

Paste

The Third Annual Queerness and Games Conference

A Launchpad, Not a Destination

By [Riley MacLeod](#) | November 5, 2015 | 12:30pm

[GAMES](#) > [FEATURES](#)

 Share

 Tweet

 Email



“Games are a medium that matter to queer people,” says Bonnie Ruberg. “And queerness matters to games. This is real.”

Ruberg was one of the organizers of the [Queerness and Games](#) conference, also known as QGCon, which took place at UC-Berkeley over the weekend of October 16th. QGCon brought together over 200 academics, developers, designers and the queer community at large to explore the overlaps between gender, sexuality and play. It was a mix of academic and industry-oriented presentations, roundtables and workshops, a combination that would seem difficult to cohere into a whole. However, making space to honor individual differences while looking to participants’ similarities bridged the gaps and made the event a valuable weekend of discussion and community.

Though focused on queerness and games, sessions ran the gamut of topics and formats. Michelle Clough gave a hilarious and informative talk about having diverse bodies in games and encouraging fan cultures around them. Representatives of the Different Games Collective led a workshop titled “What is Success for People in our Communities?” in which participants discussed the struggles they faced in creating sustainable lives as game makers and academics, brainstorming solutions for surviving in fields that are often hostile to or difficult for queer people. Panels discussed cosplay, masculinity in games and the identities of queer game makers and players. Keynotes by Lindsay Grace and Sandy Stone explored intimacy in technology and how it can enrich our interpersonal relationships.

QGCon also featured informal roundtables for people of color, genderqueer and non-binary people, trans people and more. This format allowed participants to speak with others with similar experiences. Many attempts at diversity in both academia and games flatten these differences in service of a broader view of “community,” but consciously making such spaces highlighted the numerous identities and experiences present within the umbrella of our idea of queer.

There were also two sessions of microtalks that gave five minutes to any participant to present off the cuff; topics included imposter syndrome, gendered language, finding safe male spaces and game post-mortems. The open nature of the microtalks let every attendee be a speaker, empowering individuals to be experts in their unique perspective and encouraging sharing and reflection.

These talks existed amidst gameplay sessions and design workshops. Anna Anthropy and Seanna Musgrave presented new games and spoke on their design processes, and students from Berkeley’s Queer Games Workshop shared their work and what they’d learned. A small arcade of games featured work by Robert Yang, Niamh Schönherr, Raghav Bashyal and other queer creators.

In the closing session, QGCon organizers Christopher Goetz, Chelsea Howe, Diana Mari Pozo, Bonnie Ruberg, Dietrich “Squinky” Squinkifer and Zoya Street reflected on the themes that had emerged during the weekend. There was a call for moving beyond simple representation of queer characters to look for ways to sustain and embrace the presence of queer people in games. Humor and absurdity were repeated topics, as well as affection, care and comfort.

Unique for such events, a deeply personal thread ran throughout the conference, centering the emotions and needs of individuals; participants were even encouraged to share their own reflections on the conference in the final session. Focusing on the individual within the community and making space for their full self presents a holistic model that could certainly inspire other conferences in both academia and games; in the words of one attendee, “The games community really needs something like this right now.”

Advertisement

While focusing on the individual, QGCon also never lost sight of the communities that individuals comprise. Conferences come out of our communities but also create communities in their own right, and many participants discussed how important QGCon’s unique space was to them. The organizers paid special attention to this in planning and executing the conference, especially in regards to accessibility. QGCon values being free, often a rarity for both academic and industry conferences, as well as the creation of safer spaces through gender neutral bathrooms, a framework for dealing with conflict and providing food to attendees. These material accommodations went a long way in allowing so many people to attend and hopefully represent an example for making other events more accessible and welcoming.

While QGCon is an important space in an industry that often overlooks or minimizes diversity, the future of the conference is in flux. Many of the organizers no longer live in the Bay area; in addition, a lack of institutional support and the stress of unpaid labor on the organizers inspired them to turn to the conference community for answers in a structured roundtable about QGCon’s future. Participants brainstormed ideas including hosting local QGCons (an idea lived out the following week at USC, which hosted their own one-day QGCon Local), charging for the event or soliciting donations and even moving the entire conference online. In industries that often use “do what you love” as a means of extracting uncompensated labor, the organizers’ willingness to share their own process provided a vital inside look into what it takes to run events like this and just how tenuous these spaces can be.

In his talk on the idea of “infinite play,” professor and designer Richard Lemarchand discussed games that “continue play for the sake of play,” games that encourage “horizons rather than outcomes.” QGCon embodies this ethos—a launch pad rather than a destination, pointing out gaps and possibilities rather than presenting solutions. As the conference’s own concerns show, spaces like this are becoming rarer even as they grow more vital. Anyone can create an event like QGCon, but everyone is needed to make it happen.

Riley MacLeod is a freelance writer and editor from Brooklyn, NY. He is Managing Editor of [Haywire Magazine](#), a games site dedicated to mentoring new writers, and his work has been seen at [Critical Distance](#), [Christ and Pop Culture](#) and in [Merritt Kopas’ Videogames for Humans](#), among others. You can find him on [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#).

Tags queerness and games conference the feature

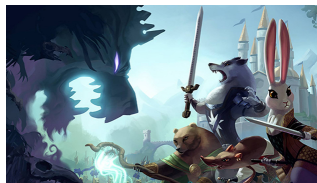
Recently in Games



Make Believe for Adults: LARPing with Wayfinder



An Inside Look At The Competitive Catherine Gaming Scene



"Furries Are Amazing": Discussing Armello's Success With Trent Rusters



Start the discussion...

Be the first to comment.

