



Key 1: Craft Your Approach

Explore how to craft games through the lenses of self-reflection and intersectionality to support your representation goals.

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Key 1 Overview

The Geena Davis Institute has been a pioneer in promoting diverse representation in entertainment and media by focusing on six major identities and their intersections: gender, race/ethnicity, LGBTQIA+ identity, disability, age, and body type.

We've found that it is important to be aware of how individuals' experiences vary depending on their intersecting identities, and how our own identity shapes our perspective.

Key 1 is divided into two learning achievements that will shape your approach to designing your game:

1. Self-reflection: Tap into personal reflections to guide thoughtful and respectful creative choices.
2. Intersectionality: Explore and understand how individuals' identities overlap and influence their experiences, to help you create authentic, multidimensional characters that will resonate with your players.

At the end of Key 1, you will find definitions of the core concepts covered in this section as well as references.

Achievement 1: Self-reflection

Tap into personal reflections to guide thoughtful and respectful creative choices.

Introduction

We all have preconceptions that impact our work. They can be related to societal norms, stereotypes, or personal experiences.

Self-reflection involves being open and candid about how our thoughts, backgrounds, and experiences can shape what we create. "Reflexivity" is a term for this approach.¹

Why It Matters

Personal experience can influence the types of stories that you tell and how you frame in-game actions and perspectives.

¹ GDI's primary basis for the reflexivity approach is the following: Soedirgo J, Glas A. Toward Active Reflexivity: Positionality and Practice in the Production of Knowledge.

During the writing process of your game, reflect on how your social identity and your team members' social identities might sway the narrative and research process for the game.

This can begin a conversation about how the team's backgrounds might influence stories or platforms, unintentionally favoring one group over another. And this self-awareness can help you craft more inclusive games.

Try It: Mapping Your Social Identity

Here's an exercise to help you better understand your social identity — in other words, how you identify yourself in relation to others — and how it shapes the stories and characters you may create.

Considerations

1. For each identity, reflect on how you identify and how this shapes your perspective. Keep in mind that you may not have just one answer and may choose “not applicable.”
2. Reflect on how experiences as a member of these identity groups might affect your interpretation of the story you're telling.
3. Ask yourself who you are in relation to the communities represented in your game.

Questions to Ask

- **Age:** How old are you? Do you identify with a specific generation, like Gen Z or the millennial generation?
- **Body Size:** Body neutrality means not dwelling on the shape or size of your body. But many people face discrimination due to their body size. Have you?
- **Disability:** Do you have a disability? This includes physical, cognitive, and communication disabilities, and some mental health issues.
- **Education:** What level of formal education have you completed? Do you have vocational training?
- **Ethnicity:** What is your ethnicity?
- **Gender Presentation:** What gender do you identify with?
- **Language(s):** Do you speak multiple languages?
- **National Origin:** In what nation were you born? Do you feel an attachment to that place?
- **Race:** What race do you identify with?
- **Religious or Spiritual Affiliation:** Do you identify as a member of a particular religion, or do you have another type of spiritual affiliation?
- **Sexual Orientation:** Do you identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or another sexual orientation?
- **Socioeconomic Status:** Socioeconomic status refers to your family's financial security. What is your level of financial security?

Chart to Map Your Social Identity

You can [download the chart here](#) to record your thoughts.

Social identity	How do you identify?	How does this identity shape your perspective?
Age		
Body Size		
Disability (Physical, Emotional, Developmental, Mental Health, Neurodiverse)		
Education		
Ethnicity		
Gender		
Language(s)		
National Origin		
Race		
Religious or Spiritual Affiliation		
Sexual Orientation		
Socioeconomic Status		

Here is another exercise for more practice: the University of Michigan's [Social Identity Wheel](#).

Questions to Guide Writing with Self-Reflection

These questions can help guide you:²

- Who do you suppose says the words your characters say? Why would they say them?
- Who does the narrative benefit? Does it create or reinforce inequalities?

² More guidance on this approach available from University of Michigan here: <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/dominant-narratives/>

- Is the story told from the perspective of a group with power? Is this a story that is promoted widely in the real world?
- What assumptions are being made in the narrative?
- Does the story ignore the perspective of a marginalized group that should be included?

Take Action

- Workshops: Attend workshops, seminars, or conduct rigorous research while you conceptualize your game. See our resources page for more information on where to find workshops.
- Record Keeping: Keep a detailed record of your thoughts and decisions throughout the development process, occasionally referring back to your notes from the social identity mapping exercise to keep awareness top of mind.

Achievement 1 Complete!

Apply It

Incorporate regular team discussions and workshops focused on exploring personal biases and perspectives, fostering a collective understanding of the importance of mindful representation in your game.

Achievement 2: Intersectionality

Explore and understand the role of intersectionality in creating authentic, multidimensional characters that will resonate with your players.

Introduction

The term “intersectionality” was coined by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, and considers how an individual’s various identities can combine — or intersect — to create unique experiences of oppression and discrimination.³

Why It Matters

Thinking about character design through an intersectional lens will improve diverse representation in your game and allow for more accurate portrayals of characters’ identities.

³ Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299.

For example, queer characters should be racially diverse to accurately reflect the real-world queer community. And thinking about the intersection of race and queer identity will lead to white, Latinx, or Black queer characters being portrayed in ways that reflect their unique experiences as queer people of color or as white queer people.

Intersectionality and the Nuances of Representation

Accurate representation requires considering identity intersections and their nuances.

An intersectional lens considers the intersection of gender, race, age, class, and other identities and the impact of multiple systems of bias and/or prejudice on a character's internal identity and on how the character is perceived.

Examples of Intersectionality in Media

- At the intersection of gender, race, and skin tone, differences emerge in terms of both who is on screen and the prominence of their role. [Read the report here.](#)
- Asian women are more likely than white women and other women of color to be visually and verbally objectified on screen. [Read the report here.](#)
- Harmful tropes about Muslims have existed on screen for decades, but these tropes vary for Muslim men and Muslim women. [Read the report here.](#)

Take Action

- Watch: [The urgency of intersectionality | Kimberlé Crenshaw | TED](#)
- Explore more about intersectionality in this guide from Dr. Olena Hankivsky: [Intersectionality 101.](#)

Achievement 2 Complete!

Apply It

Establish a protocol for ongoing education and research on intersectionality, encouraging your fellow game designers to actively seek diverse perspectives and experiences to inform character creation.

Core Concepts

Explicit Bias: A kind of bias that people are aware of having, like when someone has a conscious preference either for or against particular groups.

Implicit Bias: Unconscious beliefs that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions. These biases are often rooted in societal norms and can impact how we perceive and interact with others, particularly in relation to characteristics such as race, gender, or age.

Intersectionality: A framework for understanding how multiple aspects of a person's social and political identities (for example, gender, race, class, and sexuality) combine to create unique modes of discrimination and privilege (Crenshaw, 1991).

Reflexivity: The process of being aware of how one's background and experiences shape their perspective, and actively considering these influences in order to improve the objectivity and quality of one's decisions or perspectives.

References

1. GDI's primary basis for the reflexivity approach is the following: Soedirgo J, Glas A. Toward Active Reflexivity: Positionality and Practice in the Production of Knowledge. *PS: Political Science & Politics*. 2020;53(3):527-531. doi:10.1017/S1049096519002233. Retrieved from: <https://politicalsciencenow.com/toward-active-reflexivity-positionality-and-practice-in-the-production-of-knowledge/>
2. More guidance on this approach available from University of Michigan here: <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/dominant-narratives/>
3. Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299.

You have attained Key 1! Next, Key 2: Craft Stories.