

HATRED & THE MEDIA

To what extent is the media response to games containing excessive sadism and violence justified?

EMILJANO KURBIBA
Falmouth University
November 27, 2016

Introduction

Tom Bissell once wrote "Many shooters ask the gamer to use violence against pure, unambiguous evil: monsters, Nazis, corporate goons, aliens of Ottoman territorial ambition. Yet these shooters typically have nothing to say about evil and violence, other than that evil is evil and violence is violent" [1] This statement is clearly applied to a game genre but can it be applied to the media and does the media make it clear for all before an individual plays a game? Like most mediums video games are commonly prone to criticism and study but when a game is so bold/striking and out of the norm it usually sparks controversy and consumers turn to the media for a voice on the controversy.

Hatred

Hatred is a game released on June 1st, 2015 by Destructive Creations; it is an isometric shoot 'em up game where a player would play an unknown deranged male where they would go around relentlessly committing mass genocide for points. The following articles are reviews for this game from media outlets, some being from the video game industry and some being from general news.

PC GAMER

Christopher Livingston at PC GAMER reviewed this game and made a brilliant point that in other games where a primary goal is to complete an objective and killing can sometimes be mandatory in order to do so like Hitman where you would have to kill and steal a guards clothes to walk around unnoticed it gives you a sense of morbid satisfaction and it makes you one step closer to a goal; in this however it does not, if anything it makes you ask a question to yourself that no game should "why am I doing this?" [7]. -Full review here

Kotaku

Nathan Grayson wrote an article on HATRED too and in short, he believes that this game made him realise that "the line he draws between perfectly entertaining video game violence and upsetting video game violence is becoming increasingly arbitrary"[4].

The Guardian

Keith Stuart wrote an article on HATRED mainly focusing on its marketing and controversy surrounding it but he summed up the game to be a "silly shooting game that seeks to tap dance between self-deprecating parody and pseudo-anarchic posturing so that it captures all sections, moods and arguing positions of its target demographic." [9] He argued that with all the media's responses to the game the developers themselves wanted this controversy and a game like this and succeeded in doing so.

Destructive Creations & The Media

Sadism is the pleasure of harm and throughout all the research conducted in this study it is apparent that this game either makes players feel uncomfortable and uneasy or leaves them questioning the morality of the game.[3] [8] The term Sadism and Masochism is used many times to describe this game, It is true to a degree that this game is about Sadism but does this mean that the media's response is justified?

The CEO of Destructive Creations Jaroslaw Zielinski was part of an interview with Polygon in 2014 just after the trailer of HATRED. When asked who is the target consumer? Zeilinski responded with

"You know I wouldn't exaggerate with this 'graphically realistic' thing. ;) Our target is basically a gamer that is coming home after a long, tiring and overall a shitty working day. So, we give him the opportunity to just sit by his computer and let some of the steam go by shooting NPCs and destroying the level.

"The game is also addressed to people that are in general tired of colourful, sci-fi shooters and are looking for a change. In Hatred, they are not forced to run with a laser gun and save the universe for a hundred time (sic). Quite the opposite in fact as we give them a chance to be The Bad Guy and the one that's being hunted." [2]

IMPORTANT NOTE: This was an interview conducted in 2014, a year before its release. The reviews above are published after the games release.

From this interview, it appears Zielinski is trying to reach a demographic that is tired of the conventional protagonist driven game where everything is fine in the end, a "good guys win" scenario if you will. In creating something completely different it sparked outrage in the media. This leads me to believe Zielinski & Destructive Creations are expressing themselves in their medium by exploring a darker area of the industry.

Freedom of Technology

The media serves a multitude of purpose - they act as an information centre for an individual or group, but what happens when news outlets intentionally deliver information which can be seen as controversial? These occasions are protected by freedom of speech but what about games? In 2011 The Supreme court in America passed Video Games to be protected by the first amendment where congress shall make no law prohibiting the expression of freedom of speech, or of the press. In short Destructive Creations are entitled to their creation no matter the content of it because Video Games are seen as part of an artistic medium. [5]

Consumers & The Media

Judith Levine wrote a wonderful informative report called "Only a Game: Why Censoring New Media Won't Stop Gun Violence"[6] it is about the connection between the media, Gun Violence & Video games. She reported the sciences behind gaming, discussing censorship and court laws in Video games.

"Is Macbeth violent, is Oedipus Rex? How about Grimm's Fairy Tales, Wile E. Coyote cartoons, or professional hockey? Do films like Quentin Tarantino's Django Unchained condemn violence or revel in it? Is the aggression in the video game Madden NFL more acceptable than that in Assassin's Creed?"[6]

This quote taken from the report is fascinating in the sense that it poses many questions, questions that can obviously be answered by The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) but when did PC GAMER, KOTAKU & THE GUARDIAN become that primary voice consumers obeyed when facing controversial games like these? Understandably these mediums have every right to write such reviews, in fact it is their job to do so but where do we draw the line between the consumer and these outlets.

1 Conclusion & Solution

Yes, the media's response is justified because in a sense it has every right considering the game's content but this does not mean consumers should blindly be discouraged from the game itself. Judgement is something we face every day in our lives and considering gaming is seen as an artistic medium should we not take individual approaches to a video game. Like an art gallery where the artists are absent people stand in awe and discuss what an art piece in front of them means individually. Can we not take the same approach towards games especially ones like these and not rely so heavily on the media?

References

1. Tom Bissell. *Extra Lives: Why Video Games Matter*. Pantheon, reprint edition edition, 06 2011.
2. Colin Campbell. The man who made that hatred trailer says the game is all about honesty, 10 2014.
3. Extra Credits. Hatred - crossing the line from violence to sadism - extra credits, 05 2015.
4. Nathan Grayson. The kind of video game violence that disturbs me, 10 2014.
5. Roy S Gutterman. Violent video games and the first amendment. *Huffington Post*, 06 2011.
6. Judith Levine. Only a game: Why censoring new media won't stop gun violence. Technical report, New York, 2013.
7. Christopher Livingston. Hatred review, 06 2015.
8. José I Navarro, Esperanza Marchena, and Inmaculada Menacho. The psychology of hatred. Technical report, University of Cadiz, 06 2013.
9. Keith Stuart. Hatred: Gaming's most contrived controversy. *The Guardian*, 05 2015.