



HOW GREATLY DOES THE VIDEOGAME INDUSTRY AFFECT AMERICAN CULTURE?

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Videogames are everywhere these days. From the millions of browser-based games at your desk, to the plethora of consoles out there, to even to the device a majority of Americans hold in their hands today, their smart phones, videogames are integrated into today's society in America. This relatively new media has been profound in many lives we see today, including me. From childhood I remember playing videogames, simple games on my mom's computer to a Gameboy, to a Nintendo DS, to a Nintendo GameCube, to an Xbox, to a phone that I hold today. I give responsibility to these devices for my astonishment for technology. I am inspired to become a videogame designer and/or programmer, so these games have greatly influence me and my aspirations.

However, there is another part of American culture that resonates with me: Representation and Discrimination. As a white male, I find myself in a privileged position, viewing discrepancies in equality and noticeable discrimination, especially in the political climate in the United States. These qualities of the climate, also apply to me for I do not identify as heterosexual, meaning that I experience misrepresentation in media, including videogames, for many do.

Because I plan to go into the industry of videogame development, I would love to uncover whether the videogames industry is directly affecting the trends in discrimination in America or simply reflects the culture of the country I live in. Just curiosity stems from a single statistic. "Adult women represent a greater portion of the video game-playing population (31 percent) than boys under age 18 (18 percent)" (Entertainment Software Association, 2015). The Entertainment Software association is a United States organization that focuses on not only connecting video game developers but to also accurately and annually report global statistics on games and gamers. However, the association surveys only focus on the United State's videogame conventions, where they get most of their news in videogames.

To uncover this, I ask the question: "How greatly does the video game industry affect American culture?"

THE QUESTION

This question uses the video game industry as a medium to evaluate the American culture we have today. It is important to not the definition of videogame: "an electronic game in which players control images on a video screen" (Merriam-Webster, 2017). This denotes any game on a screen such as cell phones or consoles. As a developed nation, technology has profound effects on society. However, these effects can either be perpetuated through the gaming industry, or they can be made by the gaming industry, directly shaping minds.

This question does not address the entire globe when looking at video games. Because of the global nature of the industry video games have profound effects on the culture of the world. However, I am only concerned with the United States.

METHODOLOGY

The way I determined to organize my research and to effectively judge how greatly the videogame industry affects American culture goes as follows:

First, I will provide background information and statistics about the American culture's involvement with videogames to answer questions such as: Who plays videogames? Who makes videogames? Which videogames are the most popular? These questions will determine the status of the American culture and how involved the culture is with videogames. By providing these statistics I will have insight in how large of a role, whether the industry affects it or not, videogames have in the culture.

In my main research I will be evaluating distinct characteristics of the American culture and determining whether each part of the videogame industry shows a similar characteristic. Depending on which aspects of the industry show this characteristic it can be shown how

greatly the gaming industry affects the culture. The aspects I will be looking at are the videogame developers, the gamers, and the games themselves. For example, for my first section I will be looking at the characteristic of gender discrimination in the culture. For this I will be determining how greatly each aspect of the industry: developers, games, and gamers, shows this tendency. Now depending of which aspects match up I will be able to conclude whether the characteristic of the culture, in this case gender discrimination, is reflected by or created from within the videogame industry. A combination that might occur is that the developers are sexist, the games are sexist, but the gamers are not. In this instance I would conclude that the videogame industry, when concerning the sexism in the culture, has no effect on America. I will do this method for the following topics: gender discrimination, racial discrimination, and homophobic tendencies.

SEXISM

PREFACE

The videogame industry is ever growing, and because of this more jobs and better opportunities for workers around the United States have emerged out of this sector. In fact, according to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016) the projected growth of just software developers of 299,500 more jobs by the year 2026 (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics is a government run bureau focusing of objective analysis of jobs in the united states. This projection shows the growth and influence of the industry, and this doesn't even include videogame designers, artists, and managers. This large advancement in jobs hides a statistic that provides information about the status of the Information Technology workforce in America concerning gender gaps.

DEVELOPERS/WORKPLACE

The Information Technology (IT) field in America is a large workforce, and one that is increasing due to advancements in technology. However, it is important to note: "The percentage of women in the Information Technology(IT) industry declined by 18% in the last eight years, with females now only representing one quarter of IT workers." (Dunlop,2008). These statistics provide insight into how the industry does not represent the ratio of men to women found in the population.. This misrepresentation in the industry highlights the discrepancies found in the culture. These statistics can be explained perhaps by the observations made by women both in the industry and out of it. They might see the videogame industry unwelcoming to women and minorities, proving that the workplace environment reflects sexist tendencies found in American culture. These statistics come from Janet Dunlop in her research in *The U.S. Video Game Industry: Analyzing Representation of Gender and Race*. With much of her research focusing on the effects of events, technologies, tragedies, and new aspects of society has on the American culture. Though she has this experience her intensions may be skewed due to her feminist agenda.

I take you now to an inside worker of the videogame industry as she describes her experiences with it:

I noticed straight away that there was a shortage of non-white non-men in games, and that I was often the odd one out, but thought it meant that I was special...The gaming industry is a business, first and foremost...when I used to go to industry events, a lot of people would talk about...designing games for women in terms of them being an untapped market, and this felt very strange and superficial to me. No one ever talked about any of the intrinsic, psychological benefits of representing marginalized people in games (Shevinsky, 2012)

Elissa Shevinsky is a technology executive, and cybersecurity expert, though she has experience in persuading large companies in seeing her view, using legal force to get what she wants. Do note that Shevinsky has compiled these stories into a book. The speaker here is referred to as Squinky. She puts us in the perspective of a gender-queer woman in the industry of video game design in the United States. This is her critical opinion about a field that she has always dreamed to be in. However, it presented itself to be not what she expected, concerning work ethics and morality. She highlights the lack of representation of people like her. This aspect of her story highlights the failure of the American society to push towards representation. The bare fact that she felt justified to write about her own experience of the gaming industry should be enough to prove that it lacks representation. But again, does this affect or reflect American culture? Based on her second part of the quote she saw her colleagues finding women and racial representation as a business model; it can provide more profit if used. This implies that the industry does not use this method, for the people in the industry haven't considered it because they are part of the white male demographic of videogames.

The author's name is not actually Squinky but Dominique Pamplémousse. She uses this identity the gender-neutrality allowing her to express herself without discomfort. This aspect of her, that she is a gender-queer woman, is important on the content of this source. This allows a perspective that isn't usually shared to be, without other opinions shadowing hers.

Based on the evidence provided above the industry, the workplace itself also hold the discrepancies the American culture has on women. However, a look into the future is valuable to this judgment. We can reference a survey done by the International Game Developers Association, IGDA, a non-profit organization focusing on providing assets to developers. Though beneficial to their members, this organization is looked down upon for intruding on the business of developers. It acts much like a union; therefore, it has skewed views on topics involving workers' rights. This survey notes:

“76% of respondents identified their gender as male, with 22% identifying as female. Only 0.5% identified as male-to-female transgender, and 0.2% as female-to-male transgender. An additional 1.2% selected “other” as their response to this question. This is a significant change since the IGDA's 2005 Diversity Survey, in which women made up 11.5% of the sample” (IDGA, 2014)

Even though the industry is showing a lack of equality in the work force, times are changing, and the trend is a shift in this trend. This evidence provides insight into the answer to the question: perhaps it is more complex than numbers. Numbers may be insightful into looking for a numerical answer, but we are searching for qualitative answers. To get this let us look at sexism in the videogames themselves, and how the industry's inequality may be reflected in the games.

VIDEOGAME CONTENTS

“There are few playable female characters and most female characters are seen in submissive, hyper-sexualized or victim roles. Many of these images are so ingrained in dominant U.S. cultural expectations of women, ethnic minorities, and their roles in society that they are perceived as normal.” (Dunlop, 2008)

Videogames today provide new perspectives around the world. You can play an immigrant finding a home, a soldier fighting a new world war, or a farmer living a subtle lifestyle. However, these videogames offer little to none female characters to play as. In other words the videogames are exclusive to men, or even odd alien beings. Women are predominately sexualized and misrepresented to appeal to male players. This can easily be found in American culture today: Advertisements focusing on women's bodies instead of the product, television

shows having more male main characters than women. This highlights that the videogames themselves have similar characteristics to American culture.

To further this comes specific games that portray women wrongly:

Games such as *WWE WrestleMania*, *Grand Theft Auto*, and *Midnight Club: Street* depict women as mindless subordinate sex objects, while seemingly harmless games such as *Star Wars* and *Spiderman* place females in subordinate roles that are either props or much less important than men. (Dunlop, 2008)

These video games offer gamers an experience that is not found in real life. Fantasies that offer a false reality are fine when it comes to unrealistic physics, large battleships in space, or other alien underwater races, but hiding sexist tones in the characters' portrayal and background are detrimental. However, I believe the most surprising thing is why people still play these games, including women. Now it is time to look at the gamers that play these games.

GAMERS

Gamers are the core of the videogame industry, they provide profit to videogame developers. Without the gamers the videogame industry wouldn't exist and without the industry the gamers wouldn't exist. Some gamers are unique from each other, especially when you break down the statistics by gender"

"In the last three years, the amount of female video gamers grew from 40% to 42%" (Entertainment Software Association, 2010) and in 2015 it grew to "44%". This increase has me wondering why videogames then do not change their contents to appeal to more female gamers. According to Daniel Schultheiss (2017), "females were less involved in videogames, were disgusted by aggressive content and stereotypical game characters, and were less attracted by competition". Daniel Schultheiss currently works as a research n a university in Switzerland. Daniel does research in Communication and Media, Quantitative Social Research and Qualitative Social Research. Though no more information about this high level researcher can be found. This is intriguing. It is obvious that more and more females are playing

videogames even though the content of videogames, the most popular ones, have stereotypical tendencies. Perhaps even though more females are playing, they don't play these games. Which leads me to the conclusion that the gaming community does not share the same characteristic of discrimination of females.

VERDICT

Based on the evidence presented it can be concluded that, when concerned with the issue of gender misrepresentation and sexism in American culture, the videogame industry only reflects the culture. This can be made by how the three categories compare with each other. When the inside of the industry, the developers and the games themselves, highlights the cultural problem of sexism, but the gamers and consumers of the industry does not it can be decided that the industry only uses the methods of other media platforms, such as movies and television and news, to devise their workforce and product.

HOMOPHOBIC TENDENCIES

PREFACE

Heavily found in American culture today, especially in teenage culture, is homophobia. The words "fag", "homo", and "gay" are used with negative connotations to not only dismiss homosexuals but everyone in the LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer and non-hetero) community. These terms "gay" and "faggot" are not only found within high school walls but also online. Online harassment can extend from social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram, but many don't realize that videogame chats and online forums are breeding grounds for homophobia and derogatory comments.

DEVELOPERS/WORKPLACE

Many don't realize that the videogame industry has the power of censorship, filtering, and controlling the dialog between players. This may be beneficial in some aspects, for example blocking slurs from appearing on players feed, or chat, when playing a game. However, this was not the case in 2011-12. During this time Blizzard, a well-known videogame company, known for creating World of Warcraft, held controversial filters on their in-game chat, reported by Fox Van Allen. Fox Van Allen is the head writer of CBS Interactive, a news organization focusing of entertainment news such as video games and movies. Though, he is head writer of his department he has only held the position for two years, previously writing for a different newspaper about different topics, other than videogame culture.

Yesterday on the official World of Warcraft forums, a poster brought up the fact that the word "transsexual" gets censored by Blizzard's mature language filter. Almost immediately after, another poster brought up the fact that the word "homosexual" is censored as well" (Allen, 2012)

This seemed harmless at the surface. Blizzard soon realizing the claims that can be made towards them and their views on the LGBTQ+ community made an attempt to spin the situation. Stating that the only reason why the words were blocked were to prevent discrimination and

inappropriate chats towards the community. However, amongst the controversy, a point was made:

Banning the word homosexual, while simultaneously allowing the word faggot to go uncensored even to the eyes of a 10-year-old, is another sharp insult to the gay community. It's an endorsement of the gamer culture, a message that says that the word faggot's place in the gamer culture should be protected. (Allen, 2012)

Blizzard has met countless claims of homophobia and discrimination towards everyone outside their gamer culture. These blames point directly to the creators and managers of the games they produce. This highlights the homophobia created within the industry. One may note that this is the mistake of one company, therefore it is an anomaly. This is not a valid argument, for Blizzard is the largest videogame industry in the world. However, a further analysis of the videogames themselves and the people who play it need to be analyzed to reach a conclusion.

VIDEOGAME CONTENT

Videogames, as we know from the previous topics, provide not only insight in what the developers feel about a subject, but also gives players a reaction and voice in how they feel about a subject. The LGBTQ+ community would argue they are underrepresented in videogames. Now I'll look at the opinions of the game culture on the videogames, including the history of LGBTQ+ in videogames, and what is happening today.

The Gaymer ("gaymer" : a player that self-identifies as gay) Survey, done by Shaw the winner of the 2016 International Communication Association's Popular Communications Division's Book Award focusing on media representation states:

Stereotyping has long been a concern of LGBTQ media representation. 'Stereotyping is one step beyond the initial stage of sheer invisibility that minorities have to move through on their way to even token representation'. Gaymers did not want to be placated with token characters; they wanted good games. If those games happened to include non-binary, non-normative gender roles, and non-heterosexual relationships and references, all the better. One argument given in mainstream gaming forums about the lack of diversity in video games is that the LGBTQ community does not make up a significant

portion of the market. This justification was notably absent in my discussions with gaymers" (Shaw, 2012)

Though this is a single opinion from one member of the community, they bring up a good point about lacking media representation. Though LGBTQ+ members aim for equality, their representation in games can be negative due to stereotypes, and, sadly, this seems to be the case. Many videogames lack characters that portray non-heterosexual relationships or characteristics, that aren't stereotypical. This list is too long to write. Only a list of LGBT inclusive games can be managed, even then these lists are detailed, only providing minimal proof that they are inclusive.

A commenter on LGBT HUMANIST NEWS (2012), a news organization focusing on reporting news on LGBT events and controversy, providing insight into the emotions and feelings of the community. However, this organization has defined views on LGBT controversy, states:

There are many games that allow you to engage in same-sex relationships in the game environment. A March 2012 post on Freethought Blogs by "Assassin Actual" discussed their experience gaming and the same-sex relationship that their gaming character was engaged in, and Fox New's apparent slippery-slope disapproval of this in games such as Mass Effect 3" (GaymerCon and The Rise of the Gaymer, 2012)

Recent games today are slowly allowing homosexual relationships to be played out and in turn gamers feel more accepting towards these changes. In addition there are also games that directly comment on homosexuality. In this videogame entitle "Coming out Simulator"

There's no easy answer in *Coming Out Simulator*, no optimal ending to be achieved if you collect the requisite amount of points. Case based the game off a pivotal moment in his own life as a teenager. And just like in real life, the moment of "coming out" in this game is traumatic no matter which way the player chooses to approach it." (LeJacq, 2014)

Clearly, the author of this article, Yannick LeJacq, a writer for Kotaku, an online news forum focusing on gaming news, shows that games are insightful and inclusive in the LGBT community, even reaching out to the gaming community about the topic. Though his expertise is prominent

he now works for Blizzard entertainment, this brings up questions about his opinions about homophobia in the industry.

This odd balance between homophobia and acceptance shows that the importance of a gamer's point of view is advantageous...

GAMERS

In this section I look at two perspectives of the gamers: Gay gamers (known as "gaymers") and regular gamers, and how they communicate their homophobic tendencies, reacting to homophobia or creating it.

To look at how the videogame industry injects homophobia into the American culture we must look at the gamers themselves and see whether or not they are homophobic. This can be done by looking at the gaming LGBT community and their experiences with homophobia.

A notable example of homosexuals putting their opinions together on the community of videogames is a survey done by Adrienne Shaw, an Assistant Professor in Temple University's Department of Media Studies. This survey produces responses of gamers in the LGBTQ+ community, entitled the "Gaymer Survey". Some instances of answers answer important questions about how homophobic the gamer community really is, according to a person that may feel strongly about the topic, and have firsthand experience:

There is a big stigma in the gay community about video games – they think you are social retard because you play video games instead of going to the bar and hooking up. So it's nice to be around other gays who like games as much as I do. I don't really mind the homophobia in the str8 [straight] gaming community 'cause it's illogical and immature – but I DO hate the game-ophobia (or whatever you'd call it) in the gay community. (Shaw, 2012)

This interviewee states that even though there is homophobia in the gamer community, this homophobia stems from assumptions in both ends. Meaning that there are stigmas set on gamers, presumed to be white-male and heterosexual, perhaps never doing anything of "value" in life, in other words anti-social. While on the other hand, homosexual men are seen as

outgoing, lively, adventurous, and creative – not needing an outlet such as videogames, or not being able to sit there for long, needing social interaction. These stereotypes are merged and force many unacceptance for “gaymers”. This is where confusion and homophobia comes in from the gaming community and “game-ophobia” from the game community. This doesn't support the notion that the videogame industry causes this homophobia, that these stereotypes are already existent in the American culture, only furthered, or allowed by the online games today.

However, as mentioned in the Developers/Workplace section of this subtopic, the industry can greatly influence whether this phobia can continue. It is important to note how the consumers decided to react to this controversy over Blizzard. This scandal occurred in 2012. The next year the first ever “GaymerCon” or “GaymerX” took place in San Francisco. This “GaymerCon” is a convention focusing on videogames. However, this convention focused on bringing together the LGBTQ+ communities. Based on their fundraising page, from 2013, I was able to gain information on how the organizers felt about the Blizzard incident of 2011-2012:

“The stereotypes about gamers are many, but the core is the perception that gamers are usually straight white guys in dark rooms furiously mashing at a controller. That's not the reality. Gamers come in all sizes, genders, races, and sexual identities. Unfortunately, stereotypical bias among gamers does exist and it can make a hostile environment for minorities in the gaming community. Hang around an online game long enough and you'll start hearing homophobic, racial, and misogynistic slurs slung around without a second thought. Gamers, as a whole, have had to make space for themselves in a society that, for a long time, treated them as outsiders. They have come together and created a real community of people, but one that is not always welcoming if you don't fit into the mold. Just like most gamers, queer geeks and gaymers want that same sense of community and belonging. Therefore, we intend to create a space where all gamers and queer geeks can come together in a welcoming and safe space.” (GamerX, 2013)

This source is from Kickstarter, a public website meant for individuals or organizations to publicly raise money for their cause or product. This source provides a primary source for gaymers opinion and efforts. Though, this is useful the words of each “kickstarter” are persuasive to get people to donate. Clearly, in response to the Blizzard scandal the community of gaymers

responded to this positively and addressed the issue by raising awareness towards derogatory terms and stereotypes. This goes against the gaymer survey's message done by Adrienne Shaw. In other words, her research contrasts to the existence of Gaymer Con when considering if the videogame industry affects gamers. She failed to realize that events like the Blizzard incident built up awareness, meaning the American culture is influenced by the gaming industry, reacting and accommodating discrimination by creating "safe spaces" that further acceptance and destigmatize the LGBTQ+ community in videogames.

VERDICT

I saved this horrid detail about the Blizzard incident until the end of this section, not only because it fits in every one of the categories above; the industry, games, and gamers, but because it shows the clear relationship the industry has with gamers, and how that relationship can be destroyed, even looked down upon, yet somehow excused in the end, due to the advantages the videogame industry had over the American culture:

The Blizzard scandal was not just controversy about chat filters in their games but what happened at their own convention, BlizzCon, where fans of their games, such as World of Warcraft, come together to socialize and see new games. The managers and organizers of BlizzCon decide to present an online streaming personality to the audience. These gamers play the videogame, World of Warcraft, in front of a live online audience. DO NOTE: This video was chosen after the stream, the broadcast, was finished, meaning BlizzCon had control of what will be said. The LGBT Humanist News summarizes the incident in their article:

Video game company Blizzard Entertainment's convention (BlizzCon) featured a video presentation on stage of American death metal band frontman, George Fisher, carrying on in a string of homophobic slurs. In an outdoor, sit-down interview, wearing a black t-shirt the long-haired, alabaster-skinned Fisher discussed his play of World of Warcraft. In terms of teams, Fisher says that he "don't play no fuckin' homo-Alliance neither...Fucking die you fucking emo-cocksuckers." Appearing to get worked about the game, Fisher continues... (GaymerCon and The Rise of the Gaymer, 2012)

More phrases that the streamer said were “If I could just reach into my computer, I would fucking punch that mother fucker’s lights out right now” and “Go cry in a river and tell me how you’re going to slit your wrists you night-owl faggot” (GaymerCon and The Rise of the Gaymer, 2012)

Clearly Blizzard found themselves in hot water later stating: “We are sorry that we offended anyone; everything at our shows is just meant in fun. Thank you all for speaking up. We’ll definitely keep this in mind for future shows” (GaymerCon and The Rise of the Gaymer, 2012)

The point of showing this example is that it solves the riddle of the question I am answering about homophobia. The industry has profound affects on the games, and what can be said in them. But the gamers are controlling, reactive, and judgmental of the industry. In this instance, homophobia, it is dynamic. The industry pushing and pulling from the culture. The United States is reactive, voices heard

FINAL VERDICT

Based on the evidence above we can look directly at the relationship between the videogame industry and the American culture. With profound sexism in the American culture I investigated the gaming industry, its insides, its output, and its audience. With the verdict of it clearly affecting the culture, we can compare this to the homophobic tendencies found not only within the gaming culture but also the American culture.

I have created 3 noteworthy observations:

First the industry is complex, yet a simplistic view can be applied to it. One may view the industry as a machine, constantly strategizing its millions of moving parts to accommodate outside stimuli such as reviews, demand, and opinion on scandal. A simplistic viewpoint would be that the industry produces games and the culture consumes it, simple. Both approaches are useful and work well together. The main notable reason based on the topic at hand is that the

complex system implies the industry reflects the culture while the simplistic view says it controls the culture. After this research I can conclude that based on the viewpoint chosen your answer will defer.

Second, gamers are people. It may seem an odd statement, but the point of it is that people are different. They are not "a people" they are people. People are diverse and reactive. Many fail to see this, even the industry. It is what stereotypes do.

Third, a simple media can be reflective of all media. Games are what people do for entertainment. If someone kills zombies while trying to chat about the most recent update for a new game, then something is shown about that person. If someone discriminates against women and the LGBT community while casually using slurs to other like-minded people without second thought or consequence, assumptions about the state of American culture can be made. Games are one form of art, entertainment, media and the sharing of thoughts, it is another language that influences other languages, other media and cultures.

Through this research I can conclude, based on my methodology, that the gaming industry does affect the American culture. However, it cannot be refuted that the culture affects the industry. The videogame industry is dynamic, like any industry. The gaming industry greatly affects American culture, and American culture greatly affects the industry.

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