

# How Gaming Acts A Gateway Into the Alt-Right for Distressed Gamers

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If you have no prior experience with this particular topic, the title might have surprised you a little. After all, it suggests that the gaming community might be some form of an enabler for some people to fall into the claws of alt-right ideas. For the uninitiated, the idea possibly sounds ridiculous. Unless you buy into the lies and exaggerations of those who claim video games are the main cause of the violence that they, again, the claim is rising, you probably do not have a particularly negative opinion of video games. In addition, almost all readers of this article would be able to point at a few of their acquaintances or friends who play games and are definitely not alt-right. But trust me, there is a strong precedent for the title of this article being what it is. There exists on the internet a subset of gamers so infamous for their alt-right-ideology-fueled actions that those who are critical of their actions even coined a name for them: Capital G Gamers (Sometimes stylized Gamers™ or abbreviated CGGs). Now let us take a look at what warranted their surprisingly poor reputation.

There are possibly a thousand events we could point to here that would work as great examples, but to demonstrate the sheer magnitude, it might be best to go after the single greatest event which kickstarted all of the discourse the rest of this article will dissect. In 2014, game developer Zoe Quinn's ex-boyfriend Eron Gjoni wrote a disparaging blog post about Zoe, which, among other things, accused Zoe of having an unethical sexual relationship with video game journalist Nathan Grayson. This checked a few boxes for groups of people that would later be called Gamers™. First, the existence of a female (note that Zoe has come out as genderfluid since) in the video game industry. Second, a woman partaking in sexual intercourse. Third, a game journalist allegedly committing an unethical act. Capital G gamers pounced on this opportunity in incredible numbers and soon the sparks of Eron's blog post had turned into an all-engulfing fire. Eventually, Gamergate turned into a fight between the CGGs and their perceived enemies, where the CGGs fought to protect their "gamer identities" against their politically motivated opponents, (1) that is what "Gamergaters" thought of it anyways.

In the aftermath, many commentators called it an extension of the ongoing "culture war" over the increasing prevalence of diversification, political correctness, and overall progressivism. But what came to define the movement was the absurd amount of harassment aimed at those who became targets of the Gamergaters, the main one of which was Zoe Quinn. Zoe was already a common target because of the unusual structure of her 2013 game *Depression Quest*. But Zoe stated that the death and rape threats towards them had increased thousand-fold. (2) Other popular targets were feminist game critic Anita Sarkeesian and video game developer Brianna Wu, among others. On one occasion Sarkeesian had to leave her residence due to security concerns. (3) Similarly, Wu had to leave her home with her husband after

receiving multiple death and rape threats. (4) And to think all this had started from a blog post! With a simple blog in hand, Eron Gjoni became the Gavrilo Princip of the gaming world. This incredibly overblown response by proponents of the movement perfectly illustrates why Capital G Gamers can be very dangerous at times.

All this does beg another question though: Who are these people? Why are they so aggressive, especially towards progressive ideas, women, and people of color? And what creates them? First of all, the majority of this crowd is made out of white males, especially young adults and teenagers, who spend a great amount of time playing video games. Being bullied or lonely in real life, not being particularly affluent, or being the citizen of a lower income, lower quality of life country, or area is very common amongst the whole demographic. The majority of them thus cannot be said to lead fulfilling lives and many of them are using video games as a form of escapism. In small doses, escapism is considered normal and healthy, but as it becomes more prominent in a person's life, their sense of reality starts to warp and they start showing undue affection and care to their preferred medium of escapism.

In our case, some gamers, from traditionally more privileged parts of society, flock to video games as a way to escape their dissatisfying lives. But as the video game industry gets larger, some people inescapably begin pointing out the racist, sexist, homophobic conventions and expectations within games and the community. This inevitably leads to some gamers being confronted about their privilege. But if these gamers happen to be the ones using games as a strong escape, they often become very angry at the thought of being privileged. After all, their lives aren't all that great and they lack the necessary historical, societal, and economical context to make sense of how they can be privileged and suffering at the same time in a very flawed system, so instead, they reject any idea of themselves being privileged and sometimes even go so far as to think that they are actually the ones being oppressed. Thus, they find themselves in a conflict with the more progressive aspects of the gaming community.

Note that the gaming community is not only related to video games. There is a very specific nerd subculture centered around gaming that gives us a better look at the full picture. First of all, most gaming discourse takes place in specific subreddits, discord servers, and the like. Secondly, information and ideas travel around gaming circles by the way of internet memes and occasionally short texts more so than they travel around with longer more meticulously argued posts. Notably, both of these factors lead to this discourse falling under the niche category because both the "forum" and the means of discussion are themselves niche. Another thing about these forums is that they are often catered toward a very specific audience with heavy moderation in place. This leads to spaces of many like-minded individuals who, more than anything, strengthen each other's conviction on the consensus opinion of the group. Add to that the very flawed system of communication members of these groups make use of, that is, emotion-based memes and short texts which are produced to be digested in a short time without the subject doing fact or context checks, but are nevertheless intending to change the opinion of said subject, and you can see how misinformation and crudely thought out baseless arguments thrives in these communities. Thus, owing to the structure of their communities,

the people within this specific nerd culture are very prone to be ideologically radicalized without realizing it.

Yet, this would not be enough to radicalize them if not combined with another factor, after all the surroundings being conducive to radicalization means nothing if there exists no reason to be radicalized. If they were feeling threatened or oppressed due to some external factors, however, then people within this environment could very easily be indoctrinated. To understand what this factor was for our would-be Gamers™, we must analyze the demographics of gaming across the years. In the times of the very first video games, few people understood their appeal as the first games were very simple and easily replaceable with non-digital forms of play. Most viewed it as some new gimmick by the computer nerds, which themselves were not very well understood at the time. As technology and software progressed, however, the audience widened greatly, and games started to be appealing to people outside the tech industry. Most early adopters were, of course, the wealthier people, who could be informed of the advent of video games and also have the means to purchase the necessary equipment to play them. This was especially centered around the U.S as it was the heart of the game development industry at the time. Due to all these factors, most early adopters of video gaming were straight white males but it does not stop there: Game developers were straight white males at even higher rates than gamers. Of course, as time progressed, the audience of gamers diversified because if the customer's got the money, the developers are (mostly) happy to sell their products. In fact, two separate reports by the Kaiser Family Foundation and Nielsen survey research found that African American and Hispanic youth ages 8–18 spend more time with video games on average than White youth. (5) But things aren't so bright on the development front. In the UK, for example, only around 15% of developers are women and the percentage of minority developers in the game dev industry is less than half their percentage in the general population. (6)

This has created an environment where game development is carried out for straight white males by straight white males. The situation has only begun to change very recently, and more and more games are featuring minority characters and protagonists. It is a very gradual process but nevertheless, it is taking place. Concerns over the state of the video game industry regarding equality and representation have also begun to be raised more frequently which should inevitably force developers to be more inclusive. We are still at an early time, but video games seem to be changing for the better. But to some, this does not seem as good as we just made it out to be. This “some” is, of course, capital g gamers. Yet, they did not come to this viewpoint by the way of simple racism. They are very much convinced that they are defending themselves against an invasion.

We previously discussed that gamers are revolted at the idea of being privileged because of their various precarious situations. But as awareness of inherently racist, sexist, and homophobic systems and practices increases, people get called out for their privileges at a more frequent rate than before. This progression of events naturally puts some gamers and progressives at odds. The progressives call for gaming to be more equal but gamers do not

agree with the notion that they might be privileged, thus they see equality only as a cover-up of what they perceive as an attack on their culture. In their minds, evil SJWs are attacking gamers under the guise of progress and they must do everything they can to defend it, even if that everything includes threatening a woman with rape.

While considering all this, we must reiterate that these people usually do not come to these conclusions on their own. The plethora of alt-right influencers and echo-chambers are very close to gamer spaces, often intersecting with one another. These proponents of radical ideologies then attempt to inject their ideologies to distressed gamers looking to identify the cause of their misfortunes in life by redirecting the blame at evil SJWs, feminists, and the like. The more innocent gamers, desperate for an enemy and an oppressor, gobble this up without much thought, and unknowingly take their first step into the alt-right. Interestingly, the process is very similar to how the alt-right recruits the working class by blaming immigrants. In both cases a group that might be seen as threatening to the target is demonized, feminists and immigrants, and the actual source of the problems, often corrupt systems and corrupt individuals holding too much power, are swept under the rug. These same gamers later become critical of immigration as well, in their natural course, as a result of the aforementioned intersection between gaming and alt-right spaces. So, to truly understand how the transformation happens one needs to look at the alt-right influencers and echo chambers.

If you are active on the international side of social media, you might have seen that there are some alt-right content creators with decently sized followings. If you have, say, clicked on one of their videos on YouTube you might also have noticed that YouTube keeps recommending you other videos from other alt-righters. Constantly. What is the reason for this? YouTube has personalized recommendations, but it seems to increase tenfold for alt-right YouTubers. Does YouTube have a specific agenda to push alt-righters? Well, probably not directly. It is most likely that since these creators generate so much content so quickly, and their viewers watch it all to get their fix of outrage, the algorithm recognizes those channels as more profitable to advertise. Besides, there is a lot of cross-channel promotion between them, which also pushes up their profitability for the platform. Similar cases exist for other social media platforms as well. These alt-right influencers not only push their ideologies by content but by followers too. Their comment sections can be considered alt-right echo chambers, they often try to lead people to their subreddits and discord channels which can also be considered alt-right echo chambers, which also lead to other, independent, communities, which can, again, be considered alt-right echo chambers. It should be evident now that we must also talk about these echo chambers to form a more complete understanding of the subject.

First, the name echo chamber succinctly describes their main fault: The consensus opinion is amplified, and all others are drowned. How do you accomplish this? Well, simply bringing together a lot of people of sufficiently similar opinion will automatically create this effect to some degree, but to complete the chamber, one needs moderation. A team of moderators who silence dissenting opinions by hand greatly amplifies the echo effect. The team need not have

consistent guidelines or clearly stated rules they are enforcing; it is best if they can hide behind vague principles to enforce the majority's way of thinking. If you are not familiar with them, the previous sentence is describing the moderators of the aforementioned communities and sometimes even influencers themselves. Of course, when the community is structured this way, even moderates who fall into it by accident or innocent skepticism are prone to get radicalized. It can be said that there are "layers" of different communities like this which are varying degrees of radicalized and utterly divorced from reality. The top layers would be YouTube comments of alt-right influencers, the bottom layers would be the niche websites like 4chan and 8chan which often ridicule even the alt-right influencers for being too far left. Fortunately, most people do not drop down to the very bottom of this rabbit hole. Still, it provides the "stairway" by which people descend into madness.

Then can we say that people with very malicious intentions are corrupting innocent and vulnerable gamers into alt-right goons? Well, probably in some cases, but it would be best to not apply that thinking to all of the cases related to our topic. First of all, the thought that there are "alt-right missionaries" with deep convictions in their "faith" is a somewhat naïve way of thinking. Some alt-right influencers might best be categorized that way, but that does not seem to be applicable to some, or even most of them. Most of these people seem to only carry a slightly unreasonable commitment towards their ideologies and a much stronger interest in preserving their wealth and popularity. The things they must do to preserve those are what makes them seem very deeply involved in preaching about their beliefs. This happens because their income and fame are directly based on the well-being of the outrage culture. To sustain themselves, these influencers constantly need to keep creating rage among their followers, even when there is no reason to be outraged. For this reason, these people often make mountains out of molehills, which further fuels outrage culture because it gets their followers addicted to anger, which they substitute for actual solutions to problems in their lives. Also, it might be good to remember that outrage is better if you want to pander to the algorithms.

Up until now, we have only talked about external agents pushing gamers towards the alt-right, but if this is such a common occurrence, then the content of the video games they play must have something to do with it as well, no? No, not really. In fact, if you ignore the aforementioned issue of diversity, most video games are actually left-leaning in their message. To illustrate this point, let us examine two Wikipedia pages. The first one is "List of video games considered the best" (7) and the second is "List of best-selling video games" (8). We will consider the most recent entries in the first article and in both lists we will generally consider games that have single-player modes with traditional storytelling.

The first of our games is The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt. This game is seen through the eyes of a shunned minority (a witcher) and often tells his troubles created by his status in society. Other minorities also appear, both by fictional and realistic metrics, and quests involving those minorities almost always end up with the main character fighting against their oppressor. It has been criticized for its representation problems but carries a clear anti-alt-right message. The next game is Grand Theft Auto V. For the uninitiated, the Grand Theft Auto series is

perhaps the most comprehensive criticism of the American Dream, ever. The series commonly ridicules casual and systematic racism present in the US and even those profiting from it. Also at times, it is very forward with its ridicule of white people who are ignorant of their privilege. That one should make Gamers™ very angry. The Last of Us comes just after GTA V, and it has been praised many times for its LGBTQ+ representation, one of the main characters being a lesbian woman, which the game does not vilify or fetishize in any way. Peeking out to our second list, we can see the title Red Dead Redemption 2 which is very heavy-handed with its anti-racism message. The player does not get an honor decrease if they kill a KKK member, unlike any other killable character in the game. It also depicts the struggles of the suffragettes at the time to some degree. Perhaps, the most confusing game here would be Call of Duty: Modern Warfare, which has been bashed for its depiction of the Russian military but is very apt at describing the horrors of war and delivering an anti-war message. Plus, the Modern Warfare series even has a Russian protagonist for a time later on.

The skeptic reader can check whether we have purposefully misrepresented the list by following the links in the footnotes. There are three games from the first list and two games from the second, all taken in order from games that met the aforementioned criteria. These games could all be called anti-alt-right, but that does not even really matter. Even if they are not anti-alt-right, you would be hard-pressed to find a game in those lists which is pro-alt-right. Thus, we can state with confidence that there is a disconnect between the content of video games and Capital G Gamer culture. Which begs the question of why this disconnect exists? Gamers seem to love games but there is a disagreement between the games and their ideologies. Furthermore, it places them at odds with game developers as well, since the two groups seem to have wildly different political views. How can Gamers™ continue to love these games?

The answer is, for the most part, that they do not even realize they hold different political views, because they cannot even realize the actual political messages of the games they play. For Capital G Gamers, the game does not contain any politics so long as it does not contain any minority characters, which they call "pandering to the SJWs". For example, in Grand Theft Auto V, Gamers™ did not complain about the anti-racist subtexts and statements at all but were very furious at the prospect of having an African-American protagonist. For additional context, Franklin, the black protagonist, is one of the three of the game's protagonists, two of which are White Americans. Additionally, he is not the first black protagonist of the series either. Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas featured CJ, another black protagonist. Still, all that did not stop our favorite group of racist people from being outraged, ranting about it on online forums, and even making a White Franklin mod which changes the skin color of GTA V's Black protagonist. (9) That last point perfectly illustrates our point, simply changing Franklin's skin color does not change the anti-racism stance of the game, the references to Afro-American culture, or the Ebonics that Franklin speaks in. But Gamers™ are satisfied with skin color because what they perceive as political is only the existence of minority characters in their games. But when game developers try to give the same messages on Twitter, gamers are happy to bash them for it, saying that developers should not be talking politics, all the while claiming that video games are art. So, thanks to their cognitive

dissonances and lack of general context regarding political issues, gamers are able to enjoy games only being triggered by minority characters.

At this point, we have developed a good understanding of how and why alt-right gamers are created, as well as how and why they can stay that way. We have also discussed a few examples of the repulsive actions undertaken by alt-right gamers, but we should furthermore discuss their effects on the overall gaming community in order to complete our understanding. First of all, their toxicity spreads into the community at large, which can be potentially putting for minority gamers. They also drive away minority developers by the way of online bullying. Both these factors reduce the minority percentage and representation in gaming which slows down the progress of equality within games. Because these alt-righters are prominent in the gaming community, their repulsive behaviors are also normalized. The frequency of racial slurs in gaming lobbies, for example, is partly due to this reason. There are also counter-movements however after all some gamers are not particularly pleased with the current state of affairs regarding societal equality in gaming. Even the term "Capital G Gamers" we have been using throughout this article was coined by these people, so they also have some prominence within the community. But the infamy of the racist gamers has brought criticism from outside of gaming circles as well. The more socially liberal non-gamer folks have been making fun of gamers for the inherent racism in the industry, which has garnered criticism from other gamers to the alt-right gamers for tainting the reputation of the community. Yet, thankfully, the loop of anti-progressivism is starting to be broken as the video game industry gets more and more popular, and more and more minorities are engaging in video games and video game development.

So, does that mean that we will someday see a more equal video game community? Yes, probably. After all, the cinema underwent a similar process. Showing minorities on the white screen were first shunned, then ranted about, and finally accepted and internalized by the majority. This is not to say that cinema does not have its own share of problems with equality and diversity, but the general outline of events regarding progress in cinema should be mostly applicable to video gaming as well. Perhaps, the disgruntlement we are currently seeing in gamers is indicative of the progress we are making. The statistics, too, tell us that video games are moving in that direction. In the meantime, however, the radicalization of impressionable gamers feeling they are under attack remains a real phenomenon that should be examined and discussed. Does that mean the gamers who have been radicalized during the transition state are unsavable? Not necessarily. We had previously talked about the main reason for them being susceptible, which was the lack of overall context. As they get older and wiser, many alt-right gamers eventually gain enough context to grow out of their evil ideologies. The alt-right rabbit hole is not one that you cannot climb back out of. So until the industry progresses enough that young gamers are not vulnerable to alt-right tactics, the best we can do is simply to keep an open mind and try to inject them with the context and information they need to break out of the loop. As we observe such people gaining more influence and those kinds of communities getting larger, we must conclude that, despite the unfortunate alignment of the circumstances, there still is hope that the video game industry and community could champion true equality and social progress.