Creating Safe Spaces at Game Events

Matt Conn, Midboss/GaymerX
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Speakers

Matt Conn, Midboss/GaymerX
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Microtalks: Creating Safe Spaces at Game Events

Question:

What are safe spaces?

Microtalks: Creating Safe Spaces at Game Events

Answer:

Safe spaces are places in which marginalized people can feel welcome, considered, respected, and heard with the help of systematic support for responding to instances of discrimination and exclusion.

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Or, to put it simply:

Safe spaces are where people who are different can feel comfortable being themselves.

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Question:

Why do safe spaces matter?

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Answer:

Safe spaces matter because they give marginalized people the opportunity to hear and be heard without fighting for legitimacy from the status quo.

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Question:

Why do safe spaces matter for video games?

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Answer:

Good question, cat! Safe spaces are especially important for video games because of longstanding problems of discrimination and exclusion.

Or, to put it simply:

It's really hard to be different in games.

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Question:

Don't safe spaces shut down free speech?

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Answer:

At their best, safe spaces don't shut down difficult discussions, they make difficult discussions possible.

Remember:

You may not be the one who needs safety.

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Question:

Can any space really be totally safe?

Answer:

No, but you can help turn any event (or workplace) into a safer space.

One last reminder:

Avoid the white knight complex.

Microtalks: Creating Safe Spaces at Game Events

Thank you
for making your next games event safer!

Microtalks: Creating Safe Spaces at Game Events

Game Design Classrooms are Safe Spaces, too!

Toni Pizza (@tpizza)
Co-Founder, Secret Crush Corp.

Uh…What sort of classrooms are we talking here, Pizza?

- Undergrad
- Game Design
- 15-20 students

Some acknowledgements…

- There's some inherent privilege in (teaching & studying) Higher Ed
- Institutional flexibility and resources vary
- Students coming into your class may not be familiar with what a safe space is or why it is important

Quick Overview:

- Class prep
- In the classroom
- Outside the classroom

Syllabus Strategy:

- Craft a diverse syllabus
    - Read: Theory + Journalism + Texts + Blogs
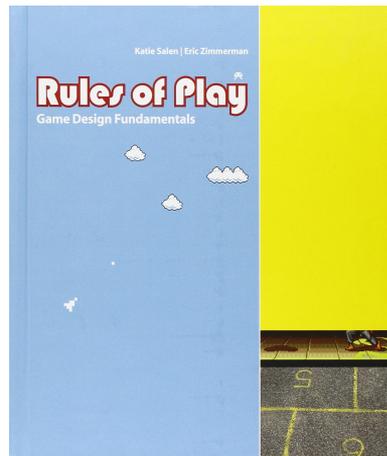
Syllabus Strategy:

- Craft a diverse syllabus
  - Play: Digital & Non-Digital
  - Play: Explore themes
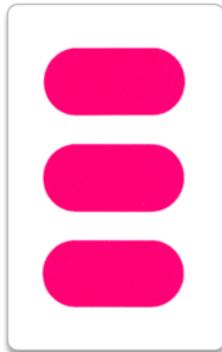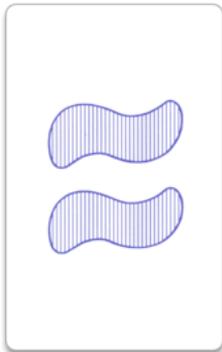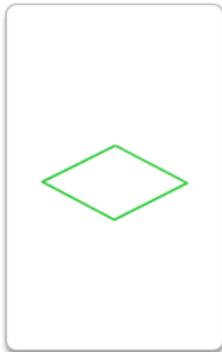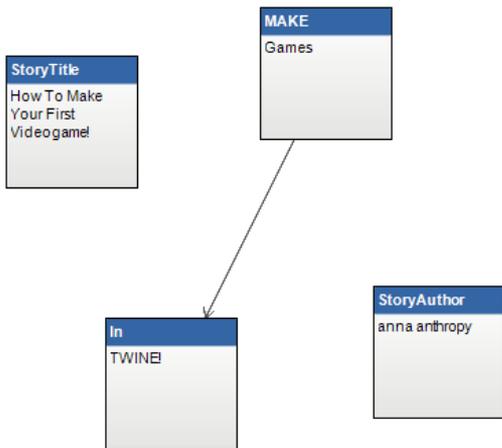
Syllabus Strategy:

- Don't require students to use specific tools/ platforms unless they're free

- Don't require students to buy an entire textbook for one chapter

Set Expectations Early:

- Have a safe spaces discussion!

In the Classroom:

- Stay on the same level, avoid talking down to students (ex: sit in a chair and talk *with* not *at* the group)

In the Classroom:

- Encourage students to 'be experts' & share knowledge with you

- Create opportunities for peer-to-peer learning
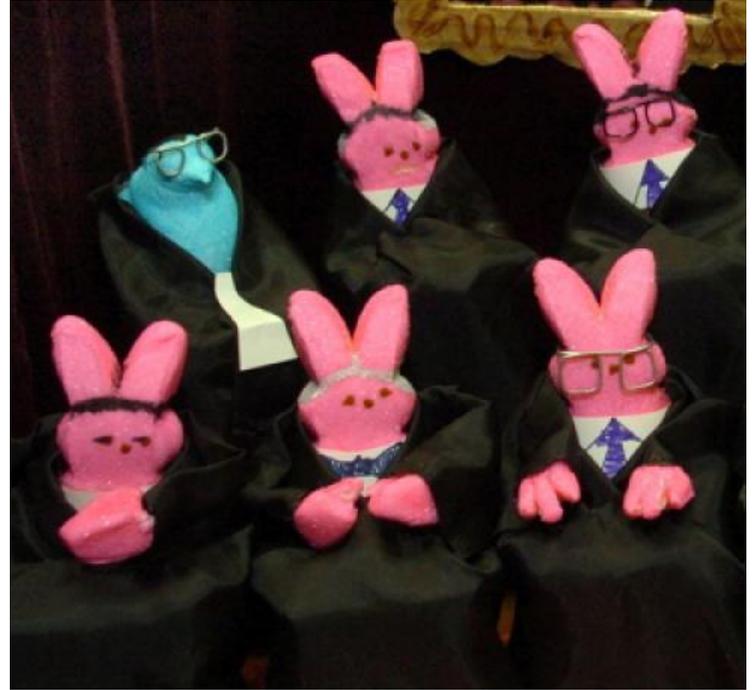
Create Positive Feedback Loops:

- Model & moderate appropriate feedback
- Be aware of singling out students

Thinking Outside the Classroom:
- Discuss where student games fit into the larger culture

Thinking Outside the Classroom:

- Discuss how different student roles & strengths translate into industry positions
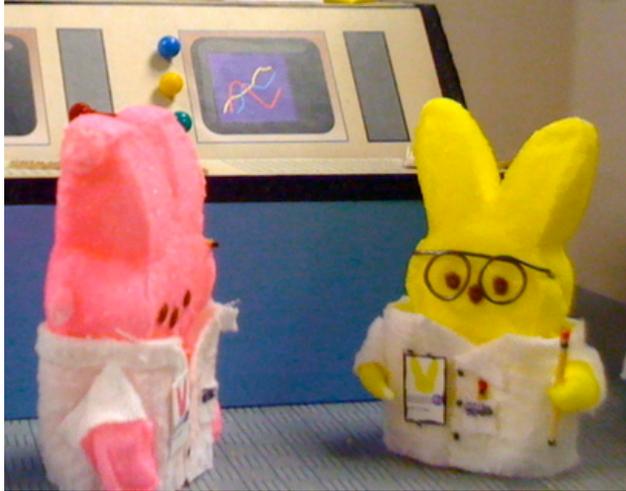
Iterate!

- Iterate on your syllabus based on student feedback- actively involve students in this!

THANKS!
@tpizza

Walking The Line:
Creating Safe Spaces That Are Also Fun

Matt Conn
CEO, MidBoss

Fostering Online & Offline Community... Together!

- Due to the communication limits of online environments (Twitter, virtual worlds), poorly worded and/or short statements can be easily taken by the receiver in unexpected ways, and good people can be quick to act or anger.
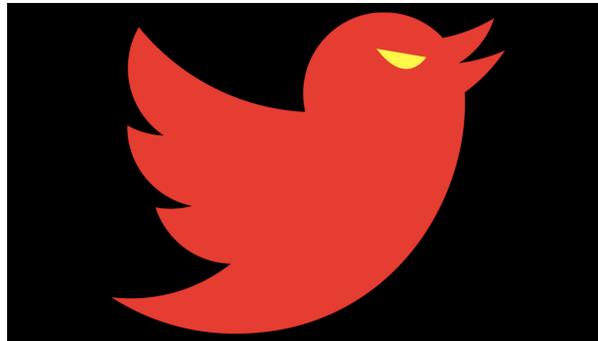
Creating Community Standards

- When you think about communities that "work" as opposed to those that do not – I have found that moderation from both the community and the staff, as well as clear expectations of the community are heavily prevalent.

The Gaming Industry's Guiltiest Pleasure

Teach, Don't Banish

- Most people are not "bad people" – having a proper system in place to punish those who break the community guidelines is important, but more so so that people know what not to do in the future.

- Your goal should not be to banish people, but let them know what behavior is not acceptable.

Let's Talk it Out – What Tools Are You Using?

OR

The Need For "Safe & Fun" Spaces

● The need to create a safe space where people can relax, feel at home and not be worried about being harassed is paramount for attendees to feel comfortable expressing themselves openly.

Expert Difficulty: Combining Safe with Fun

- It's important that whatever event you run, whether online or in the meatspace is fun and engaging **no matter how safe it is**. Without fun, people walk away feeling less energized than when they came in.

Difficulty of Creating a Safe Space
EASY   **MEDIUM**   **NIGHTMARE**

size

Difficulty of Creating a Safe Space ONLINE
EASY   MEDIUM   NIGHTMARE

size

Not A Safe Space = Not A Fun Space

- Discomfort can affect us in very subtle ways, making us less social and less adventurous, two things that make a big difference in enjoying fan events.

It Starts At The Top

- "If they can do it, then I can do it"

- Visible staff and speakers affect the audience. Diverse representation can lead to a more diverse audience.

- If staff or speakers behave poorly, it will set a lowered bar of expectations for the audience.

Creating a Fun, Safe Space is Worth it!

Thank You!

@mattconn

matt@midboss.com

Safe Spaces at Game Conferences

Bonnie Ruberg (@myownvelouria)
PhD Candidate, Berkeley Center for New Media

Game Conferences

and Expos, and Cons, and Game Jams, and...

Bonnie Ruberg, "Safe Spaces at Game Conferences"

The Queerness and Games Conference (QGCon)
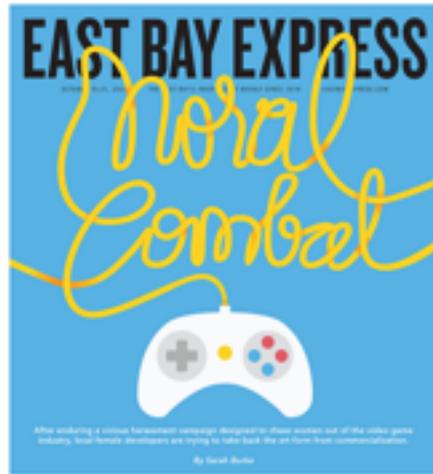
Bonnie Ruberg, "Safe Spaces at Game Conferences"

I do the nitty-gritty stuff.

Bonnie Ruberg, "Safe Spaces at Game Conferences"

Safe Spaces:
It's in the little things!
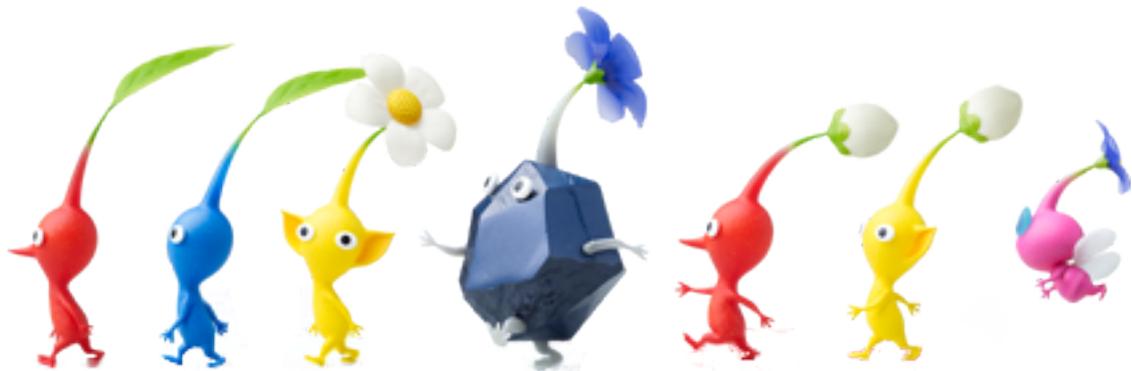
Bonnie Ruberg, "Safe Spaces at Game Conferences"

1. Bathrooms
- Designate at least one as "gender neutral"
- Men's and women's should say "trans inclusive"
- Think about use patterns and privilege

ALL GENDER
RESTROOM

Bonnie Ruberg, "Safe Spaces at Game Conferences"

2. Pronouns
- Add preferred gender pronouns to name tags
- Encourage participants to avoid assumptions

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3.Inclusivity Statement
- Add one to your print materials and/or website
- Call attention to it at key moments
- See qgcon.com/inclusivity for a model

Bonnie Ruberg, "Safe Spaces at Game Conferences"

4. Language
- Watch our for ableist terms
- Educate your attendees
- Set a precedent
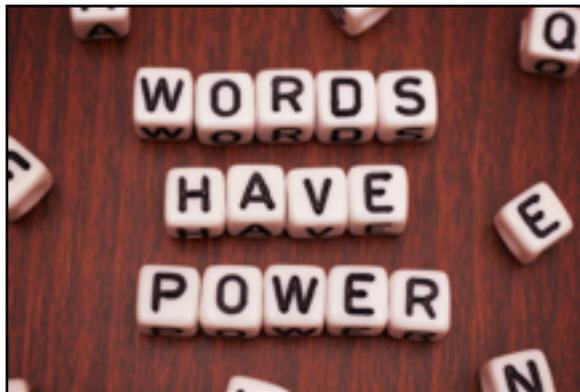
Bonnie Ruberg, "Safe Spaces at Game Conferences"

5. Accessibility
- Make sure your venue is accessible
- Put up clear signage to ramps, elevators, etc.
- Include options for all ability types

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6. Point Person
- Designate a point person for safe space concerns
- Make sure attendees know how to get in touch
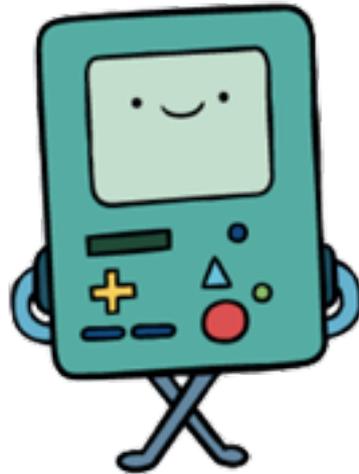
Bonnie Ruberg, "Safe Spaces at Game Conferences"

7. Free Stuff
- Give away free food
- Make admission free (if you can)
- Be mindful of travel expenses

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8. Take Suggestions
- Give participants the opportunity to comment
- Invite them to share in person or online

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Let's recap

1. Bathrooms for all
2. Gender pronouns on name tags
3. State your inclusivity
4. Avoid ableist language
5. Make your event accessible
6. Designate a point person
7. Make stuff free
8. Encourage feedback

Bonnie Ruberg, "Safe Spaces at Game Conferences"

Event Organizers Have the Power
(and the responsibility)

Bonnie Ruberg, "Safe Spaces at Game Conferences"

Safe Spaces at Game Conferences

Bonnie Ruberg (@myownvelouria)
PhD Candidate, Berkeley Center for New Media

3 Stories of Safe Space Failures

Chelsea Howe
Creative Director, EA Mobile

Game Dev: Spaces without Escape Pods

- Higher Stakes: Paycheck on the line
- Broader Differences: All walks of life
- Fewer Options: Stick with it or quit

"Bloom Where You're Planted"

Compassionate Activism

- Building, not Burning
- Investing, not Expecting
- Uniting, not Dividing
- Trusting, not Judging

Social Justice Cleric

#1
Of Fear and Foolishness

I'll Play the Fool

- Queer Retreat
- Broke Into Groups
  - White Folks
  - POC
- Mind Blown
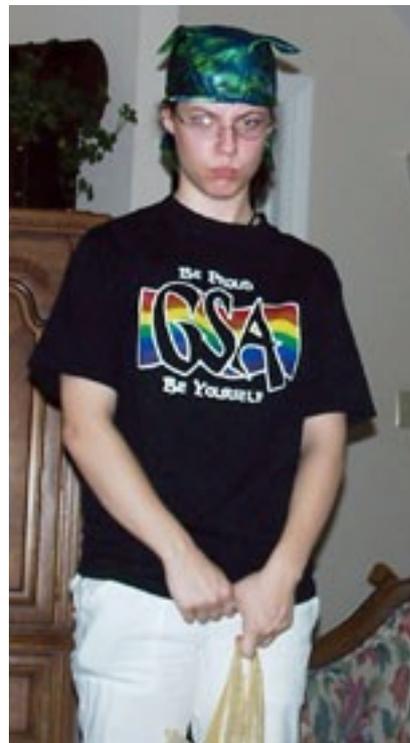
Baby SJW Chelsea,
circa 2005

The Effect of Fear

- Fear = Defense
- Fear = Rely on What You Know
- Fear = Revert to Instinct

When you are afraid, you cannot learn

Inclusivity is a Mindset

- Communication
- Forgiveness
- Trust

No Sarcasm

No Assumption

No Sensationalism

Good intentions are everything

For You or For Them?

fadical:

people will honestly criticize lesbian weddings no matter what like if they both wear dresses then they're "enforcing traditional gender roles" but if one of them wears a tux they're "imitating heterosexuality" but if they both wear tuxes then they're "proving that they're basically men" so like what the fuck do you want us to wear lol

10,781 notes

#2
The Sexist Feminist

Some Kind of Feminist

- Coworker proudly identified feminist
- BUT
  - Promoted male colleagues first
  - Asked female coworkers about dates in 1:1s and exit interviews
  - Called female employees emotional despite screaming matches with male employees

Feminism Isn't a Destination

- You don't get to identify and quit
- Eliminating conscious bias is step $1/\infty$
- We are all 'ist'
- Conquering unconscious bias requires *active work* – express your anti-bias!
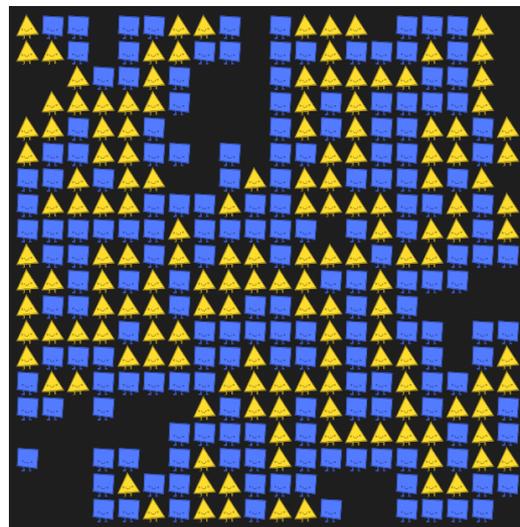
ncase.me/polygons

Inclusivity is a Process

Even if you think you're inclusive, you've always got road ahead of you

And everyone is in a different place on their own journey

Why are they so upset?

Oh. There's definitely a problem

Maybe there's a problem

You're ALL the problem!

YOU'RE the problem!

Wait — I'M part of the problem

Society's the problem!!!

And they're all deeply interwoven and embedded in our culture and collective subconscious

Holy smuck there's a ton of problems

This is hopeless

This is hard

I have to try

These problems affect everyone

Trying is ha the battle

This is really important

#3
Not So Safe Space

QGCon 2014

- Speaker's past work & interview made an attendee uncomfortable

- QGCon organizers were oblivious to speaker backgrounds

- Reconciliation session was overdrawn, got heated in the end

Inclusivity is HARD

- You WILL get it wrong
- Failure is OK – failure means we're learning
- Practice how to reconcile:
  - LISTEN – don't just act/react
  - BE EGOLESS – this isn't about you
  - KEEP TRYING – fight the urge to quit

Remember:

Inclusivity is a Mindset

Inclusivity is a Process

Inclusivity is HARD

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