eludamos
Journal for Computer Game Culture
Vol. 17, No. 1: Party Studies in Game Studies (2026)

eludamos.org

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Eludamos: Journal for Computer Game Culture
Volume 17, issue 1: Party Studies in Game Studies (2026), pp. 115–140

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Safety at Game Industry Events in Finland

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Abstract

Global game industry events pose safety concerns for women and gender-diverse attendees, but events organised within the Finnish game industry are experienced as safe, particularly by women attendees. This article examines how the sense of safety is produced at Finnish game industry events by using empirical material and situating the analysis within party studies. Four interlinked sources of safety are identified: individual safety precautions, social safety forming from close connections, institutional safety providing formal rules and processes, and cultural safety arising from shared community values. While individual safety precautions place responsibility on participants themselves, the latter three dimensions together form a community accountability model that explains how the sense of safety is collectively maintained. By foregrounding safety as a precondition for successful social connection, this article extends party studies by demonstrating how event design, organisers’ actions, and community practices can enable authenticity, belonging, and participation.

Keywords

Game industry; events; safety; gender; harassment; diversity; inclusion

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After the annual Game Developers’ Conference (GDC) held in San Francisco in spring 2023, the game industry press reported various incidents of sexual harassment, assault, and drink-spiking experienced by women attendees at off-site parties and on show floors (Batchelor, 2023; Bevan, 2023; Blake, 2023; Mercante, 2023a). This information was neither new nor surprising, as stories of abuse and harassment had already been reported from earlier GDC conventions and other industry events, including PAX East, Gamescom Dev, and Nordic Games (Batchelor, 2022; Bevan, 2022; Mercante, 2023b; Robertson, 2023).

At the same time, survey data collected from Finnish game developers indicated that women and gender-diverse individuals reported less harassment and fewer unwanted encounters at local game industry events than in their workplaces

Eludamos Vol. 17, No. 1: Party Studies in Game Studies (2026), pp. 115–140
https://doi.org/10.7557/ejcgc.v17i1.8277
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(Myöhänen, 2023). In response to the question on event safety, respondents generally reported feeling very safe at local game industry events. Latter is noteworthy as sexual harassment and other forms of unwanted behaviour are known to contribute to safety concerns (Butt, 2022; Consalvo, 2008; Fisher et al., 2025; Fisher & Harvey, 2013; Harvey, 2022; Taylor, 2024). The discrepancy between global reports and local results led to the following research questions: do women really feel safe at Finnish game industry events, how safe do other underrepresented groups feel, and, if safety is experienced, which factors contribute to that?

Safety concerns related to event participation are not trivial in the game industry, as events hold significant value for career development. Researchers have shown that individuals who attend game industry events are more likely to find new career opportunities, gather useful information, receive support for work-related issues, and demonstrate commitment to their careers (Browne & Whitson, 2021; Butt, 2022; Harviainen et al., 2022; Komulainen & Sotamaa, 2020; O'Donnell, 2014). Conversely, non-participation can negatively impact career progression (Browne & Whitson, 2021). As such, game industry events are situated at the intersection between work and leisure, thus exemplifying the blurring of boundaries between professional and personal life, which is characteristic of neoliberal capitalism and cultural industries (McRobbie, 2016). At a broader scale, safety concerns reinforce exclusionary cultures within the industry, which may hinder the participation of underrepresented groups (Butt, 2022; Fisher et al., 2025; Harvey, 2022; Ochsner, 2019; Taylor, 2024; Weststar & Legault, 2018).

The Finnish game industry hosts a wide range of events, from company anniversaries and publication parties to special interest meetings, game jams, and smaller conventions. In this article, particular attention is given to monthly meetups organised by the local branch of the International Game Developers Association, IGDA Finland. These events present several compelling aspects for the purpose of this study. First, they are widely known among local developers, held in major cities across the country, and are free and open to all. Second, although labelled as meetups, these events operate in ways that party studies identify as parties: they take place after work hours, usually in venues associated with partying such as bars or nightclubs (Butt, 2022), facilitate social interaction and identity work (Sutton-Smith, 1997), connect strangers and friends, support the continuity of local game industry culture, and include repeated, ritualised activities such as conversations, drinking, music, games, talks, and game demo presentations (Masek & Stenros, 2024). However, despite the party-like nature of the events, I have decided to use the term *event* throughout this article, out of courtesy to organisers and, as discussed later, recognising the importance of event naming for the creation of safety.

Reading professional events through party studies enables an analytical shift from instrumental values, such as networking, career growth, and information sharing, towards social interaction, norms, and rituals that are also present in these events.

Participation at these events is shaped not only by goal-oriented networking practices but also by social encounters, rules, and playfulness, which may exceed instrumental ambitions. According to Masek and Stenros (2024, p. 87) successful parties are defined by organisers' active facilitation of social connection and engagement, through which playfulness emerges. Continuing my earlier work on who is able to participate in events and on what terms (Myöhänen, 2025), I argue that the ability to form meaningful social connections depends on the sense of safety. While opportunities to attend are not equally available to everyone (Myöhänen, 2025), nor are the conditions for socialising and engaging with others. When safety concerns prevent participation, they also limit access to social and playful interactions – even when these interactions would be crucial for career progression.

This article examines the relationship between organisers' implementation of event safety measures and how participants perceive them. The analysis extends the earlier notion of Masek and Stenros (2024) by showing how such facilitation must also address safety in order to be effective. When organisers fail to recognise differing safety concerns, or prioritise the needs of dominant groups, participation becomes limited to those already in privileged positions. In the end, I outline a *community accountability model* that identifies social, institutional, and cultural dimensions through which organisers can facilitate safer events.

The central aim of this article is to offer concrete, empirically grounded examples from the Finnish game industry that event organisers and communities elsewhere can draw on to strengthen their event safety. This article also contributes to the growing body of local game production studies, which have revealed how practices are shaped differently by local laws, cultures, and customs (Keogh, 2021; Kerr, 2021; Prescott & Bogg, 2013; Sotamaa, 2021; Sotamaa & Švelch, 2021). As Aphra Kerr (2021, p. 296) has suggested, conducting local production studies can help situate heterogeneity within the game industry. From this perspective, this article broadens the scope of the existing research on game industry event safety, which has concentrated almost exclusively on large international conventions, and offers alternative views grounded in a local ecosystem.

Research on game industry event safety

Empirical studies have confirmed that safety concerns at industry events primarily affect women and gender-diverse individuals, although these are also the groups that research has predominantly focused on. Ochsner (2019) found that during the 2012 Twitter campaign #1ReasonWhy, responding to the question of "why there are so few female game makers in the industry", 10% of event-related tweets by women addressed safety concerns. Taylor (2024) has characterised game industry conventions as unsafe for women, attributing this to the infrastructural conditions of large events. Butt (2022), while acknowledging the formative role of party culture in new creative industries, highlights that alcohol usage itself does not make

women feel unsafe, but that drunken behaviour and the tendency to use alcohol as an excuse for unwanted advances create safety concerns.

Several researchers, including Kerr (2006, 2021) and Consalvo (2008), have argued that the historical dominance of white, young, cisgender men in game cultures has created homogeneity that fosters exclusive and discriminatory cultural practices. In this context, harassment is a key factor contributing to safety concerns and is rooted in the industry's gender imbalance. In Ochsner's (2019) study, 15% of tweets described unwanted advances from men and the sexualisation of women developers, who were treated as event promoters ('booth babes') or attendees' girlfriends. Fisher and Harvey (2013) reported similar event experiences among aspiring women developers in Canada, particularly feelings of being unwelcome due to the lack of other women present. Butt (2022, p. 205) further observed how event safety concerns can create professional dilemmas for women and gender diverse industry members, as attending events may feel necessary, but may also involve the risk of encountering harassment (see also Fisher & Harvey, 2013; Ochsner, 2019; Taylor, 2024).

More recent studies of GDC and other major conventions document different personal tactics, or strategies, to cope with harassment and discrimination (Butt, 2022, pp. 205, 208; Fisher et al., 2025; Taylor, 2024). Butt (2022, p. 204) reports that during GDC 2018, several women experienced or witnessed sexual harassment. She highlights how common game industry party venues, such as nightclubs and bars, are often associated with sexual encounters, which further exposes women to unwanted advances in these environments (Butt, 2022, pp. 207–208, 218).

Research has also shown that homogeneity within the industry places pressure on underrepresented individuals to adapt to dominant norms (Butt, 2022; Harvey, 2022; Ochsner, 2019; Prescott & Bogg, 2013). Underrepresented people are left to develop their own coping strategies to survive in the industry (Butt, 2022, pp. 205–206; Harvey, 2022; Taylor, 2024). This self-reliance has also been acknowledged in local industry studies (e.g., Fousek Krobová & Švelch, 2023; Szczepanska, 2023). The pressure to develop individual coping strategies has been connected to neoliberal values (Butt, 2022; Szczepanska, 2023; see McRobbie, 2016). However, as Fisher et al. (2025) emphasise, individuals who are closer to majority groups and hold greater independence at work have more resources to avoid unwanted encounters.

Efforts to improve game industry event safety have included targeted events for underrepresented groups, alcohol-free gatherings, and events organised outside bars and nightclubs (Butt, 2022; Fisher et al., 2025; Harvey, 2022; Komulainen, 2019; Taylor, 2024). It is worth noting that while alternative events may be free from sexual harassment and may therefore be considered safer, they may still not be inclusive – nor even safe – for every attendee (Fisher et al., 2025).

Data and method

Survey data

The first dataset derives from the 2023 Experience Survey conducted by We in Games Finland (WiGFi), a non-profit organisation supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion within the Finnish game industry. WiGFi's biennial online surveys gather insights on diversity, equity, and inclusion within the Finnish game industry community. The 2023 survey was conducted in collaboration with Better Games Together, an initiative involving Finnish game companies Supercell, Rovio, Metacore, and Next Games to support LGBTQIA+ professionals in the industry.

The survey format was familiar to me: I served as WiGFi's chair when the first survey was designed in 2021. In 2023, together with researcher Susi Nousiainen, we provided advisory support for survey planning and conducted analyses for WiGFi (Myöhänen & Nousiainen, 2023; Nousiainen & Myöhänen, 2023). I hold a contractual right to use the 2023 survey data for my own research.

The survey was distributed through organisers' channels, newsletters, and major social media platforms followed by Finnish game industry professionals, resulting in 130 responses. The majority of respondents were current or former industry professionals (89%), alongside game students (7%) and individuals working in fields closely related to the game industry (4%), such as service providers. 55% of respondents had under five years of industry experience, while 8% had over 15 years. In terms of gender, 53% of respondents were women, 37% men, 7% were gender diverse, and 3% chose not to disclose their gender. Due to the collaboration with Better Games Together, LGBTQIA+ issues were emphasised. In separate questions, 38% of respondents identified as LGBTQIA+ community members and 4% as transgender. Other underrepresented identities were not systematically surveyed but appeared in open responses.

Compared to local industry demographics, women and LGBTQIA+ individuals were overrepresented in the survey. At the time of data collection, women comprised 22% and diverse genders approximately 9% of the Finnish game industry workforce of 4100 individuals (Neogames, 2023). While exact data on LGBTQIA+ representation are currently unavailable due to Finnish employment legislation and limited research, estimates suggest that their proportion exceeds 20% (WiGFi chair E. Jukkala, personal communication, September 17, 2023). Given that the focus of this study is on underrepresented groups, this deviation supports rather than distorts the research aims.

Interview data

The second dataset originates from interviews conducted in 2023 as part of my dissertation project. The full dataset includes 33 recorded online interviews and one email interview with individuals from underrepresented groups in the Finnish game industry community.

Ethical approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of the Tampere Region for the research. Given my prior employment and equity work in the industry, reflexivity formed an integral part of the research design and execution. To make my insider researcher position clear, I disclosed my industry background and my previous affiliation with WiGFi in interview calls, and explained my research interest at the beginning of every interview (Coghlan & Shani, 2008; Humphrey, 2007). Interviewees signed the consent form after the interview to ensure they had full knowledge of what they were consenting to (Rothe, 2022).

The call for participation was shared in Finnish game industry professionals' social media groups and through my own social media channels and networks. Recorded interviews ranged from 39 to 146 minutes and were conducted in Finnish or English. Discussions followed an interview question list that was structured to avoid biases and checked before interviews by both research experts and possible target group members. Event questions formed the last section of the list. During the interviews, I emphasised the importance of interviewees' opinions and experiences and monitored my tone of voice and commenting.

Interviewees represented intersecting underrepresented identities. 19 of them were Finnish, including language and ethnic minorities, and 15 were from abroad, representing all major continents. All but one interviewee lived in Finland, with 16 residing outside the capital region. Their professional roles covered most areas of game production, and their career lengths varied from 4 months to 23 years. Companies they worked for ranged from small start-ups to large corporations, with four interviewees unemployed at the time of the interviews. 12 interviewees used she/her pronouns, five used he/him, and six used they/them. Others used multiple pronouns, several favouring she/they, and some chose not to identify through pronouns (which is not required in the Finnish language).

Interview questions did not specifically address sexuality, ethnicity, disability, or other similar identity markers, but interviewees frequently contextualised their experiences through their identities. Five identified as queer, and twelve belonged to sexual minorities. Four interviewees disclosed having a physical disability, and eight identified as neurodivergent. While most interviewees were white or white-passing, nine expressed that they were of non-Finnish ethnic origin. Four people identified as transgender. The group also included individuals belonging to different religious backgrounds.

Protecting informants is crucial in production studies focusing on smaller communities; for example, Butt (2022, p. 162) excluded domestic observations due to the difficulty of ensuring participants' privacy. As presenting the above-mentioned intersecting personal information in chart form could compromise the privacy of several interviewees, I chose not to disclose identifying information in a more detailed format than provided above. Relevant contextual background is included in citations to ensure analytical insight.

Prior to analysis, interviews were transcribed and anonymised. Given that my insider position likely helped build trust with the interviewees, and being aware of the potential for 'over-sharing' (Humphrey, 2007), I offered participants the opportunity to review and modify their transcripts. Ten accepted this offer, resulting in one minor, location-related change. Some citations in this article have been translated from Finnish to English.

Survey analysis

Both datasets covered a range of issues beyond events. Segments related to event experiences were first identified, and the analysis then focused on these selected parts.

The survey's numerical responses primarily informed analysis of perceived safety among women and other underrepresented groups. Due to small sample sizes, gender options 'non-binary', 'genderfluid' and those unsure of their gender were grouped under the category 'diverse genders'. Results from questions "If you don't attend events at all or often, why not" (n = 108) and "How safe do you feel at IGDA events" (n = 99) were calculated and compared against respondents' gender, career length, and LGBTQIA+ identification. The first question included 12 preset response options, and the second used a five-point Likert scale. Respondents were advised to skip these questions if they had not attended events.

Survey responses concerning experiences of unwanted behaviour at Finnish game industry events (n = 111) were analysed similarly and cross-analysed with responses related to IGDA event safety. This question included a list of preset options from which respondents could select all that applied, and an option to add experiences not listed.

Interview analysis

Interview analysis focused mostly on sections in which interviewees addressed pre-formulated questions about their event experiences regarding their safety, such as the importance of codes of conduct and their reasons for perceived event safety, but sections where these topics were raised spontaneously were also included. For the analysis, I applied Nicmanis' (2024) reflexive content analysis

method, chosen for its emphasis on researcher reflexivity. Coding was done inductively but guided by the research questions. The analysis structure developed through this coding process forms the structure of the following sections.

My positioning required ongoing critical reflection, especially during interview analysis. While my background in the game industry provided useful contextual knowledge for situating participants' experiences, certain aspects, such as different safety conceptions and experiences related to immigration, required additional contextualisation of interviewees' backgrounds. Throughout the analysis, I reflected by writing about my own understanding of event safety concerns, which, I realised, had been largely shaped by my prior work against sexual harassment at WiGFi. Acknowledging my biases helped me to ensure interviewees' perspectives, especially when they described positive experiences. Ultimately, the findings included issues that I had not considered in earlier practical work, which further reasoned for the value of the study.

After the interview analysis described below, the survey's open-ended, event-related responses were subjected to deductive analysis. This analysis followed the interview analysis structure in order to confirm – or challenge – findings from interview analysis.

Women's safety at Finnish game industry events

When asked about reasons for not attending game industry events, only 3% of survey respondents selected the option "I don't feel safe", with one respondent specifying that their concern related to the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, more respondents indicated safety concerns in response to the question on perceived safety at IGDA Finland events, indicating that such concerns exist but they did not prevent participation.

IGDA events' safety was assessed on a five-point scale, ranging from "not safe at all" (1) to "extremely safe" (5). Over half of survey respondents, 53%, reported feeling extremely safe, and 40% selected the second highest option (4), bringing the combined total for the two safest ratings to 93%. Among women, the combined total for the two safest options was slightly higher, at 96%, with 47% selecting "extremely safe". Men more frequently chose the highest rating at 68%, but their combined total of the highest options was slightly lower than that of women, at 94%.

These results indicate that women generally feel safe at local industry events. To understand the reasons why women reported such high ratings at Finnish game industry events, I examined factors commonly associated with women's safety concerns identified in earlier research by comparing them to the local industry environment.

Gender imbalance has often been identified as a root cause of women's safety concerns in the industry (Consalvo, 2008; Harvey, 2022; Kerr, 2006). This explanation would imply a more equal gender composition in the Finnish game industry. Yet the local industry remains heavily male-dominated, with women comprising a smaller share of the workforce than the European average at the time of the study (EGDF, 2025; Neogames, 2023).

Event venues have also been linked to safety issues. Butt (2022, p. 218) notes that industry events are often held in bars and nightclubs that encourage alcohol consumption and gendered behaviour, thereby affecting women's safety. However, IGDA Finland's events are likewise held in bars or nightclubs, and alcohol consumption is a common activity at meetups (Myöhänen, 2025; Komulainen, 2019), suggesting that venue choice does not account for the results.

Sexual harassment has been identified as a major contributor to women's safety concerns in the game industry events (Butt, 2022; Consalvo, 2008; Fousek Krobová & Švelch, 2023; Harvey, 2022; Szczepanska, 2023). To examine this, I analysed responses to the survey question concerning unwanted experiences at Finnish game industry events over the past two years, with a focus on experiences of sexual harassment. It is worth noting that these responses covered a broader range of local events, such as game jams, conferences, and workshops, and therefore do not allow for conclusions about harassment experiences at IGDA events specifically.

The most frequently reported form of event sexual harassment was unwanted sexual teasing, jokes, stories, remarks, or gestures, with 9% of all respondents having such experiences, all but one of whom were women. Sexual comments about clothing, anatomy, or looks were reported by 7%, again with all but one response coming from women. Unwanted messaging, phone calls, or pressure for non-work-related dates or chats were reported by 3%, as were experiences of unwanted deliberate touching such as leaning over, cornering, hugging, or pinching, all these experiences were shared by women. One respondent, also a woman, reported someone asking or spreading rumours about her sexual fantasies, sexual life, or sexual history. No experiences of actual or attempted rape or sexual assault were reported in the 2023 survey.

These results indicate that sexual harassment exists in the Finnish game industry as well, and is a problem encountered almost solely by women. Interview analysis further confirmed that women recounted experiences of sexual harassment. Although not all women were subjected to such behaviour, those who had often described serious consequences, including reduced willingness to attend events and, in some cases, reconsideration of career plans or decisions to leave the industry altogether. An earlier WiGFi study reported that some women avoided friendly interactions with men at events as they could be misinterpreted as flirting (Myöhänen, 2023). One woman interviewee with seven years of industry experience summarised her situation as follows:

> Sometimes I'm surprised that I'm still in this business. I've had so many unpleasant advances and comments, and everything else that I've been subjected to.

However, harassment did not fully correlate with perceived safety. A comparison of reported sexual harassment experiences and event safety ratings in the survey revealed that although respondents who reported lower safety ratings (values 2 or 3) had experienced sexual harassment, the majority of women reporting event-related sexual harassment, 85%, still selected the highest safety ratings (4 or 5), with half choosing "extremely safe". This challenges the assumption that sexual harassment directly determines perceived safety.

An interesting aspect emerged among women with international event experience. They consistently described Finnish industry events as safe, but this did not apply to international events. One interviewee, travelling to international conferences to source contracting partners for her successful mobile game company, described her recent experiences abroad:

> We were just at a conference in [North American city] and it was still visible there, just like an everyday thing. They looked at me and my female colleagues from head to toe, and even though we were the only representatives of our company, we were not approached except in attempts of sexual encounters. It was really interesting, as perhaps I had already got used to the fact that the situation was no longer like this. And then you meet someone outside the Finnish bubble and you're like, oh, this habit is still very much alive here.

The most blatant experiences of sexual harassment shared by interviewees had also occurred abroad, usually at larger conventions, such as an incident with male Ubisoft personnel who propositioned one woman interviewee and offered a meeting with their company in exchange for sex. These statements align with earlier research notions on safety concerns at international industry conventions (Butt, 2022; Harvey, 2022; Ochsner, 2019; Taylor, 2024) and highlight the difference between local and global event contexts, underlining the heterogeneity of the game industry (Keogh, 2021; Kerr, 2021; Sotamaa, 2021; Sotamaa & Švelch, 2021). These accounts also raise questions about how event safety is shaped by the scale and context of professional events.

The safety perceptions of underrepresented groups

Survey data allowed for the separate analysis of responses from gender diverse individuals and LGBTQIA+ community members. Across genders, respondents with diverse gender identities reported the lowest levels of perceived safety. While 88%

of gender diverse respondents selected one of the two safest options, only 25% chose "extremely safe" (see Figure 1). This gender group also reported the lowest safety levels in the 2021 survey (Myöhänen, 2023). However, the smaller number of gender diverse respondents compared to women and men limits the robustness of this finding.

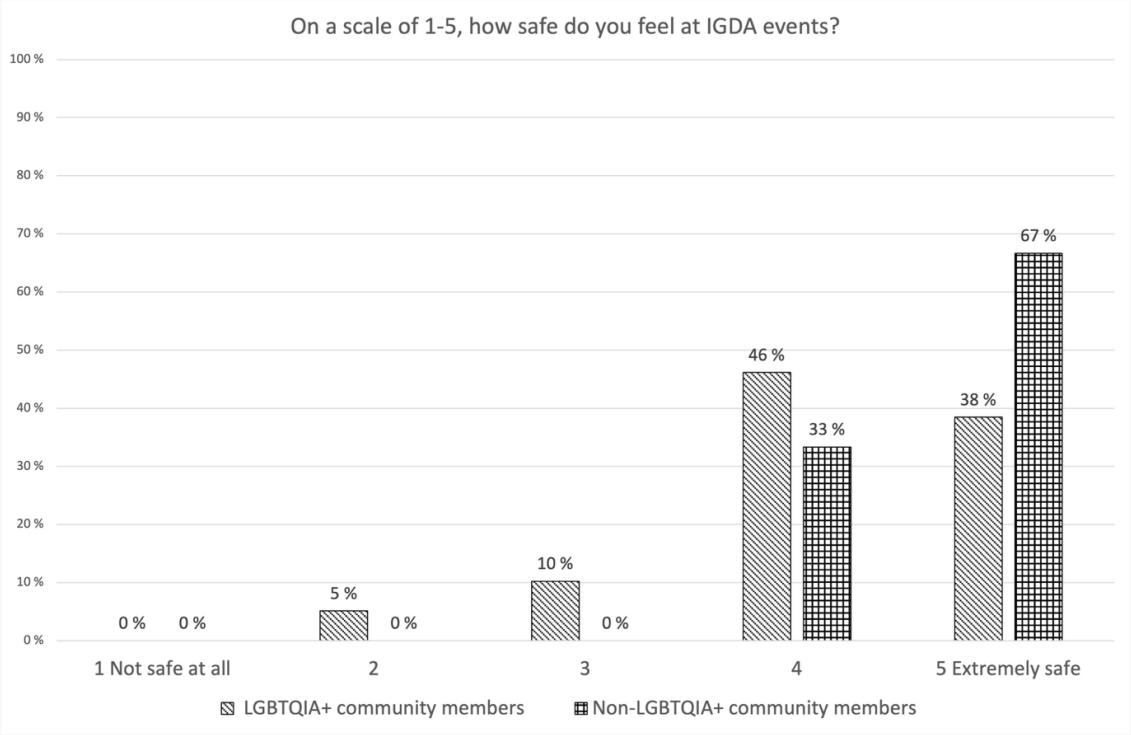

Figure 2. Event safety by LGBTQIA+ belonging.

Even so, safety ratings among gender diverse respondents aligned closely with those of LGBTQIA+ community members. Among LGBTQIA+ respondents, the two safest options combined accounted for 85%. This is significant, as among non-LGBTQIA+ respondents, the same figure was 100% (see Figure 2). This indicates comparatively high safety concerns among LGBTQIA+ community members. It is still important to note that LGBTQIA+ individuals' safety results varied considerably; some, for example, considered local game industry events very safe compared to events outside the professional environment, as one openly transgender interviewee described: "I feel safer here than anywhere else".

During the interviews, I asked how safe interviewees felt at local industry events. Interviewees' responses mirrored survey findings: all confirmed feeling safe at local industry events, some confidently, others under certain conditions. I deliberately refrained from defining safety, allowing interviewees to interpret safety themselves. In the analysis, it became evident that conceptions of safety varied, often reflecting the identity aspects most discussed in the interviews. For example, women frequently referred to the ability to avoid sexual harassment, expatriates highlighted Finland's general safety, and interviewees who discussed their Black or Asian ethnic origin highlighted discrimination and racism as sources of their safety concerns.

LGBTQIA+ interviewees most frequently emphasised emotional safety as central to their event experiences, a pattern that may relate to minority stress arising from

conflicts between their values and those of dominant groups (Meyer, 2003). A well-connected queer interviewee who actively attended events described:

> I've never been harassed or anything like that, ever. It's just like emotional safety is the big thing. So if I feel like, okay, these people just do not get me, this group of people is gonna be weird or awkward or the vibe isn't gonna be good, then I'm not gonna go.

While this material does not allow for a more nuanced exploration of differences in safety conceptions, these findings highlight that safety concerns are not a universal experience, but rather a construction connected to lived experiences and identity. Understanding this holds an important role in addressing event safety concerns; if the varying reasons behind safety concerns are not studied, the challenges faced by specific groups may be overlooked. In our report for WiGFi on LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the Finnish game industry, we noted that although the industry was framed as accepting and inclusive, non-LGBTQIA+ members tended to believe that the industry had greater acceptance towards LGBTQIA+ community members than individuals belonging to that community themselves (Myöhänen & Nousiainen, 2023). Such positive bias may also hinder the recognition of, and action on, LGBTQIA+ safety concerns, which will not be solved by addressing, for example, issues related to sexual harassment.

Factors contributing to safety

After asking interviewees about their perceived event safety, I invited them to reflect on what contributed to that feeling. In the analysis, I identified four interrelated categories as sources of feeling safe: *individual safety precautions, social safety* stemming from close peers and friends, *institutional safety precautions* including formal structures for safety, and *cultural safety* arising from shared community values. These categories are presented in the following sections. While these categories are interlinked and overlap in practice, considering them separately allows for a more nuanced evaluation of how safety is produced.

Individual safety precautions

"As a woman, you always have to be a bit on guard in certain situations", noted a woman CEO when asked about event safety. This quote exemplifies the individual safety precautions taken by underrepresented interviewees as they navigate cultural environments that are not inclusive to them (Harvey, 2022). Although such practices were not often mentioned in the material, they emerged particularly in interviews with women and gender diverse individuals. Interviewees described measures such as avoiding leaving drinks unattended, choosing non-revealing clothing for events, leaving events early or before other attendees became intoxic-

ated, monitoring others' alcohol consumption, or opting out of events that might carry safety risks. In a related pattern, some individuals felt safe because they only attended events targeted at underrepresented groups.

Similar protective tactics taken by women have been documented in studies of global game conventions, including, for example, careful clothing choices, using headphones or business cards to avoid unwanted interactions, and using male companions to avoid harassment (Butt, 2022; Fisher & Harvey, 2013; Ochsner, 2019; Taylor, 2024). Communal actions taken to ensure individuals' safety include, for example, verbally exchanging lists of suspicious men, establishing digital support networks to ensure mutual safety, and employing safe words with peers to exit uncomfortable situations (Butt, 2022; Fisher et al., 2025; Ochsner, 2019; Taylor, 2024).

Expressions such as having a 'thick skin', 'being teflon', or referencing senior status or personal characteristics as protection against unwanted advances can also be interpreted as coping tactics (see Harvey, 2022; Fisher & Harvey, 2013). In my material, these approaches were most often mentioned by senior community members. As Fisher and Harvey (2013) note, such strategies are frequently passed down as advice or survival requirements to younger generations of underrepresented people entering the industry. Some senior interviewees recognised their privileged personal position, which was also reflected in some men's survey responses. Finally, some individuals simply explained that since nothing bad had happened to them or they had not witnessed inappropriate behaviour, they had no reason to feel unsafe.

As several interviewees noted, coping did not occur only at game industry events; tactics were applied in all social settings. While it is important to recognise the broader social structures hindering women's and gender diverse individuals' participation, treating this solely as a societal issue should not prevent action within subcultural contexts. Managing safety concerns as personal problems that a person must solve independently places a significant burden on individuals, demanding additional time and energy that could otherwise be invested in more meaningful work (Fisher & Harvey, 2013; Harvey, 2022; Szczepanska, 2023). This is particularly relevant in professional settings, as the responsibility for ensuring a safe working environment is both ethical and expected of the employer. If the management sees professional events as leisure time or informal 'fun' and thus relies on individual adaptation, this can set part of the workforce in an unequal position.

Considerations around individual coping reflect the boundary work characteristic of neoliberal culture, where the distinction between work and leisure becomes easily blurred (McRobbie, 2016). The following sections move away from the neoliberal emphasis on individual responsibility by examining collective and organisational measures for strengthening safety.

Social safety patterns

The most frequently mentioned reason for feeling safe at Finnish industry events was the presence of friends and familiar faces. Although the word *friend* carries significant meaning in Finnish and was not always used by Finnish interviewees as such, interviewees' descriptions painted a picture of close, trusted relationships with selected industry colleagues. One interviewee referred to their industry contacts as their family or tribe, another emphasised feeling accepted and able to be herself among her colleagues, and one explained that attending local events felt like being 'among one's own people'. By weighing event success by its ability to sustain social connections (Masek & Stenros, 2024), local events would be counted as successful.

The importance of social connections for perceived safety was highlighted especially by women participating in international events. They often confided having security concerns in unfamiliar environments where they knew only a few participants. A safe atmosphere was created in the presence of trusted networks, as described by a well-connected woman interviewee:

> Then again, in the Finnish events, because I usually know so many of the people who are there, I feel so safe that if something bad were to happen, I could turn in any direction and wave my hand, and someone would come to help.

Friends and acquaintances forming small, closed circles at local industry events have been criticised for being hard to get into for newcomers, thereby creating an exclusive event atmosphere (Harviainen et al., 2022; Komulainen & Sotamaa, 2020; Komulainen, 2019). From the safety perspective, these tight-knit circles function as protective structures for underrepresented individuals in the industry. A non-binary interviewee who had attended various local IGDA gatherings explained this as follows:

> These circles are quite small, and you already know the people, and maybe they know too that if I mess up here, the consequences are bigger than just being excluded from the community. There's also this assumption that you know how to behave…

Returning to the question of scale and context raised earlier, familiarity appears to reduce safety concerns. Large parties at international events can enable anonymity and weaken accountability, thereby posing an increased safety risk for underrepresented people. In local settings, where 'everyone knows everyone', such risks are easier to mitigate.

Examples given above focused on long-lasting connections, but the material also included mentions of ad hoc networks serving the same function. These included, for example, WiGFi gatherings arranged before Helsinki IGDA meetups, designed

to help participants form connections in smaller and safer settings. Such networks resemble in function women's networks created for safety at international conventions (Butt, 2022, pp. 190–191; Fisher et al., 2025; Taylor, 2024, pp. 190; Ochsner, 2019). However, as noted by Fisher et al. (2025), some of these networks do not fulfil their purposes but act more as company PR.

However, social connections are not used only for feeling safer. Parties operate as ritualised occasions for reinforcing social ties (Masek & Stenros, 2024) and these professional events serve a similar function. Interviewees highly valued the possibility of meeting industry friends at events, as expressed by one interviewee: "You know that everyone is there and everyone knows we all are busy, so it is very convenient to meet there". Similarly, 28% of survey respondents mentioned the absence of friends as a reason for not attending events.

Beyond facilitating safety and social ties, events also play a key role in identity creation. Butt (2022, pp. 199–202), following McRobbie (2016), has demonstrated how industry events act as spaces for building and expressing professional identity. This closely resembles Sutton-Smith's (1997) understanding of identity creation as an essential aspect of parties.

However, social networks alone do not fully explain high safety ratings in the Finnish game industry events. Several interviewed newcomers with very limited networks reported feeling very safe at events, and survey results reinforced this finding: respondents with less than two years of industry experience consistently selected either one of the two safest options. While this may reflect the narrow participation history among newcomers, it may also suggest that there are additional factors contributing to perceptions of safety.

Institutional safety precautions

Finland is often described as a 'promised land of associations', with over 100,000 registered and countless unregistered organisations, strong constitutional protection for freedom of association, and widespread participation in civic organisations (Neuvonen, 2025). The strong non-profit culture extends to the local game industry as well; in 2023, there were 14 national and regional game industry support organisations (Neogames, 2023).

Over the past decade, local game industry associations have taken collective action to improve developer safety. In October 2014, following the Gamergate events, Neogames, an umbrella organisation that coordinates and supports the development of the Finnish game industry, IGDA Finland, and the Finnish Game Developers' Association (FGDA) issued a joint statement condemning harassment in the industry (Hiltunen, 2023). In early 2018, at the beginning of the #MeToo movement, Neogames published the first industry-wide code of conduct, which was adopted by all major associations, including IGDA Finland. Later that year, Neogames,

IGDA Finland, WiGFi, FGDA, and Finnish Game Jam established the Finnish Game Industry Task Force to prevent sexual harassment in the industry by developing shared protocols and guidance for handling sexual harassment cases (Hiltunen, 2023; Neogames, 2022). Alongside these initiatives, organisations such as WiGFi and Better Games Together have actively voiced shortcomings in industry's diversity and inclusion.

In interviews, a gender diverse company manager reflected on these efforts:

> We have such great national resources, we have a code of conduct and protocols that anyone can apply, whatever the size of the company, and then we have the Task Force. They are so important resources that… I'm still confused about how the game industry is so different in getting on board regarding these matters. Maybe I'm in a bubble to some extent, because we have these organisations, like We in Games, and also organisations that aren't that dedicated, but still have taken it [DEI] into their agenda. It's so significant. It influences the minority experience, or what you could call minority stress, so that it won't grow that big at all.

To examine the role of formal structures, I analysed interview references to event codes of conduct. While they are not the only safety measure in place, codes of conduct are usually the most concrete and visible safety mechanism for participants, and are widely used across Finnish game industry events.

Nearly all interviewees agreed that event codes of conduct were important. An active eventgoer and former event organiser explained:

> I feel that it is important to know that there are such things, because it creates a safe atmosphere. Even though I'd expect that nothing happens since it's a game industry event, it's a fact that these things still happen, and people are people.

There was no illusion among the interviewees that a code of conduct could completely prevent unwanted behaviour, but its presence provided peace of mind and reduced safety concerns. Knowing that breaches would have consequences also reinforced participants' sense of agency. One interviewee described her expectations:

> When I meet people from the game industry, it's at events where the organisers have taken the rules for safe spaces and respectful behaviour very seriously. So you kind of already know that if something inappropriate were to happen, it wouldn't be allowed or accepted, and something could be done about it if needed.

Codes of conduct also built trust in event organisers, but simultaneously held them accountable for responding to breaches. Events known for poorly handled conduct

breaches were well known, and interview discussions suggested that mismanaged cases carried reputational damage for years.

For some, the code of conduct was not personally important, but it ensured the safety of other event participants. Interviewees from all genders mentioned, often light-heartedly, that they did not check the code because they personally felt unlikely to need it, but they still emphasised its importance for those in more vulnerable positions.

While opinions about codes of conduct capture only a fragment of institutional efforts, it seems that their presence positively influenced the event atmosphere. This suggests that institutional safety measures play a meaningful role in shaping perceptions of safety at events. However, further research is needed across different types of activities and their impact.

Beyond initiatives taken, I also interpret the practice of naming professional events as meetups (IGDA, 2026), gatherings (WiGFi, 2026), receptions (Gamescom, 2026), opening nights, or simply events (GDC, 2026) as institutional safety precautions. Such naming anchors these events to work rather than leisure and therefore emphasises their professional nature. Several women interviewees likewise expressed that sexual encounters do not belong at industry events, thereby highlighting the professional nature of these events through their personal influence. These kinds of individual efforts to reshape culture are beyond the scope of this article, but they exemplify the role of individual agency alongside institutional measures.

Culture of safety

A welcoming and friendly community culture was frequently mentioned by interviewees. A start-up company CEO reflected on reasons for this:

> Maybe the idea of Finland being a nice place to make games is that it's easy to get to know the people you would like to hang out with, and usually those people are pretty nice. And then it leads to you becoming friends. Or you feel it is easier to be quite casual. And perhaps the reason why we are so casual is that the game industry has developed a really nice discussion culture where it's not just an endless success story, where you have to say that my company is doing well all the time. And then it causes that feeling that we can come as we are.

Local game industry events were often contrasted with investor meetings and events in other industries. Another CEO described feeling constrained in business settings, whereas game events allowed them to be their "*true self without shame*". This ability to be oneself emerged across interviews, including managers and job seekers whose positions might otherwise necessitate that they behave differently.

In interviews and the survey's open comments, Finnish events were described as casual, inclusive, and non-hierarchical, and industry professionals as accepting, progressive, and well-informed. The positive atmosphere was reported by majority groups, but also by underrepresented individuals. An Asian student applying for her first industry position described her early experiences:

> The feeling that I got so far, it's like everyone in the game industry is so nice and kind. The culture of the whole community is so friendly. In the IGDA meetups, you can talk to anyone you wanna talk to. No matter their level in the industry.

Similar endorsements were given by senior professionals, including a Finnish developer with nearly 15 years of experience in the game industry and some egregious workplace experiences, illustrating how negative work experiences did not carry over into the event context:

> If only the game industry was like the events, it would be awesome! … Everybody is just friends, and you meet new people just like that. It's all really so nice.

A sense of belonging was another recurring theme. Even individuals who described themselves as introverts, socially restricted, or 'not fitting into the crowd' mentioned belonging, or as one newcomer summarised: "Everybody's a bit weirdo, so you don't really stand out that much". A senior industry professional explained:

> I have a feeling from the world that I don't belong. I'm a little lonely space creature. In the game industry, much less. Of course, it still sometimes happens in the game industry, but less than in the world, you know. There are so many freaks here that I feel I also belong somewhere in between.

Interviewees with international experience emphasised the distinctiveness of the Finnish context. A US developer with experience in large US game studios described:

> I think first it's just that it's a much safer society here in Finland in general. And then, in game events I feel those people are my people. We are in the same industry, and people don't just randomly come. They come here because of same interests. And you can just naturally trust each other, because we have similar objectives.

In these accounts, safety was described as the possibility of being oneself without adjustment or performance, illustrating psychological safety emerging from the sense of belonging. This aligns with safety concepts articulated by LGBTQIA+ community members, where safety was grounded in emotional safety rather than physical risk. This also resembles the playfulness described by Masek and Stenros

(2024) as a socially situated mode of interaction that softens normative expectations. Due to its consistency across the material, I would mark the 'possibility to be oneself' as a central safety dynamic in Finnish game industry events.

Researchers have characterised the Finnish game industry community culture as cohesive, value-driven, low-hierarchical, and open to information sharing (Harviainen et al., 2022; Komulainen & Sotamaa, 2020; Kultima, 2018; Lehtonen et al., 2022). These characteristics have most likely enabled and contributed to a safer environment, as the CEO suspected above. In interviews, several senior professionals noted significant cultural change over time, with one describing the transformation as "like night and day", while another noted that those who left the industry earlier might struggle to recognise the current atmosphere. While acknowledging this shift, I argue that core values such as open information sharing, low hierarchy, and mutual support have largely remained stable. What has changed is the presence of systematic actions to ensure the safety of underrepresented groups.

Social structures, institutional precautions, or cultural values have only limited impact alone. Formal rules and processes have likely contributed to improved safety at industry events, but they could not be effectively implemented without community acceptance and alignment to the community's values. When shared cultural values enable inclusive practices and the possibility to effectively introduce safety protocols, and prioritise social connection over transactional networking, they create what I conceptualise as *community accountability*. This framework enables authenticity, belonging, and the 'ability to be oneself', and through these, supports the experience of safety. Through this, safety emerges as the freedom to exist without performance or self-monitoring.

While this model presents safety in the Finnish game industry scene, it can also explain why unwanted encounters are more common at large conventions. High levels of anonymity, weaker social ties, and the absence of shared goals can reduce the effectiveness of safety practices. However, the global and local dynamics require further empirical investigation, particularly through comparative research on locally organised industry events.

Discussion and conclusion

In this study, I have demonstrated that women in the Finnish game industry generally perceive local industry events as safe. Extending the analysis beyond gender revealed that LGBTQIA+ community members experience distinct and qualitatively different safety concerns at industry events. This emphasised that safety concerns do not appear to function as a single, uniform condition, but is shaped by individuals' identities and lived experiences.

Women's perceptions of safety did not stem from the local industry's gender ratios, event venues, or activities, and women also reported experiences of sexual harassment at Finnish game industry events. Shifting the analytical focus from gender-specific factors to differing reasons for feeling safe made it possible to identify four interrelated safety sources: individual safety precautions, social safety formed through the presence of trusted peers and friends, institutional safety provided through formal rules, policies, and processes, and cultural safety emerging from the community and shared values. Together, the latter three categories constitute what I conceptualise as a community accountability model. This model explains how close social connections, clear boundaries and consequences, and inclusive cultural values reinforce one another to support safety, authenticity, and shared responsibility. Event safety thus emerges as a multidimensional, identity-related condition that affects individuals' ability to participate, belong, and be themselves at events.

Rather than placing the burden on individuals and emphasising individual safety precautions that reproduce structural inequalities, responsibility for event safety should be located at the organisational and communal level. Event organisers and company managers play a central role in actively supporting the safety and social connections of all participants. While safety concerns can be addressed through targeted actions aimed at specific groups' concerns, such as measures designed to prevent women's sexual harassment, attention to dimensions of the community accountability model can create event spaces in which authenticity, mutual responsibility, and everyday accountability enable more equal opportunities to attend and socialise for broader participant groups. For example, event design choices that support smaller sub-events, repeated encounters, and recognisable social networks can benefit all participants, but they are particularly important for underrepresented individuals due to the perceived safety they provide. Such measures also help reduce anonymity, which can be further mitigated through simple practices such as compulsory name tags. To facilitate safety is to facilitate social connections.

Simple but effective institutional measures include implementing a code of conduct and related procedures, which enhance participants' sense of agency and help to mitigate the impact of unwanted experiences. In the Finnish game industry context, collective statements and coordinated action have been especially effective in signalling that harassment is unacceptable and in shaping durable cultural norms. Even seemingly minor decisions, such as event naming, can contribute to how participants interpret the nature of the event and set the expectations for it. Finally, nurturing shared interests and a welcoming, and inclusive event atmosphere builds a cultural environment in which participants feel able to be themselves.

While the community accountability model may explain the high levels of safety concerns at large international conventions, further research is needed across

other local game production contexts to assess which features are widely shared and which are context-specific. Also, the material used in this study focuses on women, gender diverse individuals, and LGBTQIA+ community members. Future research should extend the analysis to other underrepresented groups, such as people with disabilities, religious minorities, and those from diverse ethnic backgrounds, whose safety concerns remain insufficiently understood.

This study demonstrates that safety concerns are culturally embedded, identity-bounded, situational, and changeable. For party studies, these findings underline that safety is not peripheral to event design but foundational: the freedom to exist authentically and engage socially without high-level self-monitoring is a prerequisite for participation, belonging, and playfulness, also in hybrid professional spaces. Safety does not stand in opposition to playfulness; it is a condition that enables broader participation in playful event practices.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank, first and foremost, the interviewees who generously participated in this research. I am grateful to my colleagues at the Tampere University Game Research Lab, Professor Alison Harvey, and my supervisor, Professor Olli Sotamaa, for their comments on earlier versions of this paper, as well as IGDA Finland Chairperson Kim Kupiainen for reading the article and for his support. I also thank the anonymous reviewers for their insightful suggestions, particularly Reviewer 2 for highlighting the distinction between instrumental and societal values.

Funding statement

This research was supported by the Academy of Finland project Centre of Excellence in Game Culture Studies (353266).

Ethical approval statement

Approval for the research was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Tampere Region, statement 48/2023, 28.3.2023.

Data availability statement

Subject to the written consent of the interviewee, pseudonymised interview transcripts will be deposited in the Finnish Social Science Data Archive (FSD) for the purpose of reuse in academic research and scholarly theses, including doctoral dissertations and master's theses. The survey data is not publicly available, as it is owned and managed by an external party and participant consent has not been given.

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