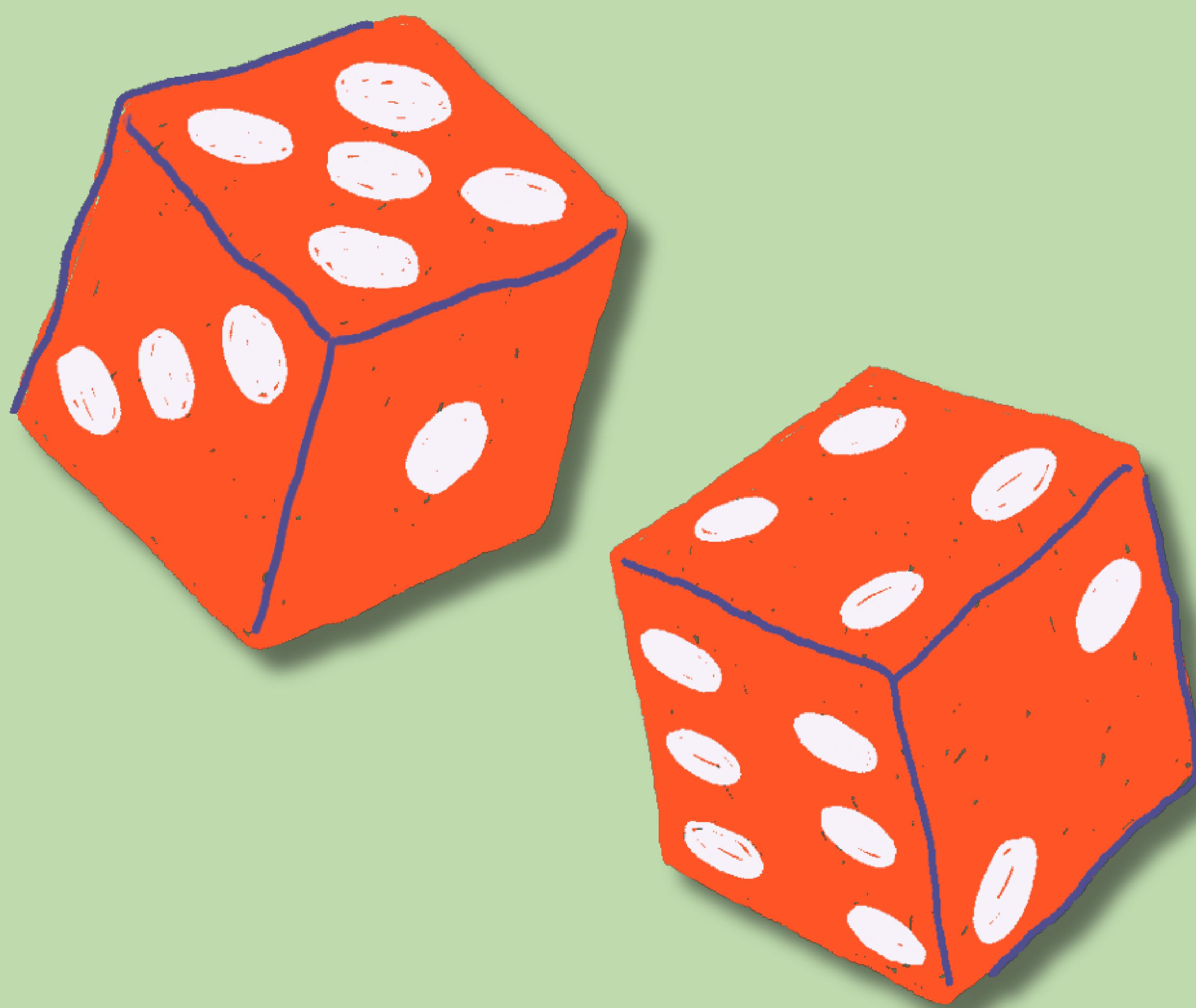


LET THEM PLAY

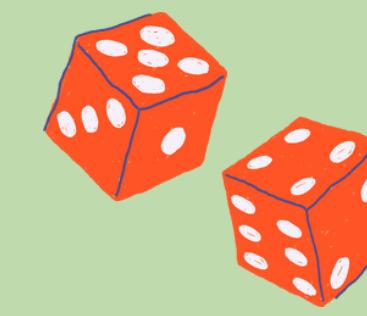
Campaigning for improved inclusivity in board gaming.



**STOP
DEFAULT
MALE PRO
IN BOARD
RULES.**

ING TO
ONOUNS
GAMES'

#LetThemPlay in Numbers



+25,000

Original #LetThemPlay content got more than 25,000 impressions across various platforms.

#LetThemPlay inspired over 1000 unique online comments about inclusivity in board gaming.

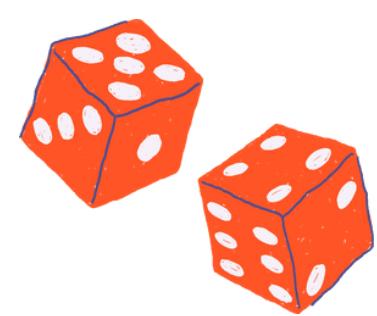
+1000

+300

Days of Wonder were asked to stop defaulting to he/him by 300 people via the #LetThemPlay petition.

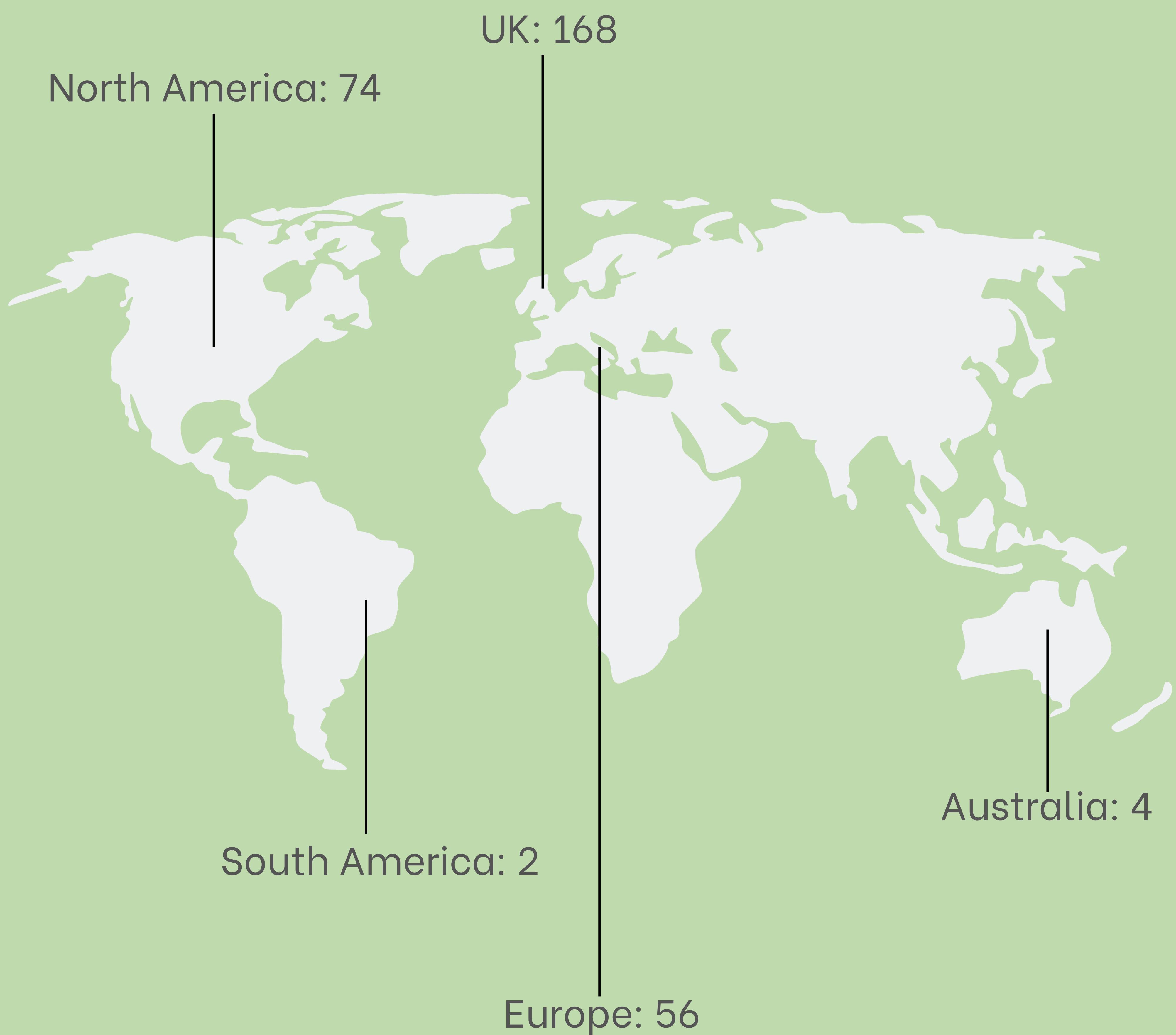
Days of Wonder has said that zero of their games will continue to default to he/him. Victory!

0



Mapping Our Support

A global community of petition supporters





Kempeth · 14 days ago

Signed.

zero cases of real, actual, rulebooks

Reply Quote ...

Rule boo

↑ -7 ↓



Tom T 🇺🇸 ⚡ @Tomahawk9000 · 3 hours ago

I learned a lot in this thread. I don't think this was mentioned: could it be harder for people who do not have English as their first language to go along with these changes? On top of that perhaps especially so if their first language is less accommodating to being gender inclusive? English has a very high number of non-native speakers. Being one of them I needed those examples to show me for example how I already use non-gendered "they/them". The examples given here do show me there is a way to write English rulebooks gender neutral without it feeling "forced".

1 upvote 1 tip

Reply Quote ...

irmilla · Feb 4



Jamie Tang 🇺🇸 ⚡ @jatang · Mar 16

Karen Robinson @KarenSDR wrote:

To be honest, I'm old enough and have seen enough changes that I just really appreciate it when there are a mix of male and female characters in the story, and male and female players in the examples. That at least is an easy thing to do in any language, I expect.

I recently read a book that features the following praise: "[The author] has been called 'the thinking man's John Grisham' by The New York Times." It was published in 2023. I found that very jarring because I'm not a man. I like John Grisham's books and I enjoyed this book as well. It was a library book. If I saw that on a front cover at a bookstore I would not buy it.

I understand that many languages have pronoun and gendered word challenges beyond that of English. Writing clear rules is difficult in general, in any language. However some instances are easy. Just be a thinking person.

3 upvotes 1 tip

You say OP isn't su



Parker McParker 🇬🇧 @MLBath · Mar 19

I really hope this wasn't the intention, this thread.

1 upvote 1 tip

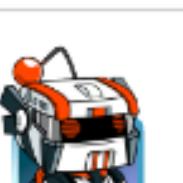
The fact is we want our instructions to whoever writes them makes them cle



[On topic: I'm still looking for that exar

7 upvotes 1 tip

I think it's perfectly fine



felix_m

Karen Robinson ⚡ Designer @Kare

Yes, thank you, Parker. I was about to

1 upvote 1 tip

Anyplace in the game: rules, example

3 upvotes 1 tip

writing in general snou

playing

1 upvote 1 tip

A

b

c

I

W

R

E

H

O

V

G

H

O

L

Y

U

T

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

U

Y

Timothy Melle Hi Hannah,
Thank you for s
I find any argu
and wargames,
there is for som
is an unresolvab
case. So many
because there are far worse offenders to ambiguity than "any" hypothetical example I've seen when someone says introducing they/them could be a source of confusion.

@robohobbit Mar 21

If you want a rule book for writing rule books, perhaps a [technical writing manual](#) would be helpful. A one-paragraph rule seems inadequate to cover this subject.

Reply Quote ...

Karen Robinson Designer @KarenSDR Mar 22

I was reading a rulebook recently for an implementation of the ancient game [Liubo](#) and thinking about this thread. The writers do it seemingly effortlessly, and they're students, not professionals. Here's a sample:

"1. You also score points by having your Owl reach one of its nests. These two spaces are circular spaces located on your opponent's side of the board. When an Owl lands on or passes through a nest space during its movement, its player immediately scores 2 points, and the Owl reverts to being a normal bird."

Note the switch between "you" and "the player", and yet it's quite clear that both are referring to the same person. Also the game character (the Owl) is also referenced with "it" since it's a non-human creature.

Reply Quote ...

they intend to offend

they intend to offend reason why revised rulebooks are not made available digitally in their websites.

Justin Difazio @Viewtiful_Justin Mar 13

I think this is a worthwhile endeavor, and there's no reason that gender neutral language can't be used everywhere

Reply Quote ...

world of power was a man.

:: waves hand warmly :: like me! I use They/Them mixed in with occasional She/ representation. It's one of the easiest ways to save a life. <3

Reply Quote ...

I ilv @Oblivious ilv Mar 13 (edited)

20 ago -- had no idea how bad it is on rulebook language. Sent you a GeekMail.

Luc @Norfolk Mar 19

Hannah @Hannah43 wrote:
Hi Dylan, the version we looked at was the 2015 printing. I just had a look again and even the 2019 version which is currently on the Days of Wonder website still uses he/him. <https://cdn.svc.asmodee.net/production-daysofwonder/uploads/...>

I've gotten used to gender neutral pronoun use in rulebooks, so seeing it otherwise is jarring. Interestingly, the latest Ticket to Ride rulebook you've linked isn't consistent in its pronoun use: "If a player successfully completes a series of routes that connect the two cities, they will add the amount of points indicated on

Reply Quote ...

Bez Shahriari Designer / Publisher @stuffbybez Mar 22

In case there is any doubt, I do support this and I would sign the petition if it didn't switch to Thai for me (or if I could read/understand Thai better than I do).

I would suggest a list of good practices might feature:

- all generic instructions use gender neutral pronouns
- player names and actions in examples use no more than 60% (rounded up) of male names/pronouns.
- depictions of humans in art/story/lore feature no more than 60% male-presenting people (rounded up).

Reply Quote ...

Eddie the Cranky Gam... @apotheos Mar 12

Myself, I switched to gender neutral language early in the recent social justice awareness initiatives.

It is trivial to do, and yes it does sometimes require sentences to be constructed differently than if you used gendered terms. But it's never a problem - and it's an advantage to have an inclusive mindset from the start of the thought process.

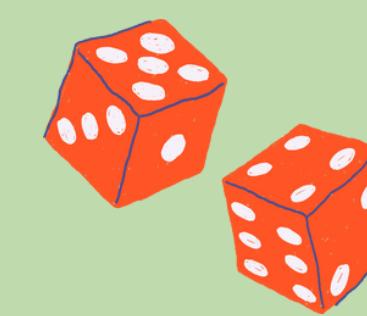
I rather worry that all this grammatical exploration has rather buried the important points of this thread. I am also suspicious that this was intentional.

Remember that when you aren't part of the group being discussed one needs to listen more than one speaks.

Reply Quote ...

Laure I'm all
I'm all
I'm all
I'm all
5

Who Was It For?



Despite making up the majority of board game players, women are often overlooked by designers and publishers. The ways in which women are overlooked are varied. According to a [2020 study](#), of Board Game Geek's (BGG) top 40 games by popularity:

- **18%** only contain male-presenting playable characters.
- The rules and box art of **72.5%** contain no images of women or girls.
- **73.8%** of pronouns used in their rules are male.

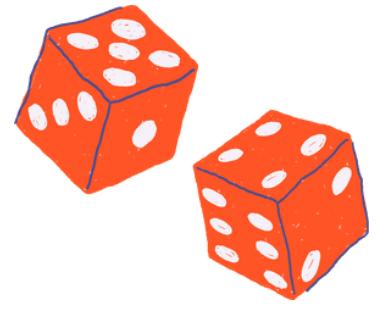
Netnographic Research

In order to ensure our campaign met the needs of our community (women who play, or want to play, board games), we carried out netnographic research within the popular board game forum BGG.

This is clearly a **hot topic**, our posts were engaged with about 10 times more than the average post on BGG. However, despite our attempts to focus our research on women, a large part of that engagement came from men, even in the *Women and Gaming* section of the forum!

Women shared our frustration and were keen to see gender-fair language used. Most men agreed, but a vocal minority felt that gender-fair language posed a risk to clarity. This was addressed through reference to rule sets that excel in clarity and inclusivity.

We also engaged designers, influencers and academics so that we might build on existing work.



Why does it matter?

Why board games matter

As well as being a wholesome source of entertainment for people of all ages, board games are important cultural artefacts, frequently used as tools of social reproduction. This is as true today as it was in Nazi Germany, where board games played an important role as Nazi propaganda.

Why language matters

Language is everywhere. It's hard to imagine thought without language. It is no surprise then, that the language we are surrounded by profoundly influences us. For example: Women who read job descriptions that exclusively used male pronouns were less motivated to apply to that job.

Why it matters now

Everyday language is increasingly scrutinised along political lines. The politicisation of gender-fair language represents a significant threat to the inclusion of women and non-binary people in society. For example: In Bavaria gender-sensitive language has recently been banned in all public institutions, including schools and universities. Conservative politicians mock gender-inclusive language, which undermines the tangible effects of male-centric language and movements to tackle these.

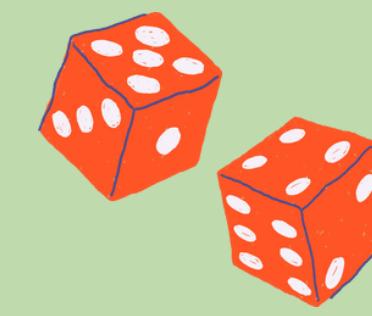
The scale of it

28 of the top 100 board games default to he/him in their rulesets, including Ticket to Ride, an incredibly popular introductory board game.

The simplicity of making the change

Alternatives could include: They/Them, You, Player One, *If Sarah X she must Y*, etc.

The #LetThemPlay Way (Pt. 1)



Contacting The Change Maker

Having set our sights on Ticket to Ride, its owner, Days of Wonder (a subsidiary of Asmodee Group) became our most immediate *change maker*. Naturally, we tried to get in touch; we messaged higher-ups on LinkedIn, filled out *Contact Us* forms, sent emails and picked up the phone.

Finally, Asmodee's PR firm, Mason Williams got back to us. It quickly became clear that just asking nicely wasn't going to be enough. We were going to need to do some convincing.



Developing Campaign Strategy

Our demand for gender-fair language isn't a new one. BGG users have been discussing this for over a decade. Organised and thoughtful campaign strategy is needed to unite our community around a clear ask. Therefore we developed strategy regarding five distinct areas:

- **Messaging**
- **Look and feel**
- **Engaging our community**
- **Raising awareness outside our community**
- **Engaging the *change maker***

Messaging

When it comes to messaging our number one priority was consistency. All our communications contained at least three of the following phrases:

- **#LetThemPlay:** Our campaign name and our ask in one succinct, powerful and *#able* phrase.
- **Long overdue:** Other sectors dealt with this long ago, why is the board game sector so behind?
- **Welcoming:** You don't need a PhD in linguistics to know what makes you feel welcome. It's simple.
- **Win-win:** A welcoming environment is good for business. Publishers and designers can win too.

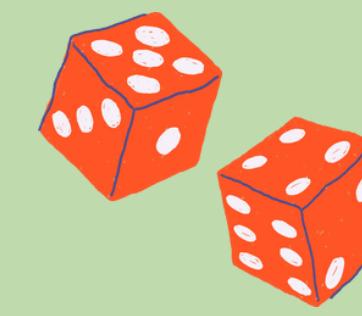
Look And Feel

Broad appeal is the name of the game here. *Monopoly Green* being our campaign's main colour sends a clear message:

It doesn't matter whether you grew up in the 40s or are growing up now, this campaign is speaking to you.

But *Monopoly Green* doesn't just transcend generations, it also isn't loaded with old fashioned gender tropes. Let's face it, if you think pink means you're speaking for women, you don't know many women! Rainbow colours are just as loaded and tired. While we are proud to say that non-binary people are part of our community, they are not all of our community.

The #LetThemPlay Way (Pt. 2)



Engaging Our Community

Forums like Reddit and BGG provided us with incredible access to our community, despite how global and scattered it is. Keen to campaign *with* and not *for* female and non-binary board game players, the forums allowed us to provide regular updates on the campaign and get regular feedback from our community.

The atmosphere in forum threads was overwhelmingly positive and supportive. Oftentimes, members of the community would step in when others (often male board game players) required clarification or convincing.

Examples of Community Engagement



Floofeh · 22d ago

When I invite friends over for dinner I cook food that works around their dietary restrictions. If Robert at work prefers to be called Bob, I'll call him Bob. If I make a typo in an essay, I'll correct it.

I think it's perfectly fine to ask for something as simple as a small language change to reflect that board games are for everyone. :) I love seeing my friend's kids pick up board games and if a small adjustment will make them maybe feel a bit more at home with board games is a win for the community. God knows I won't live forever to explain everything to my friends.

I don't see why change has to mean explanations have to be more confusing. Board game rule writing in general should be super crisp and clear so we don't spend more time reading than playing.

All the best to OP and anyone reading this. Please remember we are here in the first place because we share a love of the hobby. Having been to board game meetups and cons I also know our community has plenty of people who feel or have felt like outcasts in their life before. I hope we can model a different attitude and be better and warmer to our own people.



Eddie the Cranky Gam... 🇨🇦 @apotheos · Mar 12

Myself, I switched to gender neutral language early in the recent social justice awareness initiatives.

It is trivial to do, and yes it does sometimes require sentences to be constructed differently than if you used gendered terms. But it's never a problem - and it's an advantage to have an inclusive mindset from the start of the thought process.

I rather worry that all this grammatical exploration has rather buried the important points of this thread. I am also suspicious that this was intentional.

Remember that when you aren't part of the group being discussed one needs to listen more than one speaks.

4 7 ⚡ Tip

Reply Quote ...

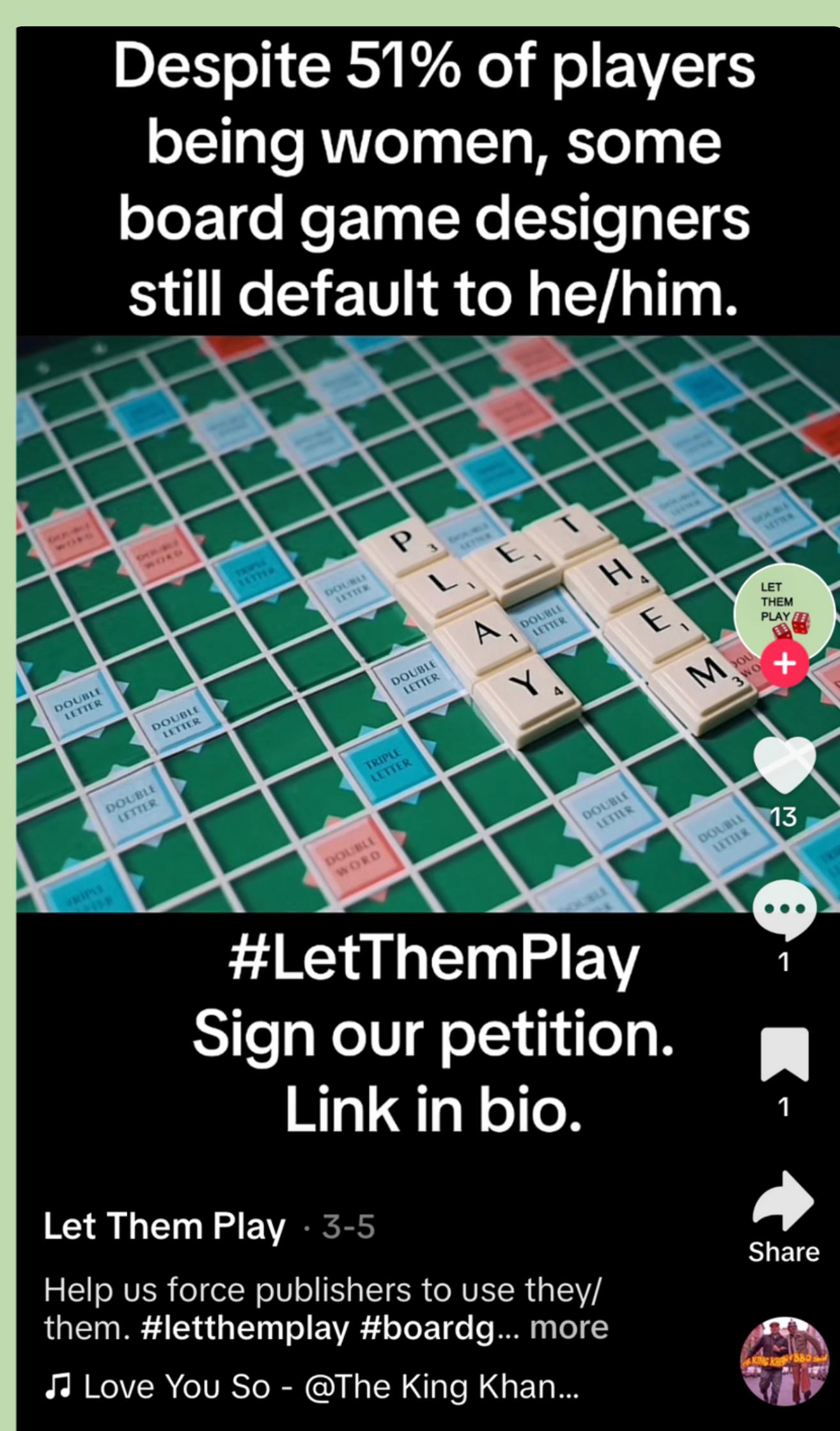
Raising Awareness Outside The Community

Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok and X allowed us to reach beyond the enthusiasts. The wider audience was more likely to be unaware of the issue, which warranted an adapted communication strategy:

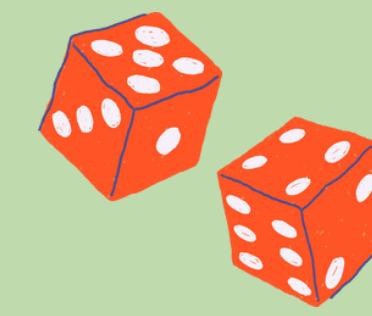
1. We platformed other creators such as [Our Family Plays Games](#) in order to help build our audience.
2. We produced creative content to engage our audience, while introducing them to our campaign.
3. We use related hashtags such as: #BoardGames, #women, #TicketToRide, #equality, etc. to improve our chances of being algorithmically discovered.

As a result, a number of people shared our petition and campaign on social media, improving our visibility.

Examples of Raising Awareness



The #LetThemPlay Way (Pt. 3)



Engaging The *Change Maker*

Continued engagement with our *change maker* via their PR firm, Mason Williams, was imperative for getting the change made. We remained polite throughout our communications, despite staying firm on our demands and being clear when we were not satisfied.

In the end, our engagement with our community paid off in an unexpected way, as industry titan Elizabeth Hargrave stepped up to help us.

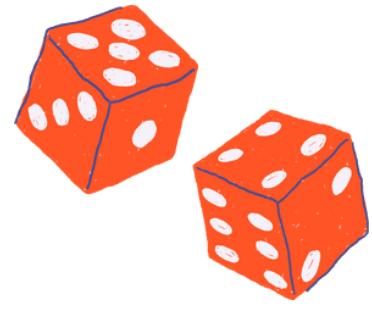
She got in touch with Alan Moon, author of *Ticket to Ride* directly, who in turn, got in touch with the head of Days of Wonder, Adrien Martinot. Adrien agreed to change the rules!

Shortly afterwards, Alan got in touch with us to thank us and congratulate us on our victory, confirming that “they will be changing the rules”. While it’s disappointing not to hear from Adrien directly, it is deeply exciting to see our change made and have the support of two of the biggest modern board game designers.

Alan signed off in true board-game-eccentric style:

Be Happy. Play More Games.

*Best Wishes,
Alan*



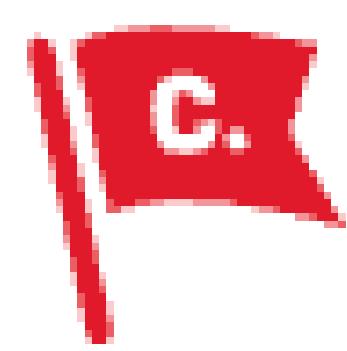
Victory!

In addition to Alan's confirmation, Mason Williams reached out with an official response, albeit not from Adrien:

“Days of Wonder will be reviewing their online rulebooks and will [...] actively work towards using gender-neutral language when updating existing editions and for new releases.”

While that is by far the biggest success of the campaign, we'd like to take some time to appreciate some of the other successes:

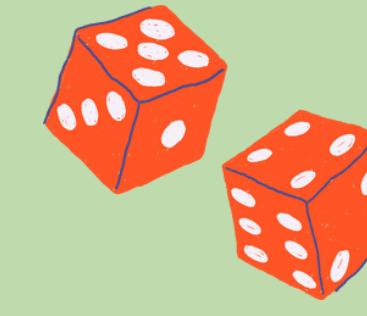
- **Strengthening Community:** Through engaging with the community in an open and authentic way we think we have strengthened the community and built up a greater understanding of inclusivity within it.
- **Starting Conversations:** Undoubtedly many of the people who signed our petition will have gone on to discuss inclusivity, both in relation to board games and more widely, with their friends and family.
- **Potential Domino Effects:** Hopefully other publishers and designers will take note and make the change soon.
- **Raising Money:** Despite not intending to raise any money whatsoever, Let Them Play raised over £20.



Victory

This petition made change with 305 supporters!

Lessons Learnt



Authentic Engagement

One of the initial issues that we encountered, was the claim that our intentions lacked authenticity - that we were trying to push an agenda, rather than having a genuine relationship with the community. This occurred because:

- Forums are somewhat transparent, so users knew that we were new to the forum.
- The board game community is tightly knit, with the views of newcomers carrying less weight than those of well known members.
- People who disagreed with the intentions of our campaign could use this to engage in ad hominem/feminam attacks.

Though these comments were outnumbered by positive ones, we felt that it was nonetheless important to extinguish such arguments and quell any doubts about our campaign through our actions.

In order to build trust:

- We were careful to keep a balance between following the rules and etiquette of the community and asking for a change in the community, which requires some disruption.
- We made sure to build on the existing wealth of knowledge of people in the forums by referencing other people's work, and by showing that we were open to learn from commenters instead of preaching to them.
- We drew people into our campaign gently by generating conversations with the community, such as asking for positive examples of games that use gender-fair language.

Over time, as our posts and comments gained upvotes in the forum, we seemed to gain credibility - more users reached out to us over private messages which enriched our campaign, and helped us to develop relationships within the community.

Focus

We identified our change early on and had a clear idea of what we wanted to achieve, which helped us to carry out a very targeted campaign. At the same time, engaging with the board game community challenged us to continually define and evaluate what was within and outside of our scope.

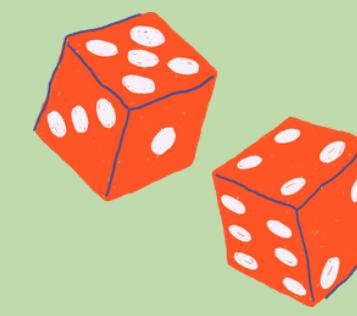
Aspects we considered were:

- Rulebooks and gender-fair language in different languages where gender-fair language isn't as easy to implement
- Changing not only rulebooks but also covers of board games and characters within the game
- Changing character names to reflect diversity (moving away from Tom, Dick and Harry)

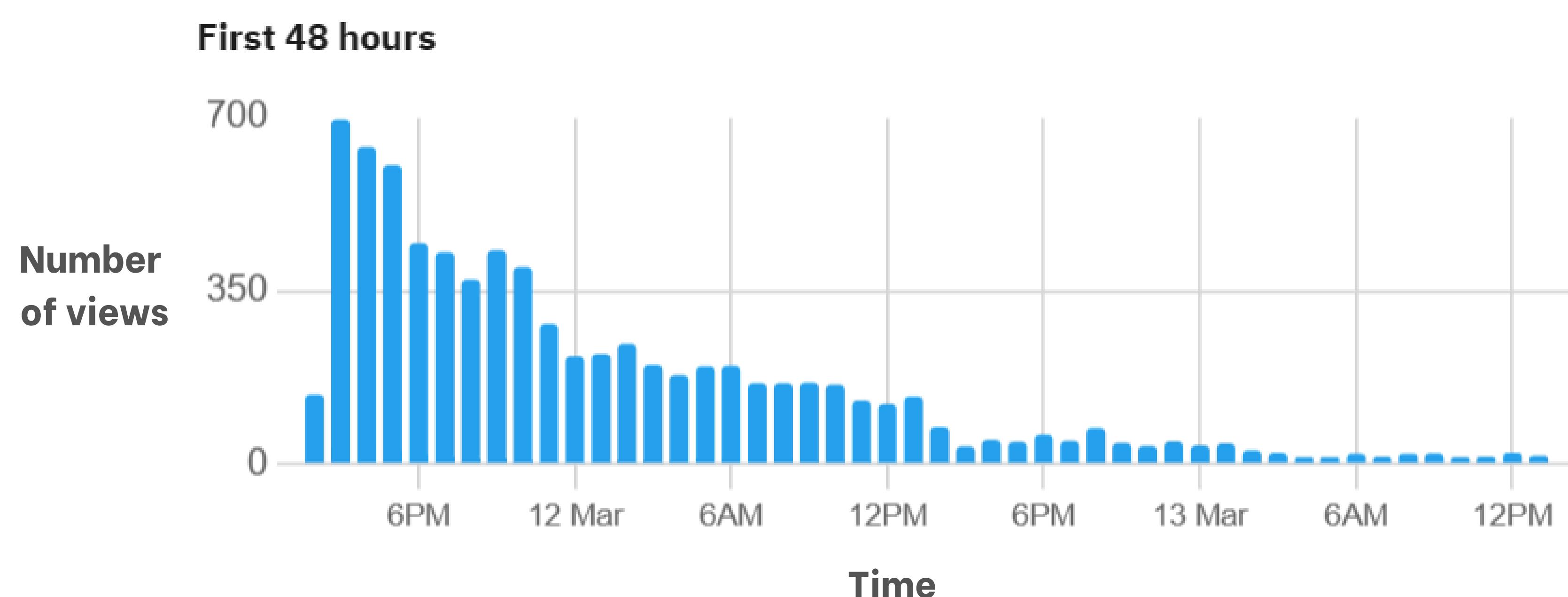
Efficiency analysis of different campaigning tools

Social media - we created accounts for X, Instagram and TikTok. Through the course of our campaign, efficiency (inc. engagement, petition signatures and tangible changes) was low compared to the input (time and effort spent to create innovative content). We believe that this was due to a combination of factors, including our campaign being quite niche and more suited to discussion, and the relatively short timeframe of the campaign for our accounts to gain traction. Our successes in this space, however, showed that if we could gain momentum over a longer time frame, social media would be an important tool to reach a larger audience and make changes on a greater scale.

Lessons Learnt (Pt. 2)

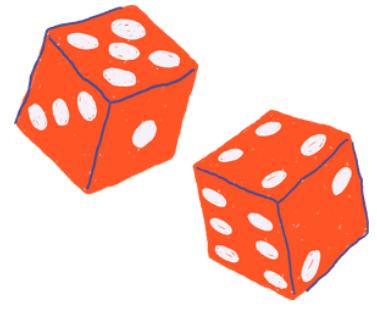


Reddit - required low input (a single, written post) and provided a good outcome (high engagement and signatures). The posts that we made reached many thousands of viewers, however the algorithm of the site ensures that posts are only 'hot' and engaged with for a limited amount of time, giving the platform short-term appeal, but no possibility of continuous engagement.



Online forums - direct communication with the community on BoardGameGeek required high input (posting regularly and replying to other people's comments). However, we decided to stick to this strategy as it provided the highest engagement (comments, petition signatures) as well as enabling us to create relationships with important members of the board game community.

Perhaps most importantly it allowed true enthusiasts like Elizabeth Hargrave to take our campaign seriously, as we were communicating through enthusiast channels and providing real value, rather than through more basic social media channels. Elizabeth, after all, is very clear on her website that she is not interested in being asked for things.



What's next?

Push On

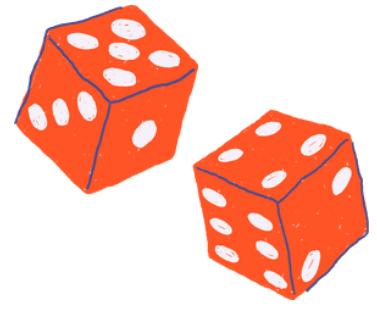
Our goal is to create industry-wide change and eradicate all cases of rulebooks defaulting to he/him by 2026. We want to target other game publishers and introduce an industry-wide commitment for publishers to use gender-fair language in all new releases and in all reprints of older games.

Consolidate

We will create a style guide for writing gender-fair language, addressing the concerns around ambiguous language raised in the forum. This style guide can facilitate discussions around gender-fair language and enable lasting change. The guide will be co-created with female and non-binary designers to ensure community ownership. We will ensure publishers and designers sign on to establish lasting industry-wide standards.

With the style guide, we also have the option to address other aspects around inclusivity which came up in our research on the community's needs, including

- equal gender distribution of characters
- inclusion of trans or non-binary characters
- character names (culturally diverse instead of traditional Tom, Dick and Harry)
- design of board game covers (women characters not overly sexualised, representation of all genders)
- address underrepresentation of female board game designers within the industry



Links

1. [An Analysis Of Gender-inclusive Language And Imagery In](#)
2. [Top-ranked Board Game Rulebooks](#)
3. [Elizabeth Hargrave](#)
4. [Elizabeth Hargrave Form](#)
5. [Our Family Plays Games](#)
6. [A is for Adolf: Teaching German Children Nazi Values](#)
7. [The impact of gender-exclusive language on women's anticipated ostracism](#)
8. [German state of Bavaria bans gender-sensitive language in schools and other public bodies](#)
9. [Ticket to Ride Rules](#)
10. [Gendered Language in Game Instructions Forum Post](#)

This work contains 2337 words and is not the product of AI.