

# All Our Stories

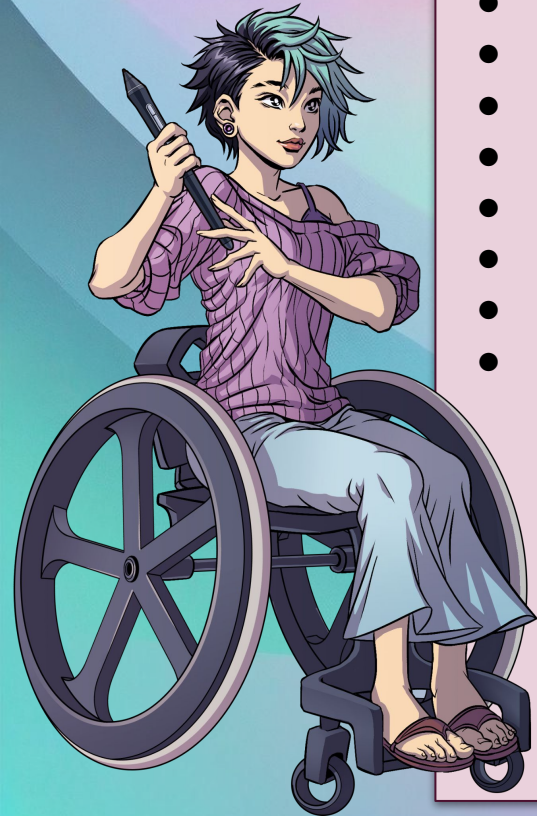
Thoughts on diversity, inclusion,  
and saving the world with games

Anna Högberg Jenelius  
Valiant Game Studio

# This talk

This is what I will talk about:

- Who is playing games?
- A look at diversity and inclusion
- Why is it important?
- “Politics in games”
- Saving the world
- How we do it at Valiant
- Wrap-up
- Q&A



# Who am I?

Anna Högberg Jenelius  
*Any pronouns*

Indie Game Developer/Consultant  
Games since 2011  
Indie since 2015  
Valiant Game Studio since 2017  
Credit on 50+ games

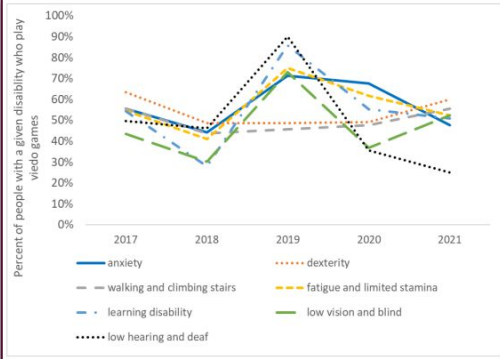
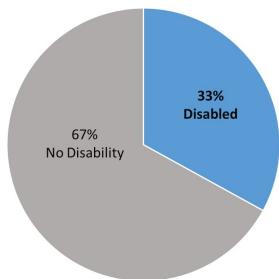
Based in Stockholm, Sweden



# Our Players

- 3.07 Bn people play games around the world.
- 46% identify as female, 1% other.
- Average age is 32 years old.
- 10% identify as LGBTQ+.
- Around 33% are believed to be disabled.

Around 33% of US video game players are believed to be disabled

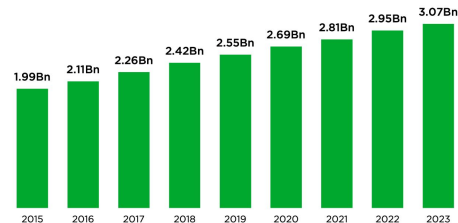


<https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/intl/en-emea/future-of-marketing/management-and-culture/diversity-and-inclusion/lgbtq-media-representation-gaming-industry/>  
[https://www.theesa.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/ESA\\_2023\\_Essential\\_Facts\\_FINAL\\_07092023.pdf](https://www.theesa.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/ESA_2023_Essential_Facts_FINAL_07092023.pdf)  
[https://scholarworks.csun.edu/bitstream/handle/10211.3/223477/ID%2031\\_pgs%20232-248.pdf?sequence=1](https://scholarworks.csun.edu/bitstream/handle/10211.3/223477/ID%2031_pgs%20232-248.pdf?sequence=1)  
<https://blogs.lib.umich.edu/eaten-grue/cvqa-residency-%E2%80%93%93%2%A0power-disabled-player>



## 2015-2023 Global Players

Forecast Toward 2023



Source: ©Newzoo | 2020 Global Games Market Report  
[newzoo.com/globalgamesreport](https://newzoo.com/globalgamesreport)

+5.6%

Total Players CAGR  
2015-2023



Mobile Players in 2020

2.5Bn



Console Players in 2020

0.8Bn



PC Players in 2020

1.3Bn

## VIDEO GAME PLAYERS ARE DIVERSE:

53% Male

46% Female

1% selected "Other" or chose not to answer

The average video game player is **32**  
 and has been playing for **21 years.**



10%

of gamers identify as LGBTQ+.



# Representation & inclusion

- Around a third of players do not feel welcome in gaming communities.
- Among LGBTQ+ people, 65% do not feel that all sexual orientations are properly represented in games.
- Gender balance in protagonists is getting more even, however still leans towards male.
- 49% of Asian Americans feel like some races are underrepresented in games.

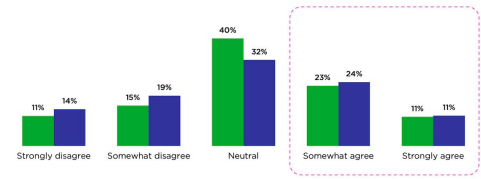
## 1 in 3 Gamers Have Not Felt Welcome in Gaming Communities

And is more pronounced among underrepresented groups, in particular those who identify as ethnic minority and LGBTQIA+



"I oftentimes don't feel welcome in gaming communities"  
Among players aged 18-50

United Kingdom United States



**35%**

of players in the U.S. often don't feel welcome in gaming communities. This increases to **47%** for LGBTQIA+ gamers.

**33%**

of players in the U.K. often don't feel welcome in gaming communities. This increases to **40%** for gamers of ethnic minorities.

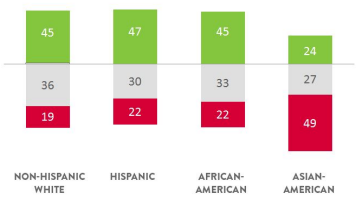
Q: Below are several statements about playing games. How much do you agree or disagree with each statement about games? "I oftentimes don't feel welcome in gaming communities"  
Source: Newzoo | Gamer Sentiment Study: DE | Base: Total players aged 18-50 - U.K. (n=1,995), U.S. (n=1,875)



### ASIAN-AMERICANS FEEL VIDEO GAMES UNDERREPRESENT SOME RACES

HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE STATEMENT "ALL RACES HAVE AMPLE REPRESENTATION/INCLUSION IN VIDEO GAME CHARACTERS"?

AGREE SOMEWHAT/STRONGLY NIETHER AGREE OR DISAGREE DISAGREE SOMEWHAT/STRONGLY



Source: Nielsen 360° Gaming Report.



### Video Game Protagonists By Gender (2015 to 2020)

This year, video game companies have announced more games with female protagonists than in previous years.

Female Male Multiple Options N/A Gender Ambiguous/Non-Binary

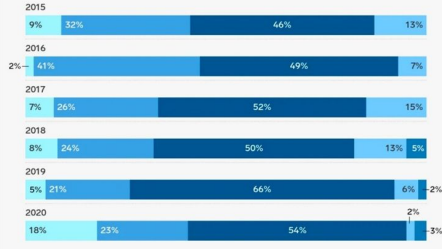


Chart: WIRED - Source: Feminist Frequency

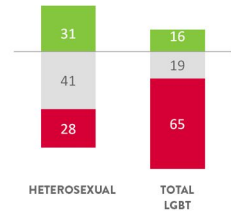
Anita Sarkisian, *Gender Breakdown of Games in 2020*, Octobre 2020, *Feminist Frequency*, disponible sur : <https://feministfrequency.com/2020/10/15/gender-breakdown-of-games-in-2020/>

### LGBT GAMERS FEEL VIDEO GAMES DO NOT PROPERLY REPRESENT ALL SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS

REPRESENT ALL SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS

HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE STATEMENT "ALL SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS HAVE AMPLE REPRESENTATION/INCLUSION IN VIDEO GAME CHARACTERS"?

AGREE SOMEWHAT/STRONGLY NIETHER AGREE OR DISAGREE DISAGREE SOMEWHAT/STRONGLY



\*Includes "Gay or Lesbian," "Bisexual," and "Transgender or Transsexual."

Source: Nielsen 360° Gaming Report.



# Why is it important?

“Seeing yourself and others like you represented in video games goes beyond immersion, it normalises our existence to other gamers.”

<https://www.overclockers.co.uk/blog/video-game-representation-why-it-matters/>

- In a world that seems to grow colder and more divided, games can help us understand and respect each other.
- We can show each other our humanity. That we exist. Encourage empathy.
- We can help people understand and embrace themselves.

## Most gamers think diversity matters and that share increases with each new generation

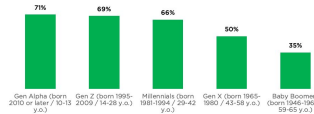


Attitudes towards the statement “Diversity in games is important to me” | % Completely agree/ Strongly agree/ Agree  
Base: Total players

Among total players



Among total players by generation



35% of Baby Boomers agree vs. 69% of Gen Z

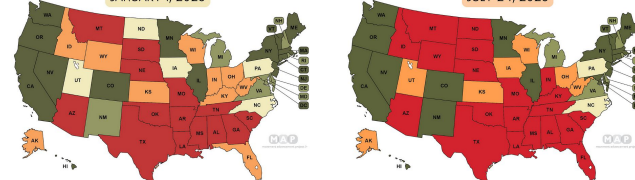
newzoo

Source: Newzoo Global Game Player Study 2023. Global average based on average across all markets.  
Base: Total players (n=243,045). Generation data represents players (n=232,372). Generation data represents players (n=232,372). Baby Boomers represent 20%.

## MAP'S GENDER IDENTITY POLICY TALLY CHANGE BY STATE

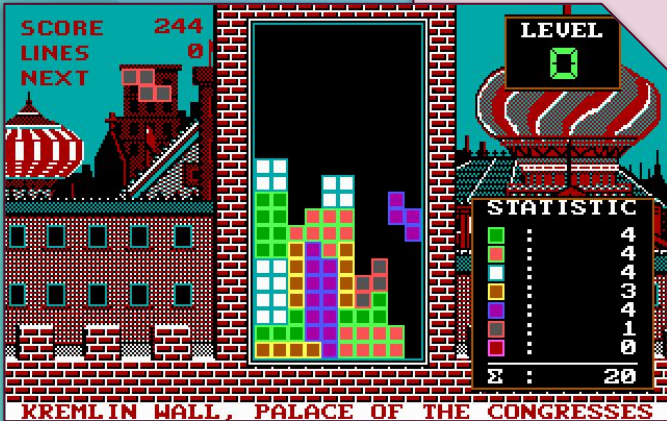
JANUARY 1, 2023

JULY 24, 2023



# “Politics in games”

- Some argue that “politics” have no place in games.
- Usually, they are referring to “politics” they do not agree with.
- Games are art.
- Art is political.  
(Or at the very least a great political tool)
- Deliberately being “non-political” is a political act.
- Choosing to be “non-political” is a privilege.





# Saving the world

We have immense influence as game developers.

Will you use your voice deliberately?

What will you use it for?




**Bundle for Ukraine**  
A bundle hosted by Microsoft Games @ 1x1.0x @ with content from 238 creators

Buy 998 items for \$10 - Regularly \$6,879 Save 99%

Amount: **\$6,370,587.20** of goal **\$6,000,000.00**

100% of goal 449,636 contributors \$14.17 average contribution \$9,000.00 top contribution

This bundle ended March 18th 2022.

Share it:   

**BUNDLE FOR UKRAINE**

**-1,000 works worth over \$6,500**  
Minimum \$10 donation  
All proceeds to charity



**Child's Play**

## GamerGate to Trump: How video game culture blew everything up

What began as a backlash to a debate about how video games portray women led to an internet culture that ultimately helped sweep Donald Trump into office. Really.

BY IAN SHERR, ERIN CARSON / JULY 8, 2017 5:00 AM PDT




## HOW GAMES SAVED MY LIFE

Testimonials about the positive, life-changing power of video games.



**WHY REPRESENTATION MATTERS**

**A Look at Asexual Characters in RPGs**



Sep 8 at 8:03am • 

When I opened the 5th Edition D&D Player's Handbook to find a black woman as the "Human" entry, I teared up. I'm betting to many that's a tiny thing. To me it's actually a big deal. Representation matters, and after more than thirty years of life, I can finally see myself mirrored in the worlds I love the most.



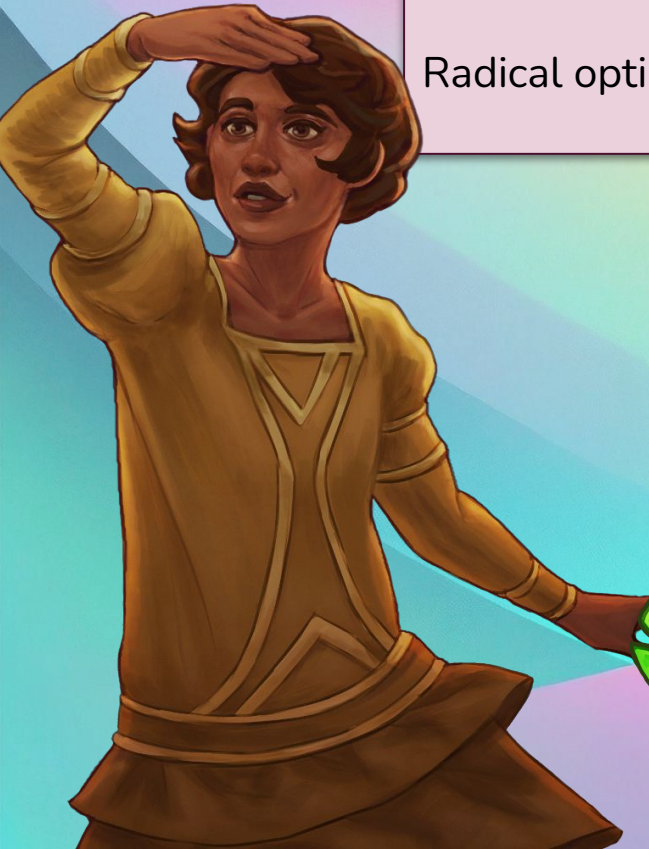
  2.6k  38 Comments 1.4K Shares



# How we do it at Valiant

Meaningful, inclusive stories that change perspectives.

Radical optimism (not toxic positivity).



# Themes (guiding idea)



“At the end of the day, we are all the same.”  
“We are all different, and that’s a good thing.”

## KREATUREKIND

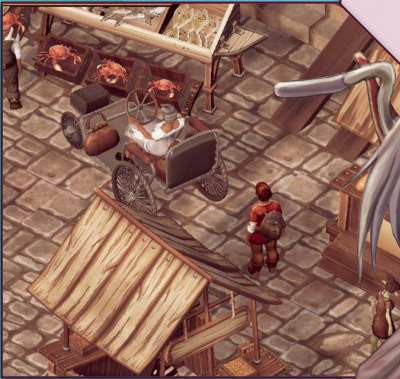
“There is no ‘big bad’ in real life - and for real change to happen, we need grassroot movements.”





# Gather knowledge

- Approach your subject with curiosity, and an open mind.
- Read, watch, *listen*.
- Other people don't owe you an education, take responsibility of your own knowledge.
- Consider intersectionality, and whose voices you are listening to & amplifying.
- Best of all is a diverse workforce who tell their own stories.



# Plan, and document

- Gamedevs make meticulous design schematics and spreadsheets balancing hundreds of items. Of course we can also plan and design for diverse perspectives!
- Try to keep a holistic view of what is represented in games:
  - Gender identities & presentations
  - Sexualities
  - Ethnicities
  - Disabilities
  - Body types
  - Age
  - etc etc
- Do this even when it “doesn’t matter”.
- Remember: Representation is more than a checklist - it’s about truly diverse stories and perspectives!

## Teen 2: Yui



Archetype: Cleric  
Mode of magic: Runic  
Card types: Support  
Gender: Female (cis) [she/her]  
Age: 18  
Personality: Chill, friendly, understanding  
Visual description: Often dyes her hair in various colors, hippie-inspired vest, short braid. Yui uses and demonstrates human rights, gender philosophy, history



## Teen 1: Riley



Archetype: Bard  
Mode of magic: Dancing  
Card types: Support/DPS  
Gender: Female (trans) [she/her]  
Age: 18  
Personality: Confident, supportive, reliable  
Visual description: Riley's dog is black and mother white. She keeps her dark curly hair long, and likes cute and practical clothes that are part youth fashion and part Billie Eilish.  
Short bio: If you have a problem of any kind, Riley is always there, ready to listen. Realistically, she's the best friend anyone could hope for.



## key\_008 - Yeldar

### The Professor

Portrait



References



Name: Yeldar  
Old name: Oa-Sildavie Shiyekdar

Code: key\_08

Role: Is a professor at the University of Duberdon

Age: 999 years old (friends are planning their 1000th birthday)

Gender: Omni (androgynous)

Sexual preference: Asexual

Race: Elf

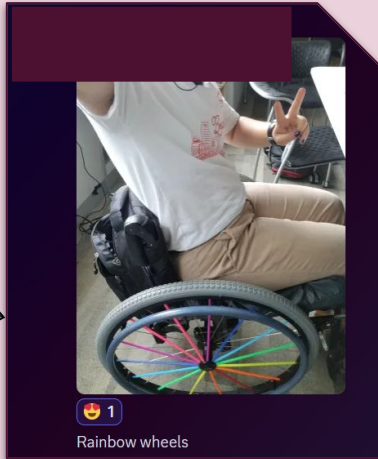
Ethnic look: Philippine American

Body type: Tall, very slim, spindly



# Feedback, and growth

- We are all on a journey.
- Even if you're part of a community, you can likely still learn more.
- Listen to feedback, use it as an opportunity to learn and grow.
- It's easy to get things wrong, and sometimes people who "fail" are treated harshly.
- But, we still need to try.
- If you're lucky, your community will help!



Rainbow wheels



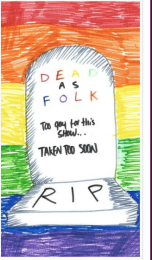
## Bury Your Gays

📄 Main 🔍 Analysis 📖 Lessons 🗨️ Quotes 📺 Playlists 📺 Video Examples 📄 Create Now

"Kudos for including such a well-developed gay character! Have you figured out how you're going to kill them yet?"  
— [Wendy Rose](#)

This trope is the presentation of deaths of LGBT characters where these characters are normally able to be viewed as more expendable than their heterosexual counterparts. In this way, this death is treated as exceptional in its circumstances. In aggregate, queer characters are more likely to die than straight characters. Indeed, it may be because they seem to have less purpose compared to straight characters, or that the supposed natural conclusion of their story is an early death.

The reasons for this trope have evolved somewhat over the years. For a good while, it was because the Depraved Homosexual trope and its ilk pretty much limited portrayals of explicitly gay characters to villainous characters, or at least characters who weren't given much respect by the narrative. This was due to negative attitudes towards gay people and due to the Moral Guardians' Hays Code, which did not allow gay people to be shown on screen unless it was part of a plot line that showed that they were wicked. This meant that most of them would either die or be punished by the end. Even somewhat sympathetic characters would usually receive punishment, as their sexuality was perceived as a negative trait (similar to how one would write a sympathetic drug addict). However, as sensitivity to gay people became more mainstream, this then transitioned into the Too Good for This Shitty Earth narrative, where stories would depict the subject of homophobia and then depict LGBT characters as suffering victims who



Keep them the L's with... [Alameda University Student Association](#) Imagine what "They're Dead!"



# Then again...

- Let's remember that we're making games. Making a fun experience is always central.
- Not all players care, and some will respond in destructive ways.
- Large corporations have found that "pandering" is profitable, it's easy to get cynical and fed up with shallow representation.
- Choose where and how you are able to be the most effective.
- Be mindful of your mental health, and personal safety.

## All 10 Times Disney Introduced Its First Openly Gay Character (and Gave Us Nothing)

Oh wow, I always felt Undertale was really missing shallow card battle mechanics and a party cribbed from a corporate diversity stock photo.

7 Reply

### The problem is not representation...

But OVERrepresentation.

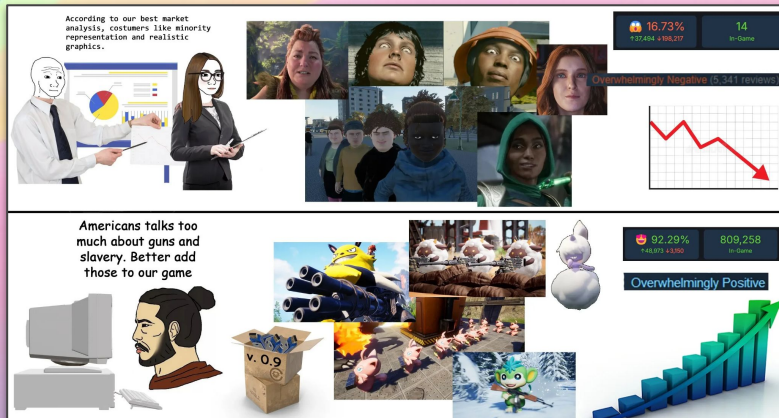
The arguments used most often by defenders of overrepresented homosexuality and the also overused "strong female lead" in this game are "LGBT exists", and "This only reflects the real world". Well let me say you, it does not. LGBT represent only a tiny minority of the real world population. Overrepresenting is just as bad as not representing at all.

No one is saying there SHOULD'NT be a reasonable amount of LGBT and "strong female lead" representation. In Act 3 everyone and their dog is gay and/or strong female lead. [Even freaking Raphael is gay](#)

At this point Larian is just pandering, and this annoying obsession (admittedly fueled by really loud lobbies that not only affect Larian, but whole industries) with OVERrepresenting this themes must stop.

This game could have been the greatest masterpiece of the decade, but due to decisions like this it falls short of the true jewel it could have been.

Bring back the moderate, middle way, where wisdom lies.



# TL;DR

- Players are diverse.
- Representation matters.
- We have great influence as game developers.
- We can still be better at diversity and inclusivity in our games.
- Listen, watch, learn, grow.
- Take care of each other, and yourselves!





# Thank you!

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