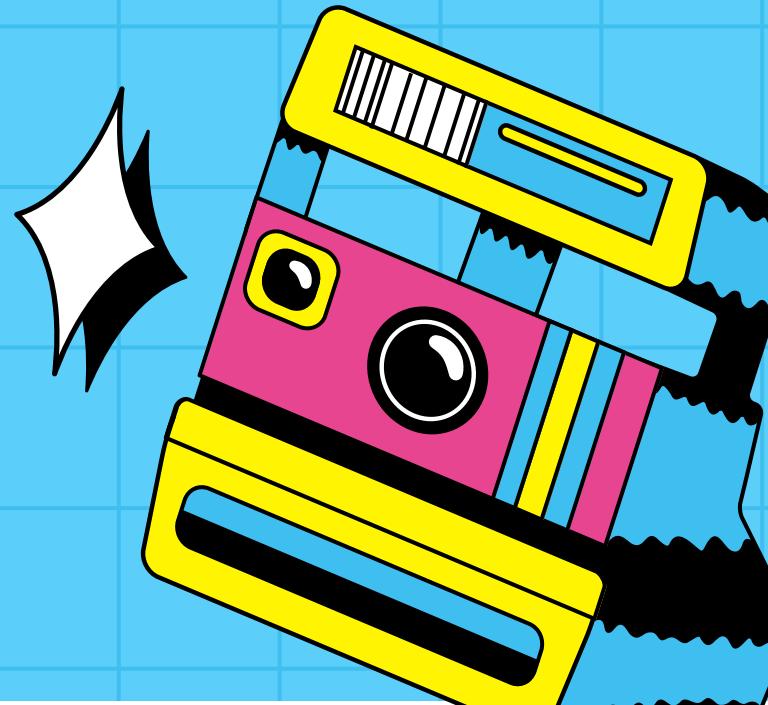
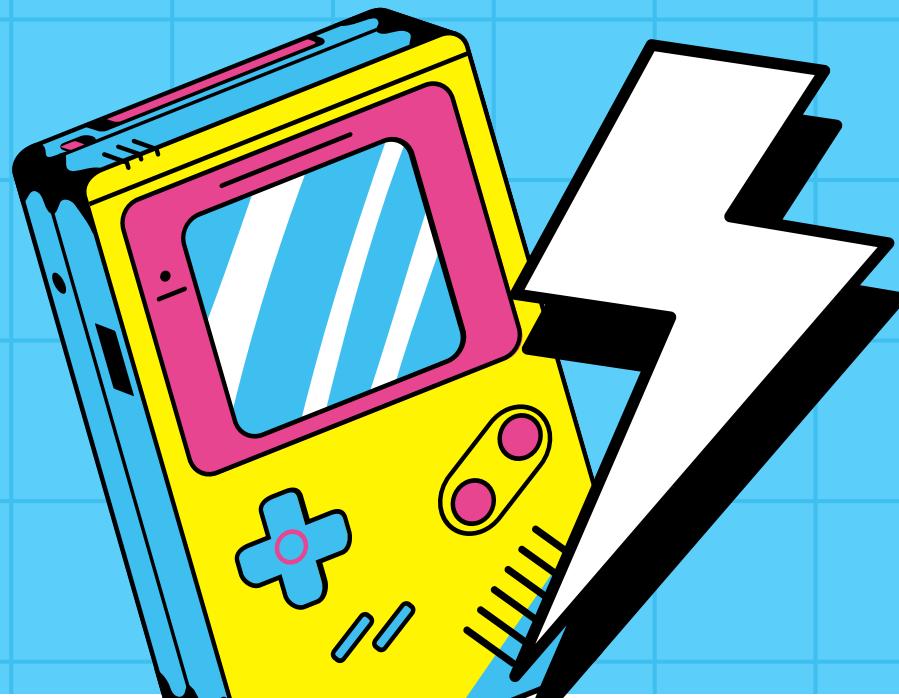


A Hermeneutic Photography Study of Trans Women and Trans Femme Geeks' Queer Joy

THEN 2026



Presenter

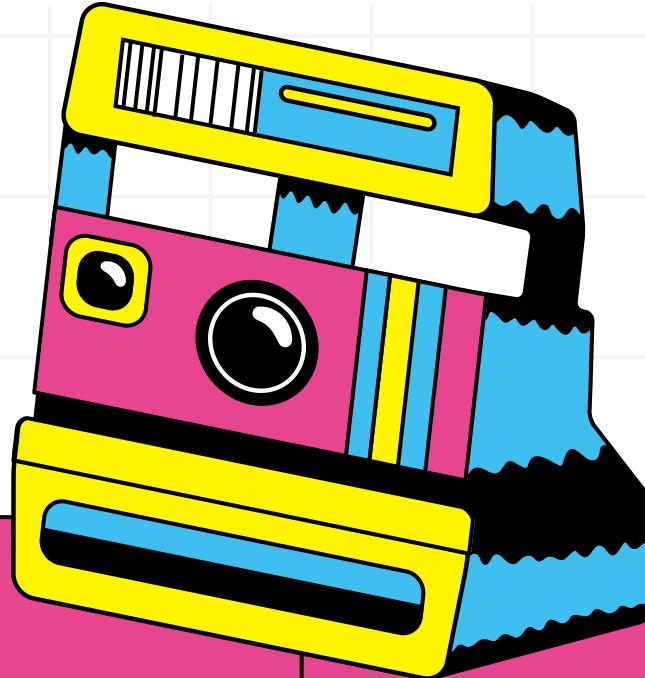
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objectives



Identify key themes of queer joy in the lived experiences of trans women and trans femme geeks as revealed through hermeneutic photography.

Describe how joy-centered and strengths-based frameworks can be integrated into affirming care for transgender and gender-diverse clients.

Apply research findings to develop at least one practical strategy for fostering resilience and belonging in clinical, educational, or community settings.

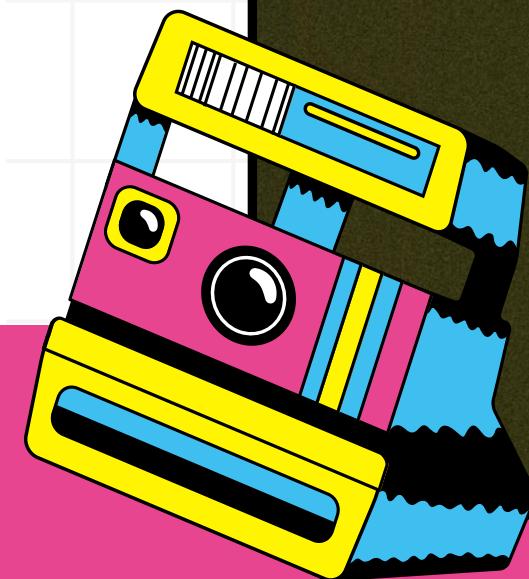
Objective 1

Research Findings and
Themes of Queer Joy



What is Hermeneutic Photography?

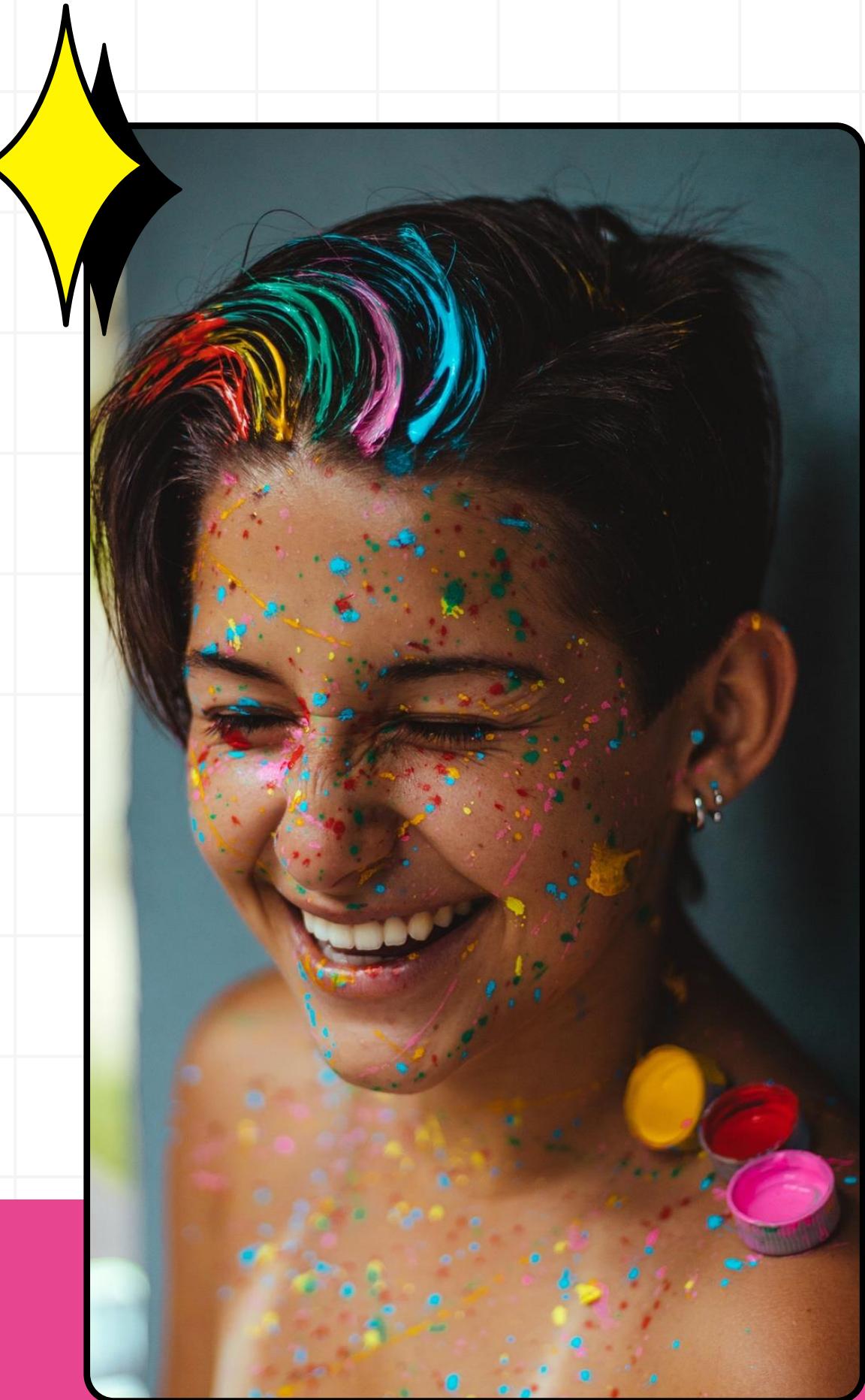
Hermeneutic photography is a qualitative research methodology to explore meaning-making in the world using interviews and photos from participants (Hagedorn, 1994).



What is queer joy?

Queer joy is part of an epistemological framework which argues that when research only asks particular kinds of questions then they receive the same kinds of answers, limiting insight and re-perpetuating narrow views of marginalized communities (Henricks, 2016; Shuster & Westbrook, 2022).

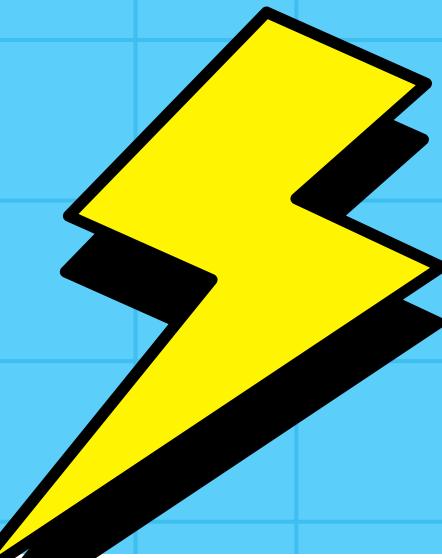
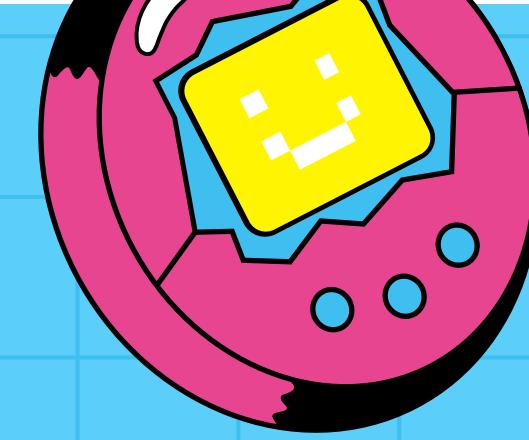
Queer joy is about the joyful experiences that queer people live into which sustains them in the face of oppression (Shuster & Westbrook, 2022).



Participants &

Process

(Buchanan, 2025)



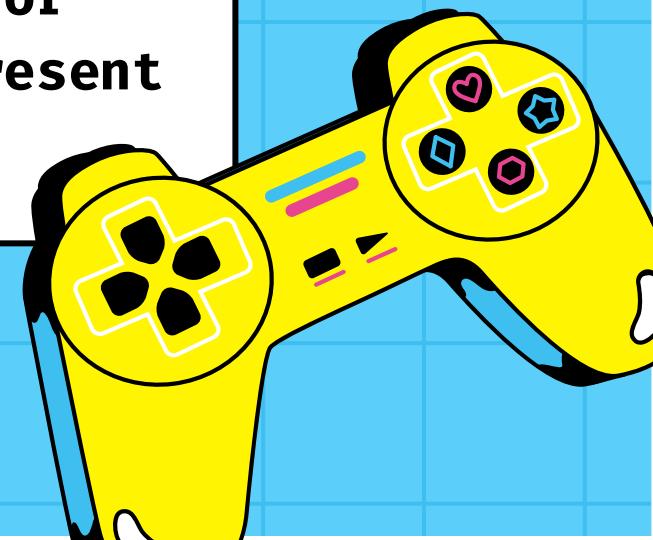
University of Florida, IRB Approved Study

8 total participants who self identify as a trans woman/trans femme and as a geek

3 meetings with each participant

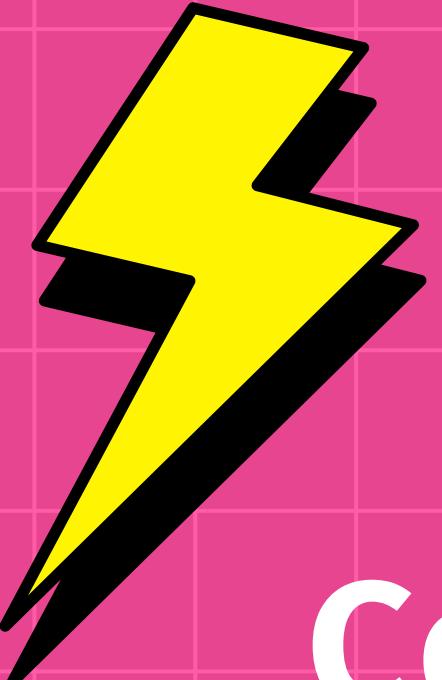
- 1) Informed Consent Meeting
- 2) Data Collection Interview
- 3) Member-Checking Meeting

Transcripts and photos were analyzed for queer joy and for additional themes present



4 Major Themes of Queer Joy

(Buchanan, 2025)



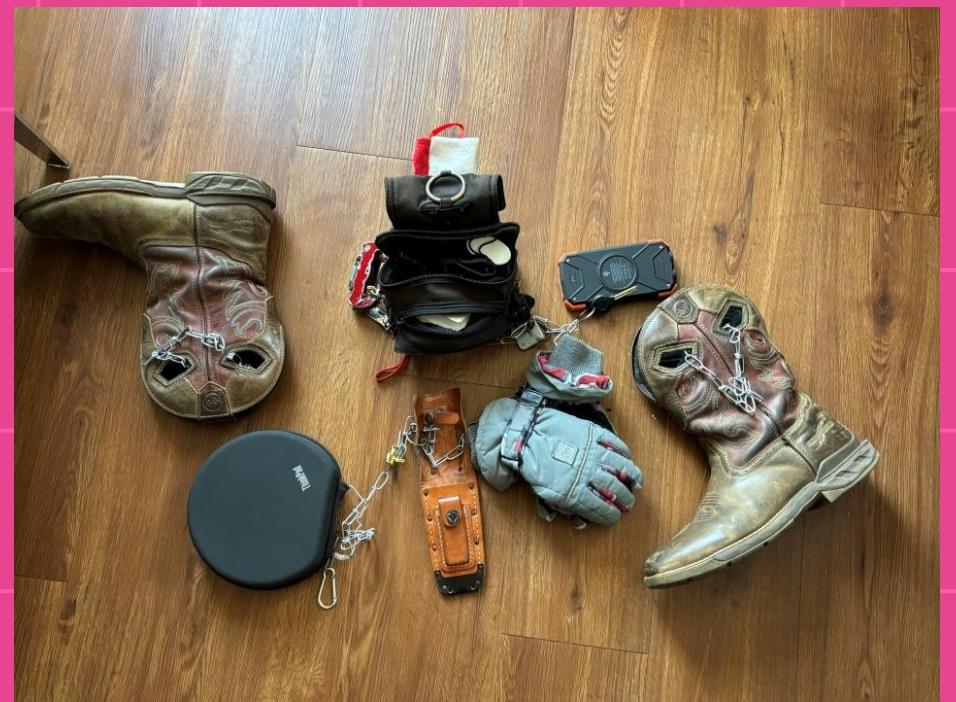
Creative Engagement

Authentic Living

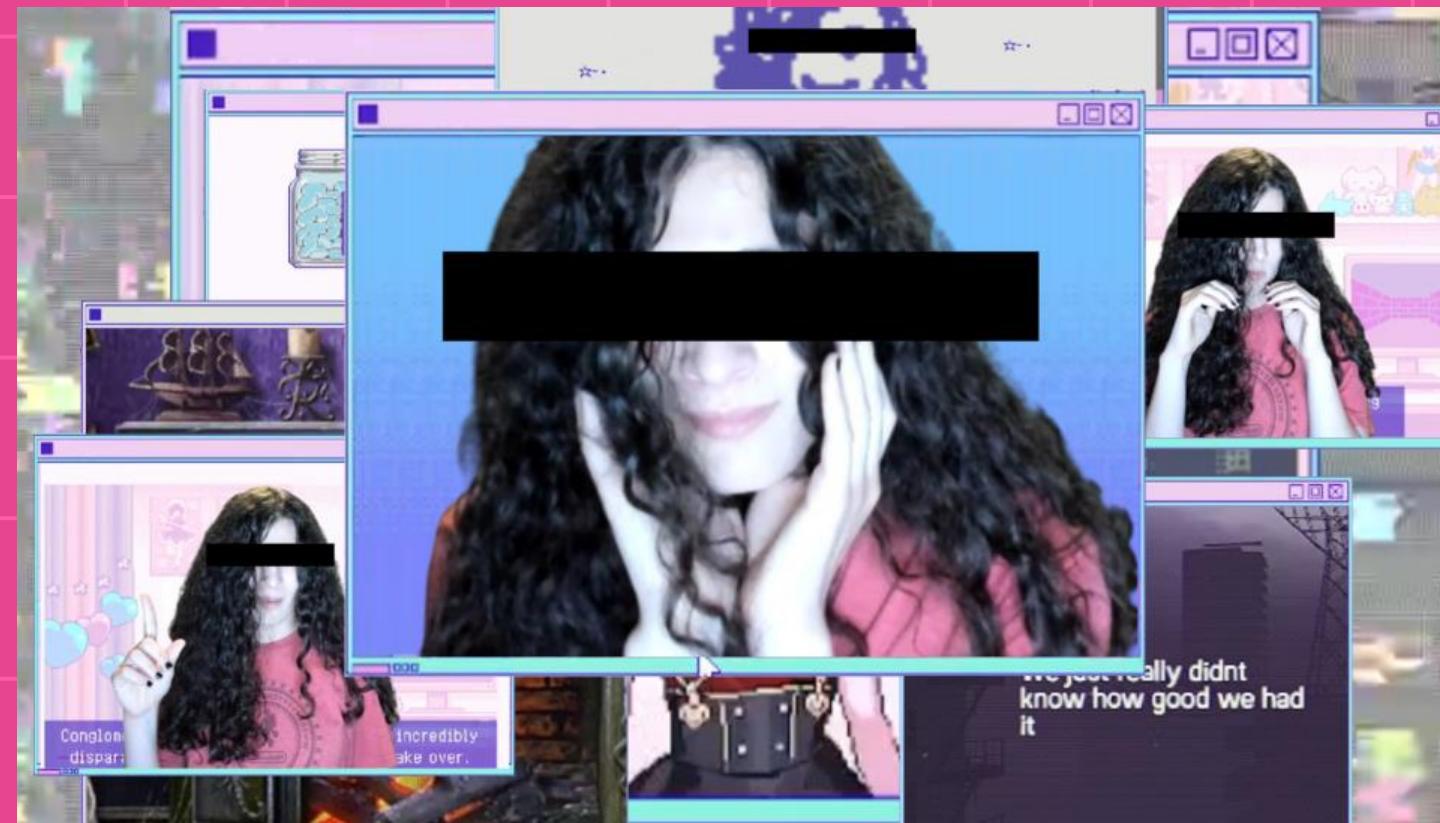
Connection and Representation

Resistance and Advocacy

Creative Engagement



Creative Engagement



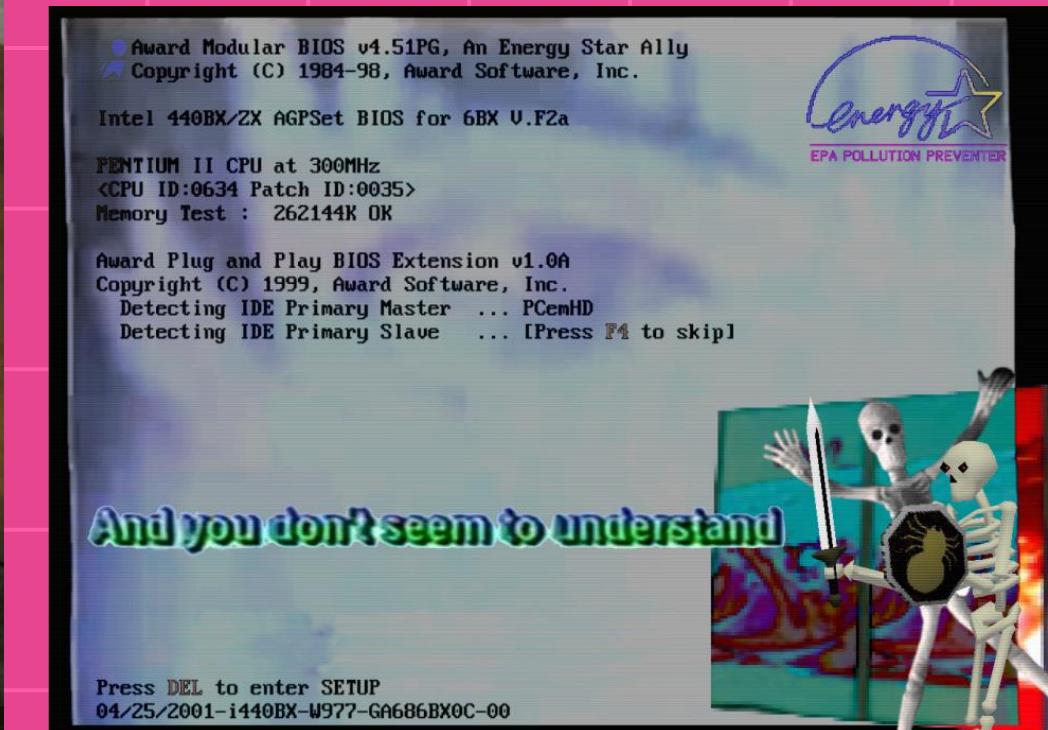


Creative Engagement

Tomoko - “. . .but being able to make a dress, being able to wear it, and really feel happy about wearing it really flaunt myself wearing it really want to find excuses to wear this and performing in this. That's really one of my that's really one of my spots for queer joy, so to say.”

Opal - “and I think that this is like so queer geek joy, because for [dancing and cosplay group name] you have the option to be either like a maid or a butler, which is pretty binary, but I chose to be the maid, and I think that's queer in that, like I'm still embracing like the femme, and like it is so geek cause like it's [dancing and cosplay group name]. And also, I think those cat ears are super. Geeky.”

Authentic Living



Authentic Living

Bayonetta - “But yeah. Sadly, the thing that isn't showing [in the photograph] that I wish it was showing. But because I have a lot of hair, you can't. I actually have little Pac-man earrings on. This is the 1st time I've ever worn earrings.”

Anisha - “It's like you can derive meaning from anything I feel like that's like kind of integrated with like queer joys, and like you don't have to like necessarily present as anything, or be anything, or look a certain way like you, just like inherently like, if you feel that way and you can, if you feel that way, you can like. express it onto other people or like help other people understand without having to be like anything like you can. Just as long as you're like, what's the word like honest, and like thorough with who you are like, you can like transmit meaning through anything.”



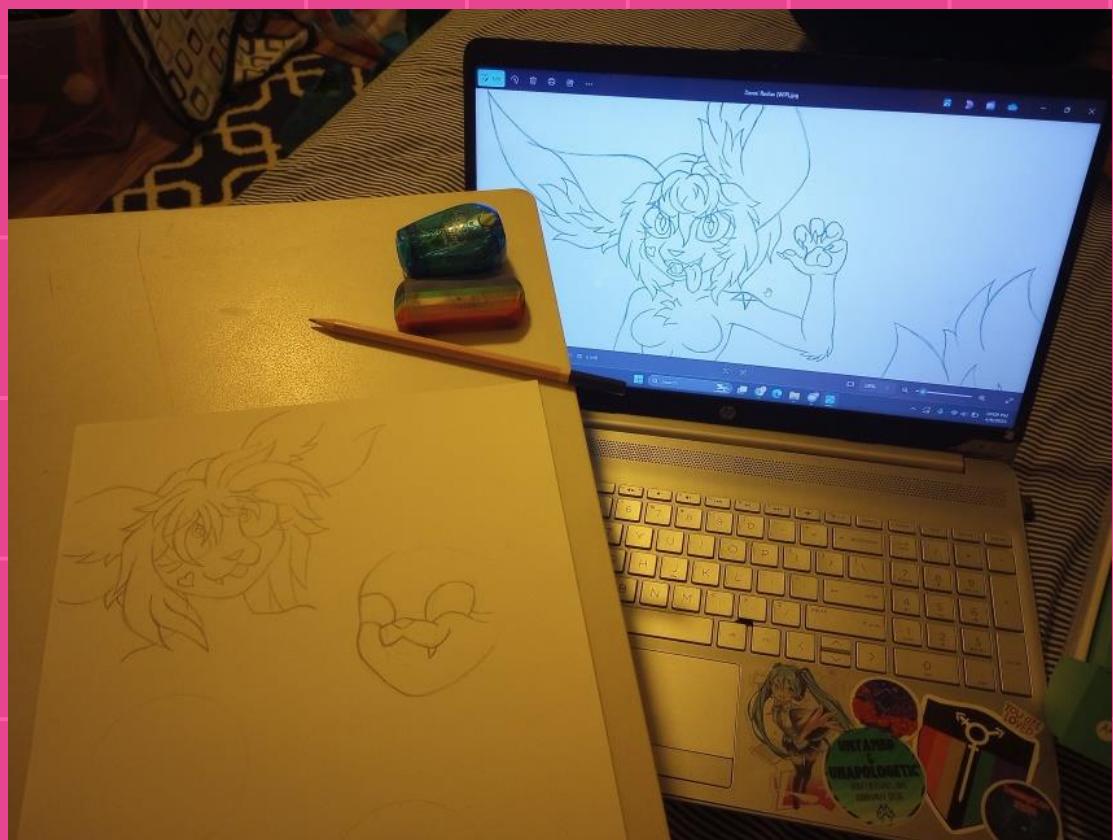
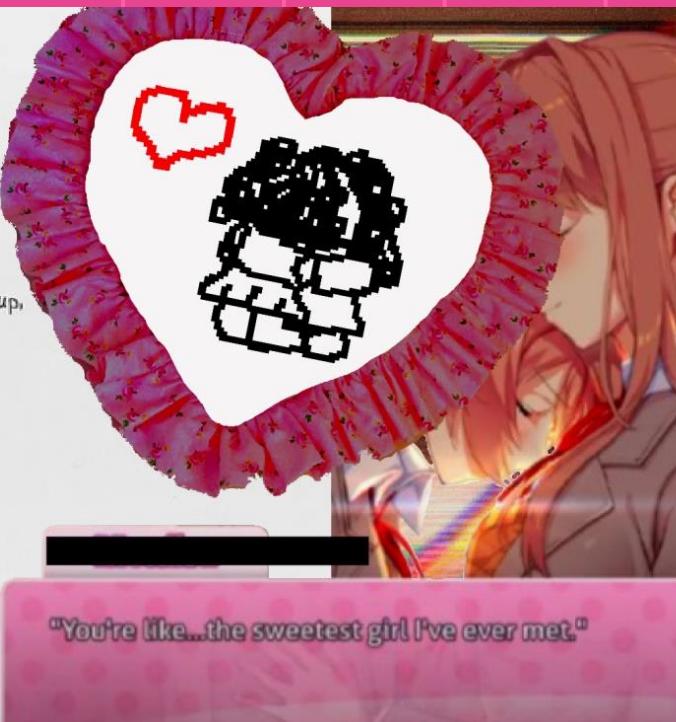
Connection and Representation



Take my hand, take me forward.
Take me to your dream land.
Caution me to watch my step,
So I can't look back at my footprints.
Climb the stairs ahead of me,
While I look up to you.
The more I look forward, the more I look up,
The more I can lend to you.

If you can trust me to follow your pace,
I'll trust you to set it.
If you can trust me to lend you a smile,
I'll trust you to return it.

Take my hand, take me forward.
Take me to your dream land.





Connection and Representation

Wound – “I really love my girlfriend. That's that's this one [referring to the photo]. That's what this one is.”

Rarity – “And it [referring to dance and cosplay group] was like a really strong community for me of a lot of queer people, and like allies that made me feel welcomed. And that's like kind of what pushed me to feel comfortable to transition. So it occupies very special space in my heart.”

Tuna – “How a lot of like people of color talk about their ethnic communities with their racial communities like, I have that kind of affinity to like the queer community, right? Like I feel like, like, culturally, like more like aligned and and so on and so forth.”

Resistance and Advocacy



Resistance and Advocacy

Ticia - “So I guess one of the ways that kind of experience, queer joy openly is to do it in spite of those around me who actively want to suppress me in any regard. So you know, interlinking that with just kind of expressing myself openly with, you know, like anime shirts or political slogan buttons all over my hat, or just like hooking the pride flag to my belt. . .”

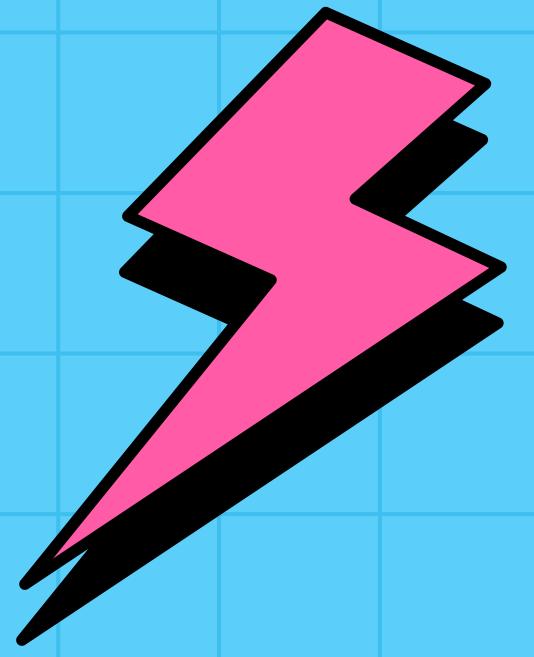
Opal - “I think that advocacy is a huge part of my identity, too.”



Objective 2

Joy-Centered & Strengths-Based Frameworks for Affirming Care

how do
clinicians use
these
findings?



Queer joy is a clinical resource that we can harness and use with our clients (Shuster & Westbrook, 2022; Buchanan, 2025)

It aligns with **strengths-based** counseling approaches (Smith, 2006), **liberation** psychology (Martín-Baró, 1994), **narrative** work (White & Epston, 1990), and **queer theory** (Martin, 1996; Muñoz, 2009).



Gaming & Streaming

- 1) #Gayman communities as validating (Güden & Rızvanoglu, 2023)
- 2) Rhythm games may offer opportunities for emotional regulation.
- 3) Streaming/VR may act as a way to further embody one's authentic self.

Cosplay & Performance

- 1) Clients use subcultural aesthetics and roles to explore and express identity (Maki, 2017).
- 2) Opportunity to integrate narrative and creative approaches to explore who your client would like to embody through cosplay (Earl, 2021).

Creative Engagement: Fandom as Therapeutic Resources

Authentic Living: Centering

Gender Euphoria



Gender Expression & Transition

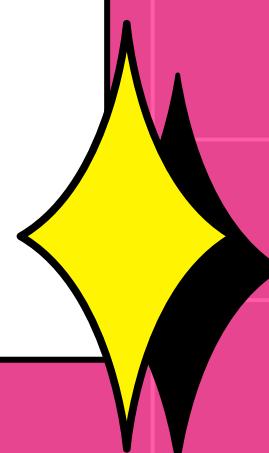
- 1) Integrate gender euphoria work (Gross et al., 2024)
“What moments feel most you?”
- 2) Use styling, visual boards, character design.
- 3) Trans and queer femme geeks often experience pressure to justify both their gender and their geek identity (Maynard, 2017). Therapy can support the reclamation of both.

Affirming the Self

- 1) Incorporate values based identity work in alignment with ACT: “Who do you want to be?” (Hayes et al., 2012).
- 2) Invitation for the client to define “queer joy” and what it means to them.



Connection & Representation: Relational and Reflective Work

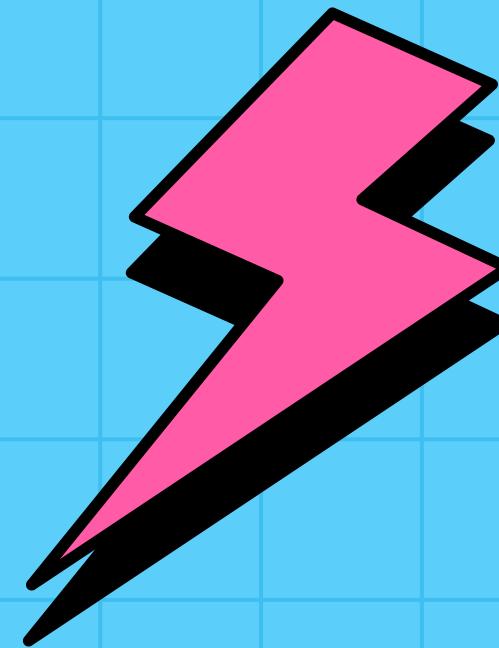
- Encourage community-building (queer servers, cosplay groups, con-going)
 - Use character identification to explore identity and counter shame.
 - Create geeky media-based meaning making exercises (i.e. “What does that mean to you?”).
- 

Objective 3

Inclusive and Empowering
Environments

Affirming Spaces Start with intentional Design

Model celebration, not tolerance. Be joyfully queer-affirming (Earl, 2021; Kavanaugh, 2021).



Affirm queer and geek identity without gatekeeping – LGBTQ+ femme fans are often excluded from nerd spaces (Maynard, 2017).

Validate all expressions of fandom and identity – you don't need to “prove” your geek credentials (Buchanan, 2025; Reagle, 2015).



Representation in community settings fosters belonging (Jenson, 2019).



Strategies for clinicians

- Offer space for identity exploration (name, look, style) in real life and in gaming/RPG character creation.

“RPGs not only allow gamers to manipulate the game, but they also intend for players to reflect themselves or create new identities.” (Nielsen, 2015).

- Co-create visual tools (character sheets, pegboards, fandom mood maps, queer joy vision boards).
- Respect complexity – don’t oversimplify queer joy or gender (Buchanan, 2025).

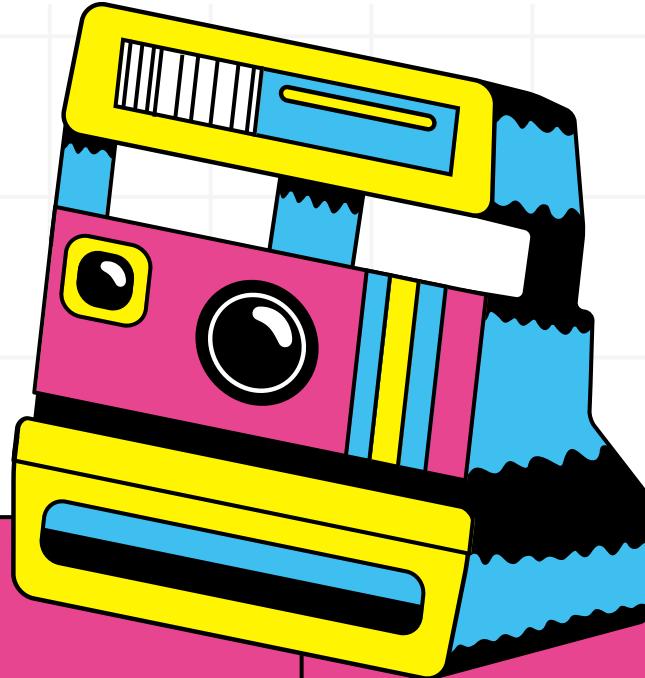




Strategies for community Leaders

- Encourage queer guilds/servers/con meetups (Romero, 2017).
- Support queer joy engagement – drag shows, cosplay circles, Pride Fests (Buchanan, 2025).
- Help clients find or create safe online communities (Stern, 2016).

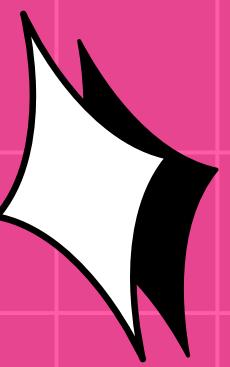
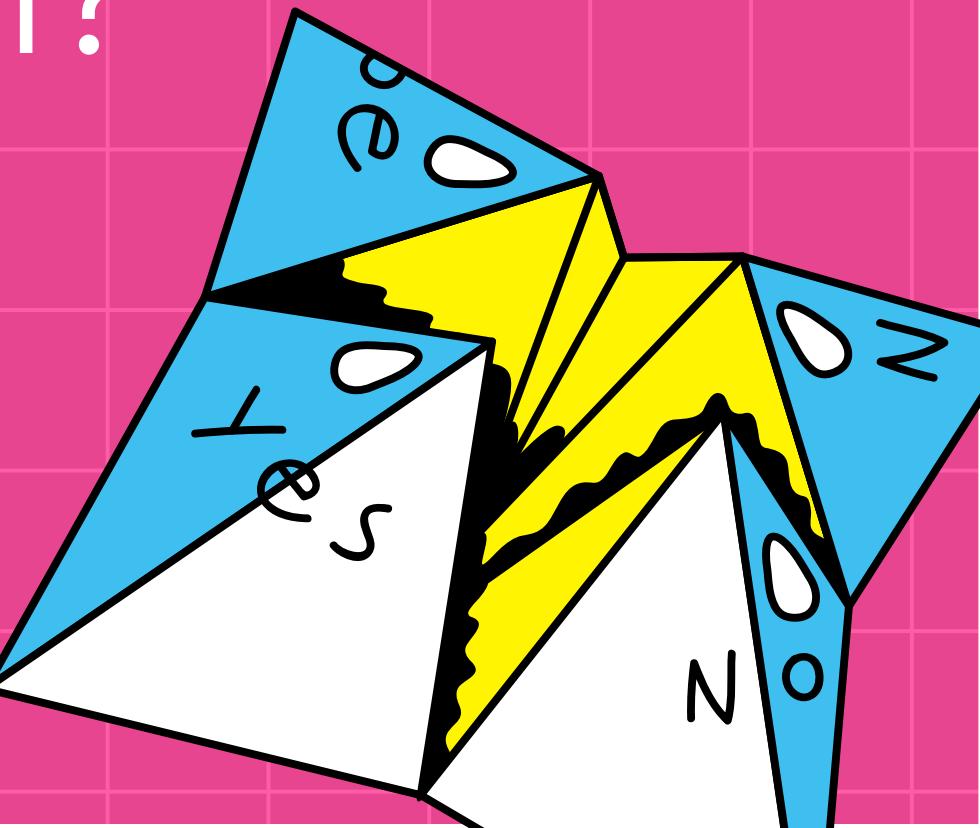
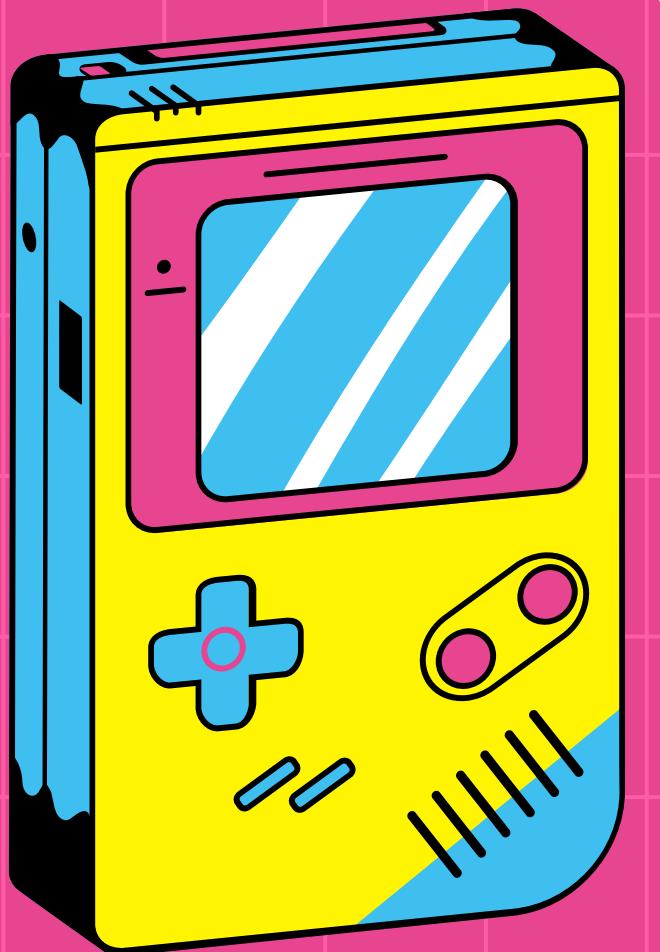
objectives



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<p>Apply research findings to develop at least one practical strategy for fostering resilience and belonging in clinical, educational, or community settings.</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Making it real (Q&A)

What is one action/shift you can take with you based off of today's presentation?

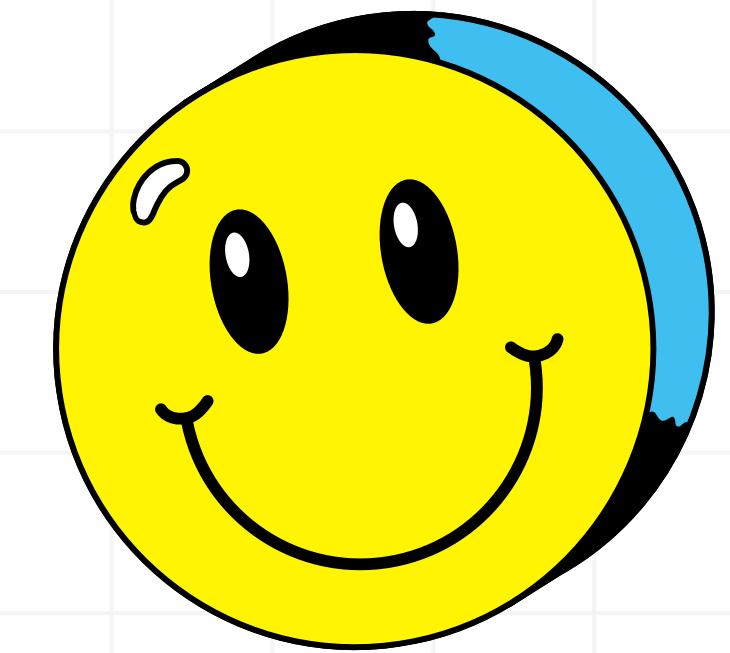


Thank you
for listening!



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