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GAME STUDIES FOR GREAT JUSTICE

Amanda Phillips

In the age of GamerGate, the “social justice warrior” has become a polarizing figure in gaming culture: a hero to some (who might prefer job classes like wizard or rogue instead), but an emblem of all that is wrong with political correctness to others. GamerGate, a high-profile harassment event that began with an ex-lover’s vengeful tirade against an independent game developer and eventually expanded into a wide-ranging assault on political accountability in gaming under the guise of concern for “ethics in games journalism,” has unfortunately hijacked conversations about social justice in game studies, marking nearly every conversation about race, gender, and sexuality in videogames. While the use of “social justice” as an aspersion is a fairly recent development (intersecting, as well, with trends in Tumblr activism), I engage it here in its classic form: the pursuit of fairness in the many political and social systems that structure our everyday lives. Robyn Wiegman expresses it best:

I use the phrase “social justice” as a generic figure of the political destination of identity knowledges, knowing that its meaning is precisely what is at stake in the different disciplinary and critical relations that generate identity-based scholarship. For some scholars and in some disciplinary traditions, social justice will always be measured by a state-oriented outcome, with the transformation of laws and policies signifying its political resolution. In others, the juridical solution is absolutely rejected, along with the terms by which dissent is managed in a liberal social order, such that justice is always excessive of constitutional orders and governmentality of any kind, being the eternally postponed figure of what is to come.

(Wiegman 2012: 3)

Wiegman’s definition leaves the end of social justice somewhat open, for the disciplines engage with the concept on vastly different terms. Videogames may seem a trivial object for those concerned with something so grand as equity, but they are an increasingly important component of the media landscapes that shape the world around us. As a scholar trained in the interpretive humanities, my social justice scholarship on games aims both to recognize the links between real-world structures of power and their diffuse ideological forms in games and to open up new futures through alternative interpretive readings. A sociologist may pursue social justice in game studies by giving voice to marginalized gaming communities. A game designer may pursue social justice by inventing new game mechanics that challenge the dominance of competition and violence in the medium. There are many, many ways to do game studies for great justice.

In the spirit of modeling social justice academic practice, I would like to start by pointing out that what I have to say in this chapter does not come from my own brilliance and experience, but from listening to and receiving the wisdom of other folks, mostly women of color, who have been theorizing and designing intersectional paradigms of justice for centuries. For this piece in particular, I am grateful to the Summer 2015 workshop participants for the Center for Solutions to Online Violence, who have helped to shape my understanding of social justice practice in online scholarship, as well as Professors Barbara Tomlinson and George Lipsitz for their help in introducing me to thinking about disciplinary disloyalty. My aim is to point newcomers in the direction of particular scholars and methodologies, and to do justice to their legacies by building on their contributions in other fields.

This chapter offers five concrete suggestions to launch your game studies for great justice. Its title derives from an old internet meme centering on the mistranslation of the introduction to Toaplan's (1991) Mega Drive port of *Zero Wing*. "All your base are belong to us" might be a more familiar part of that same translation; and as such a title might suggest, this chapter assumes some familiarity with videogames and gaming culture. It will be most useful for scholars who are acquainted with the basics of videogame or media studies but are hoping to direct their research toward a cultural studies approach that prioritizes the pursuit of systemic justice over simpler solutions like diversity and representation.

Look Beyond the Fun

Having an emotional attachment is a vital part of scholarship. Researchers do not dedicate so much time and energy to questions and texts that have no personal value for them. For scholars of social justice in particular, leading with the heart is an important way to push back against the dehumanization and impossibility of "objective" research, which frequently masks the operations of hegemony. However, it is also important to be aware of how such attachments influence one's analysis and exposure to different kinds of texts.

This is particularly important in studying videogames because of the way they historically have been linked to fun and fandom. We think of games as things we do for fun, even when we are making or studying them. Much of the popular discourse around gaming connects them to the pleasure and satisfaction that comes from achievement or overcoming obstacles, even when the point is not fun itself, but more mundane achievements like training. The popularity of gamification attests to the allure of "fun" for educators, advertisers, and gamers alike.

But fun is not everything. Bonnie Ruberg (2015) argues that the hegemony of fun in game design and culture flattens the emotional complexity of the gamic experience, and that "no-fun" can be an affective position with radical potential. She points to scholars such as Jesper Juul (2013), who writes about how failure and frustration are also important characteristics of gameplay. In fact, failing is one of the most important parts of a game, since we do it over and over and over again. This line of inquiry matches up with social justice disciplines that recognize how competition, winning, popularity, and mass accumulation are important components of white supremacist cisheteropatriarchy.

Let us look at three different critical lenses that might be useful in thinking about unfun aspects of gaming. Ruberg (2015) engages queer failure, a concept developed by J. Jack Halberstam (2011), to think about how queerness resists capitalist imperatives to produce. While heteronormative futures depend on the constant reproduction of children in much the same way that capitalism requires continuous production of goods to drive

the accumulation of money, Halberstam suggests that queer lives that “fail” to reach these goals in fact open up new space for alternative ways of being. Drawing on this celebration of failure, which refuses the value of success in an oppressive world, can be quite powerful in the context of a gaming culture that often prioritizes domination and winning as the highest form of play.

Necropolitics is a school of postcolonial theory that interrogates how power over death and dying lend oppressive regimes significant control over populations. Proposed by Achille Mbembe (2003), it can be a useful analytic for game studies work that thinks through the centrality of death and dying in games. Even though they do not involve actual loss of life, videogames engage the dimensions of technology and control that are central to necropolitical power. They are exquisite objects to think about how ideology—and, in this case, the power over (virtual) death—flows through our entertainment.

Finally, the feminist killjoy is Sara Ahmed’s (2010) fun-ruining figure who is always blamed for disturbing the social solidarity of a dominant group. When friction appears in the group, she is identified as its source rather than the one who points out or suffers from its existence. In the context of the social justice wars in popular culture, it is useful to have ways to talk about the figures who are blamed for pointing out inequalities and oppressive practices. Because Ahmed’s feminist killjoy specifically ruins fun, this figure is all the more appropriate for discussing social justice backlash in games.

Turning these critical lenses on the unfun parts of gaming can be quite powerful. However, theory is not the only resource for social justice scholarship. Ruberg (2015) suggests that a taxonomy of “no-fun” games might include those that annoy, anger, disappoint, and hurt. Insights can also come from “bad” games, broadly conceived: easy games, boring games, ugly games, amateurish games, glitchy games, experimental games, and unfinished games. When access to the knowledge and means of production of digital games results in an industry that is 76 percent white and 75 percent male (Weststar & Legault 2015: 11), it is important to look for inspiration beyond the expectations set by these creators. Big-budget AAA games are often popular, influential, and well-crafted, and they are increasing in narrative and aesthetic sophistication every year. However, they offer a limited range of what games can be, coming from a limited range of creative perspectives, and with one major purpose: to make money for their parent corporations. Many indie game designers also strive to achieve AAA-style polish, with similar results.

Anna Anthropy, the radical trans lesbian game designer, encourages everyone to learn how to make games. She advocates for simple tools such as Twine that open up game design to those without the programming skills often thought necessary to make games (Anthropy 2012). She and other transwomen designers, including Merritt Kopas and Mattie Brice, create minimalist, short games that subvert AAA expectations, often telling stories or using mechanics that are not marketable in the mainstream. Their games are highly personal, occasionally unpolished, but always evocative and meaningful to play. They do not make much money, often relying on crowdfunding models to support their production. In a tragedy for justice, these transwomen have endured intense harassment for offering alternatives to the AAA industry without being able to support themselves financially.

Getting beyond fun is an important first step when choosing objects and mechanics to write about. Good critique can come from unexpected places. Do not avoid certain types of titles—indie games, for example, or AAAs—because they are not your type of game. Depending on your research question, valuable facets of an issue might be spread across a wide range of media types and genres, produced by users of varying skill levels.

Practice Strategic Disloyalty to Your Discipline(s)

The formation of the academy over hundreds of years has led to what some see as a stratification and calcification of disciplines into rigid structures that stifle critique (Allen & Kitch 1998). Debates about the utility of disciplines and their complicity in the power structure of the academy are endless, but they demonstrate one thing for certain: disciplines constrain the creation of knowledge by training their initiates in particular methods of analysis. Clare Hemmings (2011) writes about how disciplinary discourse itself can shape the way knowledge is formed, such as the historical “waves” model of feminism that erases the early contributions of women of color to feminist movements. Roderick Ferguson (2012) examines how becoming part of an institution can rob a field of its radical potential even as it provides a home and resources for the work to be carried out. The structures of our disciplines, their histories, and the conversations that we have within them are tremendously impactful on the work we can do.

This particular conversation within feminist studies is very broad; Robyn Wiegman even provides an incomplete bibliography in her footnotes (2012: 72). But I come by the wording of this section via the work of Judith Stacey (1995), who wrote of the need to be disloyal to disciplines (in her case, sociology) in order to meet the political demands of feminist scholarship. A strategic disloyalty is one that acknowledges the power and privilege of disciplinary structures, but learns to break with them at appropriate moments when they hinder rigorous social justice critique.

A discipline like game studies is relatively new and still figuring out its identity, but it already has its own history of territorial disputes and anxieties. The much-ballyhooed “Narratology vs. Ludology Debates,” while ultimately dismissed as unhelpful posturing, is a perfect example of the abstract boundary-making that occurs during the formation of a discipline. This debate, which occurred in the early 2000s across the *International Journal of Game Studies* (Aarseth 2001; Eskelinen 2001; Juul 2001), collections such as *First Person: New Media as Performance, Story, and Game* (Wardrip-Fruin & Harrigan 2004), and various conference presentations (Frasca 2003; Murray 2005), was an early attempt to carve out a niche for game studies as different from the study of literature and cinema, from which many early practitioners originated. The language of these debates is revealing: some scholars felt they were being “colonized” by other disciplines whose training did not adequately prepare them to talk about games as games (ludo-) rather than as narratives or visual art (Juul 2001).

Ideological posturing aside, we can read such a struggle as vying for influence and institutional recognition in the context of an academy with access to shrinking resources. Video-games are objects of study that attract high volume enrollments, and game studies criticism has the potential to reach a broad audience. The emphasis on games as games added useful critical perspectives to the game studies conversation that may not have emerged from a purely literary or filmic standpoint, but the reaction to methods from fields like literary studies led many to downplay the utility of these fields to the study of videogames entirely. For example, Aarseth (2001) described the work of cinema and literary critics as “colonising” games, while Eskelinen described the “interpretative violence” done by Janet Murray (1997) in her reading of Tetris as a metaphor for the “overtaxed lives of Americans in the 1990s” (Eskelinen 2001: 143). Perhaps as a result of these anxieties about humanistic colonization, early game studies work on cultural issues like gender and race is less prominent than the formalist perspectives of the ludologists. Some current trends in the field, such as code studies or platform studies, require specialized technical knowledge in order for a scholarly contribution to be adequate, replicating the very barriers that limit diversity in the tech industry in the first place.

Strategically breaking with the traditions of a discipline can help us to adapt scholarly approaches to new problems. Think about the training you have received in your degree program, where it places its priorities and encourages you to intervene, and what tools it gives you to make those interventions. How do these tools shape your analysis and the questions you are able to ask? What topics do they miss or obscure?

When it is clear that breaking with tradition is the best course of action, the task can still be quite complicated. One of the most important strategies for understanding and properly implementing theory and methods from other disciplines is to familiarize yourself with its context. Critical race theory, queer theory, feminist theory—all of these have their own vocabularies, historical trajectories, and foundational texts that have shaped them over time. They have more contact points with other humanities and social science disciplines than tech fields like computer science, but they are fully developed practices in their own right that require expert knowledge for persuasive implementation.

Seeking training, whether in the form of classes, apprenticeships, or co-authoring with others, is an important part of doing interdisciplinary work effectively. Many humanities disciplines neglect training in collaboration, but interdisciplinary work might be an opportunity to strategically adopt the norms of other fields and work with multiple individuals to bring a project to fruition. The most important rule here? Whether you are primarily a feminist theorist interested games or a game studies scholar hoping to bring the perspectives of disability studies to your work, you must respect the histories of the disciplines you wish to cross and understand your own adequately before stepping out.

Reach Beyond Discourses of Diversity and Inclusion

Making videogames is a multibillion-dollar industry, and it intersects in many places with the concerns of broader social justice movements: labor rights and compensation, education, the digital divide, transnational labor, and much more. However, conversations about social justice in videogames often revolve around the quantity and quality of X type of characters in games, the recognition of X group in gaming publics, or the inclusion of X group in the industry itself—where X represents any identity category that is not “straight” or “white” or “male.” Reducing diversity and inclusion to numbers is tempting because it offers an easy, tangible goal to achieve. However, it also masks more serious structural problems with a comfortable veneer with which content creators are familiar. This is how tokens are created: they are solutions to mathematical problems.

Representation and inclusion are important to help us imagine and believe in new spaces of possibility, but they are small steps in a more expansive quest for justice. More often than not, lack of diversity is a symptom of larger systemic problems rather than the cause of inequality. Increasing diversity in the workplace or in media content does not necessarily mean changing the underlying structures that created the lack in the first place. For example, Sara Ahmed (2012) has written extensively about how diversity policy in the university can substitute for substantive changes in the fabric of the institution. Ferguson’s study suggests that the institutionalization of diversity actually extends hegemonic power. This can apply more widely to corporations and other institutions: if a company does not provide maternity leave or benefits, it will be difficult to retain people who give birth. If crunch time is an essential part of the work environment, it will be difficult to retain people who have reasons to be home on time—family obligations, physical or emotional wellbeing, religious practices, and so on. If subtle forms of racism, homophobia, and misogyny are part of the

social fabric of the work environment, individuals brought into the fold by diversity recruitment initiatives may not be able to perform at their best level or retain interest in their jobs.

Critics such as Adrienne Shaw (2015) advocate for treating diversity as a norm rather than a goal for the games industry, and to always consider gaming within a broader social and political context. She is critical of the notion of diversity as it is deployed in conversations that pose it as a problem to figure out, noting, like so many scholars before her, that such thinking places the onus on oppressed and underrepresented groups to fix their own conditions by becoming pioneers in hostile territory. Brice (2015) directly implicates wealthy organizations that ask “diverse” speakers to work for free in order to improve their corporate climate or, in the specific case of the Game Developers Conference, add value to their high-priced event. Such actions ignore the reality that improvement requires money and structural changes that will force some to give up a bit of their power, privilege, and comfort. The games industry has a reputation for hostility toward women and people of color, preventing many from choosing to enter the field in the first place. Adding members of underrepresented groups may or may not change these dynamics. If they make it through the process, then it might be easier (for all sorts of reasons) to maintain the status quo rather than challenge it. Some might even make it harder on people from their own groups to succeed in this setting—a documented phenomenon whereby individuals metaphorically kick the ladder out behind them rather than lifting others up (Carbado & Gulati 2004; Kaiser & Spalding 2015).

When it comes to onscreen representation, social justice scholarship does not need to revolve around the male gaze or the agency of gamers over their avatars. Most of the time, such approaches investigate the obvious markers of inequality without situating them within the greater context of the technological and ludic systems of a game or the decades-long conversations about agency and gazes that have occurred in feminist and queer theory. Disciplines that prioritize social justice excel at contextualizing objects of analysis within the overlapping systems of power in which they are embedded.

For example, some of my own work investigates the discourse of the “male gaze” as it applies to the game character Bayonetta, who many critics felt was gratuitously sexualized and, therefore, a harmful representation of women in gaming. However, a close examination of the game’s narrative, in-game camera functions, and battle mechanics reveal that Bayonetta’s relationship to visibility is not straightforward, and that we can read her as occupying a position that resists hegemonic masculinity through excessive queer femininity and button-mashing controller mechanics. The major problem with the popular understanding of the male gaze, beyond its ubiquity in fan feminist conversations, is that it simplifies what has always been a complicated set of gendered power relationships into the heteronormative formula “man looks at woman.” Bayonetta is an ideal case to understand where and how this breaks down (Phillips 2017).

The veneers of avatar and narrative design conceal game mechanics and computational processes that are often confused for technological inevitability. For example, take the common refrain from designers that a lack of computing resources prevents them from including female avatars in their games (Totilo 2010; Farokhmanesh 2014). Such explanations obscure the human decisions that underwrite game design, from physics algorithms to animation details. Reading representation in gaming as a surface-level phenomenon fails to hold the entire system and its priorities accountable for the resulting problems. Platform studies and software studies are two areas of inquiry that are interested in the relationship between culture and technological design; while Bogost and Montfort’s (2009) first entry into the MIT Press Platform

Studies series did not have social justice as a primary focus, it did demonstrate the varied relationships between the material of the Atari 2600 and the creative output of its game developers.

Outside of games, Wendy Chun (2006, 2012) and Tara McPherson (2012) provide some models for understanding software production through a social justice lens, making connections between design practices and real-world power structures. Such connections can easily be made in the material of videogames. Karyl Ketchum (2009) investigates the racial politics built into the avatar creator software Facegen, which serves as the basis for avatar facial customization in a variety of games as well as an aid for police sketch artists. Reed and Phillips (2013) interrogate the motion capture interfaces used to animate games and computer-generated movies like *Avatar*, showing how these technologies use the bodies and movement of people of color to guarantee its authenticity. When platform studies critique holds social justice at its core, it can provide a robust account of the meat and bones of a project, rather than simply emphasizing the skin.

Recognize Your Ethical Responsibilities to the People You Write About

Certain topics, such as the harassment of women and other groups online, have recently captured the public's attention, making them tempting topics for analysis. As academics, we frequently benefit from writing about and commenting on such events, in informal venues like professional blogs as well as more official documents like peer-reviewed publications or interviews with the news media. Having something to say about controversy grants us social and intellectual capital.

However, the raw materials of this analysis frequently come from the suffering and public shaming of others. The accessible, fixed nature of tweets and other online speech have led many to treat them as texts that are open for public consumption rather than, for example, conversations recorded by an observer or statements made in an interview. This opens up a treasure trove of data for commentators in disciplines that have no formal procedures for interacting with human subjects: in many humanities disciplines, the text is an object, like a book or a poem, that has been released by its creator and is subject to any kind of critique without needing the permission or consent of the author. Many disciplines in the social sciences, by contrast, have elaborate procedures to ensure the anonymity and dignity of their human subjects, most of whom are made to feel like contributors to a greater intellectual project even if their participation is unpleasant. Regarding social media as "text" cuts the human subjects out of the situation entirely. We treat texts and human subjects interviews quite differently.

Since so many of us writing about videogames and other contemporary media are dealing with current events rather than historical acts that have had time to settle down, there are additional consequences to consider. For example, the speed and variety of online commentary often means that important patterns are not immediately apparent.

Platforms such as Twitter are technically public, but they are also venues for conversations that can feel very personal to the individuals involved. The openness allows likeminded community members to find each other easily and engage in distributed conversation, and the vastness of the field of conversation can lead to a false sense of insignificance with respect to the whole. In 2014, a conversation about the journalistic ethics of embedding tweets sprang up after a journalist wrote a story using the tweets of rape survivors who shared their

experiences in response to a question by Twitter denizen, Christina Fox. Fox and other bloggers, such as Anil Dash, challenged what many journalists used as their primary defense: Twitter is public, and anything posted to Twitter is fair game for reporting (Knibbs 2014; McBride 2014).

But Twitter users and journalists involved in the conversation also suggested that context is key here, and that some users have a lot more to lose than others when their tweets are aggregated in a news story and shared with thousands of readers. Sudden exposure and direct linking can leave underprepared members of the public vulnerable to targeted harassment and an overflow of responses in their inbox.

This is important to consider when writing in the age of GamerGate. Academics are not journalists, of course, but we do benefit professionally from writing about these events and conversations. It is courteous to contact those individuals whose social media posts you would like to discuss, and to consider the impact of your publication on their well being. By their own accounts, many individuals embroiled in social media harassment events receive a spike in unwanted attention when someone publishes about them later. Are you quoting a public figure, or a person who appears to be conversing with friends? Are you benefitting from labor that these individuals perform for free? Will linking directly to their posts facilitate further harassment? Can you anonymize their words without reducing their effectiveness for your argument?

As of this publication, no one has changed official institutional recommendations with regard to the use of social media as text (rather than interview) and its creators as authors (rather than subjects). However, organizations such as the Center for Solutions to Online Violence are currently working to develop guidelines and best practices for scholars who are dedicated to engaging in this type of research. Theorist Moya Bailey (2015) has written about Twitter ethics in her scholarship about transwomen of color activism online, offering a model of collaborative consent that differs from IRB processes in the academy by centering the expertise of “subjects” rather than treating them in a paternalistic way.

Thorough game studies research takes into account not only representation and technological platform, but also audience reception and fan practices. So many important conversations and insights into games appear online. Until official recommendations can be made, it is best to carefully consider the context of these conversations and how to minimize the harm while still accomplishing the important work that your analysis performs.

Get Your Gear and Your Party Together

Given the volatile nature of the discourse surrounding social justice in gaming, it is important to prepare yourself for the eventuality that someone, somewhere, will take issue with what you write. Whether it is a foaming internet mob or skeptical colleague, resistance to the perspectives of social justice criticism are common. Writers in academia have historically been spared much of the vitriol that journalists and other critics have received, but this is not true for every academic writing about games.

Harassment can endanger someone physically, but it more frequently causes emotional and psychological damage to individuals who become worn down by continuous conflict. Practices like doxing (the online distribution of personal information) can be used to intimidate individuals into silence, and they can happen to academics as easily as to other individuals writing about social justice in games. It is important to consider how you would like to present yourself as a professional online, and how closely linked your public life is to your private one. Keep in mind that our positions in our institutions usually mean that our basic

information—name, picture, email, and place of employment—is easily traced. Consult organizations such as Crash Override or the Fembot Collective for strategies on securing your personal information and online accounts against hacking, doxing, and other forms of harassment.

In addition to the technical preparations, it is important to cultivate personal and professional networks of individuals who are passionate about social justice. It is dangerous to go alone! Social justice is a collective pursuit. In her indictment of white academic feminism, for example, Audre Lorde (1984) repeatedly encourages us to face the chaos of our differences and unite because of, not despite, them. Solidarity across oppressive categories without reproducing the hierarchies and exclusions of patriarchy is the only way to move toward justice. For Lorde, the fear that differences such as race, class, and sexuality within the category “woman” would cause the feminist movement to splinter was itself a tool of the patriarchy that prevented feminists from achieving their goals. This sentiment has been repeated over and over by important activists and thinkers. Your comrades can be fierce defenders, valuable critics, and compassionate friends. These folks can be tremendously important in surviving what is otherwise an isolating experience.

But the direct tactics of internet vigilantes are sometimes easier to confront than the more subtle strategies of academia. Nonracial ideology, sometimes known as “colorblindness,” pervades the left-leaning culture of the humanities and social sciences, enabling individuals to deny the ways in which institutions are thoroughly racialized even when they believe they are on the side of justice. Work by scholars like Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) and Carl Gutierrez-Jones (2000) have supplemented the calls for intersectionality by Lorde (1984), Crenshaw (1991), and others by excavating the unacknowledged ways that whiteness controls institutions. For example, Ferguson’s study of the institutionalization of diversity shows how discourses of rigor can mask what is actually an assessment of an author’s identity or politics. Strategic disloyalty to one’s discipline can leave an opening for technical or methodological critique from scholars who are unfamiliar with or opposed to different modes of knowledge production.

Finding like-minded scholars might seem difficult when you are just entering the field, but there are many places to look. Conferences are a good place to start: smaller, local conferences with narrow themes are great places to find colleagues with your specific interests. For example, the Queerness and Games Conference started as a San Francisco Bay Area conference that attracted a small but diverse group of academics, fans, and designers who were interested in queerness and social justice in videogames. Over the years, its attendance has grown. Larger organizations also have special interest groups and graduate support networks that can help you get started. For social justice in particular, the American Studies Association, the National Association of Ethnic Studies, and the National Women’s Studies Association cover a broad range of topics, many with significant digital humanities and media studies interest groups. HASTAC is a network of scholars interested in digital humanities and media production that provides extensive support for junior scholars working in social justice disciplines.

Supportive and experienced colleagues can help assess your work and refine it to address or avoid some of these pitfalls, or simply provide encouragement and direction for placing your scholarship where it will be more productively received. In addition to my institutional mentors, I have benefitted greatly from the input and collegiality of the #TransformDH Collective, a loosely affiliated group of early-career academics working to bring social justice to the forefront of digital humanities. We share resources, write together collaboratively, and invite each other to conference panels in order to increase our chances of getting on a

competitive program. Each in-person meeting is an opportunity to further refine our perspectives on social justice as they apply to our specific disciplines within digital humanities. Since no one scholar can have a view on everything, it is important to share and critique ideas, to hold each other accountable to the principles of justice and boost each other's confidence in a tough system. As social justice advocates and scholars have proven for decades, solidarity is vital to doing important, difficult work.

These tips are only a start, and it is important to remember that justice is a moving target: power is agile, and it adapts and shifts in order to maintain its foothold. Your toolkit must change over time. It is crucially important, therefore, to familiarize yourself with the fundamentals of social justice practice so that you can identify appropriate courses of action when there is no clear path. Be aware of your personal biases and the biases placed on you by disciplinary practices. Look beneath the surface to understand how power flows through structures. Place the needs, priorities, and safety of oppressed groups at the center of your work. Form scholarly and social communities to offer support, accountability, and continual learning. Social justice scholarship in game studies, or in any media studies discipline, is a small fraction of the work necessary to improve our world. While it is not sufficient by itself, it can, at its best, provide inspiration, critique, and nuanced conversation for those looking for wider-reaching cultural solutions.

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