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Inequality in Entertainment Media: Censorship, Erasure, and Gender Bias
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ABSTRACT

While people may assert that pop culture and media is designed for everyone to consume and enjoy equally, it is actually catered to and manipulated by those that create and distribute this information. Furthermore, the generation who creates the media during any specific time period, retains more control of the information being shared than the generations of those consuming the information. This allows for total control of subject matter, presentation, and the particulars of actualities distributed or discussed within the society. No form of pop culture is exempt of this control. From tabloids to reality TV and video games to movies, pop culture can influence society's behaviors, stereotypes, ideals and values in a positive or negative manner. I would not be amiss in saying that the hand that crafts the information, rules the world.

Society enjoys maintaining the pretense that pop culture and media are the unbiased source of information, created equally for everyone to enjoy. Throughout the history of humankind this information has been presented to the public in a format that makes it trustworthy and relatable. We see ourselves and others represented and portrayed in applicable situations and stories. Even though reported material may be somewhat fictionalized versions of concerns and accounts, people from various walks of life buy into the information, relinquishing control to the creators, at times mindlessly allowing the information to make an impact positive or negative, on entire generations.

On the other side of that generational impact regarding pop culture, the beliefs and prejudices of whichever generation is created and regulating the pop culture intake by society will shape that society or shine light on exactly what the agenda is of the groups on both the censorship and creative sides of pop culture around the world.

In some instances, censorship can be based solely on rules or traditions in regards to what is considered culturally acceptable around the world. We can look to Nintendo as an example of a company complying with cultural acceptance in pop culture. Based on revenue, Nintendo is the world's largest video game manufacturer. A virtual giant in the industry. Nintendo is also responsible for classic icons and idles of the world wide gaming community such as Mario, Samus Arin, Kirby, Bowser, Donkey Kong, Link, Princess Zelda, Princess Peach, and hundreds more. Nintendo has been placed on a pedal stool for decades as the standard to meet in ultimate family friendly gaming companies. A large part of the original marketing campaign for the Nintendo's gaming console the Wii, was promoted as bringing families together, playing video

games and spending time with one another. Curious enough, what is deemed “family friendly” or “rated E for everyone” in the West, is very different from the Eastern Hemisphere.

The Nintendo Entertainment Corporation is based out of Kyoto, Japan, where all ideas, story boarding, design, and initial programing take place. This means character development is done with the main focus being on Japanese culture and ideals. Part of what this has come to mean is that characters developed by Nintendo Entertainment who fall in to the spectrum of the LGBTQIA+ community who aren’t portrayed in some negative way have been known to get censored in the North America. (Patrick) A recent example of this is the non-playable character Vivian from the game “Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door”, which is one of the many installments in one of Nintendo’s most beloved and family friendly series *The Super Mario Brothers*. In the Japanese version of the game the Vivian is a male who identifies as a female and starts the game as one of the villains however, after suffering verbal abuse from his sisters Vivian switches sides and joins Mario to help him on his quest. On the other side of the world, in the English version, all references to Vivian’s gender being anything other than a heteronormative female, are removed from the game and game manual.

It does appear that the Western Hemisphere is becoming more comfortable with some forms of alternative sexuality. In the popular fighting game, *Street Fighter* the character Eagle, shown to be a confident and strong homosexual man in the original Japanese version of the game, had many lines that alluded to him being gay, and removed in the English releases. (IRC) Juri Han, a playable female character in the *Street Fighter* series, has it written in both Japanese and English character profiles that her likes include, “bitter food, spiders, and big breasts.” In

another series of fighting games, “Dark Stalkers: The Night Warriors”, the characters Lilith and Moragen are cleared by North American censors, to be openly bisexual. Then again they are the two most attractive, half naked, succubi in the games, so one could speculate that makes it more acceptable within American culture.

Some people who study the trends and products shaped and driven by pop culture, believe there is a dangerous trend being over utilized and delivered to the general public. It is the deliberate oversimplification of content. Hollywood is a prime example as this industry feels the need to continuously “dumb down and simplify” a novel or television series in order to produce a blockbuster film. It would appear the writers and producers assume that the audience consuming the material would be bored to death or afraid of any portrayal of character, story line, or scenario that deviates from what is known as a profitable endeavor. Stories and plot lines continue to be recycled over and over again to the point of total predictability. Imagination and originality seem to have been laid to rest with classics such as author Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein* and *Casablanca* directed by Michael Curtiz.

(Miller) As Merrill Miller, former Associated Editor of TheHumanist.com and a former Communications Associate at the American Humanist Association says in her article, *Game of Gender Roles: Popular Culture and Women* “Popular culture reflects this polarization of women’s efforts toward equality, but it also contributes to it. When books, movies, television shows, and songs present women as passive and submissive, they’re upholding the same view of women espoused by extreme conservative religious leaders—that women are not fully capable of shaping their lives or making their own decisions.”

Take the *Star Wars* franchise as an example. In the latest movies within the franchise, the

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main characters have been Rey from “Episode VII: The Force Awakens”, played by Daisy Ridley and Jyn Erso portrayed by Felicity Jones in “Rogue One: A Star Wars Story”. (Willert) More women have screen time which includes speaking and action rolls in the more recent *Star Wars* releases when compared to “Episodes IV: A New Hope”, “Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back”, and “Episode VI: Return of the Jedi”.

In the original *Star Wars* trilogy there are eight recognized women in the entire galaxy. Out of these eight only three of these women are considered recognized well enough that the average member of society does not have to look them up on Wookieepedia by typing a physical description of them into the search bar.

(N.d.) Everyone who has ever watched the original *Star Wars* trilogy, will more than likely remember Princess Leia Organa, Luke’s aunt Beru Lars, and Senator Mon Mothma. Princess Leia, portrayed by the late Carrie Fisher, is the only female character to appear in all three films of the trilogy. Her screen time totals a modest fifty-seven minutes spread across the entire trilogy. That’s less screen time than Luke Skywalker and Han Solo, the two male co-stars of the original trilogy. Even the expressively portrayed male droids C-3PO and R2-D2 logged more screen time than the human female actresses. Beru Lars, or “Aunt Beru” appears for a total of one minute and forty-five seconds in “Episode IV” and then is killed off screen. In 1977 Senator Mon Mothma delivers the rebel fleet crucial information needed to destroy the new Death Star in “Episode VI” for one minute of screen time, and then is not seen again until December 2016.

The other five women in the original trilogy are slave girls and strippers in Jabba the Hut’s Place during the first act of “Episode VI: Return of the Jedi” and who are not listed with

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names in the credits. (Jabba) According to the Wookieepedia their names are Oola who is better known as the one who gets eaten by the Rancor, Rystall Sant or the one with red hair, Greeata Jendowanian known by most people as the green one, Lyn Me the blue one, and Sy Snootles known better as the formerly puppeteered now computer generated lead singer of the Max Rebo Band.

The only purpose for these characters in the movie and in the entire scope of the cinematic *Star Wars* universe is to sing, dance, flirt with bounty hunters, and then die either by being eaten by a monster or blown up along with everyone else in the vicinity by the lead male characters.

CONCLUSION

Yes, it is true that in the media created today there are more representations of people who are ethnicities other than Caucasian, but the majority of main characters and heroes in comic books, television, movies, video games and the like are white. There are more diverse and powerful roles being given to and made expressly for women but it's still nothing compared to the amount still given to and created for men. Modern pop culture may also be starting to become more okay with giving media characters who are not cisgender and heterosexual as leading roles but there is still not a major role given to a member of the LGBTQIA+ community where the fact that they are part of that community isn't used as their defining character trait. Even with the progress made in representation shown in the mainstream media over the past decades, there is no form of media whether recent or retro pop culture is as inclusive and representative of all the people who enjoy and consume it across the world and across demographics as the people who are depicted in major pop culture like to pretend.

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