Censorship as Part of Localization

Practice and Perception of Regional Changes in Japanese and Western Video Games

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Abstract

Regular online outrage about changed content in regional editions of video games has brought our attention to the concepts of censorship and localization. Game Rating Systems have their fair share of critics among those debating the details of localized content and prove to be in a peculiar position between developers and the end-user. The current state of the industry shows that alterations are made to regional versions of a game, especially with regards to sensitive topics such as violence, nudity, and sexualization. A survey to gauge end-users’ perception on these topics has been spread amongst residents of Japan and Western regions. Japanese respondents show to be more accepting of legislation surrounding video games whereas Western respondents tend to display a severe dislike for any sort of legislation, and often see not only censorship, but also localization in a negative context. Censorship, self-censorship, and localization are complicated and nuanced topics that turn out to be complexly intertwined with the practice of game production.

Keywords: Localization, Censorship, Self-censorship, Game Rating Systems, Outrage Culture, Japan, the West.
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Glossary of terms

This section will explain some of the terms used in this thesis that might cause confusion as to their specific meaning.

The West or Western World

This thesis will be comparing Japan versus ‘The West’. ‘The West’ or ‘the Western World’ can be interpreted in many ways, all within a different context and the interrelation between various regions, nations, and states. There are many accepted definitions of the West and in general the term is highly dependent on the context. This thesis will rely on Huntington’s depiction of ‘The West’ in his 1996 book ‘The Clash of Civilizations?’, which mostly relies on cultural and religious similarities. His map of the world civilizations, as can be seen in Fig. 0, divides the world into 9 different civilizations. Although much remains to be discussed about this division, such as the inclusion of Latin-America into the Western Civilization, this thesis will rely on the depicted Western Civilization in the image. The focus will be on Northern America and Western and Central Europe, as this aligns with the intended audience for the questionnaire and the reference from the PEGI and ESRB game rating systems.

Henceforth, when we, in this thesis, refer to ‘the West’, we will follow Huntington’s classification unless we specifically mention countries or regions by name.

Fig. 0: Huntington’s map of civilizations
1 Introduction

In February 2019, the Japanese rendition of the well-established fighting game tournament known as “The Evolution Championship Series” – “EVO Japan” for short – encountered a small hiccup during their broadcast. The event was not only streamed for their Japanese audience via the livestream platform of OPENREC, but had a version targeted at an English-speaking audience running simultaneously, on the streaming platform Twitch. While promoting the then-newly released *Dead or Alive 6* (2019), the broadcast became progressively more sexual than the (Western) EVO staff might have intended. While the director of Dead or Alive 6 was demonstrating the game on stage, two scantily-clad women joined in and started discussing and mimicking the well-known *Dead or Alive* bouncing breast and butt physics, jumping up and down eagerly. When they later paused footage of the game to discuss in detail, it created a moment of a male fighter and a female fighter being in a very sexual position, and EVO cut the broadcast (Walker, 2019). The broadcast, however, was only cut for the English side of the stream, on Twitch, while the Japanese OPENREC stream continued. While the English broadcast was temporarily switched off, the EVO director, Joey Cuellar, apparently tweeted something to the extent of ‘The DOA ad that aired on our stream does not reflect the core values of EVO’ (only screenshots of this tweet exist anymore) and that they ‘ended the stream to protect the integrity of [their] brand’ (Donaldson, 2019). That same broadcast, however, also contained plenty of advertisements and showcases for the excessively violent *Mortal Kombat 11* (2019), EVO has, as a result, been called out for their hypocrisy: They stopped the broadcast for too much sexual(ized) content but readily diverted to footage zooming in on rib cages being sawed in two and spines being ripped out of bodies. Many have expressed their disagreement with EVO’s decision to cut the stream because of sexual themes, which should serve as a first hint at the dichotomy of Western and Japanese sensitivities.

This is illustrative of a steadily growing outrage culture on social media platforms around Japanese games, being released in the West and undergoing an alleged “censorship”. These discussions tend to focus on the censorship of heavily sexualized characters in Japanese games for the Western market, and even deem it an infringement on freedom of speech. One example is a Change.org petition with a call to “stop the censorship of Japanese Nintendo games in Western regions” (Schmidt, 2016). Schmidt names three main reasons why he rejects censorship in video games: “Video games are the intellectual property of their respective developers”; “video games are a means of cultural exchange and therefore of utmost importance”; and “video games are a product whose[sic] financial success is heavily dependent on the respective target audience”. He lists a number of Nintendo games that have altered content in the West, compared to their Japanese versions, such as *Fire Emblem Awakening* (2012), *Fatal Frame 5* (2014), and *Xenoblade Chronicles X* (2015), which we will discuss in Chapter 3, but seems to focus mostly on changes regarding characters’ outfits and customization. He implements a vocabulary that paints his petition as a defense of freedom of expression and the developer’s original intent, without acknowledging that development teams often represent a plurality of stances on these issues, or that developers themselves instigate most of these changes, as we will learn later.

A similar petition, supposedly consisting of “gamers and developers” alike, also made its rounds in 2016 and gathered much more supporters, upwards of 8,700 (Mandatory Fun, 2016), although not quite as much as the seemingly intended goal of “1 million”. It uses more general talking points and employs very vague, almost paranoid, language to paint the current status of the industry: “It is unfortunate that the political climate in the Western world has led to a situation such as this one, and some of you may be familiar with the idea that currently several large games media outlets have become openly hostile towards the video game community at large. A great deal of us in the
West are just as exhausted of it as some Japanese developers have expressed themselves”. The authors keep referring to “scaremongers” that are trying to divide a “global game culture”, possibly eliciting echoes of the GamerGate controversy. They then go on to encourage Japanese game developers for their cultural idiosyncrasies, citing many Japanese games to be the ones who influenced and defined not only generations of Japanese, but also Western youth, swerving into a more positive, unifying tone towards the end. The general sentiment seems to be an attempt at bridging cultural gaps in the media and taking a stand in defiance of taboos, but the examples they use as main motivators are, *Xenoblade Chronicles X, Blade & Soul* (2012), *Street Fighter V* (2016) and *Dead or Alive Xtreme 3* (2016) – games quite prominently at the forefront of the shallower end of these discussions. Looking more closely, these games mostly have their sexualized content, such as skimpy outfits for female characters, toned down for the West, or as in the case of DOAX3 were not localized at all, which is framed like the desire of the masses (“We, [...] the actual consumer base of these products”) is impeded by a powerful minority/elite that left “developers afraid to offend the delicate sensibilities of some” and therefore felt pressured to modify their content. This portrayal will be encountered more often.

More recently, there was similar outrage online around the appearance of Tifa, a character in the new *Final Fantasy VII Remake* (2020). Many people called for Square Enix to stop “censoring” the character and revert the changes they made from the original version of *Final Fantasy VII* (1997). The discussion was mostly centered around her apparent decrease in breast size and the addition of a sports bra. With the original model being low-detailed PlayStation-1-era graphics that left a lot to the consumer’s imagination, many people online discussed the changes negatively and repeatedly called for ‘no more censorship in video games’ (Fusco, 2019; ThatmodderGrim, 2020; Philipp, 2019). Tetsuya Nomura himself, director of the remake and character designer of the original title, has subsequently come out and said in an interview that restricting her breast size was done to make Tifa’s design look more athletic and natural (Hernandez, 2019b).

**Purpose and Research Question**

Many comments online vehemently echo a ‘no-censorship’ stance, but do not go beyond the censorship of sexualized characters in their aims and elaborations. Amongst this outrage culture, there seems to be a very clear idea of what censorship and localization are and should be. However, at the same time, they often seem to contradict themselves (mostly by confusing localization with censorship) or to display a very one-sided view on which sensitive topics are even relevant to the discourse.

These discussions have been ongoing and known for their verbal and rhetoric ferocity in Western circles, which increasingly brought up questions, such as: What warrants such negative response to regional changes in the Western audience? What would a Japanese audience think about these changes? Which changes, if any, are made when Western games make the transition to their commercial region? And what do they think about those changes, as well as changes made to Japanese games for the Japanese market?

These questions formed the basis of our desire to explore the practice of regional changes in Japanese and Western video games and how the concepts of censorship and localization are perceived by people in Japan and in the West. Thus, the aim became to answer the following questions:
What are current practices for changes in Japanese and Western video games, when they make the transition from one region to another?

And, in turn, how are the concepts of localization and censorship perceived by people in Japan and in the West?

Or, for short: What is the practice and perception of regional changes in Japanese and Western video games?

The nuanced topics of censorship and localization are explored and their relation to game rating systems operating in the West (ESRB and PEGI) and Japan (CERO) is examined.

The chapter detailing the state of the industry takes a closer look at a variety of games, from both the West and Japan, and their specific regional changes. A summary of the general trends in the industry regarding regional changes concludes the chapter and provides a basis for understanding public perception on these changes.

To further examine public perception, a survey was conducted amongst people from Japan and Western regions, asking their opinions on localization and censorship and other sensitive topics in video games. The results are evaluated using quantitative and, in parts, qualitative methods.

Finally, a discussion combining all the findings from the research explores possible reasons for people’s perception and why it might sometimes be at odds with the common practices.
2 Background

This chapter will discuss the concepts of censorship, self-censorship, and localization with regards to video games, and will further expand upon the game ratings systems in Japan and in the West, specifically CERO, PEGI and ESRB.

The aim of this chapter is to provide the reader with background knowledge on these topics and to provide a solid and verifiable basis for further discussion.

2.1 (Self-)Censorship

Censorship, as defined by the Oxford online dictionary, is “the suppression of any part of media that are considered obscene, politically unacceptable, or a threat to security”. Self-censorship, as defined by the same online dictionary, is “the exercising of control over what one says and does, especially to avoid criticism”. The main difference between these two forms of censorship is the involvement of a formal obstacle such as a government body. Self-censorship is the individual, intentionally and voluntarily, deciding to withhold information (Bar-Tal, Nets-Zehngut and Sharvit, 2017, pp. 1-18). Although this description is mostly referring to individual self-censorship, there is overlap between individual self-censorship and self-censorship of larger bodies, such as organizations or companies. Within organizations or companies there can be various kinds of self-censorship among employees. These include defensive self-censorship, prosocial self-censorship and opportunistic self-censorship. While these forms of self-censorship are examined through the lens of the employee, they can also be applied to the larger body, the company or organization for example, in a societal context. Opportunistic self-censorship is motivated by the need to maximize profit, defensive self-censorship is based on the fear of the negative consequences of speaking up, while prosocial self-censorship is generally practiced for the benefit of others (Bar-Tal, Nets-Zehngut and Sharvit, 2017, pp. 41-60).

Most of these forms of self-censorship refer to factual information being shared or withheld, but there is also self-censorship in works of fiction. It is more difficult to gauge the level of self-censorship in fiction due to its fabricated nature, than it is for other forms of self-censorship. The entire idea of a fictional creative work is that creators are not obligated to mimic reality. That makes it hard to determine the creator’s intent, unlike, for example, documentaries or biographies, the purpose of which is to describe and portray information that has occurred in real life. When discussing self-censorship in fiction, we are entirely reliant on the producer’s self-testimony even though people do not admit to self-censorship easily. Despite this problem, two kinds of self-censorship can be identified in fictional texts: political self-censorship and commercial self-censorship. Political self-censorship is the case where a produced work is not in line with the true inner voice of its creator. Authors may be afraid of the backlash against their perceived political agenda in their fictional text or may want to avoid hurting a certain group of people. Commercial self-censorship is a lot more straightforward. Producers who apply commercial self-censorship do so mostly for the commercial benefits the changes might incur. The main thought process behind commercial self-censorship is the idea that something might not sell well or not reach as wide of an audience if they do not apply changes to their product (Bar-Tal, Nets-Zehngut and Sharvit, 2017, pp. 207-219).

Especially this last form of self-censorship is relevant to game production, as it is not only a creative production but also very much a business. Due to the nature of game development being one of cooperation between many different people, self-censorship is hard to measure. Particularly all the subtle variations between different kinds of self-censorship and their social context can
cloud one’s judgement on whether self-censorship has taken place or not, to what degree and whether it was necessary or not. The best way to figure out whether censorship played a role in a piece of media is to directly ask the people involved in the creation of it. But even then, the answer might be unreliable.

2.2 Localization

Localization began in the 1980s mostly for computer software to be usable with different languages but later included more and more products, among which video games. Early video games often did not require much localization, generally just a few translated lines of text. Early Japanese video games such as Space Invaders (1978) and Pac-Man (1980) posed no major language barrier and only needed slight adjustments before they could be published in the West. These games also often had no need for localization as they generally did not contain culture-specific elements (O’Hagan and Mangiron, 2013, pp. 46-49). However, as videogames grew, not only in popularity but also in technical features, so did the need for localization. Compared to older video games such as Space Invaders, games of today have a massive amount of text, dialogue, and visual imagery that need to be localized. O’Hagan and Mangiron (O’Hagan and Mangiron, 2013) and Chandler (Chandler, 2005) provide a very comprehensive description of the process of localization and all the different elements involved. The localization process is a huge collaboration between many different disciplines, such as translators, managers and programmers among others, and requires a large amount of time to complete. Video games often contain many different assets that need to be translated, unlike written text or printed media. Amongst those assets are the more straightforward ones, such as in-game text and in-game audio, but they also include cinematic assets, promotional material, art files such as text within graphics or even the graphics themselves, on top of the actual printed material, such as game boxes and printed manuals (Chandler, 2005, p. 51). But, not only is localizing a video game a process full of linguistic and cultural issues, it is also a process containing many technical issues. Onscreen text present in the user interface (UI), such as menus, tutorials and system messages, but also narrative elements, dialogue that only exists in written form and in-game descriptions of items, abilities, etc. are all bound by strict space limitations. This is especially the case for menus, as the large amount of written information requires the space to be used optimally and can cause unforeseen problems when working with different languages the translation of which can vary in length considerably (O’Hagan and Mangiron, 2013, pp. 122-123). Localization and translation work is also affected by specific game consoles. Not only do most games need to adhere to specific terminology established on each platform, such as Sony’s and Microsoft’s terminology for the directional buttons or directional pad, localization needs to take into consideration different button mappings for different regions as well. A familiar example is the mapping of the PlayStation controllers. In Japanese society, a circle, ‘O’, is used as confirmation or as something being correct, while a cross, ‘X’, is used opposite, as something that is incorrect. For Japanese games, this means that ‘circle’ is often used for confirmation and ‘cross’ for cancellation. This is, however, not the case for most Western countries. In most Western countries, a cross is often used as confirmation when checking a box. Thus, when localizing Japanese games for a Western audience, key-mapping is also adjusted to count for cultural differences.

On top of the large amounts of text and graphics that need to be localized, voice-over is another massive part of localization. The translation of the spoken lines itself is a large amount of work, but some things to consider are also remapping the lip movements of the characters to the new voice-over, adjusting facial animations depending on context, and in the case of cutscenes, the translated voice-over needs to fit within the same amount of screen time as the original version.
The amount of localization a game company wants to implement depends entirely on their level of localization (O’Hagan and Mangiron, 2013, pp. 141-142). The level of localization goes from no localization at all to full localization that involves the entire package of translating every asset in the game, doing a completely new voice-over, new printed material, etc. In between no localization and full localization are two more levels of localization. Box and docs localization limits itself to just the localization of the printed material, such as the box and printed manual. This is mostly useful for games with little text in them, games that are not expected to sell very well or games that are in English being distributed to regions that have a good control of the language. Taking it a step further is partial localization, in which only the in-game text is translated and subtitles of spoken lines are added.

Finally, blurring the lines between what some consider censorship and others just a necessary and unavoidable part of localization, the actual translation itself is frequently a point of critique. Localizing a game is not just about translating language but also about translating cultures. Often, cultural attributes need to be translated as well to fit the cultural ‘language’ of the intended audience. Even language itself is a cultural attribute. It is not always as straightforward as literally translating a text word for word. Sometimes, words do not let themselves be easily translated in the target language or grammar structures can vastly differ which makes translating a good running sentence a challenge. This is especially the case for languages that vastly differ from each other in alphabet, sentence structure, writing direction and pronunciation. On top of that, translators need to take other cultural attributes into consideration as well. These include attributes such as norms and values, gender roles, religion, cultural heritage, and cultural rules and laws (Pyae, 2018).

Localization is thus a huge amount of work that includes many different types of assets and many different disciplines within game development. The level of localization depends on budget and on the game developer’s intent of distribution and accessibility, and translation might need to deviate from the source material to ensure a smooth gameplay experience. That is all done to make it as accessible as possible for as many different people as possible.

2.3 Game Rating Systems

Game rating systems are put in place to inform consumers of the contents of the product they are buying and can impose restrictions on the type of content being distributed. Different regions follow different guidelines on how to publish video games and what restrictions need to be put in place. This section will discuss three different game rating systems. CERO for Japan, ESRB for Northern America and PEGI for Europe. Furthermore, this section will also go over some of the limitations of these systems and their relation to censorship.

2.3.1 CERO

CERO (CERO, n.d.), established in 2002, is the official Japanese entertainment rating organization for video game content and stands for Computer Entertainment Rating Organization. CERO helps inform customers of the contents of the products that they are buying and clarifies what age group the product is suitable for. According to their own website, CERO also aims to ‘help young people grow in a healthy and sound environment and maintain society’s ethical standards at a proper level’. Their activities include screening and rating computer and video games, conduct surveys and research for improving their rating system, disseminating the age-appropriateness rating system to the public and informing them about the system, and communicating and cooperating with
domestic and foreign organizations with the aim to maintain ethical standards them about the system, and communicating and cooperating with domestic and foreign organizations with the aim to maintain ethical standards.

Fig. 1: CERO age classification marks

CERO rating marks are grouped into two types of marks: Age classification marks and other marks. Other marks include marks that are used for educational purposes, marks for trial versions, and marks for promotional material of games that have not been rated yet. Age classification marks (Fig.1) are the main indication of the CERO rating. Age classification marks are displayed prominently on the front of the physical video game box and indicate that the game is suitable for the players of the indicated age and above. They go hand in hand with the content icons that are often displayed on the back of the game box. The content icons show what kind of content the consumers can expect in the game and what the game’s age classification is based on.
CERO provides four categories of expressions that are covered by the CERO rating on its website (CERO, n.d.). Here, they clarify what content is under these expressions. For example, sex-related expressions include kiss, embrace, underwear exposure, nudity, sexual intercourse, among others. The other three categories are violence expression, antisocial act expression and language- and ideology-related expression. CERO further mentions that each of these expression types has an upper limit of what they consider appropriate in a game and any content exceeding that upper limit is designated as a banned expression. Games that contain banned expressions will not be assigned a rating and as a result, are very hard to publish. CERO does not provide any clarification on what they consider to be the upper limit but does provide a list of banned expressions, among which are expression of genitals, expression of mutilation/body-cutting that gives an extremely cruel impression, expression of mass murder/violence that is not necessarily related to the theme or concept, and expression and language that incite discrimination, to name a few. CERO provides the entire list of banned expressions on their website under their code of ethics (CERO, 2011).

CERO provides the consumer with a lot of information on the physical game boxes and their website clarifies in even more detail. They carefully list all the expressions under their related category and provide a list of expressions that they deem unacceptable in their code of ethics. Although CERO provides a lot of information about their rating system, the sometimes vague and interpretable language can cause some confusion. For instance, the ‘upper limit’ of the four expression types is not properly explained and one is left to guess where that upper limit stops. The list of banned expressions also contains some dubious wording. Under banned violence expressions, for example, CERO often mentions the following: “Expression of [BLANK] that gives an extremely cruel expression”. [BLANK] can be filled in by any of the violence expressions that they state in the banned expressions list. CERO does not clarify any further what they understand under ‘an extremely cruel expression’, which makes it difficult for consumers and developers alike to know where to draw the line.

2.3.2 ESRB

ESRB (ESRB, n.d.), which stands for Entertainment Software Rating Board, was established in 1994 and assigns age and content ratings to video games in North America. The founding of the ESRB was in response to the criticism of excessive violent and sexual content for consoles in the early 90s. Particularly after public concerns regarding the releases of Night Trap (1992) and Mortal Kombat (1992), congressional hearings in 1993 pressured the video game industry into creating the ESRB as a self-regulatory organization (as per the Video Game Rating Act of 1994). The ESRB ratings are roughly based on the Motion Picture Association (MPA) of America but includes consideration for video games’ interactivity. On their website (ESRB, n.d.), they mention that their primary mission is ‘to help parents make informed decisions about the video games and apps their children play’.
The ESRB follows six rating categories and a rating pending (RP) icon for games that have not yet been rated. The rating categories range from Early Childhood to Adults Only. Most ratings have their respective age number mentioned above the letter, except for teen rating, which is generally considered to be appropriate for ages 13 and up. The rating categories in Fig. 3 can be found on the front of the physical video game box, while the example rating in Fig. 4 is often found at the back of the box. This second example shows the rating category, the content descriptors and possible interactive elements. Content descriptors indicate content that may be of interest or concern for the consumer and provide insight into the chosen rating category. The content descriptors are written down and do not have any associated symbols. Interactive elements do not have any influence on the rating category but are there to inform the consumer of features that may be of interest or concern, such as in-game purchases, shares location, and users interact, among others.

Although there are six rating categories, the Adults Only category is very rarely used. According to the ESRB website (ESRB, n.d.), currently only 27 titles have an AO rating. Most of these games have this rating due to strong sexual content, with a few outliers that have the AO rating for their intense violence or gambling practices. Several games that used to have an AO rating have since been adjusted back to an M rating, either due to changed content or changed perception of the content. An example would be Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, which was originally M-rated but
changed to an AO-rating after a sex mini-game was found in hidden content. This change was later reverted once Rockstar patched the game and removed the offending content. Games with an AO rating are denied publication on major console platforms and most retailers refuse to stock them. Clearly, the AO rating has a very negative stigma in the industry.

2.3.3 PEGI

PEGI (PEGI, n.d.) was established in 2003 and stands for Pan-European Game Information. PEGI replaced several national age rating systems that now all follow a single system used throughout most of Europe. PEGI is used in more than 35 countries and is supported by all the major console manufacturers, publishers and developers. According to their code of conduct (PEGI, n.d.), PEGI aims to not only ‘provide information to the public on the content of interactive software in a responsible manner’, but also to ‘ensure safe online gameplay for children’. They use a system of age recommendations and content descriptors to inform consumers, especially parents, and help them decide whether or not to buy a specific product. On their website, they specify that PEGI ratings ‘consider the age suitability of a game, not the level of difficulty’.

Fig. 5: PEGI age labels

Fig. 6: PEGI content descriptors
On their website (PEGI, n.d.), PEGI outlines the kind of content that falls under their age labels and why a game was assigned a specific rating. The number on the age label indicates the recommended minimum age for the product. PEGI further details the content descriptors and what age label the content descriptor can appear in. For example, the violence content descriptor can be found in the PEGI 7 rating, but only for non-realistic or non-detailed violence. A few other content descriptors such as bad language, can only be found on a PEGI 12 rating or higher, while drugs are only considered for the PEGI 16 rating or higher and the discrimination content descriptor is restricted to PEGI 18 rating. In an interview with Jack Davies (not his real name), a game examiner from PEGI, he elaborates on the process of how PEGI rates games (Stuart, 2013). When asked about the phrase ‘realistic looking violence toward humans’, Davies explains that they do not specifically look at the quality of the graphics but that they look at realistic reactions to violence. Characters must react to the violence like they would in real-life. Davies provides the following example: “If a character gets punched and they respond by falling backwards, there doesn’t necessarily have to be blood for a 16 certificate, they just need to respond realistically”. Davies also shortly elaborates on the ‘gross violence’ category, such as being able to inflict post-mortem damage on bodies and, in the case of Tomb Raider (2013), being impaled by spikes through the jaw and abdomen. This last example, Davies clarifies, is what gained Tomb Raider its 18+ rating.

In 2018, PEGI introduced the new content descriptor of in-game purchases (PEGI, n.d.). In April 2020, PEGI announced that it will require video game publishers to provide additional information on the nature of in-game purchases if these include random items such as card packs or loot boxes (PEGI, n.d.). Fig. 7 shows an example of this change. The 16 rated game contains the content descriptors for violence and in-game purchases, but also details at the bottom that it includes paid random items.

Developers are informed of the rating decision of PEGI beforehand, enabling them to edit their product and resubmit it for another evaluation. There are, however, no restrictive policies in place for publication or distribution of games with the PEGI 18 rating.

**Fig. 7: Example of PEGI 16 rating with content descriptors**

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3 State of the Industry

The concepts of localization and (self-)censorship are closely intertwined and it remains nearly impossible to determine without direct communication from the creators, whether changes in video games are made for one reason or the other, while other choices obviously appeal to game ratings boards. Regardless, it is important to be aware of the current state of the industry and the characteristic changes that have been made to regional versions of video games. To examine public opinion on censorship and localization changes, we thought it imperative to aggregate and explore some exemplary cases of localization/censorship changes, compiling a nuanced assortment representative of current industry practices and relevant to the common discourse. Therefore, this chapter will detail a variety of games who have undergone changes or adjustments for regional versions of video games. A summary of the general trends in regional changes, derived from our close look, concludes the chapter.

3.1 Japanese Games

This section goes over several examples of Japanese-produced games, their reception and their changed content. The games ratings are listed for the respective regions, CERO for Japan, PEGI for most of Europe, and ESRB for Northern America. A short explanation of the game is provided after which there is a more in-depth explanation of the regional differences. The last sub-section discusses some more general region differences of cover art.

3.1.1 Resident Evil 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CERO – Z, D</th>
<th>PEGI – 18+</th>
<th>ESRB – M</th>
</tr>
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*Resident Evil 2*, or *RE2* for short, is a 2019 remake of the 1998 survival horror game, *Resident Evil 2*. The game is developed and published by Capcom and has received much critical acclaim and even managed to outsell the original game. The game enjoys heavily updated graphics and an overhaul of the controls. Set in the fictional Raccoon City, the two protagonists, a college girl and a young police officer, fight to survive in a zombie outbreak.

The game is mostly censored for its Japanese audience and not so much for its Western audience. Despite the standard version having the CERO D rating, which is considered to be appropriate for people aged 17 and older, the similarly rated American version (ESRB – M), has very notable differences. Even the special CERO Z version, intended to only be played by people over the age of 18, does not come close to the level of gore and graphical violence portrayed in the Western versions. Both ESRB and PEGI rated the same localized version of RE2 and although they have come to slightly different age ratings, the difference between both Japanese versions is staggering. The Japanese versions prevent the player from beheading zombies entirely and the Z version has reduced visuals when detaching limbs, the D version prevents this completely. A few notable cutscenes have also been adjusted. The Western release has a cutscene where a police officer is pulled in half by zombies, exposing the insides of the man’s torso in full detail. Both Japanese versions have this censored and instead show the full body of the police officer. Another cutscene shows the protagonist examining a corpse up close, showing the mutilated head up in full detail in the Western release and the Japanese Z rated release, but these visuals are heavily limited in the Japanese D rated version.
3.1.2 Yakuza 3

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<th>PEGI – 18+</th>
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Yakuza 3 is the third entry in the Yakuza series published by Sega. Yakuza 3 was released in Japan in 2009 and a year later in the West. A remastered version was released in 2018 and 2019 respectively. Yakuza is an action-adventure role playing series and the player follows the story of a Yakuza. The games are modelled after real-life Japanese locations and contain many elements of Japanese society.

Because the game closely resembles Japanese society, many of the game’s elements are unique to Japan. This caused a problem for the localization and thus the Western release of the game has had quite a few changes made. The game contains an abundance of side-quests and mini-games outside of the main story. The cut content from the Western release includes quiz games, which were mostly about Japanese pop-culture and history, the traditional Japanese game shōgi, a Mahjong mini-game, pachinko, which is a Japanese mechanical gambling game, sections containing hostess clubs, a massage parlor side game and around 20 side quests. The remake has restored nearly all of the cut content, albeit with some changes made to both the Japanese and the Western version. This includes the removal of a side-mission that involved a cross-dressing man, which was seen as insensitive in the current social climate, the removal of the quiz game, and a change made to a family crest that originally resembled the Japanese rising sun flag.

3.1.3 Judgement

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Judgment, known as Judge Eyes in Japan, is an action-adventure spin-off from the Yakuza game series published by Sega. The Japanese release was in December 2018 while the international release was a few months later in June 2019. The game revolves around a detective trying to solve several mysterious murders in the fictional district of Kamurocho in Tokyo.

Judgment has used the likeness and voices from a variety of different Japanese actors in the game. A few months after the Japanese release, one of the actors was involved in a drug scandal in Japan, which resulted in Sega removing all the copies of the game from stores and preventing further sales. Sega furthermore decided to remove the actor’s likeness from the game and replace all the voice lines. This change was also applied for the international release in June 2019. The Western release contained a slight change in a small quest. The translators working on the localization of the game felt that the scene of a woman being catcalled on the street would benefit from being made a tad more uncomfortable than the Japanese version. In their opinion, it added to the experience and better resembled Western catcalling (Hernandez, 2019a).

3.1.4 Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE

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<th>PEGI – 12+</th>
<th>ESRB – T</th>
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*Tokyo Mirage Sessions ♯FE* is a role-playing game developed by Atlus in 2015. It is a crossover between the *Fire Emblem* series and *Shin Megami Tensei*. The game is set in modern-day Tokyo and follows a group of teenagers who fight against hostile beings called Mirages. The group joins forces with friendly Mirages to protect innocent people.

The Japanese versions only had a few minor changes made from pre-release footage to the final version. This includes a costume switch where a character’s original design wore underwear with a pair of stockings while the updated design sees her wearing a pair of skin-tight jeans instead. In contrast, the Western release underwent more heavy changes. Most of these changes revolve around costume changes that, among others, focus on covering up the many bikini outfits that are in the game. This includes outfits for characters but also other visual material in the game, such as photographs, magazine covers and advertisements. Some of the other changes that were made to the Western version were increased ages for the main characters, updated voice-lines reflecting those changes, dark black shadows during acrobatic scenes to hide the characters’ underwear, avoiding any mention of gravure modelling, and changing a questline that was mostly focused on sexy modelling to feeling good about oneself while wearing unique clothing.

The recently updated version released in 2020 called *Tokyo Mirage Sessions ♯FE Encore*, retains most of the changes originally made for the international release.

### 3.1.5 Nier

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*Nier* is an action role-playing game developed by Cavia in 2010. Published by Square Enix, the game has two versions: *Nier Gestalt* and *Nier Replicant*. The single-player game follows the story of protagonist Nier as he tries to save Yonah, who is either Nier’s daughter or sister depending on the version, from an illness. The game combines different elements from various game genres such as (bullet hell) shoot’ em ups, text adventures and hack ‘n slash.

The two versions of Nier – *Gestalt* and *Replicant* – are released in different regions. Japan has gotten both versions and the West has gotten *Gestalt* only. *Gestalt* portrays the relationship between Nier and Yonah as that of father and daughter, while *Replicant* portrays the relationship as that of a brother and sister. Other than that, there are virtually no differences between the two versions.

### 3.1.6 Xenoblade Chronicles X

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<th>CERO – C</th>
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*Xenoblade Chronicles X* is a Japanese action role-playing game published in 2015. Developed by Monolith Soft, the game features a customizable player character who explores the open world of the planet *Mira* together with a party of companions.

Several things have been changed for the Western release of *Xenoblade Chronicles X*, most notably regarding the outfits for a 13-year-old character called Lin Lee. The outfits can be worn by any of the characters and have remained consistent across characters in the Japanese version.
The Western version has changed quite a number of these outfits to be less revealing for Lin Lee, while older characters keep the original outfits. Another costume difference concerns the *fundoshi* costume. This costume has been adjusted on all characters in the Western release to more closely resemble casual underwear instead of the traditional Japanese undergarment. A final notable change was made to the bust slider during character creation. The Western version of the game has removed this option entirely and the default bust size of the female characters is set to medium. The executive director of Xenoblade Chronicles X, Tetsuya Takahashi, comments on the changes and explains that as a developer, he believes it to be ‘ideal to be able to adjust content so that it’s culturally acceptable’. Takahashi further expands on fans of the game calling the changes out for censorship and explains that he believes that it is most important to make sure the end user does not have a bad experience and that changes like these contain a lot of back and forth between the localization team and the developers (Schreier, 2017).

3.1.7 Cover Art of Japanese Games

Cover art has seen many regional variants throughout the years and still, although not as regularly, games are released with different covers for different regions. A particularly notable example is the *Kirby* franchise. Kirby has a slight but peculiar change made to its covers for its Western audience compared to its native Japanese releases. On almost all covers of Kirby games released throughout the years in the West, Kirby looks notably grumpier than its Japanese counterpart. On many occasions, Kirby has gained a pair of angry looking eyes for Western releases. The difference can be observed in Fig. 8. Shinya Kumazaki, who has worked on the Kirby games his entire career and has been the director of the Kirby series since 2008, spoke about this adjustment in an interview with Gamespot. He notes that Kirby’s cute character is its biggest draw in the Japanese market, while the aspect of Kirby battling hard is a more appealing image for the United States. Thus, they decided to adjust the cover for the Western market to make Kirby more appealing for that region. Kumazaki does clarify that this is still only done on a case-by-case basis, as some of the Japanese games also feature an angry Kirby on the covers (Gaston, 2014).

![Fig. 8: Kirby cover art](image-url)
Another example of cover art difference can be seen in many games of the *Final Fantasy* franchise. Japanese *Final Fantasy* games often have a very simple cover with just the name and logo on a white background. For the Western releases, this is often changed to include the main characters and a coloured background as can be seen in Fig. 9. Other notable Japanese games that have had significant cover changes include the *Metal Gear Solid* series, *Ico* (2001), *Yakuza 2* (2006), *Mega Man* (1987), *Dark Souls* (2009) and *Resident Evil 4* (2005), to name a few. It should be noted that there were even regional cover variations between North American releases and European releases in the early era of gaming.

### 3.2 Western Games

Similar to the previous section, this section analyzes several examples of Western-produced games, their changed content and their reception. Much like before, game ratings are listed for the respective regions and all games are shortly explained before diving further into regional differences. Lastly, cover-art of Western games is discussed.

#### 3.2.1 Mortal Kombat 11

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*Mortal Kombat 11*, or *MK11* for short, is a brutal fighting game developed by NetherRealm Studios in 2019. The game is a one-on-one 2.5D fighting game where players fight with one of the 25 playable characters in the game. The game is well known for its highly graphic finishers called ‘fatalities’, where one character uses a special move that finishes the opponent and wins them the battle.

The *Mortal Kombat* series has been the center of many heated debates about violence in video games as it is one of the most graphically gruesome video games out there ever since its first release in 1992. The *Mortal Kombat* games were partly responsible for the creation of the ESRB in 1994 after much controversy. *Mortal Kombat* remains hugely popular in the West but does not perform as well in Japan. What is more, *MK11* has been banned outright in Japan due to its excessive violence. For the Western release, *MK11* got some heated fan backlash due to its female costumes. Some changes have been made to the female costumes, compared to previous
instalments of the video game series, which did not sit well with many fans of the series. The female characters are now better equipped in their outfits to handle combat situations according to Ed Boon, co-creator of NetherRealm Studios and creative director of MK11 (Macias, 2019).

### 3.2.2 Red Dead Redemption 2

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*Red Dead Redemption 2*, or *RDR2* for short, is one of the best-selling games in recent history (Grubb, 2020). The game was developed and published in 2018 by Rockstar Games, otherwise known for its popular Grand Theft Auto series, and takes place in a fictionalized South, Mid-Western United States in 1899. The game follows the story of an outlaw named Arthur Morgan as he deals with the decline of the Wild West. *RDR2* has a rich and interactive open world full of shootouts, hunting, horseback riding, a bounty system, interacting with non-playable characters and a morality system, among others.

Several things have been changed for the Japanese release of *RDR2*, mostly regarding the graphic scenes. To be specific, while limbs can still be detached from bodies by shooting at them, unlike in the Western version, the Japanese version makes the detached body parts disappear and does not show bones or internal organs. This has resulted in changes to a few quests as well, specifically one about finding the murderer of a string of dismembered bodies. The Japanese version replaces the dismembered bodies with the entire body instead. Another aspect that has been altered concerns nudity. Several brothel scenes have been changed in the Japanese version to cover up the prostitutes that could otherwise be seen (partially) nude. Furthermore, a scene where a man is threatened with castration has been changed so that the man keeps his pants on during the entire scene.

### 3.2.3 Grand Theft Auto V

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*Grand Theft Auto V*, or *GTAV*, is an action-adventure game published internationally in 2013 by Rockstar Games. The game features a large open world in the fictional state of San Andreas, which is based on Southern California, and the fictional city of Los Santos, which, in turn, is based on Los Angeles. The story follows three different criminals as they work together to try and commit a heist while pressured by both the government and several imposing crime figures. The open world aspect of the game means the player can freely explore the map on foot or by vehicle. The well-known ‘wanted’ system measures the criminal activity of the player and controls the level of aggression of law enforcement towards the player. The game enjoyed much critical acclaim and is one of the best-selling games of all time (Sirani, 2019).

The GTA franchise has been the subject of many controversies surrounding its violence and depictions of women and *GTAV* is no different. One of the more notorious controversies is the torture sequence in *GTAV* where the player gets to choose the torture devices and perform the actions while interrogating a victim. This scene was changed for the Japanese release and prevents the player from choosing the torture devices and does not show the acts of torture either. Other changed scenes include one of the main characters promptly pulling his pants down and a scene
where the same main character has sexual intercourse in the kitchen while watching television. In the Japanese version, the character keeps his pants on and the sex scene is skipped entirely. Finally, the Western version contains a scene where one of the main characters must spy on a popular teen idol and finds them having sex with someone in their garden. The Japanese version changed this to the teen idol smoking instead.

### 3.2.4 The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt

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*The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, or just *The Witcher 3*, is part of a videogame series that is based on *The Witcher* fantasy novels by Andrzej Sapkowski. The game, developed by CD Projekt, was published worldwide in 2015. It is the third installment of the series and follows the protagonist Geralt of Rivia, a monster slayer, as he tries to find his missing adopted daughter. The game is an action role-playing game that is based on central and northern European cultures and contains magic and melee combat, a choice system and a central story with several endings.

The Japanese version has a few changes compared to the Western version. Most of it is related to the depiction of violence and gore in the game. Certain scenes have been adjusted to conceal intestines and dismemberment. Another aspect of the game that has been changed for the Japanese release is nudity. The game contains several scenes where the characters are now clothed in underwear while having sexual intercourse and any other moments of nudity are covered up.

### 3.2.5 Cover Art of Western Games

Just as with Japanese cover art, cover art from Western games have also undergone changes for their release in Japan. A well-known franchise for which changes to its cover were made for the Japanese market is Crash Bandicoot. Naughty Dog’s classic franchise had made quite a few adjustments for its Japanese version. In an interview with the developers (Hester, 2017), they said they had had to focus on making Crash look much cuter and softer. Although some changes were made in-game, the actual 3D model of Crash did not change, despite him changing significantly on the Japanese cover. Fig. 10 shows the difference between the two versions of the first Crash Bandicoot released in 1996. Most notable are the changes to his eyes and eyebrows. Every release since, Japanese versions for Crash Bandicoot contain the same changes as made in 1996, with softer colours, bigger eyes and bigger eyebrows, which is visible in Fig. 11.

*Fig. 10: Crash Bandicoot (1996) – Western and Japanese cover*
A similar thing was done with regard to the Spyro games from the developer Insomniac Games. Although some in-game adjustments have been made for the Japanese audience, there is a notable difference in the cover art of the Western and Japanese releases. Fig. 12 shows both versions of the cover for the first Spyro game of 1998. The Japanese cover has made quite significant adjustments to Spyro’s appearance. Spyro’s shape is much rounder and it looks cuter and friendlier than its Western counterpart. The Spyro Reignited Trilogy (2018), which contains the first three Spyro games, did not have any changes made to its cover for the Japanese release.

Other Western games with prominent changes to the covers include, but are not limited to, the following: Heavy Rain (2010), the Ratchet and Clank games, especially from the PlayStation-2-era (2002-2005), Borderlands 2 (2012), Borderlands 3 (2019) and Uncharted 2 (2009).

It should be noted that some games also have different covers for the North American market and the European market.

3.3 Summary

Although the examples discussed in the previous section are but a small part of the many games that have been released, one can clearly observe some trends in their localization or censorship methods. First of all, games released for Japanese audiences tend to minimize the depiction of extreme violence and gore, especially if this includes human to human violence, and disapprove
strongly of dismemberment and beheadings (RE2, MK11, GTAV, RDR2, and The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt). They also do not show full frontal nudity and are averse to scenes of sexual intercourse (GTAV, RDR2, and The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt). This is in line with CERO’s list of banned expressions, which they do not tolerate, even with the highest age rating. For the same reasons, these games have received the highest ratings from PEGI (18+) but only the second highest rating from the ESRB (M). Although PEGI and ESRB always rate a game no matter the contents and do not seem to have any banned expressions, it is interesting to note that ESRB considers none of the games mentioned above for its AO category, despite other regions classifying them with their highest ratings available. Furthermore, ESRB does not seem to consider games with high amounts of violence and gore to fall under the AO classification, as that is reserved almost exclusively for erotic content.

Games released for Western audiences tend to be more sensitive towards sexual imagery, particularly that of younger characters, and adjustments are often made to fit the social standard. This includes aging up characters in the narrative and adjusting outfits (Tokyo Mirage Sessions ♯FE and Xenoblade Chronicles X). Other instances where content was cut or changed for the Western versions often included content heavily revolving around cultural topics/aspects (Yakuza 3) or content that might not resonate as much with their target audience (Nier).

A general difference in video game art covers one can see through the years is that Japanese seem to prefer their covers to be more serene/abstract or 2D/hand-drawn, showing cute, likeable characters, while for Western covers impressively-looking 3D characters in action poses are preferred. This was especially noticeable in the earlier days of video games, but covers have recently become more similar across regions. Furthermore, in the earlier days of videogames, there was also often different cover art for North American releases and European releases as well since those were more distinct with region-locked consoles (NTSC U/C and PAL). However, over the last few years, cover art releases for the Western market have been very consistent.
4 Previous Works

Two studies that we take a closer look at (Cho and Han, 2004; Hong, 2015) are centered around cross-cultural studies between South Korea and the United States. Both studies investigated Davidson’s hypothesis on the third-person effect, which is a theory that states individuals tend to overestimate the influence of media on others or underestimate its influence on themselves (Davidson, 1983).

Cho and Han discussed the perceived effect of the mass media on self vs. other in their 2004 study. Their study investigates the implications of culture on the third-person effect between South Korea and the United States. They distinguish between individualism and collectivism, two antagonistic concepts derived from political theory and cross-cultural psychology. Collectivist cultures (like South Korea, or e.g. Japan) tend to put the needs of the group first, and the concepts of ‘self’ and ‘other’ are not as separate as in individualist cultures (like e.g. the West), who put more importance on individual experiences and views, which seems to be motivated by a stronger need of self-enhancement over others. They conclude that collectivist societies tend to portray smaller differences between perceived media effects on self vs. other, compared to individualist societies, who hold a more dualistic view on the matter. This is in line with the standpoint that culture is important in defining people’s view on the relationship between self and other, and that the third-person effect is closely related to that culture (Cho and Han, 2004).

Hong’s cross-cultural study between South Korea and the United States contains a lot of relevant information for our topic. Hong discusses cultural values, individualism, collectivism, uncertainty-avoidance, and the third-person effect. He combines these theories with a survey to find out what the support for regulation of violent videogames is in these different cultures. Hong makes some interesting observations with regards to people’s estimations on the effects of violent video games and their willingness to support game regulations. Individuals with experience playing violent video games are less likely to support regulation of those same games. In the same vein, American respondents report less support for regulation of violent video games than South Korean respondents. Hong mentions that studies have shown that censorship or media content regulation are more common in collectivist societies compared to individualistic societies. Hong provides several suggestions as to why there is a notable difference between the two cultures. He mentions the setting in which both societies play violent video games may be relevant to their opinion on legislation. Americans predominantly play video games from their own homes while South Koreans often spend time playing video games in public spaces, such as PC rooms and on their mobile devices. Restrictions on violent video games thus becomes about regulation in the public sphere (South Korea) and in private places (United States). This coincides with larger third-person effect perceptions in American society and less in South Korean society. Hong also mentions different attitudes towards censorship, noting the American First Amendment of freedom of speech, and how both individuals and companies use that to block government intervention, while explaining that South Korea does not have a similar concept. Finally, Hong concludes that third-person perceptions and support for regulations may depend greatly on nationality, and thus on cultural values. He notes that especially collectivism in a society may be one of the leading factors of support for regulation, while individualism seems to contribute to the third-person perception (Hong, 2015).
5 Method and Materials

This chapter centers on the survey of this thesis. It consists of quantitative research with a survey and one qualitative element in the form of an open question at the end. The survey was distributed to people from Japan, Europe and North America. The survey uses a 5-level Likert scale wherever possible.

5.1 Reasoning of the Method

When starting the research into the differences between public opinion in Japan and the West, a survey was planned for both regions. Initially, the idea was to focus the survey on very in-depth questions regarding censorship in a few specific games or censorship practices in general that kept coming up in online social communities. However, upon doing more research into the concepts of censorship and localization, it became apparent that there would be numerous problems with that approach. Due to the vast amounts of nuance in the concepts of censorship, and especially self-censorship, and the complicated process of localization with all its different facets, it would have been unreasonable for us to determine which games had been censored, self-censored or localized. Furthermore, it was not feasible to get direct access to people in the games industry and ask them personally if content in their games had been subjected to censorship, self-censorship or localization. Because of the impossibility to determine, with certainty, if changes in a game for a different region were made due to censorship or localization, we decided to take a different approach. Although there was the option to ask respondents about specific cases of changed content in video games and how they felt about these changes, the risk of many respondents not having seen or played the games from which the changed content was and the sometimes graphic content that these changes were about, would have probably resulted in a far lower response rate.

Hong’s article, as discussed in the previous chapter, provided some clarity for the approach of the survey. His cross-cultural study was very similar to the intended comparison of this thesis between Japan and the West. Inspired by his approach, our survey is modelled roughly after the ideas he proposed in his article. This meant more general questions to the respondents and questions that gauged the respondent’s opinions on the matter at hand.

5.2 The Survey

The survey questions are split up in 5 sections.

(1) Demographic questions

There were two questions in this section:

- How old are you?
- What’s your gender?

These questions were optional in the survey. Respondents could answer the question, state that they preferred not to say, or leave the question blank entirely. These questions provide interesting data but in order to maximize the number of respondents to the surveys, they are optional so as to not exclude people from answering the rest of the survey if they did not feel comfortable answering these questions.
(2) Region specific questions

In our survey we have asked questions regarding the respondents’ origin and where they currently reside. This section contained the following two questions:

- Which region of the world do you consider yourself from, originally? (born, grown up)
- In which region do you currently reside?

Respondents had the option to answer with “Japan”, “Europe (EU/EEA or UK)”, “Northern America (Canada or USA)” or “Other”.

The region-specific questions ask the respondents what region they consider themselves to be from originally and in what region they currently reside. This second question was added for any cases that may not have a clear-cut answer to what region they are from. This also allows us to see the results of any respondents that may have grown up in a different region than where they currently reside. An example of an interesting case would be a person who grew up in Japan but currently lives in a Western country and vice versa. Would they have a different opinion than people that grew up and are still living in the same region? Those cases may be relevant for the results, and for that reason we have structured the the region-specific questions this way.

(3) Behavioural questions

As can be noted from Hong’s article, opinions on game legislation can be influenced by how familiar one is with games and how often one spends time playing games. Therefore, the survey included several questions that try to determine the respondents’ game playing time and contact with games, such as buying games, and the time spent informing themselves about the content of games. This would ideally account for answers from parents buying games for their children vs. people buying their own games.

There were five behavioural questions in both surveys. Four of these questions used a Likert scale option while one question had three options, allowing the respondents to choose between yes, sometimes, and no. The questions were as follows:

- How often do you play games?
- How often do you buy games (from your current region)?
- Do you research if a game has been cut or censored before buying it?
- Do you import games from other regions?
- Do you pay attention to age ratings and other warnings before buying a game?

(4) Opinion questions

The last section of the survey goes into the respondents’ opinion on a variety of topics surrounding censorship and localization. Based on the research we have done into game legislation, localization, censorship, and the state of the industry, we have noticed some patterns and topics that have come up regularly. For that reason, the survey includes some of these topics. For example, the sexual content, especially with regard to minors, in Japanese games is often reduced for their Western releases and this has received widespread attention on social media in gaming circles (Subreddits, YouTube, change.org). Thus, the survey included questions that specifically ask about the sexualization of minors to evaluate the respondent’s opinion on that topic. On a scale of ‘not at all’
to ‘severely’, the survey asked respondents how bothered they are by several topics that can be found in games, ranging from adult or offensive language to the sexualization of minors. The topic of sexual themes and content and all its nuanced facets remained difficult to summarize with a single phrase. The result is the slightly broad wording of ‘Nudity and sexual content (implied and explicit)’.

After the questions about sensitive topics, the survey asked the respondents a more general question about whether they agree with the censorship of violence, nudity and other sensitive topics. This was done to gain further insight into their opinion towards censorship and cross-check the answer to this question with the previous questions about sensitive topics. Finally, the respondents were asked about their agreement or disagreement with six statements. These were aimed at measuring the respondent’s opinion on the helpfulness of age ratings, whether localization and censorship are necessary, if games should focus on their creative intent, and if games should be accessible to as many people as possible.

The entire set of opinion questions all follow the Likert scale and are split up in three sections: How bothered the respondents are by seven topics being depicted in games, if they agree with censorship of violence, nudity or other sensitive topics, and what their stances are on six statements.

The following seven topics were asked of the respondent:

- Adult / offensive language
- Blood and gore
- (Excessive) violence
- Drug use
- Nudity and sexual content (implied and explicit)
- Sexual violence / abuse
- Sexualization of minors

The following question was asked of the respondent:

- Do you agree with censorship of violence, nudity or other sensitive topics?

The following six statements were asked of the respondent:

- Age ratings and warnings are helpful to me.
- Age ratings and warnings are helpful to others
- Censorship is necessary.
- Localization is necessary.
- Creative intent of a game is the most important.
- Games should be accessible to as many people as possible.

(5) Open comments

Finally, respondents were able to leave any thoughts they have regarding censorship or localization in an open question. We deemed it important to give the respondents an open area to write whatever they think about the topics of censorship and localization in order to possibly provide insight that otherwise might not have been considered.
5.3 How to Conduct the Survey

The survey has been created using Google Forms and was filled in online. The full survey can be found in the Appendix. The English survey can be found in Appendix A, and the Japanese survey can be found in Appendix B. The English comments to the open question can be found in Appendix C and the Japanese comments in Appendix D.

To spread the survey to as large of an audience as possible, we have reached out to our own social circles and have approached several online groups. To reach Western respondents, the survey has been shared on three survey-focused Facebook groups (The Research Survey Exchange Group, Survey Sharing 2020, and Thesis/Survey Questionnaire Filling Group), which mostly comprised students working on their own research, and two game-oriented Facebook groups (Video Game Fans, and Gamer Girls and Guys), which are focused on games. The survey has been shared in our personal social circles and was finally posted on the subreddit r/TrueGaming on the website Reddit. Reddit is a network of communities where users can upload, share, rate and discuss all kinds of topics. These different communities are called ‘subreddits’, which all have their unique name and are denoted as r/Nameofsubreddit. Users are able to join a variety of these subreddits, to converse and share content with people who have similar interests.

To accommodate for Japanese respondents and reach as many people as possible, the entire survey has been translated into Japanese. It has been translated by a native Japanese speaker and any uncertainties towards translation were discussed thoroughly. The survey has been shared on three Japanese Facebook groups related to games, anime, and manga (アニメ 漫画 ゲーム 好きな人はあつまれ〜, ゲームについて熱く語る会, and スマホゲーム業界人グループ). Furthermore, we have relied on our own social connections with Japanese people. Due to that, the survey has been spread amongst students and teachers at the School of Media Science, Tokyo University of Technology.

Everyone was encouraged to participate in the survey, regardless of their previous experience with videogames or their personal background.
6 Results and Analysis

This chapter shows the results of the survey. All images provided show the results of the English survey on the left side and the results of the Japanese survey on the right side, whenever possible. For larger graphs, the English survey results will be at the top and the Japanese survey results at the bottom. In case neither of these options are possible, it will be specified below the image from which survey the data originates. Whenever an average is used, the number will be rounded off to two decimals.

The English survey has had a total of 900 respondents and the Japanese survey has had a total of 59 respondents. The full survey and data are added in the Appendix under Appendix A and B. The results of the open question can be found in Appendix C and D.

Aside from the age question, all the other questions have had data removed from respondents younger than 18. This amounts to a total removal of 125 responses from the English survey. The Japanese survey did not contain any answers from people younger than 18.

6.1 Optional Demographic Questions

The optional demographic questions consist of the following two questions:

- How old are you?
- What’s your gender?

Both these questions were optional and respondents were able to skip this question if they chose to do so.

6.1.1 Results

Fig. 13: How old are you?
Of the English respondents, 99.6% (896 out of 900) answered the optional age question. 14% of respondents (125 out of 900) answered that they are 17 or younger. These answers have been removed from all subsequent data. The total respondents of the rest of the survey is thus 775. Of the remaining English respondents, another 99.6% (772 out of 775) answered the optional gender question. The Japanese survey, however, has a response rate of 100% on all the optional questions. It is interesting to note that the gender results of both surveys are percentually almost identical, despite the big difference in the number of respondents. Another thing to note is that the respondents of the Japanese survey have a larger percentage of 35 and older respondents, compared to the English survey.

6.1.2 Analysis

The demographic data shows some interesting results that have to be kept in mind for the rest of the discussion. It shows that most of the respondents are male with an almost even split amongst both the English and Japanese survey of around 80% male versus 14% female. This result is not entirely surprising as the survey has been spread around our social circles and in social circles online mostly revolving around games. The majority of people participating in these social circles are male. For example, most of the English respondents come from the post on the subreddit r/Truegaming and Reddit is used by a majority of men (Statista, 2016).

In contrast, the difference in age groups is significant between the English and Japanese survey. The English survey has, on average, a younger response rate than the Japanese survey. In the English survey, more than 50% of the responses fall under the 22-34 category while in the Japanese survey the majority of respondents were 35 or older. As can be noted in Fig. 13, the second and third most answered options get steadily younger for each survey. The English survey has the second most answers in the 18-21 age range, and its third most answers in 17 or younger. The Japanese survey has its second most answers in the 22-34 age range and its third most answers in the 18-21 range. This is likely a result of the limited reach of the Japanese survey and our own
social circle consisting mostly of people aged 35 or older from the Tokyo University of Technology.

6.2 Region Specific Questions

The region specific questions were as follows:

- Which region of the world do you consider yourself from, originally? (born, grown up)
- In which region do you currently reside?

These questions were not optional and required an answer to be able to complete the survey.

6.2.1 Results

![Pie chart showing region of origin](image1)

Fig. 15: Which region of the world do you consider yourself from, originally?

![Pie chart showing region of current residence](image2)

Fig. 16: In which region do you currently reside?
More than 50% of respondents of the English survey are originally from and reside in Northern America and just over 30% come from and live in Europe. Roughly 10% of respondents consider themselves to be from a different region other than the ones specified and a similar percentage answers they currently live in a different region than those specified.

For the Japanese survey only 3% answer they are originally from a different region and 1% answer they currently live in another region.

6.2.2 Analysis

The initial purpose of both of these questions was to get a clear picture of who was considered ‘Western’ and valid for this research and who would be excluded. However, in practice, this was more complex than initially imagined. The definitions for the terms ‘West’ and ‘Western world’ might be clear in theory, in practice, many respondents have expressed their confusion about this question. Northern America is not the same as North America, but feedback of multiple respondents has shown that this is not always clear to them. Mexico is not considered Western in our research, but many respondents did consider it to be part of North America. There is an argument to be made about who is considered Western and who is not. If a person would consider themselves Western, would there be any reason not to include them? Furthermore, not an insignificant number of respondents answer that they are currently living in a different region than where they are from originally. Some of those live in an ‘Other’ region but originally came from a ‘Western’ region. There are cases the other way around as well where they are originally from an ‘Other’ region, but currently live in a ‘Western’ region. Although the terms of ‘West’ and ‘Western world’ have been defined, it did not compute for borderline cases. The aim of this question was to get a clear picture of who was from a Western region but failed to consider what respondents of the survey would consider Western. Defining a term such as ‘Western’ might make sense in the theory, but in practical use, such as this survey, not everyone will be on the same page.

Roughly 10% of respondents have answered ‘Other’ in one or two of the region specific questions. The rest of the results in this thesis includes these responses as it seemed unjust to leave them out completely. Their number is not insignificant but due to the large number of total respondents should also not have a significant impact in the total results.

6.3 Behavioural Questions

The following behavioural questions were asked of the respondents:

- How often do you play games?
- How often do you buy games (from your current region)?
- Do you research if a game has been cut or censored before buying it?
- Do you import games from other regions?
- Do you pay attention to age ratings and other warnings before buying a game?

These questions were not optional and respondents were required to answer to be able to submit the survey.
6.3.1 Results

The following results are an average calculated from all the responses. The full graphs can be found in Appendix A for the English results and Appendix B for the Japanese results.

How often do you play games?
1 = Very Rarely, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Very often
English: 4.56  Japanese: 3.68

How often do you buy games (from your current region)?
1 = Very Rarely, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Very often
English: 3.67  Japanese: 2.75

Do you research if a game has been cut or censored before you buy it?
1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Always
English: 2.28  Japanese: 1.90

Do you import games from other regions?
1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Always
English: 1.90  Japanese: 2.02

Fig. 17: Do you pay attention to age ratings and other warnings before buying a game?
6.3.2 Analysis

The behavioural questions about time spent playing, buying and researching games have several notable differences between the results of the two surveys. There are especially significant differences between the mean answers about play time and buying games. Both questions have around a point difference between the surveys with a higher average for the English survey. This difference is not surprising considering the survey spread. Most English respondents have likely found the survey through the r/Truegaming subreddit, which is completely focused on video games, and the post with the survey gathered more than 350 upvotes. Thus, the audience can be expected to be avid gamers. As Hong has noted in his research, respondents with higher familiarity with video games often have lower tolerance for legislation surrounding video games. For that reason, it was important to ask respondents about their game-related behaviour.

There is a smaller difference between surveys amongst respondent’s research on cut or censored game content, although the result is slightly higher for the English survey. Due to the online outrage about cut content in video games it was initially expected that a larger percentage of English respondents would check games for cut content before buying, as that is what the outrage culture has been so heavily focused on. In hindsight, it seems most respondents do not pay too much attention to possible cut content in their games. Furthermore, there is virtually no difference between respondents’ habits on importing games and all hover around rarely importing games. While people on online social communities have frequently commented on wanting the authentic experience of a game, the respondents rarely import games to ensure they get this authentic experience.

Finally, around three quarters of English respondents have answered no to the question on whether they pay attention to age ratings and warnings before buying games. This is different for the Japanese respondents as only half say no to the same question while the other half is split between sometimes and yes. A possible reason for this could be the older average age of the respondents of the Japanese survey, as they are more likely to be responsible for younger individuals. As such, they would be more likely to pay attention to age ratings and warnings when buying games. This is probably in contrast to the average English respondents’ age, who are unlikely to be responsible for any younger individuals due to their own younger average age, but who are simultaneously often older than 18 and hence will not be restricted by age ratings themselves.

6.4 Opinion Questions

The respondents were asked how bothered they are by the following 7 topics:

- Adult / offensive language
- Blood and gore
- (Excessive) violence
- Drug use
- Nudity and sexual content (implied and explicit)
- Sexual violence / abuse
- Sexualization of minors

The following question was asked of the respondent:
- Do you agree with censorship of violence, nudity or other sensitive topics?

The respondents were asked what their stance was on the following six statements:

- Age ratings and warnings are helpful to me.
- Age ratings and warnings are helpful to others
- Censorship is necessary.
- Localization is necessary.
- Creative intent of a game is the most important.
- Games should be accessible to as many people as possible.

6.4.1 Results

**Fig. 18: How bothered are you by the following topics? English responses**
Fig. 19: How bothered are you by the following topics? Japanese responses

Do you agree with censorship of violence, nudity or other sensitive topics?

1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree

English: 1.81 Japanese: 2.60

Fig. 20: What is your stance on the following statements? English responses
6.4.2 Analysis

The questions about how bothered the respondents are with certain topics follow a very structured pattern, except for the last two options in the graph: sexual violence/abuse and sexualization of minors. Both surveys follow a steep curve downward, which is especially steep in the English survey. The vast majority of respondents in the English survey are not at all bothered by topics such as adult/offensive language, blood and gore, (excessive) violence, drug use, and nudity and sexual content. This is only slightly milder for the Japanese survey, with a less steep curve downward and more respondents answering very mildly to mildly to those same topics. The more nuance in responses is reserved for the last two topics: sexual violence/abuse and sexualization of minors. The Japanese survey still follows a slight downwards curve, but overall seems to be equally split between all options. The English survey shows a different result, with a small majority being not at all bothered by sexual violence/abuse and then showing an almost equal distribution of other responses. Sexualization of minors in the English survey is the only topic that shows an upwards curve with a majority of respondents answering that they are severely bothered by the topic.

When asking respondents about if they agree with censorship of violence, nudity or other sensitive topics, we can see a clear difference between the English and Japanese survey. The average is almost an entire point higher in the Japanese survey. Despite the higher score, however, Japanese respondents are halfway between disagree and neither agree nor disagree, compared to English
respondents who show a stronger favour towards disagree and strongly disagree. This could show a more decisive response from the English survey.

Lastly, when asking the respondents about their opinion on several statements, the results are very different for both surveys. We can see three upward curves for the English survey on the usefulness of age ratings for others, creative intent and accessibility. There is clear agreement on the importance of creative intent and many respondents agree that games should be accessible to as many people as possible. There is also a clear downwards curve in the English survey for the statement about censorship, echoing a very similar response to the previous question about if they agree with censorship.

The two remaining statements about age ratings for themselves and the necessity of localization have a more equal response. Most English respondents edge towards disagreement on whether age ratings are helpful to themselves. This could in part be due to the fact that many of the respondents are past the age where age ratings are restrictive to them and in part due to the possibility that they are not responsible for younger people. This is interesting when we compare it to the Japanese respondents on this specific question and we see that these respondents edge heavily towards neither agree nor disagree and slightly towards agree. Since the Japanese respondents are of an older age on average than the English respondents, this could affect the current question. A possible reason for why the respondents agree slightly more with this statement may be due to them being responsible for a younger person. Japanese respondents in general agree more with the necessity of censorship and localization but show a more divisive response with regards to creative intent and accessibility. Japanese respondents are less in agreement about accessibility for as many people as possible and are also more nuanced or divided about their agreement on creative intent.

6.4.3 Age group ‘35 and older’

Due to the substantial disparity in the number of respondents between the English and Japanese surveys (775 English respondents vs. 59 Japanese respondents), it is fair to assume the results may be skewed towards one side and therefore potentially less meaningful or representative. To accommodate for the disparity, this section takes a closer look at the opinion questions from the ‘35 and older’ groups of both surveys.

‘35 and older’ was by far the largest demographic in the Japanese sample, so an attempt to approximate a more comparable English sample size was made by creating new graphs that focus on the groups of ‘35 and older’ among all respondents. The disparity between these two groups is considerably smaller, containing 81 respondents from the English survey and 33 respondents from the Japanese survey, respectively. Fig. 22 to Fig. 25 show the results of the opinion questions from only the ‘35 and older’ respondent groups.
Fig. 22: How bothered are you by the following topics? English respondents 35 and older

Fig. 23: How bothered are you by the following topics? Japanese respondents 35 and older
Fig. 24: What is your stance on the following statements? English respondents 35 and older

When comparing these results to the results of the entire respondents group, there are a number of interesting things that come to light. For the English respondents, there is virtually no difference between the total respondents and the ‘35 and older’-only respondents when it comes to how bothered they are by certain topics. Both of their graphs (Fig. 18 and Fig. 22) show nearly identical results. The other graphs that show their agreement with a number of statements follows a similar
pattern and displays only very slight differences in their answers (Fig. 20 and Fig. 24). It shows that the smaller group of 35 and older English respondents have almost identical answers to the entire English respondents group.

When looking at the Japanese comparison between the entire Japanese respondents group and the Japanese 35 and older respondents, there is a similar response, but with a few variations. Looking at the responses on sensitive topics (Fig. 19 and Fig. 23) generally the responses are fairly similar with only minor differences. The last two topics, sexual violence/abuse and sexualization of minors, show a more divisive answer from the 35 and older group compared to the entire Japanese respondents. For those two sensitive topics, 35 and older respondents are less likely to pick the neutral option and tend to incline slightly more towards answering to being more bothered by these topics. The final opinion question about 6 statements once again portrays very little difference between the entire Japanese survey and the Japanese 35 and older respondents (Fig. 21 and Fig. 25). Amongst 35 and older respondents there is slightly less agreement towards the necessity of censorship and slightly more neutral towards game accessibility when compared to the entire Japanese survey results.

This comparison indicates that there is very little difference between opinions of different age groups, compared to the total survey results. The results of the total English survey with 775 respondents and the results of the English ‘35 and older’ group with 81 respondents are almost identical. It is a similar case for the Japanese results, where the difference between the total respondents and the ‘35 and older’ group is minimal. This demonstrates that the big discrepancy in respondents between the English and the Japanese survey is likely to have little influence. A smaller sample size shows similar results.

6.5 Open Answer

The final part of the survey was an open answer where respondents could freely write their thoughts regarding censorship or localization, creating additional qualitative data to complement the otherwise quantitative data set from the survey. The open answer provides some more individual insight of respondents who took the effort and liberty to write about their thoughts on localization and censorship. For the English survey, 21.68% (168 out of 775) of respondents have written something in the open area while 23.79% (14 out of 59) have done the same for the Japanese survey. Not every comment is discussed in this section, but all the comments can be found in Appendix C (English) and D (Japanese). Answers to the open questions that are discussed in this section are referred to with their respective number in the survey entry, e.g. #58.

6.5.1 Results

For a look at this qualitative set of data, a so-called ‘thematic analysis’ was employed, grouping similar responses together via an inductive approach. We discovered some semantic and latent themes that seemed to commonly emerge and re-emerge across various responses, as we went through each answer.

A few patterns were found when reading through all the comments. It is important to note that these are roughly generalized patterns and a number of comments not listed here express a more nuanced view on the topics of censorship and localization. Some of those will be discussed as individual comments.
Don’t like, don’t buy

There were many respondents that commented along the lines of ‘don’t like, don’t buy’. These all echo the very same feeling that they do not agree with censorship and that instead, people should just avoid buying games that they do not like. For example, Japanese respondents #18 and #43, and English respondents #125, #240 and #267 are just a few of the many comments that do not seem to agree with their idea of censorship and that, in turn, people themselves should take responsibility and avoid games with content they do not enjoy.

Age ratings are for parents and censorship is for kids

Many respondents seem to associate censorship and localization with age ratings. The result is that many of them respond by mentioning that age ratings are only useful for parents with children and that censorship is only meant for kids, not adults. A few comments that express the respondents’ opinion in a similar note are the English #6, #546, #673, and #801, among others. It seems to enforce this idea that age rating boards cause games to be censored to fit a target age rating and that games meant for adult audiences should be completely free of any form of censorship since those people are not children anymore.

Censorship, and any kind of changed content, is bad, no matter what

Many respondents have commented with a very firm stance on censorship and changed or cut content, no matter the circumstances. They express their complete unwillingness to accept any changes made from the original product and often believe it to be a lesser product. They do not wish their games to be changed for anyone, and especially not people who they believe are not the target audience. Comments that share a similar opinion are the Japanese #19 comment and the English #39, #208, #290, #447, #450, #558 and #816 comments, to list a few. There were especially many English responses that stated the respondents’ disagreement with censorship and any kind of changed content in games.

Adapting to cultures is a good thing

Several respondents believe that adapting games to different cultures is very important, as it allows for more people to enjoy the game. They seem to express their support for localization changes that adapt to their own or other cultures and are generally positive towards small adjustments. Comments that include similar opinions are the English #66, #195, #514, and #721 among others, and the Japanese #45 and #55.

I draw the line at… /the law should be respected

Numerous respondents have shown to be against censorship but do draw a line at certain topics. Often, this line is drawn at content that is illegal by law and very often referring to the topic of sexualization of minors mentioned in the survey. The other side of this argument is not exactly opposed to censorship but does emphasize that some things should follow the laws of the region and if adjustments are needed then that is acceptable. Respondents that follow this pattern are the Japanese #30 and #36, and the English #79, #330, #335, #605 and #624.

Games as art, games as intended

The last pattern that can be seen from the respondents’ comments is the concept of games as art and games as intended. This mostly revolves around rejecting censorship for the sake of not changing the game’s creative intent, but there are also more nuanced comments that compare
games to other art forms that also, when necessary, might require censorship. Comments that follow this train of thought are the English #115, #197, #245, #300, #743 and #846.

(7) Individual comments

Finally, several respondents provided a lengthy and nuanced view on the topic of censorship and localization that were not easily placed in one of the previous patterns. These comments, however, do provide a very interesting insight into the discussion on censorship and localization.

An example of this would be the Japanese comment #52, wherein the respondent writes about the interactivity of the medium of games and how that can influence censorship. Furthermore, the respondent notes that games that are localized will never be 100% like the original because of the nuance in language and cultures. Although they expressed their desire for the localization team to work closely with the producers of the game to remain as close as possible to the original. The respondent also makes an interesting note about experienced users, and how they may already understand how a game has been adapted from its original version, compared to less experienced users, who might take changed content as is, without understanding possible changes.

English comment #133 writes that there does not seem to be a correct answer. The respondent mentions that localization and censorship are tough aspects to handle for any company and that adjusting content to reach a broader audience can cause conflict trying to please fans.

English comment #273 expresses their dislike towards the use of the word censorship in controversies. He mentions the example of the Final Fantasy VII Remake, specifically surrounding the character Tifa and her breast size. Although the debacle was considered censorship by many, the respondent writes that the designers changing a character’s outfit in a remake does not take away from the artistic vision of the game. He argues that the overuse of the word censorship has led to real censorship going unnoticed.

6.5.2 Analysis

A large number of respondents that wrote in the open question have expressed their dislike for censorship in games, many of them also not accepting localization or any kind of changes. There do seem to be many different interpretations of these concepts among the comments, as there are quite a few answers that write they are very opposed to localization yet do want their games to be translated to their language. Some respondents express their confusion about the term localization and have never heard of it before. Despite the confusion about localization, many respondents that commented seem to have a clear idea of what censorship means to them. As can be seen in previous results, the English respondents are more familiar with games, as they spend more time buying and playing them, and have a lower tolerance of any form of censorship. In general, they seem less bothered by sensitive topics than their Japanese counterparts, except for the topic of sexualization of minors. The comments reflect this very strong opposition towards any form of censorship as the majority expresses their opinion in ways mentioned previously (patterns (1) to (3)). Although not as much as the opposition, there were quite a few respondents who expressed understanding towards localization and believe it to be a good thing. These respondents generally offer examples of why changes might be beneficial and helpful to others especially. This shows their understanding and empathy towards other people who may benefit from localization.

For the most part, Japanese comments offer a milder opinion towards censorship and localization and often do not express themselves as very divisive. Contrary to that, most of the English comments seem to be very determined in their opinion on the topic and generally are unfavourable
towards changes and especially to the concept of censorship. The comments that are more neutral towards changed content provide more nuanced views on the topics.
7 Discussion

This chapter combines the background information about (self)-censorship, localization and game rating systems with the gathered data from the survey. This discussion is segmented around the most prevalent talking points, in parts derived from the thematic analysis of people’s perception and common practices of the industry.

7.1 Limitations

In the following sections, flaws and limitations of the research are discussed. It is important to be aware of these as they could have an impact on the results and the data analysis. These are important to take into consideration when we discuss our results in the next couple of sections. Another important thing to mention is the mostly Western perspective of the thesis. Due to our own involvement in Western online resources and social media circles, the thesis leans heavily on a Western perspective. A more Japanese-oriented perspective on the topics discussed in this thesis, and the online discourse surrounding them, would have benefitted the research greatly.

7.1.1 Respondents

There are three things with regards to the respondents that one must keep in mind. First, the majority of respondents identified as male. This means that the results are heavily skewed towards a male perspective and this should be considered earnestly when trying to draw conclusions from the data. The results are mostly a representative of a male gaming audience. This brings us to our second important piece of information regarding the results. The high average of respondents’ playing time means that a large amount of our respondents spend a considerable amount of time playing and interacting with games. According to Hong’s cross-cultural study that was discussed in Chapter 4, the higher a player’s familiarity with games, the less likely the person is to support legislation for video games. While we had expected a large number of respondents to be very familiar with games, it is nevertheless something that should be kept in mind for further discussion. Lastly, there is a high discrepancy in the number of respondents between the English and Japanese survey. Although it is not unsurprising for the English survey to reach a wider audience due to a larger amount of English-speaking communities compared to Japanese-speaking communities, the English turnout was surprisingly big, which resulted in a very large discrepancy. To accommodate for that, the sub-section detailing the results for respondents of the age of ‘35 and older’ was included.

7.1.2 Survey

During the course of the survey, much feedback and multiple complaints have been received. Especially regarding the wording of the survey, the lack of definitions for important terms, such as censorship and localization, but also about perceived bias in the survey. Some respondents mention that they struggled to understand the questions or what exactly is meant with specific topics. The survey was intended without definitions of terms because the aim was to garner respondents’ own opinion and interpretation of the concepts, rather than universal textbook definitions. The criticism, in a way, confirmed our approach, as it proved that a lot of people have a different idea on what the terms censorship and localization mean, and that this meaning is very
negatively charged in the majority of cases. This will be a point of further discussion in a later section.

In hindsight, the region-specific questions, although interesting, proved to be problematic. Some people considered themselves ‘Western’ even if they weren’t originally from a Western region according to the definition set for this thesis (see Fig. 0). It is important to take into consideration that not everyone is on the same page about what ‘Western’ means. For this thesis, we opted to leave these borderline cases in, but we are aware they are not without problems.

7.1.3 State of the Industry

When working on the chapter on the state of the industry, it was apparent that only a few examples of changed content per region could be included. As it is difficult for such a small number of examples to be representative of all games with changed content, we have tried to include different genres and different changed content so as to get as wide of a view as possible within the constraints of time. Certain games that were investigated and possibly could have been included ended up not making the cut in hindsight, due to lack of clarity, consistency or reference material (outdated versions of games). An example of this would be Street Fighter V (2016), of which content had been changed at different points in time but which were also not applied consistently across regions and versions. Although it was an interesting case to look at, it did not make sense to include it in Chapter 3 as it had not been consistent since release. Furthermore, more Japanese games were included than Western games. This was mostly due to the lack of variety in Western games with changed content for the Japanese region as they all mostly follow the same patterns of violence and sexual content being toned down for the Japanese region. Lastly, the cover art sections on both Japanese and Western games is quite dated as regional differences between cover art have declined dramatically but it nevertheless was relevant to include as it showed the thought process behind these changes and expands on the (perceived) differences between regions.

7.2 (Self-)Censorship and Localization

As could be seen in the sections about (self-)censorship and localization in Chapter 2, these two topics are very complex. There is a lot of nuance and subjectivity to it. This makes it difficult to clearly define both terms with regards to video games and to discuss changes in video games. Outrage about changed content in video games is often portrayed as being more straightforward than it actually is. In many cases, such as the ones we have shown in the introduction, people are jumping straight to cries of censorship when content is changed for a different region. However, as discussed in the game rating systems section in Chapter 2, it is often a collaborative process between game rating systems and developers. Where would one draw the line between censorship, self-censorship and localization? That line seems to be blurry at the best of times. Often, end users lack insight into the entire production process of a video game and all the thoughts and opinions of people included in it. And on the rare occasion that developers themselves publicly discuss changes made to their games, it is often only as a reaction to public outrage.

Much like the outrage illustrated in the introduction, many respondents to the survey seem to express and describe a very negative view on censorship. Censorship is often viewed as a process that is an extremely forceful governmental intervention and simultaneously an infringement on civil rights. To them, it carries the meaning as something only unitary one-party (authoritarian) governments (e.g. People’s Republic of China) would be able to do.
However, in practice, few games rarely are censored by the government in the West, despite the outrage culture in online social circles making it out to be that way. If any censorship is involved, it would almost always fall under self-censorship, and that is not what many of the respondents seem to think about. Self-censorship is extremely complicated as most of the time it is almost untraceable. As mentioned in Chapter 2, commercial self-censorship seems to be one of the most relevant forms of self-censorship for games. Most games are, for the most part, commercial products, and their aim is to be successful and make money. Where would one draw the line between self-censorship and a smart business decision? One could argue about where to draw the line, but games that are not economically successful generally do not have a long lifespan. Making decisions that help make a game a (more) commercially viable product, also often do not drastically change the contents of the game. This can be seen in the process of localization, where, despite all the difficulties that come with localization procedures, the aim is to remain true to the feeling of the original game. Sometimes translations may not line up correctly but can still evoke the same feeling the original had wanted to portray. To make something accessible and approachable to another culture and language, content sometimes needs to be changed, but localization attempts to remain as close to the original meaning as possible. One example of this is the localization of *Final Fantasy X* (2001) where “arigatou” is translated to “I love you” (Klepek, 2020).

Many Western respondents to the survey are divisive about whether they deem localization to be necessary or not. It seems that many interpret localization as purposefully changing content for the sake of appeasing a different culture, judging from their comments. Furthermore, it appears that many of the Western respondents do not think about translation when they hear the word localization. However, simply translating a game from one language to another is already a form of localization. In that sense, it seems the West also has a slightly negative idea of localization. Ironically, the West’s response to game accessibility is very positive, which seems to contradict with their strong dislike for censorship and divisive opinion on localization. Most of the time, both concepts aim to make video games accessible to a larger audience. Especially since a lot of English comments responded with the pattern of *don’t like, don’t buy*, that seems to directly contradict with the accessibility of games. A possibility could be that the Western respondents interpreted the statement as ‘everyone should be able to play games’ versus ‘every game should be playable by everyone’.

On the other hand, Japanese respondents respond a lot more favourable for localization yet are more split whether or not games should be accessible to as many people as possible.

### 7.3 Artistic Intent

When participants of outrage culture argue about changes in video games and demand the true artistic intent of a video game, instead of the ‘censored’ version, what do they consider to be the true artistic intent? Many of the comments on the survey express their preference towards the artistic intent of the game over any changes, but none of them elaborate on what that means. They hint at the ‘original’ version of a game. If one would assume that to be the version created in the country of origin, there are a couple of interesting cases that pop up. One of those came up in the “State of the Industry” chapter: *Resident Evil 2*. RE2 was created in Japan, so if one would assume the ‘original’ version is the one produced for the country of origin, the Japanese version of RE2 would be the true artistic intent of the creators. However, the Japanese version has less content than the Western release. Not so surprisingly, there has been little complaint about the Western release for RE2 and its differences between the Japanese version, probably because there is more content compared to the Japanese release. The slope of the argument of artistic intent is a slippery
one, and often falls flat when taking in mind the bigger picture of game production. Much like the arguments for (self-)censorship, game production is a huge collaborative effort between many different people from many different disciplines and departments. It would be ignorant to assume that all people that have worked on the game share the same creative vision and agree with all decisions made during the production. Despite there being several directors and producers on most game projects, there often is not a single person that exerts control and oversees every single aspect of a game during production. What is simply left in due to low prioritization, is not necessarily the same as what is implemented with meticulous intent. The Western responses seem to put a high value on creative intent, both in the survey questions as well as in the open comments. It seems, more often than not, that the West is more worried about content that is removed or changed rather than the integrity of the products they are buying, as they often seem to argue. As can be seen from the examples of outrage culture in the introduction, most concern seems to be with regards to appearances of female characters. Two games from Chapter 3 fall into that same category: *Xenoblade Chronicles X* and *Tokyo Mirage Sessions ♯FE*. Both games have changed content for the West that is mostly centered around outfits of characters. Both games also have had considerable backlash from online platforms about these changes, echoing many of the same arguments about artistic intent and an inferior product. One could argue that changing an optional but extremely revealing outfit on a 13-year-old character in an action role-playing game does not fundamentally change the core idea of the game. It would be naïve to think a single outfit would either make or break the game, but that seems to be the argument that is often made. Rather than focusing on the thematic, philosophical or mechanical core of the game, most outrage seems to solely revolve around removed or changed cosmetic content, without regards for the hectic of game development or other possible reasons why. The outrage appears especially out of place when considering the majority of Western respondents to the survey are bothered by the sexualization of minors.

This seems to contrast with the Japanese respondents, who are less bothered by the sexualization of minors. Most of the games that have this type of content are originally from Japan, and these games are often adjusted to be more in line with Western societal standards and expectations. It would not be surprising if the tolerance of sexualization of minors is higher in Japanese respondents due to difference in culture and it being more common in Japanese creative fields.

Artistic intent is often an argument against censorship and localization, but also often lacks the detailed nuances of what artistic intent could even mean in the context of the actual production process.

### 7.4 Game Rating Systems

Considering how important the role of game rating systems are in society and in their respective regions, it is important to discuss some of the problems with these systems with regards to public perception. In general, the game rating systems provide information to consumers about the products that they buy. They provide an age rating recommendation and content descriptors that describe the kind of sensitive content the product may contain. The maximum age rating for all the game rating systems discussed in Chapter 2 is 18+. Although the different systems have different standards, the age ratings are roughly the same across regions. There is, however, an interesting situation going on with the highest rating, especially with regards to ESRB. As discussed in Chapter 2, ESRB’s highest rating, AO, comes with a stigma that makes a game almost unsellable, as game consoles and retail stores will not sell products with an AO rating. The official ESRB website shows only 27 games with an AO rating. Comparatively, the 18+ equivalent of
PEGI shows almost 2400 results on their official website. CERO provides no official database, but a quick search online shows at least more than 150 games with the Z rating (VGGeek, no date).

As can be seen from the background, game rating systems mostly offer a rating to inform the public but generally do not have any actual power to censor content. One could argue that the ESRB’s AO rating is a death sentence for a game that wants to be commercially viable and could thus, indirectly, force publishers to adapt their possibly AO rated game to fit more within the M rating. However, the ESRB’s limits seem to be quite broad when it comes to what they consider M rated games when compared to other regions. AO seems to be exclusively reserved for extremely pornographic or sexual games. Unlike ESRB, PEGI’s highest rating has no negative consequences for selling aside from a higher minimum recommended age. CERO has shown to consider certain depictions of violence and nudity unacceptable, as can be seen from the descriptions of Western games in Chapter 3. All the rating systems offer the developer a chance to adjust their product in case the developer does not agree with the age rating it has been given.

Many of the respondents do not agree with any form of censorship and many comments argue against any kind of change at all, but few mention the possible influence of the game rating systems. As is clearly visible from the amount of games the ESRB classifies as AO, the heavily negative consequences of an AO rating would deter developers from making games that would be considered AO. It is surprising that there are not more complaints about the ESRB rating system by the Western respondents, as it could pose a solution to the localization changes that people in online social circles often disagree with.

7.5 Concluding Thoughts

As is, the state of affairs seems to be that ‘censorship’, in the authoritarian sense of the word, is often linked to changes that occur in the process of video game localization. While this type of censorship of video games certainly exists, resulting from different countries having different laws, the process itself is often more complicated than a straight, top-down legislation from the government dictating what to add or keep in any given video game, and what to cut.

As most games nowadays attempt to be as global of a product as they can be, the creators themselves try to adjust for several cultural sensibilities, depending on which country they are trying to release their product to and who their target audience is. In the age of general availability of information on the internet, it seems that people are increasingly grouping up to discuss these changes and the different versions of a product that exist, sometimes to the most excruciating detail. These groups often look at what exactly one version might miss out on, compared to another version, and might start feeling that they are being robbed of content. This stance is understandable, especially for individuals pertaining to a neo-liberal/libertarian view, where one can see a product being cut or otherwise altered as an infringement on their freedom of choice. Knowing about the existence of another version of the game they purchased or intended to purchase being available somewhere, that has, strictly speaking, more risqué or mature – or very simply more content, they feel alienated, both as passionate admirers of said work and as willing, paying customers.

What they often turn to in defense of the more controversial version of the games, however, is an anti-fascist rhetoric alluding to an oppressive power forcing changes upon their desired version which, in their minds, is sacrosanct and the only true version, as originally intended by the artist. The process of localization is diluting and destroying their enjoyment of the product as intended by the creators and hampers with an important cultural exchange. More often than not, that interpretation directly contradicts the changes themselves, which tend to be of a rather superficial
nature, not substantially meddling with the core message or themes of the work of art. Creators even regularly come out to stress that this perceived pressure is not the full story.

A large portion of vocal critics of the localization process that instigates any changes upon the product are from Northern America, which has been historically more prude when it comes to media. This might be the direct effect of one generation being fed up with, reacting to and over-compensating for the outdated ideals and norms of their preceding generations. Many changes seem to be encountered with the feeling of loss of (cultural/monetary) value and the fear of prescription of (normative) values. The paying customer is robbed of their pleasures for the sake of someone else’s morals.

It is often forgotten that this localization-based occurrence of censorship is not a one-sided decision. What is freedom of expression for one person, can be the ideological cage of another. One starts to question if true, free artistic expression can really exist. What if the artist is propagating themes or ideas that are dangerous to society or even a certain sub-group of society? What if an artist has ideals that are built to hurt or harass? Art is supposed to explore limits and be uncomfortable at times, ultimately intended to “enrich” and “elevate” culture, but at what point does a specific piece become a detriment to culture? Or does it only start to become a detriment once it is normalized and blown up into a whole genre, possibly consumed by many over a long period of time? Clear, simple answers to these questions do not exist, and as a result, we as a culture have to constantly negotiate the boundaries of art. Morals, ethics and cultural sensibilities are endlessly fluctuating. And as a result, our criteria by which we rate, alter or even ban art are fluid social contracts, born out of a continuous discourse.
8 Conclusion

What is the practice and perception of regional changes in Japanese and Western video games?

Regional changes in video games are often focused on adjusting to different cultural sensitivities/sensibilities and aim to reach as wide of an audience as possible. Changes are generally centered on sensitive topics such as violence, nudity, and sexualization. Japanese regional changes are frequently focused on reducing nudity and violent content while Western regional changes are typically more about reducing sexualization.

The survey has provided insight into the perception/differences between end-users in Japan and in the West. The results are similar to Hong’s research where collectivist societies are more accepting than individualistic societies of legislation surrounding video games. The survey shows a similar result, with Western respondents rejecting any form of censorship very strongly and self-report to be not bothered by most sensitive topics depicted in games. They have expressed their dislike towards any kind of change and generally see both censorship, as well as localization, in a negative context. Japanese respondents, on the other hand, are more accepting of legislation, have self-reported to be more bothered by similar sensitive topics than their Western counterparts and provide a more nuanced view on localization and censorship.

The results of the survey and the research into the concepts of censorship and localization, show that many respondents do not fully grasp these concepts and show a very emotional reaction when confronted with them. It seems that changes are often viewed as something being taken away from their video games, rather as a tool to reach a broader audience. Considering most cases that attract discussion are first and foremost home console titles, localization - and the perceived ‘censorship’ that may result as part of that process - are historically linked to that more regulated setting (as opposed to the open platform PC) and could therefore be seen as a collaborative effort by developers, publishers and platform owners, to cater a more sanitized and curated experience. Rather often, it is however depicted as the struggle of the artist against regulatory bodies - a War of Artistry vs. Authority. Which is not to say such is never the case, or something not to be wary of, but it becomes apparent that some misconceptions surrounding localization and censorship have led to the misuse of these words, without thought for their complexity and nuance.
References


ThatmodderGrim. 2019. *Square Enix has an Ethics Department and it told the Final Fantasy 7 Remake Developers to “restrict” Tifa’s chest*. [online] Reddit. Available at: https://www.reddit.com/r/KotakuInAction/comments/c2giey/gaming_square_enix_has_an_ethics_department_and/ [Accessed: 11th of May, 2020].

**Games**


Appendix A

Appendix A contains the English survey in its entirety, including questions and results. The open question comments of the English survey can be found in Appendix C.
In which region do you currently reside?

- Japan: 410 (53%)
- Europe (EU/EEA or UK): 10 (1%)
- Northern America (Canada or USA): 262 (34%)
- Other: 5 (1%)

Which region of the world do you consider yourself from, originally? (born, grown up)

- Japan: 93 (12%)
- Europe (EU/EEA or UK): 10 (1%)
- Northern America (Canada or USA): 268 (34%)
- Other: 5 (1%)

- Japan
- Europe (EU/EEA or UK)
- Northern America (Canada or USA)
- Other
How often do you play games?

- Very rarely: 6
- Rarely: 10
- Sometimes: 50
- Often: 185
- Very often: 524

How often do you buy games (from your current region)?

- Very rarely: 44
- Rarely: 77
- Sometimes: 201
- Often: 225
- Very often: 228
Do you research if a game has been cut or censored in your region before you buy it?

- Very rarely: 284
- Rarely: 213
- Sometimes: 126
- Often: 84
- Very often: 68

Do you import games from other regions?

- Very rarely: 364
- Rarely: 222
- Sometimes: 118
- Often: 47
- Very often: 24
Do you pay attention to age ratings and other warnings when buying a game?

- Yes: 600 (78%)
- Sometimes: 48 (6%)
- No: 127 (16%)

Do you agree with censorship of violence, nudity or other sensitive topics?

- Strongly disagree: 391
- Disagree: 202
- Neither agree nor disagree: 132
- Agree: 41
- Strongly agree: 9
What is your stance on the following statements?

- **Age ratings and warnings are helpful to me**
- **Age ratings and warnings are helpful to others**
- **Censorship is necessary**
- **Localization is necessary**
- **Creative intent of a game is the most important**
- **Games should be accessible to as many people as possible**

How bothered are you by the following topics?

- **Adult / offensive language**
- **Blood and gore**
- **(Excessive) violence**
- **Drug Use**
- **Nudity and sexual content (implied and explicit)**
- **Sexual violence / abuse**
- **Sexualization of minors**
Appendix B

Appendix B contains the Japanese survey in its entirety, including questions and results. The open question comments of the Japanese survey can be found in Appendix D.

あなたは何歳ですか？（任意）

あなたの性別は？（任意）
あなたが生まれ育った主な国はどこですか？

- 日本: 57人 (97%)
- ヨーロッパ (EU/EEA またはイギリス): 2人 (3%)
- 北アメリカ (カナダまたはアメリカ): なし
- その他: なし

あなたの今の居住地はどこですか？

- 日本: 58人 (98%)
- ヨーロッパ (EU/EEA またはイギリス): 1人 (2%)
- 北アメリカ (カナダまたはアメリカ): なし
- その他: なし
どれぐらいの頻度でゲームをプレイしますか？

お住まいの国で発売されるゲームをどれぐらい購入しますか？
お住まいの国のゲームを買うとき、あなたはその一部が検閲されてカットされていただったりしているかどうかを事前に調べますか？

まったく調べない：34
たまに調べる：9
時々調べる：5
けっこう調べる：10
必ず調べる：1

あなたは外国からゲームを買いますか？

まったく買わない：25
たまに買う：18
時々買う：7
頻繁に買う：8
いつも外国から買う：1
あなたは、暴力表現や性的表現などデリケートな内容について検閲することに賛成ですか？

絶対に反対: 12票
反対: 20票
賛成でも反対でもない: 10票
賛成: 14票
強く賛成: 3票
Appendix C

This appendix contains all the answers received from the open answer question at the end of the English survey. They will be listed as the number of their entries in the survey.

Two responses have been omitted from this list as they contained personal information regarding the respondent.

English survey responses to open question

#3: No

#5: It is needed on some level, but it wasn’t in my childhood and yet I became someone.

#6: kids shouldn’t play 18+ games. However, a grown adult should be able to play a game without censorship because of his national choice, because he can decide and agree or disagree with violence. I’d love to see a feature to censor illegal or gory stuff so kids or adults who disagree with violence could enable this feature (it would be the first thing to select by playing the game)

#14: I’ve never played a video game that’s heavily driven sexually, so I don’t know how reliable my answers are. I do think censorship should be optional, just for the player’s enjoyment. I personally don’t mind it, but some people just prefer to get through the story and skip the gore and/or nudity. This was a quick, interesting survey. Thank you!

#16: To clarify, child porn is not a thing that should be graphically depicted in a video game.

#33: The question of censorship is a really hard one. It often boils down to “what’s legal in a jurisdiction”. I have no problem with depiction of many illegal activities, but as you can see in my answers I draw the line at any involvement of minors with sex or drugs.

#39: Games should be made for the people they are made for, not misshapen to fit a perceived audience that never cared in the first place.

#50: I would like sensible edits made to the ridiculous and ugly tropes like some Japanese game where you have to grope a 15-year-old’s chest, but it’s best if the game explains what they cut and offers to let you play the uncensored option.

#53: I think it depends on your age. Let’s say it’s a little kid playing GTA (5y old), that isn’t ideal. Because of the excessive brutality. Personally censorships are shit. If I buy something, I want to enjoy every aspect they included in the game. I remember when I was younger, the EU version of “COD Black Ops 1” was censored. And I was fuming. Really disliked it after that, but there was no solution to play it another way. So I just played without minding it too much.

#58: Generally I think people who complain about censorship are overblowing it and being whiny. Japan has a real problem with sexualizing minor girls and I'm quite happy for that stuff to go away. However, I wouldn't say they're completely wrong, sometimes the censors go overboard. For example, Germany censoring any reference to Nazis in games was definitely the wrong way to go. I think that Localization should be the act of adapting the medium to the local audience and that should mean changing it in ways beneficial for the audience. That's not censorship, that's the 'artistic intent' that people keep whining isn't being respected.

#61: I think it can be important when it serves it's intended purpose of making themes more unfavorably applicable. When used as a way to censor cultural elements it can detract from the overall experience.

#65: I think sensitive topics can be really powerful storytelling tools. For example, Call of Duty Modern Warfare (2019) deals with controversial topics like child slavery in the campaign. It really expands the scope of evil that we see. Don't get me wrong, I think that young kids and people who are triggered by certain sensitive topics shouldn't be exposed to these topics lightly, but that's exactly why the ESRB system was created. In my experience, people don't
pay attention to a game's rating anymore. Even parents purchasing for their children. Every game is rated and has a breakdown of potential sensitive subjects right on the box. If people ignore the warnings, then can't handle the content, they only have themselves to blame.

#66: I don't like the framing of changes to games across regions as "censorship" (unless, for example, that change is being pushed by an outside party like a government). I think sometimes changes to content are necessary to stay true to the creative intent of the game. If some aspect of a game is not meant to be shocking or uncomfortable in its original release, but is likely to be interpreted that way in other regions, then cutting or modifying that content might actually help players of the localized version experience the creative intent more closely. I see this as analogous to swapping out culturally-specific references and puns for localized versions that will resonate in a translation: less literal, but more likely to elicit the intended emotions from the player.

#74: I haven't thought about it too much, but while there are some things I wouldn't particularly like to see in games I don't think censorship should happen. Fiction gives us an opportunity to explore things that we couldn't otherwise, even the most horrible of things if the developers are aware and skillful. I also think localization is useful but probably shouldn't be the only option available to play the game.

#76: Good localization is when the game is translated in a relatively linear fashion from one culture to the other. I believe this new trend of changing dialogue during localization to fit a narrative and changing characters, rather than as a means of taking difficult to translate / culturally centered dialogue (Japanese puns that don't work in English as an example) and adjusting them to fit the language it is being localized to. I simply don't want the creative abilities of developers to be stifled because they have to "think of the children" while producing an M-rated game.

#79: I believe that censorship and localization is good if the thing being depicted is something that in the society the game is being localized to, it is very much illegal is even see, like sexualization of minors, etc.

#87: When it comes to "censorship," it depends what's being censored. Much of what people complain about is insignificant, either costume changes or tweaking of homophobic dialogue, but I would certainly disapprove of completely removing certain story elements or mechanics.

#90: Turning a skirt into a skort is not censorship.

#91: I'm from and reside in Chile

#92: It's not censorship unless the government actively censors a game. Then I'm high against censorship. For a videogame company to voluntarily adjust their product to sell better in a region, I'm not bothered by it and wouldn't call it censorship since it's a voluntary PR move.

#93: I think the topic is frequently oversimplified. Localization isn’t so simple as I think lots of folks believe it to be. Sometimes changes that read to some as censorship are necessary for conveying the authors’ intended messages to new audiences because of the different contexts those audiences exist in. Sometimes that means the message changes a bit because the original message wouldn’t really make sense to the new audience. Sometimes the localizers lose the message. It’s not perfect, but I have a lot of respect for localization and the folks who do it.

#101: It's interesting that in my market, censorship is almost entirely self-censorship due to fear of market lashback rather than any top-down imposed censorship. When it happens though, it frequently feels sort of stilted and throws off the game.

#105: Apart from removing unnecessary censorship (via option/patch/not having censorship at all), I think that rating agencies are based as well, and we need some other rating way (for example introducing loot box rating... almost 3 years after Battlefront 2 fiasco)

#113: As far as the answers go, I only support nudity/child sexualization if it improves the richness of story or to make a character or situation more evil or hard

#115: I would greatly prefer to see the work as the author or creator's intended, however "offensive"; however, I don't have any problem with localization for purposes of practical language translation
#121: People forget that even though discrimination, like only selling to men, is wrong; pandering is ok. Making a game that has as much blood and gore in it as possible so 16 year olds who think it's cool buy it is legitimate and protectable speech.

#122: I understand the need of dev to localize or adapt their game to another language or culture. But censorship shouldn’t be a decision based on potential revenue unless it is inconsequential to the message the dev want to give. Warnings on the boxes are necessary for minors or fragile people of course but I don’t look at them anymore as I research the game content in other ways.

#125: I personally think censorship is stupid, the people who demand that the "problematic" parts of a game be censored or removed entirely are never the people who are actually buying the games in the first place. I feel no game should be censored. If you don't like it you just shouldn't buy it. Not every game has to be for every person.

#133: Localization and censorship are tough aspects to handle for any game company. There is a want to censor/localize elements to fit the demands of those who would not play these games otherwise. While at the same time pleasing fans who prefer to leave artist/creative vision/original designs intact and untouched. There is no obvious correct answer from a business standpoint so I understand the complexity of the situation.

#135: It really depends on the game involved. It’s not so easy that you can just make a blanket statement.

#139: Censorship- that is to say, government regulation, should be limited to explicit incitement to real life violence and perhaps dissemination of dangerous false information, such as false claims regarding covid or anti vaccination proponents. However, censorship in the form of 'self-censorship' based on public reaction is a wholly different matter which must be judged on a case by case basis.

#141: Censorship sucks, but it often is blown way out of proportion with regards to video games.

#144: Female JRPG characters should be allowed to wear clothes. It's misogynistic and I hate it.

#147: For a better interpretation of my answers: I'm more likely to be bothered by how a game approaches sensitive issues, rather than the topic itself. There's interesting and thoughtful ways to do it and then there's just tasteless, "shock value" kind of games.

#148: Censorship is contextual and circumstantial. I don't believe in unnecessary censorship especially when the age rating is obvious and valid (it isn't always valid, WWE games are rated 16 in my country and basically most games not aimed directly at children end up with an 18 age restriction) so while I do believe in protecting children from inappropriate content it comes from the same place as I wouldn't let a child watch a Tarantino movie so I wouldn't let them play GTA.

#151: People say they need to be censored because they believe that video games cause violence, but I’ve done my research and almost always find that violence is caused by mental illness in the person, games help cope with your stress by letting you take it all out on a virtual world, instead of your own.

#153: I feel localization is very important because of the fact that cultural differences can drastically effect a foreigner's understanding and enjoyment. I play a lot of JRPGs and other Japanese media, and so many Japanese cultural references or societal quirks are lost to me, so localizing these things to either be more clear or "American" to me. I do feel like creator's intent is most popular, so if that cultural or societal reference is important, I think it should remain.

#156: All-or-nothing arguments that treat all changes as "censorship", and in so doing conflate reducing the sexualization of child characters (i.e., altering clothing to make it less revealing) with substantive alteration of narrative content, strike me as childish, reductive, and silly.

#171: I personally think that censhships are not so great as it blocks some good laughs.

#173: Localization is not crucial for me (I strongly prefer to play games in English and it is not my first language), but I know it is very important for many people.

#174: Censorship is never justified, there are no exceptions.
Localization is fine by me, but I think censorship is changing the structure of the game. 

Most "localization" is just a form of modern colonialism looking to make the art of one culture conform to the social expectations of the majority's culture.

Games are art. If you think about it that way, if there are offensive parts to that game, then a warning would be administered. I don't like censorship, but I do understand age restrictions. Or at least a warning to guardians as to what's in the game.

sexualization of minors ain't cool kids

Localization and censorship are not the same thing. They can often (unfortunately) overlap, but the goal of localization is not to censor things from the original. The purpose of localization is to ensure that audiences/customers from other regions receive the same experience as those from the region the game was originally released in. Some things that make sense in one region might not in another, and so it must be changed to accommodate the new audience. This might entail changing some details, such as units of measurement, currency, slang, jokes and references, brand names, etc. By keeping things as is, there is the possibility that the original idea behind something (like a joke) will not be understood by the new audience, and thus it goes against the creator's intended effect. Many people decry localization as censorship of the original creator's intentions, when in fact it is quite the opposite. By localizing something, they are actually preserving the original spirit/idea of the creator, but delivering it in a different way so that the new audience can understand it. If something makes the player laugh/cry/laugh in the original Japanese version, then it should invoke the same reaction in the English version, even if it requires changing some things around.

I consider video games as an artform, and therefore censorship is a delicate topic. There is controversial art that uses explicit topics to make a statement or to provoke, there is bad taste, and there is also malicious intent. I think censorship should exist, but rating agencies should be able to differentiate between what the intent of the game is. As a German, I have bought games from other countries multiple times because of Germany's laws against the depiction of swastikas and violence. Games like Left 4 Dead 2 and Wolfenstein were censored in Germany, which I don't agree with as the intent of these games was not to provoke violence or Nazism. But, I do think that Germany should have the right to censor a game which is used e.g. as a form of neo Nazis propaganda, as the intent is to cause racist and violent behaviour. And if the intent of the game is contradictory to basic values of a country, no amount of localization or cutting will change that. So a game should either be released as originally intended or not at all. Sorry for the rant, good luck on your thesis :)

Games should be accessible to all people, but games are an artistic medium that should not be Bowlderized, whether to appease Chinese censors, German censors, or American religious groups. I wish more game studios would civilly disobey censorship orders by making it simple for gamers to obtain full assets for an authentic artistic experience. Many of the games I play are censored in Germany (Hearts of Iron 4) or China (China: Mao's Legacy).

I think that even if artists put something racist, homophobic, embarrassing, etc. in their games we should still not censor it. For example in the Atlus Persona 5 controversy, that homophobic cutscene was a result of a cultural difference between Japan and western society. Thus, it shouldn't be censored despite being offensive.

Localizers should not be allowed to change things as they see fit to censor them.

A small but loud minority of people make a big stink out of extremely minor changes because they think the changes are a condemnation of theirselves rather than the artistic integrity they claim it's really about. "I like this and they think there's something wrong with this, therefore they're saying there's something wrong with me and where do they get off saying there's something wrong with me."

I'm all for letting the people do what they want. If a game has stuff in it you don't like then don't buy it. And if someone makes a game with stuff you don't like don't make them change it, it's not your game or the governments.

Any "controversial" content, such as violence or sexualization of characters can be used in both mature and immature ways. The intent in how these topics are used and presented is more important than the existence of the topics themselves.

I think censorship of any kind is generally a hindrance on anything regarding censorship, censoring games is like censoring art to me it should never be done, that being said I think what is in the game should be advertised and well known so that others can avoid it on their own merit if they are uncomfortable or don't like certain topics.
#246: It is important that the localization preserves the creative intent of the author. Don't remove nudity for the sake of releasing a game outside Japan/Asia. Neither remove offensive language when releasing a game into Japan (most common examples). Publishers who take a game with "problematic" topics that are not culturally accepted in the target audience country/culture. (see Omega Labyrinth vs Labyrinth Life). While Age Ratings help me to see eventual content in a game I'm not interested, it's very disrespecting to the original authors of a game if the publisher of another region targets a lower age rating than the original one (since CERO doesn't rate nudity as high as violence, compared to PEGI/ESRB who rate it exactly the opposite). Localization IS necessary, because languages have their own quirks and jokes that don't translate as well, however it depends on the content. Rewriting a joke is fine. Replacing an character's entire interaction with "..." (Nintendo, Fire Emblem), or inserting doge memes (Nintendo, Zelda) is a disrespectful action. Thank you for doing this survey.

#248: Censorship should not be tolerated in any form of media.

#263: Certain depictions of subject matters can be upsetting, but I think people who create the content should be free to make their vision and if I then had a problem with it, I would be critical of it. Censorship should be avoided.

#267: Generally speaking, I am strictly anti-censorship. However, I would concede that some compromises are practically inevitable for the sake of creating and selling a viable product. Regarding sensitive or offensive material, I believe that 99% of the responsibility of consumption lies on the shoulders of the consumer. If someone is bothered by excessive violence, sexuality, or any other aspect of a piece of media, the onus is on them to research the media they choose to consume.

#273: I believe the vast majority of "censorship" controversies are totally blown out of proportion. The most recent one that comes to mind is FF7 Remake character design, specifically around Tifa and her breast size. The main thing people don't seem to understand is that making tweaks and adjustments like that doesn't harm the creative intent of the developer. There have been complaints about the fact that you can see a small bra outline coming from her dress, and they claim that this is censorship because they made her wear a bra. This doesn't change the game or the artistic vision in any real way. The overuse of the word "censorship" in cases like this has diminished the meaning behind it to the point where any real censorship goes unnoticed behind the cleavage defenders.

#277: I don't think that localization is bad, but they can ruin a game when they do a bad job.

#278: I have no idea what you mean by "Do you agree with censorship of violence, nudity or other sensitive topics?"

#284: Localization can be very helpful. Games originally from Japan can be more relatable if they are localized. However, bring able to import unlocalized games in also important to those who desire it. Both are useful. Censorship is not

#286: I took "(Excessive) violence" as like overt torture, or something on the level of The Saw movies.

#287: Your definition of censorship is unclear, as it doesn't differentiate mandatory external government/etc censorship vs internal censorship a company or creator may impose on its own product for various reasons - I typically disagree with the former, but have no objection the latter. I think the ESRB rating system is useful but flawed - in particular Adults Only rating is never utilized even though I think more people would be willing to buy that category of games if more stores were willing to sell them; even in Steam and other online stores, games be be released without rating but it is almost impossible to find an actual AO game for sale.

#289: I avoid buying censored games on principle

#290: Censorship/localization is evil and is ruining gaming

#291: I think censorship in games should only be necessary if the vast majority of gamers are disturbed by something in the game. Even then, there must be an option to turn the censorship off for people who do not mind the disturbing content.

#293: Age ratings are the most appropriate approach, since the player can be informed of the content of the game. Mandatory censorship will always be a bad approach, since the question arises: "who determines what is acceptable?"
On the other hand, optional censorship, e.g. the player skipping a cutscene or a level, or just not playing or purchasing the game, maintains an individual's autonomy and liberty to be challenged, should they wish, as an adult.

Graphic content is portrayed in all kinds of artistic media, from music to paintings to games, because they can reflect the artist’s reality and can make similarly affected people feel less alone to experience their story told - and the problem of a viewer/player unwittingly reliving trauma can be avoided through warnings, without resorting to censorship.

#299: Digital version of the game should be released untouched/uncensored regardless of the censorship on the disc version.

#300: While some things make me a bit squeamish or disgusted, it’s not a reason to censor the game. Doing so messes with the intent that the creator(s) of a game has. Games are a form of art and the vision of an artist should not have to suffer because of censorship.

#301: What is meant by "censorship"? State censorship is very bad. Cutting content isn't censorship. Should have defined your terms beforehand.

#309: Mainstream, "AAA games" are commercial products and not solely art. As such, it is in publishers interests to cooperate with local government to meet the expectations of that society. Further, this survey asks about both censorship and localization, which acknowledges that localization is separate from censorship. Censorship being just one aspect of localization. Localization is inarguably necessary, censorship may be "appropriate".

#330: Weird Japanese shit that only the weeb care about SHOULD be removed in games. Ex: Face petting in FE: Fates and characters who would be considered sex offenders in real life that are played as a joke in an incredible amount of JP media.

#335: Censorship generally happens due to it being required by law or because the various companies involved in making-selling games not wanting to be associated with certain kinds of topics. As a sidenote, there's nothing about political censorship here. EG: References to the Nazis in Germany (Swastikas).

#342: Authorities, leave the gamers and developers alone.

#344: Censorship always takes away from the value of a game's story and gameplay. Localization also takes away from the original intentions of scenes or actions of characters.

#346: Sometimes violent or sexual content is vital to telling a story. In these cases, I think it's important not to censor the content. On the other hand, sometimes sexual and violent content is not presented in a very thoughtful or sensitive manner in a game. In general, I think it's best to let the consumer decide whether they want to purchase a game or not based on its contents.

#359: Translations are more important than localizations. Localizations can ruin the meaning. Someone shouldn't worry about an audience not understanding parts of a culture. This difference can motivate and engage people in language learning. It's more important to convey authentic situations. Further, from a philosophical standpoint why do we care about content. Nothing should be censored. Creative freedom and freedom of speech should be granted to everyone.

#370: I’ve heard of a game called Trials of Cold Steel III that was censored not because laws require it, but because the localization team thought a character was "too mean". This I think, is quite abhorrent behaviour. Either way, I despise censorship in all forms.

#378: As an adult I believe that games should have more freedom in what they choose to censor or not. They should be able to trust that their audience has read their warnings and can make a decision for themselves if they want to be exposed to such content.

#380: The issue seems more wide than this survey accounts for. I believe that AAA games in general should be accessible to all, at least from purely monetary view. Indie games may be as weird as they authors want it: i may not like it, you may not like it, but someone will. Another thing is that if something is politically artistically socially neutral, it may not provoke speaking about issues. An easy example is Life is Strange series. Does it depict violence, mental health problems, sexual and physical abuse? Yes. Do these topics make some people extremely uncomfortable (or maybe even cause inflict negative emotions due to their trauma)? Also yes. Should we still talk about these topics
in video games? Yes, because if someone knows that the game is not for them, they'll avoid it (hopefully, assuming developers and rating agencies did their job right delivering the warnings regarding game contents), but for others it may show aspects of social problem that they don't yet understand, and I have even heard people claiming that depiction of such sensitive things helped them cope with their own situation.

#387: My umbrage at a case of potential censorship is highly context sensitive. So it's always a case by case basis.

#393: Localization means translation. Internationalization (or i10n) is the word for changing things to local sensibilities. Such as not showing nudity in NA or changing a joke about Japanese politics to one about American politics since most Americans won't know how the Diet works. Why would anyone be against localization? I10n is the more interesting question.

#402: The biggest problem with sexual content in games is that it is frequently handled in a very prurient way even in games where that doesn't make any sense. I don't have any problem with porn games or games that are deliberately lewd, but it is weird to me when an otherwise normal game randomly has lewd elements for no apparent reason, as it feels awkward and out of place.

#407: Original is almost always better, but localisation should still be a thing, because there are a lot of people that don't know English and they should be able to grasp such an art.

#418: Games intended for adult audiences should not be censored.

#447: Games should be localized with all of their content unchanged. Make the dialog flow well and any jokes work for whatever language you're translating to, if that involves changing any lines than keep it as close to the intent as possible. Don't push your own beliefs or agendas into the dialog/localization either.

#449: The worst is when localization/censorship cuts content. Mobile game Danmachi Memoria Freese removed the vast majority of voice acting and dialog that was present in the game as they removed the "Commination Mode" from the English release after featuring it heavily in advertising. I'm sure they saved a lot of money doing so little work on localization.

#450: I don't like playing censored video games. It feels like I'm playing an inferior version.

#451: Game ratings and warnings are not helpful to me now, but would be if I was a parent. Most localization is bad and gets in the way of cultural exchange.

#455: Chig Bungus is gunna' be The Beatles 2 of the maymay world, just wait and see.

#471: I don't think that localizing the sexual or violent content for different cultures in and of itself constitutes "censorship".

#472: Age range is important. Some children aren't ready for intense violence or sexual content. Some adults aren't either.

#476: I despise the censorship that happens when localizing certain titles, typically Japanese titles to western markets. It's often very pointless and unnecessary.

#485: I don't know what "localization" means as used in this survey. I think it is appropriate for consumers to be aware of what they are purchasing. I am an adult who games, and little offends me, but I don't want to support sexualization of minors, and I want to be aware of what my kids are playing. There is a difference between censorship of content and making consumers aware of what content is included.

#491: If you do another version of this survey, I would suggest defining to people what you mean by localization, since that can be as simple as adding a language or as far-reaching as cutting out significant portions of games.

#514: Localized content in games can help where a game's story may not translate to another culture. Look into how the story for FFXIV is localised between Japan and say the UK and other English speaking countries.

#537: A game is a product of its creator. I think the extent of localization should be language translation, and nothing beyond that. I don't play games with sexual violence or pedophilia, but if some creator has some good reason
for putting them in a game, I am not one to stop them. If a creator wants to sacrifice sales for the purpose of putting disagreeable content in a game, it is their right. When I say I would import a game from another region, the main reason for this would be to practice another language. For example, I’ve pirated a bunch of Japanese games so I can practice Japanese, but other than language differences, the only reason I'd care to import another region's game would be for speedrunning differences if I happened to run that game. By the way, I haven't bought a game in many years. All the games that I play are old pirated Nintendo games for the Gamecube and Wii. I also play Old School Runescape. I think the gaming industry has really gone off the rails in the past decade, and I don't really pay attention to mainstream games anymore.

#546: Only acceptable in games that are aimed for kids. Otherwise it is nonsense.

#558: Censorship is bad, regardless of the reasoning behind it, and localization is often used as an excuse to censor things that a small group of elites don't like.

#570: Don't import but will watch region locked games

#571: describing the removal of maybe illegal pedo stuff the same way as 'censoring' regular sexual content just seems like a disingenuous argument in favour of the pedo content.

#573: Not at all, Good luck on your survey!

#577: Age ratings as a form of censorship are effective in allowing the general public to choose whether or not they should purchase a game and the short list of provided reasons for the rating is an effective measure to inform a consumer of the potentially disagreeable topics presented by the game. Further censorship beyond an enforced age requirement (asking for ID on purchase) is unnecessary.

#580: I think games based on a historical period are particularly affected by censorship. History should by all means be uncensored and depict reality as it truly was, no filters and showing everything; even if its harsh or unpleasant. CoD: WW2 comes to mind as an example of a game succumbing to "political correctness" and as a consequence damaging the title and the game.

#583: I'd be really interested to see a study detailing the attention paid by parents to ratings when buying games for their children. It can seem sometimes that parents are unwilling to research the games played by their kids at a young age (CoD, GTA, etc.). I think localisation is important as a part of the translation process, but it can sometimes be difficult to implement properly without compromising the creative vision of the artist in the original language/region. Although sometimes (Fire Emblem Fates, for example) removing elements of the game for the international market seems to be the right thing to do. Best of luck with your research! I hope the survey results you collect are helpful to you! 😊

#586: Generally, I personally am not super bothered by censorship in games, but I can definitely sympathize with people who are, since many end up feeling as though the localized version of a game often becomes the inferior product, lacking content that the original had. That said, because of cultural differences between Japan and the rest of the world, I get why it is necessary. Personally, I find the sexualization of minors quite abhorrent in games (assuming the game is not addressing it as a serious topic of discussion, which they almost never do ), but I also understand that the culture of Japan just feels very differently about it than we do, so I can definitely appreciate when a localization team goes out of its way to address that, and censor that sort of content.

#593: The only censorship I can think of is Hearthstone changing card art for China and Undead being less skeleton-y in World of Warcraft in China. And Conker Live and Reloaded bleeped out a bunch of stuff.

#595: Just a quick note on the last point (sexualization of minors) of question 10, which I think is by nature illegal in my country (and probably in most others, too), and while I would still be bothered by it, I would argue it rarely falls under censorship in the classic sense, as the government doesn't pick out specific cases, with it being illegal for all forms of media. This is also why I did not consider it for question 11, which I would have otherwise given a higher digit answer.

#599: Localization is most useful when it opens up a game to a new audience while preserving the creator’s spirit and intent. When the localizers inject their own agenda or make editorial decisions on what audiences should or should not see the enterprise no longer has any value.
You picked a pretty specific topic to do a paper on, haha. Good luck!

As mentioned above, sexualisation of minors is definitely a quintessential example for good use of censorship.

I would prefer if the creative liberties taken by video games did not have to find alternatives to their intended stories or themes simply because people find the content disturbing. Games like bioshock, outlast, and many others with horror elements would have many aspects that make them well loved and interesting removed if they were sanitized to be more widely digestible.

This survey has almost no merit without proper definitions of "censorship". "Do you agree with censorship of violence, nudity or other sensitive topics?" doesn't mean "anything" to me unless I have some kind of context for what that means. Is the government censoring games? Are the people doing the localization? I think you need to put some more thought into what you're looking to study here. I basically took neutral options for everything involving the word "censorship" here because I can't give an honest answer with the way this is currently set up.

Censorship is bad, localization is sometimes necessary to maintain the presence of content without editing it beyond what is required.

Censorship is there for a reason. The best example I know of is Wolfenstein. In the EU release they eliminated all likenesses to nazi Germany to follow their strict censorship laws. These laws are in place because they don't want that to happen again or for those events to be worshipped.

Localization is a great tool with the right script or situation - literal translations may feel very stilted. Additionally, something like a puzzle or riddle based on obscure cultural knowledge might warrant localization so the player has a better chance at solving it on their own. There are some scenes that add little to the overall game or characters but may come off... poorly, in some situations. An example of this might be Persona 5's "aggressively flirtatious gay men" scene, where they essentially drag off a character that is a minor for the purpose of a "haha, gay people are weird!" joke. While this might go over well in Japan, there's little reason to include this for a western localization - it adds nothing to the game as a whole, and will serve to make many players uncomfortable. It was not localized in the western release, but I think it reasonably should have been.

Censorship is never good unless the content is illegal (i.e. sexualization of minors)

Censorship stifles creativity and the range of experience possible in a game. It's not the governments job or responsibility to dictate what a person can and cannot create or view. Although there is some merit in classifications, whether age based or not, to notify sensitive people of potentially distressing content.

I think its very depending on your country on how you deal with censorship. A citizen of china is gonna have to pirate most games to get the actual experience. were as someone from usa at most would have to deal with very minor censorship.

Parental supervision might be a potential third variable. Other than that, good survey!

Adults should censor things themselves. The line to draw for minors is very difficult to find between what is acceptable or not.

Parents buying video games for their children is the only time "censorship" should ever come up.

Localization does matter! Being part of something that you can relate makes the game it self fell more personalized. Being part of a community with their own jokes/knowledge of the subject. Like for instance, whoever made this survey COMPLETED forget the ENTIRE south continent! Like, I can only choose Japan, Canada n US or Europe/UK, what about South and middle America? Australia? African countries? How come we are just "one"? If you take in consideration that South america consumes way more games than Europe you can see that you are missing a good amount of data when you just locate them into "other". This is what I mean by localization matter! You acknowledge a country/culture and everything that comes with it. If you already start considering them "other" and not really recognize them, then there is no localization ever to be done. Cheers.
This poll is incredibly barbones, I didn't indicate what my nationality is, or my experience with localization (Dutch translations are rare and usually suck, however we are more tolerant of certain things like depictions of guns and nudity). Localization isn't explained, so you don't know what a reader expects from it. Localization usually refers to changing the script to better suit the audience, but it can also refer to altering actual content. You don't know the rating board. A rating board impacts the localization and censorship heavily. True the EU uses PEGI, but Germany for example uses UKG and many Asian countries also use their own systems. Germany for a long time didn't accept depictions of Nazism in games, while the rest of the world was ok with it. Japan cracks down harder on violence, while the US is more concerned with sex and nudity. Lastly the categories I'm ok with are weird, you don't mention what falls into those categories and some seem to be PEGI's categories, which I actually encourage, let costumers know what their children are getting into.

I think the rating of the game depends on if something should be censored or changed. For example in Fatal Frame Maiden of the Black Water they completely changed some unlockable outfits when localizing the game from some skimpy bikini outfits, to outfits of nintendo characters (Samus and Zelda to be exact). Now while i personally like the costumes we got in the west better i can 100% understand people being upset they change them because it is an M rated game.

I never support censorship even if it makes a game more palatble for me. I would rather a game be uncensored and I choose not to play it, rather than it being censored and something I'd choose to play. Localization is good but often wanders dangerous close to the censorship.

Not a good survey. Did you have anyone look at this beforehand? There are also some issues that I imagine came from English not being the native language it was originally written in, such as awkward wording or fragment sentences.

I think the main reason to disagree or agree with these topics is how the game chooses to handle it. The last of us handles sexual assault a thousand time better than gta or many other series I love getting to see the medium handle these topics in an adult way but it can be shitty to see negative stereotypes reinforced in others.

Only very rarely would I consider a game to have been truly 'censored', such as the Taiwanese game Devotion, which was pulled from Steam after it was discovered to have a joke about the Chinese leader in it. Issues of cut content, all-ages versions, etc, I would consider to be issues of capitalism or commercialism. The fact that games get sold for money is foundational to the way games are made and how they are designed. To call it 'censorship' when a game is changed for a different market is to ignore all the ways a game is designed to get you to buy it.

release time on games are stupid. if your game releases at 18:00 that's way to late. Ideally its 0:00 if not find a better time than mid day US

Some localizations replace cultural stuff to appeal to the 'new' audience. I'm no fan of that. I want everything the original has to offer, from weird idioms to foreign food and everything inbetween. But I get that it's necessary to get as big a playerbase as possible. Not everyone wants something new or foreign, they want to relate right from the getgo.

I can't agree of disagree on these topics because the topic is situational and the following is of course just an opinion. Game and media developers have goals to reach target audiences due to media demands of people over time that change due to culture and political interactions. If the developer's focus is creativity, then accessibility may be sacrificed. Changing the system that governs accessibility likely requires a change in the culture and politics which can take generations.

I feel like it’s heavily dependent on the type of game and especially the type of story. Excessive violence, drug use and even severe gore can feel in place if it suits the story, like how in The Walking Dead you have to cut off somebody’s leg. When it doesn’t fit it just comes across as needless and strange.

I’m from Australia and we’ve had games censored. The largest game we had censored was Mortal Kombat 9 as it was rejected classification but later released. I think it’s a violation of our freedom not allowing adults to play games they won’t. Australia goes on about being a “free” country yet we aren’t allowed to play certain games due to censorship.

I believe that censorship is never okay when localizing a game, but I do think that some changes can and sometimes should be made during a localization process. Specifically I believe that changes made to keep the original
intent intact in a way that would make more sense to consumers in other regions are positive and helpful. For example, changing Japanese wordplay that would not make sense to a western audience to a pun would be positive localization.

#730: Nudity is more taboo than it should be

#733: The ratings systems that we have in place across the globe are designed to help consumers avoid the content that they personally do not want to engage with. Both the ESRB and PEGI have detailed summaries on their website for every game. Holding back content, or censoring content that is 'problematic' typically is unnecessary because in most cases you can find an example of a similar 'problematic' content in other games. In some cases from the same company: I.E Nintendo/Atlus with "Tokyo Mirage Sessions#FE" a cross-over game fusing the worlds of Fire Emblem & Shin Megami Tensei, both games rated T and above and feature sexual themes and characters in provocative clothing. However when it came time for the western "Localization" all of the cleavage and even scenes with bikinis where covered up or changed entirely. Fire Emblem on it's last outing before #FE had a character named Camilla who is very "well endowed" so to speak and showed it; Shin Megami has a demon who is a penis riding a chariot. To the credit of #FE however the main character and most of the characters are about 16-17 so the change would be somewhat understandable seeing how western views are about depictions of minors, but the English localization also changed every character to at least 18 years old. The other big thing with #FE in particular is how "localization censorship" can actually affect other regions, including the native one. When #FE was enhanced and ported to the Switch, it added new content as well as all of the DLC, save for one. A hot spring DLC did not make it's way to the new console version, on top of that every change that had been made for the western version was now the default for the Japanese version on the Switch. Which did not sit well with the Japanese player-base at all. Sorry to go on this little novel here, hopefully everything is understandable.

#737: The Australian case study is worth referencing in your lit review.

#742: Censorship is not 'necessary' perse, but I still entered agree because I think it's a necessary option to consider for the game developers to achieve their stated goals.

#743: Essentially, I don't think it's ever useful. I don't always agree with someone's artistic vision, but I'm in complete support of letting them express themselves.

#744: I believe this survey is kind of vague and you should rethink it and repeat it with more precise questions.

#746: Kids today are never reading about censorship. I personally know a couple of kids who are in middle school that know about strip clubs because of GTAV and racist slurs from online gaming. It's kinda sad.

#751: Fuck da police

#782: I'm not entirely sure why censorship and localization are being grouped together, as they seem like completely separate things.

#784: I think the use of the word "censorship" here is a bit misleading. The games aren't being censored, as it's not being done or being mandated by an outside party. A publisher/developer deciding to remove or change content isn't censorship, it's the creator deciding to remove or change content. This is true even when it's market based. This doesn't make it a necessarily acceptable practice (changing/removing scenes for Chinese release in movies, for example, is still a troubling practice), but it's also not necessarily a bad practice, either.

#792: Localisation will mean different things to different people. If it's just a translation (whether that's of the menus, subtitles for dialogue, or re-recording dialogue) so that more audiences can enjoy the game, I don't think many people will find that problematic. When you start adapting things to suit different cultural tastes more people will start to object (whether rightly or wrongly). Your responses might be slightly confounded if different responders have different understandings of this word.

#797: What does censorship mean in context?

#801: Some content (excessive gratuitous violence such as Hatred or overt sexual content like eroge games) shouldn't be easily accessible to minors. However, that content should not be censored for mature adults as long as it doesn't contain anything outright illegal. Although the ESRB is pretty faulty, it's up to parents and consumers to know their boundaries. Do research.
The game should now be changed from the creators original vision, the people who follow and buy those games want them for what they are not for what someone in the West not who has no appreciation for the medium or the product to decide for everyone else even adults what is 'appropriate' for them. Its not only insulting to the creators its insulting to the consumer and the argument 'think of the children' means little when the game is rated M or A and if some bad parents want to ignore those and still get them for there children who are not of appropriate age thats on them not the rest of society to parent there children.

Nice survey bro! <3

I wasn't aware localization is a big thing in gaming. FREE THE GAMES FOR EVERYONE

Ratings alone are simplistic blanket statements, what matters are the specifics that make up the so-called rating. M for Mature is vague and meaningless. M for Mature (adult language, violence, gore) is vastly more useful. Though honestly, when it comes right down to it you should really just do your research as a parent. Go online and google the game, it takes no more than a few minutes to find out whether you think it's appropriate for your kid. That being said, the problem with many games isn't really violence, but the use of it. The majority of games depict crude subjects in a way that is un-artistic, un-creative, and unnecessary. Much of the violence in video games is done somewhat mindlessly. It doesn't add anything to the game, it's trashy, and it's just there to appeal to knackle-dragging basement dwellers. Art forms (video games included) should elevate their audience, not play to the lowest common denominator. That's not to say you can't have any violence, you can still create a masterpiece and chop someone's head off (LOTR anyone?). But it's high time we stop creating content for the mindless masses and remember the real purpose of art. Only then will censorship be unnecessary.

My answers come from the perspective of a non-parent. If I was choosing a game for my child I would absolutely pay more mind to the content and the censors/ratings/etc.

A game should be viewed for what they represent with a stand point for the population that should separate those who are under age for certain games. Like any art they should be recognized for the talents of many.

Remnants of an outdated and archaic mentality. Can be primarily seen in both the video game and film industries released in countries with outspoken religious voices.

Many define censorship as direct government intervention of a media. More often, what we see is publishers make changes to account for localized appeal.

Personally, I think nothing should be censored. Censoring out certain idea from a creative piece can only harm it, and art as a whole. Localization, however, is another thing. For example, how Nazi imagery is often removed in the German release of games, as it is extremely taboo in their culture.

You need to clarify your terms more. I am assuming when you say "localization is necessary " you are asking if I think games should be translated from their native language to mine, which I think all games should. If you are asking if I think its necessary for artistic studios to take artistic license or make changes when translating you need to define localization. I think the removal of of nudity etc. from games that have previously had them or it being changed is response is often seen as censorship, when often times it is the result of a different creative vision, or the studio caring more about sales/pr then an artistic vision which isnt really censorship.
#890: Censorship is really a mood killer. When I learn that a game I played in EU or US version is censored, that makes me mad. If I knew Japanese I would only play Japanese version of games because these are usually not censored.

#891: Laws of what is acceptable in other regions may not adhere to local laws. I am neither for nor against censorship - as they are decisions made by publishers to achieve either the purity and integrity of the original or seek the most profit, as well as comply with local laws.

#900: I have no idea what your questions are asking, because they are so vague and lack context. If you really want any useful results, have someone with background in survey design go over your questions. As it is right now, I have no idea what kind of useful data I could get out of these answers.
Appendix D

This appendix contains all the answers received from the open answer question at the end of the Japanese survey. They will be listed as the number of their entries in the survey.

Japanese survey responses to the open question

#13: 日本では、自分の感性の問題を社会の問題と置き換える人が増えていると感じています。その陰には、自ら傷つきたい欲求というものが隠れているように思っています。Localization 進んだとしても、表現の枠組みが形成されたとしても、Localization 以前の問題は引き続き表出するのではないかと、ふと、思いました。

#18: 結局は映画と同じで、嫌なら買わなければいいし、子供にやらせなければならない。親の教育の問題、責任をゲームに押し付けているに過ぎない。

#19: コンセプトに沿ってゲームの内容を決めるのはゲームの開発スタッフであり、不快かどうかを判断するのは遊んだプレイヤー。部外者が検閲するものではないと思う。

#30: 国・地域に基づく価値観、風俗、風習や宗教的事柄があるのは事実なので、それに適応するのは産業的に言っても当然のことでしょう。そうした制約を担保するための検閲が存在するのにも一定の理由があるはずで、そうした検閲は許容されるべきものでしょう。しかし、中国のような非民主国家における政治的動機による検閲は許容されるべきとはあまり思いません。

#32: ローカリゼーションと言う言葉自体初めて聞きました。日本人はそこまで気にしないのかも知れません。

#36: ゲームプロデューサーです。ESRB などのレーティングは開発者の責任であると考えます。芸術表現を超えた誤解を与える過度の違法行為の表現（善人がドラッグをするなど、悪人なら可能）は検閲以前に自粛すべきだと思っています。ゲームは没入感があるので、未成年ユーザーやのためには、映画や小説よりも少し厳しくすべきであると思っています。

#43: 例えば暴力がダメな国では暴力表現がある作品を発売しなくてよいと思う。内容を変更してしまってはキャラクターの生い立ちなどの背景設定が変わってしまう。性的表現はパッケージに対象年齢を書いておき、ゲームと現実を混同しないよう注意書きをして対応すればよいのでは？性的表現を嫌な人がパッケージを見て購入をやめるという選択ができる。

#45: その国、宗教や食文化に合わせた修正は必要かと思います。またそれをデベロッパーやパブリッシャーが比較するのも他国の文化を知る上では楽しいかと思います。この国のこのシーンではこの表現だけど、こっちの国は違う表現です。なぜなら食文化が違うからとか。ネガティブにならないように。

#49: 必要なのは検閲や年齢によるレーティングではなく、分別のための情報開示。警告を含む適切なヒントにより購入者が取捨選択できる状況が理想。

#52: 私は海外のゲームをすることはほとんどないので、検閲やローカリゼーションについて深く考えたことはなかったのですが、ゲームが本や映画などよりも没入度が大きく（プレイヤーの介入があるため）、人に影響を与えやすいメディアであること、そのプレイ人口の多くが、影響を受けやすい若者世代であることを考えると、ゲームの表現を検閲するのはしょうがないことであると思います。したがって上記のような理由で、ローカリゼーションする際に作品を一部改変するというのはいたしかたないことだと思いますが、そのとき、作品が元々もつ意味というのが極力損なわれないようにするべきだと私は思います。というのは、ゲームは娯楽商品であると同時に（ここでの娯楽はエンターテイメントのような意味合い）芸術的価値をもっていると私は思っていて、ローカリゼーションによって作品の持つ意味などが大きく変わってしまったならば、ゲームをプレイする人たちはそのゲームが本当に伝え
たかったことが分からず、極端に言えば誤解してしまうからです。確かに世界の多くの人がプレイできることは素晴らしいことですが、そのような誤解が生まれてしまう可能性が高いので、ローカライズに際して一部変更されているということをライトユーザーが知れるように、バックジャージやホームベース、販売ページなどに工夫を入れていくことが大事ではないかと思います。ただ結局、ゲームに限らずどんなメディアでも、ローカライズの際に言語が変わってしまうと、その意味情報はいくらか損なわれる訳で、どれだけ優秀な翻訳家をもってしても、完璧に言語変換のみのローカライズというのは不可能です。つまりローカライズすると、その言語、すなわちその文化に多少は必ず寄ってしまうということです。そうしたとき、そのように言語変換の際に生じる文化バイアスの程度が非常に大きくなったものが、文化的観点による内容の改変であると捉えると、内容の改変もどこまで受け入れ難いものではないのかかもしれません。本当に100%その作品のことを知りたければ、原作、原著にあたるしかないのです。また以上の話は発売された後にローカライズする場合の話で、初めから複数の言語での同時発売や、ゲーム内で言語が変更できる場合などは、ローカライゼーション、という概念は当てはまらないのではないかと思います。というのは、ゲーム制作の現場では、初めに何国語で作ってから他の言語へ、どういうに作っていくと思うのですが、重要なのかその作品が発売されたとき、すなわち世の中に出たときで、そのとき世に出たもの全てが原作であると思うからです。

#54: ムスリムとか厳しい国向けにはせざるを得ない

#55: 作っている国と遊ぶ国において価値観は同じでは無い以上、ローカライゼーションは必要だと思います。

#56: 究極的には万人の賛同を得られる表現は存在しないことを認識すべきであると考えます。個人的には、日本国外で日本人を「黄色い眼鏡をつけた出っ歯のサル」と表現することも、あるいは日本国内で、外国人の人種や宗教を揶揄する表現があったとしても、それを強く非難して販売規制の圧力を掛けたよりも、「こういう奴らなんだな」と心に留めておいて今後はそれに見合った対応をしていくようなスマートで大人な関係性が望ましいと思います。

#59: 各国のルールに沿った検閲は必要と考えます。しかし「他国では〇〇なので合わせよう」というのは、昔してきた環境などによる人の認識の違いがあるため、沿うべきではないと思う。