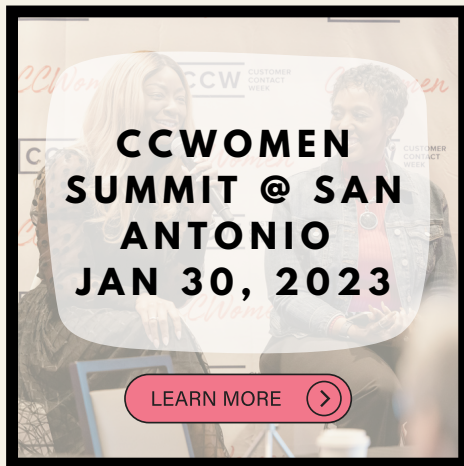


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About the analyst



Grace Gilbert is a writer, editor, content creator, and DEAI advocate at CCWomen.

They are the host of the CCWomen Podcast, which features cutting edge insight from women executives, activists, gender equity advocates, and more. If you would like to be featured on the CCWomen podcast, please reach out at ccwomen@cmpteam.com.

Gaming is for the Girls: Kimmy Li and Jaye Watts, Women CEO's in a Male- Dominated Industry



[Photo by Pixabay](#)

If you know anything about video games, you know that they have become synonymous with adolescent boys doing Fortnite dances at any given time, adult men in elaborate gaming (thrones?) chairs, and, of course, one-dimensional, hyperfeminine female characters who are about as realistically proportioned as a Barbie doll.

Although the gaming industry is culturally understood as a space for male consumers (and is marketed as such), [46% of gamers are actually women](#).

Meanwhile, however, women make up [only 16% of executives in the gaming industry](#), and only 30% of developers. Nonbinary and trans people make up only 8% of game developers worldwide as of 2021.

With so many female and nonbinary gamers, and so little representation in the boardroom, it's no wonder that video games are lacking in [diversity, equity, and inclusion](#).

When games are developed by men and for men, it leaves little room for the voices and experiences of marginalized people. Instead, we often get the same [tired tropes and stereotypes](#) enforced over and over again.

For an industry that is projected to be worth [\\$256.97 billion by 2025](#), this gap between the demographic of the consumer base and that of the executive and development base is troubling.

I, for one, am so ready for the needle to move away from the at best, frustrating, and at worst, [dangerous](#) representations of women and marginalized folks in popular media.

So which companies are taking the lead? And how will they fight for equity?

Women of Color Take Their Seats at the Head of the Table

At this year's [Women Impact Tech conference](#), I had the pleasure of hearing from so many incredible women in the tech industry.

But two really stood out— [Kimmy Li](#), CEO of [NEKCOM Games](#), and [Jaye Watts](#), Founder and CEO of [Coexist Gaming](#). As Li and Watts spoke among their peers about their efforts to make the gaming world a more equitable place, from storyboard to gameplay, I felt hopeful for the future of gaming.

While I am not a die-hard gamer myself (just a longtime Animal Crossing and Minecraft fan), I know so many young girls who are, and this number [only continues to increase](#). Representation and diversity in video games is more important than one might realize— from a young age, games and other media teach us how to see ourselves in the world, and how the world sees us in return.

Jaye Watts, CEO of Coexist Gaming, is aware of the importance of inclusion in the mobile gaming sector.

She's been a lot of things throughout her life— a [Grammy-nominated recording artist](#), a songwriter, an electrical engineering student at Stanford, and, of course, a gamer.

Watts founded Coexist Gaming out of a need for a safe space for marginalized people to participate in gaming, specifically Esports gaming, which is something she has found community in since she was about four years old. Coexist Gaming is the “world's first subscription-based gaming service,” she explained, and her company is an attempt to meet the needs of the market.

“63% of mobile gamers are women,” Watts shared while discussing a mobile gaming tournament she held at the [Coexist Game House in Manhattan](#).

“And they are here to bring the smoke.”



Jaye Watts
Founder, CEO, Coexist Gaming

Kimmy Li, CEO of NEKCOM Games USA, is passionate about developing captivating independent games for all gamers.

She has an extensive twenty-year career in tech consulting, startups, and, of course, the gaming industry.

While NEKCOM has been around for about 11 years, Li took on the challenge of opening up the company's US office in New York City. With a robust background in business development and innovation, she knew she was the right person for the job.

However, from the business and development side of things, she began to see the need for change.

“The gaming industry has been around for 30 years,” she explained when asked about the opportunity gap in the gaming industry. “A lot has changed, but at its core, there are [very few women doing game design](#) and development.”



Kimmy Li
CEO, NEKCOM Games USA

Insight from Li and Watts, CEO's and Changemakers in the Gaming Industry

Q: What was one encounter of gender bias you faced in the gaming industry?

KL: I only realized the full impact of gender bias in game development pretty recently. I attended a business conference for executives in gaming— and, looking around, most people in the sessions and meetings were males. This automatically creates an uncomfortable situation for any woman, no matter her position. It can be difficult to speak up for yourself, which is why we need more women in this field.

JW: Honestly, people developed ideas about me before they even met me. One time, I was set to meet with some stakeholders. We were all in the boardroom together, only these two men kept talking about this “awesome guy” who started his own gaming company . When I looked over, one of them asked me if they could have some coffee. That’s when I realized they thought I was there to serve them, because I couldn’t possibly be the CEO they were waiting for. At the moment I reached out my hand. “I’m Jaye Watts,” I said. “I think you’re talking about me.” Unfortunately, as women, and women of color, we need to be more prepared than anybody else. I placed an emphasis on research and development, knowing every detail, knowing the ins and outs. So when I showed up they had no choice but to respect me. You should be an expert in every meeting. You need to be super ready.

“Maybe if you don’t like the world you live in, you were meant to build a new one.”

-Jaye Watts

Q: How are you making sure that women are supported in your company? How do you use your platform?

JW: The most exciting thing to me is the Coexist Game House here in Times Square. We have only one male employee. It really wasn’t hard to staff only women, because they were overqualified. We do a lot of outreach and host women’s gaming sessions with our nearly all-women staff. We have women on the last Wednesday of each month come into our store or Zoom in. With these events, we only have women-owned businesses involved, from catering to cocktail napkins. We connect in that space, we support women, and we play. And it's so much representation.

KL: In running the business and recruiting, I always receive more male than female applications. This is the unfortunate reality of the gaming industry. To combat this, we recently launched an exciting new internship program. Our effort is so we can try to bring more women into the game development and design industry. The truth is, many in this industry pursue a career in game development because of passion, rather than being funneled in by educational programs. So we want to find women who are passionate about games, and build their confidence and skills so they can make them, too.

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