What are the most effective strategies to improve gender balance in game studios?

A worldwide issue about to be completely and instantly solved by some random undergraduate student dancing on the heavy side of the gender balance scales

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Question

Background

- According to IGDA, women comprised 21% of the game industry workforce in 2018 [15] - down 1% from 22% in 2014 [7].
- Similarly, in 2018, women comprised only 17% of IT sectors in the UK [1]
    - Management positions have the most balance: in 2018, the proportion of women in IT project and programme management positions was 32% [1] (up from 15% in 2013 [2].)
- Finally, according to HESA, only 17% of computer science university students were female in 2016 [4] - corresponding with the IT industry
    - This limitation in developing talent suggests the issue begins at a much earlier stage than the workplace.

Issues

- A 2013 study concluded that a "sense of belonging" is said to enhance meaning in life [10]
- Regular incidents of targeted harassment of women by vocal portions of the gaming community [**?**, 8, 11] threaten this sense of belonging.
    - Further research: GamerGate
- In such an example of repeated harassment and the resulting controversy, a minority may be inclined to believe that this is a result of being outnumbered by an oppressive entity
    - This is unlikely to incentivise working in the industry as a minority

- Many studies and news articles push for greater character diversity in games.
- Is the appeal of playing games associated with the appeal of producing games?
    - The rise in female gamers [3] and drop in female developers [7, 15] challenges this association
    - Games that represent women more could improve the sense of belonging in the gaming community through role models - predicting the desire to make games. (cite 'playing games' linked to making games)

Effects of improved diversity

- In an ideal world: could improve diversity of games due to increased diversity of perspectives in workplaces
  - In the present world: actually can disrupt the implementation process due to creative differences [9]
  - "Transformational leadership" can overcome this through moderation of ideas whilst facilitating intrinsic motivation within the team [14]
- An influential study analysing relational demography [12] showed that workers in a heterogeneous workplace reported highest satisfaction when the organisation comprised members of their sex, as well as a general preference of homogeneity.
- A difference in gender, among other demographic differences, have been associated with a negative perception of subordinates by superiors overall [13]
- Conclusion: Existing behaviours disrupt potential benefits of diversity, at least in the present culture

Impacts of discussion

- Discussion of discrimination appears to be far from sufficient, but is necessary to facilitate the development of solutions
- Movements such as #MeToo and #GamerGate raise awareness of the harassment of women in the workplace
- Counter-productive effects:
  - Could greater awareness of workplace harassment, while essential for progression, also successfully portray the workplace as an unappealing and unreachable place for women?
  - Could sensitivity to the topic from conflict-fearing individuals, for fear of tension and self-association with a polarising or aggressive party, hinder progress?

Potential solutions

- I had no time to cite these solution ideas, halp.
- Stats suggest the problem develops before university age.
- Several programmes (citation needed, HALP) have been engaged specifically to affirm and facilitate women's potential in computing, with K-12 level programming activities
    - This helps the computing domain...
    - ...however, demographics on sites such as DeviantART suggests a lot of talent exists already - but is not in the industry. This is indicative of the other issues at play.
- Discussions portray a negative and uninviting perspectives of the industry
    - How can we counter this with discussion of positive results?
- Stronger harassment policies could be implemented to counter minority-targeted toxicity (and toxicity in general)
- Boom this problem is totally and cleanly resolved by this undergraduate student with Internets

Outstanding Questions

- What are the links between game content and developer demographics?
  - Hard to answer definitively: Demographics for players of specific games are hard to find.
  - Anecdotal intuition may suggest a natural link between the gender of an artist and its fanbase, owing to differences in preference and perspective.
- What is the association between the IT industry and gaming industry?
  - A 2009 study [6] found that the link between gaming and working in the IT industry was not strong, even though the gender disparity between both industries is similar.

Any questions?

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