

Equality & Diversity

in the

Games Industry

*Discussions on equality and diversity
work and tools to think critically
about them!*

**Game
Habitat**

A big

Thank You...

...to all participants who made this project possible by giving their time and energy to discuss issues of equality and diversity in the games industry with me – this report would obviously not be possible without you. I'm very grateful for every single one of you sharing your perspectives and thoughts in this study.

Many thanks to Game Habitat who welcomed me into the warmth of the game-dev community where I've met lots of awesome people! From the Game Habitat team, I was fortunate enough to meet Peter, Eliana, Yeliz, Henning, Kristina, Lewis, Bobbi and Oscar during my internship. Thanks for everything!

Also, I wish to thank all the inhabitants for the interesting discussions, relaxing sauna hangouts, intense table tennis matches and generally for making Dev Hub a great place to be in during my stay. Thank you all!

Shortly about the author

My name is Oskar Larsson and during the fall 2019 I've done, as part of my Master's degree in gender-studies, an internship at Game Habitat in Malmö conducting this study of equality and diversity. The conclusions and analyses made in the report are my own.

The logo for Game Habitat, featuring the word "Game" in a bold, orange, sans-serif font above the word "Habitat" in a similar font. A small yellow diamond shape is positioned between the two words, centered under the 'i' in "Habitat".

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Glossary & clarifications

AAA – They types of games typically with a big budget and involving a big workforce.

E&D – Equality and Diversity. Used interchangeably with the Swedish 'jämställdhet och mångfald'. E&D is in the text used broadly in the same sense as similar concepts such as equal opportunity and affirmative action.

Dev – Game developer

Game Habitat – Game Habitat is the hub for game development in southern Sweden with the mission to create the best possible environment for everyone and everything related to game development.

Games industry – The Swedish games industry unless stated otherwise.

Indie – Independent game development

Participants – The people interviewed for this project, treated anonymously throughout the text.

20/80 model¹ – The roughly 20% female and 80% male gender distribution in the Swedish games industry workforce as of 2018

1 Dataspelebranschen (2019) Swedish Game Developer Index 2019. Gender statistics are based on the binary judicial Swedish gender.

Introduction

In front of you is the result of an interview study conducted at Game Habitat in Malmö, Sweden during the fall 2019. Ten game developers and industry professionals sat down with me to discuss matters of equality and diversity and kindly shared their views on how E&D in different ways can engage with issues, formulate visions of a future games industry and make changes to realize those visions.

After the around ten hours of interviews it became clear how complex these issues are – not only the issues themselves but also in the range of understandings and experiences that people from different positions bring into these matters. Therefore, a big portion of this report will be about making sense of these discussions by looking at recurring topics from the perspectives of **problems**¹, **goals** and **methods** of equality and diversity.

The **purpose** of this report is to act as a **resource** for those that currently work with or want to work with equality and diversity in the games industry. This is done, not by arguing for particular answers or fixed solutions, but rather by presenting some perspectives on situations where we might often struggle.

The perspectives flow directly from the participants that kindly shared their insights and experience from the games industry and gave their time for this study. The study makes a unique snapshot of the rich discussions on equality and diversity – while many perspectives and views on these issues surely are missing, this study makes no claim to represent all positions in these matters. Rather, the aim is to disentangle questions of equality and diversity in terms of problems, goals and methods, and to put those questions in perspective. Hopefully, it can serve as an overview of, and inspiration for, practical work with equality and diversity in the games industry.

In this chapter

- An overview of the project
- Purpose of the report
- Background
- Structure of the report

The following questions were fundamental in the design of the study.

- Are the participants subscribing to a generally **unified vision** of equality and diversity?
- How is the games industry **experienced** in terms of equality and diversity?
- What **needs** are there in terms of further work with equality and diversity?

¹ Problems in this sense, refers to the issues that E&D work are addressing rather than potential problems of E&D. The latter is discussed in chapter 3 on methods of E&D.

Background

This study exists because of **Game Habitat** wish to create the most inclusive and diverse game development community in the world and create the best environment for everything and everyone related to game development. Part of achieving this goal is of course to get a sense of where we are today.

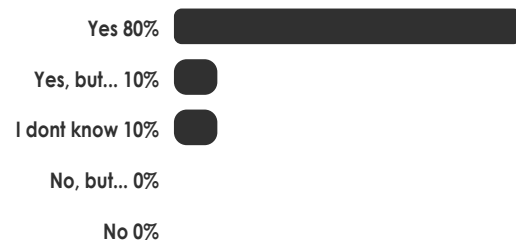
While I've met many industry professionals that are fulfilled by their work and life in the creative industry of games, there are definitely issues to engage with. A statistical sign is the **20/80 model** that will figure throughout this report – if we count those employed in the games industry, we will find that there is around 20 % female and 80% male working in the Swedish games industry as of 2018¹. While gender is only part of the story, these statistics tells of a quite demographically uniform industry. How this homogeneity of gender can be thought of in relation to E&D-work is discussed in length throughout later chapters.

More internationally, the International Game Developers Association found that, although US-centered, game developers over the world want a more diverse industry. In a survey from 2017 IDGA report that “diversity in the game industry, diversity in the workplace and diversity in game content were rated as important by 81-85% of respondents²”. In Sweden, sustainability seems widely discussed, including social dimensions and questions of a more diverse industry. One might say that social questions of gender distribution, diversity, games culture and working conditions has been, and continues to be important in the games industry.

Structure of the report

The first and main part of the report engages with the participants discussions about the *what, why* and *how* of equality and diversity – each in separate chapters. **The first chapter** ‘What’s the problem?’ looks into problem-statements for E&D to address in the context of workplace, industry level and games. **The second chapter** looks at goals of E&D – the reasons participants thought that E&D is important. **The third chapter** engages with questions of doing E&D and the concrete methods suggested and discussed by the participants. In **chapter four**, I comment on some of insights of the study and reoccurring themes from the interviews, focusing on meritocracy and structural issues as common tensions when discussing E&D. In **the last short chapter**, those interested can read a bit more about how the study was performed, the conditions and context of it and some limitations.

Would the games industry be positively affected by greater equality and diversity?³



Lastly, I should point out that this is not a study in the strictly scientific sense of the word, meaning that it does not focus on referencing academic work and rigorous methodological concerns. It should be read for what it is – a discussion of ten games industry people’s thoughts on diversity and equality.

¹ More statistics on gender and the Swedish games industry can be found in Game Developer Index: <https://dataspelsbranschen.se/game-developer-index>

² IGDA 2017 Developer Satisfaction Survey: <https://igda.org/resources-archive/developer-satisfaction-survey-summary-report-2017/>

³ The results are the ten participants opinions in this study.

Chapter 1

What's the problem?

Problems might sound like something we don't want. While this might generally be the case, defining a problem can be good when we have a situation that we want to change, so that we know what to even work with. We might understand problems as belonging in a certain area – the problem of equality and diversity might, for example, be understood as belonging in the area of recruitment. Placing a problem in a certain context have big consequences for how we might imagine solutions and goals – which is why I begin our journey of E&D in the formulation of problems. This chapter explores the participants formulation of problems for E&D to address within the contexts of the games industry, the workplace and the games.

Of course, focusing on formulating a problem in relation to E&D poses the question of **not seeing an E&D-problem at all**. Not seeing a problem makes the questions of methods and goals quite unnecessary, which is why we start here. What the problem-sceptic position fundamentally does is to ask the question of what E&D is engaging with without finding any clear answers. In relation to equality and diversity work this suggests something important – that we might not overall have such a clear and unified picture of what issues we are trying to address with efforts to diversify the industry. Of course, some people have thought long and hard about the issues, and we'll get to them in just a bit, but there seem to exist a lack of understanding around the

issues we're aiming to work with. Feeling left out of these matters and not having a somewhat clear picture of what it's even about is of course not very motivating or inviting. In that sense, problems are a crucial starting point.

In this chapter

- Why should we define E&D problems?
- E&D-issues in three areas of the games industry

Do we even need equality and diversity?

What are we trying to solve?

- Participant

First, let's consider three contexts of the games industry:

The games industry

The sum of companies and organizations within an industry context

The workplace

Individual companies

The games

The product of the companies

I will make use of these abstractions to give an overview of where participants suggested problems reside that might be approached through E&D. Most of the participants did not identify just one of these 'places' as the main point of interest, but rather jumped between levels of abstraction to formulate their view of what issues E&D-work is about and explain how they saw things fitting together.

The workplace

The individual company or workplace might be the place many of us think about in relation to issues of equality and diversity. The workplace is where a lot of work-life is played out, decisions are made and people meet to collaborate on work. The workplace is where most of the Swedish anti-discrimination laws are in effect to ensure that the labor-market does not discriminate on irrelevant grounds and that people can feel safe at their work.

For some of the participants, **organizational practices** were an important question of equality and diversity. Non-existent or unclear structures of how the work is to be organized is seen as a problem of equality as unclear responsibilities leaves room for habits, biases and preconceptions which often follow gendered patterns. For example, one female developer explained how she's often assigned more administration tasks than her male co-workers and occasionally being left without tasks at all. Having clear structures of how hiring, firing, promotion, work distribution, responsibilities and benefits work in an organization helps making sure that decisions are not made on irrelevant or unintentional biased grounds. Structures are also a way of supporting those that can experience multiple difficulties. Being new in an organization or having an expendable position such as intern can leave one quite vulnerable when speaking up about issues, as expressed by a participant.

Organizational practices here refer to matters such as distribution of work hours, distribution of types of work, contracts, vacation and how overtime is dealt with.

Would I get support if I took a stance there? Being an intern, I felt expendable.

-Participant

If you don't have a passionate project you don't really belong here. It's not accessible for single parents, like, how are you going to do a passions project or over hours if you're the only caretaker of your kid?

- Participant

Working conditions was framed as a question of E&D in how it might exclude some groups from participating on equal terms in work. Having caring responsibilities and being a single parent was examples of life-situations that can make it hard to perform work in the games industry. Another point that was brought up, more specific for the games industry, is passionate work. As an industry that attracts people not primarily with good pay but rather by passion – this risk competing with good working conditions, a participant argued. Therefore, in relation to efforts towards diversity, companies might want to think about the language of passion and how it stands in relation the way they organize work and what work conditions looks like.

Excluding effects in the workplace can also be manifested in the **physical environment**. While it's often property-owners responsibility to follow regulations and laws, participants told of toilets lacking bins and noisy workplaces affecting non-neurotypical groups more, making the physical environment an issue of inclusivity.

A big part of the discussions dealt with questions of **culture**. The word 'culture' is of course tricky as it seems to change meaning drastically depending on context. When writing about culture in workplaces here, I refer to social conventions that affects for example what's normal and common sense, how we're expected to behave and what happens when we fail those expectations, and what's considered important, funny, respectable or professional within a given context. Culture, in this sense, has a lot to do with what's considered a problem, making it an important question of equality and diversity work.

Many described working with culture as the main issue of equality and diversity, but it's a complex matter as most of the participants stressed the fact that there are a lot of different cultures at play in the games industry – sometimes being very warm, open and welcoming and other times more excluding, some more global or regional, and others more local in nature. In order not to get lost in these complex discussions, remember that we're currently looking at what formulations of E&D-problems the participants identified in relation to workplace culture.

Looking at workplace culture from the perspective of E&D raises questions of who might be excluded from the workplace – feeling left out, feeling 'weird' or out of place. Among the participants, it was generally accepted that there *are* cultures at workplaces that are significant for the work. However, if this should be a question of equality and diversity was a somewhat **contested matter**.

I think [the games industry] feels welcoming mainly because a lot of people felt like they never fitted in. We have a lot of nerds and people that, if you go to an industry event and say 'oh, I was bullied' most of the people will be like 'yea, I was bullied too'. So I think we have a lot of misfits, traditionally, but then if you don't conform to that, you're not super included.'

- Participant

Firstly, those that didn't identify workplace culture as an obvious E&D problem expressed uneasiness with the idea that it should be regulated how to act beyond just treating everyone with respect, regardless of one's gender or background. One participant perceived working with workplace culture as 'social policies' and said that these will make people nervous. Moreover, this was described as politics, which should be left out of the workplace. Another participant touched upon the same theme, arguing that speaking to much of issues of E&D in the workplace risks making people feel bad and being too tense about those matters.

Should one not be able to do one's job without being indoctrinated in politics at work? - Participant

If you talk about equality all the time, people will be on their guard all the time. - Participant

Then, how did those that considered workplace culture an important E&D issue think about this work? The problem, several participants contended, is that some individuals are seen as **belonging** within the games industry in virtue of conforming to the male norm, while others need to work hard to fit in. One participant describes experiences of being positioned as suspect because of her gender – as working in games and being a woman requires an explanation. Other times, it can be difficult to know if one is being treated differently because of exclusionary cultures or not. As one participant put it, it's not like people inform you when they are discriminating against you, and when they are not.. Being an outsider is the result of a culture that excludes difference rather than embracing it, which is something that E&D challenges. Therefore, having an interest and developing a collective awareness of excluding practices is a matter of E&D – but more on this in the methods chapter.

Several participants expressed that there are companies they would not consider working at because of their perception of that company, suggesting that the perceived workplace or company culture can be a quite important issue of E&D. Company culture, rather than just being an internal issue, seems to play an important external role in attracting or repelling underrepresented groups in the games industry.

Some people can at first be like 'oh she just got here because she's a woman' but when they see you're good, it's usually fine.

- Participant

...you have to prove yourself over and over again in the games industry, show that you belong, and that is so much work. And because you get labeled as a troublemaker so easily if you don't fit in, you are a lot more likely to overextend yourself.

- Participant

There are definitely companies where I'm like, oh, I'm not going to work there... When you get that feeling of, like, yea those types of people as a woman, you don't want to go there and work. That's very excluding I'd say.

- Participant

The games industry

In the interviews, conferences were brought up frequently – specifically the issue of **representation regarding conference speakers**. Conferences were by some understood as important as the events become the face of certain types of positions and work in the industry. Public and industry events affect who we imagine when we for example think about a programmer or 3D artist. This question of diversity in industry events was clearly important to many of the interviewees and some suggested therefore that this would be a good place to make use of quotas with reasonable margins. Framing representation at conferences as an E&D problem means saying that what happens here plays a part in keeping things as they are, or the other way around, presents an opportunity to break patterns. The general idea was that it matters who is *seen* in industry context.

If you're not seen, you might not be believed to exist, which is kind of scary.

- Participant

Other E&D-issues about the industry related to common **industry practices**. **Unpaid internships** supported by study grants and loans are commonplace overall in Sweden and the games industry is no exception. This structure affects people differently depending on citizenship, economic resources and language skills as that greatly affects access to education as an entry point of the games industry. **Networking** was also framed as a significant industry practice in that it matters who has access to these events. Here, one participant pointed out that game dev community events sometimes can be unclear in whether unestablished game developers are welcome or only legal companies which in terms of reaching underrepresented groups can be an issue of E&D. The way games education reach or fail to reach different groups was discussed in a similar manner.

Conferences are expensive. So I don't think it's very inclusive on a socioeconomical level.

- Participant

Party culture within the games industry was also described as a matter of E&D in the role of **alcohol** at such events. One participant mentioned how free beer and paid soft-drink at parties encourages drinking. Alcohol was connected to issues of E&D in issues as a matter of who gets to be and feel safe at events. A participant expressed how it is partly a gendered issue – particularly in that women can be quite vulnerable in relation to a culture of intense alcohol consumption.

Women can be quite vulnerable in the games industry, and that is impossible not to notice I think it's very clear. I see how both men and women, and non-binary – how everyone deals with this. It's so youthful and so much partying. It easily becomes uncomfortable for a lot of people, and I think that's a serious question.

- Participant

The games

Games were often discussed a matter of E&D. These discussions often centered games as an important way that the games industry interacts with the player population and communicate important ideas. Except for just *who* you can be in games, participants talked about what you can do and what stories are told from what perspectives as questions of diversity. Several participants talked about the unrealized potential of the interactive medium and the possibilities beyond the realm of entertainment. Many saw the development of the medium as intertwined with questions of games reaching a broader population and taking on a different role in society beyond entertainment, potentially including a wider demography developing the medium and its technology.

The main issues of E&D in relation to games was about the role they might play in attracting groups to the industry. A link was made between the diversity in games and diversity in workforce. Stereotypical genres were taken as an example of how patterns might reproduce: students in game education studies established genres in order to learn skills needed in the industry, which affects what games they produce once they enter the industry and the cycle starts over. While this of course is not the whole story of games and genres, it might shine a light on how we can think of genres and game content in relation to education and questions of diversity.

In conclusion, problems for E&D to address are the things we do or think involved in reproducing the current state of things. Formulating E&D-problems might therefore be described as the activity of analyzing possibilities for changing structural patterns towards more diverse outcomes. Having focused on potential E&D-problems in the area of games, workplaces and industry, we have looked at multiple expressions of social patterns and inequalities. The 'list' is however not final in any sense, but rather one particular set of understandings based on the participants views on issues of E&D. Rather than settling with one singular explanation for why social patterns and homogeneity are so persistent within the industry, some participants understood the issues as plural, mutually reinforcing and therefor structural.

What we see and experience affect us, and if some groups and ideas underrepresented – it's kind of like they're not existing. This is sort of, like silencing a voice.

- Participant

The misogyny needs to disappear, and we need to establish a culture that also attracts other than just white males. This is made through games and representation.

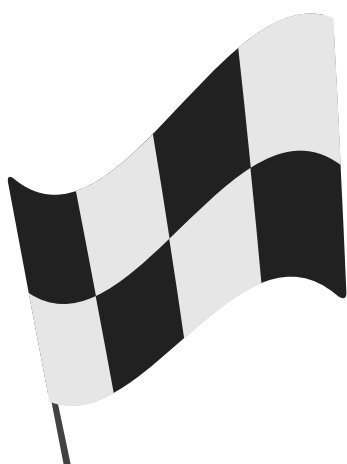
- Participant

Chapter 2

Goals

of equality and diversity

If the last section was about the *what* of equality and diversity, this chapter is about the **why**.



In this chapter

- Reasons for working towards a more diverse and equal games industry
- Two main types of arguments: effectiveness and wellbeing

If we have decided upon something as a problem, we might have an idea of the goal – the **reason** we are motivated to work for a change. Say, for example, we agree that it often is difficult to combine childcaring responsibility and work in the games industry and consider that an E&D-problem. Why would we want to change that condition? Oftentimes we might settle with a feeling of it being the right thing to do. However, this section dives into concrete formulations of goals. We might for example call upon democratic principles to argue that it makes sense to make game development accessible for more people if that lies within our power to do. It might also be argued that it's a good idea for an industry having trouble to satisfy its needs for experienced people to make sure they don't disappear as soon as they become parents – thereby arguing for a better working industry as well.

Most goals of E&D formulated by the participants can either be understood as relating to improving the **industry's function** or improving the **conditions of people** in it. Most often, arguments in respective category did not imply mutual exclusivity, meaning that what's good for people might often be good for the industry in economical and functional terms. However, exceptions were discussed in for example how E&D risks being hijacked for branding and PR purposes rather than having actual people's conditions in mind, which was looked upon with skepticism by many participants. Keeping in mind that the separation between 'good for industry in economic terms' and 'good for people in social terms' is an abstraction for clarity rather than a precise division made by all the participants – let's look at some of the goals of E&D that came up in the interviews.

For a better functioning games industry

Most participants had thought about how a diverse industry makes for a more effective and productive industry. The ideas about E&D in this category can be subdivided further into issues of human resources, better quality games for a broader market, more effective production processes and aiding the transformation of the interactive medium itself in its development.

Goals regarding **human resources** centered around reaching a **sustainable inflow of game devs** for the industry – effectively attracting more talent and letting people develop experience and expertise within their fields. The idea is that by attracting a more diverse workforce, there will be more people involved in these processes which generally will strengthen the industry. Another related goal was to reach a more meritocratic and skill-based recruitment by means of becoming more aware of inherent biases in recruitment processes.

Several participants argued that in aiming to reach a stable and competent workforce, we must not focus too much on **'getting people in'** on the expense of making sure that the people already working does not leave because of discontent with industry conditions. Here, a participant also mentioned turnover costs when people leave as an incentive for companies to keep the people they hire.

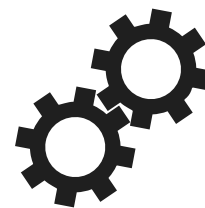
Another set of arguments was about reaching untapped **markets** by developing games that appeal to more consumers in a **qualitative way**. This means avoiding stereotypical notions of human experience when developing with a target audience in mind. A participant talked about diversity of characters in games as a feature that is requested by many players and several participants talked about the roles of in-game avatars in mirroring peoples own lives and experiences to make the link between consumer desires and diversity in games.

We do think about it a lot when we make characters, now that I think about it. Partly just because it sells better [laughter]. No, that's the very harsh reality of it. It's not so popular with the stereotypical guy to play, people want to be able to choose difference.

- Participant

The actual process of game development was also described as something that might be positively affected by greater diversity. While this point wasn't developed extensively, the general idea was that by drawing from a broader and more diverse base of knowledge, general problem solving becomes more **effective** in well-structured teamwork.

Lastly, in arguments relating to the general improvement of the games industry, participants talked about the development of the interactive medium itself. It was argued that there still is great potential in games as a medium with this potential more likely being realized as more and different people participate in the processes of creating games. More diverse projects increase chances for innovation and creative solutions.



Why do you want to work with games? Because you've played games! If you can't find a game you want to play as a person of a different color or gender, then you will never be introduced to it, or never think it's cool.

- Participant

Many companies want to be perceived as working with equality and diversity – and oftentimes they do! But they focus on getting people into the industry rather than making them stay.

- Participant



For the wellbeing of people in game development

Structural change such as achieving a more diverse industry has far reaching and complex outcomes, making it a quite difficult matter to conclude in a list. What follows is however some of the ideas of how people might enjoy better conditions in a more equal and diverse games industry, based on the participants views. Looking closely at how E&D is argued for as a way of making the games industry a better place to be in, the participants answers can be explored in terms of **general positive effects** and **positive changes for minorities**.

In relation to **general positive effects** of E&D, a common goal was that of braking patterns of hierarchies and empowering people. Some participants, both men and women, referred to the more general system of patriarchy to frame processes that affects all people in negative ways, and creates possibilities only for a few. Rather than ‘taking power’ from anyone or group and give it to some other, a participant argued, the idea is to be mindful and aware in what ways power is distributed so that it is rooted in **legitimate structures** rather than **habit or bias**. Being aware of how biases and norms broadly affect organizational structures and work will empower everyone in virtue of all being able to participate on more equal terms. In relation to this idea, a participant talked about the 20/80 gender distribution as ‘not a women’s problem’, but rather a condition that affects everyone in the industry. The goal of E&D in this sense is to **make visible** the culture that exists when we think there is no specific culture. This allows for challenging norms that might be harmful, such as drinking culture, so that decisions of alcohol might be made on grounds that are less from habit or pressure. This idea was also touched upon by other another participant arguing that the problem of workplace cultures lies not primarily in its content, but rather in whether it’s unconsciously reproduced or not.

Other general goals of E&D were that of diverse environments being good for all in the sense that difference tend to stimulate people in growing and develop socially. The idea is that we tend to learn a lot from different experiences which was described as particularly valuable in a creative industry such as games.

Some participants also talked about what the goals of equality and diversity is not. One participant for example said that the goal of E&D not should be misunderstood as a project that aims to exchange one hierarchical system for another as it rather is about questioning illegitimate hierarchies in the first place.

X – It's not 'we want to be the dominant...', we're not going for matriarchy, right? We just want to get rid of patriarchy [laughter].

O – Ok, so let's change the system instead of switching people around?

X – Yea, exactly. We want to empower everyone, and I think that's what need to happen in the games industry.

The immediate goals relating to the **conditions of minorities** was often expressed in relation to addressing the negative effects associated with being of minority status within a group. A common theme was that of feeling singled out, different, and as quite not belonging with the majority group. Many of the women developer told of their gender being a factor that made them **different** in game environments – in gamer culture, in games education and in game development. Even efforts to address these issues can make people feel further different or ‘other’ by being in the spotlight of diversity work, making methods an important topic of E&D (more about this in the methods section).

In addressing the question of how minorities feel in a homogenous environment, some participants did so in terms of things being *weird* – particularly their professional and personal interest in games, and that the goal of E&D is to make it not so. In that sense, the goal is to **challenge norms** that regulate who is being normal and who is overstepping imagined boundaries by just doing the job they are paid to do. The overarching goal in relation to minorities can broadly be defined to arrive at an inclusive environment that allows for difference. Being included happens in different ways, be it that the work is organized in a way that’s inclusive to different people, that the physical environment does not exclude, or that there is an understanding that some perspectives tend to be amplified and considered ‘common sense’ where others are silenced and made particular – different. Being **listened to** is in this sense a goal of E&D.

Equality means that it's not weird when people are different.

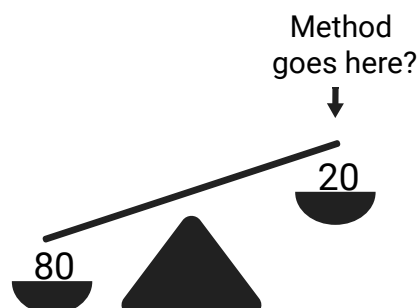
-Participant

Chapter 3

Doing equality and diversity:

Methods

Having looked at equality and diversity work as issues to address with the goal of achieving desired outcomes – what fundamentally remains to discuss are **ways of doing equality and diversity work**. Rather than just ideas of *how* to work, the question seems to provoke many ideas of *how not* to work. The discussions on methods might be where false polarizations, exaggerations and misunderstandings of E&D stand out most, making it quite an important topic to address. This chapter also addresses the question of *who* does E&D work.



In this chapter

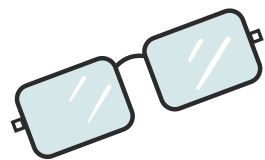
- Two tendencies of thinking about E&D-methods
- Concrete methods discussed
- Who is doing E&D work?
- Thoughts on how not to work

Not having a clear picture of E&D-problem and discussing methods sometimes lead to a **philosophical turn** in the interview – for example testing the validity of quotas as a sound method for achieving justice. While these discussions are valuable and interesting in themselves, they tended to consider quotas or manuals of behavior as main methods of E&D work. Those that focused more on concrete E&D-problems, on the other hand, often elaborated on ideas of what to do to remedy the issues they identified, which resulted in a more diverse set of ideas of how to do E&D work. Participants sometimes also pointed out ways that well-meaning E&D work can have unintentional or contrary effects from the intended goal which is discussed at the end of this chapter.

Two distinct ways that methods of E&D were approached were whether participants started thinking about methods directly, or if they considered E&D as a perspective that in turn lead to concrete methods. For example, the first tendency would ask questions of methods, assessing their legitimacy and adequacy, such as: how are these methods measured? What are the goals of the methods? Is 50/50 reasonable? How do we draw lines between groups that are subject to a method? Is ‘treating everyone equal’ consistent with ‘working with groups’? Should we abandon meritocracy? This might be thought of as a **mechanical approach** to E&D-methods – focusing on cause and effect, principles of E&D work and viewing E&D mainly as forcing statistical change.

The most important part is that the people working are very skilled. There are probably more guys in Sweden that have experience and skills of working with games than girls. You shouldn't take people in just because of their culture or gender

- Participant



The other tendency started with thinking about how things are now – underscoring that the industry is structured according to **certain conditions, norm and practices** today, rather than being in a neutral state. Instead of seeing methods of E&D as *adding* something to this neutral situation, it is very much about asking questions about the methods used today in everyday practice that reproduce the current state of things. In this sense, E&D becomes much more of a **perspective** before it becomes *a set of actions*. Of course, actions hopefully flow from the perspectives, including for example quotas as we shall see. By training ourselves to see things like norms, we can act with greater intentionality and less by habit, increasing our chances to break repeating social patterns. This perspective located methods by asking things like – what are we doing today? Do we want to continue doing it? Why are things the way they are today? Who is being excluded? What are the alternatives? This might be thought of as a **structural perspective** on E&D-methods.

Just as with previous abstractions, the participants views don't fit perfectly into just one or the other category and the purpose is not to categorize anyone's views neatly into boxes. Rather, the two perspectives show different tendencies of approaching methods of E&D. The participants often drew from different aspects of these at different times and sometimes the perspectives intersected.

Working with E&D – how and where?

The main discussions about E&D in the workplace was about working conditions, organizational practices and dominant cultures. A general method for an inclusive organization that was discussed was in making clear how the organization work so that everyone can participate on equal terms. This was approached through the subject of working with organizational structures in order to effectively structure the work in ways that fits a diverse workforce. **Inclusive organizational structures** can mean clarity about promotions, policies relating to childcare, vacation and other HR-structures that relates to different people's needs as well as the possibility of people to have a say in relation to these policies and structures.

In relation to working conditions and organizational practices, one participant talked about the different conditions of indie and AAA game development. As smaller companies might lack resources for HR, making it hard to voice concerns and express needs, sharing **external HR-support** was suggested as a concrete method to address potential difficulties of smaller companies with HR. Working with **unions** was also brought up as a way of systematically working with organizational practices and work conditions, as well as getting access to expertise and helpful networks.

[...] from a legal perspective Sweden is very equal, just, nobody knows about it, or doesn't know how that looks in practice. And neither do I – but that's where unions come in. That's their job.

- Participant

Considering the structure of the workplace as an issue of E&D also means working not just to ‘get people in’, but also making **work in the games industry sustainable and attractive for more people**, effectively creating the conditions for people to want to stay in the games industry. This was for some participants seen as very important ways of working with E&D.

Awareness about norms was also part of this general project as the idea of who is a ‘normal’ in the games industry relates to how organizational structures look and what counts as common sense in everyday work. It was also argued that while discussions are important, the work must not end there but should result in a concrete **plan of action** to be effective.

In relation to industry events, **representation** was a common topic. Some participants talked about how **valuing** diversity in public events motivates us to put time and effort into finding diverse speakers and realizing that the path of least resistance probably leads to a homogenous lineup. **Quotas** was here suggested as a quantitative method that effectively can make sure diversity is made visible at industry events. A participant pointed out that it matters how this is done, as it is not uncomplicated to value diversity without the risk of making the proposed speaker feel their competence undervalued.

The overarching method from these discussions can be understood as **valuing diversity**, where quotas of speakers can be one way to realize that value. Another might be to consider the **content** of industry events – is diversity also a topic for the big stages, or is it discussed mostly at women in games lunches, as elaborated by a participant. In a similar way – valuing diversity at social events such as parties might motivate us to think about the role of alcohol as contributing or obstructing the development of a more diverse environment.

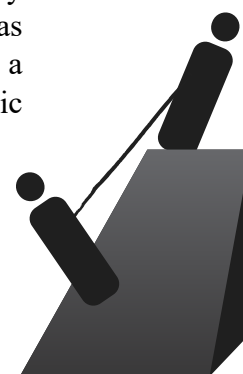
Another discussed method of doing E&D was that of **mentorships** in the dev community. The idea is to connect and empower those in similar situations by sharing resources and supporting each other. One participant discussed that mentorships and other supporting projects *are happening*, but that they’re mostly arranged and run on grassroot basis rather than as a feature of the organizations themselves, who would benefit from running those activities continuously if they want a more diverse organization. **Paths into the industry** was also brought up as an issue of diversity where a method could be to question unpaid internships as a widespread practice as these are inaccessible to many along the lines of economic resources and nationality.

More companies need to take it more seriously – not just think about it but also make a plan of action

- Participant

“You might need to put some more time and effort into finding more diverse speakers”

- Participant



We don't need to force upon people 'to be norm-critical' – we should just start doing it. That is the important thing, we need to make it an everyday practice. It should be the norm to be wary and think critical of norms.

-Participant

I want people to take a stand forward publicly and not behind closed doors.

-Participant

A **norm-critical perspective** in game development was discussed as a way of not reproducing the notion of games as a gendered media. Some participants talked about representation in games as something that should be made consciously rather than by habit. The idea of **fighting structures with structures** is visible here in the suggestion to make reflective and critical thinking 'the default' in for example games education.

On an industry-wide level it might be hard to identify methods of working with E&D. However, from the discussions flowed the idea that the games industry actually is quite an important part of society – **how this industry collectively acts, matters**. Here, some argued that what needs to be done is to broadly take a stance – acknowledging that the games industry wants to become more diverse by addressing a set of issues. Instead of putting all strength into showing how things are getting better, it is important to spot the issues and do the work as well and being public about it in the process.

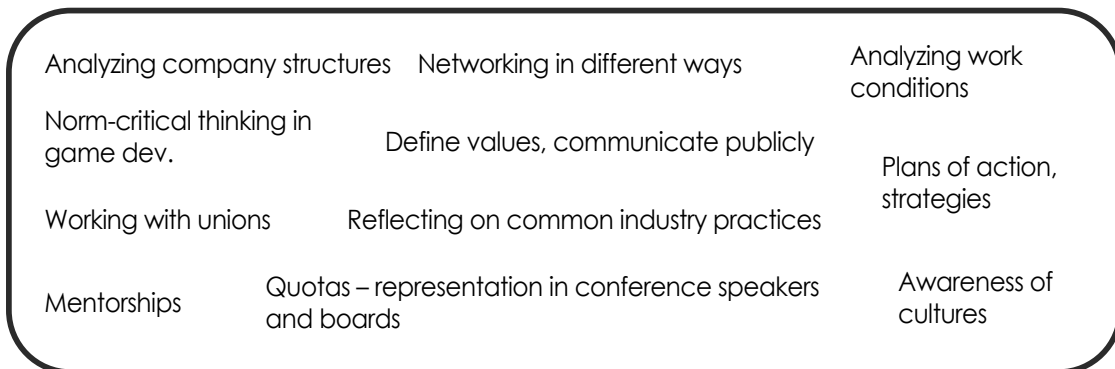
From the ten hours of discussion, different concrete ways of working with E&D are voiced. However, it becomes clear that the work to identify suitable methods ultimately must come from the context and the people involved. There don't seem to be any package solution, but rather it starts with motivation and analyzing where the work might be well invested – something that requires dedication, knowledge and time. In that sense, the **main method** of E&D might be understood as that of **valuing equality and diversity as a social, and consequently economic good**. From there on, actions can be made in the direction of diversity in ways that make sense within the context.

As one participant argued, it is the **cause of the symptom** that must be addressed firsthand rather than the symptoms. As the cause is structural, E&D can be done in **different ways** to challenge patterns and develop other, more inclusive ones. Listing ways of working with E&D might therefor help in inspiring ideas about how one can go about addressing the cause of for example 20/80, homogeneity and dominant cultures – but ultimately the situation needs to be thought of, discussed and evaluated within a context.

I wish the resources would be put on solving the problem rather than bandages, because that's how it feels.

-Participant

Valuing equality and diversity – examples



Who does the work?

In discussing *who* should do E&D-work, many pointed to where formal power resides – at **CEOs, boards** and the **top of organizational hierarchy** as places where the responsibility and the real possibility lies to achieve substantial change. Here, participants mentioned education for leadership as a way of prioritizing E&D within an organization. Other participants did not think that companies themselves usually are adequately equipped to work with questions of E&D. This position was more sceptic of individual companies to actually prioritize and put resources into E&D-work and instead suggested **educators** and **NGOs** as actors that can do much important work. One participant pointed out that there is no Swedish organization tasked with monitoring and systematically working actively with E&D in the industry on national level. Such an organization would be able to work in a way that individual companies might not – broadly in scale and long-term.

Individual employees were also discussed in relation to performing diversity work. Here, the danger of E&D becoming an **extra workload** for minorities was pointed out. The concern with minorities being burned out on this work was taken as a reason to focus on organizational structures so that good practices are solidified in the workplace rather than embodied by those for whom these questions matter the most. Benevolent interest in minorities positions and experiences within the games industry might also add up to a substantial amount of work for minorities in educating their surroundings. Participants even told of having pre-made texts and links to refer to as a strategy to cope with questions about being in minority in the games industry.

A lot of minorities already gets so much extra emotional labor, they need to deal with everyday harassment, they have to deal with not fitting in, they have to work harder to overcome their circumstances, and then they also have to educate their peers. And that's all before changing the games industry [...] We cannot put more work on people that are already disadvantaged.

- Participant

Participants also considered **social position** as important in relation to who does E&D work. One participant thought that those in a position of structural social power – white men, are in a special position to put questions of E&D on the agenda and showing that this work is about everyone. Other suggestions outside of company or organizations was **grassroot initiatives** such as game jams, which was seen as a creative, alternative ways of networking and meeting people outside of more regular patterns in the industry.

Taken together, different people in different organizational locations and social positions are seen as having a part to play in working towards a more inclusive games industry. In seeing E&D as a broad project that's intended to improve the conditions of all, it becomes clear that everyone's included and needed somewhere in this work.

I have a list [of resources] because I have been asked so often how it is to be a woman in the industry...

- Participant

It's not always women are heard when bringing a message about gender. Men need to talk more with other men about these issues.

- Participant

Thoughts on how not to work

Lastly, we'll take a look at how the participants thought about E&D methods that can have consequences contradictory to the goal. One tension that was brought up several times was that of **isolating or pointing out minorities further in E&D-work**. In working hard to feel accepted in the games industry because of for example gender, it can feel damaging being reminded of one's difference – something that might happen when we discuss industry conditions and experiences of minorities. This was sometimes described as the mistake of 'targeting a specific audience'. Isolating out 'the diverse' too much was also discussed in relation to separatist events. A participant asked: where are you not, when you are at a women in games lunch? This brings attention to the risk of discussions about equality and diversity taking place elsewhere than on the big stages and making separations where we might really want the majority culture to engage with inclusive practices. Participants however often emphasized the value of separatism in creating a space of reflection, sanity checking and networking for minorities rather than totally discrediting separatism altogether.

Some participants also expressed the need for good E&D-work to have a **broad and open understanding** of what diversity of people might mean and that fixed, hierarchical ideas of what difference matters most can be unhelpful. This relates to the idea that it's important to have a say in E&D-work – that it is not a fixed package, but rather a discussion where expertise lies both in practical equality-work and in knowing the context it is to take place in.

Some participants talked about the relationship between doing E&D and communicating that E&D is being done. The tension lies between being a 'good company' without problems or engaging with problems to improve conditions. The issue, as it were, is that companies in fact can 'be good' and still have problems – maybe it precisely that they acknowledge problems that makes them a 'good' company, some participants suggested. The risk outlined here is to fall in the trap of **prioritizing appearances** over concrete work as well as having a particular understanding of what good appearances are. One participant took the gender division of labor as an example of how we focus exclusively on the percentage of women in the games industry, but not on what they do within it. Are they for example programmers or in administration? This is perceived as suspect as it might look like the goal is for numbers to look good rather than working towards changing things, some argued. Many expressed the belief that what actually 'looks good' outwards is not to communicate that there are no problems, but rather to show that issues are taken seriously and that there's willingness to work with the problems. This is related to the idea that E&D should go beyond just meetings and discussions and involve concrete plans.

Whenever there's talk about female representation or being targeted for something because you're female then. *Sinking a bit down*. Because that's the only time when you're like 'oh, you're different – you are the ones were talking about...

- Participant

In human relations, there are aspects that might be more important than just gender.

- Participant

Chapter 4

Discussion and conclusion

This chapter differs from the previous in that I allow **my own analyses and thoughts** to take more space by commenting broadly on some of insights of the study and reoccurring themes from the interviews. This chapter also look at some common tensions underlying many of the discussions, focusing on meritocracy and structural thinking, and end with some concluding remarks.

In this chapter

- Broader discussion on the study
- Tensions: meritocracy and structural phenomena
- The birdcage analogy
- Concluding remarks

From the ten interviews I see a **great interest in questions of equality and diversity** – there is much competence and critical thoughts about these matters as well as humble insights about the limits of one's own views and the need for collaboration. There's a general understanding that the games industry, still being quite young, is subject to change and is very much in a state of transformation. Some participants considered an aging demography of game developers the promise of a maturing industry coming to terms with the importance of work-life balance and being reflective about social dimensions of game development. Many talked about how diversity has become a topic that is brought up more and more in comparison to just a few years back. In that sense the game dev community has a lot going for it when it comes to equality and diversity work.

There are also **challenges** that comes with working in a context with such strong gender division – both in the industry overall, 20% female 80% male, but also in terms of the gendered division of work of which there are less statistical accounts. Furthermore, having difficulties keeping people, and specifically seniors, in the industry might bring into question the idea of a self-maturing industry. These conditions mean that it takes time, resources and dedication to work effectively towards a more diverse games industry.

An insight gained from the interviews is that **problems play a key part in E&D work**. If there's no perceived problem, there can be no concrete methods and goals of E&D. The notion of an unsustainable industry might be one way of articulating such an overarching problem were E&D can be formulated as a perspective that can engage with company practices and industry structures to make working in games more sustainable, attractive and inclusive for a wider population. Discussing goals of E&D showed how the participants imagined an inclusive and diverse industry where these goals were formulated as improving the conditions of minorities and people in general, as well as having a more stable and effective industry overall.

The critique of a too narrow understanding of ‘difference’ made the participants is important and should not be understated. Many rejected the idea that E&D only is about men, women and cultural or ethnic background. People differ in social, biological and psychological ways and working with diversity requires a broad and open understanding of how exclusions might work differently in different contexts. Taken as a whole, the discussions and various interpretations of E&D supports the idea that progressing in E&D-work means working for more clarity about what it really can be about. This means discussing concrete actions, perspectives and ideas, but also discussing the purpose of a more diverse environment in games.

There is a lot of focus on equality and gender, and not so much on diversity. Most things are for women and non-binary folks.

- Participant

Tensions

Over the course of the interviews, I noticed some underlying and reoccurring tensions. One such central tension is how **meritocracy** often is pitted against diversity as if the two were incompatible. The idea might go something like:

If we are to only value skill, we must not treat anyone differently regardless of social characteristics. E&D means treating people differently, so we can’t have both.

While this might be part of a bigger discussions unfit for this short report – the point I want to make here is the tendency for meritocracy being used to shut down or block ideas of promoting diverse outcomes without engaging with the ideas to their logic conclusions. I see a few issues with the use of meritocracy in this context. Simply stating that one must ‘choose by skill’ doesn’t mean that we can’t make efforts to diversify the demography of ‘the skilled’. Does for example mentorships, encouraging networks of diverse people to empower each other, analyzing work conditions or marketing games education to new groups necessarily violate the principle of meritocracy?

A start in this discussion might therefor be to distinguish between situation where efforts for E&D and meritocracy have a meaningful relationship, and where they don’t. The conflict rather seems to exist as long as we don’t talk about concrete examples where the *actual merits are defined*. What skills mean in the context of game development would be an interesting discussion, probably including a range of merits – technical, social, creative and collaborative in nature.

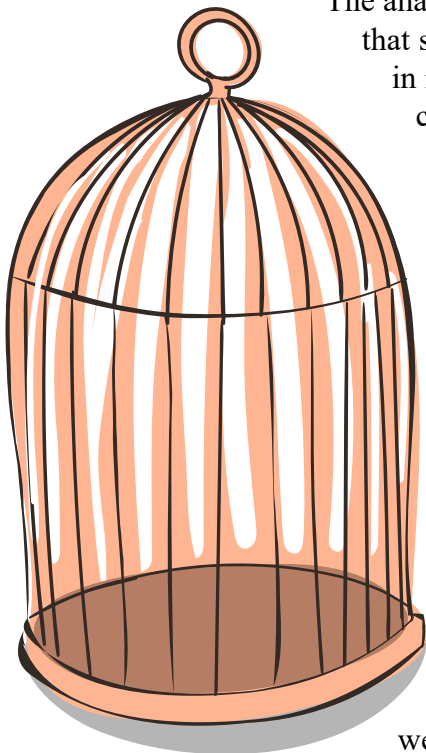
Furthermore, this line of thinking risks establishing a mutual exclusivity between ‘being skilled’ and ‘being diverse’ which might further reinforce the current norms and marginalize those outside the norm. Meritocracy in itself is not really what I’m discussing here, but rather how it is imagined in relation to E&D. In the case of recruitment, meritocracy might rather be seen as on the ‘same side’ of E&D as anti-discrimination law basically dictate that applicants are to be chosen on legitimate grounds such as experiences, skills and competence. In short – how meritocracy it is placed in the context of E&D should be thought of carefully as their relationship might not really be as contrary as it appears, while other times there might be very well be a matter of choosing between different values.

When I started looking for a job, I was afraid to be hired in order to make the numbers look better. I wanted to be chosen for my skill, not my gender.

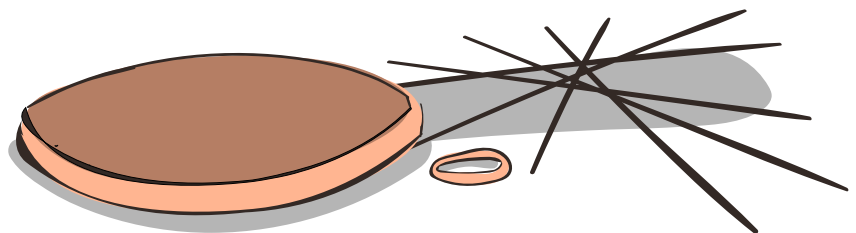
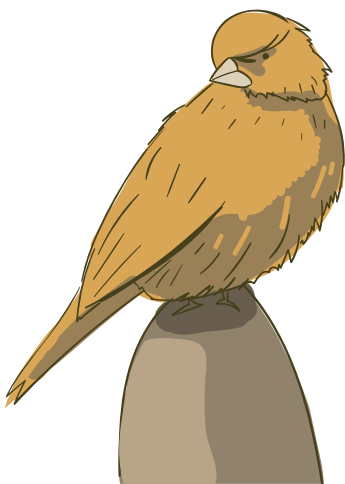
- Participant

Another common tension I wish to discuss is that of framing or understanding problems – specifically **structural problems**. With the risk of simplifying some hundred years of sociology, the difficulty of describing people’s behaviors in group is that it’s an incredible complex system where theorists argue over what elements even exists and matters most in describing human activity – individual behavior or societal structures, material conditions or ideological movements and how these might relate and influence each other. Trying not to get lost in these discussions, I suggest an **analogy** to describe a tension of framing E&D-problems in the interviews rooted in these fundamental questions.

The analogy of a **birdcage**¹ can be helpful in illustrating how the constrain that social structures have upon us are structural rather than individual in nature: it’s not any individual wire of the birdcage that creates the constraint, but rather the joint relationship of the wires that traps the bird. This analogy illustrates the need to understand ‘the problem’ as a systematic one – rather than just individual obstacles stopping people from participating on equal terms, it is the relation of obstacles structured in certain ways that result in social constraints for some people and not others. In this perspective, societal constraint is better described as the probability for certain outcomes.



When discussing questions of equality, diversity and discrimination, it is common to end up talking about the ‘individual wires’ – not because we lack competence, but rather because of our collective thinking and theories being skewed towards things more easily observed. It takes certain perspectives to see how many issues together are part of and cumulatively constitutes a social system. This can explain how we might not considered us subject to discrimination and yet tell stories about how we’ve concealed parts of our names when applying for jobs, having to justify our being in the industry trough skills because of our gender, or not applying for jobs because of the perceived bro-culture of that place. Taken together, these are precisely the issues that are related to the games industry reproducing itself as homogenous place, but it might not still register as direct discrimination. This is no critique of the individual, but rather a critique of how we generally tend to think about injustices happening in clear, isolated events rather than in the form of structural or systemic ways, and for good reason



¹ The birdcage analogy is borrowed from Iris Marion Youngs book: Responsibility for Justice (2011), whom in turn reference Marilyn Frye.

– social structures are not observable in themselves, only by their outcomes. The individual events seem better at catching out attention than the background conditions that make them possible in the first place, which is why it is hard work. This perspective means accepting that working for a long-term effect takes time and effort, but it might make us better prepared for working more effectively for change.

Concluding remarks

Working with E&D can be thought of as doing the work that allows us to see and become aware of practices that are part of structures so that we can take measures to break repeating patterns. What these measures and methods should be is not a fixed concept, but rather relates to the context in which the work is to be done. However, a general purpose of equality and diversity is to challenge norms solidified in practice that have excluding effects for those ‘differing’ regarding gender, ‘race’/ethnicity, sexuality, economic background, nationality, disability, religion, age, and other difference that matters in a given context so that a more diverse and inclusive environment is more likely to develop. The games industry faces many challenges but also opportunities to realize a more diverse, equal and sustainable future.

Chapter 5

The study

When, where and how?

This short, **technical chapter** give an overview of the design and process of the study and some limitations of it.

The study was designed and carried out at Game Habitats community and co-working space Dev Hub in Malmö, Sweden during the fall 2019 over the course of 16 weeks. Members of Game Habitat was invited to participate by signing up in a google form questionnaire spread through online communities on Discord and Facebook. Eleven people responded to the questionnaire of which ten interviews were scheduled and performed. The eleventh person opted out. The interviews were carried out in September and October 2019.

The type of interview chosen for the study was a semi-structured approach where a core set of questions where the same for all participants, but time was reserved for follow-up questions and for the discussion to progress more naturally. The participants were also asked to fill out some quantifiable questions regarding attitudes towards E&D during the interviews, but these rather took the form of stimulating discussion than important sets of data.

All interviews were recorded with informed consent of the participants and they were reminded of the right to withdraw from participation at any time. Interviews where conducted both in Swedish and English. After the interviews where done, I went over the material several times looking for patterns and themes which became the basis of the chapters. Quotes from the Swedish interviews was translated into English.

Six women and four men participated of which no one identified as transgender. The women where in the age span of 20-34 and the men 30-49. Amongst the participants, there where experiences of working in relation to the AAA industry, but most where in the indie-business. The main work areas represented amongst the participants was tech, management, art and design. Most of the participants where currently working in the industry but not everyone. Industry experience ranged between 1 to 11 years with just above 4 years being the mean value. The vast majority had some sort of higher education.

Limitations

What is lacking from this study is, ironically, a fair treatment of the diversity of the games industry itself. AAA and Indie should be thought about further from their specific contexts which economically, organizationally and surely socially, are significantly different. In a similar manner, this study pays little attention to difference between what relation participants has to the industry – if they are a CEO of a company, teacher in games education or an intern. Further discussing participant's opinions and attitudes in relation to one's position in the games industry would of course have been interesting but were not possible within the frames of this study and with such few participants. A consequence of the voluntary recruitment for the study also means that only people motivated to talk for an hour about E&D signed up – which might or might not be representative of most people in the games industry.

Another limitation is the issue of language. The Swedish word 'jämställdhet' isn't easily translatable because of its specific development in a Swedish political landscape about gender-issues. This preciseness was sacrificed for a more general understanding of equality and diversity, or *jämställdhet och mångfald*, which broadly refers to efforts for inclusivity.

Lastly, the conditions of the study hardly allowed for a deep and thorough enough engagement with the participants distinct positions and views to represent them truthfully on these complex matters. Rather, nuance and detail were sacrificed for overview and accessibility.