

Between Diverse Industry and Game Characters - An Analysis of Tool-based Representation Design

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ABSTRACT

As products of both creative endeavors and corporate planning, game characters are created for player engagement. Questions around representation, of both videogame characters and player identities, as well as marginalized game industry workers, has been at the forefront of gender- and feminist writings in interdisciplinary game studies. This study is located in the intersection of these perspectives, focusing on the King's Diversity Space, a game design and research collaboration between King, Activision: Blizzard, and the MIT Game Lab (Massachusetts Institute of Technology Game Lab). The results show how different goals, limited transparency, misinformation in the promotional material and eventual loss of equal ownership cumulated into an eventually non-successful collaboration.

Keywords

Game production; Game characters; Tools; Diversity; Organizational culture; Inclusive Design; Research collaboration

INTRODUCTION

Video game characters created for various imaginary worlds are represented through diverse backgrounds and identities, reflecting both cultural, ethnic, gender, and additional societal markers from our lived realities as well as fictional identity categories. These characters do not only appear in the featured games, but also in fan creations, game marketing, and beyond (see e.g. Shaw 2015; Phillips 2020). Players tend to prefer playing with characters that look like them, however not all bodies are made available to players (see e.g. Dietrich 2023). Maletska (2024) argues that focusing solely on visual and textual representations of game characters risks that layers of the "connection with (queer) player's experiences remains undiscussed" (137), highlighting the relevance to also include game mechanics. Our focus here is character representation, not from a player perception perspective, but from a game design perspective. While fictional characters are not necessarily representative of

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their creators, games are created in the contexts of intersecting interests, including both creative endeavors and corporate realities. As we will get back to, game industry professionals might experience a disconnect from the values or representations communicated through the final game.

Previous intersectional analysis in game studies has often focused primarily on either character representation (see e.g. Pelurson 2018; Phillips 2020; Shaw 2015) or marginalized game industry workers affected by corporate and political agendas (Fisher, Chen, & Taylor 2025; Nooney 2020; Okabe 2018). This paper is situated between existing research on game characters and representations, as well as game production studies, and focuses on one case from a high-budget game development context. The aim of this paper is to explore connections between game characters, representation of diversity, and game production based on the case of the King's Diversity Space. The King's Diversity Space (KDS) is a game design and research collaboration between King, Activision: Blizzard, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Game Lab (the MIT Game Lab) and is also referred to as King's Diversity Space Tool, or Diversity Space Tool (Activision: Blizzard 2022). By exploring the process around creating the tool, we are underlining the connections between the game design processes and in-game representations based on empirical interview material from an expert involved in this particular case, showing the situated effect on research-industry collaborations and organizational culture.

The KDS web-tool (see Figure 1), a tool designed for game designers for inclusive game design, consists of various character categorizations, their alignment with different 'categories of diversity' and a decagon visualization to support this analysis. Initially intended as a workshop tool for inclusive character design, the Diversity Space Tool was originally developed for a game industry audience (Jakobsson et al. 2019). While originally built for a facilitator-led workshop for game designers, the collaboration would later result in a project with the goal of developing a web tool for the industry, operating without a facilitator (Jakobsson et al. 2019; Activision: Blizzard 2022). The KDS tool and Activision: Blizzard were also tied to the Swedish studio King, known for the *Candy Crush Saga* (see e.g. Tassi 2022), and being part of the larger game conglomerate¹. As a subsidiary², King is named as the industry-level project collaborator while the main public communications have been handled by Activision: Blizzard (2022). The collaboration was led by Mikael Jakobsson all together, prototyping and spearheading the tool through workshops and design sketches and Jakobsson is the expert interviewed here.

Diverse character designs are specifically used as promotional material, see for example screenshots showcasing a "diverse cast of characters in Call of Duty: Vanguard" (Blizzard Entertainment 2025, 1). Both the Call of Duty: Vanguard and Overwatch 2 franchises and associated characters belong to Activision: Blizzard (2022) and since 2023 to the Microsoft corporation. As the characters from Activision: Blizzards Overwatch 2 (2025) were used to exemplify the KDS (see figure 1), we continue with such a focus here. Overwatch 2 remains one of the larger live-service games that fall under the genre category of hero shooters. This genre is identified by competitive player versus player environments, which are populated by a cast of heroes controlled by the players. These include objectives and different goals, and the players compete for these by using weapons and abilities tied to their chosen hero. With the release of *Marvel: Rivals* (NetEase Games 2025) on the 6th of December 2024, Activision: Blizzard got yet another competitor for the genre focusing on the

Marvel Multiverse and its highly popular characters, and as such, we see a clear financial incentive to continuously create profitable characters.

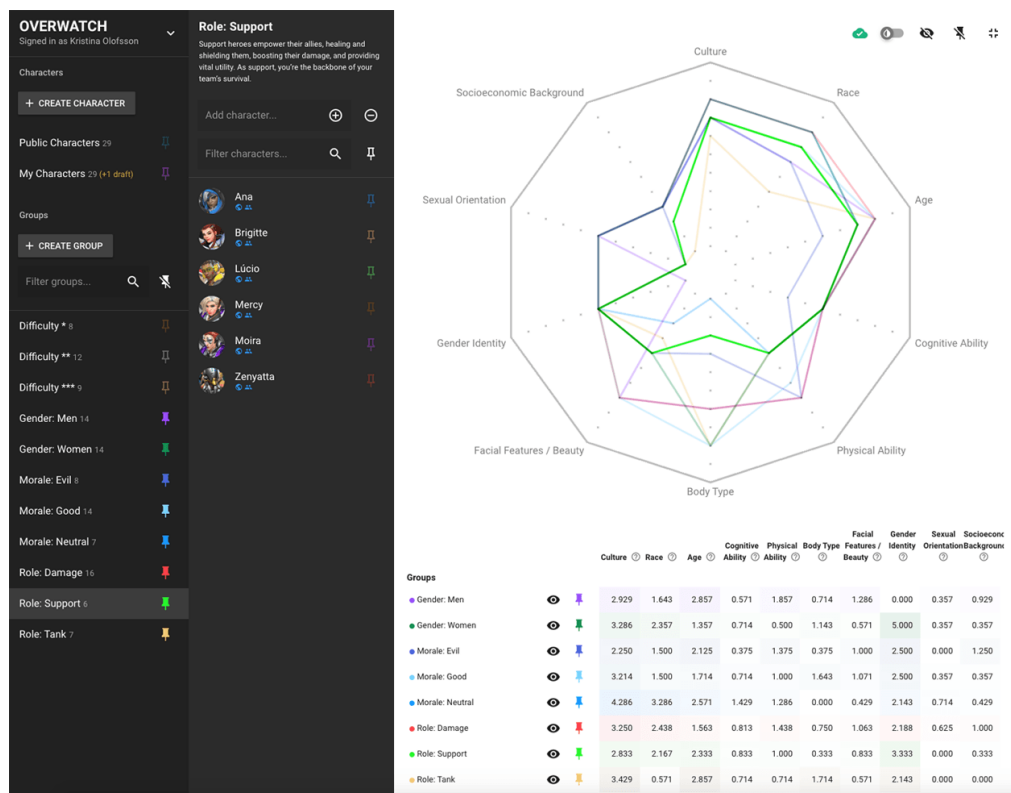


Figure 1: A screen-capture of the King’s Diversity Space with characters from Overwatch 2 (Blizzard Entertainment 2025)

According to the developers, the King’s Diversity Space, contributes with “... a tangible way of avoiding tokenism, stereotypes, and exclusion” in the process of designing diverse characters and narratives (Activision: Blizzard, 2022, 1). There is limited previous research focusing on the tool, with existing work focusing on project collaboration aspects (Jakobsson et al. 2019). The primary data used in this case study consists of an expert interview conducted in early 2024 with Mikael Jakobsson, one of the leading researchers and design teachers at MIT who was involved in the game industry collaboration with King (see Solala 2024). As an identifiable expert on the topic and the collaboration, Jakobsson has consented to being named in this paper.

This paper examines the intersections of game design, game production, and game representations through the previously mentioned expert interview, as well as employing game news and marketing material as supplementary content to the game Overwatch 2. As such, our research questions are:

RQ1: In the case of King’s Diversity Space, how did the game developers’ communication about the tool affect the research and industry collaboration?

RQ2: How can research and design collaboration in the industry create opportunities to tackle systemic issues for the global games industry?

Background

Character representation in video games has been extensively discussed in critical game research, see e.g. the work by Kennedy (2002) on Lara Croft, the protagonist of the Tomb Raider-series, with her (at one point) ever-increasing breast size and revealing clothing, as one of the early examples. Corneliussen (2008) noted that despite being fictitious, the races in World of Warcraft (WoW) are gendered according to the male-female binary, as female characters have breasts and slimmer waistlines whereas male characters have more notable muscles. In the same volume, Langer (2008) notes that with the fictitious races of WoW being shaped by cultural borrowing from non-game contexts, they manage to be both racist as well as antiracist at the same time (Langer, 2008). As highlighted by Phillips (2020), the women protagonist (FemShep) in the Mass Effect trilogy having the same movements as her man counterpart show the financial incentives within the game industry: reskinning characters without changing their movement patterns is a less costly option. If diverse in-game representation is only present in the character creation stage, the game developers shift the responsibility of marginalized bodies to the players (Shaw, 2015). However, not all bodies are available as avatars, as game designers decide “which skin tones, facial options, hair colors, and hairstyles are available to the player, thereby placing strict limits on the variability of avatar appearance. When non-white options are absent from avatar creation capabilities, the world is populated only by white avatars”, thereby curating a white space game world (Dietrich, 2023, p. 24).

Game production studies analyze the behind-the-scenes of game making and industry, and it further questions official narratives of corporate game development (Sotamaa and Švelch 2021). Nooney (2020) noted that efforts made by women in the US game industry are often uncredited, especially when their work support the product, such as work in administration or sales, rather than directly with the product. In a study on the Japanese game industry, Okabe (2018) saw how gender norms also affected Japanese women game developers: due to protectionism (being sent home earlier due to risks associated with commuting as a woman alone at night) and motherhood resulted in the women being perceived as less hardworking than their men colleagues. The current shift in the game industry, where games are no longer seen as finished products but as a service that is to be continuously maintained and updated, has a clear effect on those working in the industry and their professional identities, which can be seen in the difference of performance criteria laid out by a Games as a Service (GaaS) model versus the traditional Games as a Product (GaaP)(see e.g., Dubois & Weststar, 2021). Whether or not this impacts the inclusion of marginalized groups within the game industry remains to be seen (Dubois & Weststar, 2021).

Previous case studies (Blom 2022 & 2023; Shaw 2015 & 2017; Phillips 2020) on videogame characters, diversity in game making, and digital solutions for complex societal questions show overlapping boundaries in the field of identity politics and cultural products of game development. When games adapt to a live service game model, this can have an impact on the player and the reception of the game character (Blom 2023). In their analysis of the dynamic game character, Blom notes that “dynamic game characters become a problem when video games promise players creative agency over the figure’s identity inside the game, while developers struggle to follow through on that promise” (2023, p. 24). Through online connectivity and constant demand for content by the players, in live service games require the

attention of the developers. As Blom (2022, p. 54) describes, this rather presents itself as an unfinished text or “fluid text”, allowing the expansion of narratives and character updates and even mechanics on a ceaseless basis. A major emphasis within the Overwatch franchise is the playable characters: not only is the gameplay for each character unique, but the characters also represent various real-world nationalities and contexts. The cast is according to Activision: Blizzard (2022) presented as diverse: diverse in terms of technological features and modifications, bodies, origins, gender, ethnicity, as well how they are representing various cultures, countries, and communities.

Ganzon (2022, 224) highlights that examining gaming culture via individual fandoms can help flesh out cultural politics that limits inclusivity. While discourse of diversity in Overwatch also happens among the game’s audience (see e.g. Välisalo & Ruotsalainen, 2022), here we examine how it is located within the politics of game-making. Game design is in turn directly influenced by the game’s strategy and the player’s feedback, iterating the idea of the “dynamic game character“(Blom 2023, 24) and how it exists in the character drafts and approaches of the creative game industry. Dynamic game characters, as defined by Blom (2023), are characters which offer the player different types of creative agency, influencing the way they interact and shape the character’s identity, which causes tensions with narrative continuity (ibid. 24-25). Further, Blom (2022) highlight the power the power position of the game developers: through the example of how the Overwatch hero Mercy was overhauled and how changes to her character design were in conflict with her original narrative backstory, it is apparent designer have the power to change a text as it being engaged with by the players.

In understanding the intersections of design, production, and representation of characters, we move towards complicating “what it means to seek pleasure through becoming the other” (Leonard 2006 in Leach & Dehnert 2021, 29), which here means acting as and becoming a character in a digital game. The theoretical focus of this paper lies on transculturality, and intersectionality (Shaw 2015; Ganzon 2022) by deploying Adrienne Shaw’s reading (2017) on Stuart Hall’s reception model of “Encoding/Decoding”. Illustrated here (Figure 2), is the process of hiding and interpretation or encoding and decoding of a text or texts, with intended uses by the designers and emergent uses by the users, following Hall’s theory (Shaw 2017). Shaw further describes this and frames it for games and interactive media: “The point in bringing Hall into this, moreover, is to interrogate the power dynamics involved. What counts a dominant, negotiated, or oppositional use is intrinsically linked to who has the power to define how technologies *should* be used (Shaw 2017, 599).”

Theories of intersectionality and representation allow the deconstruction of tool-based representation design with the specific case of the King’s Diversity Space, extending the analysis to the overlap of design, research, game production, and game characters and the effects of the projects reception.

Encoding/Decoding for Designed Affordances?

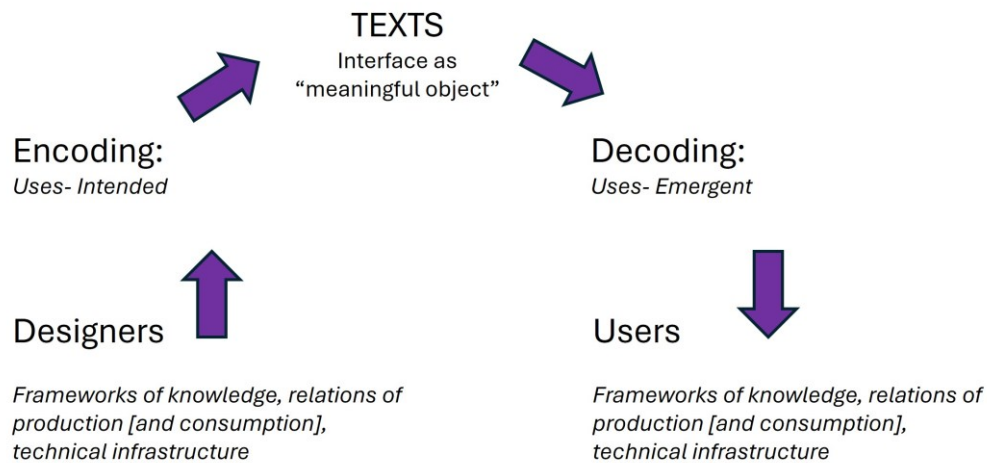


Figure 2: Encoding and decoding the interface. (Re-drawn by Brückner; original cf. Shaw 2017)

Understanding the designer’s perspective in this specific case is crucial to further unpack the relationship in research-industry projects and trace the development of the text towards interpretation and engagement. The following section will lay out the material used for the analysis and discuss the methodological choice for the research.

RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODOLOGY, AND MATERIALS

This paper utilizes empirical data gathered by Maximilian Brückner (see also Solala 2024) through an expert interview with a key project stakeholder of King’s Diversity Space, Mikael Jakobsson. Jakobsson has kindly consented to the interview and being named here in this paper in line with the expert interview methodology (where anonymization is impossible due to the uniqueness of the profile of the interviewee). The expert interview method allows us to “blend general results with context-specific information that is often not in the public domain” and, thereby, contextualize the relationship of development processes and promotional communication (von Soest 2023, 277). The unique perspective of the expert interviewee within and outside expertise (actor and analyst) reinforces the framework of this study (von Soest 2023, 283).

We discuss this material in relation with political regressions for global players engaged with US diversity policies and their impact on male-dominated industries by reviewing literature connected to concepts brought up in the interview (see e.g. Shaw 2015; Phillips 2020). We do so by employing Shaw’s model (Figure 2) on Hall’s (1991) critical media and cultural studies theory of encoding and decoding with an emphasis “of designed affordances to better account for power, resistance, and interactivity in digital media environments” (Shaw 2017, 593). This allows us to particularly focus on important aspects of design, use, user, and reception (ibid. 597).

The interview data contextualizes the case of King’s Diversity Space, to illustrate the importance of situating complex design solutions in game production environments. The expert interview data functions as primary data in this paper and communication

about the King's Diversity Space tool by Activision: Blizzard functions as secondary data. The official communications changed their location and content on the official Blizzard website throughout 2024 until they got entirely removed. The archival version of the blogpost, including edited content, by Wowhead (2022) is still available and accessible at the time of writing.

The participant was provided with information about the project prior to the interview over email. As Jakobsson is currently Research Coordinator for the MIT Game Lab, we argue that he was able to provide informed consent for participating in line with expert interview practice using actual names rather than pseudonyms. The participant has seen the quotes in context and accepted the use of quotes used in this paper prior to publication. As the material was initially gathered for a thesis project (Solala, 2024), we asked separately for consent to use the material for this paper as well. As such, we thereby adhere to the principle of consent as a continuous process (see e.g. Tummons, 2022). The semi-structured interview was conducted over Zoom in 2024 and transcribed by the first author.

“IT GAVE ME THE CREEPS” - MAIN FINDINGS

In this section, we discuss the key findings from the interview data, and in relation to the public communication materials. The central findings in this part relate to disruptions during the collaboration project, differences in organizational culture and values, and a mismatch between public communication statements and intended design.

According to the promotional material, [...]” the Diversity Space Tool can clearly delineate between token characters and true representation” in the process of designing diverse characters (Activision: Blizzard 2022, 1). In the tool, diverse representation is based on identity categories, such as age and body type as well as race and cultural background and their respective scaling on the tool's vectors. What is referred to with ‘true representation’ is not explicitly defined. The public statements and marketing communications did not reflect the initial ideas of the project group, as King's Diversity Space initially was intended as an iterative tool which should not be viewed in isolation (Jakobsson 2024). The blogpost refers to the tool as a “measurement device” with an opportunity to “uncover unconscious bias” (Activision: Blizzard 2022). Especially the measuring aspect can be seen as a dangerous component, which according to the expert interviewed here, was never intended to be part of the tool (Jakobsson 2024). Other parts of the blogpost describe heterogeneity and overwhelming amounts of white protagonists in a majority of videogames and focus on creative collaborations with DEI specialists. While these respond closer to the tools intended design, the text as a whole disappoints that promise as it showcases diversity as something which is measurable and supports tokenistic representation, and neglecting the lived experience of the different marginalized groups the tool is based on in the first place.

According to Jakobsson, those within this research-industry collaboration that pushed for change, or requiring further iterations, left the company and their ties to the project behind. Jakobsson highlighted the trouble of trying to do research on the project, while simultaneously seeing what happened to the final version of King's

Diversity Space. Ultimately, the tool became inaccessible and was repurposed for corporate PR communications, all while Blizzard was facing legislative hurdles and employee turnover (ibid. 2024). That is to say, a disruption of communication between project partners took place, and today, only an edited blog post is the sole public remnant of the tool alongside the scattered screenshots of the tool circulating the web. Jakobsson (2024) emphasized in relation to the project: “I think it is a little bit [...] more about sort of corporate culture and [...] the grind of the game industry. And in many ways, I think King is better than other [...] studios I have been working with.”

As noted above, the interviewee highlighted the difficulties the collaboration faced, both from a perspective of corporate organizational culture and from aspects of the creative games industry. He still wanted to point out that it might be worse with other companies. Following up with the situation of precariousness for many, he shared what one of his key contacts at King had said that they are “too tired to keep pushing [...], it’s so frustrating. Basically, I don’t have it in me anymore”. (ibid. 2024). According to the interview material, this appeared to have been a shared experience among marginalized game industry workers, particularly those rejecting diversity being presented as something measurable and correspondingly pushing for change of the tools industry use. Further, the interview material highlights the importance of improving design pipelines within a men-dominated environment (ibid. 2024).

“[...] They both worked at King, and she also left. [...] Fire soul women³ that [...] were (changed grammar for readability) doing this sort of against the tide, [...] have given up on King [...] and gone to work somewhere else.” (Jakobsson 2024)

As the industry collaborators involved in the project eventually took ownership of and started driving the project, various contributors including the researchers within the collaboration were affected and moved on. Jakobsson highlights that the researchers involved were questioning the parts of the tool which might be misinterpreted, such as numbers and scores of diversity. How the events moved forward from here, was illustrated by Jakobsson (2024) with the following words: “The next thing I see is that press release or whatever it was from, from Activision: Blizzard. Their description of the tool just gave me the creeps.”

While in collaboration with high-budget game development actors, this project emerged as a collaborative initiative between higher education environments and the games industry. The resources offered from the perspective of the industry were mainly from women designers pushing for change, who found support through university actors. In the end, the communication between collaborators was disrupted due to the push for a deliverable tool, the focus on numbers within the tool, and finally, removing access to the final prototype. As noted by Jakobsson, this impacts not only broader game industry access but also prevents access for educational purposes and further workshops. The status of whatever is left of the tool is currently unknown to us.

DISCUSSION

The text (the King's Diversity Space) changed initially through the need for intricate metrics and numbers from corporate industry interest. With the pushback of the academic design team, we can observe a disruption of its intended use on the design and development backend. As Shaw (2017, 598) highlights, the "negotiated uses might fall somewhere in between perceptible and hidden affordances". We see here that the use of a specific text might be identified as 'correct' but at the same time not always as intended (ibid.). This further shows how the collaboration between research and industry in the case of the King's Diversity Space caused more than just project disruption: as the official communication caused what some collaborators found to be misleading information to be conveyed to Overwatch enthusiasts and player audiences at large. As the official communication did not give enough context to understand intended use and the iterative, analytical nature of the tool, supported by workshops and readings of academic literature discussing complex concepts of society and identity, the intended use of the tool was distorted.

Emergent use of the King's Diversity Space is tough to assess, as the data shows that access for industry professionals and researchers is restricted, not to even mention the general public. While player reception of the tool is beyond the scope of this paper, we argue that while players consume the games and engage with the characters, their decoding still happens from a perspective that connects with game cultural agency (Blom 2023). This shows that their engagement and player reception matters as the players are active in shaping the game culture surrounding their favorite games and can reject content pushed on them, even if the developer remains the authority at large (Blom 2022). Players seem to engage with the discourse surrounding the tool, however, there appears to be conflicting perspectives and stances in the tool's existence, where arbitrariness does not support its cause from either side, antagonizing players over a highly charged and political topic (see e.g. Tassi 2022). Jakobsson (2024) mentioned that the communication materials caused various news coverage from game journalism and regular news outlets. The political nature of the topic can form an opposition focusing on an anti-diversity discourse. This view is reflected in curated game lists and subreddits for "anti-woke games" (woke = "aware of and actively attentive to [...] issues of racial and social justice"; cf. Merriam Webster 2025), which celebrate the lack of diversity and representation efforts. Due to financial interests, the role of the audience can have a direct effect on projects such as these. Based on the interview material, it is plausible that was the case here as well, as the industry collaborators rejected the recommendations of iterative commitments by the consulting researchers.

As noted by Tassi (2022, 1) it is not uncommon for companies to edit public communication posts, especially when backlash is causing Activision: Blizzard "[...] to trend negatively, which is usually the only reason it *has* trended in the last year or so." The political nature of the topic resonates differently with different perspectives, and interestingly, the tool "[...] has united both left and right-leaning gamers in condemning how terrible this comes across" (Tassi 2022). It is possible that a shift in player reception could have impacted consecutive official communications from the side of the development teams and, thereby, kept the tool accessible to all parties involved.

Due to the visibility of the tool and the game characters made visible through it, the player audience got pulled into the discourse of how Activision: Blizzard seemingly

creates and adjusts their characters with a tool-based approach. Blom (2023, 23) argues that the look and mechanics of a game character as well as audience interpretation and interaction are closely tied to the author's control over a game's meaning-making. In the case of the King's Diversity Space, we see that authorial control becomes a type of complex encoding representing the game design perspective. While the researchers of MIT game lab involved in this project had similar authority during the process, the post-project phase stripped them of ownership, agency, and equal participation in public communication. This was a move which does not come as a surprise: as of the time of writing this paper, global games industry actors drop inclusive hiring and DEI efforts through regressions in US policies under Trumpian rule, targeting companies and universities "[...] thought to be engaged in 'illegal DEI'" (Drenon 2025). With the acquisition of Activision: Blizzard by Microsoft at the end of 2023, the ownership of intellectual property from game-related projects changed. How this affected the limbo-like state of the tool is something the expert could not comment on, but found that the tool re-emerging was unlikely. However, one development which could be observed post-acquisition is that the game launcher of Overwatch 2 (named Battle.net) stopped featuring the sequel number in the game name within its startup interfaces, prompting a reversal of its status as a game sequel. As a very recent development in early 2026, this might hint towards a stronger focus on its franchise and the game as a continued live service game with apparent rebranding needs.

Industry-research collaborations can offer valuable insights into opportunities for development and study. When the intended use is, however, contested already during the encoding process (Shaw 2017), the emergent use might either cause difficulties in connecting with the design vision or fail entirely and succumb to secrecy, as shown in this collaboration. In this case, this meant that the researchers were unable to access the tool after the deliverable was met according to the game industry actors. Jakobsson (2024) added that even now he is unsure if someone is in fact continuing working on the project and if so, who. The collaboration suffered, thus, due to disconnect between the parties, which is unfortunately as it could have been a longer collaboration or partnership. For some (including the authors), seeking "pleasure through becoming the other" (Leonard 2006 in Leach & Dehnert 2021, 29) have a place in both, the analysis of societal themes, feminist readings, and educational design workshops to foster inclusive design environments. For others, intersectionality is shaped by a for-profit mindset, and diversity becomes a marketing ploy. Based on the interview material and in the case of the KDS, the latter perspective, apparently unfortunately disconnected the actors, both within industry and academia fighting for change from the project (Jakobsson 2024).

Following Ganzon (2022) on cultural politics, inclusive design focusing on the deviation of normativity could be a way to tackle limitations in terms of representation and hegemony in digital game creation. However, the strikingly normative nature of the characters' whiteness and slim features still reinforces the notion of the minorities deviating from the major heteronormative cast. Especially when keeping intersectionality in mind, slim, able-bodied and/or athletic bodies as well as gender normativity are still predominant in Overwatch 2, taking even just a glance at the current game's hero gallery at the time of writing. As the "hero-theme" has the chance to challenge the reinforcement of dominant normativity, we hope to see an opportunity of genre development that goes beyond superhero aesthetics and hyper-athlete display (in addition to Overwatch 2, Marvel: Rivals). Echoing Jakobsson, we argue that the collaboration in itself can be seen as a learning experience and a

signpost for future designs for increased in-game diversity, even when the communication materials and corporate leadership changed it into something not all collaborators could identify with anymore or into something it was never intended to be.

CONCLUSION

Following the critical media theory of encoding and decoding, this study offers insights into a large-scale collaboration between research and industry. Commonly, project-related insights into global game making are rarely revealed to the public, unless there is a major gain for the developer. The data allowed us to understand the disconnect between promotional message and intended design, proposing a simple fix of complex societal themes which entirely detaches from the research team's perspective, led by the expert interviewed here. As the MIT Game Lab was mentioned in the promotional material of the tool as a single solution for inclusive design, this resulted in negative publicity for Jakobsson and the rest of the team.

While emergent uses should be clear for developers and designers when they are made for their own audience groups, the disruption of the intended use further complicated the situation and had, therefore, a direct effect on the collaboration. Based on the material, we see that twisted information and/or misinterpretations can also be harmful for research-industry collaborations and the oversimplification of complex topics further amplifies this (see RQ1). Displaying the tool as a single solution fixing representational and diversity issues in digital games is problematic and presents itself like a corporate sales-pitch.

The effects on collaboration between research and industry in the case of King's Diversity Space (see RQ1) are as follows: the collaboration suffered due to limited transparency, research collaborator detachment through what they perceived to be misinformation in public communication material, and loss of equal ownership. The reception of the general public prompted an iteration and clarifications on public communications. Without a tangible follow-up to the project or its whereabouts, the tool itself remained inaccessible to research project members. While further effects are beyond the scope of the current data, future research could include, for example, research focus on employee turnover from this project, voluntarily or involuntarily.

Regarding how research and design collaboration in the industry can create opportunities to tackle systemic issues for the global games industry (RQ2), we would propose that contracts should include guarantees to use projects for educational purposes regardless of non-disclosure agreements and intellectual property rights. This would ensure that those in marginalized positions, in this case women designers from the industry and research stakeholders, are accredited properly and contribute to statements on projects if communications cause disruptions. Research opportunities which involve high-budget game development need to be always reflected upon by assessing risks associated with exposure and publicity. The focus should shift towards equitable approaches, offering consultancy and researchers to set their own project objectives in addition to establishing healthy collaborations and sustainable goals that incorporate multiple voices.

We see a need for further case studies on research-industry collaborations, as well as research on public opinion, player and fan perspectives on game communication. As this work is primarily based on one expert interview and some second-hand accounts

of other perspectives within the collaboration, which is a clear limitation, we welcome future research endeavors including additional and potentially contrasting voices on the King's Diversity Space. However, unique perspectives such as the one studied here allowed us to see structures behind large scale projects such as the KDS including multiple collaborators and various interests.

Lastly, the intersections of official narratives, lived collaborator experiences, and character representations in games provide interesting insights into game industry practices as well as relevant perspectives for those studying designed representation in interdisciplinary game studies. Participating in inclusive design and discussing critical perspectives on representation provides researchers with insight into industry practices and in turn offers the creators and developers the benefits from shared knowledge. When no transparency beyond marketing posts and convention sneak peaks are offered, the intersectional pleasures we seek become restricted and inaccessible until further notice.

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Figure 1. Activision: Blizzard. 2022. King's Diversity Space Tool: A Leap Forward for Inclusion In Gaming, "Breaking down gender, character roles, and even personality types." [King's Diversity Space Tool: A Leap Forward for Inclusion In Gaming - Wowhead News](https://www.wowhead.com/news/kings-diversity-space-tool-a-leap-forward-for-inclusion-in-gaming-327053)

Figure 2. Shaw, A. 2017. Encoding and decoding affordances: Stuart Hall and interactive media technologies, 597, Figure 1. "Encoding and decoding the interface" (redrawn by author).

ENDNOTES

¹ Conglomerate, specifically, a combination of companies under one umbrella; with the constructed name Activision: Blizzard, the company is not only part of mergers between Activision and Blizzard Entertainment but the parent company with all other instances got acquired by Microsoft in late 2023.

² While inhabiting own management, a subsidiary is still formally owned by a parent company, and as seen in this example, this includes decision-making and specific project ownerships.

³ 'Fire soul' is a direct translation from the Swedish expression 'eldsjäl', which refers to an enthusiast who is putting in hard work for a certain cause, at times even pro bono. See for example Witkowski (2023) for a discussion about such "ildsjæl" presence within the Danish esports scene.