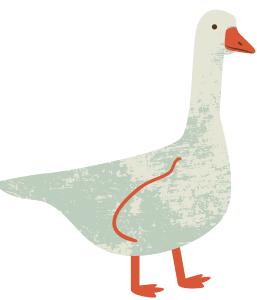




G i S



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Games Intersectional  
Symposium 2025: Zine of  
Abstracts & Reflections

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What is the...

# Games Intersectional Symposium

The Games Intersectional Symposium (GIS) is a space for marginalized voices in games to connect, create, and reflect - through research, storytelling, design, or community practice.

Following an open call, **12** contributors joined us for the symposium to present their games, research, and work, each centered around the topics of games and intersectionality.



the Symposium took place on the

19th

&

20th

September 2025

In this ZINE, we collected  
thoughts & reflections  
of the speakers & organizers

You can find...



...info about the speakers

...abstracts of their contributions

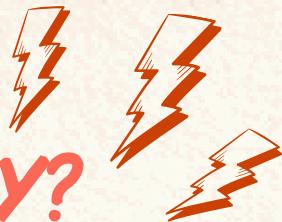
...links to game demos

and much more!

# Our Intersections



# WHY INTERSECTIONALITY?



Intersectionality is a concept developed by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe how different forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, ableism, classism, don't act separately, but overlap and reinforce each other (Crenshaw 1989; Crenshaw 1991). For example, a queer migrant woman may face barriers that can't be explained by sexism or xenophobia alone, because these systems stack up in ways that change what everyday life looks like.



Video game culture, development, and research are not separate from these dynamics. Because people with intersecting identities often face more barriers and have access to fewer resources, we wanted to create a platform that centers marginalized people in games and supports their work, thoughts, research, and creations.

The GIS 25 contributions collected in this zine reflect this focus. Here, we explore topics of resistance, social change, queerness, representation, embodiment, neurodiversity, trauma, and empathy. Some pieces offer critique of games and game cultures; others share demos and game design experiments that center lived experience and open new paths for self-expression.



Crenshaw TED Talk

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989 (1): 139-167.

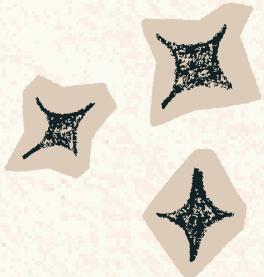
Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43 (6): 1241-1299.



Speaker's



Contributions



# Queering Play and Playing Queer in The Sims 4



## About Nic

Nic Kilzer BA MA is a PhD student and external lecturer at the University of Klagenfurt, Austria. Their research interests are broad and include cultural, literary, media and game studies as well as gender and queer studies. Their dissertation concerns depictions of queer resistance to normativity and hegemonic societal structures in fantasy, science fiction and horror media, and their real-world impact. Most recently, they have published a paper on queer representations in Dragon Age: Inquisition and given presentations at the Video Game Cultures conferences in Klagenfurt (2023) and Birmingham (2024).

## Abstract (1/2)



Based on Ruberg's notion of queer play, in which video games "can become platforms for playing at the boundaries of heteronormativity – or for disrupting and dismantling heteronormativity itself" (Ruberg 2019, 15), this talk explores the queer representation, potential and shortcomings in The Sims 4 (Maxis 2014). As a franchise, The Sims (Maxis 2000–2014) has always included queer identities, and the latest instalment proves to be the most diverse, with detailed customisation options for player characters' sexuality, gender, relationships, appearance and personality. This talk focuses on a variety of aspects that make The Sims 4 a queer game, including avatar creation and customisation, gameplay and player experience, explicit representation, relationships, and cosmetic and build items, as well as the potential for players to queer the game even further without influence from the developer.

## Abstract (2/2)

The main methodology of this talk is autoethnography. An autoethnographic approach allows me, as a queer player of The Sims 4, to connect my personal experiences to the broader cultural and social impact of the game. The combination of autoethnography, game analysis and cultural context provides a well-rounded exploration of The Sims 4 as a “safe haven” for (queer and otherwise marginalised) players. At the same time, The Sims 4 will be analysed critically, highlighting issues such as capitalism, hegemony and intolerance within the player community. As with all my research, I am committed to intersectionality and a sensitive approach to difficult topics; thus, other aspects of identity, such as race and disability, will also be taken into account in this analysis.



## This topic is important to me because...

...AS A QUEER PLAYER, I AM ALWAYS LOOKING FOR WAYS TO EXPRESS MYSELF IN THIS MEDIUM WITHOUT HAVING TO LOOK FOR A HIDDEN “GAY BUTTON”.



What stood out to me during discussion at GIS was...

...THE AMAZING DIVERSITY IN BACKGROUND, KNOWLEDGE AND IDENTITY OF EVERYONE WHO CONTRIBUTED.

If there's one action based on my contribution I'd like to see, it's...

...THAT DEVELOPERS CONTINUE TO CHAMPION DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY WITHOUT JUST TICKING A BOX. PARTICULARLY WITH THE RECENT SALE OF EA TO CONSERVATIVE ENTITIES, IT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER TO HIGHLIGHT MARGINALIZED VOICES.



Queerness

Game Analysis

Autoethnography



# The Role of the (Queer) Body in Role-Playing Practices – An Autoethnographic Analysis of Cosplay Experiences

## About Alex

Alex is currently enrolled in the MA program American Studies at the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany. He has a BA degree in Theatre Studies with American Studies as a minor. He is particularly interested in gender and queer studies, especially in the context of plays and performances. Alex also does practical field work as an actor and a cosplayer.

## Abstract (1/2)

In the field of Performance Studies, cosplay has been gaining increased attention in the past decades. Particularly from a sociological perspective, this practice is not just a form of performance art, but also a form of role-play that emphasizes the connection between the cosplayer and their body. For people who experience gender dysphoria, the fact that the physical body plays such an important part may initially be a challenge, since the body they are born in may not align with their gender identity. However, I propose a different perspective upon the notions of "role" and "character" when it comes to cosplay that presents the body as an opportunity rather than a limitation. By engaging with the language of sociologist Erving Goffman, who uses "role" as a multifaceted and interdisciplinary term that can be applied both to roles one plays in a performance but also to roles one has within society, I argue that the role that a cosplayer embodies at a convention is inherently different from the roles they occupy in everyday life, but also different from the role of the character their costume is inspired by. Thus, within the space of the convention, a new role and character emerges, and the cosplayer has certain freedoms in customizing this character.



Hi! I'm Alex  
(he / him)

## Abstract (2/2)



In this talk, I argue that the process of creating this new role enables queer cosplayers to explore their gender identity. Researchers before me have asserted that conventions are liminal spaces which are on the edge between the real world and a fantasy world. As liminal spaces, these rooms are partly disconnected from the established gender standards of society, and they offer the flexibility for cosplayers to experiment with their bodies. For this talk, I will be conducting an autoethnographic analysis of my own experiences as a transgender cosplayer who grew up in a heteronormative society with strict traditional gender roles. Disclosing my background is important to me in order to highlight why cosplay represents a unique opportunity for me to explore my body and gender presentation. I will be focusing particularly on cosplays of characters who themselves present outside of the traditional gender roles when it comes to their outer appearance. At the end of this talk, I would like to offer the opportunity for other attendees who have experience with cosplay or other forms of real-life role-playing, such as LARPing, to tell their own stories. I am aware that my own experience is strictly subjective and that every queer person might perceive their body and their gender differently, so I want to emphasize that this talk is merely a small contribution to the ongoing conversation about queer representation in convention spaces. The goal of this contribution is to stress the importance of practices such as cosplay in the struggle for visibility of marginalized groups, since they offer people a space to express themselves freely and to view their body in a different light. Furthermore, I hope that my talk will open the floor for further research in terms of how this approach can be applied to similar practices, like LARPing and how this perspective on embodied roles can be used as a technique beyond the queer lens to other intersectional groups.

Hi! I'm Alex  
(he / him)

This topic is important to me because...

... THE PRACTICE DESCRIBED HAS PERSONALLY HELPED ME EXPLORE MY GENDER IDENTITY.

What stood out to me during discussion at GIS was...

... HOW INTERTWINED THEATRE AND VIDEO GAMES CAN BE.

If there's one action based on my contribution I'd like to see, it's...

... PEOPLE FINDING SPACES IN SOCIETY WHERE THEY CAN BE THEMSELVES AND EXPERIMENT, BE IT CONVENTIONS OR ANYWHERE ELSE.



Queerness

Performance

Autoethnography

# Customizable\* - Character Creators in Games



## About Eileen

Eileen Carette is a Master's student in Game Studies and Engineering at the University of Klagenfurt in Austria. They have a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science from Western University in Ontario, Canada. While their background is in technical sciences, they have long held an interest in the humanities, and have done work in subjects ranging from literature studies to anthropology to musical theatre. Eileen is particularly interested in how mediums can shape narratives, and enjoys applying a technical and detail-oriented lens in order to delve into how creators can craft effective stories.

## Abstract



Have you ever seen a character creator that allows you to design a female character who is taller than a male character? What about one that lets women weigh more than 55 kg? Or lets you pick any body type other than curvaceous? And the real question—have any of these game designers met a real life woman before? Even as character creators become increasingly customizable, they frequently still limit options in ways that reinforce strict ideas of gender, as well as beauty standards that are frequently ableist and racist. Even in supposedly progressive games like Cyberpunk 2077, while you can customize your genitals (which the game got a good deal of press for), you can't get top surgery. Or, god forbid, have a woman be tall. By limiting customization options on the basis of gender, these character creators perpetuate ideas of what "men" and "women" are that are not based in any kind of biological reality and do not accurately reflect the diversity of the world around us. In addition to discussing this issue and how it can perpetuate internalized biases and gender roles, I will also be presenting a short game prototype designed to call attention to this issue by satirizing the arbitrariness of these limitations placed on character creators.





This topic is important to me because...

...ARBITRARY GENDER-BASED RESTRICTIONS IN CHARACTER CREATORS PERPETUATE AND REINFORCE STRICT IDEAS OF BINARY GENDER, WHICH IS NOT ONLY FRUSTRATING TO ME PERSONALLY AS A NON-BINARY PERSON, BUT ALSO PROMOTES FALSE IDEAS OF CLEAR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN THAT ARE THEN USED TO JUSTIFY SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION.

If there's one action based on my contribution I'd like to see, it's...

...CHARACTER CREATORS THAT DON'T INCLUDE GENDER-BASED RESTRICTIONS. SLIDERS FOR EVERYTHING.

play the game [here!](#)

Queerness

Game Demo

Character Creators



# Assigned Earth at Birth



## About Intrapology:

Intrapology combines games and theatre, through an innovative format designed for audiences that are excluded from in-person venues due to disability, chronic illness, or inequality. Our series of online interactive performances focuses on video calls between alien anthropologists studying our world. The audience collectively shapes the story, through a web app that looks like the protagonist's computer desktop. Our diverse team is majority LGBTQ+ and disabled or neurodivergent.

## Abstract:

Intrapology is about how people make worlds together, and the cataclysmic social fragmentation that threatens to unmake them. It is a series of online interactive performances representing the experiences of neuroqueer and chronically ill people. The question is, why are we earthbound beings socially constructing a giant shithole? And is it possible to engage purposefully in worldbuilding for a better future? We shared Assigned Earth at Birth (Intrapology Episode One) at Games Intersectional as a live table read using our open-source software Intrinsicsink in Gather.town, which participants contributed to by voting, writing, and reading.



Hi! I'm Zoy!  
(they/them)

This topic is important to me because...

I AM A CHRONICALLY ILL ARTIST AND DON'T GET TO GO OUT TO SHOWS AS MUCH AS I'D LIKE

What stood out to me during discussion at GIS was...

DIFFERENT VIEWS ON WHAT UTOPIA OR DYSTOPIA LOOK LIKE, WHAT EMPATHY MEANS, ETC.

If there's one action based on my contribution I'd like to see, it's...

MORE ONLINE-FIRST HYBRID ART THAT CENTRES QUEER DISABLED FOLK



Access

Art sharing

Performance

# SOCIAL INNOVATION AND VIDEO GAMES: EXPLORING IMPLICATIONS FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING

## About Milica & Patrick



Milica Marković is a Predoctoral Researcher and Lecturer at the Department of Innovation Management and Entrepreneurship at the University of Klagenfurt, Austria. Her research and teaching interests include Social Innovation, Circular Economy, and Sustainable Entrepreneurship. Patrick Gregori is a Senior Scientist at the Department of Innovation Management and Entrepreneurship at the University of Klagenfurt, Austria. His research and teaching interests include Entrepreneurship, Sustainability, and Business Models.

## Abstract:



Social innovation emerged as a solution to numerous global challenges. Education has the potential to increase awareness of these challenges and to shift mindsets towards more sustainable practices. Leveraging different methods and tools for knowledge dissemination is important to make a stronger impact. There is a growing interest in video games and their role in education. However, we lack insights concerning their application in social innovation education and teaching. Therefore, this study explores the educational video game Eco, building on autoethnographic approaches and players' online data to accommodate the experiences with the game. The findings show that the game's design facilitates different modes of learning that, in turn, enable social innovation competencies, including systems thinking, problem solving, and communication and collaboration. The study shows that video games like Eco have the potential to be powerful tools for learning. Furthermore, it provides practical implications for implementation in teaching settings.



This topic is important to me because...

...WE SHOULD HAVE MORE ACADEMIC RESEARCH ON VIDEO GAMES THAT CHALLENGE THE NOTION OF GAMES BEING USED SOLELY FOR ENTERTAINMENT. ADDITIONALLY, THERE IS A GAP IN RESEARCH REGARDING HOW TO TEACH SOCIAL INNOVATION, AND EXAMINING THIS TOPIC THROUGH THE LENS OF GAMIFICATION COULD CONTRIBUTE VALUABLE INSIGHTS TO THE DISCUSSION.

What stood out to me during discussion at GIS was...

...OPENNESS AND INCLUSIVITY WHICH ADDRESS PEOPLE'S DIVERSE INTERESTS REGARDING VIDEO GAMES, AS WELL AS THE AREAS THEY CHOSE TO DISCUSS.

If there's one action based on my contribution I'd like to see, it's...

...MORE PEOPLE INVOLVING IN SOCIAL INNOVATION ACTIVITIES AND CONTRIBUTING TO CHANGE.

Learning

Game Analysis

Social Innovation

# Congratulations, You've Chosen Poorly

## About Laura

Dr. Laura Arnott is an independent scholar whose work focuses on digital screen media through the lenses of gender, transcultural, and queer studies. Her doctoral thesis examined the methods involved in articulating the embodied experience of "Japaneseness" as evoked through Japanese Role-Playing Games. She has presented games research at institutions including Bangor University, Klagenfurt University, Birmingham City University, and Liverpool John Moores University. Her forthcoming publications include an article on Final Fantasy and queer play (Sidestone Press, October 2025) and a study of monstrosity in dating simulation games (Peter Lang, Spring 2026).

## Abstract

*Olleee*

"Congratulations, You've Chosen Poorly" is a choice-based interactive short story that invites players into the fractal terrain of neurodivergent embodiment - specifically, the daily navigation of AUDHD (combined autism and ADHD). Drawing inspiration from Slay the Princess (2023), Ryan North's Romeo and/or Juliet (2016), The Stanley Parable (2013), and The Wolf Among Us (2013-14), this meta-narrative uses branching paths, looping logic, and narrator/player friction to explore how perception, emotion, and identity can fragment and reform under the pressures of masking, miscommunication, and sensory overwhelm.

Through feminist and queer storytelling strategies, the piece also unsettles the binary assumptions often embedded in choice mechanics and dialogue systems, instead highlighting the fluidity, contradiction, and exhaustion involved in trying to be legible within neurotypical frameworks. Interrogating how games (and life) construct "rational" versus "irrational" responses, Congratulations, You've Chosen Poorly asks what it means to play roles you never consented to, and whether empathy can emerge not from clarity, but from shared disorientation, miscommunication and ostracism.

This contribution - comprising a creative narrative and a short reflexive companion piece - contributes to ongoing conversations around access, identity, and the politics of play, positioning creative writing as a critical tool for reimagining player subjectivity.

Hi! I'm Laura  
(she / her)

## This topic is important to me because...

...CONGRATULATIONS, YOU'VE CHOSEN POORLY IS A SEMI-AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WORK SHAPED BY MY EXPERIENCES AS AN AUDHD, QUEER, AND FEMALE CREATOR. THE GAME EXPLORES THE TENSION BETWEEN SELF-PERCEPTION, CHOICE, AND EXTERNAL EXPECTATION -THEMES THAT MIRROR HOW NEURODIVERGENT AND MARGINALISED IDENTITIES OFTEN NAVIGATE INTERSECTING SYSTEMS OF CONTROL. DESIGNING IT ALLOWED ME TO TRANSLATE LIVED EXPERIENCE INTO A FORM THAT QUESTIONS HOW WE "PLAY" IDENTITY AND AGENCY WITHIN CONSTRAINED STRUCTURES.

## What stood out to me during discussion at GIS was...

...THE SUPPORTIVE, COLLABORATIVE ATMOSPHERE OF THE SYMPOSIUM - PARTICULARLY HOW NEURODIVERSE MODES OF THINKING AND COMMUNICATING WERE MET WITH OPENNESS. IT UNDERSCORED HOW MUCH WE NEED ACADEMIC SPACES THAT CONSCIOUSLY ACCOMMODATE DIFFERENT COGNITIVE AND SENSORY STYLES, AND HOW REFRAMING CONFERENCES TO INCLUDE EMBODIMENT, AND SLOWER DIALOGUE CAN MAKE PARTICIPATION GENUINELY INCLUSIVE.

## If there's one action based on my contribution I'd like to see, it's...

...I'D LIKE TO SEE MORE CREATORS AND INSTITUTIONS EMBRACING SELF-REFLEXIVE FORMS OF PRACTICE THAT FOREGROUND NEURODIVERGENT EXPERIENCE AS A CREATIVE STRENGTH, RATHER THAN SOMETHING TO BE ADAPTED AROUND.

Queerness

play the game [here!](#)

Game Demo

Neurodiversity

# Disruption through Strategic Game Design: Challenging Caste Transmission Using Interactive Media

## About Skrikkanth

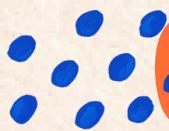


I'm a queer, neurodivergent HCI graduate of an Indian ethnic origin with a personal and academic interest in gaming. I grew up in a conservative hostile environment and internalized toxic views while struggling with identity. Gaming helped me build resilience and unlearn harmful patterns in the absence of mental health support, becoming a lifeline. Over time, gaming helped me survive, challenge and reshape how I see the world.

My academic research focuses on Player-Computer Interaction. I've written a couple of research papers on player emotions, behaviours, mechanics, learning curves and I'm looking to pursue a PhD that brings together games, mental health, and camaraderie. I believe that gaming holds immense potential for emotional growth, social justice, and healing. I'm extremely passionate about the discourse around gaming and the industry, and deeply value symposiums like this as communities where I can contribute strongly and be a part of.

## Abstract (1/3)

In many non-western conservative cultural contexts, queerness is met with strong hostility. However, certain queer-coded characters in fiction have been met with affection, even by those who express strong anti-LGBTQ+ views. This essay explores this paradox through the lens of a queer character- Bon Clay, from One piece, a Japanese Manga series. Bon Clay is a flamboyant character who is an 'Okama'- A Japanese term used to describe homosexuals. While the identity of Bon Clay is debated, the character, despite strongly representing the LGBTQ community, is widely beloved among Indian Anime fans, who identify to be predominantly anti-LGBTQ+. This reception reveals a paradoxical contradiction where understanding the character design and representation further can override cultural prejudice, creating space for empathy without direct affirmation. In a media landscape like India, where Indian mythology is resurging in games but stripped of its pre-colonial queerness, this paradox becomes a powerful tool. By examining how parasocial relationships, mythic narrative design, and emotional framing affect audience reception, this piece proposes a strategic framework for designing queer characters in games especially within hostile or conservative societies.



Hi! I'm Srikkanth  
(they / them)

## Abstract (2/3)



Bon Clay, from One Piece is a flamboyant character who is a part of the LGBTQ+ community. They identify as an 'Okama' in Japanese culture. While a specific identity isn't attached to them, the community usually considers Bon Clay to fall under the original definition of Okama which is homosexual, and certain groups consider them to be gender-fluid or Non-Binary. Despite embodying traits often targeted by a queerphobic rhetoric, Bon Clay is paradoxically beloved by many Indian anime fans, including those who otherwise express discomfort or hostility toward queer identities. This contradiction points to the emotional disarmament embedded in their design. Bon Clay sacrifices themselves for friends, remaining fiercely loyal to the protagonist, while providing levity in emotionally intense arcs. These traits likely allow audiences to form deep parasocial connections that override their cultural biases. In a context where real-world queerness is demonized, characters like Bon Clay become emotionally acceptable exceptions, revealing a powerful role in narrative framing in enabling empathy for marginalized identities.



To contrast, Abby from The Last of Us Part II is a muscular, morally complex character whose arc includes killing a beloved protagonist, Joel. While she represents a form of queerness and emotional vulnerability, her physical dominance and narrative ambiguity challenge the emotional expectations of players. Unlike Bon Clay, Abby offers no comic relief, no traditional sacrifice for the hero, and no traits that culturally disarm resistance. As a result, she is widely hated even beyond her actions, which reveals how queerness, when presented without emotional buffers, is often punished in popular media. This contrast with Bon Clay highlights the importance of emotional design in character reception: it is not only identity that provokes rejection, but how that identity is framed, softened, or challenged within the player's moral comfort zone. Pre-colonial Indian mythology was rich with queer and gender-fluid representations: from Mohini, the female avatar of Vishnu, to Ardhanarishvara, the composite of Shiva and Parvati, and Shikhandi, a trans warrior in the Mahabharata. Texts like the Kamasutra explored sexuality with nuance beyond the heteronormative binary. However, colonial influence and Victorian morality, later reinforced by nationalist conservatism, led to the systematic erasure and sanitization of these narratives.



## Abstract (3/3)

Today, Indian mythology is resurging as a source of pride and cultural identity in games like *Raji: An Ancient Epic* or *Uncharted: Lost Legacy* or even upcoming AAA games in India like *The Age of Bhaarat*, which centers the world and narrative core around Indian Mythology. However, in this resurgence, the queer histories are almost entirely absent. This erasure represents both a loss and an opportunity. Given the emotional and cultural reverence Indian audiences hold for mythology and parasocial relationships, carefully reintroducing queerness through these familiar narratives can allow designers to restore erased identities while disarming resistance through cultural familiarity. In doing so, games can reclaim myth's original inclusivity while engaging players in meaningful, emotionally resonant representation.

The paradox of Bon Clay's acceptance reveals a subtle but designable emotional pattern: queerness framed through traits like sacrifice, mythic loyalty, comic relief, and deep friendship can bypass cultural resistance in ways that direct identity affirmation often cannot. While this should never replace authentic, unapologetic queer storytelling, considering this approach as a starting point presents a powerful strategy especially in conservative or postcolonial societies where backlash is high and empathy is low. In Indian contexts, where parasocial bonds with characters are intense and emotionally intimate, such design strategies can likely serve as soft interventions: not diluting queerness, but translating it into culturally familiar emotional languages. While not a rigid framework, it can be a call for designers and storytellers to observe which narrative traits provoke empathy, and how they can be used to reintroduce erased queer histories through games. In doing so, designers may find new ways to challenge prejudice through contradiction over confrontation.

As someone who identifies as an Indian Queer and a part of the Indian cultural context, I'm approaching this paradox as a lived tension over just an abstract concept. The emotional acceptance of queer-coded characters by queerphobic audiences is hopeful but deeply troubling. It reveals design potential, but also the conditional nature of that affection. There is a strong ethical risk in suggesting queerness must be softened, sacrificed, or mythologized to be accepted. Indian mythology is sacred to many, and queer lives are not narrative tools. Yet ignoring these contradictions leaves the space open for tokenism, erasure, or nationalist co-optation. This essay reflects on how emotional resonance, if handled with care, can reopen doors that were closed by colonialism and conservatism. It does not suggest compromise of Queer character design. Games, with their unique capacity for immersion and empathy, can carry that work forward if we are willing to sit with the discomfort and design through it.

Hi! I'm Srikanth  
(they / them)



## This topic is important to me because...

...I WAS RAISED WITHIN CASTE PRIVILEGE, TAUGHT TO SEE IT AS CULTURE AND PRIDE RATHER THAN HIERARCHY AND HARM AND UNLEARNING THAT SYSTEM HAS BEEN DIFFICULT AS IT IS AN ONGOING PROCESS OF REFUSAL. THIS TOPIC MATTERS TO ME BECAUSE CASTE CONTINUES TO SURVIVE AND HARM QUIETLY THROUGH FAMILY AND DIASPORA - AND I BELIEVE INTERACTIVE MEDIA CAN BE USED TO INTERRUPT THAT TRANSMISSION. GAMES HAVE IMMENSE POTENTIAL TO CHALLENGE THE BELIEFS WE INHERIT BEFORE THEY BECOME IDENTITY.

## What stood out to me during discussion at GIS was...

...HOW DEEPLY PEOPLE RESONATED WITH THE IDEA THAT GAMES AND RESEARCH ARE, AND SHOULD NEVER BE NEUTRAL - THAT DESIGN ITSELF CAN BE AN ETHICAL AND POLITICAL ACT. I LOVED HOW PARTICIPANTS CONNECTED QUEERNESS, RACE, AND OTHER INTERSECTIONAL ELEMENTS AS INTERSECTING SYSTEMS OF EXCLUSION THAT CAN BE MADE VISIBLE AND CHALLENGED THROUGH GAMING.

## If there's one action based on my contribution I'd like to see, it's...

...I'D LIKE TO SEE MORE DESIGNERS, ESPECIALLY FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH, AND ITS DIASPORAS, APPROACH GAME DESIGN AS A SPACE FOR RADICAL JUSTICE AND RESISTANCE. CREATE WORLDS THAT CONFRONT INHERITED HARM, RATHER THAN REPRODUCE IT. MOST OF THE RESEARCH AND CHANGE IS SITUATED AND FOCUSED TOWARDS THE GLOBAL NORTH - AND I WOULD LOVE TO TAKE THIS FURTHER WITH EXPOSURE TOWARDS THE IMMENSE POTENTIAL THAT GAME-BASED RESEARCH HOLDS IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH.

Resistance

Social Change

Game Design



# No Diversity, No Games: Why Inclusion Is No Longer Optional

## About Jack:

Jack Guttman is a Syrian refugee in Austria and an award-winning game developer across art, real-time VFX, game design, and gameplay programming. Known for Path Out, re-launched by UNHCR for educational purposes.

## Abstract:

Game development is at a creative standstill. We're recycling systems, stories, and perspectives. Jack Gutmann, Syrian refugee and Real-Time VFX Artist/Generalist Artist, makes the case that diversity is not charity or branding it's survival. Jack shines the light on how the lack of marginalized voices isn't just unjust, it's making our games boring, repetitive, and financially fragile. This is not about being "nice." This is about keeping games alive.



Hi! I'm Jack  
(he / him)



## This topic is important to me because...

...INEQUALITY ISN'T JUST ABOUT PREJUDICE, IT'S ABOUT CHANCES. I'M FROM SYRIA, WHERE COMPUTERS WERE BANNED UNTIL THE EARLY 2000S. MY CHANCE OF PURSUING COMPUTER SCIENCE WAS FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT FROM SOMEONE BORN IN EUROPE. IF WE ONLY HIRE BASED ON PRIVILEGED ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE, WE MISS OUT ON BRILLIANT MINDS. WE NEED EQUITY TO LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD, AND NOT JUST IN JOBS, BUT BY LOOSENING LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION BARRIERS FOR REFUGEES. BEYOND THE MATH, THIS IS ABOUT SURVIVAL. PEOPLE FROM MARGINALIZED BACKGROUNDS BRING NOVEL PERSPECTIVES AND PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS THAT ARE THE ANTIDOTE TO THE CREATIVE STAGNATION KILLING OUR INDUSTRY.

## If there's one action based on my contribution I'd like to see, it's...

...FOR PEOPLE IN HIRING AND LEADERSHIP TO CHALLENGE THEIR DEFINITION OF "QUALIFIED." THE NEXT TIME YOU SEE TWO RESUMES, ONE PRISTINE, ONE UNCONVENTIONAL, I WANT YOU TO ASK WHY. THE ANSWER IS ALMOST ALWAYS THAT ONE PERSON HAD A FAIR CHANCE TO WORK HARD AND SUCCEED, WHILE THE OTHER HAD TO FIGHT JUST FOR THE STARTING LINE. STOP GLORIFYING THE INHUMAN "HUSTLE" OF WORKING THREE JOBS TO SURVIVE. WE NEED TO MOVE BEYOND THE "PULL YOURSELF UP BY YOUR BOOTSTRAPS" MYTH AND START BUILDING LADDERS INSTEAD. THE ACTION IS SIMPLE: CHOOSE TO SEE POTENTIAL, AND THEN TAKE A CHANCE ON IT.

Resistance

Social Change

Games Design

# Game Demo: Ascension Day



## About Ricardo & Rue

Ricardo: I'm a game design student of mixed race. I am autistic, and have been struggling with mental illness for most of my life. When I first started dealing with (at the time) undiagnosed anxiety and depression at 14 years old, I made Ascension Day to get some of the things I was feeling off my chest. It just started as your traditional JRPG, but it evolved into characters that had a little bit of me in them.

Rue: pronouns are she/they, the writing editor and additional game designer of Ascension Day

## Abstract:

This is a game that explores various mental illnesses and reactions to trauma. It also explores themes of religion and race, with the main character, Rikuto, being of mixed race and dealing with depression, along with Shun dealing with the struggles trans men face, Kumiko having anger issues, Unknown being an empath and feeling worthless without serving others, and Yuutsu having anxiety and self-harming as punishment. This is an RPG visual novel hybrid. I wanted to share a game demo as well as a medley of music from the game played on the piano.

play the game [here!](#)

Hi!  
We're Ricardo (he/him)  
& Rue (she /her)



## This topic is important to me because...

...THE TOPIC OF MENTAL HEALTH HAS BEEN REALLY CLOSE TO MY HEART BECAUSE IT IS SOMETHING THAT I STRUGGLE WITH ON A DAILY BASIS.

## What stood out to me during discussion at GIS was...



...A LOT OF OTHER PEOPLE STRUGGLE WITH THIS TOO, AND IT'S A RELIEF TO SEE OTHER PEOPLE WHO ARE AS PASSIONATE ABOUT SIMILAR TOPICS AS I AM.

## If there's one action based on my contribution I'd like to see, it's...

...I JUST WISH FOR PEOPLE TO BE A BIT MORE UNDERSTANDING OF MENTAL HEALTH IN GENERAL. I WANT THEM TO SEE THIS GAME AND THINK OF ALL THE PEOPLE THEY MAY HAVE LEFT BEHIND OR FORGOTTEN ABOUT BECAUSE OF MENTAL ILLNESS. AND I WANT THE PEOPLE WHO ARE AFFECTED BY MENTAL ILLNESS TO SEE THIS GAME AND SEE SOMEONE OUT THERE WHO UNDERSTANDS THEM.



Art

Game Demo

Performance



# Reimagining what affects us: An Afternoon at Home

## About Tan:

Tan Schütz finished the Master programme Game Studies and Engineering at the University of Klagenfurt in the beginning of 2025. Nowadays, they teach in that very same program about video games, representation, and queerness. Their research often combines theoretical, activist, and therapeutic approaches to understand how video games affect us, and how we can affect them as systems and worlds. When their cat is not sitting on their keyboard, they can be reached via tan.y.schuetz@gmail.com.



## Abstract:

As part of my MA thesis, I created a game in Twine called "An Afternoon at Home". It is based on the analysis of an indie visual novel ("Our Life: Beginnings and Always") from the lens of radical softness, affect theory, and schema therapy. Following ideas from these three approaches, this game does not replicate childhood experiences but reimagines them in a way I nowadays wish they had happened.



Hi! I'm Tan  
(they/them)



This topic is important to me because...

... IT'S BASED ON MY OWN CHILDHOOD AND SOMETHING I CAN ONLY SHARE IN FEW CIRCLES.

What stood out to me during discussion at GIS was...

... HOW THE GAME RESONATED WITH YOU. THANK YOU FOR YOUR ENGAGEMENT AND IMPRESSIONS!

If there's one action based on my contribution I'd like to see, it's...

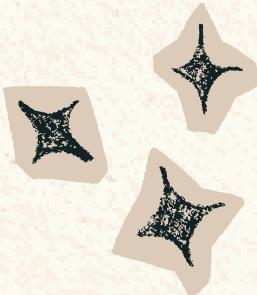
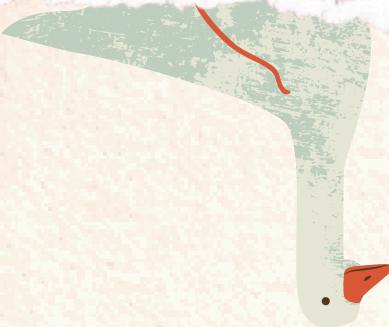
... ALLOWING YOURSELF TO NOT FEEL GREAT AND PRODUCTIVE. TAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF, TO JUST BE WITH YOUR FEELINGS AND MEMORIES.



Queerness

Radical Softness

Therapeutic Games



# Organizer's Reflections





The symposium is important to me because...

...IT ALLOWED ME TO MEET AND CONNECT WITH LIKEMINDED PEOPLE WHILE LEARNING ABOUT DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES.

What stood out to me during the symposium was...

...HOW MUCH PEOPLE CONNECTED ABOUT THEIR SHARED IDEAS, BUT ALSO STRUGGLES.



If there's one action I'd like to see going into the future, it's...

...THE DECONSTRUCTION OF BARRIERS FOR MARGINALIZED PEOPLE IN GAME STUDIES AND GAME DEVELOPMENT!



RACHEL



## The symposium is important to me because...

IT'S PROOF THAT WE CAN BUILD ACADEMIC SPACES THAT TAKE LIVED EXPERIENCE SERIOUSLY, VALUE MULTIPLE WAYS OF KNOWING, AND MAKE ROOM FOR PLAYFUL FORMS OF SCHOLARSHIP

## What stood out to me during the symposium was...

HOW EASY IT FELT TO BE UNDERSTOOD. NOBODY NEEDED CONVINCING THAT GAMES, IDENTITY, DISABILITY, TRAUMA, AND COMMUNITY MATTER — WE WERE ALREADY SPEAKING THE SAME LANGUAGE, SO CONNECTION FELT NATURAL, EVEN ONLINE.

## If there's one action I'd like to see going into the future, it's...

I'D LOVE TO SEE MORE CONFERENCES EMBRACE MIXED FORMATS AS A LEGITIMATE WAY OF DOING SCHOLARSHIP, NOT ONLY PAPERS, BUT ALSO DEMOS, PERFORMANCES, AND CREATIVE WRITING, ALL TREATED AS EQUALLY "SERIOUS," IN THE SAME TRACK AND HIERARCHY.

KSENIIA

hi





The symposium is important to me because...

IT HELPED ME CONNECT WITH LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE AND DISCUSS TOPICS THAT ARE OTHERWISE IGNORED OR ACTIVELY SHUNNED IN GAMES-RELATED SPACES.

What stood out to me during the symposium was...

THE DIVERSITY OF TOPICS DISCUSSED, AND HOW IN-DEPTH AND SPECIFIC SOME OF THE PRESENTATIONS WERE!

If there's one action I'd like to see going into the future, it's...

PEOPLE HAVING MORE WILLINGNESS TO LISTEN TO AND UNDERSTAND OTHERS.



SHIVI  
(THEY / THEM)



The symposium is important to me because...

COMING FROM A TECH BACKGROUND, I FEEL LIKE THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH ACADEMIC SPACES FOR PEOPLE TO BE UNAPOLOGETICALLY THEMSELVES, AND I AM HAPPY THAT WE WERE ABLE TO CREATE ONE.

What stood out to me during the symposium was...

HOW OPEN PEOPLE WERE ABOUT SHARING THEIR OWN STRUGGLES, WHICH HELPED EVERYONE FORM BONDS WITH EACH OTHER FASTER.

If there's one action I'd like to see going into the future, it's...

ELITISM BEING REPLACED WITH KINDNESS AND RESPECT FOR ONE ANOTHER.





THANK YOU FOR TAKING  
THE TIME TO LOOK  
THROUGH OUR ZINE



FOR MORE INFO  
ON THE  
SYMPOSIUM OR  
TO GET IN  
TOUCH, VISIT  
OUR [WEBSITE](#)

