn victims, amputees, and victims of ballistic trauma, as those are the disabilities that developers are most likely to present in the game (Dix, 2016, Currys PC World, 2019). Another important point to mention is that the physical disability of characters is often “fixed” in the games, and it is often replaced by superhuman powers or superhuman prosthetics (Currys PC World, 2019).

In recent years, there has been an increase in the representation of mental disabilities due to the increased awareness of mental health (Currys PC World, 2019).

While there is more work to be done to represent disabilities and the diversity of disabilities in video games, below are some examples of characters with disabilities, both physical and mental.

Examples of video game characters with disabilities:

- **Symmetra from Overwatch 2** - Symmetra is the first playable character in Overwatch that has an Autism Spectrum Disorder. She is also an amputee (like some other characters from the Game, such as Cassidy and Torbjorn), and she has a cybernetic arm.



OVERWATCH

Image 1: Symmetra. Source: <https://playoverwatch.com/en-gb/heroes/symmetra/>

- **Senua from Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice** - Senua is a young warrior that has severe psychosis.



Image 2: Senua. Source: <https://hellblade.com/gallery>

- **Jeff “Joker” from Mass Effect Series** – Joker was born with Vrolik syndrome (also called: brittle bone disease). Because of this, he relies on crutches and leg braces to walk. Despite this, he became the pilot of SSV Normandy.



Image 3: Joker. Source: https://masseffect.fandom.com/wiki/Jeff_%22Joker%22_Moreau

- **Lester Crest from Grand Theft Auto V** – Lester suffers from a wasting disease which has limited his mobility, and he uses a wheelchair. Because of this, he also became overweight and suffers from asthma.



Image 4: Lester. Source : https://gta.fandom.com/wiki/Lester_Crest

- **Cassie Thornton from Perception** – Cassie is a blind woman who navigates by echolocation. She relies entirely on her hearing to explore her surroundings.
- **Josh Sauchak from Watch Dogs 2** – Josh has some troubles understanding social cues and does not understand some slang words. He has Asperger's Syndrome.



Image 5: Josh. Source : https://watchdogs.fandom.com/wiki/Josh_Sauchak

- **Baiken from Guilty Gear Series** – Baiken lost her left eye, and her right arm was severed in an attack when she was a child.

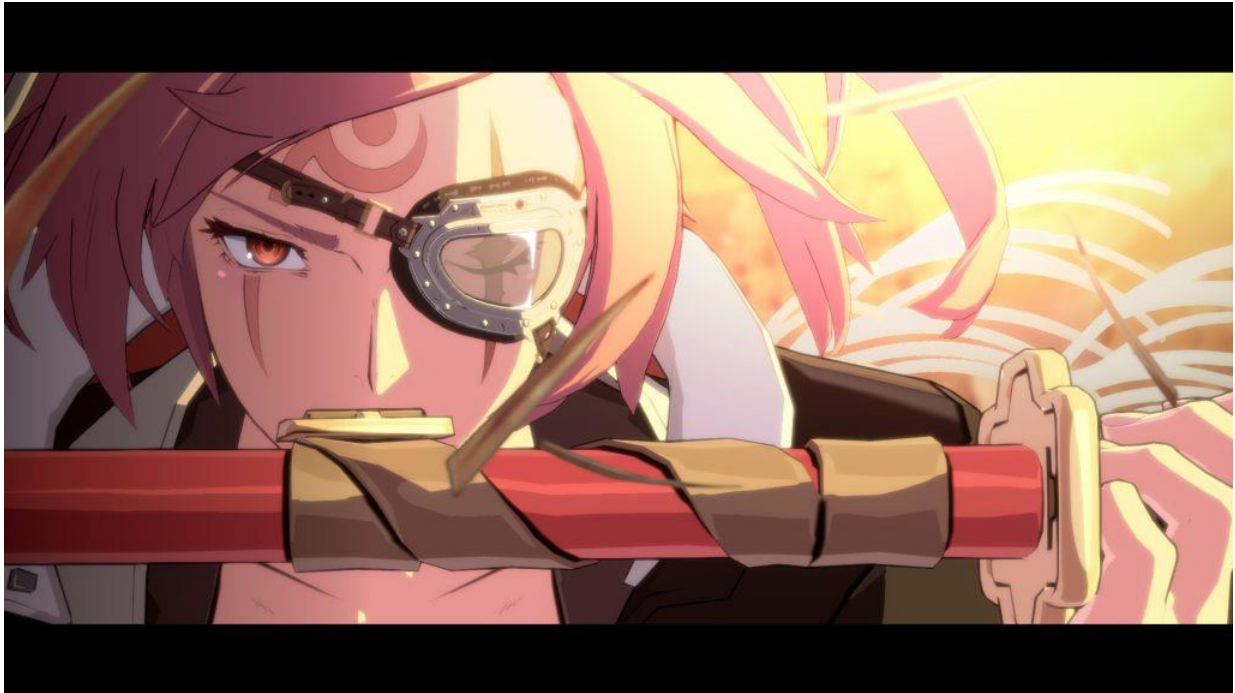


Image 6: Baiken. Source: <https://www.guiltygear.com/ggst/en/character/bkn/>

- **Dr. “Huey” Emmerich from Metal Gear Series** – Huey has hereditary spastic paraplegia, because of which he often uses a wheelchair. Later in the game, he develops a mechanical exoskeleton which enables him to walk upright.



Image 7: Huey. Source: https://metalgear.fandom.com/wiki/Huey_Emmerich

- **River Wyles from To the Moon** – River is the wife of Johnny Wyles whose last wish is to go to the moon. While learning more about Johnny’s past, the player encounters River, who is suggested as “having a condition”. While the game does not directly name Asperger’s syndrome, the player gets many clues which point to that.

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