How can levels of stylized game-character details contribute to creating representation and relatability in female player characters?

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Abstract

This thesis’ aim is to discuss how different levels of details can contribute to creating perceived levels of representation and relatability. This was firstly done through a pilot study, which was made to gather more intel about female opinions on set player characters in games. Then through the creation of six stylized 3D busts, and finally through a main study, serving to find trends in female informants’ opinions about the levels of details, representation and relatability in said busts. Earlier research is presented and discussed, and notable connections between the earlier research and this thesis’s findings are presented.

Keywords

Player character/avatar
Representation
Relatability
Stylized
Gender
Abstrakt

Denna uppsats syftar till att presentera nya data och intressanta trender inom den aktuella debatten kring kvinnlig media-representation i spel. Detta genomfördes genom skapandet av en pilotstudie, gjord för att samla mer information om kvinnors åsikter om förbestämda spelkaraktärer, sedan genom skapandet av stiliserade 3D-byster, och slutligen genom utförandet av en huvudstudie, som tjänade till att hitta trender i kvinnliga informanters åsikter kring nivåerna av detaljer, representation och relatabilitet dem tidigare nämnda bysterna. Tidigare forskning redovisas och diskuteras, och anmärkningsvärda samband mellan den tidigare forskningen och uppsatsens resultat presenteras.
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1 Introduction

The gaming community is a growing field, with more and more people across the world playing games. With it comes the need for conscious designs, especially regarding representation in set player characters, acting as a crucial step to ensure the further development of media representation in the gaming world. This thesis aims to delve deeper into the subject of female player characters and female media representation in games. This from a genre-less or genre-neutral standpoint. By studying former research on the topic, as well as conducting quantitative studies, this thesis aims to justify notable connections and present new data within the subject.

1.1 The purpose and research question

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss how different levels of details can contribute to creating perceived levels of representation and relatability. This when purely made through visual design choices in set player characters, and when viewed by female informants. The goal is to present a scale showing where perceived representation and relatability increases, decreases or stabilizes in correlation with increased levels of details, which hopefully could be used to improve representation and diversity in games. This might be of use for game companies, or anyone interested in, designing set player characters. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following research question:

How can levels of stylized game-character details contribute to creating representation and relatability in female player characters?
2 Theoretical approaches

The theoretical approaches for this thesis are centred around research on gender, generality, representation and relatability within the field of game studies.

Many writers discuss relatability, without describing it. That's why this thesis will be using the definitions by the Cambridge dictionary and Ben Zimmer, although it's noted that Zimmer is not a researcher. In the Cambridge dictionary (2020) relatability is described as “the quality of being easy to understand or feel sympathy for”. While Ben Zimmer (2010) explains, in his article The Origins of ‘Relatable’ that it is the meaning to relate, understand, empathize or feel a connection with for example a game character.

Another important aspect to bring up is the importance and understanding of the definitions of gender. In 1991 Donna J. Haraway published her work Simians, Cyborgs, and Women, The Reinvention of Nature where Haraway discusses the definitions of sex and gender. This work has been referenced in many game-studies from there on, often surrounding gender representation in games. Haraway (1991, p.135) mentions that gender identity can be seen as a possession to show ownership of the self, and that one could be born with it, or gain it through cultural production. She brings up the works of Robert Stoller (1968, 1976), and refers to his description of gender identity (1964), where sex is related to biology and gender related to culture. Haraway also refers to De Laurits’s (1984) definition of gender, as a social construct revolving around experiences, history and practices. Haraway (1991, p.147) states in her work that “Gender' was developed as a category to explore what counts as a 'woman’”. This helps us understand that gender is different from sex, and that its value and meaning can vary a lot depending on cultures and history.

This thesis will also discuss the norm around keeping white men as the unmarked, and anything outside of it as the “changed” and “marked”. This will be referred to further on in the results section of the thesis, where the works of Sara Ahmed (2010) Vihetens fenomenologi and Trepanier and Bonenfant (2017) Bridging Game Studies and Feminist Theories and Maria Lönn´s (2018) Den brutna whitens opacitet: Om femininitetens renhet och färgskala färgskala [whiteness’ broken opacity: about the purity of femininity and colour] will be further referred to and discussed.
For this thesis gender representation will be discussed and studied with the hopes to help improve representation and diversity in games. Representation was described by Stuart Hall in his book *Representation* (2013, p.14-45) as the “production of meaning through language”. Hall went on to describe that languages uses signs to refer to people, events and objects in the real world, as well as abstract ideas and fantasy worlds. Hall states that representation is to accept another culture, to a certain degree of cultural relativism, yet for that to happen translation is needed.

This way of thinking makes it clear that to bridge different cultures and enable acceptance on an equal level between them, a sort of translation must be there. That's where games and other visual media comes in, as it can act as a neutral translator, if worked properly. This because gender can visually be represented through games.

This, and the following research, is used to analyse the results of this study. That's why the theory and earlier research is combined in this chapter. To help highlight different trends in the research, these subjects are divided into categories:
3 Previous works on the subject

In this chapter previous works on the subject will be presented and discussed, as to present the underlying studies and opinions which helped create this thesis study.

3.1 Female views on female media representation

In research it has been considered important to investigate what women's opinions on game characters are, to better insure good female media representation, for instance in this study by De Jean, Upitis, Koch and Young, *The Story of Phoenix Quest: How girls respond to a prototype language and mathematics computer game* (1999) where they stated that there were results which suggested that the Phoenix Quest game, appeared more appealing to the girls playing it, since they felt that the protagonists age and gender were close to their own.

Only three years later, Helen W. Kennedy published her work *Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or Cyberbimbo? On the Limits of Textual Analysis* (2002) where she stated that the online, girl gaming community, had vivid discussions around the portrayal of female game characters, where they complained about the sexist portrayals of women, as well as about the lack of powerful female leaders in games.

These findings show the importance of research surrounding female opinions about game characters, as well as present suggestions about representation, which are interesting for further discussions.

3.2 Representation, diversity and relatability in game characters

Fast forward to 2007, Jansz and G. Martis (2007, p.141) published their study *The Lara Phenomenon: Powerful Female Characters in Video Games*, where they conducted a content analysis on 12 contemporary video games and their introductory films. Their findings showed that even though female characters appeared as often as male characters did, in the leading parts, “they were portrayed with a sexualized emphasis on female features.” And the majority of the characters were portrayed with a white skin colour, with “the heroes exclusively so”
In 2015 Adrienne Shaw (2015) published her book *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture* where she conducted a quantitative study, featuring in depth interviews with people who were in marginalized groups and played games. She stated: “People do not want to feel alone and unseen. Representation is important because it is an external acknowledgment of one’s existence”. (Shaw 2015, p.192)

In Shaw’s research, she gathered answers, where representation didn’t matter to many of the informants, when playing games. She suggested that producers should include more diversity in games for just that reason. Even though Shaw’s findings might seem shocking, her suggestions are clear. Since most players do not seem to care about representation of themselves, it should be easy to implement more diverse player characters, without worrying that it will affect the percentage of people buying and playing the games. There are a few different ways to define a player character. Zach Waggoner (2009, p.8) defines it in his work *My Avatar, My Self: Identity in Video Role-Playing Games* as “In the broadest sense, an avatar is “the user’s representative in the virtual universe”.

Gabbiadini, Riva, Andrighetto, Volpato and Bushman (2016) wrote, *Acting like a Tough Guy: Violent-Sexist Video Games, Identification with Game Characters, Masculine Beliefs, & Empathy for Female Violence Victims* with the goal of investigating sexist video games, and how they affect the empathy players felt for female violence victims, after playing the games. They hypothesized that by playing violent-sexist games, while highly identifying with the aggressive male player character, the endorsement of masculine beliefs would increase. This would then reduce the empathy felt by the player. Their researched showed that violent-sexist video games can in short-term decrease the empathy felt for female violence victims. And these findings were particularly pronounced among male participants who identified with the misogynistic characters.

In Trepanier and Bonenfant’s (2017, p.14) work, *Bridging Game Studies and Feminist Theories* they brought up Sarkeesian’s video *Women as Background Decoration* (2014) where she talked about the usage of non-playable female characters, who seemed to be added into the games mostly to “infuse edgy, gritty or racy flavouring into game worlds” To which Trepanier and Bonenfant added, that these characters main function is to titillate assumed male, straight players, due to how the characters are objectified, by the way they are animated and dressed.
These studies argue for the need of change in the game industry, as well as suggest that all female characters need a better representation in games. They suggest that it's not enough to simply add female characters to the games to create diversity, the characters need depth, and this depth should not be achieved by putting the female characters in purely vulnerable positions.

### 3.3 Generality in game characters

In Shaw's work (2015 p.159-189) she urged researchers to call out the “unquestioned use in games of white, English- speaking, hetero- sexual males as normative and the use of other identities to mark difference” She also marked that the most common assumption is that everyone is white, male, cis-gendered and heterosexual, and that things as sexuality, race and gender are only considered unimportant to people living with the privilege of never receiving violence derived from them.

As the author and researcher of this thesis, the importance and need of debating generality and its meaning to female viewers, grew. It became apparent that generality and visual looks were co-dependent, but what it actually meant for female viewers were still a mystery for me.

In Izzy Burton’s talk (2020), *Storytelling for animation and beyond*, held at The Vertex, London, she said that, one could design a character's looks to be “generic enough to make people feel represented.” Those words became some of the sparks for this thesis. The reasoning that, a general looking character, might just appear as more representational, than a complexed and detailed character, made me want to explore where the tipping point is. It is often assumed that the description of a general looking game character, gives the wider public an inner picture of a blank faced, white male. As Shaw urged, it's time to change that. But to change it, one need to know what the world wants to see instead.
4 Method and materials

This study is conducted in three steps, done through a collection of quantitative data, modelling 3D sculpts based of said data, and finally collecting quantitative data around the 3D sculpts. The sculpts for this thesis will be referred to in text as busts, player characters and sculpts.

4.1.1 Pilot study

For the first step, background data collected through a pilot-study featuring open questions, were conducted through an online survey. The population featured women, nonbinary and men, who were divided into separate cluster groups. The cluster sample for the pilot study were taken from the female cluster group. This way of separating cluster groups was taken from the teachings of Annika Eliasson in her book Kvantitativ metod från början (2018) A cluster group is a group of people or things who are similar or share a similar distinguishing trait. One could make a cluster group, for example, out of people who share age, religion, or in this case gender. A cluster sample is the choice of only researching the answers given by one of the cluster groups. In research this is mostly done in quantitative studies.

The reason to only study one of the cluster groups came from the need to narrow the scope of the thesis. The reason to choose the female cluster group was because this thesis aims to study what females think about game characters, and thus the female cluster group’s answers became the most important ones, in order to answer the research question.

The online survey was hosted at the web domain Surveymonkey.com. The survey was released into the channel #general, on the web domain gotlandgame.slack.com, as well as on the “Buddies” discord channel under the #general channel. These channels are made on the behalf of the game department at Uppsala University. As a result, anyone accessing these two sites had the opportunity to answer the survey. Mainly game-students enrolled at the university, but also teachers, alumni and former enrolled students had the opportunity to answer the survey if they had access to these two channels.

To enhance the reliability of the study, the four questions were made to produce similar wanted data, but through different wording.
The first question of the survey asked the informants about their gender, where they could answer nonbinary, female or male, this was the first question to help make the cluster groups. In the second questions they were asked to specify their age, the answers were made into general age groups to help ease the cluster selection later on, they could answer either 10-18, 18-30, 30-50 or above 50. After the informants had answered the two primary questions regarding their gender and age, four questions followed. These related to generality, relatability and representability in set player characters.

In question three, the informants were asked: “What defines a "basic/general" looking "Player Character" in games, according to you?” and they were given a textbox where they could answer freely. The purpose of the question was to find out what the female informants considered as basic or general, so keywords could be collected to be used in the second part of the method.

Question four were related to their answer in question three, it read as “What kind of visual changes would make you relate more to a general/basic "Player Character"?” and they were again given a textbox to freely word their answers. The purpose of the question was to find out what the female informants would want to see changed on said basic/general character, so that the keywords could be collected and used in the second part of the method.

Question five was not particularly linked to the previously asked questions, since it was made to test for similar data again, through a different worded sentence. This question’s purpose was to find out which set player character, the female informants had last been playing as. So that upon examination, one could find out whether the set player character had been a female, male or nonbinary. The question asked was: “What was the latest game you played with a fixed player character? (not customizable)”. To which the informants could answer in an open text box.

For the last question, it was obvious that it was linked to the answer given by the informants in question five. This since they were asked: “And how relatable on a scale of 1-3 did that player character feel to you, purely through visuals? (1 being low or not at all relatable, 2 being moderately or generally relatable and 3 being very relatable)” and were yet again given a text box to answer in. This question’s purpose was to find out, if the set player character, appeared to have higher or lower chances of being relatable to the female players, due to its visual design.
4.1.2 Creation of the busts

In the second step, the female cluster group’s answers were analysed to find common keywords describing what a basic/general looking player character looked like, and also to find the common keywords, used to describe the visual changes one would make to said player character to make it more relatable.

These keywords were chosen if they were mentioned at least two times, from two different informants’ answers, and were used to create six different, stylized, 3D, player character busts. This thesis’s definition of the usage of the world stylized, is that stylized art assets are usually known for not trying to achieve photorealism. In Kim Aavas’s summarized talk, *Realistic vs. Stylized: Technique Overview*, (Aava, 2017) she describes working with stylized art, as being free to play with colours and shapes. As well as adding, enhancing or removing details to create a specific feeling. Thus, the busts for this thesis did not aim for photo-realism.

The first character was made up purely by the keywords for basic/general. The second character swapped one of the basic/general keywords, for a keyword used to describe the visual changes. This process of swapping a keyword from the basic/general group, to a keyword from the visual changes group, were repeated until the sixth and final bust consisted only of keywords from the visual changes group. The creation of the busts will be discussed in greater detail in the results section where pictorial examples may also be found.

4.1.3 Main study:

In the third and final step, the main survey was conducted. It was designed based off experiences from the pilot study and the creation of the busts, and it took on a clearer quantitative nature. The survey called for people that identified as female participants solely, and aimed to gather data regarding representation and relatability in the created busts.

The choice of scale used to measure the first two questions’ answers were the Likert scale by Bertram D. (2012). With question 1 being “On a scale of 1 to 7, how represented do you feel by this character's looks?” and question 2 being “How relatable does this character look to you on a scale of 1 to 7”.
Two more questions were featured in the survey, which did not follow the typical numbers given by the Likert Scale but used similar properties for answering. The first one was “If this character was the set player character in a game, how inclined would you feel to play the game” and the informants could answer between 1, 2 and 3, where 1 symbolized not at all inclined, 2 as moderately inclined and 3 as highly inclined. The second one was “Would you describe this character as general looking?” and the informants could only answer between Yes or No. For every bust, the questions described were asked.

The survey was hosted on the web domain www.docs.google.com and was published once again into the channel #general, on the web domain gotlandgame.slack.com, as well as on the “Buddies” discord channel under the #general channel. The survey was also posted on my personal LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts. It was also posted in two different Facebook groups named Honey & the bees. and Geek Women Unite! (Sweden) Anyone with access to those sites had the opportunity to answer.

4.2 Validity and reliability

In this heading the importance and meaning of validity and reliability in research will be presented. Validity in research is usually meant to question if the researcher is measuring the data in a proper way. While reliability in the research can be proven if the same method can be conducted again and provide similar answers as the first trial.

In this study validity is proven due to the non-leading questions asked, and the proper handling of the data. The same type of data has been collected through several questions which were presented differently, this to ensure that the informants would be able to properly give their honest answers.

The reliability of this research is proven due to the carefully explained step by step methods, which most anyone could replicate if they followed the same steps.

It’s notable that the informants were self-selected, not randomly selected, and thus a degree of bias plays in through the self-selection.
4.3 Ethics at work

When conducting research involving human participants, it's important to make sure that the study has followed the four requirements for ethical research. This has been thoroughly done in this thesis. In the Forskningsetiska principer inom humanistisk-samhällsvetenskaplig forskning (2002) The Swedish Science Council, writes about these four requirements:

1. The information requirement

It's important to describe the purpose of the research and inform the informants beforehand about the intent behind the research.

Before each survey an informative text regarding the aim and goal of the study, the later usage of the answers as data for the thesis and to what purpose, as well as the given anonymity and consent requirement, were presented. To read the texts in their full go to the appendices headings.

2. The consent requirement

The informants are to be free to decide how long and at what conditions they attend the research. They are to be free to end their participation during interviewing at any given time without negative consequences.

In both surveys the informants were free to answer and drop the surveys as they wanted without negative consequences. By answering the surveys the informants also consented to be part of the study.

3. The confidentiality requirement

The informants have a right to remain anonymous. Researchers should keep in mind that even though the informants are given somewhat anonymity through the study, they might be identified by other readers due to their easily recognizable way of expressing themselves. In that case the researcher must take actions to obstruct the outsider’s possibility to identify the individual.
In this thesis all the informants have been anonymised, no names have been gathered through the survey or presented in the thesis.

4. **The usage requirement**

Information and data regarding individuals may not be sold, used or loaned for non-scientific purposes.

The material gathered for this study have only been used for research purposes and after the completion of the thesis the gathered data was destroyed.

4.4 **Potential limitations and weaknesses of the studies**

In this heading, some key factors which could have imparted on the results of the two studies are mentioned and discussed.

First off, in the pilot study, only 13 female informants’ answers were collected and analysed, making the answer group and rate very limited. The informants were most likely associated with the game design education at Uppsala University year 2020, and so their opinions might not reflect the general public, but instead come from a source of knowledge around games. This might have impacted the results of the pilot study’s questions.

In the creation of the busts, personal opinions and creative style, might have unwittingly affected how the resulting busts turned out. The busts were made to follow the keywords and have a neutral lightning and background to deter any emotional responses which could affect the opinions of the informants outside of the character design, yet the choice of modelling style and texturing of the busts might have affected the results outside of the given keywords. For example, in bust one, where the traits of the bust might have been heavily influenced by my own artistic abilities and way of creating art, and thus not seen as the most general looking bust.
For the main study, 70, female identifying informants, answered the survey. The reason for it only being female answers was due to the survey only asking for female informants’ answers. This might have affected the informants and made them consider themselves to having a certain expectation in their answers. It’s noted that the difference between felt representation and felt relatability were not explained to the informants, due to the pilot study showing results where the informants answered in such a way that it was deemed that they knew the difference the informants were not given the choice to elaborate on their answers and speak about their opinions, this might have affected the results, since some trends could not be further explained due to lack of information. The study was only accessible for those who had access to the internet, and so any informant who could not access the survey could not leave their opinions about the busts. This might have limited the general female, public opinion and affected the results of the survey. The busts were presented in the order they were made, from one to six, and not presented in a random order. This might have affected the informants’ answers since they could’ve noted the process of change and adhered their opinion to it accordingly.

Finally this thesis did not take game-genres into consideration, and the results might have had different results depending on if I had ask the informants to consider the busts as set player characters in a PvP Shooter, or in an adventure based game. This due to the genre possibly influencing the opinion about the set player character.
5 Results and analysis

In this chapter the results from the earlier three steps of the methods will be presented and analysed. Starting with the results from the pilot study, moving on to the creation of the busts and finally presenting the results from the main study.

5.1.1 The pilot study

The informants, as described in the methods, were divided into cluster groups, from where 13 female identifying individuals could be found. Those informants´s answers are the ones presented and analysed for this thesis.

| What defines a "basic/general" looking "Player Character" in games, according to you? | What kind of visual changes would make you relate more to a general/basic "Player Character"?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer 1:</strong></td>
<td>middle age male white stubble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer 2:</strong></td>
<td>30-year-old white man with brown hair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer 3:</strong></td>
<td>White Male, 25, fit, basic clothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer 4:</strong></td>
<td>A character that fit into the usual manly or female stereotypes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer 5:</strong></td>
<td>White, male. But also white, conventionally attractive female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer 6:</strong></td>
<td>Male, white, brown short hair, fit - but not muscular.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer 7:</strong></td>
<td>Depends on genre, but since I’m most used to jrgs: young, lanky male teen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer 8:</strong></td>
<td>I think like a gender fluid human for basic and in general I do imagine like a dude mid 30s white, hmm maybe a bit muscular but not so much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer 9:</strong></td>
<td>Natural hair and eye color, no face complexions (acnee, freckles, wrinkles, scars), athletic body, neutral colored clothes, neutral face expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer 10:</strong></td>
<td>Bald humanoid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1, showcasing the results from the first two content questions from the pilot study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer 11:</th>
<th>a generic answer for a generic question ; i guess overused /typical /stereotype characteristics.</th>
<th>depends on what kind of character it is... something that makes it more unique like visual hints to characters past.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answer 12:</td>
<td>No eye catching colours, plain features in the face, gender conforming haircut.</td>
<td>Change in hairstyle and colour (to fit mine), general height and size, able to change skin colour to mine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer 13:</td>
<td>White/light skinned person, more often than not male characters, darker/natural hair color, physique on point/skinny/fit/really muscly</td>
<td>I relate to characters that have some resemblance to myself of course however to me the biggest deal is the gender of the character e.g. as a female I relate mostly to female characters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Analysing the answers:**

A common consensus trending in the answers, with nine out of 13 answers, was to describe the character as male, and with seven out of 13 answers, as white. Even if the informants didn’t use the exact same wording, they described the character as having a white skin colour and belonging to the male gender.

Another common agreement was to describe the character as having brown or dark hair, as well as being fit, athletic or muscular, with the hair being mentioned across three informants’ answers and the body type mentioned across four informants’ answers.
Two of the informants described the character as looking plain or neutral, as well as mentioning the character adhering to gender conformity or stereotypical visuals.

In five cases, the changes the informants would like to see, were to change the body type of the player character. As to not be fit or muscular anymore, as well as change the height and size of the character. In four cases the informants wanted to change the gender of the character, most often from male to female.

Some other common changes the informants wanted to see was the skin colour, with three informants’ answers, as well as changes to the hair, with another three informants’ answers. Some informants mentioned that they wanted to see more personality and unique visual details, while some others answered that they could relate more to a character which looked like themselves.

For the second part of the pilot study the informants were asked these two questions, which’s answers were dependent on each other:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What was the latest game you played with a fixed player character? (not customizable)</th>
<th>And how relatable on a scale of 1-3 did that player character feel to you, purely through visuals? (1 being low or not at all relatable, 2 being moderately or generally relatable and 3 being very relatable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer 1:</strong></td>
<td>monkey island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer 2:</strong></td>
<td>The Witcher 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer 3:</td>
<td>Gris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer 4:</td>
<td>Witcher 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer 5:</td>
<td>Life is Strange 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer 6:</td>
<td>I do not play games that does not offer at least a choice between &lt;2 different characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer 7:</td>
<td>Dead cells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer 8:</td>
<td>The last day of June</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer 9:</td>
<td>Life is Strange:Before the Storm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer 10:</td>
<td>It must have been a first person game, cant remembe what game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer 11:</td>
<td>deponia. the character didnt need to be customized. he looked unique like his personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer 12:</td>
<td>Transistor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer 13:</td>
<td>Hellblade: Senua's sacrifice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2, showcasing the results from the last two content questions from the pilot study

**Analysing the answers:**

In these two questions any common consensus between the informant’s answers proved difficult to find. Two informants had played the game *The Witcher 3: Wild hunt* (CD Projekt RED, 2015) where the main character is a white male, yet their answers showed that their perceived level of
relatability with the character were different from each other. In another case, two informants
who had both played games with a set female player character, answered with different levels of
perceived relatability to the characters. Many informants answered that the set player character
felt moderately or generally relatable, regardless if their last player character turned out to be
female, non-binary or male. Thus, no clear conclusion could be drawn from these answers.

5.1.2 Analysis of the whole survey´s answers

After studying all the 13 informants´ answers to the pilot study´s open questions, it became
apparent that only the two first questions would help in answering the research question. The
latter two questions´ answers were too individual to be of any immediate help even if they
provided some interesting answers.

And so, from the first two questions, two groups of keywords could be made out. These
keywords were then used as the base for the creation of the busts.

5.2 The creation and analysis of the busts

As earlier stated, keywords were collected from the pilot study´s answers. If a word with similar
meaning, such as fit or muscular, were mentioned across at least two informant´s answers on the
same question, it was counted as a keyword. This because they described the same visual
attribute, just with different words. For example, if the words man, male, dude or something
similar were mentioned in several answers to question 1, they were made into a keyword. This
created a group of five keywords for basic/general, but only four keywords for the visual
changes group. This left a spot open, illustrated in the following table, where there was no
keyword for visual changes to counterpart the general keyword. To work around that it was
decided that some single time mentioned answers from the informants would be incorporated in
its place, even if they hadn't been mentioned across two different informants´ answers. These
answers were words such as face complexions and personality.

To start the creation of the busts, the keywords were separated into two different groups. These
were:
| Keyword 1: | Keywords used to describe a basic/general looking player character in games: Male/Man/dude or similar. Mentioned nine times. | Keywords used to describe the visual changes one would make to a general/basic character to enhance the relatability woman/female/ other gender, or similar. Mentioned four times. |
| Keyword 2: | White, or similar. Mentioned seven times. | other skin colour, or similar. Mentioned three times. |
| Keyword 3: | Brown/dark hair, or similar. Mentioned three times. | (different as opposed to dark) hair, or similar. Mentioned three times. |
| Keyword 4: | Fit/muscular/athletic, or similar. Mentioned four times. | Other body types (outside of fit/muscular), or similar. Mentioned five times. |
| Keyword 5: | Neutral/plain, or similar. Mentioned two times. | |

Table 3, showcasing the results from the keywords gathered from the pilot study
Table 2.1 and Image 1, showcasing the keywords used and the final result of the bust

When all the keywords were collected, a system of using these keywords to create the visual design of the six stylized busts were made. It started with the first bust containing all the keywords for basic/general. This would in theory make this bust the visual description of the basic/general looking player character.
Table 2.2 and Image 2, showcasing the keywords used and the final result of the bus

For the second bust, one of the keywords for basic/general was replaced with a keyword from the visual changes group. This made the character “marked” as Trepanier and Bonenfant (2017, p.2-3,) brings up where they describe that many game designers choose to transform the male player character into a female, simply by adding feminine and gender-reinforced attributes to the character. This instead of creating an original female player character. This is in many cases problematic, since the male character then remains as the normal or “unmarked” version, while the female character becomes the changed and “marked” character. Thus, rendering the character simply to a female version of the male one, and not her own unique character.
For the third bust, the second keyword for basic/general was replaced with a visual changes keyword. In this example, it is the skin colour of the character which is changed. Nothing else on the character has been modified, except for changing the skin colour from white to darker. This is yet again arguably problematic in many cases, since “whiteness” is often seen as the “unmarked”, while any other skin colour is seen as the “marked” change. In Maria Lönn’s work (2018, p.46-79) she discusses how whiteness often is seen as something unmarked, especially by white subjects, and how this view often is never questioned.

This is also brought up by Sara Ahmed (2010, p.66) in her work where she mentions that by using black coloured bodies as a sign of diversity, one is simply just confirming whiteness as the norm.
Table 2.4 and Image 4, showcasing the keywords used and the final result of the bust

For the fourth bust, the third keyword for basic/general was replaced with a visual changes keyword. This character is no longer purely a “marked” exception of the first “unmarked” character. In many of the informants’ answers it was noted that a change of hair and hairstyle was wanted to increase the relatability with the character. This is the first step of making this character into its own unique design.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bust four</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>woman/female/</td>
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<tr>
<td>other gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other skin colour (outside of the white colour spectra)</td>
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<tr>
<td>changed hair (outside of the brown/dark hair)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fit/muscular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neutral/plain</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bust five</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>woman/female/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.5 and Image 5, showcasing the keywords used and the final result of the bus

For the fifth bust, the fourth keyword for basic/general was replaced with a visual changes keyword. This time it was the body type of the character that was changed. It was now no longer seen as particularly fit or muscular. While maintaining the hair from the earlier bust, this bust clearly displays a unique design. This since many of the keywords from basic has been switched out to visual changes keywords.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>other gender</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>other skin colour (outside of the white colour spectra)</td>
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<tr>
<td>changed hair (outside of the brown/dark hair)</td>
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<tr>
<td>other body type (outside of fit/muscular)</td>
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<tr>
<td>neutral/plain</td>
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</table>

**Bust six**

<table>
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<th>woman/female/</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>other gender</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
other skin colour (outside of the white colour spectra)

changed hair (outside of the brown/dark hair)

other body type (outside of fit/muscular)

replaced neutral and plain with adding characteristics such as jewellery and signs of age

*Table 2.6 and Image 6, showcasing the keywords used and the result of the bust*

For the sixth and final bust, the fifth keyword for basic/general was removed, and were replaced with several, single-handedly answered suggestions, such as jewellery and personal visual characteristics. This character has more indicators showing the player what kind of personality it has, as well as breaking out of the often-unquestioned white male player character norm.

These were the busts which were then used for the main study’s survey, which will be presented in the next heading.
5.3 The main study and analysis

In this chapter, the data generated from the main study’s survey, is presented and analysed. In total 70, female identifying informants, answered the survey. Pie-charts are used to present the data for each bust. The pie-charts-parts are decided by the percentage of answers each option got from the informants. The results will be presented in this manner:

1. The question asked
2. The bust in question
3. The pie-chart with the percentages of the votes, for visualization
4. The options presented for the question, and their percentages of the votes
5. Analysis of the results

The specifics for each answer’s pie-chart, is described under their respective heading.

5.3.1 Results from question one

The first question asked under each bust was: On a scale of 1 to 7, how represented do you feel by this character's looks?

In the first question asked under each bust, the informants were given a scale of 1 to 7 to answer from. Each number have its own meaning and is represented with their own colour in the following pie-charts.

The colour coding for the scale, for the first questions answers, are as follows:

- Nr.1 in the scale stood for being not at all represented. **Nr.1 is represented with indigo blue**
- Nr.2 were considered to be little to not at all represented. **Nr. 2 is represented with red**
- Nr.3 were considered to be little to moderately represented. **Nr. 3 is represented with yellow**
- Nr.4 in the scale stood for being moderately represented. **Nr.4 is represented with green**
- Nr.5 were considered to be moderately to a bit higher represented. **Nr.5 is represented with purple**
- Nr. 6 were considered to be a bit higher to highly represented. **Nr. 6 is represented with turquoise**
- Nr.7 in the scale stood for being highly represented. **Nr.7 is represented with fuchsia**
On a scale of 1 to 7, how represented do you feel by this character's looks?

These are the results from bust one:

![Image of bust one with a pie chart showing the results: 1: 65.7%, 2: 21.4%, 3: 8.6%, 4: 2.9%, 5: 1.4%, 6: 0%, 7: 0%]

With a 65.7% answer rate to nr. 1, the majority of the informants answered that they felt not at all represented by the character's looks. Less than a fourth of the informants answered with nr.2, and the remaining percentages were spread out over answer nr.3, 4 and 5. It's notable that this bust is the only one, out of all the busts, to get an answer rate of 0% on both option nr.6 and nr.7, regarding the first question's answers. This could suggest that this bust's visual design was the least representational according to the informants, which could also suggest that a male looking player character is less representational for female players.

These are the results from bust two:

![Image of bust two with a pie chart showing the results: 1: 14.3%, 2: 7.1%, 3: 17.1%, 4: 28.6%, 5: 22.9%, 6: 7.1%, 7: 2.9%]
In the second bust, more than a fourth of the informants, with a 28,6% on nr.4, answered that they felt moderately represented by this character’s looks. The levels of felt representation had increased, when compared to bust one, with answer nr.5, 6 and 7 combined gaining more than a fourth of the informants’ answers. This could suggest that by making the character into a female, it increased the felt representation levels, by female players.

These are the results from bust three:

In bust three, less than a fourth of the informants, with a 22,9% answer rate on nr.4, expressed that they felt moderately represented by this character’s looks. Answer nr.1 had increased to 18,6% of the answers, and answer nr.2 had drastically increased to 20%. More informants answered that they felt less represented by bust three, than bust two, with the votes on felt representation declining in nr 4, 5 and 6.

Yet, it’s notable, that answer nr.7 still had an answer rate of 2,9% of the votes, when compared to the earlier presented bust. This could suggest that the same number of informants felt as highly represented by this bust, as the earlier one.

This could suggest that many of the informants felt less represented by this character's skin colour, than the previous busts skin colour, due to it being the only change made.
These are the results from bust four:

In bust four, 24.3% of informants answered with nr.5 on the scale, meaning that almost a fourth of the informants felt a little more than moderately represented, by the bust. Answer nr.6 and nr.7 also both increased in numbers of votes, when compared to the earlier bust. With a decreased answer rate on nr.1, resulting in 11.4% of the answers, it shows that less informants felt not at all represented by the character.

The change of hair color and hairstyle on the character suggest an increase of felt representation by the informants.

These are the results from bust five:
In bust five, the highest percentage of informants with 20% answered nr.2, which is a notable change of felt representation, when compared to the earlier bust, bust four. Many of the informants’ answers were placed low on the felt representation scale, yet this bust had the most evenly distributed answers on the scale, out of all the busts. With nr.4 and nr.6 both reaching 14,3% of the votes, it proved harder to find a common consensus regarding the visual changes of the bust.

This could suggest a greater split between the informants’ answers, where the visual design led to more evenly divided answers on the felt representation scale.

These are the results for the sixth bust:
In the final bust, the highest percentage of informants answered with nr.1, with an answer rate of 20%, and both nr.2 and nr.3 coming close with a 17,1% of the answers each. This shows that the majority of the answers landed on little to none felt representation by the character.

It's notable that the answer rate for nr.7, with a 1,4%, is the lowest number since the first bust, which had a 0% answer rate. The changes of hair colour, adding of jewellery and signs of age could suggest that less informants felt represented by this character´s looks.

5.3.2 A summarized analysis of question one´s answers:
When analysing all the answers for question one, it's clear that the first bust was voted to be the least visually representable character. It's also revealed that the second bust gained the most answers for being moderately representable. And the fourth bust proved to have the most answers registered in the higher felt representation part of the scale. This could suggest that bust four was voted the most highly representable bust, for many informants.

5.3.3 Results from question two
The second question to follow under each bust were: How relatable does this character look to you on a scale of 1 to 7?

In the second question asked under each bust, the informants were given a scale of 1 to 7 to answer from. Each number had its own meaning and is represented with their own colour in the following pie-charts.

How relatable does this character look to you on a scale of 1 to 7?
These are the results for bust one:
In the first bust, the answers nr.1 and nr.3 ended up in a tie for the highest answer rates, where both of them reached 27,1% of the answers each. This means that the majority of the informants expressed low relatability with the character. It's notable that in bust one, not one informant answered that the character looked highly relatable. Instead many of the answers ended up in the lower numbers of the scale. With almost a fourth, 22,9%, of the informants answering nr.2. This could suggest that this bust had the least relatable visual design, out of the six busts.

These are the results from the second bust:

In the second bust, the highest percentage of informants, with a 35,7% of the votes, landed on nr.4. Which meant that more than a fourth of the informants answered that the character looked
moderately relatable. 20% of the informants answered with nr.5, and both nr.6 and nr.7 had an increase in answer rates. With nr.7 gaining 4.3% of the votes, compared to 0% in bust one.

This is a steep increase in felt relatability, when compared to the earlier bust, bust one. This could suggest that the informants felt that the visual design of the female character appeared as more relatable than the male character.

These are the results from the third bust:

The third bust’s highest answer rate, with 28.6% on nr.4, indicated that the character looked moderately relatable to more than a fourth of the informants.

It’s notable that only nr.2, 4 and 6, had a change in answer rates, with nr.2 and nr.6 both gaining more votes. This could suggest that the changing of skin colour, only affected a few informants opinions about their felt relatability, and that many of the informants had the same opinion about this bust and the earlier bust.

These are the results from the fourth bust:
In the fourth bust, 20% of the informants answered with nr.4, while nr.2, 6 and 7 had all gained more votes. The majority of the informants’ votes ended up in the higher part of the felt relatability scale, with nr.5, 6 and 7 combined having 44.3% of the votes. This could suggest that the change of hair and hair colour increased the perceived levels of higher visual relatability in the character.

These are the results from the fifth bust:
In the fifth bust, the highest number of informants answered that the character felt moderately relatability, with an increase of numbers compared to the earlier bust, resulting in 25.7% on nr.4. Meaning that a fourth of the informants agreed to the character looking moderately relatable.

Although, in this bust the answers were more evenly spread out among the numbers on the scale, compared to the earlier busts. With both nr.3 and nr.6 reaching 15.7% of the answers each. This suggest that the changing of body type on the character split the informants’ opinions, and a common consensus were harder to find.

These are the results from the sixth bust:

![Image of character]

In the sixth and final bust, the highest numbers of answers were split into nr.4 and nr.6, with both of them receiving 20% of the answers each. Many of the informants answered that the character looked moderately or highly relatable, yet it's notable that this character had the highest percentage of answers for nr.1, with a 12.9% of the votes, since the first bust. Yet this bust also had the highest percentage of answers for nr.6, out of any of the busts, with the 20% of the votes. This could suggest that the informants had strongly, different opinions about the perceived level of visual relatability in this bust, thus making it hard to form a common conclusion.
5.3.4 A summarized analysis of question two´s answers:
When reviewing the results from question two, it shows that the first bust was voted the least visually relatable character, out of all the busts. The bust with the highest answer rate of being moderately relatable was the second bust. While the fourth bust gained the most answers in the higher part of the felt relatability scale. This could suggest that bust four was the most highly relatable bust for many informants.

5.3.5 Results from question three
The third question presented under each bust were: If this character was the set player character in a game, how inclined would you feel to play the game?

For this question the informants could only answer between 1,2 and 3, and so the scale with the numbers presented on the left of the pie-charts have been updated, as well as with new colour codlings. Nr.1 on the scale stood for being not at all inclined and is represented with indigo blue. Nr.2 on the scale stood for being moderately inclined and is represented with red. Nr.3 on the scale stood for being highly inclined and is represented with yellow.

If this character was the set player character in a game, how inclined would you feel to play the game?
These are the results for bust one:
In the first bust, the majority of the informants, with a 64.3% answer rate on nr.2, expressed that they were moderately inclined to play a game with this bust as the player character.

These are the results for the second bust:

In the second bust two thirds of the informants answered with nr.2 on the scale, which meant that they felt moderately inclined to play a game with the second bust as the character. This is an increase from the former bust, bust one.

These are the results for the third bust:

In the third bust, the majority of the informants still felt moderately inclined to play a game with this bust as the player character, yet the number had decreased when compared to the previous
bust, bust two. Instead the answer rate, with a 21.4% for nr.3, had increased. This could suggest that some informants felt more highly inclined to play a game with this bust as the character, compared to the earlier busts.

These are the results for the fourth bust:

In the fourth bust the majority of the informants felt highly inclined to play a game with this bust as the player character. This bust had a drastic increase of informants’ answers to nr.3, resulting in a 47.1% of the votes. This bust is also the one with the lowest answer rate to nr.1, with an 8.6%, out of all the busts. This could suggest that the level of detail on this character, felt the most appealing to the informants, compared to the other busts.

These are the results for the fifth bust:
In the fifth bust the majority, with a 51.4% of the informants, changed to feeling moderately inclined to play a game with this bust as the player character. The answer rate to answer nr.1 increased to the same level as in bust nr.2, with a 14.3%. This could suggest that the visual changes to this bust decreased the felt inclination to play a game with this character, by the informants asked.

These are the results for the sixth bust:

In the final bust, the majority, with a 55.7% answer rate to nr.2, answered that they felt moderately inclined to play a game with this bust as the character. It's notable that there is a slight decrease in the answer rate for both answer nr.1 and nr.3. This could suggest that some informants felt less opinionated on the visual design of this character, compared to the previous bust, bust five.

5.3.6 A summarized analysis of question three’s answers
The results for question three, shows that bust four is the one with the highest inclination to be played by the informants. This could suggest that the fourth bust was the most liked visual
design, and that most of them would rather play a game with that bust as the player character, when compared to the other busts. Meanwhile, the first bust was the least inclined to be played character, and the second bust was the one with highest answer rate for making the informants moderately inclined to play.

5.3.7 Results from question four

In the final question asked under each bust, the informants were asked to answer only between yes and not to this question: Would you describe this character as general looking?

Since the informants could only answer yes or no, the pie-charts have been updated. The, Yes and No, answers are presented on the right of the pie-chart, with their respective amount of percentages of the answers. The answer option Yes, is represented with the colour indigo blue. The answer option No, is represented with the colour red.

Would you describe this character as general looking?
These are the results for bust one:

The majority of the informants, with an answer rate of 64,3% to answer No, would not describe the first bust as general looking. This could suggest that, even if the character was created out of all the keywords the earlier informants had used to describe a general looking character, it doesn't mean that the character in itself will end up looking general.
These are the results for bust two:

In the second bust the majority of the informants, with a 52,9%, would not describe it as general looking, although it is notable that there was an increase in the number of informants that would, with answer option Yes resulting in 47,1% of the votes. This could suggest that more informants felt that this female character looked more general than the male one.

These are the results for bust three:

In the third bust there was a tie between the informants’ opinions. Half of the informants would describe this bust as general looking, while the other half wouldn’t. This could suggest that more
informants felt that the skin colour used on this bust felt more general looking than the earlier ones.

These are the results for bust four:

The majority, with more than two thirds of the answers, 72.9% of the informants, would not describe the fourth character as general looking. This is also the bust with the lowest number of informants that would describe this character as general looking. This suggest that many of the informants felt that the added change of hair and hair colour rendered the character far from general looking, when compared to the other character busts.

These are the results for bust five:
For the fifth bust, with a 68,6% answer rate on option No, the majority of the informants would not describe the character as general looking. Yet the number of informants that would had increased when compared to the earlier bust. This could suggest that some of the informants felt that the changed body type of the bust, appeared as more general looking than the previous one.

These are the results for bust six:

In the final bust, more than two thirds of the informants, with an answer rate of 71,4%, would not describe the character as general looking. This could suggest that the levels of details added to this bust, compared to the earlier bust, slightly increased the numbers of informants which would not describe this character as general looking.
5.3.8 A summarized analysis of question four’s answers
When analysing all the answers for question four, the data shows that the fourth bust was the least likely to be described as general looking, by the informants. Meanwhile the third bust was the most likely to be described as general looking. This could suggest that the visual design of the fourth bust is the most unique design out of the six busts.
6 Discussion

In this chapter the findings from the two studies are discussed, alongside the earlier mentioned research. A discussion around the expected and unexpected trends in the data, as well as new suggestions, are presented. This chapter also aims to identify potential weaknesses or limitations in the studies, and present deductions formed from the results.

The goal to help improve diversity and representation in games are also discussed further in this chapter, where recommendations, learnt lessons and possible practices are offered.

6.1 Discussing the pilot study´s results

In the pilot study´s first two questions, some notable trends emerged among the answers. With nine out of 13 answers, the common consensus was to describe a general looking character as male. Another clear trend, with seven out of 13 answers, was to describe the general looking character as white. These trends could suggest, as Lönn (2018), Ahmed (2010) and Trepanier and Bonenfant (2017) wrote about in their works, that for many the “unmarked” and “norm” is to see a player character as a white male. Lönn (2018) described that whiteness is rarely questioned, and especially seldom by white subjects. While Trepanier and Bonenfant (2017) noted that by simply adding female characteristics to a male character to make it female, it leaves the male model as the “unmarked” and the “norm”. When connecting this to the study it suggests that many of the informants did not question whether to describe a general character as male or white, which would render this trend in the answers as expected, due to the earlier works suggesting the same behaviour.

The change of gender, from male, to increase relatability, was requested by four out of 13 informants, a trend which was expected due to the earlier answers given in the survey, and to the earlier research presenting the same findings. For example, as in De jean, Upitis, Koch and Young´s (1999) work, where they presented findings where their female informants had answered that, they found the game more appealing, because the protagonist of the game were close to their own age and gender. These findings combined suggest a trend where females tend to relate more to a female player character, rather than a male. While at the same time, the white male character seems to be the general norm. Thus, suggesting that these informants wants to see a change in the common accepted norm for set player characters.
An unexpected trend was that most informants answered, that the last set player they had played as, felt moderately relatable. This, regardless if their character had been female, non-binary or male. This trend was unexpected since I thought that female players would always have a higher felt relatability scale, with a set female, rather than male, player character. Especially, considering that the same informants, had answered that they wanted to change the characters gender from male, to increase their felt relatability with the character. Yet, this could be explained, with the help of one of the informant’s answer to the question, which read as follows: “not at all visual wise except he was white, but i could still relate to him because he is funny” This could suggest that some of the informants related more to the character, even if it was a male, because of redeeming attributes outside of the visual design.

6.1.1 Discussing the main study´s results

In the main study´s results, the first question revealed that most informants thought that bust one, the white male, was the least representable character. It was expected that the female informants would find this bust as the least representable, due to the answers given in the pilot study and from analysing earlier research suggesting the same behaviour. For example, in Kennedy´s (2002) work, where she stated that the online, girl gaming community, complained about the lack of strong female leaders in games. As well as in Shaw´s (2015, p.192) statement “Representation is important because it is an external acknowledgment of one’s existence”. And this suggests that a white, male, set player character doesn’t make the most female players feel represented in the gaming world.

Meanwhile, the fourth bust turned out to have the highest answer rates for being highly representable. This result could suggest that by making the character a darker female instead of a white male, one will interest a larger crowd, due to the increase of felt representation by the informants in bust four. Yet, bust five and six, both with more visual details added, did not have an increase in felt representation by the informants. As mentioned earlier, Burton (2020) stated in her talk, that one could design a character to be generic enough to make people feel represented. This could suggest that adding more details than necessary steers people away from feeling represented.
For the second question of the main study, the trends show that the fourth bust proved to be the most relatable one. This trend was not unexpected, due to the earlier research on the subject, referring once again to De jean, Upitis, Koch and Young (1999) where their findings proved that girls relate more to a player character that looks like them, gender and age wise. Although it can’t be proven what age the informants were, so one must go with that they related more to a character of their own gender. It's notable that the sixth bust ranked almost as high on the relatable scale as the fourth bust, with only a few answers in difference. This is interesting, since the fifth bust did not gain as much votes for being highly relatable. One could question what made the fifth bust less relatable than the fourth and sixth, when the sixth bust builds upon the foundations of the fifth.

In the third question of the main study, one of the trends shows that bust one was voted the least inclined to play character. This trend is interesting because it could suggest that these informants were less likely to want to play a game, where the set player character was a male. That's when the fourth bust comes in. The fourth bust was the one with the highest answer rate for making the informants feel highly inclined to play the game. This could suggest that bust four had enough unique, visual details, to interest the female players to engage in the game. Which could suggest that the tipping point for creating the most engaging and likeable visual details, once again, lands on bust four.

In the final question for the main study, there arose some interesting and unexpected trends. Firstly, the third bust was voted the most likely to be described as general looking. This is interesting and unexpected, since bust three is not built up solely by the keywords for basic/general. Instead, it was expected that the first bust would be voted the most general looking, due to it being designed purely from the keywords given in the pilot study by the female informants. The reason why the trend turned out like this can't be proven, instead only speculations and suggestions can be made. It could be that, I as the creator, designed the characters in such a way that the keywords did not reflect properly in the first bust. Yet, it's still unexpected that the second bust was not voted the most general looking character in that case, since it's a white female. One could question why the informants felt that the third bust, with a darker female, appeared as more general looking. Perhaps, it comes through as more stereotypical than bust two, or perhaps the informants did not see white skin colour as the
unmarked norm. Yet, this can't be proven due to the lack of data regarding the question, which opens up for further welcomed studies on the subject.

The other trend from question four, showed that bust four, was the least likely to be described as general looking by the informants. This trend is also unexpected due to the remaining busts containing less of the keywords used to describe a basic or general looking character, by the earlier informants from the pilot study. It opens up a discussion around the details added to bust five and six, and whether those visual designs might appear as more stereotypical in games. Since the informants could not elaborate on their opinions, it's hard to prove any new claims, yet this too opens up for a further discussion and for more studies to be made on the subject.

6.2 The deduction

In this heading, the more general application of the results and proposed recommendations will be discussed.

The trends collected through the studies seem to point in a general direction at what female informants want from player characters in games. They suggest that there is a certain tipping point where the adding of details won’t necessarily increase the felt representation and relatability, and thus suggest that it won't be necessary to increase the level of details on the characters to reach larger female target audiences. This information can be of use for character designers who need to put together a budget for creating the most representational and relatable set player character for a game.

All these findings suggest, that many character designers and producers would benefit from testing out at what level of detail their set player character needs to be, to gain the widest target audience's interest. A proposed recommendation would be to study more about what female players would like to see in a set player character, to increase positive female media representation in games.
7 Conclusion

In this chapter the conclusion of the analysed data will be presented.

My analysis suggests that there is a tipping point where representation and relatability won't increase by the continued adding of visual details. It also suggests that most female informants felt more represented by, and related to, a female player character, rather than a male one.

This drives the discussion around female media representation forward, and present new suggestions for further studies on the subject.

This thesis aim was to answer the question: How can levels of stylized game-character details contribute to creating representation and relatability in female player characters? And the answer is that, to a certain degree, the adding of details can increase the levels of felt representation and relatability to the female player character, when viewed by female informants. Yet, too much details, might decrease the felt levels and steer away the inclination to play a game with that player character. Therefore, character designers and producers should carefully research what their target audience wants, and consciously design a budget for the character creation, to fulfil those needs.
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Appendix

A
Hi everyone! I’m trying to gather more background data for my thesis research about player character design! If you would have a minute to answer my survey that would be very helpful!
Thanks in advance! :D

B
Player characters in games
In this survey we’re looking at relatability in visuals when applied to a player character in games (not NPCs or companions)
No answer is wrong, it’s up to you to define the answers as to what you think is true!
Thanks in advance!
1. What gender do you define as?

- Nonbinary
- Female
- Male

2. What's your age?

- 10-18
- 18-30
- 30-50
- above 50

3. What defines a "basic/general" looking "Player Character" in games, according to you?

4. What kind of visual changes would make you relate more to a general/basic "Player Character"?

5. What was the latest game you played with a fixed player character? (not customizable)

6. And how relatable on a scale of 1-3 did that player character feel to you, purely through visuals? (1 being low or not at all relatable, 2 being moderately or generally relatable and 3 being very relatable)
**D**

**Representation and relatability in stylized player character busts**

This survey calls for female participants, its intention and aim is to gather data regarding representation and relatability in stylized player characters when viewed by female identifying individuals, its intention is purely for research interests. I am making this survey for my Bachelor thesis at the Department of Game Design at Uppsala University.

I ensure your anonymity by not collecting data which could link your answers to your person. After the study has been conducted and the thesis published, the survey with its answers will be destroyed to further ensure your anonymity. If you have any inquiries about the survey, thesis or regarding the collection of data feel free to contact me through this email: Hanna.Aholind.4776@student.uu.se

By answering this survey, you’re consenting to the fact that your answers will be used as data for my thesis, regarding female opinions on visual representation and relatability in stylized player characters. It can prove difficult to revoke your answers after submission, due to the high level of anonymity given by the survey. You are free to end the survey at any given time without submitting your answers.

**E**

[https://forms.gle/3UZKs5m7vg7ivDiq9](https://forms.gle/3UZKs5m7vg7ivDiq9)

(this is the hyperlink to the main study)