

**REPUBLIC OF TURKEY
ANKARA UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
Department of Media and Communication Studies**

**TV SHOW ADAPTATIONS OF VIDEO GAMES: A STUDY ON GAMERS'
VIEWS ON EMPATHY, FIDELITY, AND QUEER REPRESENTATION**

Master Thesis

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Ankara, 2024

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Thesis Acceptance Page

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MASTER THESIS

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31.07.2024

Ethics Statement

I hereby declare that; all the information in the master thesis I prepared under the advisory of Assoc. Prof. Burcu SÜMER with the title “TV Show Adaptations of Video Games: A Study on Gamers' Views on Empathy, Fidelity, and Queer Representation (Ankara.2024)” was collected and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct; all materials in this thesis which I obtained from other sources have been fully cited and referenced; that I acted in accordance with the rules of scientific research and ethical conduct during the course of the study; and in any contrary case of above statements, I will accept any form of legal consequences.

Date: 12/08/2024

Canan UYUMAZ

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Introduction

Adaptation studies is a rich field of research and video game adaptation is part of it, consisting of many subcategories. It is an important study field because of the recent popularity in the mainstream culture (Ristić & Kubik, 2024). It is also valuable because of how digital games interact with different mediums, such as television, cinema, books, and comics. This type of storytelling across mediums has drawn attention since the 1990s. The industry has cooperated with different branches of the culture industry as well, especially since the 2000s. While processing the mediation of these stories, a mutual flow between the cinema and the digital game industry has occurred (Dikmen, 2019).

Video games to films and films to video games have always existed as the means of adaptation. *Super Mario Bros.* marks the first film based on video games in 1993, while Atari's *Raiders of the Last Ark* is the first video game that is adapted from a movie, *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* in 1982. However, this long process of video game adaptation was not always successful. In fact, most were criticized for lack of loyalty to the source material. Some of them were even considered as a failure (Moore, 2010).

Another form of adaptation has gained popularity in recent years. TV Shows and series that are adapted from video games have been gaining popularity and success at an incredible rate. Tomatometer¹, which is a score that represents the percentage of professional critic reviews, has two separate lists. Video Game Movies has 52 movies in the list, with *Werewolves Within* having the highest rate at 86%. The rest of the list is getting even lower percentages. Video Game TV Shows, however, has 12 TV shows in

¹ Tomatometer is a metric based on evaluations from critic reviews, it is a trusted measurement of film and television.

the list, with *Arcane* and *Cyberpunk: Edgerunners* sharing the first place with 100%, closely followed by *The Last of Us* with 96% rate.

The television series that were chosen for this study have notable records as well. *Arcane*, an animated television series that is adapted from the popular multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) game *League of Legends*, charted in Netflix's Top 10 chart in 52 countries, ranking second on the United States chart. *The Last of Us'* premiere was watched by 4.7 million viewers on its first day and lastly, *The Witcher* was the most in-demand TV series in the world according to Parrot Analytics. These three TV series have been nominated and won awards as well. *The Witcher* has 33 nominations and 7 wins, *The Last of Us* has 65 wins with 132 nominations, and *Arcane* has 22 wins with 5 nominations.² It is clear that the popularity of these series is an undeniable fact and provides a good view on adaptation studies. These television series also have another thing in common: they all have queer representations.

The inclusion of queer representation bears some important questions. Why do these popular TV series have queer representations and why this is always a controversial debate among fan communities, and lastly, why this is important and relevant for research in game studies, adaptation studies, and queer game studies. Shaw and Ruberg (2017), note that queer game studies should not only focus on queer literary but also focus on areas like film studies, media studies, and other interdisciplinary research. They also highlight that this emerging research area is an intersection of already existing fields.

While queer representation in games and their adaptations are not new in video games and gaming fan culture³, they are changing gaming culture and its future (Chang,

² Most notably *The Witcher*; 2024 BAFTA TV Award Winner for Special, Visual & Graphic Effects, 2022 BAFTA TV Award Winner for Make Up & Hair Design, *Arcane*; 2022 Primetime Emmy Winner for Outstanding Animated Program, Outstanding Individual Achievement in Animation x3, *The Last of Us*; 2024 Golden Globe Nominee for Best Television Series, Drama, 2023 MTV Movie + TV Award Winner for Best Show, Best Hero and Best Duo.

³ Fan culture consists of individuals forming communities with people who share similar interests.

2017; Harper, 2017). Moore (2010) points out how new media is the driving factor for adaptations, as new media and its atmosphere require adaptation as a strategy as participation. New media's ability to converge as media in our day is, therefore, promoting participation (Jenkins, 2006). This points at the intersection between adaptation studies and queer game studies. Participation is the gaming fan culture, and this fan culture consists of gamers. Undoubtedly, the best place to find gamers is Twitch and *Discord*. *Twitch* was founded as a live-streaming platform, solely focused on video games and esports tournaments. While the platform includes more genres, its embedded chat function is a great tool to observe the viewers.

The viewers can communicate through these chats, with both other viewers and the streamer themselves. This then, creates the participatory fan culture, where gamers are not only limited to watching content but also actually participating in live communication. This *participatory culture* is, therefore, much different than the passive media spectatorship, and perhaps, new media's emphasis on our role in constructing media usage can explain why television series that are adapted from video games are important, and how can that shape our views on queer representation as well. *Discord* was founded in 2015 by Jason Citron and Stan Vishnevsky, it was a built-in voice chat function to help people communicate in games, however, *Discord* has evolved into one of the most popular chat apps. Now, *Discord* has many functions where communities can create their own servers with forum-like text and voice channels. It is much easier to find fan communities through *Discord*, especially gaming ones.

Fan communities and gamers often expect fidelity to source (see Cutchins, 2017; Corrigan, 2017; Jellenik, 2017; Baty, 2020). This fan culture serves as a loyal fan base for the upcoming adaptations, and companies should always consider having loyalty to source, and aim for fulfilling gamers' expectations. This could be the key to success and profit. While *The Last of Us* and *Arcane* are known to be positively received by viewers,

The Witcher upon its release of the third season has a 30% drop in viewership compared to the previous season, and audience perception of the series has dropped as well (Mears, 2023; Tassi, 2023).

The lead actor Henry Cavill, who is known for being a fan of the game and intervening in scenes to be more loyal to the source, has decided to leave the series.

Liam Hemsworth is going to be taking his place as the lead actor in the next season.

Rumors that Henry Cavill left the series because producers were straying away from the game have been circulating too, which added more fuel to the community to react negatively (Watson, 2023). The comparison between the two series and *The Witcher*, which is known to be not loyal to the game, highlights the importance of fidelity. A number of researchers have noted that while games were lacking in representation and while game developers were reluctant to create significant changes because of the reception they could get, there is a need to create safe spaces (Shaw & Ruberg, 2017). These safe spaces can be used by gaming communities to discuss sexuality, gender, and race. This points out various important terms, such as identity, self-expression, and empathy. In games immersion and emotional experiences are often noted, as games allow players to experience these said experiences firsthand (Sell, 2021; Clark, 2017). Games' ability to provide such experiences pushes gamers to have empathy toward characters and stories.

Just as adaptation studies and queer game studies point to positive traits, they are also highlighting various issues. “Pinkwashing”, “queer marketing”, and “queer baiting” are some of the terms that have originated from the expectation of gaining queer following and support, while never developing subtexts into actual queer representation. Most games and adaptations also carry the problem of bringing the representation to life. Studies have shown that queer communities do not wish for creating further distance but instead they require natural and organic representation within games and

adaptations (Shaw, 2010). In the selected television series, these problems are also evident.

In *The Last of Us*, supporting characters Bill and Frank's story was often noted as the *bury your gays*⁴ trope (Turner, 2023). However, the TV series has changed this into something meaningful. Bill and Frank still died, yet they chose to die together instead of ending up hating each other just as they did in the game. In a way, they still got their happy ending in the TV series. *Arcane*, an adaptation from the *League of Legends* game, Vi, and Caitlyn are two characters that are often mentioned together, as their stories align with each other. *League of Legends* has never confirmed their relationship, except for a few fan arts in Pride Month and it is still not officially confirmed in *Arcane* either, still *Arcane* has only one season and there are some implications about their relationship for the second season.

The Witcher was criticized for queer baiting, as there were multiple homoerotic subtexts between Jaskier and the main character Geralt in the first two seasons. However, this was denied by the producers and the actors and instead, they named it a platonic friendship. Jaskier got himself another male love interest in the third season. While loyal game fans argued that Jaskier is portrayed as a womanizer and straight in the games, queer communities argued that it was an action to keep their queer following. This gained negative reactions from communities (Troughton, 2023).

Overall, the reason why these three television series were selected for this study is their popularity. Adaptation studies mostly highlight fidelity, which is the expectation of loyalty to the source. This is seen in the difference between two successful series *Arcane* and *The Last of Us*, and *The Witcher*, which is increasingly losing popularity due to its lack of loyalty to the games. Queer game studies suggest an intersection with other existing research fields (Shaw & Ruberg, 2017). This is observable in adaptation

⁴ Bury your gays is a trope where queer characters are killed off or end up with tragic endings, instead of getting their happy endings.

studies, where the queer representation in selected adaptations suggests a parallel presence. However, if these representations are positively received, or if they are seen as queer marketing is not clear, and this study aims to answer those questions as well.

Adaptation studies note empathy, which is also considered important in queer game studies. Queer gaming and adaptation have been noted as political activity (Shaw, 2017; Macklin, 2017; Ruberg, 2020). Therefore, it is required to expect these adaptations to create safe spaces and discussions for queer representation. It is important to note that while queer theory has been around for a long time, queer game theory is relatively new and provides a great opportunity to discuss in the context of adaptation studies. Film adaptations and game adaptations too have existed for a long time, yet television series and shows that are getting adapted from video games are relatively new. Furthermore, television series and shows that are adapted from video games have scarce research, yet the popularity of these adaptations requires more scholarly research. Therefore, it is important to fill this gap in the field.

In the methodology part, this study maps three key concepts that are coined as the *Game Adaptation and Representation Framework*. The three key themes include *fidelity*, *queer representation*, and *empathy*. Loyalty to the source, in other words, fidelity, has been mentioned repeatedly in previous studies (Sell, 2021; Baty, 2020). Its importance as a key theme is further explained in chapter 3, where the reason for The Witcher 3's loss of popularity is inspected through its problems with loyalty to the game. The expectation of natural queer representation, instead of a forced one that further distances individuals is mentioned in previous studies (Shaw, 2010; Ruberg, 2020; Sánchez-Soriano & García-Jiménez, 2020). Similarly, this aspect is explained in detail in the third chapter, with the reactions from critics, fans and reviewers to the three selected TV series. Lastly, empathy is noted as a key element in both adaptation studies and queer game studies, making it an anchor point for both fields (Clark, 2017; Brady,

2017; Sell, 2021). In my analysis of the literature review, two subcategories emerged as key themes for fidelity: *identity* and *representation*.

In queer representation, *queerbaiting* and *diversity* emerged as subcategories. These two main themes hold empathy as an important theme too, but as previously mentioned, empathy appears as an anchor, which creates a third theme itself. Seeing different perspectives of characters in games and TV shows creates an ability to consider different points of view, enhancing empathy. Therefore, *different perspectives* is added as a subcategory to empathy.

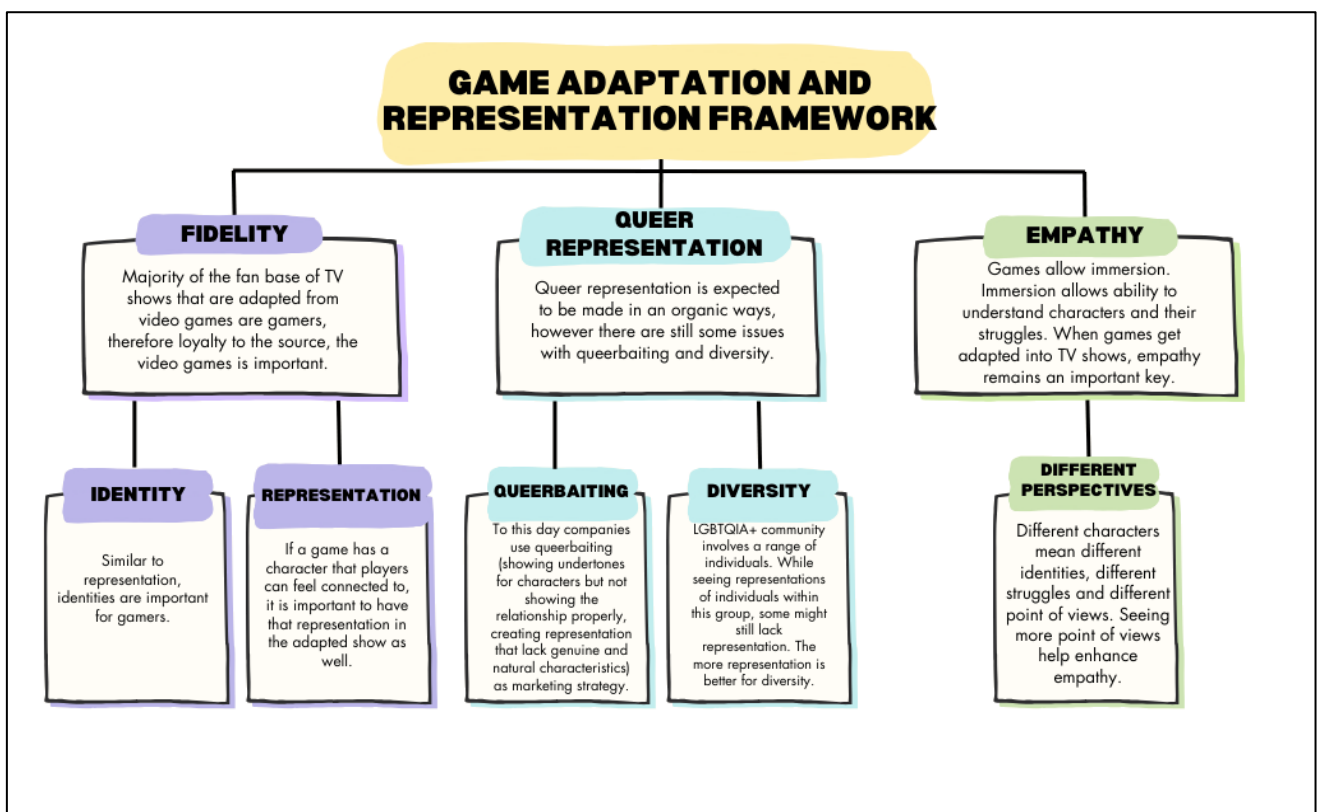


Figure 1. Game Adaptation and Representation Framework

While the key themes that are derived from previous studies are supported through reviewers' ideas, and statistics such as awards and viewership, there are still some gaps. First of all, fan expectations and ideas can differ from critics and reviewers. Secondly, getting first-hand information from fans who are also gamers is extremely important to understand and link the main key concepts and also to conclude what kind

of improvements can be made in these adaptations. After all, both game adaptation studies and queer game studies have one main target: gamers. That is why this study uses thematic coding, using the Game Adaptation and Representation Framework. The research questions are as follows:

RQ1: What are fans' expectations of TV series that are adapted from their favorite video games? What do they like to see?

RQ2: What kind of portrayal is wanted for queer representation by the fans, and what are the current problems with it?

RQ3: Is empathy needed for better understanding of characters and representation of identities?

RQ4: What kind of improvements can be made in these adaptations according to fans?

This study uses qualitative analysis, both for analyzing three selected TV series and games, and also analyzing the interviews and linking them to the key concepts. Data collection is conducted through semi-structured interviews, where the questions aim to connect with the framework. Participants are chosen through purposive sampling techniques. There are some criteria for participants to be eligible, the participants are expected to be familiar with all three TV series and the games, and they are expected to use *Discord*, which is a communication application that is popular among gamers.

The interviews are conducted through voice calls on *Discord*, which are recorded on a software called *OBS* and then transcribed with *Microsoft*. The participants are given an informed consent form to read and sign before participating in the study. The total number of participants is fifteen, and while this study involves LGBTQIA+ individuals, it is not a criterion to be eligible for the study. Participants' demographic information, including if they consider themselves an LGBTQIA+ individual is asked to

link *Queer Game Theory* and participants' views on the queer representation in these adaptations. The Interview questions are semi-structured to develop consistency while also enhancing flexibility for participants to elaborate on their ideas about the topics. The interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Limitations to this study could be generalizability. While this study chose three TV series that are adapted from video games, more could be analyzed in further studies. Likewise, the fifteen participants for the interviews could be increased to gather broader results for discussion. Another limitation could be the style of the selected games and adaptations. For example, *Arcane* is an animated TV series while the others are live-action series. *League of Legends*, which *Arcane* has adapted from, also has more freedom to change things in the adaptations as it is a strategy game, while the lore and character stories are a big part of it, there are still gaps for producers to fill. Meanwhile, franchises such as *The Witcher* have less flexibility, as the characters are long set-in stone, with a variety of books and games. This is a reason why, in this study success was considered as a result of awards, ratings, and viewership numbers, not opinions of the fans. The reception of fans is, however, important to be linked with the success of these series, as it still paves the way for popularity and the said success.

Chapter 1: Adaptation Studies

1.1. Understanding Adaptation and Transmediality

Hutcheon and Cox locate the root of adaptation in the West, with a general idea of adapting a text into a medium from another (Jellenik, 2017). Throughout history, adaptation and its definitions have consistently shifted with reinterpretations of earlier definitions. Over time, these revisions have led adaptations to be considered as improvements to their sources. Early cinematic adaptations, for instance, represented *intertextuality*⁵, correlating other social and artistic forms (Corrigan, 2017). As Hutcheon suggests, the uncommon pleasure of adaptation lies within this intertextuality, where *knowing audiences* enjoy comparing the new adaptation with the original source (as cited in Spence, 2024, p. 4).

The 21st century is rich in the sense of adaptation studies and the definitions of adaptation. It is more elaborate and dynamic in textual and cultural studies. Film adaptations are considered important to study as they represent a movement towards examining popular culture (Miller, 2017). However, this importance does not only involve film adaptations, but it is also true for other forms of adaptations. The field of adaptation studies includes exchanges between novels, comics, games, and other forms of media (Newell, 2017).

As a process, adaptation is the practice of adjusting and configuring mediums with one another, and the relationship it harbors between (Corrigan, 2017). Elleström (2017) supports this, by calling adaptation a *transmediation*, where a medium is

⁵ Intertextuality refers to the relationship between texts, such as when one text references or incorporates elements from another text. In the context of video game adaptation, TV series scripts can involve quotes or scenes directly taken from video games.

represented by other kinds of medium in different ways. Terms such as *intermediality*, and *transmediality* have become important terms in definitions of adaptations, as the adaptation's impact and influence on political activities, and social and cultural platforms increased (Balestrini, 2020, p. 340). Transmediality was first coined by Henry Jenkins in 2006, his manifesto of *transmedia storytelling*⁶ differs from adaptation in the way that it encourages a new model of co-producing different media forms, highlighting the significance of functions and differentiations in comprehending transmedia as a separate literacy. In the digital age, transmedia adaptation is not only about converting stories from one medium to another, the production of immersive and rich experiences is also a part of the interactive and participatory process of storytelling.

Hence, having a transformative approach to storytelling, narratives are not limited to a single medium, they are distributed across different platforms allowing the audience to experience richer interactions. This ability contradicts traditional storytelling, as multi-layered stories broaden beyond a single medium (Kitrar, 2024). This evolution can be noted within the timeline of changes in digital media. For instance, the game *League of Legends* uses transmediality through the screen, onto the performative stage. The game publishes songs from known artists, using them as the voices of game characters and even having the artists perform in Esports tournaments (Febrer, 2023).

Another example can be given through *The Last of Us*, the company Naughty Dog adapted their own games twice, delivering better versions of the games and promoting Sony's consoles in the meantime. This also allowed the games and HBO's television series to establish a collaboration. The game's fans formed an audience for the television series and the series' popularity helped the game's sales in return. Media

⁶ Transmedia storytelling is a technique that tells a single story or the world of it across multiple media platforms, such as movies, television, video games, comic books, and more. Transmedia storytelling allows each medium to explore different aspects of the stories and characters.

convergence, therefore, creates a circle among different mediums, helping and boosting each other's capacity (Spence, 2024). This evolution has led to adaptation into opening more gates for different scopes, it does not only focus on literature and cinema but also on the internet, music, television programs, and in this study's case; TV series that are adapted from video games.

1.2. Video Game Adaptation Studies, Ludology and Narratology

Picard (2008) notes that the relationships between video games and other media date back to the early years of the video game industry. Adaptations of movies and television shows into video games began in the 1980s with platforms such as the *Atari 2600*. The first movie adapted from a video game was "*Super Mario Bros.*," released in 1993. Considering the history of video games and adaptations, it is important to explore ludology and narratology, the two terms are foundational controversies in the field of Game Studies. The debate between the two terms leads to understanding video games and their narrative capability.

While the ludological perspective identifies three key aspects; game mechanics and rules, player agency and interactivity, the narratological perspective highlights storytelling and plot development, character development, and symbolic and thematic elements which are used as cultural symbols or conveying deeper meanings like *identity* and *morality* (Veloja, 2023). Narratology then, contributes a framework for comprehending narrative elements like plot and characters in video games. This framework can help analyze characters and their connections, emphasizing how stories are created and how they have an impact on players. Ludology, on the other hand, focuses more on player interactions with the game mechanics, revealing the decision-making processes of players (Belhadj, 2023). While some debate that the structures of the games disable the ability to partake in meaning and statement, some claim that

games in fact have the ability to construct meaning to provide a basis for making arguments (Bogost, 2009). These elements are significant in explaining why video games are adapted into TV shows, as their narrative capability and character development provide great material for adaptations into other mediums. However, while these debates existed in past studies, recent studies showcase their combined usage and how they can offer a better comprehension of interactive storytelling (Belhadj, 2023). Therefore, when studying TV series that are adapted from video games, the emphasis is rather placed on transmediality and the differences these adaptations provide to the source, instead of the debate on ludology and narratology. However, within the framework of transmediality, the combination of ludology and narratology remains important for accurately adapting games to television.

1.3. Key Themes in Adaptation Studies: Identity, Fidelity, Representation

1.3.1 Fidelity in Video Game Adaptations

Fidelity is the expectation of faithful understanding and loyalty to the source. According to Cutchins (2017), “interpreting texts has the power to generate productive dialogues between readers and other readers, texts and other texts, which overcome the isolation of individual audiences” (p. 71). While the historical evolution of adaptation has shown us how fidelity was overlooked for some centuries, it has gained its importance as a useful concept in adaptation studies. As noted by MacCabe and a group of critics, fidelity is important in adaptation studies. In their collection *True to the Spirit: Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity*, these scholars explore how fidelity provides insights into the production process and assessment of adaptation (as cited in Corrigan, 2017, p. 33). The dated definition of adaptation has led critics to ask the question of what the adaptation does to its source.

The shift toward more participatory views requires not only narrative shifts but also changing the imposed views on new audiences. Therefore, taking fan communities into account is key to understanding the concerns of the audience and the structure of the genre. This also becomes the process of adaptation. To understand the audience, fidelity should be considered. Fidelity has always been a part of adaptation studies. It is not possible to overlook the importance of it since its very core is thought of as the definition of adaptation and how we read adaptations through the fidelity lens. (Jellenik, 2017, p. 48). Another view that supports the involvement of fidelity is that the adaptation is a study of the media itself. Until recent years, previous video game adaptations were complete failures with examples like Peter Jackson's *Halo* and *Final Fantasy: Spirits Within* (Moore, 2010). One of the reasons why these adaptations have failed is the skepticism of the players. Game players, as it was mentioned before, expect loyalty from the source. In past studies, researchers tried to answer questions like whether a game can faithfully recreate its canonical text or if adaptations owed responsibility to the texts they originally adapted from. Another research pointed to the players' expectations and how they were shaped by their previous encounters with the medium and another has claimed that film-to-game adaptations are defined by gameplay and player choice (Flanagan, 2017; Leitch, 2017; Perry, 2017; Moore, 2010).

This could lead us to the result that players do feel immersion and connect with the lore and characters in the game. Therefore, this alone could be the reason why they are expecting fidelity. Baty (2020) supports this, noting that emotions such as anger and guilt are more personal to the players, rather than viewers in movies. Previous studies have been pointing out the fact that viewers are not only passive viewers now, but also in spectatorship positions. *Interactivity between mediums, relationship between adaptation and remediation, role of global corporations, and participatory culture* have also been coined as useful ways to understand new forms of media (Sell, 2021).

1.3.2 Exploring Identity in Gaming Communities

Game adaptation has been broadening its borders, highlighting viewers and readers as agents of adaptation (Corrigan, 2017). These individual consumers achieve this through their social interactions with other consumers. These new reader and writer interactions are coined as fan cultures (Jenkins, 2006). Fan cultures are the signs that transmedia storytelling is not only a business model but also a part of an active participatory popular culture, therefore they help to define entertainment and adaptation. Transmedia storytelling requires audience engagement and invites that participation as it moves from the passive media consumption of traditional storytelling (Kitrar, 2024). The aim to reach fan cultures and gaming communities creates competition between producers and it leads them to invest in media franchises with knowing audiences. Unlike in history, digital technologies now allow audiences to actively search and move across platforms.

Therefore, fan communities build knowledge related to the source through fan forums, and platforms like *Discord* and they also contribute to the popularity of series through their fanfictions. These new developments enrich audience participation and the creation of immersive transmedia (Joyce, 2023). Audience participation and interactivity are highlighted in transmedia writing as well, as it adheres to the combination of traditional elements of writing with an understanding of fans (Kitrar, 2024). Hutcheon puts adaptation between product and process, pointing to terms such as immersion to showcase how audiences respond to adaptation and its extension to the new media. (as cited in Corrigan, 2017, p. 33).

1.3.3 Representation in Video Game Adaptations

Stobart (2018) notes that video games rely more on interaction and players for the story's progress. Video game narratives change players and expect them to adapt to their current situations. Video game adaptations too, often immerse players in those

situations by expecting them to make morally ambiguous decisions and question the players' decisions in both the gaming and real world. Video games provide avatars and characters, where players get to experience the story firsthand, they hear, see, and respond to what is happening in their surroundings. This creates an experience that connects the player to the game, or the characters, leading players to express their identity. These characters can be tools to explore identity and self-expression (Sell, 2021). The very mentioned emotional experience shows us that while humans are not comfortable with unknown and foreign thoughts and world views that contradict their own, stories are fiction, and they often allow humans to empathize.

If players manage to find empathy toward fictional beasts, they can also find empathy toward perspectives on gender and orientation. This creates a great tool for being accepting (Brady, 2017). This tool then, can be used by games to erase the limitations of distances and people can communicate on their favorite games. This common ground could lead even a non-gaming person to understand the purpose and the message of a game and then lead them to empathize. The story video games bring could get people enlightened about an experience that the character is going through, immersing the player to relate to the character (Alexander, 2017). The most significant thing to take into consideration is, however, acknowledging gaming communities as not monolithic. Gaming communities do not only represent their members' gaming interests, but they also represent community engagement, individual behaviors, and participation.

It also showcases players' expectations for representations, making it a much-needed field to analyze cultural practices that are involved in video gaming (Kocurek, 2023). One example of the importance of gaming communities can be given from the Mass Effect 3 Ending Controversy. Mass Effect 3 Ending Controversy started with the criticism of the game's ending. Players criticized the ending, voicing their concern of the

lack of any possible happy endings, or how small they had control over the story's ending. Usually, players like to see the consequences of their actions and choices if they are given the possibility to choose from, however in Mass Effect 3, their choices had little impact on the ending of the story, leaving them with similar endings. Many criticized how the ending did not make any sense regarding the story told in the previous two games as well and voiced disappointment toward how the main character died.

This criticism started with petitions, polls, and forum threads to ask for a change in the ending of the game, leading to the organization of delivering 300 cupcakes to the BioWare offices, the founder of the games. These cupcakes had vanilla flavoring, and each had different icing, symbolizing all possible endings and how they were thematically similar, leaving players no control over the story. The company then released an extended cut DLC, which was free to play. This DLC rewrote the scenes and details of the ending to align with the player's choices throughout the three games. Therefore, a game's ending was changed because of the power of one gaming community. This specific instance has showcased that players build emotional connections and attachments toward game characters, becoming an active audience in game-making (Burgess & Jones, 2018).

1.4. Differentiations and Issues in Adapting Video Games into TV Series

Stories and the way they are told differ from one medium to another and the differences form cultural flashpoints, as the adaptations try to assess their distinct sides. However, many video game adaptations struggle because they are trying to only replicate actions of the games (Spence, 2024). The different capabilities and traits of different mediums should be considered while creating adaptations. For example, in *The Witcher*, the audience is more passive in television series; while in games, the story

world profits from immersion. That is why it is difficult for the audience to understand the decision-making of the main character Geralt, especially if the audience does not know the source (Joyce, 2023). Some adaptations move from simply replacing the source, and instead try to enrich the original by challenging problematic aspects (Spence, 2024). This is supported by Kitrar (2024), as transmedia storytelling builds a bridge between media platforms, it adds more to provide better engagement and experiences for the audience.

Thus, transmedia storytelling moves from replicating action and instead adds layers and depth to the story. One of the problems while adapting video games into television series is that while video games offer multiple choices with multiple possible outcomes, for the television series one choice needs to be taken to be canon. Hence, non-linear storytelling and player agency are difficult to convert into linear storytelling for a passive audience (Joyce, 2023; Kitrar, 2024). This problem brings forth issues like fidelity and while enriching the stories is a great aspect of adaptations, problems such as linear storytelling can be solved through the combination of ludology and narratology (Velaya, 2023).

While television series and its audience are mostly considered passive, adapting video games into television series often comes with a knowing audience of the source, therefore, in a way, the previous audience and their expectations are shifting the audience from passive to active. While enriching the story of the video games, producers are also careful while threading the expectations of the fans. Even though there are many drawbacks while creating these adaptations, film and television companies are willing to pay for these games, in order to have an existent fan base (Joyce, 2023). Transmedia storytelling too, has the ability to widen this audience reach, by spreading the story across platforms. This ability of transmedia storytelling deepens

engagement as well, and undoubtedly fans are becoming the first consideration of producers (Kitrar, 2024).

Chapter 2: Queer Game Studies

2.1. Queer Game Studies and Queer Theory

Queer game studies have captured interest from fields such as literary studies and media studies, as video games and their influence on culture increased with time. While it is not seen as sufficient to name it as a discipline, it is indeed an emerging interdisciplinary field that is getting recognition within specific academic circles. Various research papers, conferences, and edited volumes have been done in the field, focusing on subjects like fan cultures, online gaming, virtual worlds, homophobia, representations of characters, and relationships. This new area is important as it includes games scholarship and queer scholarship together, making it interesting to study through concerns such as social justice and diversity (Shaw & Ruberg, 2017).

Queer theory is an interdisciplinary field that explores understandings of terms such as sexuality, gender, and identity. It also aims to question the fixated assumptions that are associated with sexuality. Queer theory was first coined in 1991, by film theorist Teresa de Lauretis in *Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities: An Introduction*. This term emerged in LGBTQIA+ representations and various mediums as well, as mediums started to shift and diversify by time. In the 1980s and 1990s, minority marketing had become a popular tool among media industries as a way of promoting new markets. LGBTQIA+ representations in mainstream media, in a way, assisted this said queer market value in movies, television shows and music industries. Therefore, digital media studies and queer theory had merged in a way, creating possibilities for studying this interdisciplinary field (Ahn et al., 2014).

Video games are played by millions, creating prospects in which having the ability to impact players, how players see themselves and see the world around them. Queerness comes into view with that, as while many queer people, women, people of

color and other minorities have been playing and making games even from the start, they were often misrepresented and was the target of hostility by those fall into the category of cis gender, straight, white, and male gamers. However, terms such as diversity and identity have been growing in gaming field, with the aim of inclusivity and representation, games have been introducing more LGBTQIA+ characters and relationships, and companies have been promoting the inclusivity of women in gaming (Ruberg, 2020).

In some circles, the games themselves were coined as leisure activities that provided pleasure and escape from reality instead of productivity. This has been denied by many scholars, games are not solely for fun. They are productive, and they can be used for game-based learning, or they can be used to create political consciousness. Video games reflect and react to society, they are productive in culture, and they are also considered a political act (Clark, 2017; Ruberg, 2020; Shaw & Ruberg, 2017). Queer games are however expected to be productive and liberating with fun elements as Burrill (2017) states, “queer theory—and queerness itself— through its inherent variance and fluidity, serves as a model for the productive and radical possibilities of virtual worlds that resist formations of control, predictability, and homogeneity” (p. 31). Thus, video games, including queer games, go beyond just entertainment. They provide opportunities for learning, social critique, and exploring diverse identities. This shows the important cultural and political roles that video games can have in today's society.

2.3. Queer Game Studies History

In early studies queer theory was used to study sexuality. Its' focus on sexuality had shifted, examining asexuality, and challenging the focus on sex itself in sexuality studies. There are also other subjects that gained interest, such as disability and socioeconomics. This leads scholars to one aim, keeping intersectionality in queer game

studies (Chang, 2017). While mentioning the history of queer game studies, 2013 as a year should be regarded. 2013 had two community oriented and diversity focused conferences, *Different Games* and *QGCon* where queer analyses of games were included. Another event, *Game Developers Conference* was held to discuss hyper inclusive games. *GaymerX* too, was held for the first time in 2013, a gaming fan convention specifically aimed for LGBTQIA+ members. All these gatherings and the number of attendances proved that queerness in gaming were an increasing topic. In 2014, Nintendo, a great and mainstream gaming company was criticized for not involving any same-sex relationships in their game. All these activities pointed at a positive increase in queerness in games. However, it also brought challenges too (Shaw & Ruberg, 2017). Twitter hashtag, *#GamerGate* was a misogynistic online harassment campaign against feminism and diversity. Under this hashtag, many claimed that these diversity efforts were changing what was already established in gaming culture.

While others argued that games were already inclusive and this call for diversity harmed their fandom. There was a shared fear of the game criticism, which allegedly “took away” their video games. Even from the earliest dates, there always been issues of gender, sexuality, and the term gamer, in the sense of who qualified as a gamer or not, especially against women and other subjects. Queer game studies, on the opposite, provide itself as a tool to change the ways of this debate (Ruberg, 2020; Richard 2017). It is also significant to note that it is highlighting the need to create safe spaces for exploring discussions of sexuality, gender, race, and difference (Shaw & Ruberg, 2017).

2.4. Issues in Games for Queer Game Studies

The Anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric continues to be present in games industry, yet underrepresentation and discrimination is not only restricted to queer and transgender individuals. People of color, women and other subjects are also target to such issues

(Ruberg, 2020). The understanding of games solely as fun is erasing the possibility of using games as tools to explore social issues and reflect society. Some gamers are using this to challenge the industry's homogeneity⁷, claiming that games should be for fun (Alexander, 2017). Another claim is that women never cared about games before 2007, although discussions of sexism and diversity had been published in early 1990s.

Gamers, which grew up with games that were made by other men, formed some sort of possessiveness over games and often feared the idea of diversity, finding it a threat of their games taken away from them (Cross, 2017, p. 181). Diversity is an important key in research especially within feminist, black, and queer game studies. The main discussion among the question of diversity lies in the lack of representation, throughout history majority of video game characters, especially the playable protagonists have been white men. The typical white men, who are usually heterosexual, cis-gendered, fit, and able-bodied, are also culturally and ethnically coded. These types of representations confine demographics and give the message that only the stereotypes can be seen as heroes, this also opens the way for homophobia, misogyny, racism, and white supremacy (Stang, 2023).

Inclusion is still problematic for many groups, and the execution of these representations has even more issues. For example, women characters are increased in numbers, yet gender is not reflected in these gameplay or narratives, leaving it on a superficial level (Renshaw, 2020). As Clark (2017) notes, showing diversity among stories and characters increases the possibility of empathy. Thus, diversity should be considered by the games, industry, players, and culture. Some TV Shows and games are not only criticized by cis men, but also by queer identities. There are some views that most companies use queer representation for their marketing and self-interest. This causes *queerbaiting* and *pinkwashing*, which is undoubtedly one of the most concerning

⁷ Homogeneity refers to a state where everything is the same kind, this applies to objects, people or abstract things like society.

issues in Queer studies. Both issues are defined and explained in the following text. Game companies used to create games that are targeted for heterosexual, white and male audience. They were creating the games for said audience because they thought their target market was them (Shaw, 2010). The target audience, and its' construction is affecting representations, the gamer term should not be designed for one group. Even more, not having the representation for the marginalized groups are making the members of this group to be not associated with the term gamer (Clark, 2017). The solution is not placing a presence in a marketplace by force, like adding game items in color of pink or items that are associated with cuteness.

This strategy distances marginalized groups from mainstream games, and instead of promoting inclusivity, it tries to push the image of difference (Shaw, 2010). Studies have highlighted how media and sexuality have intersections, and this leads to media being a product of a market. While queer players have been a part of gaming community as long as it existed, game companies have started to consider them as a new market or as the consumer marketplace (Ahn et al., 2014; Shaw & Ruberg, 2017; Clark, 2017). Concerns about *queerbaiting* and *gaywashing* in games have been stated in previous studies, like how Macklin (2017) asked if same-sex romance options represented gaywash, with how they promised LGBTQIA+ options but offered little to no flexibility with the actual game play.

Queerbaiting is the practice of hinting at or teasing a potential queer relationship or character to gain and attract a queer following, while never delivering the representation. Such instances can be given from various TV shows or movies, like the popular ship Sterek from the TV Series *Teen Wolf*. Gaywashing is described when companies portray themselves as supporting LGBTQIA+ rights or queer community for their marketing purposes, without being genuine about it. *Pinkwashing* is another important term for queer studies, as it is a term that is used to describe political or

corporate strategies that portray themselves as LGBTQIA+ friendly, while trying to hide or downplay other issues, like discriminatory practices. This term will be explained further but firstly, I want to focus on queerbaiting and gaywashing. In today's world, marketing should accept the diverse identities of consumers, including gender, race, and sexuality. Instead of defining gamers by one identity, the goal should be to change how viewers perceive their relationship with media, regarding empathy, especially among Gen Z. While seeking diversity, companies should prioritize genuine representation without distancing groups or highlighting differences, ensuring that games remain enjoyable and emotionally relatable.

Pinkwashing, originated from Israel's efforts to create a friendly image towards LGBTQIA+ community while trying to distract media from their role in the war with Palestine, which would politically aid them in future endeavors or attract tourists to their country. Israel, however, does not legally recognize same-sex marriages, showcasing how they are using it as a political tool. This is seen in movies and TV shows too, to attract queer audience queerbaiting and pinkwashing is often used, by suggesting possible relationships with homoerotic subtexts but never following through. Creating inclusivity can lead to creating stereotypes too, which is harmful to the representation of minorities. Newer stereotypes involve young and well-educated gay male characters, while older ones involve LGBTQ characters as comic relief or victims.

It is important to note that in recent representations, LGBTQ men outnumber women, creating a lack of diversity regarding sub-groups such as transgender and non-binary genders, different races, and socioeconomic statuses (McInroy & Craig, 2016). The attempts to create more representation but ending up as stereotypes can be explained through the companies' lack of understanding of the LGBTQIA+ members, and their tendency to tick the boxes.

Pinkwashing and queerbaiting, therefore, leads to hiding sexual diversities. These are marketing elements that are focusing on marketing goals, and without real, positive, and normalized sexual diversity, queer representation will not be achieved properly and will continue to get criticized (Sánchez-Soriano & García-Jiménez, 2020). Perhaps, games such as *Baldur's Gate 3*, which is praised by its flexibility in identities, relationships and gender, and the game's success by winning six awards and including the most important award, *Game of the Year*, in *The Game Awards 2023*, shows us that organic queer representation does indeed lead games to success, and positive feedback from gamers.

The last notable issue is how pressures of industry and response from gamer communities have effects on game developers. In past studies, these effects pointed at a reason why game developers were reluctant to create changes (Shaw & Ruberg, 2017). In recent years, there is a notable shift. Big gaming companies have been increasing LGBTQIA+ representation to create more inclusion. While some queer players have praised the attempt for inclusivity, some considered these as marketing efforts (Ruberg, 2020). It is not surprising to see that the main issues in queer game studies are going hand in hand with other mediums. It is also easy to see queerbaiting, pinkwashing, gaywashing, and queer marketing in adaptation studies. Therefore, I will be noting and matching the issues in the adaptations that I have chosen as well. However, before moving to the next chapter I also want to note the positive sides of queer game studies, how and what queer theory means in gaming perspective and what it means for the future for the field.

2.5. Identity, Empathy and Community

Queer game studies lead game studies to a meaningful interaction with identity and social justice (Ruberg, 2020). Queer theory itself, is an act of challenging the

normalization and oppression. Therefore, queer game studies should too be involved in such act. Instead of aiming to increase the number of queer representations, queer game studies should try to challenge the normalization of game studies to focus on marketing potential and removing the flexibility of games and play. Queer methods should be about embracing differences, not marginalizing them further (Shaw & Ruberg, 2017). How can queer game studies achieve these goals? One of the possible answers is identity. Games should build experiences which focuses on culture and identity because video games and the representation in them can be important to audiences. Queer game studies should ask how identities are produced in media and how can this cultural construction be built without the strictly gender normative forms. (Shaw, 2010; Street, 2017). Macklin (2017) defines video games as tools for us to express ourselves, try on identities and explore experiences:

Whether by choice or by default, many players have engaged in “gender play”— playing as a character of another gender. This is one way games give us opportunities and choices that are ripe for exploring different identities and experiences. Gender play is a form of meaning made somewhere in the air between the game and us, through a playful conversation between the possibility space of the game and our own subjectivity. Gender play is something many of us fondly recall as a form of self-expression in our early days as queers. (p. 254)

Many video games, indeed, give us options to play as different genders, races, and classes. This possibility, either called gender play or a door for empathy, permits us to be on the character’s shoes. Empathy is, therefore, a popular key theme in queer games. Creating safe spaces for queer audience or educating straight players are still debated as goals of queer games (Ruberg, 2020). I ask why empathy, should not help us for achieving both? It is a strong tool, especially in video games as they offer immersion. Clark (2017) writes how diversity of stories and characters help create empathic

possibilities for games, and Alexander (2017) adds how even the people that are not considered gamers could pick a game and get touched by the story of it, and the empathy. Community is another key for queer game studies, just as game adaptation. Queerness is not only in characters or romance options, but they are also in community building. Even the interviewed game developers of queer games in Ruberg's (2020) study expressed that they grew up in socially isolated environments and they found their space in queer community through games (Shaw & Ruberg, 2017; Ruberg, 2020). Communities are often built around similar interests, and these communities of marginalized players are putting pressure on the industry. This is to create more diversity of gameplay, not only for representation in the name of "representation". This is then becoming a political tool, that is used by the gaming community (Shaw, 2017; Macklin, 2017; Ruberg, 2020).

Some researchers argue that in the future of queer games, queer game studies should have the criticism toward normative and stable representations. Queer games should address issues and not solely focus on the aspect of fun, but instead push players toward thinking and experiencing empathy (Goetz, 2017; Macklin, 2017). It should also question the queer marketing, and how industries are using these marginalized groups for their own gains, how representation should not be done by further differentiating the said groups, but instead represent these individuals in an organic way.

Queer game studies, as a field is becoming more recognized as an important discourse and activism among scholars and game developers (Ruberg, 2017). This field intersects with adaptation studies, particularly evident within the TV series I have chosen for my thesis. In this chapter, I tried to explain why queer game studies is important, how it is received among gaming communities, and how they shared similarities with adaptation studies. Key themes such as *queer representation*, *queerbaiting* and *diversity* were highlighted. In the next chapter, I will start analyzing

Arcane, *The Last of Us*, and *The Witcher*. I will correlate the important factors that I have highlighted in the last two chapters to the TV series and video games that I have picked. I will also try to see if the chosen adaptations share the same concerns and future hopes or if they have any differences.

Chapter 3: TV Series Adapted from Video Games

3.1. Arcane

Arcane was released in 2021 with 9 episodes, it is an animated TV series from Riot Games and Fortiche, a French animation studio. The series was created by Christian Linke and Alex Yee, and the TV series is adapted from a game, *League of Legends*. *Arcane*'s second season is planned to be premiered in November 2024. Winning 22 awards, 4 being Primetime Emmy Awards⁸, having 5 nominations, and having a 9.0 IMDb rating, *Arcane* is a prime example of success in video game adaptations to TV shows. *Arcane*'s story revolves around the lore of the game *League of Legends*, the animated series has steampunk action-adventure themes and follows two siblings' stories on two opposite sides of a city, Utopian Piltover that is known for riches and technology, and the underground city of Zaun, which is oppressed, fighting against poverty.

The story is only a quarter of what the game originally presents, *League of Legends* has rich backstories and over 140 characters. *League of Legends* was released in 2009, as a multiplayer online battle arena video game. The game is free to play but monetized through character skins, as purchasable character customization. Creating rich stories and world building for each character, and even creating connections between the characters, the game is successful to build some sort of loyalty between the world and the player, pushing players to purchase in game.

Therefore, this rich source enables the game to provide different adaptations as well. *League of Legends* has comic books, music videos, and animated TV series. The

⁸ "... Primetime Emmy Awards are given to the shows that are produced specifically in America and are aired at the time of primetime" (Pasricha, 2023, para. 6).

importance of the music videos should be noted as well. *League of Legends* is known for its music videos, some of the most viral videos having millions of views. *League of Legends* uses its characters, to create animated music videos with known singers. For example, *League of Legends'* most viewed music video Warriors is watched 424M times, with 3.6M likes in total. The music is collaborated with Imagine Dragons, one of the famous bands. *League of Legends* music videos have gone viral multiple times, with watched numbers as 209M, 154M, 159M, and more. This was one of the reasons why *Arcane* was created in the first place, with animated characters and songs gathering so much interest from the fans, Riot decided to follow fans' requests for a show (Moore, 2021). *Arcane's* soundtrack *Enemy*, which was a product of collaboration with Imagine Dragons and JID, gathered 381M views as well.

Arcane differs in some stories of the characters from the game, however, it is important to note that characters and their lores have some gaps within the game, allowing the producers to fill the gaps and have some freedom to add their own perspective. This could have ended in a failure, but *Arcane* achieves success through beautiful stories, showcasing each character's personality and their mistakes, and reminding viewers that they can find something to relate to in them. What *Arcane* does right is while having the freedom to change things, they are still loyal to the characters' traits and they beautifully convey these traits, highlighting them in a way to connect the viewer with the characters. So, there is still fidelity in the adaptation, just with a twist of freedom.

The series is not only cherished because of its loyalty but it is also known for its wonderful animation, music, and world-building. *Arcane* has been noted as one of the best video game adaptations by multiple publications, Bennett (2021), called the series vital in video game adaptation and highlighted that the series had political and familial conflicts, Motamayor's (2021) review in *IGN* magazine called the series as a nail in the

coffin for the so-called video game curse. The show was positively perceived by the audiences, not only limited to the fans of the game, but it was also noted as welcoming for the newcomers as well, since the stories kept the viewers engaged (Motamayor, 2021; Cabral, 2021). Different perspectives regarding different characters were also one of the welcomed aspects of *Arcane*. As it was mentioned above, *League of Legends* has a rich story with 167 champions. These characters have their own lore and stories. *Arcane* kept this aspect in telling the stories from different perspectives. In *Arcane*, different characters and their own goals and struggles can be seen, still *Arcane* does a successful job of portraying these stories without distracting the viewer too much.

3.2. The Last of Us

The Last of Us was released in 2023 by HBO Max, with 9 episodes. The TV series is based on the video game franchise *The Last of Us*, by the gaming company Naughty Dog. The game itself has over 37 wins and 18 nominations, with sales records like 20 million units. The game, therefore, has already a solid fanbase and perhaps it is the reason why the premiere episode, with 4.7 million viewers overnight had recorded as the second-largest debut for HBO since 2010 (Porter, 2023). The TV Series has 65 wins, 132 nominations, 8 Primetime Emmys, and an 8.8 IMDb rating. The second season is expected to be released in 2025. The series has post-apocalyptic drama themes, with a story revolving around Ellie and Joel, the main characters who are stuck in a world where the pandemic hit, causing a fungal infection that turns people into zombies. The story shows the collapse of the society that we know of, conflicts, and survival. Joel finds out that a girl named Ellie is immune to the infection, and the story takes a turn as they try to take Ellie to Fireflies, a militant group who hope to synthesize a vaccine.

The game is a third-perspective game, allowing players to see the stories from their eyes and pushing them to make choices that lead to different outcomes. This process is, therefore, creating feelings of immersion and empathy. The rich world-building provided the game franchise with different adaptations. *The Last of Us* was released in 2013, a year later a remastered version followed. *The Last of Us: Left Behind* was released in 2014, with the main character Ellie, and her relationship with her best friend, including a kiss between the two characters that provided LGBTQIA+ representation, which was at the moment rare for big games. *The Last of Us Part II*, a sequel was released in 2020. The game also has comic books, tabletop games, and a television adaptation. *The Last of Us* has been noted as faithful, Leane (2023) called the series faithful, to the point of feeling like watching cut scenes from the game itself. Hilton (2023), pointed out how video game adaptations are difficult to convey, as games are interactive and involve players in the storytelling, whereas media requires viewers passive and how *The Last of Us* was successful at finding that balance, naming the series as a landmark of adapting video games. Several reviewers noted the series as the best video game adaptation (Lussier 2023; Hilton 2023; Leane 2023).

While there was much praise for loyalty to the source, acting, and production, there was some criticism as well. Such as the lack of confrontations with the zombies, as the game's main focus was letting the players feel the experience of darkness, death, decay, and fright. The reviewer thought that the apocalyptic disaster required these aspects, which the game provided perfectly, and without such aspects, the series was becoming a familial crisis (Brown, 2023). However, this specific review received some conflict among fans. While some fans agreed with the reviewer, some harshly disapproved. There were some differences between the game and the TV series as well. For example, while in the game the outbreak is portrayed as being transmitted through

airborne spores, in the television series, it was changed to a pandemic transmitted through direct contact, meals, and bites (Walsh, 2023).

3.3. The Witcher

The Witcher was released in 2019 by Netflix, with 8 episodes. The series has 3 seasons with a total of 25 episodes and the filming for the fourth season has reportedly started in March 2024. The series is based on two sources. The original source is the book, written by Polish writer Andrzej Sapkowski. The game was developed by CD Projekt Red, as an action role-playing game in 2007. The game has two sequels, *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings* was released in 2011, and *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* was released in 2015. The games are also adapted, from the book. *The Witcher* game has 28 nominations and 16 wins, while the TV series has only 6 wins and 32 nominations, with 3 Primetime Emmys nominations and 8.0 IMDb rating.

Compared to *The Last of Us* and *Arcane*, which only has one season each, the longer series, *The Witcher* seems to have not achieved a similar success. *The Witcher* takes players to Continent, a fantastical world with monsters, sorcerers, and kingdoms. The series revolves around three main characters: Geralt of Rivia, Princess Cirilla of Cintra, and sorceress Yennefer of Vengerberg. The story explores different times and events that shape each character, and eventually merge as one as three characters find each other.

The Witcher has a rich world-building. This again, provides different adaptations. *The Witcher* has six fantasy novels with 15 short stories by Andrzej Sapkowski, one movie adaptation called *The Witcher Film: The Hexer*, the TV series, one animated prequel film *The Witcher: Nightmare of the Wolf*, one spin-off TV show *The Witcher: Blood Origin*, and of course games, with three main games, 2 expansion packs *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt - Hearts of Stone* and *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt - Blood*

and Wine, and 7 spin-off games; *The Witcher: Crimson Trail*, *The Witcher Adventure Game*, *The Witcher Battle Arena*, *Gwent: The Witcher Card Game*, *Thronebreaker: The Witcher Tales*, *The Witcher: Monster Slayer* and *Roach Race*. The first season of *The Witcher* has received mixed reviews. Some criticized the show as it lacked the world the games and books provided, while many praised the main character's actor, Henry Cavill (Abdulbaki, 2019). Henry Cavill was embraced by the fans as he was known to be a fan of the games himself. His want for loyalty to the source was appreciated among the gaming communities (Clough, 2023). Some criticized that without knowing the context of the game or the books, it was difficult for the viewer to understand the world and the setting, and it was not clear at all. However, the first season was noted as faithful to the source as well by some critics as well (Bryan & Campbell, 2020). The second season was noted to be improving (Butler 2021; Lane 2021), yet some reviewers added that the series still had the issue of gaps that would not be understood by regular viewers who did not have the context of the game and books (Hadadi, 2021). The last season, out of three seems to be the most negatively received. While with 541 million hours viewed in the first 28 days and becoming among the most-watched original series by Netflix, season two had 484 million hours watched (Clark, 2022).

The third season, compared to the other two seasons has lost a 30% drop in viewership, and audience reception dropped as well (Tassi & Mears, 2023). Tassi (2023) reported that the drop in viewership was caused by the adaptation's lack of loyalty to the source in season 2, then the main actor Henry Cavill left the show, and his place was reported to be taken by Liam Hemsworth. Actor changes are not positively received in most cases, and the backlash of the news was higher as fans were extremely unhappy about the situation since they were familiar with how Henry Cavill was also a fan of the games and how he intervened in some cases to be more faithful to the character. His portrayal of the character was mainly the reason of the success in the first season.

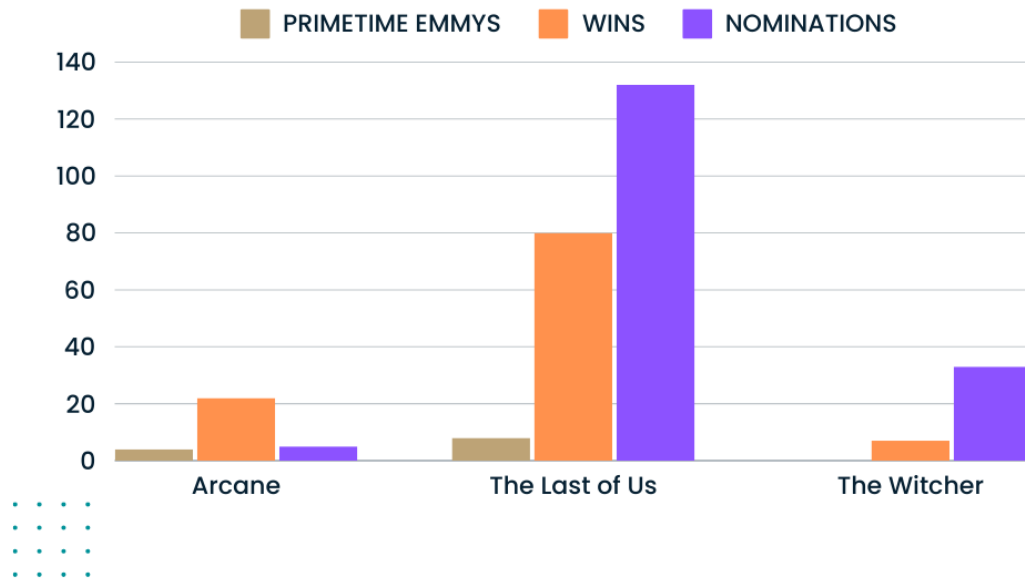


Figure 2. Primetime Emmys wins, other award wins, and award nominations of the selected TV series

The Witcher has no Primetime Emmys, although it was nominated for three it failed to get the wins. *Arcane* has more wins than nominations, this suggests a success rate as the series are recognized and awarded. While *The Last of Us* has the most nominations, wins, and Primetime Emmys, *The Witcher* has the least wins. *The Witcher* has more nominations than *Arcane*, however, it still has fewer wins than *Arcane*. Nominations should not be considered as a success rate as *Arcane* and *The Witcher*'s visual styles are different, and they may get nominated for different categories. It should also be noted that *The Witcher* has three seasons in total, while both *Arcane* and *The Last of Us* have one season in total. This also points to the difference between success rates among the series.

3.4. Queer Representation in Selected Series

Arcane is based on the game League of Legends, so it is important to note the LBGTQIA+ representations in the game as well. The game introduced its first

LGBTQIA+ characters back in 2017, Kai and Valmar in a music video. Then, Neeko was confirmed as a lesbian, in 2018 through a writer's message. Three years later, more characters would be introduced periodically. In 2021, 2022, and 2023 each year had three characters introduced as LGBTQIA+ members, through stories, music videos, and art. It can be seen that more characters have been introduced in recent years and the positive reception surrounding the characters showcases future possibilities for the game and the TV series. It is, however, important to consider what Riot Games is doing right to receive such positive feedback. To consider this, two characters can be analyzed from the game and the TV series, Vi and Caitlyn. Vi and Caitlyn are two popular characters from the franchise. It was previously noted that *League of Legends* creates characters, stories, and specifically connections between characters.

Vi and Caitlyn are connected through the stories as well. Players can see these connections in the lores, or the voice lines characters have. For example, if Vi and Caitlyn are on the same team in the game, Caitlyn says, "I'm glad you'll have my back, Vi. Let's keep the chaos to a minimum, shall we?" while when they assist each other Vi says, "High five, cupcake!" or if they are on enemy teams and if Caitlyn kills Vi, Caitlyn says "I never wanted this, Vi..." In the story, they both live in the same city, Piltover, a city that is known for progress. Though, Vi and Caitlyn are opposites, even in their upbringing. Caitlyn is born into a wealthy and influential family, sort of an aristocratic family within the upper city. Vi is born into poverty, living in Zaun known as the undercity filled with crimes.

The game and the show slightly differ in how they meet. In the game, Caitlyn is the sheriff of Piltover, and she hears about Vi's fighting skills with a weapon that she had stolen from the upper city. Caitlyn asks Vi to join the law instead of punishing her for stealing, and that is how they become partners in the job. Two different personalities, Caitlyn being strict and level-headed while Vi being impulsive and energetic, works

charmingly well. In *Arcane*, Vi, and Caitlyn find themselves in a conflict that surrounds the upper city of Piltover and undercity Zaun, Caitlyn then goes on to free Vi from the prison to get help in one of her investigations. The two work on the case, and develop a connection. It is important to note that, up until this point they are still not an official couple. They were extremely popular before *Arcane* was released, and the only undertone was Vi calling Caitlyn cupcake in the game and being partners in the music video of *Warriors* to fight against an enemy, however, while some fans supported the idea of a possible relationship, the company did not confirm anything. In *Arcane's* first season, Caitlyn's orientation is confirmed in a scene, where she flirts with a woman, and throughout the show, we see undertones between Vi and Caitlyn.

Riot has confirmed Vi and Caitlyn's orientations officially in their Pride Month article but apart from that both in the show and the game they are not considered as a couple yet (Celebrating Pride with the Community, 2023). Some reviewers have criticized this, saying that the series will be apprehensive about showcasing the two characters' relationship openly, but instead will touch upon the subject barely next season (Cejer, 2022). While other reviewers strongly wrote about how the series was not queerbaiting. Binette (2022) acknowledges that people are right to be expecting queer representation, given the history of queerbaiting by companies seeking profit.

However, Binette notes that the term *queerbaiting* is sometimes misapplied, highlighting that relationships do not necessarily need to be immediately confirmed, they can instead develop gradually over time. Furthermore, Binette points to the reality that queer individuals do not constantly announce their orientation. The previous chapter has noted that people want representations in an organic way that does not feel forced or rushed (Shaw, 2010), and *Arcane* creators, Christian Linke and Alex Yee must feel the same too, as they commented on how they always wanted to tell an organic story between the two characters, while speaking in a panel with BAFTA on Twitch.

They also confirmed that season 2 would have the story that they had determined and planned all along (Sacco, 2022). *The Last of Us* has several games, yet the LGBTQIA+ representation is never really mentioned openly in the first game. Perhaps, it is one of the criticisms of the series. The first game, *The Last of Us Part I* has a character named Bill, and the main characters Joel and Ellie meet up with Bill at one point, then from Joel's perspective, the players learn that Bill had a “partner” once, called Frank. The two fall out after Frank decides to leave Bill, stealing from him and complaining about the way Bill is managing the town. However, in his attempt to leave the town behind, an infected zombie bites him. Then, players find Frank's body, who seemingly decided to end his life rather than turn into a zombie. Another interesting detail is that Joel discovers a note from Frank to Bill, which tells Bill that he hates Bill and even says that he knows that trying to leave the town will kill him, but it is still better than spending a day with Bill.

In the TV series, however, Bill and Frank have an episode dedicated solely to them. The two have been shown as a couple, they fall in love over time and age together. The series beautifully shows that in the midst of an apocalypse, the two find purpose in each other, and after Frank gets sick, they decide to close their eyes to the world together. As can be seen, there is a difference between how their stories are portrayed in the game and the TV series. The majority of the reviews from magazines praise the episode, and most reviewers agree on the fact that *The Last of Us* is about humans, while the zombies and the hardships of survival are one of the main themes, such as the emotions and the characters the players meet along the way. Therefore, the adaptation's screen time for the couple provides a perfect reminder of the love and hope that keeps humanity going (Sepinwall, 2023; Romano, 2023; Swan, 2023).

Another queer representation in the franchise is Ellie, one of the main characters in the story. Ellie's orientation was not mentioned in the first game. Yet, after a year the

gaming company released a DLC, *The Last of Us: Left Behind*. The story revolves around Ellie and Riley, and it gives the players the opportunity to discover the timeline before Ellie meets Joey. Ellie and Riley lived in the Boston quarantine zone where the two quickly became friends. The players witness the story of how their friendship evolves, and they go through a series of events that lead them to the point of the breakdown of the story. Riley brings Ellie to a mall, the place where they first met in an attempt to fix their friendship. They then, spend time together in the mall, fooling around, taking photos together. However, as Ellie is in the military school and is being called to her station, she is forced to leave soon. Before they say their goodbyes, Ellie kisses Riley.

This is the moment where Ellie's orientation is confirmed, still, the story ends in a terrible way. The two get cornered by zombies, and as they struggle to fight them off, they both get bitten. Riley unfortunately, dies because of the infection, whereas this is the moment Ellie discovers that she is immune. This story is crucial, especially in highlighting the survivor guilt Ellie has. Reviewers have commented on the representation as well, noting it as a beautiful and natural portrayal and also noting that the number of queer characters in video games are scarce, and for such a popular character to be a queer was indeed a breakthrough moment (Macdonald, 2014; Hamilton, 2014).

The TV series also adapted this story in the 7th episode, and it was as natural as the way it was portrayed in the game. Ellie's story continues in *The Last of Us Part II* where we see her as a 19-year-old. She is the main character of the game, as the other main character Joel gets killed at the beginning of the series. This created a lot of controversy between fans as Joel was loved by many. Ellie was suddenly, put at the center of all attention and therefore her personality and relationships were also at the center. She meets with a person named Dina, and they became a couple after getting to

know each other. Throughout the game we see them going through hardships. Ellie even raises Dina's child together with her, though their relationship only lasts to a point. Ellie cannot let go of her rage and she wants revenge for Joel's death. She then leaves their home to kill Joel's murderer. It is then implied that Dina had left her as Ellie comes back to an empty house. Joel was a father figure for Ellie, and while this is a heartbreaking story, considering Ellie's survivor guilt, and the fact that she could not save Joel, Ellie's decision to leave Dina to take revenge can be rationalized to a degree. The story, in a way, stays at a cliffhanger for their relationship.

The game received a lot of backlashes, Joel was the main character of the series and then he was replaced by Ellie. Half into the game, players switch characters to Abby, the killer of Joel, and this seems to have stoked the fire even further. The main characters were women and Ellie was queer, so there was a lot of hate towards those facts alone too, by bigotry (Boom, 2020). Apart from the mixed reactions from the fans, the reviews for the game from reviewers were mostly positive. Dornbush (2020) has highlighted the game's ability to show the strength and fragility of the human spirit, and McKeand (2020) mentioned how the game successfully portrayed each character as complex. It is important to note that when the game was first released, many players were upset by Joel's death, and they stopped playing the game to rate the game 0 on *Metacritic*, a platform that aggregates reviews of different mediums. This platform has two different ratings, one is the Meta score which is based on critic reviews, and the other is the user score where any user can rate the game.

This platform's user score rating then does not reflect the series' success, as while the meta score was 94 with 108 critic scores, the user score was 4.8 from under 100,000 people in 2020. However, this can still showcase the reception of the fans, as many were rating the game 0 out of 10, even within the week following the game's release (Boom, 2020). The second season of the TV series is still in the works, and it is

still not known how the series will adapt *The Last of Us Part II*, still, the controversial reception from the game fans is one of the reasons why it is important to analyze this game, and interview gamers.

The Witcher has a couple of queer characters. Some of them are minor characters that players see in the game, such as Seraphine and Mislav, whose orientations are discovered by letters and side quests. Philipa Eilhart is a sorcerer and an advisor to the king, and the character is politically ambitious. Players see her sexuality both in the games and the book as she has girlfriends. Ciri is one of the main characters, and it is seen that she is bisexual. However, there are some issues with the topic. Firstly, Ciri's portrayal was problematic in the books, because her first partner Mistle was abusive. They got together after Mistle sexually assaulted Ciri. It was a toxic and abusive relationship, and Ciri, tried to rationalize it thinking Mistle loved her and did not want to admit that she was abused. However, there was a point where they had to make a choice to stay together or part ways, and the two were finally coming to peace with the fact that their relationship was deeply wrong. Ciri chose to leave, and Mistle was understanding about it. This is not shown in the games, however, and Ciri's sexuality can only be seen through a player's choice.

There is a scene where the player is asked about a male character, and if the player chooses the option, Ciri says that she prefers women. In the TV series, Ciri's orientation is not discussed yet. Still, the last episode shows viewers that Ciri has met Mistle and her group, and viewers still do not know how the TV series is going to adapt it into television. It is not clear if the TV series is going to use the book or the games, or if they are going to change the story entirely. As it is seen from Jaskier and his sexuality, Netflix does change things from the book and the game, they are not entirely loyal to the source. Adaptations have the freedom to shift things, yet this does not mean that they will always succeed.

The Witcher's drop in viewership approves this. Jaskier, another popular character from the franchise is straight both in the books and the games, he is even known as a womanizer by the fans. Prince Radovid is another straight character in the books and the games, known as a ruthless and bloodthirsty tyrant. They are never mentioned as queer in the books or the games. In season 3, however, the two fall in love over time. Radovid even chooses to give up on his noble position to be with his lover, Jaskier. Yet, his plans fail when another character, Philippa kills the current king, forcing Prince Radovid to take the crown instead. Their relationships falter because of this event but it is not clear how the plot will continue in the next season.

This change received a lot of backlashes from the fans. There have indeed been many opinions on how the TV Series was queerbaiting by hiding undertones between Jaskier and Geralt (Coates, 2020; Opie, 2021). There were also opinions about how showing Jaskier as a queer character was stereotyping gay people. Jaskier is a bard, and his outfits and the way he acts would be considered flamboyant by many. Still, Jaskier's whole personality was that, even with having a flamboyant attitude, he was a ladies' man. Therefore, some believed that the TV series was trying to tick the boxes, creating a stereotype that all gay people would be effeminate. Hollywood productions are known to do this, putting queer people that check the boxes in the shows just to have that diversity and inclusion, ending up with characters that are not developed organically.

This act alone is considered homophobic by many (Sandhu, 2023). In previous studies, researchers have noted that TV shows often stereotype gay men as effeminate, and these portrayals feed the expectation that there is a boy and girl role in same-sex relationships, and this expectation and assumption is leading productions to heteronormativity⁹ (Seif, 2017). Fans were also angry, as they believed that this change of two important characters' sexuality was not made because it would have made sense

⁹ Heteronormativity is the idea that heterosexuality is the natural norm and default sexual orientation, therefore heterosexual relationships are seen as expected, privileged, and normal.

in the storytelling, or because it would make more sense than the source material, but instead, they added these characters as queer solely in the name of representation.

3.5. Overall Reactions to Arcane, The Last of Us and The Witcher

Out of all three adaptations, it is seen that *Arcane* was the most positively received in the means of queer representation and loyalty to the source. *The Last of Us* follows next, with almost equal success and *The Witcher* seems to be lacking from that reception, both by the fans and the reviewers. *Arcane* was mentioned as being thoughtful of the way to represent the queer characters, the series does not put the representation as the main goal but instead, develops queer characters in a natural way. In previous studies, it was mentioned that queer people did not want to be separated or put into a display just in the name of representation (Shaw, 2010).

The Last of Us: Left Behind, which was the story of Ellie and Riley was also proof of that, as the game was successful in the organic development of the characters and their individualities. The TV Series, *The Last of Us* was also praised for adapting Ellie and Riley's story, engraving the episode in a natural way. However, another episode dedicated to Bill and Frank was criticized by the fans. Although reviewers believed that their story showed a beautiful message of hope for the future in an apocalyptic world, fans criticized the episode because it did not add anything to the original story of the games. Bill and Frank were not on good terms in the game as well, and the TV series decided to change the story into something else.

Although the final product was beautiful, some fans were not happy with the said change (Glaze, 2023). This highlights fidelity, a theme that has been mentioned throughout the study. *The Witcher* is the most negatively received one, it is seen that the backlash it received is not entirely aimed at queer representation, instead fans have seemed to be furious with how much Netflix is changing the story and the characters. To

give main characters who are known to be straight a completely different sexuality is a risk to take, and taking this risk in an adaptation where fans periodically criticize not being loyal to the source is even riskier.

Perhaps, failure to create organic representations and failure to be loyal to the source also affect empathy and immersion. Games are known to have opportunities for players to get immersed in the stories and the characters. As players go through the story, they see events from the characters' eyes and form some sort of connection. It is not a surprise that a forced story would make the players feel less empathy, and the video games' ability to create political messages would stagger. Games are great tools to create safe spaces and good representations for minorities, therefore game producers should be careful not to marginalize LGBTQIA+ identities, and instead develop their personality and struggles, their happiness and aims in a natural way, just as they would for a straight character.

When people are playing the games, they should not be worried about a character's orientation, instead, they should see the world from their eyes, and sympathize with their struggles and lives. All three adaptations are still continuing, so for the producers there is still room to achieve success, which is determined by the viewership numbers, awards and ratings in this study. Perhaps, fans' feedback will push producers to listen more to them and end up with better versions of their stories. This is another reason why video game adaptations and queer studies are important to study.

The latest adaptations show us that queer characters are included, although some fail to do it in the expected way. Therefore, studying adaptations through key themes such as *identity*, *representation*, *fidelity*, *empathy*, and *queerbaiting* and learning viewers' and players' opinions and expectations on the adaptations is important. If studies achieve to learn more, these productions can get closer to fixing these failures as well, and have healthy representations that will allow us, humans, to have a better

understanding. The next chapters aim to put these into practice, by interviewing gamers and viewers of the series.

Table 1. Summary of the three selected TV series, in relation to the three themes

Selected TV Series	Seasons as of May, 2024	Release Date	Source	Notable LGBTQIA+ Representation (Confirmed)	Notable Debates
Arcane	1	2021	Game	Vi Caitlyn	Minor changes from the games. Caitlyn and Vi's relationship.
The Last of Us	1	2023	Game	Ellie Riley Billy Frank	Dedicating an episode to Frank and Bill, differences from the game. Minor changes such as how the disease is transmitted.
The Witcher	3	2019	Game/Books	Jaskier Radovid Philippa	Lead actor Henry Cavill's departure. Jaskier and Radovid's relationship, sexuality. Major changes, such as differences in personalities, killing characters, less monsters.

CHAPTER 4: Results and Discussion

4.1. Interview Results and Discussion

Before analyzing participants' replies, the demographic information of participants should be noted. Participants were asked of their age, if they considered themselves as part of LGBTQIA+, gender, and preferred pronouns. The participants' ages range from 18 to 33, with a median age of 24. Ten out of the fifteen participants identified themselves as a member of LGBTQIA+. The gender identities of the participants varied, with 8 identifying as cis woman, 3 as cis man, 2 as non-binary, and 2 as trans man. Pronoun preferences were also diverse, 5 using she/her pronouns, 5 using he/him pronouns, 1 using they/them pronouns, and lastly, 4 using she/they pronouns.

Table 2. The demographic information of the fans participating in the interviews

Participant Identifiers	Age	Gender	Preferred Pronouns	LGBTQIA+ Individual	Familiarity with the Games/TV Series
1	24	Nonbinary	They/them	Yes	Yes
2	29	Cis woman	She/they	Yes	Yes
3	21	Trans man	He/him	Yes	Yes
4	21	Cis woman	She/her	No	Yes
5	31	Cis woman	She/they	Yes	Yes
6	22	Cis woman	She/her	Yes	Yes
7	18	Trans man	He/him	Yes	Yes
8	27	Cis woman	She/her	No	Yes

9	27	Cis woman	She/they	Yes	Yes
10	21	Cis man	He/him	No	Yes
11	33	Cis woman	She/her	Yes	Yes
12	30	Cis man	He/him	No	Yes
13	20	Nonbinary	She/they	Yes	Yes
14	24	Cis man	He/him	No	Yes
15	27	Cis woman	She/her	Yes	Yes

4.1.1 Expectations of the Fans

The first research question is what are fans' expectations of TV series that are adapted from their favorite video games and what do they like to see in these adaptations? Considering the first research question in mind, the interview started with getting general views on TV shows and series that are adapted from video games. According to participants' replies, it can be seen that fidelity, in other words, loyalty to the source material was consistently emphasized. Out of fifteen participants, all participants mentioned their expectation of loyalty to the source. Participant 1 commented, "First thing I expect is loyalty to the source material...to continue that fan base, there should be loyalty in the adaptation." This comment was repeated by Participant 2, "For me, it's most important to maintain the original like integrity of the series."

Some of the participants have also noted that they do not mind some changes, as long as the adaptation stays loyal to certain points. "Executive producers should be loyal to the original source, but I also believe that some additions could be made because the audience, the demographic of audience changes every day. So the changes might be made" (Participant 8). It is important to analyze these points as well, as they

relate to the subcategories of fidelity. Identity is the first subcategory of fidelity. In the literature review, especially in the adaptation studies part, it was noted that identity was an important key in terms of loyalty to the source (Sell, 2021; Clark, 2017). Participant 13 emphasized the importance of identities, especially related to sexuality and race: “Personally, I think it's very important to keep all people of color...their identity, especially their skin tone or race, has an impact on the sexuality.” These identities were also connected with the original source and personalities of the characters. Participant 4 commented: “First of all, I want mostly the characters to be closest to their original personalities. I don't want them to be so far away from their personalities that we don't recognize the characters anymore.”

This applies to the representation in the fidelity category as well. The representation here highlights how TV series and shows should stick to the characters that are loved by gamers, as they play the characters and build some connection, they expect that representation in the adapted shows. “I value the characters and world building and the overall plot of the video games when there's a movie or a TV show... if they stray from the overall plot or fail to bring a beloved character to life properly. I am prone to dislike that production” (Participant 3). Participant 12 highlights this connection: “I'm a gamer before I am a viewer and as a result, I think my priorities when it comes to adaptations of video games is accuracy.” In that regard, replies have also shown that even from the general expectations of the participants, it can also be seen that there is an expectation for a natural queer representation, diversity, and empathy.

What is interesting is that most of the replies emphasized characterization as the key. While terms like world-building, aesthetics, and casting have been mentioned by participants, characterization was the most prominent reply among fifteen participants. “Different small deviations or certain changes are fine because I mean, of course we are.

We are also talking about video games, so certain things are going to change when you adapt it to TV screen or there might be something you know, regarding cinematography... Or about acting styles etc. So, I do accept certain deviations but... Especially about characterization and plot and story. I'm very strict. I think so, and certain things are fine, but I expect them to be loyal to the source material” (Participant 11). Participant 2 noted similar concerns: “Okay, well, I expect them to be accurate, at least, to the video game. And I mean, I don't care if they change the plot for the television, but I care about the important characteristics and the characters, especially. I want them to portray the characters very well. That's my concern, basically.” Analyzing the participants' answers, it seems that some changes in the adaptations are welcomed by gamers, as long as the characterizations of the characters stay loyal to the source. This is an important key point, as later in the results characterization will also be connected to queer representation and empathy.

The second question was learning the reason why participants followed these three franchises. Most replied that they played the games before the adaptations. Characterization was again, prominent in some replies: “I'm a big fan of *Resident Evil* and I appreciated how there was a lady protagonist in a video game. That was my reasoning to play *The Last of Us*. And I also came to really like Joel because he's a character that I like, he has that archetype that I really like, you know, in a character” (Participant 3). Participant 3's reply showcases that it relates to all categories of the Game Adaptation and Representation Framework, with characterization and connection to the character being given as a reason.

Some of the replies have also noted that they watched the series first, and then became interested in the games. “I've actually, I haven't played *League of Legends* or something like that before. I've just heard really, really good things about *Arcane*” (Participant 13). Participant 6 also talks about not being familiar with *League of*

Legends, before watching *Arcane*: “Well, a friend recommended *Arcane* to me... I watched *Arcane* before I ever played *League of Legends*, and I thought that it was very artistically interesting”.

This phenomenon points out how adaptations create circles among mediums. During my thesis writing, another video game was adapted into a TV show, *Fallout*. A recent magazine title that I came across supported this observation, as it was titled, *Considered doomed 6 years ago, Fallout 76 is attracting record player numbers thanks to the TV series* (Prescott, 2024). It appears that both mediums are contributing to each other in regard to getting more recognition. This aligns with Corrigan's (2017) observation of adaptation where they noted this as the first process of adaptation. Lastly, some participants replied that they were encouraged to watch the shows or play the games because of their friends and their influence.

This could be noted to highlight the importance of the fan communities and how identity and representation are a part of these communities. Jellenik (2017) coined this as a process of adaptation as well, saying that understanding the fan communities were the key. “Actually, I had no idea about the *Arcane* TV series. My brother recommended it. That's why I started watching it. But he also plays League of, I mean *League of Legends*, etcetera. So he already knew the lore and also told me about the lore and he told me, you know, it's a good series, so you should give it a chance. And I did and started watching it because of it” (Participant 11).

4.1.2 Fidelity

Keeping my first research question in mind, on the fidelity category of my framework, I also wanted to ask specific issues that gained some debate over the adaptations and get participants' views on these questions. On *The Witcher* issue, most of the replies talked positively about Henry Cavill, with commenting that they support

his decision to leave the series. Henry Cavill is a known gamer, and most of *The Witcher* fans knew him for his dedication to the series (Henley, 2023). Participant 1 noted the characterization while replying to this: “It might sound biased, but I support Henry Cavill 100% in this issue, because by adapting a video game, as I said, you should stay loyal to the source material as much as you can. But if you start changing the characterizations, or the like the essence of the character itself, as I said before, then it starts to seem different.” Participant 12 commented on how Henry Cavill's departure killed the series: “I mean, I was a fan of Henry Cavill anyway, but if, if anything, it made me more of a fan. As I mentioned, when it comes to my priorities of series staying accurate to games, I think that's a really respectful hill to die on for Henry and I really appreciate that he did that because I think a lot of *Witcher* fans also disagreed with how Netflix was changing the writing. So, my feeling of it is, I think it's really good what Henry did even. Though, he kind of killed the series. I think Netflix killed it before he did. And that there was no replacing him at that point.”

For fans of the series, having an actor who is also a fan means a lot, as it provides a sense of assurance regarding loyalty to the source material. Participant responses revealed that *The Witcher* fans were particularly upset by the loss of this reassurance, especially considering they were already unhappy with the changes Netflix made. With this assurance now gone, fans appear to be less optimistic about the future seasons of *The Witcher*. Some of the participants commented on the changes *The Witcher* did, especially highlighting interesting points like how the series got Americanized. “Also, another point I really dislike about not being faithful is that the video game I think cares more about the Slavic source. I mean the, like the very small details, also like the tombstone engravings etcetera. You really feel the Slavic sense in video games, but it is too Americanized in the TV show, and I think that's also something that adds to the discontent” (Participant 11).

This falls down under the representation and identity category. Participant 11 was right; the game and the books had the Slavic influence, and this identity and representation was not really evident in the TV series. This is a problem regarding most of the themes in *Game Adaptation and Representation Framework*. For those who appreciate getting to know different cultures, Netflix had taken this opportunity for empathy from fans. There could also be fans that belong to this specific community and culture and expect their representation. Therefore, according to participant responses, *The Witcher* lacked fidelity. The second question was aimed at trying to figure out what sort of changes bother fans, while the first question focused on a very heated issue. *The Last of Us* is known to be more loyal to the source, so the changes from the video games are very scarce. The replies have paralleled this as well, and twelve of the participants have noted that they do not mind such changes, as long as it does not change the storyline or the characterizations.

Participant 7 replied: “Frankly, it doesn't really bother me at all. I find both airborne disease and transmittable disease through physical direct contact to be fast standing by themselves separately. I don't really believe that it changes anything with *The Last of Us* by itself as a story because it has the same concept. Both infectious anyways, it turns biotic organisms into zombified things like fungi.” However, three participants shared their dislike of this particular change. “I didn't like the fact that how contagious the sickness was spread in the series. I wanted it to be still the same. I didn't want it to be different in general. It would be better if they stayed true to it. The fans would like it more too, I believe. We would like it that way if it was not like this” (Participant 4). Looking at the replies of the participants, however, this dislike is voiced more softly compared to the replies toward *The Witcher*.

In the question regarding *Arcane*, I aimed to compare the changes between *Arcane* and *The Witcher*. Most of the replies commented positively, they also noted that

Arcane had more freedom to shape the characters and these types of changes elevated the series. The key concern here was characterization again, as participants replied that as long as the characterizations of the characters did not change, such changes were welcomed. “And *Arcane*, it's not quite a direct adaptation, I don't think. It just feels more like an extension of what was already in the lore” (Participant 5). Participant 8 also supported this change, “The changes *Arcane* adapted did not mess with the lores of the characters. They actually enriched the characters' struggles and the journey they went through. So I believe that's why. Because in the video game, it's more of like an encounter, and fight and war. But characters should be more interesting and should be more representative of the audience. So I'm satisfied with the change changes actually.” When asked about the difference between the three franchises and the receptions, many participants noted that *Arcane* had more artistic liberties while *The Witcher* was set in stone with so many books and games. Participants highlighted that when producers care about the source, it can be seen in the adaptation as well.

Burgess (2023) explained the success of TV shows that are adapted from video games by pointing out how winning over original fans and players was the key. They explained the way to win the fans and gamers was by being authentic and respectful to the source. Participant 11's reply supports this as they voice their dislike for *The Witcher's* lack of loyalty. “The producers, the showrunners, don't really seem to care about the integrity of the source material, the plot lines, and characterizations. They seem to just use the brand name and popularity to sell it...” Then, added more when asked about *Arcane*: “... Unlike *The Witcher*, it feels like people involved in *Arcane*, in the show are genuinely invested in the story itself. So it's not just done for a money grab. It's not just done for profit. So that's a huge positive and also maybe it's easier to accept or not care about the changes here because the general lore in *League of Legends* has been changing and being rewritten over and over for a decade. So also, when you

have people that do actually, know the world and have a good vision, and genuine interest, of course, the end product will reflect that and be good.”

Overall, when asked about their expectations and priorities participants have replied with an expectation for loyalty to the source. This was noted as prominently as characterization, with world-building, aesthetics, and lore following. Three questions were asked to get more opinions on fidelity, and these questions were some specific issues that participants would be able to comment on. Most commented positively on *The Last of Us* and *Arcane*, commenting that they were mostly loyal to the source. Meanwhile, *The Witcher* was the most criticized among the three. *The Witcher's* criticism mostly involved characterization, lack of loyalty to the world-building, and producers' lack of genuine interest in the series, another important point for most to criticize was the main actor, Henry Cavill's departure from the series. Analyzing the literature review, critics' and reviewers' opinions supported that fans do expect fidelity.

By conducting the interview and analyzing the replies of participants, it is also proved that fans expect loyalty to the source. The sub-categories, identity, and representation were also seen as key factors in participants' replies, as many commented that they wanted their favorite characters to be represented in a good and loyal way and that they expected characters' identities to be loyal as well. Identity and self-expression were key terms in adaptation studies, and this interview provided additional evidence to support this (Sell, 2021; Clark, 2017).

4.1.3 Queer Representation

In the next part, I moved to the questions of queer representation. The Game Adaptation and Representation Framework, has queer representation category, with queerbaiting and diversity as subcategories. The questions I have chosen aimed to correlate these categories with participants' replies and the literature review. The second

research question asks what kind of portrayal is wanted for queer representation by the fans, and what are the current problems with it? In previous chapters, some of the problems that were listed were genuine and organic representation. LGBTQIA+ members voiced that they wanted representation to be something that does not distance them (Shaw, 2010). Another problem was listed as queerbaiting. Queerbaiting is suggesting possible relationships with homoerotic subtexts but never following through, and never really giving that representation. It is done by companies to gain a queer following and make money from queer individuals. From critics' reviews, *Arcane* and *The Last of Us* were often praised for their queer representation. Some of the problems are rooted back in the games, like how Ellie's sexuality was shadowed by Joel's death. However, in TV series these were depicted in a beautiful way, as critics commented (Sepinwall, 2023; Romano, 2023; Swan, 2023).

The Witcher was often criticized for their queer representation, some reviewers commented that the series was queerbaiting (Coates, 2020; Opie, 2021). Yet, relying only on critics' opinions was not sufficient to prove these views, the fanbase's opinion was also needed for a more comprehensive understanding. I used two specific questions for this part, trying to highlight the debates on these representations. The first question was about Jaskier and Radovid's relationship in the third season of *The Witcher*. This was a highly debated topic among fans, and I wanted to include it in the study to point out what fans found wrong, and what they wanted differently. Three of the participants did not want to comment on the issue, and all of the twelve remaining participants voiced some discomfort with Jaskier and Radovid's relationship.

However, the reasoning behind these discomforts differed. Most of the participants commented a need for a genuine relationship and storytelling, instead of a forced one. Some of the participants regarded that *The Witcher* series denied them a relationship between Geralt and Jaskier, giving chemistry and undertones but never

following it. “I think that it was very poorly executed in the show, as they have denied him his true sexuality for two seasons and then announced that he was gay out of the blue” (Participant 3). Some regarded the issue here as not Jaskier's sexuality, but instead the relationship he has with Radovid. As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, the two have nothing to do with each other romantically in the games. “I can accept Jaskier with anyone at this point, but not Radovid. In the books, he is this tyrant who is killing the marginalized folk. He's a genocider, or so I'm not supposed to root for this person because he's gay. I mean, come on” (Participant 11). This again leads us to a few key points. Firstly, fans ask for natural representation with good storytelling, and they do not want to witness queerbaiting. As I mentioned earlier in the fidelity part, characterization also becomes a key point here. Most of the participants are not comfortable with this representation, claiming that this changed Jaskier's personality. “In the game, it was actually quite a large element of his character that he was a ladies' man. So to change that theme, not only unnecessary but just a bit over the top... by changing that aspect, they're actually changing quite a fundamental part of his character beyond his sexuality, because it's also his characteristics of who he is now, how he behaves” (Participant 12).

As discussed earlier, some fans are open to changes from the source, as long as the characterization stays loyal. This again becomes apparent from participants' expectations, as stated by Participant 9, who identified as an LGBTQIA+ member, “I think they were kind of forcing that on us like that... These characters are already built for years, and everyone knows about them. They have their own stories and their own personalities. We loved him because of who he was, like, not because he was gay or something, but Netflix turned this into a queer baiting.”

The second question followed the third episode of *The Last of Us*, where Frank and Bill's story is shown. Out of 15 participants, only two have voiced some dislike toward the episode. Even in their commentary, however, they noted that the episode was

good, still they preferred not to see one episode dedicated to a relationship, rather than the sexuality of the said relationship. Many of the participants have commented that their relationship gave more insight into the pandemic and the struggles that have come with it, and how it felt real. Many also commented that it was beautiful storytelling, showing that love and hope can exist in an apocalyptic world. “And I mean, I still consider it as one of the best episodes of TV for sure, because it had great writing and it had great emotion. It had catharsis without pathos. It had everything” (Participant 11). *The Last of Us*, particularly the third episode that tells the story of Frank and Bill seems to be very well received among participants, mostly because of the storytelling. As Participant 5 stated, “Killing your gays is already such a common thing that it was like, they gave them a chance to not have such a hateful ending.” most of the queer representation in TV has many stereotypes, killing your gays is one of them. The death of queer characters or tragic endings is not new, and participants seem to enjoy how *The Last of Us* changed this from the game and gave them something more meaningful.

Lastly, empathy was also noted by some participants. It is an important key theme, as just as characterization, empathy too is involved with queer representation and fidelity. Just like how adaptation creates circles among mediums, fidelity, queer representation, and empathy do as well. “Clearly, from what I've seen is incredibly impactful at the point I've been scared to watch that episode because I know it's gonna make me sad... I think showcasing something like that in a show just has such a good chance to increase people's empathy and tolerance” (Participant 6).

On the last question for the queer representation part, I wanted to ask participants their general thoughts on queer representation, if they think companies use queer baiting, just to compare their answers to the first two questions. I was also curious about what kind of improvements can be made in their opinion. According to participants' responses, all participants believe that companies use queer representation

as a marketing strategy. This is supported by previous studies, where companies are noted to be using queer following as a new market (Ahn et al., 2014; Shaw & Ruberg, 2017; Clark, 2017). While many noted that not every company does it, they think that most of the companies use queer marketing for money. The criteria here seem to be the natural representation again, since participants commented how rushed storytelling shows them that the company does not care about genuine representation. Participant 5 gives an example from Disney, “Disney Park didn't let their workers wear pride pins during pride, but then was selling a whole bunch of pride merchandise.” Participants 3 and 4 note that if a representation is marketed in such way and executed poorly, then it is clear that companies use it as a way to grab quick cash. While queerbaiting and companies' tendencies to use queer representation as a marketing strategy seems to be the leading problem, another seems to be the lacking representation for all LGBTQIA+. Participants 2 and 11 for example, noted that there is lack of asexual representation in the series and that they wish to see it more.

Participant 11 commented on how most of the series use stereotypes, rather than being interested in portraying them more diversely, “We have tragically dying gays or just, you know, very effeminately portrayed gays. We only have, for example, Butch lesbians.” This lack of diversity and focus on marketing strategies were noted in queer game studies as well (Sánchez-Soriano & García-Jiménez, 2020). Then, according to the participants, what can be done to have a natural representation they wish for? According to participants' responses, there are two ways. Firstly, fans want to see genuine representation, this was discussed in the previous two questions as well. Fans seem to like natural storytelling where they are able to see characters and their stories, and personalities. “It should be added more naturally, and it should be part of the story to an extent of it is to be part of the characters build up.” (Participant 12).

This aligns with Kaur's (2023) argument that proper queer representation combats stereotypes and allows empathy for equality. Lastly, participants voiced their want for companies to hire more queer people. Not just writers, but also animators, actors, and voice actors. When asked why they wanted queer people to be employed in these companies, Participant 3 replied, "So they can just talk actual, like actual talk from experience rather than faking it. So it has to be if a character is queer, the writer has to be someone that understands the struggles of a queer person." Similarly, Participant 1 also replied that queer people needed to be hired to get the first-hand experience and get a better understanding of how the relationships work. If we are expecting games or their adaptations to allow empathy, this idea is extremely important. If non-queer people put poorly executed representation, that is far from the reality of queer people, this does not only harm queer community but also harms the possibility of empathy with other members of the gaming community. Having that experience or opinions from queer people, companies can better create and build their characters respectively.

Considering the three questions, and the research question, problems with queer representation can be pointed. Firstly, queerbaiting and using queer representation as a marketing strategy is the leading problem in many adaptations. However, *The Last of Us* and *Arcane* was noted as not using queerbaiting according to critics' reviews and according to participants. There were many criticisms of *The Witcher* from critics, and that is why questions tried to compare *The Witcher* and the two other adaptations regularly to see the difference between the series. Participants noted that LGBTQIA+ representation in *The Witcher* seemed forced, and not well written. This leads us to another key point, genuine and natural representation.

Participants voiced that to fix this, queer people should be hired or interviewed for their experience, and instead of focusing on and distancing LGBTQIA+ members

for their sexuality only, companies should write the characterizations well. Another issue was the lack of diversity, participants voiced their dislike toward the lack of asexual representation. Companies should aim to have more inclusivity and diversity, as long as they do not execute this for the sake of it, but instead genuinely write characters. Well-written characters enhance empathy; therefore, the last part of the interviews focuses on empathy as the key theme.

4.1.4 Empathy

The third research question asks if empathy is needed for a better understanding of characters and representation of identities. Empathy is closely associated with both fidelity and queer representation. Given the overlap between game adaptation studies and queer game studies, it's not surprising to find empathy as a common theme between them. The first interview question in this section tries to gather more personal views of the characters and how participants feel connected to them. Participants replied that it is good to have a character you can relate to. Some of the participants commented on how relating to a character was important because getting familiar with a character, building that connection, and getting invested in a storyline allowed them to be more interested in seeing what would happen.

Participant 12 stated, "If you don't care about characters then you don't care about repercussions. You don't care about what could happen if you're not invested." However, there were also different perspectives about relating to characters. For example, two of the participants commented on how similarities between them and the characters made them feel better. Participant 8 noted Jinx and Vi from the *Arcane* series and connected how their sibling energy was matching her and her brother. "The character Vi from *Arcane* actually is an elder sister and we see how she does everything for her sister. So I see myself in that while being an older girl, an older sibling in a household in a Middle Eastern household, actually. How we can be overlooked, how are

doings and behaviors can be overlooked while we do everything for the best of our sibling.”

Participant 13 too, noted that representation and empathy were important, and it was not only about sexual representation. Linking Jinx's mental illnesses and how it was portrayed in the *Arcane* series, Participant 13 found a connection between themselves and Jinx and also commented how seeing positive reactions to Jinx on Twitter had helped her feel better about her own condition. “A lot of people say she may have BPD, so borderline personality disorder, and I personally also think that so that's more of a reason for me to empathize and like her because I also have BPD, so I just know how it feels to be so overwhelmed, and paranoid and think that everyone is against you... So if a character is well written, for example, Jinx. You know, there are people who understand this thought process. They understand the person and they don't inherently make them evil. For example, in the case of Jinx, again, a lot of people think that or just in general BPD, bipolar or borderline personality disorder, both of these. Yeah, disorders are very much stigmatized to this day, and having such a well-written character, which shows that she is not, Jinx isn't inherently evil. And I think all people, all the people who have watched *Arcane* know that. It just shows people like me for example. That people like me can exist and we are seen and people also have empathy with us.”

Both Participant 13 and 8's responses link back to identity and representation in the fidelity category and also the empathy category. It is seen that fans value the representation of identities, whether it is sexuality, geography, being a woman, or mental illnesses it is important to have representation for series. Lastly, some participants commented that they like to see the flaws of the characters, just as people have flaws in real life they expect to see more realistic characters.

Participant 4 comments about Abby, a character known as killing Joey, the main character of *The Last of Us* in a wish for revenge. “In some fiction, they try to make the

character more merciful, more forgiving, and it's not working that way. It doesn't work that way. You feel pain, and you want to make the person who hurt you feel pain. So, for me, it's more relatable. She's more relatable to me.” Empathy in this aspect is seen in three perspectives according to participant responses. Firstly, participants wish to be invested in the characters' stories, therefore they wish to have a connection with the characters. Secondly, participants highlight that seeing a part of themselves represented in the series makes them feel better, and they also think it allows other people to have more empathy toward them. Brady (2017) also noted that video games are great tools for people to be more accepting. Lastly, participants want to see the characters' flaws, and how they are making the wrong choices because they succumb to their feelings just like it would be in real life, they wish for realistic portrayals with well-written storylines. This leads us to another key term that was revealed in the first part, characterization. Characterization is revealed as an important theme for participants, they highly regard it in the sense of representation and empathy.

The reason why I asked about Abby, how she killed Joel, and how the game shifted to her point of view was because this was one of the most heated debates. Joel is the main character of *The Last of Us* series, and as it was repeatedly mentioned in participants' replies as well, everyone loved him. However, in *The Last of Us Part II*, Joel is killed at the beginning of the game by Abby. This created a backlash from the fans of the game, however, later in the game the story shifted to Abby's perspective. Then, we saw Abby's reasoning for killing Joel. I was interested to see if this created any empathy toward Abby, and if it changed participants' opinions of the character. I was also curious about how seeing characters from different perspectives enabled empathy toward them, or how it made participants feel.

Participants' responses were mixed, while the majority, 10 participants replied that the events shifted their perspective on Abby and that they empathized with her, one

participant had mixed feelings, while three participants voiced hatred, and one participant voiced dislike. The majority commented that they sympathized with Abby after seeing the events from her perspective because her father was killed by Joel and it was normal for her to seek revenge. “My view changed on her significantly because after realizing that Joel had like, you know, committed something so despairing and now, like, putting myself in Abby's place and truly understanding, like her agony and grief regarding the death of her own father. I began to like completely to empathize with her and even share her own feelings... And honestly, like such twists like these are really, like, delightful for me. And it only makes my, like, enjoyment of the story increases tenfold” (Participant 7). The reception of the fans showcased that they are more open to sympathize if they see the characters’ struggles from their perspectives. Alexander (2017) noted an experience a character is going through provides immersion and helps players to relate to the characters. The interesting part of the responses from participants that voiced high dislike or hatred was the reasoning behind it, according to the participants Joel's death had an immense factor on hatred toward Abby, because Joel's death did not make sense. Participants commented on how Joel's death clashed with his personality. This is interesting, considering how it was highlighted repeatedly that characterization was important to fans. It seems that the debate over such events is also rooted in characterization.

Participant 9 explained this, also noting that they wish the TV series would change Joel's death in a better way, “And like, I think the worst thing about the second game was that how Joel died and it didn't make any sense to me. If he were killed in some other way, I would be fine with that, but it didn't make any sense because Joel is not a naive person, not an innocent person who would go to somewhere like, oh, I'll help you and stop because Joel wouldn't help anyone really. Because he's selfish. I didn't like the way they killed Joel, which made me really hate Abby. Then I had to play as

Abby and I already hated her so I couldn't find any kind of relationship between me, like there was no connection between her and me.”

Participant 11 also responded in a way that supported this, commenting that they did not really hate Abby, but the way Joel was killed off did not make any sense. “My reactions were I don't know, mix of both parts. I mean, I both loved it, and I also hated it. I mean, I think I never really hated Abby, but I hated how they, like, killed Joel there because that's my problem with that part... He is such a suspicious character, and he is so cynical. So why would he just start to trust immediately? Trust this character who he knows nothing about before? Why would he follow her? Why would he go to her camp and just be killed immediately? So that was my biggest problem.” This issue was also discussed in previous chapters before, the backlash from the fans shown that the events were poorly written, at least considering that it was targeted at the already constructed fanbase of gamers. It is not clear how these are going to be adapted into the TV series, and if the events stay the same, it will be interesting to see if the TV series also receive a similar backlash.

In the last question, I wanted to emphasize how the diversity of the characters enabled fans to see more perspectives and I was also curious if *Arcane's* success on this enhanced fans' empathy. All of the participants commented that *Arcane* did a really good job of portraying the characters and showing different characters' stories throughout the story. A few participants noted that while having a lot of different perspectives could have been risky, *Arcane* was successful in gathering interest in characters with their good story writing.

Participant 6 commented that in *Arcane*, even what would be considered villains had reasonings, “Even if you take like the drug kingpin, Silco, like you look at his actions and you're like, OK, I see why he's doing this though.” One participant noted that it was overwhelming at some point, but it still gave them insight into characters'

lives. Participant 15 commented how *Arcane* highlighted diversity, “You may want to see more of your favorite character. In this respect, I think it is very important for such adaptations to appeal to all kinds of fans.”

4.1.5 Adaptation Improvements

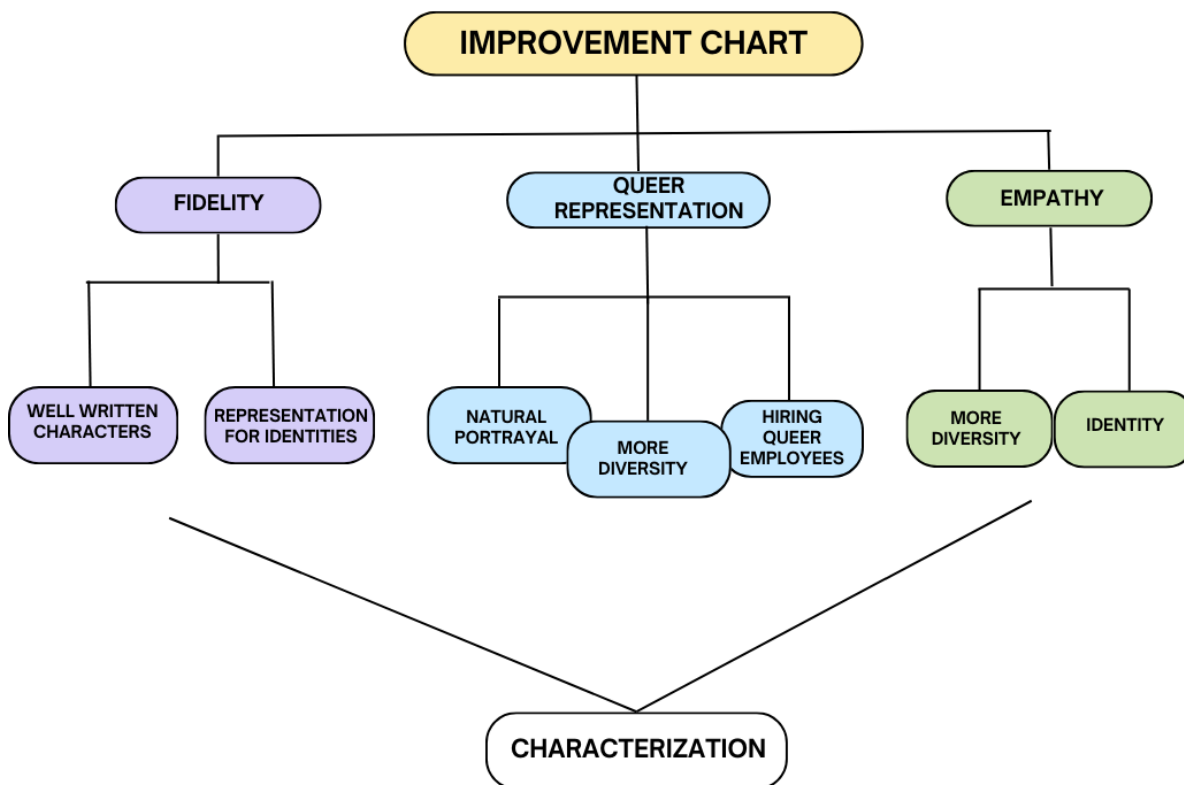


Figure 3. In relation to the Game Adaptation and Representation Framework, improvement suggestions for the TV series adaptations from video games, according to participant responses

The last research question asks what kind of improvements can be made in these adaptations according to fans. This question was answered throughout the analysis of the participants' replies. Firstly, fans who are also gamers expect loyalty to the source. According to Jellenik (2017), “we recognize an adaptation as an adaptation only

through the act of comparing it with its source (and finding it wanting)” (p. 50). Regarding participant responses and analyzing them, loyalty is mostly focused and associated with characterization. Participants voiced their wish for well-written characters that represented their favorite characters, they also voiced a wish for more representation of identities. For queer representation, they voiced a want for more natural portrayals of LGBTQIA+ members.

They also highlighted characterization, and to get better characterizations, they suggested hiring queer people. Lastly, they asked for diversity, especially for asexuality. In regard to empathy, participants voiced that seeing characters that they can relate to have made them happier and enabled other members of the community to feel empathy for them as much as it allowed them to feel empathy toward other characters. To achieve this, participants noted diversity, identity, characterization, and the importance of the writing.

Conclusion

Video game adaptations have been a part of the mediums for a long time, especially film to video games and video games to films were always a norm. However, films that are adapted from video games have not been tremendously popular or successful, the majority of these adaptations have been considered failures too. Wentworth-Weedon (2023) noted that TV series were more suitable for video game adaptations, as multiple episodes allowed characters to develop over time and films were not able to provide this as much. Whether the reason is this difference or not, multiple TV series and shows have been gaining increased popularity in the last years. The phenomena started with *The Witcher*, followed by *Arcane*, *The Last of Us*, *Castlevania*, *Halo*, *Fallout*, and much more.

This increased popularity sparked my interest and I simply wanted to know what was causing this success, and why *The Witcher*, when the first season was highly praised among gamers, was receiving so much negative feedback now. As a gamer and viewer, myself, I had my own views and I wanted to see if other gamers were thinking the same too. I chose *Arcane* and *The Last of Us* as well, because the two series were the most highly ranked series that are adapted from video games by *Tomatometer*.

Another issue sparked my interest too, while being in these fan communities myself, I realized that some of the biggest debates always involved LGBTQIA+ characters, or the representation itself. Throughout the literature review, I came to the realization that adaptation studies, particularly game adaptation studies and queer game studies often shared common key points and concerns. The two fields were overlapping on certain themes, and this has helped me come up with a framework. In the adaptation studies chapter, three key themes were highlighted. The main one was fidelity, which I would add as a main category in the Game Adaptation and Representation Framework. Fans and gamers expected loyalty to the source, as they connected to the game through

the gameplay and stories of the characters. Identity and representation were highlighted since fans expected to find parts of themselves in these representations or find parts of the characters that they grew accustomed to (Sell, 2021). Therefore, I added identity and representation as subcategories to fidelity. Moving to queer game studies, I came to the realization that previous studies had already pointed out that LGBTQIA+ members have the expectation for a natural portrayal. With this in mind, I wondered if this was true, either by LGBTQIA+ members or non-LGBTQIA+ members, and what would cause a natural portrayal in fans' opinions.

I also wondered if *The Witcher* had so much criticism because it lacked this natural representation. Therefore, queer representation was added as the second main category. In the literature review, I also found out two key points for queer representation. Firstly, many fans were bothered by queerbaiting. Queerbaiting is the notion of shows and games showing undertones for queer representation but never following through, just to gather a queer following. I was suddenly reminded of *The Witcher* again, how there was debate over Geralt and Jaskier and a possible relationship between them. Yet, while watching the first two seasons, even though I personally realized the undertones, I knew they would not follow this because I knew Jaskier was a womanizer in the games, and his sexuality as bisexual or gay was never mentioned in the books either. Season 3 surprised me when Jaskier and Radovid fell in love.

As a fan of the games and the series, I was shocked to see how these events unfolded. While reading queer game studies and coming to the realization that people wanted organic representations, I could not help but think how Jaskier and Radovid's relationship felt just the opposite of that. The last key point in queer game studies was diversity. People wanted diversity in characters, and even when I was doing the interviews asexuality was mentioned, and I was reminded how there was almost no asexual representation in TV series, let alone TV series that are adapted from video

games. The last main category was empathy, throughout the literature review, just as how I realized the two fields were overlapping, I came to the realization that empathy was one of the key themes that made these fields have so much common terms. Video games often allowed immersion, which then allowed empathy for the characters as players got involved in their stories more and more (Clark, 2017). Queer game studies often mentioned that video games allowed people to find empathy toward these representations (Brady, 2017). Therefore, empathy was mapped as the third main category. I added a subcategory to empathy, different perspectives. Different perspectives allowed more characters and more diversity, again this theme was related both to fidelity and queer representation.

I knew that *The Last of Us* and *Arcane* were loved more than *The Witcher* and that *The Witcher* was losing popularity. However, in the third chapter, I started to do broad research. I compared the viewership, critic numbers, and award numbers and took these as the success factor. The results paralleled my thoughts and observations. I also wrote more about the three video games and the TV series and mentioned the differences and queer representation in them. Using critic reviews and magazines, I listed the main concerns and criticisms toward these three series and video games.

Keeping these criticisms in mind to later use them in my interview, and how these criticisms also paralleled my framework, I was left with a more concise goal and research questions in mind. My first research question asked about fans' expectations and what they liked to see in these adaptations. All fifteen participants replied that they expected loyalty to the source. Interestingly, many pointed out *characterization* as their main concern. Some even commented that they did not mind changes to plots as long as characters stayed loyal to their originals. I later saw that characterization was also the main concern in queer representation and empathy categories. Participants also replied that they wanted their favorite characters to be represented and they also wanted

representation in mental illnesses, race, and much more, not only sexuality. Identity was, therefore, important to them as well because they wanted to see the characters they felt connected to through the video games. Following the framework, my second research question asked what sort of portrayal fans expected from queer representation and what were the current problems with it. Regardless of if they considered themselves LGBTQIA+ members or not, all participants voiced a want for more natural portrayals, instead of forced ones. They also voiced their discomfort with queerbaiting, some of them noting *The Witcher* as doing this, while most participants found *The Last of Us* and *Arcane* queer representations beautiful, saying that these two series focused more on the personalities of the characters, not their sexualities. Participants also voiced that they wanted more diversity, especially for asexual representation. They commented that they did not wish for stereotypes, in the sake of representation on paper.

The third research question asked if empathy was needed for better understanding of the characters and representation of identities. The answer was yes, this key theme was indeed related to both main categories. Participants have noted that seeing different perspectives appealed to bigger audiences and they were able to see the reasonings behind characters' actions, whether they agreed or not, and that this allowed empathy. Some commented that seeing characters that are similar to them helped with representation and that it helped other members of the community to feel empathy toward them. Lastly, participants noted that they wanted to see more realistic characters, with flaws just as they would have in real life.

The last research question asked what kind of improvements could be made according to fans, and all of these three categories in the framework answered this question. Fans expected fidelity, identity, and representation, they expected organic queer representation and diversity, and lastly, they expected characters with flaws or characters that had well-written stories.

Analyzing all the answers from participants, I realized that most of the responses were paralleled to my framework. However, there were two different key themes that were not included in my mapping, and that I noticed while analyzing the participant responses. Firstly, there was a very important theme, characterization. It fits all the categories perfectly because participants expected well-written characters and wanted adaptations to be loyal to their favorite characters and their personalities. Participant 11 gave Geralt from *The Witcher* as an example, “He is supposed to be this knight trying to restore his honor. Now he is some kind of maniac, like slaughtering people like in Taverns and such.” Three participants commented on how Joel's death did not make any sense because his personality traits would not allow him to be naive to trust others and that they hope for TV series to change this from video games. This alone has shown me that fans put characterization above anything.

Secondly, participants commented on something that I did not put much thought into in the past. They voiced their hope for more queer people to be hired in these productions. They expressed that natural, genuine, and realistic queer representation can only be reached by first-hand experience, and to have this, queer people should be hired or interviewed. This first-hand experience and ability to create more genuine characters again was related to characterization. Therefore, in future studies, these two key points can be added to the framework and TV shows and series that are adapted from video games can be analyzed through this mapping.

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APPENDIX A SOCIAL SCIENCES SUB-ETHICS COMMITTEE DECISION

EXAMPLE

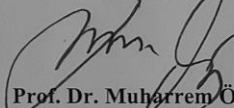
ANKARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ
ALT ETİK KURULU
KARAR ÖRNEĞİ

Karar Tarihi : 06.05.2024
Toplantı Sayısı : 14
Karar Sayısı : 154

154- Üniversitemiz İletişim Fakültesi öğretim üyelerinden **Doç. Dr. Burcu SÜMER**'in danışmanlığını yaptığı, yüksek lisans öğrencisi **Canan UYUMAZ**'ın, "Queer Representation in TV Show Adaptations of Video Games: A Study on the Reactions Across Gamer Generations" başlıklı yüksek lisans tezi ile ilgili 16/04/2024 tarihli "İnsan Üzerinde Yapılan Klinik Dışı Araştırmalar Başvuru Formu" Etik Kurulumuzca incelendi.

Üniversitemiz İletişim Fakültesi öğretim üyelerinden **Doç. Dr. Burcu SÜMER**'in danışmanlığını yaptığı, yüksek lisans öğrencisi **Canan UYUMAZ**'ın, "Queer Representation in TV Show Adaptations of Video Games: A Study on the Reactions Across Gamer Generations" başlıklı yüksek lisans tezi ile ilgili araştırma protokolüne uyulması ve etik onay tarihinden itibaren geçerli olması koşuluyla uygulanmasının etik açıdan uygun olduğuna oy birliği ile karar verilmiştir.

ASLININ AYNIDIR
06/05/2024


Prof. Dr. Muharrem ÖZEN
Ankara Üniversitesi
Etik Kurulu Başkanı

APPENDIX B INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographic Information:

Age:

Gender:

Preferred Pronouns:

Do you identify as LGBTQIA+ individual:

Familiarity with *The Witcher*/*The Last of Us*/*League of Legends*:

Familiarity with *The Witcher*/*The Last of Us*/*Arcane*:

Interview Questions:

A. General Views on Video Games and Adaptations:

A.1. What are your expectations, priorities, and preferences regarding television series adapted from video games?

A.2. What are your reasons for following these three franchises?

B. Fan Expectations of Fidelity:

B.1. There have been claims that *The Witcher* series did not stay faithful to the games, with even Henry Cavill reportedly complaining about it and leaving the series because of it. What are your thoughts on this issue?

B.2. In *The Last of Us* game, the outbreak is portrayed as being transmitted through airborne spores, whereas in the television series, it was changed to a pandemic transmitted through direct contact, meals, and bites. Do such changes bother you? Are there other changes from the game that bothered you?

B.3. *Arcane* made some changes while adapting *League of Legends* characters. For instance, in the game, Viktor and Jayce are not friends but rather two scientists who know and respect each other at the beginning. However, in the series, their stories are depicted as those of very close friends. Such changes were positively received both by fans and critics. What do you think about this? While changes in *The Witcher* received negative feedback, what might *Arcane* be doing right?

C. On Queer Representations in the Adaptations:

C.1. Do you think Jaskier's sexual orientation was well portrayed in the series? Many fans and critics argue that in the game, both Jaskier and Radovid are heterosexual, and because of it their relationship in the series feels artificially constructed. They believe that this relationship is one of the reasons why the series is losing popularity. What are your thoughts on this?

C.2. In the third episode of *The Last of Us* series, supporting characters Frank and Bill were introduced. While many fans enjoyed the episode, some felt that dedicating an entire episode to their relationship did not contribute significantly to the overall story. Additionally, there were criticisms about the portrayal of their relationship in the series compared to the game. In the game, Frank and Bill are depicted as hating each other to the point of Frank leaving their safe grounds, risking his own death, yet in the series, they are shown to love each other so much that in the end, they chose to die together. What are your thoughts on this episode?

C.3. What are your general thoughts on queer representation in the mentioned video games and their adaptations? Do you think companies use queer representation as a marketing strategy? What kind of improvements can be made in these representations?

D. The Impact of Games and Adaptations on Empathy:

D.1. Is there any character from these series that you feel close to? If so, why? Do you think it's important to have a character you can relate to?

D.2. In *The Last of Us Part II* game, there's a point where the main character shifts from Ellie to Abby. At this point, we see that in the past, Joel killed Abby's father. So, while Abby was initially the main antagonist, we suddenly start seeing the story from her perspective and witnessing the struggles she goes through. Did this event change your feelings towards Abby at any point? Would you like to see events from Abby's perspective in the new season of the series?

D.3. One of the reasons why *Arcane* was well-received was its lack of a focus on a single main character. Throughout the series, we see multiple characters dealing with their own problems and how they cope with them. Do you think this is important for these series? How does experiencing the stories of multiple characters instead of focusing on one main character provide a different experience?

APPENDIX C INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Research Title: TV Show Adaptations of Video Games: A Study on Gamers' Views on Empathy, Fidelity, and Queer Representation

Principal Investigator: Canan Uyumaz

Location of Research: Ankara University

Dear Volunteer,

You have been invited to participate in the above-mentioned research planned within the scope of a Master's Thesis. Before agreeing to participate in this research, it is important that you understand the purpose of the research and make your decision freely within the framework of this information. Please read the following information carefully, ask questions if you have any, and request clear answers.

Television series adapted from video games have become increasingly popular in recent years. These television series, with their awards and viewership numbers, surpass the success of films adapted from video games. Therefore, it is important to examine television series specifically and to highlight the factors that distinguish them from films. Another notable aspect is that all of these new adaptations feature characters representing queer individuals. This representation has generally been the focus of debates and has influenced the success and failure factors of the series. Therefore, this study will examine *The Witcher*, *The Last of Us*, and *Arcane* productions, conduct interviews with fans of these games and adaptations, and determine the factors that contribute to the success of these adaptations. Fifteen volunteers who follow the mentioned games and adapted television series, and use the *Discord* platform, will be included in this study. The interviews will be conducted via the *Discord* platform in voice format, and the interviews will be recorded. Before the interviews, you will be provided with written questions, which are expected to be answered during the interviews. The interview is expected to last approximately half an hour. Participation in this research is voluntary, no payment will be made to participants, and participants will not be charged any fees. Participants are not obligated to participate in the research if they do not wish to do so, and they will not face any negative consequences if they choose not to participate after agreeing. The results of this research will be used only for scientific purposes and will not be shared elsewhere. All information obtained from you will be kept confidential, and the confidentiality of your identity will be preserved when

the research is published. If you withdraw from the research or are withdrawn from the research by the researcher, your data will not be used. However, once the data is anonymized, it will not be possible to withdraw from the research.

I have read (or listened to) the text containing the information that should be provided to volunteers before the start of the research. I asked the researchers questions about any issues I found lacking and received satisfactory answers. I believe I understand all the explanations provided to me in detail, both in writing and orally. Sufficient time has been given to me to decide whether or not I want to participate in the study. I am aware that the interview will be conducted via the *Discord* platform and will be recorded. Under these conditions, I declare that I voluntarily accept the use, presentation, and publication of the personal information obtained as part of the research for scientific purposes, provided that confidentiality rules are followed, without any coercion or pressure.

Interviewee;

Name - Surname:

Date:

Signature:

Researcher;

Name - Surname:

Date:

Signature:

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the intersection between game adaptation studies and queer game studies through the analysis of selected three television series adapted from video games: *Arcane*, *The Last of Us*, and *The Witcher*. Through thematic coding, this study develops the Game Adaptation and Representation Framework, consisting of three main themes: fidelity, queer representation, and empathy. These themes are analyzed and observed through existing literature and interviews with the fans, who are also gamers. Fifteen participants are involved in the study, and the data is collected and analyzed with semi-structured interviews, purposive sampling, and qualitative analysis. The main aim is to understand fans' expectations, both for the series and the queer representation and to suggest improvements for future adaptations. Limitations include generalizability and the differences between the adaptations, such as *Arcane* having more freedom compared to the other two series. Overall, the study contributes to understanding TV series that are adapted from video games, why they are popular and always at the source of debates among fan communities, understanding fan expectations, and highlighting improvements for better representation.

Keywords: Queer game studies, game adaptation studies, video game adaptation, *The Witcher*, *Arcane*, *The Last of Us*, queer representation

ÖZET

Bu çalışma video oyunlarından uyarlanan televizyon serileri, yani *Arcane*, *The Last of Us* ve *The Witcher* üzerine yapılan analiz ile oyun uyarlaması çalışmaları ve kuir oyun çalışmaları arasındaki kesişimi incelemeyi hedefler. Bu çalışma tematik kodlama kullanarak uyarlamaların oyunlara bağlılığı, kuir temsili ve empati olmak üzere üç ana tema içeren Oyun Uyarlaması ve Temsil Şemasını geliştirir. Bu temalar mevcut literatür ve aynı zamanda oyuncu olan hayranlar ile yapılan röportajlar üzerinde incelenir. On beş katılımcı bu çalışmaya dahil edilmiş ve veriler yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme, amaçlı örnekleme ve nitel analiz yolları ile toplanıp analiz edilmiştir. Çalışmanın temel amacı hayranların hem serilerin geneli hem de kuir temsili üzerindeki beklentilerini anlamak ve gelecekteki uyarlamalar için geliştirilebilecek örnekler sunmaktır. Sınırlamalar genelleştirilebilirlik ve seçilen seriler arasındaki farklılıklar sayılabilir, örneğin; *Arcane* uyarlamasının diğer uyarlamalara göre daha fazla özgürlüğe sahip olması gibi. Genel olarak bu çalışma, video oyunlarından uyarlanan televizyon serilerini, popülerliklerini ve hayran toplulukları arasında dönen tartışmaları anlamak, hayran beklentilerine değinerek ve daha iyi temsil için fikirler sunarak katkı sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kuir oyun çalışmaları, oyun uyarlaması çalışmaları, video oyun uyarlaması, *The Witcher*, *Arcane*, *The Last of Us*, kuir temsili