

COOPERATIVE GAMING

DIVERSITY IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY
AND HOW TO CULTIVATE INCLUSION

ALAYNA COLE
JESSICA ZAMMIT



CRC Press
Taylor & Francis Group

Cooperative Gaming



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Cooperative Gaming

Diversity in the Games Industry and How to Cultivate Inclusion

Alayna Cole and Jessica Zammit



CRC Press

Taylor & Francis Group

Boca Raton London New York

CRC Press is an imprint of the
Taylor & Francis Group, an **informa** business

First edition published 2021

by CRC Press

6000 Broken Sound Parkway NW, Suite 300, Boca Raton, FL 33487-2742

and by CRC Press

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

© 2021 Taylor & Francis Group, LLC

CRC Press is an imprint of Taylor & Francis Group, LLC

Reasonable efforts have been made to publish reliable data and information, but the author and publisher cannot assume responsibility for the validity of all materials or the consequences of their use. The authors and publishers have attempted to trace the copyright holders of all material reproduced in this publication and apologize to copyright holders if permission to publish in this form has not been obtained. If any copyright material has not been acknowledged please write and let us know so we may rectify in any future reprint.

Except as permitted under U.S. Copyright Law, no part of this book may be reprinted, reproduced, transmitted, or utilized in any form by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying, microfilming, and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without written permission from the publishers.

For permission to photocopy or use material electronically from this work, access www.copyright.com or contact the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc. (CCC), 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, 978-750-8400. For works that are not available on CCC please contact mpkbookspermissions@tandf.co.uk

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

ISBN: [978-0-367-34280-7] (hbk)

ISBN: [978-0-367-34279-1] (pbk)

ISBN: [978-0-429-32482-6] (ebk)

Typeset in Minion

by Lumina Datamatics Limited

Contents

Authors, [vii](#)

Introduction, [ix](#)

CHAPTER 1 ■ Being Marginalized	1
<hr/>	
BUT WHAT CAN I DO?	7
Spend Money	8
Act	8
Speak Out	9
Listen and Learn	9
CHAPTER 2 ■ Development and Representation	11
<hr/>	
REPRESENTATIONS OF MARGINALIZED IDENTITIES	11
Gender	12
Queer Identity	13
Race	19
Religion	24
Chronic Health Conditions	27
HOW DO I REPRESENT DIVERSITY?	31
AAA versus Indie	32
<i>Accessible Game Engines</i>	36
<i>Game Jams</i>	38

CHAPTER 3 ■ Company Culture	45
<hr/>	
HIRING AND PROMOTING PRACTICES	49
INTERNAL POLICIES AND TRAINING INITIATIVES	51
Mission Statement	51
Code of Conduct	52
Accessibility Action Plan	53
Training	54
CREATING COMMUNITIES AND COUNCILS	56
MENTORING	57
EXTERNAL MESSAGING	58
ASSESSING AND REFLECTING	59
LEVERAGING FINANCIAL AND SOCIAL CAPITAL	60
CHAPTER 4 ■ Events	63
<hr/>	
COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTANCY	64
CODE OF CONDUCT	65
ONLINE MESSAGING	65
STAFF, VOLUNTEERS, AND SPEAKERS	66
PREPARE THE VENUE	67
PROVIDE OPTIONS	68
ARRIVING AT THE EVENT	69
DO WE HAVE TO DO IT ALL?	69
CHAPTER 5 ■ Future of Diversity and Games	71
<hr/>	
REFERENCES, 75	
NAME INDEX, 89	
SUBJECT INDEX, 93	

Authors

Dr. Alayna Cole is the managing director of Queerly Represent Me, a not-for-profit championing queer representation in games. Alayna is also a producer at Sledgehammer Games, co-chair of the IGDA LGBTQ+ special interest group, and an award-winning games journalist and game developer. She was featured on the 2016 and 2017 Develop Pacific 30 Under 30 lists and the 2017 and 2019 Develop Pacific Women in Games lists, and has received several other accolades in the industry.

Jessica Zammit started writing in 2013 for Start Select Media and for the next five years she followed her interest in writing about representations of mental health, diversity, and particularly, sexuality in video games. Jessica has been speaking about diversity in games at conventions like PAX Australia since 2016 and has been featured on several other discussions in and around the topic of representation in games and games criticism. Along with her co-author, she is co-chair of the IGDA LGBTQ+ special interest group, and was featured on the 2018 Develop Pacific 30 Under 30 and Women in Games lists.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Introduction

GAMES AND DIVERSITY HAVE a complicated relationship. Examining games, their content, the industry that produces them, and the audiences that consume them reveals a range of issues. It's vital that we continue conversations about diversity and games, but the multifaceted nature of these issues and the industry makes it difficult to know where to start.

The International Game Developers Association (IGDA)—a global network of people working in the games industry—is responsible for ongoing surveying of the industry. The results of their 2017 Developer Satisfaction Survey (IGDA 2017) revealed that 61% of game developers self-identify as being “white/Caucasian/European,” 74% as “male,” 81% as “heterosexual,” and 75% as not having a disability.

Despite being a global survey, a large proportion of the IGDA's respondents—49%—are working in the United States. However, demographic statistics in other Western regions reveal similar results. In Australia, 18% of people working in the games industry identify as female (IGEA 2018). The statistics are not much better in the United Kingdom, where only 19% identify as women and 4% are described as “Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME)” (Creative Skillset 2016).

In these Western countries, the games industry is homogenous: predominantly white, cisgender, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, and neurotypical. But it's not just the companies creating games that feature a lack of diversity. At the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) in 2018, only 5% of games featured exclusively female protagonists (Feminist Frequency 2018). People from marginalized groups are not being adequately represented in game content or the game studios producing that content, and this is leading to the lack of diversity across games overall.

But what is diversity?

The same terms are repeatedly used when discussing the demographics of games and the games industry, but there's limited history of

people establishing whether we have a shared understanding of what these terms mean. Research conducted by Queerly Represent Me (of which both authors are directors) in 2017 indicates that, despite using similar words like “diversity” and “representation,” individuals are “referring to marginally—or sometimes significantly—different concepts” (Zammit & Cole 2019a: 2).

In the responses to this survey, we saw respondents who implied that diversity means trying to suppress white people, that representation is about “forcing” characters into games without properly incorporating them into the narrative, that diversity is “a trick, a scam, or an agenda,” or that representation of diverse perspectives is creating divisions between people (Zammit & Cole 2019b). One respondent declared, “Diversity is a code word for white genocide.”

It’s difficult to begin discussing whether games have a problem with diversity and representation, what this problem entails, and how we might solve it, when there is no guarantee that the people having this discussion are using terms with a shared meaning.

The Queerly Represent Me survey asked participants to define “representation,” “diversity,” and “marginalized groups” and then performed an analysis of responses (Zammit & Cole 2019b) to determine the “tying threads” that could be used to create foundational definitions of these terms (Shaw 2014: 69). This process resulted in the following definitions:

- **Representation** is a portrayal, typically in media, that individuals can identify with and that grants visibility to a group.
- **Diversity** is including a broad variety of different people with an assortment of backgrounds and experiences, as well as demographics such as gender, sexuality, race, and ability.
- **Marginalized groups** are oppressed by and pushed to the fringes of society due to systematic discrimination and power imbalance in social situations, the legal system, politics, and other institutions.

These definitions act as a basis for the conversation that we will be having with you in this book and for the ongoing conversations that we are calling you to have with the people you work with, create with, and play with. They allow us to understand what people might be thinking when they use terms like “representation,” “diversity,” and “marginalized groups” and also

allow us to interrogate our own internal definitions of these terms. Terms that are used as part of political conversations become charged with politics of their own, and it's only by questioning our biases that we can learn how to best acknowledge one another's humanity and ensure games are a space where everyone is included.

Another question in *Queerly Represent Me's* survey asked participants whether they felt that representation of diverse identities was important in games and to explain why or why not (*Queerly Represent Me* 2017). Despite statistics demonstrating that there is a significant underrepresentation of marginalized groups in games and the games industry, a number of survey respondents had a skewed perspective of either what "diversity" means or what it looks like. This is captured perfectly by one participant's statement: "There's plenty of diversity already."

This was not an isolated attitude. Another respondent suggested that, "Representation is adequate already, and not of concern to anyone besides those who do not play games, in my experience." This participant seems certain that the Venn diagram of "people who play games" and "people who would like to see more diverse characters in games" are two separate circles. Another respondent takes this further: "sjw [social justice warriors] don't play games and will find any [*sic*] reason to make a game look bad ... the normal people are already included" (*Queerly Represent Me* 2017).

Marginalized people have always been involved in both playing and making videogames (Golding & van Deventer 2016: 22). It wasn't until the 1980s and 1990s that videogames began to be specifically designed for and marketed towards male markets (Fron et al. 2007), with the "gamer" being assumed to be white, straight, and male (Golding & van Deventer 2016: 27).

By referring to "the normal people" (*Queerly Represent Me* 2017), this survey respondent is suggesting that people outside the dominant social group are "abnormal." This reinforces the in-group and out-group mentality that was first established in the 1980s by advertising companies, encouraging us to form bonds with the people who are similar to ourselves and to dismiss or exclude those who are not (Henry et al. 2010). This unconstructive mentality demonstrates the participant's ignorance of what diversity is and what increased diversity means for games. It also dismisses the hundreds of other survey respondents who said that they *do* think diversity is important—for being able to see themselves in games, to create examples for others, and for the greater good of the games industry overall. Statistics demonstrate that many socially progressive people—who