

Blue House Monthly

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Gender & Sexuality in: The World Ends with You Series

The Life of a 19th Century
Trans Woman

Liver Disease in
Transgender Patients



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About the Cover

“One Small Step for a Trans Woman, One Giant Leap for Mankind”
by Miku (@mentally_ill_baby)

Miku has an exceptional talent for making on-the-nose photoshops, usually from famous events or significant works of art. They're always very tasteful. For the more subtle ones, you could almost miss the details of what was changed. For this one, she has edited one of the most famous photographs in history, along with a friend along for the ride.

Community News for October 2024

- We've celebrated Mia's birthday, and she hosted a large community viewing of *The People's Joker*.
- Server owner and Co-Editor of BHM, Lapis Lazuli, has adjusted very well to starting law school.
- Although Miku lost her old account, she's back and fit right back in making excellent photoshops.

About Next Issue

Now that the Blue House Monthly editorial staff have finished with their move, BHM can get back onto a somewhat regular schedule again. Since we're closing towards the end of the year, and the holiday season is fast approaching, we will have only one more issue left this calendar year. In December, we will release a special edition “back issue” with the older articles from our days hosted on SquareSpace, before we started publishing an archival pdf format. This will complete Volume 3 of BHM. Volume 4 will start on February 1st 2025. We want to give our writer-volunteers well-earned time to enjoy their holidays. This is also a chance for those who are in university to focus on the end of their semesters as well. The table below has the publication schedule until the next Volume.

Publication Date	Volume	Issue	Notes
Nov. 1st, 2024	3	8	Last issue for submissions in 2024.
Dec. 15th, 2024	3	9	Special “back issue” edition.
Feb. 1st, 2025	4	1	First issue of 2025.
Mar. 1st, 2025	4	2	Second issue of 2025.

The Life of a 19th Century Trans Woman

by Brooke (@damorian.)



Cover to German edition of *A Person Changes Their Sex: A Life Confession* (7)

A few months ago, I was reading through Susan Stryker's "Transgender History" (1) when something caught my interest. Stryker included a number of excerpts from different sources, and the one I found most interesting was a two-page summary of the life of a trans woman in the late 1800s.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

How this story gets to us is almost as fascinating as the story itself. To contextualize some of this, in the century prior to World War 1, six million Germans immigrated to the United States. This made them by far the largest immigrating ethnic group, and today, more than

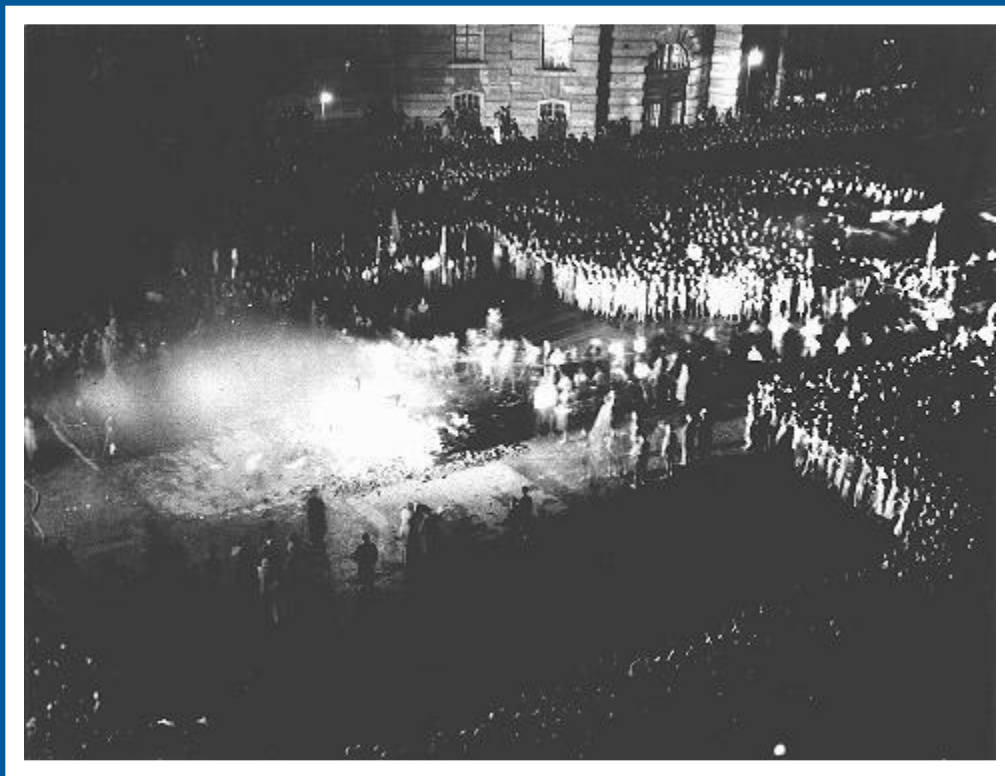
1/7 people in the US have German ancestry (2). In certain parts of the country during that time period, primary schooling was taught in German, newspapers were written in German, and much of the population maintained their ties to family, business, and politics in the greater German speaking world. (3)

Why does this matter? Because our protagonist was part of this German speaking immigrant population. For reasons that I hope become clear, I will be using feminine pronouns to address this person, but she addresses herself as John, Hansel, Johanna, and Jenny throughout her writing. She was an avid reader of a German magazine titled “Antenatal Care”, a feminist magazine for mothers. So much so, that she wrote them an appeal in 1905 for how to raise feminine sons and masculine daughters, citing her upbringing, life story, and experiences. The beginning of her letter will sound familiar in modern trans discourse:

"Your publication, Antenatal Care, interests me so much that I have to keep it: I am physically a man, mentally a woman; for that reason I have a lot of sympathy for everything that is womanly..."

MAGNUS HIRSCHFELD

Understandably, the magazine didn’t know what to do with it, so they neither published it, nor responded. After waiting “a long time” and never seeing her writing published, she sent it to Magnus Hirschfeld in Germany. Hirschfeld was a doctor and prominent sexologist in the early 1900s. He would eventually open The Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin, where they studied what we would now consider LGBT+ people. However, being gay, Jewish, and a prominent thinker and figure in the Weimar government wasn’t the best when the Nazis came to power. The famous photo of Nazi book burnings was from when they sacked his institute. A bust of Hirschfeld was reportedly carried out of the building in a procession and thrown onto the burning pile with his books and research. Thankfully, by this point he had already fled to Paris where he attempted to reopen his institute without success, before retiring in Nice and dying a few years later. I am thankful that, despite the Nazi’s attempts, much of his work escaped censorship, and is available to us to learn from today, which is where I’m sourcing this story. I only wish we had Johanna’s original letters for completeness, but I imagine those were lost to the burnings. (4)



Book burning in Berlin, Germany, May 10, 1933. (5)

Before all of this, Hirschfeld and Johanna began a long correspondence, likely over several years. Hirschfeld was a doctor, and he produced a number of informational pamphlets on sexuality in the early 1900s. Johanna was a traveling book and magazine salesman throughout the northwestern United States, specifically selling German literature, and although it isn't explicitly stated in any source, it's likely she read and distributed his works in the German speaking community and that's how she was able to get in contact with him. A condensed version of her life story is published as "Case 13" in Hirschfeld's first book, "Transvestites" (6). This book invented the term "transvestite" and at the time it was a non-judgmental medical term to explain a phenomenon that clearly has existed throughout history, but had never been seriously studied. The cases and analysis in this book are fascinating, given the time period, in how similar it is to our understanding of transgender people today, and how they should be treated by society. The quotes throughout this article are from Johanna's letters to Hirschfeld, published in his book.



Fig. 1. Als junger Zeitungsverkäufer.



Fig. 4. In seinem Frauenkostüm.

Johanna as a newspaper salesman and Johanna in women's clothes (7)

AUSTRIA

Johanna was born in 1862 in the Austrian Empire. From an early age, she refused to wear trousers, and her mother allowed her to wear her older sister's dresses. At the age of 5, her father died, and her mother died a year and a half later in 1868, leaving her an orphan. She was taken in by her aunt, who did not allow her to wear dresses. She says she always wanted to be a girl, and she recounts being bullied relentlessly for her feminine nature.

Shortly after this, she went to live in a Catholic orphanage in Austria. There, she still desired to wear dresses, but was scolded by the nuns. She was intelligent, responsible, and a favorite among her caretakers. They urged her to go to the boy's seminary, but she expressed her desire to attend the teachers' seminary (where girls would go) with the hope of becoming a governess or a children's teacher. The next part of her story is quite extreme, but inspiring. You have to admire the conviction to her belief, self-acceptance, and the bravery of her actions. In her words:

"Even at that time I had firm plans to come forward as a woman. But when I realized that my guardian would not give me my father's inheritance unless I went to Brixen [the boy's seminary], I began to think of ways I could thwart this... Well, when I saw that they were not going to allow me to study to be a teacher, I still had the thought again and again, in spite of all my religious training, of secretly procuring and setting aside some girls' clothing and running away in them. Then, when I became employed as a general hand for a rich landowner who owned a lot of property, cows, and pasture in the Alps, at the first opportunity I stole from a girl who was my size. I put on her things and took her certificate of domicile and burned my boys' things that night. Everything boyish I left behind in Voralberg and went to Switzerland so that my relatives would not know where I was. I was anxious about writing and was afraid, too, that they could force me to go as a boy."

SWITZERLAND – FRANCE

She started working as a nanny and a housemaid and learned embroidery. During this time, she would also go out at night dancing and flirting with boys. She says she was happiest when she would take the children on a Sunday walk; "that was when I felt I was in heaven." She mentions being very religious and frequently praying to God to turn her into a girl. When she was 16 ½, a man tried to rape her. While she defended herself, he found her secret, and she fled to France where she began working as an embroiderer.

She traveled to different factories because she was particularly skilled working with satin, and in these factories she would be housed with other women, though she implies they were in lesbian relationships. "I had the opportunity for the first time to come together with women who with other women lived like married people, which in France is a rather widespread custom." One particular night she shared a bed with a girl who assaulted her while she slept. Her bedmate said she was "not made right" and "I always touch the people I sleep with and found out that you are not like them." Embarrassed, Johanna begged her not to tell or she would need to leave immediately, but the girl promised not to. The girl was persistently interested in Johanna, and eventually, she allowed herself to "be examined by her". She was the first woman with which Johanna would be intimate. "I had the burning wish to become a mother by her."

The girl eventually married a man for money, but still in their relationship, asked Johanna to move in with them. She declined, but she did visit often. She knew that the girl's husband was attracted to her, and one evening she came to visit her friend. The husband invited her in and tried to rape her, and again, finding her secret, threatened to call the police immediately if she did not leave town.

After this, she went back to living and working as a man, but she didn't move far. She hated working as a man and spent her private time alone at home, dressed as a woman. She did bump into her friend again, who begged her to come back. She said she would leave her husband and that she would never be with a man again. Johanna declined:

"I did not want to, because at the time I, too, had doubts about myself. If at that time I had had the experience and knowledge I now have, I would have taken the place of a wife for her. But at that time I looked at it as wickedness, suffered terribly amid thoughts of suicide, and no longer took any joy in my life as I was leading it."

NEW YORK

In 1882 (age 20) she left France and moved to the United States to live again as a woman. She moved to New York, where she worked first as an embroiderer, and later as a maid on a farm, which she thought would allow her to live inconspicuously as a woman. The farmer's wife was gone one day, and the farmer "became fresh" with her, so she left again to work as an embroiderer in Jersey City.

At her new job she was making good money, which allowed her to buy and wear the most modern ladies' fashions. Originally, she planned to work there for a long time, but she had trouble getting along with the women she worked with, so she quit. She started working for another embroiderer and the man in charge came on to her and one night when they were both drunk, he made an unwelcome advance and discovered her secret, yet again. However, this time he threatened to call the police if she didn't sleep with him and become his mistress. He forced her into a sexual relationship, living with him, that she could not leave:

"A few months passed during which I got more miserable each day and felt more unhappy. One morning, I packed everything together and, when he was away, sold everything of worth, sent my women's clothing off, dressed myself as a man, and traveled to Milwaukee."

WISCONSIN – MONTANA – CALIFORNIA – PACIFIC NORTHWEST

In Milwaukee, she worked at a timber yard and as a cook. After that, she traveled to Montana as a woman to be a cook. She was "betrayed again" and moved to San Francisco in 1885, which is where she lived throughout her correspondence with Dr. Hirschfeld.

In San Francisco she lived with a woman and her husband as a nanny who had just had a baby girl, "Lizzie". The wording she uses here is familiar to any parent, as she "became a

mother” and “devoted all of my free time” to this child for four years. Johanna went by Jenny at this time. She says the child called for her first thing in the morning and it made the husband jealous that their child liked her more than he or his wife.

“The child grew near to my heart as if she were my own, and never again did I love another child as this one. And that was just as well. When Lizzie left with her parents, I was totally despairing because I loved her so much.”

She then lived as a man and became a traveling book seller, mostly selling “trashy literature” and “socialist writings”. She would frequent dance halls, which were similar to today’s night clubs. She became close friends with the dancers, and would often take their old clothes. She moved into a house with several of the women and became their “room mother”, cooking and cleaning for them, and only lived as a man at her day job selling books. She says she “could have become a lover to any of these women” but she had no desire for them, and threw herself into her work. She earned enough to eventually build her own house and move out, giving up her work with the dancers completely.

During this time, she briefly says she fell in love with a “woman of a manly type” but the man-woman didn’t understand her, and married another man, and allegedly, “was never happy” with that decision. Throughout the 1890s, she began traveling, selling German magazines and books throughout the Pacific Northwest and opened a bookstore in San Francisco. She hoped keeping busy would allow her to repress her desires:

“I hoped I would forget my feminine nature by traveling, but in vain. It came before everything. Actually, I felt happy only in my dreams. I dreamed I was a young woman.”

It’s clear from her writings that Johanna was a “mother at heart”. She talks about repeated dreams, over decades, of being pregnant and having a baby, or later being a grandmother, and being distraught when she awoke to find it wasn’t real. The wording she uses describing her time as a nanny is always brighter than describing other parts of her life. She says she read every book on parenting and teaching that she could get her hands on. In her later life she wrote:

“Even today I often wonder if I should give up my bookstore and rather become a nanny. Bringing up and caring for children is my greatest joy.”

In 1904, at age 42, she ran an ad in a newspaper that she was an “effeminate man, seeking a manly woman”. She got many responses, but none suited her. She tried to have a relationship with a “distant relative” but she was mean to him and “too feminine”. In 1906, she met a woman of “strong and manly character” that she fell in love with. However, she expected her to propose and she never did. “I alone want to play the female’s role, which they have to protect, as it were, as a man.”

CALL TO ACTION



Her case is finished with her writings on being an activist for equality and “total freedom everywhere”. She says that feminine men and masculine women are “natural” and “you see them every day”. She appeals that her feminine nature is “not a passing fancy,” implied in a sexual context, and claims that she has done nothing wrong and has never been arrested, and is welcome everywhere she has ever lived, proving her good nature.

The thing most shocking about this story is how closely it matches the internal experiences of transgender people today. Even though at the time, there was no common understanding of “transgender” as we know it today. She knew herself, and despite unbelievable hardship and incredible sacrifice, she became herself. Her life story is inspiring to me, and I wish all trans people had her courage and perseverance, even though, as Johanna argues, they should live in a society where they don’t need it.

Johanna’s story isn’t just interesting, I think it played a major role in moving trans rights forward today. While Hirschfeld had certainly interviewed dozens, or possibly hundreds of trans people, only a handful had a multi-year long relationship with him, and only 17 cases were documented in his original book, with Johanna’s being one of the longest and most detailed. Her life helped paint a picture of what it means to be trans. This early work informed future researchers and the general public.



Gerd Ketter (8) and his “Transvestite Pass” (9)

Hirschfeld's "Transvestites" is almost 1000 pages, most of which is analysis and recommendations. He believed, based on his research, that homosexuality and "transvestism" were innate, and recommended against attempting to change them, and even worked with the government to get people "transvestite passes" so trans people could dress in public as they liked, and even get legal name changes.

The battle for trans acceptance and medical care isn't over, and I'm thankful for those that came before us and fought to live as authentically as possible. Living good lives and telling our stories is just as important today as it was back then. Although it doesn't always seem like it, I really do believe things will get better for trans people if we keep fighting to be ourselves. I will leave this with her closing statement in her letter to "Antenatal Care":

Do give this theme, dear ladies, some attention so that the next generation will be happier than we are.

Sincerely,

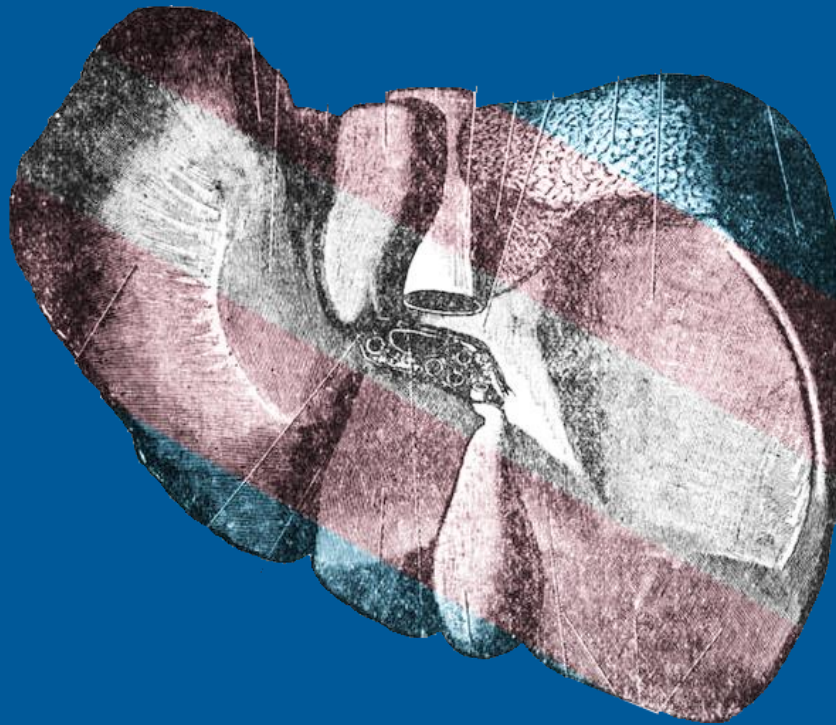
"John O."



Citations for this article can be found starting on page 37.

Liver Disease in Transgender Patients

By Poliwhirl (@poliwhirl61)



An anatomical drawing of a healthy liver, with the trans flag superimposed.(9)

A study published on June 25th this year in the American Journal of Gastroenterology, conducted by noted hepatologist Dr. Brian P Lee, showed that transgender patients had an incidence of liver cirrhosis *double* that of the general population. (1)

THE POPULATION

The study took a large de-identified healthcare database that included over 60 million patient records spanning from 2007 to 2022, and identified transgender patients using diagnosis codes. Specifically, the ICD-9 codes: 302.5 – trans-sexualism with unspecified sexual history, 302.51 – trans-sexualism with asexual history, 302.52 – trans-sexualism with homosexual history, 302.53 – trans-sexualism with heterosexual history, 302.85 – gender identity disorder in adolescents or adults.(2) And the ICD-10 codes: F64.0 – transsexualism,

F64.1 – dual role transvestism, F64.2 – gender identity disorder of childhood, F64.8 – Other gender identity disorders, F64.9 – gender identity disorder, unspecified, Z87.890 – personal history of sex reassignment. (3, 4) These codes are sort of a dictionary for healthcare services to describe clinical history and diagnoses in an easy to parse format. For instance, rather than having a verbal case history of “patient had acid thrown on them” you can describe that with the code T54.2X3A, which means “Toxic effect of corrosive acids and acid-like substances, assault, initial encounter.” Ideally, this means that no medical history gets lost – or even added – throughout a patients’ medical record history simply due to mis-transcription.

This method of identifying trans patients reportedly has a true positive rate of about 90%, and a false negative rate of less than 0.1%. Generally, this means that this will capture the vast majority of transgender patients, while including almost no non-transgender patients in the sub-population. In the overall study population, this resulted in 329,000 patients in the cis cohort and 300 patients in the trans cohort. One third of the trans cohort was identified as receiving hormone therapy.

THE DISEASE

Liver cirrhosis is a very descriptive term, but meaningless without context. Cirrhosis, or fibrosis, is a scarring of the liver resulting from chronic liver stress and damage. This scar tissue prevents the liver from performing its primary functions: removing waste products and toxins from the body, fat digestion, energy storage, tissue repair, and immune support.(6) While the liver does have well-known regenerative capabilities, after enough damage the liver will fail to function at the level needed to sustain life, at which point a life-saving liver transplant is necessary.

THE FINDINGS

The study identified that origins of liver cirrhosis were increased across the board in trans patients. Namely, trans patients had higher anxiety (70.7% vs 43.2%), depression (66.4% vs 38.4%), HIV/AIDS (8.5% vs 1.6%), and alcohol abuse (57.5% vs 51.0%), viral (30.5% vs 24.2%) origins of their liver cirrhosis compared to cis patients. This is pointed out as a clear example of the Minority Stress Theory at play.(7) The Minority Stress Theory generally states that society-wide stressors negatively affect minority populations’ health in nearly every aspect.

The largest finding from the study is that trans patients had double the incidence of liver cirrhosis compared to cis patients, even when standardized to age. The good news is that both trans and cis patients received liver transplants at identical rates (0.3), and additionally had almost identical 5-year survival rates.

LIMITATIONS

The study was not without self-identified limitations. The study identified about 0.07% of the population as transgender. However, a summary conducted by the Williams Institute at UCLA identifies various ranges depending on age group and region. These estimates can range from between 0.3% to as high as 3%.(8) The authors point towards the lack of insurance coverage for trans patients, social stigmas, and mis-classification by the ICD-9 and ICD-10 diagnosis codes.

THE AUTHOR'S Q&A

We reached out to the principal investigator of this study directly for comments and questions from our community. Dr. Lee responded quite quickly that he was happy to take questions from the community. However, as a practicing physician and researcher, he became quite occupied with his obligations, and was unable to respond directly to our questions. Regardless, when we receive responses, we will gladly update this article with his answers to our questions. And I sincerely thank Dr. Lee for being eager to talk with us.△

Citations for this article can be found starting on page 38.



"Lonely Thoughts" by Left (@leftq) and @leftQn on Twitter/X

A History of Gender & Sexuality in: The World Ends With You Series

By Daya (@dayasan)



A selection of pins(1), the game's version of weaponry, with additional LGBT pins added (86, 87, 88, 89)



From left to right: Shiki (real), Mr. Mew, and Sho.

INTRODUCTION

I frequently get asked on Blue House where my discord profile picture is from. Those of you who have known me for a whilst may remember me previously having two other profile pictures.¹ These are all from the same video game, *The World Ends With You*, a 2007 RPG by Square Enix for the Nintendo DS. Needless to say it is one of my favourite games. It saw a re-release in 2012 for Mobile Phones, the same year that the characters showed up in the 3DS game *Kingdom Hearts: Dream Drop Distance*. An enhanced port was made for the Nintendo Switch in 2018. This created sufficient attention to set up the 2021 sequel *Neo: The World Ends With You*, for Playstation 4, Nintendo Switch and PC. Additionally, just prior to the sequel's release a heavily condensed summary of the first game was released as a 12 part anime.

Whilst only a two-part series, I still want to cover how it deals with the topic of both gender and sexuality. To avoid rewriting the title repeatedly, I will use the common acronym, TWEWY (and NEO:TWEWY for the sequel). I hope to explore if the games acknowledge issues of gender and sexuality. To do this, a brief background of each game and the story will be required, as such I cannot entirely avoid some spoilers. The article will be in two main halves, one for each game, each consisting of various chapters. It will be clear and obvious when the article changes to the coverage of the sequel.

¹ The first is Shiki(2), who you partner with at the start of the game and is of importance throughout. The second is Mr. Mew(3), Shiki's hand-made stuffed cat (which she uses as her 'weapon') and the third is one of the antagonists, Sho Minamimoto(4).

THE WORLD ENDS WITH YOU



Logo of TWEWY, the outlines are of the buildings you can see from Shibuya Scramble Crossing, the already mentioned 109 shopping centre is in the centre(5)

TWEWY was originally released for the DS as a collaboration between Square Enix and Jupiter. Square Enix is a large developer that has multiple games being developed simultaneously. This game was in development at the same time as *Final Fantasy Tactics: The War of the Lions* (PSP) and *Heroes of Mana* (Nintendo DS), the year before they had released *Final Fantasy XII* for the Playstation 2. Jupiter on the other hand is a relatively small developer, focusing almost entirely on handhelds, predominantly Picross games, though they had collaborated with Square Enix once before, on the underrated *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories* for the DS.

The game takes place entirely within Shibuya, the stylish and incredibly busy suburb of Tokyo.¹¹ The player character is Neku, a somewhat unlikeable character who has been called ‘...grumpy and [an] introvert...’ (8, p.216). To summarise the story, your goal is to survive seven days in this version of Shibuya, completing riddle-like tasks given by ‘Reapers’ in what is sometimes referred to as a ‘game’. However TWEWY is set apart from the massive field of RPG’s on a few counts. For example, you fight using an unusual system, an active battle system using many different abilities given by ‘Pins’(9, p.75) which are obtained throughout gameplay and can be mix and matched based on your play style. The highly unusual method of battle is not entirely surprising, given the previous collaboration of Square Enix and Jupiter resulted in *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories*, which had its own unique battle system using cards. The battle system can come across rather complex

¹¹ Though technically Tokyo is not a city, it is a Metropolis, consisting of 23 Wards (Including Shibuya) which have city level responsibilities(6), lists of Japanese cities will often contain the wards of Tokyo listed as individual cities(7), thus Shibuya is more of a city itself than a suburb.

and I will not explain it in depth here, but for story reasons you must have a partner player within the Reapers Game, originally paired with a girl called Shiki (the more attentive Blue House members may recognise this name) but other partners appear later on(10, p.757).

A noteworthy thing about the game is the soundtrack, arranged by the amazing Takeharu Ishimoto, originally hired by Square Enix as a synthesizer programmer on Final Fantasy X, and later become composer for multiple games, including *TWEWY*, *Before Crisis: Final Fantasy VII* and later *Final Fantasy Type-0* (11, p.44). The soundtrack received critical acclaim, being called ‘...top-notch...’(12, p.10) and since being well known for having 25% of its cartridge space taken up just with the music(13, p.38). The graphics are also noteworthy, being unique almost indescribable, sometimes called comic-style but sometimes referred to as anime-style(14), the enemies in the game are heavily stylised creatures such as frogs and wolves(15) and can only be described as looking like tattoos(16).

With the narrative also getting specific praise(17), it is no surprise *TWEWY* was soon used as a benchmark title for other DS RPG’s to be measured against(18). The game was called ‘Nintendo DS Game of the Year’(19, p.69), ‘...one of the best [games] you can find for the Nintendo DS...’(20, p.64) and Square Enix most original RPG in recent history(21, p.254). Being showered with praise and receiving almost no complaints, *TWEWY* however still flew under the radar, hindered by being outside of an established Square Enix series such as *Final Fantasy*, *Kingdom Hearts*, *SaGa* or *Dragon Quest*. This is something which is a recurring issue for Square Enix, many of the stand-alone titles are widely believed to be superior to the series offerings but suffer from low sales due to having no famous series name to piggyback on. Any further discussion of how the gameplay works in *TWEWY* is mostly unnecessary – and rather confusing – though I will explain some parts further where needed to better show how the game handles gender and sexuality topics.

SHIKI



Shiki as she appears throughout almost all of TWEWY(22)

It is obvious from the above image that the Shiki seen here is not the Shiki profile picture at the top of the article. There is good reason for this. However, the true, full explanation is incredibly complicated and would require essentially a full unravelling on the games complex storyline, so I will heavily simplify the situation.

Almost through the entire game Shiki looks like the above, acting predominantly bubbly and upbeat, almost to the degree of being sickly and annoying, contrasting sharply with the doom and gloom player character Neku. However, this is not what Shiki looks like at all. She woke up in the alternate Shibuya looking like the above, but this is actually the appearance of her best friend Eri. At which point she began to copy Eri's bubbly personality as well. The real Shiki, seen below, looks a lot less glamorous. Her personality is rather withdrawn and crippled by self-hatred. Much of this is explored in Chapter 6, of which I will combine some of her lines of dialogue:

"...this is what I always dreamed of - a new me. I hated who I was. All I wanted was to like myself. To be cute, and smart, and perfect...like Eri...I was so excited to be Eri that I even acted like her - all bubbly and cute. But it was just an act...I'll never be Eri...Eri has all the things I don't. Looks, brains, design sense. Lots of friends...I envied her. And now that I'm inside her body, it just hurts even more."(23)



Shiki's real appearance, partly unveiled at the end of TWEWY and fully in NEO:TWEWY, the above image is from the latter(24).

I won't go into how her appearance became Eri's due to the complicated storyline, but Shiki is the games most complex character, despite coming across as a bit of an upbeat, sickly-sweet character at the beginning. As you may expect, the game has her slowly begin to accept herself, and stop comparing herself to Eri, and to live her own life herself, accepting her 'flaws'. Whilst of course this part of Shiki has nothing to do with LGBT issues,

it does however speak about the well-known issue of female self-image issues, causing distress and even mental problems.

The issue of toxic levels of jealousy and self-hatred are ones that many transgender people are well aware of, for of course different reasons entirely. But I feel a great many would – if given the choice – completely change their appearance and personality. Shiki does exactly this during the course of the game, and becomes a far more interesting character during her journey of self-acceptance. I feel this demonstrates how important it is for people to begin to accept the way they are, even if just a little, and resist the urge to go on an unhealthy journey to completely overhaul every aspect of their lives. Such a journey is likely to never end, as we will find more and more things to hate about ourselves and that requires change, the process never stopping, when we should instead look back at the road travelled to feel some satisfaction at our changes.

FEMALE CHARACTERS



From left to right, Rhyme(25), Uzuki(26) and Mitsuki(27)

How to utilise female characters is a question many game developers have struggled with, with arguably the most common usage being a weak and helpless individual reduced to being “...objects to be rescued...” (28, p.111). Or at best, playing a supporting role, as a healer for example. Alternatively, female characters are used for sex appeal, for example female warriors wearing a ‘...chainmail bikini...’ as ‘...women are put there by the boys and for the boys’ (29, p.93). They may also come across as a Mary Sue, inexplicably skilled in almost every way with seemingly no real downsides. A game series which has struggled notoriously with female characters is *Super Mario*, with Princess Peach being continually kidnapped and her rescue being the primary plot point of many games in the series. Other female characters in the series appear in only a few games, almost all entirely forgettable in every way. Rosalina is possibly an exception, but I doubt anybody remembers much about her storyline.

TWEWY has a broad cast of characters, as discussed already. The player character is Neku, and has three different partners through the game. Shiki is the first, being probably the

most complicated character in the game, inherently flawed and central to much of the storyline. The other characters in the game are split into two groups, other players of the 'game' in alternate Shibuya, and 'Reapers', those who either run or moderate the game. Of these a good portion are female and I would argue all are well-written characters, strong and also flawed in their own way.

The two other characters you spend the most time with are a sibling pair.^{III} The brother, Beat, is a polar opposite of Neku – loud, brash and all-action. The sister of the duo is Rhyme, quiet, kind and the more mature of the two, however she does not remember her connection to Beat and believes that he is a kind stranger. Rhyme herself is a bit of a tomboy, due to her relatively short hair, androgynous clothing and her manner of speaking in the Japanese version, where she will use the personal pronoun 'ボク' (31, 16:58) or 'boku' which is usually – but not exclusively – used by males(32), and often used by tomboys(33). Whilst not exactly shattering gender norms, it is nice to see a female character not looking stereotypically feminine, and the additional speech pattern in the Japanese version an extra bonus, one which sadly would have been impossible to easily translate to most Western languages.

The other two major female characters are both what are referred to in the game as 'Reapers', the manual describes them as a '...mysterious organization [which] runs the games and issues missions...Harriers who hunt players down to the officers who command them.'(34, p.7) The first of the two is a Harrier, Uzuki, who the character will become very familiar with due to her repeated attempts to kill you, usually using other enemies to do so. Described as being '...relentlessly devoted to her career...' (35, p.17) she seems to enjoy her work but more than anything wants to become an officer. Which is difficult when her Harrier partner is laid-back and unambitious, a frustration she will often take out on the player. Despite being a frequently encountered antagonist, it is difficult to not like Uzuki. Whilst her emotions get the better of her, and her dialogue with Kariya intended to bring about some needed comic relief during the game. She is also ruthlessly ambitious, she and Kariya ruthlessly murder one of the main cast. She is one of the more complex and well-written characters in *TWEWY*, and one of the more likeable, despite her behaviour above.

The last major female character is Mitsuki, she is an officer Reaper, and a high ranking one, who later in the game becomes the 'game-master' – the officer in charge of running the game's day to day operation. Mitsuki is in some ways the opposite of Uzuki, instead of being quick to anger, she is '...cold and calculating, with a cruel streak...' (35, p.17) However similar to Uzuki, she is highly ambitious. Instead of doing this by simply succeeding, she is willing to manipulate others and even actively proposing a coup in order to guarantee her promotion.

TWEWY has a well balanced range of female characters, from Shiki, the complex and well written character already covered in the previous chapter, to Rhyme, the quiet and

^{III} *Neku, Shiki, Beat, Rhyme and Joshua (see next chapter) are generally considered to be 'the main cast', even though other characters may appear just as often or even more so. For example in Kingdom Hearts Dream Drop Distance, TWEWY makes an appearance and it is these five characters that are in the crossover(30, 80-81).*

balanced tomboy who is impossible to dislike. Rhyme's androgynous appearance fooled many who didn't pay attention to pronoun usage and believed them to be male. Uzuki, the quick to anger antagonist who you will bump into repeatedly is one of the more likeable characters when she isn't trying to kill you. And Mitsuki, whose attractive appearance and cold demeanour hides a ruthless ambition, willing to do anything and everything, even secretly enjoying the suffering she causes. *TWEWY* has nothing in the way of the helpless damsel in distress, nor a Mary Sue, the female characters showing depth, strengths and weaknesses. I would argue they are on the whole are better written than the male characters, doing a fine job of female representation, which is something the video game industry has often struggled with.

TRANSGENDER



Overworld Sprites of the below NPC.^{IV}

I have analysed how *TWEWY* deals with the female gender, however there are no transgender main characters. Given, for example, between 0.5(38) and 1%(39) of the US identifies as transgender, this is not entirely surprising. The game does, only once, approach transgender topics. To briefly explain a game mechanism first, the player will occasionally utilise a power akin to mind-reading, with the ability to implant thoughts in certain game scenarios(40). When doing this, certain people in the surrounding crowd will have thought bubbles with a very short descriptor. Pressing this thought bubble will expand the thought so it can be read. These are referred to in game as 'thought fragments'.

Starting with the original DS *TWEWY*, during gameplay you can come across a woman with a thought bubble, entitled 'Passing', whose thought is:

^{IV} The overworld sprites you see during the mind-reading are actually picked at random from a large pool, however for this image I used the sprites that I saw when I played the game. Image created from these 2 different sprites(36,37)

"I knew dressing as a girl would be fun! And not one person has caught on- proof that my beauty passes the test! Ooh, I could get used to this..."^v

This can be read as either a male-to-female transgender or, arguably, a cisgender crossdresser. However, the passing aspect is more heavily associated with transgenders than crossdressers. As such, this NPC is widely considered online to be a male-to-female transgender by fans.

In the Switch remake (called *Final Remix*) this NPC reappeared. For reasons unknown, they moved out of the main game chapters and into 'A New Day', the brand new post-game chapter(42). This is not unheard of, a quick comparison of the text dumps shows at least one other thought fragment was moved from main game to the new post game chapter. An NPC with the thought fragment titled 'Cheap!', so it does not seem there is any nefarious reason for the above change.

The remake also introduces new thought fragments, which includes one for a male NPC this time, it being entitled 'Dare to Wear', his thought is:

"I really want to try wearing a skirt just once, but I'm scared... That said, Shibuya's full of all kinds of people. Maybe I'll just go for it!"(42)

This reads him as either a crossdresser or male-to-female transgender, however it does add some context to the other thought fragment and their sprite changes entirely to a female NPC. Though these two NPCs are not confirmed to be the same person, it would seem a very logical conclusion. The additional inclusion was a nice but solitary moment, *Final Remix* kept it but also expanded on it with what is essentially a prologue thought fragment. I was a bit surprised when I came across them, but appreciated that the topic was not being forced into the game to be debated but instead just acknowledging the existence of transgendered people, which is always welcome.

CROSSDRESSING



Logos of the clothing brands in TWEWY Final Remix(43)

^v This is from a text dump of all of TWEWY dialogue(41), it is the original DS version as you can see repeated mentioned of 'stylus' and 'bottom screen', both of which are of course therefore intended for the DS and not the Switch version.

Yet another unusual aspect of *TWEWY* is clothing. Like many RPGs, you can buy new clothing/armour, however they have different branding. This branding is of some importance, as every area in the game has both trendy and unpopular branding, giving associated boosts or drops to your stats(44), meaning dressing for the area is of importance, easily making the difference in some of the trickier fights. You can even change the trends, if you win multiple fights wearing a certain brand in a single area you can boost the worn brands popularity(45). I will quickly note that these clothing are just icons, it does not amend the characters overworld or battle sprite.

Clothing is not locked by gender, it is however locked behind a bravery stat, with the more female clothing generally having a higher bravery requirement, and with male characters generally having a lower stat. This does however mean that if you put the effort in, you can ‘...put Neku in a fluffy pink dress...’(46, p.34). This ability to put any character in any gender clothing is unusual – albeit women can wear stereotypically male clothing without an issue, it is vice versa that needs the bravery stat. Many RPGs have either gender-neutral clothing only, or gender locked, avoiding any potential crossdressing.

It is also a fact that *TWEWY* does not just allow crossdressing, it promotes it. Some of the dresses have got very high stat boosts and abilities, making them amongst the best items of clothing. A portion of the clothing has an ability locked to a particular character, some of the stereotypically feminine items have got abilities specific to a male character, clearly showing the game’s promotion of crossdressing.^{vi} Additionally, the usage of the term ‘brave’ is itself noteworthy. After all, brave usually has a positive connotation(48), so not only does the game allow crossdressing, by using the term ‘brave’ and locking certain female clothing abilities to a specific male character, *TWEWY* pays little attention to gender norms.

HOMOSEXUALITY



Joshua(49), the player partner with a snotty attitude(34, p.7)

^{vi} For example the Frilly Parasol has a boosting ability locked to just Joshua, likewise Platform Shoes has an ability exclusive to Neku, both of which have an item description stating they are for a ‘princess’(47)

There are no major characters who are confirmed as anything but heterosexual, however the game does not ignore the existence of homosexuality. Joshua is widely considered to be homosexual by fans, despite a few hints, nothing is confirmed. For example, Joshua jokingly tells Neku 'Keep staring and you'll make me blush.' And in response to Neku's anger in another scene 'Hee hee... Shut up and walk, dear'(23), though with Joshua's character being pompous and demeaning, it could be that he was merely toying with Neku hoping that it would make him uncomfortable.

In the post-game chapter 'Another Day' during a discussion with other players of an in-game tournament, he requests that his player colour 'I should be Pink, because Pink is love...'. Moments later when discussing the equipment given that he has 'Dibs on the rainbow', to which he is told 'Of course. It was meant for you'(23). The above are all merely hints that alone mean little, but together do begin to show a pattern where I can see why people do read Joshua as homosexual. Though to me I read his character as simply being mischievous, doing/saying things to provoke people that he feels are a little bit inhibited.

However, there are two confirmed homosexual characters in the game itself. Both of which show same-sex attraction to the player character Neku, though they display it in different ways. They both run shops where you can buy clothing, and food – which gives temporary and permanent stat boosts. Over time buying from the same store unlocks new items and also changes the dialogue with the shopkeeper to become more friendly. The first is a character called Makoto Miki, an NPC you will see repeatedly during the story, who eventually owns a ramen store.

Different lines of dialogue appear dependent on your action, such as entering, leaving, buying an item, etc. At high friendship, one of his dialogue will contain "Y-you sure look nice today...again. (Is he really dressing up just for me!?)" and "Th-th-thank you! (Aaack! He IS just coming in to see me! Wh-what do I DO?)"(50). His flustered appearance making it even more obvious that he has a crush on Neku and is misinterpreting our repeated visits to the shop.

At the other end of the shopkeeper scale is HT Masuoka who runs a clothing store. Instead of being flustered and embarrassed, Masuoka outwardly and continuously flirts with Neku, even at lower friendship levels commenting on Neku's '...Nice, firm body.', at higher levels going all the way to 'Feel free to try on anything you like! Heck, I'd be happy to help you slip into it.'(51). This overt flirty homosexuality doesn't feel out of place in *TWEWY*, Shibuya itself is known as not just the stylish area of Tokyo, but also a youthful and progressive area. In 2015 it became the first part of Japan 'recognising same-sex unions as equivalent to marriage.'(52). *TWEWY* deals with homosexuality in only these small ways, but I feel this is inobtrusive and proportionate, acknowledging they exist and not dealing with them as a joke, as some RPGs have a habit of – the Persona series being particularly guilty of this. I do not believe every game should have a checklist of gender and sexuality to ensure its main character cast ticks all the boxes. A simple acknowledgement of existence in a pool of characters is enough in my opinion, and in this manner *TWEWY* succeeds in showing a fully fleshed out character pool of varying genders and sexuality.

CONCLUSION - TWEWY



Neku(53), the player character.

So how does *TWEWY* deal with gender and sexuality overall? It deals with gender very fairly. It lacks the damsel-in-distress stereotype, as the female characters present are a mixture of personalities. *TWEWY* has (in my opinion) two of the three most interesting antagonists being female, and my favourite character in the game, of course, is Shiki. Transgender representation is lacking, but acknowledged as existing. I do not consider this problematic in any way, and I'm happy with that level of inclusion personally. I do not believe every game should have at least one transgender main character. That is illogical and unrealistic. Gender norms are happily ignored, Rhyme's tomboy style – and Japanese speaking manner – fooled many who believed the 'she' pronouns were a mistake. Meanwhile, the game does not just give you the option of using female on male characters, it seemingly encourages you to do so.

Whilst a bit more open and playful with sexuality, no main characters are confirmed homosexual. The enigma Joshua may or may not be, but there are minor characters in the game who are openly homosexual. Despite the somewhat sparse overt representation, *TWEWY* became a favourite amongst the LGBT community. A lot of fans adamant that Joshua is canonically homosexual, and Shiki's self-acceptance issues are shared and understood within many circles, transgender fans especially. I generally appreciate and prefer this light touch to these topics than something a bit bolder, though I do feel that Joshua could have been made canonically homosexual without it being a problem. *TWEWY* certainly waves enough hints about it, but seems to not want to make the leap to full on inclusion. I do not hold this against the game, it is just more of a missed opportunity than anything.

NEO: THE WORLD ENDS WITH YOU



NEO : The World Ends with You[®]
Logo of NEO:TWEWY(54), almost identical to the original game

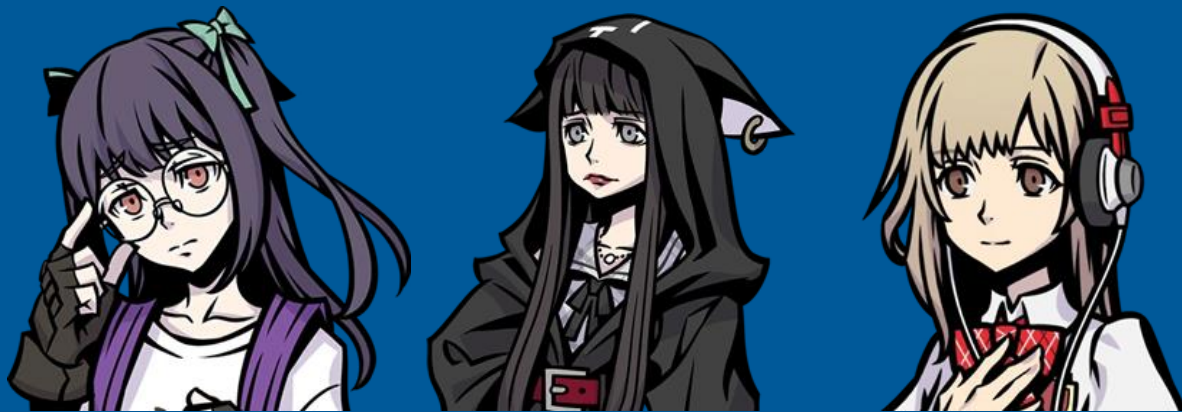
Following the 2007 release of *TWEWY*, a slightly retouched version was released for mobile phones in 2012, mostly due to now using only one screen. Despite being four years old and with no sequel, *TWEWY* was still popular enough to get included in *Kingdom Hearts Dream Drop Distance*. Square Enix usually only included Disney crossovers and its own *Final Fantasy* crossovers, so the inclusion of characters from a standalone four year old game is testament to *TWEWY*'s longevity. 2018 saw the (excellent) Final Remix version released for the Switch. Then in 2020, a sequel was finally announced(55), being released the following year for the Playstation 4, Nintendo Switch and PC.

Like the original, it is set in Shibuya. This time it included an additional area, the Harajuku district just to the north which is famous for '...teenage fashion and cosplay culture'(56). Shibuya's map was also updated with the real-life changes in Shibuya since the original was released. Primarily the overhaul of Miyashita Park(57). Unlike the original game, where you mostly controlled Neku, and your partner attacked on the lower screen in a complicated system, *NEO:TWEWY* plays much like a regular action-RPG(58, p.56), with four characters fighting on screen at the same time(59) as you skip between them during frantic battles. *NEO:TWEWY* is a direct sequel, and whilst somewhat standalone with a new main character, one of the team members is a returning character from *TWEWY*, the incredible Sho Minamimoto who was the former major antagonist. Some storylines were threaded along both games(59), including Shiki's storyline finally getting the ending it deserves, and multiple cameo appearances from much of the previous cast.

The fourteen year gap between the two games has had an increasing acceptance in Japanese society toward LGBT issues. As already mentioned, Shibuya in 2015 was the first part of Japan 'recognising same-sex unions as equivalent to marriage.'(52). This was

followed the same year by the most populous city in Tokyo, Setagaya(60), with Oizumi in Gunma becoming the first town in Japan to follow suit in 2019(61). Soon, Ibaraki become the first prefecture to do the same(62). 2017 saw a same-sex couple recognised as foster parents for the first time in Japan(63), in Osaka. As a final example, the year before the game was released, a third womens-only university in Japan announced it will begin accepting male-to-female transgender students that had not legally changed their gender marker, stating ‘...it has redefined the term ‘woman’ in line with public acceptance that the issue of gender is more diverse than the binary choice of male or female.’(64). In light of these societal and legal changes surrounding LGBT acceptance in Japan, it would be logical – or even expected – for *NEO:TWEWY* to have a higher level of inclusion than the original game.

FEMALE CHARACTERS



From left to right, Nagi(65), Shoka(66) and Tsugumi(67)

NEO:TWEWY has a larger cast than the original game, due to a larger group of reapers, returning characters who stay for longer than just a cameo, and also that now you do not simply pair up in the game, but large teams are encouraged to form, with the last placed team being eliminated, permanently. As such, there is naturally going to be more female representation due to volume alone. The one you will encounter the most is Nagi, who is on your team. Anyone who has played *Persona 5* can definitely see some of Futaba in Nagi, being highly intelligent, with nerdy mannerisms, a lack of traditional fashion and a keen video-game otaku, plus having similar large circular glasses. Nagi is the brains of your team, often quiet and unemotional, unless to show ‘...disdain toward those she deems superficial and disingenuous.’(68). However she will drop into obsessive fangirl behaviour when her favourite game character is mentioned. The nerdy otaku fangirl has become a known character type in JRPGs.

Though Nagi does not feel too stereotypical, she is far more outgoing and friendly than the usual portrayals of this character type. Additionally, her unique clothing falls outside of a usual feminine styling whilst also not being a tomboy. It is refreshing to have the primary female character shown this way.

Other than Nagi, Shoka is the female character you will see the most, who is the only other female on the game's cover(69). She is a Reaper, whose job seems to be to monitor the players of the game early on. It is not a job she enjoys and often takes it out on anyone who asks too many questions. *NEO:TWEWY* has a rather complicated storyline, a good portion of this includes Shoka, who is shown throughout the game to overall be a good person with a very strong sense of loyalty. Her unique style, with a hoodie and phone case seemingly styled after Shiki's stuffed cat plush, Mr Mew, caused many rumours prior to the game's launch. Primarily that Shoka and Shiki are the same person. Whilst this is not the case, there actually is a reason for her clothing to resemble Mr Mew. Shoka is another well written female character. At the start of the game, her personality somewhat resembles Usuki's – the primary female Reaper from the first game – but it quickly becomes apparent that they are nothing alike except in their very strong popularity amongst fans.

The last major female character is Tsugumi. However she is infact not new to this game at all, showing up in a single screenshot at the end of the mobile phone release of *TWEWY*, and showing up in one of Neku's visions in the new post-game chapter 'A New Day', exclusive to the Switch remake *TWEWY Final Remix*. Her role in this is much expanded. At the start, she appears as a member of a rival team, but she is far more involved in the story than that. She appears partway through the game, and she is similarly well written character like Shiki, with arguably the most complex and sympathetic storyline. Strangely, Tsugumi carries around a Mr Mew plush, just like Shiki's handmade one – again for good reason. Her personality changes drastically throughout the game, from being incredibly aloof – almost robotic – to a character more similar to Rhyme from the original game, being softly spoken and eager to help.

There are many other female characters of note, such as another Reaper, Ayano, who shares some similarities with Mitsuki from the original game; she is cruel, ruthless and willing to hide her intentions with her good looks. Unlike Mitsuki, she does show incredible loyalty to her superiors, and she does have a positive relationship with someone, which is sadly something used against her later in the game. On the topic of Reapers, Uzuki returns in this game, still looking for a promotion, however her character has a bit more depth now and is even willing to help you – of course only if it helps her as well. Another Reaper is Coco Atarashi, who similar to Tsugumi is not a brand new character, and was introduced in the same post-game chapter in the Switch remake. Her cutesy youthful appearance hid a deeply manipulative and devious personality, her only real loyalty actually being to Tsugumi.

The last female character of note is Kanon Tachibana, arguably the most normal of the female characters. She is in charge of one of the teams playing the Reapers game, the Variabeauties, which will be discussed later. Despite showing up relatively frequently, you learn little of her personality, though she does seem to care for her team and others. She also does not seem too concerned when members of her own team are erased, putting it down to simply being a part of the game.

NEO:TWEWY manages to better *TWEWY* when it comes to female characters, not just in quantity – a given considered the larger cast – but in quality as well. In fact, I'd argue that

almost all of the best-written characters in this game are female, with the exception of Sho Minamimoto. Of the three permanent team members, Nagi is the one with the stronger backstory and deeper personality. Shoko and Ayano are the most interesting and well-written antagonists. Shoko has an especially deep backstory and became a fan favourite from the beginning. Tsugumi has the most complicated backstory in the game, and is involved in much of the games events. Her pre-existing friendship with Coco is important, Coco is another well written character, who despite her frighteningly deceptive personality is hard not to like. Uzuki's return is appreciated and her character is expanded on further. Lastly even the cameo appearance of Shiki is incredibly welcome, giving her story arc a heartwarming and well-written ending she sorely deserved(70).

It has been argued that video games reserve their best writing for male characters, Square Enix on the other hand have used all of their best backstory and writing on the female characters, arguably at the extent of most of their male counterparts who are in comparison, somewhat dull and uninteresting.

TRANSGENDER

There would be a transgender chapter here, if *NEO:TWEWY* had any representation. However it does not have any at all, though given that *TWEWY* had that single NPC thought fragment (*Final Remix* increasing it to two for the same NPC) I guess it is not entirely unsurprising. It is however a little disappointing, especially considering almost 15 years have passed between the games. With more visibility and acceptance of transgender people within Japan, I was expecting at least a little more inclusion rather than none at all. I believe that including one or two explicitly transgender NPCs, or even a minor character, in a game with a giant casting of minor characters and seemingly endless NPCs, would not be disproportionate and I do not think this would have caused any pushback from fans.

CROSSDRESSING & MAKE-UP



Naoto Kuwata(71), a shopkeeper of a record store in the game)

As discussed in a previous chapter, *TWEWY* allowed you to use female clothing items on male character, though the high bravery requirement of the more feminine clothing and the low bravery stat of male characters soft-locked them unless you put the effort in to increase it – something rather simple to do. The ability to choose female clothing for male

characters returns in *NEO:TWEWY*, however the bravery stat has now been removed, giving more freedom for you to ‘...mix and match...’ such as having the main character Rindo ‘...rock a maid outfit and knee high boots.’ Again, this does not amend the overworld or battle sprites (71, p.100), most probably because of the complexity of achieving this level of customisation.

Similarly to *TWEWY*, the choice of using female clothing on male characters was not unnoticed by gaming media, *NEO:TWEWY* received praise for making it even easier, and Square Enix seemed eager to show that this choice remained in the new game. For example, Square Enix’s website has a single screenshot of the clothing equipment page, clearly showing that it is amending the clothing of the main character Rindo, with the recommended item underneath being the female clothing item Cute Camisole(72).

Like the original game, *NEO:TWEWY* has an ability to see the thoughts of many NPCs. It does not have a specified name, so I will continue to call them ‘thought fragments’ as it was originally. There is an NPC who pops up in others’ thoughts as well as appearing himself, a celebrity who is often mobbed by crowds and causes shops to get rushed by his fans when he has been there. One of his own thought fragments says:

‘Stay calm, Kashiki: no one knows it’s you. That guy just now totally thought you were a girl. Man, I oughta thank my makeup artist for teaching me how to beat my mug so well!’(73)

Kashiki has dressed in drag, extremely convincingly, to avoid being mobbed by fans. It is also notable for the phrase ‘beat my mug’, beat in this context being a term often used by drag queens meaning to apply make-up(74).

In fact this is one of many references to drag queens. One of the thought fragments is entitled ‘Inner Saboteur’(73), a term popularised by Ru Paul(75), a member of the team called Variabeauties used the word ‘Hunty’(76), a term of endearment predominantly used within the drag community(74). As a last example, one of the main characters Fret uses the term ‘and I oop’(77), a line made famous by the drag queen Jasmine Masters(78). It could be argued that this is merely *NEO:TWEWY* adjusting to the times, but there is more drag terminology here in one game than I can safely say I have come across before in any other medium.

NEO:TWEWY is also not averse to ignoring gender norms. For example Naoto Kuwata, who runs a record store where you can purchase music tracks with in-game currency, has his hair dyed pink and purple. He wears purple lipstick and has purple nail polish. Masaya, a male shopkeeper of a clothing store, is notable for being visibly androgynous, and an NPC called Eiru is repeatedly assumed to be a female due to his feminine looks and voice(80). These are hardly ground-breaking additions, however they make the in-game world less stale, less heteronormative and more queer friendly.

HOMOSEXUALITY



The in-game logo of the Variabeauties team(81), led by Kanon, briefly mentioned in an above chapter.

TWEWY had the two homosexual shopkeepers who either flirted with or became very flustered around the player character Neku, as well as the enigma that is Joshua.

NEO:TWEWY decided to one-up the original and bought in the Variabeauties, one of your rival teams participating in the Reapers game. Though having a female leader, Kanon Tachibana, the team is notable for having its 'basic' members consisting of flamboyant male homosexuals who have a penchant for using terminology such as calling Kanon their 'Kween'(78, 81). Before a battle sometimes they use the battle cry of 'Let's go girls!'(82). This has had a mixture of praise and criticism from the media, being accused of including '...tired gay stereotypes.'(82), whilst others said that queer players felt that this inclusion was '...not only relatable to them, but life-affirming.'(83)

As mentioned already, *NEO:TWEWY* has a different form of thought fragments than the first game, but in essence it is the same thing. Here the game adds a little LGBT depth, with one male NPC's thought fragment being:

'So he's into guys with a clean look, eh? All right—I'm off to NATURAL PUPPY [one of the in-game clothing brands] to pick out a new outfit. Hell, I'll buy the whole mannequin if it'll help!'(84)

Another, this time a female NPC:

'My girlfriend told me to pick her up some Air in a Can from Shibuya, but like...seriously? That's what you want as a souvenir? You've got plenty around you at home!'(84)

The latter especially is welcome, their sexuality being not the focal point of the thought fragment, she just happens to be a lesbian. Having LGBT representation in video games is often welcome in the form of major characters, but is equally important having them present as minor or even fleeting characters who happen to be LGBT, rather than their sexuality or gender being their primary defining characteristic.

CONCLUSION – NEO:TWEWY



Rindo(85), the player character.

NEO:TWEWY, with its larger cast list of both major and minor characters, would logically be expected to have a wider group of female characters, and it did not disappoint here. Almost all female characters of note are well-written, refusing the usual female stereotypes, and almost all of the most interesting and complex storylines revolve around a female character, especially Tsugumi and Shoka. In fact, it could be argued this was at the expense of the male characters, who in comparison are rather bland and uninteresting – with the exception of Sho Minamimoto and possibly the player character Rindo.

Likewise, it also is not afraid to have characters who fall visually outside gender norms, with the make-up wearing male shopkeeper epitomising this. One of the male Reapers, Kaie Ono, has an unusual styling with much pastel coloured jewellery and a pink phone with bunny ears. The common references to drag culture to me indicate that there was an original intention to explore cross-dressing a bit more than the game ended up doing, instead there is just a single cross-dressing NPC thought fragment: the celebrity who was doing it to avoid being mobbed by fans.

Despite the increased character roster, it has less LGBT representation than the original, with no transgender representation or mentions at all. Inclusion primarily is a pair of one-off thought fragment homosexual NPCs. Though this does not include the Variabeauties, whose rank-and-file members are all flamboyant, catty, gay men stereotypes – albeit their sexuality being unconfirmed within the game itself. The Variabeauties portrayal lead to some criticism within video game media. *NEO:TWEWY* had an opportunity to be more inclusive, and whilst it did so with female representation, LGBT inclusion is almost entirely absent. Where it is arguably present, it is done so in a way in which many in the LGBT community disliked. This was a missed opportunity overall and, in my opinion, a step back from what the original game achieved. Whilst limited, it did so in a more balanced way. It would have been positive, or even potentially expected at this point, to have an overtly LGBT major character, due to both the wide cast list and given how Japan had been slowly edging forward in LGBT matters politically.

CONCLUSION – OVERALL

It is a shame that LGBT matters had been given little representation within both games. *TWEWY* did have some homosexual shopkeepers and a transgender thought fragment. *NEO:TWEWY* took a step back with the homosexual representation either being brief or getting criticism for its portrayal. Both games had the ability to use female clothing on its male characters, something which did not go unnoticed within gaming media – though not receiving any criticism. *TWEWY* could have easily made Joshua canonically bisexual or homosexual, both of which he is widely believed to be anyway. In my opinion this would have been well received. *NEO:TWEWY* should have included some firm LGBT representation, either a homosexual or transgender major character. It is definitely a missed opportunity for not doing so, after all it was released in 2021, set in a part of Tokyo renowned for LGBT acceptance.

At the very least, both games did an amazing job with their female characters. *TWEWY* had the incredible Shiki (I may be biased here...) and also the Reapers Uzuki and Mitsuki fulfilling different roles and being well written antagonists. *NEO:TWEWY* had the wide range of female characters just discussed above. Both games seemingly reserved their best storylines for the female characters: there are no damsel in distress stereotypes here. The female characters in both had a superb mix of personalities and were well-written, thought-out characters with individuality and meaning. It is with female representation that both games set themselves apart from most other series, given how many video game series struggle with this. Even some of the longest standing ones, such as Mario and Zelda, have had issues with this. Many games in both of these series involved the male player character rescuing a female helpless princess.

Lastly, I heavily recommend these games to anyone who likes RPGs, the former having its best version on the Switch and must be played prior to the sequel. The anime adaptation is so heavily condensed it leaves much of the story out. The sequel is on Switch, PS4 and PC. They are criminally under-appreciated in comparison to Square Enix's larger gamer series, despite arguably being superior to most of their other games. ♡

Citations for this article can be found starting on page 39.

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