

VIOLENCE IN OUR SOCIETY

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This animation explores violence in our society. Depictions and themes of violence are a recurring theme in the movies and television shows I watch, the sports I play, and in my hometown of Baltimore. Due to this observation, I became interested in the idea that perhaps there is more to violence. Perhaps it may even be a necessary tool for our society.

I created an animation to address these themes. The scenes depict practices of violence in our society that we have deemed acceptable. For example, we enjoy the violence that occurs during sports like football or boxing. Whether or not we actually participate in these sports, it is still aired on every sports channel to millions of viewers. In addition, two of the highest rated shows on television currently are *The Walking Dead*, and *NCIS*. We would not watch these sports or shows if we didn't enjoy them.

My animation starts and ends the same way; I want the conclusion to make sense and create a video loop. My goal for this project is to challenge the negative connotation we have with the word "violence", for it clearly is something that we are all deeply fascinated with. When it is simulated, it is harmless, if not beneficial.

Sally P

This paper is an exploration of how violence plays a role in our American society, and in which ways it is used. I will address the following questions: Is violence a want or a need? How does power play a role in the execution of violence? How do morals affect our perspectives on violence? And finally, is violence inherently bad?

Violence has always been a strangely fascinating topic to me; all my favorite movies and shows have fallen under the horror genre. For example, I have re-watched the TV show “Dexter” three times, which is about a serial killer who works as a Blood Spatter Analysis Agent for Miami Metro Police Department. So, during the day he works for the police, but at night he hunts for other serial killers to be his next victim. While it is purely fictional, the show still contains very graphic and bloody scenes. Oddly enough, I find myself unable to look away every time, even though I am frightened and disgusted. Furthermore, my favorite way to spend a Friday night has always been going to a scary movie with my friends. I have no problem spending my own money for a night of pop outs and screams. However, when I take a step back, I find it somewhat disturbing how much I enjoy being scared and seeing gore like that. I cannot seem to find a root to this morbid interest of mine. Even at a young age, I was always the kid who could watch any scary movie and not be phased.

In addition, my relationship to violence extends even further than just my odd fascination in movies and TV. For my entire life, besides Oxbow, I have lived in Baltimore, Maryland, a city with a shockingly high crime rate. Baltimore is known as the heroin capital of the country and has been rated one of the ten most dangerous cities in the country. Just since last year, our crime rate has increased by 6%.¹ This has meant an increase in the homicides, rape, theft, and almost every other form of violence imaginable in the city. Baltimore reached the peak of its violence after the murder of Freddie Gray, a black man who died due to injuries on his spinal cord, after being given a “rough ride” by police officers in a police van. After Freddie Gray died, the whole city broke out into protests. The protests started peaceful but quickly turned into violent riots. All of a sudden people began burning down buildings and breaking things such as cars, and windows. Fights between police officers and the people of Baltimore broke out, and many people were arrested. The city was absolutely destroyed, and it was devastating. While I don’t live right in the center of downtown Baltimore, where all the riots occurred, I was still affected. Family friends’ stores had been burnt down, and other family friends’ loved ones had been arrested. I was let out of school early when the riots broke out for my safety. While the rioting has stopped, the social injustice is still present. There is an unbelievable amount of police brutality and crime that occurs in the city. I see my community struggling, and it deeply saddens me. I feel that violence is a major theme that keeps reoccurring within my life because of where I live, as well as what I watch. Since violence has influenced my life in these ways, I want to learn more about the role it plays in our society and the different forms it can take. So, for my paper I want to distinguish how and why I react to all the different aspects of violence in my own life. Whether or not all the types of violence I feed into are “bad,” and what types are necessary.

Violence is a complex concept that does not come in one solid form. Violence can be experienced or performed in a psychological, physical, sexual, emotional, financial, disrespectful, political, or neglectful manner. The list goes on and on. Violence plays an adamant role in our society, yet there is a very negative connotation attached to the word. Whenever the word violence is brought up, the worst case-scenarios come to mind: murder, rape, terrorism, etc. However, is the practice of violence inherently bad, and are the results of violence always harmful?

It is undeniable that as Americans we are constantly surrounded and bombarded by violence; it takes hundreds of different shapes and forms. We witness violence in the entertainment industry, the food industry, and our government; violence is everywhere. It has become something that, as Americans, we can not possibly hide from. But do we want to hide? Despite the goriness of the movie,

¹ "The Ten Most Dangerous Cities in the U.S.," Forbes, <https://www.forbes.com/forbes/welcome/?toURL=https%3A//www.forbes.com/pictures/mlj45jggi/7-baltimore/&refURL=https%3A//www.google.com/&referrer=https%3A//www.google.com/>.

or the bloody images in the video game, we still play. So, we have to ask ourselves, do we want violence, or do we need it?

There are a few situations in which we want violence, we crave it. For starters, violence as a whole utterly fascinates us. As humans we are naturally curious. In fact, we have the nickname of “informavores”: creatures that search for and digest information, just like carnivores hunt and eat meat.² This natural curiosity drives our interest to see the blood and gore. We do not fully comprehend violence, and therefore, we turn movies, TV, and the media to feed this attraction. It is not abnormal in our society to be interested in violence. Similar to how we view crimes, we view criminals as being on a whole other psychological plane as we are. Unlike us, many criminals have no distinction between right and wrong. Their morals are completely distorted compared to ours, and therefore we do not understand their decision making. So, we watch shows like Dateline to get the whole story on how their brain works, and how they could commit such heinous crimes.

Another situation in which we want violence rather than need it, is through the corruption and exploitation of power. There have been many cases in our government where violence has been misused. Over the past decade, reports of police brutalities have massively increased; in these situations, officers have used violence to assert and exploit their power. Eric Garner, for example, was a victim of police brutality on July 17, 2014 in Staten Island, NY.³ When police began to arrest him for selling illegal cigarettes, an officer put Garner in a choke hold for approximately 15 to 19 seconds.⁴ Garner died shortly after due to a combination of the chokehold, compression on his chest, and overall poor health.⁵ Many police officers have been taking advantage of their authority to practice violence on innocent people, especially minorities. There is no doubt that our society needs a form of protection and authority to prevent crime; however, many authorities have abused this position of power. It is inexcusable for police to be committing acts of violence on innocent people. There is no excuse. Although our society definitely needs some form of authority in order to maintain peace, violence becomes unacceptable when the authority becomes unreasonably abusive.

There are many additional cases today in which people use violence to claim control and power. Domestic abuse is a prime example in which people assert violence for their individual control. There have been millions of cases where one person in the household or relationship uses violence in the form of isolation, humiliation, physical abuse, neglect, etc. This is to completely dictate and dominate the victim. For many, this want for control comes from a deep place within. The abuser may commit this violence due to feelings of jealousy, anger issues, insecurities, and in any situation that would make him or her feel inferior.⁶ Domestic violence is an unfortunate scenario where the use of violence to attain dominance is completely exploited.

Fascination and power are the two most evident cases in which violence becomes something we abuse rather than something that is necessary. Otherwise, violence has become a need in our society. It is a coping mechanism for some, as a way to relieve stress and cool down inner aggressions. As I mentioned previously, using violence does not only mean killing or physically abusing someone. For example, psychological violence is unfortunately another method that many people have extorted in order to unleash their inner rage. Victims of psychological abuse experience different, but just as a painful form of suffering as do victims of physical abuse. Psychological abuse can invoke feelings of

² Vivian Hemmelder and Tommy Blanchard, "Why Humans Are Hard-Wired For Curiosity September 8, 2016," Footnote, last modified September 8, 2016, <http://www.footnote1.com/why-humans-are-hard-wired-for-curiosity/>

³ "Death of Eric Garner," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Eric_Garner.

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Toby D. Goldsmith, "What Causes Domestic Violence?," Psych Central, <https://psychcentral.com/lib/what-causes-domestic-violence/>.

shame, guilt, low self worth, depression, suicidal thoughts, substance abuse, and sleep disturbances. Needless to say, the list goes on and on. Many people turn to violence to cope with their own issues. So, in order to help prevent people from committing acts of violence as a coping mechanism, our society has created socially acceptable ways for us to practice it. While many of these activities are fabricated, they still affect those who partake in them.

Sports are a perfect example of exercising violence in a way that our society has deemed as “healthy”. It has been scientifically proven that the practice of sports reduces crime rates as well as anxiety and depression in teens. There are an estimated 45 million kids and 15 million adults participating in recreational sports in the United States.⁷ If 60 million people all of a sudden stopped playing sports, crime rates would explode.⁸ Rather than those aggressions being taken out by tackling a player on a football field, they would instead be taken out by tackling someone on the streets, or even by verbally or emotionally attacking someone. Although the whole sports industry is very self-contradictory, it prevents violence by enabling it and making it a “game. This is necessary violence if it prevents crime.

In addition to sports, children, teenagers, and adults have turned to violent video games as another way to relieve stress. Brutal video games such as Grand Theft Auto and Call of Duty have taken a rise in the gaming industry. Grand Theft Auto, for example, is a video game that essentially has kids and teenagers virtually stealing cars, assaulting women, and starting savage fights. It gives the gamers an opportunity to be the bad guy in a world with only positive end results. The more crime you commit, the higher level you reach! While these games carry a negative connotation, they have actually been proven to have positive effects. Dr. Ferguson, a professor at Texas A&M International University conducted a survey exploring the effects of violent video games. He explained, “In this study, 103 young adults were given a frustration task and then randomized to play no game, a non-violent game, a violent game with good versus evil theme, or a violent game in which they played ‘the bad guy.’ The results suggest that violent games reduce depression and hostile feelings in players through mood management”.⁹ Therefore, the video games that had the player pulling the trigger caused mood improvement. In addition, these games are an outlet that keeps potentially violent people at home.¹⁰

In addition to forms of entertainment, our society enacts violence through the food industry. We raise animals on farms to ultimately be a part of our next meals. Even animal products such as dairy are obtained as a result of animal abuse. Many farms keep cows cooped up in pens that are extremely small, in addition to physically mistreating them. However, for many people, meat is their prime source of lean protein. As an athlete, I can personally attest to the fact that meat completely satisfied my energy needs. I definitely do not agree with the system in which many animals on farms are raised and treated, but the truth is, is that our bodies are built for meat consumption. We humans have been consuming meat for our survival since the beginning of time. It stabilizes our blood sugar, helping to prevent type 2 diabetes and other chronic diseases.¹¹ Additionally meat has the most concentrated source of B

⁷ Brad R. Humphreys, *The Size and Scope of the Sports Industry in the United States* (n.p., 2008), [Page #], http://college.holycross.edu/RePEc/spe/HumphreysRuseski_SportsIndustry.pdf.

⁸ Jared Wadley, *High school sports participation lowers major crime and suspensions*, [Page 1], <http://www.ns.umich.edu/new/releases/20745-high-school-sports-participation-lowers-major-crime-and-suspensions>.

⁹ Christopher J. Ferguson, Dr., *VIOLENT VIDEO GAMES HELP RELIEVE STRESS, DEPRESSION, SAYS TAMU PROFESSOR* (n.p.: Texas A&M, 2010), [Page #], <http://www.tamui.edu/newsinfo/7-08-10/article5.shtml>.

¹⁰ Michael Kaplan, "Why Violent Video Games are Good for Kids," The New York Post, last modified December 19, 2016, <http://nypost.com/2016/12/19/why-violent-video-games-are-good-for-kids/>.

¹¹ Kadya Araki, "Why All Humans Need To Eat Meat For Health," Breaking Muscle, last modified October 4, 2014, <https://breakingmuscle.com/fuel/why-all-humans-need-to-eat-meat-for-health>.

vitamins, and is the only food source that contains vitamin B-12.¹² It is unfortunate how animals are treated in the food industry, however the consumption of meat and animal products are necessary sources of protein and vitamins.¹³

Along with the food industry, our society and government enacts violence through our capital punishment system. The death penalty is the highest, most brutal punishment that someone could receive. One would have to commit one of the following crimes: treason, terrorism, espionage, federal murder, large-scale drug trafficking, or attempting to kill a witness, juror, or court officer in certain cases to receive this brutal punishment.¹⁴ So if you were to commit a violent crime, it would be returned by violence. The argument of whether or not this is a moral punishment has gone on for years and years. However, the ends justify the means. The death penalty does a number on saving the lives of innocent people from heinous criminals. I do believe that the philosophy behind the death penalty is pretty perverse; we end violence by using violence. However, the punishment is deserved. The death penalty also helps prevent horrible crimes because it serves to fear potential criminals.

Overall, violence is used in a range of different platforms throughout our society. We use it as a source of entertainment, as a stress reliever, to gain power, in our government, and in the food industry. As a society we have condoned violence that we deem as necessary. We condone it in our food industry to supply our bodies with essential nutrients and vitamins. In addition, we condone it through the sports and entertainment industries. Both industries have become an outlet for people to be aggressive in a fabricated world. As a society, we have determined that as long as it's fake, it is moral. Killing a hundred people with a gun in a video game means nothing to us. This is because it didn't actually happen, and the morals behind it are pure. The intentions are to get to a higher level or gain points, not to actually harm someone. Yet when a real crime occurs, in most situations, the criminal's intentions are tainted. They are purposely trying to abuse someone or something.

So, the ways in which our society has embraced violence are not necessarily bad. In fact, while a country with zero violence may seem desirable, it is likely impossible for several reasons. First of all, too many people already have a taste for it, and they love it. If America were to suddenly censor all video games and television, and to end all sports, there would be a huge uproar. People would find a loophole; they would pirate violent films and games, and would have underground sports teams. In addition, there is no guarantee that the demolition of this societally accepted violence would not lead to potentially more harmful forms of violence. It is likely that there would be riots and fights. Sports, for example, are something that many people depend on, and not just as a stress reliever. Many people use sports as a way to get college scholarships with tuitions they otherwise could not afford. If this demolition of fabricated violence were to occur, everyone would have to unanimously agree to no longer accept it. This is highly unlikely, for there is already a current split between our country when it comes to our beliefs on violence.

Furthermore, our society has created a system in which we end violence and crimes by committing violence; hence the justice system. So if all capital and state punishment was suddenly announced as wrong and terminated, imagine the crime that would break out. No rules, no consequences. It is like *The Purge*, a movie that explores what would happen if all crime was legal for 12 hours. Within those 12 hours the most heinous crimes occur; murder, torture, rape, theft, arson, etc. While the movie is fictional and only shows the extremes of violence, it illustrates an important point. The thought of no punishment taints people's morals. All of a sudden people lose respect for violence

¹² ibid

¹³ ibid

¹⁴ "Capital punishment by the United States federal government," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capital_punishment_by_the_United_States_federal_government.

and the way it should be conducted. We base a lot of our morals on our authorities; so, for the most part, what they allow, we allow. If our authorities step down and give crime the chance to be legal, we will start to deem crime as moral. Now, I definitely agree that there are many situations in which our authorities abuse their power through violence. However, without them our country's use of violence would become disastrous.

Therefore, violence in our society is absolutely necessary and not always bad. There are definitely many cases in which it is misused, for sadistic, power-frenzied, and selfish intentions. Examples include police brutality, domestic abuse, and psychological and emotional abuse. However, when it is not creating actual human victims, it should be moral, and practiced. It has been proven that the effects of sports, video games, movies, and television, regardless of the violence, has been positive. It is a form of stress relief, and has done a number on preventing crimes. Therefore as a society we should embrace and support it, for it is causing no harm. As I previously mentioned, violence is here to stay; so, we should continue to try and control it by utilizing in fictional and harmless ways.

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