

# POLITICAL CORRECTNESS: THE EFFECTS OF GAMING IN THE SOCIETY AND THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

Zhengye Shi

Obridge Academy, NY 11801, USA

## **ABSTRACT**

*In this study my approach is the dispute and the structure of political correctness in terms of sociological questions, as follows. 1. Why this apparently centered in creative output on achieving social change through the gaming industry? 2. How are we to comprehend the association among the chaos of inequality in the gaming industry and putting character disfigurement (gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation)? 3. How do we connect globalization - political correctness to video games? The study conclude with a discussion and tactics for contesting critiques.*

## **KEYWORDS**

*Culture, Discourse, Political Correctness, Video Games*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Politically correctness has been the focal point of controversy among international gamers and game enthusiasts. Some people think a healthy piece of political correctness is expected in a topography that has a long, ugly history of inequality. Some are more cautionary, knowing that worrying about being politically correct is ruining the artistic liberation of developers and can be acognizant as the turn-away of forms of expression or action that debar, marginalize, or insult certain racial, cultural, or other groups as defined by Oxford, and they are a big part of our multicultural community and therefore their encompassing in games can be preceded as an act of political correctness. However, in our numérique society, this term is often disdained. Nonetheless, in this study I will use it as a neutral term because I believe that there is indeed asurge of these groups, and it is often used in discourse about this topic. Ironically, the term was brought into the modern day by Toni Bambara to call out those who hid behind the wall of being publicly "courteous or polite" to continue holding their bigoted compartment and avoid the conference of social transformation. As we know it today, it has been contorted to simply mean "coherent to public customary and mind what you say," which is exactly the adverse of what Bambara ought. In the cyber or gaming community, political correctness predominantly has two sides: you're for or against it. It's easy to think of the anti-politically correct crowd as one that is anti-progress, stuck in the 1800s with how they think people should or should not behave. For the liberal, they are the Conservatives "ruining" the country's potential and stuck in a past where it was OK to be discriminatory. In the gaming world, the anti-politically correct crowd is half of the problem.

## **2. THEORY**

We might see the altercation around 'political correctness' as a political and anthropological contentious in which both labelled 'political correctness' and those who labeled them 'politically correct' are engaged in a centered representation, values, and identities - in short, 'cultural chaos'. An instantaneous caveat is that the homogeneity of 'politically correct people' is no more than a constructed homogeneity through the category but shall leave until later. The objective on both side is cultural diversity. As trigger for boarder social change.

### **2.1 Games are Fantasy so being Realistically Vivid is Unnecessary.**

When it comes to games set in true and real-life settings, this debate pops up that the video game world is fantasy. If one complains about how someone is represented, whether that be body image or stereotypes, people are quick to say that it's "just a game" and no one should take them seriously. Developers have a constructive take on the antiquity and can swivel as they please to make a remarkable game. However, the problem with this steam of consciousness is that it throws out any being responsible for actualy issues that phlebotomize into the gaming world and fortifyprehistorc and antiquiated ideas.

It's a psychological truth that perceived the same ideas in our amusement without condemning it does, in fact, affect us. This study is a serene model of how race is illustrated and or portrayed in games and is only one of the plentitudes of studies that come out yearly on the subject. All games don't need to be pragmatic, but they don't need the same fantasy either.

### **2.2. Some Games are Real, and that Incorporate Politically Incorrect Activity.**

If someone grumble about the insufficiency of women military soldiers or ethnic minorities in the game called Call of Duty, netizens are quick to say that it's preordained to be realistic, as there are far less women than men in real combat. That's true. But it's also a fact that the game Call of Duty is a hyper-frenzied game. If it were meant to be representational in any way, there would be a lot less shooting, a lot more sitting around standby for commands, and no way to heal your shot wounds by just solely ducking behind a counter. This argument falls on the perception that your quintessential video game is pragmatic in any way. People can't pick and choose what they deem to be a necessary "pragmatism" factor without appearing hypocritical.

### **2.3. If You Don't Like a Game, Don't Buy It.**

This argument is the most understandable. If you don't support an organization's ideals for any reason, you're in your rights to boycott said organization. Nonetheless, a thing about entertainment and amusement is that it is constructed and built by people who are flawed and have opinions. If someone were to only buy, watch, or playthings that perfectly lined up with their worldview, the entertainment industry would have shriveled up decades ago and we'd all be outside.

The world is not a perfect place, but it is one full of the means to better it. With unbolted communication and the web, it is easy to vociferate your concerns and find others to sustain you. In the end, this argument falls flat because it's one against constructive criticism. Without constructive criticism, games can't get better. People will buy what they enjoy, but they can also be aware of its shortcomings.

## **2.4. Make Your Own Personal Computer Games.**

Possibly the most political answer of them all is this one. People are already making their own diverse games that they feel represent them better. The problem is that the gaming industry is like any other American industry—discriminatory, biased, and under the thumb of mostly white men. It's difficult for an indie company to break into the "AAA" side, but statistically, it's even harder for those who are in the minority.

A more appropriate response would be to tell people to support the already existing alternatives or tell companies to take diverse initiatives if they haven't already. Ultimately, this response is one of ignorance. There are already personal computer games, but it is up to the gamer, whether pro- or anti-politically correct, to seek them out in a world that typically does not support them and relies on the consumer to vote with dollars.

## **2.5. Political Correctness Ruins Creative Freedom**

This is the most ironic response of them all, considering creative freedom is already ruined. The creative process is stifled by publishers forcing developers to appeal to their wanted demographic. Typically, this is a white man. Being politically correct in this case would encourage creative freedom. Having to create the same, heroic, white, and muscular man with a scruffy beard, "hard" personality, and who probably lost a loved one is an old trope that is mostly prevalent not because developers like creating the same person over and over, but for safe marketing purposes. There's nothing wrong with creating a character you identify with, but when that character becomes indistinguishable from the rest, it's hard to believe that it's anything but intentional. The white, scruffy, heroic man can work - but not every game has a Joel from *The Last of Us*. In conclusion, this response is an insult not just to the creatives, but to all white men who don't think of themselves as a singular audience who need pandering to.

On the flip side, some can find the pro-politically correct crowd as one that is ridiculous, touting freedom of expression while also demonizing those who don't agree with them. For the conservative, they are the Liberals "ruining" the country with their need to feel fawned over and don't care about the realities of things like money or politics. In the gaming world, the pro-politically correct crowd are the other half of the problem. Arguments include games can have social consequences, games are fantasy and should not be subject to real-life statistics, if the game industry wants to be taken seriously it should conduct itself in a more responsible manner and appealing to more demographics increases profitability.

# **3. DISCUSSION**

## **PART 1**

### **3.1. Personal Computer Games are in Decline**

Arguments clouded those games are fantasy so being realistic is unnecessary, some games are realistically vivid and that includes politically incorrect things and political correctness ruins creative liberation. The modern gaming industry is a behemoth that generated an estimated \$135 billion in revenue last year (according to TechJury), with a gaming community of more than 2.5 billion people from all over the world. It wasn't always mainstream, though — the industry started as a niche market that targeted students, nerds, and individuals willing to put up with atrocious load times and horrendous graphics because they were enchanted by the medium.

As computers are concerned a Commodore 64 that featured games with 16-color graphics, 320 x 200 resolution, and chiptune sound effects. Followed by the Amiga 2000, upgraded this experience many times over, thanks to its 4,096 colors, 640 x 256 resolution, and far better audio quality. Then, in the 1990s, Intel INTC, -1.26% Pentium processor, and the rest is, as they say, history. Those older computer games had only one goal: to entertain and excite.

Early computer games were a special art form that could awe you with presentation, jog your brain with puzzles, immerse you in their world with engaging stories or simply help you hone your reflexes as you blasted dozens of baddies off the screen. Fast-forward to the present, and this concept of personal computer gaming is crumbling. Many avid Steam user with over 400 games under its belt, find it increasingly hard to find new titles that could provide the same level of fun as the older ones. And that's not because of a lack of visual or audio fidelity — modern games look and sound realistic and breathtaking. Nor is it because of the amount of content — unlike older games, modern titles provide hundreds of hours of in-game activities to keep you invested. One reason is the gaming industry has become far more focused on generating large profits than creating good products.

When you stop caring about quality and focus on money-making mechanics, games lose their most important purpose and become shiny, but ultimately shallow and often half-baked, gambling simulators. If you look at the chart below, you can see that personal computer gaming isn't even the biggest revenue maker anymore — in 2019, it constitutes a projected 25% of the industry's total and is constantly overshadowed by mobile games and continuously moving forward – present. Console games are also going through a market-share decline. I don't see this declining trend for personal computer gaming slowing any time soon unless something changes drastically.

Worldwide Distribution of Games Market Revenue  
from 2015 to 2019 (by segment and screen)

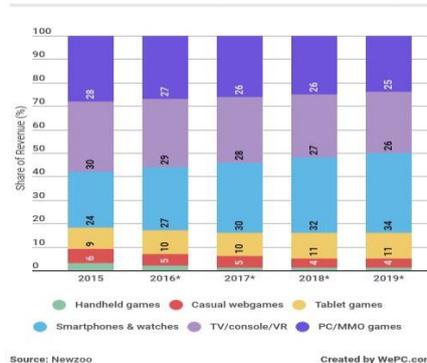


Figure 1.0

## PART 2

### 3.2. Gender, Ethnicity, Sexual Orientation,

The diversification of the world has not always been shown in games. It took a little bit longer for this medium to have characters that mirror our globalized society. But why is the globalization and the diversification of the world only now showing in video games?

### 3.2.1. Gender

You might wonder why diversity issues are controversial in gaming since diversity has already been somewhat apparent in other means of entertainment, like television and film. One reason for the issue of female representation in games could be that gaming is still mostly seen as a masculine hobby, even though about 40% of gamers are female (Entertainment Software Association, 2015).

A common justification for this stereotype is that, although women might play games, they should not be considered “true” or “hard-core” gamers because they play more casually and less skilfully compared to their male counterparts. (Paaßen, Morgenroth & Stratemeyer, 2016) Games would therefore be more directed to ‘typical’ male players, presumably a young, heterosexual audience. This is shown in the small number of female video game characters and the hyper sexualization of those characters that do exist. It is because of ideas like these a lot of male main characters in games are presented as strong, and females as sexy (and straight), since that would appeal to the audience (Paaßen et al., 2016).

According to several older studies, stereotypical white male characters reigned in mainstream gaming. However, nowadays, "results show that female characters appeared as often in leading parts as male characters did. They were portrayed with a sexualized emphasis on female features" (Jansz & Martis, 2007). This study seems to indicate that female characters' inclusion in recent games is far larger than it was in earlier games. Jansz and Martis (2007) call the development of strong female characters the ‘Lara Phenomenon’. Lara Croft (figure 6) is a name that you might recognize from the movie Tomb Raider, which is based on a video game (first released in 1996) that has become a big nostalgic name in the community. Although she was a strong and independent character, she nonetheless had a sexualized appearance that has become a brand for the game. Initially, it seems that this was done to boost sales, since most females were depicted heavily objectified like that in games. However, when we compare depictions like these to the new and diverse characters that populate video games nowadays, we see how stereotypical these depictions truly are. I will elaborate on that later.

### 3.2.2. Ethnicity

"Research have shown that most leading roles in games are of white race, the heroes exclusively so." (Jansz & Martis, 2007). Jansz and Martis (2007) partially back this up by arguing that the medium has a different way of how players identify with characters. In games you can change and influence the world you are playing in and therefore the character creation in games is a lot different than with other media. A study on the representations of gender, age and ethnicity in 150 games of the same year showed that other races than white were largely underrepresented. Their results showed that 80% of the leading characters in games were white. Other ethnicities filled the remaining 20% of the games (Williams, Martins, Consalvo & Ivory, 2009). A very low number indeed.

Non-white characters are also often stereotypical and for example portrayed as aggressive, as thugs or as athletes. These depictions are dangerous according to some researches, because they normalize these stereotypes. This can provoke negative social judgements that are not necessarily true (Burgess, Dill, Stermer, Burgess & Brown, 2011). The stories told about minorities in games come "(...) with underrepresentation and overreliance on stereotypes" (Burges et al, 2011). It is primarily a white male world and that does not seem right since “we are moving toward a more global and therefore more racially diverse society” (Burges et al, 2011). Even though many of these games were brilliant pieces, like Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas.

### 3.2.3. Sexual Orientation

Unfortunately, there is not a lot of research on sexual orientation in video games. However, successful games like *Gone Home* (2013), *Life is Strange* (2015), *The Last Of Us* (2013) and *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (2014) show that having a leading character who isn't heterosexual is a rising phenomenon. If we take a look at a list containing video games that feature LGBT characters, we see that those characters were also present in games in the past. However, when I looked more closely, I found that these instances almost always were comprised of subtle references or of characters being made fun of because of their sexual orientation.

In the past, this underrepresentation was because of censoring laws that were present for several mediums (Hays code). Later, homosexuality was carefully introduced in the media in ways that were not out there. While in other media this has already changed, video game writers for a long time still allowed "space for an audience member to overlook or deny the homosexuality of a particular character if that's the way they would prefer to see things" (Gravning, 2014). In Gravning's article we see examples of these careful references in games, one of them being *Lara Croft*. The writer of the game states how she would love for Croft to be (openly) gay, but played in to expectations of gamers (and their parents) instead. This subtleness might be connected to the masculine culture I already spoke of. LGBT rights are still a sensitive topic and although this has become more widely accepted in Western countries, it is still a taboo for a lot of gamers, like we saw in the controversy surrounding *The Last Of Us*. But still, slowly but certainly we are seeing an increase of LGBT representation in games.

## PART 3

### 3.3. Connecting Globalization to Video Games

Globalization is not a new phenomenon; it has always been present in our history. But what we see now is that it has accelerated a lot. It includes more people; it goes faster, and it happens more often. Part of why this is the case can be explained by the new digital infrastructures of our Western society (Wang, Spotti, Juffermans, Cornips, Kroon & Blommeart, 2013). Through the internet with its Web 2.0 that sparked the culture of connectivity and the addition of smartphones, it has become fairly easy to connect to people all over the world in different ways. Because of that, we are more easily confronted with other norms, opinions, and ideas from different parts of the globe (van Dijck, 2013). Society has become information-driven, with new forms of global flows and networks that exist online and offline. The internet is now the main infrastructure of globalization; it is the thing that globalizes us into who we are today (Castells, 2010). New global 'identities', that are more in the open because of the digitalization of our society, are slowly also showing up in games, in the form of new diverse characters.

But why with new diverse characters? Our identities have changed with globalization. "People define their 'identity' (singular) in relation to a multitude of different niches" (Blommaert & Varis, 2015). These different niches, such as urban culture, hipster culture, LGBT culture, gaming culture etc. have become more easily accessible because of new technologies. This influences the way we organize our lives and how we think about them. There is a wide range of new cultural phenomena due to globalization, and these new phenomena also seem to be more present in video games. Different ethnicities, genders and sexual orientations appear more in mainstream games, and we can likely connect these politically correct depictions to our new digitalized global life that is influencing our way of being. Our video games now match the super-diverse society we live in more, due to globalization.

## 4. CONCLUSION

gender stereotypes can be seen when looking at the physical features of two characters whose roles are very much alike. Croft (figure 6) seems to be a hyper-sexualized character. In other words, she is presented in a 'sexy' way (big breasts, tiny waist, revealing clothing etc.). As a result, powerful women like her are seen as sex objects. If we compare this to Nadine (figure 5), from the Uncharted series, that is (co-)written by the same man who wrote *The Last Of Us*, we see a non-sexualized woman with a strong physique that fits her character. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that she has a South-African background that reflects in her appearance. She is not a stereotypical sexy white female at all, but rather a globalized super-diverse one.

This is just one example of a new type of character in a Western video game that is influenced by globalization. When it's looked at a list of the most anticipated games, still to be released, or some Triple A games released in the past two years or so, we see a lot of games that have diverse characters, may this be main characters, or side characters. This means that the phenomenon is not just about some games that have happened to play over the past couple of years. Games like *The Last of Us: Part II*, *Death Stranding*, *Ghosts of Tsushima*, *Detroit: Become Human*, *Assassin's Creed Origins*, *Red Dead Redemption 2*, *Dishonored 2* and *Uncharted: The Lost Legacy* all have diverse characters in leading roles.

These type of games show that the stereotypical white male main character is no longer as dominant a character in the gaming community as it used to be. They also show that we are slowly turning towards a more accurate representation of our globalized society (and past) in the characters of video games. The gaming community has long been a niche culture within our society. It had its own culture, which used to be a masculine one that did not leave much room for diverse characters. Gaming is now more global and popular than ever, and this might be why games are also becoming more diverse, a development that has provoked conversations about political correctness, since it includes groups of people who in the past were a neglected subject in gaming. Whether this development is 'ruining' the games, story, or gameplay wise, is another discussion. But it is so that our globalized and diverse society is now indeed influencing the stories of video games.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Blommaert, J. & Varis, P. (2015). Enoughness, accent and light communities: Essays on contemporary identities. *Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies* 139.
- [2] Burgess, M., Dill, K., Sterner, P., Burgess, S., & Brown, B. (2011). Playing With Prejudice: The Prevalence and Consequences of Racial Stereotypes in Video Games. *Media Psychology* Volume 14, Issue 3.
- [3] Castells, M. (2010). *The rise of the network society*. Malden: Wiley Blackwell.
- [4] Entertainment Software Association (2015). Essential facts about the computer and video game industry.
- [5] Gravning, J. (2014), *How Video Games Are Slowly, Quietly Introducing LGBT Heroes*, The Atlantic.
- [6] Jansz, J. & Martis, R. (2007). The Lara Phenomenon: Powerful Female Characters in Video Games. *Sex Roles* Volume 56, Issue 3–4, pp 141–148.
- [7] Lalonde, R., Doan, L. & Patterson L. (2000). Political Correctness Beliefs, Threatened Identities, and Social Attitudes. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*: Volume 3, Issue 3, pp 317–336.
- [8] Oxford Dictionary, political correctness.
- [9] Paaßen, B., Morgenroth, T. & Stratemeyer, M. (2016). What is a True Gamer? The Male Gamer Stereotype and the Marginalization of Women in Video Game Culture. *Sex Roles* Volume 76, Issue 7–8, pp 421–435.

- [10] Tamburo, P. (2017), *The Last of Us 2 and Why “Personal Politics” Belong in Video Games*. Crave Entertainment.
- [11] Van Dijck, J. (2013). *The culture of connectivity: A critical history of social media*. New York, NY: Oxford University press.
- [12] Vertovec, S. (2006). *The emergence of super-diversity in Britain*. Centre of Migration, Policy and Society, Paper 25.
- [13] Wang, X., Spotti, M., Juffermans, K., Cornips, L., Kroon, S. & Blommaert, J. (2013), *Globalization in the margins*, Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies 73.
- [14] Williams, D., Martins, N., Consalvo, M. & Ivory, J. (2009). *The virtual census: representations of gender, race and age in video games*. *New Media & Society* Volume 11, Issue 5, pp 815–834 [DOI: 10.1177/1461444809105354]

© 2021 By AIRCC Publishing Corporation. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license.