Games and Play Day 2

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"Horror, guilt and shame" – Uncomfortable Experiences in Digital Games
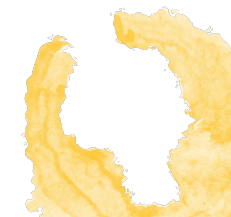
Chad Phoenix Rose Gowler and Ioanna Iacovides

When poll is active, respond at **PollEv.com/adriannaburton109**

Text **ADRIANNABURTON109** to **22333** once to join

https://PollEv.com/multiple_choice_polls/vYySJR4fKAxcZBzdJosa4/respond

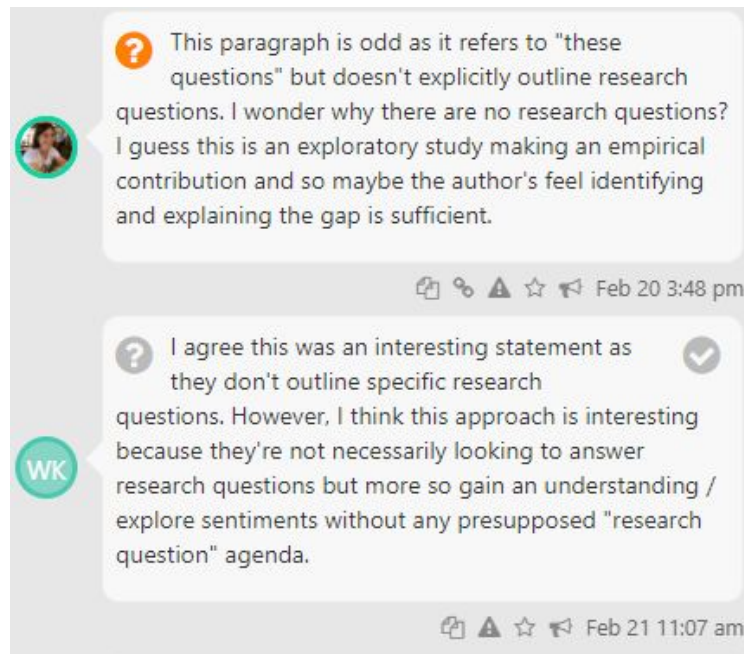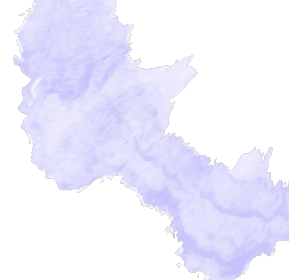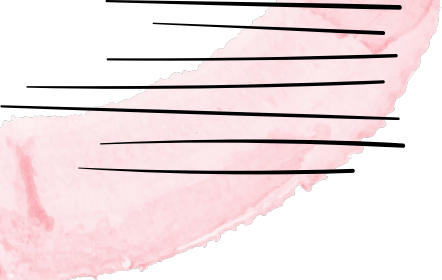https://PollEv.com/multiple_choice_polls/Ty0YC1NpgsPtQPUiq0z2P/respond

Overview

Gap in the research

- Shift in HCI towards understanding more complex forms of player experience, but has yet to examine player discomfort

Research questions

- How discomfort is caused, different forms, and how it influences overall engagement

**Research questions?
Where?**
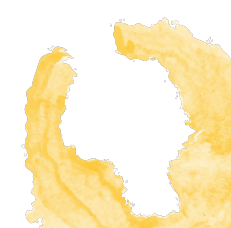
Uncomfortable Interactions

Benford et al. "those that cause a degree of suffering to the user"

- Can provide benefits when done carefully and ethically

4 main types of discomfort

- Visceral: unpleasant sensations or pain
- Cultural: difficult themes and association
- Control: surrendering or gaining responsibility
- Intimacy: distorting social norms

More recent research starting to look into uncomfortable interactions in more mainstream games

Method

immigration,
moral
dilemmas,
gun violence,
violence,
drugs, nudity

PAPERS, PLEASE
the short film

PAPERS, PLEASE - The Short Film (2018) 4K SUBS

13,303,359 views • Feb 24, 2018
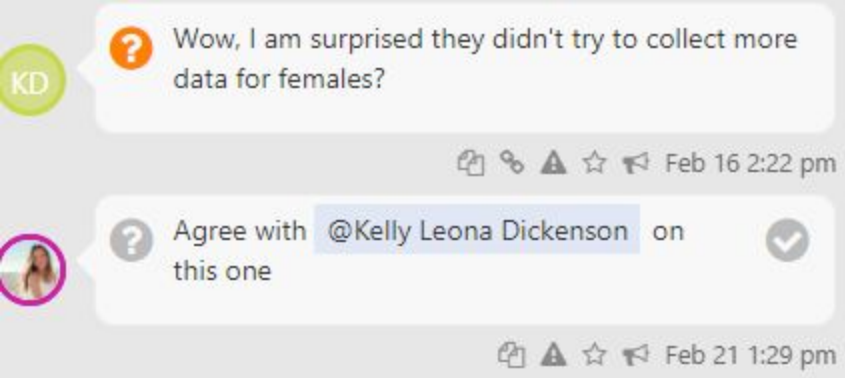
Participants

	Total responses	Mean age	M	F	NB
Darkest Dungeon	40	23.40 (SD: 5.96)	38	2	0
Fallout 4	28	30.18 (SD: 10.99)	19	8	1
Papers, please	27	23.96 (SD: 5.79)	18	7	2

Table 1. Breakdown of responses and demographics by game (M = male, F = female, NB = non-binary)

Final Themes

The nature of discomfort
1. The persistent pressure of uncertainty
2. When things don't go your way
3. Great responsibility, limited power
4. The tragedy of loss
5. Unwanted exposure to disturbing themes
Impact on player engagement
6. The need to process uncomfortable experiences
7. Discomfort as contributing to a richer gameplay experience
8. Discomfort as a catalyst for reflection on life, the universe and everything

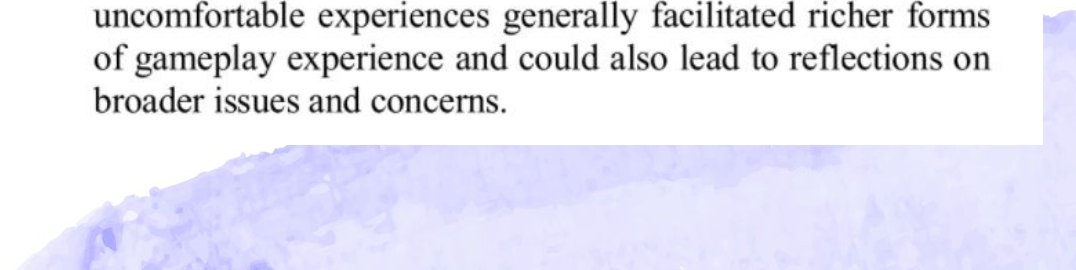Table 2: List of final themes

Implications/Suggestions

"Based on our findings, we would suggest that game designers should consider ensuring that any discomfort is relatively short-lived, and to provide players with an opportunity to step back and process their experience."

What games have made you feel discomfort?

Why might this be the authors' main suggestion?

What are some ways designers might create an opportunity to process discomfort?

disturbing themes. Many of these experiences resulted in strong negative reactions where players expressed feelings such as anxiety, frustration, feeling foolish, guilt, sadness, helplessness and disgust. To process these feelings, players required time and space. While there was a risk that discomfort could jeopardize their engagement, uncomfortable experiences generally facilitated richer forms of gameplay experience and could also lead to reflections on broader issues and concerns.

Hacking Masculine Cultures – Career Ambitions of Female Young Professionals in a Video Game Company

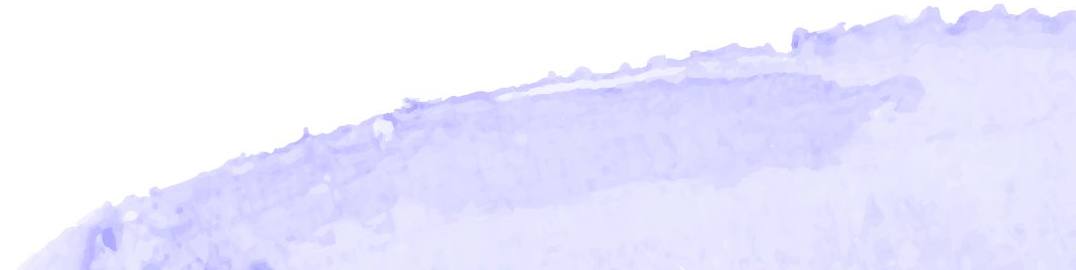**Michael Ahmadi, Rebecca Eilert, Anne Weibert, Volker Wulf, Nicola Marsden**

15%

Percentage of IT workforce who are women
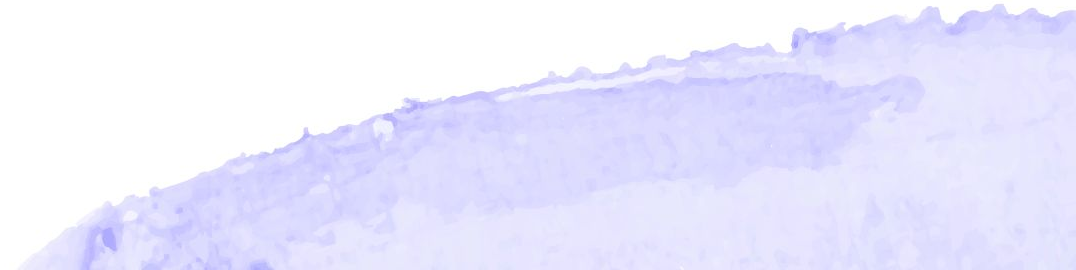
Introduction

- Women face many barriers in the workplace, and IT is no exception
  - Pay gaps
  - Sexism and stereotypes
  - Lack of advancement and networking
- Lack of diversity -> design flaws and a poorly designed final product
- Employing women can dismantle stereotypes embedded in game mechanics and design
  - Think about the last video game you played–was the protagonist a woman? A woman of color?
  - If your character is customizable–were you able to make it look exactly like you?
- Men benefit most from a corporate workplace, forcing women to make changes in order to have their voices heard

Research goals

- Ethnographic study
- Describe concepts of masculinity in corporate structures
- How do female professionals navigate the workplace?
- Make contributions to the discussion and undoing of gender in the workplace and feminist research in HCI

Gender and video game culture

- Gender assumptions are responsible for lack of women in the tech sphere
- Video games are vastly underrepresented, but the proportion of male and female gamers is equal
- Gaming is marketed to boys, gaming is seen as a masculine hobby
- Both of these are games that I have played…what makes one more masculine? More feminine? How do you think these games play into gender stereotypes?

Gender and the video game industry

- Most women who are in industry are in non-technical roles (PM, HR)
- Sexism is rampant, as evidenced by the GamerGate controversy
- Men who represent a certain type of heterosexual masculinity tend to benefit most from societal power structures, all others are subordinate -> "hegemonic masculinity"

What we still haven't learned from Gamergate

Gamergate should have armed us against bad actors and bad-faith arguments. It didn't.

Sarkeesian cancels Utah speech after GamerGate threat of school massacre

Woman Whose Life Was 'Nearly Destroyed' by Death and Rape Threats in Gamergate Controversy Protects Others from Online Hate

Undoing gender in video game production

- Scholars have reflected on "doing" and "undoing" gender and the role of gender performance in society
- Simply including women might not work, but undoing gender expectations might
- How many women can you name in positions of executive power in the video game industry?

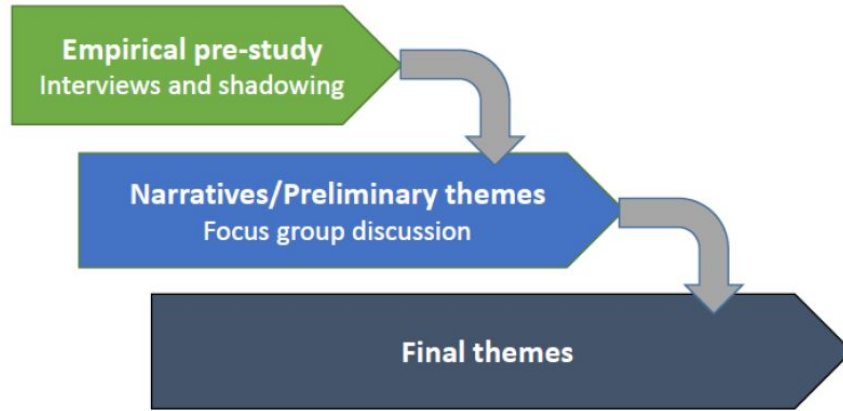
Marcin Iwinski, CD Projekt Red CEO

Doug Bowser, Nintendo of America President
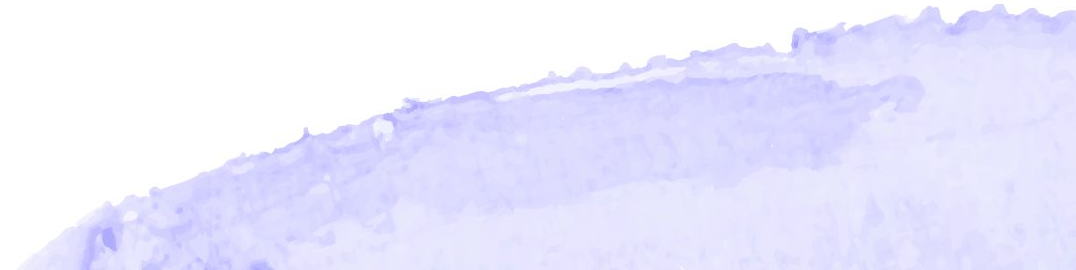

Nicolo Laurent, Riot Games CEO

Research methods

- Study is part of an ongoing project that studies the intersection of gender and IT research
- Researchers wanted to focus on talent acquisition and development
- German company has been developing since the 90s and is now part of a larger corporate network
  - I wonder why they didn't name the company?
- Qualitative methods
  - Interviews with women about their childhood, education and entrance to the field, previous and current experiences in business life, perception of the corporate culture and career opportunities

Empirical pre-study
Interviews and shadowing

Narratives/Preliminary themes
Focus group discussion

Final themes

Findings

- Women enjoy working in their respective companies, but experience subtle notions of masculinity, a "man cave" style of environment and interaction
- Many of them have a strong desire to work for that company, in the industry, or both
- Have expressions of this being their "dream job"
- Most are self-described as gamers or geeks, appreciative of the culture
- Emphasis on bonds between female coworkers
- "Coffee incident" -> female coworkers are always the ones brewing coffee despite everyone in the office drinking it, male coworkers would deliberately leave a little bit at the bottom of the pot
- Undoing of gender expectations
  - Paternal maternity leave
  - Greater accommodations for families
  - Break rooms for pregnant women
- How else can we work to dismantle gender expectations in the workplace?

Discussion

Do you think women are kept out of the industry because of the toxic masculine culture, or does the culture exist because women are kept out? What came first?

The paper mentions adopting a "gamer" culture of creativity, geekiness, and anarchy in the corporate environment. Would that work? What might that look like?

What are your thoughts on gender performance in the video game industry? To what extent will women adopt a more masculine or androgynous expression as a result of their workplace (as opposed to naturally expressing their gender in an androgynous/masculine manner)?

How do you think gender performance manifests in games themselves? How can we solve problems of excessive female sexualization and male power fantasy characters?

Doom Guy Comes of Age: Mediating Masculinities in Power Fantasy Video Games