

MORAL ENTERTAINMENT – GO YOUR OWN WAY: THE PRODUCER AS MORAL  
AUTHOR IN ENTERTAINMENT

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“It seems today that all you see is violence in movies and sex on T.V. ...but where are those good old-fashioned values on which we used to rely?”<sup>1</sup> These opening lines belong to the popular cartoon *Family Guy*, and they point towards the idea that we have departed from a traditional moral center in entertainment. In many ways, the culture of a people can be most easily seen in their entertainment, making it an important tool for understanding social norms, such as morality in the example above. There have been countless varieties of entertainment throughout history, each one elucidating a different element of its respective culture. Just as gladiatorial displays emphasized the value Rome placed on conquest and violence, the entertainment that we indulge in today is equally exposing of cultural values. This gives us the opportunity to understand our society more comprehensively. Additionally, technology has paved the way for global connection, creating some unique challenges. One of these challenges is the attribution of authority in entertainment. This paper will examine the role of authority, specifically moral authority, in today’s entertainment. I argue that this lies with the individual producer, and the amount of authority that each has is proportional to their voice in society. The focus will be on entertainment here in the United States, but will address other countries as well, since entertainment is increasingly globalized.

Before we can move forward to understand moral authority in entertainment, it is important to understand what moral authority is. Hannah Arendt addresses this in her book “What is Authority”, in the section appropriately titled, “What is Moral Authority?” In this she talks about the definition of authority, and more specifically the nature of moral authority. One

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<sup>1</sup> “Family Guy.” *Family Guy*, Seth MacFarlane, David Zuckerman, season 1, episode 1, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 31<sup>st</sup> Jan. 1999.

common confusion she addresses is that authority is synonymous with power. Her distinction between the two is included below:

“Since authority always demands obedience, it is commonly mistaken for some form of power or violence. Yet authority precludes the use of external means of coercion; where force is used, authority itself has failed. Authority, on the other hand, is incompatible with persuasion, which presupposes equality and works through a process of argumentation.”<sup>2</sup>

Authority is not forcing an action, it is creating an action. It is the difference between your parents withholding dessert before you finish your vegetables, and you respecting your parents’ authority enough to eat your vegetables before you touch your dessert, even if they are on the same plate. The main reason that authority is such a confusing concept today is that it is becoming less apparent in human interaction. We more often deal with power relationships than we do with authority, and then call that power authority. However, the classic definition of authority is more like motivation than it is force. Moral authority is a sub-section of authority, the authority to create action and to define that action ethically. When we look at the role of moral authority in entertainment, we can define it as the ethical motivation for the production of entertainment. An example of this is the moral authority exercised by Disney when they included a gay character in the live-action remake of *Beauty and the Beast*, despite knowing public opinion would be divided on its appropriateness.<sup>3</sup> They exercised moral authority by including a controversial character to encourage the normalization of LGBTQ+ characters in children’s entertainment<sup>4</sup>. This is an example of moral authority because the producer, Disney, made an

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<sup>2</sup> Arendt, Hannah. “What is Authority?” , 91, *Between Past and Future*. New York: Penguin Books, 1987

<sup>3</sup> 2017. *Beauty and the Beast*. Directed by Bill Condon. Produced by Disney. Performed by Dan Stevens, Luke Evans, Emma Watson.

<sup>4</sup>Mumford, Gwilym. 2017. *The Guardian*. March 16. Accessed December 4, 2017.

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/mar/16/beauty-and-the-beast-disney-gay-scene-malaysia>.

authoritative statement through the film, with the intent to create a subsequent action. This is the unique nature of moral authority in entertainment, where the entertainment produced speaks authoritatively for its producer.

The individual producer does not have to be a single person: it is merely an entity acting singularly. This could be a girl writing her blog about teenage fashion, or Pixar releasing their next children's film. Regardless of size, if the producer acts under their own power, they are an individual. It is also important to understand that there is not a single morality visible in entertainment. Since morality is derived from an amalgamation of beliefs, religion, culture, and historical tradition, and production of entertainment is a diversified pool of these, moral authority is exercised differently by each individual producer. Moral authority, in turn, is the ability for this individual to exercise their authority in accordance with their moral code. There are those that would argue that there is a single, absolute morality<sup>5</sup>. If our world existed in a vacuum of ideological similitude, then there could exist a single morality. However, if there was one true morality, we would not have experienced the of moral revolution we have over the past millennia. This disparity of moral opinion is easily seen in entertainment, since many individual producers exercise their moral authority to depict their views onscreen, as described above with the example of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*. Of course, these entities do not all operate on the same scale, and different moralities are perpetuated through differences in exposure, an issue whose implications for moral authority will be discussed further later.

We have seen how moral authority is can be distributed in entertainment, but where does it come from? In today's society, the source of moral authority is not clearly definable. Moral

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<sup>5</sup> Arendt, *What is Authority?*, 94

authority used to belong to a single source. An example of this would be the vicar of a small English town during the Victorian era. He would have moral authority over his parishioners because his moral authority was derived from the Church and tradition. But that single-ness of moral authority was dependent on shared common thought. It seems that there is no common thought sufficiently universal enough to derive moral authority from, since our society is so religiously and culturally diverse. The only issue that comes close this is the human rights movement. In western society, the idea that all humans possess basic human rights is generally accepted, but there is no agreement on the definition of basic human rights, or even the definition of human, for example the arguments between pro-life and pro-choice groups. In the paper, *Cultural and Moral Authority: The Presumption of Television*, David Morrison discusses the “collapse of a shared social and moral order”, where the changes in entertainment brought about by diversity are clear: “it is a demand for the democratization of culture and a recognition that the traditional cultural elites could no longer expect their values to hold sway”<sup>6</sup>. Because authority is reliant upon tradition and religion, as they become more fragmented, so too does moral authority. The United States is comprised of a melting pot of many combinations of vastly different religious and cultural groups, from Hispanic Buddhists to Middle Eastern Christians, which makes a singular morally authoritative consensus seemingly impossible. In a country where Billy Graham and Rihanna both hold a significant presence, a single moral voice cannot be agreed upon.

Therefore, more examination is necessary to understand where the moral authority for producers in entertainment is derived. Previously, the United States based its moral authority in

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<sup>6</sup> Morrison, David E. "Cultural and Moral Authority: The Presumption of Television." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 625 (2009): 116-27. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40375909>.

entertainment on the conservative religious roots it came from, namely, the Protestant values of the Founding Fathers. This can be seen in the literature of the day, for example, *The Last of the Mohicans*, where the white protagonists battle the ‘savages’, who are in fact Native Americans battling for their homeland<sup>7</sup>. This brought in politics under the guise of morality, painting the Native Americans as immoral beasts. This was itself a morally authoritative choice, to produce a material that would enforce a specific ideal, that of the superiority of white man, through tragedy. This was a common cultural and religious view that the majority party held, and their entertainment reflected this. In an increasingly diverse and secularized nation, this type of common thought can no longer be so easily seen. Today’s proliferation of individual cultural and religious groups has muddied the clarity of moral authority in entertainment. This is echoed in the words of Morrison in the article *Cultural and Moral Authority: The Presumption of Television*, who says “without a shared moral language, it is difficult to proclaim a moral order or indeed a cultural order. Instead, moral appeal is replaced by appeals to taste, individual preferences of consumption”<sup>8</sup>. As Western culture continues to fragment, order, be it cultural or moral, becomes more diffused, because individual preferences are so diverse. Authority becomes confused because it is more often defined by what serves individual parties. This is the root of the confusion of moral authority.

However, this confusion is clarified by the fact that moral authority now lies with the individual producer. Because entertainment is created by a broad spectrum of different groups, the only thing that unites them must be their individuality. Indeed, this individuality is the identity of postmodern culture, especially in the United States. The cultural tie that unites

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<sup>7</sup> Cooper, James Fenimore. *The Last of the Mohicans*. Sterling Pub. Co., 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Morrison, *Cultural and Moral Authority: The Presumption of Television*, 124

residents of the United States is that everyone is different but equally deserving of basic human rights. This is reflected in fundamental documents such as the Constitution. This is a developing value, seen in how interpretation of the Constitution has changed along with the civil rights movement over the past decades, but one which I argue is developed enough to be considered a commonality for United States residents. This is the common thought where moral authority is now derived from, individuality.

As stated before, entertainment is an extension of cultural expression. The *Last of the Mohicans* was an expression of the culture in early 19<sup>th</sup> century United States. Recent technologies, television, the internet, and smartphones most of all, create personal avenues for modern cultural expression. Where before the majority group held the moral authority, backed as they were by religion and tradition, now individuals can make their voice heard. The form of entertainment today allows for grouping of common thought so that no minority stands entirely on their own. Representation is not equal from group to group, but neither is it homogenously restricted to the majority party as it once was. This issue of unequal representation, and its implications for moral authority, will be further examined later on.

This shift from monopolized moral authority to individual moral authority is an intriguing one. Different producers have differing amounts of moral authority, these proportional to their ability to create action. For example, Disney has much more authoritative heft to influence the public than another company, for example Reel FX Creative Studios. Reel FX Creative Studios released a film called *The Book of Life*<sup>9</sup>, a story centering around the Hispanic tradition of Dias de las Muertos. Disney also recently produced a film based on Dias de los Muertos, *Coco*<sup>10</sup>. That

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<sup>9</sup> 2014. *The Book of Life*. Directed by Jorge R. Gutiérrez. Performed by Reel FX Creative Studios.

<sup>10</sup> 2017. *Coco*. Directed by Lee Unkrich. Performed by Disney.

movie will reach millions more people than *The Book of Life* did, purely because of Disney's size and popularity. Regardless, both companies hold moral authority, and exhibited this in their films. This authority is, because of their respective ability to reach people, proportional to their influence as an individual producer. Again, authority, is defined as the ability to create action. Logically then, the amount of authority a producer holds is equivalent to their ability to make their voice heard, and therefore create action.

Some might argue that it is not individual producers that have moral authority, but rather only the majority group, because it has the ability to make its moral authority into the majority action. In other words, there is no proportionality since the majority party creates the majority action. This ignores minority action. Action accompanies any moral authority, and that has been seen throughout history's entertainment, by the majority groups which create entertainment based on their moral authority. For example, the Romans with their gladiatorial displays. An alternative example of a minority group producing entertainment according to their moral authority can be found in the example of Vietnamese water puppetry. This is an ancient form of cultural expression dating back nearly 1000 years. Vietnam is a country who has undergone a series of takeovers throughout its existence, but still maintained this artform, regardless of if they as a people held the moral authority majority. This art, their entertainment, spoke to their fortitude as a people, their moral strength. It expressed a moral authority that was rooted in their culture, not in the reigning power. Their entertainment did not create an immediate change, but it enforced the identity of the people, battling the opposing influence of the group who held power. The action, which enforces the authoritative nature of this artform, was the enforcement of cultural identity. This is one example where a minority moral authority was utilized in



entertainment<sup>11</sup>. The moral authority belonged to the Vietnamese people who produced this entertainment, but it was proportionally smaller than the authority, and accompanying power, that belonged to, for example, the Chinese, during their period of rule in Vietnam.

A modern shift from a minority moral authority to a majority can be seen in the treatment of the LGBTQ+ community in entertainment. When conservative Christian religious moral authority held sway in the United States' culture, it was reflected by the lack of LGBTQ+ representation in entertainment. As the United States drifted towards secular humanism, LGBTQ+ communities gained more representation, and more specifically positive representation, in entertainment<sup>12</sup>. This was enabled by the formation of a minority group with a voice in entertainment who used their moral authority to create content in alignment with their moral code. This individual minority group has grown to an arguable majority size, as evidenced by the Disney example given earlier. Their authority increased proportionally to their ability to effect change in the entertainment industry.

Changes such as these are volatile, since they change the actions of the majority group, thereby changing what is considered moral. However, entertainment actually provides a platform for these changes to be examined and discussed before they are incorporated. An example of this can be found in the pro-life, pro-choice discussion. The topic of abortion is a hotly contested one, since both sides are arguing for human life, but they disagree on the moral line that is being crossed<sup>13</sup>. This disagreement is addressed in television shows such as *Jane the Virgin*, which

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<sup>11</sup> Pack, Sam, Eblin, Michael, and Walther, Carrie. 2012. "Water Puppetry in the Red River Delta and Beyond: Tourism and the Commodification of an Ancient Tradition." *Asianetwork Exchange* 19, no. 2:23-31. *Academic Source Complete*. EBSCOhost (accessed November 20, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Zick, Timothy. 2016. "The Dynamic Relationship between Freedom of Speech and Equality." *Duke Journal of Constitutional Law & Public Policy* 12, no. 2:13-75. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 18, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Siegel, Reva B. 2014. "Abortion and the 'Woman Question': Forty Years of Debate." *Indiana Law Journal* 89, no. 4: 1365-1380. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 16, 2017).

wrestles with the moral decisions that accompany an unexpected pregnancy. The show speaks to a varied audience demographic, which represents an equally varied set of standpoints. Each of the characters faces a different moral quandary, and they battle with these, reflecting the questions of their audience. “Should I get an abortion? What opportunities would this child have if I kept it, is that fair?”, are just some of the questions posed in the show. The producers have created an authentic show that accurately depicts a struggle between different ‘individual preferences’, even between majority and minority thoughts. This is an expression of their moral authority. Gina Rodriguez, the actress who plays Jane, said in an interview on CBS that Jennie Urman, one of the principle creators, “has this ability to have commentary on social issues without judgment. [...] what’s beautiful about art is that you get to discuss them in a way that can create tolerance and create healing, and create a communication and dialogue”<sup>14</sup>. The purpose of this show was to create content in alignment with its moral authority in the hopes of initiating discussion, and subsequent action, on controversial issues. Some of these addressed in the show are racism, pro-life/pro-choice conflicts, and a variety of political issues. This is the same relationship as authority and power, since the producer cannot force social change, but is exercising moral authority in a way which could motivate it. This is an example of how moral authority has individualized, since even 50 years ago themes in popular television dealt only with the majority ‘individual preference’.

The individualization of ‘individual preference’ points to the relationship between the producer and consumer. This is discussed by Sae Won Kim and Ju Choi Chong in the *Journal of Business Ethics*, in the article *Habits, Self-Control and Social Conventions*: “consumer choice is

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<sup>14</sup> Rodriguez, Gina, interview by Norah O’Donnell, Gayle King, Charlie Rose. May 2017. *Gina Rodriguez on tackling social issues in “Jane the Virgin”* CBS This Morning.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fm\\_1\\_THJNMs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fm_1_THJNMs)

an increasingly complex issue in today's globalized, internet-based society. Consumer choice and preferences in the 21st century raise important issues for the ethics of consumers, rationality, including issues of self-control and lapses of judgement"<sup>15</sup>. Each producer has an individual preference in deciding what to create, and the consumer has their own individual preference in deciding what to consume. Subsequently, consumers support the producers which create content in accordance with their preference. This following gives producers more authority, because they have more of an audience to spread their content to, and therefore more of an ability to create action. The consumers hold the power in the relationship, because they carry out the action in accordance with the authority of the producer. The concern raised by Kim and Chong is that as more choices exist for consumers, there will be subsequent 'lapses of judgment' and a struggle with self-control. Unfortunately, this is a negative side-effect of the individualization of moral authority. Because there is no longer a central moral authority to mediate what is produced, consumers are provided a bevy of options in entertainment that did not exist before, creating the potential for negative consumer behavior. Understanding the moral authority of the producer is so important because of this: since the producer can influence consumer behavior, they must be aware of their responsibility that accompanies this authority, to attempt to reduce any negative consumer behavior. Regardless, some of this behavior will persist, simply due to the plethora of options that will confuse consumer behavior.

An example of the implementation of moral authority in a controversy between individual thought is included below. Based on the presupposition of human rights made in the

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<sup>15</sup> Chong, Sae Won Kim and Ju Choi. 2007. "Habits, Self-Control and Social Conventions: The Role of Global Media and Corporations." *Journal of Business Ethics* 147-154.

First Amendment<sup>16</sup>, people have the right to consume and create media insofar as it does not infringe on the rights of other people. However, the multiculturalism of the American people can cause conflict. Let us revisit the live-action remake of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*. This movie was produced in a way that aligned itself with a liberal ethic, writing the character of LeFou as gay. Consequently, the conservative audience members took issue, as it went against their moral code of what was appropriate to include in a children's film. Anti-LGBTQ groups boycotted the movie, which in turn frustrated the LGBTQ community. The issue was with the ethics of the movie, and boycotting was a form of free speech, just as watching the movie was. Regardless, in this case Disney was acting on its individual moral authority as a producer, by creating content that in turn aligned itself with their moral code.

Let's move on from the definition of individual moral authority in entertainment to a related issue, that of the role authority when controlling content. This, I argue, is a power relationship, not involving true moral authority. In the film industry, content control has changed from a direct banning of materials<sup>17</sup> to a softer version, ratings. Almost any film can be produced, but different ratings are applied to each, making them variably accessible to the public dependent on its score, e.g. you must be 17 years or older to see an NC-17 film in theaters. This process varies across the different types of entertainment. For example, on social media sites such as Facebook or Twitter, accounts can be blocked, or content can be completely removed. Usually, this is done with the professed intent of helping the audience. In reality, this is often not the case. As Hannibal Travis states in his paper examining postmodern American media, "small

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<sup>16</sup> 2017. *Constitute*. Accessed September 25, 2017.

[https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/United\\_States\\_of\\_America\\_1992](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/United_States_of_America_1992).

<sup>17</sup> Rockett, Kevin. "Protecting the Family and the Nation: The Official Censorship of American Cinema in Ireland, 1923-1954." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 20, no. 3 (08, 2000): 283-300.

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/208167912?accountid=135130>

cliques of owners and managers – often formed in ways that discriminate based on gender, national origin, race, and religion – dictate which facts and opinions should be allowed on the air (or wire)”<sup>18</sup>. This lack of diversity in control, in a country which prides itself on being so ethnically and culturally varied, has serious socio-political implications. If one of these “small cliques”, for example CNN or FOX News, promotes information that corresponds to its own clique’s biases, that significantly narrows ideological representation, again limiting individuality to the majority group. This bottlenecking of entertainment is less a protective measure for its audience than it is a manipulation of information. This is no longer authority, but an expression of power. When power is exercised at the expense of moral authority, there is the real danger.

This brings up a second concern of control in entertainment. Who holds the moral authority to decide what is damaging content? This is an important question, since controlling content usurps the natural proportionality of moral authorities of multiple producers. If we consider moral authority to be a force under which an action is carried out, but rather the reason it is committed, then this is equitable to a religious leader banning books that go against the religious dogma. The books are still available if people are willing to get them, but their morally authoritative figure discourages such behavior. However, this analogy borrows on the image of a common thought process. There is no such common thought in mainstream entertainment, therefore making this ‘banning’ impossible unless it were to transcend morally authoritative bounds, and become a power struggle. If a single entity has the power to decide what is moral and immoral in entertainment in a way which restricts content, this violates some of the basic tenets of human rights. One of the main statutes of United States’ pride is free speech<sup>19</sup>, and

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<sup>18</sup> Travis, Hannibal. 2011. "POSTMODERN CENSORSHIP OF PACIFIST CONTENT ON TELEVISION AND THE INTERNET." *Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics & Public Policy*.

<sup>19</sup> 2017. *Constitute*.

control of entertainment directly acts against this. Of course, no system is perfect, and free speech in a structured, imperfect government is improbable, but entertainment, which exists for the sole purpose of consumerism, is unnecessarily edited. In a perfect world, this would be an unnecessary censorship of free speech. But what about in the world we cohabit today? I argue that it is still unnecessary. The fact is that there are groups who are more likely to make their voices heard, based on sheer size. Alternatively, there are groups that will never be heard because they are too small. Their respective moral authority will reflect this, since the “louder groups” will have more moral authority. However, if censorship exists, it will not be the small groups who advocate for fair speech, but rather the large groups who hold subsequent authority. This destroys the possibility for evolution, and therefore progress, of thought. This destruction is not an act of moral authority, but of power. Therefore, regardless if entertainment control exists or not, it is not morally authoritative, because it passes from the realm of authority into the realm of power.

A counterargument to this claim is that the dangers perpetrated by uncontrolled production and consumption should be mediated, and it would be morally delinquent not to do so. In this case, the moral authority would rest with someone other than the producer. But who would that be? The most commonly reason cited for control in entertainment is that the content absorbed by an audience influences said audience’s behavior. If the content is positive, the influence is positive, if negative, the influence is negative. However, the positivity or negativity of these actions is determined by those being influenced according to their own perception of its morality. This trend would suggest the merit of controlling media for the protection of the consumer. However, there is conflict surrounding the actual impact of entertainment on

consumers. This is referenced in *Current Proposals for Media Accountability in Light of the First Amendment*:

“There has been an intellectual debate at least since the 1960s on the role of global media and global corporations in relation to consumer choice driven by either habits or rationality. If consumers are totally rational, then global media and corporations provide just information and knowledge. If consumers are influenced by habit, however, then large corporations can manipulate consumer choice and preferences and the general topic of self-control and self-restraint.”<sup>20</sup>

This is a relevant concern, since if consumers are influenced by media, then entertainment should indeed be censored for the good of the general public. If watching violent films propagates violent behavior, then it should indeed be mediated. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) conducted a study on the correlation between violent behavior and violent media in the United States. The FTC is a branch of the United States government established to protect consumers and inappropriate business practices. This study found that there is an “insignificant causal connection between the entertainment industry and violence in America”<sup>21</sup>. There are many other studies which either support and oppose the actual influence of entertainment on consumer behavior. There is no decisive argument for or against the influence of media in consumer behavior. Because of this, there is also no single consensus to derive authority from. Once again, it falls to the moral authority, and subsequent responsibility, of the producer to create content. Regardless of who would control content, they could not hold moral authority, because there would not be a single source that that authority could be drawn from. We cannot rely on a perfect organization to control content, nor can we expect consumers to

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<sup>20</sup> Rotunda, Ronald D. 2004. "Current Proposals for Media Accountability in Light of the First Amendment." *Social Philosophy & Policy* 269-309. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/205253818?accountid=135130>

<sup>21</sup> Rotunda, *Current Proposals for Media Accountability in Light of the First Amendment*, 2004

perfectly mimic the content presented in entertainment. Ultimately, authority lies with the producer.

A final thought on the relationship between power and entertainment control. In a paper which addresses the postmodern censorship of American media published in the *Notre Dame Journal of Law*, this form of control is examined:

Television filters the reality experienced by Americans in several different ways. First, it reports many false and misleading statements as if they were facts, polluting the public mind with error. Second, small cliques of owners and managers - often formed in ways that discriminate on the basis of gender, national origin, race, and religion - dictate which facts and opinions should be allowed on the air (or wire). [...] Third, reporters strip context from stories, depriving the public of understanding, creating stereotypes and caricatures of politicians and subjects, and blurring perceptions of cause and effect. Fourth, some advertisers directly influence the coverage of events by television, and propagate misleading, personality-distorting, and money-wasting messages on a consistent basis. Finally, the government buttresses corporate censorship with rules, regulations, and direct censorship.<sup>22</sup>

Essentially, entertainment is manipulated from its conception to its consumption. This manipulation allows for the expression of different views. The secularization of entertainment and the diverse demographic of the consumers has led to a grasping for power in entertainment, burying moral authority under the pursuit of personal benefit. In a vacuum, moral authority in entertainment exists with the individual, but it cannot escape the power struggle that accompanies socio-political interaction on which human interaction is based. Control of entertainment is a form of manipulation in entertainment that is passed off as a morally authoritative action. However, authority is defined by the ability to create an action, not force one. Therefore, control is not a reasonable exercise of moral authority in entertainment. This

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<sup>22</sup> Travis, *Postmodern Censorship of Pacifist Content on Television and the Internet*, 2011



paper does not argue that this type of control does not exist, but those that control entertainment do not have the moral authority that producers do.

Before we proceed, let's revisit the meaning of moral authority. As stated before, moral authority is the moral creation of an action. But what makes up the morality part of moral authority? Jean Tronto comes to the rescue with her analysis of externalist and internalist approaches. The externalist view claims that it takes an outsider to observe a situation, and make a moral call based on his or her observation, since they are objective and rational. The internalist view claims that only someone operating within the situation in question has the understanding of the case to make a proper moral judgment<sup>23</sup>. I argue that, in entertainment, true moral authority requires both of these viewpoints to be properly implemented. The consumer is able to dictate their own entertainment consumption to an extent, but ultimately they are at the mercy of the producers who supply said entertainment. This place of dependent consumption is historically the place that most individuals have occupied. Below, we will explore the world of production that social media has introduced to the masses of individuals, and see how moral authority acts on that stage.

Why is this relevant to us, the individual consumer? The most dramatic change of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been a shift in communication, most significantly the onset of social media. It places each of us in the unique position of being an individual producer. While none of us has the moral authority in entertainment that a company like Disney has, it is still vital to comprehend the fact that moral authority accompanies any sort of production. Time Magazine's list of most influential people on the internet consisted of a wide variety of entertainment producers, containing stars such as Rihanna, Donald Trump, and BTS, many of whom were made famous

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<sup>23</sup> Tronto, Joan C. August 2011. "Who is Authorized to Do Applied Ethics? Inherently Political Dimensions of Applied Ethics." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 407-417.

by the material they created on their own, rather than a preexisting project<sup>24</sup>. Perhaps the most striking example is that of J.K. Rowling, who holds a spot in the unranked list. Because of a story she wrote while struggling as a single mother, she has launched a multibillion-dollar industry and inspired the childhoods of many. What she produced as an individual has gained a massive amount of exposure, and she holds an equitable amount of moral authority as a result. Any material we release for public consumption has the effect of making us producers, thereby giving us moral authority.

As I argued before, entertainment takes on the morality assigned to it by its producer. In the case of social media, deciding where the morality is from is simplified, since its users are both consumers and producers. We need to understand the reality of having moral authority. If you are the CEO of a mass entertainment industry such as Pixar, moderator of your own YouTube channel which reaches 30,000 people, or a mom posting recipes on her Facebook to her 150 friends, you have moral authority proportional to your ability to create content, and inspire action. This is why understanding the moral authority of producers in entertainment is so important, because now we share that responsibility as producers of our own media. There is a legitimate case to be made for the control of entertainment in this case, since free speech is protected insofar as it does not harm other people<sup>25</sup>. However, I argue that control should rest with the individual, appropriately uniting power, as a consumer, and moral authority, as a producer. Cyberbullying is one example of a way in which social media can be used as a weapon against other people.

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<sup>24</sup> Time Staff. 2017. *Time*. June 26. Accessed 1 December, 2017. <http://time.com/4815217/most-influential-people-internet/>.

<sup>25</sup> Constitute, 2017

On social media platforms such as Youtube and Twitter, people are able to create their own content and reach out to the international community. This feature, individual content creation, has been made available to the general public in a way never before experienced. Also, since moral authority belongs to the individual producer, moral authority is given to anyone who uses these platforms, since they are suddenly each their own independent production entity. It also raises questions, such as, should the platform for this public media, for example Instagram, have the authority to mediate the content produced by the consumers of its program? One example of this controversy is the #freethenipple movement, which protests against the censorship of exclusively female breasts<sup>26</sup>. The opposition to this movement claims that female breasts uncovered on social media would be too inappropriately sexual. Again, I would argue that this is an example of misplaced power in entertainment, and that, for the reasons cited in my earlier argument, that the moral authority should lie with the producer to dictate what media they produce, and what message they want to send. In the case of #freethenipple, different filters on social media would easily exclude posts from those who did not want to see them, and allow those who did want to post these images to do so, preserving each group's moral authority.

Entertainment is a timeless cultural norm. Epic poetry from Greco-Roman eras, Chinese opera, and West African mythologies are all examples of how entertainment is key to culture. Moral authority in entertainment is a concept not easily understood, but invaluable because of its application in our modern society. As argued in this paper, moral authority rests with the individual producer, and whether the this is a teenager on Instagram or Disney with its latest princess film, each has a unique ability to exercise their moral authority. That moral authority, proportional to one's voice in society, belongs to each of us uniquely. Ultimately, understanding

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<sup>26</sup> Esco, Lina and Milano, Alyssa. 2015. "Should We #Freethenipple?" *Time* 186, no. 11 70. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 14, 2017).

moral authority is important for understanding our role in entertainment. In today's world of technological connection, most specifically with social media, we are no longer merely consumers, but also producers with our own moral authorities. Because moral authority's source has been complicated by diversity in Western culture, it has become more difficult to see. Nevertheless, it still very much exists. As more producers exercise their authority to create entertainment, more conversations and subsequent actions can take place. Although Family Guy might ask where those "good, old-fashioned values" have gone, I believe that the assignation of moral authority to the individual producer has created an environment which facilitates growth, not throwing out the old-fashioned values but rather evolving them along with our society.

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