Public Policy and Violent Video Games
CIS 590 Project

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March 10, 2015

Since the advent of video games, there has been a controversy surrounding this form of media and game content. Violence and gore are very prevalent in many of the most popular titles and, indeed, they are often a selling point for developers. Games are thought to be more influential and emotionally compelling than films, as the player interacts dynamically with the virtual world and essentially "becomes" the character to guide their actions, rather than just watching actors on a screen. Again echoing the sentiment expressed in "Digital Nation," this technology is moving so fast that we do not know the longterm effects that it will have on us and our minds, especially the developing minds of children.

Recent increases in gun-related violence initiated by young people has caused quite a stir and has lead people to suspect that there are some connections between such acts of violence and video game play. Varieties of studies of this have shown correlations between violent game play and hostile behaviors, violent responses, and even reduced school performance [1, 2, 3]. At present, the causal relationship between violent video games and aggressive behaviors is still to be proven and further established due to the lack of supporting experiments and theory analysis [?, 9, 10, 11]. However, it is not hard to see the influences these video games can have on the current and future generations, such as causing degraded communication skills, morality, health, and even altering players' own personalities. Consequently, people can easily find these correlations, either directly or indirectly, between their hostile acts and these video games, regardless of proof of causation. As a result, many governmental policies have arisen in an attempt to restrict access of video games with mature content to underage individuals. Censorship is another measure taken to protect youth, and in some countries censorship is not a voluntary act.

Purchase restrictions and censorship are not a complete answer, however, as game developers feel their right to free speech is not being respected if their work is being altered or restricted in any way. Social norms of modern society, in which youth are gaining increased irreverence for law surrounding technology renders many laws useless. Norms further complicate the issue, as generally parents and guardians of children are not as savvy with technology and modern culture, and therefore are unaware of the negative content present in the games their children play. Lastly, enforcement of age limits on software is incredibly difficult. Therefore, public policy surrounding these games is an open issue that merits further investigation.

By definition as an ethical issue, there are positives and negatives to both sides of the argument. Censorship and restriction can greatly impact all stakeholders in different ways. Ethical analysis of the situation, using two workable theories, demonstrates the two sides of the debate. Using these theories as a base, we further explore each viewpoint with additional evidence and arguments.

Arguments Against Censorship

As we have seen with several accounts of censorship attempts, such as protecting children online, Kantian analysis shows the censorship and restriction of video games to be wrong. We start by using the first formulation, the universal rule, to examine the act of censoring or restricting violent video games in any way. If every media company was subjected to censorship by the government, then media would not be unique and could not explore issues deemed "inappropriate" by some third party. Governments would have the say as to what is "unsuitable," but this may not reflect

the ideas brought forth by the governed citizens. Furthermore, this would not be respecting the individual rights of the citizens, who should be free to watch, read, or play whatever they wish. Similarly, if every media was subject to restrictions laid down by the government in power, a tyrannical governmental force could essentially remove any media from circulation or impose tight restrictions on its purchase. This would render the creation of intellectual property practically useless.

The second formulation of Kantian analysis inspects the extent to which an action uses people as a means to an end. By removing or altering pieces of a person or group's intellectual property, governments are imposing their views on the public and not respecting the artistic freedom of the IP's creators. Restricting the sales of games to any party is condescending, treating people of the restricted group as if they cannot know what is morally right or wrong. Thus in both manners of restriction, citizens and creators are being treated as means to an end. By both formulations, we see Kant would find such acts of video game censorship and restriction to be wrong. Since Kantian Analysis is a workable theory, we know we have a solid and logical argument.

The ethical analysis provides the basis for the argument against censoring video games. There are several other arguments against this act, namely the suppression of free speech and individual rights, and the lack of studies providing actual proof that video games cause violence.

Freedom of speech and freedom of artistic expression are highly valued in Western culture. The main argument against censorship of video games is the limitation of free speech that such an act imposes. By having elements of their game altered or sometimes even removed entirely, developers feel they are not being allowed artistic freedom and that their expression is being stifled. By not being able to produce what they desire, game developers also feel their audience and, by extension, their range of paying customers is being limited. ([Yiding] Maybe someone will ask, if designers are worried about their benefits, then they will also treat customers as an end, not a pure altruistic action(such as make contribution to people's life).)

There have been several recent examples of developers voicing their frustration by being inhibited as artists, where filmmakers and other media developers are not silenced in this way. Currently in Germany, due to sensitivities surrounding World War II, the German government is very protective of its people in regards to shielding them from media that could possibly encourage violent behavior. For the past several years, video games have been the major focus of this, causing the country to break away from the standard Pan European Game Information (PEGI) rating system [6] and enact their own, more strict system called Unterhaltungssoftware Selbstkontrolle (USK) [7]. Under this rating system, any game considered to be realistically violent is essentially banned. The German government requires that every game sold in Germany must be submitted to the USK committee to obtain a rating and games seen to be too realistically violent will be denied a rating and therefore not able to be sold within the country's borders. Games with a USK 18 rating, which can be equivalent to an ESRB Teen (T) or Mature (M) rating for violence, cannot be advertised or sold on a shelf in stores. They must be held behind the counter and only purchased with valid IDs proving the buyer's age. Making customers have to explicitly ask for games that are considered "inappropriate" is an attempt to alter social norms surrounding these games, making it taboo to even purchase them.([Yiding] another example to support your opinion: (Wiki)In China, SARFT, the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television, is responsible for censoring any materials like movies, speech, TV shows, etc. in order to filter those who may offend sensibilities of Chinese government or disobey the common cultural standards. They will clip those sensitive moments in a movie which may damage the completeness of these artistic works and consequently make it hard to understand for the audiences. Also, some of the movies including too much sexual or violent contents("Fifty Shades of Grey") will be not allowed to be released forever. This will cause frustrations of designers.)

Crytek, a game company headquartered in Germany that specializes in violent shooter games, has had significant issues with the German government and is struggling to remain in operation. The president of Crytek, Cevat Yerli, is very much against censorship and feels it stifles the creation of art and is blinding the people to the future of entertainment. When asked about the German "ban" on violent games, he stated that "a ban on action games in Germany is concerning us because it is essentially like banning the German artists that create them. If the German creative community can't effectively participate in one of the most important cultural mediums of our future, we will be forced to relocate to other countries." [8]

Films, another media that has become increasingly violent and graphic since the transformation of the Motion Picture Production Code into the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), are not regulated in the same way that people are suggesting for games. Films are allowed to have wildly violent, gory, and explicit content. They are simply given a higher age rating. Parents are held responsible for making choices about what their children watch and for monitoring their viewing habits. This is how games are currently regulated. They are given a rating of age-appropriateness by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) and parents are responsible for ensuring their children only play games appropriate for their age group. Many feel it is unfair to have stricter limits and imposed censorship on games, when movies do not have such limits.

In Western culture and ethics, the rights of the individual are often viewed as equally or sometimes even more important than the rights of the collective. The act of censoring is calling into question an individual's rights to view, read, watch, or play what they like. Similar to the recent gun law debates, in which people state that the Second Amendment protects an individual right to own property and that banning guns violates their rights, the anti-censorship side of the video game regulation debate argue that their rights and freedoms of expression as individuals are imposed upon if regulation is implemented. Censorship may be beneficial to the collective society as a whole, but many feel that it is not ethical to sacrifice their own freedoms for this profit.

A sentiment that is commonly echoed in anti-censorship and even anti-monitoring groups is intellectual freedom, which is the belief that humans have the right to explore and grow intellectually, regardless of the source of information. Julie Cohen emphasizes this right in her paper on intellectual property management [12]. [...]

Another similar argument, complementing the case for individual rights, is that the government should not be able to dictate what is morally "right" and "wrong" in regards to the media. Firstly, a government's conceptualization of right and wrong may not be similar to the opinions of the citizens. Even if most of the citizens agreed, the issue of individual rights surfaces again, and each person should be able to decide for his or herself what type of media is good for them to personally consume.

The events inciting the move toward regulation and censorship have been the recent increase in gun-related violence and the studies following the incidents that have correlated such acts of violence with violent video game play. However, these studies have only been able to show correlations of the factors. Thus far, the causation of violent behavior has not been proven, causing many to believe that there is another factor involved in these cases of violence behavior that has not been inspected thoroughly [4, 9]. Former FBI profiler, Mary Ellen O'Toole, states that violent video games are not the sole cause factor causing violent acts, and are just one risk to individuals who are already contemplating acting out violently[10]. Surprisingly, a recent study conducted by Markey *et al.* even challenges the correlations of violence and video game play [11]. In this study, the researchers examined how popular game trends compare to real-world crime rates. The results showed that there is no evidence that violent video games are positively correlated to real-world crime rates in the United States. Since causation has not yet been proven, and now even the correlations that incited the urge to regulate are being called into question, many feel it is unfair to censor or

otherwise regulate media that has not been shown to be directly responsible for aggressive behavior.

Kantian analysis has shown the act of censoring or restricting video games to be ethically wrong. This result from a workable ethical theory, coupled with the infringement of individual rights and the lack of proof of causation provides a strong argument against the censorship or restriction of video games.

Arguments For Censorship

([Hannah] Since our paper is a debate, we want this section to be strongly for censorship. Because of that, we don't want to point out first thing that there is no solid evidence. Instead, we want to emphasize the correlations between violence and video games.) Admittedly, for now, there is still lacking of supporting evidence such as theory analysis or persuasive experiments to prove and further establish the causal relationship between violent video games and aggressive behaviors of young generations. However, based on existing experiments and result analysis, ([Hannah] Remove 'apparently')apparently there is (are) some correlations between ([Hannah] these violent games and aggressive and violent behavior) these media violence, and current and even future generations. In other words, ~~caused by violent video games,~~ there are some very obvious impacts which may damage communication skills, morality and even personality of our children.

([Hannah] Generally, one should not start a sentence with a citation. Maybe rearrange it to be "There have been several experiments examining the biological and psychological effects of violent video games [1, 9, 2, 3].")[1], [9], [2], and [3] shows different kinds of experiments designed and implemented in biological, psychological and statistical ways. In [2], the authors effectively chose varieties of participants at different ages, with different genders, and from different locations(schools, cities, etc.) for their experiments. After data collection and analysis, they did a survey on different individual participants about their behaviors of both at school and in their daily life. Statistics of their media habits indicates that children in 8 and 9 grades are more likely to play video games around 9 hours per week, and males play more than females. As a result, these adolescents usually prefer to spend more time on watching a movie, listening to music, rather than reading or studying. Another result about their interested games is that only 1% of boys and 16% of girls prefer to have no violence in video games. Based on these data, the survey shows that 23% of children reported that they may argue or have conflicts with their teachers almost weekly or almost daily. And 34% of them reported at least a physical fight within past year.

In [3], several studies on media violence and aggression are discussed. For example, Bjorkqvist's experiment(1985) ([Hannah] Which paper is the Bjorkqvist experiment from? We should add it to BibTeX and cite it in the same way we cites the others, using the cite command.) is designed to display two kinds of films, violent and non-violent, in front of randomly chosen 5 to 6-year-old Finnish children in order to observe their further behaviors. The result shows that those who only watched violent films reach a higher rate on physical assaults, as well as other type of aggression. Another experiment from Josephson(1987) ([Hannah] Again, we should add this to BibTeX) indicates that violent content in the films (such as physical attack in a hockey movie) will remind those boys (7 to 9-year-old) who have watched this movie and stimulate their physical attacks and other aggressive behaviors when they play hockey. Unfortunately as we know, at present, more general proof theories, universal experiment framework, and unified evaluation standards which are used for proving these causal relationships still needs to be discussed and finally established. As a result, it leads to many disagreements and criticisms on these experiments which poses lots of difficulties on drawing a certain conclusion that there exists such causal relationship between digital media violence and aggression behaviors. However, it is not hard to see that there are some very

common features including experimental procedures, sampling and data processing methods, etc. among these controversial experiments, such as random sampling, large number of participants, wide range of methods, and so on which to some extent prove the objectivity, fairness and reliability of their results. Therefore, we can conclude that there really exists some correlations between media violence and aggression behaviors of youth even though the actually causal relationship is still expected to be proved.

In order to prove the necessity of censorship, utilitarianism analysis will be applied and discussed in the remaining part of this section. Our proposition should be censorship is necessary to be applied to constrain both designers and purchasers' behaviors. And now here is the question, is censorship ethical or not?

According to this issue, consider the stakeholders first. Obviously, without censorship, violent video games may have both positive and negative influences on different social groups, individuals, and official organizations. For example, the negative impact would be that it may decrease the force of laws, disturb the social orders, hinder education, and so on. On the other hand, it can maximize the benefits for manufacturers and designers. Since it is not that easy to directly point out if censorship is ethical or not, here we will choose government, police, hospitals, education organizations, game manufacturers, parents, youth and our whole society as stakeholders to do ethical analysis, and try to reach a conclusion on this problem.

Government has a strong responsibility of maintaining the harmony and safety of society. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to control and predict the trends of people's attitudes, opinions, judgments and behaviors. ([Hannah] I would remove 'Apparently,' as it sounds like you are not certain of the issue) Apparently, for violent video games, censorship provides a way to control their impacts by regulating designers' behavior using some unified standards and principles. Since we admit the relations between these violent games and aggressive behaviors of youth, censorship helps a lot in avoiding the potential and unpredictable risks and threats involving intentional attacks, physical assaults, and many other aggressive behaviors stimulated by these media violence. In this way, government can better govern the public, so that their regime can be consolidated, and the force of laws and regulations can be strengthened.

Second, consider other official organizations and social groups, here we set police and hospital as examples. Censorship undoubtedly has positive influences on these groups and organizations. For example, censorship can help to constrain the age of purchasers, such as "this kind of product cannot be sold to the youth under 12-year-old." Also, it regulates the game designers' behaviors like games with too much blood and violence contents cannot come into the market. In this way, it reduces the possibilities of children accessing violent video games so that juvenile delinquency could be effectively decreased and controlled. Consequently, the number of victims, injuries, and harms are also decreasing. For both police departments and hospitals, their workload and stress can be relieved, as well as their supplement requirements and financial pressure.

Another set of stakeholders benefitting from censorship are education organizations, like schools, universities, colleges and some other social education organizations. When educating our children, educators not only aim to teach students new knowledge, but also tell them how to be a "good" person. "Good" has a wide range of meanings, here we emphasize on the ethics part. School managers need to monitor and regulate students' behaviors in order to avoid any unnecessary accidents. It is very common that students may have some disagreements or other conflicts with each other, their teachers, or even their parents, and sometimes it is hard to predict and further control their following actions. Luckily, censorship provides a way to keep our children away from violence contents hidden in games which may stimulate their aggressive behaviors. Thanks to censorship, it is easier for educators to monitor, and control students' behaviors, establish education strategies and design educating methods.

¡¡¡¡¡¡¡ Updated upstream Now, ([Hannah] In most papers, one should avoid using contractions (like "let's")) let's think about the interests of game manufacturers. Most of these code designers create games in order to make profits. In other words, not all of the game makers are altruistic. As a result, censorship will undoubtedly shrink their benefits. For instance, it limits the range of customers for a certain product based on their age or gender, which will decrease the total amount of sales. Another concern is that censorship may depress their motivations and passions of creating novel games. Creativity plays an important role in Read-Write culture which is the core of the improvement of human civilization, as Lawrence said in his TED talk, too many constraints may pose obstacles to designers' creativity and imaginations which will damage this expected culture. In addition, as mentioned in the previous section, censorship undermines free speech. Democracy needs free speech, the public needs free speech, our society needs free speech. Everyone, no matter who you are, where you belong to, should have equal rights for speech. Especially for those weak groups, like communities of color, religion, and disability, they need the right to speak out loudly, to show their feelings, to tell their own stories and to fight for justice. Since censorship constrains free speech of the public, it will obviously cause some negative impacts on game manufacturers. ======= Now, let's think about the interests of game manufacturers. Most of these code designers create games in order to make profits. In other words, not all of the game makers are altruism. As a result, censorship will undoubtedly shrink their benefits, for instance, it limits the range of customers(based on their age or gender) for a certain product which will decrease the total amount of sales. Another concern is that censorship may depress their motivations and passions of creating novel games. Creativity plays an important role in Read-Write culture which is the core of the improvement of human civilization , as Lawrence said in his TED'talk, too many constraints may pose obstacles to designers' creativity and imaginations which will damage this expected culture. In addition, as mentioned in the previous section, censorship undermines free speech. Democracy needs free speech, the public needs free speech, our society needs free speech. Everyone, no matter who you are, where you belong to, should have equally rights for speech. Especially for those weak groups, like communities of color, religion, and disability, they need the right to speak out loudly, to show their feelings, to tell their own stories and to fight for the justice. Since censorship constrains free speech of the public, it will obviously cause some negative impacts on game manufacturers. ¿¿¿¿¿¿¿ Stashed changes

Furthermore, censorship is an important weapon for parents to protect their children from accessing media violence, and any other "unhealthy" contents spreading through the internet. Parents usually have less time on observing, monitoring and controlling the actions of their children because of busy working and stress. Another problem is that it is hard for parents getting involved in this issue since they have less awareness and sometimes can hardly better understand the further impact of violent games on their children.

In addition, individual(young players) is one of the most important parts considered in this ethical issue. As we know, because lacking of consciousness of self-discipline and hard to be objective, our children cannot fairly judge and evaluate what they can do and what they cannot. Most of their improper behaviors just depend on curiosity, a sudden impulse, or the instigation and stimuli from others. It is very common that many adolescents may face difficulties of distinguishing the real world from virtual world–game addiction. This can easily cause some unexpected troubles. For example, a child may have some aggressive behaviors on the other children just because he played a game which reminded him of the similar actions. For our young generation, social norms is also a very critical concern especially in the internet. When playing online games, almost all the designers try their best to build a more interactive virtual world for customers, this means everyone can communicate with others, both in the way of text and voice. As a result, this kind of "free speech" leads to an out of control situations which may misleading our children and destroy

their correct morality. These interactions, especially in violent online games, usually contains some "foul languages", some aggressive emotions and other bad contents which aims to insult, hurt, slander others. These online behaviors are hard to control because of anonymity, so that to some extent they will "hurt" our children as well. This may stimulate their aggressive behaviors like physical attacks or some other dangerous actions.Therefore, censorship can decrease the risks of bad behaviors, and help our children get away from those violent content. It is undoubtedly good for their growth, and will increase their awareness of self-protection, and sense of responsibilities for maintaining peace, harmony and safety.

Lastly, censorship is an effective way to keep our society harmonious and safe because it regulate behaviors of related person so that the potential risks and threats of aggressive behaviors(e.g. shooting criminals) can be controlled and reduced.

Based on the discussion above, censorship is necessary for us. However, a more comprehensive and effective solution is still needed since our regulations(code, social norms, laws and market) still have some loopholes which provides those premeditated people a way to spread media violence. For example, there exists some very tiny online games with bloody and passive content which are widely spread and allow free download through the whole internet. What's more, because of anonymity, it cannot be monitor and control in time. Here the imperfection of our regulations is exposed which needs to be further discussed.

Possible Solutions

Conclusion

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