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WHY HAVE THERE BEEN NO GREAT WOMEN OR NON-BINARY BOARD GAME DESIGNERS?

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Abstract

Board Games are becoming increasingly popular, and yet the Board Game designer population continues to be primarily made up of white men. This article intends to present the factors that may have held women and non-binary people back from occupying the Board Game community as intensely as men and which contribute to the homogeneity of Board Game designers today. Firstly, supported by the relevant literature, this article starts by establishing a connection between implicit stereotypes and the way we choose to spend our free time. Secondly, data from studies performed in different countries shows that, even when choosing to play Board Games, women have tendentially less free time than men to play – and, therefore, less time to develop ideas for new Board Games. Lastly, this article focuses on the women who play and how their experiences in Board Game events and conventions may prevent them from participating further in the hobby and its community, including in Board Game design.

Keywords: Board games; Women designers; Board game designers; Gender stereotypes; Gender inclusion

Introduction

Tabletop Games, so called due to being played around a table (as opposed to digital games played in virtual worlds), are important for human development in several dimensions. As moments of in-person socialization, they promote healthy social interactions between people, enhancing positive social relationships. Moreover, they are one of the leisure activities that recharge our energies, important for the maintenance of mental health. Studies in psychology suggest that frequently playing Tabletop Games can contribute to the reduction of symptoms of depression and anxiety (Noda et al., 2019). Lastly, considering the need to activate different cognitive abilities while playing, the benefits of Tabletop Games in the development of these abilities have also been systematically shown (Noda et al., 2019). It is not surprising, then, that these types of games are becoming one of the most popular hobbies of today (Booth, 2021).

Within Tabletop Games, we can find Board Games, Miniature Wargames, Roleplaying Games and Trading Card Games. Each of these categories has its own way of playing, its own community and, therefore, its own specific forms of discrimination and exclusion. Although it is important to analyse the presence of women and non-binary designers in all kinds of games, this article focuses specifically on Board Games, as they are becoming increasingly popular, including – curiously – with the generations that, according to the stereotype, would be fully committed to digital entertainment (Booth, 2021; Brown, 2021).

Despite this rising popularity, the Board Game community continues to be primarily made up of white men, especially when we look at Board Game designers, and further noticeable when it comes to the most famous names (Pobuda, 2018; 2023). As such, shamelessly paraphrasing the title from Linda Nochlin's (2015) famous 1971 article, "Why have there been no Great Women Artists?", this article draws a parallel search for the question "Why have there been no Great Women or Non-Binary Board Game Designers?".

One would be quick to think of the most obvious answer: yes, there have been great women Board Game designers. Although relatively unknown, even to Board Game enthusiasts, Lizzie J. Magie designed and patented the original version of what we now know as Monopoly, in 1904. Her game was called The Landlord's Game and it was intended as a cautionary tale against unfair rent charges and in favour of the single tax. Although Parker Bros rejected publishing the game, a few hundred homemade sets were sold among Quaker communities and university students, with each group making their own copy and adding their own changes, such as renaming the streets and adding the rule of rent increase from owning a set of properties. It was only when Charles Darrow came across one of these copies and had the means to produce five thousand sets and sell them through retail outlets that Parker Bros were persuaded of the commercial advantage of publishing the game. For decades, Darrow was credited as the creator of Monopoly, until around 1983, when a legal battle involving Ralph Anspach's Anti-Monopoly game brought to light the original patents and the game's actual origin (Parlett, 2018).

A more recent example, and possibly a much more likely name to come to mind to a Board Game fan, is Elizabeth Hargrave, the designer of Wingspan, Mariposas, and others.

Today, she is one of the loudest voices advocating for more female and non-binary representation in games and actively works to promote women and non-binary Board Game designers[1] (Hargrave, 2023).

Many other women and non-binary Board Game designers exist, yet naming them as examples does nothing to answer the real questions underlying the title of this article: do women Board Game designers exist in the same proportion as men? Or even in the same proportion to female players as male designers do to male players? Do non-binary designers exist in the same proportion to non-binary players in the community? Among the existing women and non-binary designers, how many, in proportion, are considered Great Designers (capitalization intended)? How many, in proportion, have had their games reach the top ratings of the most reliable Board Game websites? How many, in proportion, are surrounded by fans in conventions with questions about their next game? How many, in proportion, come to mind to enthusiasts when they are asked about their favourite designers? And, if disproportionately lower, *why*?

There is a severe lack of information regarding the Board Game community, when it relates to gender. The few studies that set out to know the composition of the Board Game community show that, despite a growing audience, Board Games continue to have a fanbase that is mostly populated by white men, whether as players or as industry workers (Booth, 2021; Hargrave, 2023; Pobuda, 2018). No studies were found reporting the rate of non-binary players. Regarding women, despite the many limitations derived from the convenience samples used, the few questionnaires to which we have access show roughly the same rates: around 25% of players are women (Hargrave, 2023). It would somewhat make sense, then, that women would make up around 25% of Board Game designers. This is far from being the case.

A 2018 study shows that, from the top 200 Board Games rated in the popular website BoardGameGeek.com (BGG), only 2.4% of designers were women, and only 4.1% were non-white men. In the sample, no game had been designed by a non-white woman or a (known) non-binary person (Pobuda, 2018). In the same year, and considering the ratings of the same website, the 50 most popular Board Game designers were mostly white men: only one (white) woman and one non-white men were on that list (Booth, 2021). More recently, Pobuda (2023) concluded that, among the designers of the top 400 Board Games on BGG, 92.6% were white men, 4.1% were non-white men, 2.7% were white women, and 0.5% were white non-binary people.

Why are there so few women and non-binary people designing Board Games? And why are these few not considered among the Great Designers? It was with the desire to understand the possible factors at play that this commentary article was planned, in order to provoke thought and discussion among the academic community (Green et al., 2006) regarding the research question: *What are the obstacles that hinder women and non-binary people from becoming Board Game designers?*

To design, one needs to play

To create something, or at least to create *something* that places our name in the History of those *somethings*, it is

considered essential to have had in-depth contact with several other *somethings* of the same type. Great Writers will read aplenty, Great Painters will study the works of other Great Painters, Great Musicians will spend hours upon hours listening to music. In each art, in each field, it is by studying what has been done before and what is being currently done that one draws inspiration, ideas, meanings, and tendencies.

It can be derived, then, that Great Board Game Designers play all kinds of Board Games, studying their mechanisms and mechanics, evaluating player interactions and classifying what types of games create what types of experiences. In videogames, this is a known reality, as a long history of playing games is a common first step for a game development career (Weststar & Legault, 2018). In the world of Tabletop Games, this has also been found by Booth (2021), through his interviews with 40 game designers, in which they all described themselves as, most of all, players.

Therefore, one of the factors that may contribute to so few women becoming Board Game *designers* could be that there are fewer women Board Game *players*. As aforementioned, around 25% of players are women (Hargrave, 2023) and there are no statistics regarding non-binary player. But why are there fewer women players than men?

To play, one needs to be interested in playing

Human beings do not live in a vacuum. The values ingrained in our society and the stereotypes we encounter throughout our lives deeply affect our brains and have consequences on our behaviour and our expectations (Rippon, 2019). Studies that tested reaction times related to implicit associations between words have shown that implicit stereotypes affect even the self-reported less prejudiced of people (Hinton, 2017). Therefore, stereotypes unconsciously affect the way we perceive the world, even when we consciously do not agree with those stereotypes and actively try to counter them in our thinking and judgement.

Moreover, most people tend to think about stereotypes as applied to other people: *I hold a stereotype about people of a certain social group to which I don't belong, and therefore I view anyone from that group through that lens*. These types of stereotypes certainly exist and affect the way people are regarded, treated, hired, considered for promotion, evaluated as a threat by police officers, and many other aspects of human life (Rippon, 2019).

However, humans don't just hold stereotypes about *the other*. Stereotypes are just as relevant and powerful when they are applied to the social groups to which we belong (Hentschel et al., 2019; Rippon, 2019). A study on implicit associations has shown that, when evaluating positive associations with different ethnic groups, certain cultural hierarchies were consistently found in the responses: Whites were rated highest, followed by Asians, Blacks and, finally, Hispanics. This consistency was found not only among White respondents, but among people belonging to all the mentioned ethnic groups (Axt et al., 2014).

In another study (Shih et al., 1999), Asian women were presented with a difficult math test. Through a questionnaire, a group of them were subtly reminded of their Asian identity.

These women performed better on the test than the control group. Another group were subtly reminded of their female identity. These women performed worse than the control group (Shih et al., 1999). The influence that stereotypes have on our own identity is called self-stereotyping and it can become unconsciously and deeply ingrained in our thought patterns, behaviours, and performance (Hentschel et al., 2019).

Additionally, and importantly, we don't internalize these stereotypes based only on what we experience in person, but also through all types of messages by which we are surrounded, including the ones present in the media we consume (Hinton, 2017; Rippon, 2019). A study by Martins and Harrison (2011) showed that higher television consumption levels was correlated with low self-esteem levels for white girls, black boys and black girls. The opposite was true for white boys: the higher their time spent watching television, the higher their self-esteem. The authors posited that this could be due to how these social groups are usually portrayed on television shows and movies (Martins & Harrison, 2011).

We may consciously disagree with gender or ethnic stereotypes, but the implicit associations made in our brains still unconsciously affect our judgement. The predictive coding theory in neuroscience posits that one's brain makes judgements and generates predictions based on statistical probabilities that come from one's experiences in life, in order to minimize prediction errors and constantly update and refine its model of the world (Hinton, 2017; Rippon, 2019). It is only when we have consistent and regular experiences that counter the stereotypes over a long period of time that we will be able to deconstruct these implicit biases (Hinton, 2017). This is why it is so important to have more women in STEM, more men in caretaking roles, more people of all gender identities, ethnicities, intellectual and physical abilities, age groups, and sexual orientations in all kinds of positions, professions, and social roles.

One term that has become familiar in stereotype literature is *stereotype threat*, defined as the fear of confirming a negative stereotype about one's own social group through one's characteristics or behaviours (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Studies in neuroscience have concluded that both women and men show a worse performance in tasks if they have been previously told that their gender usually performs worse in those tasks. Brain scans reveal that, instead of the task-appropriate areas, the areas of the brain that are activated in those instances are the ones that deal with error processing as well as social and emotional processing (Rippon, 2019). The anxiety generated in these situations can consume cognitive resources, leading to distraction and decreased focus (Hinton, 2017). Additionally, the fear of confirming stereotypes can lead individuals to disengage or avoid situations where their performance may be evaluated, further exacerbating the negative effects (Rippon, 2019).

Importantly, the stereotypes that affect us are not a reflection of an individual's abilities, inherent qualities or decision to hold certain beliefs. They are rather a consequence of the social and cultural contexts in which we operate, and depend on hegemonic representations (Connell, 1987; Hinton, 2017). Beliefs and stereotypes about gender include ideas about how people from each gender think, behave, and what they are interested in. These stereotypes come from the cultural

notion that men and women's biological differences make them intrinsically better at different roles in society, such as the 'breadwinner man' who is the head of the family and the 'stay-at-home woman' who is subordinate to the man (Connell, 1987).

Studies from the 1970s show that more than one third of all advertisements shown on television depicted women as domestic agents dependent upon men (Gill, 2007). It might be argued that these advertisements portrayed the reality of the time, but knowing what we now know about the influence that media stereotypes have on our brains, these advertisements did not only *portray* reality, but also *produce* reality. Children growing up watching this role division in their own family and watching such advertisements on television were thus constantly exposed to the message that women belong in domestic life and are to be dependent upon men, ingraining these stereotypes into the new generations.

As such, these gender roles operate through institutions such as the family, education, politics, and the media, which shape and reinforce gender norms and expectations by rewarding those who conform to its ideals and marginalizing or stigmatizing those who deviate from them (Connell, 1987). Stereotypes about gender roles, i.e., the specific tasks, positions, and professions that belong to each gender, however, are not disassociated with the stereotypes regarding the personality traits and characteristics that we associate as belonging to the different genders.

Connell (1987) has put forward the notions of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity, referring to the traits that have been socially constructed as the idealized form of masculinity and femininity in Western society. For hegemonic masculinity, these characteristics include physical strength, emotional stoicism, aggression, competitiveness, and the control and domination of others. On the other hand, the traits of emphasized femininity that are deemed desirable and appropriate for women within a patriarchal social order include qualities such as nurturance, submissiveness, passivity, attractiveness, and emotional sensitivity (Connell, 1987). A recent study has concluded that this gender distribution of traits still persists today in the associations made by both men and women: women were rated lower than men in agency traits, including assertiveness, independence, and leadership competence, and higher in communality traits, including concern for others, sociability and emotional sensitivity (Hentschel et al., 2019).

The propagation of these gender traits has had actual consequences in people's lives. Young boys get praised more often for getting answers right and finding solutions to problems, while young girls are praised more often for good behaviour and for having their work neat and tidy (Rippon, 2019). At home, women have held the highest share of domestic work and caretaking tasks, while at work they tend to drift toward employment related to care and service. In turn, men are thought to belong in roles of agency, problem solving, taking charge, and holding positions of power (Hentschel et al., 2019).

Therefore, gender stereotypes aren't limited to beliefs and ideas about what we *are*, and what we *should be*, but also include what we *are capable of* and what we *enjoy* doing. From

an early age, we live surrounded by images and messages about masculine and feminine activities, masculine and feminine toys, masculine and feminine professions, masculine and feminine hobbies (Hentschel et al., 2019; Rippon, 2019). Playing football, crocheting, restoring an old car, playing the harp. Although it is quite possible to find numerous examples of people of different genders in any of these activities, one could definitely make the case that there is an expectation in Western society about the *type* of person that likes to do those activities – and their gender. Board games are no exception.

If men are thought to be the ones that are good at solving problems, thinking rationally, and dominating others, then what better pastime than playing Board Games, in which you strategically solve problems in order to win (dominate)? This argument has been put forth in the realm of digital games by Walkerdine (2007), who asserts that many videogames are an arena for the production of contemporary masculinity, by encouraging and reiterating performativities of heroism, killing, winning, action, technological skill and rationality. As such, it could be possible that, if the idealised version of femininity involves being nurturing and submissive, girls might be self-stereotyped into dedicating themselves to other activities.

Yet, the industry holds its share of the blame. Modern Board Games have been commercialized and marketed to a very specific target population: young boys. The first commercial wargame, *Little Wars*, created by H. G. Wells in 1913, contained the following description in its first page: "*a game for boys* (…) *and for that more intelligent sort of girls who like boys' games and books*" (Wells, 1913, p. 1). Fifty years later, the cover of Battleship, published by Milton Bradley Company, contained in its 1967 edition the illustration of a family: father and son are front and centre, playing the game at the table; mother and daughter are in the background, washing and drying the dishes.

This is not just a 20th century problem, however. The famous study by Erin Ryan shows that, in 2016, it was more likely to find a sheep on a Board Game cover (7.5% of analysed Board Games) than a cover that contained only women (5%). On the other hand, covers that contained only men made up 62.6% of the sample (Ryan, 2016).

Pobuda (2018), when analysing the BGG top 100 Board Games published in 2017, and excluding aliens, animals and instances where the gender couldn't be determined, concluded that the games' box art portrayed white males 63.6% of the time, white females at 20.1%, men of colour at 9.7%, and women of colour at 6.6%. When expanding upon her first study, Pobuda (2023) found that, among the BGG top 200 Board Games, excluding aliens and animals, men represented 76.8% of the characters and women were represented 23.2% of the time.

Despite the famous saying to the contrary, Board Games, just like books, grab our attention and spread a message through their covers. However, we can see the dominance of male characters not only in covers, but also in the actual content of the games. Many Board Games have a complete lack of women characters, even when we take our focus away from wargames with all-male armies (Brown & Waterhouse-Watson, 2016). When we do find women represented in Board Games, they are often repetitions of two of the most common

feminine stereotypes in media: the damsel in distress and the femme fatale, frequently both hypersexualised through exaggerated curves and exposed skin. Although there are commendable exceptions, it is still rare to see a Board Game with a 50/50 split in characters, with female majority or with an all-female cast (Brown & Waterhouse-Watson, 2016).

Interestingly, when presented with an all-female character roster, such as is the case of One Deck Dungeon, designed by Chris Cieslik and published by Asmadi Games, some reviewers complain about the lack of male characters. On the BGG website, we can read: "*Was really excited to get my two nephews into this, seemed perfect for them. It's too complicated for what it appears and they really didn't connect at step one, choosing which female to be. Lack of a male character is odd*"[2]. In the same page, another reviewer comments: "*SJW* [Social Justice Warrior] *game. Made my sons disappointed and uninterested in characters. I'm sure people applaud the developers decision. The none inclusive nature of the game fell flat in my house*". In another review, we can read: "*Wasn't as good as the hype made me believe it would be. Hate the character choices...no males at all?? I'm a woman and I don't like this. It comes off as pandering and makes me feel like this is a chick game*"[3].

The latter comment brings up an interesting point about what is considered a "chick game", i.e., a game intended for women, which is (therefore) considered inferior. The genres of media more enjoyed by women than men have tendentially been classified as "lesser" genres. In television, such has been the case of soap operas (Gill, 2007). In videogames, casual games are strongly associated with women and are often considered as an inferior type of videogame, not played by "real" gamers (Kivijärvi & Katila, 2022).

However, even if one decides to ignore the implicit association of something made for women as being "lesser", it is noticeable how these reviews highlight a simple message: a game with only female characters is not a game for men or boys. If such is true, it is thus inferable that a game with only male characters is not a game for women or girls. And this has been much more common a case in Board Game history than the inverse.

It seems that Board Games follow the tendency of other types of media, in which the male gender is considered the norm, the *universal subject*, the *default*, and women and non-binary people are almost invisible (Gill, 2007). Representation in Board Games, as in other types of media, is important because it holds the potential to affect the way people view themselves in relation to that media and to other people who use that media (Booth, 2021; Pobuda, 2018).

Considering the messages, both obvious and subtle, in our environment, the media, and in Board Games themselves, telling us that games are for men, it does not seem surprising that many women and non-binary people haven't had the initiative to enter the Board Game hobby. But what about the ones that do?

To play, one needs time

Playing Board Games takes time, even if one takes only into account the amount of time needed for the specific act of

playing a Board Game: many Board Games have an estimated game time of one hour or more. To be involved in the Board Game hobby, one needs free time to play, i.e., free time to dedicate oneself to leisure activities. And this time is not the same for everyone. Studies performed in different countries, in Europe as in other parts of the world, have consistently shown that there are gender patterns regarding the uses of time (Amâncio, 2007; Anxo et al., 2011; Giminez-Nadal & Molina, 2020; Perista et al., 2016; Rubiano-Matulevich & Viollaz, 2019). Although unfortunately the studies analysed regarding this issue do not report on non-binary people's uses of time, the research shows that women and men tendentially spend their time differently.

The rate of participation in unpaid labour (domestic work and taking care of children or dependent adults) is much higher for women than for men in several countries (Perista, 2002). Even when analysing only the employed population, women spend more time in unpaid labour than men: studies show differences from 3 to 10 more hours a week (Amâncio, 2007; Giminez-Nadal & Molina, 2020; Perista, 2002).

This gender difference intensifies when studies compare people in more advanced phases of the traditional life path: women who cohabit with their male intimate partners spend more hours in unpaid work than single women, while time spent by men in both situations is relatively the same (Amâncio, 2007; Anxo et al., 2011). The presence of children crystalizes these gender roles even further: women with children spend from 11 to 40 hours more a week in unpaid labour than men in the same situation (Anxo et al., 2011). On the other hand, men spend around the same amount of time in unpaid work, with or without children (Rubiano-Matulevich & Viollaz, 2019).

The conclusions of these studies are equally crucial when one considers the total of productive activities, i.e., the sum of paid work and unpaid work. In Portugal, when analysing the employed population, Perista and her colleagues found, in 2016, that women spend, on average, an extra 1 hour and 13 minutes a day on productive activities (Perista et al., 2016).

And this is not just seen in Portugal: data from 19 countries have shown that, on average, women spend an extra 30 minutes every day on productive activities, when compared to men (Rubiano-Matulevich & Viollaz, 2019). The direct consequence of this is that women, on average, tend to have less free time to spend in leisure activities (Anxo et al., 2011), given that studies show that men report spending an extra 36 minutes a day on leisure activities when compared to women (Rubiano-Matulevich & Viollaz, 2019). In fact, Erin Davis presented research at the 2013 BGGCon[4], a Board Game convention, in which the women interviewed shared their and their friends' experiences with trying to balance Board Game playing and domestic responsibilities. More recently, Pobuda (2022) has shared her doctoral research corroborating these findings. At the end of a long day of (paid and unpaid) work, women report not often having the time or energy to play Board Games (Pobuda, 2022).

The fact that we do not all have the same 24 hours in a day is an argument that Elizabeth Hargrave herself has put forward (2023) as one of the possible causes for the small number of women Board Game designers: designing games is

something that is done mainly on one's free time, and certain demographic groups have more time and more resources to do so than others. However, it is not only a lack of time that creates obstacles for the participation of women and non-binary people in the Board Game hobby.

To play, and to design, one needs to be included

Being involved in the Board Game hobby usually means more than having two or three games at home to play with one's family. Board Game fans usually frequent each other's houses, game stores, Board Game cafés or associations, and participate in national and international Board Game conventions. In these events, one is able to try different games, meet new people with whom to play, test Board Game prototypes, and exchange ideas, experiences, knowledge, and perspectives with other fans and designers. This social component is an important part of the Board Game hobby – not only the socialization inherent with playing a Board Game with other people, but the socialization of all the activities before, after, and around the actual play. Being an active participant in the Board Game hobby usually means being an active participant in its community, and, as all other social activities, carries a risk of rejection and exclusion.

This social integration in the community becomes even more essential when one has the intention to design a Board Game. Differently than creating a book, a painting, or a musical piece, creating a Board Game is, by itself, an extremely social process. An indispensable phase of Board Game design involves repeated contact with other people in the community: the testing phase. It is considered essential to test one's prototype several times, ideally by several different people. It is by observing people's experiences while playing the game and by listening to their opinions, that a designer improves, clarifies, changes or removes rules, in order to make a better final product. Moreover, it is often in Board Game conventions that designers attempt to pitch their ideas and prototypes to Board Game publishers (Booth, 2021). As such, it becomes essential to analyse the experience of people of different genders when participating in these Board Game events and conventions.

The Board Game community holds many "invisible ropes", as named by Gill Hova (cited in Booth, 2021) in an unfortunately no longer available online blog. These invisible ropes are attitudes and behaviours that hinder a person's entry into the community. One sets forth to enter and encounters an invisible rope that prevents one from moving forward. Perhaps it is the experience of having other players make assumptions about one's lack of ability due to not being a man, an experience that several women have shared (Booth, 2021; Peaker, 2019).

Perhaps, on the other hand, it is the anxiety one might feel due to being a female player or a non-binary player, as a few of Brown's (2021) interviewees have shared. In these instances, the effects of the aforementioned stereotype threat are felt. If John plays a certain way, it is because he is John and that is the way that John plays; if Mary plays a certain way, it is because she is a woman and that is the way that women play. Surrounded by stereotypes and attitudes that propagate the notion that women are not interested in playing, or are not as strategically-inclined as men, some women

feel internalized pressure to perform well and prove that they belong in the gaming world, so as to not reinforce the stereotype to the other (male) players at the table (Brown, 2021; Peaker, 2019). If playing becomes more stressful than fun, it makes sense that some people may find other activities to relax in leisure times.

Yet, one might be persistent, and willing to try again, only to be hindered by other invisible ropes. Perhaps it is a male designer that ignores a female tester's opinions but avidly takes notes when male players express those same opinions, as was recounted by a player interviewed by Booth (2021). Perhaps it is noticing that, in a local game store that hosts Board Game events, the unisex bathroom does not have a trashcan and as such there is no place to dispose of menstruation products, as was experienced by the author of this paper. Perhaps it is by noticing that all keynote speakers at a convention where white men, as recounted by Maria (2015). Perhaps it is being the subject of sexual harassment, an objectifying male gaze or a sexualising comment one too many times, as was shared by Garland (2016), Kalyndra (2014) and Maria (2015).

What should be the limit to one's persistence, to one's tolerance of intolerance? Could we fault anyone for leaving a community in which they do not feel welcome? Studies in neuroscience have shown that the pain of social rejection activates the same areas of the brain as physical pain (Rippon, 2019). As such, in the same way as we subsequently avoid placing our hand in boiling water after getting burned the first time, human beings have developed a rejection sensitivity as a way to predict and expect the situations in which we might be socially rejected, in order to protect ourselves (Rippon, 2019). Our brains are, consciously or unconsciously, paying attention to these social cues of rejection. The invisible ropes that permeate the Board Game community come together to create a hostile environment that, implicitly or explicitly, tells certain people that they do not belong in the Board Game hobby.

Participating in Board Game gatherings and conventions is not always a motivating and positive experience, and this hostility can be especially restrictive to someone who is designing their own Board Game. As Gage (1883) put it, inventions are the result of much consideration, and inventors need to have not only the necessary freedom to think and exercise their powers, but also the necessary receptivity and protection of their ideas. Even when not explicitly rejecting the presence of women in the community, the implicit biases we hold may lead us to unconsciously embrace a man's Board Game idea, while rejecting the same idea if brought forth by a woman.

Conclusions

From the obstacles that act before we even think about trying Board Games, such as stereotypes and gender roles, to the invisible ropes that act when we do try to enter the hobby or when we actively participate in the community, it is possible to see how women and non-binary people have been consistently pushed away from Board Games, both as players and as designers. When analysing all these factors, I am reminded of the sentiment expressed by Gage (1883) when writing about women inventors: it is less surprising that so few women and non-binary people have designed games than the fact that some have done so at all.

The Board Game hobby will only become more inclusive when there is greater diversity in the voices of people who create them. This will not only make Board Games themselves much more diverse, but will also open doors and possibilities to young people of all genders to explore this possibility as a hobby and/or as a career (Booth, 2021). It is only when we start to see more and more women Board Game designers that the implicit stereotypes about women as players and as designers will start to be deconstructed and countered.

The participation of people of all genders in the Board Game hobby is crucial, not only for women and non-binary people – giving them access to such a beneficial activity – but also for the hobby itself. Gathering different perspectives from different social conditions brings new ideas, new games, new dynamics, new mechanisms and new themes. It enriches our hobby and the experiences it brings us. It is time for women to claim this leisure activity, this career possibility. It is time for the Board Game community to open its doors and cut its invisible ropes. It is time to have more Great Women and Non-Binary Board Game Designers.

Author contributions

Carolina Magalhães Dias: Conceptualization, Writing, Reviewing, Editing.

Endnotes

1 See Elizabeth Hargrave's website for more information: https://www.elizhargrave.com/women-nonbinary-designers

2 Review available at: https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/179275/one-deck dungeon/ratings?pageid=1&comment=1&rating=1

3 Review available at: https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/179275/one-deck-dungeon/ratings?pageid=1&comment=1&rating=3

4 Erin Davis' preliminary report available at: https://docs.google.com/file/d/0BxMj6fVK-hgIOGtrMFR5c1dVdFk/edit?resourcekey=0-UFjSG_7G9lFgcnIGqiRcxA

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