Diversity Tools and Takeaways

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Today's Panel

Instead of another "diversity is good" type of talk, let us give you tools to make your games and workplace more inclusive. This panel focuses on giving people who are beyond a 101 level of understanding of inclusion concrete things to take back with them to their teams, projects, and studios. We will provide a starting checklist to work through character design, advice on using diversity consultants for the greater good of the project, and ways to respond to criticism if you have a diversity fail.

Your Panelists

Tanya DePass: Director of I Need Diverse Games non-profit, games & culture critic, diversity advocate

Chris Barney: Game Designer, Poptropica. Creator, Fall of the Last City. Writer, Perspectivesingamedesign.com. Lecturer, Northeastern University.

Link Hughes: Game Designer, ArenaNet. Roleplaying nerd. Psych aficionado. Root beer connoisseur.

Shana T Bryant: Senior Producer, Take-Two Interactive. TheMushroomQueendom.com. Creator, *Terrible Allies* comic.

Mel Fox: Production Coordinator, Roll20.net. 2D artist.

Diversity isn't just about ROI in the short term

When you decide to invest in diversity in your studio, your projects, on your team you must think of it as a long term investment. Not simply a short term goal that can be laid aside when the "right" returns don't happen immediately or even in a few months.

TL;DR: You can't half ass it and expect people to throw money at you and be grateful that you hired that one brown person, or one queer person or a few women.

You need to be in this for the long haul, full stop.

Why a diversity consultant is a good investment

If you don't have the lived experience you will get it wrong.

A consultant/a group of consultants can give you in hours what might take you weeks or months of research to learn

Including diversity, and doing it well can turn a demographic that has critique of your game into one praising it for doing the work.

Building professional relationships with diverse developers will create potential resources for hiring or future consulting for the rest of your career.

Why not fall back on stereotypes?

It's simple, using stereotypes for "representation" is lazy, unoriginal and offensive. POC, LGBTQIA, neurodivergent and disabled people are not one-dimensional so their representation in games should not be paper thin.

It's also showing that the industry hasn't moved beyond the idea that 18-35 white boys and men are their core demographic. That the people playing these games won't see through their failure to consider anyone but their scruffy, white dude, full of man-pain as the way truth and light of game leads.

Lastly it reinforces negative association with people of color, LGBTQIA, neurodivergent and disabled people. If a major media source like games doesn't interrogate these tropes and move beyond one dimensional portrayals, we can't get to good representation.

Definitions of othering & Use in games

Othering is putting people in the category of "Not like Me" for example, putting People of Color (POC), LGBTQIA, Mentally Ill, Disabled, Neurodivergent, Non-Binary or anyone unlike yourself into a silo of "other"

When people are categorized as other, they are often exoticized as "alien" and strange to those who can't see them as fully people.

<u>Games do this in several ways</u>:

Anthropomorphized animals with traits often ascribed to non-whites

Non-humans have black coded hairstyles but the player can't use them. (see also poorly done black hairstyles)

Having fantasy races as stand-ins for POC (see elves,orcs, etc) without actually having them as characters

Using weak allegories for issues of oppression, racism and other ism's by having the stand in non-humans

Building Teams

1. Stop hiring (for now).

1. Retention, retention, retention.

1. Establish goals.

Building Teams

4. Measure your progress.

5. Use better (read: *new*) metrics.

6. It's Learnin' Time.

Building Teams

7. Teach your teams why diversity AND inclusion are important

8. Don't rely on volunteers.

9. Hire a professional, and pay them.

Building Teams

Ask WHY.

Be honest.

Character Creation Checklist (a start!)

Why is this character in the game?

Are you using yourself as the template for the race/class/gender/etc. of the character

Are you including a diverse characters just to have them? aka Checkbox Diversity

How would changing this character's diversity profile change the game?

Could it make the game better?

Do you have the resources to do it well?

Avoid stereotypes

Consult with experts on the lived experience you want hour character to have

Avoid the 5 F's (Flags, Fashion, Food, Faces, Festivals)

Transitioning to Diversity

- Make it safe to learn and improve.

- Demonstrate understanding of concerns

- Align around goals

- This will be an ongoing process

- Communication challenges are a good thing

So you failed, now what?

You are not the devil for failing

You deserve it, but you are not a bad person

This doesn't mean give up on better diversity in your project!

You might fail again, that's ok!

Use this as a learning experience not a punishment

THANKS!

Questions?