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# Mia, 17

## Vocational school student in game development

- Lives in her childhood home with her parents and their dog
- Has just started her studies
- Parents work desk jobs as specialists in business: They value education and expect their daughter to go to university



## Goals

- Develop strong programming and game development skills
- Continue her studies in university level
- Create a portfolio of game projects to showcase her skills
- Challenge and overcome gender stereotypes in technology fields



## Motivations

- Already existing interest and aptitude towards the themes
- Interest in innovative and non-traditional education program
- Learning opportunities and networking in game projects
- Desire to challenge gender stereotypes in tech
- Good salary in programming
- Teachers are great and treat girls with respect
- Feedback from teachers



## Challenges

- Initial challenge of choosing the school and program due to its novelty
- The competitive nature of admissions: Only the best gain admission
- Worry that she would be the only girl in the class
- Difficulties with teamwork and collaboration on school projects: Surprisingly strong social skills are needed for working in the field-
- Dedication and perseverance is required to succeed in studies



## Hobbies & interests

- Playing since elementary school and creating video games for a few years before applying to the vocational school.
- Plays both single and multiplayer games, depending on the mood and available company.
- Always plays online games with her friends, never with strangers: she doesn't feel comfortable playing with strangers
- A passive follower of game-related online communities
- Is starting to find and follow studies-related online communities and is interested in being active in them
- Participates in game-related clubs and activities in school
- Enjoys music and outdoor activities, such as going for walks with her family dog
- Is currently exploring a new coding language through an online course



## Solutions

- Equal treatment in studies from teachers while taking into consideration that some might not have as strong tech skills
- Women in tech and STEM presenting their jobs to girls and setting examples locally
- Encouraging girls to pursue their fields of interest at school and at home
- Fostering safe space guidelines and emphasizing their meaning in study projects
- Setting boundaries and encouraging open discussion about the group dynamics
- Group activities at the start of the studies to help students getting acquainted



## Risks

- Girls are not as vocal in projects or self-assured in their skills which can lead to them being "bulldozed" in their ideas or being withdrawing altogether
- Male students might feel that females are coddled in the studies if they get special attention; This applies to anyone who requires special attention as it might irritate the majority
- Opportunities are not presented equally to all students
- Women feel that more is expected of them than of their male colleagues / classmates
- Allowing gender exclusive groups in study projects doesn't foster diversity but forcing the minorities to different groups can be stressful to them



## Advice

- Embrace your interests and don't be deterred by stereotypes
- Seek out supportive communities for advice and learning more
- Focus on learning by yourself and pursue the most interesting aspects of the field



*Is a technological field really ok for girls?*

*Will I be the only girl in my class?*

*I have the support of the people around me.*

*I'm good at what I do and I want to learn more.*

*I wish more girls would consider the field as career option.*



## Mia's journey

### **Mia was initially unsure what to study.**

Because of her interest and aptitude in games and technology, her study advisor suggested the game development field. The degree was fairly new, so Mia had not heard about it beforehand.

At first, Mia was skeptical about applying because of the societal pressure and gender stereotypes that computing is not suitable for girls, and because of the competition in applying to game development. Her study advisor and her parents encouraged her to apply to the field.

Her parents reminded her that it's always possible to switch careers later and that programming skills would be useful in other tech fields too.

After her application was accepted, Mia was worried that the class would consist only of boys, and she would be the only girl. She tried not to dwell on it too much and eventually decided to consider it a challenge:

Even if she was the only girl, she would show everyone that she could do this.

In her studies, Mia was glad to find out that the study advisor had been right about her aptitude towards the field, allowing her to excel in her studies. Furthermore, she was looking forward to the opportunity of studying more specialized courses.

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# Bree, 24

University of  
applied sciences  
student in game  
design

- Moved into her own apartment for university studies
- Studied social sciences but switched into game design



## Goals

- Learning everything she needs to be able to start making her own ideas into games
- Becoming a narrative designer
- Better mental wellbeing and a supporting work environment
- Growth of great professional self-esteem



## Motivations

- Being able to use her creativity in her studies every day
- Feels that she found “her people” in the degree
- Her skills are valued
- Feedback from teachers and industry professionals during studies



## Challenges

- Never considered game industry when she was younger
- Got into video games “late” compared to her peers and it makes her feel insecure
- Mental health challenges: Studying can be stressful, and it impacts wellbeing-
- Suffers from imposter syndrome



## Hobbies & interests

- Art and creating things
- Consuming movies, books and comics
- Video games became an important hobby as a young adult
- As a young adult is growing into her own person and exploring what she wants to be in the future

“”

*I really like art and storytelling.*

*There are other creative jobs besides a career in art.*

*I should not allow other people to pressure me into making my career choices.*

*The game industry is both demanding and rewarding, and it requires a lot of work to succeed.*

*I need to consider my mental wellbeing very carefully and do my best.*



## Solutions

- Less stigma and more support for mental health issues
- Better career guidance in schools and encouragement for choosing the career path
- Support for finding one's own strengths and actively developing them



## Risks

- Being open about one's mental health issues can impact career options negatively
- The need for accommodating one's mental wellbeing at work can be viewed negatively
- Not enough time, space and money for healing, which leads to imbalance in wellbeing and life, and even negligence of one's health
- Challenges in financial situation and the lack of paid training positions



## Advice

- One should seek a career / field that fits into who they are as a person rather than trying to change themselves
- Don't forget the importance of supportive networks of friends and acquaintances, and remember to rely on them
- Check your negative habits such as interacting in echo chambers (environment in which a person encounters only opinions and views which coincide with their own, reinforcing their existing views) in social media and doom scrolling



## Bree's journey

**Bree has been drawing ever since she could hold a pencil and creating her own stories.**

She is always the happiest while creating things on her own in solitude. She lives and breathes through art and creativity, and when she can't create, she focuses on consuming movies, books and comics. As a kid, she thought that games are only for boys and none of her friends or family ever played video games.

Bree studied in art-oriented senior high school, but wasn't sure if she wanted to do art as living since it's very difficult to make a career as an artist or a writer. Being good isn't enough, you'd have to be the best and there is always someone better. Also, her family didn't consider art as a real job and encouraged her to look for degrees in healthcare.

Bree applied into university to study social sciences because it was at least more plausible career option than art. Art could still be a dearly beloved hobby. In university she met a friend, who was an avid gamer, and they started playing video games together. She became interested in how games are made and how they can be used to tell stories. She heard

that it's possible to study game design that combines art, writing, design and tech.

Bree applied into university of applied sciences to study game design since it combined her interests. She has been profoundly enjoying using her creativity in multidisciplinary teams and learning new things. She thinks she probably can't become a concept artist but making graphical assets and narrative design are the most interesting areas to her.

Her current greatest concern is that finding a good place for her mandatory practical training is difficult. The industry is extremely competitive as there are lots of applicants and companies are not hiring trainees. Bree hopes to find an unpaid training position with the option to work remotely as she doesn't have the extra funds to travel to another city for the job unless it is a paid position.

During her studies, Bree has been suffering from mental health related challenges. She needs support and encouragement to overcome these challenges, defeat imposter syndrome and grow her professional self-esteem.

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# Nina, 27

## University student in information technology

- Bachelor of business administration, information technology
- Avid gamer and skilled in her chosen competitive game



## Goals

- Complete her degree with high marks
- Secure an entry-level position in the industry
- Continue building her portfolio of digital products
- Climb the ranks in her favorite video game



## Motivations

- Interest in combining technical skills with usability
- Desire to contribute to the industry as a female and offering her point of view-
- The ability to make better digital products that make people's lives easier
- The industry changes constantly, so she must keep developing her skills



## Challenges

- Limited local internship opportunities
- Balancing academic commitments with personal interests and social life
- Facing negative attitudes and behavior while gaming because she is a woman
- Feeling that sometimes she is not taken as seriously in the industry because she is a woman



## Hobbies & interests

- Competitive video gaming
- Participating in and building online gaming communities
- Creating digital products that are user-friendly
- A prosperous career in technology industry as a female developer



*Video games are important to me.*

*I want to work in technology industry.*

*I prefer working on my own and remotely.*

*Finding an accepting online community for gaming should not be this difficult.*

*There should be consequences to those who mistreat others online.*

*I want to make products that make people's lives easier.*



## Solutions

- Leveraging university resources and networks to find internship and job opportunities
- Participating in online communities for female developers and gamers to find like-minded people
- Use the available tools in games and communities to limit engagement with toxic players and reporting them
- Promoting positive and supportive behavior policies in games and communities
- Be prepared to go out of your comfort zone and allow personal growth



## Risks

- Lone wolf mentality can be damaging to oneself
- Facing competition for limited industry positions post-graduation
- Unknowingly fostering a bubble of her own values and point of view instead of a nutritious, equally beneficial work environment for everyone
- Not reminding oneself of the state of things in the real world can be harmful



## Advice

- Find the environment that allows you to grow as yourself, instead of it forcing you to change
- You are allowed to reach for your dreams, and you deserve to be treated right
- Take a look around to realize that you're not on your own



## Nina's journey

**Nina is a 27-year-old university student,** studying information technology and programming. She has a strong academic record and is actively involved in student projects and gaming events. She has always been passionate about games. It felt like the right fit to work in a technological industry, and to work on interactive products.

Nina is an introvert, who has found her dearest friends online through video games. Her friends live across the world, and it suits her just fine. Her father is a programmer and as a kid she often helped him tinkering with computers and building them. Math was always her favorite subject at school.

Nina started playing video games as a kid in her older brother's steps. In primary school she was the only girl who played. Boys from the class thought she was cool because of this. Gradually she got into online games and started playing in a more competitive level. Competitive gaming required finding regular team mates to play with and voice communications.

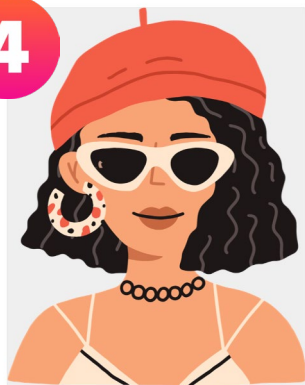
She participated in several online gaming communities, but often faced misogynistic attitudes and harassment due to her gender. For years she avoided playing with voice communications in matches with random teammates. This affected her ranking and status in the game negatively as she was not able to play in the level she wanted to achieve. As an adult she found an online community with a good and accepting atmosphere. There she is treated just as one of the team members and not looked down upon just because she is a woman.

Career in technology had always interested her. Nina studied to become a bachelor of business administration in information technology. After her studies, she had difficulties finding work. Open junior positions were rare and there were a lot of applicants, so the competition was fierce. After almost a year of unemployment, she got into a medium-sized company as a full stack developer.

In the future she wants to make better digital products to help make peoples' lives easier.



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# Clarissa, 39

## Professional in game industry

- Lives alone and currently wants to focus on her career
- Background in IT
- Worked in mobile game industry for 8 years
- Has had her own company for 2 years



## Goals

- Successfully develop her game development company
- Create innovative and engaging games
- Be the best team leader
- Find the best talent while promoting diversity
- Mentor young women entering the game industry



## Motivations

- Passion for game development: Wants to make an impact with her vision
- Drive for entrepreneurship and team leadership
- Inspiration from successful female entrepreneurs in tech
- Believes in the best side of the community and wants to foster positive, reinforcing environment



## Challenges

- Issues in career progression when working for another company: Poor company leading, unfairness between remote and in-office workers, and no opportunities for advancement which lead to the feeling of being stuck
- Negative work culture in other companies: Strong bro culture led to being feeling left out and often uncomfortable
- Discouraging the crunch culture
- Finding the best talent for her company



## Hobbies & interests

- Tabletop and role-playing games like Dungeons and Dragons: She is the only one of the friend group who doesn't have problems with scheduling the sessions
- Going to the gym for exercise
- Wants to spend more time on personal creative pursuits, like writing and storytelling, but feels it's difficult as an entrepreneur to take the time to use her work skills on personal projects
- Does her best in upholding work-life balance



*My hobby became my work.*

*I got fed up with the bro culture in my previous workplace, so I decided to start my own company.*

*There are many female role models in the industry that I look up to. I want to be like them one day and be a role model to the new generation of female developers.*

*As an entrepreneur I need to hire the best talent, but most of the applicants are men, especially in tech related roles, so upholding diversity is challenging.*

*Pretend that you're a middle-aged white man and take his confidence and do what he would do.*



## Solutions

- Teach girls to be more assertive and competitive; they need the self-confidence in the game industry
- Present successful role models
- Promote the development of diverse skills like programming and mathematics relevant to game development to girls
- Normalize the opportunities in game industry and highlight its financial potential
- Implement supportive policies for better work culture and environments, and ensuring diversity in the industry
- Promote transparent decision making: Reduce unexpected career challenges for workers
- Be active in local game developer's associations and participate in events, workshops and discussion



## Risks

- Trying to change the prevalent culture and being against the working conditions can lead to suffering personal consequences and impose a risk to one's career
- The game industry can be volatile and pose risks to job stability
- Limited diversity hinders the development with under presentation of certain groups and lack of diverse perspectives in game content and development teams
- Financial uncertainty in indie developing
- Using the benefit of working remotely can unfairly hinder one's career progression compared to on-site workers
- "Woke culture" stigma: Not ensuring a balanced outcome for all groups can turn out negatively and put minorities on a pedestal



## Advice

- Seek mentorship and advice from experienced industry professionals: Local and online game developer's associations are a great place to start
- Stay adaptable and open to new opportunities and challenges
- Transparent policy making and ensuring a generally fair approach in hiring decisions
- Community accepted guidelines for industry: Everyone agrees to work towards a more diverse and inclusive future



## Clarissa's journey

**Clarissa entered the game industry almost by accident.** She has a background in the IT sector in various positions and the shift to game industry happened gradually before game development degrees were widely available. She has strong management and team leading skills with a passion for creative and tech collaborative projects. After working for eight years in various mobile game companies, she started her own company.

Clarissa's experiences in other companies were varied. The prevalent bro culture made her uncomfortable as she was usually one of the few women in the workplace. The crunch methodology in projects was stressful and started to impact her wellbeing, driving her towards a burnout.

Also, as a person preferring to work from home, she realized this was impacting her career advancement negatively as on-site workers were often favored for higher positions over remote workers.

Clarissa is passionate about creating innovative games and supporting other women in the industry. As an entrepreneur she struggles finding the best talent while upholding a diverse workforce.

She believes that because so many women are in graphics, they don't think that they can start game studios because they're not programmers. She wants to show an example as a female developer.



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## Anne, 44

### Vocational school teacher in electrical engineering

- Mother of two boys
- Her parents and brother are engineers, so the career choice was always clear to her
- Was a bit of a tomboy as a kid
- Lives with her husband and children in the suburbs, very middle-class
- Short commute to work and tries to bicycle as often as possible



### Goals

- Imparting the knowledge to students and finding ways to help them learn
- Keeping work and free time separate and being able to recover from work



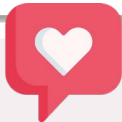
### Motivations

- Teaching motivated students and seeing them learn and achieve their goals
- Teaching and engineering strike a perfect balance between straightforward theory and room for creativity



### Challenges

- Feels that as a woman in the field she has to always be slightly better than men
- Starting a family creates obstacles and affects career negatively



### Hobbies & interests

- Spends as much time with her family as possible
- Enjoys doing things around the house; anything that is different from her day job
- To balance out the technical field, likes to do things that are traditionally considered feminine such as baking, cooking and reading

“

*My life is nice and stable now.*

*Choosing a male-dominated field was never an issue for me.*

*Starting a family hindered my career progression more than anything else I've encountered in the industry as a woman. This felt unfair as the societal pressure and work environment weren't supportive.*

*I have now time to raise other peoples' children since my own are older.*

*I love working with motivated students. They're great.*

*I wish more girls would choose engineering fields. There is no reason they wouldn't thrive in them.*



## Solutions

- Teach young people to about the importance of listening to others, no matter their background
- Educators should push for equality and treat students equally
- More family and child-friendly work environments and cultures
- Have more women represent their fields in schools
- Policies to ensure one starting a family won't cause negative consequences
- Open discussion about recruitment culture in companies
- Possibilities of working in different, more family-friendly ways e.g. shorter workdays
- See the employees as people, not as a resource



## Risks

- The change in industry gender balance can be slow and requires continuous effort
- Girls choosing a male-dominated field as pioneers might face challenges in work environment
- Sharing one's personal life can affect career opportunities negatively
- Different life situations requiring flexibility from the employer should be afforded equally to everyone



## Advice

- Believe in your skills and aptitudes, and pursue your interests based on them
- People are not unilateral: One can work in male-dominated fields but enjoy feminine hobbies or vice versa
- Encourage companies to set examples in making more diverse hiring decisions
- Check your prejudices and treat everyone with respect



## Anne's journey

**Anne never really thought about becoming a teacher.** She studied engineering because everyone in her family is an engineer. She chose the field based on her interest. Still, she was worried that she would be the only girl in the class, and it made her anxious. Even though electrical engineering is widely male-dominated field, Anne thinks it suits women well and more girls should choose it as the occupation.

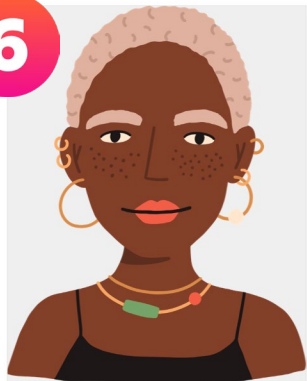
Anne's career in an engineering office came to a full stop when she got pregnant. While pregnant she couldn't work in the building sites at all as a safety measure. While she was on family leave, gradually the idea of teaching started to grow in her mind. She got her pedagogical qualification after returning to work in the engineering office. When her kid was older, she thought it was the time to start helping other people's kids to grow.

The best part of her work is seeing students learning to do things they couldn't before and helping them overcome their challenges. Teaching combines reactivity and creativity; not everything can be planned beforehand. Especially in her field learning is done by doing, not lecturing. The nature of her work is rewarding and that is why she enjoys it.

Anne is the only woman teaching the degree. Because of this she makes it her goal to go promote the degree in secondary schools so girls will see it as a real option.

Anne is a work-life balance promoter. On her free time, she focuses on anything that is not work-related. She exercises a lot and wants to stay in good shape.

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# Ivana, 54

## University teacher in game design

- Lives with her husband and two cats
- Her kids have already moved out
- Strong professional background in game industry and media field
- Started teaching as a side job



## Goals

- Inspire and mentor the next generation of game developers
- Promote diversity and inclusion and their importance within the game development field



## Motivations

- Passion for educating and mentoring students
- Desire to bridge the gap between the education and the industry
- Special interest in the societal aspects of gaming



## Challenges

- Current role was initially intended as a side job but evolved into full time position: the decision to leave the industry for teaching required a lot of thought
- Struggles with the rigid educational systems that don't cater to the industry needs
- Practical experience is not emphasized enough over formal academic qualification which makes finding part time lecturers more difficult



## Hobbies & interests

- Occasionally playing games, but spends less time on gaming due to other commitments
- Prioritizing responsibilities over leisure activities
- Has an impressive balcony garden



## Solutions

- Regularly updating the degree contents to include latest industry trends; more flexibility in studies
- Collaboration with industry professionals to provide students with insights from the field
- Advocating more inclusive policies and support systems within the university
- Use the opportunities for professional development to keep up professional skills
- Inviting more female guest lecturers to give role models to especially new students



## Risks

- Degree not being future-oriented; students need the know-how of current and future trends, and the degree should allow the foresight and flexibility to adapt to future industry needs
- Disregarding self-development as teacher can impact students negatively
- Disregarding students' needs and aptitudes, but also allowing too much freedom in studies or too much imposed restrictions
- Being too involved in helping struggling students can affect one's own wellbeing
- Students being too dependent on their teacher



## Advice

- Set boundaries with students for your own wellbeing
- Keep up professional networks in the industry
- Develop professional skills
- Be open to feedback and develop the course contents continuously



*I didn't think I would become a teacher, but never say never, I guess.*

*The educational system should be able to better consider the industry needs because game industry evolves constantly and fast.*

*The students are the best and I'm often mind blown by their creativity.*

*We are working for a better future for the whole industry by setting good examples and practices. It's a teacher's responsibility and privilege.*



## Ivana's journey

**Ivana is a professional game designer gone teacher.** She always considered teaching a side job until she was offered a permanent position. Eventually she became the head of the degree.

Currently she teaches game design with a focus on narrative design. She considers the best part of her job to be interacting with students and seeing the creative and amazing projects they create.

Ivana tries to always find female teachers and guest lecturers to show an example and foster better gender-balance in the field. Often this has proved difficult since female developers tend to have more overall responsibilities and commitments than men in the same positions.

She would want to play more games on her free time but has other priorities like taking care of her family's two cats and the garden on their balcony.