

GDC

March 20-24, 2023
San Francisco, CA

Empowerment Playbook Making and Measuring Change in the Games Industry

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York University

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Toronto Metropolitan University

SOFTCHAOS

#GDC23

Overview

Context: Who are Pixelles and what do they do?

The Challenge: What impact has Pixelles organizing had in games and how do we convey it?

Playing with Impact: How do we visualize change interactively in a safe and consent-driven fashion?

Empowerment Playbook: Strategies for Change



PIXELLES

Pixelles is a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering more women developers and improving gender diversity in the games industry.

People who previously didn't consider game development as a career path are now employed in studios of all sizes, elevating their peers, and leading teams.

2013

Workforce Stats 2013

- **Gender:**

- 76% Men, 22% Women

- **Race/Ethnicity:**

- 79% White, 8.2% Hispanic/Latino,
- 7.5% East Asian/South-East Asian, 2.5% Black

- **Sexual Orientation:**

- 86% Heterosexual, 2.8% Homosexual, 6.5% Bisexual

“Do you feel there is equal treatment and opportunity for all in the game industry?”

47% answered “No”

28% answered “Yes”

25% answered “Not sure” or “Not applicable.”



Photo by Steve Kegan

JANICE HENDRICKS

"I was one of the first full-time women in graphics and programming at Nutting. They didn't quite know what to make of me."



ROBERTA WILLIAMS

"I think it will remain a male-dominated business."

Video Games Magazine, 1983.

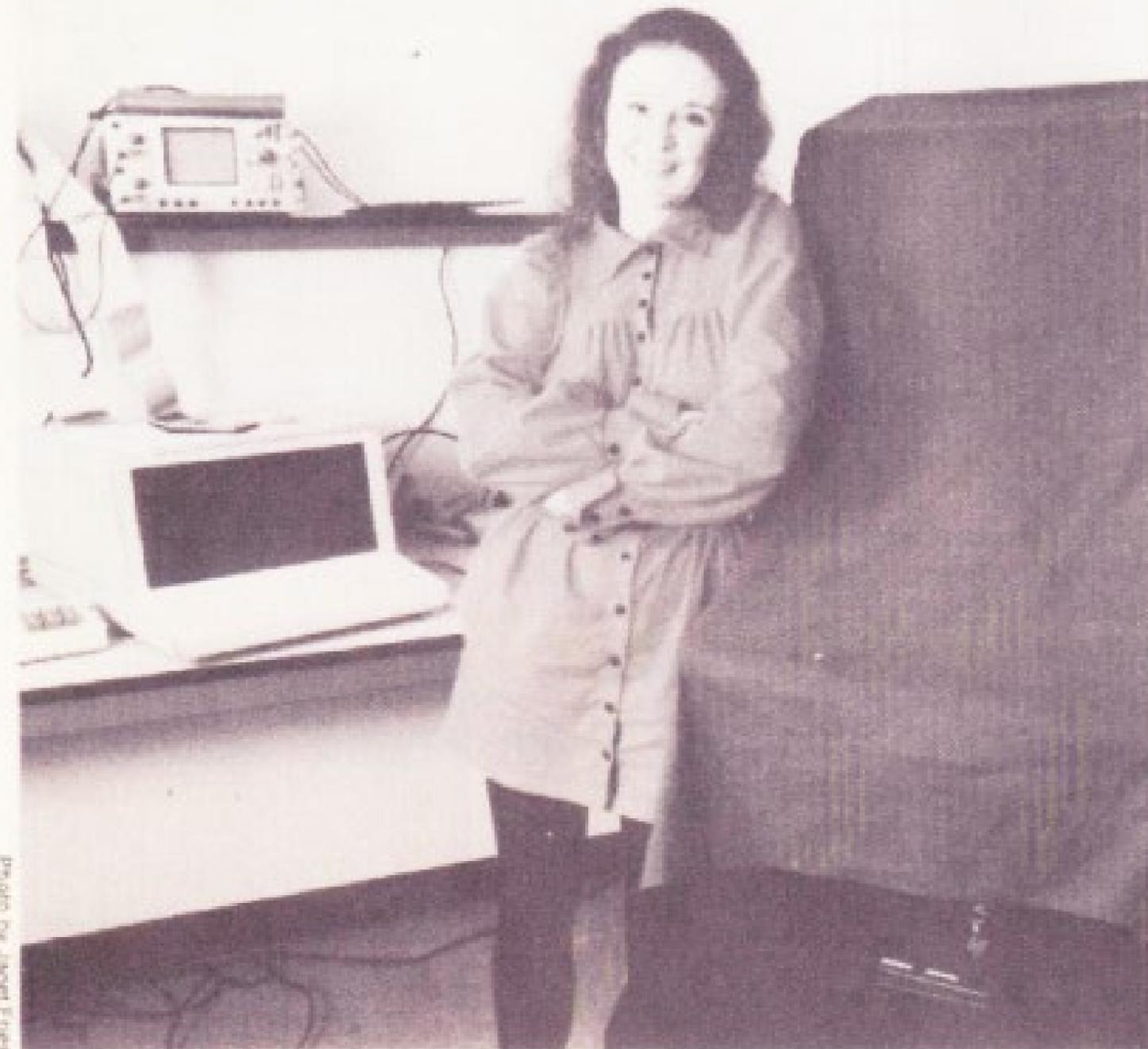


Photo by Janet Fries

DONA BAILEY

"Atari was always saying they were trying to hire women, but they said the percentage of women applying was low."



Luke

@Burning_Luke



Why are there so few lady game creators?

12:50 PM · Nov 26, 2012

5 Retweets

1 Quote Tweet

10 Likes





Tara J. Brannigan

@kindofstrange



Follow

My own #1reasonwhy - I busted my ass to get a promotion. First response to it happening was that I only got it because I 'have nice tits'

Reply Retweet Favorite



Rhianna Pratchett

@rhipratchett

Follow

#1reasonwhy Because I still have to keep saying: "But what if the player is female?"

27 Nov 12

Reply Retweet Favorite



J.R. Blackwell

@jrblackwell

#1reasonwhy because when we tell the truth about what has happened, we're told we're whining.

07:23 PM - 27 Nov 12



Caryn Vainio

@Hellchick

Follow

Because I got blank states when I asked why a female soldier in a game I worked on looked like a porn star. #1reasonwhy

26 Nov 12

Reply Retweet Favorite



Lillian Cohen-Moore

@lilyorit

Because every disclosure of harassment feels like risking never being hired again.

#1reasonwhy

12:04 AM - 27 Nov 12

Reply Retweet Favorite



Ashly Burch

@heyashwp

Follow

Because I am confronted with rape or violence in the comments section of Hey Ash videos #1ReasonWhy

Reply Retweet Favorite



Brenda Romero

@br

Follow

When announcing MY new game, an industry publication referred to me in the headline not by my name but as John Romero's wife. #1reasonwhy

11:06 PM - 27 Nov 12

Reply Retweet Favorite



Florence Vaillant @fvallant · Nov 28, 2012

I'm a game designer at Ubisoft San Francisco. If I can, I'm happy to help any women interested in becoming a designer. [#1reasonmentors](#)

3 4 2



MoJen @mojenmusic · Mar 23, 2013

I'm speaking at the [@blackgirlscode](#) STEM Video Game Challenge in San Francisco today. Excited to meet future women coders! [#1reasonmentors](#)

3 1 2



Dr. Jessica Hammer @kleenestar · Feb 9, 2013

Helped some girls design their first game today with [@nightskygames](#). [#1reasontobe](#) [#1reasonmentors](#)

1 2 3



Morgan Lockhart **GDC** @missdoomcookie · Nov 26, 2012

[#1ReasonMentors](#) Been shipping AAA games as a writer/designer for six years. Feel free to ask me questions.

4 3



Minni Wiitala @MinniWiitala · Nov 27, 2012

There are a lot of awesome people out there. Don't let the bad apples ruin the barrel for you. [#1ReasonMentors](#) [#1ReasonWhy](#)

1 1



Ben McKenzie @McKenzie_Ben · Nov 27, 2012

If you're wondering what comes after [#1reasonwhy](#), check out [#1ReasonMentors](#) for support and [#1reasontobe](#) for positive stories.

5



The Duchess @TheDuchessSF · Nov 28, 2012

[#1reasonmentors](#) I'm a Senior Community Manager at Zynga, and worked in the art Dept at EA, previously. Budding designer/writer. Let's talk!

3 1 4



LadyCoders @LadyCoders · Nov 27, 2012

Mentoring women in tech and encouraging them to mentor each other is what we live for! [#1reasontobe](#) [#1reasonmentors](#)

2 2

Sexism in games is a universally acknowledged truth

Games culture needs to change

X How can we **get more** women into the games industry?

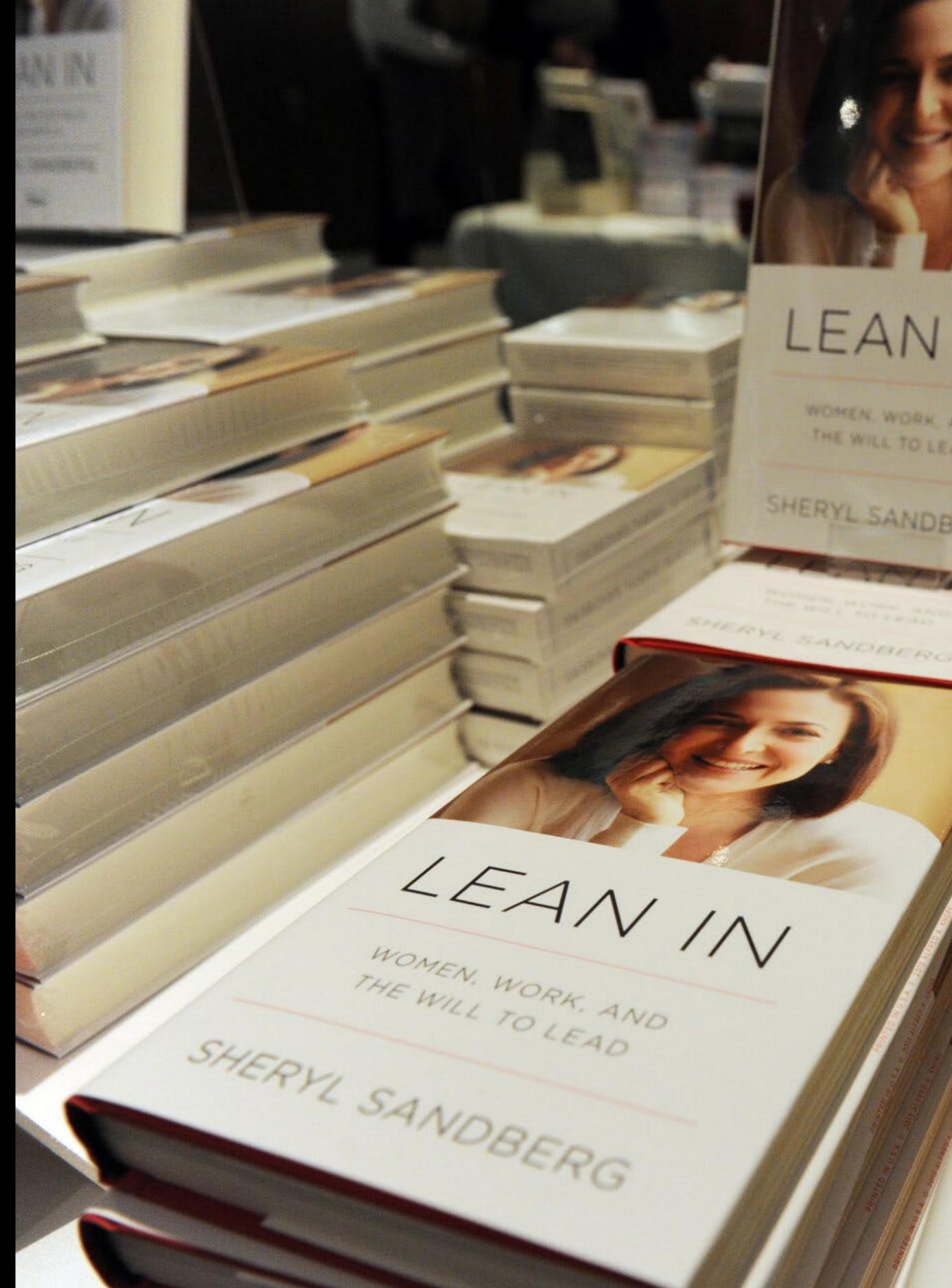
✓ What **needs to change** to keep women in the games industry?

Feminism

Women's Empowerment

Women's Empowerment in 2013: Leaning In

“Taking risks, choosing growth, challenging ourselves, and asking for promotions (with smiles on our faces, of course) are all important elements of managing a career. One of my favorite quotes comes from Alice Walker, who observed, *‘The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.’*”



X This is an individual
solution to a systemic
problem.

**Games culture does not
welcome change.**

shadex4555

Usually not one to complain about review scores, but detracting 1 full point because the game is not "politicaly" correct and because it was reviewed by a feminist is laughable.

Carolyn I usually like your reviews despite the fact that I can't stand your voice, but this time you come of as rageing emotional feminist.

We live in a pretty equal gender society these days (western countries), yet sexism is more of a sore thumb then almost any other subject, genocides in videogames are ok, but show some titties and you better run because the feminists spearheaded by carolyn will chase you down with pitchforks!

mat0265

Your sexuality is confusing not the game

Edited By **cool_prateek89**

Gamespot.- Fire this woman before she takes down gamespot with her. She should work for Human rights or some feminist group instead.

Dawg9000

People have reason to be angry. GTA IV got a 10 and was definitely nowhere near as good as this. Gamespot's been putting this feminist bullshit in our minds, and it doesn't help when they start docking scores for shit that has nothing to do with the game. Looks like that landwhale just got dealt a bad pair of cards being born with a vagina. I wouldn't wanna do a fat Thor.

Edited By **Junot9**

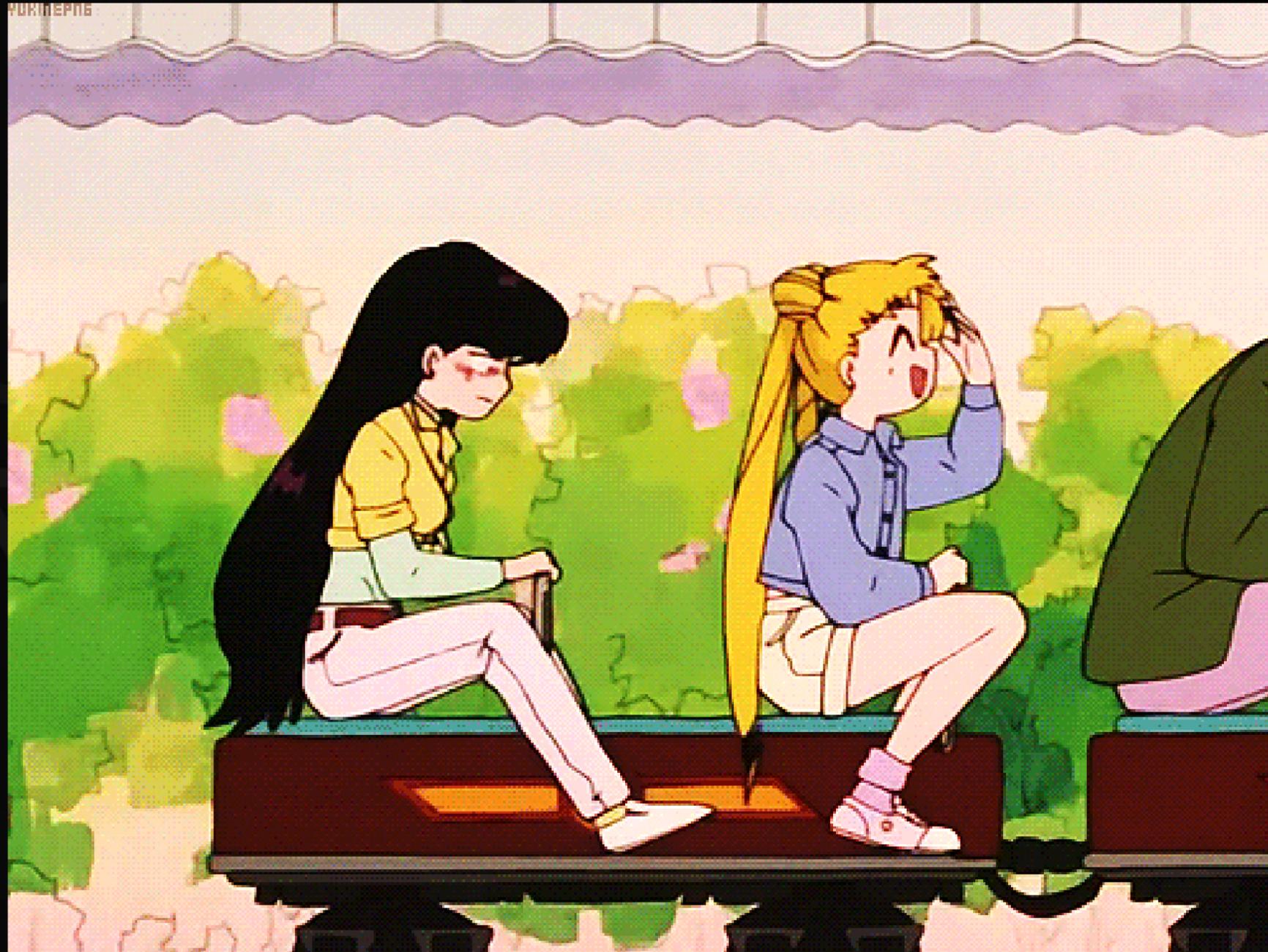
I don't want to hear from a bra burner about my GTA. This reviewer takes herself WAAAYYY too seriously.

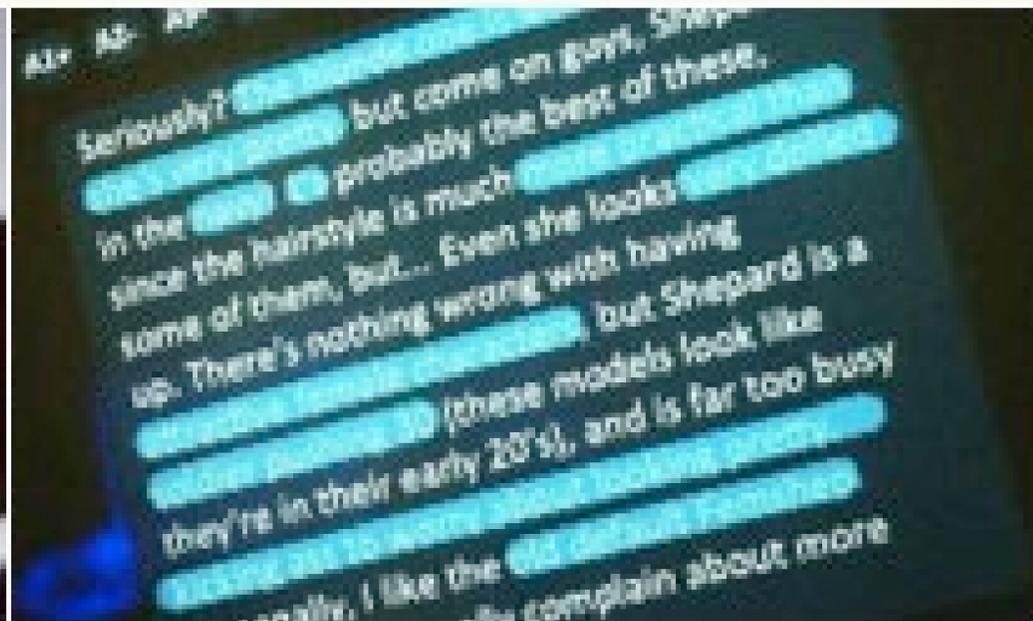
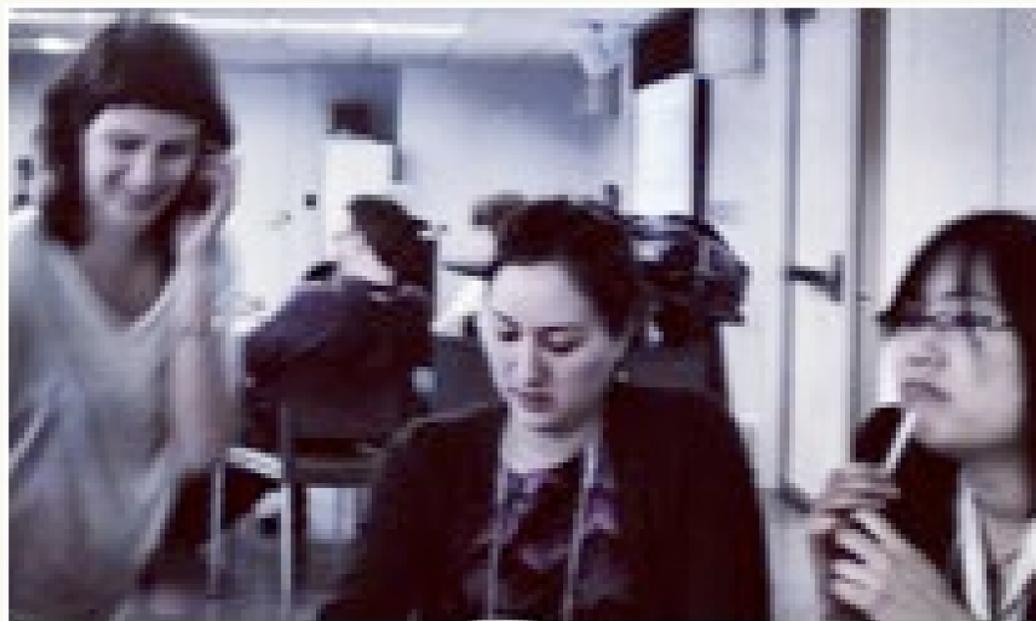


Systemic sexism and misogyny can make it feel like it's impossible, as individuals, to shift the status quo

2023

Destination: Inclusivity







8-BIT
KATE HEPBURN
SAYS:
HEY YOU!
JOIN THIS CLUB!

DAMES

Making Games

A FRIENDLY SOCIETY OF
LADY VIDEO GAME ENTHUSIASTS

[HTTP://WWW.DAMESMAKINGGAMES.COM](http://www.damesmakinggames.com)

FIRST PUB NIGHT:
THIS SAT. NOV. 5
@ POUR BOY

DMG⁺

DAMES MAKING GAMES



PIXELLES

MONTREAL



Pixelles Game Incubator

This skill building program is an eight-week workshop series designed to help twelve gender-marginalized people make their first video game.

No programming knowledge or previous experience required!

FOCUS:

Aspiring Developers Discovery Mentorship

Accessible Education



Mentorship



10 Years of Pixelles Game Incubator



200+ new game makers

Workshops

Mentorship Program

**Pixelles Game
Incubator**

Game Jams

Writers' Group

Socials

Ateliers

Programme de mentorat

**Incubateur de jeu
Pixelles**

Game Jams

Groupe des écrivains

Activités sociales

Monthly Workshops

Talks, hands-on workshops and masterclasses lead by game developers in our community.

Not only are these workshops a source of free education but an opportunity for new leaders to strengthen their own voices, public speaking and confidence.

FOCUS:

Career Development Masterclasses

Accessible Education Leadership Development

Public Speaking



Workshop: Things to Consider When Starting a Game Studio

Online event

Friday, October 1, 2021 at 12:00 PM EDT



Workshop: Get that job! Writing a great resume for

Online event

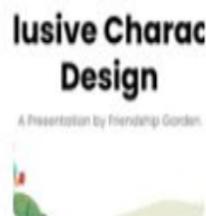
Thursday, May 20, 2021 at 6:30 PM EDT



Creating Culturally Responsive Gaming Experiences

Online event

Tuesday, March 23, 2021 at 3:00 PM EDT



Inclusive Character Design

Online event

Thursday, February 11, 2021 at 2:00 PM EST

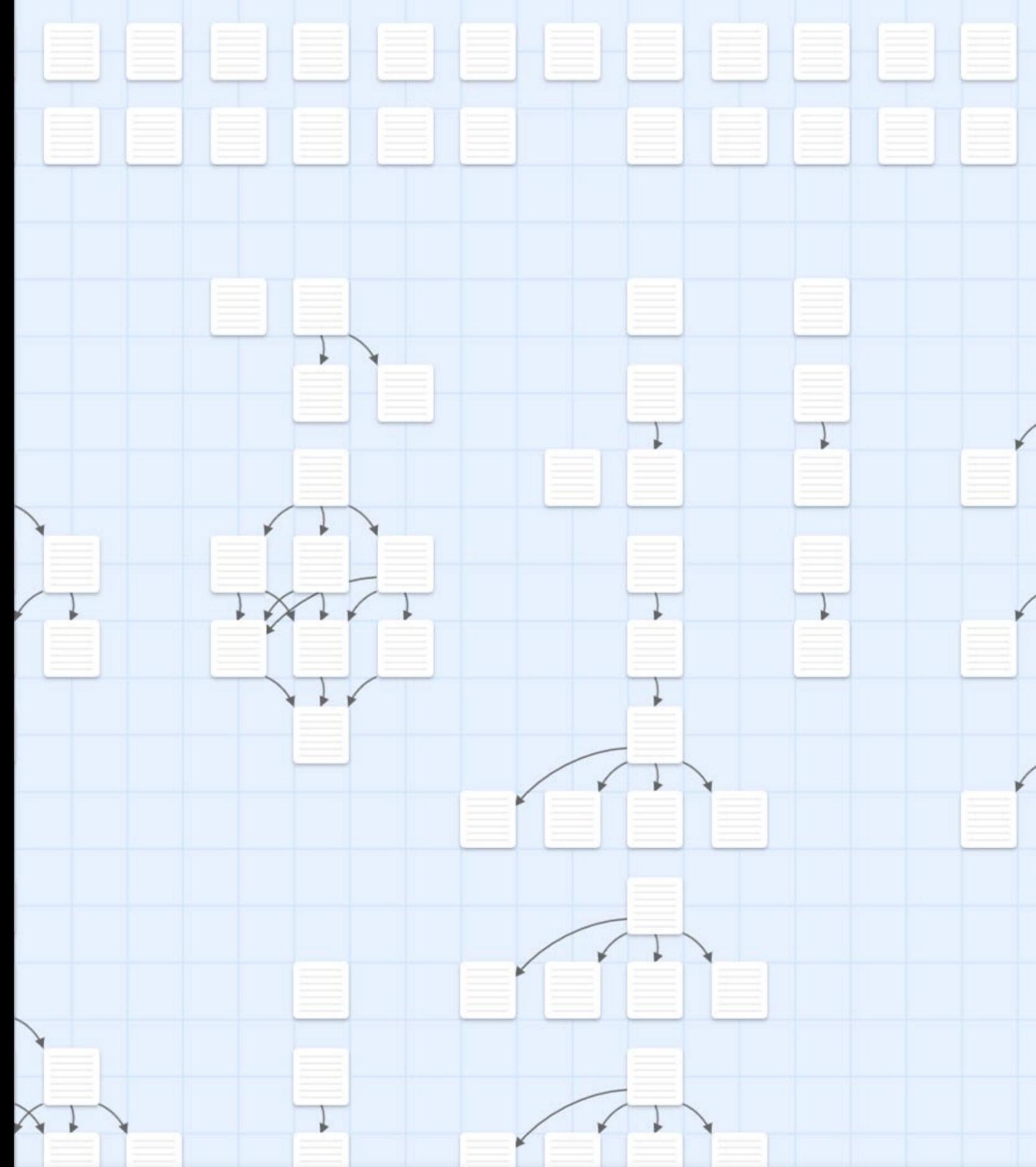
Writing Portfolio Program

Guided by assignments, themed discussions, mentors, and critique groups, this program empowers participants to create written pieces and build a professional portfolio that they can use to apply for game writing positions.

FOCUS:

Junior Writers Aspiring Narrative Designers

Mentorship Accessible Education



Career Accelerator & Peer Mentorship

Peer mentorship and co-development models help women who feel stuck, overwhelmed, or burnt out in their careers.

Facilitated by a third party expert, this program aims to develop vital support networks, career strategies and problem-solving.

FOCUS:

Career Development Mid-Career Support

Peer Mentorship Leaky Pipeline Glass Ceiling



ACCÉLÉRATEUR
DE CARRIÈRE

CAREER ACCELERATOR

PIXELLES x MOTIVE EA

PEER MENTORSHIP

for **GAME DEV MOMS**

GDC Ensemble

This mid-career scholarship program offers free passes to GDC.

We also provide a holistic experience where participants are empowered by exclusive events, career opportunities, peer support and financial assistance.

FOCUS:

Career Development Networking Conferences

Mentorship Mid-Career Support



Creator Funds

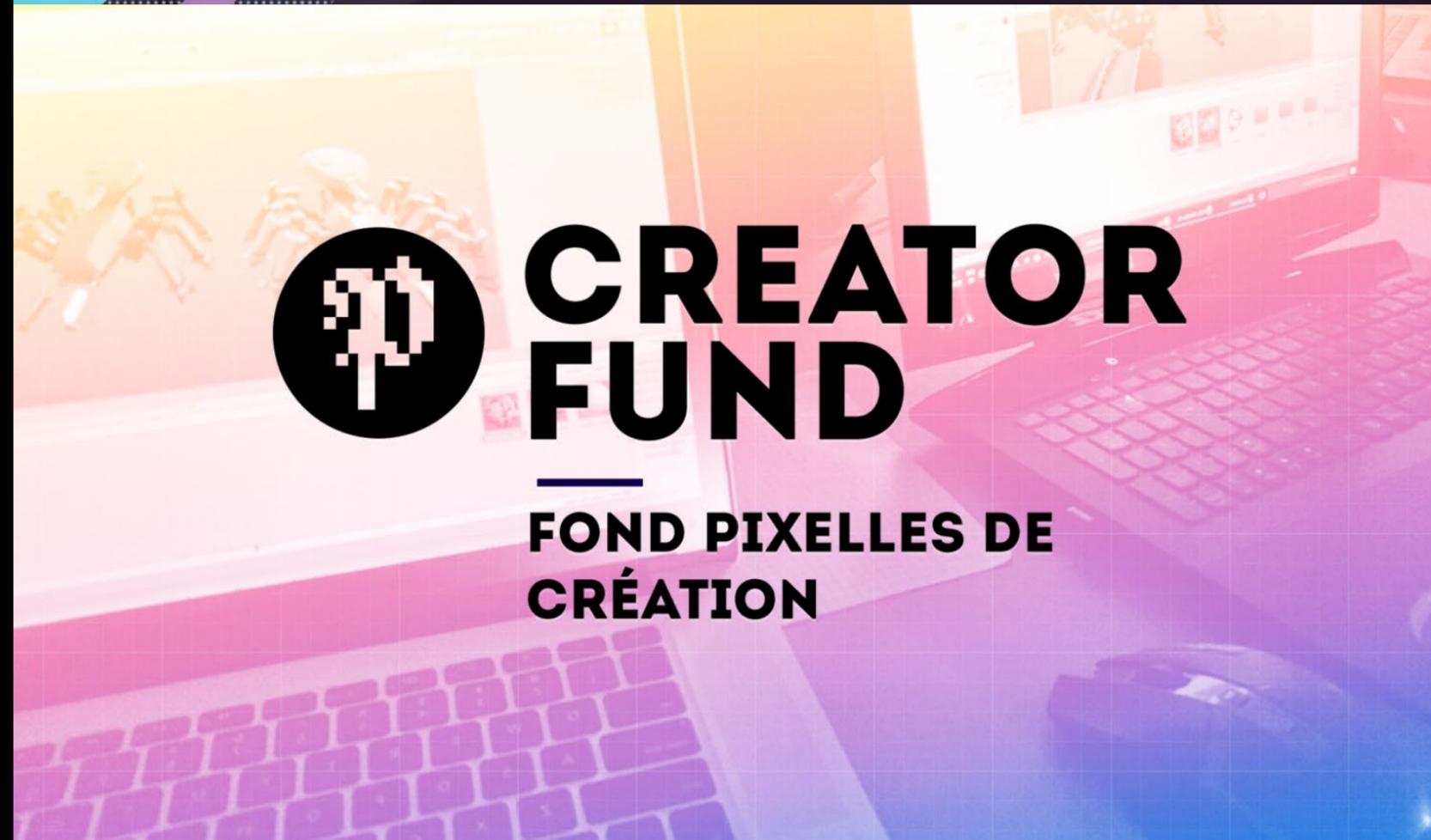
Our Creator Fund initiatives offer grants and mentorship to marginalized creators in Canada. There's no recoup, no publishing or platform requirements.

Past focals: prototyping, finishing, BIPOC creators, marginalized genders

FOCUS:

Funding Mentorship Indies BIPOC

Entrepreneurship



Socials & Networking

Inclusive opportunities for developers of underrepresented genders to meet, connect with their peers and build vital support networks.

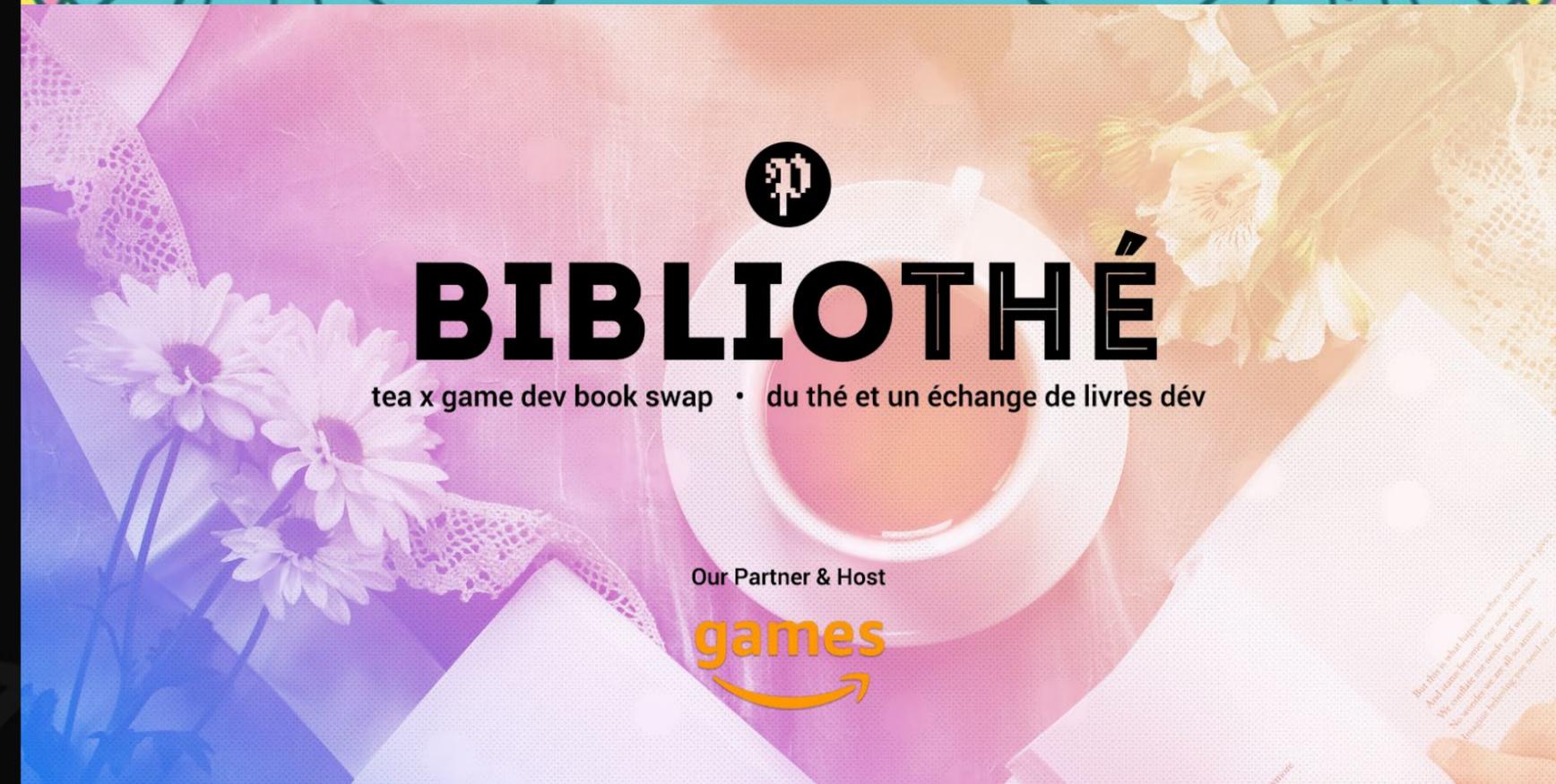
Alcohol-free social offers games by Canadian developers, microtalks.

Babies and families are welcome!

FOCUS:

Networking Peer Support Public Speaking

Indie Showcase



Grassroots Philosophy

Creating inclusive opportunities for developers of underrepresented genders to meet, connect with their peers and build vital support networks.

FOCUS:

Maximally Accessible

Lowest possible requirements for participation





PIXELLES

Pixelles is a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering more women developers and improving gender diversity in the games industry.

People who previously didn't consider game development as a career path are now employed in studios of all sizes, elevating their peers, and leading teams.



Empowerment through Community Building



NO SEXISM
NO RACISM
NO ABLEISM
NO HOMOPHOBIA
NO TRANSPHOBIA
NO GENDER POLICING

NO HATE.

[PIXELLES.CA/SAFETY](https://pixelles.ca/safety)



NON AU SEXISME
NON AU RACISME
NON AU CAPACITISME
NON À L'HOMOPHOBIE
NON À LA TRANSPHOBIE
NON À LA POLICE DE GENRE

NON À LA HAINE.

[PIXELLES.CA/FR/SAFETY](https://pixelles.ca/fr/safety)

Intersectionality





Anja Boskovic @damedebugger · Mar 7

I participated in indiegogo.com/projects/pixel... this year and they have given me the support and education to become a hobbyist dev. @PixellesMtl

6 11



Anja Boskovic @damedebugger

.@PixellesMtl I don't really have the words to explain how important and life changing a program like this is.

Star icon



Sasquatch @Tundra_Foot

If you know any ladies who want to make games but are like me and didn't have a background in game design, then @PixellesMtl can help. <3

Star icon



melanie segado @sciencelaer



Follow

These wonderful ladies gave me the motivation I needed to finally start making games after years of shying away from it :-)
@PixellesMtl

Star icon



Jessica Marcotte @jekagames

Hey you! @PixellesMtl changed my life, and even if that's corny, it's true, and more people should have that happen!
indiegogo.com/projects/pixel...

Star icon



saharkubba @saharkubba

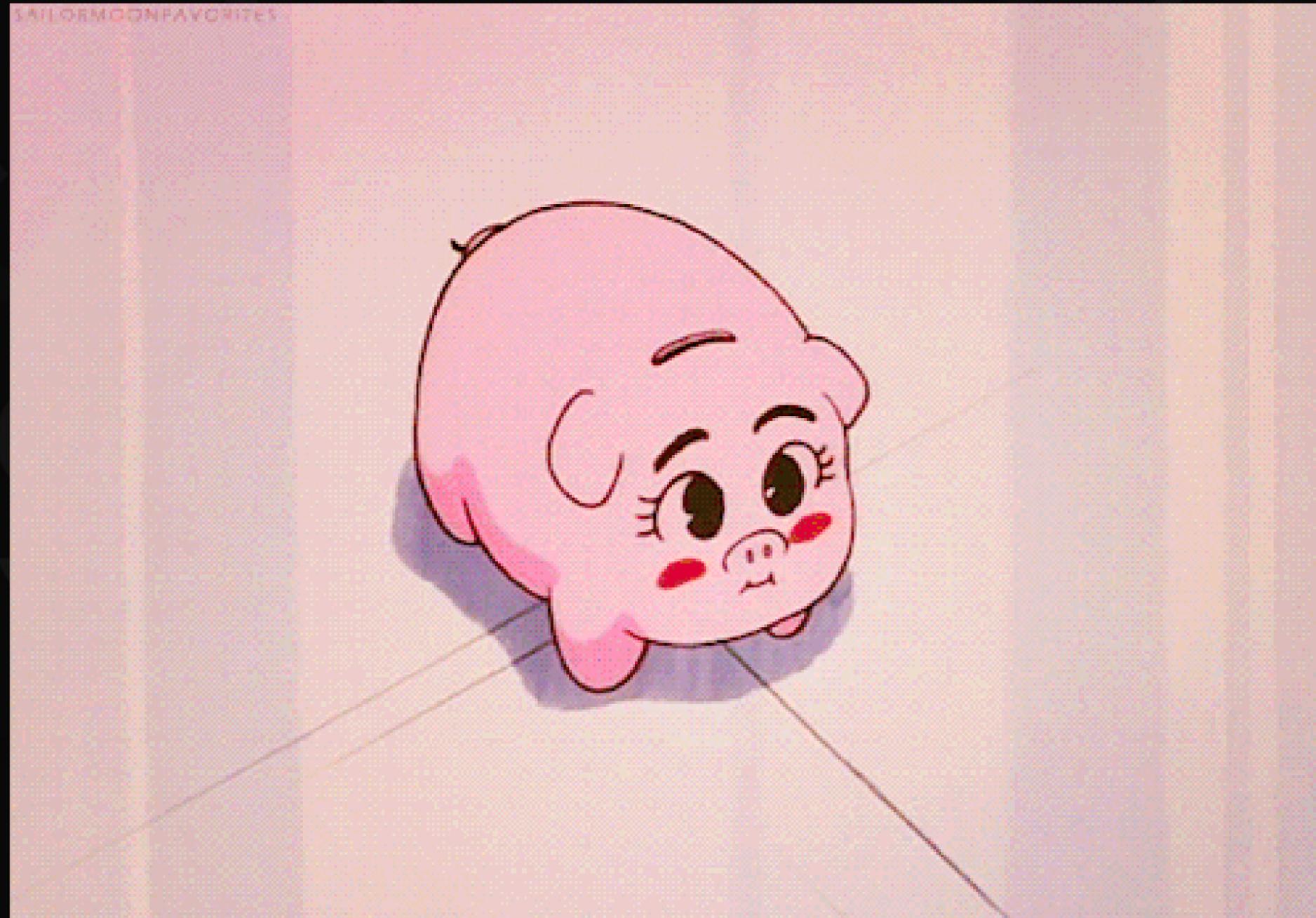


Follow

Thanks to @PixellesMtl I discovered video games as a mode of expression. Please support their Indiegogo campaign at indiegogo.com/projects/pixel...

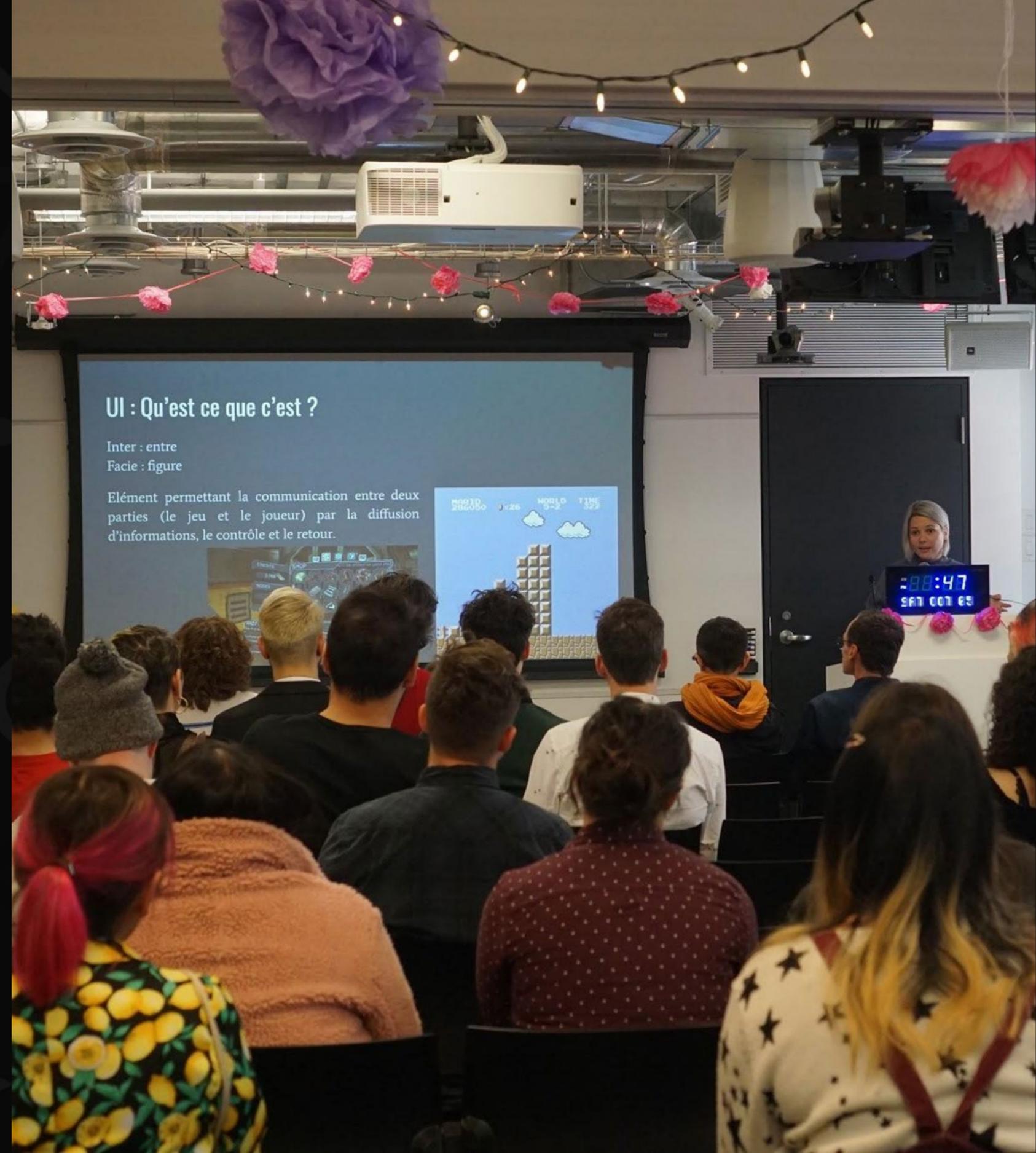
Star icon

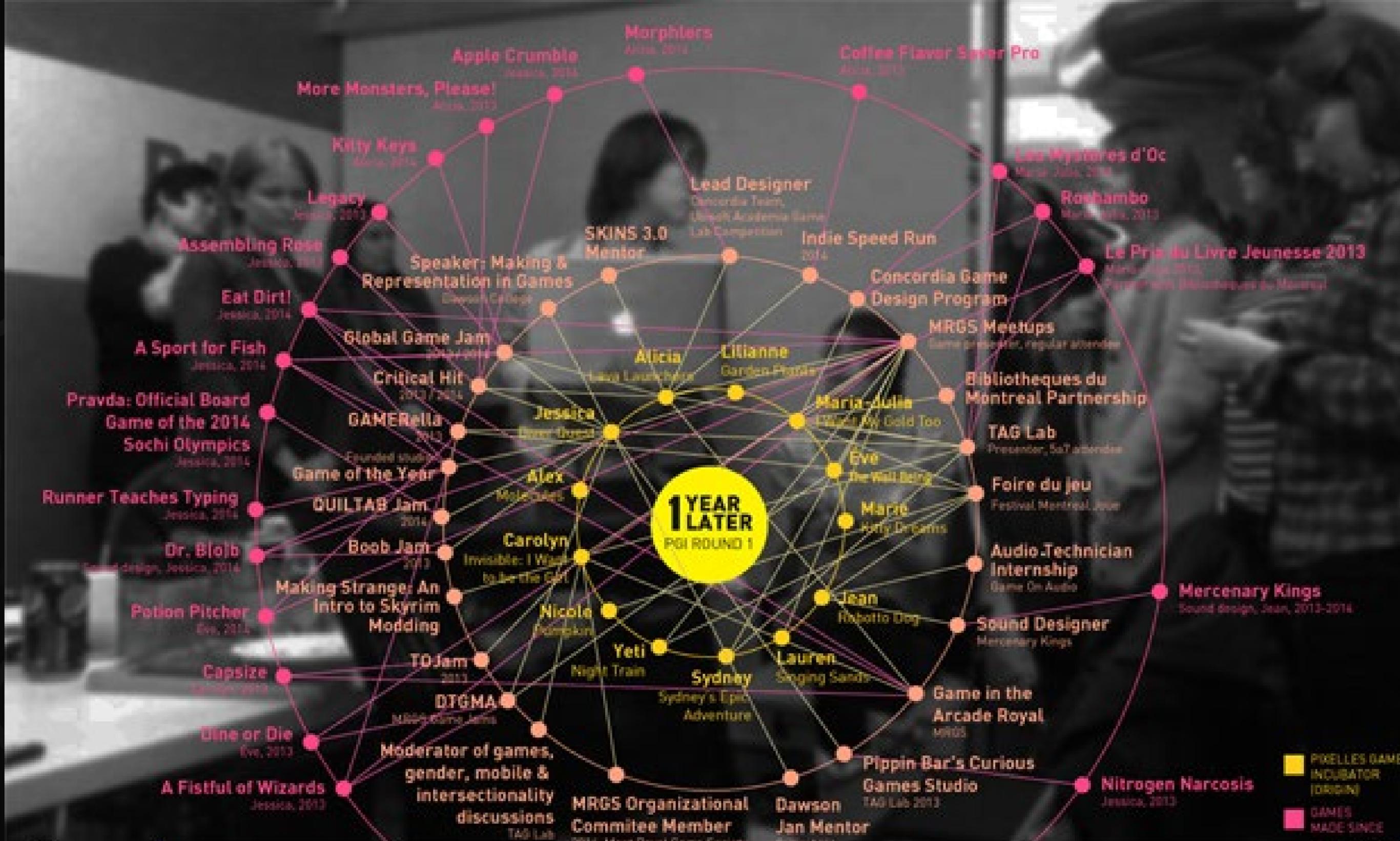
Who are you, again?



Communicating Impact

- Newsletter Subscribers: 903
- Twitter: 7,622 followers
- Facebook Page: 1,108 followers
- Facebook Group: 2,508 members
- 200+ new games
- 400+ new mentorship relationships from 30+ studios
- 600 workshop participants
- 100,000 new connections between game-making women & the games industry & community





Game-making activities by 2013 participants, one year later



COMMUNITY & PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Fisher & Harvey
circa. 2011





Una Lee - www.andalsotoo.net

The Research

Methods:

16 interviews

2 co-design workshops, one online (10 participants) and one in-person (11 participants)

The Participants:

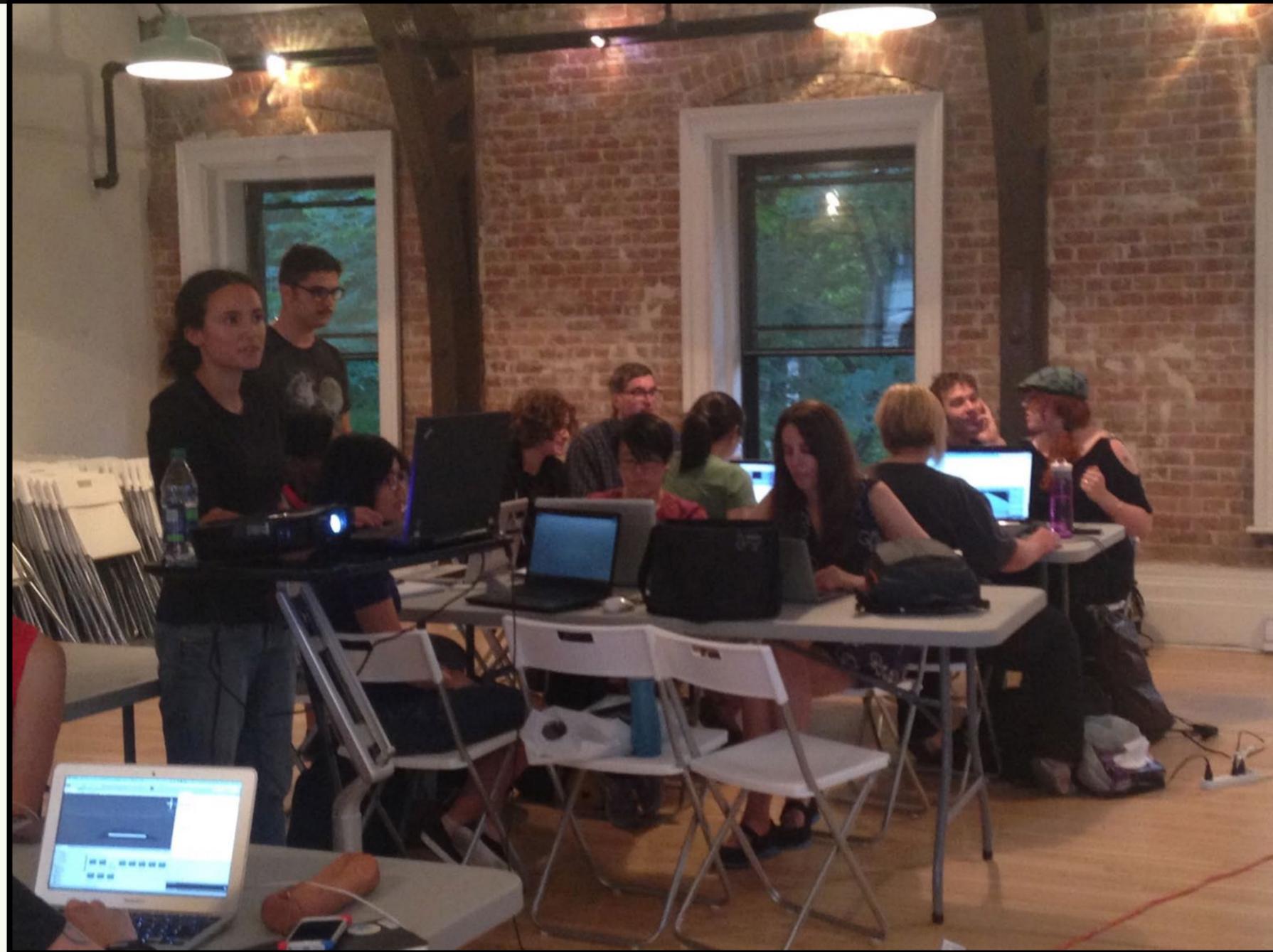
All participants came from the Pixelles community, and the majority were involved in organizing and leadership activities and also work in games currently

“Pixelles was- for my career change- it was the entire reason...There are a number of ways that it helped in extremely **concrete, measurable ways.**”



People participate in Pixelles for many reasons

“So I got this **non judgmental community**, really, it took away the fear of starting something new. And it **took away the imposter syndrome** that was honestly quite high from from the past career where I've never really fit. Yeah, it **took away that barrier to entry**. The emotional one, which was quite high.”



Pixelles is a women-only space, and it emphasizes inclusivity



Pixelles organizers create a space that is positive and beginner friendly



Pixelles demystifies working in games



Pixelles is non-judgmental and open to trying (and failure)



Types of Impact

- **Personal**- what do folks get out of their participation?
- **Community**- how does this contribute to making something bigger than the individual?
- **Professional**- what specific career outcomes are linked to Pixelles activity?
- **Industry**- how does participation create change in spaces of gameswork?
- **Cultural**- how are these impacts reverberating in games and beyond?

Personal Impacts - confidence building and personal growth



“It was part of a big shift, not just career wise, although for me, it marks a shift in my career was also working on confidence and working on recognizing my skills and my value.”

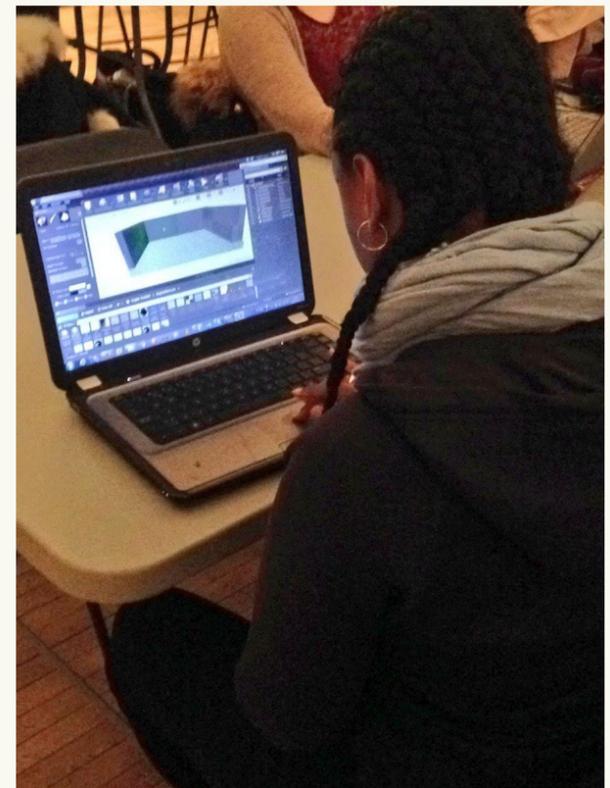
Community Impacts - creating something bigger than the individual

“That is a very deep question. Do you have six hours? Yeah, something that's beyond performative and usually starts from a **positive place of the positive intention**, but also with the **desire to help or protect or amplify** the people who want to join and be that part, be part of the community. I think it's also a **lot of giving, taking, giving**, it has to be a bit of a balance of that as well.”



Professional Impacts - connections, shared values, and resistance

“I think that I probably wouldn't be in games if it wasn't for **Pixelles**. I don't think that's too hyperbolic to say because I felt like, after taking my first steps with learning how to make something very basic with Pixelles, I was able to sort of **demystify that process of learning and felt equipped to keep learning and seek out like other, other chances and having that effort recognized them celebrate it with like other participants was also like a big confidence booster. And I also met people that I'm still connected to and friends with today.**”



Industry Impacts – claiming space and raising expectations

“I'm also currently the woman in games lead at my studio. I'm one of the leads, it was a group of us that run initiatives in the studio. And I'm also one of the co-leads for...our LGBTQ plus Employee Resource Group at the studio. So I think a lot of the Pixelles stuff that I experienced, kind of **pushed me to care about just people like connecting with people.** And so a lot of the stuff that I have run just before the pandemic was **like, outreach and like meeting students, and kind of like, oh, this is like, a community and meet us. This is a real option for you in life.**”



Cultural Impacts - impacts reverberate in games and beyond



“There's people who care so much about wanting to make an industry better ...it's good to see familiar faces kind of fighting the good fight... we're just happy to see people who know of Pixelles, who have been inspired by Pixelles to be like, ‘Oh, this brought me back into games, or this got me inspired to try games’, and I love to see those other stories.”

Let's Visualize!!! But how and what???

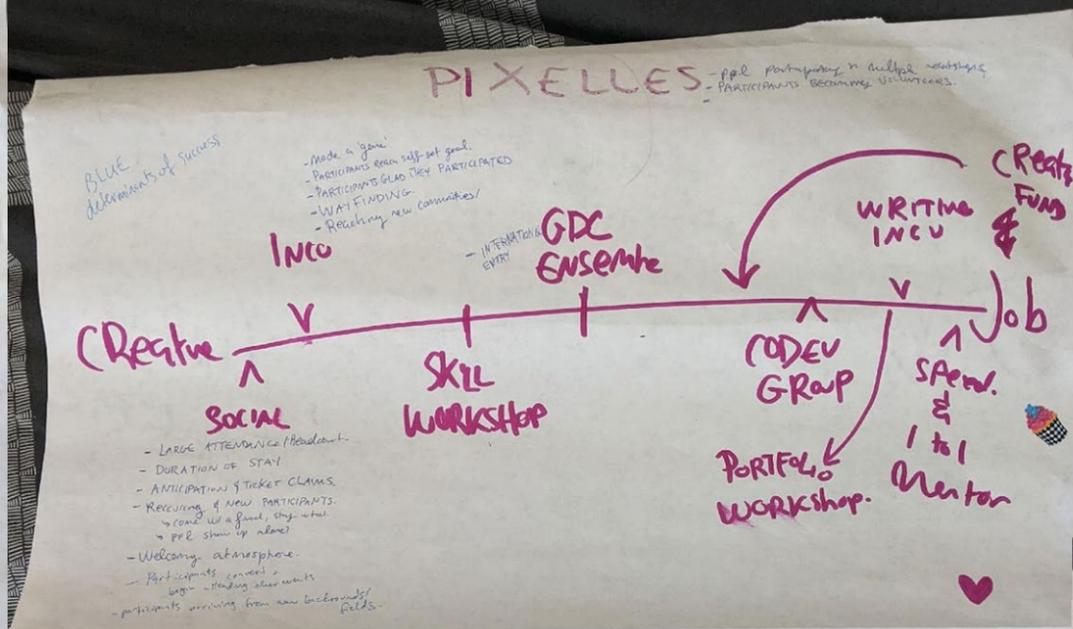
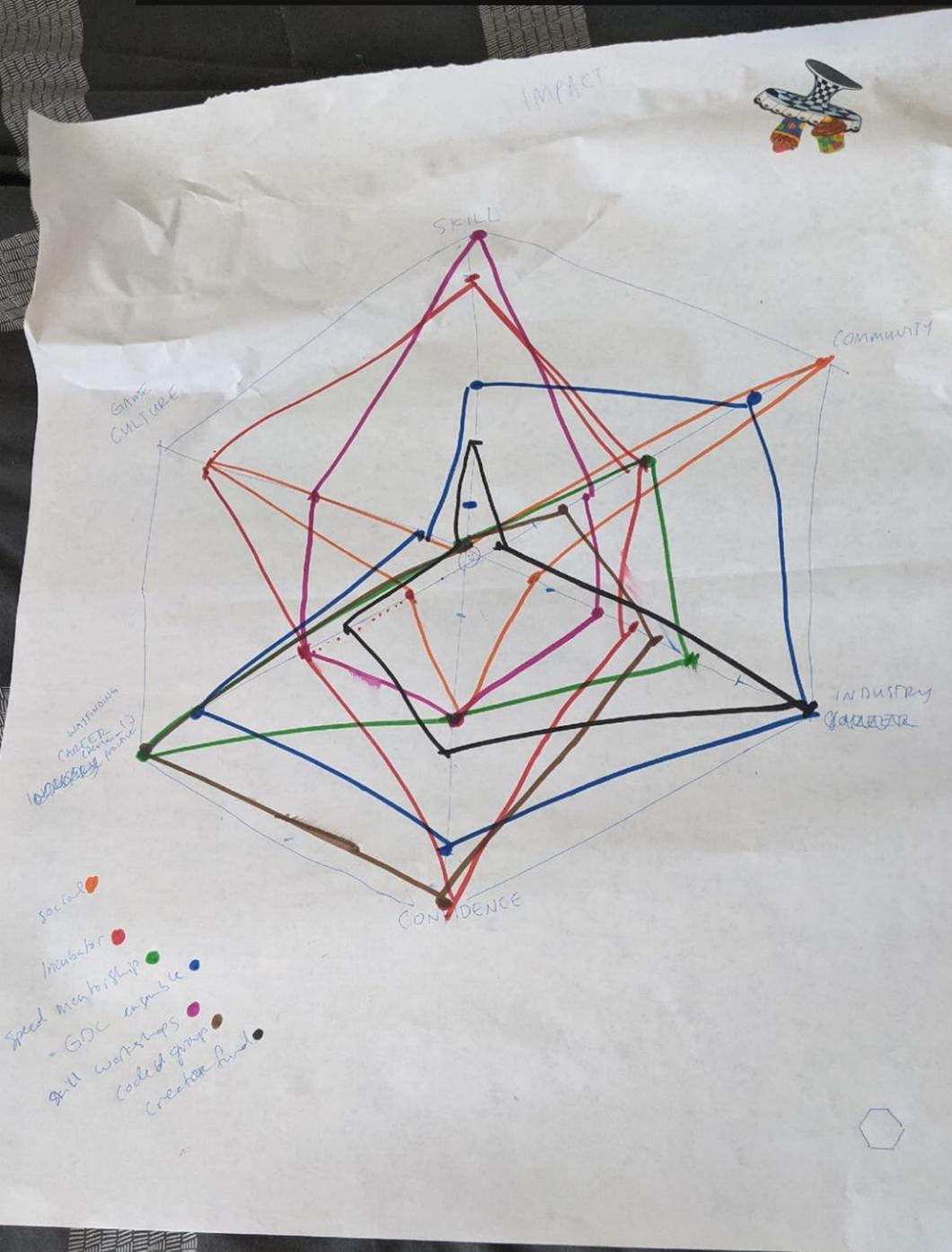


“I've directly seen the impact that Pixelles has on people's lives. So for me it would be really important to be able to have something that can be shared in this mostly digestible for the rest of the world, **for them to see how much good this organization is doing and really kind of shows how much of a gap there is in actually supporting people and how much work there still is to be done.** And hopefully get people on board and supporting Pixelles more and sending us a couple of checks and stuff like that, which is always appreciated.”

Co-design Workshop 1 @ BaNQ



Co-design Workshop 1 @ BaNQ

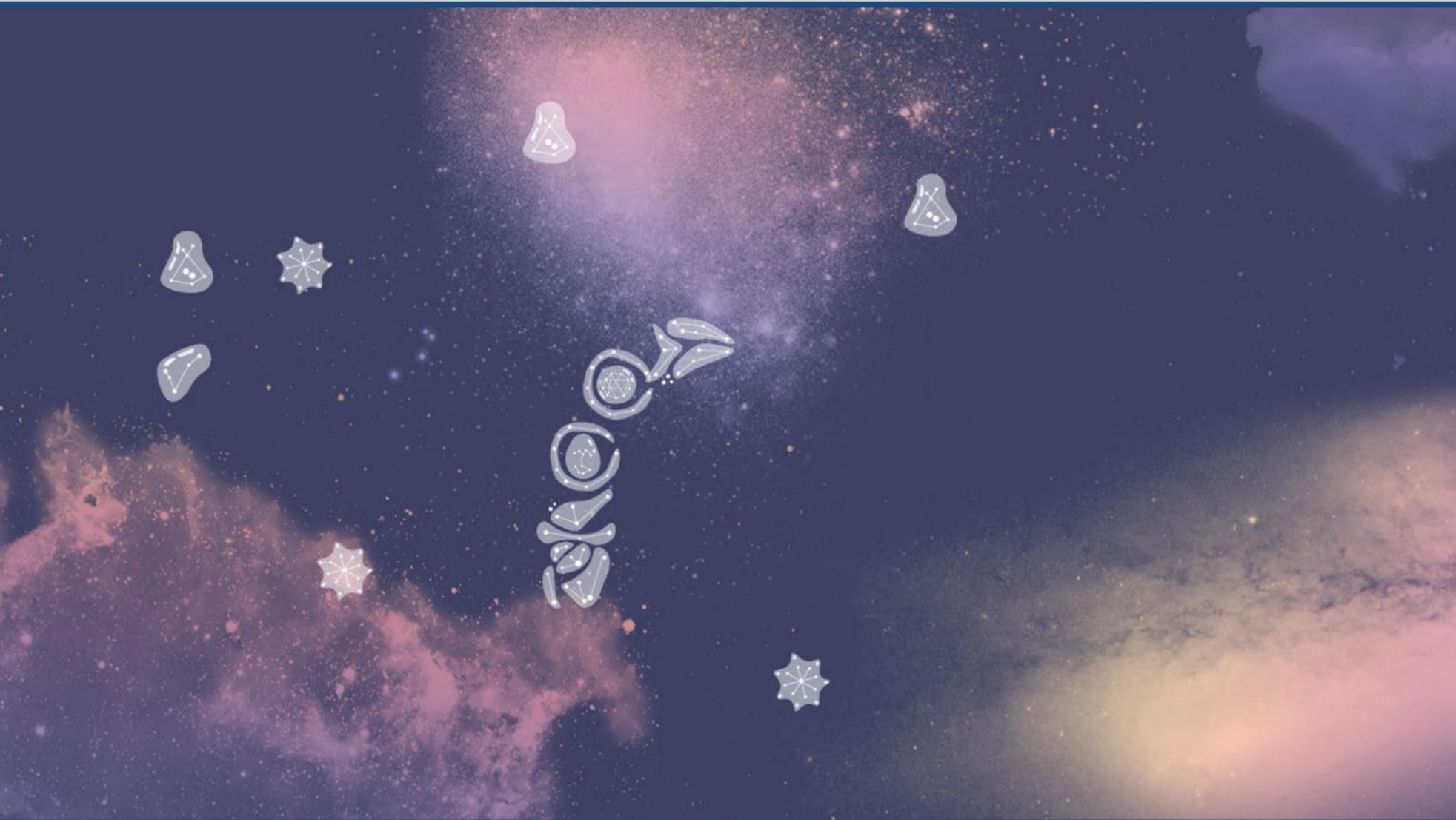
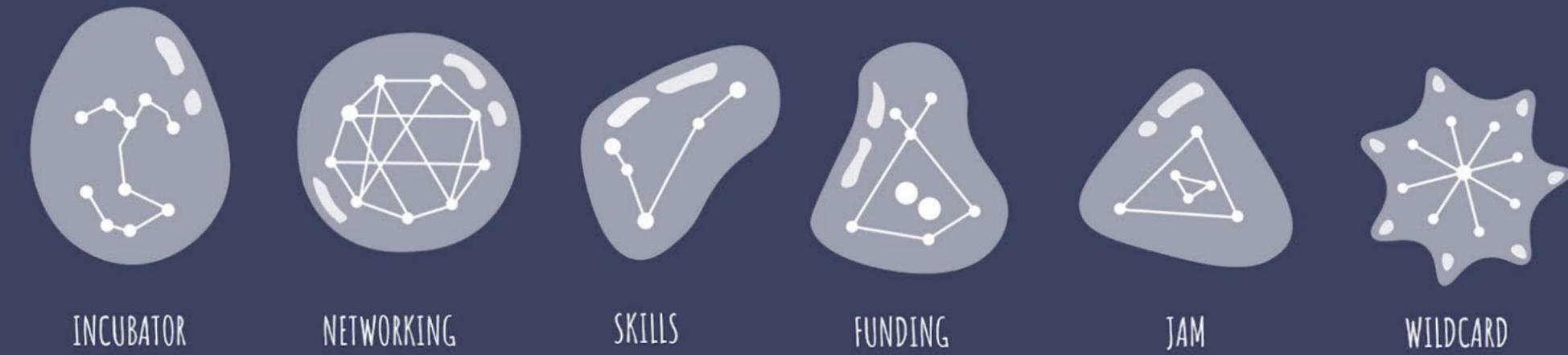


- "INCUBATOR" 1 to 1 Mentorship?
- WRITING INCUBATOR (Creator Funds)
 - SOCIALS GDC Ensemble
 - speed Mentorship CODEU GROUP / CAREER ACCEL.
 - GAME JAMS WORKSHOPS.

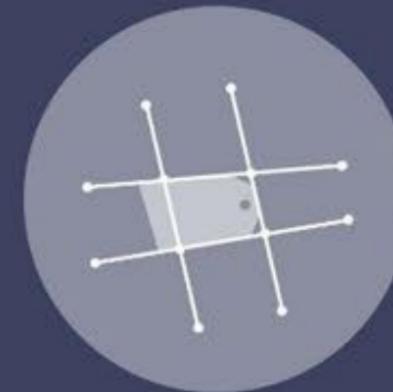
- WHAT INFO DOES FEEL SAFE TO SHARE?
- people do want data shared that helps Pixelles exist and reach people.
 - "Pixelles is a feminist witch hunt" LOL.
 - People get labelled as "difficult"
 - some people have no stake or experience with marginalization. Some people only feel affected by direct, personal situations.
 - could quantitative questions "safely" point to issues?
 - + time/space for feedback / text boxes?
 - data used for context but never publicly share
 - leading questions are a problem!
 - embedding consent in tools + practices

Co-design Workshop 2 (online)





- Each Shape of “Moment” refers to a different type of Pixelles program
 - Incubator
 - Networking
 - Skills
 - Funding
 - Jam
 - Wildcard
- Each Moment is the documentation specific point in Pixelles history, with its many impacts
- Each Moment is from the perspective of an individual or organization (*ie “Allison at Teacade” and “Squinky at Teacade” are different moments*)



COMMUNITY IMPACT

How did this moment contribute to the co-creation of a space where I and others feel like we can get and give support and solidarity through our challenges, vulnerabilities and endeavors?

PERSONAL IMPACT

How did this moment contribute to the co-creation of a space where I and others feel like we can get and give support and solidarity through our challenges, vulnerabilities and endeavors?

CULTURAL IMPACT

Aggregated community and personal moments: How did the many community and personal moments contribute to a larger impact on the culture?

INDUSTRY IMPACT

Aggregated professional and personal: How did the many professional and personal moments contribute to a larger impact on the industry?

PROFESSIONAL IMPACT

How did this moment allow me to gain a competency, laurel, or connection that helped me better my employment prospects or work environment?

TAGS

Meaningful details of the moment: date, location, organizations, people, games, ect

CONTINUING CONTRIBUTION

Who gave back to Pixelles to make this moment happen?



COMMUNITY IMPACT



PERSONAL IMPACT



PROFESSIONAL IMPACT



TAGS



CONTINUING CONTRIBUTION

Icons represent different types of impact. Moments have:

- Community Impact
- Personal Impact
- Professional Impact
- Continuing Contribution
- Tags

EVENT TITLE CAN BE THIS LONG
ACROSS TWO LINES MAXIMUM







PROFESSIONAL IMPACT

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis autem vel eum iriure dolor in hendrerit in vulputate velit esse molestie consequat, vel illum dolore eu feugiat nulla facilisis at vero eros et accumsan et iusto odio dignissim qui blandit praesent luptatum zzril delenit augue dui dolore te feugait nulla facilisi.

Photographer: Illustrator McCurvetool
MONTH 20XX

CLOSE



CULTURAL IMPACT



INDUSTRY IMPACT



TAGS

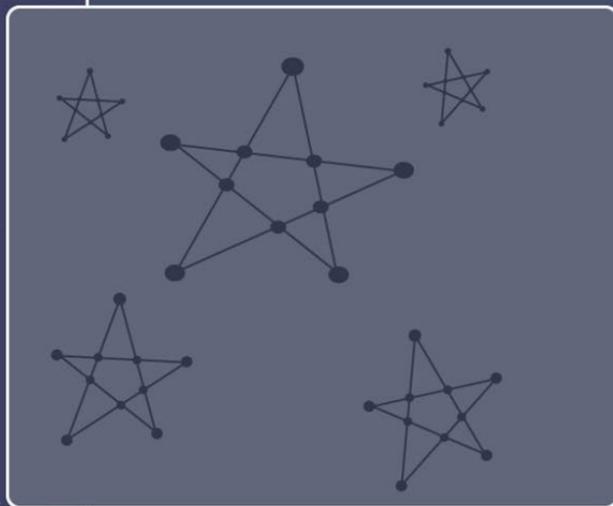


CONTINUING CONTRIBUTION

Icons represent different type of impact. Achievements have:

- Cultural Impact
- Industry Impact
- Continuing Contribution
- Tags

ACHIEVEMENT TITLE CAN BE THIS LONG TWO LINES MAXIMUM



INDUSTRY IMPACT

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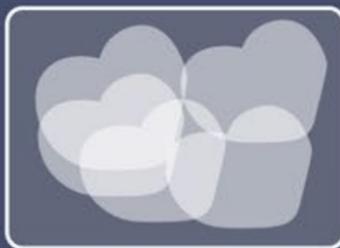
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Photographer: Illustrator McCurvetool

5 MOMENTS IN ONE YEAR

CLOSE

EVENT TITLE CAN BE THIS LOOOOONG ACROSS ONE LINE MAXIMUM



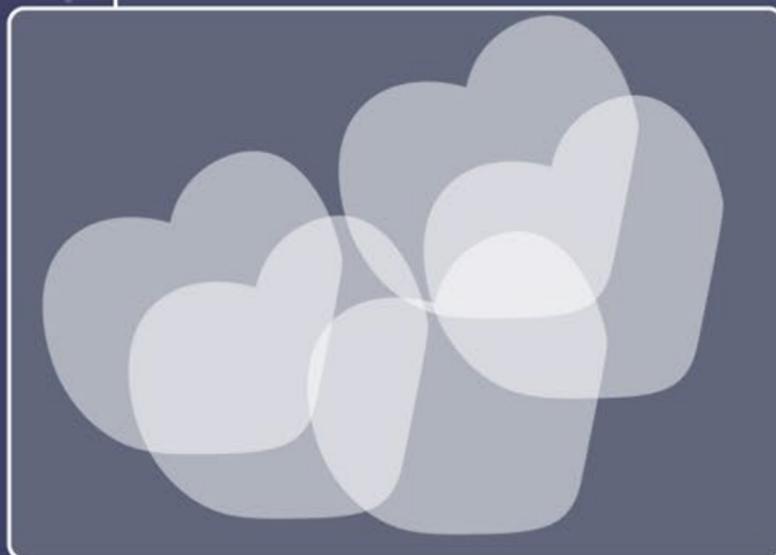
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MORE

CLOSE

- Popup when clicking on a “Moment”
- Gives summary of the program associated with the moment

EVENT TITLE CAN BE THIS LONG
ACROSS TWO LINES MAXIMUM



PROFESSIONAL IMPACT

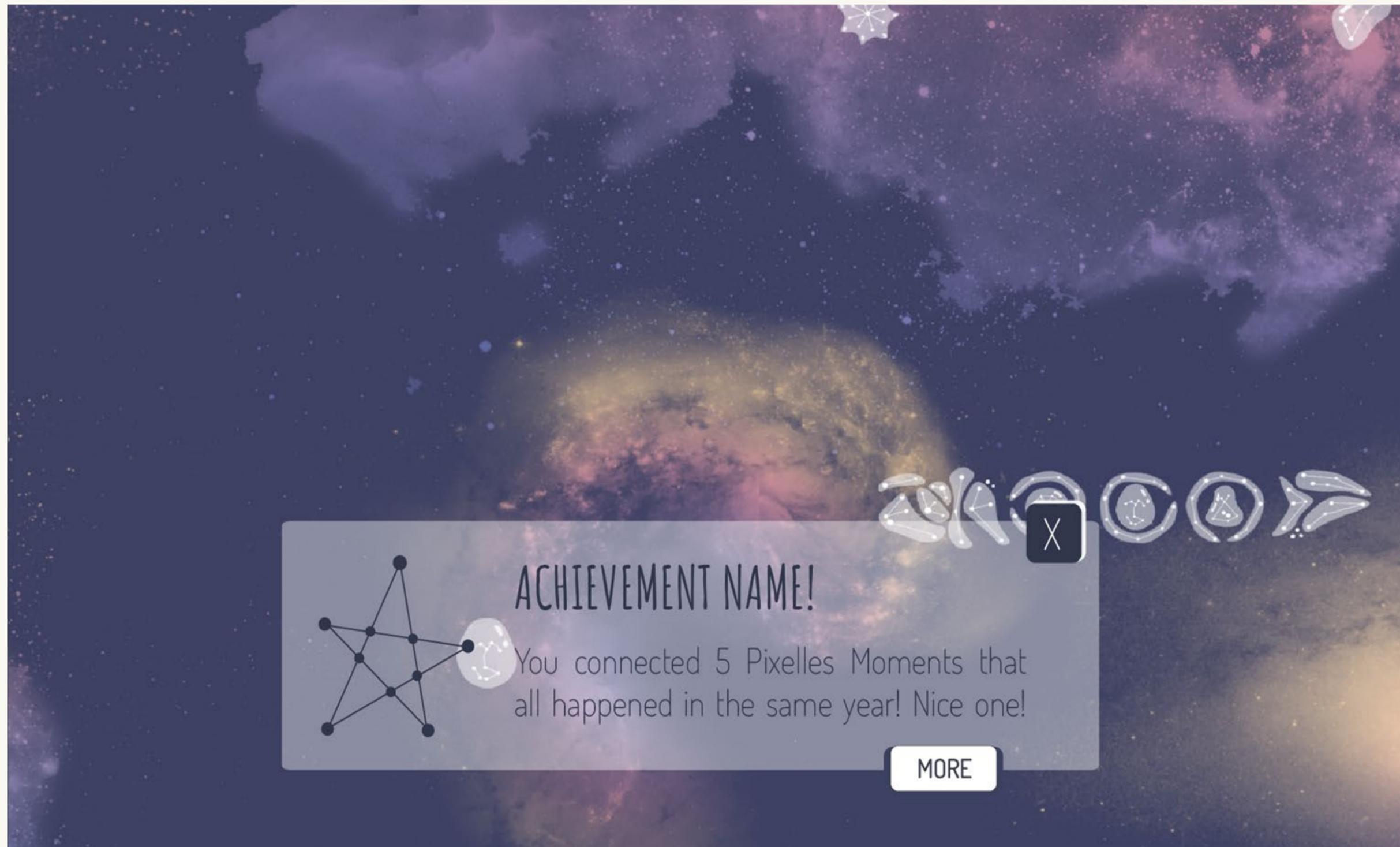
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Photographer: Illustrator McCurvetool

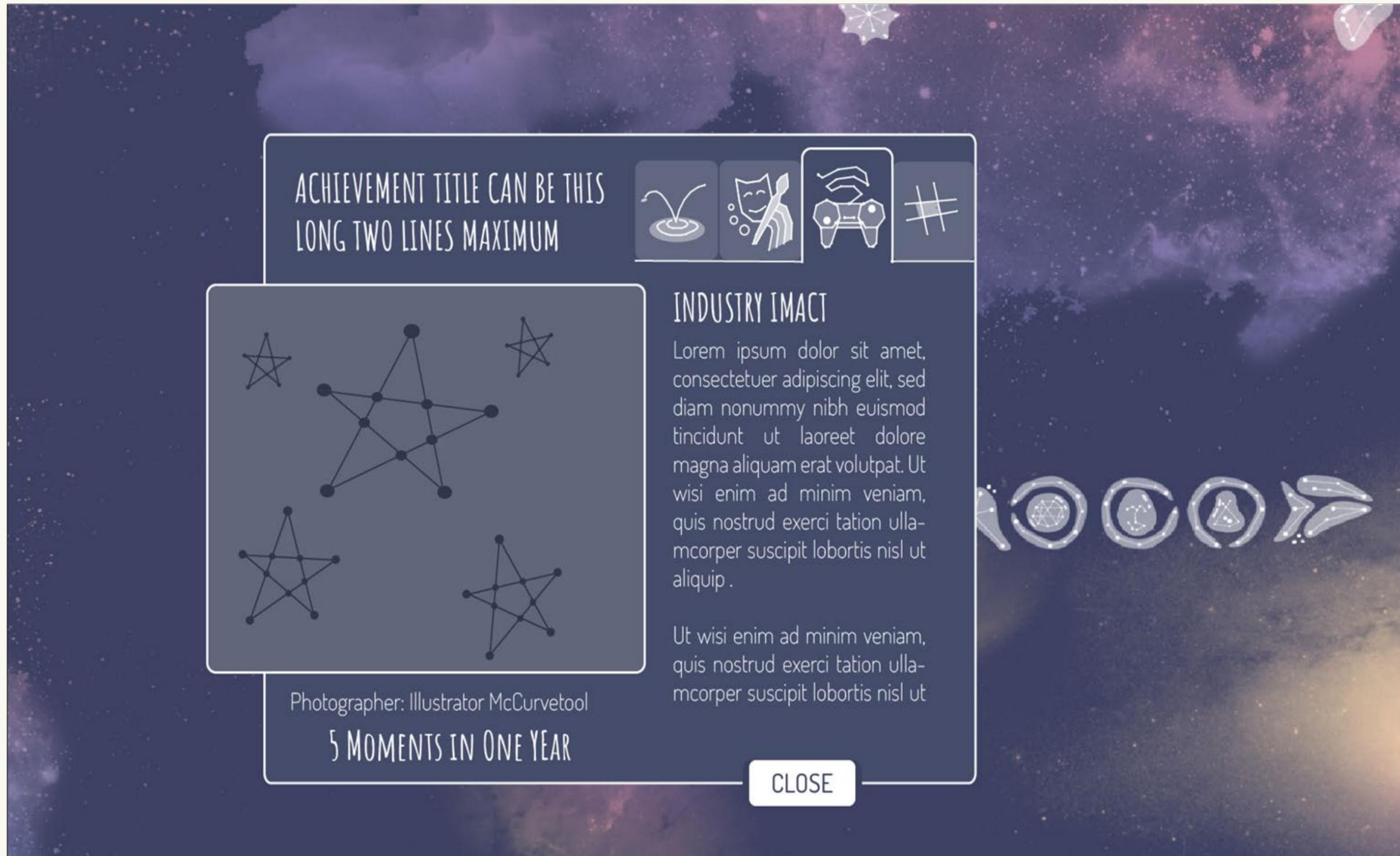
MONTH 20XX

CLOSE

Detailed popup
with different
types of
“individual”
impact:
Personal
Community
Professional



Achievement basic popup



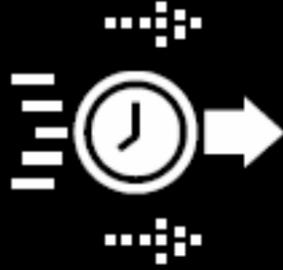
Detailed Achievement popup with different types of larger scale impact:

Cultural and Industry



Impact is more than just numbers

Women



more frequently report being **temporary employees** compared to men

Workers of Color



report being **independent contractors** and **freelancers** at higher rates compared to white workers.

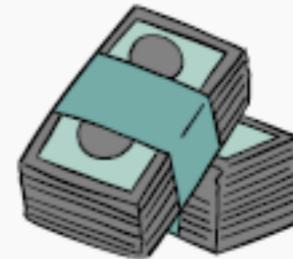
Women & Workers of Color



are more likely to hold **part-time positions** compared to white men.

COMPENSATION

Men are disproportionately represented in higher income brackets, and women are disproportionately represented in lower income brackets.



Do you feel there is equal treatment and opportunity for all in the game industry?"

2014

47% answered "No"

28% answered "Yes"

25% answered "Not sure"

or N/A

2022

74% answered "No"

12% answered "Yes"

14% answered "Not sure"

Your DEI Initiatives Are Making Your Culture Worse

Anita Sarkeesian (Executive Director, Feminist Frequency)

Location: Room 2005, West Hall

Date: Thursday, March 23

Time: 2:00 pm - 2:30 pm

Pass Type: All Access Pass, Core Pass, Summits Pass, Expo Pass, Audio Pass, Independent Games Summit Pass

Topic: Advocacy

Format: Lecture

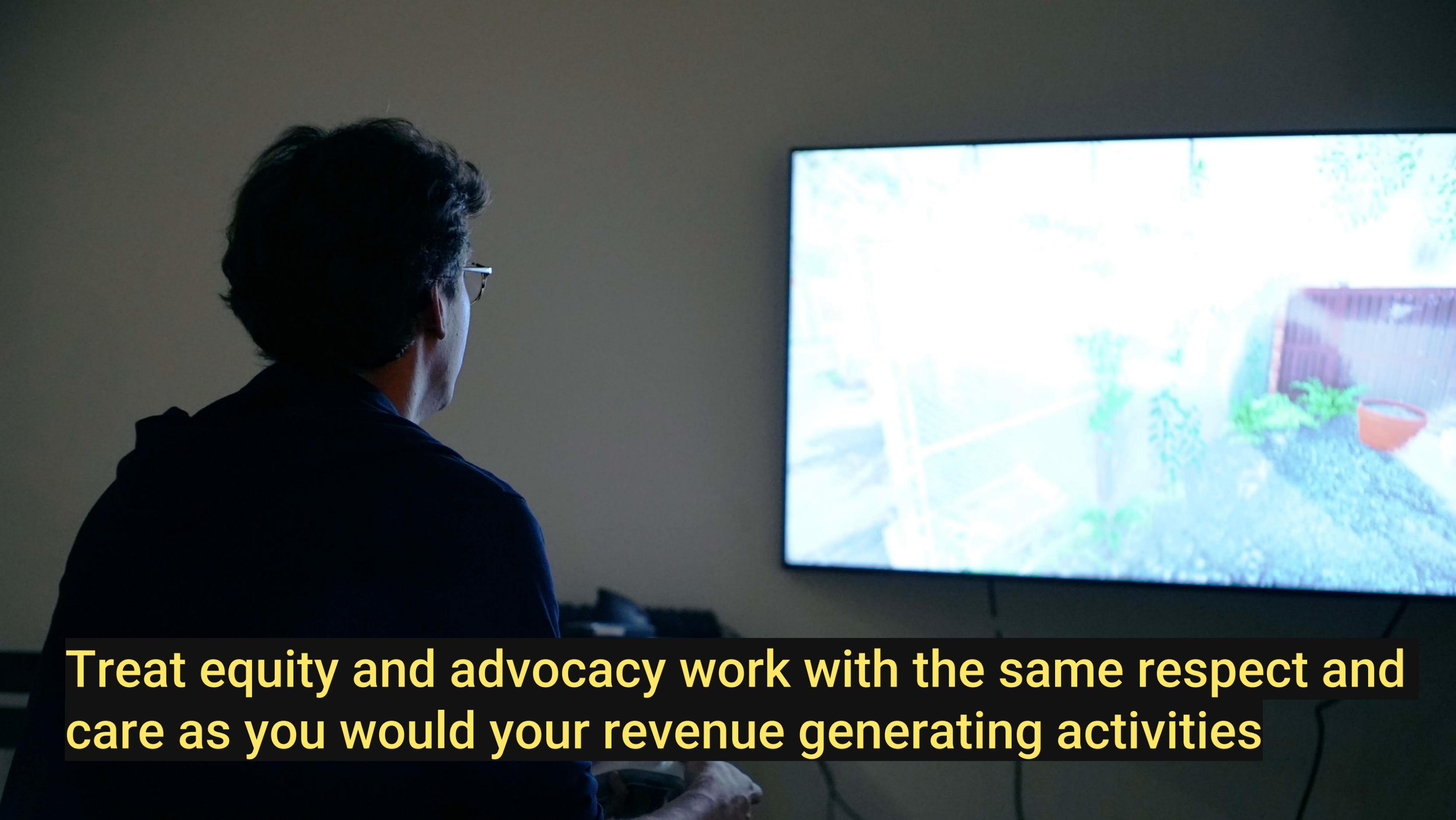
Vault Recording: Video



Empowerment Playbook



Marginalized people know what they need from allies



Treat equity and advocacy work with the same respect and care as you would your revenue generating activities



**Inclusivity work requires materials.
Invest money, time, and resources into it.**

This is labour!

- Pay people
- Release them from other duties
- Be mindful of overloading people
- Respect their time and timelines





Your own visibility should not be the focus.

Don't forget:
White Women Voted
for
TRUMP

A person is blindfolded with a green cloth and stands in a dark room with purple ambient lighting. They are holding two glowing green controllers, one in each hand, with their arms extended horizontally. The background features a bright, glowing purple light source. On the left side, the silhouette of another person's head and shoulder is visible.

Decenter yourself

- Why are you doing this?
- Who asked for it?
- How will they benefit?

Sit with the discomfort

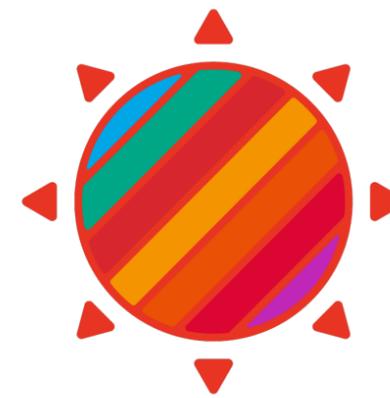
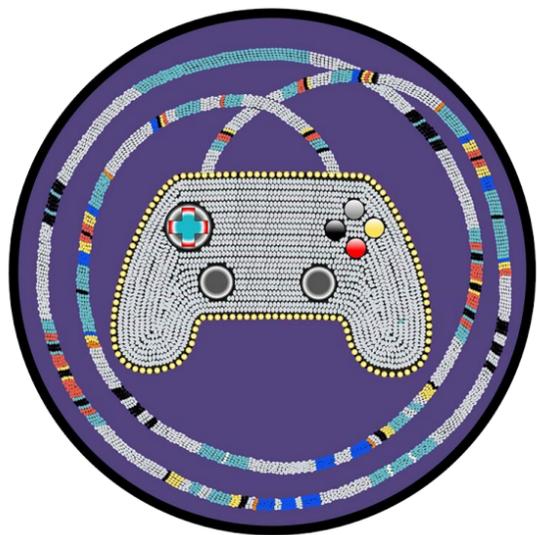
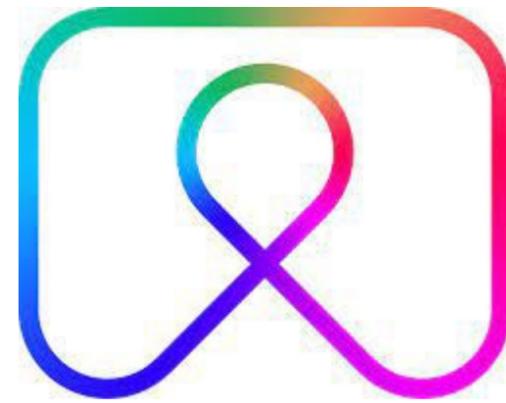


**Reframe criticism and failure as opportunities
for change**



Empowerment

The “secret” to making and measuring change lies in collective and communal power



Thank you

Dr. Alison Harvey

Associate Professor

York University

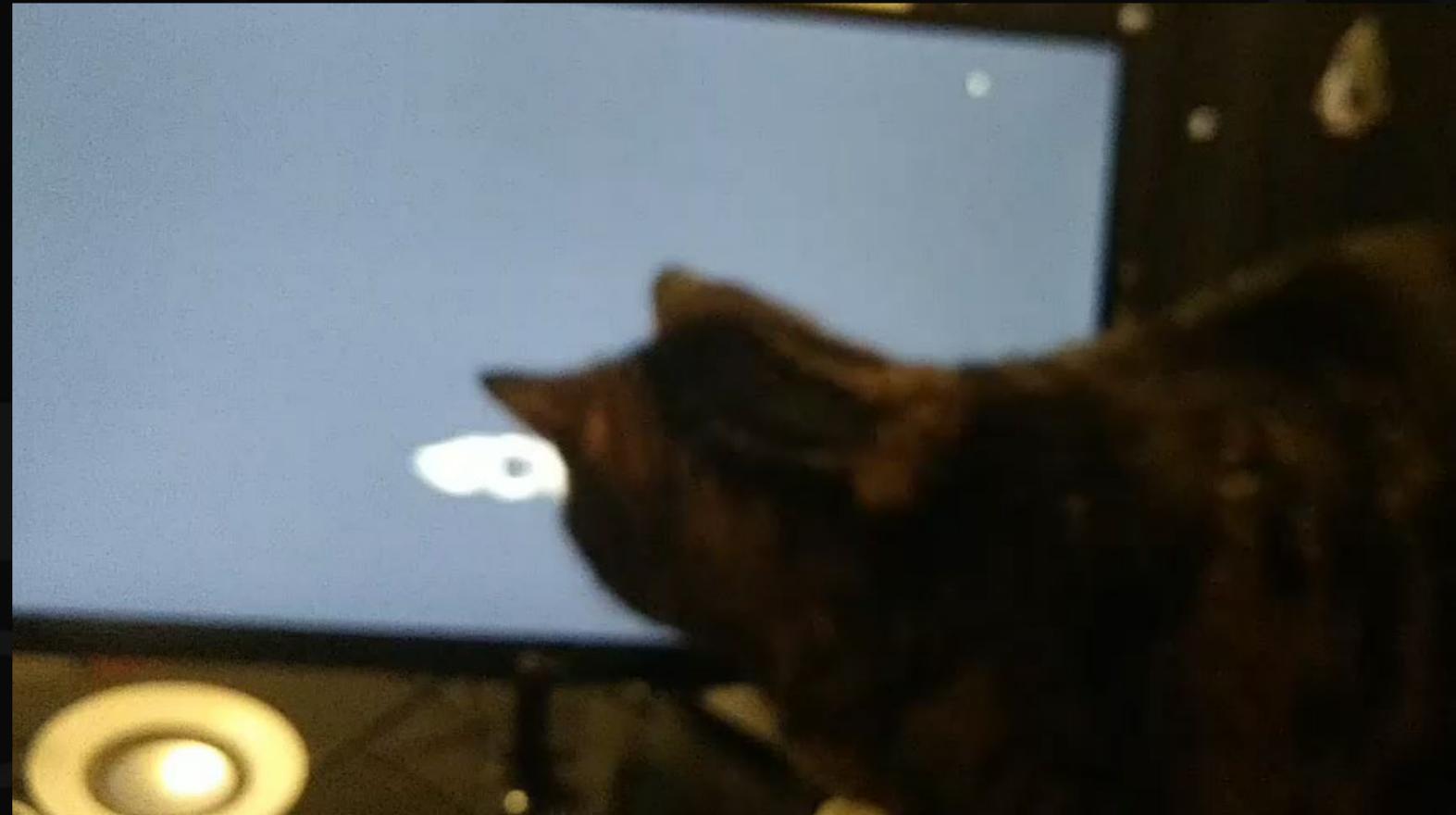
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Social Sciences and Humanities
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