Chapter 10
A Framework for Addressing Gender Imbalance in the Game Industry through Outreach

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ABSTRACT

Though the lack of diversity in the game industry workforce has received a great deal of attention recently, few initiatives have been implemented to address it. In particular, gender composition in the game industry workforce and among students studying games at post-secondary institutions is highly imbalanced, with an approximate 9 to 1 ratio of male to female students. This chapter considers three key aspects: 1) the current demographics of the game industry, 2) the effects of gender imbalance on the game industry and one of its current pipelines, and 3) a potential framework to address the imbalance. The proposed outreach strategy is informed by a discussion of established frameworks for initiating change in related fields. The chapter concludes with suggestions for future research to address the gender imbalance in the game industry and its pipeline.

INTRODUCTION

There is a lack of diversity in the game industry workforce, and it is has been acknowledged as a serious problem for the game industry, among both AAA companies and independent developers (Contestabile, 2012; Serviss, 2013; Sinclair, 2013). Recently Ben Serviss (2013), an American independent games developer, made a call for something different than the straight white males that have typically dominated the game industry, adding another voice to a growing number calling for a more diverse set of individuals developing digital games (Contestabile, 2012; IGDA, 2005; Ligman, 2013; Sinclair, 2013). Diversity in the workforce has been considered a quality of life issue by the International Game Developers Association (IGDA), which has conducted industry

surveys on the topic (IGDA 2005, Margolis et al., 2012). Recent activity, such as heated exchanges on industry social media sites, has indicated that this topic is being widely discussed, with workforce diversity and representation in games being considered one of the top five trends of the game industry in 2012 (Graft, 2012; Isaacson, 2012; Plunkett, 2012). One of the most egregious areas of diversity imbalance remains gender, with little change in this area in the past ten years.

This lack of diversity leads to a number of questions regarding the game industry's gender imbalance. How do we attract and cultivate diverse talent? How do we retain the diverse talent in our degree and training programs once we have them? How do we ensure that individuals have the opportunities to grow within the industry and effect the kind of change that more and more people agree needs to happen? How do we make some in the industry understand what an important issue diversity is? All of these questions beg another: Where do we begin?

As those questions indicate, the path to creating more diversity in the game industry is not straightforward and there will be many points of entry for those wishing to explore and address this issue. There are three key questions this chapter investigates:

- What is the current state of gender imbalance in the game industry and its pipelines?
- Why is the issue of gender imbalance important in the game industry?
- What are ways in which this issue can be addressed?

The goal of this chapter is to provide a framework for future research and outreach initiatives to bring more women into the industry. A discussion of established frameworks for initiating change in related fields informs the development of the framework for addressing the imbalance in the game industry.

BACKGROUND

Depending on the reader's perspective, diversity may be viewed as an issue of fairness or of moral obligation, or even for some, not an issue at all. Less subjective and open to debate, however, is that a diverse workforce can create broader market shares and increased revenues (Barrington & Troske, 2001, Contestabile, 2012). The demographics of the game industry, demographics of students and faculty at post-secondary institutions, effects of gender imbalance, and successful outreach initiatives are components that must be considered in any research evaluating diversity and its importance within a field. Since the digital game industry is relatively new compared to other related fields such as art or STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields, we provide results of related research and activities for comparison and analogy when data for the game industry is unavailable.

Game Industry Demographics

Over the last decade there has been an increased awareness of the lack of diversity in the game industry, culminating in the recent identification by a prominent industry association site as one of the top five topics in the game industry (Graft, 2012). The game industry has recently faced repeated criticism for sexist policies, culture, and practices, with the Twitter hashtag #1reasonwhy becoming associated with multiple stories of gender discrimination in the industry (Haines, 2004; Isaacson, 2012; Plunkett, 2012). Concern about the lack of a diverse workforce prompted the IGDA to examine workforce diversity, conducting two full-scale industry surveys on the topic since 2005 (IGDA, 2005; IGDA, 2011) as well as a 2008-2009 Quality of Life Survey (Legault & Weststar, 2012). While the IGDA surveys included questions on a multitude of demographic categories, including age, ethnicity, education, compensation, sexual orientation, and disability status, we focus here on the results for gender.

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