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Transgender in Games

A Comparative Study of Transgender Characters in Games

Emil Christenson and Danielle Unéus

Faculty of Arts
Department of Game Design

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Supervisors: Ann-Sofie Lönngren, Hans Svensson
Examiner: Masaki Hayashi

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Abstract

This thesis contains an analysis of transgender characters in games. The method for selecting the characters was based on the importance of the character in the game with the requirement that the game must have sold at least half a million units. The goal was to analyse well-known characters in gaming history to get an overview of how the game industry has represented transgender in games. Out of 102 characters only six of them met the requirements and have been analysed with the use of *queer theory*. Gender and how the characters break the norms of what is feminine and what is masculine is in focus. In the analysis, the characters are examined through their mannerism, design, personality and dialogue. The analysis is then summarized into identifiable patterns. The result of this thesis is a better understanding of how transgender characters are portrayed in the game industry.

Keywords: Transgender, Video Games, LGBTQ, Character Representation, Queer Theory

Abstrakt

I denna uppsats analyseras transgenuskaraktärer i spel. De karaktärer som analyseras har valts ut baserat på hur mycket karaktären syns i spelet och ett krav är att spelet måste ha sålt minst en halv miljon exemplar. Målet var att analysera välkända transgenuskaraktärer från spelhistorien för att få en överblick över hur spelindustrin representerar transgender i spel. Av 102 karaktärer har sex karaktärer uppnått kraven och blivit analyserade med hjälp av *queerteori*. Fokus är kön, hur karaktärerna bryter mot vad som anses vara kvinnligt eller manligt. I analysen undersöks karaktärerna utifrån deras mannerism, design, personlighet och dialoger. Analysen avslutas med mönster som har identifierats. Resultatet av denna uppsats är en bättre förståelse av hur transgenuskaraktärer porträtteras i spelindustrin.

Nyckelord: Transgenus, Videospel, LHBTQ, Karaktärsrepresentation, Queerteori

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Terminology

An understanding of the basic vocabulary is crucial to understand this thesis. This terminology is based on GLAAD's media reference guide (GLAAD, 2017a), *National center for transgender equality* (2017) and *The Swedish Youth Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer rights* (Transformering.se, 2016).

Transgender refers to persons that have a different gender identity than the assigned gender at birth. The term transgender is an umbrella term that includes persons that identify as the opposite gender of the gender they were assigned at birth but also those that do not identify as either male or female and other variations, for example *nonbinary*, *bigender*, *genderqueer*, *intergender*. A transgender might want to change their legal gender, dress and correct the physical appearance through hormone medication and/or surgery to match their gender identity. Transgender is not related to sexual orientation. Other variations include *transgender person*, *transwoman*, *transman*. *Cisgender* is a term for people whose gender identity matched the gender they were assigned at birth. *Cisgender* is the opposite of a transgender.

Passing is a term for when a transgender person is viewed by others accordingly to the transgender person's gender representation. For example, a *transwoman* is *passing* when she is viewed as a woman by all who meet her. *Passing* can be vital for a transgender person's safety because a transgender person can become a target of *transphobic* harassment and violence. Not all transgender strives to *pass* as the opposite gender they were assigned at birth. *Transition* is the period of time when a transgender starts living as the gender they identify as. A *transition* can be several months or several years. Each individual defines when their *transition* is complete. But if the person has been diagnosed as transsexual and goes through the process that is laid out by the hospital. Then there are some laws provided on how long it should be and how it should be done. This can also vary from country to country. For example, a *transman* might consider the *transition* period to be over when he is *passing*. While anyone can dress up as the opposite gender, *transvestites* or *crossdresser* generally refers to males that occasionally wear clothes, jewelry and makeup culturally associated with women. *Crossdressing* was common in theatre history when women were not allowed to perform and instead male actors *crossdressed* when they were playing female characters. Disguise, comfort and self-expression are some of the purposes of *crossdressing*. In the modern society where *crossdressing* is the main attraction at shows, the actors are called drag queens for males that *crossdress* to women or drag kings for women that *crossdress* to males. A trap character is a transgender female character that is used in a transphobic manner as a plot twist where the goal is to fool the player into thinking that the character is female to later reveal that the character has a penis. This is a term that comes from a transphobic context and has been formed from a heteronormative perspective. That there only exists two true genders and one can only exist in one of these genders or else they would be labeled as belonging to a false gender or trying to conceal their "true" gender.

1 Introduction and Background

The transgender community is fighting against discriminations in their medical, social, legal and work life (National Center for Transgender Equality, 2017; Tgeu.org, 2017). As the transgender community is so diverse, discrimination has to be fought against on many different levels simultaneously. According to Hall (Hall et al., 2013) it is important how we represent people in media, since it affects how we interpret our own world. Media reflects the view of the culture in which it is present but also holds the opportunity to affect that culture. People's linguistic ideas and interpretations are constantly changing and the visual impressions we receive can strengthen or alter our worldviews. We as game designers want to get an understanding of how transgender characters are represented, what the stereotypes are, so that we can make a conscious decision on how we choose to represent transgender characters in the games we create.

Games are a more recent entertainment media to present visual stories than films and series. It is recently that games have become more cinematic and have had the opportunity of involving complex characters. In the 70s, simple games such as *Pong* (1972) and *Space invaders* (1978) were the biggest titles. In the 80s, there were *Tetris* (1984), *Super Mario Bros* (1985), and *The Legend of Zelda* (1986) and in 2010, we have more complex stories as *Silent Hill 2* (2001), *Bioshock* (2007) and *The Walking Dead* (2012). The first documented portrayed transgender character is *Birdetta* in the game *Super Mario Bros. 2* (1988) for the NES published by Nintendo.

Compared to the game industry, the film industry has a longer history and has presented more talked-about transgender characters. Example of famous transgender characters are the main character in Oscar winning series *Transparent* (2014) where the story is about a *transwoman* in her early *transition* and the popular Netflix series *Orange Is The New Black* (2013) with the *transwoman* character *Sophia Burset* where the actress became the first *transperson* to be nominated for an *Emmy* (Gjorgievska and Rothman, 2014). Other big series and movies that have a transgender character are *Friends* (1997), *Sense8* (2015), *Naked Gun 3 1/3* (1994), *Family Guy* (2010), *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* (1994), *The 40 Year-Old-Virgin* (2005), *Crocodile Dundee* (1986) and *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013). The film industry has shown a pattern in how transgender characters are represented. The majority of transgender characters in the film industry are *transwomen* (Sandberg, 2015) while in the 2015 *Report Of The U.S. Transgender Survey* we found that of transgender persons 35% identify as *nonbinary*, 33% identify as transgender women, 29% identify as transgender men and 3% said that *crossdresser* best described their gender identity (James et al., 2016). GLAAD (2007b) catalogued 102 episodes and non-recurring storylines of scripted television that contained transgender characters, and found that 54% were portrayed in a negative way, 35% were categorized at ranging from problematic to good. Only 12% were considered to be a fair accurate representation. 40% of the times the transgender character was casted in a victim role, 21% villain or killer role, 20% as sexworker and *transphobic* phrases were used 61% of the times (GLAAD, 2007b). There are several comedian shows that use transgender characters as a comedic *transphobic* element. For example, in *The Cleveland Show* (2009) and *Family Guy* a man throws up a lengthy period of time after discovering that he had slept with a *transwoman*. In *Naked Gun 33 1/3* the main character throws up in a tub after a *transwoman* undresses and reveals that she has a penis. Similar storyline happens in *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* where the main character finds out that one of the characters is a *transwoman* and exposes her to the other characters. They react in disgust and gag collectively.

We want to highlight the transgender community because how a group is represented can affect how the group is treated (Hall et al., 2013). In our experience, it is rare to come across a transgender character in games. Our goal is to create a base for other game designers to look at, to see how are the most well-known transgender characters in games represented and if there are any patterns. Games have the opportunity to be one of the most immersive mediums, because they are not restricted by physical laws and do not need to conform to reality as much as movies or books. This thesis is listing a few of the most well-known transgender characters and are comparing them to each other. The characters are analysed by different properties that is laid out in this thesis. The analysis is followed by a reflection about the patterns of how transgender characters are represented in games.

1.1 Previous Work

The written work on transgender characters in games are mainly private smaller blogs or discussion forums. There are a few journals and books written about *LGBTQ* in games that mention transgender characters (Shaw and Friesem, 2016; Wysocki and Lauteria, 2015; Lauteria, 2011) but with the main focus on *homosexuals* and gender roles.

LGBTQ Video Game Archive (2017a) and *Queerly Represent Me* (2017a) are online web archives that focus on *LGBTQ* content in games. They have covered games with *LGBTQ* content from as early as the 80s. The archives cover transgender and *nonbinary* game characters. *LGBTQ Video Game Archive* is sponsored by *Refiguring Innovation in Games* and the *Temple Digital Scholarship Center* and it is a research project by Dr. Adrienne Shawn from *Temple University*. *Queerly Represent Me* is founded by Alayna Cole, a writer and academic who focuses on *queer* representation in games and storytelling.

This thesis complements the previous works with a comparison and a listing of transgender characters in games and analyses them with focus on whether or not the characters break the *heterosexual matrix*. In previous works, only one character has been covered at the time. By analysing several characters from different time areas, the thesis provides the reader with an overview of how the game industry has represented transgender.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse and compare different transgender characters in order to get a better understanding of how the transgender population has been represented in the games media. The thesis also analyses if there are any similarities in the way that the characters are portrayed. The intention of this thesis is to further the knowledge of transgender characters in the past in order to advance the representation of transgender characters in the future.

2 Material and methodology

This chapter is divided into two parts, a first one describing selection method and theory, followed by a second part with a presentation of the four categories, mannerism, design, personality and dialogues. The first part describes how the characters were selected. The second part briefly summarizes *queer theory* and how the theory is applied in the analysis. The research to gather information about the characters was made through an analysis of the games and of the manuals and the games' official web pages, *LGBTQ Video Game Archive* and *Queerly Represent Me*.

2.1 Selection method

The goal for selecting the characters was to pick the most well-known transgender characters through games history. To find the transgender characters the authors went through *LGBTQ Video Game Archive* (2017b) and *Queerly Represent Me* (2017b) lists containing 102 transgender characters in games. The characters chosen must have existed for at least three years. This time range makes it possible for more discussions, analysis and interviews of the developers. There are cases to be found where the developers choose to change the character after a time, as the developers of *Samus* from *Metroid* (1986) who were backing down from the claim that she is a *transwoman* (Wikitroid, n.d.). For a character to be included in the analysis the character must be designed by the developers to be explicitly a transgender character and be a part of the characters designed identity. *Crossdressing* characters such as *Bridget* from *Guilty Gear* and *Chihiro* from *Danganronpa* (2010) that *cross-dress* as protection while they identify themselves as the gender they were assigned with at birth, are not included. Characters that have been designed by the player to break the gender norms and characters that have rumors that they are transgender but can not be confirmed are not included. Other requirements were that the transgender character needs to have a role in the game where manners, design, personality and dialogue are visible. If a character has a minor side role where the player barely interacts or sees the character, the character has not been analysed in this thesis. The characters were picked from published well-known games because those are more widely spread and therefore impact the game industry more compared to indie games that have only sold a few units. The authors choose to determine if a game is well-known by their units sold rate. The game or game series must have sold a minimum of 500 000 units in total to be included in this thesis. The website database *VGChartz* (2017) was used in order to know how many units were sold.

Out of 102 characters, the following six characters met the requirements. They were: *Birdetta* from *Super Mario Bros. 2*, *Poison* from *Final Fight* (1989), *Shablee* from *Leisure Suit Larry 6: Shape Up or Slip Out!* (1993), *Vivian* from *Paper Mario - The Thousand-Year Door* (2004), *Erica* from *Catherine* (2011) and *Krem* from *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (2014). The characters are listed in the analysis in a chronological order starting with *Birdetta* 1988 and ending with *Krem* 2014.

2.2 Theory

Fanny Ambjörnsson is a Swedish researcher and teacher at the section for gender studies at *Stockholm University*. She has written several books regarding *Queer Theory* and is basing her work on Judith Butler. Judith Butler is an American philosopher and is known as one of the first gender theorists that launched *Queer Theory*.

According to Judith Butler (1990) and to Fanny Ambjörnsson (2016), the *heterosexual matrix* provides a binary view on gender, where gender is divided into two groups, women and men. In a society with a *heteronormative perspective*, *heterosexuality* is the expected norm for people's sexuality and women are expected to act in a feminine way and men are expected to act in a masculine way. To fit into the *heteronormative perspective* of what a woman or what a man is, the person's biological sex, social gender and sexuality must match- a woman must have the body, the mannerism of a woman and be sexually attracted to men. When a person does not follow this matrix, it is considered unnatural and abnormal. In the *heterosexual matrix*, a person's genitals define that person's gender, which *transgenderism* is challenging. *Queer theory* questions the *heterosexual matrix* by pointing out that the matrix is not natural and it is not fixed. Judith Butler explains gender as performative and as being something a person is not born with and also that gender is a social construction that is taught at a very young age.

The focus in this thesis is gender. In the analysis the authors have observed where the characters break the *heterosexual matrix*. how they are crossing the line between women and men. When designing a character there are normative ways to convey the character's gender, that are aligned with what is femininity and masculinity within the *heteronormative perspective*. To analyse the different areas where the characters can break the matrix, the authors have categorized the areas into mannerism, design, personality and dialogues. Are the characters' mannerism feminine or masculine, are they designed to look, act and talk like stereotypical women or men?

2.2.1 Mannerism

Nonverbal signals are a major part of how humans convey information (Mehrabian and Ferris, 1967). By the use of body language and tone a person can send information about his or her emotional state and reinforce or contradict a verbal message (Krauss, et al., 1996). The receiving end can by observing another human's body language, understand if it is safe to approach, read emotions and get feedback from their own messages (Mehrabian and Ferris, 1967). Studies done on body language show that females and males use their body language differently (Carney, et al., 2005). Social gender constructions and biological aspects shape a person to use their body language in distinctive ways (Van Edwards, 2013). Even though the lines for what is female and what is male body language is blurry and both females and males can use each other's body language, there is still a pattern common enough for body language experts to categorize it into female and male body language (Van Edwards, 2013; Pease, 2004).

As stated in *The Definitive Book of Body Language* (Pease, 2004), a stereotypical female walk includes swinging the hips, minimal head movement up and down and feet placed in front of each other on a line. The female body language is closed: legs together, arms tucked to the

side or close to the body, compared to the open male version: legs spread and arms that are taking up more space. Women tend to tilt their heads more to display interest and expose the neck area. They also have softer exposed wrists, smile more and play with their hair. The female body language shows submission. The male body language is more aggressive, taking up broader space, wider walk and stance. A typical male walk includes swinging of the shoulders, more up and down head movement and knee bending. The male voice is deeper compared to the higher pitched female voice. The purpose to look at the body language and tone is to observe how the character is portrayed in a gender normative way and if they follow the stereotypical gender roles of the heterosexual matrix. Is the *transwoman* moving and sounding as a heavy male, a tender female or as combination of those two?

2.2.2 Design

Design in this thesis refers to the visual design and appearance of the character, for example body shape, colours, and clothing. The design is a tool for the designer to exaggerate and play down traits in a character (Solarski, 2012). A character's design tells the viewer about the character's femininity, masculinity and personality traits.

According to Ekström (2013), characters' silhouette can be broken down into the basic shapes - circle, square and triangle - and the shapes send messages to the viewer. Circular objects are interpreted as friendly and safe. Squares are associated with strength, stability and confidence while triangular objects send signals of aggression and danger. Colours is another way to send messages to the viewer (Caivano, 2005). In the western culture pink and blue are used as gender codes, pink for girls and blue for boys (Ambjörnsson, 2011). Pink signals softness, cuteness and love, while blue sends messages about authority, infinity and truth (Lindstrand and Walter, 2016). Red signals aggression, danger and passion, while orange and yellow associate with energy, playfulness and warmth (Lindstrand and Walter, 2016). By looking at these stereotypical representations of female and male genders the analysis will be able to analyze if the characters are following their stereotypical gender role.

Diana Crane (2009) argues that clothes are also ways to send messages to the viewer. Clothing can convey information about the character such as profession, status, personality, background, age and gender. Men are more likely to buy clothes for practical reasons compared to women that tend to have a bigger interest in fashion. Some cloth pieces, fabrics and styles are more associated with femininity such as skirts, dresses, high heels, the use of ruff, bows, and jewelry. Clothing can also give away a person's profession. The way the designer chooses to use shapes, colour and clothing sends different signals to the viewer and therefore this is analysed.

2.2.3 Personality

Sandra Bem (1974) is the creator of *BSRI* - a widely spread tool for measure of feminine-masculine personality traits. Bem lists 20 traits that are more common for men, 20 for women and 20 gender neutral. Bem's selection method was to list 400 personality traits and having a jury rate them by masculine and feminine traits.

Masculine items	Feminine items	Neutral items
49. Acts as a leader	11. Affectionate	51. Adaptable
46. Aggressive	5. Cheerful	36. Conceited
58. Ambitious	50. Childlike	9. Conscientious
22. Analytical	32. Compassionate	60. Conventional
13. Assertive	53. Does not use harsh language	45. Friendly
10. Athletic	35. Eager to soothe hurt feelings	15. Happy
55. Competitive	20. Feminine	3. Helpful
4. Defends own beliefs	14. Flatterable	48. Inefficient
37. Dominant	59. Gentle	24. Jealous
19. Forceful	47. Gullible	39. Likable
25. Has leadership abilities	56. Loves children	6. Moody
7. Independent	17. Loyal	21. Reliable
52. Individualistic	26. Sensitive to the needs of others	30. Secretive
31. Makes decisions easily	8. Shy	33. Sincere
40. Masculine	38. Soft spoken	42. Solemn
1. Self-reliant	23. Sympathetic	57. Tactful
34. Self-sufficient	44. Tender	12. Theatrical
16. Strong personality	29. Understanding	27. Truthful
43. Willing to take a stand	41. Warm	18. Unpredictable
28. Willing to take risks	2. Yielding	54. Unsystematic

Note. The number preceding each item reflects the position of each adjective as it actually appears on the Inventory.

Figure 2.1 Table of traits (Bem, 1974).

The traits were selected after the jury's stereotype of what is masculine and feminine. *BSRI* have received criticism for cementing gender-stereotypical thinking (Hoffman and Borders, 2001). In this thesis, these traits are used as a base for analysing gender stereotypical personality traits in these characters. Is the *transwoman's* personality breaking the *heterosexual matrix* by having more stereotypical masculine traits than stereotypical feminine?

2.2.4 Dialogue

The pattern of how characters talk is something that also can identify the gender of the character. According to John Locke (2011) there are stereotypical gender coded topics. It is more common for males to interrupt, issue commands, threats, give information, heckle, tell jokes or suspenseful stories while females are more likely to agree with other speakers, acknowledge points made by other speakers, be polite, and cooperate or collaborate. This is why it is of importance to analyse the dialogue of the character in order to find out if the portrayal of the transgender character is still reproducing the *cis* gender norm.

3 Analysis

This chapter is divided into two segments, characters and comparative analysis. In the first segment, the six transgender characters are presented in chronological order. The presentation includes the first appearance of the character and their background as transgender. The second segment consists of an analysis categorized into design, mannerism, personality, dialogue and other shared similarities.

3.1 Characters

3.1.1 Birdetta - Super Mario Bros. 2



Figure 3.1 Birdetta (Mario & Sonic at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, 2016).

The character *Birdo* is referred to as a male that believes he is a female and would rather be called “*Birdetta*”, hence the character is called *Birdetta* throughout this thesis. This character is encountered first in *Super Mario Bros. 2* which was published in 1988. The gender of *Birdetta* is not mentioned inside the game. It is not until one opens the manual that the gender of *Birdetta* is revealed. The manual text is: “He thinks he is a girl and spits eggs from his mouth. He’d rather be called ‘*birdetta*.’(sic!)” (Digitpress.com, 2017). Initially *Birdetta* was an antagonist but has later in the game series been depicted as an ally. This thesis examines the following games where *Birdetta* appears: *Super Mario Bros. 2* which is her first game that she appeared in and the latest game she appeared in *Mario & Sonic at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games* (2016) for the 3DS. In later installments that *Birdetta* appears in, her gender has become fluid and is not explicitly said to be transgender and in some games, she is even referred to as a female character. There are also some variations depending on where the game is released. In this thesis, the authors treats her as a representation of a transgender female character.



Figure 3.2 Birdetta from Super Mario Bros. 2 (Super Mario Bros 2, 1988).

3.1.2 Poison - Final Fight



Figure 3.3 Poison collectable toy (Bigbadtoystore.com, n.d.).

Poison started out as a transgender character in *Final Fight* (1989). She is a playable character in several beat'em-up and fighting games developed by *Capcom*. In the localization to America *Poison* and her sidekick *Roxy* were swapped with male characters. Even if *Poison* was swapped out in the American version, she remains to this day as one of the first playable transgender characters. In the design document of *Final Fight* (1989), *Poison* is described as a transgender character (Wysocki and Lauteria, 2015). In *Capcom Classic Collection* (2005) manual, *Poison* is described as a *cross-dressing* man and in the game she is referred to as “she”. *Yoshinori Ono* the producer of *Street Fighter IV* (2008) was asked about *Poison*’s gender and responded:

Let's set the record straight: In North America, *Poison* is officially a post-op transsexual woman. But in Japan, she simply tucks her business away to look female (Matt, 2008).

Yoshinori Ono later in an interview wrongly claims that *Poison* was originally designed to be a woman and that he does not want to take a stance and rather let her gender be mysterious (Patterson, 2011).

3.1.3 Shablee - Leisure Suit Larry 6



Figure 3.4 Shablee's and Larry's date (Leisure Suit Larry 6: Shape Up or Slip Out!, 1993).

Leisure Suit Larry 6: Shape Up or Slip Out! is one game from the adult-themed adventure game series published by *Sierra* from 1987 to 2009. The player plays a man in his 40s and the goal is to seduce women. *Leisure Suit Larry 6: Shape Up or Slip Out!* has a dark-skinned transwoman named *Shablee*. She is a side character the protagonist can go on a date with after fetching her a dress. After some work *Shablee* tells the protagonist that she is ready to have sex with him and she asks for a condom. The protagonist hands her the condom and she turns away from the camera and puts it on. *Shablee* later turns around facing the character with an erect penis protruding her dress. The protagonist reacts with disgust and starts spitting and hurling on all fours and *Shablee* takes a step towards the protagonist and the screen fades to black with the protagonist screaming in pain and a narrator ends the scene by saying “No wonder she knows what a man really wants...”

3.1.4 Vivian - Paper Mario



Figure 3.5 Vivian (Super Mario Wiki, 2013).

Vivian was first introduced in *Paper Mario - The Thousand-Year Door* (2004) where she's having a major part as an ally to the protagonist *Mario*. She also appeared in *Super Paper Mario* (2007) as collectable catch card that gives the player powerups and in *Super Smash Bros Brawl* (2008) where *Vivian* is a collectable sticker. In *Paper Mario - The Thousand-Year Door* (2004), *Vivian* is a part of the villainous group *Shadow Sirens* which consists of her and her two sisters. *Vivian* later chooses to abandon her sisters to instead join *Mario* on his quest to take back his body and name. The events that led up to *Vivian* turning her back on her sisters are the bullying she gets exposed to. In one scene *Vivian* calls her and her two sisters the three shadow beauties and in response one of the sisters answers "I don't see three beauties! I see two, but then there's you, and you're **PLUG-UGLY!!!**". In the original Japanese version, *Vivian* calls the group the three shadow sisters and the sister replies "I don't see three sisters! You're a boy!!!!!" translated by Yokoyama Ria, teacher at *Kai Japanese Language School*.



Figure 3.6 Tree shadow sister (Nintendo, 2004)

3.1.5 Erica Anderson - Catherine



Figure 3.7 Erica Anderson (Catherine Wiki, 2015).

Erica is a character from the puzzle platform adventure game *Catherine*. The narrative in the game plays as an anime between the puzzles. *Erica* is a waitress at the inn called *Stray Sheep Inn* where much of the game takes place. *Erica* is depicted as a flirty, sociable and high-spirited person. Throughout the game *Erica* is a target for *transphobic* comments. A main theme in this game is romance and sex.



Figure 3.8 Toby regretting his choice (Catherine, 2011).

When one of the main characters called *Toby* succeeds in approaching *Erica* and they have sexual intercourse, *Toby* discusses his experience with his friends. At first, he is pleased that he has lost his virginity and he says “I am now a man”. His friend reacts in disgust and quickly tries to change the subject and *Toby* says that it felt “weird” but that it could have been because it was his first time and that is the end of the scene. At the end of the game *Toby* regrets his decision to have sex with *Erica* and says that it is weird because they knew *Erica* as “Eric” when they were kids. In the end credits of the game *Erica* is listed as “*Erica (Eric) Anderson*” but in the manual the character is listed as “*Eric Anderson (Erica)*” (Atlus, 2011). *Erica* does not seem to pay attention to any of the *transphobic* remarks. *Erica* also gets the nightmares that only male characters can get.

3.1.6 Krem - Dragon Age Inquisition



Figure 3.9 Krem (Character Krem. n.d.).

Krem is one of the first *transmen* in the video games media. *Krem* is a big side character in the game *Dragon Age Inquisition*. It is not until halfway through the game that *Krem* reveals his past. When this fact is revealed the player can choose how they like to react to it. The player can ask if *Krem* really is a woman. Depending on the choice, the player will get different answers, *Krem* and *Iron Bull* will begin to explain who *Krem* is and why he is a real man. Later the player can approach *Iron Bull* and ask if *Krem* being a woman is not a problem for him. *Iron Bull* will answer: “He’s not a woman”. The player can also ask *Krem* why he became a man and *Krem* will answer: “I didn’t decide anything. I’ve been like this my whole life.”

3.2 Comparative analysis

3.2.1 Design

Birdetta's visual design has to some extent changed throughout the series, most likely as a result of the increasing quality of graphics in games. *Birdetta*'s design contains stereotypical elements for a female character (Ambjörnsson, 2011). Her body's tone uses the colour pink, a female gender coded colour, which emphasizes *Birdetta*'s femininity (Ambjörnsson, 2011). Her long eyelashes and the makeup on her eyes also help to highlight this aspect. The big red bow on *Birdetta*'s head is something that has been recurring in portraying a female character in video games since the creation of *Ms. Pac-Man* (1981). Her body shape is round and almost plushy, except her nails that are sharp. The visual design of *Birdetta* contradicts her role in *Super Mario Bros 2*. In this game, she is the boss that the protagonist has to beat. Other enemy characters in *Super Mario Bros* franchises often follow the triangular silhouette design or have faces that express anger in order to signal to the player that they are enemies. Therefore, it is an interesting choice of design in the characters design of *Birdetta*. The round body shape is a way of making the character look friendly and feminine. In the later games, *Birdetta* is often a playable character.

Vivian who is also a part of the *Mario* franchise shares a similar round and plushy body type while her sisters have the triangular shaped hair, hats and nose. Same as *Birdetta*, *Vivian* and *Poison* have the bright pink colour included in their design. *Poison*'s face looks feminine with a v-shaped chin and with narrow space between the upper lip and nose. *Poison* displays a lot of skin, she wears short shorts and a tiny crop top. In *Ultra Street Fighter IV* (2014) *Poison* and *Elena* are the female characters that show the most amount of skin, the other female characters wear more clothes. The body shape for all 10 women are the same but *Poison*'s muscles are more contoured which makes her look more masculine, her outfit following a police theme with handcuffs around her waist and a police cap on her head. *Poison* also has a whip that hints about dominance or superiority (Cirlot, et al., 1971). This does not in any means necessary tell the story of *Poison* being a police officer, as she once was a member of a criminal gang called *The Mad Gear Gang* and is completely in the business of being a wrestler and manager. Her minimalistic outfit and her sexual mannerism indicate that *Poison*'s design is made to satisfy a uniform fetish. According to Matthew D. Johnson (2004) uniform fetish is associated with a queer sex subculture with dominance and submission, fetishism and sadism and masochism. The police occupation is a male-dominated profession. This emphasizes *Poison*'s masculine personality of being dominant and aggressive, reinforces her sexuality and signals to the player that *Poison* is queer.

Shablee is first seen in a green jumper that is zipped down to her stomach revealing both a pink bra and a lot of cleavage. She also wears full coverage makeup; makeup gives a woman a sexier look (Pease, 2004). She then later gets the pink dress that is shown in Figure 3.4. *Shablee* is a makeup artist, which is why the player at first will meet *Shablee* in a room filled with mirrors and work desks. When the player first interacts with *Shablee*, the narrator will say: "You take a closer look at the lovely young thing sitting at[...]".

Erica's visual design seems to be a cross between *Ronald McDonald* and *Wendy*'s mascot with colours as yellow, red and white. She is very slim and has big eyes. She wears a waitress outfit with an apron and a matching headband. She has a button upped shirt which shows a lot of cleavage and a short skirt. *Erica*'s face shape is the same as the other female characters but

her eyes are more square shaped like the men in the game. Her eyes are big and the irises are dark brown which makes her pupils look dilated, a signal for flirting (Pease, 2004).

Krem is always wearing his armor and he has short hair. His colours are muted and go from beige to brown and are contrasted by his armor that is of grey metal; the dark colours are associated with masculinity (Ambjörnsson, 2011). *Krem's* armor with shoulder pads make him look more boxy, friendly and masculine. His chin is wide, eyebrows straight, nose bridge shallow, and upper lip thin which makes his face look masculine (Peters, 2015).

3.2.2 Mannerism

It is interesting to look at *Yoshi*, the male counterpart of *Birdetta*. They have the same body shape which makes it possible to have the same animations for both *Yoshi* and *Birdetta*. This is seen in *Mario Kart Double Dash!!* (2000) where *Birdetta's* and *Yoshi's* animations are identical. In *Mario Tennis* (2000) all the basic action animations are the same for both *Birdetta* and *Yoshi* except for the entry walk, victory pose and defeated animation where the developers chose to animate the characters differently. *Yoshi's* poses are more masculine, with a regular walk and high jump in the victory pose. He ends up taking more space, while *Birdetta* is skipping when she is walking and blowing away kisses when she wins a set, which is considered to be a childish feminine behavior (Martin, 2017). The skipping walk signals to the player that *Birdetta* is a kid because it is a walk style most common for young children. In *Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour* (2003) when *Birdetta* makes a hole in one, she poses a more masculine pose, legs spread, hands closed, and gives the audience a fist bump. When she fails, she first lets her shoulder and head down to show sadness (Fexeus, 2015) but then quickly turns around in a pirouette and ends up in a childish innocent pose. Much alike *Birdetta*, *Vivian* also shows a childishness. She puts her hand in front of her mouth after giving *Mario* a cheek kiss. The covering of the mouth is most commonly used by kids, teenagers just puts a finger to the mouth instead while adults' version of covering the mouth is touching the nose (Pease, 2004). *Vivian* holds her hands close to the body with her hands slightly angled outwards. Women tend to have their wrist bent while men keep theirs straight. The bent wrist shows submission and are therefore considered to be a more female body language trait (Pease 2004). *Vivian* constantly smiles except for when she is sad. Women smile more than men and this is too a sign of submission (Pease, 2004).

When *Poison* first appeared in *Final Fight* she had the same animations as the male characters except for the knockout animation where all the characters lie flat and she lies in a fetal position. In *Final Fight Revenge* (1999) *Poison's* victory pose is a dance around a strip pole or she grabs her breasts to correct them and then flips her hair. All this are associated with sexual femininity, flipping the hair and emphasizing the breasts are signals of submission and attraction signal for women (Pease, 2004). The pole dance is in the western culture linked to strip clubs, touching the breast draws the eyes to her bust and flipping her hair is a body language for women to use to display sexual interest (Pease, 2004). In *Ultra Street Fighter IV* *Poison's* victory scene involves her dancing with her hips, stroking her bum, getting down on all four with her back arched, lying on her back spreading her legs and blowing a kiss to the player. While a few of the other women in the game are designed to show as much skin as *Poison*, their victory scenes do not contain the same amount of sexual indications. *Poison* makes sure to emphasize her bum, breast and legs which are according to Pease (2004) the three body parts that heterosexual men are the most attracted to. One character runs her finger

through her hair, another one winks but none of them arch their back and get down on the ground with their legs spread.

Shablee is also a character that shows sexuality. She only has three poses in the game. When the player first encounters *Shablee* she is half lying down, resting her upper weight on one elbow, tilting her head while exposing her cleavage. Cleavage serves the purpose of giving of sexual signals, heterosexual men are more attracted to the cleavage than the size of the bust (Pease, 2004). In the second pose, she is sitting on the beach, leaning backwards with her hands on the ground. The scene where the player discovers that she has a penis she first squats and turns her back to the player, moving her hands and then stands up straight with her chest up and pelvic forward. This pose is mainly used by men to show attractiveness and aggression (Pease, 2004).

Erica strikes dominant standing poses similar to men's, wide stance, hands on the hips with the elbows pointing outwards but she shows her femininity by tilting the pelvis and her head (Pease, 2004). When *Erica* is talking to the main character and his gang she puts her hands on the table wide apart and leans forward which puts her chest area on display. Putting the hands wide apart shows dominance by taking up broader space and are a more masculine trait (Pease, 2004), combined with emphasizing the chest area that signals submission, she confidently shows her sexuality.

In *Dragon Age Inquisition*, all the characters share the common animations with minor varieties. This leads to an overall gender-neutral body language for all the characters, the women and men have the same standing position with their feet wide apart and their hand gestures are similar. One of the hand gestures are more common for the women to do, moving the hands to waist level intertwining the fingers, shows insecurity (Pease, 2004). This movement is also performed by *Krem*. When *Krem* is interviewed about her new relationship he stands sideways to the player's avatar and is facing away from his leader. This position shows femininity by sending signals of vulnerability and submission (Pease, 2004).

3.2.3 Personality

Birdetta has shown different personalities in different games, but something that has stayed in most of the games is that she is competitive and that she hates losing. She also likes to flirt with the camera in her victory animations. When she is happy she often shows it by blowing kisses at the air and when she is disappointed she often tries to deal with it gracefully and tries to hide it. Whenever she gets angry she goes into a full-blown rage and starts breaking things and cries (Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour, 2003). She has the feminine traits of being cheerful and childish but she is also competitive. *Birdetta* does not have a clear agenda except for trying to stop the protagonist from proceeding in the plot. She has a role to play in the game *Captain Rainbow* (2008) where she is arrested for using the women's bathroom and the player must find something in order to prove to the police that she is a woman. This is done by going to her house and retrieving a vibrating censored object. *Birdetta* is released after the player has delivered the censored object to the police.

Poison much like *Birdetta* shows her emotions more than other women in the games that she is featured in. *Poison*'s whole design plays a lot on her personality. She is a wrestler who does not scare from a fight. *Poison* is an ambitious, dominant and aggressive leader which places her on the masculine side of *BSRI*. She likes to talk about her beauty and how much better

looking she is than the other characters. In the victory screens of *Ultra Street Fighter IV*, she often makes remarks that the opponent either belongs to her now or she suggests they should join her wrestling team. Something that *Poison* focuses a lot on is her body appeal and her looks. This is something *Shablee* in *Leisure Suit Larry 6* also shows. *Poison*'s main goal is to become rich and world famous. She is scouting for capable wrestlers in the aspiration of creating a world-famous wrestling team, which shines through at the end of her story in *Street Fighter X Tekken* (2012) where she and her companion *Hugo* reach the end of the game and retrieve the *Pandora's box*. To reach this goal they had to fight countless of strong opponents and when they finally reach this goal, *Poison* gets upset that there are no cameras to film them. No press and no witnesses. Even if *Poison* makes many seductive remarks, she does not really show any interest in love. She never displays any interest in any other character. This is something that makes her stand apart from the other characters in this thesis. On the counterpart, we have *Shablee* and *Erica*.

Shablee's motto is "veni vidi visa" which is slang for I came, I saw, I shopped. Giving the information that we get on this character, we could draw the conclusion of her being fond of taking care of her appearance. As *Shablee* is one of the side characters that the player has to go on a date with, one could say that *Shablee*'s agenda is to find love, even though this is never expressed. In *Leisure Suit Larry 6*, every character's agenda is more or less the same. They try to find love and live their lives. Much like in *Catherine* where there is *Erica*.

Erica is cheerful and hardworking. She seems to care a lot about her guests and she is most of the time in a bright mood. When the main character let his friends know that he has cheated on his girlfriend, *Erica* enters the scene and act as the moral voice, telling him that what he did was wrong. She also seems to be very loyal because of her constantly working at the *Stray Sheep Inn*, even though she complains about the boss hitting on her. *Erica* is a character who wants to help everyone. She always says to the protagonist that he should take care on the way home and asks if she should call a cab for the protagonist when he is done for the night. She is able to get together with *Toby* but that is not followed up on for the rest of the game except for a one ending where the player gets to see *Toby's transphobic* reaction to *Erica*. While *Erica* is an important character for *Catherine*, she is still a side character that does not impact the game play in a major way. This is something that *Erica* and *Krem* also has in common. *Krem* is a hard-working soldier with thick skin. He is a strong character who wants to do right. *Krem* is loyal and does everything for his superior *Iron Bull*. *Krem* is one of the major side characters in the game. As he is the lieutenant for the *Bull Chargers*, a band of mercenaries, he will accompany the player when they are hired by the inquisition. Loyalty is a feminine trait according to Sandra Bem (1974) but in this context it comes to loyalty to a superior in war. This could be considered more masculine that is probably why *Krem's* leader role is considered to be masculine. While *Krem* is not a playable companion he is featured throughout the whole game. In contrast, we have *Vivian* who is a playable companion. The loyalty and willing to do good is something that can also be found in *Vivian*.

Vivian is shy and withdrawn. This is shown through her relationship with her sisters where she is bullied and teased. Afterwards she decides to join *Mario's* party and during that journey she displays high rates of compassion and loyalty. She also shows that she is a forgiving character closer to the end of the game when she gets over her inferiority complex and makes up with her sisters. While *Vivian* in the start of the game is with her sisters, that is out to stop *Mario* from reaching his goals. *Vivian's* own agenda turns out to be a journey to help *Mario* and find herself in the process. Her agenda is to help everyone she can and in this instance, it is to help *Mario* in his journey as a playable character.

3.2.4 Dialogue

Birdetta does not have dialogue in the games she is in, *Captain Rainbow* and *Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga* (2003) being an exception, but her voice is deeper than her counterpart Yoshi, whose voice is high pitched. *Birdetta*'s voice is performed by both men and women. In *Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga* the character *Popple* presents *Birdetta* as Birdo on which *Birdetta* responds "Don't call me birdo... call me Birdie". *Birdetta* is together with *Yoshi*. In the Japanese manual for *Mario Kart Double Dash*, in the description for *Birdetta* this text can be found: "Looks like Yoshi's girlfriend but really is his boyfriend! Bring an egg/eggs and race!" (Nintendo, 2003) translated by Yokoyama Ria. This text is lost in localization translation.

Vivian has a poor relationship with her sisters. The sisters always tease *Vivian* and use harsh language against her. It is not until she accompanies *Mario*'s party on the journey that you get to understand completely what *Vivian* is all about. When *Mario* first meets *Vivian*, she is crying, scared to be punished by her sisters if she does not find the missing bomb. *Mario* comes in like a hero, he finds the bomb and starts soothing *Vivian*. When *Vivian* stops crying she starts focusing on *Mario* and decides to return the kindness *Mario* showed by joining him on his journey. Much like *Birdetta* and *Poison* this dynamic duo consists of another male character as a companion.

"Not bad. Ever considered a career in Pro Wrestling?", "I can sympathize, but the future is what's important. Not the past". These are some of the dialogues that *Poison* has in *Ultra Street Fighter IV*. The lines sum up *Poison*'s goal focused mind. While *Poison*'s main focus is on her agenda, she also talks a lot about her own looks or the look of the character that she fought. In *Final Fight* (1989), *Poison* is described as a guy that likes to wear women's clothing and fights to stay in shape and maintain her looks. *Poison* likes to heckle and show aggression to the other characters. In *Ultra Street Fighter IV* when a random character from the audience says to *Poison* "pro wrestling is totally stupid and cheesy.... So why don't you dance, girly?" she replays with "You two, you're such...what are you little girls gossiping about?!" and then proceeds to beat them up. *Poison* is most of the time a character that works alone and for her own benefit. *Poison*'s voice actors are all women.

While *Shablee* does not have the goal focus as *Poison*, she still makes similar remarks towards her own look or others' looks. Her voice is seductive and she adds moaning to her speech when she talks. Her dialogue often comes back towards her looks or making flirty comments towards the protagonist. *Shablee*'s voice is performed by a woman. Someone that also likes to flirt is *Erica*.

While she does not flirt with the protagonist she is flirting with the protagonist's friend *Toby*. But this is not the only dialogue that *Erica* has in the game. She also speaks a lot to the protagonist. The voice actor for *Erica* is a woman. When the player speaks to *Erica* she often talks about how men never know what women want. Other than that, *Erica* is also the one who starts to spread the rumor about *The Woman's Wrath*, which is the dreams that only guys get throughout the game. She is really invested in this phenomenon as she is also having those dreams. *Erica* has a childhood relationship with the main characters and two other characters in that gang as they went to school together. That is why the main character is able to hint at *Erica*'s past. The boss at the *Stray Sheep Inn* is constantly hitting on *Erica*. This is not something that the player will witness but it is something *Erica* loudly protests against and she refuses him all the time. *Erica* is surrounded by male companions as either her friends or

colleagues. The surrounding characters often make comments that indicate that *Erica* used to be a man. *Erica*, herself does never talk about her past gender. Something that *Krem* is discussing openly. But he only does so in a way to correct and inform the player of *Krem*'s situation.

Krem's dialogue is sharp and his personality as a hard-working soldier shows through his relationship with his superior *Iron Bull*. They constantly throw jabs at each other with sharp comments and jokes but they never joke about *Krem*'s past gender. When the player asks about *Krem*'s past gender he corrects the player (if that dialogue option is chosen) and then informs the player on *Krem*'s situation. *Krem* has a very strong bond with *Iron Bull*. *Iron Bull* saved *Krem* when he was being attacked by some soldiers from *Krem*'s old village. *Iron Bull* lost his eye in the process but he gained a forever loyal friend. In the downloadable content *Dragon Age: Inquisition Trespassers*, *Krem* displays affection towards a female singer called *Maryden*. *Krem*'s voice is performed by a woman that speaks with a lower tone. When *Krem* gets nervous his voice gets high pitched and sounds very feminine.

3.2.5 Other aspects

With all these characters analysed, there are a couple of similarities that seem to be shared among them. Some of the shared fates of characters are listed below.

Characters that started as transgender characters

Birdetta, from *Super Mario Bros. 2* and *Poison*, from *Final Fight* are both characters that started as *transwomen*, but have now been changed into gender fluid characters. The developers have chosen not to make a statement on their character's gender to support both sides of the player base.

Characters that are not revealed as transgender

Birdetta, from *Super Mario Bros. 2* and *Poison*, from *Final Fight* fall into this category also as they are never revealed in the game as transgender. It is not until the player reads the manual that there will be a hint of them being transgender. *Erica* could also be considered for this category as the players will only get it revealed to them in one of the endings of the game. But because of the amount of foreshadowing in the game, the authors have decided to leave her out of this category.

Transgender as a plot twist

In this category, we find *Shablee* and *Erica* even if the games use the plot twist in different ways. They still have the function of serving as bait for the player. The games hide the fact that they are transgender until the proper moment. Then they will reveal it. *Erica* is less of a plot twist character as her gender is not revealed in all the endings of the game and they do not make a big deal of the fact but her past is still hinted at throughout the game. On the extreme side, we have *Shablee* who, as in some of the movies that were mentioned above, follows exactly the same trope of being a typical *trap* character.

Characters that talk about their transition

Krem is the only character in this list who engages the character in a discussion about him being transgender, although the dialogue about it is fairly short and they do not make a big deal out of it. In both of these cases the player has the option to react in a *transphobic* way.

4 Reflections, Conclusion and Future Works

4.1 Reflections

Throughout this thesis, we have analysed six transgender characters. After the analysis, the conclusion can be made that portraying a transgender character is a multi-dimensional task. It has to be dealt with great care and with research. These chosen examples only brush the surface of what is the general portrayal of transgender characters, since the characters vary in both situation and game genres. Hopefully, these examples will provide a broader understanding of how transgender characters are portrayed in video games.

On the basis of the analysis we have found that the transgender female characters are portrayed in a stereotypical feminine way and the transgender male character in a stereotypical masculine way, with the exception of *Poison*'s personality, *Krem*'s voice actor and *Birdetta*'s competitive traits but they mainly express the gender they identify with. For example, *Poison* passes as a woman, she convey sexual femininity in her manners and visual design. The six characters indicates that when designers design a transgender character for a game the developers creates them in a way so that they break the *heterosexual matrix* as little as possible. If the player get to know that the characters are transgender it is by how the other characters in the game treat and interact with the transgender character, it is not by their appearance or mannerism. The six characters gender are treated in a binary way, they fit into the female or male gender box. We read it as an indication that it is too uncomfortable with a character that breaks the *heterosexual matrix* in a *heteronormative* society and that is the reason why *nonbinary* transgender characters are even more rarely seen than transgender female and transgender male characters.

The way the player get to know that a character is transgender signals to the player how the developers sees *transpersons*. *Shablee* is an example of *transphobic* representation, the player get to know that *Shablee* is transgender when she shows that she have a penis and after that *Shablee* is never seen again, her role in the game as a plot twist is complete. *Vivan* is presented as transgender early in the game by letting the player observe when *Vivian*'s sisters are bullying her by saying that she is not a woman. The game shows that it disagrees with *Vivan*'s sisters behaviors by giving the sisters the role as the villains in the game and by letting the player comfort and cooperate with *Vivian*. In *Paper Mario* the player does not get reminders of *Vivan* being different from any other character compared to *Erica* and *Krem* where they get comments from the other characters that they are not what they perceived to be. *Vivan*, *Erica* and *Krem*'s identity as transgender are not hidden in the games like *Poison* and *Birdetta* gets. When a character's identity gets hidden it can signal to the player that it is something that should be hidden because it does not fit and it is unseemly.

It is quite clear that transgender characters are a minority in video games and they all vary greatly in their portrayal of transgenderism. While analysing these characters it has become quite clear that the portrayal of transgender characters come in both positive and negative light. While we have *Krem* who is created with good intent and could be considered as one of the better transgender representations in video games. We also have the other side of the spectrum like *Shablee*, where the transgender characters are used as comic relief and their status as transgender is something to be ridiculed by.

Even if *Krem* is considered as one of the better representations of a transgender character, the creator still received negative feedback from the community (Weekes, 2014). The main conclusion that can be drawn by this feedback is that the community wants transgender characters to be written by transgender writers. Their argument is that it would make the character more believable and the writer would have a deeper understanding of what it means to be transgender and of what hardships it might bring. Even though there is no guarantee that a transgender writer would write a better character, they will most likely provide a better understanding. That is something that even we as authors of this thesis finds difficult in this thesis as we both are cis gender persons. It is only with the experience of others that we would even be able to do this thesis. With that said, no human has the same chances or conditions in their life.

One problem in creating transgender characters could be that it could hinder the sales of a game in markets that do not support *transpersons*. If the creators fail to make a good representation of a transgender character, they will likely lose both the transgender community as potential buyers, and the people that otherwise do not support transgender people. This is probably why we see transgender characters that have transitioned into a more gender-neutral character. This can likely be a reason for the low numbers of transgender characters in video games.

The approach for both *Poison* and *Birdetta* is somewhat of a solution, as these companies never mention the gender of their characters and only reference them outside of the game. That way they will create characters that do not limit the sales of the game but still allow transgender characters to be included.

Something that should be surfaced in this reflection, is the role each character plays in their game. Two of six characters, *Poison* and *Birdetta*, are playable characters, and even in these games the player is not locked into these characters. Exclusively playable transgender characters are something that is underrepresented. Much like in movies (GLAAD 2007b) the transgender characters get the side role or the bad guy role.

Creating a transgender character is a multidimensional task. It requires knowledge of the real life situation of the transgender people. It is important to do sufficient research and even then it could be a great idea to have someone from the transgender community check through your character. Even better is to take in a transgender person to create said character. Even if it might not be a good representation from everyone's perspective it would definitely aid in creating a better representation of the transgender community as the writer would then have first hand experience of the life as a transgender person and would be able to come with insights that a cis gender person would have a hard time understanding. A poorly represented character could result in a prejudiced opinion towards the community that the character represents.

It is important that each character created in a game will get interpreted and leave an impression on the player's cultural view of the group that the character represents. Even if it is "just a game" it will contribute to the world view that the player constructs through their impressions. It is also important to consider what role the characters play in the game. Many of the characters that this thesis has analyzed often play the role of villains or side characters. This is a representation stereotype the movie industry also commits to. The visual design of the character is also something interesting to discuss as they often follow a similar pattern of reproducing stereotypes.

The characters in this thesis often reproduce the stereotypes of what is considered feminine and masculine. Take Vivian for example, is the only transgender character of three sisters and she is also the only one wearing the colour pink which is considered a female coded colour who in contrast to her sisters who wear the colour blue and yellow. It is most likely that the author wanted to heighten Vivian's sense of femininity by contrasting the colour pink to the colour of blue, which is considered a masculine coded colour, instead of making the other sisters more masculine. Four of our six characters have some elements of pink worked into their visual design, which could make one wonder if they try to use the stereotypical colours of the gender in order to overcompensate the appearance to make the character appear more feminine than other female characters in the game. In a sense these visual design choices go on and reproduce the gender stereotypes and therefore fall into the spectrum of the heterosexual matrix.

The transgender character's personality often goes hand in hand with the heterosexual matrix, except for Poison who displays many masculine and feminine traits, such as independence, individuality, explosive temperament and greediness. Almost all of the characters that this thesis features follow the heterosexual matrix with their personality. All of them display some straight sexual desires and five out of six have a straight sexual relationship with a character of the opposite gender. Poison shows a more flexible preference as she sometimes makes remarks of the appearance of both female and male characters. However, most of the remarks that she makes against female characters are comparisons of the appearances of said character and herself. While it might not be wrong to use the stereotypical colours in a design in order to convey a message about the character, it should be known that these choices make the player to feel misguided or lead to a skewed view of the community that the character represents.

The controversy of transgender characters is something that is quite visual on the internet. There are often discussions on whether the characters are transgender or not. There is also the problem of players feeling that the game developer tries to push their political agenda through these characters as some believe that transgenderism is something that is political. Birdetta and Poison are characters that are under constant discussion whether they are transgender or not. This could be an effect of the way the developers have transitioned the characters into a more gender neutral state or even refuse to comment on the character's gender. Could there be a solution to avoid these kinds of discussion? One solution could be to remove the gender of the characters entirely.

If a developer develops a character without the regards of gender and only on the personality that they want to convey, they would be able to create a character that the player could then interpret and assign their own gender to if they would want to. This way every player would be able to project themselves into this character. A character that has been under discussion of this is *Link* from *the Legend of Zelda* as the character is one that has been under discussion of different views of the characters gender. While it has been officially stated by the creator Nintendo that Link is male some of the community still interpret the character as female. This goes to show that if we allow the players to assign the gender of the characters instead of doing it for them we could reach a more multidimensional character that represents different groups of people depending on what the player interprets the character as.

4.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has gathered and compared six different characters, in order to build a better knowledge base about how transgender characters have been represented in video games. While more research is required to get the full spectrum of how transgender characters are portrayed, this thesis serves as a foundation that can be improved on further.

There are not a lot of explicit transgender characters out there but those that are, are still surrounded by a lot of controversy and *transphobia*. To portray a transgender character is hard. It is something that is as hard as any representation of a minority. Yet, we see more and more transgender characters in today's video games. However, it should be noted that even if they are more in numbers, that does not necessarily make them any better or worse in how they chose to portray transgender people.

This thesis also made it clear to us as authors that portraying a transgender is a very hard task. But it is not exclusive to transgender characters. It is the same for every representation of other groups that the creator does not belong to. When creating a transgender person that best thing is to have a group of the community that the character represents and have them provide feedback to you. This way the creator could avoid using false stereotypes due to inexperience.

4.3 Future works

This thesis has only covered six transgender characters. To get a more precise overview a listing of all transgender characters from released games is needed. The distribution between *transwomen*, *transmen* and *non-binary* would be interesting to investigate. *Transmen* are hugely underrepresented in videos games. Only one character out of six was a *transman*. The cause of this underrepresentation is beyond the scope of this thesis but it is an interesting result that definitely deserves some attention given the fact that there are almost as many that identify as *transmen* as there are *transwomen*. The roles of the characters can also be investigated further, similar to GLAAD's (2017b) catalogue of how many characters are playing the sexworker, villain, victim role etc.

The difference in representation of transgender characters between Western game development studios and the Asian game development studios is something that could be researched more. Four out of six characters are made by companies from Japan. Another remark is that the majority of the characters in this analysis seem to have a companion and friend in the opposite sex. This seems to be a recurring phenomenon and might be based on a wrong idea of transgenderism being linked to sexuality.

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