



GAMERella, Community Outreach and Inclusive Design

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Game development has traditionally been a space gated by multiple barriers to access. Furthermore, these systemic barriers have disproportionately affected marginalized folks who were already disadvantaged in terms of access to technology and skills gained from familiarity with technology. This topic has been discussed as it concerned young girls from the late 80s to the early 2000s, specifically their play practices and access to game consoles (Fine, 1983; Bryce & Rutter, 2002). More modern studies have focused on the hegemonic practices of play which inscribe women as subaltern (Jensen & de Castell, 2011). On the other hand, more recent ethnographies of access to technology have slowly begun to address the barriers that stand in the way of marginalized consumers who wish to become developers (Fron et al., 2007).

Prior ethnographies of professional game design and development as it happens have primarily taken place within conventional studio structures, both large scale and indie, as well as at the level of institutional programs built into classroom curricula (Whitson, 2018; Flanagan & Nissenbaum, 2014). Although these are robust accounts of development processes, the general tendency to focus on professional or institutional models has invisibilized amateur programmers and developers. Simply put, game development is disproportionately difficult to access for those outside these structured scenes, and even more so for individuals from marginalized positions. The question that has interested me coming from this gap is: What are the challenges that marginalized folks face in this field and how can I create a space that equips these folks and addresses their struggles?

The answer comes through GAMERella, which has organized and hosted workshops providing those tools to marginalized folk for the past six years. GAMERella is a game jam and workshop series that caters to marginalized people who haven't had a chance to make a game before. Led by Concordia University's Technoculture, Art and Games (TAG) Research Centre, industry mentors, support staff and researchers, GAMERella welcomes participants in a low stress, learner-friendly environment, with the aim to change the way people jam, as well as the way people think about gaming. Game jams can be one of the most accessible spaces for making games (video or board) and are often the first steps in a long and successful game development career. However, based on 2014 Global Game statistics, most participants are men in their twenties and the percentage of women participating in the jam is lower than 3% in most cities. These statistics are similarly echoed in larger game development studies where the often homogenous and professionalized workforce doesn't offer a welcoming atmosphere to many marginalized groups.

I argue that inclusion in game development does not happen without first setting up proper infrastructure which can allow marginalized folks the access they have been denied, such as this game jam. We have collected from 489 participants over 6 years of hosting these ateliers in the form of personal logs, surveys (including smaller yearly questionnaires and professional trajectory accounts after 3 years) and participant interviews. Drawing from this data, we have synthesized GAMERella's

insights into a manual for organizing community outreach programs such as this one. Specifically, these testimonies drawn directly from communities are most valuable as they can communicate frustrations with game design in general, but also tell organizers which initiatives in games jams are most useful or superfluous over a long period of organizing.

The purpose of this talk is to highlight obstacles faced by marginalized folks getting into game development and community organizations like GAMERella, as well as our solutions and strategies for dealing with these challenges, developed over half a decade. The compilation of our observations and participants' accounts provides a first-hand account of amateur development specific to these communities. Applying findings from this game jam allows organizers to accelerate the pace with which they can accommodate and integrate invisibilized folks in game development in the future. GAMERella represents the first instance of longitudinal data of this scale, taken from over six years of community-oriented game jams, refined with the input of marginalized folks and thereby presents a robust and original body of data where previously there was none. Sharing this data is an unprecedented opportunity both for us as practitioners, and for those in need of this information.

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