

Are You a Boy or a Girl or Something in Between?

Using Pokémon Scarlet and Violet to Find Out How Non-cis Video Game Players Want to Be Represented in Video Games

Sjoerd van Midden

Graduation Thesis

Media Technology MSc Program

Leiden University

June 2023

Thesis advisors: Maarten H. Lamers & Isabel Hoving

Abstract

Queer representation in video games is gaining more interest in the last couple of years. However, there is still a lot of discussion about whether this representation is done appropriately or not. Especially when it comes to non-cisgender representation which isn't researched often even though it is very important. That is why this research tries to fill in the gaps by asking 'How do non-cisgender people want to be represented in video games?'. I, a cisgender man, try to understand the concept of gender and talk with non-cisgender people through interviews and questionnaires about their opinion on this question. Then I will analyze and discuss their answers with the help of gender theory to see what people mention as being appropriate and inappropriate representation. When it comes to inappropriate representation participants mention characters that ridicule, demonize and discriminate against being non-cisgender. There are characters that were mentioned that reinforce hurtful stereotypes or only feel like they are there to educate a cisgender player. When it comes to appropriate representation, the participants mention characters who normalize being non-cisgender. These characters should have a big variety when it comes to their personality, the roles they fill and how they talk about their gender in a story. So, this research shows that there are many aspects that need to be taken into account when it comes to non-cisgender representation in video games.

Sjoerd van Midden

I am a white heterosexual cisgender male student at the master Media Technology. During my minor in Game Science and Cultural Analysis, I followed a course about gender issues and sexuality, which sparked my interest in these topics and made me even question my own gender. Even though I have a background in natural sciences, like my Biology bachelor, I want to deepen my understanding of gender issues in video games since I'm not fully content with the current state of gender representation in most games.

Introduction

The transgender representation in *Hogwards Legacy*

On the seventh of February in 2023 a video game was published called *Hogwards Legacy* (Warner Bros. Games., 2023) which came with a lot of controversy about transgender representation. *Hogwards Legacy* is based on the famous Harry Potter franchise made by J.K. Rowling who has made some questionable statements regarding trans people (Gardner., A, 2023). This caused the game to already get some backlash, but in addition, the developers introduced a transgender character which poorly represented the trans community according to the majority of the players (Scott, D., 2023). The character in question is a transwoman who is called Sirona Ryan (**Figure 1**) and the players say her name is very manly due to the 'sir' in Sirona and Ryan being a common name for men. All of this made a lot of players boycott the game and even rebel against people who enjoyed the game. This is one of many examples of game developers not knowing exactly how to create LGBTQ+ characters and it causing controversy in the community.

Queer representation in *Dragon Age*

It happens more often that there is controversy around a queer character, especially in older games like *Dragon Age Inquisition* (Electronic Arts., 2014). Although this controversy is less one-sided when it comes to the gay character *Dorian* (**Figure 1**) who was both loved and hated by people for the way he represented gay men (Perlurson, G., 2018). Doctor Perlurson studied the forums of this game and found out that LGBTQ+ players had a divided opinion. This character is described as a dapper man who, according to some players, is too stereotypical and his story focuses too much on his sexuality. In contrast, others praised his story for how relatable it is since he is not accepted where he originally came from because of his sexuality. This shows that it is uncertain what counts as appropriate queer representation and that everyone in the LGBTQ+ community has different thoughts on what is ideal. This brings us to more recent video games where a lot of people

seemed to be happy about the characters. These video games are *Pokémon Scarlet and Pokémon Violet* (Nintendo., 2022). *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* have the same gameplay, story and characters with only minor differences.

Figure 1

Sirona Ryan and Dorian



Note. Examples of video game characters that spark debate regarding queer character representation: (left) Sirona Ryan from Hogwarts Legacy (*Sirona Ryan*. Harry Potter Wiki., n.d.); (right) Dorian from Dragon Age Inquisition (Dorian Pavus | Dragon Age Wiki | Fandom., n.d.)

Representation of non-binary characters in *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet*

Pokémon Scarlet and Violet seem to break some of the stereotypes surrounding gender with characters like *Grusha* and *Rika* (**Figure 2**). *Grusha* is a character that was first introduced in an early trailer for the game and a lot of people thought that he was a girl because he has more traditionally feminine traits like long hair and eye makeup (Ferrer-Pérez, Victoria & Bosch-Fiol, Esperanza., 2014). However, after a couple of days, the official website stated that he was not a girl, but a man. The opposite happened to *Rika*, who was thought to be a man while she is a woman in the game due to her traditionally manly traits like being assertive and wearing manly clothes. There is also a character named *Iono* (**Figure 2**) who people speculated to be transfemale because her hair resembles the transgender flag, but the official website and in-game dialogue don't confirm she is trans. Nevertheless, based on my own experiences in the *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* community a lot of players are very happy with the characters' gender nonconforming appearances and/or personalities.

Conclusion

These games show that there is a demand for more queer representation in video games and that there is still some uncertainty surrounding how to appropriately represent people who are non-cisgender. There is a lot of research about appropriate queer representation in games, which shows that especially non-cisgender people want to have less stereotypical or even hurtful characters in video games. However, some questions are left unanswered. What is the best way to represent them and is there a way to please everyone in the community? Although, there are of course many ways to represent someone and everyone has different views on what is best. That is why we also need to keep in mind what kind of names, personalities, roles and appearances non-cisgender players mention as being supportive or harmful. These are the questions that drive this thesis to hopefully get clear solutions and examples of what inclusive game developers should strive for.

Figure 2

Pokémon Scarlet and Violet characters



Note. (left) Grusha, (middle) Rika and (right) Iono from *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* (*Pokémon Scarlet and Pokémon Violet* | *Official Website*. Grusha, n.d.; Rika. Rika - Bulbapedia, the community-driven Pokémon encyclopedia., n.d.; *Pokémon Scarlet and Pokémon Violet* | *Official Website*. Iono, n.d.)

The structure of the paper

In the remainder of this paper, the vocabulary of terms related to gender and the LGBTQ+ community will be discussed giving more clarity to what exact definitions this research uses. Then, previous research in this area is discussed to show the problems of the past and current state of non-cisgender representation in video games, the potential of solving these issues and how this research will help come to a solution. The methods section discusses in detail how the research has been conducted and the results of these methods will be shown. Lastly, in the conclusion and discussion, the results will be analysed.

LGBTQ+ vocabulary, what are we talking about?

General LGBTQ+ terms

In the LGBTQ+ community are a lot of different terms that can cause some confusion. Going forward in this paper the following terms and definitions will be used for clarity based on the definitions from the Transgender Netwerk Nederland (Woordenlijst, n.d.). LGBTQ+ itself is an abbreviation that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer. Lesbian, gay and bisexual will not be focussed on in this research, since those are about sexuality. This research focuses mostly on gender and people who are non-cisgender. For example, transgender, which means that the person has a different gender identity than they were assigned at birth. For example, someone who is assigned the male gender, but identifies as a woman, is considered transgender. When someone does identify as the gender they were assigned at birth it is called cisgender. Queer on the other hand is an umbrella term for people who are not heterosexual or cisgender. This not only means that transgender identity is part of this umbrella term, but also people who are nonbinary. Nonbinary is defined as people who do not identify with just male or female as their gender. This is easier to understand when gender is seen as a spectrum with male and female on opposite sides. Nonbinary people can identify as anything between those two sides. So there are a lot of terms relating to gender, but this explanation is still rather simplistic which is why we need to talk about gender theory.

Gender theory

Biological sex

There are three important terms that further explain this gender spectrum which are 'biological sex', 'gender expression' and 'gender identity'. Biological sex is the gender/sex that is assigned at birth. The keyword here is 'assigned' because a

doctor determines if the newborn is either a boy or a girl. This happens even if there is a case of ambiguous genitalia. The doctors can then perform surgery on the genitalia to make them either more of a vagina or a penis (Göllü et al., 2007). This shows that at birth the binary view of there being only two genders is enforced based on the doctor's perception. The fact that biological sex is not binary is supported by my main resource during my Biology studies, a book called 'Biology, A Global Approach' (Urry et al., 2017). This book mentions on page 348 that traditionally sex is seen as binary and that the writers come to understand it's less black and white. In addition on page 349, they state that the biochemical, physiological and anatomical features of "men" and "women" are complex. This is because the development of an individual's sex involves many genes that work in a network and therefore there are many variants of these features. This means that even though the assigned biological sex at birth is often 'male' or 'female', there are biologically many variants of what could be seen as sex. This shows gender is more of a spectrum. So, gender and sex are not the same. This is explained well by Susan Stryker, who is often seen as an authority when it comes to gender theory. She says:

"Gender is not the same as sex, though the two terms are often used interchangeably, even in technical or scholarly literature, creating a great deal of confusion. Gender is generally considered to be cultural, and sex, biological (though contemporary theories posit sex as a cultural category as well). The words "man" and "woman" refer to gender. No one is born a woman or a man – rather, as the saying goes, "one becomes one" through a complex process of socialization" (Stryker, 2008)

This is where gender identity and gender expression come into place.

Gender identity

With biological sex being the sex that is assigned at birth, gender identity on the other hand is the gender that a person personally feels or sees themselves as internally (Woordenlijst, n.d.). However, gender can also be seen as a social construct, since our perception of gender is based on the society we live in and what values we grow up with (Lorber, 2018; Stryker, 2008). So gender identity is personal since it is based on your own views of gender, but your environment heavily influences those views. For example, your biological sex assigned at birth can be male, but your gender identity can be female. When there is a difference between your gender identity and biological sex, you can see yourself as transgender. On the contrary, you can also feel like the same sex that was assigned at birth, which means you are cisgender.

Gender expression

Gender expression is how you express your biological sex or gender identity. This expression can be through behaviour, clothing, speech and physical features for example (Woordenlijst, n.d.). People can express the gender that they identify with, but this isn't always the case. For example, a cisgender male person who cross-dresses has the gender identity of a man, but the gender expression of a woman. However, this expression is also based on the social construct of gender. For example, a dress can be seen as feminine, but that can be different in other cultures. This is because these male and female signifiers are taught to us ever since we are born (Stryker, 2008). When these signifiers are twisted, it can cause confusion. As Susan Stryker puts it:

“Because most people have great difficulty recognizing the humanity of another person if they cannot recognize that person’s gender, the gender-changing person can evoke in others a primordial fear of monstrosity, or loss of humanness”

It is not just confusion that is caused by gender ambiguity, it can cause the dehumanization of transgender people. This is why a good understanding is needed of what gender and sex truly are.

Conclusion

In conclusion, biological sex, gender identity and gender expression are not black and white and thus are on a non-binary scale. With this many variants of what a person's gender can be it is important to be inclusive to avoid exclusion and discrimination. This is why this study uses non-cisgender people to encapsulate everyone who identifies as anything that is not their sex assigned at birth.

Related Work

Video Games

Video games are among the most popular form of media in this day and age and their popularity keeps on growing (Mendes, L. O., & Cunha, L. R., 2022). This is partly thanks to the gamers and game developers who form a new way to perceive culture and the concept of communities through games (Saldanha, L., da Silva, S. M., & Ferreira, P. D., 2023). This shows that video games have become a big part of society making them interesting from a scientific point of view as well. For example, they can be used to study human behaviour

Characters, Stock Characters

From Shakespeare to video games, stories have always been a big part of human society. These stories can have a big influence on life since humans tend to relate to these stories and learn from them. Even though there are numerous stories, a lot of them are very similar to each other. This is because a lot of stories share the same structures, messages and most importantly the same characters (Propp., 1968). These characters are called stock characters (Stock Characters - TV Tropes., n.d.).

Stock characters are also known as tropes and are a recognisable type of character which usually belongs to a certain genre (Britannica., 2011). For example 'The Damsel in Distress' is a usually female character who needs to be rescued by a manly hero (Damsel in Distress - TV Tropes., n.d.). Concepts similar to this were analysed first by literary scholar Vladimir Propp who researched these similarities in structures and characters in folktales (Propp., 1968). He laid the groundwork for the concept of tropes and stock characters with his book '*Morphology of the Folktale*'. Propp showed that many writers come up with characters and stories that have a comparable structure. For example, Princess Zelda from The Legend of Zelda series (Nintendo, 1986) who needs to be rescued can be seen as a 'Damsel in Distress' trope since she needs to be rescued by a man named Link (Hansen, J. C., 2018).

Stereotypical characters

The problem with using these trope characters is that they usually reinforce stereotypical characteristics of the different genders (Gala Mohammad Omar Khursheed Hannah Lerner Brendan, D. O., & Mohit Iyyer, C., 2020). Stereotypical means that the characters based on often fixed, oversimplified and biased beliefs about a group of people (Britannica., 2011). Gala et al. analyzed all the different character tropes that the website TvTropes lists and found out that female stock characters usually are related to terms like 'sex' and 'sexiness' while male stock characters are more related to more diverse terms like 'science', 'war' and 'money' which are all stereotypical. For example, the damsel in distress, Zelda, reinforces a harmful stereotype that the woman is powerless and needs help from a powerful man (Hansen, J. C., 2018).

These stereotypical characterizations have been a problem for a long time, especially in video games where the characters usually are seen as 'role models' by the players (Miller 2007; McDonald, 2001). It is common for male characters to be the main character or subject, strong and independent, while female characters are usually more supplemental and the object. On top of that, there is less representation of female characters and non-cisgender characters in general (Williams. D, 2009).

Representation of players who are not cismale

Due to this lack of representation a master student named Cavaleiro (2020) interviewed women and people who are not cisgender about the lack of appropriate representation in video games. They found out that there is not a lot of faith in the gaming industry to rightfully make characters that represent their gender expression and they are afraid developers will keep using these stereotypical tropes.

There is already a lot of research about female representation in video games and it seems that there is by comparison extremely little research about non-cisgender representation. Lopez-Fernandez et al. showed in 2019 with their extensive literature review of 49 papers how much research has been done already when it comes to female representation and being a cisgender female player. They showcase the many negative aspects like hypersexualisation, hurtful stereotypes and real-life harassment and what can be done to combat this. However, non-cisgender and the LGBTQ+ community are only recently getting more attention in the media and because of this, there is less research about them when it comes to representation in video games. This is why this research focuses mainly on non-cisgender people.

Shaw and Friesem emphasise how difficult it is to find appropriate non-cisgender representation in their research about queer representation in games (2016). Gender nonconformity does appear in games, but is often misclassified as appropriate representation when it is not. For example, just because a character cross-dresses, doesn't mean they are trans. Iono from *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* is an example of this since there was some ambiguity around her being trans, but that does not mean she counts as an appropriate transgender representation.

Sadly, some of these inappropriate representations are due to discrimination. Not only do queer people suffer from being discriminated against online, but video games have been used to actively hurt queer people. For example, *Leisure Suit Larry 6: Shape Up or Slip Out!* (Sierra On-Line., 1993) has the player seduce as many women as they can, but seducing a transgender person is considered a loss. Not only this, but the transgender person rapes the main character after revealing that they have a penis. This reinforces harmful assumptions such as transgender people actively tricking cisgender people by hiding their true identity. In addition, video games like this demonize queer people by making villains out of them, like the transgender person who rapes people. If they are not demonized, they are also usually used as a punchline to a joke and are ridiculed. Due to this kind of inappropriate representation and harassment, it is common for LGBTQ+ people to abandon playing and/or making games altogether. (Shaw et al., 2019)

The possibilities of the appropriate representation of non-cis characters

If there was a more appropriate representation of non-cis characters in video games game developers could not only regain the lost trust of non-cis people but also have more diverse role models.(Cavalera, 2020; Miller, 2007). In addition, since a lot of characters are based on sexist tropes, these more diverse characters can break those stereotypes and normalize gender nonconformity. This would make it easier for people to accept who they truly are. This also allows for more fun when playing games since being able to identify with the characters leads to more enjoyment (Hefner, D., Klimmt, C., & Vorderer, P., 2007). There is also a marketing reason because if more people are able to enjoy and identify with video games then more people are potentially buying the games.

Informally Opening up the Discussion

An example of a popular video game that already seems to have more non-cisgender representation is *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* which was introduced at the start of this paper. This becomes even more apparent when taking the Japanese version of Iono (**Figure 2**) into account. Iono uses she/her pronouns in the English version of the game, but in the Japanese version she refers to herself with the masculine term “boku”. Coupled with her colour scheme resembling the trans flag it gives an even stronger argument that she might be trans. Rika (**Figure 2**) also reinforces her ambiguity, since she was named the most popular fictional crush in a poll answered by Japanese women. Usually, only male characters are in the top 10 of this poll (Downer, A., 2023).

To test the waters of the *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* community and their thoughts on the observations that the games have more non-cisgender representation an informal post on Reddit was made by me. Reddit is a social media website where people can make communities about any subject so the r/PokémonScarletViolet page was used for this. The following question was asked:

“Hey I noticed that Scarlet and Violet have quite a number of characters that break gender stereotypes! For example, Grusha was thought to be a girl at first and there are some more examples. What I wanted to ask is how you feel about it, is this already a good step in the right direction, or do we need more? For example, you can't set your preferred pronoun to they/them, nor are there any characters with those pronouns. What do y'all think? ^-^”

There were in total 28 comments whereas 4 were created by me in response to other comments. This post was posted using a personal account that has existed for many years already. This post was live for about two hours before the post was locked and removed by moderators for being duplicate/repetitive content. This

means that the original question is no longer visible, but the comments can still be read on the post.¹

The expectation was that most community members would react positively, but the opinions were more diverse. They ranged from people being very happy with how characters like Rika represented them, while others were disgusted that this topic was even mentioned.

What Can Be Learned From This Post

Despite this diversity, a lot of information can still be gained. Firstly, not only non-cisgender people are happy with the representation. For example, one player stated that they were happy that male players could have a ponytail on their avatar, which usually isn't accessible to male characters.

Secondly, two players were happy that the characters have genderfluid designs and that the characters themselves don't put any attention to that fact. This was surprising since it was thought that non-cis players would love it if the story put more attention towards it, or if the characters talked more about it. However, according to that person, this makes the characters feel more normal and therefore more accepted because it's not treated as something out of the ordinary. This shows that characters like these being normalized is something that people want. They just want to be treated equally.

Thirdly, this normalization is also needed to show cisgender players what gender nonconformity is and to make them think about it. This is because many of these Reddit community members that commented still don't fully seem to understand the concept of gender, misuse LGBTQ+ terms or express that they and others shouldn't care. Even though the inclusivity of non-cisgender representation could help a lot as mentioned before. Luckily, there were also more positive comments that showed they were happy that this was discussed and were supportive. For example, Rika winning the poll of the most attractive person chosen by women, which was mentioned earlier in this text, was brought to attention by an excited commenter on the Reddit post.

Concluding from this informal Reddit post, even though there is some diversity in what people think about the representation, a considerable amount of players clearly have a need for appropriate non-cisgender representation in video games. This brings the question of how players want their gender to be represented and which tropes should and should not be used. Also, are *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* already good enough with how they handle this representation?

1

https://www.reddit.com/r/PokemonScarletViolet/comments/11ykcj2/gender_representation/

Research Statement

This study does not aim to find the only appropriate way to make a character that represents non-cis players, but to discuss and analyse what works better or worse in character and story design based on the gathered opinions of non-cis players. This discussion and analysis can be seen as a guide and not a rulebook since video games will always be context-dependent. For example, a character that poorly represents a certain gender can still be used to convey a potentially positive message by showing what shouldn't be done.

As such we aim to help game developers and story writers create non-cis characters and help show what might go wrong even though the intentions might be right, like with Sirona Ryan. On top of that, this study aims to show how much thought needs to go into the creation of these characters and how much has to be taken into account. All of this is done to further understand the relationship between non-cisgender players and video games and to make it easier to appropriately represent them. So there will hopefully be more appropriately representative non-cis characters, both in quantity and quality.

To achieve this, we attempt to answer the following research question and sub-questions:

Main research question:

How do non-cis video game players want to be represented in video games?

Sub-questions:

1. Do non-cisgender players feel well-represented in the current state of video games?
2. Which *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* characters do non-cisgender players think are examples of appropriate representation and which examples do they give from other games?
3. Which *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* characters do non-cisgender players think are examples of inappropriate representation and which examples do they give from other games?
4. How much focus needs to be on the fact that characters are non-cisgender and what is according to non-cisgender players the best way to talk about this in a story?
5. With this focus in mind, what roles do non-cisgender players want the non-cisgender characters to fulfil from a story perspective?
(For example either a main character or side character)

6. What would an appropriate character look like, be named, have as pronouns and have as (back)story if a non-cis person would make one with the help of an avatar creator?

Methods

There are two methods used to gather the information needed to answer the main question. These are a Qualtrics questionnaire and structured in-depth interviews that lead to the participants creating their own non-cis video game character.

The questionnaire is meant to gather many different perspectives of participants. The purpose of the interviews is to get personal and thorough answers by going through the subquestions one at a time and using *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* as the foundation of the conversation. Both are used to find out what Pokémon does well or not and compare that to a more general view of video games. This means that this study is both a case study of *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* and also a general study of the current state of video games while comparing the two. This comparison is done by analysing and discussing the many different potential answers to both the sub-questions and the main research question.

Ethics

For this research, some personal information was gathered being a participant's age bracket and gender. This is why people had to consent to this before participating. For the questionnaire, this was done by asking for their consent at the start and if the participant did not consent, the questionnaire immediately ended. For the interviews, people had to consent by signing a consent form. In addition to this people could opt-in to giving me their approval so that I may quote their answers directly. It is important that this is an opt-in option and not a requirement to participate. This is because people may write or talk about personal stories that they are willing to share with me, but do not want to share directly with any reader of this thesis. For the interview, there were additional opt-in options where the participant can allow me to record and use audio and video footage of the interview.

This research and its procedures have been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Sciences Ethics Review Committees. It has been registered under code FWN2022-008.

The Questionnaire

The Questionnaire was posted on Reddit, specifically in two subreddits being: r/lgbtqstudies² and r/asktransgender.³ These are two subreddits that are moderated to be safe for LGBTQ+ people and allow people to post personal questions or research-related questionnaires for LGBTQ+ people to answer. This increases the chances that only non-cisgender people filled in the questionnaire. Before posting, the moderators of each subreddit were asked for permission.

The second platform that was used was a personal Twitter account called @chouchourd⁴.

The full questionnaire that was created on Qualtrics can be found in the appendix. The first page of the questionnaire acts as an information sheet and a consent form. On this first page, the potential participant is asked to only join in if they consent to the terms and conditions, are 18 years or older and identify as anything non-cisgender. They also could opt-in to allowing me to quote their answers directly in the research paper.

The questionnaire further consists of two sections of questions. The first section focuses on the participant's gender and how much they played *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* for demographic purposes. The second section focuses on the six sub-questions of the research statement.

The first question of the first section asks for the participant's age, but participants have to choose from age brackets. It is not necessary to know the participant's specific age, since the purpose of this question is to roughly determine which age groups are interested in this debate.

The second question which asks for the participant's gender is purposively left as an open-ended question. As stated before, it is important to be inclusive of the many different gender identities which is why this question is open-ended.

The third question asks how much experience the participant has with *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet*

The second section has 8 different questions that help answer the main questions and subquestions of this thesis.

The amount of experience people have with *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* determines in the second section whether questions 2 and 3 are skipped or not. This is because questions 2 and 3 are about *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* specifically and can only be

²https://www.reddit.com/r/lgbtstudies/comments/13u8ryy/how_do_noncisgender_people_want_to_be_represented/

³https://www.reddit.com/r/asktransgender/comments/13u8pru/how_do_noncisgender_people_want_to_be_represented/

⁴ <https://twitter.com/Chouchourd/status/1662116730771046401>

answered if the participant has at least seen a playthrough or gameplay footage of the games.

The exact questions and type of answers participants can give can be found in the appendix.

The Interview

The participants of the interview were chosen through convenience sampling. The interviews are held through Zoom, because it has a built-in recording and transcription functionality.

The interview consists of the same two categories as the questionnaire and a final third category which focuses on creating a video game character together with the participant. So the participant states their gender and how much they have played the games in the first category. In the second category, the subquestions I through V are one by one discussed with the participant by using the same questions from the questionnaire. The big difference between the interview and the questionnaire is that the interview allows one to dig deeper into the answers of the participants by asking why they have a certain opinion and how they got there. When the interviewee has experience with *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* it allows for more comparisons between *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* and other games. These can be used to see what can be done better or worse. For example, participant likes character X from a game, then that character can be compared with Rika or Grusha to see who represents them better. This helps with keeping the interview on topic and opens up the possibility to both focus on *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* and a more general view of video games.

Making their own character

All of these gathered opinions and statements from the participant are then used in the third and final part of the interview, making a custom character. This is referring to sub-question VI which will be answered by making a character in *The Sims 4* (Electronic Arts, 2014) together with the participant to see what they would do if they had to design someone who appropriately represents their gender. In this creation, there will be a focus on multiple aspects of character design being their appearance, name, pronouns, and (back)story.

The Sims 4 is chosen for this research because it is free to play and very inclusive. For example, participants can make a lot of different body types, like muscular or chubby, and change facial features regardless of gender. They can even create custom pronouns. Although age can be chosen through five options, the participants are not allowed to choose the baby and toddler options, since it's difficult to make a non-cisgender character with those options. The backstory can also be chosen through some predetermined in-game options and the participant can choose to follow this backstory or make their own version that is separate from the game. While

making the backstory, participants are asked how much focus there would be on the character's gender in the story if they were inside their own video game and whether or not the character would be a main or side character.

During this creation, the participants are asked to explain their thought process and what they make will be compared with the answers they gave to the previous questions.

The interview is recorded and live transcribed through Zoom. The live transcription is then verified and checked for accuracy to make sure any mistakes made are corrected. *The Sims 4* character creation is done with the help of the remote control feature of Zoom. So the game is installed on the researcher's computer and the participant can control it from their side.

The data from the questionnaire and interviews are not only used to describe the general opinion of the population of non-cisgender people. It is also a comparative study by comparing what these people think about *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* with video games in general. This is done in order to answer the question of how non-cisgender people want to be represented in a case study, but also a general study.

Biases

The gathered information from the questionnaire and interviews will be analysed and thoroughly discussed in the results and discussion section. There will be many possible answers and opinions that participants will mention. Often it is the case that it is impossible to fully interpret and discuss these answers and opinions without my known and unknown biases.

In addition, since Reddit and Twitter are used to distribute the questionnaire and find potential people for interviews there is a potential risk in who can react. This is on Reddit reduced by using subreddits to help guide the posts to the right target audience.

Results

Statistical Significance

There are 19 people who finished the questionnaire and 2 people who were interviewed. This means that the results, discussion and conclusion may not rightfully represent every non-cisgender person. Although this is a qualitative study and the questionnaire and interviews are not designed to represent every non-cisgender person. They hopefully provide a glimpse into some of the opinions and experiences that non-cisgender people generally have.

Questionnaire

In the first part of the study, participants had to fill in a questionnaire. In the following section, the answers to the questions are summarized individually. There were 48 participants in total who started the questionnaire and 19 participants finished it. Only the answers of these 19 participants are used, because not finishing the questionnaire counts as not wanting to participate in the research.

Age and Gender

Tables 1 and 2 show the age brackets and the many different genders of the participants. When it comes to age, it can be seen that mainly young people filled in the questionnaire. This can mean that mostly younger people are interested in the topic of non-cisgender representation. However, since Reddit is used as the main distribution platform of the questionnaire there is a bias. Reddit predominantly has users below the age of 36 and between the age of 19 and 22, which corresponds with the results (Finlay, 2014).

When it comes to gender it can be seen in Table 2 that most people identified as non-cisgender male. Although these people answered with just male, only non-cisgender people were allowed to participate which means that these people are non-cisgender males. This could mean that they are transgender males for example. However, being non-cisgender male doesn't immediately mean you identify as transgender male because you could also identify as non-binary male for example. That is why male, transgender male, non-binary male, female and transgender female are separate. Reddit also predominantly is used by people who identify as male, although this also includes cisgender people (Finlay, 2014). It is still noteworthy that in the non-cisgender community, most people identify as male. This again shows the bias of using Reddit as main distribution platform for the questionnaire.

Pokémon Scarlet and Violet

The people who played *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* had two extra questions regarding their opinion about their gender representation in these games. As stated before, to divide these participants they had to state how much experience they have with *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet*. The results of this question can be seen in Table 3. Ten people have never played *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* nor have they seen a playthrough or gameplay video of it. This means that these people automatically skipped the two questions about *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet*. The other nine people had to state how well they feel that their gender is represented in *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* and why they feel that way.

Table 1*Age Brackets of Participants*

Amount of people in age bracket	
Age bracket	
18 years old - 22 years old	10
23 years old - 27 years old	5
28 years old - 32 years old	2
33 years old - 37 years old	0
38 years old - 42 years old	2
43 years old - 47 years old	0
48 years old - 52 years old	0
53 years old - 57 years old	0
58 years old - 62 years old	0
62 years or older	0

Table 4 shows how well people feel that their gender is represented in *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet*. Participants had to state how much they agree or disagree with the statement: “*Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* have characters that appropriately represent my gender”. It seems that these games are not necessarily seen as either good or bad when it comes to representing non-cisgender people. To explain why, we need to look at the answers to the next question. Here people explain their answers and give examples of characters they thought appropriately or inappropriately represent their gender.

The only characters that are explicitly named are Grusha and Penny. Grusha (**Figure 2**) was named twice and Penny (**Figure 3**) once. However, a lot has been said about *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* characters in general.

Table 2*Gender Identities of Participants*

	Amount of people
Gender	
Male/man	7
Non-binary	6
Female/woman	2
Transgender woman	1
Transgender man	1
Non-binary male	1
Genderqueer	1

Note. Genderqueer has multiple definitions. Someone who identifies as genderqueer can identify themselves as someone who is neither male nor woman, genderless or multiple genders. It is an umbrella term (Woordenlijst, n.d.).

Table 3*Experience with Pokémon Scarlet and Violet*

	Amount of people
Experience	
I have played <i>Pokémon Scarlet and/or Violet</i> up until the end of the main story (until the credits).	2
I have played <i>Pokémon Scarlet and/or Violet</i> and have not played completed the main story (until the credits).	3
I have not played <i>Pokémon Scarlet and/or Violet</i> myself, but I have watched a gameplay video or playthrough of it.	4
I both have not played <i>Pokémon Scarlet and/or Violet</i> myself nor have I watched a gameplay video or playthrough of it.	10

Table 4

How well people feel represented in Pokémon Scarlet and Violet

	Amount of People
Opinion	
Totally agree	0
Agree	2
Neither agree nor disagree	4
Disagree	3
Totally disagree	0

Let's start with the positive non-cisgender representation. Some people are happy about how their gender is represented, because of the androgynous designs and the gender nonconformity. For example, Grusha is seen as a man with a more feminine or non-masculine gender expression. One participant states they share a similar gender expression as Grusha and they like that. Penny is an example of a female character with an androgynous haircut according to another participant. This gender nonconformity of many characters is praised in more answers, but there are some aspects that are still lacking which will be discussed next.

This brings us to the more negative aspects of non-cisgender representation in the games. Even though there are gender nonconforming characters, none of the characters are explicitly non-binary or transgender. For example, one participant says that they would like to see more usage of they/them pronouns. This is in my opinion a fair point because *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* still have all characters follow the binary system when it comes to pronouns. But another participant says they don't mind that much that this is the case for the non-playable characters. However, they would love to be able to use they/them pronouns for the player character. The games don't explicitly ask for your gender as many older Pokémon games would, but your character also only has the binary he/him or she/her pronouns. The participant would love to have the option to use they/them pronouns for their own character because:

"I use they/them pronouns, but when I want to play a pokemon game I'm forced to choose between two façades that don't represent me...to represent me. I don't get to pretend I'm a trainer in a Pokemon world, I have to pretend to be someone else."

I understand this sentiment, since in *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* the player character is more of a blank slate that the player can use to put themselves in the game for immersion. However, this sentiment shows that it's difficult to immerse in this world if you can't use your own pronouns.

So, *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* have gender nonconforming or androgynous characters which most people appreciate. However, it is important that both the players and some non-playable characters can actually identify as someone non-cisgender. This shows that having nonconforming gender expression is not enough, because having non-binary gender identities in both playable and non-playable characters is also needed for appropriate representation.

Video Games in General

Now we need to discuss the same questions but for video games in general. We know that gender nonconforming character designs are appreciated in *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet*, but there are still some problems. Sadly, table 5 shows how well non-cisgender people feel represented in video games in general and it seems to be even more negative. Participants had to state how well they agree or disagree with the statement: "I feel well represented in the current state of video games". A lot of people disagree and totally disagree with this statement.

Figure 3

Penny from Pokémon Scarlet and Violet



Note. (Pokémon Scarlet and Pokémon Violet | Official Website. Penny, n.d.)

Table 5

How well non-cisgender people feel represented in video games

	Amount of people
Opinion	
Totally agree	0
Agree	1
Neither agree nor disagree	3
Disagree	8
Totally disagree	7

To discuss why these non-cisgender people disagree a lot with the statement we need to discuss the answers to the two follow-up questions. Here participants had to give examples of characters that appropriately and inappropriately represent their gender and explain their thoughts.

Positive Characters and Aspects

First, we start with the characters that were mentioned as appropriate representation and some positive aspects of non-cisgender representation that were mentioned. Although, two participants could not think of any examples of appropriate representation.

One way that two participants mentioned as appropriate representation is that the player can choose which pronouns are used for their character. In contrast to *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet*, some games like *Boyfriend Dungeon* (Kitfox Games., 2021) let you choose your own pronouns. This shows again that being able to choose the pronouns that fit your gender identity is important to non-cisgender people.

Some specific characters that were mentioned were Shiver from *Splatoon 3* (Nintendo., 2022) and Krem from *Dragon Age Inquisition* (Electronic Arts., 2014). Shiver is comparable to Iono and Grusha from *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* because according to the participant, there was an online discussion about Shiver's gender.

Shiver is canonically a female character, but their appearance is somewhat androgynous which sparked the debate. This shows again that androgynous characters are appreciated by participants. However, Shiver is still not officially a non-cisgender character, unlike Krem. Krem is a transgender male character who, according to one participant, is liked because he is seen as a normal man who is supported by other characters and not a lot of attention is put on the fact that he is transgender. Here we start to see that normalisation is an important part of non-cisgender representation. Some other examples of this are Catalyst from *Apex Legends* (Electronic Arts., 2019) and 'The Knight' from *Hollow Knight* (Team Cherry., 2017). Catalyst is a transgender woman and again it is appreciated by a participant that the fact that she is transgender is not a big part of their story. The same goes for 'The Knight' who does not have a specific gender.

One last character who was mentioned for similar reasons by three participants is Kris (Toby Fox., 2018). Kris is a character from a video game called *Deltarune*. This character was mentioned not just because they use they/them pronouns. One participant who mentioned them said the following:

“Kris strikes me as good representation because their pronouns or presentation is never made out to be a joke ”

The reason why this is important is that non-cisgender people often get harassed and bullied in real life (Reisner & Hughto., 2019; Shaw, et al., 2019). In a video game like *Deltarune*, a character can live without this fear and constant harassment and be more normalized. This normalisation is one of the main reasons people like the characters that they mentioned, but this does leave out one aspect. On one hand, the normalisation in the video game worlds where these characters reside are representing an ideal world without harassment. On the other hand, this ideal world is not the real world where this harassment and bullying does take place.

The character Tyler Ronan (**Figure 4**) from *Tell Me Why* (Xbox Game Studios., 2020) is an example of a character where the world and story do involve this harassment. This character was mentioned by two participants who appreciated the realism of Tyler's story and how his transition was handled. One participant in particular talks about how transphobia is addressed in the game. For example, the player has dialogue options, so the player can choose how Tyler reacts to this transphobia. In addition, Tyler's original name which was assigned at birth was never mentioned or used maliciously. A character study of Tyler Ronan shows how well *Tell Me Why* puts the player in situations that real-life transgender people have to deal with (McLaren., 2023). For example, one character refuses to acknowledge that Tyler is a man and keeps referring to him as a woman. Although there are also some more lighthearted examples where characters only take a couple of seconds to get used to the fact that he transitioned.

Figure 4

Tyler Ronan from Tell Me Why



Note. (Tyler Ronan | Tell Me Why Wiki | Fandom., n.d.)

So, it is also important to acknowledge that non-cisgender characters can also be represented through a more realistic story. Although it is noteworthy that more characters from an idealistic world are mentioned by participants, that is probably because it could be difficult to handle such a heavy topic as transphobia. Additionally, even though game developers try their best, they make hurtful mistakes sometimes.

Negative Characters and Aspects

This brings us to the characters and aspects that people mention as inappropriate representations. Something noticeable at first was that nine participants could not even think of or mention any characters that inappropriately represent their gender. This might be an indication that there are fewer inappropriate characters and/or there just are not enough non-cisgender characters in games. For example, one participant mentions that they rarely see transgender male characters.

An example of a transgender male character is a young boy from *The Last of Us Part 2* (Sony., 2020), but this representation is not perfect. A participant says the following about him:

“He's fine on his own, but his suffering at the hands of his transphobic used as a prop to make the cisgender main character look better for looking after him- he has no agency or character development”

This shows a common problem with not only queer but also characters of colour who often are used as a tool to develop the white cisgender main character in video games (Russworm, T., 2017).

One participant even mentions when they do see their gender being represented it feels more like being ridiculed. For example, according to a different participant, there seems to be a correlation between non-binary characters and non-human characters like a robot. They did not give a specific example, but they did mention that it is disheartening to see that non-binary characters are often non-human because it feels like a cop-out. This correlation that they mention probably refers to the Non-Human Non-Binary character trope (Non-Human Non-Binary - TV Tropes., n.d.). This trope character design is sometimes used to the effect of circumventing having genuine non-binary representation or to even dehumanise non-binary people. It is not uncommon for video games to demonize, and therefore dehumanize queer people (Shaw et al., 2019). However, it can also be used to signify and emphasize that non-binary people are alienated (Non-Human Non-Binary - TV Tropes., n.d.). Luckily, the participant does mention that they like a lot of the non-human non-binary characters that they know of.

A different way to ensure someone can feel represented in a video game is by making sure people can customize the gender and pronouns of their character as mentioned before. However, even here one has to be mindful, because a participant mentioned that in *Cyberpunk 2077* (CD Projekt., 2020) you can change your genitalia to whatever you want, but your wardrobe is still limited to either feminine or masculine clothing. So even though you can match your physical body to your gender identity, you are still locked into a binary gender expression.

One participant also mentions that a character from *Mass Effect: Andromeda* (Electronic Arts., 2017) introduces themselves with their deadname. Though the participant does not explicitly explain why this is bad. Using a transgender person's deadname is usually highly offensive. A deadname is the name given at the birth of someone who changed it. Deadnaming is the act of calling someone by their deadname instead of their chosen name (Lemoine, A., 2021). This can be done for malicious purposes by not acknowledging someone has transitioned, which can cause dysphoria. So usually people who changed their name prefer their new name and do not use their deadname. The character from *Mass Effect: Andromeda* could therefore be hurtful towards players who changed their name.

Another example of bad representation is Sirona Ryan who was mentioned at the very beginning of this thesis. The participant who mentioned her affirms that people

disliked the name due to the 'Sir' in Sirona and Ryan being masculine. On top of that, the participant mentioned that Sirona has a "comically deep voice" and that it feels like she was made to be harmful. Sirona Ryan is voiced by actress Rebecca Root, who is a transgender woman herself, but it seems not to be enough to appropriately convey a transgender woman's voice.

Krem, from Dragon Age on the other hand, is voiced by a cisgender woman, while he is a transgender man. This is one of the problems that are mentioned about Krem, even though he was also mentioned as being an appropriate representation. There are multiple reasons why three participants mentioned Krem as being inappropriate. Firstly, since he is voiced by a cisgender woman, one participant says that he reinforces the idea that transgender men are women. Secondly, Krem immediately openly talks about being trans and one participant in particular says the following about Krem's dialogue with the player:

"Firstly, much of the dialogue about Krem's transition involved Krem explaining in detail how he exists in the world as a trans person, and parts of his past. This was meant to be educational and to expose players to diversity, but I was uncomfortable. I and many other trans people feel traumatized by our pasts and feel uncomfortable with invasive questions, but 'trans 101' portrayals such as this may accidentally send a message that trans people are completely open to very personal and deep conversations."

This is in contrast to other characters within the same game who need time and a proper relationship to fully open up about their past, thus reinforcing the idea that this is but a light topic. Thirdly, their dialogue options often are about how the main character is confused about the situation. There is no possibility to immediately show your understanding towards Krem or even say that you are transgender yourself too. This makes him feel like he is made to just educate cisgender players.

Lastly, he keeps comparing himself to cisgender men until a cisgender character reassures him that he really is a man. So, even though Krem is praised for being an appropriate transgender male character by some, others show that Krem's story and character could be handled better.

How Non-Cisgender Characters Should be Handled

The next three questions in the questionnaire focused on how characters should be handled from a story perspective and what would be the "ideal" representation according to the participants. These questions resulted in the most personal answers, but they also shared a lot of similarities.

I asked how much focus needs to be on the fact that a character is non-cisgender and the best way to talk about this in a story. The participants had similar answers

and two participants' particular answers summarised that overall shared feeling very well. These two answers are:

"I'd say that depends on the story in my opinion representation exists on a scale from 'loud representation' where the representation is a focus in those cases the character in question tends to be part of the main cast and their queerness, skin colour, disability, neurodivergence or what ever else they're representation for and their experience with that and how it shaped their life is a focus of the story or at least comes up somewhat consistently. The other end of the scale is what I call 'quiet representation' where as a logical consequence of having many characters some of them will be queer, non-white, disabled, neurodiverse etc. but it's not very relevant to plot and/or only shows up once or very rarely"[...]"In my opinion both forms are valid and important. 'Quiet representation' will probably be more common because it's easier to do whereas 'loud representation' can be difficult and intimidating especially when you're trying to offer representation to a group you aren't a part of, in the end both serve to make fiction feel more inclusive and welcoming as well as normalising people's experiences (unless of course the representation is horribly butchered or something like that)."

"It depends on the story, but I think what matters more is the way these stories are represented. A story can heavily focus on a character's transition and still be a good portrayal, but the character should have traits beyond their trans status. If the character solely exists to be trans, that is where the issue lies. Writers should write well-rounded characters who happen to be trans, rather than empty caricatures that only exist to market to trans players."

So most participants talked about how the story determines how much focus needs to be on the fact that a character is non-cisgender, but the fact that they are non-cisgender should not be their main characteristic. For example in a game like *Tell Me Why* Tyler is a transgender man and their struggles with how people interact with him is done very well and fits the story. Here, the "loud representation" fits because it is a game about heavy topics. In addition to that it is not the main struggle and main characteristic of Tyler. He still deals with many other problems and has a fleshed-out personality. The "quiet representation" seems to fit games more where the focus of the story is more lighthearted. The terms loud and quiet representation are explain the different types of representation well, so I will use them in the remainder of the paper. This loud and quiet representation is mentioned by more people in different ways. For example:

"There doesn't need to be a lot of focus on a character being trans, and I think there should be a wide variety of representation. Some stories that are happy, some that are sad, some where transition is no big deal."

There are multiple ways to put loud and quiet representation in the games. For example, a participant mentioned that pride flags and pins are a good way to show someone is non-cisgender without putting too much focus on it. While another participant also mentions top surgery scars. These are scars that are left after a surgery that reshapes the chest to make it more masculine or feminine.

When there is a need for more explanation about a character's gender a participant mentions that they prefer that the character gets to know the main protagonist first. This was a problem that was also mentioned earlier when talking about Krem from *Dragon Age Inquisition*. On top of that, a participant mentions that a non-cisgender character shouldn't be used just to explain what being non-cisgender is like which Krem also seemed to be used for.

Of course, there are people who do enjoy talking immediately about their gender and people who do not. This is why multiple participants say that there needs to be a big variety of characters. Some participants are already content with there being they/them pronouns while some prefer there being more attention to the fact a character is non-cisgender. Some characters can be loud and proud and some characters need some time before they mention it, if even. A couple of participants do say that this revelation should not be forced or used for shock value. The character needs to have agency about when and how they talk about their gender. An example that was given is that a different character outs the non-cisgender character or starts talking about it before they do it themselves.

Having a variety of characters also means that their role in the story needs to be defined. This is why the participants were asked what kind of roles the non-cisgender characters should have from a story perspective.

Nine participants answered this question with something along the lines of 'all roles'. To be more specific, when it comes to a story, you can have for example protagonists, antagonists, main characters, side characters and background characters. The reason why this is important is because as several participants state, often non-cisgender characters do not get the role of the main character or they only get the role of a villain (Shaw et al., 2019). Eight participants mention that they would prefer if a non-cisgender character would be the main character for once because of this rarity. One participant says for example:

"There should be a balance of them the same way there's a balance of cis characters"

Cisgender characters fill a variety of roles, while many of the answers in this questionnaire show that this is not the case for non-cisgender people. Four participants mention how non-cisgender characters often only fill the villain role. One participant mentioned why this is bad, because *that could lead to subconscious*

effects'. Sadly, the queer coding of villains has happened for many years now in all kinds of media and it does reinforce traditional gender roles (Kim, K., 2017; Shaw et al., 2019). Queer coding villains is related to the demonization and dehumanisation that is mentioned before. This excessive discrimination is why a participant suggests letting non-cisgender characters be any role, except villains for now. Although another participant says that it could potentially be offset if the story also introduces an appropriate heroic non-cisgender character. For example, a non-cisgender character could be a heroic love interest as a participant mentions.

Whatever the role will be, three participants mention again that the context of the story is important to which role the character will fulfil. So if the story focuses more on the gender of the character, they could be more of a main character. While side characters have less focus on their gender. One participant suggests if the story focuses more on being trans or non-cisgender, then the story should focus more on how they interact with the world instead of the fact that they are non-cisgender. This also was said multiple times in the previous question, so there needs to be a balance between how much focus goes on them being non-cisgender and normalizing this fact.

So, there seems to be a preference for more non-cisgender main characters. Even though side characters and small nods are welcomed too, there is a skewed balance compared to cisgender characters which needs to be fixed.

The last question in the questionnaire asks what the participants have in mind as a character that appropriately represents them.

This led to many different ideas for example, a participant wants to see a chubby, black transgender man. This man would not have any gender-related surgery yet, so maybe they could wear binders. The participant mentions that black, trans men are often "*pushed to the side*" which they often are. We already established that transgender men are relatively scarce in video games, but so are black and chubby men (Williams et al., 2009).

The wish that character creators allow they/them pronouns is talked about again by a participant.

A description of a character that a participant wants is a character with their own story and motivation who just happens to be queer. Here we see again that participants want non-cisgender characters to have more character traits than them being non-cisgender. They need to be well-rounded characters. Another participant wants something similar. They want to see characters that are similar to the ones that they have seen their whole life, but with some mention of them being trans or trans topics. For example, they would like a character similar to Gerald from *The Witcher 3* (CD Projekt Red., 2015). This game talks about biological/adoptive family

and identity issues that the participants relate to. The participant would like it if there were more casually trans characters and stories like this. Perhaps there could be small occasional dialogue options that indicate that the character is trans. Five more participants share this feeling but with fewer words. They just want a man, who is seen as a man, but just happens to be trans. They say it's just an adjective, like being a redhead. Them being non-cisgender is not the main focus and shouldn't be a problem for the protagonist.

One participant mentions how they want a normal person who is not just male or female and would prefer if the character does not fully understand their own gender. They would know that it is at least not binary and even if they may look female and dress feminine they do what they want and know what they are. The participant would love it if this character is not androgynous, but still non-binary. This is interesting since other non-cisgender people would like that these characters are more androgynous, but that is why more variation is needed. Both non-binary androgynous and not androgynous characters should be able to exist.

This variation is mentioned by another participant who wants a wide variety of demographics and appearances. They mention how the character should unquestionably be able to be themselves and whose own identity is more important to the story than other people's opinions. The participant specifies that some fans of the games especially ignore and disregard the identity of non-binary characters. Here we see that some people in fanbases can sadly be discriminative. This kind of discrimination can potentially scare game developers to stop making queer characters (Shaw et al., 2019).

A specific example that a participant gave is a character they have in mind that would be a Ditto. Ditto is a blob-like Pokémon that can transform into anything anyone. The participant would like if the Ditto transformed into a human and would explore the concepts of being a sapient, a Pokémon trainer and their gender. The Ditto would eventually settle in a non-binary or genderfluid gender identity, although a binary gender is also okay to the participant. The participant also gives another example of a transgender female character whose gender is treated as normal, although they do mention they see the merits of exploring discrimination in a story. The Ditto character is interesting to me since a character that can freely switch between genders can lead to an intriguing story about the meaning of binary and non-binary gender. Even though this Ditto character would maybe be seen as dehumanising and thus discriminatory, it could lead to a fascinating discussion. In addition, a different participant does not want non-cisgender characters to exist as a lesson/explanation for cisgender people and that non-cisgender people should be consulted during the creation of the story. This does show a slight contradiction with the Ditto character because, on one hand, it could open a discussion about gender,

while on the other non-cisgender characters shouldn't be used just as an explanation. The reason why I think a character like this could still exist is because them struggling with their gender identity does not have to be their main/only personality trait. The Ditto character and other non-cisgender characters should have more traits than just being non-cisgender. For example, Krem talked too fast about their personal struggles and the main character could only ask questions out of confusion. So, with a more fleshed-out character and the right balance when it comes to talking about gender identity struggles or other topics this Ditto character could be an appropriate representation.

The transgender characters should not be tokens as a participant states and they should also not be fetishized or infantilized. They should be treated as a regular person and not just suffer and die. This probably references the fact that transgender characters sometimes are used as fetish and fodder to develop the character of a cisgender main protagonist.

One participant suggests removing the gendered wardrobes in games. They ask why their masculine characters can not wear pretty dresses and also address that female armour in games is usually sexualized. *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* have this issue of not being able to cross-dress. Even though the game does not ask your gender and there are androgynous characters, the player can only wear shorts or skirts based on gender.

One participant says that most games lack fluidity and characters that are explicitly visibly queer. This being visibly queer is talked about more specifically by another participant who says:

"I would not consider a character genuine representation unless their transness is very explicit in the game, if not heavily coded. It doesn't have to be the character stating out loud that they are trans, but there should be some info in the game, hidden or otherwise, that reveals the character's identity."

This is one of the problems in *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* where there are multiple gender nonconforming characters, but they never actually are transgender or non-binary.

This same participant also states the following about the representation of their experience as being trans:

"Beyond that I would simply want my experience as a trans man to be acknowledged, whether it be recognising the complexities of our unique struggles, or just showing the day to day life of a trans man (casually taking/mentioning HRT, their trans body being portrayed neutrally without spectacle such as not hiding top surgery scars, etc.)"

Here we see that some people want a story that shows the unique experiences that only non-cisgender people can have or need to go through. Meanwhile, other people want more focus on the similarities between cisgender and non-cisgender characters and that types of genders are normal.

One of those stories that focus more on the unique struggles is the story of Tyler Ronan who was mentioned again by a participant. They would like a similar character but as a transgender female this time.

A unique struggle that a participant mentions is the constant pressure to be masculine all the time. They say the following:

“I'd like to see a trans man who doesn't feel pressured to be masculine all of the time. It feels like there are so many standards that people like me have to live up to, and if you don't subscribe to this preconceived notion of masculinity, then you can't possibly be a man.”

As a cisgender man myself, I have also felt the pressure of having to be masculine, but my gender identity was never questioned, unlike this participant. This shows that there is a pressure that cisgender people can not feel.

Conclusion

The questionnaire shows that *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* have characters with gender nonconforming designs that some non-cisgender people appreciate. However, all the characters are still either cisgender male or female which leads to some participants not feeling represented at all. Even the main character can only choose to be a boy or a girl which inhibits players to identify as themselves in the game. When it comes to other games the questionnaire shows that characters that help normalize being non-cisgender are appreciated. These characters can be like Kris from *Deltarune* who is non-binary without being ridiculed and who is accepted by all other characters. However, this can also be done by showing a more realistic world like *Tell Me Why* which shows the transphobia that a lot of non-cisgender have to fight against. Oppositely, characters that reinforce negative stereotypes, ridicule and demonize non-cisgender people are seen as inappropriate representations. Additionally, characters like Krem who can feel like they are only there to educate cisgender people are disliked. On top of that, Krem shows that it is not always appreciated that a non-cisgender character openly talks about their gender identity and the struggles they have to go through. This does not mean that every non-cisgender character should be hiding their identity or barely mentioning it. Non-cisgender characters should have a big variation when it comes to personality and how they talk about their gender. There can be quiet and loud representations

depending on the game. For example, a transgender character can never talk about being transgender and there are only a couple of hints or nudges that they are trans. Whether or not non-cisgender representation is done quietly or loudly, the non-cisgender characters should not have their gender be their only personality trait.

Interviews

There were two people who were willing to participate in the in-depth interview instead of the questionnaire. Both interviews will be summarized and discussed separately since they both varied widely in answers.

The First Interview

The first participant contacted me through Twitter after seeing the Twitter post about the questionnaire. After talking to each other for a couple of hours I asked if he would be interested in an interview to which he agreed.

This interview started similar to the questionnaire with the age bracket, gender of the participant and how much experience he has with *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet*. He stated that he is between 38 and 42 years old and identifies as a transgender man. When it comes to *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* he says that he knows about everything since he played through the whole game and participated in all the in-game events. Even though it is not a perfect game, it is one of his favourite games of all time.

Pokémon Scarlet and Violet

After this I started with the more in-depth questions. The first one was how much he agreed with the statement 'I feel well represented in the current game of video games'. He sadly disagrees with this statement because he says that there is a lack of transgender male representation. This sentiment was also shared with many of the people who filled in the questionnaire. In addition, he also could only think of a couple of examples of transgender representation. Firstly he mentioned there are some exceptions, but not many. For example *The Sims 4*. He also mentioned that you often see them more in indie games like the main character of *Celeste* (Extremely OK Games., 2018) who is a transgender woman and Kris from *Deltarune* who is non-binary. He could not think of many other main transgender characters, but he did mention that sometimes there are side characters who are openly transgender. He also mentions a problem surrounding these side characters is that often transphobic players immediately complain that transgender gets shoehorned into everything. In addition, he mentions that transgender characters are often used as the villain. This discrimination is mentioned frequently in this research because it is still a common problem (Shaw et al., 2019).

I talked with him about how I agree that there is not a lot of representation and mention that the informal Reddit post I made about *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* also got negative comments for just trying to mention gender. Although I also say that as a cisgender heterosexual white man, I will not fully be able to understand his pain for I have never felt it. He appreciates though that I do this research, which confirms to me that this research can be relevant for this topic.

Then I asked about his opinions about *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* and their characters with the next questions. I asked about how he feels about how well *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* represent him. As well as his thoughts about the games. He started with the character creator because he liked how customizable the main character is. On top of that, he felt that the player is not immediately shoved into a box when it comes to gender. However, there is room for improvement, since there are only he/him and she/her pronouns. This was also talked about in the questionnaire by other participants and seems to be a recurring issue.

The non-playable characters on the other hand were according to him very well done. He said the following:

“The NPCs all felt like very real people with very real struggles. There wasn’t anyone who was specifically queer-coded or trans-coded. I still got that sense of like, I would belong in this world. Like, I would belong among all these people. I would not be seen as someone who is, you know, weird or mentally ill for being trans.”

This shows that having a story with androgynous and gender nonconforming characters can have a big effect on how immersive and accepting the world is. With the demonizing of queer characters in video games, it is understandable that other games can make non-cisgender people feel like they do not belong there. An example of a specific character that did make him feel welcome was Rika as he said in this follow-up:

“You know, characters like Rika. I mean, she is practically a non-binary icon. She has an androgynous look and has business-oriented demeanour. A lot of queer community latched onto her. Especially bi, pan and lesbian women. Transwomen as well. She looks cool”

Rika has been mentioned more often as good representation even though she is cisgender. Her androgynous looks and non-stereotypical personality really seem to help with her popularity.

Rika was not the only character that he mentioned. A character that he had an even stronger connection with is Penny (**Figure 3**). Penny has been mentioned shortly earlier because of her androgynous looks, but he has a special and personal reason why he likes Penny. Penny is a quiet and reserved girl who gets bullied by some kids when you first meet her. These bullies are part of a team called Team Star and the

player has to stop them from bullying Penny. Later in the story, the player finds out that this Team Star was actually created by Penny. Since Penny got bullied a year ago, she got a team of people together who were getting harassed like her and tried to punish those bullies. Now a year later, the team went full circle and became the bullies themselves. This story is important because the participant feels a deep connection with this story. He himself has been bullied and harassed for a long time while at school. He does not know for certain if he would have survived that endless harassment and had to go to a different school. This is why he feels this connection with Penny. Penny got bullied and she had to do anything necessary to keep herself and others safe, like him. There is not a lot of information in the game about why she was bullied, but Penny does have red and blue short hair which is similar to the trans flag and she dresses unconventionally. Therefore she strikes him as being queer/trans-coded. This made it easier for him to feel this connection.

I never saw Penny like this, because I just saw her as a cisgender character who has a cute story, but not that deep. After telling the participant how I felt about Penny he says that making these connections for him is normal because there is so little representation. He said:

“We have the tendency to make that representation for ourselves. To find it in the things that we love...”

Another example of this is according to him Link from *The Legend of Zelda* game series (Nintendo). Even though there is nothing in any of the games that state that Link is transgender, he is someone the participant and other people can latch onto.

“Something that we got used to doing is finding ways that we can make these characters feel more like us when we aren’t getting characters who are like us.”

Even though Penny and Link are not trans, since there is so little representation, they have to make their own representation through cisgender characters. This is why I asked if he would prefer if these characters were actually trans and clearly state that they are trans.

He says that they would not have to overtly say it. For Penny it can come up in a flashback which would show she is transgender or got bullied because of wearing more androgynous clothes. This could work because getting bullied as a child for not fitting the gender roles happens quite a lot according to him. Even though children can somewhat be androgynous, he says the following about his experience:

“I tried very hard to fit in a mould of femininity because that was expected of me.”

Even at a young age, people have to follow those signifiers like Susan Stryker said (2008). For example, the participant got bullied for having a short haircut and tried to compensate by getting his ears pierced.

The participant says again that it was possible to make this theory about why Penny got bullied because there is little information about her backstory. These kinds of characters leave room for people who are not often appropriately represented to make theories. He says that these theories are often based on the experiences of the people who write them. Sadly, even though they are just theories, these people still get harassed for even posting them online by transphobes.

After this personal story of the participant on why he likes Penny so much I reiterate that he does not have to go deeper into his personal life.

He reacted to this by saying he is okay with talking about these personal stories because these stories made him who he is today. These stories make it so that he has these opinions, so it would be difficult to explain his feelings without this context. He also wants to show that he is human and that being trans doesn't make him weird or bad.

Without this story, Penny's character is more shallow, but he wants to show that her story is about someone who did everything to protect herself in a hostile environment. This escapes a lot of people, including me.

An example of a similar story is the Vox Populi group from *Bioshock Infinite* (2K Games., 2013). This group were oppressed and eventually became the oppressors. However, Penny's Team Star got out of her hands and she couldn't fix it at first, while the Vox Populi were in control of themselves the whole time.

There is a good message in Penny's story and this shows that non-cisgender people, have to rely on their own theories and imagination to find any representation since it is so scarce. It additionally shows that appropriate representation is also heavily influenced by someone's personal history.

Examples From Other Video Games

After talking about *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* it was time to talk about other video games and their non-cisgender representation.

I asked him if he could mention examples of appropriate representation from other games and he could only think of a few. As he said before, there is not a lot of transgender representation. On top of that, he mentions there is even less transgender male representation. Although he does mention that Nintendo makes characters that people can lean into like Link who was mentioned earlier.

Link is not a stereotypical hypermasculine character. The participant describes Link as being a twink. He is also androgynous and because of these aspects, the participant says that a lot of queer and trans people latched onto him, the participant at least does so himself.

The participant also shortly talked about cisgender female representation. This representation has numerous flaws too, for example being oversexualized most of the time (Lopez-Fernandez et al., 2019). Another issue he addressed is that playing video games was mostly seen as something only boys were allowed to do in his youth.

Then he talked more about Link who does not invoke the same feeling as other mainstream male protagonists invoke even though he is cisgender. This is because Link is a silent protagonist and characters like this are easier to mould and shape into your own desires, which the participant likes. However, he would also like it if there were more characters with fleshed-out personalities that represent other genders. This is because he says that these kinds of characters help people who do not understand non-cisgender people or even want them to be gone to understand that they are real. It would help with normalizing non-cisgenders. This is a sentiment that is shared with more participants so far as we have seen.

When it comes to bad representation he has more examples in mind. One clear example he mentions is an event in *Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 3* (Atlus., 2006). In this game, there is a day when the main protagonist and his friends go to a beach and start 'operation babe hunt'. They are going to try to seduce as many women as possible, but at one point they run into a transgender woman. Once it is revealed that she is transgender, the guys get sad and disappointed. This is similar to *Leisure Suit Larry 6: Shape Up or Slip Out!* which also reinforces the stereotype that transgender people are hiding something from cisgender people. On top of that, however the transgender person from *Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 3* is also highly sexualized and she flirts with teenagers while she is an adult. This reinforces the hurtful stereotypes that transgender is but a fetish and that they are pedophilic groomers (Shaw et al., 2019). The participant does want to emphasize that this does not mean that all transgender characters should be Puritans. There has to be a way to show that a transgender person has a sexual identity without being a sexual object.

When it comes to the stereotype that transgender people are groomers the participant had to say the following:

"It is not that we are pushing an ideology onto kids. It's that we remember being kids ourselves and how painful it was to not have the support that we needed to be who we truly are and all we want is to be able to support the kids of today with being themselves."

“We get accused of pushing an ideology, but we are constantly pressured to be cisgender, to be heterosexual. it’s all around us, all the time and when you are cishet (which is not a slur. It is just a descriptor). When you are cishet, this is not stuff that you need to think about because the world caters to you.”

Note. cishet is the abbreviation for cisgender heterosexual people.

He follows this up by talking about Disney movies which often cater to cishet people. He also said that almost everything is cisgender normative, like the colour pink being only for girls. This cisgender normative system is very isolating to people who do not fit into this binary system like himself. He does not blame cishet people, but the fault lies in the system, society and beliefs that are pushed by media like video games.

I said to him that I agree as a cisgender man myself I never had to really think about it. I do sometimes get misunderstood for a girl because I have long hair, but that never hurts me. I hope through this research I also make other people understand what these problems are and how to tackle them in games. This brings us to the final questions about how topics like these should be tackled in video games.

How to Handle These Topics

He says it depends on the message that you try to convey. For example, if he had to make a video game with a transmasculine character he would like subtle hints first. Some subtle hints he mentions are a wardrobe with binders, a glimpse of a trans flag or a picture from before the transition.

He says that portraying transphobia is touchy and maybe should be avoided since it is difficult to handle. Talking about transphobic topics can quickly come off as clumsy.

If a character would shout that they are trans, it would not be very realistic he mentioned. This is what could be seen in the questionnaire when looking at Krem who immediately openly talked about their transgender experience which was not appreciated by participants. He instead suggests using little nods that push the narrative without it being too direct. This way he hopes that it does not invoke the anger of people who disagree, although that might still happen with the small nods.

He talks about the anger of these people in real life and about how anti-transgender laws have gotten worse. He says the following:

“We need some way to show the world that we are just people. This has not anything to do with a fetish. It is not anything to do with wanting to push an agenda on anyone. We just wanna be allowed to live our lives. And there are a lot of people who are trying to prevent that.”

Normalizing is what is needed, although it is difficult to do respectfully if you haven't talked with people who have gone through these kinds of experiences. That is why people who read this, still need to go out there and try to do their own research first-hand to fully get the picture and do your best especially if you are cis/het yourselves.

About trying to normalize and appropriately represent non-cisgender people he says the following:

“An honest attempt to do good representation, is better than not trying at all.”

Even if a character is shoe-horned in and is imperfect, something is better than nothing. The only caveat is that story writers should avoid using inappropriate representation. It should normalize being transgender, not transphobic. This is the final statement he made before we were going to make our own character in *The Sims 4*.

The Sims 4

After the relatively heavy subjects it was time to lightheartedly make a character in *The Sims 4*. The participant had to make this character through the Zoom remote control feature. The goal was to make a character that could fit into any game the participant wanted and would appropriately represent them. The character that the participant made can be seen below in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Janiel Danuary



The participant wanted to make a character that had similar characteristics to themselves. Therefore the character is transmasculine and uses he/him pronouns

Physically the character has a masculine frame and a masculine clothing preference. The participant wanted the character to physically look like a twink, meaning he has a slim build and looks youthful. The character has side-burns. But the character does not have a lot of other facial hair because he wanted the character to have a “*baby face*”.

Some other features are that the character can become pregnant, can't produce milk and can use the toilet standing. These are extra options that *The Sims 4* gives to be more inclusive to the many different types of gender. Two more features that cannot be seen are his raspy voice and the top-surgery scars underneath his clothes.

The Sims 4 also gives options for a personality, so being transgender is not his only trait. He is a serial romantic and pansexual who likes to go on dates. He also likes writing and being creative but he is also a bit of a slob.

Because he does not take good enough care of himself, his dates often don't go too well. This is why his character arc would be about learning to take care of yourself before you can take care of someone else and start a relationship.

The reason why he is flirty and romantic is to show that he has a sexual identity that is separate from being a sexual object. This was something the participant talked about earlier during the interview

Conclusion

This first interview has shown that non-cisgender people have to sometimes forge their own representation with theories and their imagination due to the scarcity of appropriate non-cisgender characters. For example, Penny is very relatable to the participant who shares a similar story of getting bullied. This additionally shows that someone's history heavily influences whether or not they see a character as an appropriate representation. The interview also shows that the world of *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* seems like a world where non-cisgender people could live without being abnormal. This is thanks to the gender non-conforming characters that have their own stories and beliefs like Rika. However, there is still room for improvement by also using they/them pronouns.

When it comes to video games in general there seems to be more inappropriate representation than appropriate. This can be seen through characters that reinforce negative and hurtful stereotypes. For example 'operation babe hunt' displays a transgender female character who is oversexualized and flirts with minors while she is an adult. This reinforces the stereotype that being transgender is only a fetish and

that transgender people are groomers. This does not mean that there shouldn't be any transgender characters that are sexual. These characters should be able to have a sexual identity that is separate from being sexual.

The participant wants video games to focus on avoiding those hurtful stereotypes and ideas. So, he wants video games to not only focus on the normalisation of being non-cisgender. This is because even if the representation of a non-cisgender character is not perfect, it is better than having it be inappropriate and hurtful. This is why an honest attempt at making a character be appropriate representation is better than not trying at all and ending with inappropriate representation.

The Second Interview

The second participant was contacted first by me through Whatsapp through convenient sampling. The interview was held in Dutch since the interviewee preferred that.

This interview follows the same general flow as the previous interview where we started with the age bracket and gender identity. He is between the ages of 23 and 27 and he identifies as non-binary.

Pokémon Scarlet and Violet

In contrast to the previous participant he has not played *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* himself. However, he has seen gameplay videos and has watched along with his friend who played it. He also said he could name some characters, so I asked about his opinion about non-cisgender representation in these games.

He mentions like other participants that these games have quite a lot of customisation options when it comes to gender expression. However, he also mentions the lack of they/them pronouns and the customizability of these pronouns. He uses he/him himself most of the time, so it is not a big issue for him, but he does understand that it would be annoying for other people who have to use the wrong pronouns.

Two characters that stood out to him were Rika and Grusha. Even though they did feel a little bit like token characters to him, he still likes them a lot. Especially Rika, who looks and feels like a non-binary person to him.

This shows again that an androgynous appearance is already appreciated even though the characters still only use binary pronouns. After acknowledging this we started talking about games in general.

Examples From Other Video Games

When I asked how well games in general represent him he said that most games do not appropriately represent him. This is because many games he has played only have a binary cisgender protagonist.

When I asked for an example of a character that does appropriately represent him, he could not think of a specific character. Although he does mention that he maybe does not play enough games, it still shows that there is this lack of non-binary characters in games compared to cisgender characters. He does give an example of characters that he does appreciate which are strong and/or muscular women who are non-stereotypical. Rika is a good example because she is non-stereotypical but still binary.

I then asked if he could name specific characters that inappropriately represent him and he also had trouble thinking of good examples. This is why I asked what it means to be non-binary to them in order to find out if there are video game characters that are similar.

The definition of when you are non-binary differs for each person he says. For him, it is important that a character is androgynous in order to feel a connection with them. He also says that other people can be non-binary because they feel masculine, but behave feminine according to society's standards. So it is difficult to draw a line between what is and is not non-binary. This shows that what counts as non-binary and non-cisgender representation is also both personal and a social construct.

He mentions again that he would like to see the option to change pronouns. I then asked how he thinks about including not only they/them pronouns but also she/them and he/them. This is not an option in a lot of games, but he says it would be nice but also more difficult to implement in dialogue options. If it is possible to properly make different combinations work, he would appreciate it even if he uses he/him pronouns.

Talking more about other games he mentions that he also played older Pokémon games. He said that in older Pokemon games the gymleaders (bosses in the game) are usually more stereotypical while most new gymleaders are androgynous. In older games, the player characters were also more stereotypical since you could only choose a boy or a girl character. The newer character customization is appreciated a lot by him. So it is better to have more customization when it comes to appearance and pronouns.

How to Handle These Topics

He likes how Pokémon games handle non-cisgender representation, because there is hardly any focus on the fact that characters are androgynous or gender non-conforming. It is seen as something normal instead of special.

I ask how much attention there needs to be on negative experiences, like transphobia.

He would prefer if there was not a lot of attention to those kinds of aspects. The games need to show it is normal, but shouldn't talk about it that much. An example that he gives is a character he saw online who was a muscular lady and people got angry at that. So he believes if you put any more attention to the gender nonconformity those people only get more angry. This would in turn make it more difficult for gender nonconformity to be accepted. So you need to treat it as neutral as possible. That way it feels less like forcefully lecturing according to him.

Because of this, I ask if one would barely put any attention to it, would that not cater to transphobic people too much?

He says that he thinks if we do not emphasize the gender non-conformity it will be easier for society to accept gender non-conformity. For example, he is vegan and whenever he even mentions it in conversations some people can already get annoyed. So having little focus on it would maybe be better

When it comes to the roles non-cisgender characters should be able to fill he would like more main characters who are non-cisgender. This is because according to him when you only let them fill the roles of side characters, it would feel as if they are worth less than cisgender characters.

I talk about Tyler Ronan who is a main character and how much he seems appreciated by people who filled in the questionnaire. I then tell about how experiences like when Tyler walked into a room and the other characters had to adjust for a moment to get used to his transition. My question for the participant was what he thinks about how those kinds of experiences that non-cisgender people have to go through should be handled in games.

He says it depends on the game, for example in adventure games it is less important that characters talk about those experiences. While it could fit more in games that talk about more serious topics like trauma.

An example of another different kind of media that he thinks handled the subject of transitioning well is the tv-series *The Umbrella Academy* (Blackman, Slater., 2019). In this series one of the actors of a main character transitioned. Because of this, the character he played also transitioned inside the series. The participant said they handled this very neutrally. This is because there was only one moment where the other characters were a little confused and then they moved on. So, there was hardly any focus on the transition, but it was not ignored. This way it felt more normal. He

says that something like this should not be an entire plot point and potentially shoved down someone's throat. Just mention it once and that is good enough.

I then asked what would count as shoving a topic like this down someone's throat. He responded by saying the following:

“When the story starts to deviate too much from the original story, purely because a character is gender non-conforming. So if there is more focus put on it than needed to advance the story.”

Note. this sentence was originally said in Dutch and translated by me.

He gives Pokémon games as an example because it would feel out of place if characters in those stories would suddenly talk about being non-cisgender. He also said that sometimes he just wants to play a game without having to think about being politically correct. He also feels that it could be a bit confrontational in games like these.

He also feels that usually when games and other media do talk about non-cisgenders it feels dramatized which stigmatizes people who are non-cisgender. This is why he prefers to talk neutrally about it instead of it being used as a tragic backstory.

I then ask how he would talk about gender identity and being confused about one's gender.

He says that some people have body image issues while others do not like the stereotypes. So it depends on what is bothering the character. The bigger problem is that these issues usually do not come up naturally. For example, the conversations in *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* are according to him too surface-level to talk about these kinds of topics. This can also be seen in Krem, who talks about their gender identity and problems very openly which some participants did not appreciate. So it should be done with care.

Out of curiosity, I ask if it would not be appreciated if a big company like Nintendo did talk about it even though it would not fit because it could reach so many people. He responded by saying that it could have its own merits. In addition, he mentioned that many characters from the Pokémon series are already androgynous. So they are already going in the right direction.

Finally, I ask how he would imagine a character that appropriately represents him to be.

He would imagine them being an androgynous character who is not referred to with 'boy' or 'girl'. Instead, he would like if they got referred to with a non-gendered term like "adventurer". This brought us to the character creation in *The Sims 4*.

The Sims 4

Just like with the other interview, the participant had to make a character in *The Sims 4* who would appropriately represent them if they were in a game. He had to make this character through the Zoom remote control feature and the participant's character can be seen in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Luka Wolf



He mainly wanted to make a character that looks androgynous with a soft face. He preferred the character to be slightly masculine, have long hair and have he/him pronouns.

Physically the character is slim and would rather wear masculine clothes but with some earrings. Sadly the earrings that the participant wanted were not available. Otherwise, he would have black studs.

The character can not get pregnant or get others pregnant. He also can not produce milk, but he can use the toilet while standing.

Personality-wise, the character likes collecting all kinds of things from all over the world. Although, he mainly can be found gardening, being artsy and playing the

violin. He also is a bit of a bookworm and is rather clumsy. His love for gardening comes in handy, because he is also a vegetarian, so he could produce his own food.

Even though he is asexual, he is still a romantic person. He would be a perfect friend with a warm voice who just spends time in his garden all day being happy.

Conclusion

The second interview showed again that the androgynous designs of *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* characters are appreciated, but it would be better if they/them pronouns were available to the player or used by NPCs. In addition, the interviewee noticed that there are not a lot of characters in video games in general that represent him. He also wants being non-cisgender to be normalized, which could be done through quiet and loud representation depending on the game. However, he does suggest not emphasizing the gender nonconformity. He believes that by not emphasizing gender nonconformity, it will be easier for transphobes or people who don't fully understand gender to accept the nonconformity. This would be because putting too much attention on it would cause these people to feel like it is pushed too much down their throats. Additionally, having a character focus too much on being non-cisgender could be unrealistic since it can be seen as a personal topic. This is a similar sentiment to the people who disliked Krem for talking too fast about being transgender and his hardships. So, to prevent these problems, the participant advises to only put as much attention on gender nonconformity as is needed to advance the story. It is important to keep in mind that this can be done with both loud and quiet representation. This is because it is dependent on the story itself which type of representation is enough to advance.

Discussion and Conclusion

Now the results will be used to answer the main research question and sub-questions. Since the sub-questions help answer the main research question we will first start answering those one by one.

Do non-cisgender players feel well-represented in the current state of video games?

From the questionnaire and interviews, we can gather that non-cisgender people generally do not feel well-represented in video games. This can be seen by the number of people who disagree with the statement 'I feel well represented in the current state of video games' and '*Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* has characters that appropriately represent my gender'. For games in general eight people disagreed while seven people totally disagreed with the statement. This means an overwhelming 15 out of 19 people are not happy about how games in general represent them, if even. *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* were received slightly more

positively. Four out of nine people neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, two agreed and three disagreed. The same goes for the two interviewees who agreed more that *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* appropriately represent them compared to games in general. The reason for this is explained more in the next two sub-questions.

Which *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* characters do non-cisgender players think are examples of appropriate representation and which examples do they give from other games?

Starting with *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* the most mentioned aspect is that there are many characters that are androgynous and gender nonconforming. Rika and Grusha were used as prime examples of this. Grusha can resonate with people who identify as a man but have a more feminine expression. While Rika resonates for example with people who identify as non-binary and/or transmasculine.

The characters from *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* can make someone feel like they could belong in that world without any problems as one participant mentioned. This is because the characters felt real and had their own personalities while their gender nonconformity was never addressed. Being gender non-conforming feels normal in that world. This normalization is one of the main reasons these games were appreciated more than games in general as shown by the questionnaire and interviews.

Penny shows in the interview that your experiences and history can greatly affect which characters feel like appropriate representations and how you connect with them.

Characters from other games show how much it is appreciated that some character creators give a wide variety of options when it comes to gender identity and expression. For example, being able to choose your own pronouns and including they/them is a must for appropriate representation. When they/them are used, it should not be used as a joke like the character Kris from *Deltarune*.

Krem from *Dragon Age Inquisition* shows that it can be appreciated that a character is openly transgender. This shows that it is important to show in the games that a character is non-cisgender and again that it is normal.

Although normalisation is important, there is also merit in showing the negative and hurtful experiences that non-cisgender people go through. These experiences are difficult to talk about, but Tyler Ronan is a clear example of how these subjects can be tackled while also having a transgender person as a main character.

In *Tell Me Why* Tyler has to face situations that cisgender people often never have to think about. These range from a slight confusion upon seeing Tyler for the first time after his transition to their gender identity being ignored and getting discriminated against. This lets cisgender players experience these kinds of hurtful moments which they maybe never would have. Of course, it is not the same as being discriminated against in real life, but it does give more insight.

In addition to handling these hurtful moments well, *Tell Me Why* is also mentioned by participants because the fact that Tyler is transgender is not his main characteristic. He has other struggles and the game focuses more on those. Having characters with fleshed-out personalities can help people understand that non-cisgender people are real and normal.

Sadly, a lot of these positive aspects and characters also have their negative sides which will be discussed next.

Which Pokémon Scarlet and Violet characters do non-cisgender players think are examples of inappropriate representation and which examples do they give from other games?

Based on the interviews and questionnaire the following is mentioned when it comes to inappropriate representation. Starting with *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* again, even though they have gender non-conforming characters, they still have flaws. The main flaw is that none of the characters in *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet* are openly and clearly non-cisgender. There are no characters for example who uses they/them pronouns. In addition, the main player is perhaps not asked directly if they are a boy or a girl, but they are still forced into this binary system. The gender expression can mostly be gender nonconforming by being able to wear make-up as a man for example. However, even the gender identity can not yet be fully customized by not getting to choose the pronouns for example. This leads to non-cisgender people getting the feeling of having to pretend that they are someone else instead of themselves in a video game.

Even Penny shows flaws because she shows that a lot of non-cisgender people have to rely on their own theories about cisgender characters like her to make their own representation. On top of that, the people who make those theories in order to connect with each other are often harassed and made fun of because of discrimination.

When looking at other games, common problems that are mentioned are people's gender being ridiculed and demonized. This is a problem that has been in games for many years since there is a lot of discrimination against queer people (Shaw et al., 2019). 'operation babe hunt' from *Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 3* is an example of

this, but on top of that it reinforces extremely hurtful stereotypes that transgender people are paedophiles and that being transgender is only a mere fetish.

Another problem can happen when not enough research has been done by game developers. For example, in *Mass Effect: Andromeda* a transgender character addresses themselves with their deadname.

There are also relatively smaller problems, like in *Cyberpunk 2077* where you can choose your own genitalia, but the clothing is still locked in a binary system. This happens more often where cross-dressing is not possible even though it is a vital part of gender expression.

A lot of participants seemed to agree that having a character immediately talk about all their personal non-cisgender-related issues is a horrible way of representation. This nuances the pain and hurtful experiences non-cisgender have to endure since this is usually a topic that is brought up when two people have a strong relationship. Having a character like Krem immediately openly talk about it also makes the character feel as if they are made to educate cisgender people. Especially when the player character can not express their understanding of the other's situation or be non-cisgender themselves. So, one could use more subtle hints at first.

How much focus needs to be on the fact that characters are non-cisgender and what is according to non-cisgender players the best way to talk about this in a story?

The amount of focus the story and characters should have on the topic of non-cisgender generally depends on the game according to most participants. The terms 'quiet representation' and 'loud representation' encapsulate the general consensus well. On one hand, you can have a non-cisgender character whose gender is only mentioned or shown through subtle hints/nods or a mention here and there in the dialogue. Some of these nods can for example be pride-related flags, badges, top surgery scars or a picture from someone before they transitioned. This kind of representation works well in games where there is little to no focus on the discussion about gender. On the other hand, loud representation can be used when there is more focus on this topic and a character's gender plays a bigger role in their story. There is of course a gradient when it comes to quiet and loud representation, but that is also because a wide variation in characters is needed. Some characters are happy, some are sad and some are somewhere in the middle. The same goes for cisgender characters who already have this big variation as mentioned by some participants. Non-cisgender characters need the same treatment. Make sure though that the fact a character is non-cisgender is not used for shock value and that the character themselves need agency when they talk about it.

With this focus in mind, what roles do non-cisgender players want the non-cisgender characters to fulfil from a story perspective?

The story of the video game has also an influence on which role a non-cisgender could fill. A main character who is non-cisgender could have more focus on their gender than a side character.

What is most important is that many participants mention that the variation that cisgender characters have should also be available to non-cisgender characters. Sadly, there seems to be a skewed balance at the moment since non-cisgender characters are hardly the main characters. On top of that, they are often the villain, which only reinforces the demonization. So, even if side characters are appreciated, maybe focusing more on main non-cisgender characters for the time being is better and game designers have to be careful when making them a villain.

What would an appropriate character look like, be named, have as pronouns and have as (back)story if a non-cis person would make one with the help of an avatar creator?

As expected when looking at the two previous questions is that a wide variety of characters are mentioned and created. For example, a chubby black transgender man who wears binders as a subtle nod that he has not yet had the transitional surgery. Some people mention how they want their characters to be well-rounded with their own story and motivation besides being non-cisgender. They can be like cisgender characters, but with relatable stories about being casually transgender. There doesn't have to be a huge focus on the fact a character is non-cisgender since it can be seen as just an adjective.

Another example is a character who does not know yet what their gender identity is. They just know that it is not binary, but instead of dressing and looking androgynous they can still dress and look feminine. So a non-androgynous non-binary character.

Perhaps a character can be non-human but explore the concept of gender in a humanizing and non-educational way.

There are many examples of the variation that is possible with non-cisgender characters and their stories. A couple of important notes that some participants mentioned are for one that it should be clearly stated somewhere in the game that a character is non-cisgender. Only queer coding is not enough and those nods and hints are needed to fully count as representation. Of course not every participant thinks the same, since some don't mind if there is hardly any hint. Additionally, it shows that these kinds of characters should feel like the developers wanted them in the game. It is understandable that participants want their gender to be

acknowledged, normalized and should not feel like a secret. In addition, there is another important sentiment that is mentioned which is about the pressure that transgender people feel to live up to the expectations of masculinity and femininity.

How do non-cisgender people want to be represented in video games?

Finally, we have come to the main research question. The responses show that there are many ways non-cisgender people want to be represented. There is not only one right answer and I hope that this thesis gave an insight into the many ways non-cisgender people should and should not be represented.

When it comes to inappropriate representation participants mention characters that ridicule, demonize and discriminate against being non-cisgender. There are characters that were mentioned that reinforce hurtful stereotypes or only feel like they are there to educate a cisgender player.

When it comes to appropriate representation, the participants mention characters who normalize being non-cisgender. These characters should have a big variety when it comes to their personality, the roles they fill and how they talk about their gender in a story. For example, you can have loud representation and quiet representation. Additionally giving playable characters the possibility to identify and express their gender however they want is appreciated by most participants. Creating more diverse fleshed-out non-cisgender characters can not only help normalize being non-cisgender but also remedy the lack of non-cisgender characters in general. Due to this lack, one interviewee mentions how many non-cisgender people have to forge their own representation with cisgender characters.

So, this research shows that there are many aspects that need to be taken into account when it comes to non-cisgender representation in video games. Some of these aspects are talked about in related research, like discrimination and hurtful stereotypes (Shaw et al., 2019). However, this research also shows that there should be a lot of emphasis on variation. There is not only one correct way to make a non-cisgender character and that is something positive. This is because this means that there are many ways to create an appropriately representing non-cisgender character. Although there are also many ways to create an inappropriately representative non-cisgender character. If someone who wants to create a non-cisgender character keeps these positive and negative aspects in mind it will be easier to keep it appropriate.

This research has also shown that using questionnaires and interviews are a great way to gather the many opinions that non-cisgender people have. However, due to the many open-ended questions, it became difficult to summarise and critically analyze all of the answers. With more focus on only a couple of questions or even just one, there is more room for comparisons with other kinds of populations. Additionally, with more focus, it could be easier to gather more participants since

questionnaires and interviews are less time-consuming for the participant. These are the main reasons why there were fewer participants than expected. Nevertheless, this research has gathered lots of data and has helped gain insight into how non-cisgender people want to be represented in video games. Especially because they were combined, the questionnaires and interviews could balance their strengths and weaknesses. For example, the questionnaire was more quantity-focussed and the interview was more quality-focused answers. Additionally, the creation of a character in *The Sims 4* was only possible in an interview setting. This character creation session was not only helpful in gaining more insight into what the interviewees were looking for in a character. The session also gave room for a more lighthearted conversation after talking about more personal topics like the struggles that non-cisgender people have to go through.

Although it is difficult with video games alone to remove these struggles and normalize being non-cisgender. There still needs a big change in society for this to happen. At least trying to have a variety of appropriate representations of non-cisgender people could definitely help. As long as there is at least an honest attempt even if mistakes are made. As the first interviewee put it:

“An honest attempt to do good representation, is better than not trying at all.”

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge Elias for helping me a lot, for he has helped me gain confidence. This was the boost I needed to start with the questionnaire and interviews!

References

- Gardner, A. (2023, February 7). A Complete Breakdown of the J.K. Rowling Transgender-Comments Controversy | Glamour.
<https://www.glamour.com/story/a-complete-breakdown-of-the-jk-rowling-transgender-comments-controversy>
- Scott, D. (2023, February 10). Hogwarts Legacy introduces trans character but fans quickly spot issue with name - Mirror Online.
<https://www.mirror.co.uk/tech/hogwarts-legacy-introduces-trans-character-29180498>
- Perlurson, G. (2018). Game Studies - Mustaches, Blood Magic and Interspecies Sex: Navigating the Non-Heterosexuality of Dorian Pavus. *Game Studies*, 18(1).
https://gamestudies.org/1801/articles/gaspard_pelurson
- Ferrer-Pérez, Victoria & Bosch-Fiol, Esperanza. (2014). The measure of the masculinity–femininity construct today: Some reflections on the case of the Bem Sex Role Inventory / La medida del constructo masculinidad–feminidad en la actualidad: algunas reflexiones sobre el caso del Bem Sex Role Inventory. *Revista de Psicología Social*. 29. 180-207. 10.1080/02134748.2013.878569.
- Woordenlijst. (n.d.). Transgender Info.
<https://www.transgenderinfo.nl/2-2/transgender/#informatie-algemeen|2>.
- Urry, L. A., Cain, M. L. 1., Wasserman, S. A., Minorsky, P. V., Reece, J. B., & Campbell, N. A. (2017). *Campbell biology*. Eleventh edition. New York, NY, Pearson Education, Inc.
- Stryker, S. (2008). Transgender history, homonormativity, and disciplinarity. *Radical History Review*, 100. <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-2007-026>
- Göllü, G., Yıldız, R. V., Bingöl-Kologlu, M., Yagmurlu, A., Fedakar Senyücel, M., Aktug, T., Gökcora, I. H., & Dindar, H. (2007). Ambiguous genitalia: an overview of 17 years' experience. *Journal of Pediatric Surgery*, 42(5), 840–844.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpedsurg.2006.12.036>
- Lorber, J. (2018). The Social Construction of Gender (pp. 318–325).
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429494468-36>
- Mendes, L. O., & Cunha, L. R. (2022). Popularity of Video Games and Collective Memory. *Entropy International and Interdisciplinary Journal of Entropy and Information Studies.*, 24(7). <https://doi.org/10.3390/e24070860>

Saldanha, L., da Silva, S. M., & Ferreira, P. D. (2023). "Community" in Video Game Communities. *Games and Culture*, 0(0).

<https://doi-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/10.1177/15554120221150058>

Propp, V. IĀ. (Vladimir IĀkovlevich), 1895-1970. (1968). *Morphology of the folktale*. Austin :University of Texas Press

Stock Characters - TV Tropes. (n.d.) Retrieved June 8, 2023, from <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/StockCharacters>

Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2011, February 14). stock character. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/art/stock-character>

Damsel in Distress - TV Tropes. (n.d.). Retrieved March 16, 2023, from <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/DamselInDistress>

Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2023, May 26). stereotype. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/stereotype-social>

Gala Mohammad Omar Khursheed Hannah Lerner Brendan, D. O., & Mohit Iyyer, C. (2020). Analyzing Gender Bias within Narrative Tropes. *Proceedings of the Fourth Workshop on Natural Language Processing and Computational Social Science*, 212–217.

Hansen, J. C. (2018). Why can't zelda save herself? how the damsel in distress trope affects video game players (Order No. 28103818). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2441568317). Retrieved from <https://login.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/login??url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/why-cant-zelda-save-herself-how-damsel-distress/docview/2441568317/se-2>

Miller, M.K., Summers, A. Gender Differences in Video Game Characters' Roles, Appearances, and Attire as Portrayed in Video Game Magazines. *Sex Roles* 57, 733–742 (2007). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-007-9307-0>

McDonald, D. G., & Kim, H. (2001). When I die, I feel small: Electronic game characters and the social self. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 45, 241–259.

Cavallero, D. J. (2017). CHOOSE YOUR IDENTITY: GENDER IDENTITY FORMATION THROUGH VIDEO GAME CHARACTERS. Master of Arts in Communication. College of Arts and Humanities. California State University, Fresno

Downer, A. (2023). Rika's power grows as the Pokémon standout is named Japanese women's 'most popular fictional crush'

<https://knowyourmeme.com/news/rikas-power-grows-as-pokemon-standout-named-japanese-womens-most-popular-crush> (accessed Mar 23, 2023).

McCullough, K.M., Wong, Y.J. & Stevenson, N.J. Female Video Game Players and the Protective Effect of Feminist Identity Against Internalized Misogyny. *Sex Roles* 82, 266–276 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-019-01055-7>

Williams, D., Martins, N., Consalvo, M., & Ivory, J. D. (2009). The virtual census: representations of gender, race and age in video games. *New Media & Society*, 11(5), 815–834. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809105354>

Lopez-Fernandez, O., Williams, A. J., Griffiths, M. D., & Kuss, D. J. (2019). Female Gaming, Gaming Addiction, and the Role of Women Within Gaming Culture: A Narrative Literature Review. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2019.00454>

Shaw, Adrienne, & Friesem, Elizaveta. (2016). Where Is the Queerness in Games? Types of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Content in Digital Games. *International Journal of Communication*, 10, 3877–3889.

Shaw, A., Rudolph, S., Schnorrenberg, J., Winterwork, E., & Museum, S. (2019). *Rainbow Arcade: Over 30 Years of Queer Video Game History*. Winterwork. <https://books.google.nl/books?id=k8oLxQEACAAJ>

McKenna, J. L., Wang, Y.-C., Williams, C. R., McGregor, K., & Boskey, E. R. (2022). “You can’t be deadnamed in a video game”: Transgender and gender diverse adolescents’ use of video game avatar creation for gender-affirmation and exploration. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 0(0), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2022.2144583>

Hefner, D., Klimmt, C., & Vorderer, P. (2007). Identification with the Player Character as Determinant of Video Game Enjoyment. *Entertainment Computing - ICEC 2007*, 4740, 39–48. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-540-74873-1_6

Finlay, Craig. “Age and Gender in Reddit Commenting and Success.” *Journal of Information Science Theory and Practice*, vol. 2, no. 3, Sept. 2014, pp. 18–28, doi:10.1633/JISTAP.2014.2.3.2.

Reisner, S. L., & W. Hughto, J. M. (2019). Comparing the health of non-binary and binary transgender adults in a statewide non-probability sample. *PLOS ONE*, 14(8), e0221583. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0221583>

McLaren, J. (2023). Towards Representational Adequacy: A Critical Analysis of Transgender Representation in Tell Me Why. *Games and Culture*, 0(0).

<https://doi-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/10.1177/15554120231176634>

Russworm, T. (2017). "Dystopian Blackness and the Limits of Racial Empathy in The Walking Dead and The Last of Us," in *Gaming Representation: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Video Games*, eds. Jennifer Malkowski and TreaAndrea M. Russworm (Bloomington: Indiana University Press).

Non-Human Non-Binary - TV Tropes. (n.d.) Retrieved June 21, 2023, from

<https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/NonHumanNonBinary>

Lemoine, A. (2021, January 19). Deadname meaning. Dictionary.com.

<https://www.dictionary.com/e/pop-culture/deadname/>

Kim, K. (2017). Queer-coded Villians (And Why You Should Care). *Dialogues@RU*, 12.

Williams, D., Martins, N., Consalvo, M., & Ivory, J. D. (2009). The virtual census: representations of gender, race and age in video games. *New Media & Society*, 11(5), 815–834. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809105354>

Appendix

Information sheet for an interview, part 1 of 2

Introduction

Welcome to our study,

This research and thesis are carried out by master student Sjoerd van Midden and supervised by Maarten Lamers who lectures at Media Technology, Leiden University. Any data collected in this experiment is only used within this thesis by Sjoerd van Midden. The procedures have been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Sciences ethics board.

Purpose of the research

We aim to open up the discussion about how non-cisgender people want to be represented in video games, with the help of Pokemon Scarlet and Violet.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation is completely voluntary, which means you have the right to withdraw and stop at any moment without having to give any reason.

Right to Withdraw

You have the right to withdraw your consent to use the personal data within one month after providing it. You do not have to justify your decision to withdraw your consent and there are no consequences for withdrawing your consent.

Procedures

For this study, we want to ask you to answer some questions about this topic in three parts through an interview. The first part of this research will be about your gender and how much Pokemon Scarlet and or Violet you have played/seen. The second part will be about the discussion of what you think of the current representation of non-cisgender people by asking multiple questions. The third part will put theory into practice and we will use your answers to make a non-cisgender character in The Sims 4 video game. This interview will be held through Zoom.

For this study, we ask that only people who are 18 years or older and who identify as non-cisgender participate in this interview. Cisgender means you identify as the same gender as you were born while non-cisgender is the opposite (like ...

Information sheet for an interview, part 2 of 2

...transgender or non-binary).

This interview takes about 60-90 minutes to complete.

Potential Risks and Discomforts

This study focuses on gender in general and your own gender, which can be personal and perhaps triggering. So please be aware of that. By giving consent below, you acknowledge that your participation is voluntary, that you are at least 18 years old and that you are aware that you can stop participating in this study at any moment in this study for any reason.

Privacy

For the purpose of this study, the personal data that is collected is your gender, age bracket and the answers you give in during this interview. For this, the interview will be recorded and live transcribed through Zoom. The recording is only used to verify and check the live transcription for any mistakes. This data will be anonymised by referring to the participant by a number. This data will be analysed and discussed in the paper of this research.

Retaining and Sharing data

No potentially identifying data captured, including photos, video and audio, will be published or presented unless permission has been explicitly given by the participant in the consent form. After the data collection has finished the data will be pseudonymised and if published it is completely anonymised. After the research has been completed the research material will be transferred to the Media Technology archive. This data might be shared with other researchers for follow-up work or publication of a paper, but it will always be anonymised.

Sharing the Results

The findings of this research will be communicated to peers via the paper and a presentation.

Who to Contact

For any questions or comments regarding this study, you can contact the researchers at the following email addresses:

Sjoerd van Midden: s2005360@leidenuniv.nl

Maarten Lamers: m.h.lamers@liacs.leidenuniv.nl

Informed consent form for the interviews

Informed Consent Form

For participating in Media Technology MSc graduation research project
conducted by Sjoerd van Midden, supervised by Maarten Lamers at Leiden
University.

I confirm that I have been clearly informed about the nature and method of
the research, as described in the information sheet. My questions have been
answered satisfactorily.

I agree to participate in this research freely. I know that I can stop my participation at
any time. If my research results are to be used in scientific publications, or made
public in any other way, this will be done completely anonymously, **unless I give my
consent to exceptions below by marking the checkboxes.**

Audio/Video/Photo

- ☐ I hereby consent to having audio and/or video and/or photo recordings
made during the research, and to have my answers transcribed.
- ☐ I hereby consent to the video/photo/audio material to be used in public
presentations and publications, and in future experiments with other
participants.

Quotes

- ☐ I hereby consent to having my answers quoted in research publications.
When quotes are used, my (real) name and other direct identifiers will not
be mentioned.

If I would like any further information about the study, now or in the future, I can
contact Sjoerd van Midden through emailing s2005360@leidenuniv.nl and
supervisor Maarten Lamers through emailing m.h.lamers@liacs.leidenuniv.nl.

If I have any complaints about this research, I can contact the supervisor of this
research (Maarten Lamers , m.h.lamers@liacs.leidenuniv.nl) or the secretary of
the Ethics Committee for Mathematics and Natural Sciences of Leiden University
(ethicscommittee@science.leidenuniv.nl).

Name, Surname:

Location and date:

Signature

De-briefing form for an interview

De-briefing

Thank you for your participation in this research where we aim to open up the discussion about how non-cisgender people want to be represented in video games, with the help of *Pokemon Scarlet and Violet*.

Right to withdraw data

You may choose to withdraw the data you provided during the research. If that is the case, please contact me, Sjoerd van Midden at s2005360@leidenuniv.nl, not later than 1 month after participating in this research.

If you have questions

The main researcher conducting this study is Sjoerd van Midden. This research is supervised by Maarten Lamers at Leiden Institute for Advanced Computer Science (LIACS), Leiden University. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Sjoerd van Midden at s2005360@leidenuniv.nl.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the supervisor Maarten Lamers at m.h.lamers@liacs.leidenuniv.nl or secretary of the Ethics Committee for Mathematics and Natural Sciences of Leiden University (ethicscommittee@science.leidenuniv.nl).

If you would like to receive a copy of the final report of this study or a summary of the findings when it is completed, please feel free to contact the student.

Your signature below indicates that you have been debriefed, and have had all of your questions answered.

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Questionnaire About Non-Cisgender Representation, part 1 of 6

Introduction

Welcome to our study,

This research and thesis are carried out by master student Sjoerd van Midden and supervised by Maarten Lamers who lectures at Media Technology, Leiden University. Any data collected in this experiment is only used within this thesis by Sjoerd van Midden. The procedures have been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Sciences ethics board. This approval can be viewed here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fK-tfEMJ1-Ft7nQlpBYzOgOt7gqdktlc/view?usp=sharing>

Purpose of the research

We aim to open up the discussion about how non-cisgender people want to be represented in video games, with the help of *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet*.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation is completely voluntary, which means you have the right to withdraw and stop at any moment without having to give any reason.

Right to Withdraw

You have the right to withdraw your consent to use the personal data within one month after providing it. You do not have to justify your decision to withdraw your consent and there are no consequences for withdrawing your consent.

Procedures

For this study, we want to ask you to answer some questions about this topic in two parts. The first part of this research will be about your gender and how much *Pokémon Scarlet and or Violet* you have played/seen. The second part will be about the discussion of what you think of the current representation of non-cisgender people by asking multiple questions.

For this study, we ask that only people who are 18 years or older and who identify as non-cisgender fill in this questionnaire. Cisgender means you identify as the same gender as you were born while non-cisgender is the opposite (like transgender or non-binary).

This questionnaire takes about 15-30 minutes to complete.

Questionnaire About Non-Cisgender Representation, part 2 of 6

Potential Risks and Discomforts

This study focuses on gender in general and your own gender, which can be personal and perhaps triggering. So please be aware of that. By giving consent below, you acknowledge that your participation is voluntary, that you are at least 18 years old and that you are aware that you can stop participating in this study at any moment in this study for any reason.

Privacy

For the purpose of this study, the only personal data that is collected is your gender, age bracket and the answers you give to the questions in this questionnaire. This data will be analysed and discussed in the paper of this research. This data will be anonymised by referring to the participant by a number.

Retaining and Sharing data

No answer will be directly quoted, presented or published unless permission has been explicitly given by the participant through opting-in below. After the data collection has finished the data will be pseudonymised and if published it is completely anonymised. After the research has been completed the research material will be transferred to the Media Technology archive. This data might be shared with other researchers for follow-up work or publication of a paper, but it will always be anonymised.

Sharing the Results

The findings of this research will be communicated to peers via the paper and a presentation.

Who to Contact

For any questions or comments regarding this study, you can contact the researchers at the following email addresses: Sjoerd van Midden: s2005360@leidenuniv.nl

Maarten Lamers: m.h.lamers@liacs.leidenuniv.nl

Consent

- ☐ I am at least 18 years old, identify as non-cisgender and consent. I will begin the study.
- ☐ I do not consent and I do not wish to participate.

Questionnaire About Non-Cisgender Representation, part 3 of 6

Quotes (Check to opt-in)

- ☐ I hereby consent to having my answers quoted in research publications. When quotes are used, any direct identifier will not be mentioned.
- ☐ I hereby **do not** consent to having my answers quoted in research publications.

Heads up 1

The following section of two questions will be about your gender and how much you have played *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet*.

Gender and experience

What age bracket are you in? (select from the dropdown menu below) What gender do you identify as?

18 years old - 22 years old

23 years old - 27 years old

28 years old - 32 years old

33 years old - 37 years old

38 years old - 42 years old

43 years old - 47 years old

48 years old - 52 years old

53 years old - 57 years old

58 years old - 62 years old

62 years or older

Questionnaire About Non-Cisgender Representation, part 4 of 6

How much of *Pokémon Scarlet and or Violet* have you played?
Choose the answer that fits you the most.

- ☐ I have played *Pokémon Scarlet and/or Violet* up until the end of the main story (until the credits).
- ☐ I have played *Pokémon Scarlet and/or Violet* and have not completed the main story (until the credits).
- ☐ I have not played *Pokémon Scarlet and/or Violet* myself, but I have watched a gameplay video or playthrough of it.
- ☐ I both have not played *Pokémon Scarlet and or Violet* nor have I watched a gameplay video or playthrough of it.

Heads up 2

The next and final section will be about non-cisgender representation in video games and your thoughts on this. Some questions will be open-ended and you can write as much as you want. There are only 8 questions in this section. If you haven't played *Pokémon Scarlet and Violet*, questions 2 and 3 will be skipped.

Q1

(1/8) How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'I feel well represented in the current state of video games.'

- ☐ Totally agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Totally disagree

Questionnaire About Non-Cisgender Representation, part 5 of 6

Q4

(4/8) Do you know of any examples of characters that appropriately represent you from different games you have played. If yes, which character and what makes them good? (If you don't know a character's name you can describe them)

Q5

(5/8) Do you know of any examples of characters that inappropriately represent you from different games you have played. If yes, which character and what makes them bad? (If you don't know a character's name you can describe them)

Q6-8

(6/8) How much focus needs to be on the fact that characters are non-cisgender and what is according to you the best way to talk about this in a story?

(7/8) With this focus in mind, what roles do you want the non-cisgender characters to fulfil from a story perspective? For example a main character or a side character.

Questionnaire About Non-Cisgender Representation, part 6 of 6

(8/8) So, what would you have in mind as a character that appropriately represents your gender in a video game? You can be as descriptive as you want.

Q2-3

(2/8) How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: '*Pokemon Scarlet and Violet* has characters that appropriately represent my gender'

- ☐ Totally agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Totally disagree

(3/8) Why do you agree or disagree? Could you name a character from *Pokemon Scarlet and Violet* that is either a good or bad example of representation? (If you don't know a character's name you can describe them)

Note. Questions 2 and 3 are mentioned last in this questionnaire because it has been made through Qualtrics and the logic used to make sure two questions are skipped if needed requires them to be at the bottom.

Transcription Participant A

Sjoerd van Midden

Alright, thank you for participating. I'm going to start with the very very first question and that is. What age bracket are you in? And I'm saying Bracket so I'm going to see if I can copy and paste which age bracket it is because it makes it a little bit easier to see for you of course. Let me see if I can pull up the chat again. Here we go. Alright, here you can see the age brackets, so you don't have to state your exact age.

Participant A

Gotcha. My age bracket is 38 to 42 years old.

Sjoerd van Midden

Alright, thank you very much. We are going to see if maybe people from different age brackets, maybe think a little bit differently or... Yeah it's always useful information you know. That's why we ask.

Participant A

Yeah absolutely.

Sjoerd van Midden

Second, even more important question. What's your gender?

Participant A

I identify as a transgender man.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay, well then. As a transgender man... I have to ask you just one last question before we get into the little bit more deeper questions and it has to relate to the amount of experience you had with Pokémon Scarlet and Pokémon Violet. Because this study, as you have probably seen in the information sheet, spoke a little bit of a case study and a general study and that's why I ask how much experience you have. So for example, if you have played it yourself up until the credits. Maybe you haven't played it at all. So yeah, how much have you played, how much do you know about Pokémon Scarlet and Violet?

Participant A

Oh Pokémon Scarlet and Violet? That is what you said?

Sjoerd van Midden

Yes.

Participant A

I have played the entire game, front to back. I've been doing all the special raids. I'm obsessed with this game. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Oh okay. yeah, same. *Laughs*

Participant A

It is my absolute all-time favourite Pokémon game. I couldn't tell what you said at first, so I apologise again it's the auditory processing issues, but as soon as it registered I was like. Oh, ooh this is my jam.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs

Participant A

This is like... and I played every Pokémon since the very first ones and I got Pokémon blue the year it came out in the US. I've been there for every single generation. Scarlet and Violet, hands down, the best. There's glitches and stuff, I don't care, the story is amazing.

Laughs

Sjoerd van Midden

I totally agree. At first, I thought, maybe it's going to be unplayable because of these glitches and everything, but okay the frame rate is a little bit jarring. But other than that, all the glitches are also just very very funny. *Laughs*

Participant A

Laughs They are yes.

Sjoerd van Midden

I was just baffled at what you could see online, especially in very early updates where for example you could have somebodies eyes just grow larger and larger. And they just became abominations.

Participant A

Laughs The extraction noodle people.

Sjoerd van Midden

At one hand I wanna say, man this game is garbage but on the other hand it's so funny. And the story and the characters make up for it so much.

Participant A

Oh there's... as my friends have been saying, there is no straight character in that game.

Laughs

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs Exactly, exactly. Like I also got some comments, or questions regarding like why did I choose Pokémon Scarlet and Violet for this. And that vibe is the reason why I chose this. There are so many characters that are non-stereotypical, you know? And with that and talking about stereotypical characters. How much do you agree or disagree with the following? I feel well-represented in the current state of video games. Like, do you totally agree with that or totally disagree with that? Maybe something in the middle? What do you think about that?

Participant A

I'm definitely leaning more towards disagree. Transgender representation in general is pretty lacking in video games. There are some notable exceptions to that, you know, like we have talked about The Sims. But for the most part, you know, like, we don't get to be main characters. I believe the only ones that I can think of, off the top of my head, are indie games. Celeste, the main character in Celeste I believe is transgender. That might be a spoiler by the way, I apologise.

Sjoerd van Midden

I have heard about that before, so no worries about that.

Participant A

I have not played Celeste, so I can't speak too authority on that. The main character of Undertale and Deltarune, they are two separate characters, but they are kind of linked but whatever. They are canonically non-binary. And other than that I can't think of a single transgender main character in a game, you know. We get like side characters where a character openly declares that they are trans and then a bunch of angry gamer bros come in and complain about how we are getting shoehorned into things and we're shoving the trans-agenda into people's faces. Or we are used as villains.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah, for example, I have been looking up this and I'm trying to see what kind of characters do we have. But like you said I myself haven't found a lot of characters that, especially trans people, really represent you guys. Especially also what you said, if we're actually in the game, then a bunch of people get angry at it. For example, I made a Reddit post the other day. And I made a post about gender representation in Pokémon Scarlet and Violet. Basically, it was very open and I was like. Hey, I see that there's a lot of different types of characters. What do you guys think? And some people, just because I said the word 'gender' they already started to get mad in the comments. And that is also something that I don't fully understand really. But this is coming of course from a cisgender male guy, so I have never really felt it so to say. I have no idea how it is to be transgender and I have no idea how it is to be poorly represented. You know, especially I am also white I'm straight. There are many characters that I can identify with, you know.

Participant A

Laughs Yeah absolutely.

Sjoerd van Midden

So yeah, this brings us back a little bit to Pokémon Scarlet and Violet. How much do you think these characters represent you specifically and your gender?

Participant A

Well, for starters, I really like that the main character is so highly customizable. You know, It's taken Pokémon such a long time to get there. It doesn't feel like you are being shoved in a box. You can make your character represent you in a lot of different ways. Granted I think there's still room to grow there, because I think they can do things with pronouns and instead, you know, of asking are you a boy or a girl. Which I can't remember exactly if they did that in the Scarlet and Violet intro. I played it right after it came out and that was half a year ago at this point. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Sheesh, yeah.

Participant A

I can't believe it's been that long. But still I feel like it does a really good job of letting people tailor a character to what they like. For example, there is a lot of different clothing options that you can choose from. And then like the characters, the NPC's, all felt like very real people with very real struggles. While there wasn't anyone who was like specifically queer-coded or trans-coded. I still got that sense of like, I would belong in this world, like I would belong among all these people. I would not be seen as someone who is, you know, weird or mentally ill for being trans. Or you know, characters like Rika. I mean, she's practically a non-binary icon. She looks very androgynous, she's got a very like, business-oriented demeanour. You know, she is not your, you know, she's a very... It's hard for me to put this into words. I apologize because I have difficulties sometimes with articulating my thoughts out loud.

Sjoerd van Midden

It's okay.

Participant A

A lot of the queer community latched onto Rika. I think, bi and pan and lesbian women especially. And transwomen as well. She just looks so fucking cool. *Laughs*
I'm trying to be really careful about my language too, because I have the tendency to use naughty words a lot. And I'm trying not to do that.

Sjoerd van Midden

It's okay. *Laughs*

You can say it however you want.

Participant A

I have been told by friends that I'm the sweetest man with the filthiest mouth so *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

I'll be very honest, I can curse like a sailor as well sometimes.

Participant A

Okay, good. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

So, it's fine.

You were telling a story about how especially Rika meant a lot to you. I have something to say about that while we're at it. What I think is very funny is that Rika won a competition of hottest imaginative crush. But the voters were all women and the top ten were all men, except for number one being Rika.

Participant A

Wow, that's, that's so cool. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

And that is one of the reasons why I chose Pokémon Scarlet and Violet, well because that just shows how, I'm just gonna say, how successful Rika is.

Participant A

Oh yeah, well absolutely. I mean, there is something to be said about a tall androgynous woman wearing a suit and tie. There is just, there is a look, there is a vibe with that that speaks to queer communities I've noticed in particular. I mean, pretty much all the women loving women who I've know, including myself pre-transition, it's just something that is seen as something being very attractive. And it's, I mean, as far as character representation goes in that game I would say it's not just Rika. I actually felt a very strong connection to Penny.

Sjoerd van Midden

Penny?

Participant A

Yes. So there's going to be spoilers with this obviously. So...

Sjoerd van Midden

That's okay.

Participant A

I don't think that matters.

Sjoerd van Midden

That's very sweet of you.

Participant A

I, well, I. People yell at me when I say anything about anything because ugh it's a spoiler. So, I'm very cautious nowadays about what I say. You know Penny is this quiet very, like, reserved girl who's just trying to, like. The first time that you meet her you rescue her from some bullies from team Star. But eventually, you find out that Penny is actually the one who created team Star. And she created it because she was getting bullied and she found these other people who were getting bullied and brought them together to then defend themselves against this awful thing that was happening. I was, I was very mercilessly bullied when I was in middle school and in elementary school, but it got worse in seventh grade up to a point where my parents sent me off to a private school. Because then I would have a fresh start, it was a smaller school and then if I had to stay in a public school, then I don't know if I would have even survived with how much I was getting bullied.

Sjoerd van Midden

Aah, okay.

Participant A

So, I felt a very deep connection to Penny because of that, like. You know she is, she was doing something she thought she needed to do to protect herself by finding these likeminded people and creating their own little team to keep themselves safe from the harassment and

abuse that they were suffering from the hands of other students. And I think that, well first of all, her hair is red and purple or red and blue, which is very close to trans flag colours. You know, she also, she also dresses unconventionally, you know, she has this like passion for Eevees. So, she wears this adorable Eevee backpack, you know, and but she very much strikes me as someone who is queer or trans-coded. You know, and that's why she was maybe bullied so much and you know, she has a short haircut too. Which is, you know, it doesn't necessarily mean anything, but you know, it can be kind of queer-coded in a way. But I felt a very very deep connection to her story and I cried at the end at the reveal where she opened up about the creation of team Star. I never thought Pokémon could make me emotional and here I am almost crying now, because I'm thinking about how they somehow managed to do a very sincere version of the real treasure were the friends we made along the way and made it work really well. And all of her friends, all of the team Star leaders, they strike me as these are all queer theatre kids. Like, they are very over the top, bombastic outfits, like, it felt like the kind of people I would have been friends with if I were a kid if I had known people like that.

Sjoerd van Midden

Wow, I'll be honest I while you were telling this I got a little bit, I'm just very touched. I say that, I don't know that Penny could invoke such emotions. Because for me, she was just a girl who got bullied and apparently was the bully herself and that's about it, you know. But seeing how you really got touched by this character, well yeah, that just makes me think. That just really makes me think because especially when it comes to gender representation in video games. Where, yeah, I try to answer the question of how do non-cisgender people want to be represented and things like this really slip my point of view. Right, it slips my mind because I would have never seen Penny like that, like maybe someone who is transgender and who got bullied because of that. That also really shows that there may be already be a lot more representation so to say then I even know. There's also-

Participant A

Sorry to interrupt, but that's the thing because we have so little overt representation within the medium of video games and television and theatre, you know, the arts in general, we have the tendency to make that representation for ourselves. To find it in the things that we love and you know the whole Link is a transman headcanon that I've told you about in our conversations before this. You know, there is really no, you know, I mean there is no evidence in the games of Link from the Legend of Zelda being trans, ut he is someone we can project our thoughts and feelings onto. He is a silent protagonist. We don't get a lot of insights on his personality so you know. It's something that we got used to doing, is finding ways that we can make these characters feel more like us when we're not getting characters who are like us.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah, so you would enjoy it greatly if, if for example, if Penny were to say, hey I'm trans or maybe just show something like a badge, so , just something in a way to show to finally get that acknowledgement if I hear that correctly.

Participant A

Yeah and it doesn't have to be her overtly saying it, you know, maybe it could come up as a flashback, or something like that, too her being a boy before. Or maybe she is actually

transmasculine and has gotten made fun of because she is wearing more masculine clothes but hasn't felt comfortable because of all the bullying that she endured because of her coming out as a boy or something like that you know. I mean that's something I've dealt with. When I was in sixth grade, my grandma took me out to get a haircut and got my hair cut really really short. And I looked like a boy because when you're eleven years old there's not much like a distinction between boy and girl except clothing and hairstyle really. And even then it doesn't like. We're pretty androgynous when we're little. Which is why I have such a problem with people like, who are like this is for boys and this is for girls and boys have to do this and girls have to do this. Like, why do we care, why can't we just let people decide for themselves? But I was trying very hard to fit into a mould of femininity cause that was what was expected of me. And I don't know if I had much awareness of the fact that I might be trans when I was younger, but I do, I know I have had thoughts about well, if I was a boy or it would be nice to be a boy, you know, that sort of thing. But I got picked on mercilessly for everything under the sun and of course having a short haircut when you look like a boy was among those things. And that was actually, not long after that my mom let me get my ears pierced, as you can see, because that gave me a more feminine appearance and then maybe people would lay off me. They didn't. Nobody ever laid off me, but you know, it's one of those things where, it, there's all sorts of interpretations that you could make about this situation where this character was in. We don't have all the details on why Penny was being bullied. We don't have, we're lacking a lot of information and so those of us who are hunger for that representation will say, well, here is some theories. And a lot of times those theories will reflect the experiences of the person who is creating them. and that's why it bothers me too, when people get really angry about these sorts of theories being put out there, because, one, they are just theories. They are game theories. Two, nobody has to expect to accept anyone else's headcanon. It's a headcanon, it's something fan-made. It's something that an individual who is unassociated with that property has created for themselves and are putting out into the world as a way to connect with other people. It doesn't change, you know, anything about the original property. So there's no reason to be upset over that. It's very very pointless.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah, yeah.

Participant A

There's better things to be upset about if you would ask me.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah exactly, like. You're in a room talking to somebody from like the other side of the world and you're just trying to, I don't know, invoke your power on them. You're just trying to belittle someone for, for what?

Participant A

Yes, exactly, it's ridiculous.

Sjoerd van Midden

You're not getting anything out of it. It's just for hurting people. It's ridiculous, yeah. Before we go any further by the way, I see that you're going through some pretty personal stuff. Just so you know, if you feel like you need a little bit of a break or something, you

know. Just say so. Also know, you don't have to tell personal stories if you don't want to. I'm just saying that also for your own good, right?

Participant A

I understand and I appreciate that and I don't want this to come off as I'm using this as therapy because that is not the case. I promise you, I have a therapist. No, for me personally, it's important to share these experiences because the representation does matter. And being able to normalize the things that I have gone through and to show that like, you know, I as a trans person am just like anyone else. I'm a normal person. Being trans doesn't make me bad, it doesn't make me weird, it doesn't make me, well I'm weird for all sorts of reasons, but being trans is not one of them. You know, I want to show that I am human. And also, you know, these experiences that I've had have affected me, have shaped who I am, have turned me into the person that I am this many years later. And I wanna help other people see that and help find those connections when possible. If I am going to deep into things, you're welcome to reel me back in because I just have a tendency to be too honest. I have been told that by my bosses, like, it has held me back from being promoted before because I'm too honest.

Sjoerd van Midden

Oh gosh. *Laughs*

Participant A

So yeah, autism, yay.

Sjoerd van Midden

I'm, well, basically why I'm saying this is for safety reasons.

Participant A

And I appreciate that.

Sjoerd van Midden

Because this is going in a research paper and people will be able to read this text. Even though it's anonymous, right.

Participant A

And I am one hundred percent okay with that. If there's anything that I'm uncomfortable with having in that paper, I won't say it. But I'm perfectly fine with all of this information being shared. I have enjoyed the conversations I've had with you so far, I trust you. You seem like a really good dude with a really good heart and I'm happy to lend my assistance to your work.

Sjoerd van Midden

I'm actually also really happy that you're telling these stories because, you know, I have these questions on my other screen, you know, and we have sort of been going through them. And a couple of these questions are, why do you think this. Right, it's really basically why do you think this and simply your Penny story and why Penny is so important to you. There is no other way to answer that without that personal story of yours.

Participant A

Yeah Exactly, because otherwise she just seems like the bullied who turns into the bully, so why should we care. So, you know, there's reasons, you know, I could absolutely see myself, if I had been in Penny's situation and if I had the support for it, I would absolutely done the same kind of thing that Penny would have done, you know. And it's not about the bullied becoming the bully, it's about someone who's trying to do whatever it takes to protect herself in a hostile environment. And I think that escapes a lot of people.

Another example that I can think of, off the top of my head, is Bioshock Infinite. Have you played that one?

Sjoerd van Midden

I haven't played it, but I have seen a little bit of it, so...

Participant A

There is a group in Bioshock Infinite of oppressed people called the Vox Populi and they end up, towards the end of the game, becoming the oppressors and that really bothered me. And that's because like, it's a similar scenario, but in Pokémon Scarlet and Violet, because you know. The situation with team Star got out of control because Penny didn't really realize the scope of what she had done. And she didn't really, she wasn't really given a chance to fix it, because she got shipped off to Galar. The whole reason that they kinda got out of control, is because Penny was being punished with being send abroad. So she couldn't do anything about it. And so her arc is about to right this situation like, we did what we needed to do, to stop being bullied and now there's no need for it anymore because we won. And we need to, we need to be good sports about it essentially. That's kind of a minimalist way to put it. But, you know, we won, there is no need for us to continue with what we're doing because at this point we're just, you know, we're becoming the thing that we're trying to stop and so I'm going to put a stop to it. Which is, you know, she has varying degrees of good responsibility. You know, because, on the one hand she is trying to put a stop to this out of control thing that she created. But you know, on the other hand she is hacking the system that awards league points. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah, *Laughs*

Participant A

So, you know, there is dubious morality a little bit but, you know, for kids. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Right, it's for kids, you know. *Laughs*

Participant A

But I think there's a really good message there you know. And she is still doing it, because she cares about her friends, she cares about the people who created team star with her and she wants them to succeed. And if they are not going to their classes and just like, taking over small portions of Paldea to you know, block off other people. That's not helping anyone, what are you doing, why are you doing this? I need to fix this so that you're actually like, doing the thing that we got together for which is helping each other.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah, wow, I... I need to replay this game again. *Laughs* With this new view in mind basically.

Participant A

I have actually been wanting to replay this, because I just love this story so much. And I mean, like, I love this stuff with Arven. I mean a heartwrenching story about a sick dog that gets better like. And I love Nemona, but I feel like Penny is like, really underrated as far as Pokémon Scarlet and Violet fans go. I have seen a lot of people who were just like meh to ugh about her. You know there doesn't seem to be a large contingency of Penny fans. And I personally would like to see that change, because I think she is great. And also, the Eeveelutions are fricking adorable. So, how can you not love her with her big fluffy Eevee backpack? It's so cute.

Sjoerd van Midden

And she has one of the best theme songs, so I mean...

Participant A

Oh yes, god, I wanted that battle with her to last forever, because I just sat there vibing to the music. *Laughs*
The music throughout all that game is just so good.

Sjoerd van Midden

It's so good.

Participant A

Toby Fox helped with some of it, so that at least explains part of it.

Sjoerd van Midden

I've also listened to so many remixes of Penny's song.

Participant A

Aah yes.

Sjoerd van Midden

If I may ask by the way, because we are almost nearing the end of the questions. From other games, other than Pokémon Scarlet and Violet, what characters would you say are, oh that's a good example, or maybe even a bad example of a character that appropriately represents me.

Participant A

There isn't a whole lot. There's already a small amount of transgender representation in video games and there's an even smaller amount of transmasculine representation. I believe there's some NPC in the Dragon Age franchise who is transmasc. But I've played only the first thirty minutes of the original Dragon Age and went, I don't think this game is for me. Apparently my problem was rolling an elf, but I have not gone back to it. Yeah the way the elf's storyline starts is apparently like, it's not great... yeah... You know, we did discuss this before, in the discussion we had pre-interview. And I've been trying since then to think of

someone who is like clear representation that I feel is good. And that's very difficult for me, because I feel like a lot of the queer representation has been in games that I don't play.

Sjoerd van Midden

That's okay, that's okay.

Participant A

But like, I feel that Nintendo does a really good job of making characters that are relatable to just about anyone, for whatever reason. And I really do subscribe to the Link is transmasculine headcanon.

Sjoerd van Midden

Could you explain that a little bit more again?

Participant A

Yeah so, Link from The Legend of Zelda is not your typical white male protagonist in a video game. He, you know, when you think of white male protagonists in video games the things that come to mind are like, what's the, like Duke Nukem, Kratos from God of War. You know, these, like, any protagonist from the shooter games.

Sjoerd van Midden

Like very stereotypically masculine, beefy bodies?

Participant A

Yeah, hypermasculine and tough guys, they are just complete badasses all the way. The type if they were women, they would be called Mary Sues

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay okay.

Participant A

But then there is Link, who is, well, Link the twink. He is a twink, he is a stout little, baby-faced beautiful man, you play him as a child in a lot of the games, who has a very androgynous look about him. In every iteration of Link, aside from the cartoon and the CDI games, which I don't count any of these but I'm still going to mention them because they exist and are technically canon in some way I think, I'm not sure.

Sjoerd van Midden

I'm also not sure. If you look at the official timeline, I don't think they are mentioned.

Participant A

Yeah I don't think they would be called official canon, but they do sure exist.

Sjoerd van Midden

They do exist and I'm happy they exist. *Laughs*

Participant A

They are a thing that someone made and gave their thumbs-up to, and I'm just like, jep.

But every other official canon of Link, he is very androgynous. He looks very pretty. He is not hypermasculine. But at the same time he is a brilliant swordsman. Unless you are me in which case he is a bumbling idiot who runs around, flies by the seat of his pants and only succeeds by doing some crazy bullshit that shouldn't actually work. Like, ending up in a bokoblin camp in a thunder storm where there's a giant spiky ball is hanging around and you just hope the lightning hits that ball while you're not near it. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

You just pray to the lightning gods. *Laughs*

Participant A

Yeah, please, I'm gonna try to move this to a good location and hope all the bokoblins go near it right at the correct time. He's not the stereotypical male protagonist. And I think a lot of queer and trans people have latched on to that. I certainly have. I make jokes about there being a Legend of Zelda to transmasculine pipeline. You know, because I mean, I grew up playing Legend of Zelda games. Majora's Mask was one of my favourite games when I was a kid. I've always loved this, this silent little, androgynous swords person in an age where every video games protagonist is male. I'm a child of the nineties, I don't remember, you know what, the first game that I played with a female protagonist. Donkey Kong Country Two. Dixie Kong.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs yeah, Dixie Kong, I did not expect that.

Participant A

She is not getting nearly as much love as she deserves. She is one of the earliest female video game protagonists that I can think of. And she was great, you know, there was very little story in Donkey Kong, so it was kinda hard to mess that up, but I think they did a great job with her. But you know, I grew up, I didn't transition till about a decade ago, so I grew up being seen as a girl and being called a girl. Every game that I played only had male characters. You know, I have thought of another example is Super Mario Bros USA which has Peach as a playable character. But regardless, that's two examples of all the video games that I can think of when I was a kid.

Sjoerd van Midden

That's not a lot no.

Participant A

So in a world that had mainly male protagonist and where everyone who I knew who played video games was a boy and said that video games were for boys. A character like Link who is extensively a cisgender boy/man, but who does not invoke the same feelings that other cisgender male protagonists gave off is very refreshing. It's very, you know, with him being a silent protagonist, it is very easy to project your own feelings on to him and that is I think a very good thing. Having characters like that that you can mould to your own desires is great. But I do believe that having a character who is fully shaped already and who has these qualities that is representative of other people's gender identities and sexual orientations show to the people who may not understand us or who may not even want us around that we are real people. You know it help to normalize our place in society.

As far as bad representation goes, oh boy.

Sjoerd van Midden

Do you have some bad examples?

Participant A

Yeah, so I was on a podcast for a few years called the RPG bookclub, which is I think how I found you because the RPG bookclub's Twitter follows you and I noticed that recently.

Sjoerd van Midden

Oh okay.

Participant A

So, the first game that we played for that is Persona 3. And in Persona 3, I don't know if you've ever played it?

Sjoerd van Midden

I have not played it.

Participant A

So it basically like, the chapters are months in a year. You're going to a school and part of this school turns into, like, heelscape called Tartarus, a tower called Tartarus that you have to go through at night. But, in the July chapter of Persona 3, the main character and like another one, all of the characters go out to the beach and the main character and another character named Junpei. Well, Junpei kinda ropes the main character into this, but they go on what Jupei calls 'operation babe hunt'.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay.

Participant A

'Operation babe hunt', as you may deduce consists of trying to pick up women on the beach. It's kinda not cool to start and then they meet a transwoman and it gets worse.

Sjoerd van Midden

Oh, okay, what happened?

Participant A

I don't fully remember all the details of how it went down. I did have an epic rant about it, like I considered that one of my magnum opuses on the podcast where I ranted for like thirty minutes about 'operation babe hunt'. But anyway, they meet this woman, I don't remember how it comes up that she is trans, but Junpei at least freaks out about it. And this woman is also like, highly sexualized and she is interacting with high schoolers. It's not good representation at all. You know, trans characters often get highly sexualized as though, you know, to enforce the believe that being transgender is just a fetisch.

Sjoerd van Midden

Oh, I haven't heard of that yet.

Participant A

You know, I've been limiting my time on Twitter because of all the people who love to come on there and spout out bullshit about that we transpeople are pushing our fetisch onto other people, onto children and that makes us groomers.

Sjoerd van Midden

Oh okay.

Participant A

And stuff like, hypersexualizing transpeople is a way to reinforce that believe. That isn't to say that we completely dial that back and make transpeople like puritans or something in media. But there's gotta be some sort of, there's some sort of nuance to this guys. There's some happy medium in there where a transperson can have a sexual identity without just being a sexual object. You know, there's roots of misogyny in there because women are seen by men in media a lot of times as just objects of desire, objects of you know sexual satisfaction. And transwomen are put through that too. It's really really, it's unfortunate, it's upsetting, it's disgusting because this is not something that we are doing for sexual gratification.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah, I've never heard of that yet. I've heard for example, I've told you about that Reddit post I made about gender representation in Pokémon Scarlet and Violet and people were talking about, just because I mentioned gender as a word, people were saying things like oh groomer or you're just grooming. And I didn't fully understand that until just right now. I didn't know people saw, see trans as a fetisch and I just, yeah, wow.

Participant A

And yeah, I mean it's not that we are pushing an ideology onto kids that you know. We remember being kids ourselves and how painful it was not to have the support that we needed to be who we truly are. And all we want is to be able to support the kids of today with being themselves. You know, we get accused of pushing an ideology, but it's like we are constantly pressured to be cisgender, to be heterosexual. It's all around us, all the time and when you are cishet, which is not a slur, it's just a descriptor, I you know, that's a whole other can of worms. When you are cishet, this is not stuff that you need to think about because the world caters to you. You know. Disney movies are all about being cishet. Mulan is my favourite Disney movie, my all-time favourite because like. And I couldn't even quantify it as a kid because I didn't fully understand or recognize those feelings of I think I might be trans till I was in like. Probably my sophomore or junior year of high school. Mulan came out when I was thirteen. But I remember just latching on to her because I thought she was just so strong and brave and I was enamoured by this Disney character who's, you know, desire is not to find her prince charming. It's to do whatever it takes to save her family. But everything else that I've encountered in my life was cishnormative, it was heteronormative, you know. I loved Power Rangers when I was growing up and the pink ranger was a girl.

Sjoerd van Midden

Jup.

Participant A

And granted, they also made the yellow ranger a girl, but in the original Japanese version only the pink ranger was a girl. You know, and it's like, when I was a little kid I decided that pink was my favourite colour for a little while and then I fully outright rejected pink for a long time when I was a kid because I did not want to be seen as a stereotypical girl. I did not want anything to do with any stereotypical girly shit. You know, this is, it permeates our society this belief that, you know, that when you are born this is who you are and you have to, you know, you have a penis you are a boy, you have a vagina you are a girl and there's nothing you can do to change that. You know when you have a penis then you get together with someone who has a vagina and you make babies and that's it. Like, it's very close-minded and it's isolating. It's very isolating for someone who grows up and realizes I don't fit within this. I, you know, I feel more like I am a man than you know, what I was told when I was born, which was a girl. It feels like my whole life, it feels like people my whole life spend misgendering me and intentionally calling me by the wrong name. You know, it's like someone started insisting you were a woman. That would, and it's not something that cis het people tend to think about, because they don't have to. And I don't fault them for that, for the record. I don't, I don't think that they are wrong because it's not a problem of the individual. It's a problem of the system. It's the collective society and the, you know, the things that are pushed via things like the media, like video games. I got way off on a tangent.

Sjoerd van Midden

That's okay, that's fine. Yeah yeah, I think maybe it is a good time to a little bit towards the last question and then there is still some time left for making a character in The Sims. But before we do that I do wanna say a little bit more about what you just said with. Yeah you said that like, when someone says oh you are a girl. And yeah, I have had that a couple of times because I have long hair so people said that. But of course that is still not the same because I just turn around and people are like oh sorry and that is it.

Participant A

Laughs

Sjoerd van Midden

I can really imagine for you that, that would just be bullying, right? They would just go on basically. So yeah, thinking like what you are saying is very difficult for me to fully understand you. And yeah... that's the sentence. That's it, it is very difficult for me to fully understand you.

Participant A

I appreciate, but I appreciate greatly that you are doing this work because I think I think it is important for people to understand by reaching out to people who have these experiences and amplifying their voices, through research that you are doing. And I really, I do commend you for that. I think that you've been very very kind and easy to talk to throughout all of this. And I really appreciate your openness to learning and to listening and acknowledging that you have these gaps in your knowledge but wanting to fill them. That says a lot about you in a day and age where I'm just gonna get called a groomer by some random guy on the internet.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah, exactly, like, also a little bit why I am doing this is because I'm learning it, but also because for example my family also sometimes just struggles with it. They are not like transphobes for example, but they can make a little bit snarky comments about long hair and more importantly, they also don't fully understand all the LGBTQ terms and what makes you a transgender for example. Stuff like that, yeah, so they don't fully understand as well. So this is also a little bit for so that I in turn can tell them the things that you have told me and tell them, hey this is how it works. And I think that is really really important also a big part of the people who read this research eventually, right, this information also needs to go inside a video game basically. So like, hey this is what people are thinking and what's important and what you need to look out for. And if you're a cisnet developer, you know, keep these things in mind. So, yeah.

Participant A

Yeah, and I think that's awesome and means a lot to me personally.

Sjoerd van Midden

Well, well then I'm really happy to do this.

And with that, with this whole focus in mind about which characters were good and bad. The final question for now is, from a story perspective, how would you like this subject to be tackled? For example, if you had a character, would you make it a main character, would you make it more of a side character? Would you have somebody express it loud and clear, like hey I'm trans or would you have it more have it more small and have it be more of a subtle thing? A big question, but.

Participant A

Yeah it is. And it's really difficult to quantify, because it really depends on, I mean, it depends on a lot of factors. It depends on the game's setting, it depends on the story that you are trying to tell, the kind of thing that you are trying to convey. For me personally, if I was going to make a game with a transmasculine protagonist, we just go with that because that's the easiest for me to quantify and wrap my head around, I would want to give some subtle hints at first. Like, maybe he has a couple things in his wardrobe that has binders in it. Maybe he has like, maybe he's got some glimpse of something like a trans flag on his wall. You know, maybe there is a picture, you know, from when he was a little kid in his room where he looks much more feminine. Something that is not super overt but then also let's the audience know that this character is probably transgender based on what you are seeing there. You know, other aspects of it, I think that portraying things like transphobia in games is very touchy and should probably be avoided by most studios. Because I don't think they will be able to handle it in a respectful or sympathetic manner. You know, I think it could come off as really hand fisted, you know, come off as they haven't really done their research on that. You know, I would want to avoid things that come off as transphobic. You know, maybe like a character mentions something like, like oh you must have known me before my transition or something like that. You know, keeping it not, you know, I don't wanna have a character that goes on the rooftops and screams I'm trans, because that's not really realistic. You know, it's and I will be the first guy to complain about people wanting realism in their fantasy games. But at the same time there is something to be said for handling a character in a more realistic manner in a fantasy setting where, you know, if this character has traits that are very reminiscent of or invoke real-world analogies, or analogist to things in the real world. So, you

now, if you've got a trans character in a fantasy setting, you know, maybe it's a world without transphobia how are we going to convey that this character is transgender while there are positive ways to convey this, like binders for transmascs. That's a very clear way, like, this person has, they have breasts but they want to keep them bound, you know, this person is probably transmaculine. Thing that appear to be coding, but but are really more overt signs but without declaring that tis character is trans, without bringing up the negative aspects. Maybe, you know, if it's a slice-of-life kind of thing they can go to the doctors to get hormones. Little things that can push that narrative through without it being too direct in a way that would be, in a way that invoke the ire of those that won't agree.

Sjoerd van Midden

You don't want people to say, like, you're stuffing it down my throat?

Participant A

Yeah exactly, which is very challenging, because people will say that about a lot of things.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah, you could just have, like you said, a trans flag in a room for a split second in a cutscene and there would already be people like that.

Participant A

Yeah, there would already be a bunch of gamer bros who are grabbing their pitchforks and torches and are starting an angry mob. It's it's really difficult. It's a difficult world we live in. You know there was a time when, you know, when we weren't exactly like, people didn't really care about us, but at the same time it was a good thing that people didn't really care about us because then they weren't trying to actively get rid of us. Things have gotten very bad over the last few years here in the United States. And especially so in the last year alone there's been a lot of anti-legislation put out in various states. I'll let you know I'm in the process of getting the hell out of Texas because they want to put an end on gender-affirming care. They want to , you know, they just put a ban on drag that is very broad and can be used to like, basically states that any sort of like enhancement of secondary sex-characteristics or something like that in public can be against the law. It's criminalised, which means, you know, that any transwoman who wants to perhaps have breasts in any way, she can get in trouble for having breasts in public because she is trans. It's a very very scary situation right now. And this is another reason why I wanted to participate in this because, you know, we need some way to show the world that we are just people. This has not anything to do with a fetisch, it's not anything to do with wanting to push an agenda on anyone. We just want to be allowed to live our lives. And there's a lot of people out there who are trying to prevent that.

Sjoerd van Midden

Well said. Very well said, I'll say that. Okay, so... *Laughs*

Participant A

Laughs Sorry, sorry it got heavy there. It's a lot.

Sjoerd van Midden

That's totally okay, because you know, it is heavy and that is not your fault that it is this heavy of a subject, right? That's the state's fault for doing all of this, I'll just say, bullshit and inhumane things. That's wow.

Participant A

It's a difficult world we have been thrust into.

Sjoerd van Midden

And then, if I understand you correctly, then what you would want from a video game then, in this case, basically just make it so that it feels normal?

Participant A

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Yes, normalizing it will help people to recognize that it is normal and that, that's so difficult to do in a way that is difficult to do in a way that doesn't just rile people up for one reason or another. And it's, I mean, it's difficult to do in a respectful way if you don't talk to people who have had these experiences.

Sjoerd van Midden

Exactly. So, even if someone were to read through all of this, the advice would still be also go do your own research. Also, go talk to people and ,yeah, just basically also just do your best to really understand the situation and what you're getting yourself into. Especially if you are cis het yourself, since it's very difficult and it can be a lot to learn about, but yeah. I am at least happy that indie games, and also some big games, are also trying to push that agenda as well a little bit more. As you said, some could do it a little bit more subtle, some do it really on the nose and some do it really bad, but in general from what I have seen and what I have heard it is going at least a little bit in the right direction.

Participant A

Yes, and I will say too, like, personally speaking I think that an attempt, an honest attempt to do good representation is better than not trying at all. You know, even if the representation comes off as a little bit hand-fisted, a little bit shoe-horned in, you know, sometimes something is still better than nothing. You know, obviously negative portrayals do not help us and should be avoided at all costs because that normalises the transphobia more than it normalizes being trans. But, at least trying, and , I mean, going back to Pokémon there actually is at least one canonical trans Pokémon character. It is a one-off NPC from one of the games.

Sjoerd van Midden

Ooh, I know, I know.

Participant A

Yeah, you know what I'm talking about. She is, I think she is a beauty, but she says I used to be a black belt. And if you know Pokémon NPCs you know that black belts are always male characters, are always male NPC's while beauties are always female. So, she is a former black belt who officially transitioned, which is super fucking cool to me. *Laughs* I love it. And I believe too, like I have seen screenshots of it, I don't know if they were doctored, I never really looked too deep into it, but there was a Pikachu in the Pokémon anime who taped a heart shape to the end of her tail. If you know how Pokémon genders

work, female Pikachus have a little heart shape at the end of their tail, while males have a little jagged tail. So this was a transgender Pikachu, which was super cute.

Sjoerd van Midden

Aaw, that's adorable. I think I have seen a picture of that Pikachu now that you mention it.

Participant A

Yeah, it's super cute. And you know, like, stuff like that, it's very small, it's very minor but it makes us feel seen.

Sjoerd van Midden

And that's already a very very big step. If people at least would just try their best to do their representation even if it isn't. Even if you are not doing it perfectly, just doing an attempt is very very much appreciated.

Participant A

Yeah, absolutely.

Sjoerd van Midden

Alright, on that note I think we're going to do something lighter, a little bit more lighthearted.

Participant A

Excellent.

Sjoerd van Midden

We are just going to go on The Sims, The Sims 4. You already have a little bit of experience with it, right?

Participant A

Yes, yeah. I have it on my Steam and I have spent hours in the character creator and far less time actually playing the game. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs Yeah, that, originally my idea, because we have talked a little bit more than I had planned, but yeah, I know how long it can take to make characters. So, when you're going to create a character you are also allowed to just click the random button a couple of times just to get a starting point. And basically what we are focussing on is, you know, their gender identity, but also their gender expression and we could make a little bit of a story for this character.

Participant A

Yeah

Sjoerd van Midden

Because there is also a backstory thing. Basically what we are doing is, imagine that you have a video game and we are going to make a transmale character. And that's what we are going to do, just have a little bit of fun with it. And I think what the best thing to do, the

reason why I took Zoom or why I chose Zoom was because we can actually do a remote control.

Participant A

Aaah, yes yes yes.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yes, and the reason why I wanna do remote control is well, because this way you don't even need to have Sims 4, you don't have to download it which is twenty gigabytes or something.
Laughs

Participant A

Laughs

Sjoerd van Midden

And also can actually record it from my PC and talk about it in the research as well about what we came up with and what we thought was special as well. Or what was not special about it, yeah whatever.

Participant A

Okay, cool.

Sjoerd van Midden

So, we're going to test if, I think I should be able to do a screenshare and then I'll be able to do. I have tried this before to see if it works and it is Zoom *Laughs*
One time it only worked if I shared the entire screen and one time only worked when I shared the game, but there wasn't any audio. And it's just...

Participant A

A bit of a crapshoot, yeah. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah. *Laughs*
So we are going to, I'm going to try it and as long as you're in control, with or without music and it will be fine. So, I'm just going to share.
Let me see if I can.

Participant A

So I have the option to request control.

Sjoerd van Midden

Aha, and I'm going to set it to automatically accept all of the requests. So, right now.

Participant A

Yes, I got it.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yes, so you can actually see it moving and you can click the buttons? For example, you do see like the, yeah, you do. You can see it.

Participant A

No, I don't want to start with a personality assessment.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah, screw you and your personality assessment.

Participant A

Yeah. *Laughs*

Yeah, I know who I am damn it.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs What else I really really like about The Sims 4, cause, I wanted to do this, but I didn't even know what character creator I wanted to use. Because I didn't know about The Sims 4 before this and doing a little bit of research. And I thought it was amazing that you pick your own pronouns, you can pick your own, not just gender, but also you're pregnant and if you're unable to get pregnant separate from anything else.

Participant A

Yeah, yeah.

Sjoerd van Midden

But also things like being able to go for a masculine build, but also for a chubby build for example. You can go, you can go ham with this creator.

Participant A

Yeah absolutely.

Sjoerd van Midden

So, let's talk a little bit about the process, because you are, why are immediately going for a beard for example?

Participant A

Because I saw it and thought, man my beard will never be that glorious, I need to fix that. I've decided to go for essentially me in some form.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay.

Participant A

So we're going to try, he looks vaguely Asian at the moment. My sideburns, as you can see at the moment, are not as quite as glorious as that. Like it's the only facial hair that I'm currently able of growing. I can grow a neckbeard, sort of, and like a moustache of like a greasy adolescent boy.

Sjoerd van Midden

You know what's funny? That still means you have more hair growth than me. *Laughs*

Participant A

Laughs I truly appreciate a cisgender man who are, who is just as bad at growing facial hair. Also short kings.

Sjoerd van Midden

Short kings, yes.

Participant A

Also short kings.

Sjoerd van Midden

One of my friends for example, some of my friends when they don't shave for a week for example, they already have like you know. You can already see like black hairs all around and it looks kinda pretty already. And when I don't shave for two weeks, I just have like two very long hairs, and that's it.

Participant A

Laughs

Sjoerd van Midden

Like, I can count the amount of hairs that I have on my face. It's, it's, I'm honestly quite happy with it because I don't really mind having no beard and I don't have to shave that often.

Participant A

Yeah, that's really helpful.

Sjoerd van Midden

What you said about Link by the way, because you said that you quite like the androgynous look.

Participant A

Yes.

Sjoerd van Midden

What you, are you going for something, like that here as well?

Participant A

So, because like. Oh it's spinning a lot. Oh, it because of the lag.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs yeah it's a little bit laggy.

Participant A

It's okay, I can make it work.

So, I don't think I have a particular androgynous look myself, but I do, I am painfully very aware of the fact that I have kind of a baby face. So that's kind of a look that I'm going for. You know, I'm in my late thirties, so, and yet I get frequently get carded for alcohol.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs

Participant A

Oh that's too red. That's far too red... I guess that works, yeah...

I have kinda like, like dark blond, I mean in this lighting you can't really see it too well, but it's not like brown brown. It's got like a brassy kind of quality.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah, it looks a little bit more on the black side with the lighting and stuff.

Participant A

Yeah I keep my office very dim, so you can't really. Yeah, and yeah I guess it has gone brown, but it to me it doesn't look brown brown, but.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah, it doesn't have to be exactly you of course.

Participant A

Oh for sure.

Sjoerd van Midden

Like, what if we were to make like a Persona character, right?

Participant A

Right right.

Sjoerd van Midden

Or a Pokémon gym leader. What would their story be and...

Participant A

Okay, we'll go with this. That's fine, that's fine.

I know a lot of cis-dudes who got the GBS, the ginger beard syndrome.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs Where they have blonde, or brown hair and suddenly...

Participant A

Wow, that's. This is interesting, that's the same one I chose for facial hair and I think. Oh never mind, I'm blind. I was like, why are they not the same one why are they two different colours? I thought I chose the same ones, but nevermind I'm just an idiot, that's why.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs It could have just been. Any mistake that we make, we're just going to blame on Zoom, okay?

Participant A

Yeah, that sounds good, I'm cool with that.

Wow, okay there we go.

Laughs Oh no, nope we don't wanna tiny that one.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs Ooh, he's just getting ready for a kiss.

Participant A

Yeah, he is just puckering up. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

What are his pronouns by the way? I just said him, but.

Participant A

Oh yeah this is gonna be, this is guy. He is transmasculine, we're going full he/him.

Oh yeah, here, it's all up here. Yeah, so here is where you can just kind of quick-pick the gender. Physical frame, masculine. Clothing preference, masculine. He can become pregnant. No, he can not produce milk, he has had double mastectomy. Can the sim use the toilet standing? No. I mean can, yes. Should? Probably not.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs

Participant A

And then sexual orientation is over here and I like everything so I'm going with everything.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs Just, why not all? If it is possible, why not all?

Participant A

Yeah.

Sjoerd van Midden

By the way you can also just change the age as long as it isn't like a child basically.

Participant A

Oh. Yeah, yeah yeah. I'm fine with where he is.

Can I hear...

Sjoerd van Midden

Can you hear the sound by the way?

Participant A

No.

Sjoerd van Midden

Dang it.

Participant A

I know approximately what the voices sound like.

Sjoerd van Midden

If you want you can maybe mess with the options. Maybe make it a little bit louder.

Maybe that would work?

Participant A

Let's see... Audio...

Sjoerd van Midden

Can you hear the music now for example?

Participant A

Nah, it's not coming through at all. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Aah, like I said. Sometimes Zoom is like, okay here is your audio and sometimes Zoom is like, no, nah nah.

Okay basically the right side is higher pitch and the left side is lower pitched.

Participant A

Wow. I'm not trying to make your whole head bigger. I... *Laughs*

No, no, come on. It's struggling. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs

Participant A

I should probably go with presets for that reason.

Yeah, he got a round baby-face.

Sjoerd van Midden

It's just, it's just like small adjustments and use the presets a lot, yeah. That would be a little bit, yeah.

Participant A

Yeah, I'm fine with a little bit of a twinkly build.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay, twink.

Participant A

Yes.

Laughs A hot dog suit.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs

Participant A

Yeah, that's my style. A bit hot, but yeah.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs It's. Yeah, that's just how you want to be represented in video games.

Participant A

Laughs Yeah yeah.

Sjoerd van Midden

That's it you know. Only hot dog suits, and that is it. Nothing else.

Participant A

Yeah exactly, nothing but hot dog suits all the way down.

Wow they have added a lot of Star Wars stuff in here, I've noticed.

Oh my god, is that?

Sjoerd van Midden

There's a lot of options. So...

Participant A

Yeah, that's Final Fantasy Fifteen. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Oooh wait. *Laughs*

That's, wow you're actually right.

Participant A

Why, I have played a lot of Final Fantasy Fourteen and I loved the Lucian Prince attire in that game for my characters so.

Sjoerd van Midden

Ooh. Like, I didn't know they had this many references.

Participant A

Yeah yeah.

Sjoerd van Midden

That's so cool.

Participant A

Why can I not change, where's your glasses?

Physical... Oh maybe I need to go to head and okay yeah.

This is not intuitive. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

This is not the most intuitive no.

Participant A

I forgot, I forgot about how like, challenging it is to...

I got big nerd glasses, which go with the. Oh hell yeah, we're going to Mardy Grass.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs

Participant A

That was one of things that I was mercilessly bullied for when I was a kid, the fact that I have glasses. So like, for a long time I was very self-conscious about the kind of glasses that I have got. And so the most reason glasses that I've got, I got them and I was like, you know I wanna go full nerd finally and see how it goes. And honestly, I'm pretty happy with it. At first I was like oh I don't look like a cool or sexy nerd, I just look like a dork.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs Aaaw.

Participant A

All of my friends and my husband have been telling me I've been good in them so...

Oh gosch.

Sjoerd van Midden

It's difficult to really feel like they fit you, especially when you have kind of negative feelings towards them of course.

Participant A

Yeah.

Sjoerd van Midden

Especially if you've been bullied for it. It's understandable that you, that you're not immediately like, oh I love them.

Participant A

Yeah. *Laughs*

Let's see, now I believe they have added top-surgery scars in here somewhere.

At least I recall that being a thing that was mentioned, but.

Sjoerd van Midden

It's also always okay to say, hey I would like to have these details as well and I'll just write it down.

Participant A

Okay.

Sjoerd van Midden

I'll just add it and say like hey this wasn't in the creator, we didn't find it.

Participant A

Got it.

Sjoerd van Midden

Hey, let's fucking go. Top surgery scars.

Oh that's sick.

Participant A

Yeah, they have, I love these wearable medicals, like they have diabetic patches and things like that. The Sims has always been really really great at providing representation where there really was none before.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah.

Participant A

Yeah, and like, when it came out it was like one of the only games where you could play as something like same-sex couples.

Oh god, does he have a horribly hairy back? Oh god, he does. We're removing that.

Laughs

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs No hair on that back, no.

Participant A

No, no. There's other awful places where I have to deal with that. I don't wanna also deal with that on my back.

Sjoerd van Midden

Like for example, why do you specifically want a clean back, instead of a hairy back in this character?

Participant A

Well, I think it's more attractive and also less of a pain in the ass to deal with for him.

Laughs

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs Do you want to keep the Final Fantasy suit?

Participant A

Yeah, yeah I do. I don't play Final Fantasy Fifteen, but I do play Final Fantasy Fourteen and the suit is in there and I'm gonna say that represents me.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs

Participant A

At least to some extent.
I'm not gonna go through every single outfit.

Sjoerd van Midden

That's a-okay. *Laughs*

Participant A

Because then we would be here for hours.

Sjoerd van Midden

I don't want to, if you have stuff to do or you know I'm feeling a little bit tired just say like, hey I'm, let's end it here or let's do these final touches and then we're a-okay.

Participant A

I'll go ahead and finish. I'll give him some aspirations and stuff and then I'll be good to wrap it up.
I like love, soulmate and serial romantic. Sure, we'll play the field and go on dates with all sorts of people.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay, okay.

Participant A

I'm polyamorous, so that would be another way to represent me.

Sjoerd van Midden

True, that's a whole other, you could probably do a whole other thesis as well about polyamory because I feel like usually when it's in video games it's used more of like a harem kind of think you know?

Participant A

Yeah, very much so. It's really not polyamory. It's, just harem stuff. And there is so little actual good poly representation out there. I mean of all the things I've come out to my parents about, polyamory was apparently the line for my mom. Like while hasn't rejected me over it, she's very much like, oh I don't know about this. She is really not super cool with the fact that I have a girlfriend and a husband.
Let's see.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah, what kind of background do you want him to have?

Participant A

Yeah, I'm kinda making him similar to me. Oh we gotta go with video gaming of course.

Sjoerd van Midden

Oh of course.

Participant A

I've played piano, or I took piano lessons for ten years. I, one day I should go back to it, but like meh. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs

Participant A

I'm so old. I'm so old.

Sjoerd van Midden

Well, you can always at least try a song. You don't have to immediately learn a lot of new song or right, be fantastic at it.

Participant A

Yeah.

Sjoerd van Midden

You can at least try to see if you still enjoy it. Like that's the first step that you need to take before going anywhere of course.

Participant A

Yeah. Yeah absolutely.

Okay, we'll pick creative. Obviously, he's got to be romantic if he's going for love. Yeah, it's very important. It would make things difficult if he were not into romance.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs What I like by the way. Before we had sexualizing characters. Here you're making a sexual character or someone who is trying to get, you know, trying to be a little bit flirty for example. And what I like is that even though he is sexual, it doesn't immediately mean he is oversexualized, masculine.

Participant A

Exactly.

Sjoerd van Midden

This is an assumption I guess, but I don't immediately see him taking his shirt off and showing everyone, yeah.

Participant A

Yeah, there's a difference between a character being sexual and being sexualized. And not a whole lot of people really recognize that.

Oh yeah, here I can really make him like me. There you go. He's also a slob.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs Fantastic.

Participant A

Yeah. He's just, ah the perfect wretched man. He's looking for love and he is gross. That's his character arc. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs He is looking for love, but he is too gross and needs to clean up his mess before he can start loving.

Participant A

Yeah he first needs to get his shit together before he can get multiple partners, or even one.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah, taking care of yourself is very important before getting into any kind of relationship.

Participant A

Yeah.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah, can you type as well?

Participant A

Yes I can. Janiel Danuary.

Sjoerd van Midden

Janiel?

Participant A

It's *Laughs*. It's a joke from, I don't know if you've ever heard of it, Aunty Donna's Big O'l House of Fun. It is, Aunty Donna is a comedy group I think from Australia. It's either Australia or New Zealand, I can't remember and I'm going to sound like a dumb American again by saying it.

Sjoerd van Midden

I don't even know, so I'm gonna sound like a dumb European so it's fine.

Participant A

It's such, it's bizarre absurdist surrealist humour and I love it. And there is a bit where the guys are on a gameshow and one of them is being asked his name and he says it's Janiel. And they are going back and forth about it, like no it's like Daniel, but with a J as in January, Janiel. And Then to go to the next guy and he's like Danuary. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs

Participant A

And I have used this name ever since, I actually wanna take a screenshot of this because I have used this name to torment my girlfriend in many table-top games.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs Aah yes, Janiel Danuary the fourth.

Participant A

Yes, exactly. I love him. So.

Oh, I'm sorry, I thought I could use the windows key as if I were on my own computer, but you're sharing it on your screen.

Sjoerd van Midden

I guess what we can do is that I'll just, if I can get the mouse.

Participant A

Yes.

Sjoerd van Midden

I'll.

Participant A

Yes. I had to click off of Zoom, that's why I was having trouble with that, sorry.

Sjoerd van Midden

Aah okay okay.

Participant A

There we go.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay, now we stop, so I believe you can't change anything anymore.

I guess I will change pronouns for him to he/him.

Participant A

Oh yes. I, for some reason I missed that part with the pronouns.

Sjoerd van Midden

It's okay, there are so many options it's okay if you didn't see this one.

Participant A

Yeah, I just kinda got lost in the sauce. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

You can still see the screen right? So if you want to take a screenshot...

I'm going to save.

Participant A

The Danuary household. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs To my libraries.

Okay, fantastic, I have saved him, so I will now immortalize him by writing a little bit about him.

Participant A

Perfect.

Sjoerd van Midden

So yeah, I guess that ends it. That ends the interview.

Transcription Participant B

Note. This interview was held in Dutch, so the transcription was translated by me.

Sjoerd van Midden

Alright, so, then we will just get started. Firstly I'll have two questions for you. The first one is very simple your age bracket, not your exact age because we don't really have to know that. I will put it in the chat. If the chat window wants to work at least. Here we go. Okay, which age bracket are you in from the ones that I have sent?

Participant B

23 to 27.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay, thank you. And of course one of the most important questions of this whole interview is. What do you identify as when it comes to gender?

Participant B

I'm pretty comfortable in the non-binary category.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay, that's totally okay. I have already had an interview with someone who was more on the transgender side, and non-binary is also completely fine.

We gonna first talk about a couple of questions relating to Pokémon Scarlet and Violet. Have you played Pokémon Scarlet and Violet?

Participant B

Sadly, not yet, I don't have a Switch.

Sjoerd van Midden

That's okay.

Participant B

But I have friends who played it and I have also seen some walkthroughs, so I'm familiar with it.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay, so you have seen some walkthroughs. Okay okay, do you know a the characters a little bit for example?

Participant B

Yeah, I know a couple of them.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay, that's still totally fine. Then we can go to, well, the first couple of questions are about Scarlet and Violet, because those are the, basically it's a bit of a case study and a general study. And the case study is more about, how did they do it in Pokémon Scarlet and Violet and what do people think about it and then we talk more about what people think about other games in general. So, if you say that you have seen a little bit about Pokémon on Youtube, could you, how do you feel about the characters of Pokémon Scarlet and Violet? And how do they, what do you think about how well they represent your gender? Do you have an opinion about that?

Participant B

Are you talking about the character that you can make yourself, the player character or just the NPCs?

Sjoerd van Midden

Basically, both of them.

Participant B

Because for the player character you have some options to customize them, you can give your own input.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yes, you have quite some options. Basically, you can change the hair regardless of your choices and switch them around and things like that. Because in the first Pokémon games it was just like, are you a boy or are you a girl? That's a bit different now. But I don't know of course if you have seen the various options that are available.

Participant B

Yeah I believe you do have a base boy or base girl which you can change a lot of things about, but I believe that foundation is still there. Because I think for people who use pronouns that can still be very annoying even if they still use he or she and such. So I understand that that can be annoying. Like, pronouns don't matter that much for me, but I would be annoyed if I were called a lady or girl, that would be nah, I don't feel like having that.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay, yeah yeah yeah. In the game itself, you don't have they/them pronouns for example. And yeah, I myself have never really thought about that, because I'm like, oh yeah he/him is totally okay. But for you that might be a little bit different of course.

Participant B

Well in games I actually don't mind he/him, I always use that in games. But it's more that the words like sir and such. But I don't care that much about it in games, it's only a character that you play, but there are people who do get annoyed by that.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah, there are people who are annoyed by that, but this is also mostly about what you think. Like, your feelings about using they/them, or in this case, not using they/them. So, also, when looking at the characters themselves, the NPCs, the non-playable-characters, I don't know if you could call some by name or describe their appearance, but which ones make you think oh, but I can relate to them or that's a character who does represent me or not at all?

Participant B

The two characters who I can remember, who I think are a little bit the token characters, are Rika and...

Sjoerd van Midden

Rika, yes?

Participant B

And there was another elite four guy.

Sjoerd van Midden

You are allowed to basically describe them.

Participant B

I believe. I think it was a masculine guy but he looked like a woman with blue hair.

Sjoerd van Midden

I think you mean Grusha. That's the ice-type gymleader with a snowboard and a scarf.

Participant B

Yeah yeah. I liked those two.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah I get that, They are I believe a bit more androgynous when it comes to their clothing and how they are. Especially Rika. Although, maybe not so much androgynous but more gender nonconforming would be a good way to describe them. But yeah, I, why Rika and Grusha specifically, what is the reason behind that?

Participant B

I think those two are the most obviously gender nonconforming, like they are the most LGBTQ spectrum characters. So that sits with me more, especially since I, especially I was surprised that Grusha was a guy, like oh okay. *Laughs* And Rika, I just love it. She is just a non-binary vibe and I love it. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs Yeah yes, that one I totally get. For example, I don't know if you know this, but Rika has won a competition in biggest non, biggest fictional crush. But the competition was done by, only women who could vote. So, like in the top ten there were nine men and on number one there was Rika.

Participant B

Perfect.

Sjoerd van Midden

That's amazing yeah.

Participant B

Perfect. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

But yeah, okay okay, I'm also comparing this to a more general view. For example if you could compare this with other games, how well would you say, oh in the current state of gaming and video games, how well are you represented?

Participant B

I think in most games actually not, but in a lot of games you never have to specify that because you're just a character in a game and then it's decided beforehand, oh this character is a man and this character is a woman. For example if I think about it. in most games like The Last of Us and The Wolf Among Us, games that I have played. So, yeah, then you don't have really any representation at least, not like that.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay okay, for example, that's of course a big thing that non-binary, transgender and whatever you can be only starts to recently come up more often. And for example I have a book on my table that's about queer in video games through time. And there are some games that have some more androgynous characters, but it is indeed a more recent thing. So I would understand if you said that you don't really see it right now. Do you have for example maybe a specific game or character where you think that, who is like oh that one I can remember very well when it comes to representation?

Participant B

Actually, not one. But maybe I'm not gaming enough for that. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs That's also allowed for an answer. Because that is also just an answer. If you say that with all the games that I play, and things that I see there isn't really any representation that's an answer to how good, or in this case how bad the representation is, right? That, yeah, I get that, that makes it more difficult to say oh this is what I want to see or what I don't want to see. Do you know of any characters where they at least tried, but where it didn't fully work out, where it's more inappropriate representation?

Participant B

I have never really seen inappropriate representation. I have mostly seen, like where feminine characters are tough and tomboy-like, that the most representation I have seen because that is also more generally accepted, so.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah yeah yeah, okay. So, well, I'm not entirely sure if that is completely accepted.

Participant B

Not completely, but.

Sjoerd van Midden

For example when it comes to women, separate from non-cis, there it's not yet stereotypical to be tough and muscular, because that is more stereotypical of masculine characters sadly. That's something that I have some experience with, with toxic masculinity, that's a whole different story. I won't talk your ears off about that. I guess a question that I have is where would the line be for when someone is a woman or non-binary. For example, when it comes to being muscular and tough, that's also of course difficult.

Participant B

I think that's a difficult one, because it differs a lot for each person. For example, for me it's more about being androgynous and not fitting in either category, but some people can feel very masculine but behave very feminine according to the stereotypes. So, I indeed think it's difficult to draw a line between them that everyone agrees with. For me the androgynous part is important, because then I'll be more like, yes I can recognize myself in this.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah yeah yeah, Yeah, that's totally fair. That's for example, with gender theory I also talked a lot about that, or I should say we, because we are a lot of researchers who are talking about that. Because on one hand we are like we need those classification and on the other hand we, it's almost painful to classify. Yeah, so indeed those lines are difficult to draw. It's also a lot about gender identity and gender expression. When i for example go back to Rika and Grusha, they an androgynous gender expression, but not gender identity because they are still using he and she pronouns.

Participant B

Yeah, exactly.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah yeah. How would you like to see that?

Participant B

I think that like how they did in Pokémon Scarlet and Violet, just more options to customize your characters and then they should just add the option to change the pronouns so that people can change that themselves. Like if they don't care about it, then they can just choose the standard pronouns that come with the character. But if they do care then they can choose they/them. So, a bit more customizability.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yes, yeah yeah yeah. Yes, if I think myself for example, I lately played Beastly Balls, a volleyball game, then you can choose between she/her, he/him and they/them. And that makes me think about, would it for example be nice if you could also choose he/them or she/them. That's also something I think about, like, should that also be a good option? Or would they/them be enough?

Participant B

I think it would definitely be nice to have, but I personally think it would be difficult to implement in games. Like, how would games determine when to use he and when to use they? You would have to program that, but that's a more functional aspect *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs There you could use a, you could just make it a 50/50 or something.

Participant B

For example yeah.

Sjoerd van Midden

I guess. Which games do you often play by the way?

Participant B

Lately, I have played very little. I mostly play the old Pokémon games which I have laying around. Because they are easy to get into.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs That's totally okay. On Youtube I'm watching a complete playthrough of Black and White 2 and it's such a blast of nostalgia.

Participant B

Nice, yeah exactly.

Sjoerd van Midden

I haven't really thought about gender expression in older Pokémon games. You have gender identity and they use a lot of she/her and he/him and no they/them pronouns, but for gender expression, I think... What kind of characters do you have in Pokémon who are more androgynous? Or a better question is, do you have other Pokémon characters who make you think like, oh but they are also super cool from the old games?

Participant B

In the old games, the gymleaders are always pretty creative, I can't really think of one. Let me look some up.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah you are allowed to just describe them or look them up.

Participant B

I'm looking if I can find one right now. I'm looking if something shows up.

Yeah, gymleaders were always pretty creative when it comes to appearance. It's not always immediately easy to see whether they are a man or a woman.

Sjoerd van Midden

That's true yeah. Although, I would say that old Pokémon games have a little bit more of a separation. Like, if you look over time, then more and more androgynous characters appear.

Participant B

Yeah exactly, Those old games have more of a split, for example in the characters that you play yourself. Especially looking at Pokémon Diamant and Pearl, there you really play as either a boy or a girl, deal with it. And later on there were more and more options to change your hair and clothing.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah, like I think. Like, what do you think is better when it comes to the Pokémon games? Like, oh maybe one stands out to you, like oh in that one it is improving, or oh these are aspects that I think are good.

Participant B

Well, for example in Pokémon Alpha and Omega, I think that's a more recent one, right?

Sjoerd van Midden

Let me think, Alpha and Omega, do you mean Alpha Sapphire and Omega Ruby?

Participant B

Yeah, I mean those. In those you can already customize your hair a bit more. From that moment I though, hey I like this.

Sjoerd van Midden

That's very fair of course...

Yeah, I'm thinking.

Yeah, I guess, what it boils down to is how much focus should there be on the fact a character is androgynous or not androgynous? And I mean from a story perspective in the game. I'll give an example, like Rika from Pokémon Scarlet and Violet. In Pokémon Scarlet and violet there isn't a lot of attention drawn to the fact that she is androgynous. So, but, in other games it is possible that more attention is drawn to like, oh you look differently or you don't look very stereotypical. What would you prefer, or what would be a good way or are good example to talk about being non-binary?

Participant B

Then I really prefer the way Pokémon does it, because there is not emphasis on it ad they are not like oh look how much representation we have. No, it should be something normal and everyday. So, I prefer if there's no focus on it. It is just that character, deal with it.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah yeah yeah yeah. Okay, I can understand that. Because on one hand I'm like, okay normalisation, right, that's of course super important. However, at the same time, or I should say additionally, normalisation, how do I say this? What also is normal to you, right, is also

for example negative people who come at you, right? Like, like I said before, I as a heterosexual cisgender man never have to think about it. I can just walk into a room and everybody respects me. Which is weird so to say, but it is what happens. And what I can see when it comes to you and also other people who are non-cisgender is that it is a completely different story. Like, when you walk into the room, there's a chance people stare at you or say something. It doesn't always have to be something negative, it can also be positive, right? Like for example someone can walk up to you and say, good for you, right? But that also influences your day. So, yeah I guess the question is a little bit, with that in the back of your mind, what would be a good thing to do? Which is a very difficult question, of course. But what do you think about that?

Participant B

Then I'll stand by the idea of normalising and not really emphasizing it in games because then you'll teach the players and the people who aren't very familiar with it a little bit, oh this is okay. What I do notice, for example, is that if characters are not noticeably gender conforming, for example, lately there was a whole discourse about some woman who was very muscular and there were people who were actually angry about that. And then I think, if you then try to put even more emphasis on the fact that they are gender nonconforming then you'll only make people more angry, which is bad for the acceptance that you are striving for. So, you have to treat it as neutrally as possible, I think, because you don't want to lecture people on this.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay. Well, at least, lecturing, that is indeed a thing, sometimes it can come across as being know-it-all while the only thing you do is like, hey I accept this person just how he/she/they/them is and that can make someone angry already. Then the question is, does that matter so to say? Do we have to cater to those people who would react like that?

Participant B

I don't necessarily mean catering to them, I think if you mainly don't emphasize it, then people will accept it faster. I notice myself, for example when I talk about being a vegan and try to promote it then people can already become very mad at you. While if you're like, yo hey I'm vagan and that's all you need to know, then people are like okay cool. So, it's more something like that. But that's coming from a more personal experience. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs I understand that very well. Talking about veganism, I'm now vegetarian, or at least I try to eat more vegetarian. But I also have, if someone just talks about veganism, then I get the feeling of, even though it doesn't make sense, then I get the feeling that, like oh are you just talking about it because you wanna talk about it or do you wanna try to convince me?

Participant B

Yeah.

Sjoerd van Midden

And that's a me problem, right, as a disclaimer. But that's like an intrusive thought, so to say, because if you think about it, it's like why does it matter? But yeah, I fully get you with that, like me being a vegetarian already have that effect on other people too. There's also a whole

stigma around it. And this is also with gender indeed. I have, for example, before this research I made a post on Reddit about Pokémon Scarlet and Violet. I just wanted to see what people think about it and I posted something like, hey I noticed that there are gender nonconforming characters. That's what it boiled down to basically, even though I said it a little bit differently. And then I looked what kind of reactions there were and like after two hours the post was removed by moderators because there were immediately people who started a discussion. There were people who immediately were like, I would have never thought about it if you didn't mention it and there were for example also people who started talking about grooming, a lot of things. There were also people who said they liked and enjoyed it, for example one person said that they were happy with these kind of things even though he is cisgender and while being more androgynous when it comes to gender expression. This shows that people also like it of course, but I can understand why you think talking about it is difficult because it always starts some hubbub.

Participant B

A lot of hubbub *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

A lot of hubbub, yeah. *Laughs*

Yeah, okay then. I guess a little bit of a question is then, that when it comes to story and what kind of characters there are. For example, would you like, since you're saying that, yeah, there shouldn't be a lot of attention put on it, it can be more in the background, would you like that characters like that are kept as side characters or would you like a non-binary character to be more of a main character? What would your preference be? This is linked to how would you talk about it and what kind of roles can they fill in a story, so to say.

Participant B

Then I would like it if it would reflect society a little bit, like you said you can have transpeople as side characters, but you can also put them in important positions. So, yeah if it is a little bit of a main character, then that's also fine.

Sjoerd van Midden

What, sorry, what was the last thing you said?

Participant B

If it is the main character who is gender nonconforming or transgender then that would also be fine, because then it will be a little bit more upfront and then people will be confronted with it more. Which would be nice, because then it feels like people like that can also be important. If they would only be side characters then it would feel as if transpeople are worth less. Then you would get something like that.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah yeah yeah yeah. That would be. I have an example like that, because what you see is that a bunch of main characters are, like, most main characters are often men and if they are not men they are women and only then, just maybe, they are a different gender. But, yeah, you barely see it. One game that often gets named, I have forgotten the name, but the game's story is about overcoming traumas and one of the main characters is Tyler, Tyler is transgender. That was very special, because a lot of people were happy about how the

representation was done, because, as I said before, normalisation is based on this game for example since here he walks into the room and people look at him funny or are surprised. But there are also characters who react negatively or just ignore the fact he changed. So, yeah, talking about main characters, that game is praised a lot which is why I had to think about it. You know, like with main characters and side characters, so like, I'm very much like you need to find balance, but it's also that you have to see what you want with the story. Like, do you want to focus on it a lot or not. But, yeah, the question is how do you feel about that?

Participant B

I think that the amount of focus on being transgender is reliant on the story. If it is a story about adventure, then I don't really see why it would matter, but if you have a game like, like you just said, with processing trauma then it can be a plot point because it can be a traumatic experience for some.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yes, that's for sure yeah. The trauma processing was also not just about being trans, but also something about murder I believe, but yeah, it's it can be traumatic of course all those little things that happen in a childhood. So yeah.

Participant B

What I also think is a good example of the amount of focus that is put on it, is not from a game, but from. Do you know Umbrella Academy?

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah, I have seen a couple of episodes.

Participant B

So yeah, one of the main characters is a transperson in real life and he transitioned while the series was still being filmed. So the first season he was a woman, but in the second season suddenly not anymore. And they treated it very neutrally. They were like, oh hey Vanya, oh it's a he now. And they were like, oh okay it's a he. And that was about all the attention it got. It wasn't ignored, but there was also not a lot of attention put on it, which I thought was beautiful, because the rest of the story had nothing to do with it. So, it was pointed out, people accepted it, though there were a couple of people who were a bit more difficult about it, which makes it more realistic I guess, but I think that's a good way of emphasizing it.

Sjoerd van Midden

So actually by not putting a lot of emphasis on it.

Participant B

Yes, just point it out so like, yo this is a thing but don't make it an entire plot point and push it down someone's throat.

Sjoerd van Midden

That pushing it down your throat indeed. You can compare that to veganism and such, like, some people think you're pushing it down their throat when you even mention the word, right? But then I'm also like, what is then the line between, like when would you say it is shoved down someone's throat?

Participant B

When the story deviates too much from it's own plot purely because there's a charcter who is nonconforming. So, when there's more emphasis put on it then what is needed to go on with the story. That's what I think would be too much.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay okay. That's a good way of saying it. So if it is then, yeah. So if it advances the story, then you can talk about it like with Tyler who I mentioned before where the story is both about processing trauma and the history of the two main characters. There it can have a lot of influence, a transition. But in other games, like maybe Pokémon, righ? There it would be a bit weird to talk about it, although weird is maybe a dangerous word to use.

Participant B

It would feel a bit out of place.

Sjoerd van Midden

Out of place?

Participant B

Yeah I would just like to catch Pokémon and suddenly it's about this. Like, I would think it's sometimes annoying for me as a non-binary person. Like, I just want to play a game without having to be politically correct, leave me alone.

Sjoerd van Midden

So then it would be a bit confronting?

Participant B

Yes, actually yeah. I just want to play my game and then you get reminded about it again.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay, yeah yeah yeah. I guess that also, now that you mention it, with on one with the normalisation you want to be able to mention that it is difficult for people, but talking about that in the first place is also annoying for people who are non-cisgender, or at least, it can be annoying let me say it like that. Because for example, if I understand you correctly it's also a bit of a mess, so to say. So I can understand it if you say that when you are playing a game you don't want to think about all of that too. And actually, you go first, you wanted to say something.

Participant B

Especially when a topic like that is talked about it is very stigmatized and dramatised. Like when you see something about transgenders then it's about oh he is not accepted and his life is difficult, like it often feels overdramatised and I'm afraid they will also do the same in video games that it becomes a whole drama while it can also be neutral. For example with Rika and Grusha that's very neutral and not a whole dramatic traumatic story. They are just like we are gender nonconforming, yay.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yay. Yeah, yes. That's fair. Two things that, they thought, like, I can't really think of a character who is in doubt about it. Like there are characters who are transgender or non-binary or both, but I can't think of a character who shows the road towards realizing they are like that.

Participant B

Yeah, then you often get those becoming of age dramas that you see on TV, if they have doubts about it. But even there it is often that they know their gender, but the drama comes more forth out of acceptance. So, yeah, you rarely see it.

Sjoerd van Midden

Aah. Then the question is how would you handle something like that? Like how would you show the trails that come with, and then I'm not talking about acceptance of other people, but I mean. Like, how do you find out that you are not fitting between those borders so to say. Right? Like something that I will never fully understand of course is that how it feels to have a different gender identity then the one assigned at birth. So to say. I wouldn't know, like some transgender people don't like their body, and I have no idea how that feels. So to day, I have no idea how that world, i do know that with biological sex there's a lot of genes that are important for determining sex, you know. But that is different than when you find out at a certain age about that. Where I'm going with this is, would it be possible to show that in a story in a good way?

Participant B

You could show it through small hints, but it also depends on how people feel, because some people have problems with their body image, but there are also people who have more problems with the social aspects and stereotypes. So, yeah you can give small hints. Yeah, you know every hint that a character has body image issues is also pretty on the nose because I can't think of a situation in a game where this comes up naturally.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah, I guess something like that works better with something like an RPG where you really get to know the characters. It can also just be a detail of someone's story. yeah.

Participant B

I think in the right kind of games you can definitely do that, but in most games you can't really do that, like in Pokémon I don't really see space for that. That is too surface-level.

Sjoerd van Midden

I'm also like, it would be cool if a big company like Pokémon would leave a statement about it. That is what I want of course, someone who is very busy with learning about this topic and what kind of negative things happen to people. I'm like, it would be nice if, it would be pretty nice I feel.

Participant B

From something as loved and famous as Pokémon something like that would be very cool, but in itself I think Pokémon is already pretty ahead compared to other games. Also in the series, for example when you look at the Team Rocket and James and, what is her name again?

Sjoerd van Midden

Jessie.

Participant B

Jessie yeah, like they are definitely not classically cis, so with Pokémon you could already see that they were pretty early with it. Anime in general actually.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay, yes, okay. Well then with that in the back of our minds, if I had to ask you, like, how would you imagine a character, one who you make yourself, who would represent you well? Of course this is dependent on the games that he is a part of, but just okay this is what would feel good if a character was like this.

Participant B

For me I would go to the androgynous side, that is something I would like. Very much like Rika, for example. That, I like that a lot. And in the game itself, put a little less attention on saying boy or girl, but just hey adventurer, just to say something stupid.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay.

Participant B

So, something like that I would be content with.

Sjoerd van Midden

Aah, okay okay. Well then, then we'll take a look at it in the second part. Because what I would like to with you now, is make that character together with you. And for that I have the Sims 4. I don't know if you know it, but The Sims 4 is a character creator with a lot of options. I'm just gonna start it up. The idea is that I'm gonna start it up on my PC and with through screen share you can take control. And then we're gonna take a look together what kind of cool character we can make. One that makes you say, oh yeah that is someone that I'm comfortable with. And yeah, you have so many options in this game that I do have to say it's okay to click the random button a couple of times for a starting point. You can also choose to not be just a man or woman, but like, feminine, masculine, like he can't become pregnant or can become pregnant, he can make someone pregnant, it really is super inclusive. We're gonna take a look together if I can turn this on correctly for you. If you're okay with making a character together at least.

Participant B

Of course.

Sjoerd van Midden

I often enjoy, a bit, you can have some banter with each other, you can have some fun with it.

Participant B

You can mess around with it.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah. I'm also like, something that should get more attention is masculinity and femininity in characters like these. For example Sirona Ryan, if I'm correct, from Hogwards Legacy is a trans character, but quite some people were unhappy about her. She was a man who transitioned to female and the problem was that the voice was still too low. And that was already annoying, which I can understand, that it would be nice if these characters are voiced by people of the same gender. But yeah, what it boils down to, there are so many things that you need to take into account that sometimes you miss things. So that is why this creator is nice because you can change things like that. So, we're going to have a look. If I click on share screen, then I can click The Sims 4. This can take a little while, so to say, because sometimes Zoom is just like, okay now you don't get any sound and now your appliances are doing weird things just because you pressed one button. So, step one, can you see my screen? Can you see The Sims 4?

Participant B

Yes.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay, lemme see if I can turn on remote control.

Okay, if I'm correct, the you can control my screen now.

Participant B

Yep.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay, can you also hear the game? That is also a question. Can you hear the music of the game or?

Participant B

No.

Sjoerd van Midden

Aaah. That's a shame, but it isn't that big of a deal. It's only a problem for the voice because the sim makes noises and they can be higher pitch or lower pitch, but yeah. I don't know how much experience you have with The Sims 4?

Participant B

Zero.

Sjoerd van Midden

That's okay. What you can choose is, you also have a story, which is something that I thought was fun to include was to give someone also a backstory and personality. You can just say, okay we are going to fill in a personality quiz which gives you questions which you can use to make a personality. But you can also just jump in head first and choose your own things. That's also allowed, it depends on what you prefer yourself. I don't know if you can even read what's on my screen.

Participant B

This is fine.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay okay okay. Can you also select stuff?

Participant B

Yes.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay.

Participant B

I think I'm not going to do that personality quiz, because I like going straight into designing.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay. Then we'll just press no thanks. And then you have a character here and in The Sims 4 you can literally change everything.

Participant B

Yeah, even their lower legs.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yes, everything. You can, you can change the appearance but also how big his jaw is, his nose, how big his pecs are, anything you can think of. So, yeah, go have a look at what the options are, so there are a lot of options and just take a look at all the things you can change. We'll go on till you think it is okay and good enough. We don't have to make it perfectly. So yeah, I don't know if you have any ideas yet?

Participant B

Actually, not really. So, I'm just gonna, oh god, you can really change everything. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Yes you can really change anything. *Laughs*

Participant B

What the.

Sjoerd van Midden

So, you, I know we are using screen share, so sometimes you need to watch out for it being slower than you think, so be patient sometimes. And of course, most importantly, the character must, or not must, it mainly about how you would represent your gender in the best way possible. If you think that my gender, non-binary, if this character would be in a game then you would think, yeah they really represent me very well.

Participant B

Basically the ideal me. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Well, yeah, but like I said, you can be playful, so if feel free to give him a weird background story so to say. Or a little bit like that.

I will say by the way, I don't know all the options, so lately I did this with someone else who had a lot of experience in the Sims 4 character creator and he said you'll spend more time in the character creator then actually playing the game. Apparently, you also have things like references to other games. I mean, I say reference, but you literally have clothing from characters from other games. For example you can choose an outfit that comes from Final Fantasy and put it on your Sims character. Oh another cool fact by the way, is that this game is from 2014,, it's really old.

Participant B

Seriously?

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah, let me fact-check just to be sure, but yeah it is old.
Sims 4.

Participant B

You have a ridiculous amount of choices.

Sjoerd van Midden

2014.

Participant B

2014? That is actually bizarre.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah. *Laughs*

Participant B

Where is?

Sjoerd van Midden

You have all kinds of eye shapes.

Participant B

It's way too much man.

Sjoerd van Midden

It is a lot indeed, so like, like I said, if you say it is good enough or if you want to use the random button a couple if times and make some small changes. This is the final part, so we can spend as much time on this as you want. I like making characters in these kind of games. *Laughs* I for example play an MMO, Guild Wars 2, there you have, well compared to this it's nothing, but there you also have a character creator and like. Sometimes I can spend so much time in there. For example, the last character that I made I was in a discord call with my friends and I told them I wa going to make a new character and by only the time my friends went to bed my character was finished. So, while they were playing a different

game I was like, oh how would it look with these options? Or what about this combination? And then I also had to think of a name and I was like, fuck it, I'll do it tomorrow.

Participant B

That's very relatable, just constantly designing characters and going overboard.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah, yes. Like, I haven't done a lot with The Sims 4, but that's also for my own protection, you know. *Laughs*

Participant B

Thats fair.

Sjoerd van Midden

It's just, yeah.

Participant B

So many options ma, what the hell.

This one has a colour gradient. I like it.

Sjoerd van Midden

By the way.

Participant B

Oh here you have masculine. What?

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah, so you have a filter that you can turn off. We can also take a look at, in the upper left you can see a diamond. There you can set your name for example, but also custom pronouns.

Participant B

Aha.

Sjoerd van Midden

There you can also choose if he is more masculine focussed or feminine focussed. But you already removed the filters yourself, so you already know how it works a little bit.

Participant B

This really gives me Justin Bieber vibes. Not gonna do that.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs I'm definitely gonna put that in my thesis that like, how do you represent someone who is non-binary? Well, as long as they are not Justin Bieber. Justin Bieber vibes are not allowed. Number one rule, no Justin Bieber.

Participant B

You can also get some Simpson vibes it seems.

Sjoerd van Midden

Simpson vibes?

Participant B

If it works, I clicked on it but it doesn't want to load. Please load, it's hilarious. Yes. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Oooh. That's Crusty. The clown. Yooo, honestly, peak character design right there.

Participant B

Laughs Beautiful. Okay, I just want basic, man-bun.

Sjoerd van Midden

Man-bun, man-bun.

Participant B

I'm so overwhelmed right now. Too many options. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs Yeah, that's understandable.

Participant B

Ooh, a it's a ponytail. I didn't know that. Woops, aah. I just wanted to.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs Because you can change everything, even a small misclick opens up a whole other menu because the game is like, oh you wanted to change this right? You now want to change the shoulders?

Participant B

Yeah I saw that, the shoulders, what the hell. Okay where did the man-bun go, I don't like the ponytail. Man-bun, where did you go? It's also a huge amount of hair styles that you can choose from.

Sjoerd van Midden

Jup. *Laughs* There is just so much.

Participant B

It's a very volumised man-bun though. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

But if you want, you can always say, like, hey this a character who I think is cool, but on top of that I would make these changes still. Then I will just write that down. So, I would say something like, if we could change this then we would. Oh by the way, if you want to, you can any age that you want, like if you say that the perfect representation is an old man, then that's allowed. As long as they are not a child. *Laughs*

Participant B

I mean, of course. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Then that's totally okay.

There are so many options in here that I will never be able to obtain in my real life.

Participant B

You can even have fancy helmets, oh my god.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs Yeah, there are also just so many things where I'm like, where does this come from? Which brand is this?

Participant B

It's, there are also custom designs. I like that. Okay what else can we do? Accessories. Oh you can have earrings. I like earrings, let's do earrings.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yooo.

Participant B

Oh, so that's. Okay, aww is that all you have got? You only have bright colours? No black?

Sjoerd van Midden

It seems like it. Pretty weird that there is no black.

Participant B

Aah, I just want it to stop man.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs

Participant B

God damn it.

Sjoerd van Midden

Like I said you can quit whenever you want.

Participant B

Fair enough, close enough. No, no.

Sjoerd van Midden

It's too much.

What kind of character is this? Do you have an idea, like this is his personality for example?

Participant B

I just wanted to make him androgynous, so how I would see myself more, which would make me feel more represented. It's difficult, even with this many options.

Sjoerd van Midden

You have, let's see. What kind of aspects would you like to make more androgynous? Like his face or?

Participant B

Yes, I would like to make his face a little bit softer. Although, this also works.

Sjoerd van Midden

You can, I think, you can definitely change his cheeks completely, but you can also choose a more feminine build. Then he definitely looks more feminine of course.

Participant B

That's fair. Okay.

Sjoerd van Midden

Ooh, yeah yeah, I can see the androgynousness in him.

Participant B

You can also do a lot over here, why man?

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs

Participant B

I do want to get rid of that gay little scarf. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay now.*Laughs* Wow wow wow. Hold on a second.

Participant B

I'm not into scars. We can change it into something better, like this.

Sjoerd van Midden

You don't have to answer this, but what is your sexuality?

Participant B

Basically, as asexual as it can be.

Sjoerd van Midden

Aah asexual, Okay, well, then I think you are still allowed to say that something is gay. Like, I'm not allowed to say such things, you know. I need to ask first.

Participant B

Yeah, you need permission for that.

Sjoerd van Midden

I need permission for that yeah.

It's pride-month this month, right?

Participant B

It's pride-month indeed. Aah, that went to fast. There's so many options. Classic option.

Sjoerd van Midden

Classic. If you're overwhelmed by the number of options, try to keep it small in your head, like what kind of options you want. Like do I want long sleeves or short sleeves and then just choose something from one of them and then it's fine. I say that, like, I have ethical approval for this, but I don't know how ethical it is to let you work on this for an hour and let you scroll through all the options. *Laughs*

Participant B

Laughs I'm just gonna skip the tops for now. Where are the pants? Bottoms.

Sjoerd van Midden

It's good.

Participant B

I like a good flared pants.

Sjoerd van Midden

What kind of pants?

Participant B

Flared, like on top you have folds and it's nicely broad at the bottom. That's fancy, like from the thirties or something, like 1930, I love it.

Sjoerd van Midden

You have, in like the outer circle, where you can also choose a skirt or pants, you also have some options for tight clothing.

Participant B

Clothes. Sweaters. This is just pants. Ooh, this is a whole lot of pants.

Sjoerd van Midden

It's a lot of pants.

Participant B

That's too cropped.

This is so weird, like normally I would already have worked on this for like three years.

Sjoerd van Midden

I don't mind anything by the way, like my whole evening is free. I can just sit and I'm also just flipping ready to work on this for a long time.

What is also fun is to see what kind of characters people make in general. Because I have for example a completely different taste compared to my friends, so everyone makes something completely different. That's very cool to see.

Participant B

I'm always more on the masculine side, like basic, but with longer hair and earrings. That's the way to go.

Sjoerd van Midden

That's fair. Like on the left side you can choose if they are chubby or muscular for example. But also more twink.

Participant B

You have full body options, damn.
Okay.

Sjoerd van Midden

I have been thinking, like I said you can just put him in any game that we could want. And then I see something like a bathrobe, and then I'm like, what kind of game would you have when the main character runs around in a bathrobe? Like what could that be? It's either a weird RPG or it's like. Oh actually, what you could do is, you locked yourself outside of your house and you need to try to get inside. That would be very relatable.

Participant B

Something like that would be hilarious yeah, where you locked yourself outside and you just need to try to get inside again.

Sjoerd van Midden

I could. I could make a game like that.

Participant B

Actually in a bathrobe yeah, like you just grab the newspaper outside and the door closes behind your back. And then you go on an epic adventure or something in your bathrobe.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yoo, you could even make it a stealth game, a sneak game, because you don't wanna be seen in your bathrobe. It would also be funny if you just take it like a boss you know? Like you just walk around in a bathrobe and not give a shit.

Participant B

Yeah exactly.

Sjoerd van Midden

I have a small tangent. The city where I was born, there we had a singer, I don't know that guy exactly, but everybody there does recognize him. I don't know why, but he was always wearing a panther-themed bathrobe and that was his main piece of clothing. Like jep, this is what I'm doing and then he also had a huge hat on and nobody knows exactly who he is, but everybody knows him. *Laughs*

Participant B

I love that. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

It's very weird to talk about because like, yeah, everybody in that city knows who I'm talking about, but we're all like, who the fuck is that guy really? He just exists.

Participant B

I love that.

Sjoerd van Midden

He just has more self-confidence than most of us have. If I were to walk around in that kind of clothing I would be thinking too much about what other people think about me.

Participant B

We also have a guy like that, I haven't seen him in a hile, but he always wore a skirt. Like fucking fancy.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah boy. Like, I have tried cross-dressing myself, like a super cute dress, but the biggest issue with female clothing is that it is just too small for my shoulders. Like, I tried it on, but after ten minutes my shoulders were like, I'm not getting any oxygen. That was painful. Since then I have been thinking about what I want with clothing. I identify as a man, I express myself as a man, even if I have long hair, but with clothing I wish there was just more feminine male clothing.

Participant B

Jup.

Sjoerd van Midden

Like, with female clothing you just have so many options when it comes to shapes, colours, fabrics. And for male clothing you just have a T-shirt with perhaps a print on it, five colours and that's it. Choose. And with feminine clothing I'm always like but this is so much more fun.

Participant B

I recognize that. I would also like it if they gave masculine clothing some more feminine options. Because when it comes to clothing I also want to try different things. In daily life I like it more masculine, but I also do cosplay. And with cosplay I don't mind cosplaying an over-the-top feminine character, cause it's just a character that you pretend to be. Like on conventions I see way more men in skirts, which is totally fine.

Sjoerd van Midden

Also, like, how old is your charcter? Since his hair is silver?

Participant B

Yeah, I wanted to have a silver dye effect, but it's not really working.

Sjoerd van Midden

Aah, okay, so almost like it is frosted?

Participant B

It looks too naturally silver. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

You now, silver fox style, black with a bit of silver in there.

You are allowed to just pick silver, just so you know.

Participant B

Nah, I was getting annoyed by it myself. *Laughs* That's the problem.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs Okay, fair.

Participant B

It's too naturally silver. Normally in normal light it is, oh, what is this? I have to zoom out. Yeah.

Sjoerd van Midden

Oooh. And what are his pronouns? He/him?

Participant B

I guess he/him or he/they.

Sjoerd van Midden

Well, they are looking fine. So, yeah, there are some things that you can still adjust. For example the background thing on the left with those symbols. Those are all kinds of things that you can fill in. That's for when you also want to give him a personality. So, with gender expression, like, that's also partly behaviour, right? Because masculinity and femininity.

Participant B

Ooh but nature though.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yooo. Botany.

Participant B

Yes.

Sjoerd van Midden

Stones. I also, hold up, this is very important for this research. Let me see, I can't find it, but I also have a big box with all kinds of rocks.

Participant B

He is swinging.

Sjoerd van Midden

He is swinging, yoo.

Participant B

No. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

No romance? *Laughs*

Participant B

No romance?

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah, I guess he is asexual. I, the whole thing is about gender, but I have also ready some things about sexuality. And I don't know if you know Jaiden Animations, but she made a video about asexuality. And she said like, that she always listened to romantic songs and it never dawned on her that people actually feel that. Like, she thought it was just being dramatic, whatever. But like actually feeling that was new to her. That is also something I never thought about since I'm heterosexual guy you know. Like I thought it was normal that people get attracted like that, but no. Not at all.

Participant B

I don't recognize that.

Sjoerd van Midden

This is something that I haven't talked about, come to think of it, but a friend of mine said that sexuality is also dependent on time, so to say. Like at one moment you can like guys more and at another moment you like girls more. And I haven't read anything about this, but could that not be the case for gender as well? That you just, like, right now you feel like this but in ten years you feel like something completely different, maybe that's also a part of it.

Participant B

Yeah.

Sjoerd van Midden

Right now you are using the slider for the voice and the right side is higher pitched and the left is lower. Sadly you can't hear that, but yeah.

Participant B

I don't understand how the symbols correlate to the tone of the voice. *Laughs* Like why is a piece of candy lower pitch?

Sjoerd van Midden

That's the frequency. A higher frequency is also a higher voice.

Participant B

I still don't understand, why is a piece of candy a lower frequency?

Sjoerd van Midden

What? Ooh you're looking, what the fuck are those pieces of candy yeah? I can still hear it, so let me increase the volume. Hold up.

Can you click the piece of candy for example?

Participant B

Oh that's sweet.

Sjoerd van Midden

Oooh.

Participant B

Melodic.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay okay.

Participant B

What is wilted? I like a warm voice.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs I was like, how am I gonna convey this, what this voice entails like. They all sounds so differently. Like it is still sims gibberish. So it's like hubbuhbuh ad the other is like habababababa. You know? *Laughs* That's the difference. That's fine, you just have to look at the names.

Participant B

They say warm, so I'm gonna keep it as is.

Sjoerd van Midden

That's good. Hubuh buh buhbubuh.

Participant B

Laughs Ahbuhbahbah. *Laughs* Make that a quote.

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs Aaah, yes, participant B said, ahbuhbahbuh. I like how the automatic translation is not great, like these words are unrecognizable to it.

Participant B

Because they are not actual words?

Sjoerd van Midden

Mainly, that doesn't help yeah. Hey, you just saw the option for pregnant, not pregnant, I think. At the top left, the three dots.

Participant B

Jep.

Sjoerd van Midden

What did you choose?

Participant B

Here you can see. The customize. Sexual orientation.

Sjoerd van Midden

Both, okay. Interested romantically? No. Likes woohoo?

Participant B

No woohoo. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Ooh that's, oh yeah. I forgot that you have aromantic and asexual that those are two different things. Clothes likes masculine. Can make others pregnant? Neither. Can he sit? Okay okay. What sound weird by the way. I heard this from someone else, like apparently men, like cis-men can produce milk in certain situations.

Participant B

Yes, sometimes it goes wrong. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Like, it's not even that something goes wrong, it's more like if there are no women around to produce milk then it is activated in men apparently. Don't quote me on that. I'm not gonna quote myself. *Laughs*

Participant B

You need milk glands for that and I'm not sure men have that. In the standart program, so to say.

Sjoerd van Midden

I'm just confused honestly.

Participant B

I'm not sure if it's in the standard program, but I may happen surely.

Sjoerd van Midden

Oh, we talked about this before, if this character were in a game. Would he be more of a main character? Like where would you see him be? Like maybe you prefer him like a merchant or someone you can just randomly meet or he is your best friend?

Participant B

This one has friends vibes. He's just gardening and being happy. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

Gardening and being happy. That's actually a good vibe. If that could just be my life, if I could just tend a garden, be a friend and that's all I needed to do then it would be a pretty good life. A pretty good life yeah.

Participant B

If he would be a main character I would choose a bit more of an extrovert appearance, a bit more out-there. Like in anime with crazy hair and such.

Sjoerd van Midden

I guess it depends on the game.

Participant B

Yeah, it depends on the game.

Sjoerd van Midden

If you would have more of a relaxing game, like one about gardening, then he could be the main character.

Participant B

Even in relaxing games a flamboyant appearance could be fun. In minecraft i have a cape.

Laughs

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs Wait, hold up. A cape is flamboyant? Okay.

Participant B

I think so. *Laughs*

Sjoerd van Midden

I see what you mean though. That's actually quite flamboyant yeah.

I'm thinking, we only have two more things.

Participant B

Okay.

Sjoerd van Midden

Yeah, at hello my name is, there you can fill in his name.

Participant B

Oh no, why do you ask me this?

Sjoerd van Midden

Laughs You don't have to. And the second thing is that you can fill in the pronouns.

Participant B

I'm horrible at names.

Sjoerd van Midden

You know, so am I. *Laughs*

Participant B

You know what. I have a name, because he is inspired by a friend. So he's gonna be my friend.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay, that's adorable. He doesn't need a last name. Luka. I like Luka, that's a pretty name.

Participant B

Am I gonna make him a he? I'm gonna make him a he/they. Can I make them a he/they?

Sjoerd van Midden

He/they.

Participant B

Yeah you can do a he/they sort of.

Sjoerd van Midden

It's very specific I guess.

Participant B

I'll keep him he/him because it's too difficult.

Sjoerd van Midden

Fair enough. So you would prefer if you just had like some sort of randomness then?

Participant B

Yeah it doesn't have to be this specific. They can just say he/the, she/they that's easy.

Sjoerd van Midden

I also immediately think about how you would code that. Like how you would implement that.

Participant B

Yeah.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay. Luka. He is your son now, or your friend I guess. He is your creation and thank you very much. I'm gonna grab the mouse.

Participant B

Yes.

Sjoerd van Midden

Okay. Stop, so now you can't touch him anymore, so now I can do anything I want with him. Save as. Oh he must have a last name? Really Sims? Okay. We can keep it simple like your favorite animal.

Participant B

Laughs Well, my favourite animal? That's basic, that's wolf.

Sjoerd van Midden

Oh yeah *Laughs*. Shall we name him Luka Wolf then?

Participant B

That's beautiful because his favourite animals are also wolfs. Yes.

Sjoerd van Midden

Eeey, actually perfect. Let's fucking go.

Participant B

That's a great pose.

Sjoerd van Midden

Alright, I'll keep the screen like this for now. That's basically the end of the interview.