Finding Identity through Role-playing
A Case Study of the *Pouflons* Community

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Author’s Note

This research is based upon an earlier concept that was drafted by the authorial team of Shai Panaga and Christian Bondi that has since been revised into the current version, in which a new direction was pursued by myself (Bondi). Shai’s contributions to the original project are acknowledged with gratitude and due credit. Shai Panaga considers himself part of the Pouflons community and has been playing for over a year. As such, they have contributed the netnography (section 2.1) to this paper.

Thank you to the Pouflons team for their help with distributing the survey to the community.
Abstract

“Playing pretend” is often regarded as childish, but many people continue to role-play well into adulthood. Existing literature has reported instances of bleed between character and player identity, but usually in an autoethnographic report, small study, or only in theory. In my study, I attempt to establish links between primary identities, self-discovery, self-acceptance, and role-play. My findings may help in development of serious and applied games, as well as role-play’s use in therapeutic settings. I surveyed players online from a specific Art Role-Playing Game (ARPG) community, Pouflons, to find out how their characters’ personas and identities spill over and bleed-out into the player’s primary identity, what effects this had, and if players were able to notice these effects.

Keywords: Art Role-Play, ARPG, identity, larp, LGBT, role-play, RPGs, identity bleed
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1. Finding Identity through Role-playing

Role-players become their characters in-game, but do their characters ever become the player? This thesis explores the relationship between players’ identities and the experience of roleplaying characters in digital communities. A case study on the Pouflons (Pouflons LLC, 2015) community was conducted in which I sought to answer two research questions: what is the interaction between player identities and their roleplay characters and how do players report the effect role-play has had on their self-perception? In an art role-playing game (ARPG), players develop and visually upgrade their characters by completing art prompts or quests, which are then reviewed and approved by game moderators. By design, most ARPGs are nonlinear and can be played at any time and at any pace. Pouflons utilizes the ARPG website framework known as Lorekeeper, which was specifically built to manage ARPG communities that were originally based in the art-sharing platform DeviantArt. On DeviantArt, independent artists upload and share their original creative work such as illustrations, costumes, character designs, comics, literature, and of course, role-plays. My motivation for pursuing this topic is that I believe that role-playing can be formative and impactful in the development of identity and self. Further research into role-playing’s influence on identity may help inform development of serious games, in which the safe and guided exploration of identity may aid in therapeutic settings, for example, as a tool in cognitive behavioral therapy (Bartenstein, 2022).

The framework of this study is based upon already existing theories on role-play’s influence on identity, such as ego bleed, in which personality traits are “passed between the player and their character” and emancipatory bleed, in which a marginalized player seeks to embrace their “weirdness” and decolonize, combat, or unlearn their internalized oppressions and biases – like internalized misogyny, homophobia, or racism – to create and reclaim one’s
own self (Beltrán 2012, 91-92; Kemper 2020, The Mythical Norm, Internalized Oppression, and Internalized Bias). We also reference identity bleed, which refers to how one’s personal identity becomes affected by bleed experiences (Hugaas 2022, 16).

The method of study is largely qualitative and dependent on player surveys, which may include inaccuracies due to the inherent bias of voluntary participants self-reporting. This method was selected because the field lacked examples based on data from larger populations.
2. Background

My study will be centered mainly around an online community called *Pouflons*. This online community’s primary activity is centered around role-playing and developing characters, with a focus on art such as digital painting and original fiction. Role-playing in Pouflons occurs mostly independently, like single-player RPGs, with players completing prompts or quests that develop their character. Interaction between players and collaborative creation may occur through written or illustrated role-play. These prompts have art or word count requirements and must be approved by a game moderator to be marked as completed. Currency (usually Coins) earned through completing quests may be used to create or buy more characters, upgrade existing characters, buy pets, or trade with other players.

In this study, I examine the identities of players, their characters, and the bleed between them. According to the American Psychological Association, identity refers to one’s continuous sense of self, defined by physical, psychological, and interpersonal characteristics that is unique to oneself, alongside a range of affiliations and social roles such as ethnicity and gender. The phenomenon known as bleed is well-known within academic larp (live-action role-play) research but tends to mean something different for each scholar (Beltrán 2012, 95-96). Thus, I will reference Beltrán’s definition of ego bleed, Kemper’s definition of emancipatory bleed, and Hugaas’ generalized, but thorough, definitions of identity bleed to inform my analysis of how *Pouflons* players form personal identity. These particular definitions will be discussed in the literature review. I will first give an overview of the *Pouflons* community through a netnography.
2.1 Pouflons Netnography

Pouflons are intelligent, sheep-like, three-toed, four-winged creatures with magical capabilities, living on the continent of Bellacoste. There are also other playable, similarly magical species, introduced after Pouflons: the dragon-like Vespires, the bear-like Ursukis, and the gryphon-like Elyvians. The community and ARPG surrounding it was founded in 2014 on DeviantArt as a Closed Species group. Closed Species are original intellectual properties and generally consist of a fictional species or race with a combination of unique traits and original lore. They are usually established as art and/or role-playing communities. Players must gain permission to create or use characters within a Closed Species, usually through Make-Your-Own tickets (essentially a permission slip to make a character within the original intellectual property) or buying/trading for premade Adoptable characters designed by the Closed Species’ owners, moderators, or official/guest artists.

Characters in Closed Species are usually listed in a public registry or Masterlist to confirm legitimacy as a member of the Closed Species. These Masterlist entries often include additional info and categorizations such as subspecies, traits, rarity, monetary value, and transfer (gift, trade, resell) permissions. Masterlists are often tracked manually on DeviantArt, Toyhou.se, Google Docs/Google Sheets, Trello, Neocities, etc. Items and currency, if used in the ARPG, were also often tracked manually.

Before the implementation of the Lorekeeper framework, Pouflons kept track of characters, inventory, and currency manually on a dedicated DeviantArt account and group. Around 2021, after unmerging with another ARPG, Pouflons transferred the masterlist to its own Lorekeeper site. Much of the operations such as quests, raffles, inventory, currency, and character tracking now occur on the Lorekeeper site.
Masterlist entry on DeviantArt, detailing ownership, design credits, traits, and value.

Identifying information has been removed. Character art would normally appear above the given information. All information is manually entered. The masterlist link is a direct URL to the equivalent entry on the Lorekeeper site (play.pouflons.com) and was added to the description as part of the DeviantArt to Lorekeeper migration.
**Image 2**

**Masterlist entry using Lorekeeper (play.pouflons.com).**

2 The ‘Notes’ and ‘Description’ tabs do not display any additional info and are intended for moderator notes. The Credits tab links Design and Art roles. In this character’s case, both the Designer and Artist are ‘shai’, one of the contributors to this paper (Shai Panaga). The listing of character information is more streamlined and all traits are chosen from a predetermined list.

* The Profile button leads to an external character bio or profile. The badges indicate Gift Art, Gift Writing, and Trade Offer permissions—green means Open (allowed), yellow means Ask First, and red means Closed (disallowed).
Image 3

User Profile on Lorekeeper with Bank, Awards, Pets, and Inventory previews.

Image 4

Before migrating to Lorekeeper, User Bank, Pets, and Items were tracked manually in a DeviantArt journal. ³

Entry and onboarding into the Pouflons Art Role-Playing Game will be described as it is structured currently on Lorekeeper in May 2023. New members who have never owned a Pouflon or related species (Vespire, Ursuki, or Elyvian) are considered First Time Owners. First Time Owners are offered a free baby Make-Your-Own ticket or one Foundling’s Seal (a currency used to adopt premade baby characters designed by other members). Baby

³ Identifying information has been removed for privacy. The ‘17’ after the username is the User’s in-game coin balance.
characters are usually simpler in their designs, being limited in colors and traits. Baby characters are also limited in which quests they may undertake. Players must complete 3 grow-up quest prompts to grow their character up into an adult character. Adult characters have no limit on colors or traits. The Baby Character route of entry seems to be a way to ease new players into the game systems, so as not to overwhelm them with too many options. As with all prompts and quests, game currency is awarded to the player upon moderator approval of the submission. Game currency may be used to trade with other players, buy trait spells (visual upgrades), buy pets, or buy additional Make-Your-Own tickets.

New members may choose to acquire their first character through official Adoptable sales created by the mod and artist team. These characters are usually purchased via real-world currency, though in-game currency sales occur as well. Adoptable characters are usually Adult characters that tend to have very rare or desirable traits. These rare traits are obtainable via normal play without any exchange of real-world currency, but tend to take much effort or time to achieve.

It is also possible for new members to acquire their first character through second-hand resale from other members or trading art services, physical or digital goods, or different characters. These traded characters can be from other Closed Species ARPGs or they can be standalone, one-off designs.

Using Bowman’s (2010) framework of Character Evolution, this Designing and/or Adopting phase is part of the Genesis of a character—the beginning of a character, before they interact with the game systems and the world of *Pouflons*. Development, the fleshing-out of a character or personality, also occurs at this stage, as characters are required to have a visual design before they may undertake quests or prompts.

*Pouflons* and other ARPGs differ in the Interaction stage from other role-play since the Player is usually their own Storyteller (or, in tabletop terms, a Dungeon Master or Game...
Master), with the existing lore and limitations of the world being a secondary Storyteller (also present in the form of game moderators, who approve quests). In the case of independent questing, where a single player interacts with the system and lore, they have near-complete control over their character’s story, only having to answer to the predefined limits of the world. This kind of role-play is more akin to independent creative writing or world-building; some role-players may not consider the gameplay in Pouflons to be role-play at all. However, the world these characters inhabit influences their fate—the System of established lore and game moderators remain prominent Storytellers, thus, the gameplay in Pouflons does constitute role-play.

Independent questing is not the only way to play. Players may choose to interact with each other, collaboratively building their characters and character relationships. This may be in the form of collaborative art (either simultaneous or back-and-forth), chat role-play, or long-form prose role-play. Role-play may take place privately over Discord, Google Docs, iScribble.net/HelloPaint.io, Aggie.io, or other chatrooms and art tools. Finished art pieces or writing pieces may be submitted on-site as a quest fulfillment or as a general claim for on-site currency, after mod review and approval.

There are also certain Story Event Quests in Pouflons that are influenced by players’ choices or Votes, influencing the story, Non-Player Characters, and environments. This may also be in the form of a global Boss enemy, in which players submit quests depicting their characters in battle in order to deal damage to the Boss, defend other characters, or heal injured characters. Interaction between different players is more encouraged, as larger pieces that include more characters do more damage and earn more rewards to the Boss enemy.
A past story prompt and choice voting information.4

The Realization stage of Character Evolution is most evident in out-of-character conversations, usually on the community’s Discord server. Realization is when a character’s identity becomes distinct and clear to the player, through the character’s lived experiences with the world. A Realized character is no longer a concept, but a complex and independent entity. Players may talk about their characters like they have a mind of their own, thinking and behaving in a different way from the player’s primary identity.

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4 This is not the full text of the prompt. The full text includes a short story detailing a Player Character meeting a mysterious, high-security prisoner.
2.2 Literature Review

The literature available for my chosen topic has primarily focused on studying the effects of live action role-play or larp, tabletop role-playing games, and single-player role-playing games. They also tend to have a smaller sample size (Bowman, 2010), based on autoethnographic work (Baird, 2021), or are purely theoretical (Hugaas, 2022).

In her 2010 book *The Functions of Role-Playing Games*, Sarah Bowman identified a series of nine character types based off of data gathered from several informants she interviewed. These types, which would often overlap in different characters and players, described the relationship between them based on how similar the characters are to their players (Bowman 2010, 156). For example, Bowman describes some of these types as largely similar to the players but with some change such as having a certain trait magnified or they

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5 Identifying information has been removed for privacy. The emote with a ‘4’ below the image indicates that 4 separate people ‘reacted’ with the laugh-cry emote. ‘OC’ stands for Original Character.
exist with some superpower, meanwhile other types are in opposition to their player’s identity (Bowman 2010, 167, 174). Bowman asserts that as these characters develop as immersion in a role-play is nurtured, players perceive their characters more and more as a distinct identity separate from the ‘primary identity’ – the real-world self (Bowman, 2010, 127). This relationship can have a number of effects on a player’s primary identity, a phenomena referred to as ‘bleed,’ as in one thing bleeding into another (Kemper 2020, “What is Wyrding?”). Bowman’s work will be discussed in greater detail in the next section, 2.2.1.

Bleed is, broadly speaking, the transfer of thoughts and feelings between character and player. As an example, if a character falls in love with another character and bleed occurs, then it could be that those feelings are shared with the player who may then fall in love with that character or its player as well. Jonaya Kemper expands on bleed in their 2020 article “Wyrding the Self”, where they suggest the utilization of bleed as a potentially therapeutic tool one can make use of in order to assist in self-emancipation (Kemper 2020, “The Mythical Norm, Internalized Oppression, and Internalized Bias”). Emancipatory bleed, as they call it, is the feeling of liberation stemming from being freed from some form of social oppression, self-imposed or otherwise, as a result of bleed (Kemper 2020, “The Mythical Norm, Internalized Oppression, and Internalized Bias”). Kemper provides the example of a player bullied in their childhood for being emotional playing a character who is freely able to share their emotions without being bullied because of it, or when a player notices they no longer fear speaking up in their workplace or taking up space in public after playing a character in a leadership role at a larp (Kemper 2020, “The Mythical Norm, Internalized Oppression, and Internalized Bias”). In her 2012 article “Yearning for the Hero Within: Live Action Role-Playing as Engagement with Mythical Archetypes”, Whitney Beltrán suggests a similar word to bleed for another phenomenon: ego bleed, which pertains to the sharing or

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6 Kemper’s article, “Wyrding the Self” does not have page numbers, so sections are listed where the statement is made.
learning of behaviors by the player that are generally unusual for them via their roleplaying of the character, such as a person learning to be nurturing from a character to whom such behavior is a major part of their identity (Beltrán 2012, 96).

Josephine Baird, another researcher specializing in role-play, wrote extensively of their own experiences as a trans woman in her 2021 autoethnography *Role-playing the Self: Trans Self-Expression, Exploration, and Embodiment in (Live Action) Role-playing Games* wherein she analyses her experiences with different forms of role-play and partially credits them in forming her identity as a transgender woman (Baird 2021, 101). She discusses her experiences through the lens of Kemper’s emancipatory bleed, in which assuming the identity of a woman aided in gender euphoria and confirmation while still closeted (Baird 2021, 100). She also mentions the physical space of Club Wotever and its Dressing-up Corner as a safe, transformational container in which to explore – and perhaps even bring home – new and different roles and identities in the form of clothing, with the alibi of “simply getting into the spirit of [the queer nightclub]” (Baird, 2021, 107).

Kjell Hugaas in his 2022 thesis *Bleed and Identity* suggests a bleed perception threshold as a way to account for the fact that bleed is a highly personal, highly subjective, self-reported experience. This model implies that bleed is always happening within role-play, but individuals have different thresholds of registering or identifying the phenomena as it happens (Hugaas 2022, 11). Hugaas also puts forward the concept of identity bleed, in which identity itself bleeds-out from character to player. He identifies Baird’s (2021) experiences in becoming a woman as identity bleed, though she herself used Kemper’s (2020) framework of emancipatory bleed; however, the two frameworks remain compatible as identity bleed “refers to how our sense of self and our multiplicities of identities are affected by bleed experiences” (Hugaas, 2021, 16) while emancipatory bleed refers to the “realization” or acceptance of identity.
2.2.1 Bowman’s Character Types

Both Kemper’s (2020) and Beltrán’s (2012) work were largely about role-play that occurs in face-to-face situations, such as larp or table-top role-playing games. The two authors reference back to Bowman’s (2010) descriptions of players and their relationship with their character in terms of identity; character concepts can be categorized based on how similar they are to the “primary identity,” or a player’s “real-world” persona. Bowman describes how some player characters are like their players but changed in some way or how some player characters are the “opposite” to the player’s identity or morals; player characters are almost always derivative of the player’s personal identity (Bowman 2010, 157). See Figure 1 below for a description of the nine character types as outlined by Bowman (2010), with my generalized categories in the leftmost column. For discussion on how I used the generalized categories, see the Methodology section.

Figure 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Doppelganger Self</td>
<td>A character that greatly resembles their player in personality, behavior, appearance, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Devoid Self</td>
<td>A character that resembles their player, but lacks some essential trait or quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Augmented Self</td>
<td>A character that resembles their player, but with additional special traits, abilities, or powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fragmented Self</td>
<td>A character derived from a piece of the player’s main identity, often magnified or exaggerated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Repressed Self (or Regressive Self/Inner Child)</td>
<td>A character derived from a piece of the player’s main identity, but with the connotation of youth, naivety, and mischievousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Idealized Self</td>
<td>A character that possesses certain features or qualities the player wishes to have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Oppositional Self</td>
<td>A character with traits that contradict with or otherwise differ from the player’s primary personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Experimental Self</td>
<td>An exploratory character that challenges the boundaries of role-play and are meant to be bizarre or otherwise interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Taboo Self</td>
<td>An exploratory character that allows the player to examine and discuss subjects or behaviors deemed taboo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table of Bowman’s character type definitions and their categorizations.
These (often overlapping) categories of characters informed the way I asked players questions about their roleplaying characters and how their identities compare. Many of Bowman’s informants state that playing characters influence their “out-of-character” identity or “real life” persona, affecting the player’s self-esteem, self-expression, self-understanding, or understanding of others in a noticeable way—this influence is what Beltrán (2012) identified as ego bleed. If the character’s influence assisted in self-introspection and self-acceptance regarding internalized oppressions in the player (such as internalized homophobia, misogyny, racism, fat-phobia, etc.), that is what Kemper (2020) defined as emancipatory bleed.

Close-self character types mirror the primary identity without any changes to it, setting it apart from the other categories. The three types within the category are the Doppelganger, Devoid, and Augmented Selves. The Doppelganger Self is essentially the primary identity, only existing in a different reality from its primary identity, such as the character inhabiting the Dungeons & Dragons universe which would probably feature relatively superficial changes such as a belief in magic, a well-known force prevalent in that universe. This type often lends to players having a heightened sense of self-awareness. Devoid Self types are also the primary identity, with some essential quality missing; Bowman (2010, 166) uses either physical disabilities such as blindness or more fundamental pieces of a personality such as empathy as an example of things that could be absent from the character. The Augmented Self is likely the most common of the three in its category, a character that reflects the primary identity with some extra ability, such as immortality or clairvoyance.

The Partial-self category includes three character types within it, the Fragmented, Repressed and Idealized Selves. Bowman describes Fragmented Self characters as having a “fragment” of the player within them (Bowman 2010, 167), often magnified or exaggerated in some way. Repressed Self characters also use an aspect of the player’s own identity as a
foundation but features some flavor of childlike innocence, such as naivety, mischievousness, or general youthfulness (Bowman 2010, 170). An Idealized Self character type belongs to a character who possesses the traits a player wishes they had, something that, Bowman (2010, 172) reports, can help the players address deficiencies in their own self. These types are all based on some part of the primary identity, placing it relatively close to Close-self. However, Close-self character types are just copies of the primary identity with aspects added or removed, while Partial-self types build upon the foundation of the primary identity or modify it.

The three types of the Distorted-self are Oppositional, Experimental, and Taboo Selves. The Oppositional Self is easiest to liken to the Doppelganger Self, only it is the opposite of the primary identity as its name suggests; it is a sort of inside-out Doppelganger, useful for exploring one’s primary identity as one must know what one is to say what one is not. The Experimental Self type’s personas tend to stand out in a way that probes the boundaries of the role-play and often invoke themes from the game itself or present a challenge for the player who plays them. The Taboo Self characters are vehicles which players can use in order to explore more taboo concepts in the safe space offered by a role-play without having to worry as much about the circumstances. The taboos could theoretically involve anything which a stigma exists against, such as transgender expressions. Bowman tells us that these types all share an exploratory nature with each other in one way or another (Bowman 2010, 174-176). Oppositional types explore the primary identity, Experimental types explore concepts for characters, and Taboo types explore themes that carry some form of potential social risk outside of the context of role-play.
4. Methodology

Since my research focuses on identity construction, which is highly subjective and complex, I elected to conduct a qualitative study rather than a quantitative study as it will allow me to narrow the focus of my analysis on a smaller research sample rather than a large dataset. The nature of self-reported data and the subjectiveness of bleed and identity will give me a dataset that cannot be objectively true, but I have elected to place trust in my participants to be experts of their own experiences. This thesis is a case study of the online role-play community *Pouflons*. Using the approach of a case study allowed me to narrow the scope of the research while still accessing a large-enough data set. To collect data, the game moderation team distributed a qualitatively-focused survey, utilizing the Monthly Newsletter and the *Pouflons* Discord to find participants.

The game moderators also agreed to set up a pet reward for completing my survey. This may skew the results of my survey by participants simply skipping questions or answering untruthfully just to receive the reward, however, I believe increasing the potential participant pool is acceptable to risk warping my data with a slight bias. *Pouflons* moderators have made it clear that this pet is not exclusive to this specific survey and will be attainable in different ways in the future. I expected about 100 respondents, based on a 10% response rate from the community of around 1100 members. I ultimately received 135 complete responses and 49 incomplete responses, but I only use complete responses in my analysis.

As per privacy regulations outlined by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Swedish Authority for Privacy Protection (IMY), the survey must include one question at the beginning that determines if the respondent is 13 years old or older, as any individuals below 13 would need to obtain parental consent. As *Pouflons*’ Terms of Service
require all players to be 13 or older anyway, I do not intend to collect data from individuals under 13 years old.

Data is kept on a virtual private server rented by the researchers through Digital Ocean. The server is located in Amsterdam, Netherlands. Once the research has been concluded, all data will be deleted.

4.1 Survey Structure

The main objective when writing the survey was to identify player demographics, character demographics, the player-character relationship, and relationship to role-play. Thus, I ask questions about the player’s identity, their character(s), and what aspects of their identity are reflected in their role-playing experiences. I also provide Likert scale statement questions and free-text questions for players to expand upon their experiences and any creative outlets they may have based on their role-play, though all free-text questions were optional. Since personal demographics are considered sensitive information, I made the demographics portion of the survey optional. Multiple choice questions regarding character demographics and role-play experiences were mandatory to fill out. The full text of the survey questions are in Appendix B.

4.2 Data Organization

Respondents’ answers are broken into 6 sections. The first two are questions specifically for establishing the identity of the player and the second is for their character(s)’ identities. The third section prompts the respondent to answer questions about their history and use of role-play, including questions like “How often do you role-play?” and “What was the format
of the first role-play you participated in?” The fourth section is a free-answer section where respondents are asked to list up to 5 traits that are common between their characters which supplements information from earlier in the survey. The next section asks if the respondent has used their role-play in one of their creative outlets, such as writing or drawing. Then the final section is another section featuring free-answer questions as well as Likert scale questions which focuses on determining the players’ thoughts on role-play and its advantages (or disadvantages).

Next, the first two sections – the largest – were consolidated so that each column contained an answer from the respondent. This had to be done due to the way the data was exported to the spreadsheet. The two sections then had each answer (about height, gender, religion, et cetera) for both the player and character(s) placed next to each other so they could be directly compared and categorized as Close-self, Distorted-self, Partial-self or ambiguous if there was no clear indicators or several opposing indicators.

With the respondents’ answers next to each other, comparison was the next step. When characters’ and players’ identities matched, it would indicate that the relationship between them was a Close-self, while mismatched identities is an indicator of Distorted-self and Partial-self for example. During the comparison phase, the supplemental questions from the fourth section were also considered. Respondents which could not result in categorization were instead placed in the “Ambiguous” group.
5. Results & Discussion

In this section I will summarize my approach, highlight the results of it, then discuss the conclusions I drew from them. In my work, I developed a survey and, with the help of Pouflons administration, distributed it to the community and collected answers to questions about the players’ identities, the identities of their character(s), and about how the players feel about role-play and what effects it had on their lives. I had 135 complete responses I used in my data set.

Figure 2

![Category Distribution](image)

*Percentile and total distribution of respondents between categories.*

Comparing the responses of specific respondents, I used Bowman’s character types to attempt to categorize the relationship between the character and its player into three groups as I considered the responses to the survey. I divided this analysis into three sections, one for each of the categories I derived from Bowman’s character types. The categories are Close-self, Partial-self, and Distorted-self. Each contained three of the character types. In Figure 2 you can see the breakdown of each of the categories: Close-self is the majority with 56 respondents (52%) being classified in it, Distorted-self received 26 of the respondents
(24%), and Partial-self received 25 respondents (23%). During the analysis, however, I realized some respondents were still too difficult to confidently sort into a category which resulted in the creation of a fourth category, “Ambiguous.” A respondent may be sorted into this category for several reasons, but most often they had either too few answers, answers that would contradict each other, or their character(s) could belong to more than one category and there was no clear dominant one.

Ultimately, one can never know whether or not one type or another would truly fit a character, or even if a character would be limited by only one, but by asking players for their characters’ information, I hope to gain insight into what types are at least the most important or influential to them. To assign a category to players I had to consider the answers of the respondents from the survey. I broke the data from this survey down into three main groups which I used to categorize the respondents. The first section is the demographics section which contained side-by-side comparisons of the respondents’ answers to questions about their own identity and the identities of their characters. The second section contained a question which asked respondents to share five of their most common traits their characters share with one another. The third section which I call the free answer section contained Likert scale statements regarding role-play and its effects on the respondent and it included questions which asked the respondent to extrapolate on the answer they gave.

5.1 Close-Self

Assigning the Close-self types was usually the simplest, as all the character types more or less mirror the primary identity, usually demographics questions for primary and character identity matching up to each other was justification enough to suspect a Close-self assignment would be appropriate and as long as free-text answers did not contradict that
suspicion, I felt confident in that assignment. Sometimes, though, it was not that simple. Do all demographic answers need to line up? How many is too few? As established previously, all of these character types exist on a spectrum and a character can easily exist within the definitions of more than one character type. To make this system work, then, it is necessary to find which is *most* indicative of the data I collected, a somewhat subjective decision. Ultimately I settled on going with the majority, but if it was too close then I left them as ambiguous. A majority for the demographics section is five or more, but sometimes answers are not provided for either the player or character, in which case the question is not counted, so a majority could also be fewer. Figure 3 below shows an example of this.

Additionally, Bowman does also mention that Doppelgangers’ character sheets (from *Dungeons & Dragons* or other similar tabletop roleplaying games) will often feature discrepancies because of the nature of these games, often requiring characters to have specific “builds” (a character’s mechanical archetype) in order for their character to be viable in game. To kill a dragon, for instance, my character will probably need more points in a strength stat to avoid dying.

**Figure 3**

![Percentile of matching genders between primary and character identities.](image)

*The percentile of matching genders between the primary and character identities.*
After the demographics section, I organized the next section to house only a single question: “What traits are most common between your characters? Be as specific as you want. You may only input 5 traits.” At the time of writing the question I assumed answers received would be something like ‘naive,’ ‘friendly,’ or ‘curious.’ Instead, I found many respondents answered with physical features like ‘large ears’ or ‘tall.’ Although it was not what I was hoping for or expected, I noticed while categorizing respondents that it could be useful for what I was doing anyway. I had not found anything in the literature that could be related to this, but it seemed that respondents who listed physical traits in the question tended to favor the Close-self category, such as Respondent 81 who listed, among other things, long hair, anthropomorphic, and pink as their characters’ traits and was categorized as Close-self. After making note of this, I used the traits section as less-influential-but-still-relevant data that could be used to categorize.

It was rare to find such decisive content in the free answer section of the survey, but it was not uncommon for the balance to be shifted by the answers nonetheless. Bowman offered many examples of characters in her system of types via her informants’ stories about their characters. These anecdotes provided some specifics one could use and also extrapolate off of. Every Close-self character type closely mirrors the primary personality, but Doppelgangers in particular will usually feature a heightened sense of awareness (Bowman 2010, 165). This indicator of the Close-self type came up often while reviewing the comments in the free answer section. For example Respondent 13’s answer to the survey question “In what way(s) has role-play affected your self-image, self-esteem, or self-understanding?”: “It’s helped me look at my own traits and what I value in myself or others”; or Respondent 18’s answer to the same question: “As someone with a dissociative disorder, role-play helped me to find aspects of myself within the characters I was portraying”. Both Respondents 13 and 18 report the same phenomena occurring to them; by
roleplaying their characters, their self-awareness increased, which reinforces Bowman’s theory regarding the Close-self type players.

A popular, less-grounded stereotype regarding Close-self players is that they are often less-experienced roleplayers. Roleplayers commonly reason that you can only play yourself for so long before it gets boring after all (Bowman 2010, 165). This could be for several reasons. For one, most players tend to fit into the Close-self category, at least in Pouflons, which would mean that one may assume the most populated category (Close-self) would also contain the largest subset of new players. Additionally, it is a common trope for Close-self players to create surface-level character and often will not immerse themselves very deeply which might not help that impression.

Regardless, this assumption does not seem to be true based on the data. Despite the stereotype of Close-self characters being favored among less-experienced roleplayers, the category contains on average the second-oldest players compared to the other categories, as well as the youngest average age to be introduced to role-play. This does not necessarily mean they are the most experienced, though, as it is not viable to measure role-play hours, which means it is still possible for them to have less experience. However, based on the survey data it would seem unlikely for the stereotype to be true. Close-self characters can be just as deep and immersive as any other character, and their players are also quite experienced. See Figure 4 for the comparison between categories’ experience.
Respondent 47 is 22-years-old, identifies as a woman, asexual, Hispanic, is 165 centimeters tall, Catholic, speaks English natively, is not transgender, identifies with a mental health condition, and has a close family history of immigration. Their characters, on the other hand, are around their age, are women, asexual, not transgender, and are not of a particular race or religion; their height varies, and they are travellers/immigrants. Of the 10 demographic parameters, there are 5 matches: gender, sexuality, transgender, age, and immigration/travel histories. This secures a majority and the matching demographics does initially suggest a Close-self classification.

In the traits section, Respondent 47 says that the traits common to their characters are that they are women, feature an ambiguous religious affiliation, intellectually-inclined, teenager-to-young adult age range, and have some degree of concern over morality. As mentioned previously, there seems to be a correlation between the physical traits and Close-self types, but there are no physical traits here. It is worth mentioning, though, that she
reiterates that she commonly plays women, vaguely religious, young people, which fits her primary identity.

In the free answer section, Respondent 47 says they are unsure about role-play affecting their self-esteem, self-image, or self-understanding. She agrees that role-play has affected her social life, she disagrees that her characters have been stereotyped, she’s unsure how role-play has affected the way she perceives or understands others, and she does say that she roleplays characters with different racial identities, ideologies, and lifestyles, but also says that her characters are usually part of a marginalized culture, often have foreign roots or are immigrants, are women, sometimes feature some kind of struggle with mental health and she does not experiment with her identity via role-play. Based on these answers, it would seem that roleplaying a woman is an important part of role-play for her, as well as being an immigrant. Had these not been mentioned so often, I might be more willing to say that a Partial-self classification would be more fitting.

5.2 Partial-Self

Unlike the Close-self type, identifying Partial and Distorted types was much more of a challenge. While the Close-self assignment was more likely the more character/player demographics were the same, the inverse was true for Partial-self types; the more the demographics were the same, the less likely they would be categorized as Partial-self. This is because Partial-self character types are only based on the primary identity and do not need to resemble it. An exemplary Partial-self respondent should only have one or two matching demographics and the rest would be non-matching, such as Respondent 14 who possessed two demographic matches (sexuality and family immigration history). Partial-self type characters borrow only sparingly from the primary identity then expand upon what it
borrowed and centralize those aspects. Many Partial-self types have demographics differing from their character(s) in this way such as Partial-self Respondent 120, an English-speaking man that plays men and English-speakers, but otherwise does not shares aspects with their characters typically. Other Partial-self types enjoy playing characters that have personality traits that tend to be associated with younger, more naive behaviors, similarly to Respondent 41 who describes their character(s) as mischievous and chaotic, but obviously in a child-like, innocent way. Alternatively, a Partial-self type can be represented in the form of an idealization of the primary identity. As an idealization, a character could be as far or close to the primary identity as possible, so it would have to be a feature identified in the latter sections of the survey, usually by the respondent directly saying that they use their character as a benchmark for their own self or that they are an idealized version of what they wish to be. As an example, here is Respondent 15’s answer to free text question ‘Role-play has affected my self-image, self-esteem, or self-understanding.’: “It is easier to work through personal issues by projecting them, and then dissecting those emotions and reactions. I also am able to create characters that reflect me, but in my most idealized form. I have never been ashamed of my scars because so many of my characters have them. I am currently doing a similar thing with acne, by creating more characters with it.”

Respondent 15’s quote had already shown evidence in the demographic section of belonging to the Partial-self category by them sharing traits with their characters: non-binary, transgender, asexual, and a mental health condition, but cemented their classification with this comment specifically because of the mentioning of their characters reflecting their “idealized form.” When analyzing the free answer section of the survey, the things I looked out for were, to identify Partial-self types, a need for the player to act out a neglected aspect of their subconscious or an aspect of the primary personality being magnified and centralized. Respondent 15 probably acts out their issues in their role-play when they talk about
projecting their issues onto their characters. Often, respondents like Respondent 36 also mention throwing in several different identity aspects into their characters. For some Partial-self types, some players will mention a child-like or youthful way to their characters, something like what Respondent 95 mentions when they describe their character as friendly and naive. Bowman suggests that the unseriousness of this type of character, the Repressed self, is likely the need of the primary identity to relieve itself of the weight of adult life, and so something that might sound relevant to this was what I looked for in the free answer section (Bowman 2010, 170). This type is more likely to break social conventions, act out, and be mischievous (Bowman 2010, 171). Respondent 9, one of the Partial-self category, describes their characters as “chaotic gremlins” for example.

For the survey’s traits section, I could not identify a consistent trend as much as Close-self had with their tendency to choose physical and not personality traits, but I did reason that if the Close-self type would feature physical traits then personality traits are more likely to be indicative of either the Partial-self or Distorted-self as a result. A few respondents would list things like “heroic” as a trait in this section, which is a marker of an Idealized self.

Respondent 39 is 162 centimeters tall, white/European, 27-year-old, non-binary, transgender, and pansexual. They have an attention deficit disorder, a health condition, they are Kemetic, speak English natively, and have a family history of immigration. Their characters do not share many traits with them – only that they are both transgender. Their character(s) are also taller than them, do not have aspects of identity that are shared between their character. There is a lack of a majority, but also there is one matching trait, suggesting Partial-self.

In the free answer section, Respondent 39 had a lot to say about their role-play. For one, they strongly disagree that role-play has affected their self-image, self-esteem, or self-understanding, however they do not comment on this. They also mention viewing those
who put in less effort into role-play as being younger or less-inspired, possibly referring to Close-self types. They say this in response to a question about their ability to understand others, and confirm that it mostly happens in one-on-one scenarios. They have experimented in the past with their identity through role-play but it does not seem to be something they are doing these days, or at least not as dramatically as before. Most interestingly for me, though, is their answer about integrating marginalized aspects of themselves into their character. To this they tell me that each and every character receives a piece of their “soul”, then confirms that this is a part of their personality, a facet of their traits, their orientation, or one that they wish they had. This is strong evidence for Partial-self type categorization, and because of the detail it is even possible to say that they are likely a Fragmented and sometimes Idealized type.

5.3 Distorted-Self

The Distorted-self type is the most prone to irregular and contradictory data, very close to responses placed in the Ambiguous category, but there is a method to the answers, which the demographics section was rarely helpful for, though this was not always the case. An Oppositional Self type is spottable, though quite a rare type to appear in the data. To do so, the respondent must indicate traits that are opposed to their primary identity in their characters. This can get a bit complicated as traits are rarely ‘opposite’ of each other, though it could be said that our society could consider some as binary like man and woman, gay and straight, young and old, et cetera. Unless I suspected a Respondent fit in the Distorted-self type, I did not consider this perspective. Nonetheless in the survey data, an Oppositional type might appear in the demographic section as a respondent who has such ‘opposite’ traits. Respondent 54, a Distorted-self type, as an example, is a woman that primarily plays men.
Experimental types, on the other hand, are not really viable to catch in the demographics section. Taboo types could also resemble a wide variety of possibilities, but as the character’s purpose is often to explore some aspect of their identity on behalf of the primary identity, there might be, just like the Devoid and Augmented selves, one or two differences in the identity, sometimes that the player does not even want to acknowledge that they are exploring. An example of such behavior in the data was their answer to the question about them being transgender or not. Alone it could be several different types, but if a respondent, for example, says they are not transgender, yet plays transgender characters, it would not be decisive but I would be looking for any other signs indicating Taboo typehood, such as Respondent 28, a Distorted-self player who is not transgender but often plays them and talks about experimentation in later sections.

In the traits section I received a mixture of answers ranging from physical to personality traits, from themes to demographical answers. It was expected that the section would potentially contain more clues to the Experimental types who might expound more on their “bizarre concepts,” but this was not very obvious if it was included at all, which is also not unlikely. The Distorted-self types were only 24% of respondents, and assuming they would be evenly distributed through every other character type, then I would only expect to see these clues in a third of a quarter of respondents.

The free answer section was the place I expected to find most of the content I could use for identifying Distorted-self types. Expectations for the Oppositionals were that they might identify an ability to understand themselves and others. One quote from Respondent 2 read: “I think that roleplaying has really helped me figure out who I am as a person in terms of gender - when I first started roleplaying, I identified strictly as a female and didn't really think much of it. However, I only really felt comfortable roleplaying as male characters and I began to realize that it was because I wasn't actually female. I eventually discovered that I felt most
comfortable in masculine roles because I was nonbinary.” Respondent 2 mentions understanding themselves better as a result of role-play, but they also mention exploration of their identity facilitated by role-play too. These are both features of the Distorted-self so it is easy to say they would be of that category.

Respondent 28 is 30-years-old, identifies non-binary, bisexual, white (or European), is 157 centimeters tall, is not religious, speaks English natively, is not transgender, does not identify with any disabilities, and does not have any recent family history of immigration. Their characters, on the other hand, are around their own age, are also non-binary or male, are transgender, are bisexual, gay, or lesbian, do not have any specific disabilities, race, or religion; their height varies, and they are often travellers/immigrants. Of the 10 demographic parameters, there are 5 matches: age, gender, sexuality, language and disabilities. This secures a majority in the demographics section and therefore suggests a Close-self classification but it is still necessary to look through the rest of their answers to determine their category more decisively.

In the traits section, Respondent 28 says that the traits common to their characters are that they are dorky, friendly, non-binary, strong, and stoic. As mentioned previously, there seems to be a correlation between the physical traits and Close-self types, but there is only one here, “strong,” but that’s assuming they do not mean strong in spirit or personality. Just based on this section I would withhold a classification but the uncertainty is not enough to sway away from the evidence in the demographics.

In the free answer section, Respondent 28 confirms a positive impact on their self-image/esteem/understanding and mentions being able to explore gender in their comment. They also agree that role-play has positively impacted their understanding of others, and they communicate a preference for roleplaying characters with traits unlike their own, specifically gender, sexuality, and race, and they’ve explored their own identity via this
method, again sexuality and gender are mentioned specifically. Given these answers, it rounds out Respondent 28 and paints a more full picture. Because of the prevalence of experimentation as a theme through their answers, I classified them as Distorted-self.

5.4 Discussion

Bowman’s work was pivotal in understanding the dynamics at play between character and player via bleed. The categorization of respondents into the three groups made identifying character types via survey much easier, there was less difference between the groups than what was expected. While there are fundamental differences between the character types and their categories, this does not seem to have much of an effect on other parameters that I measured such as the relationship between role-play and self-esteem. It is possible that a categorization based on what players sought to take from their character(s) or their role-play, such as identity experimentation or escapism, might be more versatile for studying the effects of bleed, the formation of identity, et cetera.

Figure 5
Likert scale responses to survey question “Role-play has affected my self-image, self-esteem, or self-understanding.”

Much of the most valuable data came from the free answer section of the survey where I asked questions about the self-image and self-esteem of players, how the player’s identity differed from their character(s), how role-play has affected their ability to better understand others, and more. By the respondents telling me what impact role-play has had on them, we can see the effects of bleed on them. As Beltrán pointed out, the sharing and learning of behaviors from the characters we play can be a powerful therapeutic tool in the hands of people (Beltrán 2012, 96). Much like when we are around people we like, we pick up their mannerisms; in the same way we pick up the thought processes of our characters and learn to approach issues in ways we normally would not (Kemper 2020, “The Mythical Norm, Internalized Oppression, and Internalized Bias”). This is a method of therapy that could be applied more widely especially as a way to liberate marginalized groups of people from the biases placed upon them by society and allow them to accept themselves easier (Kemper 2020, “The Mythical Norm, Internalized Oppression, and Internalized Bias”).

In the survey quite a few people told me that they often partake in identity experimentation through role-play, and a larger-than-average proportion of transgender and non-binary people are present in the community: out of 135 complete responses, 52 identified themselves as transgender, 67 as not transgender, and 16 gave no answer. This amounts to 38.5% of Pouflons players identifying as transgender, a significantly more dense ratio compared to the average in the United States, 0.7% (Jones, 2022). Could there be so many due to their willingness to tolerate experimentation and this leads to many of the players to eventually experiment and discover another part of their identity? Baird discovered her identity as a transgender woman through her role-play which gave her the space she needed in order to experiment (Baird, 2021, 107). Some respondents would claim, specifically, that
they would make characters in order to experiment with their identity, such as Respondent 57, a Close-self type: “My characters usually represent or have some aspect of my own personality, often one i want to work on. examples would be lying, anger, self-respect, introversion, etc”. Pouflons seems to have more similarities to Club Wotever than what meets the eye. Further research on this specific topic could be helpful if a method of measuring happiness or self-acceptance before and after a period of role-play were determined and applied similarly to an online role-play community.

Hugaas tells us about the bleed perception threshold; the highly subjective nature of bleed leads us to rely on almost-unmeasureable self-reported evidence to perceive it (Hugaas, 11). Despite the prevalence of bleed’s effects being reported, some respondents would also claim they did not experience any, though we can assume that this means they were beneath the perception threshold if we are in fact always experiencing bleed while role-playing. Assuming bleed is always happening as Hugaas suggests, I extrapolated the rate at which bleed was perceived by different categories of players based on how often respondents reported bleed’s effects. It was believed initially that Close-self types would perceive bleed less as their characters’ identities would contradict the primary identity’s behaviors less often, meaning that Distorted-self, broadly speaking, would perceive more. However, this was not the case in my results, but I did notice that certain effects, such as its effect on one’s ability to perceive and understand others, were less noticeable than others, though the categories did not have significant margins between one another, probably as a consequence of their fluid state.

Overall my research supports previous researchers’ theories about bleed but provides them with a study of a larger population. I also showed how Bowman’s character types can predict what kind of bleed effects different character types might notice.
6. Conclusion

This study has examined the relationship between primary identities and role-play characters through a case study of the online ARPG community Pouflons. This has been done primarily using the role-play character types developed by Bowman, which were adapted into three overarching categories: the Close-self, the Partial-self and the Distorted-self. The concepts of bleed discussed by Beltrán, Hugaas and Kemper were also used to further examine the relationship between primary identities and role-play characters, in relation to the character types.

The material used was a survey distributed during a two-week long period to the community through their newsletter and Discord server. The survey asked respondents demographic questions about themselves, asked them to describe their characters, questions about their experience of engaging in role-play. The respondents were then categorized according to their answers as either Close-self, Partial-self or Distorted-self type respondents. The Close-self was found to be the most common type, making up a little over half of the respondents, and the Partial-self and Distorted-self made up roughly a quarter each.

The Close-self category was mainly distinguished by the similarities between the primary identity and the role-play character. The more factors between the demographic section and the description of the role-play character overlapped, the more likely the respondent was to be categorized as the Close-self type. Close-self types are also distinguished by their heightened sense of self-awareness, which was mostly expressed through the free answer responses, in which several respondents reported increased self-awareness as a consequence of their role-play. Of note was also the fact that Close-self type players tended to list more physical traits when asked to do so for their character types, rather than personality traits.
The Partial-self category base their role-play characters on their primary identities, but do not necessarily resemble it. "Basing" the character can take many different forms. For example, creating a character with traits that they themselves idealize, or magnifying a certain aspect of their primary identity. Thus, Partial-self types tended to have one or two demographic traits overlapping between their primary identity and their role-play character and were then further categorized by their description of what they sought to achieve through their role-play, such as acting out neglected aspects of themselves, such as idealised traits or child-like traits.

The Distorted-self was the most irregular category. One way to categorize them was by identifying respondents who tended to role-play characters with primarily different traits to themselves. In the free answers section they would often describe a desire to experiment through role-play, such as exploring their gender identity by role-playing characters of different genders. This exploration also relates to the bleed between primary identities and character identities, as the space created within the role-play setting for exploration also seems to have had an impact on respondents being able to explore their primary identity, as reported in the survey.

The interactions between players and their characters are mostly subconscious, characterized by the transfer of thoughts, feelings, and ideas which can teach players from the experiences of their characters. Players aware of their characters’ ability to affect themselves describe the effects as largely positive in the case of Pouflons. Should future research be undertaken, I would recommend additional experiments with identity formations and an examination of the application of role-play in therapeutic settings.
7. References


## Appendices

### Appendix A – Glossary

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>ARPG</td>
<td>art role-playing game</td>
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<tr>
<td>DeviantArt</td>
<td>an online original art sharing platform</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discord</td>
<td>an online voice call, messaging, and chat room app</td>
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<tr>
<td>larp</td>
<td>“Live-Action role-play”, a role-play that takes place at a physical location</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lorekeeper</td>
<td>a Laravel and PHP based framework, specifically created for DeviantArt-based ARPGs</td>
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Appendix B – Survey Questions

Privacy Policy

This survey is being hosted by Shai Panaga and Christian Bondi to collect data for their Bachelor's degree project in Game Design at Uppsala University, Sweden. Our supervisor is Dr. Sarah Lynn Bowman.

All participants are anonymous and they may request to remove their data at any time using a unique identifier. This survey and all collected data is hosted on a virtual private server contracted through Digital Ocean and is located in Amsterdam. We will not publish all data/answers collected to further preserve privacy, instead only picking key excerpts and overall stats.

Our findings will be published on Digitala Vetenskapliga Arkivet (DiVA) and will be free-access. All survey data will be deleted when our research has concluded.

To claim your Gnutty Professor pippet, you will be directed to a separate form at the end of the survey and fill in your username. Only the Pouflons mods will see your username and we, the research team (Shai and Bondi) will not have access to the list of users who have completed the survey. Likewise, the Pouflons mods will not have access to your survey answers.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Shai on Discord shai#4355 or over e-mail at noogie@shai.pink. You may also contact a Pouflons mod who can forward your inquiry if you’d like to stay anonymous.

You must be 13 years or older to participate in this survey. All questions regarding sensitive personal information are optional.

● I affirm that I am 13 years or older.
Role-play Survey - Pouflons
This survey will take 15-20 minutes.

Consent Token

Your consent token is {CONSENTTOKEN}. Please save or copy this key somewhere, as it is the only way to remove your answers and data should you choose to do so in the future.

This token will be shown to you again at the end of the survey.

Demographics
In this section, we ask about your own demographics. Since these questions ask for sensitive info, they are entirely optional.

How old are you?
Please write your answer here:

years old

What is your height in centimeters?
① Only an integer value may be entered in this field.
Please write your answer here:

cm

If you only know your height in feet and inches, use [this converter]
What country were you born in?
Please write your answer here:

What country do you currently live in?
Please write your answer here:

Have you or your family immigrated from one country to another in the last three generations?
Please choose only one of the following:

- None of these apply
- I am an immigrant
- My parents were immigrants
- My grandparents were immigrants
- My great-grandparents were immigrants

What is your gender?

1. Choose one of the following answers
2. If you choose "Prefer to self describe," please also specify your choice in the accompanying text field.
Please choose only one of the following:

- Man
- Woman
- Non-binary

- Other
Do you consider yourself to be transgender?
Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

What is your sexual orientation?

1. Choose one of the following answers
2. If you choose "Prefer to self describe," please also specify your choice in the accompanying text field.

Please choose only one of the following:

- Heterosexual or straight
- Gay
- Lesbian
- Bisexual
- Asexual
- Other
What is your current religion, if any?

1. Choose one of the following answers
2. If you choose "Prefer to self-describe," please also specify your choice in the accompanying text field.
   Please choose only one of the following:

   - Jewish (Judaism)
   - Muslim (Islam)
   - Buddhist
   - Hindu
   - Atheist (do not believe in God)
   - Agnostic (not sure if there is a God)
   - Nothing in particular
   - Christian

   - Other
What race and/or ethnicity do you identify with?

1. Comment only when you choose an answer.
   Please choose all that apply and provide a comment:

- Indigenous, Native, or Aboriginal
- Asian
- Black
- Hispanic or Latino/a
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White or European

Other:

You may choose multiple categories and choose to specify further in the corresponding comment fields.

What is the main language you use at home?

Please write your answer here:

If your language is not listed, please select "Other" and fill it in manually.
Do you identify as a person with a disability or other chronic condition?
Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

How would you describe your disability or chronic condition?
Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question 'G2Q00012' (Do you identify as a person with a disability or other chronic condition?)

Check all that apply
Please choose all that apply:

- Attention deficit
- Autism
- Blind or visually impaired
- Deaf or hard of hearing
- Health-related disability
- Learning disability
- Mental health condition
- Mobility-related disability
- Speech-related disability
- Other (unspecified)

Character Demographics
In this section, we ask about your characters' demographics and what they tend to be. If a certain trait is common between two or more of your characters, please regard it as a tendency.
All free text questions are optional.
What age do you tend to make your characters? *
Please choose only one of the following:

- Around my own age (within 2 years)
- Younger than my own age
- Older than my own age
- It varies

If your character can't be compared to human standards, compare their relative age within their species to your own. For example, if I'm 22 and tend to role-play senior-aged cats who are about 10 years old, I would still choose "Older than my own age".

What height do you tend to make your characters? *
Please choose only one of the following:

- About the same height as me
- Taller than me
- Shorter than me
- It varies

If your character can't be compared to human standards, compare them to their species average instead.

Where do your characters tend to originate from? *
Please choose only one of the following:

- The same country I was born in
- The same country that I live in
- Different countries
- It varies
- This question does not apply to my characters
Do your characters tend to be immigrants or travellers? *
Please choose only one of the following:

○ Yes
○ No

Do your characters tend to be a certain gender? *
Please choose only one of the following:

○ Yes
○ No

Which gender(s)?
Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was "Yes" at question "[G3Q00005] (Do your characters tend to be a certain gender?)"

☐ Check all that apply
Please choose all that apply:

☐ Man
☐ Woman
☐ Non-binary

☐ Other: ___________________________

Do your characters tend to be transgender? *
Please choose only one of the following:

○ Yes
○ No
Do your characters tend to have a certain sexual orientation? *
Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

Which sexual orientation(s)?
Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question '[6Q000008]' (Do your characters tend to have a certain sexual orientation?)

1. Check all that apply
Please choose all that apply:

- Heterosexual or straight
- Gay
- Lesbian
- Bisexual
- Asexual
- Other [ ]

Do your characters tend to be of a certain religion? *
Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- Yes, a fictional one
- No
- This question does not apply to my characters
Which religion(s)?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was "Yes" at question [G3Q00010] (Do your characters tend to be of a certain religion?)

☐ Check all that apply
Please choose all that apply:

☐ Agnostic (not sure if there is a God)
☐ Atheist (do not believe in God)
☐ Buddhist
☐ Christian
☐ Hindu
☐ Jewish (Judaism)
☐ Muslim (Islam)
☐ Nothing in particular

☐ Other: [ ]
Which religion(s), if any, are most similar to your fictional religion?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes, a fictional one' at question * [G3C00010] (Do your characters tend to be of a certain religion?)
1. Check all that apply
Please choose all that apply:

☐ Agnostic (not sure if there is a God)
☐ Atheist (do not believe in God)
☐ Buddhist
☐ Christian
☐ Hindu
☐ Jewish (Judaism)
☐ Muslim (Islam)
☐ None of these

☐ Other: [ ]

Do your characters tend to be of a certain race, ethnicity, or culture? *

Please choose only one of the following:

☐ Yes
☐ Yes, a fictional one
☐ No
☐ This question does not apply to my characters
Which race(s), ethnicity(s), or culture(s)?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question "[G3Q000013]" (Do your characters tend to be of a certain race, ethnicity, or culture?)

Comment only when you choose an answer.
Please choose all that apply and provide a comment:

- [ ] Indigenous, Native, or Aboriginal
- [ ] Asian
- [ ] Black
- [ ] Hispanic or Latino/a
- [ ] Middle Eastern or North African
- [ ] Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- [ ] White or European

Other:

You may choose multiple categories and choose to specify further in the corresponding comment fields.
Which race(s), ethnicity(s), or culture(s), if any, are most similar to your fictional race, ethnicity, or culture?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was "Yes, a fictional one" at question * [G3Q00013] (Do your characters tend to be of a certain race, ethnicity, or culture?)

1 Comment only when you choose an answer.
Please choose all that apply and provide a comment:

- [ ] Indigenous, Native, or Aboriginal
- [ ] Asian
- [ ] Black
- [ ] Hispanic or Latino/a
- [ ] Middle Eastern or North African
- [ ] Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- [ ] White or European
- [ ] Not applicable

Other: 

You may choose multiple categories and choose to specify further in the corresponding comment fields.
Do your characters tend to speak a certain language? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- Yes, a fictional one
- No
- This question does not apply to my characters

Which language? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question ' [G3Q00016]' (Do your characters tend to speak a certain language?)

Choose one of the following answers
Please write your answer here:

If your language is not listed, please select "Other" and fill it in manually.

Which language or language family, if any, is most similar to your fictional language?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes, a fictional one' at question ' [G3Q00016]' (Do your characters tend to speak a certain language?)

Choose one of the following answers

If you choose 'My fictional language is related to:' please also specify your choice in the accompanying text field.

Please choose only one of the following:

- My fictional language only exists in lore, e.g. Common
- My fictional language is developed and has no particular ties to existing languages, e.g. Klingon
- Other
Do your characters tend to have a disability or other chronic condition? * 
Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- Yes, a fictional one
- No
- This question does not apply to my characters

How would you describe your characters' disability(s) or chronic condition(s)?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met: 
Answer was 'Yes' at question *(Q3Q000019)* (Do your characters tend to have a disability or other chronic condition?)

☑ Check all that apply 
Please choose all that apply:

- Attention deficit
- Autism
- Blind or visually impaired
- Deaf or hard of hearing
- Health-related disability
- Learning disability
- Mental health condition
- Mobility-related disability
- Speech-related disability

☐ Other.
Which descriptor, if any, is most similar to your characters' fictional disability(s) or chronic condition(s)?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met: Answer was "Yes, a fictional one" at question "[G3C000019]" (Do your characters tend to have a disability or other chronic condition?)

☐ Check all that apply
Please choose all that apply:

☐ Attention deficit
☐ Autism
☐ Blind or visually impaired
☐ Deaf or hard of hearing
☐ Health-related disability
☐ Learning disability
☐ Mental health condition
☐ Mobility-related disability
☐ Speech-related disability
☐ Not applicable
☐ Other: ____________________________

Role-play and You

In this section, we ask about your experience with role-play. All free text questions are optional. This is the final section.

How old were you when you first role-played?

Please write your answer here:

__________________________

years old
If unsure when you started, just do your best to estimate.
What was the format of the first role-play you participated in? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- Tabletop (Dungeons & Dragons, Pathfinder, etc.)
- Chatroom (Discord, Skype, LINE, any DMing feature)
- Online games (EVE Online, World of Warcraft, etc.)
- Offline games (Dragon Age, Mass Effect, etc.)
- Live-action (Larps)
- Social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc.)
- Collaborative program (Google Docs, iScribble, etc.)
- Forums (LiveJournal, Tothouse, etc.)
- Other

Ex: My first role-play took place on a video game which had a roleplay server hosted in multiplayer, so I would choose "Online game".

What kind(s) of role-play have you participated in? *

☐ Check all that apply

Please choose all that apply:

☐ Tabletop
☐ Chatroom
☐ Online games
☐ Offline games
☐ Live-action
☐ Social media
☐ Collaborative program
☐ Forum

☐ Other:
Who or what introduced you to role-play?
Please write your answer here:

Ex: a friend, found a community on the internet, deviantArt, etc.

How often do you role-play? *
Please choose only one of the following:

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Annually
- Other

Twice a day would be daily, one-six times a week would be weekly, etc.

What traits are most common between your characters?
Be as specific as you want. You may only input 5 traits.

Traits include personality traits, physical traits, or demographic traits. Ex. Nerdy, dark skin, pink hair, trans man, Swedish, etc.

Do you create original work that is based on any role-play or role-play systems? *
Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

Ex: I regularly draw my Poultons characters outside of the context of quests/prompts. I would choose 'yes'.
What art form or form of expression do you use to create original work based off of role-play or role-play systems?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question 'G4Q000028' (Do you create original work that is based on any role-play or role-play systems?)
You may only input three (3) things.

Do you create independent original work that is not based off of any role-play or role-play systems? *

Please choose only one of the following:

☐ Yes
☐ No

Ex: I write poems based off of my own life experience. I would choose 'yes'.

What art form or form of expression do you use to create independent, original work?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question 'G4Q000030' (Do you create independent original work that is not based off of any role-play or role-play systems?)
You may only input three (3) things.

Has role-play encouraged you to try other forms of art or self-expression? *

Please choose only one of the following:

☐ Yes
☐ No

Ex: playing Final Fantasy XIV inspired me to animate my character, but I wasn't interested in animation before. I would choose 'yes'.

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What new art forms or forms of expression did you try out because of role-play?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question "[G4Q00032]" (Has role-play encouraged you to try other forms of art or self-expression?)
You may only input three (3) things.

Do you think role-playing in Poufions is different from other forms of role-play? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

In what way(s) is Poufions different?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question "[G4Q00022]" (Do you think role-playing in Poufions is different from other forms of role-play?)

Please write your answer here:


For the following questions, indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.
Role-play has affected my self-image, self-esteem, or self-understanding. *

Please choose only one of the following:

○ Strongly Disagree
○ Disagree
○ Unsure / Neutral
○ Agree
○ Strongly Agree

In what way(s) has role-play affected your self-image, self-esteem, or self-understanding?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' at question ' [G4Q00007] ' (Role-play has affected my self-image, self-esteem, or self-understanding.)

Please write your answer here:

Role-play has affected my social life. *

Please choose only one of the following:

○ Strongly Disagree
○ Disagree
○ Unsure / Neutral
○ Agree
○ Strongly Agree
In what way(s) has role-play affected your social life?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Strongly Agree' or 'Agree' at question '[G4Q00009]' (Role-play has affected my social life.)

Please write your answer here:

---

One or more of my characters have been stereotyped or typecast into a certain role because of some aspect of their identity. *

Please choose only one of the following:

- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Unsure / Neutral
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Strongly Agree
In what ways were your character(s) stereotyped or typecast?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' at question 'G4Q00011' (One or more of my characters have been stereotyped or typecast into a certain role because of some aspect of their identity.)

Please write your answer here:

---

Role-play has affected the way I perceive or understand other people.

Please choose only one of the following:

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Unsure / Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
In what way(s) did role-play affect your perception or understanding of others?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met: Answer was 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' at question '{G4Q800013}' (Role-play has affected the way I perceive or understand other people.)

Please write your answer here:

---

I have role-played identities that are different from my own.

*  

Please choose only one of the following:

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Unsure / Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
In what way(s) were these identities different from your own?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met: Answer was 'Strongly Agree' or 'Agree' at question ' [G4Q00015] (I have role-played identities that are different from my own.)

Please write your answer here:

I have used role-play to experiment with or explore my own identity. *

Please choose only one of the following:

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Unsure / Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
In what way(s) did you role-play to experiment with or explore your own identity?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Strongly Agree' or 'Agree' at question 'G4Q00017' (I have used role-play to experiment with or explore my own identity.)

Please write your answer here:

I consider myself part of a marginalized group. *

Please choose only one of the following:

- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Unsure / Neutral
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Strongly Agree
I incorporate gender, orientation, culture, or disability or other marginalized aspects of myself into my characters. *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Strongly Agree' or 'Agree' at question 'G4Q0019' (I consider myself part of a marginalized group.)

Please choose only one of the following:

- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Unsure / Neutral
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Strongly Agree

In what way(s) do you incorporate marginalized aspects of yourself into your characters?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Strongly Agree' or 'Agree' at question 'G4Q0020' (I incorporate gender, orientation, culture, or disability or other marginalized aspects of myself into my characters.)

Please write your answer here:
Role-playing has challenged and/or reinforced my beliefs and values. *

Please choose only one of the following:

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Unsure / Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

In what way(s) were your beliefs and values challenged or reinforced?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' at question '[G4Q00026]' (Role-playing has challenged and/or reinforced my beliefs and values.)

Please write your answer here:

Token Reminder

Your consent token is {CONSENTTOKEN}. If you change your mind about sharing your data with us, simply submit your consent token to [this form] (https://)

Alternatively, you may find the form on the homepage of (https://).
The survey is done! Do you have any other comments or thoughts about role-play or Pouflons?

Please write your answer here:

"Bzz! Data! Bzz!"

To claim your Gnatty Professor pippet, please go to the form linked below and fill in your Lorekeeper (play.pouflons.com) username.

Only the Pouflons mods will see your username and we, the research team (Shai and Bondi) will not have access to the list of users who have completed the survey. Likewise, the Pouflons mods will not have access to your survey answers.

Thank you for taking our survey!