

## Ethics and Justice

There are many theories that can be debated about the game of Pac-Man. The game itself has been around for over 40 years and has remained popular the entire time. There must be some defining reason for its appeal and longevity, a bigger connotation or message perhaps. After debating this topic for a long time, and researching various theories, we found that Pac-Man has a few underlying meanings, but one in particular resonated with us the most. There is a strong theory on the metaphor Pac-Man is trying to show through the game and one only needs to play the game a few times to see its connection to mental illness. After looking into the different connections, and understanding the debate from an ethics and justice perspective, we kept the design of our game unchanged for the fundamental and important life lesson it provides for those struggling with any mental illness as well as the awareness it brings to this affliction.

When debating the merits of the design of our game, our first consideration was whether our ghosts should or should not be represented as professors. One theory we uncovered implied the ghosts could represent the inner demons in one's mind. Pac-Man is a game representing one's mind, as one escapes reality when playing the game. Their focus, or mind, goes deep into the game and thus Pac-Man is running around your mind. Then the ghosts are the demons inside the mind chasing you around 24/7. There is no escaping your mind, shown by the fact that Pac-Man has no way out of the map. Even when one's game ends, there are many others still playing. Thus Pac-Man is stuck in a continuous loop trying to escape his mind, or the game. We came to the conclusion that we would keep them as professors, as they can provide a quick visual, reminder, or connection to the user, nudging Pac-Man to get assignments done before the due date, or worse, a frantic rush to study or finish a project with little to no time left. This message will not be lost on the college student, but from an ethics standpoint it is not immoral to depict professors in this manner. Additionally, we do not believe anyone would take this as an affront or

be offended by it. Pac-Man is just a game and should not be taken too seriously. If anything, it should be a fun reminder to the students to get their assignments done in a timely manner so their 'real life' ghosts, professors, will not haunt them.

We then looked further into the game to see that the dots Pac-Man eats are medication for his mental illness. This becomes apparent as Pac-Man keeps needing to take his pills, and once he gets enough, completes the level, or eats all the medication prescribed, the ghosts go away. It must be pointed out however, that another level will always appear, with more dots/pills at each level, as mental illness is a continuing battle and it is not one pill, but constant and regular medication to help a person deal with their struggles. The game is trying to show how pharmaceutical companies are gaining on giving short-dose medication. The effects do not last long and thus people need to keep coming back for more and more and financially need to constantly invest in the medicines that help. The companies are capitalizing on mental illness which is a genetic disease of one's chemical makeup. They rack up prices on substances needed by people; Pac-Man is empathizing with the public for having to go through such hard battles.

Each dot represents medication and after getting a good dose of medication (shown by Pac-Man eating the big dot) one can then overcome their inner demons, or trap them for a short period of time. Eventually all demons, or ghosts, get out of their cage and back into wandering one's mind. And thus the battle is back, being a continuous cycle of fighting off mental illnesses, the ghosts. The ghosts go throughout the mind, spreading their negative effects, and that's why the game is aimed towards getting rid of them. Pac-Man is trying to show the corrupt ways of pharmaceutical companies benefiting from the medical need for these prescriptions.

After taking this all into account, we noticed the game has a kill or be killed mentality. In order to continue playing the game, Pac-Man must run from ghosts continuously. Pac-Man needs

to eat all the dots before moving onto the next level. But in order to help with the process, there are a few strategically placed larger dots scattered throughout the labyrinth. Pac-Man is able to eat larger dots in order to eat the ghosts. This gives us the kill or be killed mentality that is being shown in Pac-Man. We debated getting rid of this aspect and discussed at length the morality of Pac-Man becoming the killer himself once he eats the big dots. What we did note is the ghosts come back, every time. No matter how many times Pac-Man eliminates them, they pop back onto the screen. So it's not a true death but a 'leveling of the playing field' therefore the ethics of killing are not a solid argument and can therefore be dismissed.

The application of design justice in the game can again relate to the mental health connections. This game is trying to empathize with people who are born with any type of mental affliction. They are trying to show the harsh reality of coping with such a disease. When one plays the game, eventually they stop playing as the game becomes repetitive, with no final outcome or solution and boring. This is showing the player that one with a mental disability is stuck in the game constantly trying to find a way out but cannot. This is shown through the map that has no escape, just an endless cycle. When considering the design of the game and any adjustments that might be needed, we felt it was a true reflection of those suffering and a helpful way to show the mainstream user the suffering these marginalized people might feel on a day to day basis. To remove any part of the game's design would limit the useful message the game promotes. Pac-Man is shedding light on such a dark illness and trying to get justice for those struggling with it.

As the game has not denied or approved this theory, there is no true way of knowing if this is their hidden message but the connections speak for themselves. As college students we see the effects of mental illness either personally or through friends and classmates. This is a

struggling battle that must be taken more seriously. The game shows all the little implementations of the illness trying to bring justice to those struggling with it.