Manifesto - Issues in the Industry

Video games are the perfect way to waste time. There is nothing like the feeling of laying back on the couch, folded up in a blanket with a controller in both hands, ready to escape to another world. As you delve into whatever universe you want, with snow falling slowly on mountains or a gigantic, chaotic storm at the beach, you become the character with new goals, beliefs, relationships, abilities, and more. Playing as a character can often have an affect on how you see the world outside, so the way the content is delivered is important. It is also important that the content includes people of diverse backgrounds and identities as the people playing are, and deserve to see themselves represented and have the best time playing that they can!

It is currently 2021 and video games have been around for decades now. Despite this time, there are still many issues within the gaming industry and the community that need to be addressed. Currently less than 13% of characters in video games are Black, with not many as protagonists, and much of the representation is coming from sports games that recreate real players. There are also less than 5% of characters in popular titles that are Latinx. The first Black characters to be featured in video games were in sports games such as "PUNCH OUT!!" in 1987 and "these characters were often cast as caricatures, with exaggerated, grotesque features," (Leveling Up Representation). There have also been various recent examples of racism, problematic things, and misrepresentation in games such as *Border Patrol,* a flash game with a goal to keep people from immigrating to the U.S., *Resident Evil 5* where you play as a white protagonist doing mass killings of Black enemies, and the constant portrayal of Black characters as violent and aggressive.

A lot of the issues lie in that the majority of people working in the industry are straight, white, cisgender men. A study conducted by the International Game Devlopers Association in 2019 showed that 71% were male, 24% were female, 3% were non-binary, and 79% were heterosexual. It also identified that 69% were only white, with 81% being white in total, 7% were latinx, indigenous people including pacific islanders were 5%, 16% were Asian, and Black/African-American/African/Afro-Carribean were only under 2% (igda Developer Satisfaction Survey 2019). This does not reflect everyone playing the games and means people controlling the content have non universal and specific biases, stereotypes, ideas, values, etc. It is very important to have different viewpoints and voices when creating forms of entertainment and media especially when creating content about characters that are not just straight, white, men, and because it's a form of entertainment that is so widely played.

There is also a wage gap between women and men working at companies. Along with this, many women have reported that their gender is a limiting factor in their career progression and that they have experienced direct harassment or bullying due to their gender ([The video game industry has a diversity problem – but it can be fixed](#)). More issues were highlighted by the online movement gamergate started in 2014 that showed struggles being female or non-binary within the industry. These included misogyny, character assasinations, hate speech, and death threats ([State of the Industry 2019](#)).

The gaming community can be harmful as well. There is harassment and bullying targeted at players who are women and/or POC. People use slurs, make racist jokes, and there are a lot of stereotypes that girls can't play or be gamers, which becomes a part of the culture. These people are often not held accountable for their actions and it is sometimes not an option on platforms to report them for specific (racist, sexist, etc.) behavior.

A better environment within the industry and community is needed which would include the following:

Workplace/Industry:

- More easily accessible programs to teach POC, women, LGBTQ+, disabled, low income people etc. skills in the technology field and others needed to work in the video game industry is needed.

- More POC, women, LGBTQ+, disabled, low income people etc. must be reached out to and hired to work in video game production, for high quality games, long term. More oppurtunities within the job should be created for them to learn and grow.

- Video Game Production Companies and people in the video game community and/or industry need to be held accountable and take responsibility for their actions including harmful representations of characters, cyberbullying, harassment, abuse and more.

- People should not be overworked to the point where they are burntout and frequently exhausted, anxious, stressed and/or depressed.

- Companies should value and better address the mental health of employees, create shifts around work hours and days as needed, and learn better managment.

In-game:

- An increase in the diversity and representation of POC, women, LGBTQ+, disabled, and other underrepresented people as characters in video games is a necessity, with strong, respectful, non stereotypical portrayls.

- Every character who is POC, a woman, LGBTQ+, disabled etc. should not have their whole story be based on the specific aspect of their identity. They should have their own dreams, values, motives, personality, likes, dislikes, etc. that are not all centered around their identity.

  - Characters should be able to exist in the video game world as POC, LGBTQ+, a woman, disabled, etc. without it being the biggest part of their story. It's important to normalize that people outside of the white, straight, male norm exist and live their lives and have their own stories that aren't just because they are a certain identity.

  - This is not to say that the experiences specific to people of different identities such as how they are treated by others, traditions they partake in, their relationships, or passed on belifs should be erased. There should be a comfortable middle ground in which a character exists with their identities and also who they are unrelated to their identity woven together to how they experience life.

- When incorporating different experiences and cultures into video games, extensive research on the topic is crucial, from real people who have shared experiences or aspects of their identity with the character (like diversity consultants). It is also important to include the artists and the people working in the industry who have that shared identity or experience in the work and production itself.

  - People who are working on building the story and adding cultural elements should go through diversity training.

Culture:

- Video game culture needs to shift to being more accepting, aware, anti-discrimination, and anti-harrasment as this behavior is not tolerated.

- There needs to be more regulations against cyberbullying and harrasment on video game platforms including the option to submit complaints/report users for racist, misogynistic, anti-LGBTQ+ and/or ableist behavior.

It is important that this form of entertainment which is played by people of all genders, races, sexual orientations, etc. to have artists, thinkers, coders, designers, writers, etc. to reflect the communities it is being played by. More people who are not white, straight, cis, and male deserve the chances to work in the video game industry and create great games. Also, as people see more and more people like themselves represented in the industry, hopefully it will inspire more to apply for jobs. Changing who creates the content, changes the content! I know I would love to play games with more of a diverse range of characters, and these demands will help the industry make that possible for everyone.