



Original Research

Black Women Getting a Seat at the Table in the Video Game Industry

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Abstract: Historically, the African American female population has been underrepresented within the STEM workforce, creating non-inclusive environments. The metaphor of getting a seat at the table reflects the idea of inclusivity where Black women's opinions are valued, and they can make decisions and create change within the workplace. Intersectionality poses several unique challenges for Black women pursuing careers in the video games industry. We motivate further research on this group through existing literature and insights from running a research group on the group design of human-centered data science games in a collaborative university setting. We take an autoethnographic perspective on the topic, with the first and second authors grounding their findings in their own experiences as Black women in STEM and higher education and with video game development studios. We outline tangible actions toward the recruitment, development, and retention of Black women in the video games industry in the future.

Keywords: Black Women, African American Women, Video Games, Game Development, Diversity, Underrepresentation

Introduction

Game research has demonstrated significant learning benefits for players, including improved retention (Chow, Woodford, and Maes 2011, 260), engagement (Hamari et al. 2015), and openness to innovative ideas. These concepts are essential for learning STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) and encouraging young people to enter STEM fields (Perry et al. 2013). Nevertheless, the video game industry consistently lacks diversity, as sixty-one percent of developers are white men (International Game Developers Association 2021). Many Black and Hispanic students have been reluctant to enter STEM fields partly due to the lack of representation in related careers. Schools and universities can develop the best STEM programs and have a diverse population applying and graduating from these programs, but this is irrelevant if STEM professions continue to be dominated by white males.

The authors of this paper are involved in a research and teaching project to study how to best change the STEM workforce by looking at the teaching of game development to a diverse

group of students, specifically in data science and human-centered data science. The first two authors of the paper are Black women game developers and data scientists. They are interested in the retention of underrepresented females in STEM, particularly Black women in the video game industry. Research has tied educational games to increasing interest in STEM fields (Ishak, Hasran, and Din 2023). However, there has been little research on Black women gamers and game developers specifically, and none that we could find involving the lived experiences of Black women game developers. This paper attempts to begin to fill that gap, using autoethnography of the first two authors' lived experiences, previous research, and experience in our research and teaching project to identify themes that could provide insights and strategies for educators to increase the participation of Black women in the video game industry and STEM fields.

Background

Based on International Game Developers Association's Developer Satisfaction Survey from 2021, Black people comprised five percent of game developers, meaning Black women represented an even smaller population (IGDA 2021). Research suggests the barriers that factor into underrepresentation include lack of funding in predominantly Black neighborhoods (Scott-Elliston, Arnold, and Pittman 2022), few Black women in senior management (Scott, 2011), and workforce harassment/microaggressions. We live in an ever-increasingly diverse society, and since the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, there has been an outcry for social justice and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. People want organizations to be held accountable for their actions, including those in the video game industry, where companies must impose better DEI practices or face significant financial and legal implications, as was the case for Blizzard Entertainment in 2018.¹ This research will explore the underrepresentation of Black women video game developers, why diversity in the field is necessary, and practical solutions.

Since October 2022, the first author has participated as a graduate research assistant in a directed research group (DRG), Diversifying Human-Centered Data Science through the Research and Design of Ethical Games. This DRG project studies learning in the face of increased diversity and conflicting methodological cultures. First, it invites interested undergraduates across disciplines to collaborate on researching and designing a serious game on data ethics issues. Participating students come from two university campuses in different regions of the United States to form a team of diverse individuals supervised by PhD students and faculty and connected via internet technologies. By studying students' experiences

¹ In 2018, Activision Blizzard was served a lawsuit from California's Department of Fair Employment for cases of sexual harassment and discrimination toward female employees that violate the state's civil rights and equal pay laws (Paul 2021). Activision Blizzard paid \$100 million in the settlement (Liao 2022), and they lost \$8 billion in market value (Fox, 2021) and were served a lawsuit by shareholders for intentionally withholding information (Peppiatt 2021).

throughout the project, we aim to increase our understanding of learning through collaboration in diverse teams and areas of conflicting norms. Second, it brings together a senior faculty researcher from a large public university on the West Coast with an early career data science researcher at the same institution and a junior faculty member at a medium-sized public university in the American South, a designated Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). Through this collaborative team of women, three of whom come from underrepresented communities in STEM, the team aimed for an increased capacity for conducting high-quality research with diverse participation. Third, the end product of this two-year, interdisciplinary project will be a game targeted toward underrepresented communities, which will bring more people into critical conversations about the roles of AI (Artificial Intelligence) and data science in our society. The focus on diversity and the goal to increase interest in minorities in STEM fields led to this research.

About the DRG

The format of this project is the directed research group (DRG). This unique research model was created at a large public university and “takes the emphasis off of lectures and content transmission onto the interests and motivation of students as they navigate through self-selected projects” (Byun et al. 2022, 630). Since the project began in January 2022, thirty-two students have participated regularly. Of the thirty-two, fifteen have stated they have played or currently play video games. The perceived demographics based on names show that twenty-six participants are of Asian descent, and the remaining students are White/Caucasian.² Upon observation, there were no Black student participants.

Students participated in the DRG through: a) individual assignments and readings, b) meeting with a group of peers to work on the group project of developing a video game addressing an ethical issue in data science or AI/machine learning, and c) a weekly class time, where students, teachers, and student researchers met together over Zoom and offered comments and feedback through shared Google Docs (Byun et al. 2022, 630). The DRG intends to serve as an example of education to increase interest in STEM among diverse students. One of the project’s main focuses is studying ethics and diversity through games.

Literature Review

We undertook a thorough literature review, and while we found significant research regarding the underrepresentation of Black women in STEM (Alfred, Ray, and Johnson 2018, 115), Black people in IT (Cain 2021, 157), Black women gamers (Lopez 2021), and females in the industry (Hepler 2019), there was limited research focused on the underrepresentation of

² As this research project did not collect demographic data related to race/ethnicity, the perceived demographics were drawn from participant names, accent identification, observations from group meetings discussions about participant backgrounds.

Black women who are video game developers. The lack of Black women in the field affects multiple aspects of the business, particularly in appealing to the growing Black female gamer base (Packwood, 2018). As research on the topic is limited, the subsequent section will focus on the STEM to career pipeline, industry diversity, growing the Black female gamer base, and Black people creating their own table in the industry.

STEM to Career Pipeline

A pipeline often refers to the path from education to a career in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) (Rosenzweig et al. 2021, 1). Research shows that Black students are at a disadvantage compared to their white counterparts, with a 45 percent likelihood of attending a high-poverty school, whereas white students were only eight percent likely to attend a high-poverty school (King et al. 2021, 1101). With this disadvantage, “Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) reported a 90-point differential in 8th-grade mathematics and science scores for students attending high-poverty schools compared to their peers in low-poverty schools” (King et al. 2021, 1101; Mullis et al. 2016). These disparities create a pattern of systemic barriers that dissuade Black students from participating in STEM experiences like science fairs or Advanced Placement courses(Scott-Elliston, Arnold, and Pittman 2022).

Systemic racism is the main factor in the existing barriers, which means that Black girls and boys must work twice as hard once they reach the collegiate level (Alfred, Ray, and Johnson 2018, 117). Due to this, Black students struggle, and there is a high attrition rate in STEM programs, with only thirty-four percent completing their degrees (Scott-Elliston, Arnold, and Pittman 2022; Riegle-Crumb, King, and Irizarry 2019). For those Black women who do graduate and find a career in STEM, they are then faced with toxic work environments(Cain 2021), which leads to low retention rates, which is shown in Figure 1.

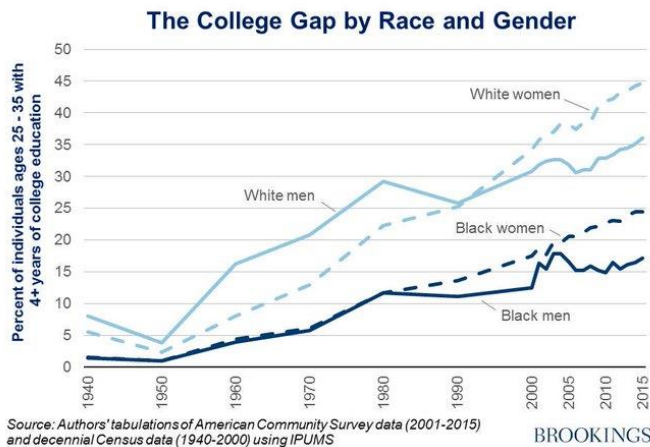


Figure 1. The College Gap by Race and Gender

Source: Reeves and Guyot 2017

This research focuses on the issues, solutions, and effects of not hiring diverse female talent rather than the career path of game development and how the male-dominated career can be a barrier, as mentioned by Weststar and Legault (2018). They touch upon many of the same issues as we do, but they approach it by studying how it impacts women staying in their careers for a long time. “When asked how long they planned to remain in the industry, the dominant response for both males and females was to stay indefinitely, 80% and 71% respectively, but almost twice as many females as males selected options of 6 years or less” (Weststar and Legault 2018, 113). These statistics illustrate the issue of diversity retention, which creates further difficulties for Black women in the field and impacts the organizations as a whole.

Games Industry and Diversity

There is significant research on the benefits of diversity in the workplace, especially regarding the financial benefits that accompany it (Cain, 2021, 158). CompTIA’s CEO calculated that implementing diversity efforts could yield an extra 400 USD billion for the IT industry (Cain, 2021, 158). Events like Gamergate³ spotlighted the harassment of others in the gaming industry who do not fit into the white-male demographic, which supports the need for more robust DEI programs (Browne, 2020). When discussing diversity in the workplace, IGDA released the following information, which shows that most employees want to see more diversity in the workplace (2021).

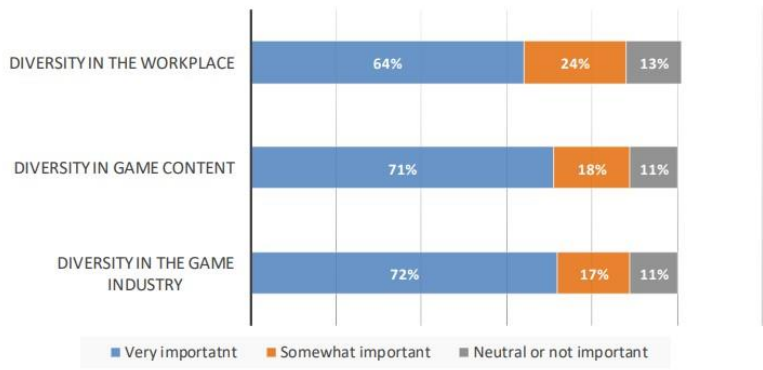


Figure 2. Importance of Diversity
Source: IGDA DSS 2021

For the games industry, the “increased level of a team’s diversity translates into more interesting gameplay” (Imagine Games Network 2012). In addition, research shows that

³ See Dewey 2014. “The only guide to Gamergate you will ever need to read - The Washington Post.” *Washington Post*, October 14, 2014. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/10/14/the-only-guide-to-gamergate-you-will-ever-need-to-read/>.

creating a more inclusive work culture could bring a seventeen percent team performance increase (Bourke 2018). We discuss further repercussions for not implementing a diverse workforce. Diversity, or lack thereof, directly impacts the underrepresentation of Black women video game developers. Without Black women behind the scenes, games struggle to market to the growing Black gamer base (Packwood 2018). Due to the lack of diversity in the industry, Black female gamers face harassment, and this was made evident with Gamergate, which means that the underrepresentation of Black female game developers directly impacts Black female gamers.

Black Women Gamers and Black Game Characters

In just short of a decade, about fifty-seven percent of video game players will be people of color (POC) (Packwood 2018). Principal investigators were unable to find statistics that break down gamers by gender and ethnicity collectively to show a percentage of Black women gamers. Women and Black players comprise 49 percent and 8 percent of all gamers, respectively (Entertainment Software Association 2022).⁴ Data shows that the global video game market is a staggering \$195.7 billion, making implementing diversity and expanding target audiences a priority (Grand View Research, 2022). How can the games industry appeal to the growing Black female gamer base when only 8.3 percent of video game protagonists are people of color (Gagné-LeBel 2022)?

In theory, Black women developers could help to increase these numbers. However, if large game studios fail to hire them, it is up to Black women to create this opportunity ourselves. Karisma Williams, a video game designer, mentions how “being a double minority—African American and a woman—only stacked the odds against me. The industry to this day is all about networking” (Hepler 2019, 49).

Creating Our Own Table

Black Girl Gamers is working to bridge this gap and now runs a talent agency for Black women gamers (JoVonn 2023). With programs like the New Voices Fund, which is a \$100 million fund that invests in businesses owned or managed by women of color, there are opportunities for Black women to do the work these large studios are reluctant to do (King, 2018). New Voices Fund is only one of the tools available to help Black women create their own table in the industry.

As mentioned by the creator of the organization Black Girl Gamers, “rather than the companies that make millions, its creators-turned-entrepreneurs who are doing the necessary work to address the lack of transparency and seemingly unclosable gaps in gaming” (Lopez 2021). Historically Black College and University Hampton University is building an eSports

⁴ The data identified here was shown in separate non-overlapping categories without showing data on the intersection between categories.

lab where students can play video games and create them (Kennedy 2019). Black people have always had to work harder to keep up with the inequalities in the workplace, and sometimes, this means creating our own space to do it (Lopez 2021). Eight brands committed to change in the field with more representation for Black women in the industry.



Figure 3: Brands Supporting More Representation for Black Women

Source: Benne 2020

Autoethnographic Perspectives

As the first two authors are Black women, autoethnography was a primary method employed in conducting this research. The methodology follows an interpretative approach based on “the assumption that social reality is not singular or objective but is rather shaped by human experiences and social contexts” (Bhattacharjee 2012). This paper will utilize data analysis and observations from the DRG project, literature reviews, and autoethnographic accounts to explore this concept.

Reed-Danahay defined autoethnography as a “form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context” (1997, 552). This research method allows the authors’ lived experiences as Black women to speak authoritatively on underrepresentation in their fields to help explain the issue within the games industry. It provides contextual evidence to support the concepts introduced, such as toxic work environments, minimization of the Black woman’s voice, and microaggressions in the workplace. This autoethnographic approach establishes the research beyond the text and into a shared reality Black women face in their careers.

First Author Autoethnography

Growing up, large family reunions, holiday gatherings, and vacations were my Black experience. I remember one family reunion when I was applying to colleges, and my cousin, Howard University alum and business owner Alicia Thompson-Overby, spoke about applying to her alma mater. However, my father brought up the issue of colorism that plagues the Black community and that it would be something I would face. At the time, it made me think I would not find my circle if I went there. I was worried about what others would think rather than the idea of immersing myself in Black culture and surrounding myself with my people. Either way, she unknowingly motivated me to want to support Black people and the culture in another way. Her dedication to uplifting Black youth in her community and standing up for social justice allowed me to see that I could do the same in my career.

Working in the car industry, I have had many interactions where I had to control my response or risk being the “angry Black woman.” This stereotype influences the work environment, because if a Black woman gets angry, colleagues attribute this to race rather than situational occurrences (Motro et al. 2021). As I move further toward obtaining a PhD and entering the world of academia, it is discouraging to find that Black women only make up two percent of tenured professors and less than two percent of full professors (Gaston Gayles, 2022). In my search for a PhD program, the lack of Black women academics is evident

Even within my graduate program, I noticed this reflected in my classes. Getting involved in the DRG project allowed me to do something I enjoy while acknowledging I want to be in the same position as the principal investigators. Sharing my goals and receiving guidance just proved to me why representation matters. Having someone who understands the struggles of being a woman of color there to raise you up makes a world of difference. Their resounding support made me feel like I was good enough to pursue my professional goals and that I could succeed. This experience showed me I could do the same for other Black women.

Identifying the lack of diversity and underrepresentation is one thing, but living it allows me to explore the issue from an internal perspective. When I look back, I think about constantly hearing how Black names are perceived negatively on the job. I knew how discriminatory the workplace can be toward Black men and women. This is an issue that then manifests itself in microaggressions Black people face in the workplace if they do not have white-sounding names. Black women have the ability and fortune to wear their hair in multiple ways, and many view it as part of their identity. Even something as ordinary as hair can create uncomfortable workplace situations when it is a white-dominated space. The disadvantages that exist mean that Black women need to work much harder than White peers to progress professionally, which proves difficult when their respective fields are historically known for the underrepresentation of Black women.

Second Author Autoethnography

From an early age, I have put much effort and planning into my career prospects based on what resources were available to me. Starting in the seventh grade, the well-funded public school district my parents worked so hard to afford would shuffle the students from their homerooms each year into the school's computer laboratory to take a career guidance assessment. Students would spend forty minutes drawing on what little self-awareness they could muster to complete a computerized test about their favorite school subjects, the types of environments they struggled and thrived in, and their work-life preferences. This was all to receive a list of careers that best fit each of us.

These educational experiences led me, as a young, bright Black student, to believe that an individual's career prospects are mainly unencumbered and determined by individual choices and self-determination. This viewpoint only started to falter when I later learned of the struggles of my career-oriented and successful mother, who fought internal and external doubt and judgment while pursuing a computer science degree at a large state university. Despite her high state standardized test scores in mathematics, the hostility of the environment and constant wear on her self-esteem led her to pursue a smaller regional university for a degree in accounting instead. This field proved more accepting to her as a Black woman in the midwestern United States during the late 1980s.

My beliefs on career progression within technology and STEM fields for Black Americans and other minoritized groups have been further shaped by my direct experience as a former software engineer, current data scientist in the tech industry, and the spouse of a Black man who has worked in video games development for the past fifteen years. I have had the opportunity to see these issues at a much higher resolution to better grapple with the nuance and indirect barriers to career success in these fields. As I have taken on managerial and leadership roles, it is clear there is much to be desired in the progression opportunities for even those who manage to secure junior technical roles. It is from this perspective that I contribute to our research.

Applying Theory

Multiple themes are mentioned in the autoethnographies by both authors, including representation, marginalization, and barriers to advancement. While the first and second authors work in separate industries, these themes intersect because of the shared label of being a woman of color. These perspectives were included to demonstrate that while our experiences differ, the themes presented are shared. This connection also applies to industry trends that were discussed throughout this paper.

In the first author's autoethnography, the mention of representation in leaders illustrates why having more Black women in leadership roles is essential. In the workplace, Black women face the constant narrative that they are not enough and they do not fit. Pay disparities, lack of

advancement opportunities, racism, and sexism work together to make the Black woman feel as if she does not belong. For the first author, this representation meant affirmation and confidence; imagine how impactful this would be if more representation of Black women existed in the video game industry. The film *Black Panther* is evidence of the importance of representation. Having a movie that highlighted Black people in a setting that celebrated blackness rather than one of poverty and suffering was monumental to the Black community.

Discussion

This paper serves to start the discussion of the underrepresentation of Black women game developers. Karisma Williams, a video game designer, mentions how “being a double minority—African American and a woman—only stacked the odds against me. The industry to this day is all about networking” (Hepler 2019, 49). The issue with networking is there needs to be Black women in positions of power to help those looking to break into the field. The following section will explore the DRG observation findings, findings for underrepresentation in the field, discussion of the connections between the DRG and the research topic, and outcomes and potential solutions to problems addressed.

DRG Findings

It was mentioned that there was a lack of Black students who participated in the DRG. While the diversity of academic discipline, gender, and university year benefited our project in increasing diversity, there needed to be better recruitment methods that specifically targeted Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students. Benefits observed include practical knowledge of data science concepts. The DRG is an optional credit/no credit class focused on research. This is already something that will discourage participants who feel the need to maximize their economic output and productive graduation output from each class they take. Since the research project was an optional credit/no credit course, it created a barrier for those who may be overwhelmed with their required courses, and taking the DRG would push the student beyond their best potential. This goes back to the issue of many Black students being underprepared in comparison to their white counterparts due to the lack of resources they had available to them throughout their education.

Socioeconomic and cultural factors could limit the breadth of experience playing certain types of games or game technology. One aspect of the DRG method is that students work more independently than in a structured research project. This included small group meetings outside of the weekly meeting, which proved to be difficult for most of the participants. The DRG allowed students to contribute ideas and be active participants in the research, but it was observed that only a few took advantage of this. This could be because some students were hesitant to voice their opinions on the basis that they could contribute less than others.

Limitations for this study, concerning the lack of Black student participants, include methods of course promotion. This DRG primarily included students from underrepresented communities, with most coming from one department at the University of Washington. However, only two percent of students in that major are Black (University of Washington, 2020). Suggestions for future studies focusing on diversity include outreach to demographic-specific organizations.

Underrepresentation in the Game Industry

The sparse number of Black women game developers has not been ignored in news or industry articles. However, there is little research on the issue. When conducting preliminary research, resources about Black women in STEM (Alfred, Ray, and Johnson 2018), female game developers (Hepler 2017), Black game developers (Michel 2022), Black gamers (Goard 2023), and Black game characters (Avery 2022) were found, but almost nothing on Black female game developers. The goal of this paper is to start the conversation for future research. With further work by organizations like Black Girl Gamers, this is only the beginning of the journey to diversify the games industry.

The field of game development has been and continues to be white male-dominated, leaving little opportunity for Black women to contribute or advance. This “frat boy culture” that develops due to the demographic breakdown leads to low retention and directly impacts the video games that invoke stereotypical Black characters without the opinion of those within the culture (Imagine Games Network 2012).

Interestingly, a plethora of research has been conducted on the general female gamer/game developer population. While Black women comprise a small percentage of this overarching group, studying the journey from the Black perspective is necessary. Black women face more racism, microaggressions, stereotypes, and less support than their white counterparts (McKinsey & Company 2021).

Systemic Barriers in the Industry

The video game industry, like others within the STEM field, perpetuates systemic barriers for Black women. The root of these barriers lies in the STEM-to-career pipeline. Schools that receive more funding compared to those in high-poverty neighborhoods can offer their students exposure to STEM resources. The Black–white income gap, \$45,870 and \$71,231, respectively, is a barrier to economic mobility for Black Americans (Reeves and Guyot 2017). The economic barriers impact access to video games and opportunities like STEM summer camps.

One of the most significant barriers is the male-dominated work environment. The Activision Blizzard workplace misconduct case illuminated the issues that occur but often get ignored by management. While issues of sexual misconduct, misogyny, and racism will never disappear, enforcing DEI policies and punishments could help. An IGDA 2021 study revealed

that only thirty-eight percent of respondents said their workplace had a formal complaint procedure for EDI issues, and twenty-eight percent said there was a formal disciplinary process. This study also revealed that seventy-four percent of respondents said there is no equal treatment/opportunity in the industry (IGDA, 2021). The report supports the fact that barriers that exist for Black women are the most reported: microaggressions and interpersonal inequities.

The Activision Blizzard case shows that dismantling systemic barriers will only occur with support from those in leadership. The “frat boy culture” in this industry refers to men indiscriminately receiving opportunities that women, especially Black women, do not receive (Lopez 2021). Using third-party HR companies can assist in hiring a more diverse workforce to combat conflict-of-interest hires.

Connections Identified

The primary connection made between the DRG and this research topic is the lack of Black women involved. For the DRG, the first two authors are Black women who have identified this disparity and can act on it for the final playtesting of the game. This would manifest in the groups that would be found to participate, allowing the other primary investigators (PIs) to study human-centered data science and ethics among varying ethnic groups.

It was previously shown that sociocultural factors play a role in the games industry and the DRG. Since the DRG involves voluntary participation, if students cannot take part in their classes and pass their courses, that severely limits the population that could take advantage of this opportunity. This parallels the games industry, which is becoming a place where only those with socioeconomic privilege and relationships with those in positions of leadership can join the field (Hepler 2019).

However, unlike the games industry, the student participants were primarily female, with ten out of thirty-two being males. When seeing the issue from this end, it is easy to see how small game studios can better reflect the population. This could translate to the games industry when Black women create opportunities and prioritize hiring diverse talent. Partnering with Black student organizations, clubs, sororities, and others could also have been implemented in the DRG. One university has a Minorities in Tech student organization that would have been an excellent source for recruiting student participants. Male students tended to speak up more often during group meetings than females. The games industry is male-dominated, so this mirrors what it is like to work in the field.

Outcomes if Not Addressed, and Practical Solutions

This section will explore the issue of diversity in the workplace and what will happen should companies fail to address it. In addition, we consider practical solutions to the issues within the DRG and the hiring and retention of Black women game developers.

If video game studios continue to ignore the importance of DEI and do not appropriately allocate funding toward new initiatives, it could have significant financial consequences, as proven above. There are other costs involved with the low retention rates of Black women and other diverse talent. This includes the cost of losing employees, replacing them, and fees for outside recruitment agencies. Research shows that diverse companies are thirty-five percent more profitable than non-diverse companies (Dixon-Fyle et al. 2020). This number was up from thirty-three percent in 2017. Diverse companies are better equipped to capture a bigger market and generate more money than companies without diversity and inclusion campaigns. The entertainment industry alone is losing a projected \$10 billion each year because of systematic issues with inclusivity and the underrepresentation of Black populations in TV and film (Boskamp, 2023).

By 2032, POC will make up most of the workforce, which should force the industry to change or risk being left behind (Wilson 2016, 4). Last year, the Society for Human Resource Management calculated “the average cost per hire was \$4,700. But many employers estimate the total cost to hire a new employee can be three to four times the position’s salary” (Navarra, 2022). So, if a company is hiring a game developer, with the average salary for Black game developers being \$87,000, they should anticipate spending about \$261,000 (Zippia 2021). Additional costs to hiring an employee will then be included, including time to fill the position, onboarding, and training.

The costs of implementing DEI initiatives to combat high turnover can be distributed across all employees, thus minimizing the costs. Implementing mentorship programs targeted to Black women can lead to higher retention rates, with seventy-two percent for mentees and sixty-nine percent for mentors, compared to forty-nine percent for those who do not participate (Knowledge at Wharton 2007). According to Reeves, the “Harvard Business Review found that diverse representation within management grew by at least 9% in companies with formal mentorship programs.” (Reeves and Guyot 2017). This could provide financial benefits by saving the hundreds of thousands of dollars that come with high turnover. For large companies (more than 250 employees), implementing a mentorship program costs around \$7,500–\$10,000 (Reeves 2023). Seeking out organizations like Black Girl Gamers to partner with or post positions on their job board will help organizations reach this target audience.

Another solution that game studios can enact is transparent pay. An outsourcing technical support company, Disbelief, offered transparent pay and saw an increase in job applications (Schreier 2022). The current wage gap for Black women puts them at a severe disadvantage in the industry. However, if large game studios implement transparent pay policies, it would be a step toward minimizing that gap. While these are a few proposed solutions to the underrepresentation of Black women in the field, others could be identified with further research.

Conclusion

This paper provided information on what little research is available on this topic in support of Black women video game developers and moving toward a goal of a more inclusive workplace for Black women. The authors provided insight into their unique perspectives linked to the Black female experience through the autoethnographic lens. Although this paper was done with an interpretative approach, more quantitative research must be conducted.

While we have outlined some tangible actions toward recruiting, building, and retaining Black women in the industry, it is only a part of the solution. Focusing on pay transparency, more concrete discrimination policies, disciplining those who fail to comply, and growth opportunities will only help a company's bottom line. When we look at cases like Activision, Riot Games, Sony, and others, the cost of dealing with the issue later is worse than if a short-term and long-term strategy was created to deal with the lack of Black women in the industry before serious issues arose. Even if tech leaders do not understand the push for DEI programs, they understand the financial and legal implications. As mentioned, society is not sitting idly by, allowing these discrimination cases to occur. So, promoting an improved work environment, better DEI policies, and diverse talent recruitment can benefit the company's public image and, in turn, drive sales.

Future research on this issue will be conducted within the next year to obtain data that will provide the perspectives and opinions of Black women who currently work in the video game industry. Exploring the current experience of Black women in the field will illustrate where the industry is failing and provide ideas to create an inclusive work environment. This study aims to have tangible actions in organizational DEI policies and practices.

Addressing this product of centuries of systemic racism will not be an easy task. However, it starts with research that can eventually be presented to these games' studios through consulting. As the creator of the organization Black Girl Gamers states, "Rather than the companies that make millions, it's creators-turned-entrepreneurs who are doing the necessary work to address the lack of transparency and seemingly unclosable gaps in gaming" (Lopez, 2021). In research, it is up to us to start the discussion and provide the public with the facts to improve workplace diversity.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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