

Games Intersectional Roundtable¹

Building a Community for Inclusivity and Diversity around Games and Academia

Tan Schütz, Rachel Gorden, Kseniia Harshina

Abstract: *Games Intersectional is a community-building initiative designed to support marginalized individuals in the video game industry and academia, including women, LGBTQ+ people, people of color, immigrants and displaced people, and people with disabilities. Our monthly roundtables, workshops, and other events create a safe space for knowledge exchange, mentorship, and collaboration among game researchers, developers, and students. The project aligns with the SDGs on Gender Equality, Reduced Inequalities, and Quality Education by promoting inclusivity, accessibility, and personal and professional growth.*

Keywords: *Inclusivity; Video Games; Intersectionality; Community; Diversity*

Members of the Project

Kseniia Harshina, Ukraine: “Working with GloCo means feeling connected to a global community of people who share a goal of wanting to make positive change in the world, starting with their local communities.”

¹ Edited by Tom Tuček

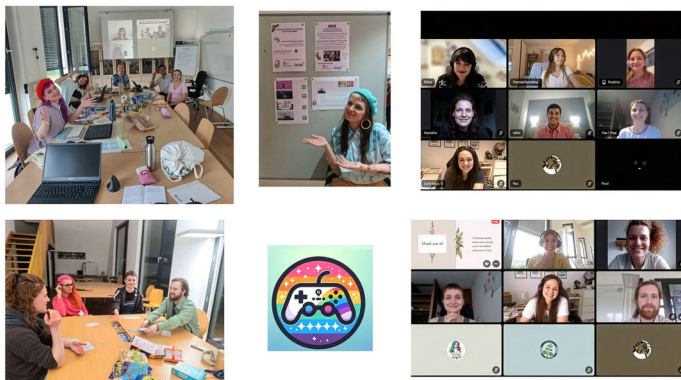
Tom Tuček, Austria: *"It means making a change, and not only focusing on what can be done around the world but also locally."*

Rachel Gorden, Germany: *"It means building a platform for and with like-minded people that addresses important challenges."*

Tan Schuetz, Germany: *"It means learning with and from people all over the world—not only about certain issues but also how to start tackling them."*

Marie Biedermann, Austria: *"Working with GloCo means to me to make a difference in building and nourishing communities that otherwise would not have formed! It means helping each other up while not looking down on any other group of people! It means community instead of competition! It means diversity instead of majority."*

Fig. 19: Games Intersectional



©Kseniia Harshina/Tom Tuček

Motivation for the Project / Problems Tackled

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework developed by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe how different social identities—such as race, gender, sexuality, and disability—intersect and overlap, creating unique experiences of discrimination and privilege (Crenshaw, 1991). Rather than viewing identities in isolation, intersectionality emphasizes that people's experiences are shaped by the combination of their identities and the interconnected systems of oppression they face. This approach is especially relevant in inclusive spaces, as it underscores the importance of understanding and addressing the diverse, layered experiences of marginalized individuals.

The video game industry, as well as academia and research surrounding games, urgently need diverse voices—not only to enhance creativity and innovation but also to reflect the vast diversity of experiences in our world. However, welcoming these voices into games and game studies is only the first step. True inclusivity requires spaces where individuals from marginalized groups can feel safe, supported, and genuinely empowered to share and develop their ideas.

Games Intersectional was founded on the principle of promoting not only equality in video game spaces but also equity. While equality ensures that diverse voices are present, equity ensures that these voices can thrive and grow. Equity goes beyond simply inviting underrepresented individuals to the table; it creates the conditions for them to succeed, be heard, and shape the future of video games and game studies. The primary goals of *Games Intersectional* are to foster a supportive community, establish mentorship opportunities, and encourage international collaboration. We recognize that many people in video games—especially those from marginalized groups such as women, LGBTQ+ people, BI-POC people, immigrants, and people with disabilities—face significant barriers in both the industry and academia. Our community provides a space where these individuals can connect with like-minded peers, access resources, and find guidance from those who have navigated similar paths.

The organizers of *Games Intersectional* are alumni of the Game Studies and Engineering Master's program at the University of Klagenfurt, Austria. Over the course of their studies, they found a sense of strength, belonging, and motivation in their interactions with one another. This sense of community provided not only emotional support but also professional guidance and inspiration for game- and research-related projects. Realizing the value of this network, they wanted to extend this community to others who might benefit from a similar environment. They envisioned *Games Intersectional* as a welcoming space where diverse voices could gather, share their experiences, and build each other up—whether they're students, researchers, or professionals.

Project Description

Games Intersectional is a community initiative that brings together game researchers, developers, and students from marginalized backgrounds, providing a safe space for networking, mentorship, and collaborative learning. Our community focuses on creating inclusive and accessible spaces within the video game industry and academia, where members can share their experiences, discuss challenges, and celebrate successes.

Our activities include monthly roundtables, where members gather to discuss current projects, industry trends, and topics of shared interest. These roundtables are a core component of *Games Intersectional*, as they create an open platform for participants to voice their ideas, challenges, and aspirations. In addition, we organize workshops that cover a range of topics, from creative writing to coding basics, offering members practical skills that can benefit their careers. These workshops mostly emerge from the community itself as a sort of skill-sharing, where members can teach others their own skills. Recently, we have also introduced a 'book club' to our monthly roundtable, where we select and discuss games that resonate with our community's focus on inclusivity, accessibility, and representation.

Since the foundation of *Games Intersectional* in December 2023, more than 10 community events have taken place, including monthly round-

tables, workshops, and social gatherings. Our community now consists of over 30 members (both local and global), with each event typically drawing more than 10 participants.

Fig. 20: Games Intersectional Roundtable meeting, Summer 2024.



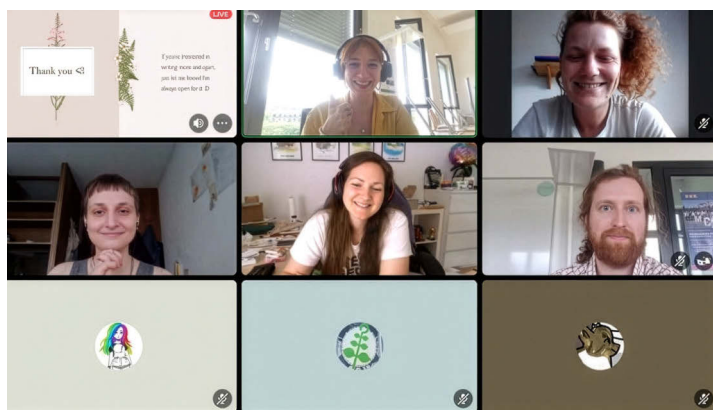
© Tom Tuček

Another essential part of our mission is to bridge local and global communities. While we're based in Austria, our Discord server allows members from around the world to participate, making *Games Intersectional* accessible to individuals regardless of location. This digital platform has enabled us to host hybrid events, like online Q&As with industry experts and collaborative game jams, bringing together participants with diverse cultural and professional perspectives. Discord also allows asynchronous communication and community activity between the monthly roundtables.

In addition to fostering inclusivity, *Games Intersectional* emphasizes intersectionality. We explore how overlapping identities impact experi-

ences within the video game sector, and our discussions focus on understanding and addressing these unique challenges. Topics covered in our events include career development, intersectionality in game design, accessibility, and the future of diverse individuals in video games.

Fig. 21: Creative Writing Workshop, organized by Tan Schuetz (30.05.2024).



© Kseniia Harshina

Connection to the framework Global Citizenship Education and the Sustainable Development Goals

At its core, GCED encourages individuals to become responsible global citizens, promoting understanding, respect, and a sense of shared humanity. *Games Intersectional* embodies these principles by providing a space where people from diverse backgrounds can come together, support one another, and engage in meaningful discussions about inclusivity in video games. By fostering dialogue around the challenges faced by marginalized individuals in games, our community encourages

members to embrace empathy and global-mindedness, key tenets of GCED.

The community's monthly roundtables and workshops serve as platforms for members to learn from one another and from invited experts, broadening their perspectives and deepening their understanding of global issues in video game contexts. This peer-to-peer learning model aligns with GCED's focus on participatory, experiential learning, empowering participants to actively address issues of equity and representation.

Games Intersectional directly supports several SDGs, including:

Goal 5: Gender Equality

Our community is committed to promoting gender equality in video games by providing safe spaces for women, non-binary, trans, and gender-queer individuals to express themselves, connect with mentors, and access career resources. By actively including women and gender minorities in all our activities, *Games Intersectional* works to address the gender disparities often seen in the video game industry and academia.

Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities

Games Intersectional focuses on building an inclusive community that addresses and reduces inequalities based on race, gender, disability, and cultural background. We work to ensure that members feel supported regardless of their identity, offering resources, workshops, and networking opportunities to help them succeed. Our focus on intersectionality also encourages conversations about the ways different forms of discrimination overlap, raising awareness and promoting inclusivity.

Goal 4: Quality Education

By offering workshops, reading clubs, and mentoring opportunities, *Games Intersectional* contributes to quality education outside traditional academic settings. These activities allow members to learn valuable skills in game design, inclusivity, and professional development, contributing to their growth as well-rounded, socially conscious game developers and researchers. Our focus on accessibility in video games further aligns with this goal, advocating for more inclusive and accessible educational content within the field.

Lessons learned

Building this community hasn't been without challenges. One of the initial hurdles has been helping people understand that the existence of a community like *Games Intersectional* is a valuable goal in itself. Often, people expect concrete, immediate outcomes, such as research projects or technical training. While those can certainly be part of the experience, *Games Intersectional* emphasizes that creating a safe, inclusive space for marginalized voices is a critical accomplishment in its own right. This understanding of community as both a support network and a catalyst for personal and professional growth is essential to the project's mission.

Throughout the development of *Games Intersectional*, we encountered various challenges and learned valuable lessons about building a supportive, inclusive community:

One of our initial challenges was defining and targeting our community in a way that was both inclusive and clear to people from different backgrounds. Initially, the group was called "FLINTA in Games," an acronym common in German-speaking countries that stands for "Frauen, Lesben, Intergeschlechtliche, Nichtbinäre, Trans und Agender" (Women, Lesbians, Intersex, Nonbinary, Trans, and Agender people). However, we quickly realized that this title was not easily understood internationally or by people from different educational contexts. Additionally, we wanted the community to be open to anyone who feels

marginalized or who wants to learn how to support marginalized individuals in video games, without limiting membership strictly to FLINTA identities. We believe that inclusivity also means avoiding gatekeeping; if someone doesn't visibly belong to a minority group, it doesn't necessarily mean they're not facing struggles. They could be dealing with invisible illnesses, be closeted, or have other personal reasons for wanting a safe community. Our role isn't to profile or interrogate members but to create a welcoming, respectful environment for everyone.

An issue concerning our initial title ('FLINTA in Games') that is still present in our current title ('Games Intersectional Roundtable') is its accessibility to people from different educational contexts; while the term intersectionality is by now widely used in many academic and academia-adjacent contexts, we still cannot expect every person who may want to join our community to be familiar with it, as this would require a relatively high level of education. To make our community more accessible and keep the threshold for joining as low as possible, we will further explore ways to communicate our mission and purpose to potential members in more inclusive and accessible ways.

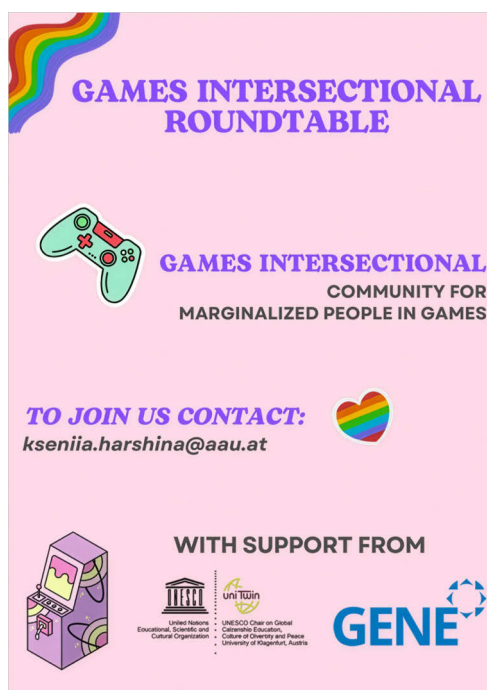
To maintain a safe space, we also introduced a simple barrier to entry: people must first reach out to one of our members before receiving an invitation to join our Discord server. This system has worked well, helping us maintain a respectful, supportive community. It has also been rewarding to see that the people who join are genuinely in need of a space like *Games Intersectional*—a place where they feel valued and heard.

We have also found that a non-hierarchical approach has contributed to a more supportive and open environment. Our community includes a range of people—Bachelor's students, graduates, Master's students, PhD candidates, and even instructors. By valuing each voice equally, we create an atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable sharing their ideas, experiences, and challenges, regardless of their level of experience. This structure fosters a culture of mutual support and empathy, breaking down traditional hierarchies that can sometimes stifle open communication.

Another key aspect of our community is the emphasis on member-led initiatives. We encourage members to host workshops on topics

they're passionate about, such as creative writing or coding. Not only does this empower individuals to contribute in meaningful ways, but the funding we receive also ensures they are compensated for their work, further valuing their contributions. These community-led workshops have proven highly engaging and effective, drawing on the unique skills and interests of our members.

Fig. 22: Promotional material



© Kseniia Harshina

One ongoing challenge has been involving the international community in our monthly meetings. Although we offer an online option for ev-

ery meeting, attendance remains primarily local. To address this, we are considering organizing a specific event aimed at international participation, such as a symposium. By hosting an event with a global focus, we aim to engage more participants from outside Austria and further strengthen our international connections.

Moving forward, we aim to continue creating a safe, inclusive, and empowering space for marginalized voices in video games, refining our approach as we learn from each experience.

For further reading

POC in Play, <https://www.pocplay.org/>

POC in Play is an organization dedicated to increasing racial diversity in the video game industry. They provide resources, articles, and community initiatives to support people of color in video games, including mentorship programs, events, and networking opportunities. This platform is ideal for those interested in how race intersects with game development and culture.

Gayming Magazine—LGBTQ+ Representation and Inclusion in Gaming, <https://gaymingmag.com/>

Gayming Magazine is the first and only global magazine dedicated to LGBTQ+ video game culture. It covers news, reviews, and features focused on queer representation and inclusion in video games. This resource is ideal for those interested in learning more about LGBTQ+ issues in video games and how the industry is evolving to be more inclusive.

Access-Ability—Accessibility in Gaming, <https://access-ability.uk>

Access-Ability is a platform dedicated to promoting accessibility in video games, covering topics like game design for disability inclusion and industry best practices. With guides, reviews, and articles, this website is a fantastic resource for understanding the importance of accessibility in video games and for implementing it effectively.

References

- Crenshaw, Kimberlé (1989). "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989 (1): 139–67.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé (1991). "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43 (6): 1241–99.
- Ruberg, Bonnie, & Adrienne Shaw (Eds.) (2017). *Queer Game Studies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Consalvo, Mia (2012). "Confronting Toxic Gamer Culture: A Challenge for Feminist Game Studies Scholars." *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology* 1.
- Murray, Soraya. (2018). *On Video Games: The Visual Politics of Race, Gender and Space*. London: I.B. Tauris.