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Behind the Screens: Understanding the Social Structures of the Video Game Industry

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Behind the Screens: Understanding the Social Structures of the Video Game Industry

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by

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ABSTRACT

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This study focuses on video game developers and their working environments in a growth industry. While some research documents the culture of video games and the people who play them, much less is understood about the labor environment for those who make games. I conducted 20 personal interviews with game developers in order to learn more about what inspired them to select this field, how they gained entry to it, and what their work is like today. Using insights from the interviews, I analyze how workers contend with its male-dominated culture and how creative skilled laborers deal with the challenges of corporate control and precarious work in the new economy.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Playing video games has been a pastime of mine for as long as I can remember. Growing up, my sister and I would spend weekend afternoons in our family basement playing games on our PlayStation. Long car rides meant that I would have time to try and beat The Legend of Zelda Oracle of Ages on my Gameboy. In college, I spent maybe one too many nights playing League of Legends or Minecraft with friends online. I have always been a part of the gaming subculture, and it is a central part of my own identity.

As a woman in the video game subculture, I always found that I felt slightly out of place. It's hard to put your finger on it sometimes, but I always got the sense that I didn't quite "fit in." When I tried to play shooting games, my skill always fell flat where my male friends excelled. It turns out they had much more experience than I did, but it wasn't just that. As I got older the gender disparities in the subculture became much more apparent to me. Other women who played games often mentioned they experienced the same sense of alienation that I did. The subculture itself appeared heavily male-dominated to me and I wondered why.

This project came out of my passion for the video gaming subculture and my passion for conducting field research. I spent one semester studying ETSU's digital media department for a fieldwork class and found out they had a video game design course. When I spoke with digital media students and instructors, my curiosity deepened and I had further questions involving the video game industry. This thesis is an expansion of that initial spark of research interest. I wanted to check my understanding of the video game subculture and industry, and I became fascinated with the drive that people had in making game development their career.

My goal with this project was to learn more about how the video gaming industry operates from the perspective of people in game development roles. In the following chapters, I

review relevant literature, describe how I completed this project, and discuss the video game industry and its work culture as seen through the eyes of video game developers. This industry has plenty of room for future research, and I am proud to be a pioneer in that discussion.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The video game industry has been rising since the 1980s. Because it has only been around for approximately forty years, it is considered contemporary (Heinman 2015). While researchers have started to understand video games and the people who play them as a subculture, not much literature explores the occupations concerned with making video games (Winkler 2006; Shaw 2018). This industry is male-dominated and is understood as a post-industrial outgrowth of the tech industry (Heinman 2015; Harvey and Fisher 2015; Sweet and Meiksins 2017). As a result, it is important to understand this industry in the context of time and culture.

Transformation of Work Culture

Work is an essential part of society. Emile Durkheim (1964 [1885]) argued that the division of labor is responsible for creating social cohesion and forming bonds within a culture. To Durkheim, it is the glue that holds society together. It is a critical social institution as it is an avenue in which humans form social ties and achieve innovation (Sweet and Meiksins 2017).

Scholars argue that we are living in a post-industrial society (Bell 1973; Piore and Sable 1984; Hirst and Zeitlin 1991). This means that collective society has undergone the industrial revolution, a historical era that is largely responsible for culture of work today (Sweet and Meiksins 2017). The "old" (industrial) economy has influenced the "new" (post-industrial) economy and shapes the way that humans think and feel about work (Sweet and Meiksins 2017). One of these normative feelings is a work ethic. Holding a job is considered a virtue by many Americans (Shih 2004), and having no occupation makes people seem morally suspect and stigmatized (Liebow 1967; Katz 1996). These ideas about the morality of labor shape how we approach work in modern times; many people continue to feel a strong desire to work (Sweet and Meiksins 2017).

The “new” economy is still different from the “old” however. The rise of technology that could replace human labor has eliminated many jobs while making new ones. Jobs are likely to be more “high-tech” and specialized than they once were. As a result, there seems to be a rebirth of skilled labor that the industrial revolution dismantled (Piore and Sable 1984; Sweet and Meiksins 2017). The new job market still demands unskilled labor, but it requires more skilled labor than the previous era (Sweet and Meiksins 2017). Skilled labor requires workers to be more educated in order to remain relevant and employable in the new economy (Hostetler, Sweet and Moen 2007).

As the need for educated workers rose, corporations began developing new methods of control. Scientific management and Taylorism were the old managerial practices that reserved information and decision making for those at the top of the corporate ladder. Keeping the workers uneducated meant that they would easily be controlled. Work used to be broken down into simple tasks for productivity rather than ingenuity (Taylor 1964 [1911]). Corporations have now attempted to create a “teamwork” mentality amongst their workers to encourage ingenuity, but they also retain an element of Neo-Taylorism (Crowley et al. 2015). This is meant to foster trust amongst the employees and employers while still undermining the power of the worker (Parker 1985; Parker and Slaughter 1988; Curry 1993).

Corporations have positioned themselves to exercise control over workers by actively undermining union presence. Employers may use tactics that entice workers with some of the good labor conditions that unions have demanded historically so that workers no longer feel the need to organize. This helps keep the workers happy, in some ways, but keeps them powerless as they lose the ability to collectively address their grievances with their employers (Milkman 2006). Employers in the “new economy” respond to organizers with aggression and scare tactics.

They will blatantly fire those who try to organize workers to ensure that unions are kept out (Head 2004).

The schedule of work has changed drastically from the old economy. Researchers describe the new economy as the "24/7" economy and the "gig economy" (Sweet and Meiksins 2017; Peetz 2019). This is because workers are now more likely to work schedules outside the old "9-5." Work can now be done at any hour of the day during any day of the week. To maintain a job means that workers must remain "flexible" to their employers (Sweet and Meiksins 2017). This means that workers must have schedules that are free to meet corporate needs. New employees must be able to work at the will of the company and lose control over their own scheduling (Kalleberg 2011). To remedy this some employers such as the company Uber allow workers to "work when they can," creating what is known as the "gig" economy. This new sector of work has potential for exploitation as it is yet to be regulated (Peetz 2019).

Another development of the new economy occurred when women entered the workforce in large numbers. The old economy was set up to make men the breadwinners and women the homemakers, even when women also participated in the labor force. This cemented divisions between the sexes (Becker 1981) that were not as clear in pre-industrial times. Women began reentering the work force in the 1940s, and by 2012 most married couples had dual incomes (U.S. Census Bureau 2012). Male wages were stagnating, and in many cases, women had to return to work to support their families (Berndhardt et al. 2001). Women did not enter the economy on the same footing as men, though. In fact, there still is a pay gap between the two sexes. According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR), white women in the work force only make 81 cents to every male dollar. Due to race chasms that have been prevalent since the old economy, women of color make even less (IWPR 2018).

The new economy also devalues work considered to be "women's work." When a work field is predominately female, the job is often known to pay less on average than a male-dominated field (England, Budig, and Folbre 2002). Employers don't consider women to be "ideal workers" either. The "ideal worker" puts in long hours and devotes their life to their career (Williams 2000). Women don't get this status ascribed to them as they struggle with what is known as "the motherhood penalty." Employers are less likely to hire women since they believe women of childbearing age are likely to leave their career to become a homemaker. Men instead receive the "fatherhood bonus" (Hodge and Budig 2010) are more likely to be considered "ideal workers." Men are more likely to get the benefits of more prestigious jobs with better pay (Williams 2000; Benard and Correll 2010; IWPR 2018).

Women who enter male-dominated fields are likely to face alienation and discrimination. They often don't feel like they "fit in" with their peers and employers due to the homogenous working environment (Elliot and Smith 2004; Arieff 2018). Male-dominated fields can be hostile working environments for women. Male workers and managers in these fields may normalize hyper-masculinity to achieve status in the eyes of other men; as a result, they may sexually objectify female co-workers (Quinn 2002; Shih 2004; Kolhatkar 2017).

Tech Work Culture

While not much literature about the video game industry has been published, video game development and production grew out of the tech industry (Heinman 2015). Understanding the tech industry could provide a better background for the video game industry as they have cultural overlaps. The tech industry began in the post-industrial era. Originally a predominately female occupation (such as women "computers"), the tech industry began emerging in the 1940s and 1950s. Women were in fact pioneers in the industry until the 1980s, when the overall number of

female computer science degrees were on the decline (Abbate 2012). This is partly because as computing became central in work and leisure activities, knowledge and skill in using computers grew in status and cultural importance. Other factors contributed to this as well, but when the work became 'important,' then there was a sudden rise and eventual male-domination of the industry (Salter 2018).

Gideon Kunda (2006) explored the corporate culture and management in tech. He analyzed the all-encompassing company culture that permeated the tech company he studied. Since employees in the tech field are highly creative, the management team did everything they could to cultivate control over the workers. Management in tech fully internalized its company rhetoric and instilled this rhetoric in the employees. The decentralized structure of management created an environment that made employees truly feel they were working as an individual for a team. Upholding the beliefs and ideologies of the company was enforced by all members of the corporation—not just management. This kind of social control placed group pressure on employees to take on the moral responsibility of work (Kunda 2006).

Tech work culture is a prime example of how the new economy manages and controls its employees. Silicon Valley is often upheld as the gold standard of what that work should look like. Employees in this field are given plenty of creative freedom and are paid well, but at a price. Since companies in this sector cultivate a sense of teamwork as well as hyper-individualism, many workers will often overwork themselves, putting in 12-14-hour days for the sake of the team. The tech industry has made work and productivity a moral obligation that can often be enslaving to its employees. Even when workers get the opportunity to leave work for personal reasons, they find that they would rather stay so that they don't miss out in being a "player" for their team. As a result, the demands in tech mirror the new economy's "ideal

worker" as employees are expected to sacrifice their livelihood for their company (Williams 2001; Kunda 2006; Kolhatkar 2017).

Since the tech field has become male-dominated, women face much adversity getting in. They have experienced hostility and isolation in their attempt to pursue careers in this field (Chech et al. 2011; Hatmaker 2012). Employers in tech are likely to see women as inadequate due to normative gender roles. Women with children may be labeled as incapable of meeting the corporate demands of the job and suffer pay and promotion discrimination known as the "motherhood penalty." Since they are women, employers may be more likely to push them towards the "softer" aspects of the career that involve managerial positions. While this seems like it is a privilege, it pushes women out of the better paying tech positions that call for creative ingenuity. This upholds the hegemonic culture of the industry and perpetuates sexism (Faulkner 2007; Chech 2013).

The Video-Game Culture and Industry

Like many industries, the video game industry is multidisciplinary. It has borrowed heavily from tech, film, and business. Researchers can study video games as a subculture and a career (Heinman 2015; Shaw 2018). Not much research has been done on the industry itself, which motivated my wish to pursue this project. Most academic research involves the culture of video games rather than the labor involved in making games.

To understand the video game industry is to understand the people who endorse it. Shaw (2018) used grounded theory to uncover more about the culture of the video game industry. She discusses how people who play video games have identified themselves as "gamers." Gamers are, as she discusses, those who labels themselves "gamers," whether they are welcomed into the

in-group of gaming or not. The label of "gamer" can be given to anyone who is passionate about playing video games and chooses to identify with the subculture (Shaw 2018).

It is important to note that gaming culture has been historically dominated by heterosexual white males, and only in the last few years has participation begun to diversify. Women are one of the fastest growing populations within the gamer community. They make up 40 percent of the gamer population as of 2016 (Paaßen et al. 2016). Gaming culture is expanding to other minority groups, such as people of color and the LGBT community (Shaw 2018). This expansion of interest among gender, racial, and sexual minorities does not come without social problems such as racism, sexism, and heterosexism. As a result, progress in ending overt and systematic racism and sexism is slow and met with hostility from some of the resistant white men within the community (Paaßen et al. 2016; Richard and Grey 2018; Salter 2018).

In fact, tensions are still high as women especially have been singled out for criticism by white men in the subculture. "Gamer Gate" was a series of online threats by men who targeted women gamers and game developers in 2014. These threats were often graphic as men would suggest that they would "come to her house" and "slit her throat" (Poland 2016). These forms of hostility could discourage women from joining this subculture and industry. This backlash can be understood as evidence of inequality within the subculture, and in the gaming industry as a working environment.

The games themselves are also an area of cultural critique. Oppressive othering can be observed in the biased representation of women and people of color and in the overrepresentation of white male characters and story lines in video game content (Schwalbe et al. 2000). Women become sexual objects and people of color are represented as racialized targets and stereotypes. According to McKernan (2015), this overt racism takes place not only in online forums and

communities, but also in the games themselves. In his study of Resident Evil 5, McKernan noticed the inhumane portrayal of black individuals. In the game, two white protagonists were in a mythical African country tasked with the job of shooting only black individuals. Many white male gamers insisted that “this didn’t mean anything,” or claimed, “we’re shooting them because they’re zombies,” without regard for the social implications of how black characters were represented (McKernan 2015:pg 36).

Some research has been done on the industry itself. Most of the research involves the unfair treatment of women in the industry. This is a field that mimics tech since much of the work is technical and the field is male dominated. As a result, women in the video game industry may face similar challenges to the women in tech. The imposition of long hours, hostility, and isolation by coworkers are a few examples where these industries intersect for women (Harvey and Fisher 2015). Understanding more about the video game industry could give future researchers a better understanding of post-industrial male-dominated industries and the culture that surrounds them.

CHAPTER 3. METHODS

I completed this project by interviewing 20 people working in or towards a career in game development. I chose to do personal interviews in order to understand the social processes that occur within the industry. Intensive interviewing allowed me to get an in-depth understanding of workers' experiences, which is why it was my chosen method of data collection. My goal was to learn more about the structure of the video game industry and how people became game developers.

My interview guide consisted of 16 questions that asked participants about their general feelings towards their work and the projects that they were working on as well as how they came into the industry. These questions were meant to uncover how people become video game developers and what performing this work means to them. The interviews shed light on the multiple pathways people took to enter the industry. Interviewees' narratives touched on some common themes that I will describe below.

Sampling

I used the "snowball sampling" method in order to identify potential interviewees (Lofland et al. 2006). I had some indirect ties with people who worked in the industry. I emailed them, some of whom participated, and they directed me to individuals who also met the requirements of my study: over the age of 18 and currently pursuing or trying to pursue game development as a career. I chose snowball sampling because word of mouth recommendations from peers was superior to contacting employers who might not grant the approval to contract workers. People who worked in game design were able to direct me to others who worked in game design, yielding a sufficient number of people to get an adequate picture of this occupation.

Getting in touch with participants was simple at first as I already had a few indirect connections but finding new people to join once those connections ran out was difficult. I was fortunately able to find more new contacts when attending a convention that included people who worked in the industry. They gave me their emails and connections to others and that allowed me to finish up my data collection. By the end of my data collection phase, I completed interviews with 20 workers. While there is still much to learn about the industry, I was able to answer my research question with this number of participants. Moreover, the interviewees yielded sufficient qualitative data to achieve saturation with main emergent themes (Lofland et al. 2006).

The sample comprises participants who work in a game studio, participants who are doing freelance/contract work, and participants who have studied game design or are currently doing so. There were twelve men, five women, and three trans individuals (two trans women and one non-binary person). Ten participants programmed, five were artists, four were in game design, and one worked in quality assurance. Most of the sample was white (17), but I did interview one African-American, one Asian-American, and one Hispanic person. Although my sample appears to be overly white, the gaming industry, as with the tech industry, is known for being white- and male- dominated (Alegria 2019; Shaw 2018). Below I will provide a table that highlights the demographics of the participants.

TABLE 1. Participant Demographics

Name	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Occupation	Sector
Alice	White	Female	Programmer	N/A
Ben	White	Male	Programmer	N/A
Cameron	White	Male	Programmer	AAA
David	Hispanic	Male	Writer	AAA
Ellie	Asian	Female	Artist	AAA/Indie/ Freelance
Francis	African-American	Male	Writer	AAA
Geff	White	Male	Artist	AAA/Freelance
Hunter	White	Male	Programmer	Freelance

Izzy	White	Female	Writer	AAA
Julia	White	Trans Female	Programmer	AAA/Indie/Freelance
Kyle	White	Male	Programmer	AAA
Lauren	White	Female	Artist	AAA/Indie
Michael	White	Non-Binary	Programmer	Indie
Nick	White	Male	Artist	Indie/Freelance
Paul	White	Male	Quality Assurance	AAA
Riley	White	Male	Programmer	Indie/Freelance
Sam	White	Male	Programmer	N/A
Taylor	White	Trans Female	Programmer	Freelance
Willis	White	Male	Programmer	Freelance
Zoey	White	Female	Artist	Indie

Ethics

I conducted the interviews on a platform known as Discord, a voice-over application for gamers. Many people who play or work on games use this application as means to communicate. I created a separate private account for this project in order to help ensure confidentiality. I asked participants to read an informed consent document (ICD) before agreeing to the interview. The ICD was approved per IRB protocol and informed participants of their rights. With participants' consent, I audio-recorded each interview for purpose of transcription (after which I deleted the audio-files). I redacted personal information and gave participants pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

The people who participated were generally forthcoming and excited to discuss their work. I had little to no trouble getting the interviewees to answer my questions. I did not provide an incentive to join this project; participants did, however, seem to appreciate the opportunity to reflect on their career and the work that they do.

Interpretation of Data

I transcribed each interview in full and coded the text data. I sat down with each of the interviews and read through them. I then went back through and started making notes of patterns based on each interview My data analysis process involved first coding line-by-line. As themes began to emerge I turned to focused coding for the remainder (Lofland et al. 2006). For example, one of the patterns that emerged was the participants' need to network. Getting into and staying in the industry required being able to communicate with insiders who could give them work or vouch for their work.

Once I noticed a particular pattern, I went back through the transcriptions and selected examples and exceptions to it. I took direct quotes from participants and put them into a separate file with the code name itself. If something didn't quite fit the code, I considered how it could potentially form a new code or if it signified a more complicated pattern in the data. This process allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of the data and consider how different themes related to each other. As the following chapter illustrates, I gained an understanding of the structure of the industry, how people came to work in it, and the different challenges that they faced by choosing this work.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Structure of the Industry

The video game industry is increasingly working its way into popular culture. It is a collection of different types of work and consists mainly of tech, entertainment, and business/marketing work. The industry is also highly creative. Video games are essentially interactive stories that invite players to have an immersive experience.

The video game industry thrives thanks to its fan base. It mimics the entertainment industry because the games must appeal to a receptive audience in order to be successful, but making games requires extensive knowledge about computer software. With players forming the foundation, people who create games are a step higher in status. It has been corporatized with the rise of AAA (pronounced "triple A") studios that have dedicated business and marketing departments to maintain a fanbase of loyal gamers. Some examples of AAA companies are Electronic Arts (EA), Nintendo, and Bethesda. These companies have produced successful games that they have turned into lucrative franchises. Some well-known titles include The Legend of Zelda, Fall-Out, and Mass Effect.

Other lesser-known studios have not yet reached AAA status. Members of the video game industry refer to them as independent or "indie" studios. Their games don't turn much profit so they have less financial influence than the AAA studios. They tend to have fewer resources than the larger companies and do not take on as many projects or have the most up to date software. Many of the games that they produce would be equivalent to B rated movies in the entertainment industry. As a result, indie studios rarely produce well-known games, but it is possible if a game manages to reach a wide enough audience.

My project focused on the development and creative side of video game production. My interviewees were programmers, digital artists, and writers for the video games. The people that I

interviewed seemed to be in the middle of the industry in terms of control. The work that they did was not entry level, but they lacked control over key decisions. The major decision makers were producers and business/management employees.

My participants were skilled laborers who took years of training to learn how to work with video game technology. The game designers reported that the industry structure is highly competitive, requiring them to persevere in order to succeed. They described many ways that the industry weeds out workers. As my analysis will show, most game developers chose their career path because of inspiration that they experienced when they were young. Their passion has carried them along despite adversity.

Anticipatory Socialization

Anticipatory socialization is a process that occurs as people contemplate taking on a new identity or role. Game developers experienced a socialization process as they moved into this career. In many cases, their passion for video games and identification with the gaming subculture inspired them to pursue this career path.

Appreciation of Video Games

Many of the developers discussed how they played video games as children. Whatever franchise of game they played, they felt a desire to either learn to program, do the art, or tell the story within a video game.

> Willis: It's kind of hard to trace it back to one thing…. It's more of growing up and playing Halo or classic Nintendo games and all of those it was like "It'd be really cool to make these things and give back for all of the experience I got out of this as a kid…"

In many of the interviews, developers expressed a childhood interest in the process of making video games. Alice mentioned playing a Legend of Zelda game as a child. She loved the way the "story was told," and decided "that's how I want to tell stories." Cameron had a fascination very early on and went to tech camps specifically to learn the game development techniques. Those who continued to pursue an element of game development often felt passion and dedication for what they did. They marveled that this is a career that people *get* to do. They described that the work often feels like a privilege.

Adding to the prestige and appeal of working on video games was the possibility of achieving fame in the eyes of gaming fans or peers. In many cases, my interviewees referred making games as "being a Rockstar," or like "making it as a Hollywood starlet." This is one of the reasons why some game developers chose to pursue this career. If they could become successful or work on a well-known and beloved game, there was the potential for fame and glory among the rest of the subculture. This could possibly elevate their status amongst gamers, especially if the game they are working on is well-received by the community.

Learning About Industry Careers

Once interviewees realized that they wanted to pursue a career in the video game industry, they had to figure out how to start. As with many careers, college offered the most popular pathway to find out if becoming a "gamedev" was a good fit for them. Over half of my sample had some college training in game development.

In response to the popularity of video games, many colleges have developed some sort of curriculum for game development careers. Attending college helped interviewees find out if they were an artist, a programmer, or designer, the three main roles on a development team. If

students ended up going to college for game development, they were given a course load that helped them explore the techniques and skills of the industry.

College also afforded opportunities to attend game development conferences. Conferences gave students a glimpse of what the game industry is like. Students could network and get to know potential employers. This kind of networking is invaluable for reasons I will explore further later. By getting a formal education in tech, potential game developers could hone their skills and understand the software. In many cases, game development college programs structured their courses to mock a studio industry environment. For these reasons, game developers with this kind of college training seemed to be more successful in entering the industry.

A couple of participants in my study were self-taught or mentored and trained from a young age. In other instances, the technological advancement in the game industry had exceeded what students could learn in school. Even on the job, some workers had to turn to their own research to understand and figure out how to use the software on their own. Finding a job or career in the industry proved challenging for many.

Getting into the Industry

As I alluded to previously, getting into the industry seemed to be one of the most difficult challenges that game developers faced. They contended with several barriers. Networking, geographic location of jobs, acquiring skills, access to tools and technology, and affording the life are the difficulties that seemed to be the most pronounced for finding work.

Acquiring Skills

Perhaps one of the first challenges game developers dealt with was developing a skill set. The video game industry is at its core a tech-based industry. It requires an extensive knowledge

of programming and proficiency in various software packages. The process for developing a skillset meant that the developers had to choose what kind of work they wanted to do in the field, but it could be difficult to develop a skill set if they lacked access to the necessary tools.

Programming required aspiring programmers to learn different software engines and code languages. A software engine is a program that allows new software to be built. The most common software engine mentioned in my interviews was Unity, which also used for developing apps. Programmers had to become knowledgeable about how Unity works. Artists had to become skilled in software as well. Photoshop and Maya are two of the well-known programs that digital artists and animators use, but there are others as well. If potential game developers can not gain access to the proper technology, then they cannot get the practice that they need to become marketable for potential job prospects.

Interviewees stressed that much of their career success depended on showcasing their work. They assembled their work in the form of "portfolios." Having a strong portfolio and building it is an important part of getting into the game industry. They had to be able to show the work they could do which would also communicate their skill level.

Although college offered a reliable path to access high tech software and tools and the time to build skills using them, the downside for interviewees was the high cost associated with getting an education. Participants frequently mentioned trying to pay off student debt. Another liability of college is that some programs may not have the most up-to-date technology. As a result, participants could end up learning techniques that the industry considered out of date. Ellie mentioned this happening to her peers, and Geff said that this was a challenge for him getting into the industry. He said he felt he was always "just behind the technology."

Networking

The process of networking--forming professional or social ties with gaming industry insiders--seemed paramount for participants to find work. Many of my participants were just starting out in the industry. They discussed different ways they were actively networking to be able to get in. For the video game industry, it seemed to be paramount for finding work. The vast majority of interviewees mentioned that they got their job through some form of social network. Participants mentioned that they "got lucky," or they "just knew the right person." A network within the industry is invaluable as it provides a leg up. Kyle put it best when describing his experience with making connections in the field:

> I was very lucky to have some friends with the people I'm working with now and to have some connections which I think is probably the best thing you can have is relationships to get in, I mean in addition to all the skills of course, you'll never get into the door without some of the skill, but the relationships and connections are a huge way to get in.

Here Kyle mentions that while skill is important, having connections to people in the industry was a "huge" benefit to be able to gain entry.

To find work, game developers are required to sell themselves and their portfolio to employers within the community. Networking was thus essential for new developers to find people willing to look at their portfolios. As I referenced previously, some participants attended game development conferences. These conferences allowed prospective developers to meet with industry insiders. Many employees who work for studios attend these conferences as they often showcase the new projects the studios are working on. Zoey had the best example of how networking at these conferences helped her land a job. She mentioned meeting someone in visual effects at a company, and after the conference she sent him her portfolio. He told her about an

internship opportunity and became her mentor. After the internship, she was invited to stay on for a contract. This was her way in the door.

Another reason why college is so important is because it's not just about who you know, it's about the connections of the people that you know as well. In some cases, having a recommendation from an instructor or a friend that they went to school with helped participants get in the door. Game developers' networks can "vouch" for their skill set. Being recommended by a third party gave some developers an edge over other applicants applying for positions in the industry. This happened with Lauren who went to school for web-design. She took some classes in game design as electives. Her instructor had some friends in the industry and was able to help land her a job as a result.

Game developers in the industry also found work on forums and through social media. By following up on connections online through people they have met, new developers could potentially pick up small contracts here and there to be able to build a portfolio. Those who didn't go to school for game design were more likely to do this. Taylor, who was doing a freelance project, found her project through Twitter by following other game developers. Riley made connections at conferences, but he was active on his Linked In page in order to constantly find new projects and contracts to work on.

Interviewees mentioned that some projects they worked on could enhance their networking. If they worked on well received and well-known games, they could boost their chances of getting a better job. On the flipside of that, if they worked on a game that did not do well, this could hurt their chances. This can make working in the industry a double-edged sword, as getting momentum could be hard if a developer has the misfortune of working on the "wrong project." This is consistent with social networking research done in the art world. Giuffre (1999)

found that artists must build prestige in order to move on to the next prestigious urban art gallery. She found networking in the art industry to be like sandpiles—they are dictated by the relationships within the galleries. This is very similar to my findings as working in the correct studios gets you farther. One of my participants, Lauren, had been in the industry for 10 years by the time I interviewed her. She mentioned how she felt fortunate that the titles she worked on were all famous or good quality games. As a result, she was able to continue to "stay in" because her portfolio spoke for itself.

Networking can be challenging to accomplish. While there are many different ways to network, not many people have the same level of resources. I interviewed a few participants who went to college for game design but worked in different fields afterwards. One of the issues that hampered their chances of landing a job in the field was the simple issue of location. Although location matters in other ways I discuss shortly, it was also tied to networking. Many game studios are in large urban areas. If participants didn't already live near those urban areas, finding work could be more difficult. Living far from any studios makes it challenging to know anyone in the industry. Attending conferences and using social media mattered more because it eliminated the barrier of geographic distance. Even still, participants were less likely to take jobs if they knew that they would have to move. Participants didn't want risk being "on their own" just in case a particular job didn't work out.

Pressure to "Stand Out"

To gain the attention of potential employers, new developers and designers had to find a way to stand out from other game developers. Not only did they have to create a diverse and enticing portfolio, they had to learn how to promote themselves in order to find work. For many developers, conferences offered critical opportunities for self-promotion. Artists had a more

difficult time with this than programmers as they were showing off their creativity more than anything else. In such a rigorous and competitive field, they and their portfolios had to be impressive at the interviewing stage to earn a privilege of a job offer.

Developers also turned to corporate sponsored events to promote themselves. Corporations host competitive events known as "game jams." The objective of these events is for participants to invent a game in a couple of days, usually within a weekend. The goal of a game jam is to showcase how creative a game developer can be as well as how efficiently they can create a good game. In some cases, if a game is good enough, the corporation gives the individual or team who performed the best some form of public recognition. Although companies rarely develop games from game jams, interviewees shared stories of this occurring. Even if they did not win, game jams offered a chance to be noticed or hired by larger corporations. Game developers also gained experience and work they could add to their portfolios.

Affording the Life

One of the last challenges interviewees faced was financial: affording the life of the industry. Given the difficulty of finding a reliable studio job in the industry, developers might begin with freelance projects while holding down a "day job." These day jobs are not in the game design industry. In some cases, those who had tech degrees were able to work in decent paying jobs such as software engineering while picking up project work in other places. In other cases, though, would-be developers had service work jobs while working on projects on the side.

Once again, location of work became an issue, as many AAA studios established their headquarters in cities with a high cost of living. For developers just starting out crippled by student debt, the cost of moving and finding a place to live could be too steep. Too many

industry jobs can be contingent or precarious following national labor trends (Kalleberg 2011). In many interviews, participants discussed how employers cancelled projects or terminated contracts and how small studios could fold. Michael was just starting out as a programmer in the industry, and he mentioned that one of the biggest challenges he faced was simply finding stable work.

> Um… So, the fact I've been through so many jobs already is pretty crap to be honest. It's sort of two years of work that I've been in 5 jobs? I've only ever made it to six months, and I've gotten to six months in my current job so I'm about to break that record. There's no sign for me losing this one anytime soon, so that's good. It's been so many false starts, so many times where I almost worked in something that wasn't games despite the fact that I've trained for ages in games.

Michael, like others, reported struggling to find and keep work. He also points out how he almost wanted to give up.

In comparison to other tech jobs, game development did not pay as well, especially at entry-level pay. Julia vented a little about this in her interview:

> I wouldn't say I regret it, but there are definitely days where I could've gone straight computer science and probably had better job prospects, I could've gone into something that interested me and could've been more… valued, I guess?

Here Julia discussed how she could have had better prospects and her work would have been valued more. Others like Julia also felt similarly, yet they sought the prestige of working in games. Interviewees seemed to relish attaching "game development" to their identity. Those who were exceptionally passionate about that work would do whatever they could to find a way into the industry, regardless of the cost.

Handling the Industry Pressure

This is a challenging industry to get into, as I have discussed. The industry itself is a difficult one to stay in as well. Participants shared different ways that they coped with being able to stay this career. In many cases people kept pursuing work in the industry due to the prestige that it could bring them. Those who worked on projects that had a large community following were often in it for the fans of the games. The support of the fans helped encourage the developers to keep going. Their passion for working on games drove them to keep going, too. Although the game developers had many problems in common, as I will explain, some of their challenges and problems seemed tied to their employment settings—freelance, indie studios, or AAA studios.

Freelance Labor

Freelance labor was a foot in the door to studio labor. Game developers often worked freelance jobs with the goal of gaining the experience to work in a studio. Frequently, interviewees took small projects in order to build up their level of experience. This kind of work is the most precarious because it is part-time and often underpaid. In some cases, participants worked on projects for "experience," rather than pay.

Work in the freelance sector was very unreliable and unstable. Individuals often entered contracts with smaller companies or other developers who worked on games. Some contracts stipulated that workers would receive payment once the game turned a profit. In some cases, games might not make it off the ground. If the game was never released, the worker might go unpaid for that labor. The absence of a safety net—base pay—was a common problem with freelance work. Workers ended up losing time and money if they sank hours into a project that fell apart. Riley, Nick, Ellie, and Michael all recounted times that this happened to them.

To increase their chance of getting contracts, some freelancers entered relatively low-paying contracts. Freelancers offered to do work for as little as ten dollars an hour, or even for free. This documents how difficult it was to for developers to convince potential employers to trust their work when they lacked experience. This created a bit of a paradox as developers cannot gain experience without opportunities to gain experience. In this situation individuals are unlikely to meet the cost of living and pay their bills. They have a skill set in which they have invested hundreds of hours of studying and training, but they struggle for opportunities to use it.

As a result, many interviewees reported finding "day jobs." It's very rare that developers could drum up enough work on freelance projects alone. Having a day job allowed them to meet the of cost of living but reduced the time they could spend on their pet side projects. Taylor was a freelance worker who spent 2-20 hours a week on a challenging project. She found it interesting but expressed frustration with those who were waiting for the project to release. Fans and clients can both easily become impatient with developers, even if this isn't their full-time job. As a result, this puts even more external pressure on freelance workers.

Freelance work seemed like a sort of limbo to many. Interviewees treated it as a way station toward someday working in a studio setting, whether AAA or indie. The first few years of their career could be rather challenging. As a result, this can easily weed out people from pursuing their goal. Interviewees who continued to freelance seemed to have "game developer" as a central part of their identity. This helped push them through those years to reach the studio side of the industry. Nick was a freelancer who just finished college. He was working on a project for an indie company on the side while working full time in a non-gaming job. He had goals of going to work for a AAA studio, and this was his stance on the work he was doing.

> One of the most rewarding things was knowing who I am now, I'm a game developer. This is what I came to be, learned to be this is what I enjoy to do, I don't regret... if I was to work at… some mediocre store, that would not be my career. My career is that I'm a game developer. That's my career.

Nick's words emphasize the centrality of "game developer" to his identity. He is pursuing game development because it defined his career, not his other job. In many cases, freelancers put up with the challenges to reach this goal. Holding the title "game developer" fueled the freelancers' determination to keep going.

Studio Labor

As I explained earlier in this chapter, studio labor fell into two tiers: AAA and indie studios. Working in indie studios presented some issues that freelancers face. There is a lot of risk and very little reward. It is rather common that small studios will quickly go under if their game does not produce enough profit after the release. One of Michael's early jobs was at an indie studio that quickly went under after the release of a mobile game that wasn't successful. This problem reflects instability and financial competition that causes industry churning.

Surprisingly, despite the risk of instability, interviewees typically preferred indie studios over AAA studios. Those who worked for indie studios said they enjoyed more autonomy. They felt more valuable to the work process because there were fewer co-workers. They also reported feeling treated better as well. Indie studios seemed to have a friendlier working environment than the large companies did. Both Julia and Ellie mentioned this as they had worked in both environments.

Although more developers in my sample said they preferred indie studios, jobs in AAA studios had more prestige because of the firms' reputation for high quality content production.

The interviewees who sought fame in the industry hoped to get hired into a AAA studio. Those who held positions in a AAA studio considered fame or the association with it as a perk of the job. Working for a AAA studio allowed developers to brag about working on well-known projects. They enjoyed using technology and working in a more stable working environment if they could get a full-time position, although some of them were only on contract or temporary.

Interviewees discussed many negative experiences at AAA studios or had heard horror stories about them. In most interviews, participants brought up examples of a bad work culture. Developers who worked in AAA studios typically felt underpaid, overworked, and unappreciated. Julia mentioned this which is why she left her second position. David felt he deserved more pay than he was getting due to the amount of work he put in, and Kyle wished he made more for the hours he was working.

Dealing with Studio Workplace Culture

One of the hardest parts of working in the industry was the culture. This was especially true for the women and minorities that I interviewed. They were the participants most likely to discuss a poor working environment. Since they are in a white male-dominated industry, it makes sense that they were more likely to observe discriminatory behaviors than their privileged coworkers. In my interviews, women mentioned instances of sexism, and people of color mentioned issues of racism. White male workers in contrast may have talked about lack of women and minorities in the workplace but never mentioned feeling oppressed themselves.

David, a Hispanic male who I interviewed, discussed how he often felt pushed out in meetings. He also discussed how "toxic masculinity" made it hard for him to fit in early in his career. He felt he was often putting on a façade in order to be able to get along with the men he worked with. He also mentioned how he felt lucky that he was "white-passing," because he felt

that helped him get by easier. Julia felt alienated in her second job due to being in the middle of transitioning from male to female. Izzy faced sexual harassment in her first job by her direct supervisor in addition to enduring comments about her appearance from coworkers. She also reported how her male coworkers encouraged her to "lean in" during meetings, insisting that she wasn't showing enough initiative. Ellie also reported experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace by a male coworker.

Teamwork is also an important part of how people get work done in this industry. They must be able to get along with their colleagues. In the correct circumstances it could create a sense of comradery amongst the workers, such as working at an indie studio. This was harder to accomplish in large AAA settings, however, as the positions and work were highly competitive. In many cases minorities felt they didn't fit in the "company culture"; this made the work feel less rewarding, and they felt they did not belong. From what I could gather, gender and racial minorities felt excluded because white men not only held the most power in their work setting, but because they defined who and what fit the standard worker profile.

One of the issues interviewees discussed was leadership. White men were more likely to hold positions of leadership within their companies. This made it more challenging for people of color and women to enter and stay in the industry as many of them did not have a mentor with whom they could relate. Women and people of color in my study believed that indie studios provided better opportunities for them, since they weren't always so overbearing. Two of my participants mentioned wanting to start their own companies as a goal for the sake of giving opportunity to people who would otherwise be disenfranchised.

Some of the white male participants did discuss how this field was dominated by white men. They could see that minorities and women were at a disadvantage in video game

development. They saw it not only at the hiring phase, but also at the education and socialization phase. It can be hard to get women and other minorities into the field if they aren't encouraged towards a STEM career, but the hiring phase is still a problem for women especially. Julia, a trans woman, described female exclusion. She worked her first two jobs as male-passing and began transitioning in her second job in a large corporate atmosphere. She left that job due to feeling alienated and switched to doing freelance work. She tried applying to many different positions, and at this point she had changed her name on her resume to her feminine name. She mentioned she "felt her call backs for interviews were cut in half," simply by making this one adjustment. This is consistent with research that Herman and Windsor (2017) did involving trans people in the workplace. They found that trans women were less likely to find a job if they were transitioning and were more likely to experience an anti-trans bias from their employers and coworkers.

Most participants in my study saw the advantages of a more diverse group of people working together. I got responses about how "games would be more creative," if the individuals working on games that were more inclusive to racial and gender minorities. Geff was an instructor of game design at a university. As a game designer and teacher, he saw the benefits first-hand of the content produced in his classrooms. He mentioned that when only men work on a project, the game ideas are all centered around violent topics, but the topics of a game become less male-centered when women entered the circle.

Inclusion of gender and racial minorities is a systematic issue though. Women and people of color are not simply "kept out." White men in the industry have better networks that allow them to enter. While the women in my study may have struggled to find that first mentor, the white men in my study did it with ease. White male interviewees never discussed feeling

alienated or left out of the production cycle. They never recounted instances of unfair treatment, while the women and people of color did. This speaks volumes to the privileges they receive based on their gender and skin color. Ben mentioned in his interview how even in high school, his teacher steered him towards game design in a programming class he took. While he never ended up working in games, his instructor still pushed him towards the industry while most women in my study had to find their own way.

Creativity vs. Profits

Within the corporate atmosphere, workers seemed to be engaged in a constant battle. Because making video games is a business, workers who are in development struggled with exercising their wish to be creative and autonomous while having to report to those who were trying to make the game profitable. This is very similar to findings in Gideon Kunda's (2006) research in the tech industry. As with high-tech organizations, game developers felt evident tensions between themselves and management. Game developers take apparent pride in their craft. They are excited and passionate about the work they are doing and how it directly affects the final product. As a result, the developers and designers reported experiencing tension with the management who worked above them. Management always had final say about whether something was good enough or profitable enough to put into a game.

Game devs often felt a loss of autonomy as a result. From the perspective of my interviewees, producers and managers are not familiar enough with the process of making a game to be able to say what should go into a game and what should not. This came up in several interviews when game producers and managers often reworked the game to suit the company brand rather than the development team's vision. Izzy discusses her frustration with this:

> You get people in the executive roles who have never made a video game and they tend to do things by expected results, and what will get the biggest profit instead of letting a creative director have a creative vision and trusting the end product will be what people will want to buy and partake in…

As Izzy explains, she feels as if there isn't enough trust with the creative developer and the development team to make a game that sells. This causes developers to feel a loss of autonomy—creative control in this case—because management does not allow them the freedom that they once believed they would have. Autonomy is an important part of creating a positive working environment in that it provides employees with an intrinsic reward (Kalleberg 2011). Losing autonomy means that employees are less likely to feel invested in what they do, and more likely to become disenchanted with their work.

Because games are considered a "brand," development teams, managers, and producers require the game to flow from start to finish. The art design is then an important aspect of the brand such that artists must mirror a certain kind of look that the company promotes. To be truly autonomous while creating a video game, developers would have to be working with a small group of people or doing a project on their own. Indie studios allow more creativity because they are typically comprised of a smaller team of developers. Michael and Riley were both working with only one or two other people in indie studios and they both felt they had more control over their work as a result. If they didn't like something, they had the power to change it.

It's not just loss of autonomy that workers face either. In some cases, orders will come from the top of the ladder to make changes in the production style of the game. The orders to change it will come fast and quick, and they could come at a moment's notice. Interviewees called this "whiplash." As a result, departments would scrap several weeks of work and time in

order to meet demands from producers. This contributed to worker exploitation as everyone was to move at the drop of a hat.

Exploitation

Regardless of where individuals were in the industry, whether they worked as a freelancer, at an indie studio, or in a AAA studio, most participants reported experiencing some form of exploitation that their employers normalized. The biggest form of exploitation was known as "crunch time." Crunch time meant that clients or employers expected developers to work long hours of overtime on various projects. Contractors might demand more work or earlier deadlines. As Ellie described, crunch time was "like when you sign contracts and everything, that means what both sides are committed to. They tried changing my salary halfway through and wanted me to work a bit more than usual."

In this case the client put pressure on Ellie to put in more time and hours for less pay than what the original contract stated. In her case, she felt "lucky" to be able to terminate her contract with them. Interviewees said that this was a pretty common issue with anyone who did contract work. Contractors would demand more work and would try to push the limits of the contract. Freelancers who had a bad experience with contract work learned to be on the lookout for clients who might try to exploit them like this. Riley discussed how he had to learn to "read people" before taking work with them, and Gabe recommended doing a background check on any potential employer.

Crunch time in the studio looked a little bit different because it affected salaried workers. Programmers and artists complained about the most. The cycle of development meant that by the end of production, everything should be working and running smoothly, but a smooth path to development is rare. There are many reasons for "crunch," from what I could gather. Sometimes,

it would be a technological issue. In some cases, the programming engines or art software would have an update, and this could set back weeks of work. The most common reason for crunch time was that companies were to release the game by a specific deadline. As a result, the remaining work gets "crunched" in at the end. Companies had business models in place that were intended to help avoid this, but they proved inefficient. The two most common business models discussed by programmers were "Scrum," and "Agile." These were two methods that helped the producers keep tabs on where everyone was in workflow that needed to be completed.

With the overall inefficiency of Agile and Scrum, employees mentioned having to do excessive amounts of overtime, making their hours range anywhere from 50-80 hours per week during crunch periods. Working upwards to twice as much as the normal 40-hour work week made workers feel exploited. None of my interviews mentioned getting compensated for the overtime that they worked. In Michael's case, he was told that they would get more vacation time to make up for the period of crunch that was required, but the company went under before making good on the promise. He was offered a check, but he said he had yet to see it. The company apparently did not make good on its promise.

Companies also seemed to employ normalization tactics to keep the employees working long hours. In many cased they supplied catered dinners or meals as a perk for the weeks that crunch happened. They also would "heavily suggest" that employees should stay to do crunch hours, but interviewees felt that this was a type of strong-arming. Izzy talked about how her company did this to her when they were in a period of crunch.

> Well, my average work week is about 48/50 hours. When we crunch, well, my studio tries to say, 'This is not mandatory crunch but we're all trying to work towards this goal

right?' And that's a problem in it of itself… but when that happens it's usually like 80 hours….

Crunch time could not legally be mandatory, but employers seemed to encourage the developers to stay long periods of time to get work done. Given the super-competitive nature of the industry, the workers felt an external pressure to keep up with the rigorous expectations or find another career. Employers would also normalize crunch time for contingent workers by dangling the possibility of full-time jobs. Contract workers often felt compelled to work harder and stay longer, in hopes that they would be put up for review for a full-time position later. In some cases, interviewees told me they witnessed coworkers on contract training their full-time replacements.

Some employees said that it was a privilege to be able to work on the games themselves, and therefore they were willing to put up with it. Cameron said, "I knew what I was getting into." As a result, he felt prepared for the possibility of being overworked. Cameron was currently rather fortunate though, as his company would regularly hand out bonuses due to a very successful and profitable game. The "privilege" of working on video games should not excuse the exploitation that workers faced, yet they all had to cope with it best that they could or find a different line of work.

Potential for Organized Labor

Due to the current climate of the video game industry and all of the pressures that individuals face (getting in, getting full time, stability of work, and exploitation), some initial interviewees volunteered the topic of organizing labor. As a result, I added a question about interviewees' opinions on organized labor in the gaming sector. The responses were overwhelmingly positive as interviewees discussed how organizing could potentially improve

their work experience. Participants believed that organizing would help make the industry more humane, could give employees more power, and help them retain their autonomy.

> …look if you're in an industry and you join a union what you're saying is I'm passionate about what I do and I know my rights as a person, and I want the right to do what I love without feeling like I'm being stripped of my humanity in the process. (Alice)

Employers are expected to exploit their workers because overwork is normalized, but organizing proves difficult. Performing walk outs and strikes is a big step that participants reported being afraid to take. In many cases, corporations may promote scare tactics in order to keep their employees fearful of organizing. Corporations may threaten to take away their jobs or even blacklist them from the company if they choose to participate in organized protests. Francis recalled how some individuals were discouraged from protesting the way some Google employees were.

> I'm sure GameStudio isn't the only company that does it, but they went out of their way to try to condemn those people and discourage people at GameStudio from doing that. 'All those people are just slowing down the production or whatever and you're just slowing down the production, and you shouldn't do that stuff because you're risking your career' and you could discourage people from… making a stand like what those employees at Google did...

The risk of losing their job keeps workers from doing something about their current working environment. At Google, employees were fired because they tried to take a stand (Scheiber and Congor 2020). Francis fears that GameStudio would respond in a similar fashion. There is a lack of social safety net for developers who might engage in labor activism because they do not have job security. Many interviewees were afraid of losing their careers and jobs as

they needed the benefits and had to maintain their current cost of living. Organizing the industry, however, would make the working environment more humane and equitable, but it would take a lot of bravery to accomplish. Weststar and Legault analyzed the data of a 2014 survey administered by the International Game Developers Association and found that 66 percent of respondents were in favor of organized labor (Weststar and Legault 2017). As game development continues to grow, it is possible that this trend would continue.

Who gets in? Who gets to stay?

To join the industry, participants had to find ways to network with insiders and gatekeepers, gain access to technology, manage living expenses and handle student loan debt. This industry is in many cases a gamble, and it easily weeds developers out. It takes years of expensive education with little opportunity for some individuals to find work. The wrong combination of human social capital can prevent entry or push people out of the industry. The people who can get in are those who could afford the rigorous education, had the right connections, stand out in the hiring process, and are financially well-off and able to afford to live in higher cost cities. Networking was perhaps the largest discussed form of gate-keeping throughout my data set. Social networks function as other privileged resources do—they help better connected developers.

Those who get to stay in the gaming industry are people who typically land a full-time position with a studio, but they must be tech savvy and able to overcome the challenges of constant changes and new advancement of technology. They must be willing to handle the long grueling hours of work. Women and minorities must be able to withstand mistreatment and alienation in the field as white men make up most employees and leadership. If tech

organizations serve as a parallel example, the pace of making workplaces more inclusive and equitable is slow.

Concluding Thoughts

Through the stories of the workers, I have come to understand a lot about how the industry operates. The very challenges for getting in are pretty similar to the ones that allow participants to stay. Finding work and affording to live the lifestyle are two constant challenges as work is hardly ever stable. Working for a large corporate studio may provide stability in work but at the cost of long hours and exploitation. Freelance workers stay perpetually vulnerable. Organizing seems to be the best option for the workers, but the corporate climate stifles this possibility. In my next chapter I will discuss final thoughts on the analysis as well as what this means for future research to be done in this industry.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

My findings about workers' experiences in the video game industry highlight some problems that are critical to consider going forward. The first concern is the precariousness of the labor in this industry. Work was hard to come by in general, and stable work in particular. Interviewees talked about contending with many barriers in order to get a job, only to find instability in the work they found. As with many other industries in which workers once enjoyed stable positions with benefits, the neoliberal era of "flexible employment" pushes more workers into precarious or contingent labor (Kalleberg 2013). Although job precarity typically affects lower-paid unskilled workers the most (Sweet and Meiksins 2017), this same trend is creeping into skilled and professional labor. The video game industry demands skilled labor with specialized training or education, as seen with many of the participants who had years of expensive schooling and needed access to expensive technology in order to be successful.

Another problem revolves around indie and AAA studios' normative workplace culture. The racial and gender minority participants I interviewed experienced strained working environments as they felt it was difficult to "fit in." This field was already known to be male-dominated, and so my findings were consistent with other literature about work experiences of racial and gender minorities in tech. While white men in the industry did acknowledge the existence of barriers, they did not necessarily discuss why or how they were perpetuated. These issues are reflective of much of modern work as well. Women and minorities still have a hard time obtaining work in comparison to their male counterparts.

This industry also relies heavily on part-time and precarious workers. Full-time positions were slim. These findings are very consistent with the growth of precarious and contingent work (Kalleberg 2013). As a result, there is a socioeconomic disparity between those who were likely

to only be working on contract and those lucky enough to have full-time work. Unless those workers had another stable form of income like a day job, they were more at risk to have economic struggles than their full-time counterparts.

Finally, unionization seemed to be the answer in the back of many participants' minds in response to the perceived unfair treatment. The problem with organizing labor, though, was the fear of reprisals the participants anticipated if they took a stand. This is also consistent with many contemporary workplaces, because many modern companies now provide some of what unions would demand for their workers. They are afraid of the potential reprisals since their company is already meeting some of their demands such as health care benefits.

It's difficult to anticipate how this young and rapidly expanding industry will change and what it will grow into. Unionizing would be the best possible future for industry workers to enjoy more stable working conditions, but due to power imbalances, that remains challenging for them. Perhaps even more "bad jobs" (in the form of part-time and precarious positions) relative to "good jobs" will become available. If that were to happen, and if workers continued to remain under pressure and dissatisfied, then perhaps they might turn to new or existing unions to bargain with companies for better working conditions, pay, and benefits.

Describing what the future of the industry may look like affirms that more research is needed. My thesis participants were limited to those who worked in development. Further sociological research could examine the financial scope of the industry and business/marketing side. Conducting representative surveys of a wider range of workers and management would be fruitful. Likewise, participant observation in a subset of studios (small to large) would expand our knowledge about development team and management interactions.

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APPENDIX: Interview Guide

Thesis Interview Guide

Basic demographic questions:

1. What is your gender identity?
2. What is your race/ethnicity?
3. What is your current job title/position?

Interview Questions

1. How did you become a worker in the video game industry?
2. What were some of the challenges that you faced when coming into your career?
3. What things are the most rewarding so far? How so?
4. What things are the most frustrating so far? How so?
5. What are some of the ambitions or goals that you have for your future career? How will you achieve them?
6. How do you go about working on projects with your coworkers?
7. How do you go about reporting your work to your superiors?
8. Were there any projects you wanted to be a part of but didn't get to do? What happened?
9. Were there any projects you worked on but wish you hadn't? What happened?
10. If you could improve one thing about your working environment what would it be? How would you go about fixing it?
11. How is the pay for your position?
12. What is your workload generally like?

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