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Non-male Career Development in the Video Game Industry

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Abstract

This paper explores the career development of non-male workers in the video game industry in a male-dominated context. It examines their motivation, perception of success, goals, and values. The aim was to contribute to the discourse on the experience of minorities in a majority-dominated work context and how this affects their career development. This study followed two research strategies, grounded theory, and the Gioia method. The sample included 17 participants who hold managerial occupations and identify as female or non-binary. The participants were interviewed with semi-structured interviews and filled out the career anchor survey designed by Edgar Schein (1990). The demographics of the interviewees included people identifying as transgender, people of color, people with disabilities, and various other backgrounds. The findings include the participants' subjective career narratives in relation to the creative, volatile, male-dominated, and high-pressure industry landscape, as well as discuss their employed strategies in coping with the challenges and barriers presented to them throughout their careers. The most common career anchors were autonomy and independence, and the least common anchors were security and stability, and general management. Non-male game workers' strategies to cope with their experience as minorities in a male-dominated context are often related to how they make sense of their behaviors and experience. Findings suggest that non-male workers tend to pursue careers in indie development in order to express themselves creatively, avoid hostile environments often present in AAA production, and live in accordance with their preference for autonomy and independence. However, this presents them with another set of challenges related to entrepreneurship which results in an unfavorable position for non-male game workers.

Keywords: Non-male career development, career anchors, video game industry, gender minorities, male-dominated workplaces.

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1. Introduction

In this chapter, we will present the background of our thesis topic and its problematization. We will present our research questions, followed by a discussion on the research purpose, the research contribution, and lastly, our rationale for approaching this topic.

1.1. Background

The video game industry (VGI) is at the intersection of the creative industries and the technology sector, making it extremely attractive to a wide variety of tech-savvy and creative individuals. Video games are an interactive medium in which players can engage with fictional worlds, characters, and stories. As part of the entertainment industry, video games have become one of the most culturally influential and financially profitable consumer products; in the United States of America, two-thirds of the population play video games at least weekly, with 48% identifying as female (Entertainment Software Association, 2022). In 2021, consumers in the USA purchased video game content, hardware, and accessories amounting to a total worth of 60.4 billion US Dollars, according to the Entertainment Software Association (2022).

The VGI presents us with a unique and interesting object for research due to its relative novelty and therefore lack of long-established work practices, combined with its high economic value and cultural relevance. Additionally, the industry is characterized by an inherently entrepreneurial, innovative, and thus inevitably volatile spirit. We use volatility in this context according to the concept of VUCA, which describes especially innovative industries and their markets as susceptible to change and thus unpredictable (Mack & Khare, 2016).

Video game development is complex, and teams within this area range from one passionate individual to hundreds of multidisciplinary experts. The industry combines multiple sectors and connects various disciplines, including management, finance, human resources, art, design, writing, programming, animation, and more. Not unexpectedly, this results in diverse, multidisciplinary teams and presents both members and leaders with especially complex challenges. A further reason why research on this topic is of particular interest to us.

Within the industry, distinctions are made between so-called triple-A (AAA) production and independent (indie) development. AAA games connotes those games made with a large budget and teams consisting of hundreds of game developers and other professionals, funded by the biggest studios and publishers with a very global reach. Indie studios are usually led by entrepreneurs with a small core team, supported by contractors or freelancers, that tend to self-publish or release their games with the help of publishers on a smaller scale within more niche markets.

Historically, the VGI, like other industries within the technology sector, has been a male-dominated industry, mirroring its target audience (EIGE, n.d.). However, as stated above, recent developments show that female-identifying people now make up around half of the players (Entertainment Software Association, 2022). Yet, within the industry, this equality in gender distribution is not represented. The division of game developers worldwide is assumed to be 61% male, 30% female, and 8% other marginalized gender identities (IGDA, 2021). While this is an increase of about 6% for female-identifying developers and 3% for other marginalized gender identities from 2019 (IGDA, 2021), it still does not adequately represent the end consumers.

As an industry that naturally also operates significantly within the cultural sector, representation can be considered an important factor. However, although almost half of all players identify as female, they are rarely represented in characters and storytelling. This is even more true for other marginalized gender identities, such as non-binary and transgender individuals. Particularly those games developed within AAA production target predominantly male audiences and seldom feature female characters (Bailey et al. 2021). Video games have the opportunity to educate and raise awareness but also risk producing and reproducing harmful stereotypes and biases within society. Within the scope of this thesis, we will argue that this is often the case today, specifically in regard to sexist gender stereotypes. Higher participation of women in the development process of end products seems appropriate not only from an ethical, political, and sociological standpoint but also economically. It is only logical for a product to be developed by those who can understand and relate to the target audience and thereby make it most relevant and attractive to them.

In the VGI, women are traditionally more represented in non-developmental roles (Prescott & Bogg, 2011a). This means they are often not part of the core team that creates and executes the creative vision of the final product but are more frequently represented in supportive roles such as production, management, and marketing. Furthermore, women that do hold developmental roles are mostly designers or artists instead of higher paying roles such as programmers and engineers, presenting us with one of the reasons for the gender inequality in pay (Bailey et al., 2021).

1.2. Problematization

Due to its multidisciplinary nature, the VGI offers a wide range of occupations and career paths. It provides its workers with the opportunity to become active parts of creating content that will potentially be consumed by a very large number of people globally, opening up possibilities to educate, raise awareness, and work against harmful stereotypes and/or practices (Newbery, 2013). Thus, video games' cultural influence should not be underestimated. As previously mentioned,

women and other marginalized gender identities within the VGI are often not part of the decision-making that would enable a significant impact on the final product. This makes it more difficult to contribute to better non-male representation within the industry and its surrounding gaming culture (Prescott & Bogg, 2011a). We argue that the industry and its workers should mirror and adequately represent its consumers, the players. Additionally, women and other minority groups should be able to benefit from the economic wealth that is generated in this sector to contribute to a more equal distribution of income.

The core phenomenon we are concerned with in this study is the experience of minorities facing barriers to their career advancement in a professional setting. As an example of this phenomenon, we chose the VGI as a male-dominated industry and the experience of women and other marginalized gender identities as the minority. We are curious to understand the career narratives of successful non-male workers within the VGI and what motivated them to enter an industry, in which they expect to face a multitude of barriers.

Therefore, we seek to better understand the non-male workers' personalities, opinions, and motivations guiding their careers in the VGI. We wish to explore what they perceive to be their ultimate goals and how this relates to the industry-specific environment.

1.3. Research Questions

1. How does a creative, volatile, male-dominated, and high-pressure industry landscape influence the career development of non-males in the VGI?
2. What strategies do non-male game workers employ to navigate gender-based challenges and barriers in the VGI as a male-dominated industry?

1.4. Research Purpose

We aim to create a more nuanced overview of non-males and their careers within the VGI as a male-dominated industry. Through this, we intend to generate theoretical knowledge that can be translated into more practical approaches to guide an agenda toward more equitable workplaces. To begin, we will cover some of the reasons for the lack of women and other marginalized gender identities in the VGI before elaborating on how they develop their careers within this industry despite the potential barriers.

More specifically, our ambition is to critically investigate the key strategies, motivations, and drivers of women and other marginalized gender identities within the industry and their career progression in

order to point toward specific aspects of the industry landscape that either actively encourage or discourage their career development.

1.5. Research Contribution

Within the literature on minorities in the workplace, we found women and other marginalized gender identities within video game development to be an underrepresented field of study. Additionally, the separate discourses on the VGI as a male-dominated industry and non-male career development mostly focus on the experience of cisgender women, excluding other marginalized gender identities, such as transgender or non-binary individuals. We recognize this as a gap and an area where we aim to contribute by providing insights and recommendations for future research.

We believe our research has the potential to contribute to ongoing discussions about the experience of minorities in a majority-dominated workplace or industry. More concretely, our focus lies on gender minorities within the male-dominated contexts of the VGI. Investigating non-male game workers' motivations and career paths, including their personal experiences and how they perceive the industry landscape with its potential barriers, may allow us to form a more nuanced understanding of all the different factors influencing non-male career development in the industry.

We believe that our findings will prove insightful from both a theoretical and a practical standpoint. Forming an understanding of people's motivations and choices and their interrelations with how they make sense of their identity and environment has the potential to contribute to more general discussions on career development. Concerning the modern discourse on gender, our research may contribute to illustrating minorities' career narratives from diverse psychological and sociological theoretical perspectives. Additionally, we believe our study presents a contribution to the literature on management and leadership as it allows us to get a deeper insight into the experiences of non-male managers and leaders from a more critical perspective.

From a practical perspective, we hope our study can contribute to establishing an understanding of the opportunities presented by video games as an interactive medium and the VGI as a still emerging industry. We believe this may prove to be helpful in encouraging more diverse, creative, and innovative teams that will eventually create increasingly relevant and commercially attractive products of high economic and cultural value.

While our study sheds light on the experiences of non-males within the VGI industry, further research may encompass a broader range of marginalized groups and their experiences within majority-dominated industries.

2. Literature Review

As part of our literature review, we evaluated previous research on career development and the experiences of non-males in the VGI and other male-dominated industries. This helped us form a more nuanced understanding of the unique VGI landscape, its potential barriers, and opportunities for non-males. Consequently, we were able to ask more targeted and informed questions during the interviews we conducted. We will present the result of our review and lay out the theoretical framework for our research.

Important clarification regarding our use of words is appropriate at this point. When referring to ‘non-male’ game workers and ‘other marginalized genders’ we refer to minority gender identities including, but not limited to, female, transgender, and non-binary individuals; thus, anyone who does not identify as a cisgender male. This is significant since we aim to focus not solely on cisgender women but to fill the research gap on the experiences of other marginalized genders. Hence, our participant group also included both transgender and non-binary individuals. When referring to ‘female’ career development as well as ‘women,’ we thus mean cisgender women, who are mostly the subjects of previous literature. Sometimes during our interviews, participants referred explicitly to the experience of women. In these instances, we do not include non-males and other marginalized genders in the discussion.

2.1. Career Development

The main keywords guiding our literature review regarding career development were:

minorities + career development, women + career, gender minorities + career, career development theory, career anchors, career goals, motivation + work, success.

The main themes within the reviewed literature on career development were people’s career goals and aspirations, individual perceptions of success, motivation, and female career development. The theories within this area were mostly sociological and psychological. The most prominent theories in the literature were social cognitive theory, self-efficacy theory, and career anchor theory, which will form our theoretical framework and will thus be introduced in more detail after the literature review.

Career development was defined by Super (1953) as a lifelong, continuous process of developing and implementing a self-concept, with satisfaction to self and benefit to society. It is an intricate process that individuals navigate throughout their professional lives, encompassing different stages, decision points, and transitions. It is crucial to recognize the factors that influence career development and contribute to individual success, benefiting both individuals and organizations (Super, 1953). The concept of career development is not novel. The emergence of career development theory dates back to the 1920s. This theory serves as a framework comprising multiple theories that collectively shed

light on the intricacies of career development (Sampson Jr. et al., 2014). The most relevant concepts within this framework are motivation, perception of success, goals, and values (Bandura, 1977; Schunk & Usher, 2019). We will elaborate on motivation, goals, and values in our theory section, as these can be explained through social cognitive theory, which will represent our main theoretical framework.

Perception of success is an important factor in career development. In the 1970s, the concept of fear of success emerged and contributed to a considerable amount of research in this area (Atkinson, 1957, as cited in Meece et al., 2006). It is perceived to be a psychological barrier to women's achievements. There are gender differences in motivation that relate to motives to approach or avoid success, concerns about failure, and expectations for success (Atkinson, 1957; 1964, as cited in Meece et al., 2006). For example, research around that time found that women and girls tend to have lower expectations for success than their male counterparts (Crandall, 1969; Atkinson & Feather, 1966; Verodd, 1969, as cited in Meece et al., 2006). More recent studies have established that women often assess career success differently than men, who tend to use more objective measures such as position and salary, while women consider subjective measures like satisfaction, advancement opportunities, and work-life balance to be more important (Powell & Butterfield, 2003, as cited in Prescott & Bogg, 2011b).

2.1.1. Female Career Development

During our research for this thesis, we encountered multiple sources that explore female career development. These studies usually do not include other marginalized genders, which, as we have previously established, is one of the research gaps we would like to fill.

Women and visible minority women face specific challenges that can hinder them from achieving their career goals and result in promotion disadvantages compared to white cisgender men (Yap and Konrad, 2009). These challenges stem from various barriers that women and other minorities encounter in advancing their careers. Gender discrimination in the workplace can impede women from achieving career success due to the differential treatment they receive from organizations. In fact, approximately 55% of the gender gap in career success can be attributed to sex discrimination (Melamed, 1995). Metz and Tharenou (2001) discovered that gender discrimination was the most commonly reported barrier to women's advancement at all managerial levels.

Additionally, self-selection plays an important role in career advancement. For instance, women often exhibit lower managerial ambitions compared to men, and even those with strong ambitions for managerial roles perceive work-home conflicts as a barrier to career progress (Van Vianen and Fischer, 2002). Additionally, several studies in this field of research have found that women are less

likely to actively apply for promotion compared to men. These self-promotion initiatives are often perceived to threaten gender-stereotypical behavior expectations; they are, however, often necessary for professional success (Doherty & Manfredi, 2006; Harper et al., 2001; Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010, as cited in Prescott & Bogg, 2011b; Probet, 2005).

Connected to the idea that self-led initiatives like self-promotion are less typical for women, it is also found that women tend to fare better in bureaucratic organizations with clear career paths rather than in more individualized and non-bureaucratic organizations (Wickham et al., as cited in Prescott & Bogg, 2011a).

2.2. Male-dominated Work Environments

The main keywords guiding our literature review on the topic of male-dominated work environments with a special focus on the VGI were:

male + dominated + work + environment, women + video games, women + creativity, gender inequality, gender pay gap, video game industry,

The main themes within the literature on women within male-dominated work environments and the VGI specifically were the VGI landscape and its intricacies for female workers, organizational influences on female career development, and the roles of women in games. Further, research connected to the creativity of women often referred to female socialization, personality traits of creative women, the female creative process as well as female identity in a male-dominated context. Theories referred to within this area of research were the theories on the creativity of women, social identity theory, the glass ceiling, occupational segregation, the theory of gendered organizations, and social-role theory. Further, feminist theories and concepts from the discourse on gender were most prominent within the reviewed literature. Most of the studies were empirical and theoretical, many of them using surveys or interviews as their main data source.

Literature on occupational segregation deals with conceptualizing occupations as social categories in which people share aspects of their identity, such as preferences and personal experiences (Prescott & Bogg, 2011a). The gender composition of these different occupational categories can influence workers and their identity regardless of their immediate environment. Thus, ideas about male-dominated occupations and industries emerge and influence workers' perception of the industry, even if their own immediate environment does not reflect these gender imbalances (Prescott & Bogg, 2011a).

Research on the experience of women in male-dominated industries is quite well-established, although there are still some gaps in the literature, particularly when it comes to the VGI. Literature

on this topic often relates to gender role expectations in relation to leadership. An example of these gender roles is Ely and Meyerson (2000) finding that men are often associated with traits such as strong, assertive, and independent, while women are associated with traits connected to collaboration, support, and relationships. They conclude that organizational cultures, corporate structures, and practices often favor men because they were initially established by men (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). Campuzano (2019) conducted a literature review on gendered traits in leadership and found that what is considered female leadership is often only valued as a supplement to male leadership in male-dominated contexts. Eagly, Karau, and Makhijani (1995) explored the effectiveness of leaders in relation to their gender from the perspective of social-role theory. Their results present us with the findings that women struggle to become effective leaders in industries where leadership roles are defined in masculine terms, facing even more severe gender stereotypes (Eagly, Karau & Makhijani, 1995). Recent research shows that in a working context, consensus perceives women as more effective leaders than men, while women perceive themselves to be significantly less effective than their male counterparts (Paustian-Underdahl, Walker & Woehr, 2014).

Another contribution from the literature on male-dominated working environments is the finding that women are often excluded from informal and social events, which results in a lack of mentoring relationships, networking opportunities, and information gathering, as well as exclusion from casual decision-making processes (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2017). Additionally, Blich and Ito (2017) report that white cisgender males tend to have homogenous networks that exclude women and other marginalized genders from being referred for positions. Research in this area is often focused on the experience of women in the IT industry (Annabi & Lebovitz, 2018; Holgersson & Romani, 2020), where women often reported feelings of isolation and exclusion (Annabi & Lebovitz, 2018). A theoretical contribution in this regard is Shore and Chung's (2021) research on inclusive leadership, which stresses that most effective inclusion is enabled when diversity in the workplace is actively promoted, for example, by highlighting the value that marginalized identities contribute with their unique perspectives and experiences. Shore & Chung (2021) stress that leadership orientations of exclusion, differentiation, and assimilation need to be actively avoided when introducing employees with minority backgrounds into a workplace.

2.2.1. The Video Game Industry as a Male-dominated Landscape

The VGI represents a considerably new sector as a digital interactive medium within the cultural industries. Newbery (2013) describes it as a hybrid sector operating at the intersection of entertainment, creative, cultural, digital, and technological industries. They identify a connection between the industry as having its own internal culture that needs to meet the demands of the culture of innovation, while simultaneously producing culture. Ross (2003, as cited in Newbery, 2013) argues that the VGI was influenced by the evolution of new-age tech companies embracing anti-authoritarian

work mentalities and employing ‘no-collar’ cultures of “openness, non-conformity, cooperation, and self-management” (p.33).

Within previous research, it is described that the VGI, including its gaming culture, often presents women and other marginalized genders with a hostile environment, both as players and developers (Bailey et al., 2021; Lopez-Fernandez et al., 2019). In their research, Newbery (2013) describes sexism as appearing to be “deeply entrenched and rampant in the games industry. It pervades gaming technology, the workplace, and the games themselves” (p.4). Several recent scandals revealed toxic work environments, misogyny, and harassment experienced by women working in games. In public discussions surrounding the topic, popular hashtags like #1reasonwhy and #gamergate incentivized a wide number of female game developers to share their experiences (Greengard, 2023; Raja, 2012). The attention is mostly directed toward AAA production studios, described by affected women as a discriminatory “boys’ club” (D’Anastasio, 2021).

AAA games are still evaluated to target and attract mostly men and feature few to no female characters (Bailey et al., 2021; Fullerton et al., 2008; Lopez-Fernandez et al., 2019). Newbery (2013) describes games as “technologically and culturally gendered activities which so far have created an industry that has been largely limited to men producing cultural play products intended for consumption by other men” (p.31). This lack of female representation is attributed to the scarcity of women in developer roles, leaving them without decision-making power regarding the content of the games (Prescott & Bogg, 2011a).

When describing the industry landscape, previous research points towards long working hours and what is commonly referred to as ‘crunch time,’ which describes an extremely stressful and intense working period of 65 to 80 hours plus per week just before the release of a game (Prescott & Bogg, 2011b). Additionally, part-time work is very rare, while oftentimes, employment is project-based with demanding and unpredictable hours (Gill & Pratt, 2008; Prescott & Bogg, 2011b). Bielby and Bielby (1996) stress the importance of the industrial context of organizations within the creative sectors and attribute the reproduction of gender inequalities to short-term employment contracts, informal hiring processes, and the overall domination of male decision-makers. Research considers these extreme working conditions resulting in poor work-life balances, including unfriendly working environments, as constituting some of the reasons for the lack of women within this industry. Additional characteristics of the unique industry landscape of creative labor, in general, are unclear boundaries between work and play as well as the passionate and emotional attachment to the work, which can lead to exhaustion, insecurity, and blurred boundaries, causing one’s identity to be closely tied to one’s work (Gill & Pratt, 2008; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011). Thus, game development seems to attract

mostly young, time-flexible men with a passion for games, who consequently maintain time-consuming and demanding work practices (Prescott & Bogg, 2011b).

Women are known to be more present in non-developmental and facilitating roles such as production, administration, human resources, and marketing within the VGI (Bailey et al., 2021; Prescott & Bogg, 2011a). If part of a development team, women tend to be overrepresented in art and animation roles and underrepresented in engineering and programming roles (Bailey et al., 2021). A part of the industry in which women are more present is indie development and specifically mobile games. However, it is considered that, in comparison to AAA games, indie production does not receive the same amount of attention and thus recognition, resulting in a disadvantageous position for women and other marginalized genders (Bailey et al., 2021).

More barriers relating to the industry are considered to be a lack of mentors and role models for women, a lack of women in senior positions, and a lack of benefits of interest to women, such as childcare (Wickham et al., as cited in Prescott & Bogg, 2011a). Schaap (2008) posits that women lack the support and confidence to advance to senior-level leadership positions within the industry and that women in management positions are less likely to be involved in activities that allow them to prove their aptitude to move up the organizational hierarchy. Prescott and Bogg (2011a) discuss how women are often directed toward managerial roles even if they prefer technical work due to gender stereotypical assumptions related to interpersonal and organizational skills. Thus, senior women within the industry are often found in managerial roles instead of technical areas of game development (Haines, 2004, as cited in Prescott & Bogg, 2011a).

Research in this area also stresses that fewer women undertake degrees relevant to working within the technology sector; there is a significantly lower number of women studying engineering, computer science, and information technology degrees (Katz et al., 2006).

Many barriers faced by women expand outside the realm of the development of games and into the gaming culture surrounding the consumers of video games (Fullerton et al., 2008). Even within the industry, there is still a misconception that girls don't like to play games as much as boys, and as stated previously, many games predominantly target a male audience (Fullerton et al., 2008). In their literature review on female gaming, Lopez-Fernandez et al. (2019) present the most prominent topics within this area of research as the benefits of female gaming, reasons why women may play fewer video games than men, perceptions and realities of female characters within games, and women's position in gaming culture. They conclude that women often encounter online harassment and negative expectations during gameplay based on their gender. Playing games regularly includes being

confronted with aggression and frequently sexualized content. Additionally, female avatar representation is often exaggerated and hypersexualized, which the authors claim can lead to feelings of insecurity, decreased self-esteem, depression, and other negative impacts on female consumers' well-being (Lopez-Fernandez et al., 2019).

2.2.2. *Gender Minorities in Male-dominated Workplaces*

A frequently cited theoretical contribution to the literature in the area of gender minorities in male-dominated contexts is Kanter's concept of Tokenism (1977). In a research paper on female leaders in male-dominated environments, Duyvejonck (2021) refers to Kanter's theory in order to make sense of the experience of women in top executive positions within manufacturing, construction, and engineering industries. Kanter defines tokens as the minority members of a majority group. Tokens are usually defined as a minority that suffers from not belonging and differentiates themselves from the majority group and from its own minority group through their unusual competence (Kanter, 1977). One phenomenon of negative experiences often endured by tokens are the constant feeling of being in the public eye and perceived pressure to perform at higher standards to prove that they deserve their leadership position (Holgerson & Romani, 2020; Kanter, 1977). Another negative experience of tokens is the feeling of isolation which we have already addressed as a common phenomenon for women working in male-dominated environments (Annabi & Lebovitz, 2018; Kanter, 1977). Lastly, assimilation describes the conscious and unconscious assumption of a majority that tokens need to fit into specific limited and stereotyped roles. This results in phenomena such as status leveling, in which tokens in an unexpected role are treated similarly to stereotypical averages, although it is not appropriate in that specific situation (Kanter, 1977).

While investigating gender segregation within the VGI, Prescott and Bogg (2011a) found that female executives in the industry feel the characteristic 'forceful' is more applicable to them than artists and coders. Additionally, they found that these women identify themselves with a more masculine gender role identity compared to female artists and coders in the industry. These results lead to the assumption that women and other marginalized genders may perceive it to be necessary to adopt a more masculine gender identity and stereotypically male skillset in order to climb the career ladder within the VGI (Prescott & Bogg, 2011a).

According to Lindley's (2005) research, women's perception of barriers affecting their career advancement is positively associated with their expectations of outcomes, or how desirable they envision the consequences of pursuing different occupations to be. This suggests that women may tend to idealize outcomes that they perceive as unattainable. Specifically, women may idealize male-dominated careers that they consider inaccessible due to gender-related barriers. Despite recognizing significant obstacles, women who have chosen male-dominated careers express their

intention to persist in those fields. Lindley (2005) suggests that this could be because women who perceive more barriers in their career development hold more positive expectations for female-dominated roles like secretarial work, believing that such occupations may offer a way to avoid those barriers. In contrast, there was no correlation found between outcome expectations and perceived barriers for men, indicating that general perceptions of barriers to career development seem to be relevant for women's expectations in specific career domains but not for men (Lindley, 2005).

Social identity theory is a common theory used within the discourse on leadership and argues that individuals and followers often choose to follow the leadership of individuals they identify with. It is based on the underlying assumption that human beings derive their self-worth from group memberships and tend to sympathize with people they feel are similar to them or represent some kind of idealism (Jackson & Parry, 2011). Thus, the extent to which a leader is selected or accepted by a group is dependent on how prototypical they are to that group and how relatable and socially attractive they are (Van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2013, as cited in Jackson & Parry, 2011). This theory offers an explanation of the glass ceiling phenomenon through which demographic minorities such as women and other marginalized genders can find it difficult to attain top leadership positions (Stafsudd, 2004, as cited in Jackson & Perry, 2011).

The glass ceiling theory is one of the most commonly referred to theories within research on the gender pay gap and gender inequalities at work. It refers to the barriers to career advancement that women, other marginalized genders, and demographic minorities face (Jackson & Perry, 2011; Schaap, 2008). It tends to explain the lack of women and other minorities in top leadership positions and could thus be a useful tool in assessing the experience of women in male-dominated industries such as the VGI. Factors contributing to the glass ceiling are unconscious bias, stereotyping, and discrimination. Additionally, women and other minorities are disproportionately affected by challenges related to work-life balance, lack of role models, mentors, and informal networks that support career development (Schaap, 2008). Practical implications for organizations are usually increased transparency in recruitment and promotion processes, training, mentorship programs, and diversity and inclusion initiatives (McKinsey & Company, 2020; Schaap, 2008).

Traditionally, the most popular approach to gender inequality at work was providing women and other marginalized groups with leadership training and development initiatives (Annabi & Lebovitz, 2018; Duyvejonck, 2021; Ely & Meyerson, 2000). Research in this area demonstrates that, instead of looking for flaws in the organizational structures and practices of male-dominated industries and cultures, interventions are often directed toward pointing out aspects of women and other marginalized genders that are lacking or insufficient (Annabi & Lebovitz, 2018). In order to combat

feelings of exclusion and the presence of barriers to effective leadership and career development experienced by women, scholars recommend making role models more visible, improving supervisor relationships, and providing opportunities for networking and forming mentorship relationships (Duyvejonck, 2021). Generally, scholars within this area of research propose the need for organizations to build a culture of diversity and accountability that allows for effective and inclusive leadership (Duyvejonck, 2021; Shore & Chung, 2021).

2.3. Construction of the Conceptual & Theoretical Framework

In this section, we will present the key concepts and theories resulting from our literature review that will construct our conceptual and theoretical framework and guide our analysis.

As we are using the Gioia method and grounded theory as our research methods, instead of focusing solely on the theoretical contribution of a single theory, our approach involves gathering contributions from multiple theories. These theories encompassed social cognitive theory, self-efficacy theory, career anchor theory, social identity theory, glass ceiling theory, occupational segregation theory, and gendered organization theory. While career development is a well-researched field, we discovered a reasonable amount of existing research on women in male-dominated industries. However, our specific research interest lies in the non-male career development within the VGI, where we found a lack of prior research and theories. As a result, we collected theoretical contributions from various theories to develop a comprehensive and nuanced approach to our research topic.

2.3.1. *Contributions from Previous Research*

In order to better understand our interviewees' career narratives and choices, an essential part of the reviewed literature dealt with the history of the VGI, the traditional roles of women within it, female career development, and the more general experiences of women in male-dominated contexts. We covered commonly assumed barriers and opportunities for women, how they are represented, and how previous research conceptualizes the lack of women in these industries. We are aware that this literature neglects to include other marginalized genders directly. Nevertheless, we believe it will add to our understanding of the experience of gender minorities in the VGI and allow our study to contribute to increased inclusion of other non-male workers in this discourse.

For example, specifically connected to the topic of career advancement in male-dominated spaces, both the social identity theory (Jackson & Perry, 2011) and the concept of the glass ceiling (Schaap, 2008) deliver practical implications for understanding the experience of minority groups such as women and other marginalized genders.

Further, previous research suggested that contrasting perceptions and expectations of success may have implications on different ideas of opportunities, barriers, and goals (Meece et al., 2006; Prescott & Bogg, 2011b). We consider this an important aspect to consider within an analysis of career development, since the notion of development in the context of careers is most likely subjective. Contributions from these studies allow us to include the experiences of other marginalized genders in our discussion.

We consider the fact that women are described to fare better in bureaucratic organizations (Wickham et al., as cited in Prescott & Bogg, 2011a) an important aspect to take into consideration. Since we interviewed both participants who work in AAA studios that resemble more bureaucratic corporations, as well as participants who work as entrepreneurs, freelancers, and indie developers in less bureaucratic contexts, we will be able to make potential comparisons between the two. Therefore, it will prove helpful to analyze our data while considering the aforementioned assumption that women may encounter more favorable career advancement opportunities in organizations with well-defined career paths. We believe that this could also prove to be true for other marginalized genders.

Recent results from research on effective leadership perceptions (Paustian-Underdahl, Walker & Woehr, 2014) illustrate women's potential lack of confidence in their own abilities in comparison to their male counterparts, instead of a perceived unfitnes of women for leadership positions. This will be a valuable insight when assessing subjective career narratives by our participants.

Another important contribution from our reviewed literature was the discourse on the evolution of the VGI as a hybrid sector (Newbery, 2013). The result is a new sector without clearly established best practices, high unpredictability due to a core dependency on technological innovations, and a considerable mix of cultures. We consider this one of the most relevant industry-specific characteristics of the VGI and thus included volatility as one of the aspects we would like to investigate regarding the potential influences of non-male career development in the industry.

Lastly, an important contribution to the conceptual framework of our thesis is the acknowledgment of certain approaches within academic literature and organizational intervention practices to eradicate gender inequality at work by 'fixing the women' (Duyvejonck, 2021). We find it important to stress that we do not perceive women and other marginalized genders as lacking the necessary skills to develop their careers toward positions of leadership and thus aim to uncover industry-specific barriers to their career advancements that need to be addressed on an organizational level. However, we are interested in pinpointing the specific strategies adopted by non-male game workers on an individual level in order to detect these potential barriers and understand the subjective experiences of our participants.

2.3.2. *Social Cognitive Theory*

In order to explore why women and other marginalized genders choose to enter and work in male-dominated industries and environments that can be described as hostile, we decided to investigate parts of social cognitive theory (SCT) developed by Albert Bandura (1977). SCT is an extensive psychological framework that examines how the social environment influences motivation, learning, and self-regulation (Bandura, 1977; Schunk & Usher, 2019). This theory emphasizes the role of observational learning, as well as the importance of agency, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals (Bandura, 1977). In this section, we will explore the previously established elements of motivation, goals, and values in relation to career development, drawing upon the perspective of SCT. We focus on these aspects of SCT as we consider them most relevant to our research purpose. However, it is important to acknowledge the extensive range of theoretical contributions of SCT and its potential application to many more aspects of the human experience than just career development.

Since its inception, SCT has maintained a close connection with motivation. The theory places significant emphasis on motivational variables, which have been extensively examined through research (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & Usher, 2019). SCT proposes personal, behavioral, and environmental influences that impact individuals' development of motivation. Motivation in career development is influenced by various factors, such as the perception of success, goal setting, and alignment with personal values (Schunk & Usher, 2019).

A goal is a mental representation of what one is attempting to attain, and according to SCT, goals can energize and direct motivational outcomes (Bandura 1997). Goals are a personal process that helps focus and sustain individuals' efforts directed toward task success. As learners observe and evaluate their goal progress, a discrepancy between the goal and perceived progress can lead learners to expend the necessary effort and persist in the pursuit of desired outcomes. The belief that learners are making goal progress can build self-efficacy (Latham & Locke, 2018; Schunk, 2012).

Values refer to the perceived importance or usefulness of learning, and SCT postulates that people's actions reflect their values (Bandura, 1997). Individuals are more motivated to achieve when they perceive their goals to be aligned with outcomes that are important to them. Researchers have demonstrated that expectancies for success, which bear some similarity to self-efficacy, predict achievement. Together, expectancies and values predict a range of motivational outcomes, including choices, effort, persistence, and achievement (Wigfield, Tonks, & Klauda, 2016).

2.3.3. *Self-efficacy Theory*

At the core of SCT are the concepts of agency and self-efficacy, which we found to be particularly intriguing aspects of career development. The concept of agency refers to an individual's ability to actively influence and shape their own thoughts, actions, and behaviors. According to SCT, individuals strive for a sense of agency and are not passive recipients of environmental influences. Instead, they are active agents who believe they can exert control over their own lives. Agency involves a sense of empowerment and taking personal responsibility for one's actions, as well as believing that one's efforts can lead to desired outcomes. Individuals utilize cognitive and self-regulation skills, such as goal-setting and strategy implementation, to exercise this sense of agency. They monitor their development toward their objectives and change their tactics as they see fit (Bandura, 1977).

Self-efficacy is a key component of the aforementioned agentic perspective. Bandura defines self-efficacy as “people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances” (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). Self-efficacy is a crucial internal motivational process in SCT as it comes from self-reflection that is both evaluative and goal-oriented. Self-efficacy is a cognitive process and is determined by how individuals interpret information from four sources: performance accomplishment, vicarious experiences, social persuasions, and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1986).

First, Bandura (1986) explains performance accomplishment as referring to personal experiences of success or failure in similar tasks or situations. When individuals succeed in a particular task, their self-efficacy increases, leading to a greater belief in their ability to perform well in similar future situations. Second, vicarious experiences involve observing others successfully performing a task, which can serve as a source of motivation and inspiration. By witnessing someone else's achievements, individuals can develop a sense of self-efficacy and the belief that they can also succeed in similar circumstances. Third, social persuasions refer to verbal or nonverbal messages from others that can influence one's beliefs about their capabilities. Encouragement, support, and positive feedback from peers, mentors, or role models can enhance an individual's self-efficacy. Conversely, criticism or negative feedback may undermine it. Finally, emotional arousal encompasses an individual's emotional and physiological responses to challenging situations. Positive emotions and arousal can boost self-efficacy, while anxiety, stress, or fear may lower it. Collectively, these four sources contribute to the development and maintenance of self-efficacy beliefs, shaping individuals' perceptions of their capabilities and influencing their motivation and performance in various domains (Bandura, 1986).

When it comes to the relevance of self-efficacy to our research purpose, we would like to highlight that multiple scholars have researched the correlation between self-efficacy and career development (Betz, 2000; Dickerson & Taylor, 2000; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994; 2000; Lindley, 2005;). It has been shown that self-efficacy and its antecedents are known to influence how people select and eliminate future activities affecting their career decisions and development. Individuals who have a strong sense of self-efficacy are more likely to set challenging goals, persist in the face of obstacles, and engage in career exploration (Bandura, 1977; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). Conversely, low self-efficacy can have serious repercussions since people may avoid difficult jobs and opt for easier ones if they feel they lack the necessary skills to complete them (Bandura, 1977).

Demonstrating the relevance of self-efficacy theory to our purpose of investigating experiences of gender minorities in majority-dominated contexts, Hackett and Betz (1981) sought to apply the concept of self-efficacy to explain why women are underrepresented in male-dominated industries and higher-status occupations. They proposed that there are gender differences in the development of efficacy expectations influenced by varying experiences related to gender roles. Specifically, boys tend to have more exposure to tasks associated with perceived masculine domains during their early experiences compared to girls. These early experiences contribute to the formation of stronger self-efficacy expectations among boys for careers requiring those skills. Additionally, in male-dominated sectors, men are more likely to have access to role models relevant to career-related efficacy compared to women. Consequently, women have fewer opportunities for vicarious learning that could help them develop efficacy expectations for nontraditional careers. These gender-based differences in socialization contribute to lower self-efficacy among women when it comes to succeeding in traditionally male-dominated careers, limiting their ability to fully realize their capabilities and potential in career-related pursuits (Hackett & Betz, 1981).

Furthermore, in a comparative study conducted by Zeldin, Britner, and Pajares (2006), the self-efficacy beliefs of successful men and women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) careers, which are predominantly male-dominated fields, were examined. The results demonstrated that men and women who pursue STEM careers derive their self-efficacy beliefs from different primary sources. Performance accomplishment was the primary source of men's self-efficacy beliefs, whereas social persuasions and vicarious experience were the primary sources of self-efficacy beliefs for women. This implies that men rely more heavily on the interpretations they make of their ongoing achievements and successes, while women rely more on relational episodes in their lives to develop and reinforce confidence in their ability to succeed in male-dominated domains (Zeldin, Britner, & Pajares, 2006).

In conclusion, SCT provides a valuable framework for understanding the motivation and driving forces behind career development. Furthermore, multiple scholars have researched gender differences in motivation and its ascendants. To further investigate that, we will introduce Schein's career anchors as part of our theoretical framework in the next section.

2.3.4. Career Anchor Theory

To enhance our understanding of career development, we have chosen to incorporate Edgar Schein's (1990) concept of career anchors into our research. By integrating Schein's ideas, we aim to gain a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective on this subject matter. Edgar Schein is a renowned organizational psychologist who developed the concept of career anchors, which refers to the individual's self-concept that underlies their career decisions and preferences. In other words, a career anchor is a set of values, skills, and motives that an individual has internalized over time and that guides their career choices. Edgar Schein's paradigm provides a comprehensive framework for understanding career development from both an individual and organizational perspective (Schein, 1990). According to Schein (1990), careers are not simply a sequence of jobs but rather a series of learning experiences and psychological contracts between individuals and organizations. His paradigm emphasizes the importance of self-concept, values, and motivations in shaping career decisions and outcomes. Schein's framework highlights the role of both internal factors like individual aspirations, values, and skills and external factors like organizational culture and social context in career development. To measure career anchors, Schein developed a survey questionnaire that measures and calculates the eight career anchors, as displayed in Appendix A. Each of the anchors represents a different set of values, skills, and motives that individuals prioritize in their careers (Schein, 1990). The eight career anchors are presented in Table 1.

<i>Functional and Technical Competency</i>	Individuals who score high on this anchor are primarily motivated by their expertise in a specific technical or functional area. They derive satisfaction from being recognized as experts and enjoy solving complex problems within their domain of expertise. They often seek opportunities to enhance their technical or functional skills further and may prioritize assignments that allow them to utilize their knowledge and abilities to the fullest.
<i>General Managerial Competence</i>	Individuals who score high on this anchor value learning several functions, sacrificing organizational allegiance, achieving internal pay fairness, and getting along with a wide range of people. For this group, climbing the corporate ladder to positions of greater responsibility, having the chance to take on leadership roles, making contributions to the success of their firms, and having high income are important values and motivations.
<i>Autonomy and Independence</i>	Individuals who score high on this anchor desire flexibility and independence in their career and decision-making. They value the ability to have control over their work and may aspire to run their own business or pursue entrepreneurial endeavors in order to achieve greater autonomy.
<i>Security and Stability</i>	Individuals who score high on this anchor prefer predictable and stable work. They organize their careers so that they feel safe and secure. They

	prefer that future events are predictable so that they can relax. Intrinsic motivational tools like job challenges and enrichment matter less to them than working conditions and benefits.
<i>Entrepreneurial Creativity</i>	Individuals who score high on this anchor have a strong inclination toward creating new opportunities. They prioritize innovation, creativity, and taking calculated risks in their career choices. They may be driven by a desire to explore uncharted territories and develop new ideas.
<i>Dedication to A Cause</i>	Individuals who score high on this anchor prioritize work that aligns with their personal values and beliefs. They are motivated by a strong sense of purpose and the desire to make a positive impact on society or a specific cause they deeply care about. These individuals are likely to be driven by a sense of social responsibility and may seek out roles or organizations that allow them to contribute to meaningful change.
<i>Pure Challenge</i>	Individuals who score high on this anchor prefer to take on difficult or complex tasks. They prefer there to be big problems to solve and challenges to overcome. They value the opportunity to learn and grow and may therefore have varied careers as they change roles looking for new problems to solve.
<i>Lifestyle</i>	Individuals who score high on this anchor value their lifestyles more than their careers. They highly value work-life balance and often have a 'work to live' as opposed to a 'live to work' mentality. This often results in flexible and autonomous work circumstances and sometimes even sacrificing career outcomes to retain the lifestyle they prefer.

Table 1; Schein's career anchor values

The career anchors survey has been widely used in research and practice to assess individuals' career preferences and values and to guide career development and counseling (Cerdin & Pargneux, 2010; Crepeau, Crook, Goslar & McMurtrey, 1992; Suutari and Taka, 2004; Yarnall, 1998).

Previous research has examined career anchors among women in industries dominated by men. In 2007, Quesenberry and Traut conducted a study on career anchors among women working in the IT sector. They collected data from 92 women who were employed in the American IT workforce. The findings revealed that the women's career paths were driven by a combination of career anchors rather than a single anchor, as suggested by Schein. They found the technical competency anchor and the general management anchor to be mutually exclusive, with none of the participants expressing high values for both anchors. The study also discovered that career anchors exhibit temporal variations and may not remain constant throughout a woman's career. This finding contradicts Schein's argument that once an individual establishes a career anchor, it is unlikely to change over the course of their career. The most common reason for women shifting career anchors throughout their careers was the desire for work-life balance, particularly in relation to raising children and managing family responsibilities. As their children grew older, the women assigned less importance to work-life balance and prioritized their career trajectories instead (Quesenberry and Traut, 2007).

2.3.5. *Contributions from the Discourse on Gender*

An important contribution to the conceptual framework of this thesis is the modern discourse on gender and gender inequality and the implications for any research within its area. We chose to include several theories in two main areas: gender as a social construct and a performative act and gender in a management and leadership context. This will provide some of the most important theoretical contributions to our thesis and act to strengthen the arguments made within it. It will also assist in contextualizing the experience of our participants.

The gender discourse is most prominently shaped by thinkers like Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, both contributors to the idea of gender as a social construct. Both authors lead the discussion on gender by examining power relations in regard to heterosexual hegemony and discussing the intricacies of discourse as the production of knowledge and power and its role in the construction of gender, bodies, sex, and naturality (Butler, 1993; Foucault, 1998). Foucault focuses on how power operates in society to produce and govern identities by imposing gender upon individuals through processes of normalization and regulation and multiple disciplinary techniques like education, media, and the law (Foucault, 1978; Foucault, 1980; McNay, 1992). Butler (1990) builds on Foucault but stresses the oversimplification of the idea of gender as a social construct and invites a very dense and thorough discussion about sex and what they consider the performativity of gender. According to Butler, we perform gender through the repeated stylization of our bodies to create the illusion of a coherent identity (Butler, 1990). This is why they argue challenged or subverted gender norms may produce feelings of anxiety and confusion in human beings and pose a threat to their constructed identities and understanding of the world, which Butler refers to as “phantasms” (Butler, 2020). These phantasms allow people to attribute meaning to the world and to understand themselves as actors within its complexity. Butler describes them as governing rules, cultural formations, and “not just illusions or false beliefs, but rather cultural and historical formations that inform the very contours of experience” (Butler, 2020, p.11). Butler and Foucault present us with discursive and materialistic approaches to gender that help us conceptualize how power, knowledge, and discourse may shape our understanding of reality. It helps us move on from arguments of biological determinism regarding gender roles and see gender as something we do instead of something we are.

In her article from 1990, Joan Acker presents the idea of gendered organizations, a concept very close to the established understanding of how society and its institutions produce and reproduce gender. In this specific case, organizations are shaped and constructed in specific ways that contribute to the construction of men and women, masculinity and femininity (Alvesson & Due Billing, 2009). Thus, gender is embedded in both structures and practices of organizations that reproduce gendered power relations, associated gender roles, and identities (Acker, 1990). Aspects of Acker’s theory on gendered

organizations contributing to the discourse on gender inequality are gendered job segregation, the devaluation of feminized labor, and the domination of ‘masculine’ leadership (1990). These aspects provide useful insights into the gender pay gap, the lack of women in leadership, and other work-related phenomena concerning gender inequalities.

2.3.6. *Contributions from the Discourse on Female Creativity*

We reviewed research on topics related to personality, motivation, and socialization, specifically regarding creative women, as we consider creativity and tech-savviness to be two of the most important characteristics of our participants. We believe that a brief sociological and psychological theoretical framework established this way will help us better understand the career narratives of our participants.

Regarding the discourse on creativity among women and female socialization, several scholars discuss that creativity, as an integral part of innovation, is an extremely valued commodity and greatly sought after in today’s economy (Bonn, 2001; Newbery, 2013; Sloan, 2020). Historically, women were less encouraged and educated than their male counterparts to use their intellectual skills creatively (Helson, 1999; Reis, 2002). Successful creative women were dependent on family support or influential mentors, cultural and financial advantages, and often enjoyed education outside of school (Reis, 2002). Creative women are described as often remaining in the background and functioning as implementers of the ideas of others, often making both conscious and unconscious decisions to work in facilitating roles (Reis, 1998; 2002). In an article about a potential theory of creativity in women, Reis (2002) describes the experiences of guilt by creative women in regard to putting work ahead of other responsibilities. Reis (2002) argues that this may explain why they often tend to select work that results in social change and improvement of the human condition.

Reis (2002) pinpoints specific characteristics typical for creative females. For example, women tend to express more doubt, are more conscious of criticism, and fear rejection. Simultaneously, creative women are found to be keen to question assumptions and have strong determination, commitment, assertiveness, and risk-taking. Other traits described by Reis (2002) are rebellious independence, strong symbolic interests, flexibility, and a desire for freedom. Correspondingly, when discussing creative labor, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) describe autonomy as a key element especially desired by creative workers.

3. Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology used in this research. First, we will explain why we have chosen social constructivism as our philosophical perspective and research paradigm. Second, we will illustrate the research approach and design, drawing on relevant literature such as *Basics of Qualitative Research* by Corbin and Strauss (2008), *The Gioia Method* by Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013), *Research Methods for Business* by Sekaran and Bougie (2016), and other relative literature on research methods. Second, we will discuss the process of data collection, including qualitative and quantitative data, participants, and the sampling method employed. Third, we will focus on data analysis and engage in a critical discussion regarding the quality and limitations of the data.

3.1. Research Paradigm

This thesis adopts a social constructivist approach, drawing on contributions from the modern discourse on gender which is most prominently shaped by social constructivist thinkers Michel Foucault (1978) and Judith Butler (1990). Social constructivism posits that knowledge and understanding of the world are actively constructed by individuals and groups through their social interactions and shared meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). It rejects the notion of an objective, pre-existing reality and instead highlights the role of individual interpretation within specific social and cultural contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Language, discourse, and social processes are considered central to shaping knowledge, identities, and social phenomena, including gender (Butler, 1990; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Foucault, 1978). Thus, we believe discourse plays a crucial role in the reproduction of gender concepts in the VGI. Accessing this discourse constitutes the gateway to these concepts. In line with this approach, we employed a mixed method, including a qualitative data analysis of interviews. This method allows for an in-depth examination of language and narratives. Qualitative research methods are valued for their ability to provide insights into subjective experiences and social constructions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). By exploring the discursive practices and narratives of our participants, this study seeks to shed light on the construction and reproduction of gender within male-dominated contexts, such as the VGI.

3.2. Research Design & Strategy

This study employed an exploratory approach due to the limited existing research and knowledge on female career development within the VGI. In the field of business research, there is a growing preference for mixed methods, which involves combining quantitative and qualitative data analysis within a single study, incorporating both inductive and deductive thinking (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). In line with this mixed methods approach, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted

alongside the collection of quantitative career anchor survey responses. To address the study's objectives and research questions, two research strategies were utilized: grounded theory and the Gioia method.

The research design followed grounded theory principles, as outlined by Corbin and Strauss (2008), which involves systematically deriving a theory from the data through an iterative process of sampling, data collection, and analysis until theoretical saturation is achieved (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). To facilitate this process, theoretical sampling was employed, whereby researchers jointly collected, coded, and analyzed data, deciding what data to collect next and where to find it in order to develop emerging theories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Constant comparisons were made between initial and subsequent interviews, as well as initial codes and findings with later ones. As an initial theory emerged, new data was compared against it. In cases where gaps were identified in the data, additional participants who were best suited to fill those gaps were included.

Simultaneously, this study adheres to the guidelines of the Gioia methodology, a systematic approach within grounded theory for qualitative research. The Gioia method allows for the analysis of large amounts of qualitative data in a structured manner, aiming to develop theories and gain a comprehensive understanding of phenomena, resulting in detailed and insightful findings (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). It provides a clear step-by-step process, starting from defining the research question to interpreting the collected data, ensuring a rigorous and organized research process. The key features of the Gioia method include several important aspects. First, it emphasizes articulating a well-defined phenomenon of interest and consulting existing literature to inform the research. Second, it places significant importance on giving a voice to knowledgeable individuals who are directly involved in the studied phenomenon. Third, it maintains flexibility during interviews, allowing for adjustments based on the responses of the informants. The Gioia method incorporates a coding system for data analysis that involves a three-step process. Firstly, researchers develop 1st-order codes, which are initial categories or labels assigned to segments of the data. Then, these codes are organized into 2nd-order categories, which capture broader patterns or concepts. Lastly, the categories are distilled into overarching aggregated themes, contributing to the development of theory. The coding system aids in organizing and categorizing the data, facilitating systematic and consistent analysis (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). In the upcoming sections, we will provide a detailed explanation of how these methods and approaches were utilized.

3.2.1. Sampling Method

The sampling process plays a crucial role in the research design of this study. The sampling began with defining the target population, which is non-male managers within the VGI. Due to the nature of the study's specific population of interest, there is no readily available data on this exact population.

Consequently, this study employed a nonprobability sampling approach. Nonprobability sampling refers to a method where subjects in the population do not have a known probability of being selected as sample subjects (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The aim of this study is neither to generalize for the population nor draw statistical inferences but to make theoretical generalizations. Therefore purposive sampling suited well for this study, when subjects are selected on the basis of experience and expertise in the subject that is being investigated. It is important that the subjects are chosen in such a way that they reflect the diversity of the population (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). More specifically, this study used theoretical sampling, which is a form of purposive sampling, which the principles of grounded theory call for. According to Glaser and Strauss (2008), theoretical sampling is jointly collecting, coding, and analyzing data whilst simultaneously deciding what data to collect next and where to gather it in order to develop a theory as it emerges. The sampling is, therefore, responsive to the data rather than established before the research begins, like most conventional methods of sampling. The purpose is to collect data from people that will maximize the opportunity to develop concepts in terms of their properties and dimension, uncover variations, and identify relationships between concepts (Glaser & Strauss, 2008). This approach allowed us to gather additional data in specific areas where further insights were needed, as indicated by the initial analysis. For instance, we recognized the need for a better managerial perspective on employee career development within the study. To achieve this, we intentionally sought out a subject who possessed extensive experience in employee development, providing valuable insights from a managerial standpoint. The sampling process was carried out in an iterative manner, meaning that we continued to select new participants until data saturation was reached.

#	PRONOUNS	GENERATION	JOB TITLE	COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE
1	She/Her	Gen X	Co-Founder	Sweden
2	She/Her	Gen X	Co-Founder	USA
3	She/Her	Millennial	CEO	France
4	She/Her	Millennial	Founder	USA
5	She/Her	Millennial	Office Manager	Sweden
6	She/Her	Millennial	Brand Manager	Canada
7	She/Her	Millennial	Communications & Dev Relations / Founder	Canada
8	She/Her	Millennial	Co-Founder & Game Designer	Switzerland
9	She/Her	Gen X	General Manager	Germany
10	They/Them	Gen X	Game Director	Sweden
11	She/Her	Gen X	Creative Director	UK
12	She/Her	Millennial	Associate producer	Sweden
13	She/Her	Millennial	Narrative Director	Sweden

14	She/Her	Gen X	Associate Game Director	UK
15	She/Her	Millennial	CEO	Sweden
16	She/Her	Millennial	Technical Design Director	UK
17	She/Her	Gen X	CEO	Iceland

Table 2; Study participants

The study comprised a total of 17 participants, as indicated in Table 2. Among these participants, sixteen identified as females, and one identified as non-binary. The sample included individuals from two different generations, with ten belonging to the Millennial generation, or born between 1981-1996, and seven to Generation X, or born between 1965-1981. The participants held a variety of job titles, encompassing roles such as CEOs, founders, directors, and designers. What they all had in common is a managerial title, which was one of the criteria for participating in the study. Furthermore, the study included participants from a range of countries, including Sweden, the USA, France, Canada, Switzerland, Germany, the UK, and Iceland. While these countries are all categorized as first-world Western nations, it is important to note that a certain number of participants had backgrounds originating from second and third-world countries. Overall, the sample size of 17 participants offered a balanced representation in terms of gender, generational diversity, job titles within management, and geographical locations. The sample provided a robust foundation for the study's analysis and findings, resulting in theoretical saturation, which is when no new information or insights emerges from additional cases (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the experiences within the VGI, considerations beyond gender and other aforementioned demographics were also taken into account during the sample selection process. We actively sought individuals from various underrepresented or minority groups within the VGI, including non-binary individuals, transgender individuals, people of color, individuals with disabilities, and individuals from non-Western countries. The deliberate inclusion of diverse identities and experiences enriches the study's understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by individuals from marginalized groups within the VGI.

The sampling process was executed by contacting potential participants through platforms like LinkedIn and Gmail. Additionally, we relied on convenience sampling, which entails collecting information from members of the population who are conveniently available to provide it (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Given the time constraints of the study, it was convenient for us to contact people with whom we had some prior connection. That facilitated a snowball effect, where subjects would recommend a specific person they believed would be a relevant candidate for the study (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

We were met with a lot of enthusiasm and interest by the individuals we reached out to. This provided us with a positive impression of the interest and need for further research on this topic. The individuals who expressed interest were invited to engage with the study, which included filling out the career anchor survey and participating in an online interview. The sampling process was conducted over several weeks to accommodate the availability of the participants.

3.3. Data Collection

The primary data collection involved a combination of interviews and surveys. Prior to the interviews, each participant completed a survey designed by social scientist Edgar Schein that measures career anchors. By completing the career anchors survey before the interviews, participants engaged in self-reflection and initiated the thought process related to career development, success, and leadership. The interviews were conducted to gain insight into their perspective on the career development of women within the VGI, their perception of goals and success, and the essential managerial skills for non-male managers in the industry. A total of 17 individual interviews and career anchor survey responses were conducted as part of the data collection process.

Following the guidelines of grounded theory and the Gioia method, the interviews were semi-structured, meaning that they were intended to raise some preliminary issues to the surface so that the researchers could determine what variables required further in-depth investigation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). Furthermore, we preserved flexibility to adjust the interview protocol based on the informant's responses, as demonstrated by the Gioia method (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). These approaches helped ensure that the questions were relevant to the interviewee's experience and expertise (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

The interview process employed a funneling technique, starting with general and easy open-ended questions and gradually progressing to more specific and personal ones (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The interviews began with an introduction of the researchers, an explanation of the study's and interview's purpose, and offering the option of anonymity. This initial phase was followed by a discussion of the interviewee's career history. This approach establishes rapport and credibility with the interviewees (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Subsequently, the participants were treated as knowledgeable informants, granting them the freedom and opportunity to express their experiences and share what they considered significant, as the Gioia method emphasizes (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). On average, the interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes.

The Gioia method calls for intertwined data collection and analysis (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). As the interviews progressed, the initial analysis grew more refined. To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives, they were posed questions that explored the following thematic areas:

- Career history and motivations for entering and working in the VGI
- Career development and goals
- Perception of success, both individual and general, within the industry
- Industry-specific managerial skills for women

All participants were asked questions related to the thematic areas, allowing for comparison of responses across interviews and capturing a comprehensive range of insights and perspectives on non-male managers' experiences in the VGI. However, some questions were tailored to each interviewee based on their unique experiences and expertise. For instance, an interviewee identifying as queer was asked about their perspective on the industry landscape for queer developers, while a creative director was questioned about their perception of the role, its responsibilities, and the potential reasons behind the underrepresentation of women in that position, considering the scarcity of female Creative Directors. An interview guide can be found in Appendix B.

The interviews were conducted online using Google Meet. This approach made reaching people in different countries and time zones easier. The online approach also provides flexibility and convenience for the interviewees and the researchers (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The interviews were recorded and transcribed using Otter AI, a transcription service that uses artificial intelligence to transcribe audio recordings. The use of Otter AI helped speed up the transcription process and increased accuracy in the transcription of the interviews.

3.4. Data Analysis

As previously mentioned, this study adopts the approach of grounded theory relying on the Gioia method to collect and analyze data. This section will elaborate on the data analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data.

3.4.1. *Qualitative Data*

The Gioia method analysis process consists of several key stages, including data coding or 1st-order analysis, category development or 2nd-order analysis, and theme identification or overarching aggregated themes (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). Following the structure of performing 1st-order analysis, which involves the initial coding of the interviews using an open coding approach, steering away from categorizing them, the interview transcripts were thoroughly examined to identify

meaningful units of data. These units, in the form of words, phrases, or sentences, were assigned descriptive codes that captured the essence of the response. The coding process was conducted iteratively, with codes continuously refined and revised as new data was analyzed. This process yielded 38 codes.

Building upon the initial coding, the next step involved 2nd-order analysis and the development of categories. The codes were organized and grouped based on similarities, differences, and patterns observed within the data. Through a process of constant comparison, recurring themes and concepts began to emerge. The categories represented higher-level concepts that provided a structured framework for organizing and analyzing the data. Each category encapsulated a specific aspect of the phenomenon being researched. Ultimately, we arrived at 14 categories. To facilitate the 1st- and 2nd-order analysis, we utilized NVivo to code the responses, a qualitative data analysis software. NVivo enabled a visual display that helped us identify frequently mentioned phrases, common themes, and patterns within the data.

Lastly, overarching aggregated themes were identified from the developed 2nd-order categories. These themes represented broader patterns, relationships, and insights that emerged from the data. The identification of themes involved a systematic review of the coded data, considering the relationships between categories and their significance in understanding the phenomenon (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). The themes were developed through careful interpretation and synthesis of the data, ensuring a comprehensive representation of the participants' perspectives. These themes include; career development, industry landscape, success, motivation, and strategies.

3.4.2. *Quantitative Data*

The career anchor survey, developed by Edgar Schein, is a self-assessment tool that comprises 40 Likert-scale questions. The respondents indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement on a scale of one to six, where one means “never true for me” and six means “always true for me.” The questions cover the eight career anchors mentioned above, with five questions per anchor. The responses to the questions that measure each anchor are then averaged to calculate the overall scores for each career anchor. This process was repeated for all eight career anchors for every interviewee. The scores for each career anchor can range from one to six, with higher scores indicating a stronger preference for that anchor (Schein, 1990). The survey data is quantitative, where statistical methods can be used to compare, summarize, and calculate descriptive statistics such as means, frequencies, and standard deviations to analyze the patterns and distribution of responses. However, as this study focuses on experiences and interpretations, the survey results were also analyzed qualitatively by connecting the interviewees’ dominating career anchors to their interview responses. This allowed us to gain a more comprehensive understanding of that person’s underlying

aspirations, priorities, beliefs, and goals. This combination gave us a richer and more nuanced insight into the individual and social factors shaping career choices and development.

The collected data from the survey was analyzed and organized into three categories: the participants' most dominating, second most dominating, and least dominating career anchors. Quesenberry and Traut (2007) found in their study of women in the IT sector that they were driven by a combination of career anchors rather than a single anchor, as suggested by Schein (Quesenberry & Traut, 2007; Schein, 1990). Thus, in addition to looking into the most and least dominating career anchors among the participants, we looked into their second most dominating anchors. To determine the dominant career anchor for each participant, a scoring system was used. If a career anchor was reported as the most dominating, it received a score of one. Similarly, if a career anchor was reported as the second most dominating or least dominating, it also received a score of one. In cases where participants scored evenly for two career anchors within the three categories, the score was divided by the two career anchors. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the distribution of career anchors within our sample and provided insights into the career priorities and aspirations of the participants. By analyzing the data in this manner, we aimed to identify patterns and trends related to career preferences, contributing to a deeper exploration of the research topic.

3.5. Data Quality

In order to ensure the reliability and validity of the study, various strategies were employed. To ensure validity and accuracy, we relied on triangulation, often utilized for mixed-method research (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Triangulation increases confidence in the findings by employing multiple methods and sources that converge on the same results. In this study, four types of triangulation were applied: method triangulation, employing multiple methods for data collection and analysis, data triangulation, gathering information from various sources, researcher triangulation, including multiple researchers collecting and analyzing the data, and lastly, theory triangulation, utilizing multiple theories and perspectives to interpret and explain the gathered data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). By applying these four types of triangulation, we aimed to ensure the validity of the study.

During the research process, there is often a trade-off between practical considerations and ensuring rigor. We had to take into account time constraints when determining the sample size for our study. Despite this, we were able to achieve a sample size of 17 interviewees, which proved to be sufficient for data saturation.

Furthermore, ethical considerations played a crucial role in this study, and measures were taken to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the interviewees and the data. To protect the participants'

identities, only specific characteristics such as pronouns, generation, job title, and country of residency were disclosed while ensuring that no personally identifiable information was shared. By maintaining participant confidentiality and protecting their anonymity, we aimed to create a safe space for open and honest dialogue, allowing participants to express their thoughts and opinions freely without fear of repercussion.

3.6. Research Limitations

This study focuses specifically on the experiences of non-male individuals within the VGI. In order to gain a deeper understanding of gender minorities within a male-dominated field, we deliberately included individuals who identify as other marginalized genders beyond merely cisgender women. It is important to note that the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all marginalized groups in majority-dominated industries, as our primary focus was on non-males. However, we believe our findings may hint towards the prevalence of certain issues within our studied domain that have the potential to showcase the need for broader research in this area.

When discussing the limited prior research on non-males in the VGI, we refer to both the scarcity of including other marginalized genders beyond cisgender women and the specific lack of research within the VGI. The existing gap in research regarding marginalized genders, prior to conducting the interviews, underscores the limitations of our understanding in this area. Nevertheless, this gap presented an opportunity for an exploratory and inductive research design. With limited prior knowledge and a desire to explore and discover new insights, an exploratory and inductive approach allowed us to gather data without preconceived notions or rigid hypotheses (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

A notable limitation of this study is the absence of perspectives and experiences of men in the VGI. We focused on non-male managers within the VGI, and thus did not collect data on the experiences of men to establish a comparative analysis. We believe that the lived experiences and narratives of non-males are valid beyond comparison to their male counterparts, however, it presents an intriguing opportunity for future research. A comprehensive investigation including the experiences of both non-male and male individuals in the VGI could contribute significantly to the field, especially regarding discursive practices reproducing concepts of gender within the VGI.

This study primarily focuses on game worker experiences within a Western context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other cultural or geographical settings. Through conducting similar research in different parts of the world, we would potentially gain a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of non-male individuals within the VGI industry across diverse cultural contexts. A comparative analysis would provide valuable insights into the differences,

similarities, and unique challenges faced by marginalized genders in different regions, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the subject matter.

We are mindful of these limitations and strive to contribute valuable insights that can help bridge the gap in knowledge and inform future research on marginalized genders within male-dominated industries, including the VGI.

Lastly, the paradigm of both grounded theory and the Gioia method emphasizes the importance of researchers having a personal connection and stake in the phenomena they choose to study while remaining aware of their own perspectives and biases (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). In alignment with this paradigm, we both have a strong connection to the research topic. We identify as females and are also both highly interested in and concerned with feminist matters. Additionally, one of the authors brings firsthand experience from working in the VGI. We acknowledge that our own experiences and perspectives may have influenced our approach to this topic. Additionally, the subjectivity of our participants and their positioning as non-males within the industry may influence their judgment and, thus, our analysis. As previously mentioned, we nevertheless believe that their lived experiences, and how they conceptualize and evaluate them, will provide us with valuable contributions to understanding their experiences within this industry, as the object of this research is intrinsically subjective. Thus, we view our stake in the phenomena of the study as an important contribution to the study whilst simultaneously being aware of the biases this may entail.

4. Empirical Material & Findings

This chapter will present our empirical material and findings from both the interviews and the career anchor survey. It outlines the most prominent themes and topics from our data collection. The five overarching aggregated themes from our qualitative data findings are; career development, industry landscape, success, motivation, and solutions. Additionally, we will present the findings from the quantitative data findings from the career anchor survey. In the following sections, we will discuss each of these themes in greater detail.

4.1. Career Development

One of the main objectives of our research was to understand how the especially creative, volatile, high-pressure, and male-dominated industry environment of the VGI may affect the career development experiences of women and other marginalized genders. To achieve this goal, we initiated each interview by requesting that the participants describe their career trajectory.

We talked with our participants about their educational backgrounds because we wanted to understand what kind of state of knowledge and expertise they entered the VGI with. For more than half of our participants, game development-specific studies did not yet exist when they went to higher education institutions. Thus, the most common educational backgrounds of our participants are general computer science, math, digital media, and business-related studies such as management, finance, marketing, and creative writing. Then, a handful of our participants that belonged to the younger generation of game workers often had more game-specific educational backgrounds such as game design, programming, and animation.

Two of our participants had very different educational backgrounds that set them apart from the others. One had studied communication, psychology, and Spanish, reasoning that she “didn’t have anything else that really drew me and it was the theory of human interaction [that was interesting to me]” (Interviewee #2). Another participant who was just about to be put in place as the CEO of a major game studio in Europe had studied geography and environmental science. She explained:

I think in gaming, you, you find people with a lot of diverse backgrounds. And I think that's one of the strengths of this industry ... so a lot of people can come in and contribute. ... There is, I think, in gaming we are looking a lot on kind of different skill sets. We are not so fixated on what degree do you hold. Yeah, as if you would, for example, look at the like more traditional industries. (Interviewee #17)

This statement demonstrates that the VGI is considered to be open to people that come from diverse backgrounds. Additionally, the statement by the participant suggests that she considered the VGI a

non-traditional industry and that higher education seems to be less important regarding the kind of knowledge and skills that are sought after.

Another interesting finding is that many of our participants had studied some game-related craft independently outside of school. This was often closely tied to some form of social support. As an example, one participant had a friend that was studying to become a programmer and shared his school literature with the participant, who then went on to learn basic programming by independently studying the books (Interviewee #8). Another participant told us she gained all of her first programming skills from books that her mother and grandfather had gotten her (Interviewee #4). Another interviewee described:

When I was about 13, 12, or 13, I got a ZX Spectrum, which was a little computer we had here in the UK, it's a home computer and I was, I was really into games at that point, and I taught myself how to code. (Interviewee #14)

This story illustrates the self-taught nature of the skills that many of our participants described when entering the industry before game schools were more common. One participant described the way she was able to land a job within the industry:

[I] quickly realized that my programming was not good enough to get a programming job in the industry after doing a round of interviews. So I started teaching myself Direct X 11, at home, and I started making my own little game and I made my own little game engine and started doing things for that to increase my knowledge and things for that. (Interviewee #16)

This experience demonstrates the high determination of the participant through her initiative of independently learning the necessary skills to be able to qualify for a job in the VGI. It also indicates that in order to be able to enter the industry, there are certain levels and standards that one's skills and knowledge need to reach.

Our participants' had different experiences entering the VGI. Nevertheless, there were common themes we were able to detect. There seem to be certain times in which new talent is especially sought after within the industry, for example, during phases of technological innovation. One participant recalls:

I had absolutely no problems getting a job. You know, I got in. I got my job about two weeks after leaving university and I think that was partially luck because it was, the PlayStation 1 had just come out. The teams were getting bigger because the games were moving into 3D. So they needed bigger teams. (Interviewee #14)

In order to cope with technological advancements within the industry, the participant got hired as part of growing teams to cover increased workloads. The participant's experience illustrates the industry's volatile and unpredictable nature, as well as the necessity for agility and adaptability by studios and teams in this industry. In the case of this participant, this put her in a favorable position.

As previously mentioned, a lot of our participants began their careers in the early years of the VGI. These participants shared their experience of there not having been very clear paths into the industry and that most of their entries were quite unique or "lucky" (Interviewee #14; Interviewee #16). We discovered that many participants found their way into the industry through a personal hobby or passion, such as writing or experimenting with game design. A lot of them described that they were already involved with some activities during their studies, with many of the younger generation game workers already working part-time, most often as interns and sometimes as employees in the industry.

Many participants described to us that they struggled to find a job in the games industry. Most seemed to have gotten their first job through connections such as their immediate social surroundings, networks, or mentors. One participant recalled that she was discovered while she was still at university due to her online presence in running a popular gaming website for a specific video game during her free time. The developer who had discovered her became her mentor and later on was able to help her land a job within the industry (Interviewee #11).

Similarly, some participants described that they attended industry-specific networking and recruitment events that allowed them to connect to people who would later aid them in finding a job. One participant recalls her experience of attending such an event initially only to support a friend who had asked her to accompany her:

I signed up for a games careers event in London ... that meant I had to sign up and put my CV on the site ... two days after that [a AAA studio] rang me up to go in for an interview with them. So I walked into an interview and they went: 'yeah, we saw your CV. We thought it might be good. We're looking for people to help us make this Harry Potter game' ... [I] walked in there with my laptop going: 'yeah, [I have] been making this game on my own for the past year' and just let them play the game. So that, they enjoyed that, it went really well.... They gave me a year's contract to work on Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix and it was insane and awesome and I loved it... So yeah, that's, that's how I managed to get into the industry. I was very lucky. It only happened because I made my friend go to an event effectively, but yeah, I was I was very lucky to get that job. (Interviewee #16)

This story about the participant's experience represents one example of industry events proving to be helpful career advancement opportunities. It demonstrates that talented individuals are highly sought after, and it provides an example of how independent studies and experimentation with video game design as a hobby proved to be a valuable selling point for the participant during the recruitment process. Lastly, it illustrates the excitement and passion demonstrated by the participant about her work.

The VGI landscape presented women who began their careers in the early days of the industry with specific challenges. Due to the fact that teams used to be small, a lot of occupations in art and animation but also marketing and finance used to be outsourced. Thus, a lot of participants spent parts of their careers acting as freelancers for several smaller projects which brought about issues of stability and security. The industry has grown significantly since then, allowing individuals to get more relevant education related to video game development and offering more clear recruitment processes within considerably more corporate organizational structures. Entering the industry now seems to be mostly through unpaid internships, often while simultaneously studying at higher education institutions. However, especially within indie production, these traditional structures of small core teams still encourage freelancing and contractor relationships, making a big part of the industry inherently dominated by entrepreneurs and independent workers.

Many participants also shared some of the setbacks and challenges they personally encountered throughout their careers. One participant had to deal with internal problems in a team she was working with, describing her experience of having been bullied on the team (Interviewee #11). Another one described that family problems forced them to drop out of education (Interviewee #10), and one described that they lacked familial support in their pursuit of a career in the VGI (Interviewee #1). One interviewee reflected on her experience of growing up in a non-Western country, describing that there was an inherent lack of opportunities for her. Overall, especially participants suffering from the intricacies of intersectionality, thus gender-minority interviewees from lower-income backgrounds, with disabilities, and people of color described having to deal with an unwelcoming industry landscape in addition to their own personal setbacks and struggles.

Another common denominator we found in several participants was the surfacing of doubt concerning their own abilities. For example, one interviewee described her hesitation in following her dream of becoming independent:

I wasn't expecting myself to become an entrepreneur at all. So I didn't have that self image because I was very shy. So I thought that being that shy, it's not possible to, to become an entrepreneur. But I wanted to make my own things. (Interviewee#10)

This participant went on to found their own company in light of their idea that being an independent game developer was their only chance of being able to create content they truly cared about (Interviewee#10). This demonstrates how indie development as a part of the VGI accommodates independent creatives that want to follow their own visions.

Another participant reflected on her decision to change occupation within the VGI:

Eventually I started to doubt myself and think okay, why? I am not enough, I'm good enough, not good enough at game design. I can't stay in this career because all the boys around me, they know the games better... So I abandoned my creative career. And I focused on something else that was kind of easy for me, right? I had a diploma in management, right and in business, so I focused on the production side of things and it was much easier. It was much easier to be successful as a producer than as a designer. (Interviewee #1)

This narrative illustrates that doubts about her creative abilities motivated the participant to pursue a role in production rather than game design. It also presents the VGI as a highly competitive environment. It suggests that our participant had an idea of success that she believed she would not be able to achieve within game design. Thus, although it originally had been her passion project, she chose to do something that she considered easier in order to reach a standard of success she had established as a goal for herself.

Another barrier or setback concerning career development within the VGI was illustrated by another participant:

The most important thing in the video game industry is that you ship games because I know people who have been in the games industry for seven years and they don't have a credit and if they're trying to get another job somewhere it's almost impossible for them. (Interviewee #11)

This helps us gain a better understanding of what career advancement in the industry usually entails. It suggests that one's achievements within the industry are measured mostly by the number and potential quality of games that one was part of successfully bringing to market. It implies that having been part of a successfully released game is one of the prerequisites for career advancement in the industry.

Lastly, we asked participants how they supported the development of their employees. One participant described how they handled career support within their organization:

So everybody should have a clear person who's responsible for the development in the organization arena. And regular one on one and regular conversation of

development. So there's usually like twice a year, it's what we call 360 reviews. So you get feedback on your work, from peers, manager, and your own self review on how you're doing in the work. And at the end of the this review, used to get to talk about how you'd like to develop further your skills to compensate, of course, other things that are essential to improve in your current position, or you're doing great already new position, and you want to expand maybe more management roles, or more expert roles. (Interviewee #9)

This is a very clear example of how an organization can actively encourage their employee's personal career development by offering feedback and specific tools to develop skills and knowledge.

We can conclude our findings within this theme by highlighting that game workers in AAA production companies reported more clear career paths, while indie developers did not. Within indie development, there seemed to be more insecurities resulting in unique career paths that were less predictable, while bureaucratic structures in AAA resulted in more rigid career development.

4.2. Industry Landscape

As part of our research, we aim to understand the unique industry landscape of the VGI as a relatively new industry within the creative and technology sectors. Even though some of our participants have been active within the industry for decades, we are aware that their descriptions of the landscape are highly subjective and may not present us with generalizable facts. However, we think that subjective experiences are still valid to illustrate common phenomena that women and other marginalized genders face when building their careers in male-dominated contexts. We collected the most relevant answers from our participants in regard to this topic.

4.2.1. *Unique Characteristics of the Video Game Industry*

One of the most prominent themes within our interviews was the unique character of the VGI as a novel industry without many established work practices. Especially in regard to indie development, multiple interviewees described the sometimes unclear work division in smaller developer teams, while AAA work division and task specialization are more rigid. When asked about how to define success within the industry, one indie developer answered:

It's hard to judge when you're in a small team and everybody is doing three jobs. It's simpler when you are just a producer at Ubisoft. If you are the CEO, the head of HR and you are also the Narrative Director and you also do all the publishing and marketing and communication which is like five jobs already it's much harder to judge. (Interviewee #1)

This suggests that, similarly to start-ups, especially indie developers tend to take on multiple roles under one job title and presents an example of why at least parts of the industry are considered to be lacking clearly established work practices. In contrast, work within AAA was described as “very segregated and hyper-specialized” (Interviewee #13).

Another unique characteristic of the VGI is the volatility and unpredictability of the industry and its markets. Multiple participants described how technological innovations continuously impacted the industry by increasing access to the end product and growing groups of diverse target audiences. One recurring example was the introduction of the first iPad. When asked about her decision to leave her previous job to start her own game development studio, one participant recalled that she had felt it was an appropriate time to leave because “the first iPad had come out and the first iPad really changed the landscape of what you could do from a business perspective, even as a small team” (Interviewee #11). This demonstrates the VGI’s susceptibility to impacts from disruptive technological innovations and our participant’s arguably risky choice to pursue an entrepreneurial career in times of change.

When reflecting on the development of the VGI, one participant described the unpredictable nature of the industry landscape and its market:

It's a very fast-growing market, and I'd say [it's] growing hand in hand with technology. So for me, the video game industry is one of the most exciting industries because you can use really serious professional skills to do the job, but in an environment that is very versatile, playful, creative, where you have to reinvent yourself all the time. So it keeps you sharp. That's what I love, like when I think about 15 years [of] evolution of different phases of [the] industry. (Interviewee #9)

This description further supports the idea of the VGI as part of the volatile technology sector and presents us with the assumption that this is one of the factors that make the industry attractive to especially creative, innovative, and ambitious individuals that are resistant to working in complex and ambiguous contexts. This is further illustrated by another participant describing the emerging field of game development as “challenging” and stating that “there’s still a lot yet to come in the future for games [so] it was interesting to be in that area” (Interviewee #12), which demonstrates the participant’s perception of this being an especially attractive quality.

One interesting topic in our interviews was the cultural influence exerted by video games as the end product. When asked about the differences between AAA and indie production, one participant explained: “The spotlight is on the AAA people for sure. They have all this spotlight and all the interest, I guess but also because their games are played by 20 million people or more, right?”

(Interviewee #1). This statement illustrates the reach and, thus, the impact that video games, especially in an AAA context, can have.

4.2.2. *Potential Barriers for Women and Other Marginalized Genders*

Another common theme discussed within our interviews was the potential barriers to career advancement that our participants perceived to be most relevant.

One of the most prominent barriers to non-male career development seems to be a lack of childcare benefits. When asked about whether or not she perceived there to be any barriers when developing her career in the VGI, one participant recalled:

I would say the one thing that I found really difficult was when I had my daughter. So all of the sudden, I've got the same sort of high-pressure job that expects long hours and now I've got a child to look after as well [...] So I did end up quitting my job when [my daughter] was one and that was not because I wanted to, I very much did not want to, it's just I couldn't cope with the pressure. I didn't earn enough to pay for full-time childcare. (Interviewee #14)

Her experience illustrates how the time-intensive and high-pressure environment of the VGI had negative consequences on the participant's life and overall well-being, forcing her to quit working and putting her career development on hold. Some narratives by participants illustrated situations in which they had witnessed women in the industry getting laid off because they got pregnant (Interviewee #4), or their own experience of getting fired while on maternity leave (Interviewee #2). It suggests that there is a need for additional benefits to support and normalize childcare.

Nevertheless, as an aftermath of the pandemic, hybrid and remote work are more common within video game development than it is for other industries. The same participant described:

I think the games industry is now a little bit more aware of people having childcare needs. So you know, we can work from home now, I can work just as efficiently from home as I can in an office and I'm not having to do a commute. So I think things are better now. It's more flexible now. And you know, you do get companies talking about childcare and helping with childcare arrangements. That was not the case when my daughter was born. (Interviewee #14)

This statement suggests that our participant believes that there have been considerable improvements made over time. Another participant explained how she considers the lack of women in leadership positions to be connected to the lack of childcare benefits provided for women within the industry:

Normally, when you come to a leadership position [that happens] later in life, it's

normally when you're a bit older and you might already have a family. And in the games industry I don't know, there are a lot of women who work really hard and then they may or may not burn out and they have kids and they go on maternity leave and they don't come back. So that means that perhaps as they reach the stage of leadership sometimes they don't actually come back to the games industry. (Interviewee #15)

This statement suggests that as women progress in their careers and advance to positions that might open doors to top leadership positions, they end their careers within games and decide to focus on their families and personal life instead, potentially due to a perceived incompatibility of both.

Another set of barriers is created by unhealthy working conditions and arguably toxic working environments. Several of our interviewees mentioned burnout to be a common phenomenon amongst game workers, with women at the forefront. When asked about gender dynamics at work, one participant working in AAA told us: "There are some things that I notice, usually it's women who take the burnout leave... I've seen at least two on our project. And it's never men, so I don't know if it's related to gender or not" (Interviewee #12). This statement suggests that women may struggle more than men to cope with the stressful work that is entailed in working for a AAA studio. However, it could also mean that women are just more likely to use benefits like a burnout leave to recover from their stress. Nevertheless, another participant called AAA studios a "meat grinder," adding that it "tends to burn people out very quickly" (Interviewee #4), which supports the idea that working practices within AAA are generally very demanding and stressful.

One participant shared her experience of encountering a harmful and toxic environment at work and how it was handled by her organization at the time:

I was bullied on the team by one of the artists and nothing was done about it. And they kept saying to me, ... just do your work, you're doing good work, we will address it afterwards. And afterwards means when the game was released, and this is basically a video game development AAA word. If there's a problem, they don't want to rock the boat because they're worried that if they rock the boat, the game is delayed, so you can misbehave. Nothing is gonna be done about it until after the game is released. But, in reality, nothing will ever be done about it. Because when the game is out, everybody is so relieved and on an endorphin high ... that everything is forgotten and like forgiven and forgotten. (Interviewee #11)

This story offers an example of harmful working environments and practices in a high-pressure AAA context. It may resemble other industries in which work is organized in projects. It allows us to

understand the stressful and emotional character of game development processes. Connected to the participant's career development, these factors seemed to play an important role in her decision to leave AAA and become an indie developer and entrepreneur.

Another interviewee described an incredibly hostile environment at one of her previous employers:

[Name of project] was notorious for having one of the worst cultures ever. ... It was a very abusive culture. Long hours, you know, and I was one of like nine women on a like 200-person team. It was not pleasant. So I quit. ... And they were so mad at me that they took my name out of the credits for [name of project] and it was such a vindictive culture even though I've worked on it for years. (Interviewee #2)

This story illustrates the forms of abuse and toxicity that can be present in hostile working environments within the VGI and demonstrates that these issues seem to be publicly known and thus contribute to their normalization.

Overall, the participants seemed to agree that the VGI has been making very important steps towards increasing their employee satisfaction and moving away from the harmful and toxic work practices that shaped the industry in the past.

One common topic in almost all of our interviews was the specific entry barriers that women and other marginalized genders face. One of our participants recalled: "When I went to university, these game schools where you studied to become a game developer didn't exist" (Interviewee #11). The lack of formal education on game development also explains why there may be a lack of established best practices within the industry. However, we could already observe a significant difference in our participants belonging to younger generations in this regard. Many of them were already able to acquire an academic education in game development before entering the industry (Interview #8, Interview #15, Interview #7).

Nonetheless, there seems to be a lack of awareness regarding game development as a potential career. One of our participants described: "When I was a kid and a teenager, I never thought that games could be a career path ... in Brazil, the games industry didn't exist" (Interviewee #15). This statement illustrates a lack of awareness of people outside the VGI and suggests a Western-centric character of the industry. In a similar tone, another participant stated: "I didn't know until I was like 14 that you could study art" (Interviewee #8), which exemplifies how a lack of education and awareness during one's childhood may lead to fewer women and other minority groups considering a career within the VGI.

Another issue reflecting the barriers to career development within the industry for women and other marginalized groups is the fact that a lot of career paths within the VGI include some sort of unpaid internship as an entry to the industry. As explained by one of our participants, only a specific group of financially secure and flexible people can afford to do unpaid work: “The only thing that the school told us was, oh, but go and find an unpaid internship and I’m like, but I need money” (Interviewee #5). Relatedly, many of the women told us that they had to do multiple small jobs simultaneously to support themselves either during unpaid internships or during their studies: “We just had to earn some money to keep studying, and then we started freelancing” (Interviewee #8). This simultaneous engagement is both time-consuming, may present the women with an additional amount of stress and is an example of the industry favoring people from economically privileged backgrounds.

Most of the participants exemplified how they experienced some kind of disadvantages in the space of game development based on their gender. One participant described her experience of how women are perceived within game development:

In the games industry we are not seen as creative, like we are not seen as someone who can create or who can direct the next Call of Duty, right? As a woman maybe you can direct the Sims. I think it’s very gendered, right? Like where we’re allowed. Like which spaces of the games industry allow us creatively. (Interviewee #11)

Her observations suggest that even if women are allowed in the space, their access to opportunities is not limitless. It also suggests the prevalence of stereotypes about the creativity of women.

One participant explained her belief that “people don’t really take me seriously” (Interviewee #3) based on the fact that she is a woman and looks young. Another participant who works as a technical director told us that she had to repeatedly prove herself to people that were not taking her seriously:

There’s been people all throughout my career that have thought ‘she doesn’t know what she’s talking about.’ They changed their opinion a couple weeks and months later when they realized I do. So you know, I like to prove things with my work and how valuable I am and that shuts people up. (Interviewee #16)

The barrier of not being taken seriously when starting out in the VGI is thus accompanied by still being questioned when having reached a considerable amount of expertise.

4.2.3. *Indie Development as a Safe Haven*

A frequently addressed topic within our interviews was the difference between AAA production and indie development in the VGI. It seems that the industry is divided into these two categories of game development that come each with their own unique characteristics, work practices, and cultures.

In regard to the fight against gender inequality and for the representation of minorities within the industry, there seemed to be a clear idea on the part of our participants that, usually, the indie landscape allows for much more diversity in developer teams. One participant appealed to AAA studios demanding they “do more” and that “we cannot rely on the people who are struggling on the indie scene to make all the fights” (Interviewee #5), stressing specifically that their bigger budgets allow them more opportunities.

A participant who was especially concerned with using their platform to represent minorities and youth described their choice to be an indie developer:

I think it's very common to think that [you] won't get recognised in a big company. So I want to work at a smaller company because it would be easier to get to do what I want and also to get my voice heard. And also many in the indies are also very aware of issues and can do something about them because at the very big companies [it] can be really hard to change things that are already set. (Interviewee #10)

This supports the idea that a lot of developers with clear creative visions and goals tend to find the indie development community and industry landscape to be a better fit for them. We also learn from this statement that the interviewee considers AAA studios to be more bureaucratic organizations that are less susceptible to change.

One interviewee voiced her concern about the gender pay gap and how this is something she is increasingly occupied with, especially in relation to less bureaucratic and, thus, less controlled organizations such as indie companies. She told us about her experience of working for an indie studio that eventually got acquired by a bigger publisher and developer and highlighted how the acquisition brought about clearer structures in both HR processes and especially pay banding as a tool to avoid pay inequity (Interviewee #14). This illustrates that there are both advantages and disadvantages of bureaucracies within creative sectors such as the VGI.

4.2.4. *Male-dominated Spaces*

In our interviews, we talked to our participants about the VGI as a space that tends to present women and other marginalized genders with a hostile environment due to harmful work practices.

We found that some of the most prominent reasons why women experience working in the industry as especially challenging is the male domination of video game development as a craft and the stereotype that women do not play video games and are thus not considered an important target audience. One participant, a very experienced leader within the VGI, confirmed that the games that

are being made within the industry are “targeted at 80% men” (Interviewee #1). Thus, male domination spans both the industry and consumer culture.

In the following section, we will present some of the experiences the participants shared with us related specifically to the VGI as a male-dominated context. One of the participants, when asked about whether or not she had ever experienced some kind of gender-based discrimination at work, told us that she never felt that she had any issues with the fact that she was female, however:

I remember one of my first interviews I had, one of the interviewers said ‘I’m concerned that you might distract the rest of the team because you’re female’ which I just sort of laughed at ... and I said, ‘well, I’m not going to dance on the desk topless, am I?’ (Interviewee #14)

This incident describes one form of gender discrimination. Although this participant believed that she had not faced many gender-based barriers, she still had experiences of discrimination based on her gender.

An interviewee who told us about her experience of being a lead designer on a successful project, described an exchange she had with her manager at the time. She had asked him if her success in leading the current project would mean that he would consider her for another lead design role in the future. He denied her request, reasoning that “almost all designers are men. And the men in our company wouldn’t want to be led by a woman” (Interviewee #11). Situations like these may contribute to women being more afraid to ask for promotions and to select themselves for leadership positions in male-dominated contexts, and demonstrate gender stereotypical assumptions about the inefficiency of women as leaders in male-dominated contexts.

One participant told us about her experience studying game development, where she had witnessed and experienced gender-based discrimination. She described that she considered some of the men in her class to have had “few interactions with women” and that they had “preconceived misogynistic ideas about women and about women specifically in games” (Interviewee #7). She also recalled that these men tended to be very vocal about it. This example includes the perspective of men growing up in male-dominated spaces without many interactions with women and other marginalized genders which could be part of the reason for the reproduction of harmful gender stereotypes.

One interviewee elaborated on the idea that there has been considerable improvement made by companies within the VGI, but stated that “at least historically, you have to do the fucking boys club shit. You have to learn to speak dude” (Interviewee #4). This statement was made in regard to a question about the male-dominated industry landscape and how this resulted in certain behavior on the

part of non-male workers. It suggests that in order to successfully navigate male-dominated spaces, non-male individuals need to assimilate into the language and practices of the dominating culture.

One recurring topic within our conversations with the participants was industry-specific work events, such as annual conventions in which game developers from across the world gather to showcase their newest innovations and projects. We've talked to several interviewees about the significance of these events, especially for networking purposes of indie developers. In relation to the lack of childcare benefits in the industry, one participant considered this to be one of the biggest barriers, especially for mothers in the industry, as these events do not provide any kind of childcare support (Interviewee #3). Additionally, one participant told us about the known issue of women being drugged at these industry events: "I'm assuming you both saw that at GDC multiple women got roofied again. It's happens every fucking year. And every time everyone's suprised, but it happens every fucking year" (Interviewee #4).

She added that although these spaces are not safe, they are important for establishing one's presence within the industry:

There's predators that go into these spaces and advising women to go to them seems risky, but also yes, there is a business reality that if you are not present, so there is a networking reality in business that if someone has not met you personally and shaken your hand and maybe had drinks, maybe gone bowling (they will not make business with you). (Interviewee #4)

This presents women with a dilemma, where they are forced to consider taking career-advancing steps by attending events to network that simultaneously presents a risk to their safety. This example of gender-based violence and discrimination at industry events represents one of the most severe barriers that women and other marginalized genders face within the VGI.

Another interviewee told us about her experience of being confronted with the gender pay gap firsthand: "I found out that the guy that was doing the same exact job that I was doing made 20,000\$ more than I did" (Interviewee #2) after an accidental data leak at a studio she used to work at. After finding out, the participant quit her job. And one participant explained a situation in which she, as a manager of a team, got bullied and harassed: "It was a quite misogynistic team that started pushing me out of my role" (Interviewee #12). In the end, despite the generally positive feedback from other team members, she switched to a non-managerial role instead before leaving the company. These experiences are examples of how gender discrimination forced women into quitting their jobs in the VGI.

One participant offered an example of how gender stereotypes can be a harmful force possibly contributing to the fact that fewer young girls chose to study relevant subjects for careers in game development “because it’s a man-dominated entertainment, it’s easier when you go tell your dad ‘I’m a fan of video games’ if you’re a little boy. It’s easier than if you’re a little girl” (Interviewee #1). This example illustrates how important a supportive social environment is that encourages girls to pursue their interests even in areas that are stereotypically considered to be male-dominated.

When asked what they consider to be the most pressing challenge for women in the VGI, one participant answered that the biggest challenge seems to be not creating new companies or new opportunities for women but rather directing all efforts to “change the old system” (Interviewee #3) and thus make it less hostile for women and other marginalized genders.

In general, the experiences of the women and non-male game workers were very similar. They all described a rather hostile and discriminating environment that posed several barriers to women and their career advancements.

4.2.5. *Occupational Segregation within the VGI*

During our interviews, a common topic that we discussed with our participants was the occupational segregation present within the video game development process.

One of our participants, a co-founder of her own indie studio with years of experience in AAA production, described the creative director as “always key” (Interviewee #1) and as the main vision holder for a project: “for every position you have a creative lead and a manager like an art director and a lead artist who’s going to lead the team and be the manager, but [the creative director] sets the intention and the quality and says no” (Interviewee #1). She explained that creative direction is a “very high level, very demanding, very intensive artistic job” (Interviewee #1). This illustrates the high level of expertise that is needed in order to qualify for the role of a creative director as well as the high levels of stress and demand that creative directors face. As a highly exposed and critical role, the creative director is described to be the person that people try to satisfy. It is also an extremely conflictual role: “It’s very rare that you hear someone say a creative director is really nice” (Interviewee #1). This demonstrates the authority of this role within its task of constantly making decisions that will highly affect the eventual outcome of a project.

One of the reasons the importance and influence of creative directors were highlighted during our interviews was the fact that there is an extreme lack of women in creative director roles. An interviewee explained to us that within AAA, there has been only one female creative director so far, a US-American woman named Amy Hennig, adding that it is unfortunate to have only one female role

model (Interviewee #11).

When asked to pinpoint some of the other potential reasons for the lack of women in directing roles, one participant answered:

Oh, that's 1000% bias. 1000% it's bias. And it is people not recognising their bias and people starting companies with people who look like them and their friends. And if your friend group is not diverse, your staffing group will not be diverse. (Interviewee #13)

The participant argues that representation needs to start from the bottom up so that more women and other marginalized groups can be promoted to levels of top leadership.

Another participant connected the lack of women in creative direction roles to the overrepresentation of women in production roles “because it’s more of a facilitating role. You get to kind of help others achieve their visions” (Interviewee #2). Similarly, one participant stated in her interview that there is a clear split between producers and creatives in that producing is “more organizing work of creatives” (Interviewee #12). Thus, participants seemed to conceptualize the natural skills and occupational preferences of women to be related to the organization and facilitation of the work of others.

One interviewee reasoned that the producer role is especially attractive to women since “it’s about being a good person, good people person, it’s about being organized. It’s about managing several things at the same time, which you notice are the usual qualities that we give to women, right?” (Interviewee #1). She explained that the creative director role is an incredibly exposed role and that there is a lack of self-selection of women to step into these roles due to the fact that it is perceived to be much easier to be on the management side instead:

So I think it's easy in this role, because you're just helping people. You just can present yourself always as: ‘I'm here to help you. I'm here to make your life easier. I'm here to make the game ship faster, less overtime.’ You're the friend. [It] is very different from being a creative director that comes and says ‘this is not good enough.’ ... So it's much, much easier to be in a producer role, [in an] supporting role. Everybody loves to be helped. (Interviewee #1)

This statement illustrates the supportive nature of the producer role and makes assumptions about a potential reason why women find this to be an especially attractive role due to its non-confrontational nature. This hypothesis is thus based on the assumption that women tend to select themselves for roles that are less confrontational and conflictual and that they naturally tend to avoid being involved in disagreements and clashes of interests.

Many of our participants described what they perceive to be the typical roles of women within the VGI. One interviewee told us about her experience of having split the design of a game with one of her male co-workers:

So we quite quickly decided that we were going to split it. I was going to do like enemies, player control combat... there was always an assumption that I would be the person doing the story and the world building because I think there's an assumption that if women are designers that's the side of things that they like, whereas it was totally the opposite way round.

This story illustrates the stereotype within the VGI that women are expected to be designers that are involved with characters, their relationships, and the world they engage with and are less expected to be involved in designing fights and enemies.

More participants voiced their opinion on this subject by supporting the idea that women are most present in roles of production, finance, HR, and management but are less present in what is considered to be relevant to the final product (Interviewee #17). PR and the work with communication surrounding a game is one additional field that is considered to be female-dominated (Interviewee #3). As illustrated by a participant:

Important is to try to understand why we can't get women in product because they certainly show interest in gaming companies and in gaming in general. So there is nothing about like women not being interested in all of this. It is just about they don't show up for product and for some reason or another ... This is just what I have observed throughout the years. That women coming through product are not so many. (Interviewee #17)

This narrative lets us assume that women are indeed just as interested in gaming and the VGI as their male counterparts and that there are a multitude of reasons why they may shy away from taking on more developmental and creative roles within the industry.

One participant described that the overrepresentation of women in managerial positions is due to the areas from which women tend to be recruited into the VGI:

“There was already not many women in tech. So like when the games industry started seeking for more women as like as an easy short term way to solve the issue, [they started] first of all looking at people in all the industries that are similar like film and in media, TV and then animation and IT sector in general. And in there, most women were also already [in] management, right? That was more related to either marketing

communication, or management or finances or HR.” (Interviewee #15)

This perspective offers us an explanation for the lack of women in developmental roles based on the fact that women started only recently to enter the VGI and that a lot of women are recruited from other areas of the entertainment or technology sector. It also lets us assume that with gradually more women studying game development and game design degrees, there will be an increase in developmental roles filled by women and other marginalized genders.

Additionally, the participant considered imposter syndrome to be one of the most relevant reasons for why women do not select themselves for exposed leadership roles within the VGI:

What holds back, I think, women sometimes, could be just the imposter syndrome... they might not feel confident in their own abilities, even though they have really good [abilities], they don't feel confident when compared with their male peers.
(Interviewee #15)

Thus, what holds women and other marginalized genders back today is the feeling that they cannot compete with the competence, skills, and knowledge of their male counterparts, resulting in a lack of self-selection for leadership positions.

A contribution we would like to highlight is the statement of one of our participants (Interviewee #8), who mentioned that sometimes it might feel as if women are put into positions of leadership just to comply with some sort of internal organizational quota. She explained that that might lead to a lack of respect on the side of the woman's teammates because they would question her legitimate qualifications for the job.

Lastly, one interviewee stressed the fact that the VGI would benefit considerably from having more female leaders in top positions. She stated that women seem to have a “competitive advantage” (Interviewee #9) in regard to the necessary skills for becoming great leaders. She explained that nowadays, leaders are expected “to be there for people, to listen, to understand them, to support them, to be a servant. So it's a very egoless type of worker” (Interviewee #9). This may constitute one of the reasons why women are increasingly selected for supportive roles like production instead of roles that require them to be less agreeable and less afraid to engage in conflict.

4.2.6. *Leadership within the VGI*

We were curious to know how the non-male game workers described leadership structures within the industry. There seems to be a unique way for how companies develop their management and leadership when starting out as a small indie studio. One participant explained how she perceived

indie studios to often develop their management:

A lot of times in a company in the games industry, [the founders] start very small and they're like friends and ... people are on the same level. And perhaps if their game is successful they have to very quickly start growing and then they get more junior talent and then they need somebody to step up you know as more like a senior, a lead, then often there's not much of an internal process and rather it's just checking within your team, within your competences like who is better at [management]. (Interviewee #15)

Thus, management, at least within indie development, seems to be something that is conceptualized as a sort of necessary burden that is bestowed upon a person based on that person's perceived personal skills and experience rather than their interest or qualification. This is further illustrated by the same participant who explained that "sometimes people like [leading] and they discover a new passion that they grow, sometimes they hate it completely [and] they can't wait to go back to just be a programmer or something other than a manager" (Interviewee #15). This narrative illustrates that co-founders specialized in game development may become managers and even CEOs, even though it is not necessarily in their own and others' interest.

Another interviewee who specialized in supporting leadership development in the VGI described how passionate individuals may start their own game studios without having the necessary skills to lead a team or a company:

[The industry] has led in a lot of creatives who thought that just by having a good idea or by being creative is how you build a studio or company, but it has shown us well over time [that this has] some damaging consequences on a human level and personal level, because being a manager, or managing a company, [does] not [entail] the same skills as being creative. (Interviewee #9)

In her statement, the interviewee illustrates how this newly established and constantly evolving industry landscape and its leadership may have negative influences on the experiences of people within it. Thus, leadership within the VGI seems to be a rather unclear and potentially flawed process that is usually dominated by studio founders that select themselves for top executive positions based on their position instead of their qualifications as leaders and managers. Another participant shared their perspective on this topic in a very similar way:

Sometimes it's just two friends starting a studio when they're still in school ... and then they have to start a company and they start hiring and those original founders, they are the CEO. And because of the legacy that we had less women in the industry, that's why. A lot of the CEOs are also founders and the founders are mostly men.

(Interviewee #15)

From this perspective, we can further conceptualize the lack of women in top leadership positions as also due to a lack of female founders.

Another participant assumed that the lack of women in leadership positions within the industry was due to the fact that they do not represent the prototypical game developer:

I think maybe you like to see yourself in people and then you promote these kinds of people ... that you feel are similar to you. And yeah, then if men are in leadership positions, they're probably going to give [promotions] to a lot of men. Maybe they don't think too much about it, right? It's just probably something you do a bit intuitively. (Interviewee #8)

This statement suggests that it is especially difficult for women who do manage to enter the industry to advance their careers due to the fact that they are in minority positions. This narrative also provides us with possible explanations for the lack of other marginalized genders in leadership positions.

One participant stated that in order to lead effectively, one needs to “solve the human puzzle of how do you align personal motivation of individuals with business goals that are, you know, fixed for a certain time, and keep people motivated in this journey” (Interviewee #9). She related these skills to “natural skills” (Interviewee #9) attributed to women. She described a shift of expectations when it comes to leadership that is also increasingly acknowledged by men.

Additionally, the participant stressed that there is a need for active training to become a successful leader:

You cannot just wing it to become a leader, or lead others, you have to go through training, you have to learn this. It's not just because you shipped a good game, and you're a creative person, or you are a good programmer or artist that you can lead a team. (Interviewee #9)

Thus, although there may be some natural skills that facilitate one's ability to grow into a leadership role, the participant still considers professional leadership training to be essential.

4.3. Success

Success is a multifaceted and highly personalized concept that can differ significantly from person to person. In our study, we investigated how our participants conceptualized success.

To gain a better understanding of their perspectives, we asked the interviewees to describe how they define success in this particular industry. One participant working in indie development described success in the VGI to be defined by two things:

It's either money or awards... awards is kind of like the games industry is saying this, like your work is valuable to us, right? Whereas if your game sells a lot, then it's the market is saying this game is valuable to us. I feel like almost outside of this binary there's not that much that is considered a success in the games industry. (Interviewee #11)

This excerpt demonstrates our participant's perception of a quite rigid predetermined notion of success within the industry. A participant working in AAA described:

If you write a play, if you don't lose money, you're considered a success. 100 people show up to your play. It's considered a success. You write a literary journal, you sell 1000 copies. That's fucking amazing. You write a book, you sell 10,000 copies. That's fucking amazing. You make a video game, you have less than a million players. You're fucking losers. Right? Like the metrics of our reach are insane.” (Interviewee #13)

This narrative allows us to form an idea of the metrics of success that are dominant within AAA game production. It also lets us compare the perceptions of success of an indie developer and an AAA developer.

We also asked participants whether they considered themselves successful and, if so, what factors contributed to their success. Almost all participants considered themselves successful. Different factors contributed to their perception of success.

Many participants elaborated on their independence as a crucial factor. For example, one explained: “I especially consider myself very privileged because I can do what I want. I have gotten like the means to do what I want” (Interviewee #10). Similarly, another participant considered autonomy to be an important indicator of success:

I consider it successful that we don't have to answer to anybody. So the situation that we never had to take investment or publisher money, and just it's just us doing whatever we want is something I'm very grateful for. (Interviewee #8)

This participant related her perception of success to her situation as an indie developer and her studio's ability to not only survive but thrive without the need for external financial support.

One participant described: “I think I consider myself successful ... Success is all about impact... success for me is also when I feel that people trust me with difficult and complex things... and they want to work with me. It's also about trust” (Interviewee #17). Thus, this participant conceptualized success as trust and the potential impact they have on other people.

Another participant explained how their personal background has impacted her view on success:

Yeah, I think for a person that comes from a non-first world country I feel like I've made to be where I am. I've overcome a lot of difficulties. So I think it's a success... I feel like I've had to tread water more than other people to do it... it's a success. (Interviewee #12)

This demonstrates the very subjective and personal nature of success and how the participant related her own idea of success to what she perceived to be barriers she had to overcome in relation to other people.

Alternatively, if the participants did not consider themselves successful, we inquired about the factors that would be necessary to achieve success in their eyes. A theme that arose was setting up new targets and moving goalposts. One participant stated:

I'm rapidly running out of goals I had as a kid, because, like, I've hit most of the marks that I imagined I wanted to hit... as a kid, I imagined that founding a studio and making my first game would be the really big holy crap moment... but I'm just setting up new targets like... my business, for instance, didn't really think of as much success because it was only a moderate success. And realistically, it was... only a 5x success. And a true success is a 10x success. So really, I need a 10x success. But that's the third goalpost that I've moved. (Interviewee #4)

This excerpt from our conversation with the interviewee demonstrates that she is aware that although she has achieved multiple of her initial goals, she still is not satisfied enough to call herself successful.

One of our participants expressed during an interview: “I definitely consider myself to be successful, aw that so why is it so hard to say? I don't know” (Interviewee #7). This illustrates that the perception of oneself as someone who has reached success seems to be a challenge to some of our participants.

During the discussion on success, one participant redirected the conversation from her personal success to the success of her company:

I think if you just look at the numbers of what the chances are of making a game and it actually being profitable and being able to do this three times in a row, yes, I consider our studio successful. (Interviewee #8)

Although we specifically asked if the participant considered herself to be successful, she phrased it as considering “our” studio successful. This may hint towards a hesitation to consider herself successful, or it may show that the participant considered it to be more comfortable to relate a feeling of success towards a collective achievement.

One recurring topic was the importance of financial success within the industry:

I think unfortunately, success sometimes is weighed by the like price tag associated with it. So I think deep down to truly call myself successful. I would like to be a little bit more financially stable but it's something I'm working on. (Interviewee #7)

It seems as if in order for her to perceive herself as successful, the participant believes she needs to meet an industry standard of financial success. The fact that our participant considered the importance of financial success to be unfortunate lets us assume that this represents a mismatch of her own personal values and what she considers to be industry-specific values.

Another participant stated:

I actually, I don't consider myself being successful. Primarily because I'm one of these people who's successful [in terms of] awards. So I get a lot of awards and award nominations and people coming to me and saying, ‘Oh, your work is so interesting or so special or unique’... But it doesn't really come with a lot of financial success. (Interviewee #11)

This statement illustrates that the interviewee did not consider herself successful based on her perception that winning awards was not sufficient if there is a lack of additional financial success.

Another participant described the pressure and high stakes within the VGI affecting their view of success:

I think when you are a producer at Ubisoft, and you are being trusted with the creation of a new IP, and you have a big team of 300 people, in that moment, you can feel successful. And I felt successful. But if you look at the bigger picture and you're more critical, you could still say wasn't successful enough because the game was delayed and the quality wasn't good and this and that so I guess I've never felt successful yet. (Interviewee #1)

This statement tells us a lot about the kind of pressures that even very experienced and arguably accomplished individuals within the industry feel. It shows that our participant seems to strive for some sort of perfectionism that is unclear if it is ever achievable. It also relates to the above-mentioned discussion on moving one's goalposts.

4.4. Motivation

During the interviews, a recurring theme was the concept of motivation. We treated this topic as a highly subjective experience that was usually the object of intense reflection by our participants. We included aspects of their social environment and socialization, personalities, inspiration, and meaning within this theme because we believe they all are closely connected to the idea of motivation and what drives a human being.

Within this theme, one key topic that was frequently discussed by the participants was the significance of fulfilling a personal purpose. The participants shared how a sense of intention and commitment to social causes motivated them in their careers. Many of them expressed their ambitions to positively affect the industry.

One participant had focused a lot of her work within a AAA studio toward positively impacting the industry. She explained:

I also fully recognize that what I'm currently working on is probably the most important work I will ever do because of the sheer reach of our product... that's a million minds you can change. And, because of the nature of the things that I'm working on, I'm actively trying to not denigrate people of color... I'm hiring four Arabic speaking actors... and I'm making sure the scripts are written in Arabic so that we don't hire white people who can do an accent... if you build those structures in, you can increase the diversity, it forces Casting to increase their pool... and that's the power. Right like?... But you have to make that choice. And you have to be annoying and stick to it and ... then people care. (Interviewee #13)

This story presents a practical example of how this participant perceives being able to trigger positive change within the industry by including marginalized groups and promoting diversity. Therefore, it seems as if providing underrepresented groups with opportunities within the industry is one of the participant's purposes. It also illustrates the perception of the interviewee that her work can have an important cultural impact due to the global reach of the end product.

Several participants mentioned creative interests as their main motivation, alongside the desire to dedicate to a cause:

I think I have two motivations. One is that to make games, like the art of making games, and then I have the other that is more like affecting the overall like industry and affecting what's the chances people get from the industry. (Interviewee #10)

This statement seems to accurately represent what most of our participants consider to be their purpose in the industry. When talking to them about their career paths, we found that 15 out of 17 participants were at some point in their career involved in some form of activist or social engagement related to political issues such as gender equity and more. However, this finding needs to be evaluated with the fact in mind that these people may also be more likely to agree to be interviewed about these topics in the first place.

Some of our participants identified as passionate players who have had an interest in video games or some kind of creative expression from a very early age, while others conceptualized their careers in video games as more casual. For example, one interviewee described that her first job within the industry was “the only job I could find, and I needed money. So I fell into it” (Interviewee #2). Similarly, another participant stated that “it was more coincidental that I ended up in games. I’ve always liked games, I just didn’t consider this as a career path” (Interviewee #9). We found that several of our participants considered games to have been an interest of theirs growing up without knowing that it could also lead to a career.

Some of our participants worked towards their careers in video games more determinedly. One interviewee shared that she “wanted to become a developer since I was six years old” (Interviewee #11), mirroring other participants’ voices and explaining they had played video games their whole life (Interviewee #7, Interviewee #4). We found that 11 out of 17 interviewees mentioned an interest in video games from an early age. All participants described in some way that the creativity of the VGI was one of the aspects that had made it attractive to them. For example, one participant who had mentioned her interest in writing as her main motivation for pursuing a creative career described that she found “that games were the best, in one of the good industries to tell stories, because they’re immersive” (Interviewee #1). Her statement exemplifies the creative and cultural value the participant sees in video games as an interactive medium. In addition to video games, participants described an interest in the arts (Interviewee #15; Interviewee #13), writing and drawing (Interviewee #1; Interviewee #5; Interviewee #8; Interviewee #13), and the entertainment industry (Interviewee #6). This finding demonstrates the creative interest and motivation of our participants and their passion for video games as the end product.

When it comes to the ways our participants attributed meaning to their work, their need for creative expression played a significant role. One participant who was the co-founder of her own indie studio explained:

My goals were only ever creatively motivated. Like I wanted to be in creative control or creative influence. It doesn't have to be control, but I wanted to have creative influence and I wanted to make my own games. (Interviewee #11)

This statement demonstrates the creative passion of our interviewee and suggests that in order to fulfill her goals and her creative visions, she believed in co-founding her own studio instead of working in an already established company. She reflects: “I didn’t know if I wanted to have my own studio. I primarily wanted to have creative influence” (Interviewee #11), which supports our assumption that the goal to have creative influence seemed more achievable by becoming an entrepreneur rather than aspiring to a top position in a AAA studio for example. Further, the interviewee explained:

I think for me money was never really, I never, I never did it for the money right? And I obviously know that you can have, you can make a video game and you become a billionaire. But that is personally not a motivation for me. I just really want to make stuff like, special, like I don't know, you know, unique games like something that's like really special. To like, express myself creatively and work on really, I guess I'm more of an artsy indie developer. (Interviewee #11)

This statement again manifests the interviewee’s devotion to a creative purpose and exemplifies the prioritization of personal creative fulfillment over financial success. This participant was one of the only women and non-male game developers we could find that carried the title of creative director, which she said she used as soon as she could because she was aware of the lack of women in this position (Interviewee #11). This suggests that the participant conceptualized her visibility as a developer as a way to become a potential role model for other women to step into these roles.

We also found that non-male game workers that did not hold developmental roles and were thus not part of directly influencing the end product acknowledged creativity within the industry. For example, one interviewee who had been working in brand management for one of the biggest AAA companies worldwide explained that for her, “the entertainment industry is really creative. And that’s driving” (Interviewee #6). This indicates that as a creative industry, the VGI attracts people who are passionate about artistic expression, even if they don’t make it the main object of their work.

Many participants were explicit about their wish for their work to have an impact. Thus, we will dedicate the next section to our findings in regard to the activist nature of some of the participants’

way of giving meaning to their work. We found that a great number of interviewees were concerned with improving conditions for women and other marginalized groups within the industry. For example, one participant had co-founded both a diversity fund that supports non-male game developers and a branch of an organization called *Women in Games* (Interviewee #1).

Several of the more experienced non-male leaders and managers we talked to held advisory roles on boards of different studios and organizations in which they represented non-male voices and their agenda toward a more gender-equal industry. One participant shared that she regularly visits secondary schools to give talks about careers in the VGI and encourages women and people with minority backgrounds who “don’t realize the opportunities are there because no one’s told” (Interview #16). She described that she saw this as part of a long-term strategy to make the industry more accessible to people from diverse backgrounds:

It's why I like doing talks out in public and things because I've been telling my bosses at this company: 'If you don't go to school at the GCSE level, you've already lost half of the girls because they've already been told that you can't be a computer engineer or a programmer or a scientist that you should go over here and learn how to type.'
(Interviewee #16)

This presents us with one of the examples of how some of our participants took concrete action to make the industry more attractive and accessible for minorities.

One interviewee clearly stated their mission as a game developer to make games that represent the struggles of young people and their identities. They explained it was a conscious choice to become an indie developer in order to make the kind of games that could have this impact (Interviewee #10). Similarly, another participant who acted as a Narrative Director in a AAA studio explained that she takes the cultural influence of her product very seriously, stating that it’s “a million minds you can change” (Interviewee #13). She reflected on her personal experience of not feeling represented by mainstream media growing up:

People weren't writing stuff for overweight, half Asian girls. That was just not a thing that was happening in the early 2000s. So I was like, alright, I'm gonna write projects for myself, because they don't exist if I don't write them because no one's writing for people like me. (Interviewee #13)

This story illustrates how the participant reflected on her own experience of being an underrepresented minority and took this as her inspiration fueling her motivation: “So I started writing for people who were like me and for people who were not like me and people that I didn’t see representation of” (Interviewee #13).

One interviewee reflected that she “really liked working for nonprofits. I really wanted to do something that was going to make the world a better place,” and she later added that in her career, she wanted to “do something good for humanity” (Interviewee #2). Similarly, another participant reflected on her initial choice to go to nursing school: “When I first graduated high school, I decided that I wanted to go and become a nurse because I wanted to help people” (Interviewee #7). These narratives help us understand that some of our participants naturally tended to gravitate towards roles that allowed them to still their need for supporting and helping others.

4.5. Strategies

During the conversations with our participants, we were interested to learn more about their ideas of potential strategies and solutions to address gender-related challenges and barriers that were identified during the interviews.

In regard to a lack of women developing their careers toward leadership positions, one participant stated that she believes “women, we just need to look out for each other a little bit more and sort of like push our friends. You know up the ladder” (Interviewee #11). Concerning the questions of why participants considered it important to have more women in top management positions, there seemed to be consensus surrounding the idea that there need to be more non-male role models in leading positions to encourage non-male career development (Interviewee #1).

Some of our participants also implied that a certain level of aggression and resilience on the side of women and other marginalized genders is needed to cope with the male-dominated environments of the VGI. One participant stated: “I think we need to be fighters” (Interviewee #3).

When discussing the need for minorities to adapt and assimilate into male-dominated cultures, one participant described:

All that’s doing is making it so that future women have to do exactly the same bullshit. I guess the answer is you need to do some degree of that to get into a position of power and then you need to use your iron fist to enforce the end of that fucking culture in your studio or your domain. (Interviewee #4)

Thus, the participant believes that instead of more generations of minorities assimilating to the industry cultures and upholding them, they need to get into positions of power that allow them to change toxic environments.

Our interviewees described what we understood as potential power imbalances, including differing levels of recognition for specific jobs and titles. For example, one participant told us about her struggle to be recognized as a ‘real’ game worker. She was working in marketing and reported that she would sometimes face hostile reactions from people in and outside of games when she told them about her profession, insinuating that working with marketing was not recognized to be an important part of making games. This participant voiced her goal of becoming a scout for video games and teams as something that would allow her to be recognized within the industry: “If I go into scouting, that would be amazing because then I would be seen as someone who works in the games industry” (Interviewee #5). This hints towards underlying hierarchical structures and power imbalances based on what area of game development one is occupied with, which had an impact on the participant's career goals and, thus, the strategies to achieve these goals. It demonstrates the participant's longing for a feeling of identity as a recognized game worker and, thus, a sense of belonging.

Multiple participants mentioned the support of mentors throughout their careers. For example, one interviewee recalled: “I followed around an Art Director [name], who was one of my great mentors” (Interviewee #2). This suggests that the participant considered having role models and mentors as part of their career trajectories as important for non-male game workers.

One recurring idea surfacing in our interviews was that women tend to have leadership skills that should be encouraged and promoted in order to make the industry a better place for its employees. One argument for this is that diversity in teams is important to include different perspectives in problem-solving efforts (Interviewee #9). Another participant stated:

Studio leadership that includes women or studios that are run by women... and it's not just only women, sometimes it's if there's a strongly LGBTQ plus leadership... A lot of times they'll enforce the same culture where they if they are present they can create a bubble. And then women who are just women who have not been run through the meat grinder can find more success more easily without changing who they are, which is nice. But like, and I guess we're just making those bubbles and eventually, hopefully those bubbles cover the industry. Someday. (Interviewee #4)

This excerpt demonstrates how the participant conceptualized the improvement of career development of women and other marginalized genders in the industry through the gradual inclusion of minority groups in studio leadership. Through this, the participant hopes the industry will present these groups with a less hostile environment.

Another solution proposed by our participants was building structures that actively encourage and promote certain values. One participant stressed the importance of building a system that actively

encourages employees' career development and the inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives in strategic processes (Interviewee #9). Similarly, one interviewee explained how clear values can affect an organization:

At the founding meeting, one woman didn't accept that the board wasn't equal. So they changed the, on the spot, they changed into an equal board. And that was, that has affected the whole development of this organization, I would say, because it came in so early, that it formed the values of the organization from the beginning. And I think that those values are what like it keeps this organization working in that way. So then it attracts people that actually feel that this is important. (Interviewee #10)

For clarity, this statement was given in connection to a question about the participant's engagement in an organization dedicated to supporting game developers in Southern Sweden and their continued efforts to promote diversity and inclusion in the industry. This example illustrates how establishing an organization on the basis of values that promote equal inclusion of different perspectives can have positive impacts.

Lastly, an interviewee that was especially concerned with leadership in the industry stated:

I think companies that have been successful now transition from the beginning. There's been a grooming of the new CEO to take over the company and help the company for the next phase of maturity and growth. So usually, the co-founder or CEO would already name and hire the successor and deliberately announce like I am grooming you to take my place three years from now. And that's, I think, the most responsible thing to do as co-founder so here it's not even about gender. This is where I see an opportunity if we want to correct that imbalance of lack of women running companies, or it's an opportunity for women to become CEOs of companies without having to build their own because that has been a trend as one industry is like, fine, nobody will give me the chance to become CEO of that company because there's so many ladders to climb before I get there so I'll be on my own, which is a hard path as well. (Interviewee #9)

According to the participant, the transition of company leadership in the VGI would benefit from more clear processes that involve the successor in a period of grooming that would allow non-male candidates to gain the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in their new executive position. Further, the participant voices her concerns about the fact that many women and minorities decide to become entrepreneurs in order to avoid potential barriers in attaining top leadership positions, which presents them with other burdensome sets of barriers and challenges.

4.6. Career Anchors

The collected data from the career anchor survey was analyzed and organized into three categories: the participants' most dominating, second most dominating, and least dominating career anchors. We found that all of the participants in the study displayed strong inclinations towards two career anchors. On average, the participants scored 5.25 for their dominating career anchor, 5 for their second most dominating anchor, and 2.3 for their least dominating anchor. The variance in scores between participants' most dominating and second most dominating anchors ranged from zero to 0.8, with an average difference of 0.25 points out of six, which is why we deemed it important to include the analysis of the second most dominating anchor,

	Dominating	Second Most Dominating	Least Dominating
Technical and Functional	1	3	2
General Management	0	0	4.5
Autonomy and Independence	7	1	0
Security and Stability	1	2.5	4.5
Entrepreneurial Creativity	3	0	4
Dedication to a Cause	3	1	1.5
Pure Challenge	0	4.5	0
Lifestyle	2	5	0.5
Total	17	17	17

Table 3; Frequencies of most dominating career anchor, second most dominating career anchor, and least dominating career anchor.

Table 3 displays the results of our analysis for the career anchors, which revealed that the autonomy and independence career anchor was the most dominant among seven of the participants, representing 41.2% of the sample. Lifestyle dominated in five cases, or 29.4% for the second most common anchor. The career anchor pure challenge dominated in 4.5 cases or 26.5%. On the other hand, security and stability and general management were equally the least frequently cited anchors. In both cases, 26.5% of the participants reported them as their least dominant career anchors. In the upcoming sections, we will provide an explanation of the key findings pertaining to the career anchors identified in our study.

We found that several participants in our study have a strong entrepreneurial and autonomous spirit, with many of them having founded or co-founded their own companies. In fact, five participants currently hold the job title of founder or co-founder, and several others had experience in starting their own businesses or studios. Throughout the interviews, the topic of entrepreneurship was frequently

discussed, highlighting its significance to the participants. When examining the career anchors of the participants, we found that autonomy and independence was the most dominant anchor among them, with it being the most dominant anchor in seven cases. This finding aligns with our observations of the participants as highly autonomous and independent individuals, which is consistent with their entrepreneurial nature. However, the entrepreneurial creativity anchor seemed to be an either-or anchor. It was the most dominant anchor in three cases and the least dominant in four cases. It was the second most dominating anchor for none. This contradicts the earlier mentioned entrepreneurial spirit exhibited by most participants.

We attribute this discrepancy to the fact that many participants had already founded their own companies, which might have influenced their responses and led them not to prioritize the aspect of starting a new business as strongly as other participants. During the interviews, some participants expressed confusion when answering questions related to the entrepreneurial creativity anchor, especially those who had already established their own businesses. They found it unclear how to interpret questions like "I am always on the lookout for ideas that would permit me to start my own enterprise" since they were already entrepreneurs themselves. This confusion may have influenced their responses, leading them to lean more toward the autonomy and independence anchor. These findings suggest that while the majority of participants exhibited a strong entrepreneurial spirit, their current entrepreneurial status influenced their responses regarding entrepreneurial creativity. The presence of their own businesses might have overshadowed their desire to seek new entrepreneurial opportunities, shifting their focus towards autonomy and independence instead.

Lifestyle and pure challenge were the two most common anchors reported as the second most dominating anchors among the participants. Lifestyle had a score of five, while pure challenge had a score of 4.5. None or very few participants scored these anchors as their least dominating anchors. Participants who identified lifestyle as their most or second most dominating career anchor did not have pure challenge as their most or second most dominating career anchor, and vice versa. This indicates that these two anchors represent two distinct outlooks on work. Lifestyle prioritizes work-life balance, while pure challenge emphasizes ambitious problem-solving. During the interviews, it became evident that most participants leaned towards either the lifestyle or pure challenge mindset. Among the participants who had lifestyle as their most or second most dominating career anchor, five out of seven held the job title of founder or co-founder. It seemed that these participants had established their own businesses, allowing them to streamline their work arrangements according to their desired lifestyle. This flexibility enabled them to meet the demands of the lifestyle they desired. On the other hand, among the participants who had pure challenge as their second most dominating career anchor, they all held the job title of either CEO or Director. This suggests that they were in leadership positions where they could pursue ambitious problem-solving

initiatives and tackle challenging projects. These findings highlight the different priorities and motivations of the participants, with some valuing work-life balance and others being driven by ambitious problem-solving.

The general management and security and stability anchors were the least dominating anchors among the participants. In both cases, they were reported as the least dominating career anchors in 4.5 cases. General management is arguably the least common anchor due to the fact that no participant had it as their most dominating or second most dominating anchor. On the other hand, security and stability had a score of one for the most dominating anchor and a score of 2.5 for the second most dominating anchor. Thus, out of eight anchors, general management is the least dominating anchor, and autonomy and independence is the most dominating anchor. This indicates that since all the participants hold managerial positions, they value the ability to have control over their work and aspire to run their own businesses rather than sacrificing organizational allegiance and climbing the corporate ladder as general management-anchored value.

The technical and functional anchor was reported as the second most dominant anchor in three cases, the most dominant anchor in one case, and the least dominant anchor in two cases. Dedication to a cause appeared to be a commonly observed career anchor among the participants. It was the most dominant anchor in three cases and the second most dominant anchor in one case. In 1.5 cases, it was the least dominant anchor. For these two anchors, the participants had no obvious similar connection to them. As a result, the scores were spread out among the most dominant, second most dominant, and least dominant career anchors.

5. Discussion

This chapter will discuss our findings and their possible implications for our research contribution. We will connect the findings to the theoretical framework we've previously established.

5.1. Career Development

Throughout this study, our primary objective has been to gain a comprehensive understanding of the VGI landscape and its impact on the career development of non-male individuals. We have identified several key characteristics of the VGI, including its creative nature, volatility, high-pressure dynamics, and male-dominated environment.

The participants in this study portrayed the VGI as a highly creative industry that attracts individuals who possess a profound passion for the products they develop and demonstrate confidence in their creative abilities. Nevertheless, non-male game workers often perceive themselves as victims of gender-based stereotypes and are not always recognized as being equally creative as their male counterparts. This finding is supported both by the narratives of our participants and contributions from the discourse on female creativity (Reis, 2002; Helson, 1999)

The creative nature of the industry appears to attract cisgender males with strong creative visions who often found their own studios and assume leadership positions, even if they may lack adequate managerial or leadership skills. The finding that these men tend to build considerably homogenous teams is well explained through social identity theory. It lets us understand that people intuitively tend to surround themselves with people they can most relate to (Van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2013, as cited in Jackson & Parry, 2011). This has the potential to contribute to gendered organizational structures within companies (Acker, 1990), that can have detrimental impact on the career development for non-males and people who don't identify as the prototypical members of an organization.

All of our participants described that the creativity of the VGI was one of the aspects that made it particularly attractive to them. Thus, we identified creative passions to be one of the main motivations of our participants. Creativity plays a role in both the industry's multidisciplinary workforce and its unpredictable nature. A participant highlighted how individuals from diverse backgrounds can contribute to the industry, coining it one of the industry's biggest strengths (Interviewee #17). On the one hand, it means there are more opportunities and a greater openness to people with different backgrounds. On the other hand, it suggests that competition is high due to the large pool of potential candidates for positions. Consequently, we suggest that the creative nature of the VGI and its openness to talent from diverse backgrounds is both advantageous and challenging regarding potential career development opportunities.

The participants established the VGI as a volatile industry by discussing its susceptibility to change in response to disruptive technological innovations. Our participants demonstrated traits of adaptability, resilience, and navigating ambiguity, which we identify as crucial qualities for thriving in such a volatile industry. They also highlighted autonomy, independence, and adaptability as key factors, which correlates to our finding of the autonomy and independence career anchor (Edgar Schein, 1990) to be the most dominating anchor among the participants.

One notable finding was that many participants hesitated to label themselves as successful and discussed constantly shifting goalposts. We believe that this may imply that the industry's volatile nature creates instability, leading individuals to continuously readjust their goals to avoid complacency or reaching definitive milestones. This may negatively impact the participants' self-efficacy, since accomplishing specific tasks typically increases self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Allowing themselves to celebrate milestones and successes would enhance the sense of accomplishment and, subsequently, self-efficacy. This, in turn, would foster a greater belief in their ability to perform well in the future (Bandura, 1986).

We found that entrepreneurs within indie development, as well as their employees, are particularly affected by this volatility. The participants' responses reflected the challenges and uncertainties faced by these individuals in navigating and maintaining stability within the industry. An example of this is the participants' perceived concept of success within indie development to be managing to survive. We believe these narratives illustrate the large amount of pressure that entrepreneurs must endure.

The industry's volatile character also manifests in the often unclear career paths and informal development toward leadership. It poses various obstacles for non-males seeking career development, especially since women tend to thrive better in bureaucratic organizations with clearer career trajectories (Wickham et al., as cited in Prescott & Bogg, 2011a). This is why we believe participants used language such as 'fight' and 'iron fist' to demonstrate the necessity to step outside one's comfort zone and rigorously work toward success. Similarly, we found that participants expressed their frustrations in this regard through the use of derogatory words and profanities.

Another prominent characteristic of the VGI that emerged was the pervasive high-pressure environment experienced by participants, particularly within AAA studios (Gill & Pratt, 2008; Prescott & Bogg, 2011b). This high-pressure environment was evident through the participants' descriptions of particularly ambitious goals that are commonly emphasized within the industry. We posit that the influence of high-pressure environments negatively shaped the participants' perceptions of success, who often presented it as an almost unattainable standard. We found that, correspondingly

to SCT, this unattainable standard for success can lead to feelings of demotivation and lower self-efficacy (Latham & Locke, 2018; Schunk, 2012). Some participants shared experiences of switching career paths and transitioning to indie development as a means to avoid or minimize the high-pressure environment they encountered. Consequently, it impacted their career paths and occupational choices.

The participants' descriptions of the high-pressure and time-demanding environment in the industry suggested that it often leads to unhealthy working conditions, characterized by long hours and a poor work-life balance. These conditions, as expressed by many participants, may be less appealing to non-male workers, particularly those who are mothers or have familial responsibilities. Consequently, this can act as a barrier to their career advancement and development toward more demanding and decision-making roles. Previous research has shown that women face promotion disadvantages and place greater importance on work-life balance compared to men (Van Vianen and Fischer, 2002; Yap and Konrad, 2009). Given that game development predominantly attracts young and time-flexible men who often engage in time-consuming and demanding work practices (Prescott & Bogg, 2011b), the high-pressure environment further heightens barriers faced by non-males. This creates an advantage for men who have more time available to actively pursue promotions, which may not be equally accessible to all non-males due to their more frequent additional responsibilities.

The VGI is predominantly male-dominated, as supported by statistics (EIGE, n.d.) and the narratives of our participants. To some extent, all participants described experiences of discriminatory and hostile environments that posed several barriers to women and their career development.

The participants' revealed that non-males often face challenges in navigating and participating in male-dominated cultures commonly referred to as the "boys' club" (D'Anastasio, 2021). They expressed frustrations about having to understand and communicate using the language and cultural norms prevalent within this male-dominated environment to establish a foothold in the industry. A clear example of the expression of these frustrations through language, and in this case profanity, was one participant's comment on having to do the "boys' club shit" (Interviewee #4).

This finding suggests that the VGI was primarily designed to cater to male perspectives and preferences, as illustrated by theoretical contributions by Acker (1990) and Alvesson and Due Billing (2008) on gendered organizations. As a result, non-males face additional barriers and challenges in establishing themselves within the industry. These obstacles can contribute to feelings of imposter syndrome, where non-males may question their own abilities and legitimacy, despite their qualifications and achievements.

Nevertheless, certain gender-related barriers within the VGI can act as motivation for non-males. Lindley (2005) suggests that some women have a tendency to idealize male-dominated careers that they perceive as inaccessible due to gender-related barriers. However, these barriers can also lead non-males to choose female-dominated occupations or occupations perceived as more catered to their gender identity, as suggested by occupational segregation theory (Prescott & Bogg, 2011a), to avoid such barriers. This choice may influence their career development, leading them to pursue specific occupations within the VGI that they perceive as more welcoming (Lindley, 2005).

Some participants, particularly ones holding more stereotypically female roles such as communication or marketing within the VGI (Bailey et al., 2021; Prescott & Bogg, 2011a), expressed concerns about not belonging to a shared identity of game workers within the industry. This seemed to have a negative impact on them. This suggests that the gender-related barriers and societal expectations surrounding gender roles within the industry can create doubts and insecurities for non-males. These concerns may affect their sense of belonging and potentially hinder their career progression and development within the VGI. This is why, we argue, that increased attention should be paid to discursive practices and the use of language that has the potential to produce and reproduce these harmful concepts about gender (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1978) from both a theoretical and a practical standpoint.

Participants indicated that feelings of a lack of belonging were more prominent within larger AAA studios compared to indie studios. This can have an impact on the career aspirations and trajectories of non-males within AAA studios. The perceived lack of belonging may discourage non-males from actively pursuing top leadership positions within these larger studios. This aligns with the paradigm of occupational segregation, where people conceptualize their occupation as part of their identity. If people do not experience a sense of belonging in their occupation or organization, they are less likely to pursue certain career paths (Prescott & Bogg, 2011a). As a result, they may seek alternative paths, such as entrepreneurship or joining indie studios, where they may feel a stronger sense of belonging and inclusion. However, choosing entrepreneurship or joining indie studios brings about its own set of challenges. In fact, as previously discussed, indie studios are often characterized by even higher levels of volatility compared to AAA studios. This heightened volatility can produce barriers for non-males in terms of career development, stability, and overall success.

Connected to the phenomenon of hostile environments within male-dominated spaces, being an entrepreneur, who is even more dependent on networks and connections, is one of these challenges faced particularly by non-males. As illustrated by one of our participants, important networking events in the VGI, such as international conferences, are perceived to present non-males with serious concerns about a lack of safety (Interviewee #4).

In conclusion, non-males in the male-dominated VGI encounter various gender-related barriers that affect their career experiences. Our research identified several key challenges faced by non-males, including harmful stereotypes, lack of childcare benefits, limited networking opportunities, gender pay gap, lack of role models, and more. These gender-related barriers have far-reaching implications, making it more challenging for non-males to enter, thrive, and advance within the VGI. As demonstrated by the participants in our study, overcoming these barriers requires specific strategies, which we will elaborate on in the next section.

5.2. Strategies

Throughout this thesis, we have discussed some of the challenges and barriers of the VGI experienced by women and other marginalized genders. The most pressing challenge identified by our participants was the pursuit of changing a system that favors unattached, time-flexible, white cisgender males.

Following Acker's (1990) idea of inherently gendered organizations, we can conceptualize the VGI as made up of gendered structures and practices. These are imbued in a culture that reproduces gendered power relations and identities connected to affiliated gender roles and behavior expectations (Acker, 1990). From a social constructivist point of view, the concepts of gender within the VGI are thus produced and reproduced by a majority group discourse established by white cisgender men. Through our interviews and literature review, we have been able to access certain narratives and discursive practices that give us access to these gender concepts. We found these concepts to include gender stereotypes reproducing the irreconcilability of women as gamers, gendered language, the hypersexualization of female characters, a gaming culture normalizing sexism and violence, and gender-based behavioral expectations and roles. (Lopez-Fernandez et al., 2019; Prescott & Bogg, 2011a).

In this thesis, we have covered specific roles attributed most commonly to women in the VGI, which are another outcome of gendered structures and practices within the industry. These predetermined rules and notions about which parts of the VGI non-male workers are welcomed to seemed to have a substantial influence on the career experiences of our participants in how they conceptualized themselves, their goals, and their ideas of success. Furthermore, we've encountered some noteworthy language use by participants when referring to what they consider 'natural' skills of women and a 'competitive advantage' in relation to the managerial skills of non-males (Interviewee #9). Viewed from a critical perspective, we argue that the use of these words may reproduce potential gender-based stereotypes of women as especially organized and supportive, possibly further influencing

occupational segregation (Prescott & Bogg, 2011a) within the VGI that often favors women for managerial positions and men for decision-making positions.

When it comes to more proactive strategies, participants demonstrated awareness of their roles' status and voiced their wish to belong and be recognized within the industry as a motivation behind career goals. We consider this goal-setting approach one example of a demonstration of agency (Bandura, 1977) and, thus, a specific strategy to cope with gendered role expectations and marginalization. We encountered several narratives of participants in which they reflected on having adapted their career goals to opportunities. Sometimes they reported having assimilated to roles that were offered to them based on how their skills were perceived or simply because there was no one else to do the job. Nevertheless, participants seemed to have made sense of these roles as fit for them based on their competencies and their overall career goals and values. Thus, underlying hierarchical structures regarding occupational segregation (Prescott & Bogg, 2011a) in the VGI influenced non-male strategies of their career development in male-dominated contexts.

Our participants demonstrated especially high levels of agency and self-efficacy in relation to how they conceptualized certain barriers. From our interviews, we often got the impression that participants tended to reconceptualize potential barriers as goals, especially in retrospect. We identify this as one of the most common strategies our participants employed and interpret this behavior as examples of both performance accomplishment and vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1977). Thus, we posit that their own achievements and the potential achievements of others in overcoming gender barriers contributed to their feelings of self-efficacy and influenced their perceptions of success.

We found that, correspondingly to theoretical contributions from the discourse on female creativity, our participants demonstrated a preference for the dedication to a cause career anchor and thus engaged in activities dedicated to improving conditions for minorities and employees generally within the VGI (Reis, 2002; Schein, 1990). Participants tended to see some greater meaning in their work beyond the development of commercially attractive and profitable games, for example, through the representation of minorities within video games. This corresponds to Reis' (2002) findings that creative women often select work that results in social change or improvement of the human condition. Nevertheless, we conceptualize this engagement as a strategy to cope with the experience of being a token (Kanter, 1977). We may interpret their engagement as a way to find belonging and connect to people with similar experiences in a pursuit to potentially balance feelings of loneliness and isolation often found in minority groups within male-dominated contexts (Annabi & Lebovitz, 2018). This engagement, thus, may make up for the lack of shared identities within their occupation in the VGI (Prescott & Bogg, 2011a).

Our participants often highlighted the general need for more women and other marginalized genders in decision-making positions to facilitate career development for non-male game workers. Participants argued that a gradual inclusion of minorities in studio leadership might contribute to less hostile working environments. In relation to the possible issue of a lack of self-selection on the part of non-male game workers for positions of power, our findings support the idea that overcoming feelings of insufficiency and symptoms of imposter syndrome may be crucial. Contributions from social-role theory and social identity theory are helpful in understanding the potential hesitation of self-selection by women for especially exposed and conflict-prone roles such as creative direction (Jackson & Parry, 2011; Eagly, Karau & Makhijani, 1995). However, understanding why women may not select themselves for these positions is not our aim. Rather, we would like to understand our participants' narratives surrounding these issues and their implications for the strategic behavior and sense-making of gender minorities in male-dominated contexts.

An approach to coping with male-dominated contexts was explained by a participant through assimilation on the part of minority groups, in order to reach positions that enable them to exert more aggressive influence to change toxic working environments and promote values of equality and inclusion. The participant stressed that this strategy is especially demanding, exhausting, and alienating, positing that more non-male game workers should be protected from having to undertake these experiences. Thus, the participant seemed to agree that this was an outdated and non-ideal strategy, and we relate it to another flawed attempt at 'fixing the women' (Duyvejonck, 2021). We connect this to our finding that attempts aimed at making women undergo specific training to compensate for specific traits is an outdated approach that has not proven to yield sustainably positive results (Duyvejonck, 2021).

Our participants highlighted the importance of mutual support among women and other marginalized genders in the industry to encourage more self-selection for advanced roles. We can understand the potential benefits of this by referring to social persuasion as one of Bandura's sources of self-efficacy (1977). Accordingly, non-male game workers may increase their self-efficacy concerning their abilities to develop their careers towards more advanced positions through both verbal and nonverbal messages of support and encouragement from others. We connect this proposed method to examples of building organizations that actively encourage career development. Participants stressed the importance of creating structures that include diverse voices and perspectives in strategic processes and thus establish organizations in which non-male game workers can develop their careers more consciously toward decision-making roles. An example of this is inclusive leadership (Shore & Chung, 2021).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that instead of creating new companies with cultures of diversity and equity at heart, our participants argued that it is necessary to direct efforts toward changing old systems and creating less hostile environments for women and other marginalized genders in already established organizations.

One example of this was presented by one participant who described the concept of ‘360 reviews’ (Interviewee #9). These reviews allow individuals to receive feedback and reflect on their development as well as set goals and establish strategies for further career advancement. We believe that this presents us with a very clear strategy and practical approach to how organizations can encourage and facilitate employee career development. This may help non-male game workers overcome certain barriers tied to a lack of awareness, self-selection, and guidance. This is especially relevant based on the finding that non-male career development is often encumbered by a lack of informal networking access, mentor relationships, and role models. We consider active organizational career development in the form of 360 reviews as presented by our participants, to have the potential to become important substitutes to these relationships.

The unique situation of leadership within the industry brings about complex dynamics of power that women and other marginalized genders need to navigate. Our participants described that decision-making power within the industry is usually held by roles such as creative directors, CEOs, and co-founders, all especially male-dominated occupations. There was an inherent connection between founding a studio and acting as that studio’s CEO, which was criticized by the participants. In order for women and other marginalized genders to attain top positions as a way to reach the highest level of career advancement and to influence an organization’s structures and culture, there would have to be a sufficient increase in non-male studio founders.

This finding correlates well with how participants who were part of indie development within the VGI conceptualized their career choices. Narratives and discursive practices from our interviews with indie developers illustrate that many of them perceived becoming indie developers as their only chance to be able to create content they truly cared about and to have their voices heard. Nevertheless, theoretical contributions from research on non-male career development suggest that the bureaucratic character of AAA, which is perceived by non-male indie developers as less susceptible to change and thus unattractive, also brings about certain advantages for more clear career advancement (Wickham et al., as cited in Prescott & Bogg, 2011a).

Thus, instead of promoting the idea of indie development as a safe haven for non-male game developers, we argue that there is a need for a paradigm shift in how power and authority within the VGI are attributed to specific positions. If it would be more established that CEOs and company

leaders do not necessarily need to be the studio founders, there would be more opportunities for non-male game workers to develop their careers toward these positions of power.

Additionally, participants argued that non-male representation has to begin from the bottom up, adding more women and other marginalized genders to the pool of potential candidates for promotions. We connect this to the issue of a lack of non-males pursuing relevant degrees for careers in video game development (Katz et al., 2006). Participants argued that with an increase in more non-male students of game design degrees, we can expect more non-male game workers in developmental and decision-making roles within the industry. Thus, a participant proposed a long-term strategy of raising awareness of career paths within game development at a lower education level in order to encourage more non-males to select subjects relevant to careers within the technology sector (Interviewee #16). We believe that this strategy has the potential to combat barriers related to the lack of awareness of non-male individuals about potential careers in the VGI.

A contribution by one of our participants in this regard was the proposed need for more rigid grooming of CEOs and executive leaders in companies. The participant argues that this would tackle the issue of a lack of women and other marginalized genders in decision-making positions. In a process of, for instance, a three-year period, non-male candidates could gain the necessary skills, knowledge, and above all, confidence to succeed in executive positions through the rigid guidance of their predecessors. This approach also has the potential to combat ineffective leadership in companies that have co-founders as their CEOs based on traditional practices within the VGI through normalizing non-co-founders as company leaders. Thus, we may be able to promote the career development of non-males toward executive positions instead of them having to become entrepreneurs and co-founders of their own studios.

This is in tune with our idea of promoting increased organizational engagement in making executive roles more attainable for minority groups. Contributions from theories such as inclusive leadership that aim to promote diversity, for example, through value propositions (Shore & Chung, 2021), are valuable approaches helping to normalize non-male perspectives in decision-making contexts.

It is worth noting that one of the most prominent barriers to non-male career development in the VGI was identified by our participants as a lack of childcare benefits in connection to unhealthy working conditions. Thus, improvements regarding the reconciliation of work with family responsibilities are an important part of our participants' demands. Organizational strategies in this regard include more hybrid work and increased childcare benefits as part of game workers' compensation.

Thus, a combination of effective strategies facilitating non-male workers' career development towards decision-making positions, inclusive leadership, benefits for an increased work-life-balance, and eventually the transformation of the VGI as a male-dominated context to one that promotes and embraces diversity may present us with the most promising strategy in tackling the issues experienced by women and other marginalized genders in this industry.

6. Conclusion

Regarding our first research question on how a creative, volatile, male-dominated, and high-pressure industry landscape impacts women and other marginalized genders' career development, we suggest that these industry characteristics influence non-males in various different ways. Women and other marginalized genders face gender-specific barriers that affect their career development within this context.

In the discussion, we elaborated on how these particular industry characteristics create gender-specific obstacles for non-males in terms of achieving a sense of belonging and identity in addition to attaining top leadership positions. Often, these barriers lead non-male game workers towards entrepreneurship and seeking refuge in indie studios as a safe haven. We have identified participants' motivations often to be rooted in creative passions and a longing for autonomy and independence. We suggest that these may push them towards entrepreneurship to fulfill those desires because of perceived barriers in AAA contexts. Further, participants described the constant shifting of goalposts in order to keep up with the instability and unpredictability of the industry. We found the high-pressure environment to impact working conditions in the VGI, heightening barriers for non-males disproportionately. We conclude that these challenges hinder non-male career progression and limit their opportunities for advancement within the industry.

In regard to our second question relating to potential strategies of women and other marginalized genders, we have discovered various methods that help them cope with the challenges and barriers presented to them. Most of them are related to their individual behavior and sense-making in regard to their identity, purpose, achievements, goals, and perception of success. We often found relations between participants' strategies to the different sources of self-efficacy, according to Bandura (1977).

During our discussion, we argued how approaches aimed at changing the behavior of minority groups, such as women and other marginalized genders in the VGI, do not yield sustainable results in addressing key challenges faced by these groups. Strategies need to aim at impacting organizational structures and discursive practices that reproduce harmful practices and cultures. Here, we propose our finding that initiatives facilitating non-male career development toward positions of decision-making may prove especially effective.

In this study, we have been able to uncover a multitude of aspects that form a complex system shaping the experience of women and other marginalized genders in a male-dominated context. We believe the most intriguing finding from this thesis is what we have coined as a wicked dilemma for non-male individuals pursuing careers in the VGI.

This dilemma is characterized by what we consider a misconception by women and other marginalized genders of indie development as a safe haven. Through our findings, we were able to create an understanding of the differences between AAA and indie video game development. Within the industry, indie studios seem to offer individuals the space to fulfill themselves creatively in an independent and autonomous way that shields them from experiences of working in rigid and bureaucratic organizations characterized by toxic masculinity and unhealthy working conditions. However, these bureaucratic organizations also offer a level of security and stability. They are described as presenting clearer career paths and may require fewer self-led initiatives. Within indie studios, employees wear several hats simultaneously, especially in executive positions. The presumed safety presented to non-male game workers by the warm embrace of diverse, small indie teams may quickly reveal the harsh reality of the intricacies of entrepreneurship characterized by extremely high volatility. Thus, we suggest that the VGI may compel non-males into becoming entrepreneurs merely based on the fact that these people demonstrate high levels of autonomy and independence and want to avoid the notoriously hostile, male-dominated spaces of AAA development. Our findings therefore conclude that it is a misconception to assume that indie development presents non-males with a career path with fewer barriers.

For future research purposes, we want to address that a comprehensive investigation including the experiences of both non-male and male individuals in the VGI could contribute significantly to the research area, especially regarding discursive practices reproducing concepts of gender within the VGI. Furthermore, a comparison of the experience of game workers outside of Western contexts could contribute to the research field of the VGI. This may provide valuable insights into the differences, similarities, and unique challenges faced by marginalized genders in different regions of the world, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the subject matter.

7. References

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8. Appendix

8.1. Appendix A; Career Anchor Questionnaire

Technical and Functional Anchor Scale

1. I dream of being so good at what I do that my expert advice will be sought continually.
2. I will feel successful in my career only if I can develop my technical or functional skills to a very high level of competence.
3. Becoming a functional manager in my area of expertise is more attractive to me than becoming a general manager.
4. I would rather leave my organisation than accept a rotational assignment that would take me out of my area of expertise.
5. I am most fulfilled in my work when I have been able to use my special skills and talents.

General Management Anchor Scale

1. I am most fulfilled in my work when I have been able to integrate and manage the efforts of others.
2. I dream of being in charge of a complex organisation and making decisions that affect many people.
3. I will feel successful in my career only if I become a general manager in some organisation.
4. Becoming a general manager is more attractive to me than becoming a functional manager in my current area of expertise.
5. I would rather leave my organisation than accept a job that would take me away from the general managerial track.

Autonomy and Independence Anchor Scale

1. I dream of having a career that will allow me the freedom to do a job my own way and on my own schedule.
2. I am most fulfilled in my work when I am completely free to define my own tasks, schedules and procedures.
3. I will feel successful in my career only if I achieve complete autonomy and freedom
4. The chance to do a job my own way, free of rules and constraints, is more important to me than security.
5. I would rather leave my organisation than accept a job that would reduce my autonomy and freedom.

Security and Stability Anchor Scale

1. Security and stability are more important to me than freedom and autonomy.
2. I would rather leave my organisation altogether than accept an assignment that would jeopardise my security in that organisation.
3. I seek jobs in organisations that will give me a sense of security and stability.
4. I am most fulfilled in my work when I feel that I have complete financial and employment security.
5. I dream of having a career that will allow me to feel a sense of security and stability.

Entrepreneurial Creativity Anchor Scale

1. I am always on the lookout for ideas that would permit me to start my own enterprise.
2. Building my own business is more important to me than achieving a high-level managerial position in someone else's organisation.
3. I am most fulfilled in my career when I have been able to build something that is entirely the result of my own ideas and efforts.
4. I will feel successful in my career only if I have succeeded in creating or building something that is entirely my own product or idea.
5. I dream of starting up and running my own business.

Dedication to a Cause/Service Anchor Scale

1. I will feel successful in my career only if I have a feeling of having made a real contribution to the welfare of society.
2. I am most fulfilled in my career when I have been able to use my talents in the service of others.
3. Using my skills to make the world a better place to live and work is more important to me than achieving a high-level managerial position.
4. I dream of having a career that makes a real contribution to humanity and society.
5. I would rather leave my organisation than accept an assignment that would undermine my ability to be of service to others.

Pure Challenge Anchor Scale

1. I dream of a career in which I can solve problems or win out in situations that are extremely challenging.
2. I will feel successful in my career when I have been able to use my talents in the service of others.
3. I have been most fulfilled in my career with I have solved seemingly unsolvable problems or won out over seemingly impossible odds.
4. I seek out work opportunities that strongly challenge my problem solving and/or competitive skills.
5. Working on problems that are almost unsolvable is more important to me than achieving a high- level managerial position.

Lifestyle Anchor Scale

1. I would rather leave my organisation than to be put into a job that would compromise my ability to pursue personal and family concerns.
2. I dream of a career that will permit me to integrate my personal, family and work needs.
3. I feel successful in life only if I have been able to balance my personal, family and career requirements.
4. Balancing the demands of personal and professional life is more important to me than achieving a high-level managerial position.
5. I have always sought out work opportunities that would minimise interference with home or family concerns

8.2. Appendix B; Interview Guide

Questions we asked everyone

1. Can you describe your career history?
2. What were your motivations for entering and working in the VGI?
3. How would you describe the industry landscape for gender minorities?
4. What are your future ambitions and career goals?
5. Do you perceive yourself as successful? If yes, why? And if not, what would it take?
6. What do you identify to be industry-specific managerial skills do women and other marginalized genders need to be successful leaders?

Examples of more specific questions

1. How would you say you support your employees in developing their careers?
2. What made you want to start your own studio?
3. Why did you become a freelancer at some point?

Examples of very specific questions

1. How would you describe the video game landscape for women of color?
2. How would you describe the landscape for queer developers?
3. Is there something you believe is important about female representation in games and the lack of women we see in creative director roles?
4. We don't see women with the title 'Creative Director' a lot. What does this role mean to you, and what does it entail to be a creative director at [company name]?
5. Why do you think women shy away from calling themselves Creative Directors, even if that's what they are?