"EVERYONE CAN MAKE GAMES!": THE POST-FEMINIST CONTEXT OF
WOMEN IN DIGITAL GAME PRODUCTION

Abstract: After over a decade of scholarly research and well-documented harassment,
sexism, and other forms of exclusion and marginalization, digital games culture is
currently the object of heightened attention and discourse related to diversity and
inclusion. This paper considers the context of this shift with a particular focus on the
relationship between gender-focused inclusivity-based action in the form of women in
games incubators, post-feminist discourse, and the neoliberal context of digital games
production. As opposed to rife anti-feminism and similar "backlash" sentiments,
articulations of post-feminism within the digital game industry provide insights into the
tensions inherent in introducing action for change within a conservative culture of
production, particularly for women in the industry. At the same time, the contradictions
and tensions of the post-feminist ethos allow for actions that function through this logic
while subverting it. Through a brief consideration of three exemplary post-feminist
articulations by visible female figures in the North American digital games community,
this article explores the challenges and opportunities presented by the gaps and
contradictions of post-feminism in games culture and production. It concludes with equal
measures of caution and optimism, indicating future directions for study and activism.

Introduction: From Women in Games to Feminist Action in Games Culture

For over a decade, the term "Women in Games" (WIG) has referred to an array of projects and initiatives that share a common goal: getting more women into the digital games industry. Organizations with variations on this mission statement include a range of advocacy and networking groups such as WIG International, the WIG Special Interest Group of the International Game Developers Association (IGDA), local associations including WIG Vancouver, and the United Kingdom-based WIG group, which focuses in particular on collaborations between the academy and the games industry. However, the goals of each group differ in important ways depending on the organization, demonstrating that despite their shared emphasis on gender, WIG bodies should not be mistaken in any way as having a universal feminist mission. For instance, the IGDA and WIG Vancouver focus on women already working within the industry, their professional development, and the dissemination of statistics on female participation in the workforce. WIG International's objectives are less tangible, positioning their members as advocates for issues related to equality, diversity, and camaraderie in the game industry workforce, without defining what these nebulous terms mean or how to achieve them in digital game production. For many years these diverse initiatives represented the most visible form of organizing women working in digital games culture, largely those employed within the mainstream, commercial industry.

More recently, however, these professional groupings have been supplemented with small scale, locally run incubator projects, which are short-term and delimited groupings oriented towards training and supporting participants to achieve a goal, such as making a game. In light of the increasing number of defunct or inactive WIG groups

(Helen Kennedy 2012), incubators represent the next wave of gender-based organizing. (1) There are key differences between WIG projects and incubators for women, including the shift in focus from women already working in the professional games industry to those looking to make their first game. Furthermore, WIG associations are usually focused on the commercial industry whereas incubators are typically focused on independent game production for first-timers.

Despite these dissimilarities, WIG and incubator projects oriented towards women are related in their efforts to render visible and support the development of a more diverse group of game designers. The rationale underlying this normative mission — that 'everyone can make games'— may be vaguely articulated or not openly stated at all. Certainly, despite the explicit focus on gender in both WIG associations and incubators for women, the reluctance to identify many of these projects as 'feminist' prompts consideration of the particular ethos informing diversity and inclusivity measures related to digital games production. This discourse of egalitarianism can provoke antifeminist and sexist responses as well as serve as a rallying cry, but when rhetoric is translated into action, as in the case with incubator projects, tensions related to the systemic and structural nature of exclusion can arise. This paper explores these tensions and their relationship to anxieties related to feminist thought and gender-based action in contemporary digital game culture.

Such an exploration is particularly warranted given the number of very public and increasingly mainstream discussions of gender-based discrimination in digital games culture from 2012 to 2014, wherein it seems that diversity has become something of a commonsense goal in this domain of production. It is essential to consider the underlying

values, objectives, and disagreements at stake, especially those that are not simply refusals or dismissals of feminist action, such as the still prevalent anti-feminism observed in the harassment of feminist game advocate Anita Sarkeesian (Becky Chambers 2012; Jennifer deWinter and Carly Kocurek, 2012). What does the tone and tenor of gender-based interventions and discussions in the game industry indicate about the contradictions, challenges, and clashes that arise around the notion of increasing the number of women in games as a mission, and about feminist action in capitalist spaces of production generally? Through an examination of this question, we argue that post-feminist articulations on this topic serve a neoliberal agenda and its attendant set of practices and visions of intelligible subject-positions in media culture and production. Furthermore, and quite ironically, it is precisely the tensions that arise from articulations of post-feminism that can lead to more radical, politicized organizing.

To expand on the role of post-feminist discourse within game culture, we consider the history and scholarship of women working in digital game development, an influential Canadian intervention related to diversity and feminist action, and responses to gender-based shifts by three highly visible women occupying prominent positions in games journalism and development. Working as researchers, activists, advocates, and allies within the Toronto and Montreal independent games community from 2011 onwards, we have become particularly attuned to how the twinned sensibilities of post-feminism and neoliberalism serve to constrain women's participation in digital game production (Alison Harvey and Stephanie Fisher 2013). At the same time, we have observed how these dominant modes of subjectification related to gender are also highly flexible and can also be taken up in very powerful ways by women seeking (or already

possessing) a foothold in this domain. Through a consideration of these entangled logics, this paper will indicate some of the key discursive challenges facing feminist organizing in games culture today, and the ways in which discursive gaps can springboard powerful interventions within the context of digital game production specifically, and digital labour processes more broadly.

Background: Gender in the Industry

Gender-based exclusion and modes of shifting this norm within digital games culture have long been a topic of scholarly research (2). Early approaches have been critiqued for perpetuating stereotypical notions of gendered preference and fixed definitions of feminine desire and masculine proclivities (Henry Jenkins and Justine Cassell 2008, Nicholas T. Taylor 2007). As Jennifer Jenson and Suzanne de Castell argue (2008), an exclusive focus on content and stereotyped premises of gendered play preferences in both scholarly research and game design results in "re-citation and re-inscription: boys necessarily always already perform masculinity and girls perform and practice femininity" (p.18). Studies of play that utilize feminist frameworks have considered other powerful forces impacting on the way gendered play is patterned, such as play spaces (Diane Carr 2005, 2006) and how and where players develop ludic knowledge, proficiency, and expertise (Jennifer Jenson, Stephanie Fisher, and Suzanne de Castell 2010). This line of research demonstrates that gender identity and performance in digital gaming is highly contingent on a range of situated factors, which has become particularly important given the recent seismic expansion of mainstream games to wider

audiences through mobile, movement-based, and "casual" digital games (Jesper Juul 2009).

Despite the calibre of this empirically-grounded and theoretically-rich research, innovations in digital game hardware and software development, and the growing numbers of female players across a range of age brackets (Entertainment Software Association 2012), there is a still a remarkably low level of female participation in digital game production (Ara Shirinian, 2012). Rather than making the distinction between consumption (play) and production (design), games and gender scholars have linked the exclusionary nature of digital game representations, marketing, and play spaces to the context of production, noting that these together can tell us a great deal about what Janine Fron, Tracy Fullerton, Jacquelyn Ford Morie, and Celia Pearce (2007) call "the hegemony of play". They suggest that it is no surprise that the discursively imagined ideal player continues to be a white, middle-class, heterosexual, technologically competent, socially isolated, and violence-oriented masculine subject when those who conceive of, design, program, and produce digital games themselves, by and large, fit this description. And yet, feminist scholarship demonstrates how male-domination within the sphere of games production is actually a relatively recent development (Laine Nooney 2013). If the hegemony of play is an assemblage of social, economic, and technical factors, as suggested above, this means that this arrangement is open to reconfiguration.

Whether the homogeny of the industry has shifted over the last few years in light of expanding player bases is difficult to ascertain in part because of a general lack of annually produced, industry-wide demographic survey information produced by a credible or authoritative third-party or regulatory body. For this reason, we use several

sources to access information and determine patterns about women's participation in the workforce. According to Julie Prescott and Jan Bogg's independent research (2011a), segregation across occupations in the video game industry still prevails, with statistics indicating a 4--6.9 percent level of female participation in the game industry workforce, a number that Prescott and Bogg note has actually decreased since 2006. Ara Shirinian's "10 years of Salary Surveys" (2012) for *Game Developer Magazine* (the official publication of the annual Game Developers Conference) reports that the highest proportion of female workers in the industry were in 2005 and 2010, when women comprised a whopping ten percent. When we account for the high numbers of women working in non-development roles in this industry, with more senior women frequently found in managerial positions within less technical areas such as marketing, rather than in the creation of content, play experiences, or mechanics, it becomes clear that an exceedingly low number of women work in coding or level design (Shirinian 2012). The International Game Developer Association's last survey in 2005 also shows that the creation of core content, within art, design, audio, and programming roles is heavily male dominated. Thus, despite the range of statistics showing nearly equal play across males and females, and an increasingly wide range of games, platforms, and controllers available on the market, on the production side, the constitution of the labour force remains strikingly homogeneous (Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter 2009).

This pronounced gender disparity in the context of production has led to the call, both in academic work (Jenson and de Castell 2011) as well as within communities of game design practice (Anna Anthropy 2012), for a reconfiguration of the digital games workforce. Do-it-yourself (DIY) game design and self-taught programming in particular

are seen as offering broader opportunities for addressing gaps in computer literacy (Yasmin B. Kafai and Kylie Peppler 2011). Greater female participation, Kafai and Peppler argue, could be one way of overcoming the masculinist geek culture of the programming clubhouse, allowing for women's skills development in technology-based areas. Game design is understood to be professionally and pragmatically beneficial because it includes a range of marketable practices, from expertise in graphics and product design to proficiency in coding, animation, writing, and interactive and audio design as well as specific content areas. Within the nascent area of independent game design studies, a great deal of attention is focused on the democratization of digital game design (Emma Westecott 2013) as well as its contestation (Aleksander Adamkiewicz 2012). ,These debates emphasize the glaring absence of women in formal game design education (i.e. schools), but they also put forth that technical knowledge and proficiency in coding are vital for a successful career in games production. The implication here is that the simple, accessible tools celebrated in DIY game design such as Twine and GameMaker are suitable for dabbling in game design, or for the development of non-technical abilities (e.g. design, art, audio, writing), but not a substitute for formal education. For the remainder of this paper, we focus on what is entailed in the DIY adage that 'everyone can make games!', and in the individualistic claim that the only thing that is hindering someone from participation is themselves (Richard Perrin 2010). In particular, we consider the reception and response to the recent focus on women in games by women already visible within digital games culture, and in particular in the fine line they must tread in discussions of diversity and action.

Why Analyze Postfeminism in Digital Games?

The uniform nature of the labour force in digital game production is something of a truism. This lack of diversity motivated the creation of the Difference Engine Initiative (DEI), a series of women in games incubators in Toronto, Canada introduced in the summer of 2011. As embedded-researchers and academic observers, we were granted the opportunity to see at close range what a women in games incubator looked like when implemented with aspiring, first-time game developers. We conducted an exploratory study of the local independent game community through our feminist participatory action research within DEI incubators and the grassroots community groups and actions borne of them. Our findings illustrated a number of important issues related to community organized diversity initiatives and the understanding and treatment of women's expertise and labour (for a detailed review of the study, see Alison Harvey and Stephanie Fisher 2013, Stephanie Fisher and Alison Harvey 2013).

While our previous work has examined empirical data from within these incubators, this paper considers a central discourse that emerged while reviewing mainstream and specialized games media coverage of women in games between July 2011 and July 2012, as well as scholarly literature on articulations of feminism in contemporary media culture. Through a survey of these texts (background documents, reports on progress, and post-incubator assessments, in news articles, blog posts, and public presentations), we were able to identify a number of emerging patterns of response to community-run, women-focused education initiatives as a strategy to rectify the homogenous context of production. In this paper, we consider one particular set of reactions: those of high-profile women in digital games culture, and the underlying

tensions within these discussions. Women who are in any way publicly known have to negotiate a complex terrain. Those participating in WIG projects or conversations often dance between what is implicitly a feminist agenda and a context that is by-and-large deeply unfriendly to anything that is labelled or characterized as feminism. We find it productive to consider these tactics in light of what we argue is the dominant logic at play— post-feminism.

While other types of responses, including anti-feminism, were also present in the public discourse regarding DEI and WIG initiatives, a postfeminist logic was characteristic of women already working in video game design. This postfeminist logic and the ways in which it shapes dominant discourses about women and digital gaming is the focus here. To that end, we discursively analyze three purposefully selected moments from our participant-observation research with the DEI— moments that were chosen for the ways in which they served to frame the conversations about women and games happening through the DEI. Thus, these moments serve as productive case studies with which to gain an understanding of the relationship between women, digital games culture, postfeminist discourses, and feminist organizing. It cannot be overstated that the point of this paper is not to scrutinize the perspectives of three individuals', but to showcase their highly visible positions and thus influential articulations of gender and feminism in these contexts.

Three Articulations of a Postfeminist Sensibility

In many ways, the first moment set the tone for the DEI. It was introduced at the public information session, wherein interested parties were informed about the initiative

by the coordinators, both leaders in Toronto's independent game community. According to Jim Munroe, the male coordinator, DEI was inspired by Robin Hunicke's 2010 Indie Game Rant at the Game Developer's Conference, an annual industry event. The two key points of this video—those that were most relevant to the DEI—were one, the importance of diversity in the digital game industry and two, the significance of education initiatives to encourage women to choose video game design as a career path. Hunicke's talk provided the lens for the coordinators to introduce a gender-based intervention in games culture through universally-appealing and distinctly not radical concepts- diversity and education. The content of Hunicke's presentation is not particularly revolutionary. What *is* striking about her talk is its tone, and, importantly, its variations over the course of the six-minute video. Hunicke begins the rant in a manner fitting the format; she is casual, almost petulant with her tone, irritably noting the tendency for female designers to receive attention all the wrong reasons. As an example, she recounts how when she asked why she was invited to give a GDC talk in the form of an "indie rant" (given that she is not an independent game developer), the response from organizers was "because you have tits."

However, the subject of her talk is neither about the questionable placement of Hunicke's presentation nor the enduring legitimacy of 'boob jokes' in this domain. Rather, her outraged and flippant tone about the under-representation of women in the games industry is quickly exchanged for a crisp, professional one as she moves on to discuss the "science of gender politics". Hunicke reviews some of the consequences of gendered technology design as well as scientific research on signaling threat (a theory of why women might reject careers in science and technology fields because of situational

cues indicating their lack of belonging) before presenting the benefits of diversity in the workplace.

Within the constraining format of an "indie rant", by necessity brief and focused on stirring a reaction rather than providing detail, Hunicke manages to create a cohesive and compelling call for greater diversity in game design, through the logic that diverse teams comprised of a range of different kinds of people align with market-based definitions of success, as they create more "awesome" games. Importantly, she closes by saying "I am not a Band-Aid", referencing directly the fallacy of bringing in the token women to speak on women's issues. In this way, the use of the video by the DEI organizers to set up a women in games project was ironic; by opting to use Hunicke's talk to explain the rationale for their gender-focused incubator, they contributed to the tokenization of Hunicke, and were at the same time able to avoid disclosing their own perspectives on inclusivity in the industry.

Aside from saving the coordinators from having to articulate their own motivations and politics, the use of Hunicke's GDC contribution is interesting to consider from the perspective of how it is mobilized for framing the act of organizing a women-in-games initiative. As a speech act, this rant in its affective fluctuation is indicative of contradictory ways in which an explicitly feminist objective— rectifying inequities in the labour force— becomes enveloped in a necessarily nonthreatening mode of address— a rant in an off-the-cuff and irreverent style. Given that Hunicke is not only a successful game designer and producer of games, such as the acclaimed titles Flower (2009) and Journey (2012), but also a PhD in computer science, in many ways it seems that she is asked to model how women have to avoid their own type of signaling threat in speaking

assertively about issues of sexism and inclusion. The framing of a women-in-games initiative through a third party, one who must encapsulate her well-researched approach to gender, diversity, and team-building in the delimited form of a rant, says a great deal about the tensions implied in both talking about and being a woman in games. Hunicke, by necessity, adopts a balanced approach to discussing the personal dimension of her invitation to speak and her visibility within the industry as one of the few well-known female designers, presenting palatable notions such as diversity, education, and equal representation rather than opening a conversation about more radical and controversial strategies for enacting structural change in the industry.

This tokenism and the challenge of talking about gender when your role in the industry continues to be marginal is highlighted in the second example, an article written for the influential video game blog Kotaku in October 2011 by Leigh Alexander, which was published in the midst of the two DEI incubators. Alexander, a prolific and well-known games journalist, wrote an article entitled "I'm Tired of Being a 'Woman in Games.' I'm a Person." This article provides a very clear articulation of the tensions implicit in being constantly visible because of one's gender rather than the work one does. As with Hunicke's talk, Alexander's tone shifts midway through the piece. For the first part of the article, she laments, in a mode she describes as potentially being interpreted as "hostile" or "confrontational", the continued need to pay lip-service to the importance of diversity and to the need to address and rectify rampant sexism within the industry. She refers to how hard she works, for a variety of publications, demonstrating the ways in which she, like Hunicke, is an established, qualified, and experienced professional. As she says, "I work, you guys", and for this reason she uses the remainder

of the article to plead for people to stop approaching her to write about "gender stuff", or referring to her as a "female games journalist", or asking her to critique hyperfeminized game characters.

In this way, Alexander's wariness about being included in particular discussions and within certain contexts simply because she is a (visible) woman mirrors Hunicke's injunction to not see her presence as a panacea for industry homogeny. Indeed, she articulates quite clearly how tokenism such as this makes her gender both central and a novelty: "So many of you still think my gender is my most important adjective".

As a journalist who covers a wide range of topics, Alexander is frustrated over the focus on one's gender in relation to one's work. She also takes issue with how gender can become entangled with assumptions about a feminist perspective and approach. A female writer is not the same as a feminist writer, and yet Alexander refers to a feeling of wariness about both at the same time. Still, despite this, she writes, "I wish people wouldn't make a big deal about my gender at all. And yet I can't even say that — stop making a big deal out of my gender'— because the war against sexism in the video game space isn't nearly won."

As with Hunicke's rant, Alexander's piece indicates the contradictions of experiencing the weight of female visibility in an exclusionary and often misogynistic context while still trying to further the message that the status quo within that context needs shifting. As with a rant, the format of a short online article necessitates brevity about the myriad issues at stake- gender, feminism, sexism, diversity, experience, and workplace culture. It also indicates the challenge of being a spokesperson for gender

issues simply because one is female in a context that is deeply unfriendly to women in general, and decidedly hostile towards feminists in particular.

The "fatigue" (as Alexander puts it) of being a representative for gender issues is more explicitly and directly addressed in the third instance, a 2012 presentation at the Game Developers Conference (GDC) by independent game designer Mare Sheppard. In contrast to the individuals considered in the previous two examples, Sheppard has a very close connection to the DEI, as she was the first incubator's co-coordinator. Her talk at GDC, presented after the DEI had concluded and entitled "Why I Hate Women in Games Initiatives", is another example of how the tensions and contradictions that arise from being a woman in games, reflecting on diversity, and taking action can be articulated.

At the beginning of her talk, Sheppard provides an account of the structure of DEI and extols the importance of diversity. Unlike Hunicke, Sheppard's presentation was forty minutes in length and explicitly addresses feminism in the context of increasing diversity in game design teams, defining it as "women and men are equal, and deserve the same rights". She discusses the under-participation of women in game design, and then her own experiences of both alienation and special treatment as one of the few women working in this domain. She reviews pop psychology research on bias and stereotypes, and explores many of the concepts Hunicke introduced in her rant.

As indicated by the title, however, Sheppard's presentation does not conclude by extolling the virtues of bringing different kinds of people into game design teams. In the second half of this presentation, Sheppard proceeds to critique WIG initiatives for segregating, categorizing, and excluding groups of people. In other words, by focusing on female-identified participants, women-only projects such as the DEI serve to discriminate

against other interested participants and create the circumstances for what she describes as a "victim support group". She posits that "trying to address discrimination and inequality can allow it [discrimination and inequality] to flourish" (Sheppard 2012). Labeling women-focused projects as a Band-Aid fix, Sheppard calls for for "a variety of solutions," proposing that a reliance on meritocracy will ensure the creation of diverse teams, whose virtues— fresh thinking, novels ways of reaching new markets— she celebrates at the conclusion of her talk.

These ruminations on gender-based diversity in game culture serve as paradigmatic public utterances that indicate the tensions implied in being a visible feminine subject in the video game industry. In what follows we will consider the content and format of these three case studies, demonstrating how they can be seen as exemplifying a postfeminist ethos, and how in turn they can serve to point to future directions for action in feminism in digital games.

Gender, Feminism, and Market-Based Measures of Success

Post-feminist analysis has traditionally and compellingly been applied to popular media texts (Angela McRobbie 2009), technologies producing subjects (D. Travers Scott 2010), and the perspectives of girls and women (Pamela Aronson 2003). However, in light of Sheryl Sandberg's Lean In (2013) and other evidence of the post-feminist ethos articulated by powerful women (Catherine Rottenberg 2013), particularly in the context of technology-based production, it seems increasingly relevant to discuss post-feminism within the broader cultural spheres around media-making, including the digital game design industry. Though Rosalind Gill's (2007) object of analysis is media culture, her

understanding of post-feminism, as neither an ideology, political or epistemological stance, nor backlash against feminism, but a sensibility that comprises of several interrelated themes, is quite fitting for discussing articulations of gender-based action in digital games culture.

Like neoliberalism, post-feminism lacks a coherent definition or shared meaning despite its frequently deployment as a descriptor of contemporary media culture. Gill addresses the multiple and at times conflicting meanings associated with post-feminism in order to begin to imagine how one might conduct an analysis of post-feminist texts. In so doing, she identifies several key features of post-feminism. Two of Gill's features are particularly relevant to a discussion of women's labour in the digital game industry: first, the emphasis in post-feminism on choice and empowerment, where power is linked to individualism and personal expression and second, the extensive and intensive degree of self-surveillance and self-discipline that is placed on women in contemporary media culture. The emphasis on human freedom located within the choices offered by the open market links the dominant political and economic neoliberal ethos (David Harvey 2005) to the micro-scale of everyday life (Susan Braedley and Meg Luxton 2010). As Gill says:

> What is striking is the degree of fit between the autonomous postfeminist subject and the psychological subject demanded by neoliberalism. At the heart of both is the notion of the 'choice biography' and the contemporary injunction to render one's life knowable and meaningful through a narrative of free choice and autonomy – however constrained one might actually be. (Gill 2007, p.154)

We want to take up Gill's conceptualization of a dominant post-feminist sensibility in media culture and extend this to how the imperatives of WIG are discussed,

particularly in terms of those utterances that do not mirror a straightforward refusal or dismissal of feminist action. We argue that the post-feminist discourse on women-in-games is exemplary of a major undercurrent within digital games culture, one that can act as a barrier to action but which also has productive gaps.

Unlike a neoliberal, post-feminist emphasis on individualism, choice, and self-regulation, feminism often emphasizes the actions and organizing require to enact change in a system of global inequity that excludes, marginalizes, and oppresses a range of people. Rather than locating the entirety of one's power in contemporary culture within individual hard work, feminism emphasizes the need for concerted efforts and concrete tactics to make a productive change in areas where social stratification occurs. However, part of the challenge of post-feminism is how it simultaneously accepts and dismisses feminism as passé, making it more complex than a simple backlash.

Some of the elements of this backlash against feminism are endemic within the digital game industry, characterized by pockets of anti-feminist sentiment (such as the above-mentioned campaign of harassment against Anita Sarkeesian for her video series on sexist tropes in video games) as well as assertions of the irrelevance of the women's movement (Elaine J. Hall and Marnie Salupo Rodriguez 2003). But the three utterances we discussed above at moments exemplify something reminiscent of what Hall and Rodriguez identify as "No, but…" feminism, which is when "women refuse to identify themselves as feminists even though they endorse the objectives of the women's movement" (p.896). More than simply a desire to shed a label with a negative resonance in contemporary culture (McRobbie 2004), however, this manoeuvre indicates that feminist values still hold credence even if they are not identified as such. What the

examples we have introduced can indicate, particularly Sheppard's talk, is not a disavowal of the label of feminism with a full embracing of its objectives, but an evacuation of politics and cultural influence from the call for greater diversity. Hunicke advocates for different kinds of more diverse teams but leave unspoken the actions that would be required to ensure this. Directions on how to do this are not clear, as indicated by both Alexander's article and Sheppard's talk. While Alexander asserts: "As far as I'm concerned, tackling sexism in games seems pretty simple: Care for your fellow humans", Sheppard suggests that we need to invest in and celebrate meritocracy. Despite their recognition of the lack of diversity in digital games, none of these influential women articulate the action entailed to address this gap. And in case of Sheppard's dismissal of direct action, it indicates the persistent resistance to engaging in the communal action required to change a culture of sexism, returning instead to the notion that women will be rewarded if they choose to work hard enough. As McRobbie (2004) notes, there is actually nothing radical about the feminism of equal representation in a media industry, but this is precisely the sort of feminism that is taken to account and dismissed in contemporary culture.

The idea that all practices are a matter of choice is central to post-feminism. Sheppard's reference to choice, furthermore, indicates the ways in which post-feminism is deeply entangled with and in the rhetoric and practices of neoliberalism, with its emphasis on the autonomous subject's ability to construct and control her own meaningful narrative, without recognition of the structural constraints imposed by power inequities. Alexander grapples directly with this, highlighting the challenge of engaging in self-care in the face of feminist exhaustion while still trying to push the agenda of

feminism in a culture oriented towards the token individual rather than structural change. Emphasizing the importance of diversity for a productive workforce but placing the onus on the individual female subject to engage in the labour of self-surveillance and skills development to be competitive also ties into Gill's theorization of the features of post-feminism. For independent game developers, the self becomes a project that requires constant evaluation, advice, discipline, and improvement.

Within the inequitable digital games industry, the resonance between neoliberalism and post-feminism can be seen to operate at the structural level where individualism supplants all notions of the social and political at the level of the subject in post-feminist discourse. This subject is necessarily autonomous, self-regulating, active, and freely-choosing, and it is female subjects in particular that are called upon to self-manage and self-discipline. This is the other side of the empowering message of the do-it-yourself movement; DIY implies individualism, flexibility, and a willingness to manage one's own skills accumulation and self-promotion with only the vaguest promise of recompense. The above three moments and their implications indicate the accuracy of Gill's suggestion that neoliberalism is gendered and that women are its ideal (though not idealized) subject. These moments further demonstrate that even the project of women in games, as it was articulated in the DEI, could be a perfect moment of crystallization of the gendered nature of neoliberalism, where it is women who are asked to engage in unpaid labour in order to pay lip service to this project only then to have their work dismissed as special treatment, with interventionist action thus deemed ineffectual (Stephanie Fisher and Alison Harvey 2013).

Conclusions: Possibilities and Future Directions

The three examples reviewed above indicate some of the tensions that underpin being a visible feminine subject in the video game industry, and gesture towards the complex terrain women who take on a prominent role within the digital game industry must negotiate, and indeed the difficulty implicit in articulating and enacting a feminist agenda in this sphere. The industry is criss-crossed by fine lines that women must carefully navigate in order to continue working there. This paper has considered these tensions in light of the continued under-representation of women in the game industry and projects, such as the DEI, geared towards recruiting more women into the industry for the purposes of creating more diverse teams with the promise of this leading to market-based success. Through a consideration of the tactics of visible women in games through the lens of neoliberal post-feminism, we have indicated some of the challenges that underlie female participation in digital game production and action for change. We would like to conclude, however, by discussing the possibilities presented by the contradictions of post-feminism.

While some applauded Sheppard's critique of gender-based direct action, the participants of the DEI responded publicly in a number of ways to counteract their representation as "victims" and the suggestion that WIG initiatives are ineffectual. Their initial response was to construct and disseminate an infographic of the ripple effects of the funding of WIG projects like the one from which they benefited (see Figure 1). Some formed a successful grassroots community group in Toronto, Dames Making Games (DMG) (3), which is welcome to female-identified individuals interested in game design, as well as their allies. This is a non-profit organization that continues to expand and

extend the reach of WIG organizing, with at least one notable spin-off group, Pixelles in Montreal (4).

We can see here an important shift, from "women in games" to "feminists in games", which is the name of an international collaboration between industry, community, and the academy that aims to shift the status quo of digital games culture broadly and in production specifically (5). DMG identifies explicitly as feminist and takes direct action to address structural inequalities. This is an important contribution, given Hunicke and Alexander's fatigue with tokenism and Sheppard's elision of feminism in her emphasis on diversity in theory but not practice. The organization has received a lot of attention since its inception, which works towards lightening the load for women like Hunicke, Alexander, and Sheppard who have for years been involuntarily cast as representatives of gender-based issues, regardless of their interest or desire to speak about such topics. It also challenges the depoliticized narratives of post-feminist discourse in its orientation towards communal organizing and feminist action.

<Insert figure 1, size: half page, caption: Figure 1: Ripple Effect of the Difference Engine Initiative, designed by Una Lee>

There is thus an importantly constructive nature to these exemplary moments, as they serve as inspiration and motivation for further action. This can be seen in the explosion of tweets using the #1ReasonWhy hashtag on November 26, 2012, discussing the harassment and structural sexism that contributes to low female participation in game design (Rachel Weber 2012), and the attention it received on major video game sites Gamasutra (Mike Rose 2012), Kotaku (Luke Plunkett 2012), as well as other media outlets such as Forbes (Jordan Shapiro 2012), TIME (Melissa Locker 2012) and The

Guardian (Mary Hamilton 2012). While here contributors provided stories about discrimination within the industry, the spin-off hashtags, #1ReasonToBe and #1ReasonMentors, were a site for women in the game industry to provide support and mentorship for others seeking to gain a foothold in this context of production, a large-scale community mobilization in response to a discussion of structural inequity (de Winter and Kocurek 2013).

All this indicates that after over a decade of scholarly research and well-documented harassment, sexism, and other forms of exclusion and marginalization, digital game culture has become an object of heightened attention and discourse related to diversity and inclusion to an unprecedented degree. There is also a greater attunement to the need for larger-scale action to change the culture, but despite the number of rants, articles, and talks on this subject, clarity about what this action would entail is elusive. We caution game studies scholars interested in spearheading or examining social change action to engage in self-reflexivity on our own taken for granted research practices to safeguard projects from the increasingly strong grip of neoliberalism within Canadian academia. This is vitally important as, in many ways, individual interventions with an emphasis on the DIY process of making a game and the end product continue to reign, with a persistent reluctance to engage with the radical organizing required to combat structural forms of oppression and exclusion, not only in terms of gender but also race, age, sexuality, trans* identities, and abilities.

We also must be attuned to how the turn to DIY game design can serve to reify the precarious labour practices prevalent in new media industries. In addition to the persistent sexism and other forms of exclusion, the context of production of digital games

is structurally difficult for many to sustain for long periods. A work environment characterized by intense periods of crunch time (Rosalind Gill 2002), a culture of long hours (Mia Consalvo 2008), relocation expectations, and precarious work conditions (Nick Dyer-Witheford and Zena Sharman 2005) is one that by necessity tends to be less challenging for women without families (Julie Prescott and Jan Bogg 2011b). Furthermore, there is evidence that the push towards diversity measures in the form of incubators is one that exploits the material, immaterial, and affective labour of women in particular, profiting from their unpaid participation in the community of video game design practice (Alison Harvey and Stephanie Fisher 2013).

Still, DIY game design activities are important because, as Kafai and Peppler (2007) note, participatory competencies such as independent game design include not only technical practices of production, but also critical, creative, and ethical practices. Furthermore, the social media know-how of the incubator participants and their resulting self-promotion activities serve to publicize the other side of WIG initiatives, the often invisible labour of those that do not become part of the small knot of celebrity game designers. It is thus important to understand the productive possibilities that can be located in the contradictions of post-feminism around game culture and labour, and take up some of our resources as academics to intervene there.

Attention to a postfeminist ethos within digital game culture, particularly around production, is powerful in that it provides us with alternative ways of talking about the spaces between anti-feminism, misogyny, and explicit feminism to understand this social phenomenon beyond mutually-exclusive binaries or accepted definitions. It can act as a discursive bridge that facilitates an individual's movement between feminist and anti-

feminist discourses, without any apparent contradiction, including not least of which would include Leigh Alexander's subsequent turn towards heavily politicized journalism showcasing the work of marginized creators and advocating for radical, intersectional inclusivity in digital games (6). It is through post-feminism that we understand how it is that the DEI was not defined by its organizers as a feminist intervention while putting forth what might be understood as an implicitly feminist agenda. The contradictions of post-feminism suggest a way of seeing conflicting and counter-intuitive utterances, actions, refusals, and embraces as productive and even as potentially offering us a way of talking about feminisms in the plural, across our differences and our difficulties with the term. And in this tendency towards multiplicity, hopefully, we will find not only a diversity of perspectives but also a plurality of types of action for change in an industry still plagued by conservatism and exclusionary patterns reproduced through the hegemony of play.

Notes

(1) Incubators can have a diverse range of intentions and included participants, but in this paper we refer to those that have been motivated by a specific desire to increase female participation in the industry.

(2) For a comprehensive review of 30 years of gender and gameplay research, see Jennifer Jenson and Suzanne de Castell (2008).

(3) For more on Dames Making Games, see dmg.to

(4) For more on Pixelles, see Pixelles.ca

(5) For more on Feminists in Games, see feministsingames.com

(6) For many examples of Alexander's writing on inclusivity in the industry, see

http://leighalexander.net/selected-links/

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