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Methodological musings on larping as research

An argument for *research with design* in qualitative
studies

Transformative Play Initiative Seminar 2022: Role-playing, culture and
heritage

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Gender exploration in larp

Research questions:

- ❖ Why do trans*, non-binary and gender non-conforming people engage in gender exploration specifically in larps?
- ❖ If larp is considered as embodied and affective practice/activity, what then does that mean for the possibilities and challenges of exploring gender?
- ❖ Exploring the concepts of integration and bleed, how does the exploration of gender impact their everyday life?



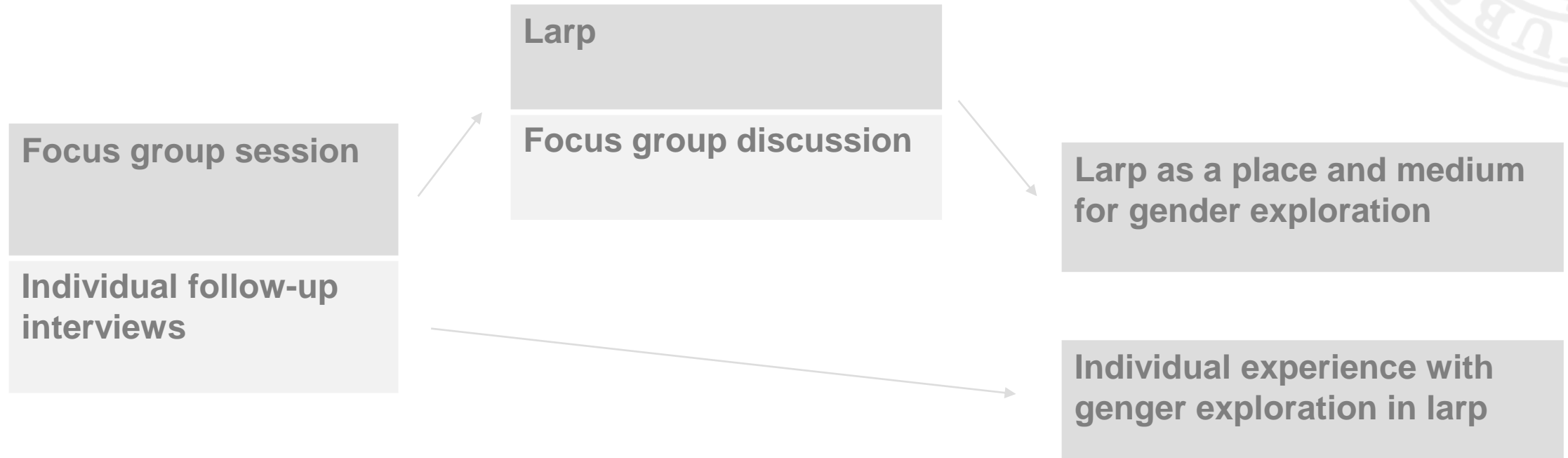
Research design

Focus group session

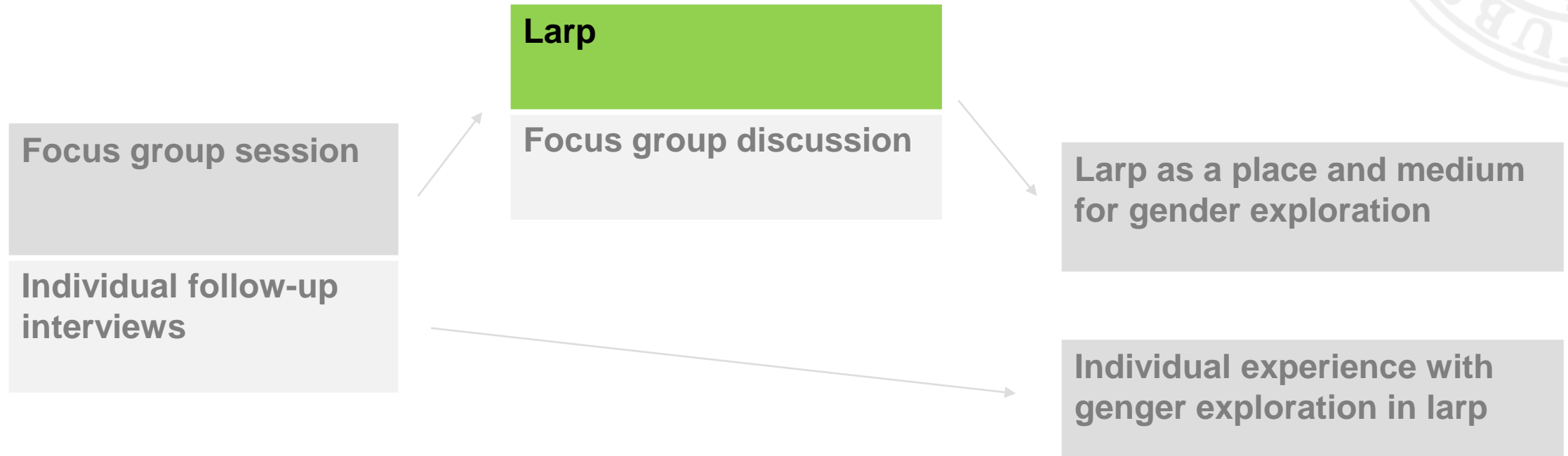
**Individual follow-up
interviews**



Research design



Research design



Different approaches to design research



	Definition	Implementation of design
Research of (into) design	The study of existing game designs in order to understand their functions and characteristics (Baird, 2022)	The researcher or study participants play an existing game to learn something about the game itself.
Research for design	The study of game design with the purpose of aiding further design (Baird, 2022)	Designing a game containing the specific design principle or mechanic that we want to test or inserting this principle or mechanic in an existing game, and then testing it.
Research through design	Research conducted through the act of design, based in a previously defined theoretical framework. The research aims to understand how the game puts into practice the chosen theoretical framework (Baird, 2022), and is focused on changing/improving the world (Zimmerman and Forlizzi, 2014)	Designing a game meant to test the chosen theoretical framework and through iterations changing the game design in order to approximate the theoretical framework.





Subject of study

- ❖ Research of design – design as is
- ❖ Research for design – design as could be
- ❖ Research through design – design as change through theory

Is design – in this case game design - as part of research only useful when researching design?





Proposition: Research *with* design

Research with design is research where design elements are included in the research process in order to foster or enhance access to insights into a subject of research that is not the design itself.





The larp: (Lost and) FOUND

Aims:

- ❖ To evoke memories of gender exploration in larp
- ❖ To support feelings of belonging, of being seen and being wanted just as you are





Who, what and why?

- ❖ Trans*, non-binary and gender non-conforming larpers who had already explored gender through larp
- ❖ Reviving an old character
- ❖ To create an embodied, affective re-visit



Structure

Welcome

Workshop

Larp

Individual debrief writing exercise

Break

Debrief

Focus group interview





2 scenes – “Lost” and “Found”

Lost

The Participants played a meta-character: “The Searcher”

Their old Characters had gone missing, and the Searchers were looking for them

Focus: Describe the Characters from the outside with love

Emotions: Stressful, urgent, “lack”

Found

The participants played their Characters and another Character’s Searcher

The Characters were found wandering the stars

Focus: Embody the Characters and re-visit what they meant to the players

Emotions: Acceptance, belonging, love



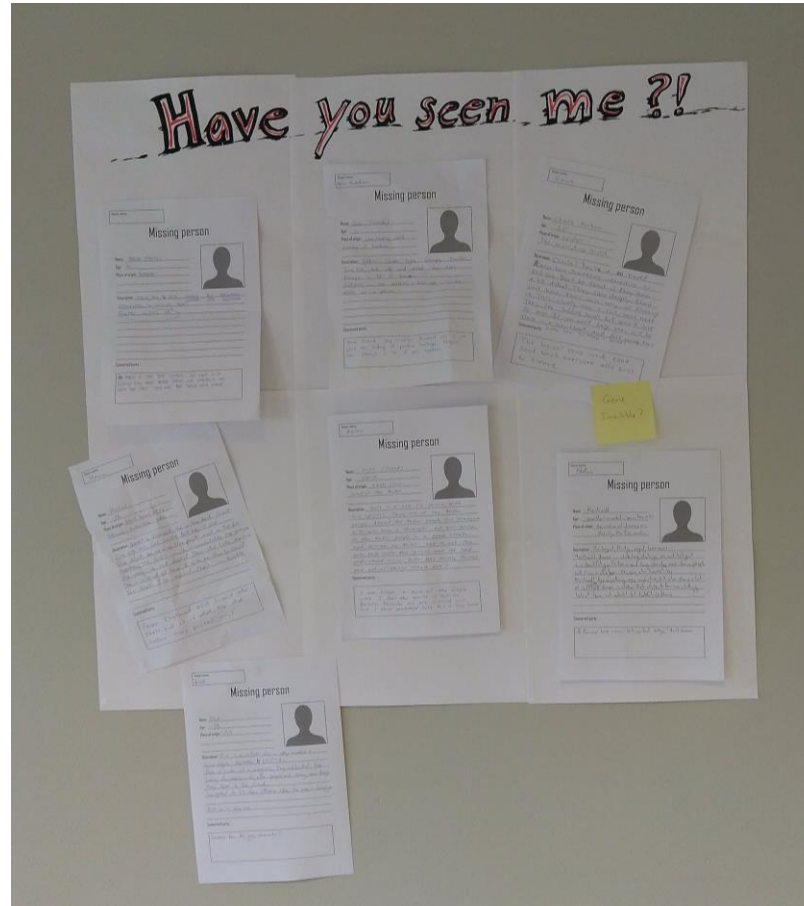


Why research with design?

- ❖ By embodying old characters, evoking memories and emotions connected to that prior experience
- ❖ Having a common experience, both as something to discuss and as an ice breaker
- ❖ Working towards making the session a safe(r) container and building trust in order to make discussions of sensitive topics possible and less distressing



What now?



Missing person's board used in the first scene of the larp



What now?

- ❖ Is this approach useful in research that has nothing to do with design?
- ❖ Is it worth it?
- ❖ What challenges or issues might arise?



Thank you!

Bibliography

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Zimmerman, John, and Jodi Forlizzi. 2014. "Research Through Design in HCI." In Ways of Knowing in HCI, edited by Judith S. Olson and Wendy A. Kellogg, 167–89. New York, NY: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4939-0378-8_8.

