

# Intersectional Pleasures: Reframing the Value of BIPOC Game Studies and Production

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## OVERVIEW

The intersectional pleasures derived from representation, participation, and production within the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) game studies and game making practices offer a crucial lens to acknowledge to a better understanding of what makes games pleasurable and valuable. This perspective highlights the intrinsic, affective rewards inherent in game creation, play, and analysis for often marginalized groups. This presentation offers a simple if not obvious thesis through which the value of this work can be understood. Instead of contrasting such work within the typical traditional metrics like economic success, player base size, or high academic citation counts the presentation highlights the value in the pleasure of producing such work. Pleasure, especially in the absence of financial or popularity metrics, helps frame the rationale for such work in pragmatic terms. BIPOC Game Studies and the practice of making games as a BIPOC creator are fundamentally valuable because they foster communal, educational, and emotional rewards that extend beyond these conventional measures. They produce pleasure in the researcher-practitioner and oft ignored outcome in capital focused frames. The work offers a thesis in three types of distinct pleasure commonly articulated in surveys about diverse game jams and for the BIPOC Game Studies community. These are, *pleasure in community*, *pleasure in production*, and *pleasure of understanding*.

## The Intersectional Pleasure of Representation and Identity in Play

For BIPOC game makers and players, pleasure is often rooted in the radical act of seeing one's own identity and experiences accurately reflected or explored within a game. The existing media landscape, including video games, has historically relied on archetypes, stereotypes, or monocultural representation, which shortchanges all play audiences. However, 42% in the U.K and 51% in the USA believe that diversity, equity and inclusions are important (Newzoo, 2022). Beyond this industry sentiment, for the player, seeing characters and intersectional stories being told provides a powerful form of catharsis and affirmation (Beverly, 2022).

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The game-playing community is clearly diverse (ESA, 2025) and nearly 41.6% of teen players seek diverse representation when choosing a game (Poretz et al, 2025). When games created by BIPOC developers foreground these intersectional complexities, they speak directly to the emotional and cultural needs of a significant portion of the player base. This pleasure is affective and complex. Beyond installs and retention rates, such work includes the satisfaction of belonging, the thrill of subverting a limiting game-player stereotype, and the joy of creating, consuming, or analyzing an artifact that contains intersectional content.

## **The Pleasurable Dynamics of BIPOC Production**

The pleasure of production within the BIPOC game-making community is deeply communal and educational. Game jams offer a potent and concentrated site for this kind of creative and social praxis. This is evident in the themes and outcomes of cultural game jams (Nørgård, 2025) social-impact-focused jams (Grace, 2025a) in places like India, Japan, and Malaysia. These events demonstrate that the practice is fundamentally Global and Communal. Pleasure not only helps explain the motivation to participating in game jams, but it also helps explain the repeated participation in them and the positive emotions associated when no financial gain is offered.

Game jams, through the lens of art therapy and safe discussion spaces, offer a non-competitive environment for participants to engage with difficult and uncomfortable topics like climate change or gender equity (Grace, 2025a). The creative constraints of a 48-hour jam facilitate dialogue and problem-solving, requiring teams to find common language, interrogate their own assumptions and aim to share a fundamental understanding. The reward here is the dialogical synthesis and deeper understanding of complex social issues.

Based on work produced by the researchers in game jams globally (Grace, 2025b), this work draws together a thesis that there are three pleasures documented in both BIPOC game making communities and in BIPOC Game Studies conference participants. These pleasures are a *pleasure in community*, a *pleasure in production* and a *pleasure of understanding*. One of the most compelling pieces of evidence to support this, was the researcher's prior finding that game jam naïve participants found game jamming helped them better understand the topics on which they made games more than actual game design and development (Grace, 2025c). This same sentiment pervaded survey responses from participants in the 1st BIPOC Game Studies Conference (Fletcher et al, 2025).

## **Reframing Value and Future Directions**

The focus on intersectional pleasures reminds researchers of the ways in which value can be reasserted in contexts where grant-funding and citation metrics might be used to trump objectives that are inherently valuable to humanity. While practically, diversity itself is a hedge against market shifts and a safeguard against the vulnerable ecosystem of monocultures, it's also important to recognize that such work produced pleasure. The value of BIPOC Game Studies is in cultivating a community of creative problem solvers and documenting the *who* and *what* of diverse game-making practices, regardless of their immediate commercial or citation impact.

The pleasure of representation and the satisfaction of meaningful creative collaboration for BIPOC communities serve as profound and important metrics of

success often not cited. This intellectual and affective terrain is fertile ground for future research that moves beyond mere descriptions of demographic disparities and interprets it less as a beast of burden, but instead a source of joy. This frame can inform future work, reminding other game researchers and producers in other fields of the payout of pleasure. Thus, explaining the value of indie game making or explaining why even esoteric game studies research domains offer value to specific communities. In systems of quantified outcomes, it's easy to forget that the qualitative value of pleasure drives some of the greatest art production and some of the most influential shifts in society. In the least, it helps remind research and practitioner that in unpleasurable political moments, pleasure can still be produced.

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