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Social Virtual Reality: Neurodivergence and Inclusivity in the Metaverse**James L Hutson***Lindenwood University, USA*

Whereas traditional teaching environments encourage lively and engaged interaction and rewards extrovert qualities, introverts and others with symptoms that make social engagement difficult, such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), are often disadvantaged. This population is often more engaged in quieter, low-key learning environments and often does not speak up and answer questions in traditional lecture-style classes. These individuals are often passed over in school, and later in careers, for not speaking up and are assumed to not be as competent as their gregarious and outgoing colleagues. With the rise of the metaverse and democratization of virtual reality (VR) technology, post-secondary education is especially poised to capitalize on the immersive learning environments social VR provides and prepare students for the future of work where virtual collaboration will be key. This study seeks to reconsider the role of VR and the metaverse for introverts and those with ASD. The metaverse has the potential to continue the social and workplace changes already accelerated by the pandemic and open new avenues for communication and collaboration for a more inclusive audience and tomorrow.

Biography

James Hutson is Lead XR Disruptor at Lindenwood University, USA. In his 16 years of professional experience, he has taught at 5 postsecondary institutions around the country and is an alumnus of the University of Maryland, College Park. He has served as chair of Art History and program manager of Pre-Art Therapy and Pre-Art Conservation, Assistant Dean of Graduate and Online Programs for the School of Arts, Media, and Communication, and now serves as Department Head of Art History and Visual Culture for the College of Arts and Humanities. His scholarship focuses on the exchange between education, emerging technologies, neuroscience, and psychology, especially with the integration of immersive realities and gamification of education. He belongs to several professional organizations and presents regularly at the College Art Association, Renaissance Society of America, International Game Developers Association, and Association for Computers and Humanities (ACH), and Oxford International Roundtable Sessions.