

The Queer Reality

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Project: Digital Media Capstone, University of Rochester

Date: September 2021 through April, 2022.

Person of Contact: Professor Stephanie Ashenfelder

Resources: Oculus Quest 2 Headset, Unity, C#, 360 Degree GoPro.

Purpose: Create an interactive media experience to place non-queer individuals into the lived experiences of people in the LGBTQ+ community in order to let them empathize with problems that they previously could not understand.

Process: The project is a Virtual Reality experience run on the Oculus Quest 2, and developed in Unity. After an initial planning process, our team interviewed multiple queer individuals in order to capture personal troubles they felt free to share. Afterwards, we turned that data into multiple scripts and moved into production with one as a proof of concept. Using some hired actors from a nearby university, we filmed one of these scripts on a 360-degree camera and edited it into the necessary segments. Putting these into Unity, we connected them to its Virtual Reality package and played the video on the inside texture of a giant sphere. We coded branching choices into the videos so that the user could interactively select options to move between the scenes until they eventually reached one of the endings.

Major Design Decisions

Audience: Early on, we decided to limit our audience to people who were neutral or willing to learn about the LGBTQ+ community instead of people who were actively hostile towards the community. The sympathetic state of mind that this project intends to create would not be possible for hostile individuals, and instead of changing our project drastically in order to fit them, we decided to narrow our audience.

Medium: We chose Virtual Reality over other mediums like a website because it is a developing field and it is an immersive medium which would allow us to fully mesh the user's senses, like sight and sound, with the experiences we are trying to convey.

Choices: We chose to add branching decisions into our narrative to make our experience more interactive. The user had to choose between different ways to handle scenarios, each of which affected the outcome of the outcome of the story. Afterwards, they could see how some of their options had affected that problem, and take that knowledge to use in reality.