Special Issue: ToDiGRA Diversity Workshop

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ToDiGRA

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ToDIGRA Diversity Workshop Special Issue Introduction

Sian Beavers & Darshana Jayemanne

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The inaugural DiGRA Diversity Workshop, “Gaming the System”, was held at The University of Melbourne on 2ndJuly 2017; we thank and acknowledge the Wurundjeri people as Traditional Custodians of this land. The Workshop was an initiative of the Diversity Working Group that first met in 2015. The event drew together five formal papers (four of which have proceeded to peer review and appear in this special issue) followed by a general discussion. The aim of the Workshop was to critically interrogate what it would mean for Game Studies to be diverse, and to invite presentations that could expand our ideas about diversity. This included questioning whether ‘diversity’ is an unalloyed good, the nature of the non-diverse ‘norm’ from which it putatively offers

a departure, and the function of diversity as a discourse operative within the contemporary academy.

Following the papers, the group engaged in a facilitated discussion forum. The opening discussion concerned the significant diversity initiatives that had been put in place by the organisers of the 2017 conference, which it was hoped would be exemplary for future committees. These included sliding-scale pricing for delegates from different Socio-Economic Status (SES) countries, diversity-oriented breakfasts and dinners, and a robust Twitter/social media policy enabling delegates to be proactive about their representation online.

Following this, broader discussions about diversity and DiGRA arose. While the discussion covered a wide range of topics, a few key themes arose. These themes are presented, along with open questions for consideration:

- *What are the regional issues that impend on diversity, and how can they best be addressed*? Would a one-size-fits-all approach lead to problems in certain cases? How can the DiGRA board, the DiGRA Diversity Group and regional chapters best work together? How do regions without DiGRA chapters relate to the organisation, and are there cases in which working to establish local chapters would be beneficial, irrelevant or counter-productive?
- *When considering funding, scholarship or sliding scales for fees, what models exist, and which would be best for DiGRA to learn from*? For example, the International Communications Association tends to approach its policy for financial assistance with reference to the delegate's country of origin, whereas the American Studies Association uses self-reported income. While there can be considerable income disparity within a single nation, it could be argued that official data on SES provide important structural advantages. Are there

additional administrative overheads that come with self-reported income, how are regional living costs applicable, and what are the criteria for assistance? What mechanisms can be put in place to evaluate these questions annually?

- *What are issues of accessibility that affect DiGRA delegates, and how should they influence venue selection and setup*? What are the best strategies for including scholars of different ability? Are hearing loops and visual aids clearly available? If there are printed materials or signage, are they framed appropriately, and do they utilise large print with sufficient contrast? What bathroom facilities are available?
- *How does jargon and insular knowledge work within the conference*? The inherent interdisciplinarity of game studies, in terms of diversity, is most often a strength. However, it can also produce barriers, as it means that academics can be speaking at cross-purposes based on differing epistemological groundings and assumptions.Furthermore, game scholars can often bring up key figures, notions and quotations on the assumption that all delegates are familiar with the history of the field. This can alienate people attending their first DiGRA, or delegates from different disciplines, so there could be a case for a glossary of commonly mentioned terms and ideas. However, who would write this? What would qualify as ‘common sense’ in this case?
- *What structures can be put in place to help those unable to attend the conference*? What are the options for recording or streaming talks, and what steps can be taken to ensure that these online elements are protected from abuse? Would presenters be open to this type of online engagement, or would concerns surrounding

potential abuse cause them misgivings about submitting to the conference? These questions would need to be carefully considered beforehand, perhaps limiting participation to registered delegates, or using an institutional login system.

- *Can organising family-friendly events be part of the spirit of play that brings us together*? Childcare should be a key consideration for organising committees. The responsibility of childcare often falls disproportionately on women. Although this is slowly changing, ensuring that these facilities are available may help to increase participation, not only from women, but also from delegates for whom the difficulty/cost of externally-sourcing childcare is an obstacle to attending the conference.
- *What are the community standards for the conference, how are they codified and disseminated*? As a membership organisation, DiGRA can be quite robust with its statements about what sort of conference it wants, however, how are these statements enforced? What are the procedures for ensuring a safe space for delegates? Should proposals to host DiGRA have a requirement for local organisers to consider relevant laws that may help to ensure a safe space? Should there be a mechanism for a block-list, and if so, who would administer this? Might such a structure place the burden for dealing with an issue on a harassed person? What is to prevent any formal set of rules from being used in perverse ways?
- *Can panel chairs be used more formally in facilitating diverse participation*? Would it be useful to have chairs assembled at the start of the conference and trained up in issues including local resources (such as mental health hotlines), the conference's social media policy, equitably adjudicating presentation length and question

times, and so on? Given that delegates will arrive at the conference at different times, perhaps an online training format would be more appropriate? Similarly, can – and should – DiGRA provide guidelines for selecting a panel to ensure diverse perspectives and voices, and to avoid homogeneity of nationality, gender and race?

- *Time*. In an age of workload allocations, unpaid peer-review that benefits incredibly profitable companies, an ever-growing academic precariat, and attention economies which favour historically cultivated privileges, what other possibilities are lost to those who devote time to 'diversity'?

Overall, the Workshop saw a robust exchange of ideas by combining formal papers with facilitated discussion, and a solid foundation was made in addressing some extremely complex issues. Perhaps the most critical insight was the need for custodianship of diversity insights, issues and approaches that can ensure transmission between conference committees and the Board.

The peer-reviewed papers assembled in this issue address the problems of diversity in games in a wider set of contexts than the DiGRA conference and organisation. The papers also favoured methodological diversity as they went through the peer-review process.

Johnstone and Pelletier present an ethnographic study of codebar London, a chapter of a non-profit organisation devoted to increasing diverse representation in technology fields through pedagogy. Johnstone and Pelletier's ethnography also informs theoretical propositions concerning 'what a feminist and critical pedagogy might look like in the tech sector', in order to treat diversity work as 'essentially political' and flag the need for more longitudinal research in this space.

To, McDonald, Holmes, Kaufman and Hammer bring a critical eye to the diversity and character representation in contemporary games through several design techniques. Through a close analysis of exemplary games (both digital and analogue), To *et al*. construct a series of four recommendations for diversity in character design. Taken together, this framework advances the need for an 'end-to-end process' of character design that addresses diversity across audience, production and distribution registers.

Butt, de Wildt, Kowert and Sandovar write up the results of a diversity survey conducted on the DiGRA Gamesnetwork mailing list, one of the most active communication forums for game studies scholars. While this methodology had limitations as a statistical measure of DiGRA as a complete organisation, the authors expand from purely statistical inferential methods to incorporate feminist theories of inclusivity and embodiment to frame recommendations for the continuing diversification of DiGRA and its conferences.

In our fourth paper, Wirman reports on the diversity of those DiGRA conferences, with insights gained both from her service as DiGRA Chapter Officer, president of Chinese DiGRA, and a survey of primary contacts at each DiGRA regional chapter in 2017. This discussion brings into focus issues of language, culture, community, politics and the relation of knowledge production to industry in various contexts around the globe: 'The future challenge of DiGRA as an international organisation is… in how it deals with regional diversification and whether it becomes a project of colonisation or decolonisation'.

The first DiGRA Diversity Workshop and this special issue acknowledge and diversify Wirman's statement across many registers. Asking the question of 'diversity' does not lead to a set of boxes to be checked or a formula to apply, but to the difficult terrain of a mutual ethical commitment. It is our hope that the papers herein will bring some of the debates raised at the Workshop to a greater audience and readership. It is only through facilitating an awareness of these issues that we can begin to

instigate necessary discussions about the nature of diversity, and the implementation of diversity initiatives, both within DiGRA and Game Studies more broadly.

1.

Facilitating Diversity-Centred Adult Computing Education

Danielle Johnstone & Caroline Pelletier

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ABSTRACT

This article draws from a dissertation composed of ethnographical study on the work of codebar London, a chapter of an organisation working to diversify the tech work force by offering free programming workshops to under-represented people. It delves into the role played by codebar's organisers, considering how the problem of gender, ethnic and sexual under-

representation in technology work leads to codebar's particular effort to solve it. In exploring links between the organisers' work and existing theories about empowering pedagogy, it addresses the question: How is diversity practiced educationally?

Keywords

Diversity, education, pedagogy, feminism, programming

INTRODUCTION

Much of the consideration of intersections between gaming and identity politics (including gender, race and sexuality) has focused on representation and play—what games contain and who plays them. This is particularly salient because of the ways that people—children in particular—perform their identity through the games they play and how they speak about them (Pelletier 2008). But another concern scholars have considered when thinking about gaming and identity is who is *making*games. Indeed, this underlies some of the considerations of game play and game development, because there is a sense that ethnic, gender and sexual homogeneity in the design and use of games could be related to homogeneity in the ranks of those who develop them. In fact, questions about the identity of developers are ubiquitous throughout the study of tech work.A question that seems immediately connected to technology and technology work in the media and public consciousness seems to be: What can be done to solve tech's diversity problem? From international news-pieces on the latest sexual harassment scandal (Bosa, Balakrishnan, and Haselton 2017) to public company strategies for addressing underrepresentation and lack of inclusivity in the workforce (Google 2017), the fact that tech workers are predominantly white, straight, cis-gendered men and the concerns about effects this could have on the technologies themselves never seem to be far from any mention of the tech industry. That there is a problem seems indisputable; how it has come about is, in many ways,

contested; and what is to be done about it is not entirely obvious. Yet, there *are* people doing things about this. For one, there are people working hard to make a place in tech for potential workers who identify as women, LGBTQ and/or of an ethnic minority.

One place you will find such people is in the ranks of volunteers who run the London chapter of an organisation called codebar. codebar is a non-profit composed of local chapters around the world. Each of these chapters facilitates workshops in office space donated by tech companies, where professional programmers volunteer to coach adult learners in the early stages of learning to code. The London (or, more specifically, the *central*London) chapter was the first to be founded, and organisers running this chapter are also tasked with managing the organisation as a whole—from maintaining the website, to providing guidance and finance for new and smaller chapters, to writing manuals for coaches, students and sponsors. The organisers of this chapter are, for all intents and purposes, the creators and defenders of codebar's mission and model. They have crafted an approach to education that is uniquely designed for the purpose of educating the people they aim to serve.

So why study codebar—what does researching it contribute to debates about diversity and gender in game culture? We have two main reasons, in this article. First, we aim to build on the work that has already been done on diversity initiatives in the games sector, notably the work of Alison Harvey, Stephanie Fisher and Tamara Shepherd (Harvey and Fisher 2015) (Harvey and Shepherd 2017) (Harvey and Fisher 2013) (Fisher and Harvey 2013). This work makes a strong case for such initiatives, whilst also highlighting the tensions they sustain, notably between aims and process. Fisher and Harvey (2013), for instance, highlight the difficulties faced by organisers of interventions for 'inclusivity' and 'diversity' who aim to increase the representation of women in the games sector, but who encounter resistance, notably from presumed beneficiaries of 'diversity' work, because of the terms on which inclusion is offered. Interventions which presume a

deficit in intended beneficiaries—notably lack of understanding, education and skill—can reinscribe exclusion, rather than remedy it, and consequently, provoke a rejection or questioning of the intervention's design. Fisher and Harvey's analysis points both to the fraught politics of 'reaching out' to under-represented groups in the tech workforce, and the emotional labour involved in navigating these coherently. This article focuses specifically on this: on the pedagogy of an intervention, and on how diversity is practiced in the way 'inclusion' is offered. We also examine the difficulties this pedagogy created for organisers, as well as the emotional labour required to respond to them.

Our second, related reason for analysing codebar's activities is to develop a better understanding of what a feminist and critical pedagogy might look like in the tech sector. In education literature, there are extensive debates about how equality can be produced in acts of teaching and learning. This strand of work is notably inspired by the work of Paulo Freire, but also more recently by feminist scholarship, such as bell hooks' work, which attends to intersectionality. We draw on this to interpret codebar's pedagogy, and thereby, explore how educational interventions in the tech sector, which aim at achieving greater 'diversity', might be understood in the politicised terms of empowerment and emancipation. Our aim here is to treat 'diversity' work as essentially political. In this, we align ourselves again with Harvey et al.'s efforts to conceptualise diversity as pertaining to the exercise of power, the inscription of inclusion and exclusion, rather than imbalances in an apolitical meritocracy.

This article draws from a larger dissertation of ethnographical research on codebar's approach to education. It focuses on the work of being a codebar organiser and how this role compares to the facilitation of liberatory learning described in bell hooks' intersectional feminist pedagogy.

BACKGROUND

The issue of diversity (or the lack of it) in the tech sector has become a lightning rod for media attention. And, indeed, if we consider statistics about tech hiring, the homogeneity of the tech sector is concerning—Stack Overflow's 2017 global developer survey, for instance, noted that, of their respondents, over 74% identified as white or European, and over 88% identified as male (excluding those who identified solely as transgender) (Stack Overflow 2017). It may be that some of the surprise about these statistics comes from the misplaced assumption that technologies and cyberspaces are inherently more free, open and even progressive—created recently and therefore without the long histories of prejudice and subjugation that have constructed social categories and power structures around race and gender. These presumptions about technology—most of which have been refuted by scholarship on prejudice and cybertyping within technologies and virtual worlds (Nakamura 2013)—are connected to the questions we ask about tech work. Given that the option of industrial programming as a career is relatively new, the industry established in a world where stereotypes about the abilities and roles of women and ethnic minorities have been seriously challenged, why is tech a white man's world?

Scholars have written about attributes of tech work that undermine the diversity of the workforce, including considering how the cultural identity of tech work can alienate underrepresented people. Mia Consalvo, in a chapter on women game developers in the book *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat* (Consalvo 2008), highlights how two particular elements of game industry culture—"passion" and "crunch time"—undermine women's desire to enter or remain in the gaming workforce. She suggests that the prevailing culture demanding long working hours (without overtime pay) and hiring based on passion is not gender-directed, but has a gendered effect. The women Consalvo spoke to clearly felt conflicted between their love of gaming, their career ambitions, the realities of their home life, and an overall

sense of unfairness. Indeed, unfairness appears to be at the centre of the reasons tech workers of underrepresented identity leave tech employment (or, arguably, choose not to enter it). A survey on tech leavers by the Kapor Center showed how stereotyping and humiliation, being passed over for promotion, and sexual harassment were disproportionately experienced by tech workers who identified as women, LGBTQ and/or of an ethnic minority (Scott, Klein and Onovakpuri 2017).

While some scholars point to the nature and culture of tech work as the source of tech's diversity problem, others suggest it is more to do with access to career entry—that it is an educational "pipeline" problem. Zarrett and Malanchuk argue that there is a gender and race-based "leaky pipeline" to IT work—that statistics show how gender and race are indicators of how likely a person is to consider a path to advanced computing work, to pursue such a path, and to continue on it (Zarrett and Malanchuk 2005). This corresponds with writings by Manju Ahuja, who explores how adult women's decisions to enter, persist and advance in tech careers are affected by structural and cultural influences (Ahuja 2002). Adya and Kaiser build on this to posit that career genderisation happens early in adolescence and that girls' choices about whether to pursue IT can be traced to specific social influences—"gender stereotyping, role models, peers, media, and parents"—and structural influences—"manifested in the institutional support available, such as teachers and counselors, access to technology, and same-sex versus coeducational schools" (Adya and Kaiser 2005).

At the same time, tech education is arguably becoming increasingly accessible due to the significant growth in the number of methods available for people to learn programming. These range from traditional computer science degrees, to individual MOOCs hosted on mainstream websites like Coursera, to virtualised versions of university modules (like the famed Harvard/Yale introductory computer science CS50 course), to language learning tools (like guided coding environments such as

Code Academy or Scratch). And, in the midst of this, there are considerations of how computing education can be re-shaped to qualify a more diverse population of programmers. Vivian Annette Lagesen, in her exploration of attempts by the Norwegian University of Science and Technology to recruit more women to study computer science, argues that a "direct effort to increase the relative number of women" learning computer science is the most important and effective strategy, having symbolic as well as practical effects, as women become more present in the tech-learning space (Lagesen 2007, 67). On the other hand, a study on introductory programming education by Rubio et al. suggests that rather than waiting for a change in the symbolism around computing, pedagogical approaches in teaching computer science should take into account the different perceptions men and women have about programming to equalise outcomes (Rubio et al. 2015). But uncertainties remain about what a truly inclusive educational experience for underrepresented programmers really looks like. These concerns are raised, in part, by Fisher and Harvey (2013), whose work addresses the inherent tensions in efforts in the games sector in "offering" inclusion in ways that may seem patrimonial or presumptive of disadvantage. As a result, the lingering question is how can educational experiences that are inclusive and empowering in nature as well as goals be (or are being) constructed and pursued?

This study considers that question, exploring how the efforts of a team of organisers work to create a proactive, productive and inclusive learning experience for prospective career changers of marginalized identities who are starting to learn programming. It explores what a grassroots, diversity-centred programming education approach involves, and what the set of volunteer organisers do to help create and maintain it. In particular, it asks how the workings of the organisation resemble existing theory about empowering and inclusive modes of learning.

THEORETICAL FRAMING

To approach an analysis of how codebar organisers enact education to empower tech learners, it was useful to consider what existing models for empowering education look like in general. Thus, the theoretical framings of this study came from models of anti-oppressive learning, in particular those of bell hooks.

bell hooks' theory of transgressive learning provided a useful set of concepts with which to understand codebar's functions. hooks' theory draws from existing models of emancipatory education—those that consider ideal learning as rooted in social justice and "formed in solidarity with the interests of the least powerful in society" (Thompson 2000). Paolo Freire—arguably the founding theorist of emancipatory pedagogies—was a particular inspiration to hooks. He posits that oppression is a learned state, reiterated by discriminatory and uneven schooling systems which rely on didactic "banking" whereby an expert instructor deposits knowledge within passive students (Freire 1970). This oppression must be un-learned by a process of growing self-awareness on the part of both the oppressor and the oppressed, and through sustained dialogue. A key scholar of black feminist issues, hooks went beyond Freire's class-focused model (and those of some Freire-inspired feminist models) to consider a range of intersecting marginalised identities, including gender, race and sexuality. She describes a pedagogy that transgresses the traditional race, class and gender limitations of "banking" education models, and engages in teaching that critiques oppression and gives voice to the oppressed.

In *Teaching to Transgress*(hooks 1994), bell hooks explains her own autobiographical connection with Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. As a black woman, her learning experiences were characterised by the oppression of a misogynistic white supremacy weaved into the schooling system, which resulted in continued anxieties about education in her role as instructor. Her

encounter with Freire was liberating in itself—it provided another vision for what education could be, for learning and teaching as radical acts of transgression. Of especial interest for this study is hooks' guidance for the *enacting*of pedagogical theory in the liberating classroom—the transgressive praxis. In particular, hooks focuses on the role of the instructor in establishing and enacting emancipatory pedagogies. The praxis she describes involves the instructor ceding some of the more toxic elements of authority to collaborate with students in a participatory and critical mode of learning. If we accept Shrewsbury's claim that the three central concepts of feminist pedagogy are "community, empowerment and leadership" (Shrewsbury 1993, 10), we can conceive of how hooks' particular intersectional and transgressive brand of this pedagogy fits into the tradition, because it frames transgressive education as the crafting of a learning community through instructor's taking leading responsibility to distribute authority and empower students.

hooks explains that, to create an effective collaborative learning community, the instructor must be willing to forgo the "exercise of power and authority within their mini-kingdom, the classroom" (p.17) in favor of a more democratic mode of classroom engagement that prioritises dialogue and allows for individual non-conformity. This comes from a conception of instructor-leadership as responsibility "not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students" (p.13). hooks recognizes that this is a demanding and even intimidating prospect for an instructor—that even the act of shifting the instructor's position from behind a desk to within the learning body and conversant with them seems unsafe, and that the unwillingness to engage in transgressive teaching that allows voice to a diverse student body often stems from the fear that cultural diversity will "replace one dictatorship of knowing with another" (p.32). Yet hooks continues to recognize the student's right to agency in learning, and the instructor's responsibility to respect and encourage this.

hooks also recognizes that learners' empowerment comes with its own responsibilities—she points out that "making the classroom a democratic setting where everyone feels a responsibility to contribute is a central goal of transformative pedagogy" (p.38). In explaining how this responsibility to contribute is to be fostered in learners, hooks proposes educational practice that gives value to student experience, in contrast to the "banking", instructor-authoritative education model that Freire critiques. This means two key things. First of all, education must be relevant to the lives of the learners—learning that is shaped by the experiences, desires and assumptions of the instructor without student input will not do this. Secondly, students must be treated as having equal value, within the paradigm of recognising how society may shape and confine the classroom for those of different identities. hooks makes clear that this equalising of students can prevent the feared consequences of experience-acknowledging education—that it will essentialise social conditions and exclude other forms of knowledge. hooks explains how an activity that allows all students to reflect on and share their experiences "makes the classroom a place where experience is valued… [and] students seem less inclined to make the telling of experience that site where they compete for voice" (p.84).

The reconfiguring of power in the learning environment ultimately aims towards a "community of learning", but hooks is clear that "sharing" does not always result in collaborating or connecting. She points to histories of race and gender in the United States, where the shared experience of gender oppression "did not mediate relations between white mistresses and black slave women" (p.97). In fact, the act of community-building can often place a larger burden upon the more marginalised members, which undermines the collaboration itself. For hooks, it is no coincidence that the most effective multi-cultural and multi-racial collaborations within women's studies tend to occur when women of color are not "tasked" with explaining race and privilege to their white collaborators. According to her model, a liberating educational experience must not place the burden of

consciousness-building and communal understanding on the oppressed, but must give them opportunity and responsibility to participate.

Summarizing hooks' theory, the role of the instructor in transgressive learning can be said to be characterised by three key features:

1. The establishment of a vision of inclusion, which necessarily involves more distributed modes of authority;
2. The necessary experience of vulnerability as a result of surrendering authority and defending student/participant humanity; and
3. The intentional empowerment of students or participants as part of the distribution of authority and recognition of humanity.

This article uses these three factors to address our key question—How is diversity practiced educationally?—through exploring how codebar organisers practice some of the responsibilities of the instructor within the learning model.

METHODOLOGY

When approaching designing a research methodology for investigating codebar, it became clear that there would be a deep entangling of the organisation's own politics and considerations of power, and the way it should be studied. It became evident early on that there was a strong parallel between the concerns of codebar as an organisation and our own concerns as researchers. To fully examine the work codebar was doing to contest oppressive social constructions of power, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and representation, we wanted to craft a research methodology that challenged the way these forces have traditionally dominated academia. One key form of scholarship

that has done this is feminist methodology (particularly that feminist methodology developed by LGBTQ people and people of color who challenge other systems of oppression that intersect with gender, including race). This became the cornerstone of our research approach. In particular, we were interested in aspects of feminist methodology which challenge oversimplified examination and elitist distance, “exposing the cultural biases embedded in the game of research” (O’Leary 2013, p.146). As a result, we selected participatory ethnographical methods that required working alongside people in order to understand and recognise perspective.

With the goal of exploring codebar’s educational approach, we used three means of data collection: document analysis, interviews and observation. The dissertation, as a whole, took an exploratory approach to investigating codebar’s entire organisational approach to education. One aspect of this was the role of organisers, on which this article focuses. Interviews with organisers (one focus group interview with five organisers, and one individual interview with an organiser who was not part of the focus group) gave particular insight into the role and into the way the organising team works. Individual interviews with a student and three coaches allowed us to explore how the organiser role affected coach and student experiences, as well as how participants perceived organisers and the organisation. Web documents from codebar’s website (including web-published manuals) gave us a picture of how organisers present the organisation and its work to the public. Finally, observations of two workshops allowed us to see how the codebar pedagogy manifested in the learning space and ways it was facilitated and moderated by the organisers present.

Combining these various sources of data allowed us to examine “the interplay between informal, interpersonal networks and the formal, official social structures” (Millman and Kanter 1987, 32). As a result, the approach to data analysis focused on creating a “thick” description by looking at the data in holistic, contextual

and discursive ways (Geertz 1973). To achieve a thick description from the data, we determined that we should not only extract from it the themes, structures and experiences the participants explicitly expressed, but also consider their reasons for framing these things in particular ways, and how the different accounts linked and contested. With this in mind, the data analysis combined approaches from thematic analysis (Braun, V. and Clarke 2006) and frame analysis (which, in itself, incorporates elements of discourse analysis) (Johnston 1995).

FINDINGS

The data collected reflected that codebar organisers played a key facilitating role in manifesting a transgressive feminist pedagogy in the organisation's educational offerings. While organisers did not take on the role of actual instruction (which is conducted by coaches), they did assume responsibilities and characteristics that hooks' model associates with the instructor, particularly in establishing and defending the learning and teaching model used in the workshop.

Table 1: An overview of the codebar structure

The workshop	The main codebar offering. Eligible students are matched with coaches (one coach to one or two students) to receive guidance and tutelage on the introductory computing subject of their choice (typically a particular programming language). Student-coach groups can follow a tutorial or work on a project. A typical workshop follows a schedule of: coaches and students registering online, coaches and students arriving and signing in at the host workspace, participants sharing a meal, organisers matching student groups and coaches volunteering for a student/group each, and 2 hours of coaching.
The Organizers	The main leadership body of codebar, made up of volunteers. Each local chapter has a group of organisers charged with planning and facilitating workshops. This includes reaching out to sponsor companies, who provide workshop space, wifi access, and food and beverages. The organisers for the Central London chapter also serve as "admin organisers" for the organisation as a whole.
The Sponsors	Companies that donate money or host workshops. Hosting involves providing space, wifi access, and food and beverages. The workshop itself is run by the organisers.
The Coaches	Professional developers who volunteer to teach at codebar workshops. They do not necessarily come from a coaching background, but teach from the perspective of their professional experiences.
The Students	Potential programmers at the early stages of learning to code. To attend a codebar workshop as a student, you must identify as belonging to a social group that is underrepresented in tech—as being a women, of an ethnic minority and/or LGBTQ.

Organisers Articulating a Vision of Inclusion

"codebar is a non-profit initiative that facilitates the growth of a diverse tech community by running regular programming workshops." For many, this is their first encounter with codebar—a banner across the homepage of the organisation's website, codebar.io. The bright text floats over the top of an image of people huddled around laptops in a vibrant workspace filled with colourful posters and bike racks. This is the official face of codebar, and everyone involved with the organisation will have visited it. Not only is it a space packed with information—from mission statements to personal accounts to lists of local chapters and scheduled events—it is also the gateway to participation. It is here that interested parties come to learn more, here that potential sponsors find contact information for organisers and directions on how to host a workshop, and here that coaches and students across the world register for workshops and other events. This website is the official and promotional face of codebar, crafted to say something specific to every visitor. It is a public space and face that is constructed by the organisers, as was made clear when I interviewed Kayla* about her experiences.

Kayla was the only organiser I interviewed individually (other organisers were interviewed as a group) and, perhaps because the call did not have the conversational, "brainstorming" atmosphere of the focus group interview, her description of the role was very clear on the logistics of organising. She was specific about making a distinction between broader, localized "workshop organisers" and more centralised "admin organisers" (who, for the most part, are also workshop organisers for the London chapter of the organisation). She explained how, along with accounting and banking, some of her duties as an admin organiser involved moderating codebar's online presence and allowing access—for instance, "if a new organiser for a particular chapter comes on board, giving them access to the emails, setting up emails, setting up twitter accounts." Kayla also explained her involvement in managing the organisation's blogs (accessed from the website

homepage), which include posts about conferences, new chapters and the experiences of "people in the codebar community who we think are doing really good things, and we want to showcase them. And also show their journeys into tech… so that they are an inspiration to other people as well." Kayla's explanation of the way admin organisers do the bureaucratic work of making the voices of codebar participants heard—giving local chapter organisers access to social media channels and highlighting the stories of community-members—highlights a reality of the role that can be traced to the codebar website more generally. Much of the official face of codebar exhibits community voices to craft a narrative of how the organisation operates. Along with the blog, the homepage exhibits a rotating set of student quotes about the appeal of codebar and its positive effects. In this way, the face of codebar is crafted from the voices of many participants moderated into a single projection of the community—which reflects the functional realities of codebar's internal societal structures. Just as bell hooks' description of the transgressive pedagogy relies in the notion that the instructor is setting the model for learning and, if they are doing so transgressively, is characterizing it as democratized and inclusive; so we can see that codebar's organisers' pedagogical practice is to establish and articulate a vision and presence that is inclusive not only in its goals, but also in its very collaborative nature.

During the focus group interview with organisers, it became evident that part of their shared intention was to use participant contributions to craft an environment or "internal society" that presented on a small scale what the broader society should ideally be at large. Chelsea* shared how her prior experiences as a student at codebar led her to become involved in helping manage its learning provision:

"I've got to say, if it wasn't for codebar I don't think I will be pursuing this career as a developer, because codebar served in another purpose of, kind of, highlighting the most vibrant and selfless, like, giving dynamic group…. I think that was, that gave

me the belief that maybe, you know, tech is not the sterile type… even though it could be an illusion, because the reality is there's still the imbalance of diversity within the industry. But when you see the better parts, you can see the future of it. You feel so encouraged, you can keep on going until you break though."

In many ways, the content of the website highlights the intended values of this micro-society. Web content uses language like "collaborative", "safe", "inclusive", "diverse" and "accessible" to describe both its intension for internal culture and its goals for the broader tech community. Online manuals provide more specific direction about what this safe, inclusive collaboration looks like—both giving direction for how to positively pursue these, and cautioning against counteractive activities that would undermine these goals. Furthermore, as well as specific value-crafting content, these online manuals discursively construct social systems for the functioning of codebar—particularly in how they position organisers. Here, organiser responsibility is portrayed as responsibility for accountability—violators of the Code of Conduct are subject to organiser censure, and participants are invited to direct concerns about others' violations to organisers and expect action:

"If a participant engages in harassing behaviour the organisers may take any action they deem appropriate. This includes warning the offender or expulsion. If you are being harassed, notice that someone else is being harassed, or have any other concerns, please contact one of the organisers immediately." (codebar Code of Conduct)

It is clear that (admin) organisers are the "voice" of codebar, yet their authority is one of responsibility and almost-democratic representation. The way they craft descriptions of codebar for public projection is by combining and moderating participant voices, by practicing empathy (often informed by their past experiences) for those they serve, and by being explicit in their demands and willingness to hold violators accountable. This

reality of the role was also reflected in how participants spoke about codebar. When asked about what could be improved at codebar, coach Shaun* made clear that he viewed organisers as central, responsible representatives of the community, saying:

"I think codebar could definitely think about what it's teaching the students. I think they should (hesitates) perhaps engage with the community to get some new tutorials written."

When Shaun says "codebar" and "they", he is referring to the central organising body (he refers earlier to organisers' efforts) but he places distance between the people he knows organise and any sense of critique, clearly unwilling to place the burden of responsibility on their shoulders and instead choosing to attribute it to the organisation as a nebulous whole. In this way, "codebar" and "the organisers" become interchangeable. Yet, Shaun's idea for active improvement is in "engaging the community"—an acknowledgement of the ways codebar organisers moderate and utilise the broader collective of participants. The conclusion is that codebar's reality is a combination of participant input—engaged, moderated, curated and protected by the organisers. If we consider codebar as a possible manifestation of hooks' transgressive pedagogy, in which the role of instructor is both having authority over the establishment of the learning model, and distributing that authority, it can be argued that codebar's particular manifestation of this role comes in the form of a type of collaborative authority.

Collaborative authority is exemplified in the relations between organisers themselves, demonstrated during the group interview. The use of focus group interviews aims to "capitalize on research participant's communication" (Kitzinger 1995, 299) and so they frequently play out in ways that involve a process of participants pursuing consensus, sometimes through routes of contention, connection or persuasion. The way that the group of organisers pursued consensus was striking and remarkably different to other groups, in which this can take the form of heated debate followed

by someone being convinced or being compelled to back down. In this case, organisers pursued consensus through a "yes and" approach similar to what has been used in improvisational theatre and adapted for other contexts like workplace mediation (Leonard and Yorton 2015)—the speaker acknowledging the point made ("adding to Chelsea's point about…") and adding a further detail or a different perspective. It is clear that the relational context of organiser work at codebar is one of collaborative respect and non-hierarchical shared and individual value. Long-serving organiser, Katherine*, explained how their organising team was intentionally crafted to make such respect possible, because of the necessity to trust co-organisers to work proactively with the ad hoc nature of the voluntary role:

"A lot of times people will be like, 'Oh this person's coming a lot and they really want to help out,' and I know them and I've talked to them a few times, and I say, 'You know what, they're great, but they will not be good for codebar organisers,' because you have to be extremely a self-starter and you have to be extremely proactive. So, the way it works—I don't know if this is like a trade secret (laughs), but basically we will get an email from someone and then whoever e-mails back first… something comes in that we need to deal with, and basically, whoever has the capacity at that point in time, whoever gets it first will deal with it."

The collaborative authority practiced by codebar organisers, ressembling the distribution of authority promoted by hooks' model, necessitates empowerment of non-organisers—particularly students. In the codebar context, this takes two forms. First, it requires the creation of an atmosphere that assumes and protects the humanity and value of the student participants (as we will see in the organisers' protection of eligibility criteria and Code of Conduct). And second, it requires that students are made active "subjects" rather than passive "objects" of their own education (as we will see in how organisers direct coaching).

Organisers Experiencing Instructor Vulnerability

Central to the goals of codebar—"to enable underrepresented people to learn programming in a safe and collaborative environment and expand their career opportunities"—is serving underrepresented students. Perhaps most vital to the goal is the regulation of that very audience. When visiting the codebar website to register for a workshop as a first-time student, clicking on the desired event will take users to a sign-up page where there is direction to read the Code of Conduct, a description of the groups the workshops aim to serve (with a link to a more detailed description of the eligibility criteria), and a call-to-action that invites the user to click "I understand and meet the eligibility criteria. Sign me up as a student." Despite this direct call for understanding and pursuit of clarity, codebar organisers still reported having trouble with non-eligible people signing up. Kayla*, when asked in the individual interview about the challenges of being an organiser, was definitive, not hesitating before responding:

"It's the emotional labour. Dealing with abuse, quite often.… Because we do have our eligibility criteria, we tend to get a few people not so happy that we do that. They try to tell us that we are discriminating. I think it's the thing for me that takes the biggest toll because you do get emails from people saying—big rants about what we're doing is wrong, that it's unfair."

The group interview also explored some of the challenges of regulating eligibility, with Katherine* lamenting that there are frequent attempts by ineligible students to enroll, despite the fact that "it is on the front page of codebar's website, so… I don't know how to make this any more explicit, right, but we should, because obviously it's not explicit enough." Certainly, codebar organisers are experiencing some of the inherent emotional difficulties of being enactors of trangressive pedagogy, as bell hooks claims should be expected. It is clear, after all, that hooks does not see the value of trangressive pedagogy as it being safe,

comfortable and enjoyable, but as it being liberating and transformative—creating change that can be challenging and unnerving. The discomfort resulting from organisers' work is caused by the fact it radically challenges existing social norms and constructions of power. Ensuring codebar is serving its intended audience is vital to its efforts, as the organisers explained when they discussed how failing to do so would be a betrayal of the sponsors and volunteer coaches supporting the organisation specifically because of its cause. The way that their process for ensuring eligibility is crafted is a vital first stage in creating a pedagogy to serve the intended students.

"I tend to think of codebar as making up for a lot of the extra barriers that certain groups face trying to get into the tech world, because basically I recognise that I haven't really faced them. So, kind of tip the scale in another way," explained Robert*, who explored how his own identity as a white man made him different from those the organisation aims to serve. He and the other organisers explained that they worked mainly on an "honour system", emailing people whose names may suggest they are not eligible to be students and inviting them to read the eligibility criteria and confirm if it applies to them, but being careful not to ask people to defend or "confess" the aspects of their identity that make them eligible. "My gut instinct generally, if someone says, 'Oh no, I face all these barriers,' is to believe them, you know," Robert continued. This trust and belief is vital to the inclusiveness of codebar's program. It ensures that the students do not have to defend or explain their experiences as marginalised, removing the burden of consciousness-raising from the shoulders of the marginalised. This, according to bell hooks, is vital to effective collaboration in education, as she suggests in exploring how multi-ethnic feminist scholarly collaboration is more successful when black women do not have to educate their white peers about race and disadvantage. For codebar organisers to effectively do their intended work in leveling the playing field for prospective programmers of particular ethnic, gender or sexual identity—the scale-tipping Robert referred to—the organisation must both

provide opportunity to “make up for” what marginalised people must overcome, and minimise the extra burdens they carry in the education process. The registration and eligibility system is one way codebar works to do this—although not without a burden on an organiser team, some of whom are of marginalised identity themselves and may have to perform emotional labour beyond their voluntary involvement with codebar, as they defend their existence in the full-time tech workplace (Guy and Newman 2004).

Certainly, the vulnerability that hooks identifies as an unavoidable part of being a transgressive instructor is a key aspect of the role that codebar organisers play. It is, in many ways, a bi-product of the elimination of distance in the transgressive model. Their defense of students’ rights to particular opportunities (a recognition of humanity in itself) can be seen to undermine the organiser’s comfort, just as hooks explores the sense of insecurity felt by an instructor doing something that is apparently as simple as physically moving from behind their desks into the ranks of the students (and, thus, opening themselves up to more possibility for disagreement, disillusionment and questioning through establishing themselves as equal in humanity to traditionally-accepted “inferiors”).

Organisers Empowering Participants

While organisers designed the registration and eligibility process to enable silence, with marginalised people not required to explain their marginalisation, they also designed it to empower students to articulate their learning needs and expectations. During registration for a workshop, students are invited to note what they hope to learn with a drop-down menu. When they arrive at the workshop, organisers invite students to confirm or change this selection when they sign in. That students get to select their own curriculum is a key aspect of the codebar approach, and it allows for variety in learning and teaching. During observation, we saw many students choose to follow a

codebar-provided tutorial in the workshop, while others brought external activities or small projects they wanted help with (Danielle, as a participant-observer, brought a small self-designed JavaScript project to complete with her coach). For student, Jenna*, selection of what to learn was based on her aim to apply to a coding bootcamp to kickstart her career. She explained in an individual interview:

"I'm probably following a slightly different path than if I had just turned up at codebar, I think, because you have to reach a certain level on FreeCodeCamp and you have to reach a certain level on CodeWars. So, I've basically now done that, and then now the next stage is sort of building a website… whereas I probably would have got on earlier to building the website, but I wanted to see if I could actually achieve the pre-requisites."

The organisers stressed that this curricular flexibility was at the heart of the codebar model, even showing some hesitation to identify a single "codebar approach to education" because of the individuality of learning and coaching needs. Katherine* explained:

"…the format, it's extremely free—up to interpretation by the coaches and the students. Because there isn't a set curriculum, there isn't a specific language we teach, and our teachers have such varied skills. It really depends on you and your coach on how you want to do it and what you make of it, basically…. you can basically decide yourself how you learn best or how you want to interact with your coach, but it's very, very freestyle, I would say."

Clearly, this is a far cry from the "banking" education model, a model that assumes the authority of the teacher and dismisses the agency of the student to select and guide learning. In the codebar model, students have the initial and vital role of setting the curricular agenda for their entire learning experience. Organisers use this to pair students with capable coaches, and students

assume the role of learning-definer. This is particularly valuable for students of marginalised identities, because mainstream white/straight/cis/male narratives about vocal women or ethnic, gender or sexual minorities is that they are "demanding"—a classic example of which is the trope of the "angry black woman" which, bell hooks explains, has allowed white feminists to silence racial critique through dismissing women of color as "too angry." (hooks 1994, 103) Characterising certain groups of people in this emotional way is how holders and systems of power have rejected legitimate demands and needs. By contrast, codebar organisers *value*demands from students, inviting them to articulate their wants and needs in the learning process. Students are established as the "subject" of the educational experience—acting and enacting it—rather than an "object" that passively receives instruction (Freire 1970, 36).

Empowerment of the student does not only happen at the stage of curriculum selection, however. It is engrained in how organisers encourage volunteer coaches (all professional developers, often without much training experience) to teach. When new coaches enter a workshop for the first time, they are greeted by organisers who explain the model to them, ask them about what they hope to achieve in the workshop, and encourage a positive attitude towards questioning and exploration. As a result, students appreciate the "patience" granted to them by coaches, who hear and address their questions even, as Jenna jokingly expressed, "though you're literally going through what to them is like, I don't know, the ABCs." Questioning, trying things out, and even failing are given a great deal of value in the codebar model. The online organiser-written Coach Guide encourages coaches to "Explain that there are no dumb questions… Let them [the students] stumble. We learn by making mistakes, getting frustrated and working through problems in our own way. Be supportive, but let them explore." It gives some more direct guidance on how to do this, including letting students try to answer their own (or the tutorial's) questions themselves, and not taking over the keyboard to demonstrate. The coaches, in the

individual interviews, also explained how questioning was a valuable tool and central to the codebar approach. Shaun explained how, in contrast to other, more traditional classroom-style coaching he has done, codebar produced better learning and coaching because of one-on-one questioning:

"At codebar, I could see there were things that the student I worked with knew at the end of the lesson…. They're then asking questions that they wouldn't be able to ask if they hadn't really understood it."

By highlighting the value of questioning in online materials and coach and student introductions, organisers not only empower students to learn by trying and even failing. They also place students and coaches on a more equal footing, by establishing coaches as actors who gain as well as give in the learning process. Questions are not only a way for students to receive information, they are also a means for coaches to evaluate learning and determine understanding. The question serves as an opportunity for a coach to "grant" knowledge to the student through a response and also as a way for them to "gain" perspective on the teaching outcomes (a result of which is finding the coaching experience "rewarding"). The act of questioning and answering is a collaborative communication that allows the mutual exchange of benefit between coach and student. This means that, throughout the codebar process, participants are engaging as equal contributors to the community of learning.

In establishing, defining and defending the model for selecting curricula and centering learning around questioning, codebar organisers equalise the standing of coaches and students in the learning model, thereby empowering all to participate in the crafting of the learning process and undermining the "banking" process criticised by Freire and hooks. All participants, both students and coaches, are "subjects" rather than "objects" of the educational experience.

CONCLUSION

The work of organising at codebar can be characterised as practicing collaborative authority and participant empowerment to establish an inclusivity-centred learning community. Organisers take on the facilitating role usually assigned to the instructor in hooks' transgressive feminist pedagogy, directing but not completing the technical information-sharing done by coaches. They also operate as a non-hierarchical team, practicing collaborative authority even within the organiser ranks, and experience many of the vulnerabilities associated with the instructor role—particularly within an empowerment-focused learning model. Considered through the theoretical lens of bell hooks' writing on trangressive pedagogy, we can see that codebar is an example of how actors can work to manifest social justice-oriented pedagogies within education efforts to prepare underrepresented people for tech work, treating the nature of learning as equally important to the broader justice it hopes to produce.

Although codebar is not focused on the game sector, but on tech more broadly, this study builds on existing scholarship in game studies in two ways. First, it highlights the importance of attending to pedagogy: to how 'diversity and inclusion' are done on an ongoing basis in educational initiatives; to the terms on which such values are offered and practiced, including in research. Celebrating and advocating these values is not sufficient: they are not merely ends but also means. Although this might seem an obvious point, it is sometimes overlooked in diversity work, including in the games sector, as Fisher, Harvey and Shepherd have shown.

A second, related point is that the effectiveness of such types of interventions is challenging to ascertain. Can we reach any conclusions about how effective codebar is at improving the diversity of the tech sector? This is open to debate. codebar itself, as well as the initiatives reviewed by Fisher, Harvey and

Shepherd, define their goal in terms of providing access to the industry. The data on this are limited, arguably unconvincing, and it's not entirely clear how such results could be achieved by means of such initiatives alone. Does this make them a vanity project, or a well-intentioned but ultimately ineffective endeavour? We would argue against this conclusion on the basis that such initiatives are nodes in a network of contributions to make digital culture more diverse. In this respect, codebar's accomplishments can be interpreted using Parker, Whitson and Simon's (2017) concept of 'cultural intermediaries': agents which promote and sustain the work of minority players or stakeholders in the game sector, giving them legitimacy and value, and ensuring that their efforts have meaning and consequence. codebar's work gives meaning and value to 'diversity' in digital culture, revealing it to be an ongoing and relational accomplishment rather than only a stable and statistical measure. However, it is worth noting that codebar itself does not necessarily view itself in this way—thus, the inability to measure effectiveness according to this metric of success is arguably a limitation in this research.

Indeed, there remain considerable questions to be asked about feminist pedagogy, codebar and social change in the tech industry. Certainly, more research on outcomes would need to be done to know if codebar is effective in achieving its self-identified goals. We also do not know if codebar London is an outlier—even within the confines of the larger organisation itself. This study does not consider the workings of other codebar chapters, which face different geographical, cultural and industrial realities. To come to broader conclusions about codebar's work, more research would need to be done on these local contexts and on whether the practices of codebar London translate to other chapters in places like Sydney, Cape Town or even Edinburgh. The methodological limitations in the sampling of the study, which relied on participants volunteering for an interview after a public invitation delivered over social media channels, means that the data was weighted towards coach and organiser perspectives—as more of

these participants volunteered than students did—and so questions remain about how generalisable the conclusions are across the breadth of students being served by codebar. Finally, there continue to be considerable constraints on conclusions that can be made about whether educating underrepresented people for entry into tech employment actually has a significant effect on the sector as a whole. codebar's work focuses on this entry level, rather than advocacy for cultural change within the companies that sponsor it. Added to this is the fact that questions also remain about whether codebar is raising consciousness amongst the marginalised people it educates, as coding-centric workshops rarely involve direct learning of content related to social critique—the "critical consciousness" that is central to Freire's foundational theory. The hope of codebar's efforts is that a critical mass of people of marginalised identities in tech employment will give more voice to the needs of tech minorities, but more longitudinal study is required to determine if these expectations are warranted.

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2.

Character Diversity in Digital and Non-Digital Games

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ABSTRACT

We explore how digital and non-digital games express diversity through characters, understood as representations of marginalized groups to which the player may or may not belong. We identify a range of techniques using visual design, abstract character representation, delineation of game setting and roles, conversation design, and the design of rules and systems. We illustrate these

techniques with exemplar games identified through consultation with experts. This analysis yields four key recommendations for designing diversity across a range of game platforms: match diversity affordances to player needs; draw strengths from both the digital and non-digital realms; design for conversation; and consider player diversity. We conclude by proposing diversity as an *end-to-end process* in both game research and design.

Keywords

Diversity, game design, non-digital games, digital games, character design

INTRODUCTION

Digital and non-digital game designers alike face challenges in representing diversity meaningfully and authentically in games. Looking beyond the most obvious reasons for this persistent dearth of diverse representations – marketability pressures and assumptions about gamer audiences, a lack of diversity among game designers, reversion to previously established norms of stereotypical character depictions – we find that even when designers earnestly attempt to include diverse characters, their efforts often fall short. A major criticism leveled at game designers in this regard concerns their focus on promoting *pluralism* rather than representing *diversity* in the narrative worlds they create. Pluralism allows players to interact with characters like themselves, for example by creating avatars that reflect their own identity, while diversity exists when players experience and interact with representations of marginalized groups, including but not limited to groups to which they themselves belong (Shaw 2010).

In practice, representations of diversity in games have focused almost exclusively on a small number of categories such as race and gender (Williams et al. 2009; Shaw 2012; Cole et al. 2017).

Other identities, such as sexual orientation, age, religion, language, citizenship, and neurodiversity are often not represented in even the most diverse games (ibid.). Further, even when race and gender are represented, the representation typically focuses on physical features (e.g., skin tone) and does not touch on cultural, psychological, or experiential aspects of those identities. Representation is then, almost literally, skin-deep; players do not have access to experiences that surface those other identities or deeper senses of identity. As well, designers have struggled to express non-visible identifiers (like sexual orientation or religion) within a game context without reverting to stereotypes. For example, presenting a romance storyline is often the easiest way to reveal a character's sexual orientation, but, in reality, we know that sexuality holds a much deeper meaning to a person's identity than just their romantic relationships (Shaw 2009). As a result, many game designers simply avoid tagging characters with invisible identifiers (like sexuality or religion) to circumvent the difficulty of incorporating that identity within the game narrative (Shaw 2009).

Queer game studies challenges this status quo by seeking queer representation in ways that go beyond the visual, and in contexts that go beyond the representations of sexuality (Ruberg & Shaw 2017). Queerness can be encoded in mechanics, in aesthetic experiences, and even in the relationship between the player and the game. While queerness can refer to sexual orientation and/or gender identity, it also functions as a critical paradigm that challenges normative power dynamics, social orders, and hierarchies (Jagose 1996). As such, the call for queering representation in games can apply to other types of non-normative identities, particularly because queerness and other marginalized identities are not mutually exclusive (Ruberg & Shaw 2017).

Inspired by queer game theory, the current work pushes back against the notion that representation is encompassed primarily by a character's appearance, particularly when it comes to invisible identities. We therefore explore the question of how game

designers represent diverse and non-normative character identities in ways that go beyond the visual – a pressing question given the centrality of characters and character-driven narratives in many game genres. Additionally, previous theorists have argued that a game's platform influences the types of mechanics that are possible, what systems can be implemented, and how game assets can be produced (Bogost & Montfort 2007). This approach suggests that when games represent non-normative identities through the lens of characters, different platforms may afford different possibilities for design and interaction.

In this paper, we solicited expert recommendations to develop a list of digital and non-digital game exemplars that include diversity, understood as non-dominant and/or non-normative character identities. We coded the games for the presence of both visible and invisible identities, conducted game design analyses, and identified specific design techniques being used to represent non-normative identities in novel and compelling ways. We derive five areas in which character diversity can be communicated: 1) visual design, 2) abstract representation, 3) setting and roles, 4) conversation design, and 5) rule and system design. We conclude by examining how the design strategies used by these games are linked to the affordances of their medium, and what larger implications they have for diversity in games.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To explore how games represent diverse identities, we consider what we mean by identity. We draw from identity theories in a range of fields, including sociology, psychology, and gender studies, to frame identity as*relational*, *self-relevant*, and *intersectional*– qualities that inform our methods and analyses.

Conceiving identity as *relational* counters the frequent attribution of identity to aspects of oneself that are immutable, innate, and visible, and instead argues that identity is actually constructed dynamically and socially through a wide variety of interacting

elements (McCall 2005). Social categories (e.g., soccer team, family) help to define an individual's identity (Hogg et al. 1995), but they also provide a context within which the individual's identity becomes meaningful (Wiley 1991). We therefore consider identity as it is *enacted in social contexts* rather than as static labels or categories.

Self-relevance is the notion that aspects of one's identity might be more relevant to some than others. Identity scholars argue that individuals construct a hierarchy of identities, with the most relevant being those most likely to lead to action (Hogg et al. 1995; Wiley 1991). The self-relevance of identity features is impacted by a variety of personal, societal, relational, and/or situational factors. In our research context, we recognize that each player embodies a range of identities – some are more likely than others to be reflected in gameplay and may have highly variable degrees of self-relevance.

Intersectionality theory also emphasizes that players occupy multifaceted social positions, and simultaneously experience identity features (Crenshaw 1989; McCall 2005). These multiple identities produce new experiences at their intersection. For example, the intersection of womanhood and blackness produces *misogynoir* (Bailey 2010), a specific set of disadvantages and stereotypes that are neither like the experiences of black men nor of non-black women. In other words, our identities are greater than the sum of our parts (Crenshaw 1989). This insight motivates our investigation of multiple representations of marginalized identities.

In addition to their implications for identity development and expression, interactions with diverse game characters can help reduce bias and prejudice through several different psychological mechanisms. First, counterstereotypical representations can effectively reduce biases and prejudice by altering players' schemas, or mental representations, of outgroups (Dasgupta & Greenwald 2001). For players who share group affiliation with

those characters, these counterstereotypical representations can also provide a psychological buffer against stereotype threat (Marx & Roman 2002). Second, perspective-taking, or the appreciation for others' unique psychological points of view, has been shown to be facilitated through exposure to the experiences of diverse others (e.g., Davis et al. 1996, Galinsky & Moskowitz 2000) and includes beneficial outcomes such as greater overlap in mental representations of self and other (e.g., Davis et al. 1996), and decreased stereotypes (e.g., Galinsky & Moskowitz 2000). Finally, taking on an alternate identity in a fictional context allows players to simulate the subjective experience of that character, a phenomenon known as *experience taking*. Research with readers showed that when experience-taking occurred with characters belonging to other social groups (such as protagonists of a different race or sexual orientation), it led to lower reported levels of prejudice and stereotyping toward those groups (Kaufman & Libby 2012).

These theories have a range of implications for game design. For example, exposure to diverse characters builds on notions of *parasocial interaction*, through which individuals form a pseudo-relationship with those characters and imagine them as part of their real-life social sphere (Hoffner 1996), while character-driven narratives appear to encourage deeper levels of empathy when they feature narrators or protagonists that differ in important ways from one's own identity or experience, or that fall outside of one's typical social sphere (Mar et al. 2006; Kidd & Castano, 2013). Experience-taking theories, on the other hand, ask the player to mentally simulate the experiences of a character who is different from themselves (Kaufman & Libby 2012). Research has shown that players can temporarily simulate aspects of a target character's identity (Kafai et al. 2010). However, something about the context or process of that simulation must stimulate an authentic, bottom-up awareness of difference, one that is uninfluenced or unfettered by their own assumptions or preconceptions.

The techniques available to designers will vary depending on the different and complementary affordances of digital and non-digital technologies. In this work, we use Faraj and Azad's (2012) definition of affordance as "the enactment of several mutuality relations between the technology artifact and the actor." This definition allows for a given artifact to have multiple contextually-dependent affordances related to a given actor, group of actors, varying focal contexts, etc. We highlight the difference between what we can easily accomplish with digital and non-digital game materials in order to articulate how these differences impact the ability to implement diverse representations in game characters and the ability to represent non-normative or marginalized identities regardless of whether the player shares those identities.

In reviewing digital technologies, we focus on affordances that can be directly juxtaposed with the affordances of non-digital games. First, digital technologies allow for automated processes in response to participation and interaction – users are afforded a wide range of complex interactions which are followed by a set of rule-based procedures and automatic data processing resulting in dynamic environments (Jiow & Lim 2012, Murray 2011). Second, digital technologies are social – they can encourage, facilitate and even enforce and require social interactions and social participation, as well as surface and make visible both individual and social interactions (ibid). Third, digital technologies allow for the creation and maintenance of multiple identities that have varying mutuality relationships with the offline self (ibid).

Non-digital games can include a wide range of physical elements, from traditional elements such as cards (Altice 2014) to unusual custom elements such as Larklamp, a lantern-based game (Warne 2017). However, most non-digital games share many of the affordances of paper, as outlined in Sellen & Harper (2004): they occupy physical space, they are hard to replicate, they cannot be remotely accessed, and they display static information. However, they can also be laid out in space as a way of organizing information, navigated flexibly, and annotated or modified using

ordinary household items. Non-digital games also effectively foster discussion among co-located participants (Kaufman et al. 2016a, Xu et al. 2011).

METHODS

In our work, we incorporate reflexivity on our own position as critics and writers. Collectively, we have a range of non-normative identities, including race, gender, religion, and sexual orientation. At the same time, we recognize that there are aspects of marginalization that we do not experience. For example, we are all comparatively young, cisgender, and citizens of the country in which we reside. We also recognize that our experiences do not and cannot represent everyone who shares a particular identity. Finally, we recognize that we are, collectively, both scholars and practitioners of game design. This social position informs how we analyze games as well as how we frame the implications of our work. We hope to speak specifically to communities that we belong to, namely game designers and game researchers.

To address these issues, we turned to the literature to develop a list of the qualities, attributes, demographics, and behaviors (social and others) that inform identity, rather than relying on our own experiences. The non-exhaustive list of features we used to guide this inquiry were: *body diversity, citizenship, culture, gender, generation, neurodiversity, physical ability, race, religion, sexual orientation,* and *socioeconomic status*. We then recruited experts to help us develop a list of exemplary digital and non-digital games that address diverse character representations. To generate this list, we contacted 16 game scholars and designers from both academia and industry. Based on our list of features, we requested recommendations of games that thoughtfully incorporated diverse identities and perspectives, or that explored, challenged, and subverted normative identities. We then narrowed the selection to games with narrative elements and human or human-like

characters. Appendix A lists the games remaining in our list after this narrowing process.

Next, members of the research team were randomly assigned games to analyze. For each game, the team member drew on a range of reference materials, including their own gameplay (Bizzocchi & Tanenbaum 2011) as well as gameplay videos, fan sites, and promotional materials. The game was coded for the presence of a range of identity factors, as per the list of features above. Once coding was complete, team members selected games to analyze more fully, either through further consultation with experts or by using public rankings such as Board Game Geek's Top 1000 rated titles. Analysis was conducted using techniques drawn from Fernández-Vara (2014), Ruberg & Shaw (2017) and others. In particular, for each identity axis present based on the coding scheme, team members identified and documented design decisions in which that identity was instantiated.

The team then collaboratively reviewed the resulting documentation and discussed themes that emerged across games. The team used qualitative research methods (e.g., Strauss & Corbin 1998) to code, organize, and discuss the material along a range of axes, including genre (e.g. comparing techniques within board games), identity type (e.g. different ways of representing gender), and approach to identity representation (e.g. giving the player control). During this iterative coding process, the team noted that non-normative character identities were represented within the game in five different ways. We present our findings based on these themes.

CHARACTER DESIGN APPROACHES

Five representational strategies for character identity emerged from our design analyses. We identified strategies for visual design of characters, particularly those that differed from player-controlled avatar customization; for representing internal or abstract elements of a character, such as skills or traits; for

character roles within a game setting, and how those roles convey identity; for the design of conversations between or about characters; and for designing rule systems that define characters' capacities in action.

For each of these five types of representation, we present both digital and non-digital examples. We also describe similarities and differences we observed in between the strategies used in digital and non-digital games. Because our game sampling technique relied on experts choosing exemplary game titles rather than on an exhaustive search, we recognize that these analyses are *illustrative*. Additionally, we do not attempt to present all design decisions found in our game sample; we choose examples that are *representative* of larger patterns.

Finally, our five modes of character identity representation are not meant to be mutually exclusive – rather, the reverse. Design decisions made around representing non-normative character identities are often interdependent. For example, a game's strategy for representing abstract elements of a character is likely to affect the design of rules that interact with those elements, and vice versa. We have deliberately chosen examples that illuminate some of these relationships.

Visual Design

As suggested by prior work in this area, the visual design of characters emerged as one method for marking identity (Cole et al. 2017). Avatar customization is currently a dominant strategy for addressing identity; digital character customization mechanisms are being studied for their impact on players (Turkay & Adinolf 2010), and also receive critical attention for their limitations and failures (McArthur et al. 2015). These methods were present in a number of games in our study, such as the *Dragon Age* series. However, we observed that approaches *other* than user-controlled customization could be used in diversity-supporting ways.

Figure 1. The "unicorn" card reads more typically feminine, while the "leather" card reads more typically masculine – the two are combined to create a hero.

Heroes Wanted (Chance & Little 2014) uses randomized character creation to disrupt player assumptions and challenge norms, particularly about gender. Players are dealt three cards each for the top and bottom "halves" of the characters, with a balance of attributes and illustrations for various gender identities, ethnicities, body types, etc., as well as elements that represent more masculine and feminine traits or elements (e.g., leather costume versus pink hair/makeup). Moreover, the character element cards contain a fair number of gender stereotype-defying exemplars (e.g., a female cop, cobra, and ninja), and the character illustrations are also, in some cases, ambiguous (e.g., gender-ambiguous faces such as the one for the "rainbow" character card). Because characters are

made from multiple cards, the game can produce unusual and unexpected combinations (e.g., a leather unicorn hero (Figure 1)) that challenge norms and, moreover, take the form of associative links between categories and attributes that correspond to the ways that stereotypes are cognitively represented; thus, through exposure to an array of attribute combinations in "completed" heroes, players have the opportunity to experience (and embody) heroic, yet relatable, characters who may challenge preconceptions (e.g., "fancy beard" or "heavy metal ninja"). The versatility that the sheer volume of covarying traits that this system of character creation combinatorics affords effectively, reinforces the complex and multi-faceted nature of personal identity.

Although games in the *Dragon Age* series allow the player to generate their own customized avatar, the other characters in the game are not customizable by the player. This allows the designers to question norms that players might otherwise replicate. For example, the designers question norms around age by filling the world with both major and minor elderly characters, such as Leandra Amell, the protagonist's mother; Wynne, a powerful mage; and Meredith, an antagonist and military leader. Because there are multiple older characters present both within individual games and across the series, the diversity *among* those characters forces the player to question whether their assumptions about the elderly are correct. The game also tackles stereotypes head-on through the character of Flemeth (Toma 2015). Flemeth is initially portrayed as a wrinkled woman with graying hair and a frail body, and often refers to the player as "child." However, in *Dragon Age: Origins* (BioWare 2009) she shapeshifts into a powerful dragon, and in *Dragon Age II* (BioWare 2011) she is shown as a warrior. While the player can predict these changes, particularly if they have played the game multiple times or consumed media about the game, the player's *character* is always fooled by Flemeth's stereotypical behavior. This creates an ironic distance between player and character that allows the player to reflect on their own assumptions about age.

Detailed customization for visually depicted avatars is not typically available in non-digital games (though some types of non-visual customization are well-explored; see below). However, the strategy of *reducing* player agency around visual markers of identity is available in both digital and non-digital game contexts. Based on the examples in our sample, this strategy relies on visually inclusive elements created by the designers, such as: elderly character models or cards bearing ambiguous gender markers; multiple exemplars of the identity in question, which can occur within a single game, across multiple play sessions, or across multiple games in a series; and awareness of likely player assumptions about the identity axis in question (e.g., that old women are helpless or that gender is fixed and uniform).

Abstract Representation

Avatars, portraits, and other visual representations are not the only ways that characters are encoded in games. Characters can also be represented with non-visual elements, such as character statistics. The elements can be defined by visual elements of the character, such as *Heroes Wanted* linking character drawings to underlying attributes by placing them on the same physical card. However, they can also exist in games without defined visual representation for characters, or can vary independently of how a character looks, as in our examples below.

Long Live the Queen (Hanako Games 2012) has a consistent visual representation for its main character, Princess Elodie: a pink-haired, large-eyed fourteen-year-old girl. However, Princess Elodie changes over the course of the game in other ways. The player must teach Princess Elodie the skills she needs to become a queen, which are represented numerically and abstractly (Figure 2). Elodie's skills are listed on the skills screen; a higher score means she is more capable in that area. The list includes both typically feminine skills (e.g., elegance, decoration, dance) and ones that are often associated with masculine roles (e.g., swords, naval strategy, accounting). However, despite Elodie's

conventionally feminine appearance, the game treats all skills as equally valuable, and she begins the game equally ignorant of all of them. The game is making two clear statements. First, Elodie is not limited to feminine traits simply because she is a princess. Second, Elodie does not need to reject feminine traits in order to become a successful leader. Rather, the player must pay careful attention to the challenges that Elodie faces, and draw strengths from across stereotypically feminine and masculine traits to meet them.

Figure 2. Elodie's skills are broadly categorized as social, physical, intellectual, or mystical, with a variety of sub-categories and skills.

Games such as *Legends of Andor* (KOSMOS 2012) and *Robinson Crusoe: Adventures on the Cursed Island* (Portal Games 2012) use precisely the reverse strategy: keeping internal statistics the same no matter whether the character is visually depicted as "male" or "female." While the intention here is ostensibly to allow players to make their own personal choice, the implicit message is one of equivalence, that there is essentially no difference in intelligence, fortitude, or power between the male and female instantiations of the character. In a world that treats men and women differently, games that maintain traits, attributes, and abilities (particularly ones that are often seen as gendered) regardless of character

gender are making a strong statement about male and female capacities.

In the tabletop role-playing game *Steal Away Jordan* (Ellingboe 2007), characters are designed by players, but are not represented visually. Instead, players describe the character's history and social situation, which are then translated into abstract game statistics. The latter is particularly important, as the game is set in the antebellum American South, and most players take the role of slaves. Every character has a statistic called "Worth," which reflects how valuable they are to the society in which they live. To drive home the socially defined nature of worthiness, a character's Worth is defined by the gamemaster and not by the player who controls that character during play. A full four pages of the game's rulebook are dedicated to explaining factors that the gamemaster should take into account when assigning Worth, such as age, sex, special skills, injury or disability, literacy, and a slave's relationship with the slave owner and his family. Players with slave characters are explicitly instructed that they can increase their character's Worth by taking the master's interests as their own, for example by keeping other slaves in line. This representation asks the player to engage not just with African-American history, but with how normative and non-normative identities are socially defined.

Both the digital and non-digital games in our sample made strong statements based on the *structure* of their abstract representation of characters, either through what was included in the representation (e.g., the incorporation of elegance in Elodie's skill list, or the nature of Worth) or through how elements of the representation related to one another (e.g. introducing no underlying differences between male and female characters). However, we observed differences in how these representations changed over time. The non-digital games had flexibility in how game statistics were updated. For example, in *Steal Away Jordan*, players are given examples of how they can raise their character's Worth, but are expected to improvise and innovate in line with those examples.

The digital games enabled complex updates to character representations; for example, determining how quickly Elodie improves her skills involves a long series of complicated computations, which has to be repeatedly executed during play. While it might be technically possible for human players to compute Elodie's skill improvement on their own, offloading the computation to the computer makes the game playable – and mastering the complexity of this mathematical system is a core element of play.

Setting and Roles

In narrative games, characters exist in a fictional context, and typically have social roles within that context. Both a game's setting and roles can cue players about how to behave (Baldwin 1992; Markus & Wurf 1987). Some games do substantial secondary world-building to create a fictional context for the characters, such as the *Dragon Age* series which features in-game books full of legends and lore. Others rely on common tropes and use the player's prior knowledge to fill in details of the setting. For example, *Dead of Winter: The Long Night* (Plaid Hat Games 2016) uses social roles, such as "doctor," to communicate a character's abilities and role in the game, which otherwise has a very lightweight setting.

Some games use their setting to first establish, and then defy, normative power structures around character identity. For example, when playing elven or dwarven characters in *Dragon Age: Origins*, players can be the target of, respectively, racial and caste-based bias. These biases are embodied in interactions with non-player characters, such as slurs directed at a dwarven player character by higher-ranking dwarves. Power structures are also reified in the physical layout of the world, such as placing Dalish encampments physically far from locations of wealth and power. The game then challenges these power structures by placing the player character at the center of the game's story. No matter how

the non-player characters treat them, only the player's character can ever save the day.

Dream Daddy (Game Grumps 2017) does the reverse, subverting norms by imagining a world where all the adult men in a suburban neighborhood can, and do, date one another. The game treats their sexual orientation as normative by using it as the unquestioned backdrop for the game's activities. The player's concerns are choosing which hot dad to date and making decisions that can determine if the dates go well; even the game's jokes rely on "dad" humor and stereotypes, not stereotypes about gay or bi men. Simultaneously, the player must ensure that his character's daughter ends up successfully navigating the transition between high school and college, subverting the typical assignment of caring work and relationship management to women. To enter into the spirit of the game (Suits 2014), the player must accept these premises.

In *Monsterhearts* (Alder 2012), players take on the role of literal monsters, such as vampires and werewolves who attend high school. The characters' monstrous, non-normative identities stand in for "experiences of alienation, shame, queerness, and self-destruction," while the high school setting creates a constrained, oppressive social structure within which the characters must survive. However, players must co-create the details both of the dangerous, "feral" world of their characters, and the normative society that treats them as monsters. To balance these goals, players are asked to produce physical game aids that are rough, messy, ambiguous, and partial, but that also provide structure for gameplay. For example, the players collaboratively create a seating chart for the characters' homeroom. Players decide where their characters sit, then begin to define facets of identity for other characters who sit nearby. In this collective process the MC is directed to sketch roughly and to take only those notes that support play. By taking the time to generate a physical-but-imperfect representation of the shared character and setting knowledge, the

players come to understand ambiguity as the space where their characters can survive.

When engaging with non-normative or marginalized identities through a game's setting or roles, the game must find ways to undermine players' prior assumptions. We observed that games did this in two ways. First, some games piggybacked the question of non-normative identities onto game material about which the player would have limited prior knowledge, such as the social structures of elves and dwarves, forcing the player to learn the game's framing. Second, some games inserted non-normative identities into strong existing tropes, such as high school drama, then relied on the player's use of those tropes to explore those identities in interesting ways. In digital games, these strategies could be accomplished through content delivery. Non-digital games, particularly role-playing games, sometimes attempt to deliver large quantities of setting material (e.g. in the form of game books), but struggle with players internalizing and using that knowledge. On the other hand, non-digital games more easily allow players to co-create the game's setting; players must internalize the setting to a greater degree in order to use it in play, since the game does not digitally enforce adherence to the game's social norms. Players may also need to discuss the game in order to agree on how the setting should function, producing interesting conversations.

Conversation Design

In our sample of games, we observed that many games with characters used *diegetic* conversation, or conversations occurring within the frame of the game, to help define character identity elements. Pre-scripted dialogue types included dialogue between computer-controlled characters, dialogue directed at player-controlled characters, and dialogue controlled by the player, while role-played conversations involved players improvisationally speaking in the roles of characters. Other games incorporated *meta-conversational techniques*, methods for starting player-to-

player conversations about the identities of the characters in the game. While these conversations are outside the scope of the game itself, game design decisions can either foster (Xu et al. 2011) or undermine (Khaled 2014) reflective conversations between players.

Many diegetic conversations in *Dragon Age* feature the PC's companions, computer-controlled characters who accompany the PC throughout the game. The game incentivizes the player to talk to their companions because conversations with companions can unlock side quests and romantic options, but companions also allow the game to portray marginalized identities. For example, in *DA:In*, the companion, Krem, is a transgender man, which is only revealed after the player has initiated many conversations with Krem and earned the character's trust. Because the identity is brought up in conversation, Krem can share the internality of his experience rather than relying on visual markers to cue the player.

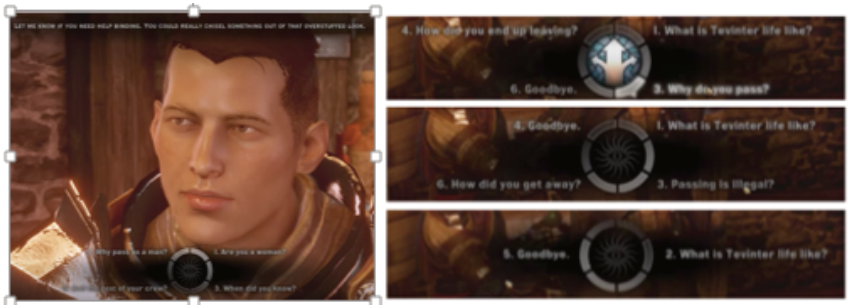

Figure 3.Krem self-discloses his gender identity through a comment about binding. The player can engage further in the dialogue but is restricted – they can ask probing questions but cannot be aggressive or explicitly transphobic.

Additionally, the conversation design in *Dragon Age* relies on dialogue trees: during a conversation, the player can select from pre-generated responses, but not generate options of their own (Figure 3). The game uses this to model appropriate behavior; the game does not provide options for many common bigoted responses to trans identity, even if the player may wish to respond that way. Other dialogue options appear questionable (e.g. "Why

pass as a man?" or "Are you a woman?"), but when the player selects those, the response actually spoken by the character is either softened (e.g., "Are you a woman?" translates to "Oh, are you? I didn't realize…") or the character will be firmly rebuked (e.g., Krem friendly but sarcastically responds, "Great! Now we can all talk about it!").

The board game *Ladies and Gentlemen* (Lamy 2013), on the other hand, generates conversation between players by putting stereotypes front and center, inviting players to confront, subvert or cast a humorous or ironic slant on them. Players are paired off, with one player assuming the role of aggressive bread-winning husband, and their teammate the role of frivolous, dress-shopping wife (who must implore her spouse to provide her sufficient funds to indulge her obsession with fashion and glamour). The game's tongue-in-cheek rules manual exaggerates these overt stereotypical roles, and from both the personal experience of the authors and other players' accounts of the game from its Board Game Geek forum, incites playful roleplay, often involving male and female players assuming the role of the opposite gender. This game and others like it, such as *Cards Against Humanity* (Dillon et al. 2009), entail a high level of player interactivity in navigating and "playing with" their overt stereotypical content; however, they are correspondingly reliant on player willingness to engage critically.

Adding structure to meta-conversations can help provide a critical framing. For example, the LARP scenario, *Against the Grain* (Turkington 2016), explores a historical wildcat hate strike by white women working in a Baltimore factory in 1944, who were protesting the first African-American woman to join their crew. Players take on the roles of stakeholders in the conflict, including characters with racist and sexist attitudes, and the game's design pushes players to have conversations *as* characters that embody racism and sexism. For example, the Bird-in-Ear technique allows the game's facilitator to undermine the marginalized characters, or harden the bad behavior of dominant-group characters, by

whispering what society thinks of their decisions. However, the game also includes a facilitated post-game debrief where the facilitator asks players to reflect on their game experiences, including explicitly asking about what they will take away from the game and what they hope to leave behind. The diegetic conversations provide the raw material for the meta-conversation about what the game implies for players.

In our sample, digital games primarily relied on pre-scripted dialogue with limited player input. These designs allowed more control over how identity was engaged through conversation, including controlling when identities are revealed, modeling appropriate reactions to diverse identities, and forestalling hateful or bias-reinforcing conversational directions. However, these games included many of the challenges to reflection noted by Khaled (2014), such as a high level of immersion and a quantification of conversational outcomes. Conversely, non-digital games included both improvisational diegetic conversations, when players either formally or informally adopted the role of in-game characters, and techniques to provoke meta-conversation, such as humorous exaggeration and explicit debrief. However, they had less control over the content of conversation, and risked provoking conversations that replicate negative attitudes about diversity, rather than supporting it.

Rule and System Design

Character identities and game norms can be introduced, reinforced, and expressed through rules that constrain characters' actions, choices, and interactions. These rules typically interact with other aspects of the character defined above, such as representations of their internal states or their in-game roles.

Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice casts the player as Senua, a warrior seeking to return her beloved to life. Senua experiences psychosis, which is represented in part through rules design. The game's key puzzle mechanic requires finding environmental patterns that

correspond to a particular rune. Senua's ability to find these patterns is framed as a direct result of her psychosis. By making what might otherwise be framed as "delusions" integral to Senua's progress in the game, the player is encouraged to see her mentally diverse perspective as a strength. At the same time, Senua is tormented by voices that no one else can hear; because they are produced through binaural audio, the player shares the experience of these confusing and often hateful messages.

Monsterhearts incorporates a game move called Turn Someone On. When a player chooses to Turn Someone On, they invoke a sexual response in another player's character. The player may decide what form that sexual response takes, but it must be incorporated into their character's next action. Players are encouraged to use Turn Someone On regardless of gender, which means the rule can introduce explicit queer content into the game. However, even if the player uses Turn Someone On in a heterosexual context, the move still serves to challenge dominant notions of sexuality as fixed (the character is turned on regardless of gender and sexual orientation), predictable (the player does not know who will turn their character on in the future), and controllable (a player cannot deny their character's arousal).

In *Thou Art But A Warrior*, the protagonists are Muslim knights defending the Golden Age kingdoms of medieval Spain; as an intentional and historically appropriate reversal of Islamophobic tropes, the game positions Christians as monstrous invaders who seek to destroy the civilized world. Although the characters are meant to fight for their people, the game rules define a tragic arc for both the characters and the kingdom they seek to defend. When a knight behaves sympathetically to the infidel invaders, or fails to defend their own people, they may accumulate points toward Weariness and Discord. A knight who ends the game with a Weariness score of 4 either dies or converts to Christianity; these are mechanically equivalent, which suggests that they are equally disastrous outcomes for the character and their world. The

dynamics of Weariness and Discord not only center the character's Muslim identity, but also deliberately decenter Christianity.

In both digital and non-digital systems we observe that rules can be used as ways of representing non-normative identity exploratively (e.g., as capacities for strength or as areas of difficulty or weakness). Acknowledging the interdependence of character representations, we see that rules and systems often operate on abstract representations. However, the structure of rules and the system can say something about non-normative identities beyond character representation. For example, the move Turn Someone On is not about how you represent the character's sexual desire as internal to the character, but is instead the way the character can take an action in the world. While both digital and non-digital games explore non-normative identities through mechanics such as new ability or added restriction, we see difference in how players interact with these systems. In digital games it is the system that does the processing and that must both define and adapt to the interactions, while in non-digital games the player may much more easily find themself in, or actively seek, corner cases where they can and may break the rules.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Compared to the dominant strategy of locating difference in the player's avatar, the strategies discussed above allow the representation of more types of difference, including those that are not always visually marked (e.g., neurodiversity); those whose visual markers can vary or, when using supposedly prototypical visual markers, may reinforce stereotypes (e.g., Jewishness); and those that are only visible in certain circumstances (e.g., bisexuality). They also allow for the possibility of strategic introduction or integration of elements of difference within a game's content, mechanics, and rule-set. As suggested by the "embedded design" model of persuasive games (Kaufman et al. 2016b), deploying tactics such as delaying the disclosure of

"otherness" in characters, interweaving elements of "otherness" alongside normative elements, and using more implicit and subtle means of communicating messages of diversity or difference can facilitate player embodiment of diverse characters and increase the positive impact of encounters with those characters as a result.

Of course, with the deployment of these approaches to depicting diversity and difference – particularly with a player base that itself is diverse in the identities, backgrounds and experiences represented – come a number of challenges which we must confront. First, the depiction of group marginalization may, for some players at least, unintentionally reinforce marginalization. For example, high-SES players who played a game simulating the daily life decisions of someone living under the poverty line were shown to emerge with *less* empathy and illusions of high agency in their views toward people in poverty (Roussos & Dovidio 2016). On the one hand, one could argue that when the goal of avoiding stereotypical depictions dictates the use of coded, symbolic, or subtle representations, this may mean that diversity will only be explicitly recognized by players who belong to those groups. At the other extreme are examples of games that present stereotypes front-and-center to invite players to subvert them or treat them ironically (e.g., the tongue-in-cheek nature of stereotypes in *Ladies & Gentlemen* or *Cards Against Humanity*). Inviting subversion in this way can be effective for players who come from a perspective of a deep understanding of bias, but what about players who might miss the point and use the game to reinforce stereotypes? Finally, it's important to anticipate the possibility of players confronting diversity or utilizing it in unintended and potentially problematic ways. For example, players may attempt to use difference instrumentally, either leveraging disadvantage or "victimhood" as persuasive devices to get their way in a game or, at the other extreme, casting difference as superhuman and exaggerating a dimension of difference for its effect (e.g., media depictions of people with disabilities have been shown to perpetuate both of these fallacies: Clogston 1990). In all of these ways, thinking deeply about the intersection of player identity and perspective, the

points of difference tackled by a game, and the methods used to represent them, reveals the potential pitfalls, and also sets up the creative challenges in depicting diversity effectively.

Match diversity affordances to player needs. We discovered that different types of games use different techniques to represent diversity in games. However, we do not rank those different capacities in terms of absolute effectiveness. Rather, we consider that different capacities may be more appropriate for players with different needs around diversity. For example, many digital games constrain player input and are difficult to modify, implying that players must respond to diverse characters using options created by the game designers. For players who have little experience with a particular type of difference, or for players who may have negative stereotypes about that group, this approach may be helpful in modeling appropriate ways to react. However, players who personally experience a particular type of marginalization may want games that easily let them customize and express their own experiences, such as role-playing games. We note that experiencing marginalization along one axis (e.g. sexual orientation) does not mean that a person understands or experiences marginalization along other axes (e.g. immigration status), or that they are exposed to it in their daily lives. The same player may therefore benefit from exposure to a *spectrum* of diverse characters in a *range* of different games that use a variety of techniques to portray those differences. As we continue to develop a design language for the representation of diversity, we can more clearly identify the strengths and weaknesses of representation in individual games, and help match those games to the players who need them.

Draw strengths from the digital and non-digital realms. Although we have talked about games as digital or non-digital, this line is not as bright as it might appear. For example, *Monsterhearts* takes advantage of many of the affordances of the digital, even though its representation of queerness is rooted in the analog. Every physical game book comes with a digital PDF, which makes

the rules searchable; the game can be played over video chat, using augmented tabletop tools to share game materials; and skins are distributed online. In the latter case, the strengths of the digital and non-digital work together to allow a deeper exploration of queerness. The *Monsterhearts* book provides explicit instructions on how players can create their own skins that represent different types of monstrous queerness, without the need for any special software or skill. However, they can also easily access skins made by others and share their own. Because players can explore skins shared digitally by other players across the global digital landscape, they can access unimaginable non-normative (or here, monstrous) identities and experiences that otherwise are inaccessible. Even though it happens outside of game sessions, this type of sharing and reflecting can be understood as a larger part of the game's engagement with diversity – and it is enabled by the game's measured engagement with technology.

Design for conversation. While role-playing games are often described as a conversation (Alder 2012), we argue that other types of game design can also be conceptualized as conversation design (To et al. 2017). Board games, for example, often feature table talk (Xu et al. 2011). Even single-player digital games like the *Dragon Age* series foster larger cultural conversations, for example through media coverage, fan works, and discussion (Jenkins et al. 2013). The conversations that players are having in and around the game can be understood as locations for representing, surfacing, and reflecting on diversity. Considering the conversations that players are having before, during, and after play, can allow designers to identify opportunities for the player to confront difference. However, game designers must consider that those conversations are also opportunities for diversity and difference to be undermined, such as in the case of "ironic" jokes about racism, or would-be subversion of gender tropes that actually reinforces them.

Consider player diversity. In our analysis, we have located diversity in the *game experience*, but games are not simply sets

of rules, objects in a box, or lines of code. They are experiences that are shared with other players, including before and after play. In other fields, there are interventions that seek to gather diverse groups of people to connect, including for learning (Kulkarni et al. 2015). Exposure to difference does not have to be entirely carried by within-game content; playing with people different from oneself, particularly when there are a range of experiences along different axes of marginalization, can also serve to increase exposure to diversity in games. While the composition of playgroups and game conversations may seem like it is outside the scope of game designers' remit, game designers have a great deal of influence over the ways that players connect. Three examples include the design of player matching systems, particularly for digital games but also including resources to find local playgroups for analog games; methods for controlling harassment of vulnerable subgroups; and the design of cover art, descriptive text, and other game materials that players use to determine whether or not they are a part of the game's target audience.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have explored a range of ways that marginalized or non-normative experiences can be represented in game characters in ways that go beyond customization of avatars. Additionally, we extend our analysis to understand the diversity-related affordances of digital and non-digital games. Finally, we derive four implications for game design for diversity: match diversity affordances to player needs; draw strengths from both digital and non-digital realms; design for conversation; and consider player diversity.

Based on this work, we believe that we should be looking at diversity in games as an *end-to-end process*, starting when the platform and audience for the game, as well as its funding and distribution models, are being considered, incorporating both before and after-play activities as well as what happens during

game sessions, and continuing through to the way that games are used in players' lives (e.g. the conversations they are having about the game and who they choose to play with). This approach gives us a lens to bring together research on games and diversity across a range of different fields, including close critical reading of games, conversational analysis from play-groups, economic analysis of distribution and funding models, and analysis of fanworks and other media.

An *end-to-end process* approach challenges us to consider design issues not typically incorporated into diversity in games. For example, how do we understand the lifespan of games as a medium for representing diversity in a changing society? Groups' experiences and social positions change over time; we need to consider the cultural assumptions that travel along with games into a changed future world. Furthermore, how do we design diverse representation in games when we're unsure how long they will be relevant? While the *Dragon Age* franchise may persist, we may lose the opportunity to play those games due to changes in hardware in ten years, let alone fifty or a hundred. In contrast, some non-digital games have been played for hundreds or thousands of years. How can we design games to represent diversity when they may exist in a future with identity dynamics we cannot even imagine? As scholars and designers, these are the questions we ask ourselves, and by challenging normative assumptions found in games and game culture, we might one day answer them.

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APPENDIX A

Non-Digital Game Titles		Digital Game Titles
Android:Netrunner		*Bully*
Against the Grain		*Dragon Age series (i.e., Dragon Age: Origins, Dragon Age II, Dragon Age: Inquisition)*
Arctic Scavengers		*Dream Daddy*
Arkham Horror (or Eldritch Horror or Mansions of Madness)		*Gone Home*
Ashes: Rise of the Phoenixborn		*Grand Theft Auto*
Dead of Winter: The Long Night		*Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*
Descent		*Mass Effect: Andromeda*
Dogs in the Vineyard		*NBA Street Volume 2*
Fog of Love		*Never Alone*
Funny Friends		*Night in the Woods*
Heroes Wanted		*Saint's Row 3*
Magic the Gathering		*Sim City*
Misspent Youth		*Starcraft: Broodwar*
Monsterhearts		*Stardew Valley*
Pathfinder		*Tacoma*
Sentinels of the Multiverse		*True Crime: Streets of LA*
Steal Away Jordan		
The Curse		
The Magicians		
The Watch		
The #feminism anthology		
Thou Art But a Warrior		
Vampire the Masquerade		
14 Days		

Game Inventory

3.

Homo Includens

Surveying DiGRA's Diversity

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ABSTRACT

This article examines which bodies have access to participate in Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) events, and to DiGRA as an organization. It is based on a survey (N=174), among subscribers to the DiGRA "Gamesnetwork" mailing list. The survey included questions on age, gender, location and career level to gain insight into who is included in the DiGRA community,

with further questions on problems and challenges faced by those who have had trouble accessing DiGRA. This paper does not proceed solely by statistical methodology, but draws on feminist theories of embodiment and qualitative methods. Through this diverse methodological approach, the paper analyzes which bodies have difficulties accessing DiGRA's academic communities and conferences, which practices cause these difficulties, and which policies might be introduced to address these. The survey indicates that young, early-career and women's bodies are in particularly precarious positions. This situation is perpetuated through various practices of economic and social inaccessibility. Upon reflection, the paper proposes a set of policies to address these practices. We conclude that this survey and its analysis are only a first step to making DiGRA a more diversely inclusive organization.

Keywords

DiGRA, survey, diversity, bodies, embodiment, conference, policy, precarity, access

INTRODUCTION

> "As researchers we all have embodied, cultural and social lives and feelings that we don't leave at the door when we do our research." (Humphreys 2017, 15).

> "When you look like what they expect a professor to be, you are treated like a professor […] the body that allow[s] them to pass seamlessly into the category. […] At one moment I express my fatigue at the repetition of these gatherings, where the all is hidden by the assumed generality of a particular ('open to all' often translating into all male, all white, or all but one). I express a sense of what is lost when academic gatherings are restricted to certain kinds of bodies." (Ahmed 2012, 176-179).

> "If we consider why freedom of assembly is separate from freedom of expression, it is precisely because the power that people have to gather together is itself an important political prerogative, quite

> distinct from the right to say what they have to say once people have gathered. The gathering signifies in excess of what is said, and that mode of signification is a concerted bodily enactment, a plural form of performativity." (Butler 2015, 8).

It is easy to underestimate the importance of bodies in academia. Instead, academic conferences such as the Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA)[1] are often seen, first and foremost, as a meeting of minds, rather than bodies. Even there, bodies assert themselves, especially in the experiences of those who are often excluded for being seen as having 'non-neutral bodies.' That is, bodies that may be differently coloured or bodies that may be differently abled. Bodies that are gendered, bodies which may be attracted to other bodies – or not at all. All these bodies, some more than others, may be stopped by border control. Some bodies may need a visa, some bodies are un(der)funded, some bodies are jetlagged. At conferences, bodies go out to smoke and bodies go for drinks. Bodies need food and different diets. Bodies lactate. Bodies menstruate. Bodies go to bathrooms.

All bodies are intersectional – even bodies which may be read as 'neutral' are inscribed with certain affordances. It may no longer come as a surprise, furthermore, that bodies may be threatened and harassed. These possibilities are easily ignored or forgotten when we take the luxury of only thinking of ourselves and our colleagues as minds and, arguably, if we uphold the distinction between those minds and their bodies in the first place.

Below we explore the results of a preliminary and inaugural survey conducted in late 2016 by the DiGRA Diversity Working Group (a committee of volunteers formed with the intention to improve diversity and accessibility for DiGRA members and game studies academics). Within the interdisciplinarity of game studies and DiGRA as an organisation, as well as through the variety of

1. "Founded in 2003, DiGRA is the premiere international association for academics and professionals who research digital games and associated phenomena" ("Welcome to DiGRA," 2012).

scholars in the Diversity Working Group, this paper has likewise used a mix of methods. The interdisciplinarity, group effort, and bottom-up approaches which this paper has adhered to, are thus a consequence of a collective and interdisciplinary effort of research by game studies researchers (of various bodies and intersectional identities), who have collaborated "partial knowledges built through self-reflexive processes." (Humphreys 2017, 2)The following people in particular have participated in the process of producing this paper. The survey was conceived by Alyea Sandovar, workshopped with the DiGRA Diversity Working Group, and put together by Rachel Kowert. Circulated through the DiGRA mailing list "Gamesnetwork", the survey was produced to assess people's experiences, and how and why DiGRA conference-going bodies can or cannot attend DiGRA. The aim of the introductory DiGRA diversity survey was to initiate outreach to DiGRA's attendees for general feedback, with intentions to improve the survey and circulate updated versions annually by the DiGRA Diversity Working Group. The paper's framing, analysis and discussion by Mahli-Ann Butt and Lars de Wildt, have resulted in these initial findings, for DiGRA to collectively reflect upon as a case study in conference accessibility.*Who finds access to DiGRA, who has trouble doing so, and how can we improve their access? How do we improve DiGRA's diversity?*The discussion works toward a more inclusive and diverse DiGRA through unpacking the data and analysis with a feminist analysis, paying "attention to formations of power, social context, and historical contingency," (Humphreys 2017, 2) and a theoretical framework of embodiment (cf. Ahmed 2012; Butler 2015; Hannabach & Shaw 2017; Humphreys 2017) with three cumulative steps:

1. 'Precarity' (i.e. which bodies are vulnerable to inaccessibility);
2. 'Practice' (i.e. which concrete, material practices restrict such bodies);
3. 'Policy' (i.e. which policies can organizations such as

DiGRA employ to improve such practices).

Taking a bottom-up approach in collaboration with the attendees of the DiGRA 2017 Diversity Workshop "Gaming the System" and the efforts of the DiGRA Diversity Working Group, we have collated a skeleton of suggested policies to be introduced to DiGRA. For these policies and diversity initiatives to be integrated successfully requires that they be considered as processes: we expect that the DiGRA community, the DiGRA board and the DiGRA Diversity Working Group will continue to take up these proposed initiatory policies and make them more rigorous by developing them into concrete practices of inclusion. In terms of discipline specificity, in light of gamergate, the initial analysis has focused on the pressing issue of harassment of women in games studies (Chess & Shaw 2015; 2016; Humphreys 2017). We conclude that future versions of the survey can be improved by circulating it beyond DiGRA's Gamesnetwork, by greater effort to reach out to more marginalised voices outside of DiGRA's current anglocentric sphere.

Asserting Bodies

What do we mean by diversity? Why be diverse? These two questions need to first be addressed to contextualize the survey, its outcome, and our consequent theorizations.

First, what do we mean by diversity? We will delineate our working concept of diversity as one that deals with a bodily diversity of physical, material bodies, not a disciplinary diversity of departmental bodies; nor a representational diversity of virtual bodies.

Second, we must ask: why be diverse? Why have diversity? In addressing this question, we argue for why we should care about the affordances of bodies.

What is diversity?

To be stopped, searched, interrupted, prevented from entering or traveling to places, is to realize the limitations of one's body. Sara Ahmed argues that "there is an implicit relation between categories, such as 'woman,' 'non-white' and other 'marked' categories of bodies, "and mobility," a relation she attempts to make more explicit (2012, 176).

> "When [such] a category allows us to pass into the world, we might not notice that we inhabit that category. When we are stopped or held up by how we inhabit what we inhabit [i.e. our bodies], then the terms of habitation are revealed to us." (ibid.)

This concept of exclusion, with inclusion as its inverse, is known to many through direct experience. Diversity here will be discussed as the inverse of exclusion: holistic inclusivity works to reshape spaces to improve the affordances of less privileged bodies. Our working definition of diversity is a commitment to an active and deliberate process of rectifying historical and cultural discrimination. This distinction also acknowledges that diversity does not grant inclusion of voices which promote exclusionary practices.

Even when voices are present, their presence does not guarantee that they are being heard (Lillis, 1997). In addition, the perspective neglects that, at any given moment, a body may have different voices that require expression – parent, teacher, designer, researcher – and what voice a body may wish to express at any given moment. Nor does this perspective consider the language a voice may express itself best in. In this brief empirical report we will not attempt to produce an exhaustive definition. Instead, we choose to delineate our concept of diversity in order to contextualize the research below. Thus, our working concept of diversity refers to a diversity of physical, material bodies – including bodies that are interrupted, harassed or unable to attend.

By focusing on embodied intersectional diversity (of ethnic, gendered, religious and other identities), we explicitly do not discuss two other topics of diversity:

> First, that of *disciplinary diversity*: humanities scholars, social scientists, game designers, and others. Interdisciplinary diversity is beneficial for all manner of bodies (including the most privileged academics of wealthy white cishet male bodies). For work on disciplinary diversity, see Quandt, et al., 2015; Williams, 2005. Academic work requires critical examination of new views and understandings, and disciplinary diversity supports the construction of such new understandings. Although, when interdisciplinarity is framed as a diversity matter in itself, this diverts efforts and attention away from addressing the historical exclusion of those with diverse bodies in academia. While we explicitly support interdisciplinarity and stand against discipline policing, we believe that it would be counterproductive for this paper to center on interdisciplinarity. This paper prioritises supporting those who are marginalised and threatened because of their embodied existence, before addressing the concerns of interdisciplinarity for the most privileged bodies. This centering of embodiment in our consideration of interdisciplinarity insures that diversity questions may continue to prioritise 'rectifying historical and cultural discrimination' such as addressing the gender divide of disciplines.
>
> Second, that of the *diversity of non-human bodies*: virtual bodies, animals, fictional representation, characters and avatars in media and games. We greatly admire the work of our colleagues researching diversity of virtual and fictional representation in media and games. This iteration of the DiGRA diversity survey only addresses questions of the affordances of human bodies researching games, and how we might continue to respond and make DiGRA more accessible and safer for a greater array of these bodies. Space could be made for future iterations of this survey to also address animal bodies, such as accessibility for seeing eye and therapy animals, as well as the consideration of reducing animal harm, environmental impact, and exploitative labour, for conference catering choices.Thus, diversity in this paper addresses the various states of embodiment for human researchers of games, with the intention to rectify historical and cultural discrimination.

Why be diverse?

The Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) and the DiGRA Diversity Working Group believe that it is beneficial for everyone to consider the diverse bodies we may include. Inclusivity and diversity being regarded as beneficial is supported by literature from management, pedagogic and other utilitarian perspectives. For example, the positive benefits of diversity to learning were demonstrated for students sharing diverse classrooms, when compared to a control group of segregated classes (Gurin, et al., 2004), whilst perceived discrimination has been shown to be detrimental to workplaces, more so than other stressors (Sanchez & Brock, 1996). The inclusion of diverse perspectives has been argued to be a vital tool for critical knowledge production in scientific communities (cf. Fehr, 2011; Hurtado, et al., 1998; Milem, 1997, 1999), including increased understanding, competence and productivity in academic milieus such as campuses, conferences and formal institutions (cf. Villalpondo, 1994; Tanaka, 1996; Gilliard, 1996; qtd. in Milem, 2003).

Utilitarian approaches, however, exist paradoxically when diversity is positioned as a quantifiable, managerial, bureaucratic discourse. Stamping the label of ‘diversity’ as a commercially valuable “holy mantra” (cf. Ahmed 2012, 51; Puwar 2004, I) becomes a strategy for institutions and academic conferences to brand themselves as inclusive through token efforts of checklists and promises of goodwill. The pervasive repetition of ‘diversity’ as an institutional mantra, cleaves diversity from its related concepts, such as inequality, racism and whiteness (Ahmed 2012, 81). For scholars of diversity (cf. Ibid., 52-3; Deem & Ozga 1997, 33), the term may suggest differences of bodies, but does not necessarily reference an active commitment to an ethical paradigm, instead granting institutions masks for their existing structural inequality (Ahmed 2012, 53).

Diversity works against its own goals when it is offered as a solution. For example, having one person of colour on a panel does not amend a white majority, nor does one women's panel amongst a sea of men, nor does the siphoning of feminist and queer studies into a designated gender track. Offering diversity as a solution burdens delegates from marginalised groups with fixing the 'lack of diversity' with their participation. Inviting and welcoming diverse bodies still calls on a position of an authorial relationship between 'hosts' and 'outsiders'. However, diversity remains valuable when offered as a question (Ahmed 2012, 17). When posed as a question, diversity makes the walls established by academic institutions visible. Following the sensibilities of Ahmed (2012), academia's walls become palpable when diverse bodies come up against them and are pushed away.Feeling resistance brings into focus the existence of institutionalised barriers.

Amongst the utility and benefits of diversity in academia, the studies mentioned above may lend themselves as 'solutions', but are also interpretable as 'questions' pointing towards two coexisting concerns: *homogenous knowledge production*(knowledge concerns) and *inequality* (justice concerns). Both concerns intertwine into reproducing each other. The underrepresentation of women and African-Americans in fields where an assumed inherent "talent", "brilliance" and "genius" (terms that are less likely to describe women and people of colour) recirculate a masculine and Eurocentric coding of knowledge creation (Storage et al., 2016). As academics, we may uncritically reproduce inequality through our everyday research practices. To draw on the work of Wendy Brown (2010, 8), categorisation, taxonomy, demarcation and creating boundaries are academic forms of legitimisation, but at the same time these practices continue to structure hierarchies, value authorial figureheads, and encourage processes of 'othering'. "Psychically, socially, and politically," Brown notes, "walls inevitably convert a protected way of life into hunkering and huddling." (Ibid., 42) Indeed, our political climate is increasingly one consumed by building walls.

To contextualise the need for diversity specifically in academia, the promises of success through aggressive individualism have helped push the academic profession into an era barren of job security and tenure track positions (Berlant, 2011). With the precarity of academic careers and the restrain of researchers under neoliberalism, Kevin Birmingham recently argued, exceptional research by asking exceptional questions is being jammed (2017). Academics are compressed into small boxes as human resources who must play the game of academia in order to survive. Without diversifiers (i.e. diversity workers), everyday academic practices may continue unintentionally fortifying the walls of its ivory Euro-phallocentric tower, and as a consequence will continue constricting knowledge and the livelihood of academics.

Sal Humphreys argues with Adrienne Shaw that this on-going constriction of knowledge is key to both understanding the academic field of game studies, as much as the medium it studies. Shaw states that "feminist theory asks us to imagine how else these [academic] spaces might manifest." (2014, 76) Humphreys comments on Shaw, arguing:

> I think this is a key question for games studies, and a key reason for being attentive to the voices that bring different understandings from the margins. Games can inherently offer us a place to imagine different worlds—spaces that play by different rules—that's what games are. To limit ourselves to a narrow field of imagined difference is to miss the opportunities that games actually hold. The benefits of diversity for games studies are clear. We gain a more robust discipline. (Humphreys 2017, 15)

Hence, the question of diversity benefits as much from an understanding of video games as from an understanding of the academic communities studying them.

This question of diversity, more generally, sets forth the tearing down of walls, beyond offering allocated spaces and access through gateways, advocating for more malleable and permeable margins (Ahmed 2012, 173-187). Diversity work offers questions

without necessarily provoking solutions, but ones which must nevertheless keep being asked. Instead of having one person of colour on a panel, one women's panel at a male-dominated conference, or isolating feminist and queer studies research into gender tracks, we might be able to unravel and address these problems by asking: *Why is the panel mostly white? Why is the conference mostly attended by men? Should topics of diversity be placed into designated tracks at all?*

Ultimately, how diversity should best be done is often debated and we acknowledge that there are multiple ways and approaches to do diversity work. As such, this paper does not simply rely on the survey data, but advances to propose measures supported by reasonable intuition and feminist praxis such as that advocated by Ahmed. There are all manners of diversity work which intends to support minority and marginalised bodies and their voices. We recognise that what has been delineated here is not all encompassing of the mass of diversity work being done across and beyond academia. For future iterations of the DiGRA diversity survey, how diversity is defined and the contextual considerations of the urgency of diversity – among other unspoken aspects of diversity this paper has missed – should evolve alongside the continued conversations on diversity work.

How diverse is DiGRA?

To this end, the survey was designed to indicate any problems that game scholars in different career phases and from different backgrounds are facing. We did so specifically to answer the questions:

1. Who finds access to the DiGRA conference and its wider community?
2. How do different bodies experience problems with such access?
3. Which bodies can we identify as having problems of

> inaccessibility, which practices uphold this inaccessibility, and how can we improve on or negate those practices?

In other words, the current survey started as a way of identifying which bodies most urgently need resources to improve the diversity of DiGRA.

Below, we briefly specify the method and the resulting dataset, which we discuss in light of the questions asked above. In all, the overarching goal is to present the diversity of DiGRA as an organization, the diversity of DiGRA event attendance, and the difficulties that may arise in prohibiting some bodies from doing so.

Method

The DiGRA Diversity Working Group constructed an online survey through Google Forms that was disseminated through the DiGRA "Gamesnetwork" mailing list in October 2016. The survey included demographic questions (age, gender, location) relating to participation in DiGRA and alternative organizations (including conferences), and several open questions to allow for inductive data collection. The questions included in the survey followed three themes: reasons for attending DiGRA events, reasons for not attending DiGRA events, and problems experienced accessing, feeling (un)welcomed, and (un)included in DiGRA.

Data

Demographics

In total, 174 DiGRA members completed the online survey, representing an 8.5% participation rate of the mailing lists' 1965 subscribers (although it must be noted that a large part of the list's population is likely inactive or consisting of double accounts, such as multiple institutions' email addresses for the same person).

One hundred and three participants (60.9%) identified as male, 66 (36.1%) identified as female, and 5 (3%) identified as agender, genderqueer or non-binary. As seen in Table 1, more than half of all participants were aged 25 – 34 (56%).

Age Category	Percentage of Respondents
18 - 24 years	3.0%
25 - 34 years	56.0%
35 - 44 years	32.1%
45 - 54 years	7.7%
55+ years	1.2%

Table 1.Respondents' age:

In terms of location, 83 participants (49.4%) reported residency within the European Union (including England), whilst 31.5% (53 participants) reside in North America. Less than a fifth of respondents were located in other regions. A more detailed breakdown of location information of the participants can be seen in Table 2 and Figure 1.

Location	Percentage of Respondents
Africa	1.8%
Asia	4.8%
Eastern Europe	1.2%
European Union (including the UK)	49.4%
Middle East	0.6%
North America	32.5%
Oceania	6.0%
South America	4.2%
South Asia	0.6%

Table 2.Participants' locations:

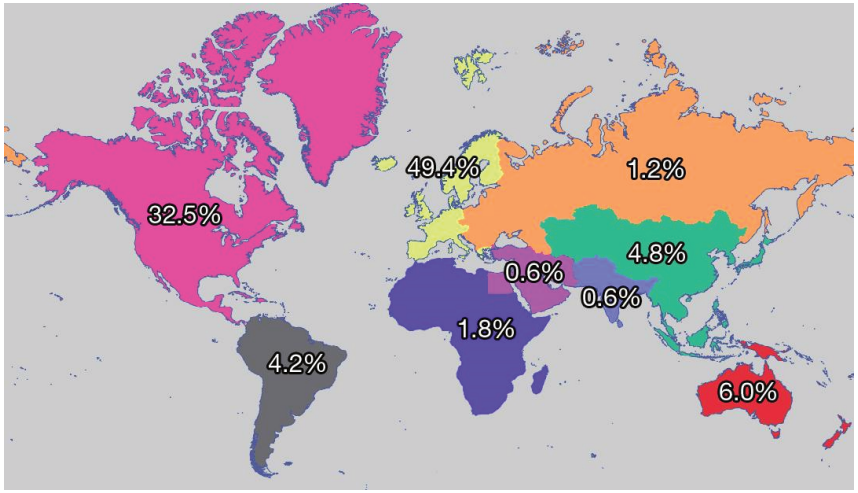

Figure 1.Geographical distribution of survey participants.

Scholars from several different levels of academia were represented within the survey. PhD students constituted the largest percentage of participants (40.6%), followed by associate and assistant professors (27.6%), early career researchers (post-doc, 10.6%), and master's students (6.5%; see Figure 2). In total, students (at all levels) comprised 51.5% of the sample, with the rest being researchers and educators at various levels. A larger number of participants were male-identifying. Within each stage of academic careers, distributions of gender show an overall increase of men further up the university hierarchy. For instance, 38% of students identified themselves as female, 59% as male, and 3% identified as non-binary (i.e., agender, genderqueer, predominantly male). Of the postdoctoral researchers and beyond, 34% identified as female, 63% as male, and 3% identified as non-binary.

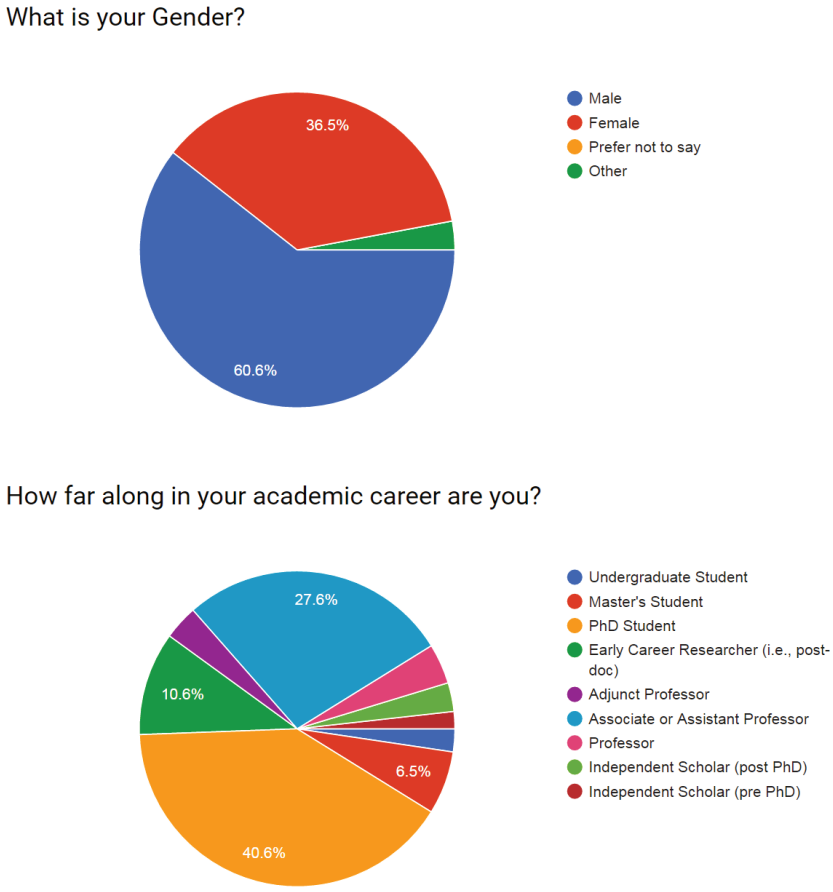

Figure 2.Gender and career stage among participants.

Participation in DiGRA

DiGRA is organized both on an international level in the shape of its journal *ToDIGRA*, mailing list Gamesnetwork, annual conference DiGRA, as well as on a local level (current local DiGRA chapters are: Australia; Chinese-speaking; Dutch; Finnish; Flemish; German-speaking; Israeli; Italian; Japanese; Turkish; British). At the same time, academic bodies make personal and strategic choices regarding which conferences to attend within constraints of available time and budgets. For this reason, the

data gathered reflects attendance of the global DiGRA conference, local chapter events, as well as the various regional and global alternatives to the DiGRA conference.

Annual Conference Attendance

When asked about participation in the annual DiGRA conference, only 5.7% reported that they have attended all of DiGRA's past ten conferences, while 17.2% reported that they sometimes attend the annual conference. Just over a third of DiGRA-goers (35.7%) only attend the annual conference when they have a paper accepted. Another third of respondents (34%) stated that they have not attended a DiGRA conference, but would consider it in the future. Of those who have submitted, 5.7% have not attended. Just one respondent (0.6%) decided not to attend, and two (1.1%) have not considered attending.

Local attendance

When asked about their local participation in DiGRA events, the majority of respondents (73.9%) had not previously attended a national or regional DiGRA event. Of the respondents, 67.7% had no access to local DiGRA chapters or were unsure.

In terms of access, 49% of respondents were "interested in becoming more active in your local DiGRA chapter." Some reasons were indicated: 41.5% do not know who to contact to participate in local chapters. Additionally, 40% do not know any other local DiGRA members, 30.8% do not have the time, and 6.2% of respondents were uninterested. Only 9.2% of respondents were active in their local DiGRA chapter.

In order to compare available alternatives to DiGRA, participants were asked which conferences they attended (or considered attending) annually. The Foundations of Digital Games conference [FDG] is the conference most likely attended (42%), followed by the International Communication Association conference [ICA]

(19.5%), and thirdly CHI Play (19%), the Player-Computer Interaction-focused conference by the Association for Computing Machinery. More locally oriented conferences are also strong contenders when taken as a category: 18.4% attended conferences such as CEEGS (Central-/Eastern Europe), CGSA (Canada), DiGRAA (Australia), F.R.O.G. Vienna (Austria), GRA (Poland), and similar conferences as viable (local) alternatives to the global DiGRA conference. Indeed, for various reasons, which we shall explore in the analysis, one of the impressions that forms from the data is the problem of funding and travel: 72.2% of survey respondents requested a conference location closer to home as a way to encourage participation.

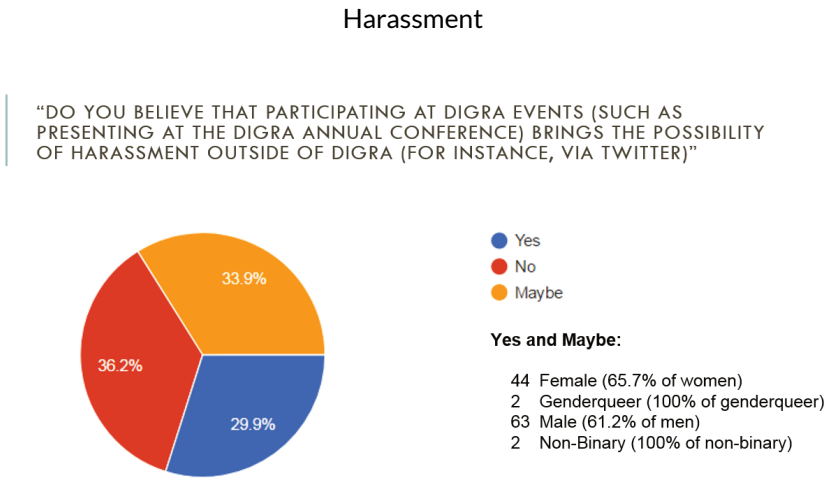

Figure 3.The possibility of harassment as a consequence of participation, broken down by gender identification.

Almost two thirds of participants (63.8%) reported that they believed participating in DiGRA could bring the possibility of harassment. Furthermore, 58.8% would not know who to speak to if they were harassed. Approximately half of all participants (47.4%) reported that they would like a more formal channel for recourse to deal with harassment and inappropriate behaviour.

The threat of harassment as a consequence for participation was deemed a concern across genders (Figure 3). Women only slightly more affirmatively answered yes (31.3%) or maybe (34.3%) to the question of whether they believe "participating at DiGRA events (such as presenting at the DiGRA annual conference) brings the possibility of harassment outside of DiGRA (for instance, via Twitter)." For men, these percentages were similar (28.2% Yes, 33% Maybe).

The current version of the survey appeared not specific enough to many participants regarding whether this threat of harassment is perceived to be toward themselves or towards fellow DiGRA participants. In light of this feedback, it became impossible to conclude how many participants had actually and personally experienced harassment, and this is something that could be addressed in future surveys. In any case, the results show a definitive confirmation that harassment is a pressing concern as a whole, although future iterations of the survey should be more rigorous in regards to questions about the threat of harassment.

Notably, 100% of non-binary and genderqueer participants answered "Yes" to this question. While a group of four participants is insufficient to draw further conclusions, it is clear that, to at least four bodies, the harassment question was unambiguous. In line with this, six participants indicated that they "do not feel welcome at DiGRA for personal reasons [or] because of who I am."

Non-attendance

Overall, participants reported being unable to attend local and international DiGRA conferences due to various reasons. A lack of funds was the most common barrier: institutional funding was a problem for 50%, and 28.2% found DiGRA entirely "too expensive to attend." Indeed, 77.8% of respondents indicated that funding and scholarships would significantly help attendance. Other reasons included feeling unwelcome (19.5%), religious

commitment (13.8%), disability (13.8%), family responsibilities (10.3%), language inaccessibility (3%) and harassment.

When asked what would enable them to attend, respondents indicated the need for a clear support system (25%); 'abuse, harassment and discrimination prevention and support' (13.9%); a 'safe space policy' (9.7%); a clear 'statement of accessibility' (13.9%); and the availability of 'childcare' (12.5%). Many of these are policies and organisational structures that would incur very little economic cost, but could be significant developments for the community.

Discussion

How does theoretically framing the survey around theories of embodiment and diversity help make sense of these data? By focusing on the bodies that want to attend DiGRA, we asked how various bodies experience access to DiGRA. We discuss these data through the concepts of precarity, practice and policy; as three concentric categories that arose from the problems indicated by participants, to be presented below. The theme of bodies also helps to push the discussion beyond statistical inference, to make reflexive political proposals for action that critique the concept of diversity itself.

Precarity, practice and policy

Notably, a number of bodies in the data above indicated they were in difficult positions to participate in DiGRA conferences and events. Beyond rights to association and rights of expression, assemblies such as these are distinctly an embodied act (cf. Butler 2015). Consequently, conferences are a 'convening' presupposed by mobility. The particular bodies congregated at a site in turn reflect the infrastructures of the particular space supporting the presence of certain types of bodies. Those who are absent may recede further into the background overshadowed by the attending

bodies. Inhabiting a particular sphere, such as whiteness, conditions the anticipation of encountering whiteness as if it were an expected 'demographic' of Eurocentric conferences. 'Body counting' (i.e. checking 'ethnicity boxes') problematically regards diversity in terms of quantifiable numbers, but it should also be recognised that these numbers can be affective for those who are counted. "It can be surprising and energizing not to feel so singular," prompts Sara Ahmed,

> "If we get used to inhabiting whiteness […] it does not mean whiteness does not still affect us. […] When you inhabit a sea of browness as a person of color, you might realize the effort of your previous inhabitance, the effort of not noticing what is around you. It is like how you can feel the 'weight' of tiredness most acutely as the tiredness leaves you." (2012, 35-36)

Through the embodiment of assemblies, the collective body of delegates represent the capacities and accommodations endowed by the conference infrastructures and policies, but furthermore, they also indicate how delegates from minority groups make further accommodations for inhabiting spaces of the accommodated majority.

Without a commitment to reshape DiGRA to be more inclusive, we risk continuing the present situation of erasing, ignoring and being ignorant of the needs of those who are absent, as well as those who come to DiGRA but will experience trouble during their attendance. The proceeding discussion moves from locating *precarity*(which bodies are vulnerable to inaccessibility),identifying *practices*of inaccessibility (which concrete, material practices restrict such bodies), to suggested *policy* (policies that organizations such as DiGRA can employ to improve such practices).

First, to locate where the data show *precarity* among participants, i.e. who most urgently needs our attention: here, the data points to students, women and genderqueer folk. Second, the data show two categorical *practices* of inaccessibility: economic and social.

Third, reflecting on the data and feedback from the DiGRA Diversity Working Group and the inaugural Diversity Workshop held at DiGRA 2017, we will suggest a list of *policies* which are categorised under six subheadings: organizational, financial, technological, local, global and symbolic.

Precarity: Students, Women and Genderqueer folk

To start locating the bodies that need our most urgent attention, the results of the survey points to two principally precarious groups which require the community's care: early career researchers (particularly students); women and non-binary identifying folk.

More than half of DiGRA attendees are students and early career researchers (62.1%) who are between the ages of 25 and 34 (56%), with many having insufficient travel funding (36.2%). A lack of funding is further felt by bodies that are in lower income brackets and from lower income economic regions, in comparison to the conference host countries. These include participants with children, those earning (below) minimum wage, and those that suffer from wage gaps, such as women and people of colour – indeed, many institutions still pay these bodies less than their male and white academic colleagues (Barbezat & Hughes, 2005; Renzulli, et al., 2006; Freund, et al., 2016).

As a consequence, below we suggest that the position of a funding officer be created to raise funds to support students, early career researchers, and other precarious and underrepresented groups.

The question of supporting young and financially precarious scholars is one which is tied in with gender representation. The greater number of male-identifying academics in higher positions in our data could either mean that a younger generation of game scholars is more gender-diverse – more women and genderqueer folk are entering the field – or it could also be indicative that, at the top levels, academic positions and funding opportunities are less accessible to non-male bodies.

Two main concerns of accessibility for these bodies emerged from our data: economic inaccessibility and social inaccessibility. When these two kinds of access fail, research from excluded bodies cannot appear at DiGRA. *Which practices perpetuate these inaccessibilities for the bodies affected?*

Practices: Economic and Social Inaccessibility

Economic inaccessibility includes the inability to pay conference fees, to travel, to afford a hotel, or to eat abroad. Economic inaccessibility includes geographic inaccessibility: expensive flights, exchange rates and visa costs. Practices perpetuating economic inaccessibility go beyond simply the 'lack of funding' that our participants decry. They include, we want to specify, the practice of making more (travel) funding available to tenured professors than to the doctoral students who need to disseminate their research to gain traction in a tight job market. They include moving toward an academic system of sessional labour and teaching-heavy appointments rather than including research and travel funds. They include paying academics unequally for reasons of gender. They include charging academics and conference-goers equally for participation regardless of how much they earn or possess. They include costs of childcare. They include involuntary exclusion from conference events such as special dinners, drinks and parties.

Economic inaccessibility overlaps with social inaccessibility; staying near the conference venue costs more than staying at a hostel half an hour outside of the city. In this way, economic capital functions to exclude people from what Bourdieu called social and cultural capital (1984). That is, economic inaccessibility prevents poorer academics from fostering the right relations and behaviours with the aim of succeeding within a social, in this case academic, in-group.

Social inaccessibility, more broadly, is the lack of access some bodies experience when excluded from hegemonic, often white,

male, cisgender, able-bodied, middle-class, anglophone academia. They include all of our participants who felt unwelcome "because of who they are," who felt uncomfortable speaking English, and all of the bodies who feared that participation would invite harassment. Particularly vulnerable bodies are all those who are deemed non-hegemonic. Those that are threatened, those that are traumatized, ridiculed and harassed. Those that need unisex toilets, those that are excluded, those that are unwelcome. In short, all those who suffer material consequences for the bodies they are born with, and symbolic violence for who they are and choose to be.

To be sure: mapping practices of economic and social inaccessibility includes registering a mountain of practices that lead to bodies being excluded. That does not mean that all such practices are fixable, or that all such fixes are feasible. Some inaccessibility happens at the organizational level, including fees. Some occur at the institutional level, such as wage gaps. Some occur at the national and international level, such as the costs of having a child, having a disability, or living within an unequal social system or economy. Nonetheless, all these inaccessibilities exist at the bodily level.

DiGRA is no stranger to harassment, with the organisation and its members being a recurring target by an 'antifeminism in games' harassment group (see: Chess & Shaw 2015; Chess & Shaw 2016), yet there is still much more work to be done in thinking through continuous ways for prevention and support, both within and outside of DiGRA. We are troubled by how many (58.8%) reported not knowing who to contact if they had a problem with a fellow attendee or organizer, with many voicing that they would like a formal channel for recourse.

Policy: Organizational, financial, technological, local, global, and symbolic

We aim to indicate specific policies that address the practices above, with the specific goal of including a diversity of bodies that

experience inaccessibility to DiGRA as a result of their precarity. The list below is by no means exhaustive. Nonetheless, the following section serves as a political turn from the analysis of data, to a call for action by which we explicitly press both DiGRA's board and its conference organizers to push for implementation of the policies. Policy recommendations are categorized by organizational, financial, technological, international, local and symbolic policies.

Organizational

The authors recommend that a number of changes should be considered at the organizational level of DiGRA itself, and its conferences. Those include a revision of the code of conduct to allow for the exclusion of harassers, the consideration of an ombudsperson, a welfare officer or diversity chair, and the consideration of a funding chair.

To address the problem of harassment, first and foremost, DiGRA must address the lack of agency that its current code of conduct lends to conference organizers when confronted with known harassers. While DiGRA can remove attendees from the conference who violate the code of conduct, there are currently no formal articulations within that code to prevent the attendance of those known to be a threatening presence, unless they act inappropriately during an event itself. This can be a difficult problem to navigate, as some bodies are more at risk of being excluded; thereby exposing these bodies to further ostracism. However, when faced with this dilemma we argue that we should draw a line against the inclusion of those who act to exclude others. There is a clear distinction between an attendee being disagreeable, and acts which violate the code of conduct. The code of conduct should include a way of addressing histories of harassment outside of the duration of single events, and attendees should have a formal way to request the assurance of their safety, and to be able to request the exclusion of persistently threatening persons. This becomes especially pertinent when, considering that

attendance itself can be used as a form of continued or systematic intimidation (see, for instance, the experience by, and account of, Sarkeesian [2017]).

Secondly and thirdly, we suggest the inclusion of at least one specific function within the DiGRA board (a welfare or diversity officer), as well as another position outside of it: that of the ombudsperson. A welfare officer would be able to address concerns of inclusion and diversity through several means – which we suggest include a regular iteration of the survey, as well as regular convening with the existing diversity committee at DiGRA, through online communication and its annual meeting. The welfare officer would ideally be part of the board, in order to represent the concerns raised by both the diversity committee and the survey; as well as serving to convene with conference organizations to accommodate disabled, excluded and other precarious bodies, and consequently to advise on policies to mitigate such precarity.

An ombudsperson, by contrast, necessarily serves outside of the appointed board. An ombudsperson hears and investigates complaints by individuals against, and principally outside of, the official organization of DiGRA and its conference. It serves in two ways: the ombudsperson has an anonymizing function, by protecting the complainant from harm; and the ombudsperson should attempt to alleviate the 'admin trap' for the victim by taking over much of the work of reporting and proof. In other words, instating an ombudsperson takes away the personal repercussions and much of the extra work that would otherwise discourage individuals from addressing practices of inaccessibility, such as issues of harassment, exclusion and other forms of discrimination. Instating an ombudsperson, furthermore, instates as a clear practice of inclusion, by providing a protocol for treating the problems experienced by bodies who otherwise do not have time, power and means available to make their issues known; for the benefit of all that follow them.

More broadly, we recommend that DiGRA be considerate of the vulnerable – and specifically gendered – nature of bearing the burden of proof, particularly for cases of sexual harassment. We can readily assume the position that students, women and non-binary bodies are more at risk of sexual harassment at DiGRA. With the release of a recent report in Australia, it appears that 51% of all university students were sexually harassed in 2016, 21% of which were sexually harassed in a university setting during 2015-2016. Women were three times more likely to be sexually harassed, and almost twice as likely to be sexually assaulted. 94% of those who were sexually harassed and 87% who were sexually assaulted did not make a formal complaint to their universities (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2017). For those in the DiGRA community who do not know who to contact for grievances, or do not have a clear sense of how the organisation will proceed if they make a report, the lack of a clearly defined channel of communication discourages those who are seeking help. It is important to acknowledge that the nature of emotional and psychological abuse does not produce the same forms of 'evidence' as physical abuse. Women are not only more likely to be sexually harassed and assaulted, women are also less likely to be heard or have their pain taken seriously (Hoffman & Tarzian, 2001). Those who are statistically more vulnerable often have more difficulty in convincing others of their own vulnerability, as Ahmed argues:

> "[T]he evidence we have of racism and sexism is deemed insufficient because of racism and sexism. Indeed racism and sexism work by disregarding evidence or by rendering evidence unreliable or suspicious. […] This disregarding – which is at once a form of regarding – has a central role in maintaining an order of things. Simply put: that evidence of something is deemed insufficient is a mechanism for reproducing something." (Ahmed, 2016)

The difficulty of reporting harassment and the burden of proof are a problem in and of themselves, and one that is all too easily ignored by those who do not experience it.

Fourth, a fundraising officer should be considered to sit on the board – specifically for the fundraising of travel funds for students, and other academics in vulnerable groups, such as people of colour, the Global South, and other disadvantaged bodies. A fundraising officer focuses on running funding campaigns with academic institutions and progressive tech companies. Such an officer, finally, would oversee many of the policies recommended in the following section.

Financial

In order to address wider problems of funding, beside the work of a funding officer, several policies are possible. Fees for DiGRA conferences have traditionally comprised of full fees and student fees. However, based on our data we argue that a differently defined policy would be more appropriate for pricing concessions.

Firstly, in the wake of DiGRA 2017's policy in Melbourne, we recommend that the concession rate be explicitly made available to those lacking funding and in positions between employment – such as, commonly, recent post-doctoral academics without funding. In addition, the recent policies on concession rates have not been sufficiently explicit or inviting: several participants in the survey and of the diversity workshop reported not knowing that they were entitled to concession rates because of their positions in industry or unemployment. Ambiguity in these cases serves nobody.

Secondly, other conferences have had success with fees based on a sliding scale: that is, a scale based either on a self-reported income bracket; or a more sophisticated set of options based on different levels of income – we suggest considering levels based on career status and country of origin. Importantly, not all students from all countries are relatively underfunded, and not all professors from all countries are relatively well-funded. By comparison, organizations such as the ICA, ASA, SCMS, CSA, IAMCR and ECREA all currently employ several membership tiers based variously on country, income and/or employment status, as well as

different levels of conference fees – some of which accommodate guests, spouses and childcare.

Technological

Less financially demanding but nonetheless effective is the use of technology to make conferences more accessible.

Firstly, we recommend that DiGRA support streaming as a valid and explicitly supported way of including those bodies that are not able to make it to the conference venue. By including streaming as a viable and acceptable option to participate in panels or present papers, the conference can include home-bound bodies, those who are unable to obtain a visa, and bodies who, for any reason, are not able to present their work. Beside issues of bandwidth; conference venues, volunteers and session chairs would do well to accommodate streaming as a way to include distant bodies.

Secondly, the use of social media and anonymized online forms could go a long way toward making it easier for DiGRA members to show concerns and provide feedback. One way of making any such system more accessible prior to, during and after conferences is to allow people a quick and non-threatening way of reporting their concerns. This suggestion should be considered in combination with, or even as an alternative to, an ombudsperson. Such a formalized channel for participants to raise concerns will be relatively cost-efficient and should be quickly implemented.

Thirdly, we recommend a continuation and expansion of the DiGRA homestay and couchsurfing community. This was an online, *Facebook*-organized initiative for conference-goers, mostly students, to find cheap accommodation alternatives abroad. It would be beneficial, particularly for young and disadvantaged researchers, to find affordable ways of staying while constructing networks of solidarity among early career researchers. The homestay community encompasses shared hostel and hotel seeking, and other accommodation services such as *Airbnb*.

International

Discussion of the homestay and couchsurfing community raises the question of international conference location. Where should the conference be held to optimize accessibility, and how can considerations of global situatedness help disadvantaged bodies?

Firstly, and this is a practice shared by many other organizations across disciplines, DiGRA must try to make sure that the location of its conferences varies, so that it is accessible to all participants. Past DiGRA conferences, with the exclusion of Tokyo in 2007 and Melbourne in 2017, have all been held in Northwestern Europe or North America: twice in the Netherlands, twice in the U.S., twice in the U.K., once in Canada and once in Germany. This trend of Eurocentric organization perpetuates both social inaccessibility (by hosting in countries that are predominantly white, anglophone and culturally homogenous) and economic inaccessibility (by demanding travel and expenditure to locations and economies that are difficult to access from outside of these areas), thereby being particularly exclusive of coloured, non-anglophone and non-Western bodies, including those below the equator and of the Global South.

Furthermore, this practice has a self-reproducing effect of positioning DiGRA to become increasingly inaccessible to academic bodies outside of Northwestern Europe and North America; to the extent that it might become increasingly less likely to attract conference attendees *as well as* organizers from other regions; thereby perpetuating and amplifying the situation. The result is that some communities have created local chapters as an alternative to the 'main' DiGRA conference. Those include, currently and in the past, Nordic DiGRA, DiGRA China, DiGRA Australia and, notably, DiGRA Japan – more on local chapters can be found in the article by Wirman (2017) in this volume.

Fundamentally, a paradox arises from the recommendation to host away from Eurocentric locations. While Eurocentric locations are

often expensive, difficult to reach from the Global South and other areas, and unaffordable for those bodies with the least resources; hosting in the Global South, the Middle-East, the third world and other regions, by contrast, adds other problems of inaccessibility. These include inaccessibility for bodies that would be discriminated against or could not physically attend, whether those are disabled bodies, practically; queer bodies, politically; bodies declined visa, and so on. Regardless, there are many possible conference locations outside of these two extremes – including in Africa, Asia, Australia and Latin-America that should be considered (see: Hannabach & Shaw, 2017).

Local

Furthermore, it is apparent that many bodies do not find access to DiGRA because of a lack of (information regarding) local options. Although the issue of local DiGRA chapters is more elaborately treated by Wirman in this volume (2017), the survey offers some indications of what kind of policies are needed.

Firstly, many bodies reported not knowing how to access chapters. Simply displaying and updating local chapter details and events through the central DiGRA website provides a reliable way to find access to these local organizations. Many chapters appear to be misrepresented on the DiGRA website through outdated information; while chapters provide an accessible and affordable way of entering into the academic community – particularly for underfunded and early career researchers.

Secondly, there is currently no clear encouragement upon registration (either for the mailing list, membership or conference-attendance) to additionally join a local chapter. A clearer referral to the local chapters upon registration would benefit all parties.

Symbolic

Although we recognize the cost and labour implied by some of the policies above, a final category of proposed policies is largely symbolic and performative, but nonetheless impactful. Looking at the open questions, specifically as filled in by participants in precarious positions, we note a large number of requests that are as easy to implement as they are to forget, regardless of their importance. These include a safe space policy; and clear statements of inclusivity, accessibility and welcome for diverse bodies including non-male and non-binary bodies, bodies of colour, and independent scholars. Requests included mentoring for inexperienced attendees, promotional efforts to researchers from the Global South; and quality standards and training for reviewers, volunteers and session chairs when dealing with diversity-related aspects. All of these are free, relatively effortless and nonetheless important to implement in order to be inclusive.

Conclusion

The survey that forms the basis of this article started out as a way to identify the current problems of the DiGRA community. In short, we aimed to indicate which bodies had access and which had difficulties accessing the DiGRA community. By surveying 174 bodies selected from that community's mailing list, the data at hand provides an initial overview of the bodies inhabiting the community, the bodies in its periphery, and the kinds of practices that complicate access for those bodies. Furthermore, by thinking of academics as bodies – rather than minds or voices – we have attempted to materially consider access as a physical movement of intersectional bodies: who flies out to conferences; who is welcomed into social groups; who feels safe; who requires help.

Who finds access to the DiGRA conference and its wider community? Predominantly young male bodies from Northwestern Europe and North America. Within this community,

vulnerable bodies are, by contrast, overwhelmingly students; non-male, non-binary, and non-Western bodies. These bodies, we argued, require attention in order to improve their access to DiGRA; in order for its community and conferences to attempt to be more inclusive and diverse.

How do different bodies experience problems with such access? Vulnerable bodies are confronted with both economic and social inaccessibility: they overwhelmingly lack the means to attend conferences, travel and stays abroad; or they are excluded from countries and hegemonic social groups. Which practices uphold this inaccessibility? Wage gaps, unequal conference fees, difficulties to address harassment, and a plethora of other practices which contribute to the exclusion and discouragement of vulnerable bodies.

How can we improve on or negate those practices? We proposed a set of concrete policies, based on the survey data and its discussion in the Diversity working group's "Gaming the Systems" Workshop in Melbourne at DiGRA in 2017. To this end, we encourage not just the relevant organizations – including the DiGRA board, its local chapters and the conference organizers – to consider, and implement, the recommendations and policies we have set out above, as well as expand and develop them more rigorously, and continue to consider the problems raised.

Additionally, we believe that this survey and its policies have relevance outside of the DiGRA community itself. It serves as a case study of one academic community; and should prove relevant to other fields, its bodies and also their struggles. If anything, this article should be taken as a call to repeat, to replicate and to improve all academic communities.

In all, we believe this research and the article itself are only a first step in performatively and informatively surveying the challenges that academic communities as a whole face in becoming inclusive. The notion of *becoming*is vital here: we hope to have shown that

the process of diversifying is a continual process of reflection, refinement and reconsideration. Indeed, the survey itself is by no means final. This version of the survey would benefit from additional attention and elaboration of questions on harassment, race, able-bodiedness and other underemphasized intersectionalities; it sometimes arbitrarily divided regions; and sometimes ambiguously phrased questions that, upon reflection, deserve more specificity.

Let us, then, end this article with our own continuing contribution to the process of DiGRA becoming inclusive. That is, our intention to make the survey iterative, and in doing so, to continually set out to inform, to improve, to include: to diversify.

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4.

DiGRA Chapter Diversity

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the perceived value and importance of the regional chapters of Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA). Drawing on a survey conducted among chapter representatives, the viewpoints of nine regional chapter representatives are discussed, particularly from the point of view of how they contribute to better diversity and inclusiveness in such a large international organization. It answers two questions: “What are the advantages of having regional chapters?” and “What exactly constitutes ‘regional’ in the context of DiGRA chapters?”

In so doing, the paper establishes regional chapters as important junctures in catering for a wide audience beyond those able and interested in participating in annual DiGRA conferences or partaking in other international events.

Keywords

DiGRA, association, regional, ethnic, chapters, local, international, global

INTRODUCTION

Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) currently supports 11 regional chapters on four continents. Chapters operate autonomously and in a self- sustaining manner, yet in association with the main DiGRA following the core principles, values, and objectives of the association. Among others, regional members are encouraged and welcomed to participate in annual DiGRA conferences. From the point of view of their establishment, the DiGRA executive board is responsible for vetting and approving chapter proposals. To help sustain its relationship with local chapters as well as to facilitate and support their local activities, DiGRA has named a designated International Chapter Officer within its executive board since 2012.

Written from the perspective of how DiGRA promotes diversity through its chapter structure, this paper has two goals. The first is to introduce DiGRA chapter structure and the developments thereof during the past four years. I will specifically elaborate some of the differences between local chapters and consider their regionally relevant contributions. The second aim of the paper is to draw examples from various chapters in order to look into what are some of the benefits and challenges that the chapters have in respect to contributing to DiGRA diversity and inclusiveness.

Material for this study was collected by myself during my term as the DiGRA Chapter Officer through an online survey sent to the

primary contact persons of each regional chapter during spring and summer of 2017. The survey focused on examining the perceived and practical relationship between regional chapters and the main DiGRA organization. Questions were asked about regional activities and chapter members' abilities and interests to participate in international DiGRA conferences. Furthermore, the survey aimed at understanding the value regional bodies of games researchers find in being part of a larger, international entity.

Nine out of eleven chapter representatives answered the survey, including the following DiGRA chapters: Australian, Chinese, Finnish, Israeli, Italian, Japanese and British DiGRA as well as D-A-CH DiGRA (chapter for German-speaking countries) and DiGRA Flanders. Dutch and Turkish DiGRA chapter representatives were not available to participate in the study. Additionally, to support articulation of the value of regional chapters in respect to participation in international DiGRA conferences, country-based participation figures of annual DiGRA conferences were obtained from the organizing committees of DiGRA 2016 and DiGRA 2017.

The paper will conclude by suggesting new ways to support and help sustain regional chapters of DiGRA. Regions where local chapters do not operate are compared with the respective regions of origin of DiGRA conference participants in the past years. Ultimately, this paper sheds light on the immense value of regional organizations and the meaningful differences between them. Since I personally acted as the first president of Chinese DiGRA, examples drawn from this chapter are relatively frequent in what follows.

CHAPTER OPERATIONS

Regional DiGRA chapter establishment seems to follow two main patterns. Most commonly, DiGRA chapters have been organized in regions where a strong community of active game researchers familiar with DiGRA seek more frequent sharing compared to

what an annual conference can provide. These chapters typically consist of active DiGRA goers and well-sustained research centers that host several games researchers. Alternatively, the initiation of the Chinese DiGRA chapter serves as an example of where a chapter is set up to bring together scattered individuals researching games through the introduction of this international organization. In the latter case, DiGRA has helped to legitimize the study of games and provided individuals with a coordinated and institutionally recognized community solely focused on games, where little or none existed prior to the chapter. Here, DiGRA lends the chapter the credibility of studying games in the first place.

As the organization grows and research in the field becomes more competitive, regional DiGRA chapters are increasingly valuable in creating avenues for supporting games research regardless of geographic or linguistic differences. As an example, DiGRA Japan organizes several events every year for around 300 chapter members. However, only a fraction of them ever attend the main DiGRA conference. Similarly, students at all levels often rely on local chapters, as the cost of participating in international events hinders contribution and attendance. Moreover, local chapters have strong and sustained partnerships with representatives of local industries. While engagement with the games industry is in DiGRA's interest, such collaboration typically best takes place at the regional level.

The activities of regional chapters vary from chapter to chapter, most focusing on maintaining local communities through organizing events, and fostering and promoting games research (and education) by providing support and research that directly addresses local issues and interests. The main activity of regional chapters is an annual conference. Five out of nine chapters included in the survey organize a conference every year. Two-thirds of the chapters organize other talks and seminars, and one-third casual gatherings. Local chapters also support initiating collaboration between members, in sharing resources, and in

supporting other events. Individual chapters adjust their operational models from time to time. It is not unusual for a chapter to remain dormant for several months or even years due to member inactivity. However, given the lack of strong regulations on how chapters can or should be run, relaunching chapters becomes relatively straightforward.

Regional DiGRA chapters are also typically very dynamic and responsive to new research foci and local interests. Alongside supporting regional DiGRA sub-communities, and therefore fostering regional diversity of DiGRA, local chapters promptly tackle local issues and interests that are beyond the main DiGRA's reach. Regional chapters foster diversity by addressing topics that may appear marginal with respect to the main DiGRA and that need urgent attention.

Language and regionality

Language plays a major part in running regional chapters and in respect to chapter members' involvement in international DiGRA events. Survey participants suggest that the language barrier or an interest to operate using the local language is one of the main reasons for setting up and framing a chapter. Among others, DiGRA for German-speaking countries is specifically organized around the German language.

The ability to communicate in English, which is the language used at DiGRA annual conferences, influences chapter members' participation in international events. Typically, chapter members from English-speaking countries (i.e. British DiGRA and DiGRA Australia) as well as from many European countries and regions are active in participating in DiGRA annual conferences. Meanwhile, members from Chinese DiGRA, DiGRA Japan, and Israeli DiGRA show significantly less participation in international conferences. In particular, the largest chapter, Japanese DiGRA, relies heavily on the Japanese language, and members are less likely to participate in DiGRA activities outside

of Japan. It has also been clear since the chapter's initiation in 2014 that only a small number of scholars in the Chinese chapter have actively participated in international DiGRA conferences. However, the reason could be the geographical distance and mismatch in academic calendars, which responses suggest. Ph.D. students, meanwhile, are less likely to have the funds to travel to, and benefit from, regional events.

The participation figures of DiGRA 2016 (Chart 1) and DiGRA 2017 (Chart 2) serve to illustrate how annual DiGRA conference participation is skewed towards English-speaking and European countries regardless of the actively operating chapters elsewhere, particularly in Asia. One practical solution to reduce segregation among researchers could be to translate research from regional chapter conferences, and include these in the DiGRA Digital Library (as in the case of the Chinese DiGRA 2016 Conference).

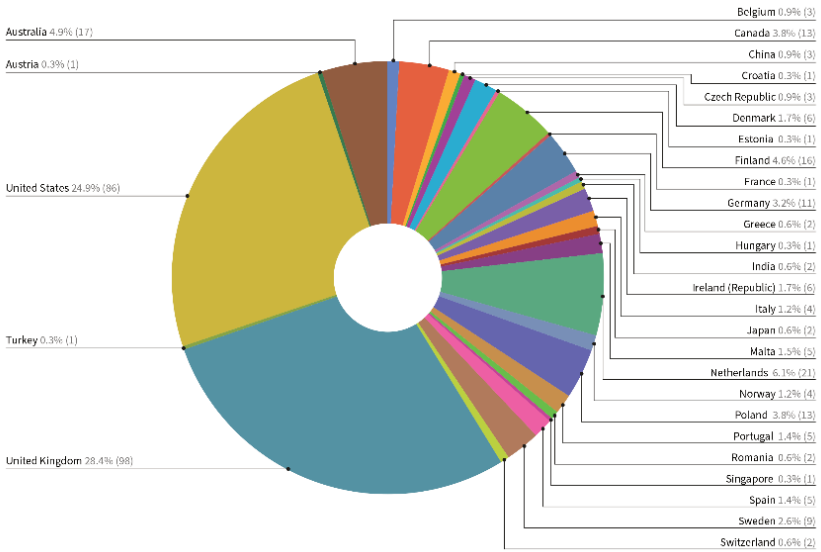

Chart 1: Conference participation demographics: Dundee, UK, 2016

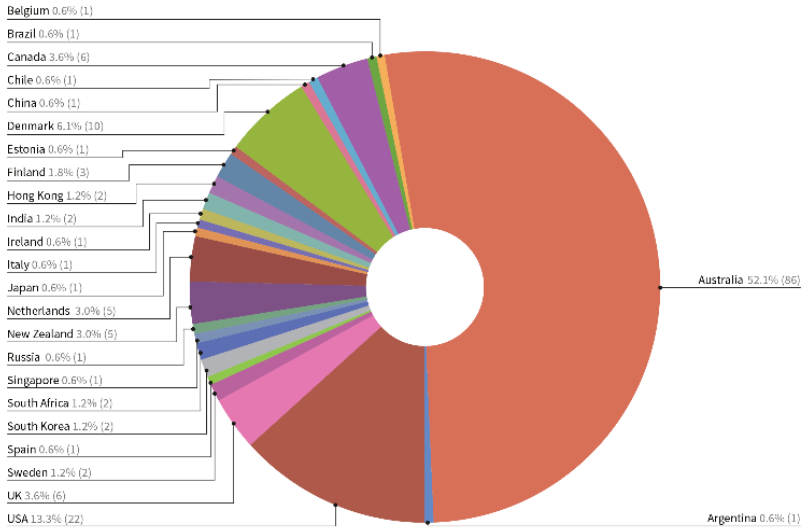

Chart 2: Conference participation demographics: Melbourne, Australia, 2017

'Regional' in DiGRA chapters

Alongside language, what makes DiGRA chapters regional is primarily related to geographical proximity and to an interest in topics specific to that area. For instance, while many of the concerns, opportunities and discussions among Chinese DiGRA members bear a close similarity to those that colleagues in other regions have experienced in the past, the Chinese regional context has its unique characteristics. Among others, the regional games industry has seen an extremely rapid and extensive growth in terms of both numbers of players and revenue. As the Western news media has addressed the Chinese context through extremities and curiosities (Wirman 2015), the current relatively stabilized game markets and largest player communities in the world provide a fruitful object for groundbreaking game studies beyond anecdotal reference points. Like Liboriussen and Martin (2016, n.p.) outline, regional games research "attends to local places and cultures but also, at least to some extent, to how the local substance connects

with higher-order economic, cultural and political structures." Regional chapters thus dig deeper into regional matters given the shared background knowledge and pre-existing ability to contextualize complex regional matters. Regional chapters may suggest a more 'diverse' DiGRA, yet the scholarly practices of attuning to a variety of topics and regional interests are perhaps of more importance: "although the significance of diversity can be described as international, the means by which diversity manifests itself will be local." (Ahmed 2012) Accordingly, the chapters contribute to the idea of advocating local manifestations for 'doing diversity' (Ibid.).

Regional matters often also touch on issues of politics and power. Among others, the Chinese government's forceful regulation of game content, and restrictions related to the access of non-Chinese games and game studios to the local market as well as existing diverse practices of monetization and publishing are without direct parallels in the Western world, and therefore call for locally attuned, highly context-aware game studies. Here we may assume that regional game studies are possibly more closely interlinked with untangling complicated issues and nuances than those typically presented at international DiGRA conferences. At the very least, such topics can be addressed at a deeper level when event participants can expect to be informed of current, local affairs.

The intricacies of local issues are only apparent to those personally witnessing and experiencing such events. Paraphrasing Dei (2013) and drawing on an example from the African context, Gumbo (2014) suggests that Global South's academic interests, for example, are often intertwined with political activism: "in the African scholar's attempt to negotiate co-existence of western and indigenous research, western academy constantly asks the African scholar to separate his scholarship from his political activism." In non-democratic and less economically developed countries, local games studies are necessarily also always closely influenced by the everyday struggles on the political and economic plane. Regional

chapters thus offer the main DiGRA organization possibly a fuller picture of how games situate as part of people's everyday lives and local culture. Gumbo has further stressed the importance of benefiting the local community through research: "questioning the hegemonic attitudes that treat the researched indigenous communities as though they were unthinking tanks from which to pour out research data without involving them actively and doing one's homework about how the research will benefit them." (Gumbo 2014, 558) Regional game studies are potentially more informed and interested in serving the local interests than those studying them from outside of the region.

In respect to regionally specific interests, regional chapters have the potential to contribute to having a wider selection of games under scholarly scrutiny. This would then help to alleviate the lack of diversity in the games we study – or the 'game citation paradox' – where "a majority of papers are focused on a minority of games." (Coavoux, Boutet and Zabban, 2017)[1]

The games industry is another area of interest for games scholars that has regional specificities which are difficult to translate to a greater community. While regional chapters gather scholars in the same geographical area, they also invite local members from the industry. Eight out of nine chapters covered in the survey describe that they collaborate with the local industry, with some having a chapter board member from the commercial world, and many of them inviting speakers and event participants from the industry. The themes of regional DiGRA conferences reflect an interest to work closely with the industry, such as "Decoding the Academic-Industrial-Gameplay Complex." (Chinese DiGRA 2016) Understandably, participants who approach regional chapters from the industry are particularly focused on local aspects of game studies and interested in the direct benefits that the study of games can bring to the field of designing, developing and

1. The study by Coavoux, Boutet and Zabban (2017) focuses on research published in English. It is likely that the results would be significantly different if other languages would be covered, too.

marketing games. Many chapter representatives agree that close communication with the local industry is an important aspect of the operations of the regional chapter. For DiGRA as a whole, chapters, therefore, provide an extension from academia to the industry.

Regardless of the value in 'going local', all except one of the studied DiGRA regional chapters agree that 'being part of a larger community' is one of the main reasons for having a regional chapter. Similarly, chapter representatives believe that the DiGRA name helps in being treated more seriously in the local context. Almost as important for the regional chapters is that being part of DiGRA offers them a point of comparison, a tool to understand their own contribution to games research. A convenient mechanism for inviting speakers from other regions, support for a mailing list, legitimization in the eyes of the local industry, and adoption of DiGRA operational models are all important for at least three of the chapters. The regional and the global benefits, therefore, support each other and depend on each other.

WHOSE DiGRA?

Figure 1 shows the presence of DiGRA chapters in different regions (red circles) and the DiGRA 2017 conference participants' countries of origin. Accordingly, current chapters are disproportionately covering Europe and Asia, even though a significant number of active DiGRA conference participants come from North America. Assuming a continuous increase in people's interest to make, play and study games, DiGRA chapters are likely to be established by emerging game studies communities in the coming years. There is currently an interest to start DiGRA Latin America, for example.

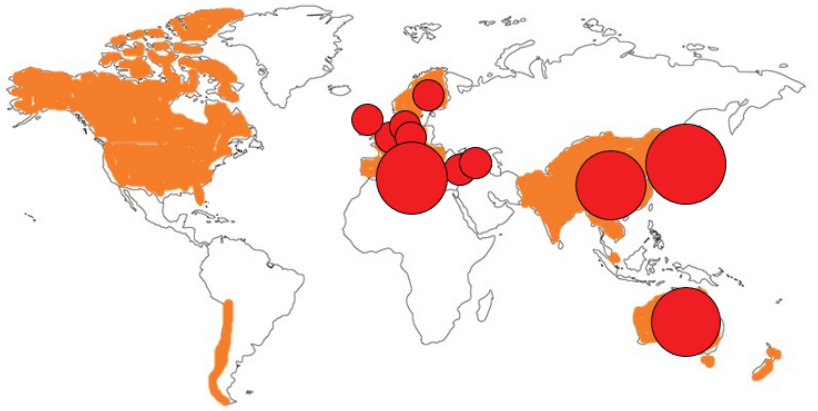

Figure 1: DiGRA chapters (red) and the countries of origin of DiGRA 2017 conference participants (orange) mapped.

However, establishing a chapter of an international, European and North American centered organization outside of these regions brings with it an existing history of doing, seeing and understanding things, or in this case, games. In building networks and supporting local research, Chinese DiGRA has aimed at being particularly sensitive in providing a platform that does not advocate a specific hegemonic Western canon of game studies. However, many of the founding members and members of the current Chinese DiGRA have been educated in Europe. Furthermore, English has been one of the languages used at the conferences, given the diverse backgrounds of delegates and the lack of a single shared language (and the political sensitivity of selecting only one among the few available). Early attempts at dividing conference papers into a Chinese language track and an English language track almost completely negated the original interest behind the chapter as an entity that brings scholars together. Yet simultaneous interpretation at conferences and other events is a significant cost consideration for small, regional organizations.

Moreover, there is no easy way for regional DiGRA events to function as multilingual platforms in which international participants can conveniently participate. However, the full adoption of the existing Western canon of game studies literature or the application of DiGRA operational models can locally threaten to impose non-fitting practices within regional communities: "When we as scholars unthinkingly adopt the discourse and knowledge of mainstream Euro-American organizational communication scholarship, we potentially absorb, without reflection, a particular way of understanding the world." (Broadfoot and Munshi, 2007)

The future challenge of DiGRA as an international organization is, as I see it, in how it deals with regional diversification and whether it becomes a project of colonization or decolonization. It may be relatively unique to DiGRA as an academic organization to have such regional chapters that operate independently without members' active participation in international activities. There exist isolated local nuances in 'doing game studies' under the large international umbrella. How, then, can these regional interests and local canons be brought to the international stage without misinterpretation, misrepresentation and misuse? How much do the regionally active scholars need to know about ways of 'doing game studies' outside of their region before entering venues like the annual international conferences? After all, solely English-speaking scholars already miss bodies of valuable work, unable to search or read existing literature in other languages (particularly when it relates to a specific cultural/geographic context).

Finally, we may look at regions such as Poland, where game scholarship is particularly active and internationally well represented, yet no local DiGRA chapter has been initiated. Several South American countries and Russia also contribute to the growing knowledge in the area of games research, making their absence on the map of *Image 1*striking. Further study is required to understand the actual contributions from these areas and to benefit from the already existing scholarly knowledge of games

in these regions. Explicating these regions' contribution within or outside of DiGRA would further help in understanding how 'diverse' DiGRA research actually is and how big a part chapters play in it.

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Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association (ToDiGRA) is a quarterly, international, open access, refereed, multidisciplinary journal dedicated to research on and practice in all aspects of games.

ToDiGRA captures the wide variety of research within the game studies community combining, for example, humane science with sociology, technology with design, and empirics with theory. As such, the journal provides a forum for communication among experts from different disciplines in game studies such as education, computer science, psychology, media and communication studies, design, anthropology, sociology, and business. ToDiGRA is sponsored by the Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA), the leading international professional society for academics and professionals seeking to advance the study and understanding of digital games.

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