UNIVERSITY
OF TURKU

Violence, Sexualization, and Otherness

An Analysis on the Representation of Transgender Characters in Video Games

Interaction Design

Department of Computing, Faculty of Technology

Master's Thesis

Author:

Joona Wiik

Supervisors:

Jouni Smed, PhD

Tomi "bgt" Suovuo, PhD

November 2023

Transgender characters have appeared in video games from the late 1980s up to the modern day. As transgender representation has surged in mainstream games during the latest decade, an interest has been raised in exploring and categorizing the various forms and trends of transgender representation. During this study, a content survey was conducted in order to collect an archive of 120 transgender and gender non-conforming characters in video games. The archive is then utilized to research different attitudes and stereotypes directed towards the transgender community. The main contribution of this research is in cataloguing which narrative character roles are given to the subjects, which stereotypes are the most common, and how often transphobia plays a part in the representation of gender minorities.

The study reveals that the popularity of explicit transgender representation is slowly gaining a foothold within the mainstream video game industry – although the majority of representation still comes from independent releases. The greater part of representation is focused on transgender women, although transgender men and genderqueer characters have also gained visibility in recent years . Especially when analyzing older games, one-sided stereotypes and narrow character roles are common in portrayals of transgender characters. The majority of representations were found to include various forms of transphobia. The most common stereotypes discovered included depicting transfeminine characters as villains, sexual predators, and sex workers. Other common themes included depictions of victimization, otherness, physical transition, and perceived comicality of the transgender body. Although transgender men were found to be notably absent from earlier representations, similar themes were found in connection with the more recent transmasculine portrayals – although less commonly than with transfeminine characters. Genderqueer characters were most commonly portrayed as friendly non-human sidekicks or playable genderless creatures. However, a clear escalation towards more diverse character narratives were found during the latest years.

Keywords: transgender; representation; video games; queer; LGBTQIA+; gender; content survey

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

1   Introduction

The phenomenon of video games as a culturally significant art form can be considered to have existed since the 1980s (Kirkpatrick, 2011). Since then the relevancy of video games as a phenomenon has only been on the rise and the field has faced exponential growth especially in the 21st century. Revenues of video game companies continue to increase each year with the video game market reaching new peaks in total monetary value year by year (ESA, 2022). Video games are also played yearly by an increasing number of people regardless of their demographics, with e.g. two thirds of people in the U.S. of all ages, races, genders, and backgrounds reportedly playing video games at least weekly (ESA, 2022). Considering the vastness and diversity of the video game community, it is no surprise that video games appear as one of the most relevant cultural products of our time (Muriel & Crawford, 2018).

When discussing the relevancy of video games as cultural products, Alan Kirby (2009) goes as far as to argue that our cultural products are evolving from postmodernism into a new paradigm of digimodernism, which explains the impact of computer technology on cultural products. Digimodernism is characterized by onwardness, haphazardness, collaborativeness, and a more participatory culture. As ordinary consumers are encouraged to actively participate in the modification of media content, features such as evolving authorship, re-defined roles, and real time interactivity become vital in defining the cultural logic of contemporary society (Kirby, 2009). Therefore, studying video games provides us with indispensable tools for understanding our contemporary cultural landscape and analyzing wider social issues in society (Muriel & Crawford, 2018). With the video game culture being a diverse, complex, and constantly evolving landscape, it can consequently be analyzed as an expression of life, culture, and society in late modernity.

As the cultural field diversifies, it also branches out to address previously overlooked topics. The increased interest towards LGBTQIA+ identities and the queer community has been impacting social discourse and the cultural field with a surge in queer visibility and representation during the 21st century. With this increased visibility, also the terminology used has become more complex and dynamically evolving. The LGBTQIA+ acronym used throughout this study stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual, and more. It is used to refer to gender, sexuality and physiological sex characteristics that differ from the normative cisgendered heterosexuality. The term *queer* is also used almost interchangeably when referring to any kind of diverse sexuality and/or gender. The main focus

throughout this study will solely be on the different gender minorities, which are grouped together under the umbrella term *transgender*. Variably, the term *trans**[1] will also be used to refer to people who identify with related terms. The equivalent term that is used when referring to people who are not transgender is *cisgender*, which simply refers to people who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.

Legislatively transgender rights have made significant gains in Europe during recent years, with multiple European governments (e.g. Germany[2], Spain[3], and Finland[4]) considering or passing legislation to advance trans rights (Saric, 2023). However simultaneously also unprecedented levels of anti-LGBT bills and legislation have been introduced in the U.S. during 2023, most of which are targeted towards the transgender community. These bills seek to deny access from trans people to things such as basic healthcare, legal recognition, bathrooms, athletics, education, and the right to publicly exist. This trend of anti-trans legislation bills has been most significantly discussed concerning the U.S., where the number of anti-trans legislation has by June 2023 already surged by 320% compared to the total of 2022 with 556 new bills introduced as illustrated in Figure 1.1 (Trans Legislation Tracker, 2023). These anti-trans developments in the U.S. have also been hugely influential for the trends of Europe and Central Asia (and vice versa). Hungary and Kyrgyzstan have already enacted legislation that removes the right of legal gender recognition (TGEU, 2023). Slovakia's[5] new bill is similarly threatening to outlaw legal gender recognition entirely. Sweden[6] has also backtracked on legislation, although in less drastic measures, with new restrictions to accessing gender-affirming treatments for minors. (TGEU, 2023).

---

[1] **trans***: originally used to include explicitly both transsexual and transgender, or (now usually) to indicate the inclusion of gender identities such as gender-fluid, agender, etc., alongside transsexual and transgender (The Oxford English Dictionary, 2018).

[2] https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/themen/gleichstellung/queerpolitik-und-geschlechtliche-vielfalt/gesetz-ueber-die-selbstbestimmung-in-bezug-auf-den-geschlechtseintrag-sbgg--199332?view=

[3] https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/02/16/victory-fight-gender-recognition-spain-0?gclid=CjwKCAjw3ueiBhBmEiwA4BhspLbY0QZRroUtuXtUQ8x6tn6uEVx407eLvKf7buGlHoBnKvFNNuPmiRoC6kkQAvD_BwE

[4] https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/02/finland-new-gender-recognition-law-a-major-step-towards-protecting-trans-rights/

[5] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/17/slovakia-block-legal-recognition-trans-people-lgbtq

[6] https://www.euronews.com/next/2023/02/16/as-spain-advances-trans-rights-sweden-backtracks-on-gender-affirming-treatments-for-teens
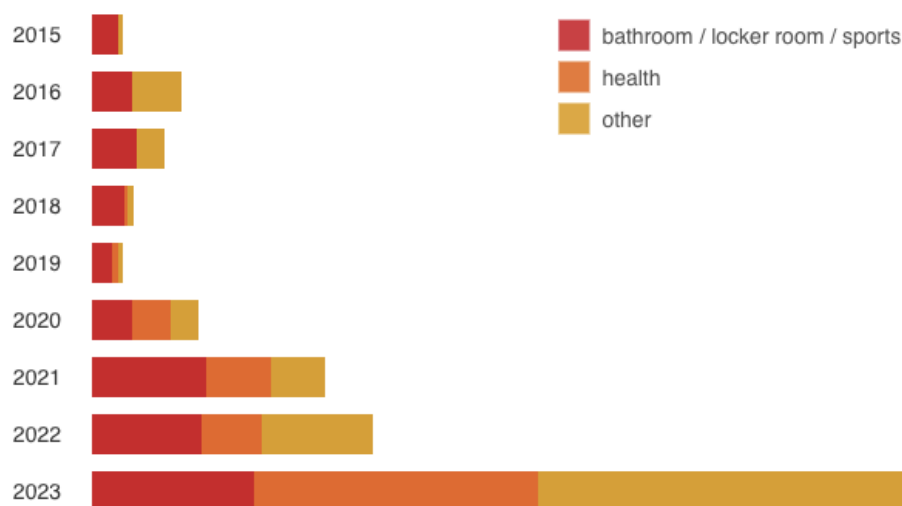
Figure 1.1: The Surge of Anti-Trans Bills Introduced in the US According to the Trans Legislation Tracker. Data Retrieved October 2023.

Considering the current levels of anti-trans legislation, research aimed at exploring and categorizing the various trends of transgender representation, and the overall discussion of different attitudes and stereotypes directed towards the transgender community is vital from a research point of view. The cultural field has an immense effect on shaping the beliefs and attitudes of people towards perceived otherness. Correspondingly, the attitudes of the mainstream population can be somewhat derived from art and culture: especially when examining how certain groups of people are most commonly portrayed in art forms such as film, television, and literature. A newer addition into the list of different forms of storytelling includes video games, which even though vastly shaping the opinions of especially younger generations, is still commonly less researched from this point of view.

According to Ruberg (2019), video games offer a particularly revealing window onto the dominant cultural beliefs. These beliefs are held by both the development teams of the games and the "mainstream" consumers[7] for whom the games are oriented toward; and this reflection of values occurs whether or not the developers intend for their games to communicate social meanings and attitudes. As argued by Mary Flanagan and Helen Nissenbaum (2014), all games impart messages about what and who has worth in the eyes of the societies that create the games.

---

[7] As described by Ruberg (2019), the mainstream consumer of video games is "traditionally imagined to be young, white, straight, cisgender men".

When focusing our attention on the way transgender people have been represented in mainstream media, multiple studies have reached the conclusion that trans representation has historically been done in negative and/or stereotypical ways (Stryker 2008, Sandercock 2015, Richardson 2016, McInroy & Craig 2017, McLaren et al. 2021). Research literature has highlighted transgender representations as overly simplistic and pervaded by negative stereotypical themes such as enactment of violence on the transgender body, the need to reveal/expose, and a framework that characterizes transness as a "problem" that needs to be fixed (medically or otherwise) (McLaren et al., 2021). In the absence of representations outside the negative themes, these stereotypes have become embedded in the public imagination. As stated by Butler (1999), if transgender people are not visible – or are visible only in negative ways – then these representations only serve to dehumanize them even further. Furthermore, as aptly noted by Billard (2016), this cycle of ignorance and hatred toward transgender individuals is reflected not only in mainstream media representations of transgender people but also in societal attitudes toward transgenderism and public policies regarding it. According to Butler in order to escape this cycle, the "qualifications for being a subject must first be met before representation can be extended" (Butler, 1999). This shift towards subjectivity in transgender representation has indeed been observed during the last decade, with new depictions of transgender people appearing on screen that have been interpreted to be indicative of a trend of more complex and positive representation (McLaren et al., 2021).

Furthermore, it has been concluded that the mere exposure to transgender people is a source of prejudice reduction (Flores et al., 2018). This would indicate that simply providing people with factual scientific information and facial images of transgender people would improve attitudes towards them simply by allowing people to categorize and better understand unfamiliar topics – and not base their opinions on harmful stereotypes commonly portrayed in the media. Finally, it has been found that the mainstream media representations of marginalized social groups have the capability of shaping the real-world views of the general public. This is mainly due to people largely depending on the media to form an impression on underrepresented communities that they have no personal experiences with (Dixon et al., 2003; McLaughlin et al., 2018; Sharma, 2022).

Although some ground-breaking representations have signaled a step in the right direction for transgender representation, transphobia is still a prevalent issue in media representation and public discourse. Transphobia can be defined as any negative attitudes (e.g. hatred, resentment, hostility, disapproval) that are directed toward transgender people based on their gender. It is

also possible to attempt a more robust definition of the term, such as describing transphobia as a hostile response to perceived violations of gender norms and/or challenges to the gender binary. However, this definition might end up invalidating transgender people who do not view themselves as violating gender norms, and is therefore often best left open for multiple interpretations on how transgender people are defined. (Bettcher, 2014).

Another point of focus when examining the representation of transgender people in modern mainstream media is to study the different character roles the subjects are given. The character roles coincide at least partially with the previously discussed negative stereotypical themes connected with transgender people, but give us a more in-depth understanding into what connotations often appear in relation to transgender representation. Do the transgender people we most commonly come across in both real-life and fictional mediums appear to always fill a certain role, such as the victim, the villain, or the comic relief? To study the character roles in the context of video games, first it must be understood what the most often occurring narrative roles are in fictional storytelling – and therefore also digital games.

Various methodologies have been suggested for classifying character roles and narrative elements of video games. Richard Bartle (2004) coined a typology aimed at providing a framework for categorizing non-player characters and their narrative significance in video games according to their spheres of action and the significance they played in the progression of the story. This typology has been widely utilized to analyze non-player video game characters and their requirements and functions. Non-playable characters can take various different roles that coincide with the function they are assigned. According to Bartle, these functions were to:

- Buy, sell, and make stuff.
- Provide services.
- Guard places.
- Get killed for loot.
- Dispense quests (or clues of other NPCs' quests).
- Supply background information (history, lore, cultural attitudes).
- Do stuff for players.
- Make the place look busy.

Henrik Warpefelt (2016) further developed this categorization by creating a three level NPC typology with four abstract metatypes that are divided into more detailed NPC types, and low-

level special cases to the types. Warpefelt then delineates these types from the perspectives of the characters functions within the game, their visual presentation and placement, and finally their behavior. For the purposes of this study, only the two higher levels are central, and the descriptions provided by Warpefelt are used in classifying transgender characters into various roles. This simplified version of Warpefelt's typology is illustrated in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: A simplified version of Warpefelt's NPC typology (Warpefelt, 2016).

Metatype	Type
Functions	Vendor
	Services
	Questgiver
Adversaries	Enemy
	Opponent
Friends	Sidekick
	Ally
	Companion
	Pet
	Minion
Providers	Storyteller
	Loot provider

The thesis aims to answer questions concerning the representation of transgender characters in video games. The main contribution of this thesis is on describing how gender minorities are represented in video games from the 1980s to the modern day, what roles the characters have been given, and whether transphobia has played a part in the representation. To answer these questions, an archive of transgender characters and information on them has been collected through a content survey.

The expected results of the content survey can be summarized into hypotheses that aim to answer the presented questions. Firstly, it is expected that there is a noticeable accentuation of gender minority representation focused on one-sided stereotypes. This hypothesis is based on previous research on how many minorities are often portrayed through harmful stereotypes (Philip, Bali & George, 2021). The most common stereotypes of transgender characters when considering the film and television industries are portrayals as mentally ill, criminals, sex

workers, and comic relief (Davis, 2009; Shelley, 2008; Thatch, 2021). Furthermore, it is expected that these transgender characters have been given narrative roles from a highly limited field based on the stereotypes. In video games, this might equate to transgender characters playing the role of an adversary more often than not. Finally, it is hypothesized that transphobia will play an active part in the portrayal and narrative casting of gender minorities in video games.

The contents of the research are divided into six chapters beginning with the introduction. Following introduction, the second chapter creates an overall look at the background of transgender representation from the perspective of different types of cultural media. The chapter will start off by providing a tentative glance into the transgender representation within film and television industries with some frameworks introduced for examining and analyzing these representations within media studies. With the foundation built on analyzing representation within the film and television industries, a literary review is also introduced of the current studies focused solely on queer representation in video games.

In the third chapter, the methodologies used within this study will be introduced. The main focus is on presenting an overview into the contents of the gathered database, and defining the specific methods used for data collection throughout the study. This will also include a more closely defined scope of the study, with certain parameters that were put into place to justify the data selection process. The third chapter will also introduce the used categorizations of character roles, and levels of ambiguity and transphobia, which are used to assist in analyzing common patterns within the chosen pieces of representation.

The fourth chapter will focus on showcasing and analyzing the results gathered through the content survey. The chapter will take a more in-depth look into the database introduced in the previous chapter and go through the common trends that appeared in it. This analysis will first focus on topics such as the frequency of transgender representation and its distribution by gender, development country, and game genre. Furthermore, we will take a deeper look into how often the characters face transphobia and how severe it is.

Through the fifth chapter, a closer look will be taken at the ways the characters are presented. The most common stereotypes and character roles will be examined and compared to the occurrence of similar stereotypes and roles when it comes to cisgender video game characters. The stereotypes that will be discussed include sexualized and fetishistic portrayals, character

roles intertwined with violence (either as victims or instigators of it), representations focused on physical transitions, and finally non-human representations of genderqueer characters.

In the sixth chapter, the focus will be shifted into the importance and relevance of the results presented in the fourth and fifth chapters. Some interpretations and implications of the results will be theorized. This will include hypothesizing the future views of transgender representation in video games based on the gathered results and comparisons of those with the evolution of other art fields such as the film industry, television, music, visual arts, literature, and creative pieces of art published on online mediums such as websites and social media. The sixth chapter will also aim to clarify the limitations of the study, and offer some recommendations for further research.

Finally, the main findings from the research will be concluded based on the content survey database. As the conclusion of the thesis, this chapter will aim to concisely summarize the main findings of the study and answer the research questions.

2   Literature Review

Previous research conducted on minority representation in video games – especially concerning LGBTQIA+ themes – has gained interest during the 21st century, with a surge in studies focused on queer minority representation during the most recent decades. This interest in research focused on queer representation has especially gained a foothold within media and gender studies, but still had quite limited reach within game studies. To create a comprehensive overview on the existing studies, a review of literature was conducted focusing on the following common keywords: "transgender/queer/LGBTQIA+ characters/roles/representation". Articles and other academic releases from media, game, gender, and queer studies were included to gather an interdisciplinary investigation into the topic. The lack of academic literature focused solely on transgender representation in video games forced the literature review to branch heavily into studies conducted on transgender representation in other fields of art.

Especially in media studies, several studies have been conducted to analyze queer representation in various types of media (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006; Gross, 2001; Russo, 1987; Sender, 2004; Shaw & Friesem, 2016). This background has assisted in building a robust foundation for researching the current and possible future field of transgender representation. Research on film and television have especially been on the frontlines when it comes to studies focused on trans representation.

Susan Stryker (2008) has created one of the first comprehensive and influential accounts of transgender history. In it, she also reviews the main directions of media representation. The mass media have paid attention to transgender issues since at least the 1950s, with especially the 21st century witnessing a steady increase in visibility and increasingly positive representation focused less on prejudicial stereotypes. Stryker's account on these positive developments account much of the changes to transgender activism, civil rights gains, and transgender artists and creators, who have managed to gain a foothold in the media industry. The public's awareness on transgender topics has been increased with projects such as Gwen Smith's *Remembering Our Dead* website (since 1999). The website aims to put a spotlight on the chronic undercurrent of antitransgender violence and murder due to hate crimes. A related *Transgender Day of Remembrance* has also become an annual opportunity to publicize the persistence of antitransgender prejudice and violence, and reach mainstream media consciousness. (Remembering Our Dead, 2023).

Jack Halberstam (2005) categorized the transgender stereotypes in Anglo-American popular culture into three narrative conventions (illustrated in Table 2.1). The first narrative convention is the 'project of trivialization'. This narrative strategy aims to portray the trans* body dismissively as non-representative and inconsequential. These cases do not provide any real narrative consequences, but solely aim to portray cross-dressing narratives where the character dabbles with gender-bending. According to Halberstam, this is used to provide a moment of humor, aptly described by Richardson (2016) as "oh look it's a man in women's clothes, how funny".

The second narrative strategy is identified by Halberstam as 'the project of rationalization'. This case fits examples such as *Tootsie* (Pollack, 1982), *Mrs. Doubtfire* (Columbus, 1993), and *The Ballad of Little Jo* (Greenwald, 1993), all of which explain and permit the gender-bending due to an external compulsion (e.g. economic or familial necessity reasons). Therefore these representations are not considered threatening to spectators, as the "gender performance" including the gender-bending clothes and prosthetics are removed at the end of the day.

Finally, the third convention is named 'the project of stabilization'. As described by Halberstam, in these cases the transgender narrative is portrayed as "strange, uncharacteristic, and even pathological". The cases in which the character has a wish for gender-affirming surgery, this desire functions almost as a metaphor for the character's overall derangement, instability, or psychosis. Depictions such as in *The Silence of the Lambs* (Demme, 1991), the characters are portrayed as deceiving, predatory, and threatening both to the other characters and the cis-normative society in general.

Table 2.1: Halberstam's (2005) Three Narrative Strategies for Representation of Transgender People.

Narrative Strategy	Motivation
The Project of Trivialization	The threat to gender stability is dismissed as trivial and inconsequential.
The Project of Rationalization	Reasonable explanations are found for behavior that seemed dangerous and outrageous at first glance.
The Project of Stabilization	Destabilization is defused by establishing narratives as strange, uncharacteristic, and pathological.

Continuing with the same trend of categorizing stereotypes of trans representation, Julia Serano (2007) divided the two main transgender stereotypes employed by popular cultural

representation as *the pathetic* and *the deceiving*. In her division, the pathetic stereotype encompasses those characters that do not pass at all and are used as figures of comic relief. This coincides quite clearly with Halberstam's 'project of trivialization'. Serano's other stereotype, the deceiving, are the complete opposite of the pathetic characters. They pass – and are therefore extremely threatening characters that are often portrayed as predatory and always waiting to deceive their unsuspecting victims, fitting with Halberstam's narrative strategy the 'project of stabilization'. Interestingly in Serano's division, the decisive factor is whether the character passes or not, i.e. are perceived as cisgender individuals of the gender they identify as. Therefore, being able to "blend into society" in a way that the transgender individual cannot be immediately identified by others is portrayed as a threatening and deceptive factor.

To examine the way queer characters are portrayed and situated within a narrative, the world's largest LGBTQ media accountability and advocacy organization GLAAD has developed the Vito Russo Test[8] (GLAAD, 2022). For a film to pass the Vito Russo Test, the following must be true:

1. The film must contain a character that is identifiably lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer.

2. That character must not be solely or predominantly defined by their sexual orientation or gender identity.

3. The LGBTQ character must be tied to the plot in such a way that the character's removal would have a significant effect, meaning the character is not there to simply provide colorful commentary, paint urban authenticity, or set up a punchline.

4. The LGBTQ character's story must not be outwardly offensive (avoids defaulting to well-known tropes or stereotypes with no further development). (GLAAD, 2022)

The literature on LGBTQ representation, and the *2022 Studio Responsibility Index* released by GLAAD, found out that even though LGBTQ representation has been increasing during the latest years, trans representation is still less prevalent than other queer people on film and television. However, after five consecutive years of no transgender or non-binary characters in theatrical releases from major film studios, a transgender character was featured in Walt

---

[8] The Vito Russo Test was originally inspired by the Bechdel Test, which focuses on cataloguing and rating portrayals of female characters within the film industry.

Disney's 2021 film *West Side Story* (GLAAD, 2022). However *West Side Story* still fails to fulfill the four criteria set by the Vito Russo Test. It must also be noted that fulfilling the criteria should be considered to be merely a first step, as trans characters would also deserve to be portrayed as fully fleshed out characters beyond just their gender identities. Trans characters would also be entitled to have their genders affirmed instead of them being disregarded by the other characters. (GLAAD, 2022).

Although the test has been coined for studying LGBTQ film representation, the same evaluation criteria can also be applied to studying transgender video game representation. This applies especially to situations where the inclusion of a transgender character is criticized, and their significance within the plot of the video game is questioned. This could be the case e.g. with the transgender character Mizhena from *Baldur's Gate: Siege of Dragonspear* (2016). Although she was also on the receiving end of much transphobic hatred, the character was also widely criticized for being nothing more than an LGBT token character with no development or story of her own, and simply used as a publicity trick to create an appearance of being progressive (Campbell, 2016). In these cases the Vito Russo Test and especially its second and third conditions are clear guidelines for clarifying the difference between meaningful and forced – or even harmful representation.

A few other recent studies focused on transgender representation in cinema and television include an article by Tom Sandercock (2015) which analyzes the teen television shows *Glee* (2009-2015) and *Degrassi* (2001-2015), a book by Niall Richardson (2016) which focuses on the representation of transgressive bodies in cinema and television, and an article by Jackson Taylor McLaren et al. (2021) which aims its focus into analyzing the transgender characters of *Orange is the New Black* (2013-2019) and *The Fosters* (2013-2018).

Sandercock discusses the significance of *Glee* and *Degrassi* as frontrunners of North American television productions for teenagers that include central transgender characters. However, according to Sandercock this inclusion does not equate to positive representation, with the characterization invariably resorting to stereotypes while still appearing to attempt to destigmatize marginalized trans youth. Mainly the representations fall short by resorting to portraying both characters centered on their transness as having "issues" with gender. They are both victims of discrimination, bullying, misgendering, and both of them are assaulted in public bathrooms at school. Jokes relating to genitalia and the characters' "true" gender determined

by biology are also made allusions towards, although the dark humor and satire go way farther in *Glee* compared to the representation in *Degrassi*.

Similarly, Richardson (2016) points to the rarity of mainstream representation which addresses transgender identities with any other agendas than evoking humor. Building on the previously presented three narrative conventions coined by Halberstam (2005), Richardson analyzes the film *TransAmerica* (Tucker, 2004), in which he recognizes a shift towards addressing the transgender population with at least a degree of sensitivity, and not focused on portraying the transgressive body as a threat. Richardson also discusses a shift towards highly eroticized pre-op trans bodies such as with the entertainer/performer Mimi Marks and porn actor Buck Angel. These nonconforming bodies are not seen as threats, but rather as fascinating, erotic, and highly sexualized and fetishized.

McLaren, Bryant, and Brown (2021) recognize the transgender characters of *Orange is the New Black* and *The Fosters* as groundbreaking and generally more complex than the previously discussed past instances of transgender character representation in academic literature. However, the most recent representations still rely on the inclusion of narrative tropes that have been recognized in earlier cases of transgender representation. As specified by McLaren et al. these tropes include the bathroom issue, violence, the trans/romance dilemma, transnormativity, transgression, and exposure scenes. The article also finds that both of the analyzed series rely on explaining how transgender people feel about themselves by using the "born in the wrong body" trope. By using these same stereotypes and tropes, the representation still inhibits a more realistic understanding of the characters and the diversity of transgender experiences.

The earliest studies that focus solely on transgender representation in video games come from the late 2010s and early 2020s. Of the reviewed studies, one of the first explorations into the representation of gender minorities is made in *Transgender in Games – A Comparative Study of Transgender Characters in Games* (Christenson & Uneus, 2017). Within the thesis, six transgender characters are uncovered and analyzed with the use of queer theory to examine their mannerism, design, personality and dialogue. Their outcomes establish that portraying transgender characters is a multidimensional task, and the strategies utilized during representation often expose the underlying preconceptions of the developers. The researched character portrayals include stereotypes such as the threatening assaulter and the victim of bullying. Commonly the games also include reminders of the transgender characters being

different from others, and various hints to them not being what they are perceived to be – which coincides with the stereotype categorized by Serano (2007) as *the deceivers*.

A similar basis for the study is used by Hibby Thatch in *A Cross-Game Look at Transgender Representation in Video Games* (2021). Within the study, a content survey into 63 different games resulted in the revelation of four overarching themes in the representation: 1. dysphoria/physical transition, 2. mentally ill killers, 3. trans shock/reveal, and 4. ambiguity. Thatch finds that the narrative themes in representation differ across the decade of release and country of origin. According to them, narratives of dysphoria and physical transition are often linked together and have become more prevalent. This indicates that the common assumption is that in order to be trans, one must experience dysphoria and physically transition. When it comes to the other trends, the narrative trope of mentally ill killers peaked in the 2000s and seems to have been less prevalent since then. Thatch also finds that narratives of trans shock are progressively changing into narratives of trans reveal. Finally, ambiguity as a trend seems to be mainly focused on Japanese content, which might indicate a variance in gender identities are portrayed in different regions and cultures.

3   Data Collection and Methods

The objective of the following chapter is to provide a concise familiarization into the data collection process and methodology of the study. First, we will define essential terminology and aim our focus towards the methods of data collection utilized. A clear introduction will be given into what data was collected and what were the primary sources and methods used in the data collection. This will also include defining the scope of the study, and introducing delimiting factors. In Section 3.2, a closer look will be taken into different levels of ambiguity appearing in the collected data. All the instances of representation are catalogued by three levels of ambiguity, with the objective of separating explicit and implicit cases. Some borderline cases fitting different levels of ambiguity will also be presented. Finally, in the last subsection an introduction will be made towards the different narrative trends, character roles, and levels of transphobia that were focused on during data collection, and the methodology for gathering information on these themes. This will also include defining five levels of severity for cataloguing individual cases of transphobia in the gathered data.

3.1   Data Collection, Scope of the Study

Within this study, transgender terminology is used according to the definitions given by the *GLAAD Media Reference Guide* (2023). The term *transgender* or *trans** is considered and treated as an umbrella term that refers to individuals whose assigned gender at birth does not correspond to their gender identity. Even though this umbrella term includes a wide variety of different kinds of non-normative gender identities and gender presentations (Thanem, 2011), this study focuses mainly on the binary transgender identities: transgender women (AMAB, assigned male at birth), and transgender men (AFAB, assigned female at birth).

It must also be clarified that *cross-dressing*, or the outdated term *transvestism*[9], are not synonymous with transgender identities. Cross-dressing is a form of self-expression and the act of wearing clothing that is traditionally associated with a different gender compared to the wearer's own gender identity. However, these terms have been commonly misused in connection and as synonyms for transgender people. Especially in older video games these

---

[9] The *transvestite* label has been deemed derogatory due to it being historically used when diagnosing mental health disorders, and it has been widely replaced by the more suitable term *cross-dresser* (Capuzza & Spencer, 2015).

terms appear quite often, with the most common example being a transgender person referred to incorrectly as a transvestite. Even though the aim is to use the appropriate terminology for each character and their gender, in some cases the incorrect terminology will be used when directly quoting the original games and their documentation.

Genderqueer identities also fall under the transgender umbrella term, and the term can be used when referring to a person who identifies with neither, both, or a combination of the male and female genders, i.e. outside the normative binary division. These gender identities have not been completely excluded from this study, even though the main focus will fall with the binary transgender game characters. This exclusion has been made mainly due to a limited representation of unambiguous genderqueer characters – even though genderqueer representation has increased during the last decade (e.g. the characters of FL4K in *Borderlands 3* (Smith, 2019) and Bloodhound in *Apex Legends* (D'Orazio, 2021)).

Another reason for the delimitation is the sheer amount of unique gender identities and gender presentations that cannot easily be categorized or researched with any straightforward gender-inclusive approaches that would avoid misclassifications (Cameron & Stinson, 2019). This is especially emphasized in situations where the discussed subjects cannot be given the chance for self-defining their gender – as is when discussing fictional video game characters. There can also be a clear difference between a character's gender identity and gender presentation or physical features, and these cases might easily result in misclassifications due to the cis-normative binary gender expectations (Cameron & Stinson, 2019). For example, the character Adel from *Final Fantasy VIII* is always referred to as a woman within the game and uses feminine pronouns, but her physical form and masculine torso have led to confusion and misclassifications (LGBTQ Video Game Archive, 2015). This phenomenon can also be recognized in cross-dressing video game characters such as The Psycho from *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* (LGBTQ Video Game Archive, 2015) and Naoto Shirogane from *Persona 4* (LGBTQ Video Game Archive, 2015), but also in transgender characters that were originally introduced pre-transition such as Lor from *Borderlands 3* (Barnes, 2022).

For data collection, a content survey was performed mainly starting off with two public LGBTQIA+ related databases – Queerly Represent Me (Cole, 2016) and the LGBTQ Video Game Archive (Shaw, 2016). Both of these databases have a wider scope than the transgender video game archive collected for the purposes of this study and include multiple instances of queer representation that were not topical for research focused solely on transgender

representation. The goal of the content survey was to find emergent themes within the narrative roles the trans* video game characters are given, and the narrative and ludologic purposes they serve within their respective games.

After gathering the initial list of the instances, these inputs were supplemented with additional information. These supplements were collected from the existing public archive materials of the game, which included the video games themselves, game manuals, walkthroughs, various Fandom wiki publications, videos of the gameplay, developer releases and interviews, published reviews, and general discussions on different forums. A wide assemblage of different source materials (especially concerning their creators, formats, and target audiences) were considered and researched to further understand the meaning of the cultural artifacts within the complex web they exist in (Hall, 1997). As a result, the transgender video game archive includes a non-comprehensive list of video game characters that can be reasonably interpreted as transgender, with further information on the characters and their roles within their respective games. The main data sources used for each of the characters have been listed within the archive inputs.

The goal for selection was to gather an extensive sample of the most well-known and most groundbreaking transgender characters throughout video game history. The main focus of the archive is in cataloging the releases from the professional mainstream game industry, as these games are widely known, documented, and researched. However, the archive also includes additional independent and peripheral games to contrast the majority of the representation within the professional industry and offer possibilities and future directions for mainstream game development.

In recent years, western video game development landscape has faced an unprecedented increase both in independent LGBTQIA+ game development and a widespread interest in games directly inspired by queer experiences (Shaw and Ruberg, 2017). This intrigue for LGBTQIA+ themes has also created a substantial, although slightly less considerable, surge in independent transgender related video games (as compared to games focused on LGB themes) (Smith et al., 2018). As theorized by Anna Anthropy (2012), the surge of queer indie game developers is steering the medium in new directions by inspiring marginalized creators to develop their own games and simultaneously encouraging large-scale and professional development companies to make their games more "diverse" and, by extension, better (Anthropy, 2012). These game-makers can also be considered to be part of the "queer games

avant-garde", a vanguard of contemporary artists (Ruberg, 2019), and are therefore also represented within this study as the pioneers of the current queer games scene.

The archive consists of the basic information concerning the chosen characters and the following details concerning them:

1. The game they initially appear in with its publication year, developer(s), publisher(s), country, genre, and a listing of all further games the characters have appeared in if applicable.

2. The character's name, whether they are a player character (PC) or a non-player character (NPC), whether they are non-human and if known, their race/ethnicity/species.

3. The gender of the character (labeled to make a clear distinction between those explicitly stated and implicitly presumed), the gender of their voice actor (when applicable and known), and whether there have been changes in these due to localization or later games.

The inclusion of gender-specific information on the characters in the archive is necessary to explore the different positions and roles given to characters of certain transgender identities within the constellations of characters. However, it must be noted that many of the characters' genders are not made absolutely clear within the corresponding games and their official communications and are consequently left to interpretation and easily made ambiguous presumptions on. These cases are separately marked and described in the archive to make sure they include as little erroneous assumptions as possible. As making flawed interpretations or mistakes cannot be completely avoided, and due to the new information being released constantly (as with Bridget from *Guilty Gear X2* in 2022[10]), the archive will need to be constantly expanded and cultivated on this aspect to remain topical.

The scope of the archive is defined by three limiting factors.

1. The main focus of the archive is on the professional and institutionalized video games. Although some video games created in the periphery of the field are included as

---

[10] Bridget's status as a transgender character has been a topic of discussion since the game's release. From the information available in the games she appears in she has commonly been read to be a cross-dressing cisgender male character. However in 2022 the developers released a statement confirming her as a transgender woman (Trahan, 2022).

counterpoise for the previously discussed reasons, the majority of the material comes from the releases of major game companies and has therefore been approved for the broader mainstream audience.

2. The language barriers concerning a big part of developed video games and research concerning the characters has delimited the archive to focus mainly on games released for the Western markets, or otherwise extensively translated into English.

3. The most delimiting factor for the contents of the archive is due to a wide portion of trans* video game representation being very ambiguous. Although some level of questionability must be withstood, there is no inclusion of characters with only popular fan theories or non-canonical speculation on them being transgender. All chosen characters have been either explicitly confirmed transgender or otherwise outside the binary gender norms, or can be reasonably understood as such from in-game information. Within this study, these ambiguous and uncertain cases have been included as examples of trans* representation and portrayals of cis-normative gender nonconformity. However, due to the possibility of differences in interpretation, the archive also includes the explanations behind each of the presumptions required in the more implicit cases.

3.2 Ambiguity

Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used when approaching and cataloging the vast amount of collected material, and in searching for any common emergent themes and trends within the representation. Of the aforementioned sources, 120 video game characters portraying strong allusions of either being transgender or otherwise portraying signs of not fitting the normative binary gender expectations were handpicked. These characters came from 107 separate video games released between the years 1988 and 2023. The chosen characters were further researched and categorized in accordance to the ambiguity level of the characters' gender representation in order to minimize probabilities of making incorrect assumptions in situations where the characters' gender identities were not made explicitly clear.

The rankings used for the ambiguity levels are as follows: The first and most restrictive ranking requires the character's gender identity to be explicitly stated either within the game or by the developers, leaving no questions about it. Clear examples of characters that are able to reach this ranking are e.g. Krem Aclassi from *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (2014)*,* Claire Russell from

Cyberpunk 2077 (2020), and Tyler Ronan from *Tell Me Why* (2020)*,* all of whom are clearly stated to be transgender within their respective games and their gender identities are openly discussed.

The second ranking includes instances where the character's gender identity is generally accepted as a part of canon, even though there have been uncertainties and/or misinterpretations on the topic in the past. However, the games themselves need to heavily imply the character's gender identity if it is not explicitly stated. This ranking also contains the characters that have later been confirmed to be transgender but were not originally described as such in clear enough terms – possibly due to the games' being released during the early years of transgender representation. The most well-known example of a video game character that falls within this second ranking is Birdetta (more well-known as Birdo) from the Super Mario game series, originally introduced in *Super Mario Bros. 2* (1988)*.* During her first appearance in the 80s, she was described in the official English-language game manual with the following words: "He thinks he is a girl and he spits eggs from his mouth. He'd rather be called "birdetta"."[11] Even though this description can be read as fairly obviously portraying her as a transgender woman, the misgendering by the official manual and multiple later changes due to localization and subsequent games has left room for misinterpretations, as Birdetta's gender has not been officially addressed.

Finally, the third category collects all the other more ambiguous instances of transgender representation, where the character's gender identity can be considered to be a topic of discussion, and the game or its developers have not confirmed or disconfirmed the theories either way. In these instances the topic and any conclusions made on it are mostly left up to the player's own interpretation. The third category is by far the most encompassing, including a wide repertoire of instances with differing levels of ambiguity. A wide portion of the characters that fit the third ranking are most likely not in fact transgender, but can be still discussed as borderline cases differing from the traditional binary gender expectations. This category could be broken down into more concise rankings, but this was not considered to be necessary concerning the requirements of this study.

---

[11] Due to the manual's description, the feminine pronouns she/her and the preferred name Birdetta will be used when further discussing her within the thesis.

To concretize the wide distribution within the third ranking, some borderline cases can be discussed. First, characters such as the Make-over Mage from *Runescape* and Kris from *Deltarune* can be considered rather clear cases of falling somewhere under the transgender umbrella. The Make-over Mage uses both the names Pete and Peta depending on their current gender presentation, and the supposed gender of the character can change even mid-conversation as they are described as having "power over genders" (LGBTQ Video Game Archive, 2016). Kris has no stated gender, a gender-neutral name, and is referred to with the singular they/them pronouns with no further information on the topic (LGBTQ Video Game Archive, 2019). It is unclear how the gender of these characters is supposed to be read, and where within the transgender, genderqueer, or non-binary field they fit. In these cases, the existence of some sort of transgender representation is quite obvious and certain, although it is still implicit and ambiguous. Due to these factors, these characters are almost able to reach the second ranking – although falling slightly short of it due to the lack of clarity in how their obviously genderqueer portrayals are meant to be categorized.

When looking at the other end of the spectrum within the third ranking, characters such as Faris Scherwiz from *Final Fantasy V,* and the previously mentioned Naoto Shirogane from *Persona 4,* can also be considered to fit the requirements. They are both quite clearly described as being cisgender characters forced to a certain gender presentation differing from their sex assigned at birth due to external circumstances. However, their true gender identity can be made various conclusions on, and fan theories concerning these characters identifying as transgender are common, proving that the inclusion of these characters is also necessary as the lowest ends of the spectrum. Before being officially confirmed as transgender, Bridget from *Guilty Gear X2* could also have been read to fit this group of characters whose gender presentation did not correspond with their birth sex due to external circumstances.

Of the chosen 120 characters, 60 were able to reach the most restrictive ranking in accordance with the ambiguity allowed, and 25 additional characters were able to reach the second most restrictive ranking. It might be noteworthy to separate the representation according to the game development location by whether it can be considered a part of the center, the margins, or the periphery of the game development field (Ross et al., 2012). When discussing media production fields, this division clarifies the *center* as institutionalized, well-funded, and professional; the *margins* as flexible, independent, semi-professional, and underfunded field; and the *periphery* as a precarious, amateur, and unfunded field.

Of all the chosen characters developed in the *center*, only 37% of were able to reach the most restrictive ranking (in comparison to 59% for games developed in the margins, and 94% of games developed in the periphery). This could indicate a more extensive freedom in making the representation explicit the further away from the professional and central location the development process is moved. It might however also be due to the peripheral game selection not encompassing the full field of amateur trans* games but solely the ones that have reached public awareness – often due to being groundbreaking examples of representation. However, this aspect would need further research to reach any conclusions.

Another noteworthy observation is that of the characters that were able to reach the most restrictive ranking, 53% were from games released in the 2010s, and 35% of the characters from games released in the 2020s, together totaling in 88% of all the characters who have reached the most restrictive ranking being from the two most recent decades, whereas only 72% of all the chosen characters are from the same time period when disregarding the ambiguity rankings as illustrated in Figure 3.1. This in its turn might suggest a shift towards a slightly more explicit approach towards transgender representation during the latest decades, although this shift seems to be less substantial than the effects of the development location.
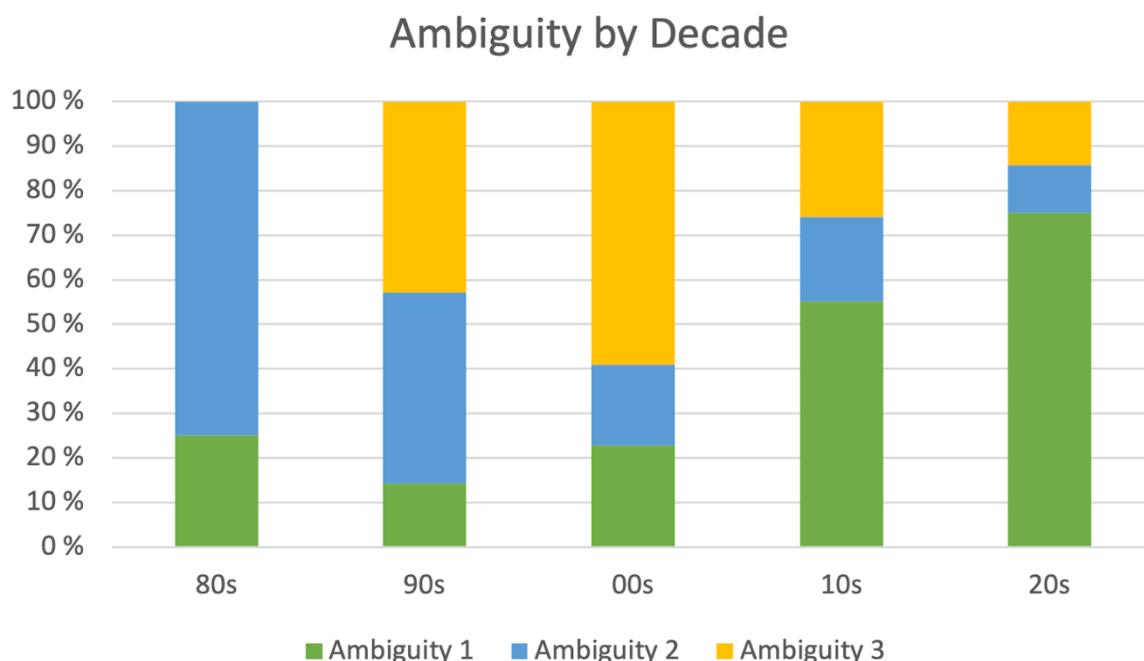
Figure 3.1: The Distribution of Characters on Different Levels of Ambiguity by Decade of Release. The most restrictive and clear-cut cases are collected under the Ambiguity 1 series, with Ambiguity 3 being the least certain cases that allowed for higher levels of uncertainty in the character's identity.

The 85 characters of the two most restrictive rankings will be the main focus of the study, as the more ambiguous cases are much more vulnerable for misassumptions and later changes. However, all 120 characters were included in researching the common trends within the representation of transgender characters and their narrative roles and purposes within their respective games. This decision was made due to the belief that even though the gender of the character has not been made explicit or is not undebatable, these more ambiguous characters that implicitly do not conform to the cisgender normative gender expectations are still a part of the representation and can enforce a wide variety of harmful prejudices and stereotypes, no matter what the actual gender identities of the characters in question may be.

3.3   Character Roles and Transphobia

The common trends associated with transgender fictional character representation that the 120 characters were screened for include ranking the severity of transphobia within the games, the sexualization of the characters, and whether they were victims of physical and/or sexual violence. These trends and narrative tropes have been discussed on previous academic publications in connection with trans* representation (Halberstam, 2005; Serano, 2007; Sandercock, 2015; Richardson, 2016; GLAAD 2022). Focus was also paid to whether the characters were portrayed as sexual predators, villains, killers, or as mentally ill, as these have previously also been found to be common themes in the representation of transgender characters (Halberstam, 2005; Serano, 2007; Thatch, 2021). Concerning the functions given to the characters, each instance was screened on whether the character was created to provide the game with either a shock value, comic relief, or a perspective on dysphoria and/or physical transition. For categorizing the narrative roles given to the characters, an NPC typology coined by Bartle (2004) and further developed and updated by Warpefelt (2016) was used in combination with a division of different player stances towards the researched characters. This categorization of video game characters into four main metatypes (Functions, Adversaries, Friends, and Providers), and further subtypes within each metatype was used to categorize the selected 120 characters.

Characters that fit the functions metatype include non-player characters that serve the player as vendors, providers of services, or quest-givers. A clear example of a character fitting in this metatype is the previously discussed Make-over Mage from *Runescape*, who is a vendor that can change the player's gender or skin color in exchange for coins. Other examples of characters fitting the functions metatype are the transgender sex workers and strippers in games such as

Dragon Age: Origins and *Grand Theft Auto V*. In both of the mentioned games the player can buy services from these characters, even though buying these services does not give the player any benefits besides a short cutscene (LGBTQ Video Game Archive, 2015).

Adversaries as a metatype includes characters that are supposed to awaken a negative "con" stance towards them from the player. The adversaries can be divided into enemies (of which a certain number can further be subtyped into bosses) and opponents (of which a certain number can further be subtyped into manipulators). Characters fitting this metatype include the earliest transgender characters such as Birdetta, who appears as a recurring enemy and minor boss in *Super Mario Bros. 2* (1988)*,* Poison and Roxy, who appear as recurring enemies in *Final Fight* (1989), and Frozen Half, who appears as a villain and a subordinate of the game's main antagonist in *Akumajō Special: Boku Dracula-kun* (later translated into English as *Kid Dracula*) (1990). Characters such as Shablee from *Leisure Suit Larry 6* (1993) and the two characters simply addressed as Unnamed Beautiful Lady and Unnamed Pretty Lady from *Persona 3* (2006) can also be considered to fit the adversary metatype and furthermore the manipulator subtype, as they all are characters that are successfully seduced by the protagonist only to be later "revealed" to be transgender as a shocking twist. After this revelation, the characters are treated with disgust and portrayed as having manipulated and misled the protagonists into their actions (LGBTQ Video Game Archive, 2015 & 2019).

Friends as a metatype are supposed to awaken the opposite reaction in the player compared to the adversaries. These characters, that include subtypes such as sidekicks, allies, companions, pets, and minions, are supposed to be received with a positive "pro" stance. Most well known examples of characters that fit this metatype are Krem Aclassi from *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, Ned Wynert from *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate*, and Miranda Comay from *Watch Dogs 2*. These characters were introduced respectively in 2014, 2015, and 2016, and portrayals of transgender characters as friends and allies have overall become more common during the last decade, although occasional friendly roles have also been given to minor transgender characters since the beginning of representation (e.g. the character of Yasmin from *Circuit's Edge* (1989) who appears as the protagonists ex-girlfriend).

Finally, the providers metatype includes non-playable characters such as storytellers and loot providers whose main goal is to advance the game. Storytellers such as Aid Worker Sya from *Guild Wars 2* (2012) and Hainly Abrams from *Mass Effect: Andromeda* (2017) fit the fourth metatype although they could also be considered as minor allies of the protagonist.

Correspondingly, when it comes to the characters considered loot providers, they can easily also fulfill the qualifications as adversaries. Examples of characters who can be considered to qualify for both of these metatypes are e.g. Flea from *Chrono Trigger* (1995) and Birdetta from *Super Mario Bros. 2* (1988) who provide the protagonist with useful loot after being defeated.

Even though all non-playable cases of the 120 characters have been categorized to fit the NPC typology, there are a few less straightforward cases. A model example of a less clear-cut character case is Vivian from *Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door* (2004). Vivian's narrative and ludologic purposes throughout the game shift and progress, and she could easily fit multiple different metatypes. She is introduced originally as a member of the Shadow Sirens, which is a group of antagonists in the game. Mario battles and defeats the group, and gets loot from them. Thus Vivian can appropriately be considered to play the role of an adversary and a loot provider. Later in the game, she however joins Mario as his fifth party member, converting her narrative role into an ally. Although this portrayal of her as a friendly party member is considered to be her "true self" and primary role, the typology does not include a separate subtype for cases where the character's role faces major shifts during the progression of the game. In these cases the characters can have been equipped with multiple different metatypes to get a comprehensive understanding of the characters full narrative role and significance within the game.

As previously stated, the level of transphobia directed towards the characters were also cataloged and ranked. The aim of including this aspect within the gathered transgender archive was to research the possible connections between differing levels of transphobia faced by the characters, the player's supposed stances towards the characters and their portrayal, and the narrative roles the characters were given. Before moving on to analyze the results or theorize on any possible connections between the role typology and the transphobia, grounded theory was once again used to gather descriptions of transphobia the 120 characters faced within their respective games. After collecting a compact description for each of the characters narrative paths and the part that transphobia played within them, the differing descriptions of transphobia were grouped into five separate levels of severity. Each of the aggregated transphobia levels included multiple individual cases of character portrayal but enough similarities that they could be considered to be a part of the same types of transgender representation.

The five transphobia levels were grouped as follows:

1. The baseline level includes character cases where no discernible transphobia could be recognized.

2. When some levels of transphobia could be observed, the second level collects all the representations shrouded heavily in ambiguity. Cases that fit this categorization include games where minor hints or remarks are made that can be read as transphobic. This level also included games where even though these remarks escape notice easily, they can be further amplified by the creators of the game participating in transphobic discussions outside the actual game.

3. The requirement to reach the third level include cases where the transgender character is purposefully misgendered. Examples of cases encountered include games where the transgender character's pronouns and/or gender is referenced in quotation marks, they are addressed with wrong pronouns or otherwise misgendered, or they are openly deadnamed[12] by minor characters and/or villains of the game. In these third level cases the characters can however stand up for (either by other characters or by themselves) and the incorrect pronoun/gender/name is oftentimes corrected.

4. The fourth level includes the most severe cases of misgendering, especially when the actions are interpreted as unnecessarily cruel, or harmful slurs are used in describing the characters. The third and fourth levels coincide partially, with the same examples for being misgendered also appearing in the fourth level cases. The main difference between these two levels is that in the cases that appear too severe to be grouped with the third level, the misgendering is often done by either the playable characters, their close allies, or official game manuals or other documentation. In these cases the misgendering actions also are not corrected.

5. The final and most severe cases of transphobia include games where the transgender characters were portrayed with sexually predatory behavior, or as mentally ill killers due to their transness. In these cases the transgender identity is established either as a cause for the character's villainous behavior, or as an another symptom of the overall derangement of the character. This level also includes cases where on top of the

---

[12] Deadnaming is the act of referring to a transgender person by a name they used prior to transitioning. Most commonly this means referring to the person with their birth name after they have changed their name as part of their gender transition (Sinclair-Palm, 2017).

previously described lower level transphobic actions, graphic transphobic violence towards the characters was apparent, and instances where the transgender character's genitalia was forcibly shown as a shocking revelation of their sex assigned at birth.

The rankings are not categories that can be solidly separated from each other, and rather exist as a spectrum with varying levels of utilizing transphobia and prejudiced narrative tropes in portraying the characters. Nevertheless, the division into these five rankings offer clues on the trends of transgender representation and how often the representation is based on transphobic commentary.

4   Analysis

In the following chapter, the results of the gathered database will be discussed with two main goals. The first part of the analysis will focus on providing a cursory glance at the frequency of transgender representation. This subsection will first group the chosen games by release years, development countries, and game genres. Then the attention will be turned towards the transgender characters themselves by analyzing the gender distribution, whether the characters are playable or not, and the gender of the voice actors in cases when applicable. The second subsection will then move on to analyze the representation of the characters in more depth with the focus especially aimed towards transphobia as a part of their representation. All of the aforementioned characters will then be categorized by the severity of transphobia in their representation. These results will be discussed according to the release years of the games and concrete examples of different rankings of severity will be exhibited.

4.1   Frequency of Representation

As previously stated, the researched 120 transgender characters come from games released between 1988 and 2023. This time period was divided into slots of four years to study the annual distribution of the released games. As illustrated in Table 4.1, each four-year time period since the very first transgender character in 1988 have managed to include at least some kind of representation fitting under the transgender umbrella. However, from the distribution of representation, it is clear that there has been a major increase in representation during the most recent decade, with 69% of all the chosen characters appearing in games released after the year 2012. Furthermore, whereas the earlier four-year slots aimed to include all transgender representation released during those years, the same cannot be said on the latter time periods. The sheer amount of video games released yearly as of 2023 makes it virtually impossible to shift through every single game. Simply looking at games released on Steam annually, it is apparent how the number of games released yearly has exponentially multiplied – with 10,963 video games released on Steam just during the year of 2022 (Clement, 2023). Similarly, non-professional game releases have been on the increase, and there are 1,016 games released on itch.io with the "transgender" tag as of July 2023 (itch.io). Due to the vastness of the current game development field, it is apparent that not all game releases have been included, and the chosen characters come simply from the most well-known cases and mainstream appearances of transgender characters.

Table 4.1: Number of Transgender Video Game Characters Based on Release Years

Release Years	Transgender Characters
1988 – 1991	5
1992 – 1995	5
1996 – 1999	1
2000 – 2003	9
2004 – 2007	9
2008 – 2011	8
2012 – 2015	22
2016 – 2019	32
2020 – 2023	29

The games in which transgender characters appear have also been divided depending on the country the game was developed in as illustrated in Figure 4.1, and the primary genre(s) of the game as illustrated in Figure 4.2. The development country was decided based on the location of the headquarters of the studio responsible for developing the game. In one case, a game had two developers based in different countries – in this case both countries were listed. When it came to independent development projects and games especially released in itch.io, it was not always apparent what the country of origin was. In these cases the development country has been listed as unknown.

As demonstrated in Figure 4.1, the two most common countries of origin are Japan (having developed 35% of all researched games) and the United States (32%). After these two countries, which make up for two thirds of all the games included in the database, come Canada (11%), the UK (5%), and Australia (3%). All countries that had developed less than three games were grouped together under the "Other" category (7%). This category includes the following six European countries: France, Germany, The Netherlands, Spain, Poland, and Finland.

GAME BY DEVELOPMENT COUNTRY

■ Japan ■ USA ■ Canada ■ UK ■ Unknown ■ Australia ■ Other

Other 7 %
Australia 3 %
Unknown 7 %
UK 5 %
Canada 11 %
Japan 35 %
USA 32 %
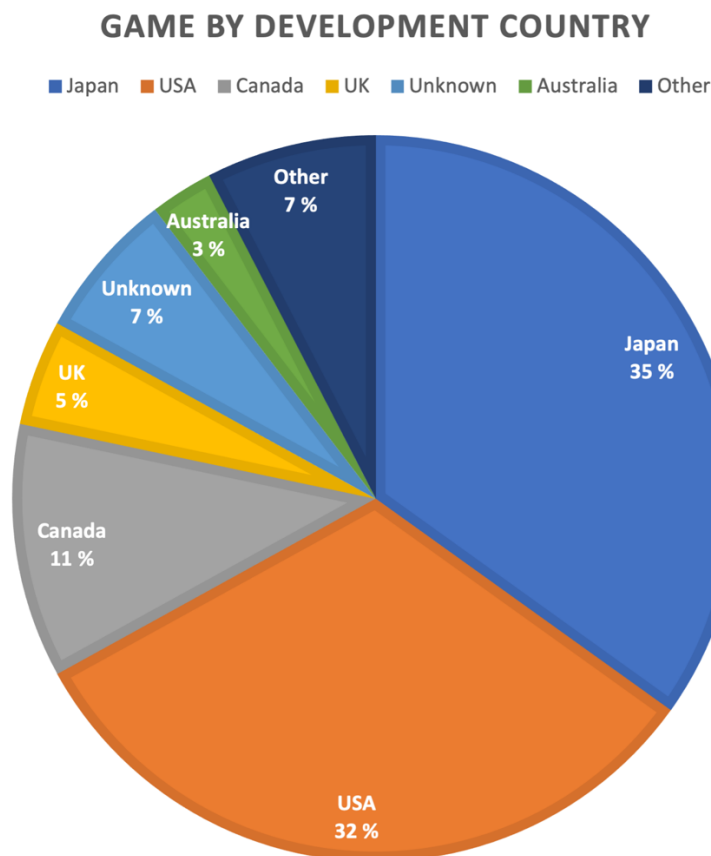
Figure 4.1: Games with Transgender Characters by Development Country

When examining the genre(s) of the games appearing in the database, a list was collected primarily based on which genres each game had been listed under on Steam. Steam was chosen due to being the largest vendor for games on the PC system (Toy et al., 2018), and because the majority of the games researched were available on said platform. If the game had not been released on Steam, secondary sources were used. These sources consisted of itch.io, Nintendo Store, App Store, Google Play, and Battle.net depending on the platform where the game was available. For games that were no longer available for purchase on any platforms, the genre was decided based on the genres listed on the game's official documentation and game manual, or ultimately by the genre listed on the official game wiki if no other sources were available.

The most common genres among the games researched were Adventure (25%), RPG (22%), Action (19%), and Indie (12%). As a single game could be listed under multiple different genres, the most common combination were games that included both the Adventure and the Action tag. Overall 13 different genres of games were found included in the database. All of the genres and the percentage of games including said genre tag can be seen in Figure 4.2.
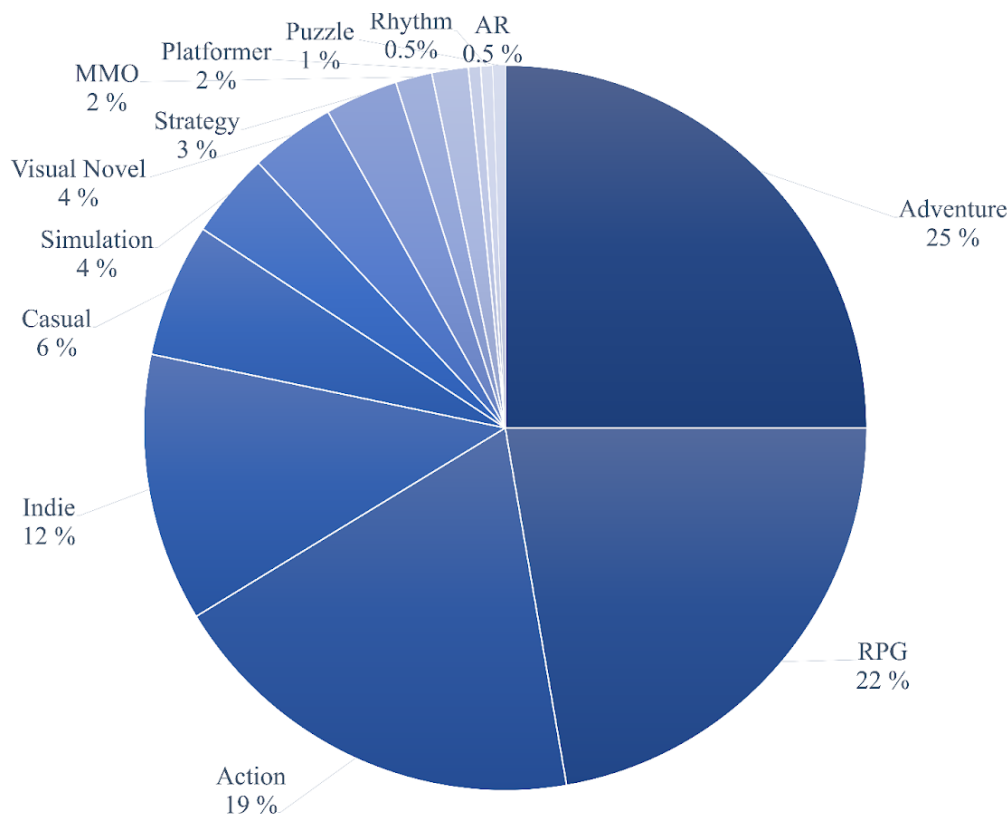
Figure 4.2: Division of Genres Assigned to Games with Transgender Characters

Toy et al. (2018) studied all game releases on Steam by their genre tag application counts, and these results differ slightly from the sampling used for this research. According to the findings of Toy et al., five genres are above all others with a distinct margin: Action, Strategy, Indie, Adventure, and RPG. Four of these genres are similarly among the most common genres when researching the sampling of games with transgender characters. However, strategy seems to be a visibly less common genre within games providing transgender representation (3%), even though otherwise it is one of the most frequently applied tags. Furthermore when it comes to application counts, action is by far the most common genre when it comes to Steam game genres in general, with it making up 46% of the total applications (Toy, 2018). This indicates that action games are also less likely to include transgender characters, as in our sub-sampling focused on transgender representation adventure and role-playing games take the lead.

The overall trend of transgender characters can furthermore be examined by grouping each of the characters by their gender. In Figure 4.3, the previously utilized four-year release time slots have been marked solely by the starting year of each period. Here the previously grouped transgender characters have been divided into three different groups: transgender women (marked "tw" in the Figure), transgender men (marked "tm"), and genderqueer people (marked

"gq") which collects together all other genders besides the binary male/female division. The most prominent and commonly represented group within the genderqueer umbrella were nonbinary people, but the category groups also all other genders together due to the rarity of such representations and the ambiguity in defining them clearly.

From all the representations of transgender people, trans women are the most commonly represented group. 60% of all transgender characters were classified as transgender women, whereas solely 12% of characters were transgender men. It can also be noted that there are no representations of transgender men before the three most recent timeslots. Krem Aclassi, the character that is often considered to be the first ever transgender man in video games, appears as late as 2014 in *Dragon Age: Inquisition*. However, the trend of transgender men being portrayed seems to be increasing similarly with all transgender representation.
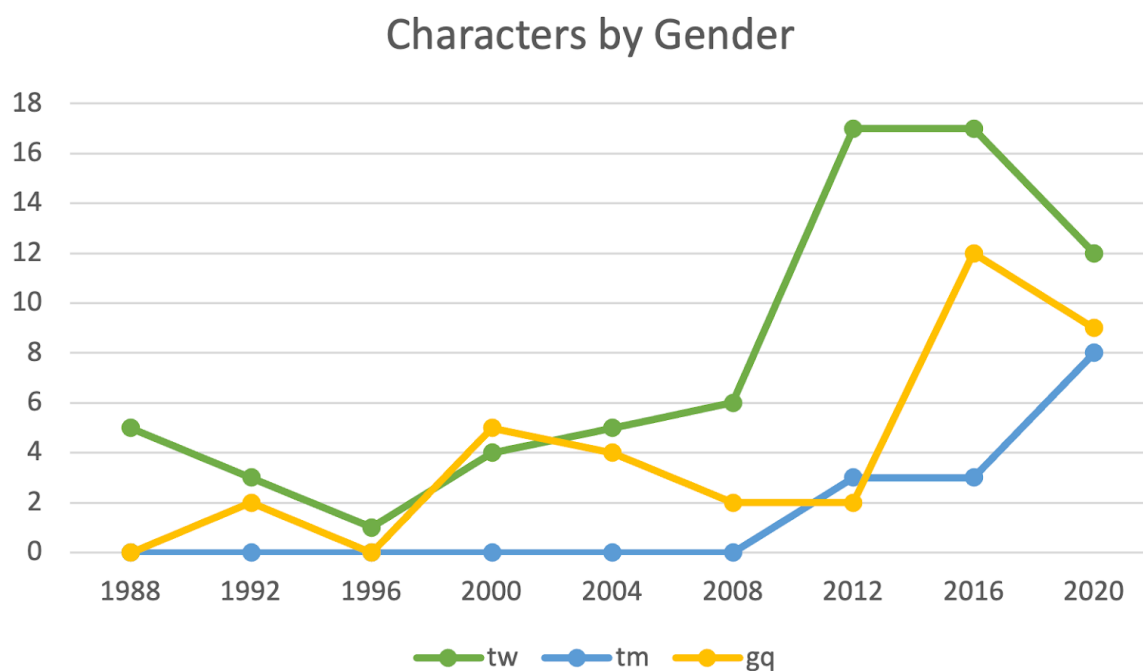
Figure 4.3: Number of Transgender Video Game Characters according to Gender. Characters are divided into transgender women ("tw"), transgender men ("tm"), and genderqueer characters ("gq").

The most interesting observations concerning Figure 4.3 are the steepest increases in representation by gender. Each of the three gender categories faced a time period when the representation seemed to multiply drastically. For transgender women this period occurred in 2012-2015, when representation of trans women increased by 283% compared to the four prior years. For genderqueer representation, a similar increase can be seen next, with an increase of 600% occurring in 2016-2019. Finally, the most recent and least drastic of the three ascents is an increase of 267% in the representation of transgender men in 2020-2023. For both

transgender women and genderqueer people, representation has been slowly on the decline after reaching this peak, with however the overall trend still facing upwards. The same decline cannot be seen for transgender men yet and there might also be references of the representation not yet having reached a similar peak. This might be a plausible theory considering that there has been no apparent decline in the representation yet, and that the current peak of transgender men still falls below the number of representation by both transgender women and genderqueer characters.

As seen in Figure 4.4, the distribution between playable characters and non-playable characters (NPCs) seems to be steadily progressing as trans characters become more common. Notably, the number of playable transgender characters listed in the database was equal to the number of listed NPCs during the time period of 2020-2023. However this can be a result of various factors. Although it might be possible that playable trans characters are also gradually becoming more common in big game productions, the most clear reason behind this shift is due to the rising number of smaller game developments, indie games, and solo game projects released on itch.io. These games are more likely to have a transgender protagonist, through whom the developer tells a story based on their own experiences as a queer or transgender person. As an example, one of the best known game developers behind multiple transgender themed games is Anna Anthropy. Her autobiographical games *dys4ia* (2012) and *ohmygod are you alright* (2015) are few of the earliest examples of smaller game productions, where the playable character and the story's protagonist is a transgender woman.

The gender of the trans character has limited effects on the likelihood of whether they are a playable character or an NPC. For example 27.5% of the researched trans female characters were playable. Almost identically 28.6% of the trans male characters were playable. However, a slight difference could be seen when considering their genderqueer counterparts. Of all the genderqueer representations researched, 38.5% of them were playable characters. Examples of these playable genderqueer characters are The Knight from *Hollow Knight* (2017) and FL4K from *Borderlands 3* (2019). The Knight is reported to be genderless, while FL4K is nonbinary, and both of these characters use they/them pronouns. This gender-neutral approach to playable characters might aim to prevent alienating players based on gender, and make it easier for everyone to identify with the character they are playing as. Gender-neutral outcomes are also common especially in cases where the protagonist is either a robot or a fictional creature or being with often no apparent gendered features.

Playable vs Non-Playable Trans Characters
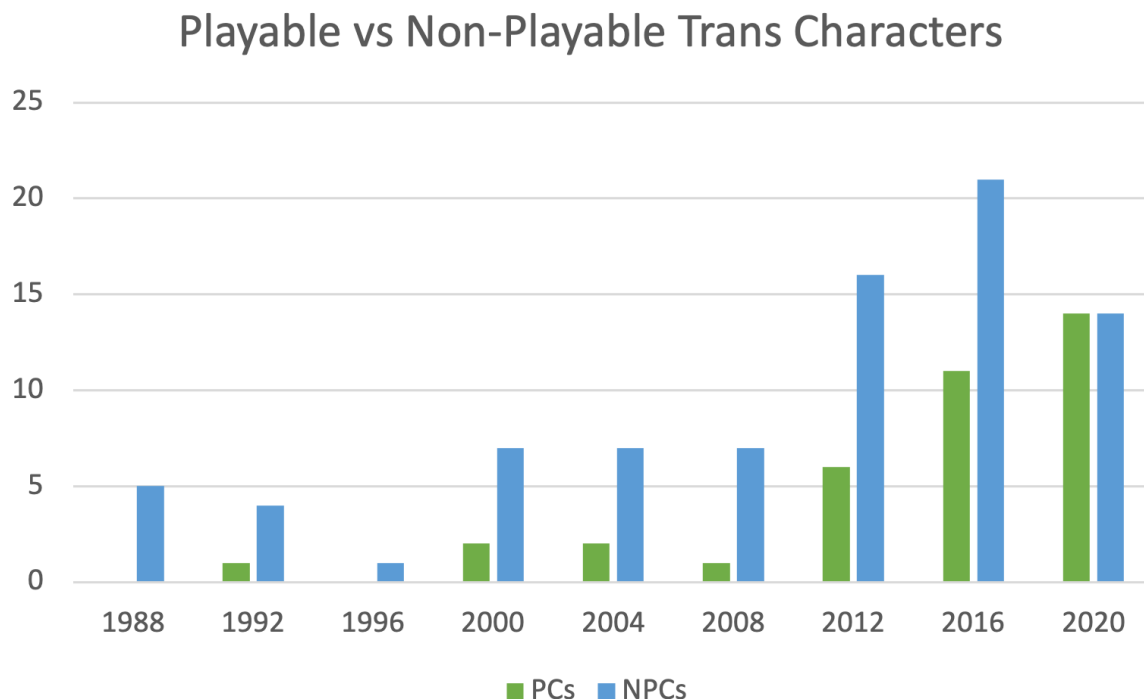
Figure 4.4: Number of Playable and Non-Playable Transgender Video Game Characters

Lastly, examination can be aimed towards the gender of the voice actors of the characters in cases when applicable. By examining the characters from this angle, the aim was to find out how often transgender characters in video games are played by cisgender or transgender actors/actresses, and how often the casted actors are the same gender as the character they are playing. However, conducting data collection and analysis on this topic proved more problematic as initially thought. In most cases, the voice actors' gender identities have not been explicitly stated. Even in cases where the gender of the voice actor is known, there is not always reliable information on whether they are cisgender or transgender. This is the reason why instead of conducting a numerical data analysis, only some speculations based on the known character cases can be reliably given.

The first cases of these casting decisions being publicly discussed and criticized come from characters such as the sex workers in *Dragon Age: Origins* (2009), Serendipity in *Dragon Age 2* (2011), Peach and the sex workers in *Grand Theft Auto V* (2013), and Miranda Comay in *Watch Dogs 2* (2016), all of which are transgender female characters who were voiced by cisgender men. Correspondingly transgender male characters such as Krem Aclassi in *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (2014) and Ned Wynert in *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate* (2015) were voiced by

cisgender women. Examples of transgender characters voiced by cisgender actors/actresses are also illustrated in Figure 4.5.

The importance of these decisions is clarified when considering that the first mainstream appearance of a transgender male character (Krem Aclassi) was voiced by Jennifer Hale, a cisgender woman, and the first PoC transgender woman who is presented positively in mainstream games (Miranda Comay), is voiced by David Collins, a cisgender man. In these cases the issue is not just on having cisgender actors playing transgender characters, but also choosing the gender of the actors according to the trans character's sex assigned at birth, not their gender (i.e. having a cisgender man play the role of a transgender woman instead of choosing either a cisgender or a transgender woman to act the role). A similar trend is common also in cinema and television.

Figure 4.5: Transgender characters voiced by cisgender voice actors/actresses. From top left to right, pictured are Krem Aclassi (*Dragon Age: Inquisition*), Ned Wynert (*Assassin's Creed: Syndicate*), Miranda Comay (*Watch Dogs 2*), Serendipity (*Dragon Age 2*), and Peach (*GTA V*).

As the topic of whether transgender actors and actresses should be primarily cast to play transgender roles raised public discussion (Capuzza, 2017; Lewis, 2018; Kisner, 2019; Oliver, 2020), a shift can be noted into more deliberate casting decisions. As pointed out by Capuzza et al. (2017), the first-hand experiences of transgender actors could bring more authenticity and sensitivity to these performances. Furthermore, the issue of causing real harm to the public

perception of trans people by casting cisgender actors has been voiced multiple times within the entertainment industry (Lewis, 2018; Kisner, 2019; Oliver, 2020; Kelleher, 2020). As trans people and their existence are downgraded into putting on a sort of performance (e.g. linguistically), this promotes an inauthentic perception of trans identity (Paternostro, 2023).

When looking at transgender representations from the last few years, we can notice a trend of more transgender people being casted to play the characters – or at least these cases being more clearly publicized. There are multiple recent cases of transgender male characters being portrayed by transgender men, e.g. Lor in *Borderlands 3* (2019), Tyler Ronan in *Tell Me Why* (2020), Lev in *The Last of Us Part II* (2020), Pelagos in *World of Warcraft* (patch 9.0.2 released in 2020), and Paolo de la Vega in *Far Cry 6* (2021). A similar trend can be seen with transgender female characters being voiced by transgender women, e.g. Claire Russell in *Cyberpunk 2077* (2020), and Tressa Smith "Catalyst" in *Apex Legends* (Season 15 released in 2022). Lastly, genderqueer characters are also recently starting to be voiced by genderqueer people, e.g. Floofty Fizzlebean in *Bugsnax* (2020), Selenium in *Vitamin Connection* (2020), and Fang in *Goodbye Volcano High* (2022). Testament, a nonbinary character in *Guilty Gear: Strive* (2021), also received a transgender voice actress in its English translation, although the actress is a trans woman instead of being nonbinary like the character.

There seems to have been a clear increase in the number of cases in which transgender voice actors' are intentionally chosen to voice transgender roles. Although no definitive conclusions can be made based on the limited findings, these sources seem to clearly indicate a positive change in casting decisions in the 2020s compared to the previous choices that have been deemed problematic. However, there were also interesting and exceptional casting choices made in earlier years besides the criticized "cis actor playing trans character" trope. For example Guillo from *Baten Kaitos Origins* (2006), who is canonically agender and referred to by it/its pronouns in official material, is voiced by two voice actors, of whom one has a masculine and another a feminine voice, and these voices are played simultaneously on top of each other.

There are also cases where the casting decisions differ depending on the translation language, e.g. with Chihiro Fujisaki from *Danganronpa: Trigger Happy Havoc* (2010) and Leo Kliesen (2007) from *Tekken 6*. Chihiro is portrayed in Japanese by a male voice actor whereas the English translation has a female actress. Chihiro's gender has never been clearly confirmed, and fans of the game seem to mostly divide between reading Chihiro as a crossdressing man

and a transgender woman (LGBTQ Video Game Archive). Similarly, Leo is initially voiced in English by a female actress, but in a later appearance in *Tekken Tag Tournament 2* (2011), Leo speaks German, which is voiced by a male actor, although the in-game sounds and grunts are still voiced by the female actress. Leo's gender has similarly been a topic of discussion with conflicting canonical sources depending on the translation (LGBTQ Video Game Archive).

4.2   Division of Characters Based on Transphobia

The second large focus was dividing the examined characters into five rankings according to the severity of transphobia they faced during their respective games. The five rankings (introduced in Chapter 3) vary from the games with no discernible transphobia (1st ranking) to the most extreme cases of transphobic portrayals (5th ranking), which included e.g. graphic cases of transphobic violence, forced revelations of genitalia, or the most harming stereotypes such as transness being the cause for the character's mental illness and violent and/or sexually predatory behavior. Each examined character was given one of these rankings, and the distribution of all representation by ranking can be viewed in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Percentages of trans* character representations by rankings of the severity of transphobia. All representations are also divided into two time periods by decades of release to illuminate the decrease in transphobic portrayals in latter decades.

Ranking	All Representation	80s – 00s	10s – 20s
1st	31.58%	18.18%	37.04%
2nd	18.42%	15.15%	19.75%
3rd	24.56%	18.18%	27.16%
4th	14.91%	24.24%	11.11%
5th	10.53%	24.24%	4.94%

Although the ranking with no discernible transphobia is the largest by itself with 31.2% of all representations, the division also displays that 68.4% of all representations examined contained

some levels of transphobia. Furthermore, 50% of all characters faced transphobia of the ranking level 3 or higher, which meant the portrayal included misgendering, bullying, deadnaming, and/or other discrimination towards the trans character due to their transness. This number is even further increased when delimiting the games by year of release to games released in the 80s, 90s and 00s. In these cases 81.8% contained some levels of transphobia, with 66.7% of the cases reaching transphobia rankings of level 3 or higher. To further clarify the state of transphobic representation and illustrate the statistics presented on the frequency and prevalence of it, five characters each fitting one of the coined transphobia levels are discussed shortly.

Minor transphobia can manifest in various different forms, and finding examples of games where it can be said there is no discernible transphobic attitudes can be challenging. Most examples of video games and characters fitting this categorization are games that have either been created by transgender people detailing their personal stories, or have been developed closely in dialogue with the trans community. Madeline, the protagonist of *Celeste*, is a fitting example of a relatable transgender character who is considered not to be portrayed in a transphobic way even though the game still discusses modern trans struggles and anxieties. The game deals with Madeline's inner struggle with her other self and her trying to abandon her reflection, but later reconciling and merging with the other self to become stronger and more complete (Thorson, 2020). This also proves the point that in order to portray a transgender character with no discernible transphobia, difficult topics can still be discussed.

Minor transphobic remarks can be heard in games such as *Tell Me Why*, which manages to portray its protagonist Tyler Ronan as a realistic multi-dimensional character. Within the game Sam, an old family friend, does not recognize Tyler when seeing him and after being made aware of who Tyler is, Sam responds with: "Damn.. You look like a real man. […] I just.. didn't know they could make a woman look so much like a man." In saying so, the transgender character is misgendered and it is hinted that he would not be "a real man" due to being transgender. The player can however choose to challenge these comments. Furthermore, no matter how the player chooses to react, Sam will apologize for his previous behavior and comments later in the game. Overall Sam is portrayed as uneducated and ignorant, but not as having any malevolent intentions behind his comments. This is a main factor in lessening the severity of the otherwise transphobic and hurtful comments, as the inclusion of such comments makes the game more realistic: transgender people receive similar comments continuously from uninformed but often well-meaning people.

Moving further with the severity of transphobic remarks but still discussing quite minor cases of hurtful commentary, we find characters such as Cremisius (Krem) Aclassi from *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (2014). He is a trans man, and his representation and portrayal has been written in cooperation with the transgender community. The EA/BioWare writer Patrick Weekes released a blog post detailing the process of building Krem's character and the careful approach to the representation of the character and the dialogue surrounding his gender. He describes the process as follows: "On the writing side, I wrote Krem as best I could, and the editing team looked at every line and cleaned up dialogue and paraphrases that could give the wrong impression. I then passed him to two friends in the GQ [genderqueer] community… at which point they showed me where I was absolutely messing things up and gave me constructive feedback on how to improve." (Weekes, 2014).

Still the representation is not without its issues. The dialogue options offered to the player come off as quite ignorant and uninformed (e.g. "Why pass as a man?" and "Are you a woman?"). Furthermore, there are minor mentions of Krem's mother and a healer misgendering him and using feminine pronouns. The player can also choose to ask Krem why he "chose" to become a man. Krem responds to the question with "I didn't decide anything. I've been like this my whole life". From the answer given to the question it is clear that Krem is fully capable of defending himself when faced with these questions, although they are portrayed as something common and acceptable to inquire from trans* people you've just recently made the acquaintance of. However when it comes to Krem, most commonly the main topic of criticism is focused on the fact that Krem is voiced by Jennifer Hale, a cisgender woman. This in itself is a problematic decision that in turn increases transphobic stereotypes as previously pointed out.

As moving up the severity ranking of transphobia, it can be noticed that the tone in which the topics are discussed and portrayed changes. Whereas in the cases with close to no discernible transphobia the characters are often portrayed as relatable personas, the further along the spectrum the representation leans more towards portrayals of otherness. The fourth level of transphobia includes characters such as the previously discussed Birdetta (see Figure 4.6), who made her first appearance in *Super Mario Bros. 2* (1988). She is portrayed as an antagonist and misgendered and ridiculed by the official game manual. Since her first portrayal, Birdetta has appeared in various spin-off games of the Super Mario franchise. When discussing transphobia surrounding the character, the most drastic portrayals come from the 2008 game *Captain Rainbow*, even though her gender has been a franchise-long running joke. In *Captain Rainbow*,

Birdetta is imprisoned for using the female bathroom because the jailer does not believe her to be a girl. The player must then find proof that she is not lying. This is later proven with a mysterious censored object found under Birdetta's pillow and implied to be a vibrator.
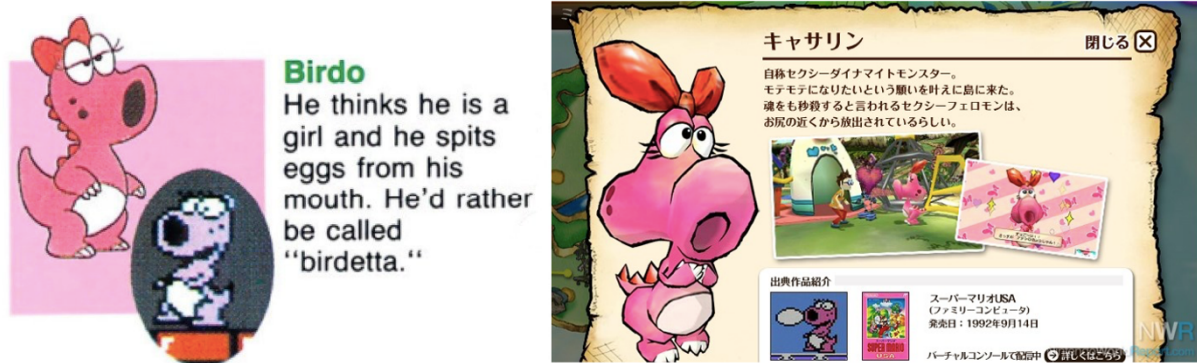
Figure 4.6: Birdetta according to the official game manuals of *Super Mario Bros. 2* and *Captain Rainbow*. The Japanese description of *Captain Rainbow* roughly translates to: "Self-proclaimed sexual dynamite monster. I came to the island to fulfill my wish to be popular. Sexy pheromones, which are said to kill souls in seconds, seem to be emitted from near the buttocks."

Other examples of Birdetta and her gender being ridiculed include the aforementioned official game manual where she is constantly misgendered and referred to with masculine pronouns. She is also consistently portrayed making typically feminine poses but at the same time given a deep masculine voice, with her being described as an *okama* in the original Japanese versions. The Japanese term *okama* was used in the Edo Period to refer to someone who is the passive recipient of anal sex. However, the slang term is usually used to interchangeably refer to effeminate men, drag queens, trans women, and gay men both as a derogatory slur and a self-referential identity term reclaimed by the queer community (Lombardo, 2020; Mandelin, 2020). However in Birdetta's case, the usage of the term is offensive, and apparently aims at being humorous, with further jokes on the matter being included in the official content of e.g. the Japanese *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* (2003), which declares "Birdo appears to be Yoshi's girlfriend, but is actually his boyfriend!?", and the Spanish version for *Super Mario Strikers* (2005), with the description "Birdo is your man... well, or woman."

The most severe cases of transphobia (level 5) are luckily not as common as the less radical and non-violent examples of transphobic attitudes towards the video game characters. However, these extreme portrayals of transphobia are still a significant part of the gathered sample (10.53%), and in their severity are also effective in strengthening harmful stereotypes. The video games of the 1990s and the 2000s can be considered to include the biggest part of the

most harmful representations, with 67% of the characters reaching the fifth level of transphobia appearing originally in games released during these decades.

Shablee from *Leisure Suit Larry 6: Shape Up or Slip Out!* is one of the characters that receive the most severe ranking when it comes to transphobia. *Leisure Suit Larry 6* is a 1993 video game developed and published by Sierra On-Line. Shablee is one of the characters the protagonist tries to seduce during the game. After successfully doing so, the game includes a scene where the protagonist is beginning to have sex with her. At this point it is revealed that Shablee is in fact a trans woman (or in the game manual's words she is "revealed to be a man") by showing her genitalia to the player. The protagonist has a transphobic reaction to the revelation, being horrified that he kissed a "homosexual transvestite cross-dresser". (LSL6 Game Design Document, 1993). At this point the pronouns used for Shablee change to masculine. Afterwards it is heavily hinted that Shablee proceeds to rape the protagonist, with his screams and cries being heard as the screen goes black. She is also verbally misgendered and stereotyped as a sexual predator by the game itself and its official book, design documents, and official wiki. The terminology used for her varies in game, with Shablee alternatively described as a transvestite and a trans woman.

5   Character Roles and Stereotypical Representations

Transgender character representations can be grouped together based on recurring themes and tropes that seem to predominate the way these characters are portrayed. For exploring these common themes, the non-playable trans* characters were divided based on the roles they possessed in their respective games according to the typology coined by Bartle (2004) and Warpefelt (2016). After taking a look at the roles given to the characters, we will move even deeper into the representational decisions by discussing four prominent stereotypes that appeared in connection with certain roles.

First the NPCs were divided according to each metatype of the typology. The most prominent metatype were Providers (39.24%), followed by Adversaries (29.11%), Functions (27.85%), and Friends (26.58%) as can be seen in Table 5.1. All of the researched characters fit at least one of the metatypes, although there were cases where multiple metatypes were assigned to a single character (as discussed in Chapter 3). As these results indicate, the provider metatype seems to be the most common with a clear margin – while the rest of the metatypes are more or less balanced with each other. A more demonstrative visual on the frequency of each metatype can be seen in Figure 5.1 which furthers the analysis by dividing each metatype's frequency by the years of each game's release date.

Table 5.1: The number and percentage of NPCs fitting each of Warpefelt's metatypes.

	n	%
Functions	22	27.85%
Adversaries	23	29.11%
Friends	21	26.58%
Providers	31	39.24%
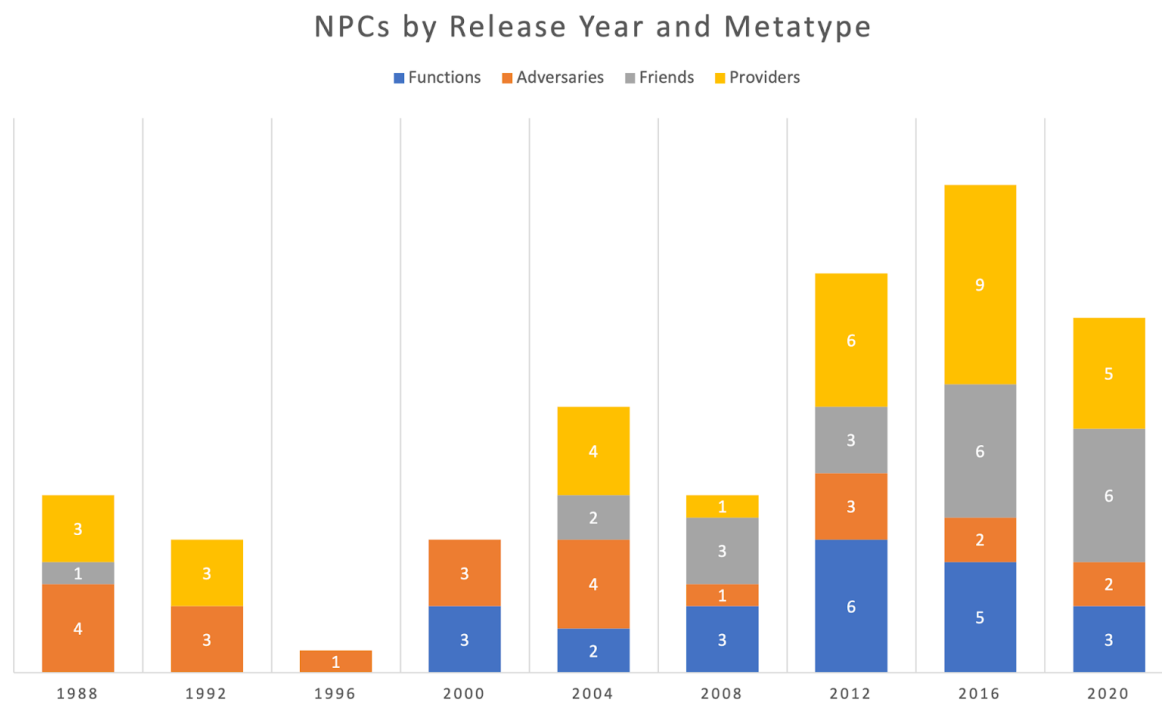
Figure 5.1: Transgender NPCs categorized by their metatypes and the years of release by four-year slots.

A few outlines can be drawn based on the data visualized in Figure 5.1. First and foremost, the earliest representations of transgender NPCs seem to focus on the metatypes of Adversaries and Providers, of which the anterior is the sole metatype to appear at least once in each of the four-year slots. Functions as a metatype has been appearing in transgender representation since the beginning of the 21st century, and Friends as a metatype has similarly gained more visibility as we are nearing the present. However, one early NPC (Yasmin from *Circuit's Edge* released in 1989) was categorized as a Friend of the protagonist, although this categorization could be objected to due to the generally minor role of the NPC in assisting the protagonist. However, the decision was made to categorize Yasmin as a Friend rather than just a Provider due to hers and the protagonist's apparent past together and resulting closeness, friendliness, and warmth that went beyond other minor NPCs of the game.

These metatypes can be researched furthermore with the assistance of Warpefelt's division within each of the metatypes. All of the transgender NPCs were divided into certain subtypes within each of their metatypes. For example, if a character was previously categorized into two metatypes, now the same character was categorized into at least one role within each of the metatypes assigned to them. Assigning multiple roles for a single character within the same metatype would have also been possible if necessary – although no examples of this were discovered. A few additions to Warpefelt's role division were also proposed. Two new roles

were given within the Providers metatype: the flirtees and the bystanders. In Warpefelt's division of roles, all of these characters could have been categorized under the storytellers, as they were all sentient interactable NPCs that gave the protagonist snippets of the game narrative (Warpefelt, 2016). However, these two new categories had the benefit of furthermore categorizing different types of storytellers, which included by far the greatest variation between characters in any subtype.

Flirtees were the characters that had a notably minor role within the game and did not form a strong enough connection with the protagonist to reach the Friends metatype. They also did not verbally provide the protagonist with important pieces of the game narrative like Warpefelt's storytellers do – their role was more to act as an object of the protagonist's romantic or sexual advances and then advance the game narrative through these avenues. In a way, the flirtees were not verbal – but rather sexual – storytellers. Their existence was not inconsequential (as is often the case with e.g. sex workers that fit under the Services subtype) and their narrative role focused on providing important snippets for the game narrative through being the objects of the protagonists romantic or sexual desires.

A similar approach was attempted with the second addition, the bystanders. The bystanders had similarly a less influential role than the common storytellers. This was due to the same reason as with the flirtees: the bystanders were not themselves the storytellers furthering the game narrative. Rather they were simply present when the snippets of the narration were provided, and were referenced during the interactions. In other words, the bystanders were not given a storytelling role themselves, but were interactable minor characters that helped the progress of the narration in one way or another. Both the flirtees and the bystanders were present during some of these narratively vital portions of the game, but they were rather the objects of discussion and narration, rather than the actual actants and discussers with the protagonist.

As can be seen in Figure 5.2, the two most common roles given to transgender NPCs were those of the enemy (20.25%) and the sidekick (18.99%). Without the new roles of the flirtee and the bystander, the storyteller role would have been the most common – although of these three the flirtees were actually the most common after the division (13.92%). These roles were then examined with the following angle: how heavily did the gender and gender presentation of the characters affect the most common roles. Here the categorization of characters into transgender women ("tw"), transgender men ("tm"), and genderqueer people ("gq") was used once again.
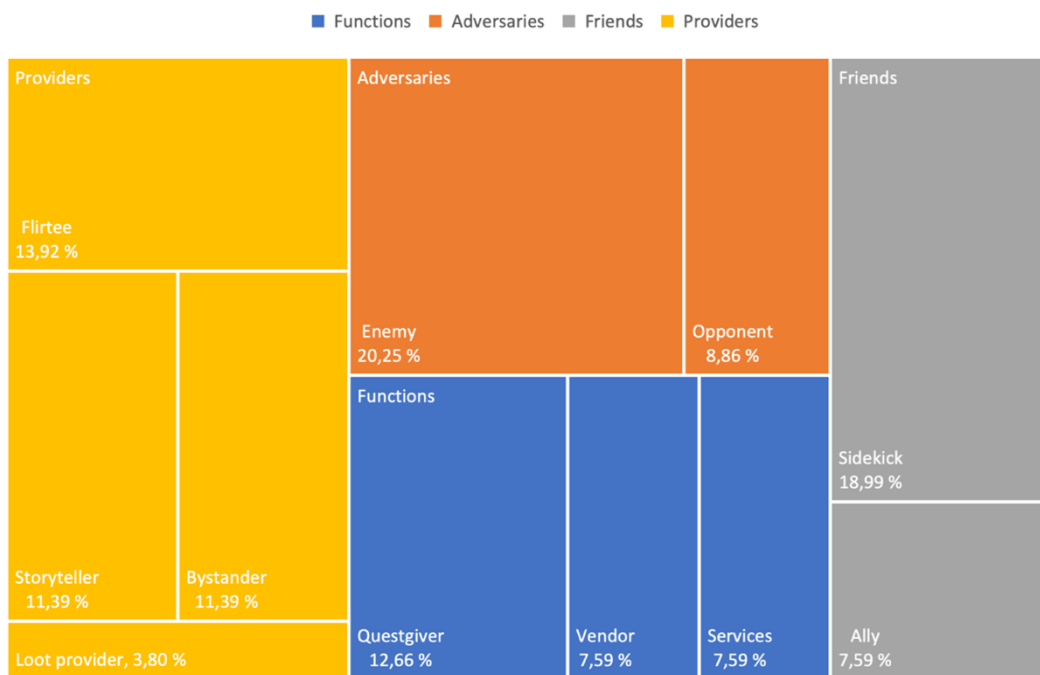
Figure 5.2: Transgender NPCs according to their metatypes and role within said metatypes. Percentages are indicators of how many NPCs (n=79) fit the role.

With transgender women, the most common role was that of the enemy (20.00% of all trans women NPCs). Transgender women took up also 80% or over of all representations of transgender characters as vendors, service providers, and opponents as can be seen in Figure 5.3. As the majority of all representation has been focused on transgender women, this is not overly surprising. However, the most prevalent roles seem to focus on either giving the trans female characters a function as providers of services (majority of which are sex work related), or as adversaries of the characters (majority of which are also sexually motivated enemies or manipulators). These stereotypes will be looked into in more depth later on.

For transgender men, the most common role was that of the ally (33.33%). As transgender men were a clear minority within the three transgender categories, it came as a surprise that 66.67% of all transgender allies were trans men. When compared to e.g. genderqueer characters, for whom the most common role was that of the sidekick (20.83%), we can presume that although both of these groups were presented commonly as friends of the protagonist, transgender men were given more agency and capabilities to defend themselves. The main difference between a sidekick and an ally is centered on whether the friend of the protagonist provides the player with a narrative connection and help through advice, directions, and resources as a sidekick; or whether their role is more connected in helping the protagonist in combat as an ally (although

the effects are commonly quite trivial for the player's praxis) (Warpefelt, 2016). As both the sidekicks and the allies are by their definitions fully autonomous in their actions, transgender men were more commonly given roles where the NPCs actually participated in combat. This also meant that the majority of representations of transgender people who were capable of defending themselves and fighting alongside the protagonist were transgender men. Transgender women were also commonly participants in violence and fighting, although more often for the antagonists side. These discoveries might be indicative of misogyny and transmisogyny affecting transgender representations, and will also be discussed shortly in more depth.
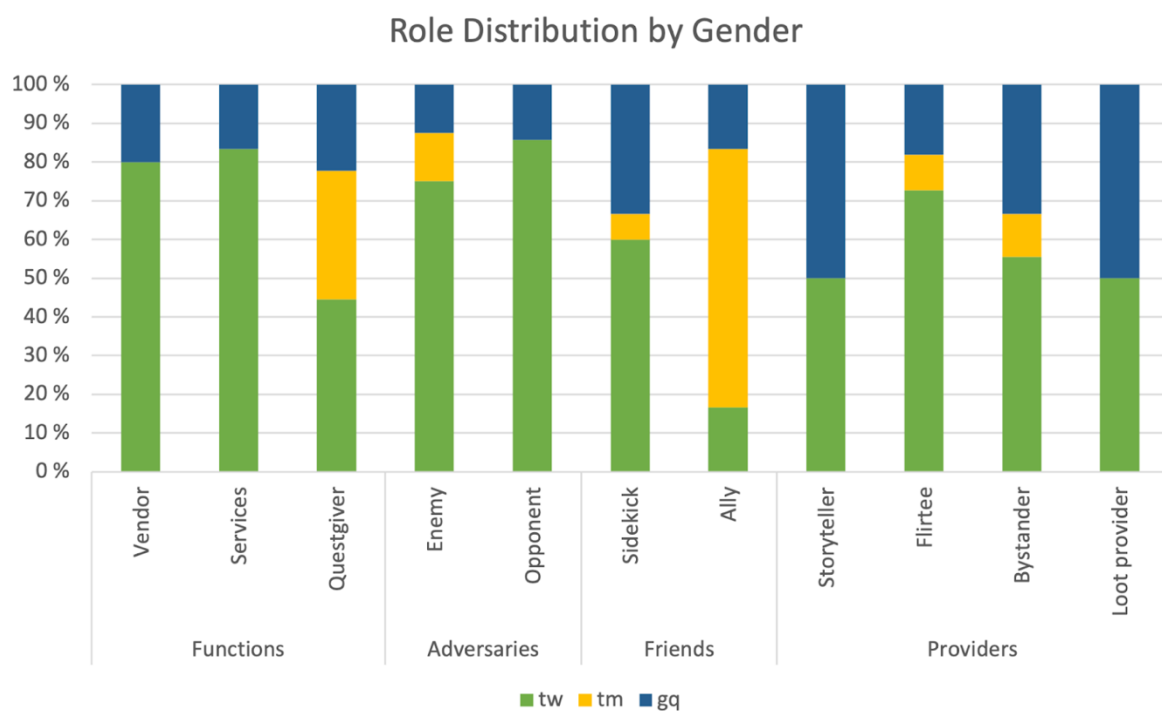
Figure 5.3: Each role's gender distribution, i.e. how many percentages of all the NPCs assigned with a certain role belonged to each researched gender category.

The division could have also been furthermore examined with the three following angles: how big of an impact did the release year of the games have on the popularity of different character roles, how much do the results shift when looking solely on mainstream game developments and excluding independent peripheral productions, and finally if the productions that utilized the help of transgender creators during the development process had an effect on the character roles they ended up portraying. The development location might prove to be an interesting research topic in the future, as groundbreaking representations come most commonly from

independent game developers, while the traditionally cautious AAA publishers tend to steer clear of innovative topics (Flint, 2021).

In the following subchapters, a closer look will be given at four common stereotypes that were identified while researching different character roles of transgender characters. These stereotypes focus on the sexualization and fetishization of transgender people (especially transfeminine characters), the prevalence of violence in their representation (both with transgender people as the instigators of violence, and the victims), the focus that is placed on physical transformation and the otherness of transgender people, and finally on the frequency of representing gender non-conformity through non-human characters.

5.1   Sexualized & Fetishized Characters

Sexualization and fetishization of video game characters is most commonly associated with female characters – both cisgender and transgender. This prevalent sexism and objectification of female game characters has been researched widely (Tompkins et al. 2020; Malkowski et al. 2017; Gestos et al. 2018). In the case of transgender women, sexism is further reinforced with the appearance of transphobia – and if the character is also a part of a marginalized racial or ethnic group, racism and the intersectionality of all these categorizations plays a part in their representation (Malkowski et al. 2017; Gray & Sarkeesian, 2020). Sexualization occurs when the character is reduced to their body parts or sexual functioning (Flores & Watson et al., 2018; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Figure 5.4: Transgender Sex Workers in *GTA V* (2013). Their crude makeup, clothing, and prominent bulges seem intentionally portrayed to be viewed as ridiculous and repulsive.

The sexualization of trans femininity aims to tempt, disgust and amuse cisgender men (Copier, 2018). This is done by traditionally borrowing looks to transfeminine characters from the iconography of drag queens and crossdressers, as can be seen in characters like Frozen Half from *Akumajō Special: Boku Dracula-kun* (1990), The Psycho from *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* (2002), Transgender sex workers from *Grand Theft Auto V* (2013) (see Figure 5.4), Lala Escargot from *Persona 5* (2015), and Mama from *AI: The Somnium Files* (2019). These representations include portraying the characters with wigs, heavy makeup, and tacky, revealing, and sexy clothing. In some instances fetishistic shots of the characters are even shown, such as with Reni Wassulmaier from *Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories* (2005) and Koko from *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude* (2004) being shown caressing their figures and clothing while looking at themselves in the mirror or making sexual advances towards the protagonists. This fetishization is in turn also connected with assumed mental derangement of the characters, as can be seen with Alfred Ashford from *Resident Evil CODE:Veronica* (2000), who is first seen moving sensually in full costume, and moments later screaming in horror after accidentally dropping their wig and seeing themselves in the mirror without it.

Figure 5.5: "Oh don't pretend to be surprised now", the female companion says with a deep masculine voice in *Dragon Age: Origins*. The game presents her gender in quotation marks.

A common trend in objectifying transfeminine characters into sexual objects is portraying them as sex workers disproportionately often. Examples of these representations can be seen in Figure 5.4, Figure 5.5, and Figure 5.8. In these representations, the problematics does not arise from the characters engaging in sex work but from the ways that the games often enforce the

harmful misconceptions of sex work as fundamentally exploitative. This devaluation appears both through dialogue and interactive elements, where the sex workers are typically depicted as minor NPCs that offer their services to the protagonist for free or at a discount. In various cases, the games also allow players to take their money back after the erotic labor has been performed (Ruberg, 2019). This can be done e.g. by stealing the money "back" after the transaction, or by physically attacking the sex worker afterwards. Furthermore, transfeminine sex workers can often be mocked and offensively treated in these representations.

Alongside being portrayed as sex workers, transfeminine characters are also often targets of the protagonists sexual interest, and objectified to be hit on and persuaded by the player to perform sexual favors. Illogically this trend often also coincides with the transfeminine characters being "revealed" to be transgender during or after the interactions, and then insulted, attacked, or ridiculed for trying to "untruthfully deceive" the protagonist, even though the protagonist is almost always the instigator of the interaction and the sexual advances. Finally, there appears to be a reoccurring trend of hinting at, openly discussing, or sometimes even visually showing the sexualized characters' genitalia.

Figure 5.6: Okabe sexually harasses Luka in *Steins;Gate* (2009) while trying to prove she has masculine genitalia.

These negative stereotypes are especially common when it comes to earlier representations of transgender women and transfeminine characters. For example, from all transfeminine representations of the 80s, 90s, and 00s (n=20), 80% of the characters were sexualized, 20% were sex workers, 35% were hit on by the protagonist, and 50% had their genitalia discussed,

groped, or shown (see Figure 5.6). For example in *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude* (2004), the transfeminine body is fetishized when Koko, a transgender woman, can be seen during a loading screen in her underwear with a prominent bulge, and she is also shown with full-frontal nudity and detailed genitalia within the game (see Figure 5.7). These trends continued to appear in mainstream games such as *Dragon Age II* (2011) and *GTA V* (2013) (see Figure 5.8) throughout the 10s and 20s, although they have become less common. However the representation is still drastically disjointed with several misinformed and fetishistic portrayals for their positive counterparts (Flint, 2021). One of the recent mainstream games that received both criticism and praise for their attempt at trans representation was *Cyberpunk 2077* (2020). The character customization was deemed to especially objectify feminine characters, and fetishize transgender bodies, which were simplified to their genitalia. Depicting customizable penises on feminine characters offered a caricature rather than an authentic representation of transfeminine characters, especially as this feature had no in-game consequences or effects on the way the character was portrayed in first-person view (Flint, 2021; Shinkle, 2022).
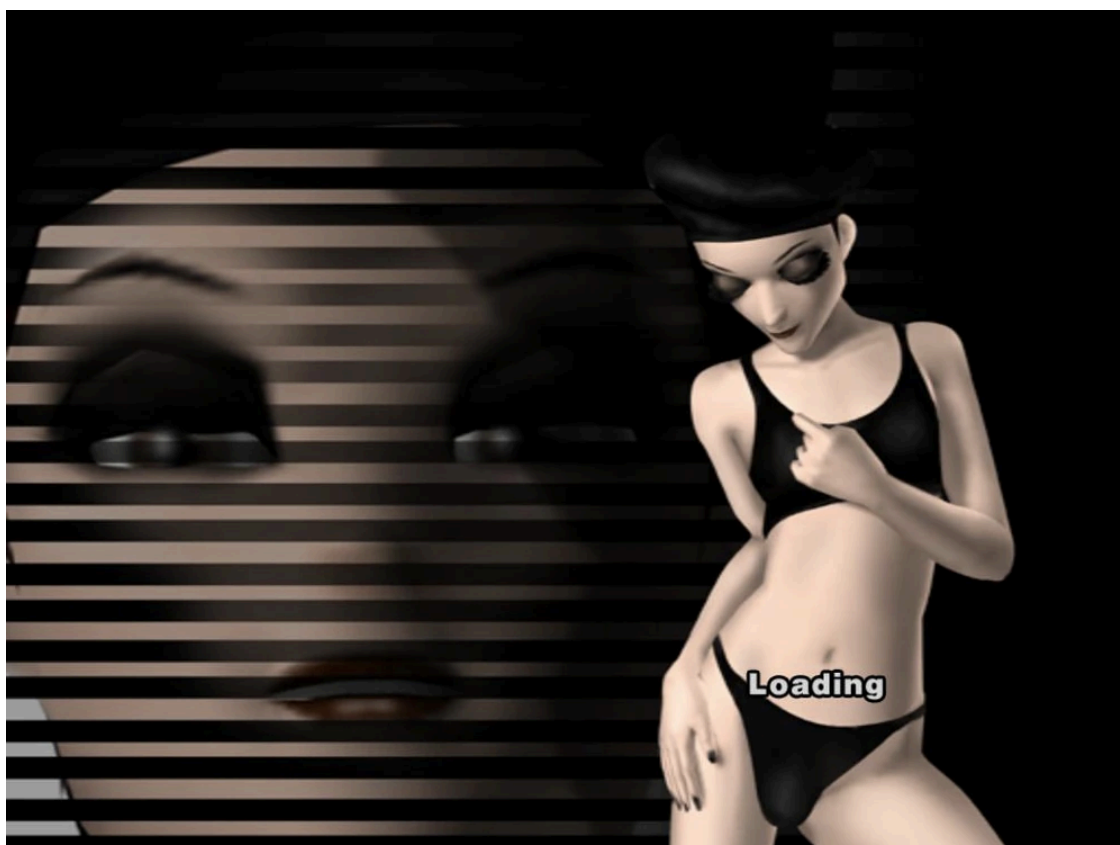
Figure 5.7: A loading screen of Koko from *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude* (2004).

Furthermore, the problematically narrow representations of transfeminine characters as desirable and/or disgusting sexualized objects for the cisgender consumer, we can also observe

a contrary trend when it comes to transmasculine characters that are often excluded from storylines about desire, sexuality, and romance (Copier, 2018). When it came to transmasculine or gender non-conforming portrayals, sexualizing the characters was not observed as commonly as with their feminine counterparts. There are a few more recent romanceable transgender men, such as Damien Bloodmarch from *Dream Daddy: A Dad Dating Simulator* (2017), but these representations still remain a clear minority and are not sexualized nowhere near to the same extent as with transfeminine characters.

Figure 5.8: Peach working in *GTA V*.

5.2 Violence: Villains, Sexual Predators and Victims

The second common stereotype is portraying transgender characters as villains, killers, and sexual predators (Thatch, 2021). This is often furthered by portraying the characters as mentally ill, and portraying their transness, mental illness, and predatory and/or violent behaviors as being interconnected. According to the stereotype famous from movies such as *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960), *Dressed to Kill* (Palma, 1980), and *The Silence of the Lambs* (Demme, 1991), gender non-conformity is an indicator of mental illness and sexual deviancy, which often leads to murderous outcomes. This connection between transgender identities, mental illnesses, and murder is not unforeseen, as transgender people have been historically portrayed in the media as dishonest, disorientated, and pathologically unstable (Halberstam, 2018). This stereotype has also been recurring throughout transgender video game history.
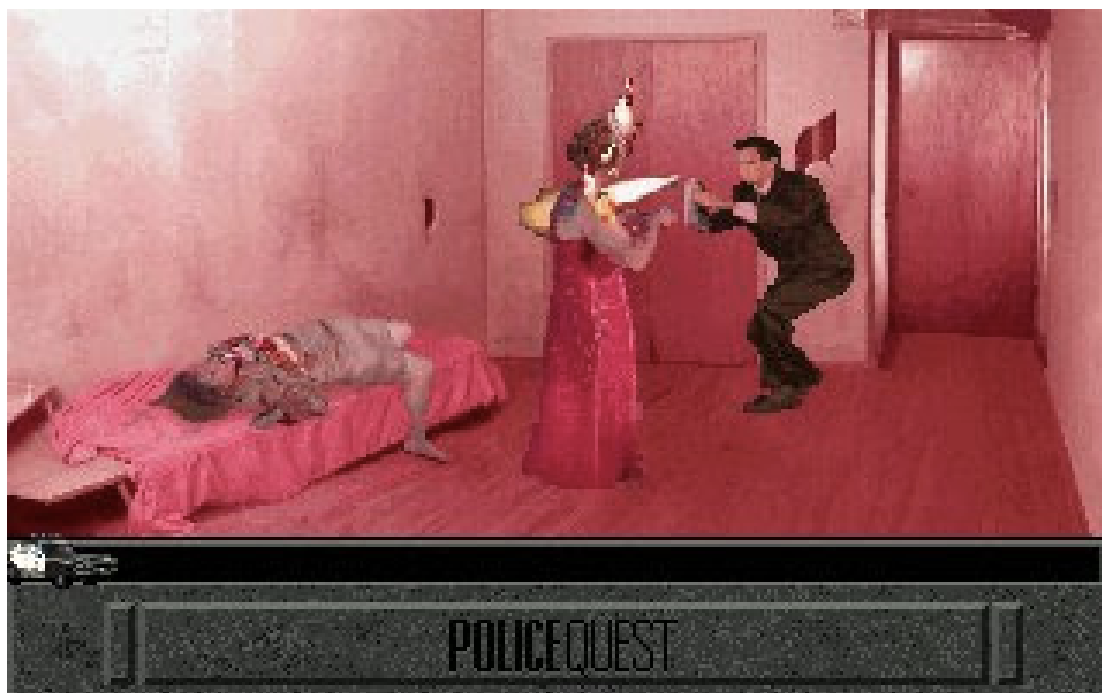
Figure 5.9: The protagonist of *Police Quest IV* lights the Cross-Dressing Killer on fire.

Apart from isolated cases such as Yasmin from *Circuit's Edge* (1989), all of the earliest representations of transgender and gender non-conforming video game characters are villains of their games. These early trans(feminine) villains include e.g. Birdetta from *Super Mario Bros. 2* (1988), Poison and Roxy from *Final Fight* (1989), Frozen Half from *Akumajō Special: Boku Dracula-kun* (1990), Cross Dressing Killer from *Police Quest: Open Season* (1993) (see Figure 5.9), and Flea from *Chrono Trigger* (1995). This persistent stereotype has continued appearing also in recent games with characters such as Val from *Outlast 2* (2017), Lena Dauman from *Deadly Premonition 2: A Blessing in Disguise* (2020), and Richard Felton from *Remothered: Tormented Fathers* (2018).

From all the 79 NPCs studied, 20% were villains . This percentage rose slightly higher when excluding independent games and self-published projects (28%), and even higher still when the focus was solely on transfeminine characters (35%). From the given examples, Richard Felton (see Figure 5.10) is the sole transmasculine villain, with most of the representation once again focused on transfeminine characters. Of these transfeminine representations, once again not all cases are clarified to be explicitly transgender, but can still be categorized into the ambiguous spectrum of drag queens, male crossdressers, transfeminine genderqueer people, and

transgender women, and therefore fit under the same stereotype that enforces a negative image of trans femininity.

Figure 5.10: Richard Felton from *Remothered: Tormented Fathers*. Richard Felton was forced to transition from female to male by Felton's father. The game argues that "hormonal imbalances" explain why Felton started murdering people (Cebulski, 2018).

Sexually predatory behavior does not always walk hand in hand with criminal activity. Although it is common for the transgender villain characters to exhibit sexual motivations behind their acts, there are also various examples of sexual predators that cannot be described as the antagonists or villains of their games. These sexual predators are mostly characters the protagonist is first interested in sexually or romantically, then faced with the "reveal" of their sex assigned at birth, and then finally it is implied that after said reveal the protagonist is sexually assaulted by the transgender character. In this thesis, both of these types have been catalogued under the "sexual predator" trope, and it is not specified whether the characters are conventionally considered villains of the game or not, as the sexual assaults, sexual violence or predatory behavior in itself are criminal acts and can be considered to uphold the same stereotype. However, 18% of all the transgender villain characters commit sexually motivated crimes. 9% of all transgender NPCs were categorized as sexual predators, with the number rising up to 14% when focusing solely on transfeminine characters. These numbers seem especially high when compared to their cisgender counterparts, and the real-life statistics in which sexual predators are most often cisgender men and transgender people report being disproportionately often the victims of such acts (Murty et al., 2018; Locantore & Wasarhaley, 2020).

Examples of the first type of sexual predators, i.e. those that are also considered enemies in their corresponding games, include characters such as the early representations such as the Cross-Dressing Killer from *Police Quest IV* (1993) and the more recent representations as Val from *Outlast 2* (2017). The Cross-Dressing Killer is said to have a sexual motivation behind the murders committed and implied to have sexually assaulted at least some of his male victims (The Police Quest Casebook). Val on the other hand can be explicitly seen sexually assaulting the male protagonist while the protagonist's screams are heard (see Figure 5.11). Val also straddles the protagonist and licks his face with clear sexual implications in an earlier cutscene (Murphy, 2020). Val's final journal entry reads: "I cut the children's throats in dreams and wake filled with sex and appetite. I love you, I am yours. I cut the throats of Knoth's sheep in waking life and sex floods me like the fear of fire in a child. I love you, I am yours. I could fuck and burn the world for all my joy. I love you. I am yours." (Red Barrels, 2017).

I have... so much... pleasure to share with you.
Oh, oh.. NO!...

Figure 5.11: Val sexually assaults Blake, the game's protagonist in *Outlast 2*.

The second type of sexual predators consists of those that were first made advances towards by the (male) protagonists, but later it was explicitly or implicitly implied that the protagonist was sexually assaulted by the predatory character, or an attempt was made at sexually abusing the protagonist. This group includes characters such as Shablee from *Leisure Suit Larry 6*, who is implied to sexually assault the protagonist as the screen fades to black and he is heard screaming (see Figure 5.12). Joan Fulton from *7 Sins* (2005) and both the Unnamed Beautiful Lady and the Unnamed Pretty Lady from *Persona 3* (2006) are less drastic examples of the same

stereotype. Joan Fulton is described in the official guide and walkthrough with the following note: "Egad! 'She' is actually a man! Be very careful, having sex with 'her' will really Stress you out" (Mathias, 2007). In *Persona 3* both of the transgender women express frustration after being "revealed" as they were "so close to snagging themselves little boy-toys."

Figure 5.12: Shablee and Larry on their beach date in *Leisure Suit Larry 6*.

As previously stated, mental illness is another common theme associated with transgender characters and characters that bend gender norms. Themes concerning mental health and illness are discussed increasingly often also in video games (Kasdorf, 2023), but for this study the focus was solely on problematic portrayals where the villainous behavior, transness, and mental illness are all interlocked together to fit the "mentally ill killer" trope commonly associated with transgender people (Thatch, 2021). This means that games like *The Missing: J.J. Macfield and the Island of Memories* (2018) that deal with a trans person facing themes such as depression, anxiety, bullying, self-harm, and suicidality (Nicol, 2018) is not counted amongst this harmful "mentally ill transgender killer" stereotype.

From the previously discussed transgender non-playable villains, 41% are openly discussed as having mental illnesses. Anti-social and psychotic behaviors connected with dissociative identity disorder, trauma-related illnesses, and schizophrenia are discussed and deducted on the characters' behavior (*Police Quest 4*, *Resident Evil CODE:Veronica*, *Remothered: Tormented*

Fathers, *Deadly Premonition 2*). The violent crimes and bizarre behaviors are described e.g. as "psycho sexual deviancy", "perverted", and "crazy" (*Police Quest IV*). Alfred Ashford in *Resident Evil CODE:Veronica* is shown talking to themself in multiple different voices, and heavily implied at having an incestuous love for their twin sister. Furthermore, in *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* the murderous transgender/cross-dressing character is simply named "The Psycho" or "Psycho Killer" that also implies a strong connection with mental illnesses. Commonly the character's mental illness and previous traumatic events are also considered to be either the reason behind the character's gender nonconformity and/or transgender identity – or to have been caused due to it. Especially trauma related to abusive parenting appears multiple times (*Outlast 2*, *Police Quest 4*, *Resident Evil CODE:Veronica*, *Remothered*, *Deadly Premonition 2*).

It is also noteworthy that in the collected database all cases of both mentally ill villains and sexual predators come from mainstream games. This does not in itself prove that these trends appear solely on games made by big game development houses. It does however imply that independent developers are less likely to rely on these old stereotypes well-known from mainstream media. However it must be pointed out that as the sampling of independent games is less comprehensive as the field is more vast, and making a deeper dive into solely self-published independent video games (released e.g. in itch.io) might also reveal outliers of independent developers using these same harmful stereotypes.

Finally, it is vital to pay attention to how transgender characters in video games are not only the instigators of physical or sexual violence, but also the victims of such acts. Victimization in transgender representation has also previously been a topic of research (Kosciesza, 2023). Transgender characters are often portrayed as facing different levels of trauma, abuse, imprisonment, harassment, violence, and murder. These different types of traumatic events are often connected to the character's gender identity and the transphobic reactions they face, especially from their own families and communities.

40.45% of all the researched transgender characters experienced (or were discussed as having experienced previously, e.g. in their childhood) some forms of physical or sexual abuse. The largest portion of characters that fit this ranking include those facing abuse from their own parents, relatives, or communities. These characters include e.g. Lev from *The Last of Us 2* (2020), Lena Dunham from *Deadly Premonition 2* (2020), and Tyler Ronan from *Tell Me Why* (2020).

When coming out as transgender, Lev was exiled from his community, forced to flee for his life, and later brutally beaten by his mother. Lena Dunham alludes to her father being physically abusive to her for being a trans woman. Tyler Ronan also had a strained relationship with his mother, which resulted in her supposedly trying to kill him after he had cut his hair short. When the abuse was due to the character's family, it also commonly led to patricide or matricide by the transgender character (or their allies) due to self-protection. For example, Lev ended up accidentally killing his mother by shoving her, and Tyler's twin sister stabbed their mother to save Tyler's life.

Noteworthily although relatively high, the percentage of trans characters having faced abuse does not include characters that encountered solely verbal abuse from their parents, e.g. misgendering, offensive interactions, or being called slurs. For example, Paolo de la Vega from *Far Cry 6* (2021) was ruled out from this group, although he described his coming out followingly: "[I was] Expelled when papá found out I'd turned from his favorite daughter into a freak. His words." with no further mentions on the matter. This would therefore indicate that an even larger portion of transgender representation indicates various forms of abuse although the events in corresponding games were not stated clearly enough to be consistently classified.

Other forms of parental abuse also include a common trope of being forcefully raised as a certain gender other than the character's sex assigned at birth or their self-expressed gender. Characters such as Bridget from *Guilty Gear XX*, Gwyndolin from *Dark Souls*, Natsume from *Ensemble Stars!*, Marina from *Fear & Hunger 2: Termina*, and Matryona from *Matryona's Last Night* were all forcefully raised as female due to various reasons that ranged from the wishes of their parents to local superstitions and customs. It is noteworthy that some – but not all – of these characters are considered to fit transgender representation (and are therefore included in the research database) depending on the way the stories are portrayed, and whether the characters wish to later escape their childhood abuse by living their lives as the sex they were assigned at birth (e.g. with Natsume and Matryona, later known as Matvey), or after trying out both roles eventually ending up identifying as transgender despite their abusive childhoods (e.g. with Bridget and Marina).

Although most of the examples of this trope seem to focus on forcing AMAB (assigned male at birth) characters to be raised femininely, Richard Felton from *Remothered: Tormented Fathers* is the sole example of a character who was forced to transition to male by his parents. The database also includes one example of an intersex man being forcefully raised as female,

although there is no certainty on whether he identifies as transgender. Michel Bollinger from *The House In Fata Morgana* (2016) was considered cursed due to his intersex body and kept locked in a room by his mother. He was also commonly mistreated by his sister-in-law, who enjoyed torturing him and treating him as a monstrous creature throughout his puberty.

Taking a step further, 26.39% of all the transgender characters suffered massive physical damage or violently died during their corresponding games. These characters include e.g. Chihiro Fujisaki from *Danganronpa: Trigger Happy Havoc* and the character known as the Black Swan from *To Kill A Black Swan.* When Chihiro revealed their gender secret[13] to a fellow student, the other student was struck by jealousy and murderous anger and killed Chihiro with a dumbbell. When coming out as a transgender woman and revealed to have a sexual relationship with her best friend, Black Swan was murdered by her transphobic and homophobic wife. Here once again an important notion is to recognize how often transgender representation in video games focuses around violence, agonization, and pain. Noteworthily, this does not entail solely video games, as even when trans representation in media does occur in more complex ways, it still often relies on narratives centered around suffering and violence (Cavalcante, 2013).

5.3   Physical Transition

Physical transition is a common part of the transgender characters' story arcs and representation (Thatch, 2021). The physical transition can consist of somewhat realistic depictions of medical procedures, or be achieved with fictional means such as highly advanced futuristic technology, magic, reincarnations, or shape-shifting. However, a physical transition is commonly portrayed as a prerequisite or defining factor of transgender characters. In these cases the representation follows a "wrong-body model" (Bettcher, 2014) and the medicalization of transness (Vipond, 2015). According to Billard (2019), these types of representations reinforce the requirement for trans bodies to adhere to cisgender aesthetics. Furthermore, portraying transgender characters predominantly with the "trapped in the wrong body" trend, these representations reinforce the assumption that transness must include a physical/medical transition for the transgender person to feel happy and whole as themselves. Thatch (2021) concludes that even although this can be

---

[13] In *Danganronpa: Trigger Happy Havoc*, each student receives an envelope that includes their most embarrassing memories and shameful secrets. Chihiro's envelope includes a note that reads: "Even though he is a boy, Chihiro Fujisaki dresses as a girl".

validating for those who identify with this "wrong-body" model, it can also reinforce transnormativity for those who do not identify with it partially, or at all.

RuneScape (2001) provides an explicit example of physical transition in its 2015 update with the addition of a transgender character, Angof. She is capable of shapeshifting and describes her transition with the following words: "Yes. This body was born, incorrectly, male. I changed that". In her diary, she has also written: "In many ways I am more myself than I've ever really been. No longer that little boy that felt trapped in a skin that was not his own". From the way Angof is represented, it becomes apparent that she fits the "wrong-body model" and feels happier and more like herself after the physical transition. Similar examples of magical transitions include characters such as Aid Worker Sya from *Guild Wars 2* (2012) and Pelagos from *World of Warcraft* (Patch 9.0.2, released 2020). After witnessing tragic events, Sya decided to embrace life and her true self by publicly transitioning and changing her appearance with magic. Pelagos on the other hand physically transitioned through reincarnation. He describes his mortal life as follows: "I had a female form in life. I don't recall my former name, or even my race, but I...never felt like my physical form represented who I was inside. [...] I struggled with that identity for my entire life…". He then moves on to describe his rebirth and new body: "This! A male form! I felt...comfortable! Excited! Like who I was inside matched what others saw for the first time!"

Examples of less magical – although not always more realistic – physical transitions come from characters such as Yasmin in *Circuit's Edge* (1989), Reni Wassulmaier in *Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories* (2005), Beauty Nova in *Pokémon X/Y* (2013), Max Lao in *Technobabylon* (2015), and Lor in *Borderlands 3* (2019). These representations fall often under the trope of portraying the transitioning process as a quick and easy procedure, although in reality physical transitioning is often a complicated process consisting of e.g. counseling, hormone replacement therapy (HRT), speech therapy, and various plastic surgeries spread out over several years (UCSF, 2019).

The outcomes of these treatments are individual, and the surgeries are generally considered irreversible. However in fiction, easy sex changes are common and accessible. An especially clear example of portraying the transition process as unrealistically simple comes with Reni Wassulmaier, who goes through her fourth transition and surgical sex change during *Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories'* events. Lor from *Borderlands 3* logs his thoughts concerning a physical transition as follows: "Sure, I could still walk into a Quick-Change booth and come

out a new bloke [...]" He goes on to then talk about the safety of their city which takes top priority over his transition for the time being. Beauty Nova from *Pokémon X/Y* describes her own transition: "Yes, a mere half year ago I was a Black Belt[14]! Quite the transformation, wouldn't you say?". The same quote in the Japanese version credits this transformation to medical science (see Figure 5.13).

Japanese script	Basic English translation	Official English translation
はんとしまえは　カラテおう　だったのに　いがくの　ちから　って　スゲーよね！	I was a Karate King just half a year ago; the power of medical science is awesome, wouldn't you say?!	Yes, a mere half year ago I was a Black Belt! Quite the transformation, wouldn't you say?
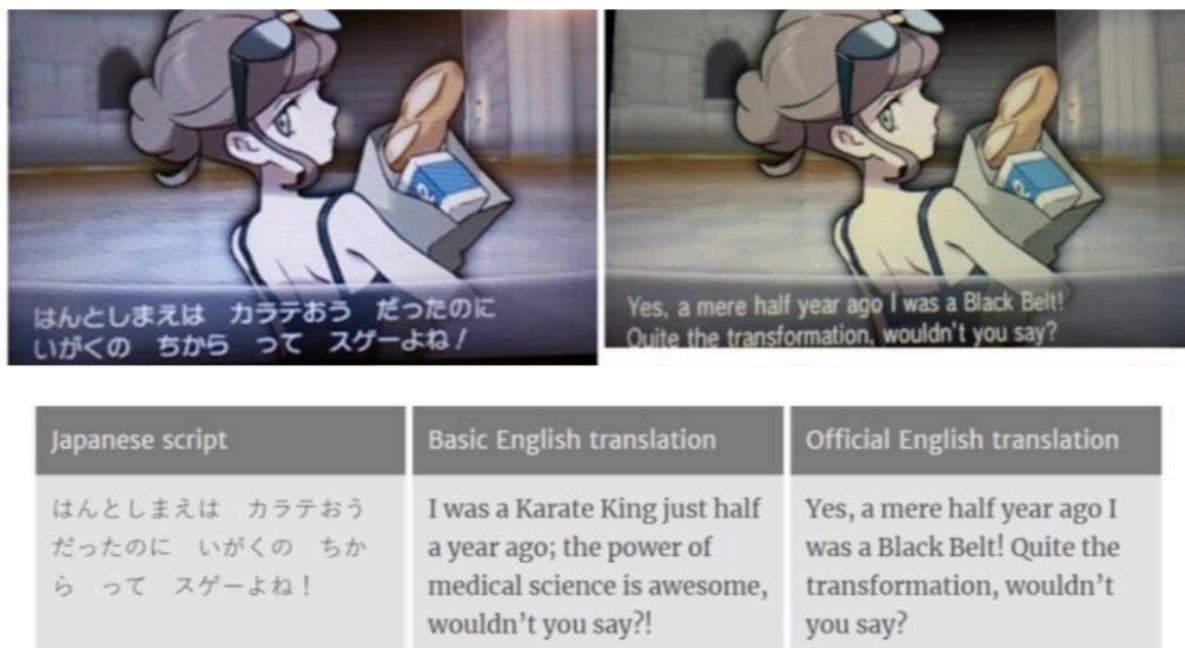
Figure 5.13: Beauty Nova in the Japanese and English releases of *Pokémon X/Y*.

Physical transitions that have been simplified to the extreme can also be seen embedded in game mechanics with character customization. Especially in RPGs, the game can allow the player to change their gender even after character creation – and multiple times during the game (see Figure 5.14). This process is rarely complicated nor expensive. The process often requires visiting a certain location (e.g. *Elden Ring* (2022)), talking to a certain NPC and paying a small fee (e.g. *RuneScape* (2001), *Saints Row 2* (2008)), or simply opening the menu for editing your appearance (e.g. *The Sims 4* (2014), *Saints Row* (2022)). These transitions are not only relatively cheap, but also often instantaneous and come with "perfect" results, including e.g. gaining the capability to impregnate or get pregnant. These magical, easy, and instantaneous transformations do not provide genuine representation of transgender experiences, and

---

[14] The Black Belt/Karate King trainer class is a male-only class. The Beauty trainer class that Beauty Nova belongs to is female-only.

therefore often provide solely fantastical elements to the games with no perceived real-world connections.

Figure 5.14: The Make-over Mage Pete/Peta from *RuneScape* (update 2002). Pete/Peta is described as having "power over genders", and can change genders even mid-conversation. The player can also change genders by paying the Mage. (LGBTQ Video Game Archive, 2016).

When the "magical physical transition" is not used as a solution to the wrong-body model, the transgender body becomes a grievance for the cis-normative viewer. The perceived otherness of transgender individuals is enforced with various tropes focused on the physical characteristics, such as by basing the representation on the "reveal" and the resulting shock or so-called comicality of the transgender body. This trope of using transgender characters as the shock factor or comic relief for the cisgender audience objectifies the transgender individual as someone to gawk at, a foreign creature that can be utilized due to its entertainment value and the emotions it awakens in the viewer (disgust, shock, fear, amusement, curiosity, lust etc.). (Halberstam, 2005; Thatch, 2021).

Real-life transgender coming-out narratives require navigating others' gender expectations, reactions, and the threat of violence, which widely impact the coming-out decisions of transgender individuals (Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2019). Their video game counterparts do not however seem to portray these aspects similarly. Even though real-life trans people report basing their decisions on whether, to whom, and when to come out largely on how they predict others will react and whether their personal safety might be at risk, this does not translate to

their video game counterparts. Coming out as transgender in video games seems to be done often either during the very first lines of discussion to strangers or as a suddenly shocking revelation, which are also the most probable situations for real-life transgender people's personal safety to be at risk (Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2019).

If being transgender is one of the first discussions the transgender character has with seemingly with any willing listener (e.g. Mizhena in *Baldur's Gate: Siege of Dragonspear* (2016)) with often also sharing their deadname upon first interactions (e.g. Aid Worker Sya in *Guild Wars 2* (2012), Hainly Abrams in *Mass Effect: Andromeda* (2017)), the portrayal seems unrealistic and not made for the transgender audience (Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2019). Some of these conversations have been changed in later patches due to community feedback. For example Hainly Abrams' dialogue with the player was later changed to be unlocked only after gaining her trust (BioWare, 2017). The full and uncut original dialogues that the player has with Mizhena and Aid Worker Sya can be viewed in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Original coming out dialogues of Aid Worker Sya and Mizhena.

Dialogue from Guild *Wars 2* (2012)	Dialogue from Baldur's Gate: Siege of Dragonspear (2016)
Sya: "*Beautiful, isn't it? After Scarlet attacked the city, this statue was rubble. Now look at it. More glorious than ever. Just like Lion's Arch.*" **Player:** "*Have we met before?*" **Sya:** "*I was one of the aid workers in Bloodtide Coast after Scarlet's attack. I'm Sya. Back then I was known as Symon.*" (ArenaNet, 2012).	**Mizhena:** "*I am Mizhena, faithful of Tempus. Praise the Lord of Battles!*" **Player:** "*Mizhena? That's an unusual name. I don't think I've heard it before.*" **Mizhena:** "*When I was born, my parents thought me a boy and raised me as such. In time, we all came to understand I was truly a woman. I created my new name from syllables of different languages. All have special meaning to me, it is the truest reflection of who I am.*" (Beamdog, 2016).

When looking at the latter trend occurring in video game representation, both using the transgender character as a shock factor and as a punchline for a joke are commonly apparent. These trends also intertwine often, with the "shocking revelation" leading to humoristic mishaps where the transness of the character serves as the comic relief. In these cases the games often rely on portraying the astonished reactions of the (cisgender) main characters once they

find out about the gender nonconformity. Examples of this come from games such as *Chrono Trigger* (1995), the *Leisure Suit Larry* series (1993, 2004), *Guilty Gear: XX* (2002), *Persona 3* (2006), *Catherine* (2011) and *Catherine: Full Body* (2019) (see Figure 5.15). There are also some examples of violent reactions to the shock. These cases relate to the real life "trans panic" that can be used as a legal defense in violent crimes against transgender individuals in cases where the assailant discovered different genitalia than expected (Thatch, 2021).

Figure 5.15: Vincent's comically portrayed reaction to seeing Rin nude in *Catherine: Full Body*.

5.4   Non-Binary Non-Human

Virtually all of the stereotypical tropes of representation discussed previously focus on the transgender characters that are binary presenting and outwardly appear as either masculine or feminine. A trend that is however focused mostly on gender non-conforming and genderqueer representations is portraying nonbinary and genderless characters as non-human in their appearance. When separating the character's explicitly stated to be nonbinary from all the researched genderqueer characters (n=34), 65% of the explicitly nonbinary or genderless characters are also non-human. The corresponding percentage when looking at all genderqueer representation is 42%, which is still substantially higher than the percentages of non-human transgender women (20%) and non-human transgender men (14%).

Even though the amount of explicit nonbinary representation is far and few between, the limited sampling still indicates that non-humanity is a common trope in nonbinary and genderless representation. These non-human characters include few early representations such as Quina

Quen from *Final Fantasy IX* (2000), but most of the nonbinary representation comes from more recent characters such as FL4K from *Borderlands 3* (2019), Selenium from *Vitamin Connection* (2020), Floofty Fizzlebean from *Bugsnax* (2020), and Jo from *Angry Birds 2* (original release 2015, Jo added in an 2023 update) (see Figure 5.16).

Figure 5.16: Examples of genderqueer representation in video games. Characters from top left to right: Blort (*Cosmonious High*, 2022), Quina Quen (*Final Fantasy IX*, 2000), The Knight (*Hollow Knight*, 2017), Floofty Fizzlebean (*Bugsnax*, 2020), FL4K (*Borderlands 3*, 2019), Jo (*Angry Birds 2*, 2023 update), Fang (*Goodbye Volcano High,* 2022), and Bloodhound (*Apex Legends*, 2019).

These nonbinary characters are often depicted as parts of foreign species that are completely absent of biological sex. Common examples are presenting genderless or nonbinary gender presenters e.g. as aliens, mystic creatures, robots, or sexless cartoon depictions of personified objects or abstract concepts, as none of these are required to have a concept of gender as we commonly understand it. Sometimes representing nonbinary characters through these alien and imaginary species can be used because these depictions make it easier to escape binary gender norms and expectations that appear when depicting human characters. Therefore an imaginary species or a robot might allow the players to view the character without applying subconscious gendered stereotypes as frequently.

However, this trope can also be used to dehumanize non-binary and genderqueer people, although the action might not be intentional or consciously decided upon. Finally, even if most of the non-human representations are positive depictions of genderqueer characters and done to increase visibility, more genuine non-binary representation is very sparse. Therefore the non-

human non-binary trope is not in itself problematic in fictional depictions – as long as realistic and genuine representation is also available. However, the findings of this study would indicate that currently there is not much of genuine non-binary and gender non-conforming representation, and the majority of representation is focused on non-human entities.

6 Discussion

The following chapter aims to widen the discussion from the previously presented results and analysis of the database into the relevance and overall implications of the study in wider context. The first section will discuss the significance of the study while providing interpretations and implications of the gathered results. The discussion will also branch out to hypothesize future views of transgender representation in the field of video games. The second section of the chapter will focus on outlining the two main limitations that were identified while conducting the study. This includes discussing both the methodological limitations and the limitations of the researcher in conducting the study. Finally, a few recommendations for future studies and further research are provided.

6.1 Significance of the Study

The significance of the research conducted can be discussed from two separate standpoints: its academic and societal relevance. First and foremost, up to this point there has not been any research conducted on transgender representation in the field of video games that would have included such an extensive sampling as was collected for this study. The database and the general statistics gathered from it can therefore function as a starting point for future studies on the topic, with no need to start the data collection process from the very beginning. This is also why it is considered vital that the full database is included as an appendix to this study, even though the current version of the database will require constant upkeep from future researchers to remain topical. Therefore any future research conducted using the gathered database will need to update and augment the contents of the database as new information is released.

Secondly, the study and its findings can provide societal relevance by helping build knowledge on transgender representation and transgender issues in general. Especially in the field of video games, the topic has not received much widespread attention, and therefore studies concerning the subject can help increase public awareness. Furthermore, the research can be considered to have generated knowledge that might in the future aid especially game developers, producers, and consumers in making more informed decisions.

Going even further, it is possible that with the help of the gathered results on the past of transgender video game representation, some future directions can be hypothesized. The frequency of trans* issues appearing in media, and the apparent increase in trans* video game representation during the last few years would suggest a similar trajectory to continue at least

in the foreseeable future. As can be noticed with other LGBTQIA+ representation, once the topics become known to the general public and a prevalent theme in mainstream media productions, the representation does not seem to abate at least drastically in the following years. The findings of the study would suggest that the minor independent productions of transgender themed pieces of art continue to be the biggest portion of representation, although mainstream creators will most likely carefully start implementing trans themes in their productions. It is presumed that at least the amount of transgender minor side characters will increase in mainstream game productions.

It is also expected that these side characters will gain more diverse, well-rounded storylines that do not focus solely on the characters' transness. This presumption is based on the heavy criticism that major game houses have received from the trans* community during the last few years following one-sided, crude, unvaried, and oversimplified characters. It is expected that the developers will therefore try to implement transgender characters diligently in the future. It is however also possible that the criticism might lessen the likelihood of approaching the topic in the future at all. If the topic is considered too difficult, sensitive, or divisive, it might result in the mainstream developers and/or producers choosing to stand clear of addressing at all.

The possibility of mainstream game houses choosing to reduce the visibility of trans* people and topics might also become a more realistic possibility if the anti-trans movement continues to gain support throughout the Western world. As the expected audience of mainstream video games is commonly envisioned to be white, straight, cisgender males (although the actual player community is much more diverse (Taylor, 2022)), the possibility of alienating the main audience by tackling minority issues might prove to raise issues during the development processes of major game houses (Shaw, 2012).

Another even more drastic simultaneous future view is that the representation would not only continue to be a minor but increasingly diverse portion of video game representation, but that the detected increase in transgender representation might result in future inertia and also increased negative representation. Due to this study not aiming its focus on recent peripheral portrayals of transgender people, a more clear understanding cannot be provided on how common peripheral and self-published antitransgender games have become throughout the latest years. However, one cannot have missed the controversy related to the release of the 2023 game *Hogwarts Legacy* that is part of the Wizarding World media franchise created by J. K. Rowling. On several occasions during recent years, J. K. Rowling has been in the center of

attention after taking multiple public stances against transgender people, trans rights, and trans* inclusive laws (Smith, 2020; Rosenblatt, 2020; Byrd, 2023).

These hateful public comments have resulted in various gamers and gaming websites boycotting the game: TheGamer refused to review or cover the game at all (Henley, 2022) and released a separate article titled "Should you play *Hogwarts Legacy* if you care about your trans friends?", The Wired Magazine rated the game 1/10 while commenting "its real-world harms are impossible to ignore" with the article discussing both the antisemitism and the transphobia concerning the game (Grey, 2023), and The Mary Sue reported on the alleged gamers' boycott (Doyle, 2023). Similarly outlets that decided not to join the boycott included disclaimers and mentions of the controversy, with Polygon's guide to the game including the disclaimer "On numerous occasions in recent years, billionaire and Harry Potter creator J. K. Rowling has taken public stances against inclusive transgender laws and trans rights" (Broadwell, 2023), and GameSpot's guide including a similar warning "The game has been embroiled in controversy due to transphobic remarks from Harry Potter author JK Rowling" (Rodriguez, 2023). However since its release, the game has been a huge financial success and the controversy surrounding J. K. Rowling does not seem to have affected the public's desire to buy the game. As an article in The Atlantic concluded: "If the public response to the game was truly a referendum on J.K. Rowling, she won." (Lewis, 2023)

A similar independent game release can be found from a few years prior, when HEARTBEAT (released in 2018, stylized in all caps) was faced with controversy after comments made by the developer and her girlfriend were made public in 2019. A few days after these comments faced criticism for their trans-exclusionary radical feminism and raised a backlash, the game was put on a 35% and 41% sale (Étoile, 2019; Valens, 2019). These statistics were interpreted by some to allude to the attempted suicide statistics of 35% transgender teens (Johns et al., 2017) and 41% transgender people (Grant et al., 2012; Tanis, 2016), which are often used as dog-whistles in anti-transgender media publications to portray trans* people as mentally ill, delusional, and deranged. Afterwards, a number of original creators and fans of the game have distanced themselves from the team citing these outputs that can be considered transphobic (Étoile, 2019; Valens, 2019).

As these two examples point out, neither of the games that have faced a backlash for their antitransgender problematics have been openly transphobic within the games themselves. As social media becomes an even larger influence guiding our buying routines, not only the in-

game representations but also the way the developers choose to advertise and market the games, and how they behave publicly might become an even larger portion of what guides the consumers' opinions on a game. However, as previously noted with *Hogwarts Legacy*, neither of the backlashes have been successful in diminishing the public's interest for the game – the controversies might have ended up even raising a larger interest in new customer demographics for purchasing the game. This would in its turn indicate that most consumers will continue to support the games they enjoy – no matter the surrounding controversies.

6.2   Limitations of the Study

Two main limitations have been identified in this study that could be addressed in future research. First, the study included certain methodological limitations as the research sampling selection and data gathering attempted to create as extensive a catalog as possible of the representation that could be considered transgender. As the aim of the data gathering was to achieve extensiveness, it poses the threat of finding representation where there is none. In other words, a selection bias can have affected the sampling, especially when making decisions based on whether an ambiguous character should be included or not. Although all of the included characters can be read as trans*, it is not likely all of them are: the ambiguous cases could as well have been decided not to pertain to this study. Here the selection process was so heavily set on finding gender nonconformity to indicate transgender representation, that the database most likely ended up including even cases where the gender nonconformity was inconsequential concerning a study focused solely on transgender game characters. However, this was taken into account multiple times during the study, and the results are clearly stated not only to discuss explicit cases of transgender representation, but also the cases that can be read as such, and therefore enforce or break the existing transgender stereotypes. Furthermore, the peripheral game sampling is far too limited to reflect the appropriate independent field generally, or to provide reliable statistics concerning transgender representation in self-published video games.

Second, the limitations of the researcher and the conflicts arising from biased perspectives must be noted. As a transgender person myself, I could not completely avoid bringing my preconceived opinions and experiences on the cases of transgender representation and transphobia I had encountered previously coming into the study. Even though the previous personal experiences and investment towards the topic also encouraged and motivated in conducting the research, these possible limitations and biases are important to note and mention. During the study, extensive care was taken towards avoiding these problems and confirming

that the data gathering and following analysis were carried out appropriately and no data/results were accentuated incongruously to support the hypotheses or arguments made during the study.

6.3 Future Work

Some recommendations for further research arose during the study. As this study was solely focused on a content survey of existing games, an interest was formed for furthering the research based on structured interviews of game developers and/or consumers of video games. These interviews might aim to sketch an outline of how game developers and gamers consider the representation of transgender characters to have evolved during the last few years, and especially what expectations and wishes they have for the future of representation. Another point of interest would be in diving deeper into analyzing why the video game field seems to have been lagging behind in representation compared to other art fields. Here the opinions of game developers working with major game houses might provide indispensable insights. Especially interesting would be trying to answer whether the comparable lack of representation stems from the publishers, the developers, the expected audience, the possibility of receiving negative media attention from either the transgender community or the anti-trans movement, or a combination of all these, and other, factors.

Another future point of research would be taking a more in-depth look at recent non-mainstream game releases, where some pointers could be found for possible future directions of also the professional video game development field. This line of inquiry might also provide insights into the possible future factors raising inertia when increasing and diversifying transgender representation.

7   Conclusion

While both the popularity of video games and the representation of transgender people has increased steadily throughout the latest decades, there still remains a sparsity of research combining these two topics. The aim of this study was to supplement this shortage by conducting an extensive study of transgender video game representation from the 1980s up to the current day. Through this study and the content survey created as a part of the research, the main contribution is in describing how gender minorities are represented in video games, what roles they are given, and how often transphobia plays a part in their representation.

With the extensive content survey, some general guidelines could be drawn in relation to transgender representation in video games. The popularity of explicit transgender representation seems to be gaining a foothold within the video game industry. Especially the ambiguity of representation seems to be on the decrease, with the vast majority of explicit transgender characters coming from the 2010s and 2020s. The most common countries of development are Japan and the U.S. The most common game genres include Adventure (25%), RPG (22%), Action (19%), and Indie (12%). When compared to all games (i.e. not just those including transgender representation), the otherwise popular strategy games seemed to have a clear absence of transgender representation. Action games have similarly less representation than could have been expected from their overwhelming popularity as the most frequently applied game genre tag.

During the study, 120 characters were identified as transgender or gender non-conforming in such an extent, that their inclusion could be seen as a form trans* representation and strengthening trans stereotypes. Of these characters, 60% were either explicitly transgender women or transfeminine characters. Only 12% of the characters were transgender men. Although various examples of playable transgender women and men were discovered, the most common playable trans characters were genderqueer, nonbinary, or genderless. Both the playable and non-playable trans characters were on the increase, with however the playable characters mostly appearing in independent and self-published games.

The original hypotheses of the study aimed to answer the aforementioned topics by first hypothesizing that a noticeable accentuation of gender minority representation would be focused on one-sided stereotypes. Although this hypothesis was partly proven to be correct in older representations and smaller parts of more recent representation, an increase of unexpected

proportions in the diversity of representation was found during the 2010s – and especially during the 2020s with a clear escalation towards more diverse character narratives. In these groundbreaking representations, independent and self-published games played the leading role, with the mainstream industry lagging behind with sparse representation.

The hypothesized one-sided stereotypes were in turn much more common in relation to mainstream and AAA games. Even though the diversity and frequency of representation is on the rise, this does not reduce the importance of also paying attention to the common and harmful stereotypes. These stereotypes were most commonly found in connection with the way especially transgender women are portrayed; and included those of the hypothesized portrayals of violence (villainous, predatory and murderous behavior most often coinciding also with mental illness, trauma, and childhood abuse), overt sexualization (most often in cases of sex workers), and comic relief/shock/reveal due to the perceived otherness of the transgender body.

Transgender women were found to be practically the sole targets of these harmful stereotypes, whereas transgender men were simply found to be not mentioned at all during the earliest three decades of transgender representation. Even when approaching the present day, transgender men were still represented less commonly than their female or genderqueer counterparts. However, most of these representations seemed to also be less harmful or problematic towards the transgender community. Similar notions were made in connection to genderqueer and nonbinary representations, most of which were focused on portraying the characters as non-human NPCs or as genderless playable characters that avoided alienating certain player demographics due to the gender of the playable character.

The second and third hypotheses of the study expected to find a connection between these stereotypes and the narrative roles the characters were given, and the in-game transphobia that was directed towards the characters. It was originally hypothesized that the characters would have been given narrative roles from a highly limited field based on the aforementioned stereotypes. This was partly proven to be false, as transgender characters received various different roles varying from the playable hero to all of the non-playable character metatypes of Functions, Adversaries, Friends, and Providers. However, clear accentuations were found in which narrative roles were most common, and how the gender of the characters shifted the likelihood of what roles they were given.

Of the four metatypes, Providers is the most commonly represented metatype in transgender representation, followed by Adversaries. Two new subcategories were created under the

Providers metatype to further catalogue trans representation. These subtypes were those of the flirtees and the bystanders, both of which are similar to the original Warpefelt's division to storytellers. However, neither the flirtees or the bystanders were given such an active role as the storytellers were. The flirtees advanced the narration by being the objects of romantic or sexual desires, and the bystanders did so by being the objects of discussion during vital snippets of narration – although neither of the roles were given such an active role that they could be considered actual storytellers. The Providers were therefore most commonly subcategorized respectively as flirtees, storytellers, and bystanders depending on whether the character was given proper amounts of agency, or if they were objectified and given a passive role in advancing the narration.

When looking at all the subcategories, that of the enemy (20.25%) was the most commonly applied role, followed by the sidekick (18.99%). Transgender women and transfeminine characters were once again the target of the most harmful casting decisions. The most frequent role given to these characters was the enemy. The transfeminine characters were often the villains of their respective games, while portraying their non-cisnormativity and "unconventional gender presentation" as being interconnected with their predatory and/or violent behaviors. This trend also included the inclusion of mentions of mental illness, sexual deviancy, perversion, and pathological instability.

Transgender women were also the clear majority of all transgender representation in the roles of vendors, service providers, and opponents. In this case, the majority of service providers were connected with sex work. In these cases, the sexualization and fetishization of the transfeminine characters was common. These sexualized transfeminine characters were portrayed as desirable and/or disgusting objects for the cisgender consumer. Their goal was to tempt, amuse, and shock, often borrowing looks from the iconography of drag queens and drawing humoristic yet often simultaneously seductive attention to their exaggerated tacky femininity combined with their prominent bulges.

When it comes to transgender men, the most common role to be given was an ally (33.33%) – with genderqueer characters the most common role was that of a sidekick (20.83%). As can be noticed, both of these characters are friends of the protagonist and therefore on the same side as the player. The representation was therefore proven to be less harmful in enforcing transgender stereotypes as inherently evil. The difference between the transmasculine allies and the genderqueer sidekicks is whether the characters participated in combat (allies fight

alongside the protagonist, sidekicks do not). Transgender men were therefore given more agency and capabilities to defend themselves, while genderqueer sidekicks participated more often only narratively. Noteworthily, also transgender women were commonly participants in violence and fighting, although this was more often for the antagonists' side.

Furthermore, a common stereotype among all transgender groups was that of the victim. Victimization and portraying transgender characters as the targets of physical and/or sexual violence was found to be a common theme, with 40.45% of all representation experiencing abuse in-game or being discussed having experienced it during their youth. An even larger portion of characters faced verbal abuse, although these cases were not included in the aforementioned percentile of physical and/or sexual abuse victims. Furthermore, 26.39% of the transgender characters suffered massive physical damage or violently died during their corresponding games. These various forms of trauma and abuse directed towards the transgender characters came occasionally from their opponents, but even more often the instigators of the abuse were the transgender character's own family members or communities. In these cases the abuser was most commonly the character's mother or father who could not accept the gender identity of their child.

It was also hypothesized that transphobia would play an active part in the portrayal and narrative casting of gender minorities in video games. This was found to be accurate, as the majority of all representation contained some levels of transphobia. When studying the different forms of in-game transphobia, half of the characters were discovered to face clearly transphobic actions that included at least misgendering, bullying, deadnaming, and/or various forms of in-game discrimination. More extreme forms of transphobia and transphobic violence were also found – granting that these extremes were the minority, as most of the transphobic actions were solely verbal. The frequency of transphobia rose even higher when delimiting the games by years of release to the 80s, 90s, and 00s. These decades also included the majority of the most severe cases of transphobia, with the representation slowly becoming less harmful as approaching the current day.

These findings indicate a twofold answer to the central research question of how transgender characters have been represented in video games from the 1980s to the modern day. Firstly, the majority of earlier trans representation was found to be heavily reliant on harmful stereotypes. These representations circled around the themes of violence, victimization, sexualization, and perceived otherness of transgender individuals and bodies. These themes appeared also

concurrently with other transphobic attitudes. However, findings centered on more recent representation indicated an ongoing shift in transgender video game representation towards more diverse, widespread, and even sympathetic portrayals. Understanding the problematics of previous transgender representation could be the key to helping shape future representation into more realistic portrayals less reliant on harmful stereotypes. This would in turn suggest that with increased public awareness and visibility on mainstream AAA video games during the last few years – and presumably during the following years – the shift towards more realistic and diverse portrayals has begun gaining a solid foothold within the video game industry.

References

Abbott, T. B. (2013). *The Trans/Romance Dilemma in Transamerica and Other Films*. Journal of American Culture (Malden, Mass.), 36(1), 32–41.

Attwood, F., & McNair, B. (2017). *The Routledge Companion to Media, Sex and Sexuality* (1st ed.). Florence: Routledge.

Anthropy, A. (2012). *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters*. New York: Seven Stories Press.

Barnes, J. (2022, Dec 18). *Lor's Transition in New Tales From the Borderlands' Continues The Series' Good LGBTQIA+ Representation.* GameRant. https://gamerant.com/new-tales-borderlands-lore-transition-lgbtqia-representation-industry-pattern/

Bartle, R. (2004). *Designing Virtual Worlds*. New Riders Publishing, Indianapolis, IN, USA.

Bettcher, T.M.. (2014). *Transphobia*. TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly 2014; 1 (1-2): 249–251.

Billard, T. J. (2016). *Writing in the margins: Mainstream news media representations of transgenderism*. International Journal of Communication, 10, 4193–4218.

Billard, T. J. (2019). "*Passing" and the politics of deception: Transgender bodies, cisgender aesthetics, and the policing of inconspicuous marginal identities*. In T. Docan-Morgan (ed.), The Palgrave handbook of deceptive communication. Palgrave Macmillan.

BioWare. (2017, Apr 5). *Regarding Hainly Abrams*. X (Previously Twitter). https://twitter.com/bioware/status/849671752192077828

Broadwell, J. (2023, Feb 17). *Where to find all Daedalian Key locations in Hogwarts Legacy*. Polygon. https://www.polygon.com/hogwarts-legacy-guide/23603929/daedalian-key-locations-reward-cabinet-missing

Brumbaugh-Johnson, S. M., & Hull, K. E. (2019). *Coming Out as Transgender: Navigating the Social Implications of a Transgender Identity*. Journal of Homosexuality, 66(8), 1148–1177.

Butler, J. (1999). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.

Byrd, M. (2023, Feb 6). *Hogwarts Legacy Controversy Explained: Why Are People Boycotting the Game?* Den of Geek. https://www.denofgeek.com/games/hogwarts-legacy-controversy-explained-why-are-people-boycotting-the-game/

Cameron, J. J., & Stinson, D. A. (2019). *Gender (mis)measurement: Guidelines for respecting gender diversity in psychological research*. Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 13(11), Article e12506.

Campbell, C. (2016, Apr 6). *Baldur's Gate studio responds to harassment over trans character*. Polygon. https://www.polygon.com/2016/4/6/11380556/baldurs-gate-studio-responds-to-harassment-over-trans-character

Capuzza, J. C., & Spencer, L. G. (Eds.). (2015). *Transgender communication studies : histories, trends, and trajectories*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.

Capuzza, J. C., & Spencer, L. G. (2017). *Regressing, progressing, or transgressing on the small screen? Transgender characters on US scripted television series*. Communication Quarterly, 65(2), 214–230.

Cavalcante, A. (2013). *Centering transgender identity via the textual periphery: TransAmerica and the "double work" of paratexts*. Critical Studies in Media Communication, 30(2), 85–101.

Clement, J. (2023, Feb 20). *Number of games released on Steam 2004-2022*. https://www.statista.com/statistics/552623/number-games-released-steam/

Columbus, C. (Director). (1993). *Mrs. Doubtfire* [Film]. 20th Century Fox.

Copier, L., & Steinbock, E. (2018). *On not really being there: trans* presence/absence in Dallas Buyers Club*, Feminist Media Studies, 18:5, 923-941.

Cebulski, B. (2018, Aug 15). *Remothered: Tormented Fathers perpetuates horror's harmful anti-trans stereotypes*. Unwinnable. https://unwinnable.com/2018/08/15/remothered-tormented-fathers-perpetuates-horrors-harmful-anti-trans-stereotypes/

Davis, C. (2009) *Introduction to practice with transgender and gender variant youth*. In G. P. Mallon (Ed.), Social work practice with transgender and gender variant youth (2nd ed.) (pp. 1–21). New York, NY: Routledge.

Demme, J. (Director). (1991). *The Silence of the Lambs* [Film]. Orion Pictures.

Dixon, T. L., Azocar, C., & Casas, M. (2003). *The portrayal of race and crime on television network news*. Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 47, 495–520.

D'Orazio, N. (2021, Jan 23). *Apex Legends devs reminds community that Bloodhound is non-binary*. Inven Global. https://www.invenglobal.com/articles/13128/apex-legends-devs-reminds-community-that-bloodhound-is-non-binary

Doyle, J. (2023, Jan 30). *Why Fans Are Boycotting 'Hogwarts Legacy'*. The Mary Sue. https://www.themarysue.com/the-hogwarts-legacy-boycott-explained/

Entertainment Software Association (ESA). (2022). *2022 Essential Facts About the Video Game Industry*. https://www.theesa.com/resource/2022-essential-facts-about-the-video-game-industry/

Étoile, L. (2019, Sep 23). *From HEARTBEAT To HEARTBREAK*. Étoile des Avis. https://lukaetoile.wordpress.com/2019/09/23/from-heartbeat-to-heartbreak/

Flanagan, M., & Nissenbaum, H. (2014). *Values at play in digital games*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Flint, E. (2021, Dec 2). *Why Do Games Still Struggle With Trans Inclusion?* Wired Magazine. https://www.wired.com/story/trans-enby-representation-video-games/

Flores, M. J., Watson, L. B., Allen, L. R., Ford, M., Serpe, C. R., Choo, P. Y., & Farrell, M. (2018). *Transgender People of Color's Experiences of Sexual Objectification: Locating Sexual Objectification Within a Matrix of Domination.* Journal of Counseling Psychology, 65(3), 308–323.

Flores, A. R., Haider-Markel, D. P., Lewis, D. C., Miller, P. R., Tadlock, B. L., & Taylor, J. K. (2018). *Challenged Expectations: Mere Exposure Effects on Attitudes About Transgender People and Rights*. Political Psychology, 39(1), 197–216.

Fredrickson, B. L., & Roberts, T.-A. (1997). *Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks*. Psychology of Women Quarterly, 21(2), 173–206.

Gestos, M., Smith-Merry, J., & Campbell, A. (2018). *Representation of Women in Video Games: A Systematic Review of Literature in Consideration of Adult Female Wellbeing.* Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking, 21(9), 535–541.

GLAAD (2023). *2023 Studio Responsibility Index*. GLAAD. https://glaad.org/sri/2023

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory : strategies for qualitative research*. New York (N.Y.): Aldine de Gruyter.

Grant, J., Keisling, M., Harrison, J., Mottet, L., Herman, J., & Tanis, J. (2012). *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*. In International Governmental and Non-Governmental Reports and Policy Studies Related to LGBTQ Issues, Activism and Health.

Gray, K. L., & Sarkeesian, A. (2020). *Intersectional Tech: Black Users in Digital Gaming*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

Greenwald, M. (Director). (1993). *The Ballad of Little Jo* [Film]. Fine Line Features.

Grey, J. (2023, Feb 10). *Review: There Is No Magic in Hogwarts Legacy*. Wired Magazine. https://www.wired.com/review/hogwarts-legacy-review/

Gross, L. (2001). *Up from invisibility: Lesbians, gay men, and the media in America*. Columbia University Press.

Halberstam, J. (2005). *In a queer time and place : transgender bodies, subcultural lives*. New York: New York University Press.

Halberstam, J., Duggan, L., & Marez, C. (2017). *Trans: a quick and quirky account of gender variability* (1st ed., Vol. 3). Jackson: University of California Press.

Hall, S. (Ed.). (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices.* Sage Publications, Inc; Open University Press.

Harper, T., Adams, M.B., & Taylor, N. (Eds.) 2018. *Queerness in Play*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Henley, S. (2022, Mar 13). *Should You Play Hogwarts Legacy If You Care About Your Trans Friends?* TheGamer. https://www.thegamer.com/hogwarts-legacy-harry-potter-jk-rowling-play-trans-friends/

Henley, S. (2022, Mar 18). *TheGamer's Stance on Hogwarts Legacy*. TheGamer. https://www.thegamer.com/thegamer-stance-hogwarts-legacy-harry-potter/

Hitchcock, A. (Director). (1960). *Psycho* [Film]. Universal Pictures.

Johns, M. M., Lowry, R., Andrzejewski, J., Barrios, L. C., Demissie, Z., McManus, T., … Underwood, J. M. (2017). *Transgender Identity and Experiences of Violence Victimization, Substance Use, Suicide Risk, and Sexual Risk Behaviors Among High School Students — 19 States and Large Urban School Districts, 2017.* MMWR. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 68(3), 67–71.

Kasdorf, R. (2023). *Representation of mental illness in video games beyond stigmatization*. Frontiers in Human Dynamics, 5.

Kelleher, P. (2020, Aug 15). *Legendary actor Annette Bening emphatically explains once and for all why cis actors should never, ever play trans roles*. PinkNews. https://www.thepinknews.com/2020/08/15/annette-bening-cisgender-actors-transgender-characters-son-stephen-ira-lgbt/

Kirby A. (2009). *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure Our Culture*. Continuum: New York and London.

Kirkpatrick, G. (2011). *Aesthetic Theory and the Video Game.* Manchester University Press.

Kisner, L.A. (2019, Jul 14). *Cis Actors in Trans Roles: Why It Matters*. Medium. https://atranslog.medium.com/cis-actors-in-trans-roles-why-it-matters-e3c5b05fe90e

Kosenko, K. A., Bond, B. J., & Hurley, R. J. (2018). *An Exploration Into the Uses and Gratifications of Media for Transgender Individuals*. Psychology of Popular Media Culture, 7(3), 274–288.

Kosciesza, A. J. (2023). *The Moral Service of Trans NPCs: Examining the Roles of Transgender Non-Player Characters in Role-Playing Video Games*. Games and Culture, 18(2), 189–208.

LGBTQ Video Game Archive. (2023). https://lgbtqgamearchive.com/

Lewis, M.G. (2018, Jul 10). *23 Cisgender Actors Who Played Transgender in Movies*. Advocate. https://www.advocate.com/arts-entertainment/2018/7/10/23-cisgender-actors-who-played-trangender-movies#rebelltitem3

Lewis, H. (2023, Apr 2). *The Hogwarts Legacy Boycott That Wasn't*. The Atlantic. https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/04/hogwarts-legacy-game-jk-rowling-transphobia-accusation/673583/

Locantore, D. C., & Wasarhaley, N. E. (2020). *Mentally ill, HIV-positive, or sexual predator? Determining myths perceived as representative of transgender people.* Group Processes & Intergroup Relations, 23(3), 378–401.

Lombardo, C. (2020, Jun 9). *Coming out in Japan. From Pots and Pans to Alphabet Soup: Japanese Queer Identities in Context.* Tofugu. https://www.tofugu.com/japan/lgbtq-identities/

Malkowski, J., Russworm, T. M., Everett, A., Soderman, B., deWinter, J., Kocurek, C., … Murray, S. (2017). *Gaming Representation: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Video Games.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Mandelin, C. (2020, Feb 14). *The Japanese Word "Okama" in Video Game Translations*. Legends of Localization. https://legendsoflocalization.com/okama-in-game-translation/

Mathias, C.J. (2007). *7 Sins – Guide and Walkthrough*. https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/pc/920843-7-sins/faqs/50795

McInroy, L. B., & Craig, S. L. (2015). *Transgender Representation in Offline and Online Media: LGBTQ Youth Perspectives*. Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 25(6), 606–617.

McInroy, L. B., & Craig, S. L. (2017). *Perspectives of LGBTQ emerging adults on the depiction and impact of LGBTQ media representation*. Journal of Youth Studies, 20(1), 32–46.

McLaren, J. T., Bryant, S., & Brown, B. (2021). *"See me! Recognize me!" An analysis of transgender media representation.* Communication Quarterly, 69(2), 172–191.

McLaughlin, B., Rodriguez, N. S., Dunn, J. A., & Martinez, J. (2018). *Stereotyped identification: How identifying with fictional Latina characters increases acceptance and stereotyping*. Mass Communication and Society, 21(5), 585–605.

Muriel, D., & Crawford, G. (2018). *Video Games As Culture: Considering the Role and Importance of Video Games in Contemporary Society* (1st ed.). Milton: Routledge.

Murphy, M. M. (2020). *Outlasting the Binary: Analysis of Gender and Queer Representation in Outlast II*. University of Oregon.

Murty, K. S., Holyfield-Moss, B., & Vyas, A. G. (2018). *Anti-transgender Bathroom Law Controversy: Protection or Discrimination.* Race, Gender & Class (Towson, Md.), 25(1-2), 98–119.

Nicol, K. (2018, Oct 16). *Review – The Missing: J.J. Macfield and the Island of Memories*. Way Too Many Games. https://waytoomany.games/2018/10/16/review-the-missing-j-j-macfield-and-the-island-of-memories-xbox-one/

Oliver, D. (2020). *Hollywood's casting dilemma: Should straight, cisgender actors play LGBTQ characters?* USA Today. https://eu.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/celebrities/2020/11/24/should-straight-cisgender-actors-play-lgbtq-characters-in-hollywood/6327858002/

Palma, B. (Director). (1980). *Dressed to Kill* [Film]. Filmways Pictures.

Paternostro, C. (2023). *How Do Cis Actors Use Language to Play Trans Characters?* University of Colorado Boulder.

Philip, L., Bali. A. & George, R. 2021. *An Exploratory Study on the Representation of Transgender Characters as Disgraceful and Disabled Beings in Gaming Media.* Journal of Tianjin University Science and Technology.

Pollack, S. (Director). (1982). *Tootsie* [Film]. Columbia Pictures.

Queerly Represent Me. (2023). https://representme.charity/

Remembering Our Dead. (2023). https://tdor.translivesmatter.info/

Richardson, N. (2016). *Transgressive Bodies: Representations in Film and Popular Culture.* London: Routledge.

Rodriguez, J.A. 2018. *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Media: Key Narratives, Future Directions*. *Sociology Compass*. 2019; 13:e12675.

Rodriguez, J. (2023, Feb 10). *Hogwarts Legacy - House Chest And All Daedalian Keys Guide.* GameSpot. https://www.gamespot.com/articles/hogwarts-legacy-house-chest-daedalian-keys-guide/1100-6511397/

Rosenblatt, K. (2020, Jun 10). *J.K. Rowling doubles down in what some critics call a 'transphobic manifesto'.* NBC News. https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/j-k-rowling-doubles-down-what-some-critics-call-transphobic-n1229351

Ross, K. (Ed.) 2012. *The Handbook of Gender, Sex, and Media*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Ruberg, B. (2019). *The Precarious Labor of Queer Indie Game-making: Who Benefits from Making Video Games "Better"?* Television & New Media, 20(8), 778–788.

Ruberg, B. (2019). *Representing sex workers in video games: feminisms, fantasies of exceptionalism, and the value of erotic labor.* Feminist Media Studies, *19*(3), 313–330.

Russo, V. (1987). *The celluloid closet: Homosexuality in the movies* (Revised). Harper & Row.

Sandercock, T. (2015). *Transing the small screen: loving and hating transgender youth in Glee and Degrassi*. Journal of Gender Studies, 24(4), 436–452.

Saric, I. (2023, May 17). *Trans rights largely advance in Europe but remain at risk.* Axios. https://www.axios.com/2023/05/17/trans-rights-europe-us#

Sender, K. (2004). *Neither fish nor fowl: Feminism, desire, and the lesbian consumer market.* The Communication Review, 7(4), 407–432.

Serano, J. (2007). *Whipping girl : a transsexual woman on sexism and the scapegoating of femininity*. Emeryville, CA: Seal Press.

Sharma, N. (2022). *An examination of viewers' mental model drawings after they watched a transgender-themed TV narrative*. Psychology of Popular Media, 11(1), 68–79.

Shaw, A. (2012). *Do you identify as a gamer? Gender, race, sexuality, and gamer identity*. New Media & Society, 14(1), 28–44.

Shaw, A., & Friesem, E. (2016). *Where is the queerness in games?: Types of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer content in digital games.* International Journal of Communication, 10, 13.

Shaw, A., & Ruberg, B. (Eds.). (2017). *Queer game studies*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Shelley C. (2008*). Transpeople : repudiation trauma healing*. University of Toronto Press.

Shinkle, K. (2022, Jun 7). *Cyberpunk 2077's Most Useless Feature Shows Its Lack of Real Controversy*. ScreenRant. https://screenrant.com/cyberpunk-2077-bad-feature-character-customization-controversy/

Sinclair-Palm, J. (2017). *"It's Non-Existent": Haunting in Trans Youth Narratives about Naming*. Occasional Paper Series, 2017 (37).

Smith S. L., Choueiti M., Pieper K., Case A., Choi A. (2018). *Inequality in 1,100 popular films: Examining portrayals of gender, race/ethnicity, LGBT & disability from 2007 to 2017*. Los Angeles, CA: Annenberg Foundation.

Smith, R. (2019, Aug 13). *A highly-anticipated video game character has just been revealed to be gender-neutral*. PinkNews. https://www.thepinknews.com/2019/08/13/borderlands-3-fl4k-gender-neutral-non-binary/

Smith, R. (2020, Jun 12). *J.K. Rowling's Transphobic Tweets and the Erosion of the Harry Potter Franchise*. Vogue. https://www.vogue.com/article/jk-rowling-transphobic-tweets-harry-potter-franchise

Stryker, Susan. (2004). *Transgender Studies: Queer Theory's Evil Twin*. GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies. 10.

Stryker, S. (2008). *Transgender history*. Berkeley, CA: Seal Press.

Tanis, J. (2016). *The Power of 41%: A Glimpse into the Life of a Statistic.* American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 86(4), 373–377.

Taylor, M. (2022). *UK Games Industry Census - understanding diversity in the UK games industry workforce*. Ukie & The University of Sheffield.

Thach, H. 2021. *A Cross-Game Look at Transgender Representation in Video Games*. Press Start 2021, 7(1), 19-44.

Thanem, T. (2011). *Embodying transgender in studies of gender, work and organization*. In J. Knights & P. Y. Martin (Eds.), *Handbook of gender, work and organization* (pp. 191–204). Chichester: Wiley.

Thorson, M. (2020). *Is Madeline Canonically Trans?* Maddy Makes Games. https://maddymakesgames.com/articles/is_maddy_trans/index.html

Tompkins, J. E., Lynch, T., Van Driel, I. I., & Fritz, N. (2020). *Kawaii Killers and Femme Fatales: A Textual Analysis of Female Characters Signifying Benevolent and Hostile Sexism in Video Games*. Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 64(2), 236–254.

Toy, E.J., Kummaragunta, J.V., & Yoo, J.S. (2018). *Large-Scale Cross-Country Analysis of Steam Popularity*. 2018 International Conference on Computational Science and Computational Intelligence (CSCI), 1054-1058.

Trahan, P. (2022, Sep 16). *Guilty Gear Strive creator confirms Bridget is a trans woman*. Dexerto. https://www.dexerto.com/gaming/guilty-gear-strive-creator-confirms-bridget-is-a-trans-woman-1932868/

Trans Legislation Tracker. (2023). *2023 Anti-Trans Bills Tracker*. https://translegislation.com/

Transgender Europe TGEU. (2023). https://tgeu.org/

UCSF Gender Affirming Health Program. (2019). https://transcare.ucsf.edu/

Unéus, D., & Christenson, E. (2017). *Transgender in Games : A Comparative Study of Transgender Characters in Games* (Dissertation). Uppsala University.

Valens, A. (2019, Oct 1). *Indie Game 'Heartbeat' Accused of Mocking Trans Suicide*. Daily Dot. https://www.dailydot.com/unclick/heartbeat-trans-suicide-rate/

Vipond, E. (2015). *Resisting transnormativity: Challenging the medicalization and regulation of trans bodies*. Theory in Action, 8, 21–44.

Warpefelt, H. & Verhagen, H. (2015). *Towards an updated typology of non-player character roles.* Stockholm University.

Warpefelt, H. (2016). *The Non-Player Character: Exploring the believability of NPC presentation and behavior.* Stockholm University.

Weekes, P. (2014, Dec 4). *Building a Character: Cremisius "Krem" Aclassi*. BioWare. https://blog.bioware.com/2014/12/04/building-a-character-cremisius-krem-aclassi/

Figure References

Figure 4.5: https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/lgbt-characters/images/5/58/Krem_-_DAI.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20201011004931 [adapted]
https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/assassinscreed/images/a/ab/ACS_DB_Ned_Wynert.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20151101140751 [adapted]
https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/watchdogscombined/images/2/22/Miranda_Comay.png/revision/latest?cb=20161123220616 [adapted]
https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/dragonage/images/b/be/Serendipity.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20111020003208 [adapted]
https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/esgta/images/2/25/Peach_caraV.png/revision/latest?cb=20210203102213 [adapted]

Figure 4.6: Nintendo. (1988). Super Mario Bros. 2 Instruction Manual. Retrieved from:
https://www.manua.ls/nintendo/super-mario-bros-2-nes/manual
Nintendo. (2008). Captain Rainbow Manual. Retrieved from:
https://www.nintendoworldreport.com/media/48182/4/7.jpg

Figure 5.4: https://lgbtqgamearchive.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/gta-v-trans-sex-workers.jpg

Figure 5.5: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHAjQRdRE4E [adapted; screen capture from video]

Figure 5.6: https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/steins-gate/images/1/19/Okabe_harasses_Luka.png/revision/latest/scale-to-width-down/250?cb=20230612215753

Figure 5.7: https://laurasambitiouswriting.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/koko.png?w=799

Figure 5.8: https://pm1.aminoapps.com/6625/2c82414057f2738b2ad8db0cd5d69b271da7b7f6_hq.jpg

Figure 5.9: http://johnnydfox.blogspot.com/2010/09/we-got-ourselves-murder-in-pq4-alright.htm

Figure 5.10: https://i0.wp.com/thegamingoutsider.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Remothered-1.jpg?ssl=1

Figure 5.11: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUNp8YblB6g [adapted; screen capture from video]

Figure 5.12: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3c_U73BagT4 [adapted; screen capture from video]

Figure 5.13: https://pbs.twimg.com/media/FbG82EfUsAEX-jN?format=jpg&name=small

Figure 5.14: http://vignette1.wikia.nocookie.net/runescape2/images/0/0a/Make-over_Mage_%28male%29.png/revision/latest/scale-to-width-down/160?cb=20141216170357 [adapted]

http://vignette2.wikia.nocookie.net/runescape2/images/9/92/Make-over_Mage_%28female%29.png/revision/latest/scale-to-width-down/160?cb=20141216170427 [adapted]

Figure 5.15: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=be7nfa0MeQs [adapted; screen capture from video]

Figure 5.16: https://cosmonioushigh.com/assets/bleb/blort.png [adapted]

https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/finalfantasy/images/d/df/Quina_Quen_from_Final_Fantasy_IX_render.png/revision/latest?cb=20200521042616 [adapted]

https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/inconsistently-admirable/images/a/ab/Ghost.png/revision/latest/scale-to-width-down/1200?cb=20220331020028 [adapted]

https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/bugsnax/images/d/db/FslooftyPortrait.png/revision/latest/scale-to-width-down/250?cb=20201122060918 [adapted]

https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/borderlands/images/b/b4/Borderlands_3_FL4K.png/revision/latest?cb=20201025043117 [adapted]

https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/angrybirds/images/3/33/JoToons.png/revision/latest/scale-to-width-down/1200?cb=20230620232930 [adapted]

https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/saimoe/images/d/dd/Fang_snoot_full_body.png/revision/latest?cb=20211112140412 [adapted]

https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/vsbattles/images/d/dd/Bloodhound_%281%29.png/revision/latest?cb=20200519181723 [adapted]

Appendices

Appendix 1 Database of Trans* Characters in Video Games

Game	Character	Year	Developer	Publisher	Country	Genre
Snatcher	Unnamed woman	1988	Konami	Konami	Japan	Adventure
Super Mario Bros. 2	Birdo	1988	Nintendo R&D4	Nintendo	Japan	Platformer
Circuit's Edge	Yasmin	1989	Westwood Associates	Infocom	USA	Adventure, RPG
Final Fight	Poison (& Roxy)	1989	Capcom	Capcom	Japan	Action
Akumajō Special: Boku Dracula-kun	Frozen Half	1990	Konami	Konami	Japan	Platformer
Final Fantasy V	Faris Scherwiz	1992	Square	Square	Japan	RPG
Leisure Suit Larry 6	Shablee	1993	Sierra On-Line	Sierra On-Line	USA	Adventure
Police Quest: Open Season	Cross Dressing Killer	1993	Sierra On-Line	Sierra On-Line	USA	Adventure
Policenauts	Unnamed Strippers	1994	Konami	Konami	Japan	Adventure
Chrono Trigger	Flea	1995	Square	Square	Japan	RPG
Final Fantasy VIII	Adel	1999	Square	Square	Japan	RPG
Final Fantasy IX	Quina Quen	2000	Square	Square	Japan	RPG
Persona 2: Eternal Punishment	Sumaru Genie	2000	Atlus	Atlus	Japan	RPG
Resident Evil CODE:Veronica	Alfred Ashford	2000	Capcom Production Studio 4	Capcom	Japan	Action
RuneScape	Pete/Peta	2001	Jagex	Jagex	UK	MMO, RPG
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	The Psycho	2002	Rockstar North	Rockstar Games	UK	Action, Adventure
Guilty Gear X2	Bridget	2002	Arc System Works	Sammy Studios	Japan	Action
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind	The Argonians	2002	Bethesda Game Studios	Bethesda Softworks	USA	RPG

Game	Character	Year	Developer	Publisher	Country	Genre
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind	Vivec	2002	Bethesda Game Studios	Bethesda Softworks	USA	RPG
Resident Evil: Dead Aim	Morpheus Duvall	2003	Cavia	Capcom	Japan	Action
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	Koko	2004	High Voltage Software	Vivendi Universal Games; Sierra Entertainment	USA	Adventure
Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door	Vivian	2004	Intelligent Systems	Nintendo	Japan	RPG
7 Sins	Joan Fulton	2005	Monte Cristo	Digital Jesters	France	Simulation
Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories	Reni Wassulmaier	2005	Rockstar Leeds; Rockstar North	Rockstar Games	UK	Action, Adventure
Happiness!	Jun Watarase	2005	Windmill	Windmill	Japan	Visual novel
Baten Kaitos Origins	Guillo	2006	Monolith Soft; tri-Crescendo	Nintendo	Japan	RPG
Mother 3	Magypsies	2006	Brownie Brown; HAL Laboratory	Nintendo	Japan	RPG
Persona 3	Unnamed Beautiful Lady & Unnamed Pretty Lady	2006	Atlus	Atlus	Japan	Adventure, RPG, Strategy
Tekken 6	Leo Kliesen	2007	Namco Bandai Games	Namco Bandai Games	Japan	Action
Mighty Jill Off	The Queen	2008	Anna Anthropy	anna anthropy	USA	Platformer
Persona 4	Naoto Shirogane	2008	Atlus	Atlus	Japan	RPG
Dragon Age: Origins	Sex Workers	2009	BioWare	Electronic Arts	Canada	RPG
Steins;gate	Luka Urushibara	2009	5pb.; Nitroplus	5pb.	Japan	Adventure
Danganronpa: Trigger Happy Havoc	Chihiro Fujisaki	2010	Spike	Spike	Japan	Adventure
Catherine	Erica Anderson	2011	Atlus	Atlus	Japan	Adventure

Game	Character	Year	Developer	Publisher	Country	Genre
Dark Souls	Dark Sun Gwyndolin	2011	FromSoftware	Bandai Namco Entertainment	Japan	Action, RPG
Dragon Age 2	Serendipity	2011	BioWare	Electronic Arts	Canada	Action, Adventure, RPG
dys4ia	Player	2012	Anna Anthropy	Newgrounds	USA	Simulation
Guild Wars 2	Aid Worker Sya	2012	ArenaNet	NCSoft	USA	Adventure, MMO, RPG
RuneScape (update)	Wizard Jalarast	2012	Jagex	Jagex	UK	MMO, RPG
Fire Emblem Awakening	Excellus	2013	Intelligent Systems	Nintendo	Japan	RPG, Strategy
Grand Theft Auto V	Peach	2013	Rockstar North	Rockstar Games	UK	Action, Adventure
Grand Theft Auto V	Sex Workers	2013	Rockstar North	Rockstar Games	UK	Action, Adventure
Heroes of Dragon Age	Maevaris Tilani	2013	EA Capital Games	Electronic Arts	USA	RPG, Strategy
Pokémon X/Y	Beauty Nova	2013	Game Freak	Nintendo	Japan	RPG
Dragon Age: Inquisition	Cremisius (Krem) Aclassi	2014	BioWare	Electronic Arts	Canada	Action, Adventure, RPG, Strategy
To Kill A Black Swan	Black Swan	2014	Marcel Weyers	itch.io	Germany	Visual novel
2064: Read Only Memories	Melody	2015	MidBoss	Limited Run Games	USA	Adventure, Indie
2064: Read Only Memories	Nina	2015	MidBoss	Limited Run Games	USA	Adventure, Indie
2064: Read Only Memories	Sympathy	2015	MidBoss	Limited Run Games	USA	Adventure, Indie
2064: Read Only Memories	TOMCAT	2015	MidBoss	Limited Run Games	USA	Adventure, Indie
Assassin's Creed: Syndicate	Ned Wynert	2015	Ubisoft Quebec	Ubisoft	Canada	Action, Adventure
Crypt Of The NecroDancer	Bolt	2015	Brace Yourself Games	Brace Yourself Games	Canada	Action, Indie, RPG
ohmygod are you alright	Player	2015	Anna Anthropy	itch.io	USA	Simulation
Persona 5	Lala Escargot	2015	Atlus	Atlus	Japan	RPG
RuneScape (update)	Angof	2015	Jagex	Jagex	UK	MMO, RPG
Technobabylon	Max Lao	2015	Technocrat Games	Wadjet Eye Games	UK	Adventure, Indie
Tranxiety	Jess	2015	Kara Jayne	Kara Jayne	Australia	RPG

Game	Character	Year	Developer	Publisher	Country	Genre
Undertale	Mettaton	2015	Toby Fox	Toby Fox	USA	Indie, RPG
Baldur's Gate: Siege of Dragonspear	Mizhena	2016	Beamdog	Beamdog	Canada	RPG, Strategy
Pokemon Go	Blanche	2016	Niantic	Niantic	USA	Adventure, Casual
The House In Fata Morgana	Michel Bollinger	2016	Novectacle	Novectacle	Japan	Adventure
Watch Dogs 2	Miranda Comay	2016	Ubisoft Montreal	Ubisoft	Canada	Action, Adventure
We Know The Devil	Venus	2016	Date Nighto	Date Nighto	USA	Adventure, Casual, Indie
Dream Daddy: A Dad Dating Simulator	Damien Bloodmarch	2017	Game Grumps	Game Grumps	USA	Casual, Indie, Simulation
Hollow Knight	The Knight	2017	Team Cherry	Team Cherry	Australia	Action, Adventure, Indie
Horizon: Zero Dawn	Janeva	2017	Guerrilla Games	Sony Interactive Entertainment	The Netherlands	Action, Adventure, RPG
Mass Effect: Andromeda	Hainly Abrams	2017	BioWare	Electronic Arts	Canada	Action, RPG
Night in the Woods	Jackie	2017	Secret Lab; Infinite Fall	Finji	USA; Australia	Adventure
Outlast 2	Val	2017	Red Barrels	Red Barrels	Canada	Action, Adventure, Indie
The Legend Of Zelda: Breath Of The Wild	Vilia	2017	Nintendo EPD	Nintendo	Japan	Action, Adventure, RPG
Celeste	Madeline	2018	Maddy Makes Games; Extremely OK Games	Maddy Makes Games	Canada	Action, Adventure, Indie
Deltarune	Kris	2018	Toby Fox	Toby Fox	USA	Indie, RPG
Hardcoded	HC	2018	Ghosthug Games	Ghosthug Games	USA	Visual novel
Last Minute Love: The Nursing Home Dating Sim	Mx. DeMayo	2018	Philip Cal	itch.io	Unknown	Adventure
Monster Prom	Zoe	2018	Beautiful Glitch	Those Awesome Guys	Spain	Indie, Simulation

Game	Character	Year	Developer	Publisher	Country	Genre
One Night, Hot Springs	Haru Suzuki	2018	npckc	itch.io	Japan	Indie, Simulation
The Missing: JJ Macfield and the Island of Memories	JJ Macfield	2018	White Owls Inc.	Arc System Works	Japan	Action, Adventure, Indie
Valkyria Chronicles 4	Rosetta Valeriano	2018	Sega; Media.Vision	Sega	Japan	Action, RPG, Strategy
AI: The Somnium Files	Mama	2019	Spike Chunsoft	Spike Chunsoft	Japan	Adventure
Apex Legends	Bloodhound	2019	Respawn Entertainment	Electronic Arts	USA	Action, Adventure
Borderlands 3	"Beastmaster" FL4K	2019	Gearbox Software	2K	USA	Action, RPG
Borderlands 3	Lor	2019	Gearbox Software	2K	USA	Action, RPG
Catherine: Full Body	Rin	2019	Studio Zero	Atlus	Japan	Adventure
Do I Pass	Player	2019	Taylor McCue	itch.io	USA	Visual novel
girl things	Player	2019	jaystarry	itch.io	Unknown	Visual novel
Lookouts	Player	2019	paranoidhawk	itch.io	Unknown	Visual novel
Moonrise	Dawn	2019	Natalie Cannon	Natalie Cannon	USA	Visual novel
Moonrise	Ishara	2019	Natalie Cannon	Natalie Cannon	USA	Visual novel
Moonrise	Rosario de la Cruz	2019	Natalie Cannon	Natalie Cannon	USA	Visual novel
Moonrise	Sati	2019	Natalie Cannon	Natalie Cannon	USA	Visual novel
Bugsnax	Floofty Fizzlebean	2020	Young Horses	Young Horses	USA	Action, Adventure, Casual, Indie
Cyberpunk 2077	Claire Russell	2020	CD Projekt Red	CD Projekt	Poland	RPG
Deadly Premonition 2: A Blessing in Disguise	Lena Dauman	2020	Toybox Inc.; White Owls Inc.; Now Production	Rising Star Games	Japan	Action, Adventure
Granblue Fantasy Versus	Cagliostro	2020	Arc System Works	Cygames	Japan	Action
Granblue Fantasy Versus	Ladiva	2020	Arc System Works	Cygames	Japan	Action
If Found	Kasio	2020	Dreamfeel	Annapurna Interactive	USA	Casual, Indie
Mission: It's Complicated	Cody Price	2020	Schell Games	Schell Games	USA	Adventure, Casual, Indie

Game	Character	Year	Developer	Publisher	Country	Genre
Ouija Sleepover	Aiden	2020	Hatoge	itch.io	Unknown	RPG
Our Life: Beginnings & Always	Terry Brook	2020	GB Patch Games	GB Patch Games	Unknown	Casual, Indie
Project Sekai: Colorful Stage feat. Hatsune Miku	Akiyama Mizuki	2020	Colorful Palette; Crypton Future Media	Sega	Japan	Music
Remothered: Broken Porcelain	Richard Felton	2020	Stormind Games	Modus Games	Italy	Action
Tell Me Why	Tyler Ronan	2020	Dontnod Entertainment	Xbox Game Studios	France	Adventure
The Last of Us Part II	Lev	2020	Naughty Dog	Sony Interactive Entertainment	USA	Action, Adventure
Vitamin Connection	Selenium	2020	WayForward	WayForward	USA	Action, Adventure
World of Warcraft, Patch 9.0.2	Pelagos	2020	Blizzard Entertainment	Blizzard Entertainment	USA	MMO, RPG
Far Cry 6	Paolo de la Vega	2021	Ubisoft Toronto	Ubisoft	Canada	Action, Adventure
Guilty Gear: Strive	Testament	2021	Arc System Works	Arc System Works	Japan	Action
Pumpkin Days	Player	2021	Pumpkin Interactive	Pumpkin Interactive	Unknown	Casual, Indie, RPG, Simulation
Purrgatory	Kyungsoon	2021	Niv (Darvin Heo)	Niv (Darvin Heo)	USA	Adventure, Casual, Indie
Apex Legends season 15	Tressa Smith "Catalyst"	2022	Respawn Entertainment	Electronic Arts	USA	Action, Adventure
Cosmonious High	Blort	2022	Owlchemy Labs	Owlchemy Labs	USA	Adventure
Fear & Hunger 2: Termina	Marina Domek	2022	Miro Haverinen	Miro Haverinen	Finland	RPG
Goodbye Volcano High	Fang	2022	KO_OP	Sony Interactive Entertainment	Canada	Adventure, Indie
Super Lesbian Animal RPG	Claire Higsby	2022	ponett	ponett	USA	Indie, RPG
Super Lesbian Animal RPG	Melody Amaranth	2022	ponett	ponett	USA	Indie, RPG
The Toy Factory Across the Street	Francesca	2022	Axel Vejar Dossow	itch.io	Unknown	RPG

Game	Character	Year	Developer	Publisher	Country	Genre
ValiDate: Struggling Singles in Your Area	Emhari Abdi	2022	Veritable Joy Studios	Veritable Joy Studios	USA	Adventure, Casual, Indie, RPG
Angry Birds 2	Jo	2023	Rovio Entertainment	Rovio Entertainment	Finland	Casual, Puzzle
BOSSGAME: The Final Boss Is My Heart	Sophie	2023	Lilycore Games	Lilycore Games	USA	Action
Hogwarts Legacy	Sirona Ryan	2023	Avalanche Software	Warner Bros. Games	USA	Action, RPG