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The War on Games: The Just Say NO! Arcade as a Pro-Social Third Place

Philip Truman
ptruman01@bellarmine.edu

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Philip Truman

Dr. Mike LaRocco

COMM-698 Thesis II

The War on Games: The Just Say NO! Arcade as a Pro-Social Third Place

Introduction

My thesis is focused on the American arcade industry in the late 1990's within the context of the Just Say NO! Family Arcade in Louisville, Kentucky. This information is examined within the context of the War on Drugs alongside Japan's robust arcade market which is still highly operational to this day. The American gaming market greatly prefers home video gaming over playing in the public spaces that are the video arcades. In my research, I have found little comparison between Japanese and American arcade culture done from an academic perspective, and even less information on the Just Say No! Family Arcade. Despite the transformation of American arcades to more family-friendly environments, especially in the late 1980's and 1990's with the introduction of Chuck-E-Cheese and smaller, local establishments such as the Just Say No! Family Arcade in Louisville, Kentucky, the American arcade is considerably less popular at the present time.

I explore the Just Say No! Family Arcade in Louisville, Kentucky. I will give background on the Just Say No! campaign which inspired the themed arcade, as well as the War on Drugs' role in youth culture and the prosocial arcade games that were featured in the arcade. Additionally, I will identify areas where more information would be helpful in solidifying the history of this small, local franchise. My intended contribution to the topic is recording an oral history of the franchise via interview with the former owner and founder Jack Turner.

Hypothesis

In this essay, I argue that the Just Say NO! Family Arcade was able to operate as a prosocial third place in Louisville, Kentucky. I will examine the use of anti-drug advertising and public programs in the United States of America, as well as gaming history and psychology to demonstrate these points. Discussion of prosocial and antisocial behavior and how it can apply to the arcade, third places, and public perceptions of the gaming industry will also play a crucial role in my argument.

The War on Drugs

In the United States, anti-drug policy has historically disenfranchised particular racial and ethnic groups (*A history of the Drug War*). The earliest drug legislation in America occurred during an era of anti-Chinese sentiment in 1878 when San Francisco, California deemed visiting or operating an opium den a misdemeanor crime. The ordinance did not stop the importation of opium, but it served to harass and intimidate operators and visitors. An article in the May 23, 1882 edition of the *San Francisco Morning Call* titled “Chinese Criminals” stated two opium den operators were jailed for 100 days and fined \$100 each, while ten visitors were fined \$10 each (Mark, 1975). Sensationalist writings proliferated in the late 19th century. Terry and Pellens wrote a study claiming “women and young girls, and also young men of respectable family, were being induced to visit the dens, where they were ruined morally and otherwise. . . the small dens in Chinatown were well patronized, and the vice grew surely and steadily,” (Smith, 1966). The *San Francisco Chronicle* would further perpetuate fears of Asian immigrants, with headlines

such as “Brown Men Are Evil in the Public Schools,” “Brown Asiatics Steal Brains of Whites,” and “Japanese a Menace to American Women,” (Smith, 1966).

Legislation regarding cocaine was heavily targeted toward black men in the American South. On February 8, 1914, the *New York Times* ran an article with the headline “Negro Cocaine ‘Fiends’ Are a New Southern Menace” (Williams, 1914). In the article, Edward Huntington Williams, M.D., discusses rumors that “addiction to drugs such as morphine and cocaine was becoming a veritable curse to the colored race” and mentioned stories about cocaine orgies and “sniffing parties” followed by “wholesale murder” but emphasized that “there was nothing ‘yellow’ about many of these reports,” (Williams, 1914). The article speaks of a specific “Cocaine Fiend” in Asheville, NC who had attempted to stab a storekeeper, beating up various members of his own household, and slashed an officer with a knife. The story details that the officer shot the man through the heart, but the bullet didn’t even stagger the man. Williams claimed that officers in the South have had to carry higher capacity firearms “for the express purpose of combating the ‘fiend’ when he runs amok,” (Williams, 1914). This article was published around the same time Congress was working to pass the Harrison Narcotics Tax Act, which would be one of the first nationwide drug legislations. The law would regulate the production, importation, and distribution of opium and coca products. The article written by Williams in 1914 created the mythical “negro cocaine fiend,” and newspapers, politicians, and physicians heavily circulated stories about this phenomenon, and the Harrison Act became law (Hart, 2014).

In 1971, President Richard Nixon declared a War on Drugs, claiming drug abuse is “public enemy number one in the United States” at a press conference. He created the Special Action Office for Drug Abuse Prevention. This was the only time during the War on Drugs that

funding was directed more toward addiction treatment than law enforcement. Several agencies and programs were set up by the Nixon Administration in the coming years, including Operation Golden Flow in 1971 where military servicemen returning from Vietnam had urinalysis testing performed to test for heroin. Only 4.5% of returning servicemen tested positive for heroin. The Nixon administration founded the Office of Drug Abuse Law Enforcement in 1972 and the Drug Enforcement Administration in 1973 before resigning in 1974 (Public Broadcasting Service).

In June 1986, Cleveland Browns football player Don Rogers and the University of Maryland basketball star Len Bias both died as a result of cocaine overdoses. This sparked a media uproar and cries for government intervention on the drug problem in America. President Ronald Reagan signed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 in an effort to combat crack cocaine. Crack cocaine was significantly cheaper than powdered cocaine, which made it more available to areas of low socioeconomic status which were disproportionately occupied by non-white minority groups. Powdered cocaine, on the other hand, was primarily consumed by upper-class white Americans, who were far less likely to be policed. The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 created minimum sentencing laws with a 100:1 disparity between crack cocaine and powder cocaine supported by unsubstantiated evidence that crack cocaine was more addictive and dangerous than powder cocaine. As a result, possession of 5 grams of crack led to a minimum 5-year sentence, while possession of 50 grams of cocaine led to a 10-year minimum sentence. In comparison, someone in possession of powdered cocaine would have to have possession of 100 times the amount to receive a similar sentence. At the same time, Nancy Reagan pledged to spread awareness of the dangers of drug abuse to youths through the “Just Say No” campaign (Lassiter, 2002).

The Just Say NO! Foundation

The Just Say NO! Foundation, based near San Francisco, California, was established by then First Lady Nancy Reagan in May 1986. The foundation provided support and direction for groups of children aged 7-14 years old who were strongly opposed to drug and alcohol abuse. National events were organized with school chapters, and the individual clubs would organize activities to raise awareness about drug abuse and to provide alternative activities to partaking in drugs (The Just Say No Foundation, 1986).

While Nancy Reagan is often cited, and is most closely associated, with the Just Say NO! quote, it was formulated by the New York advertising agency Needham Harper & Steers. The quote was created in 1983, three years prior to the start of the foundation. The Reagans were preparing to talk to children, and they were about to launch the Just Say NO! campaign. The slogan was created so that it would be easy to remember and sound kid friendly. On paper, the campaign seemed to work. Marijuana use was statistically lower during the Reagan administration following the campaign (Roberts, 2016).

Effects of Anti-Drug Advertising

D.A.R.E. was founded in Los Angeles, California in 1983. D.A.R.E. stands for “Drug Abuse Resistance Education” and according to the official D.A.R.E. website from 2006 archived on Archive.org, D.A.R.E. has “proven so successful that it is now being implemented in 75 percent of our nation's school districts and in more than 43 countries around the world,” (*About D.A.R.E.* 2006). D.A.R.E. curriculum was designed to be led in the classroom by local police officers. Prior to entering the classroom, officers must complete 80 hours of specialized training in areas including child development, classroom management, teaching techniques, and

communication skills. D.A.R.E. reports that since 1988, one day each year is declared “D.A.R.E. Day” by a presidential proclamation. D.A.R.E. reports that their program is an internationally recognized model of community policing, and some of the ways it benefits local communities is by humanizing police officers, showing the police to youths in a “helping role” instead of an enforcement role, it opens lines of communication between law enforcement and youths, and it opens dialogue between school, police, and parents to deal with other issues (*About D.A.R.E.* 2006).

Anti-drug messaging has been scrutinized extensively, often with findings that suggest anti-drug advertising can increase the likelihood of a viewer to partake in recreational drug use. Hornik identifies in his study that there is often an unfavorable effect of anti-drug advertising called a “boomerang effect” where the advertising can generate interest rather than an avoidance. Hornik cites psychological reactance theory, where abstinence messages like anti-drug advertising are seen as a threat to personal freedom and therefore behavior is adjusted to reclaim that freedom. Another idea is that anti-drug advertising makes drug abuse seem more commonplace than it truly is. Consequently, individuals tend to believe their peers are already using marijuana and are more likely to take part themselves (Hornik, 2011). Starting in 2000, there was an increase in the number of schools terminating their contracts with the anti-drug program D.A.R.E. as their methods and results were being questioned (Lune, 2010).

Wagner and Sundar explain that the effectiveness of anti-drug advertising generally varies on an individual’s personal biases. If someone already has anti-drug views, then an anti-drug advertisement will only confirm their personal beliefs. If someone is not opposed to recreational drug abuse, or is already partaking in counter-culture behavior, they will likely be mistrustful of anti-drug advertising (Wagner & Sundar, 2008). In their study, Wagner and Sundar

found that participants who received more anti-drug advertising were more curious about illicit drugs than those who did not receive any anti-drug advertising.

The effectiveness of D.A.R.E. was questioned after the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) published a study that the effect on reducing drug use was “statistically insignificant.” D.A.R.E. officials attacked the RTI, claiming that their sample size was too small and that they did not consider their new curriculum, which was introduced that Fall (Marlow & Rhodes, 1994). Efficacy was understandably being questioned when budgets for D.A.R.E. often went in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. Oakland, California ended their \$750,000 per year D.A.R.E. agreement in 1994, and Seattle, Washington paid \$250,000 per year for four officers to lead the program across schools in the city. Similarly, Spokane, Washington spent \$557,000 per year for D.A.R.E. Most of the budget went to cover the salaries of full-time officers and staff, with small portions going to “D.A.R.E.-phernalia” such as T-shirts, pencils, stickers, and bracelets adorned with the D.A.R.E. logo. Nationwide, cities spent approximately \$200 million collectively to host D.A.R.E. programs (Brunner, 1996).

Part of the reason students were skeptical of D.A.R.E. is they often relied on exaggerated or outright false information to enforce their curriculum. On a now-deleted “fact sheet” on the D.A.R.E. website, a claim was made that marijuana had no medical value, weakened immune systems, and led to lung disease and caused insanity (Lopez, 2014). On March 30, 2015, D.A.R.E. posted a news story on their official website titled *Edible Marijuana Candies Kill 9 in Colorado, 12 at Coachella*. The story was a re-post from a website called *topekasnews.com*, and included lines such as ““Children are being addicted to marijuana. I knew this day would come, when a liberal president allowed a state to legally sell Marijuana Flintstone Vitamins to children,” “Marijuana. It is one of the most dangerous drugs on Earth,” and “For every one joint

of marijuana, four teenagers become burdened with pregnancy.” The website that posted the original article, *topekasnews.com*, is a satirical website, yet the D.A.R.E. organization shared the article to their website without verifying the information (Ingraham, 2021).

A 2004 study by West and O’Neal sought to analyze the overall effectiveness of Project D.A.R.E. in preventing alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drug use in youths. Their methods of determining whether D.A.R.E. was an effective program included searches of ERIC, MEDLINE, and PsycINFO databases from late Fall 2002 and reviewing 40 articles from 1991 to 2002. During their research, West and O’Neal only found 11 studies that fit their criteria for inclusion, which is as follows: 1. Research must have been reported in a peer-reviewed journal, 2. Research must have included a control or comparison group, and 3. The research must include both preintervention and postintervention assessments of at least one of the following variables: alcohol use, illicit drug use, and tobacco use. This criterion, as previously mentioned, only allowed for inclusion of 11 out of 40 articles related to the topic. Their results indicated that there was only a marginally better outcome for individuals who participated in a D.A.R.E. program in abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs, as compared to individuals in a control or comparison group. Four of the included studies found no effect of D.A.R.E. on the study participants, and one study indicated that D.A.R.E. was actually less effective than the control group. In six of the studies, the positive effects were relatively small, and mostly applied to tobacco use. West and O’Neal ultimately concluded that Project D.A.R.E. is overall ineffective, citing the time and money invested in the D.A.R.E. programs greatly outweighing the reported results (West & O’Neal, 2004).

Winners Don't Use Drugs

In 1989, FBI Director William S. Sessions tasked the Office of Public Affairs Director Bob Davenport with creating a public service announcement for kids. Davenport and his team struggled to find a way to reach youths in a personal and effective way. Davenport met with former FBI agent Bob Fay, who was the executive director of the American Amusement Machine association. Davenport discussed the anti-drug PSA to Fay, who offered to carry the message *Winners Don't Use Drugs* on arcade machines (Hutchinson, 2015).

Sessions announced the cooperation with the American Amusement Machine Association to carry the FBI's message at a photo session. Next to Sessions were three arcade machines – *Double Dragon*, *Team Quarterback*, and *Tecmo*. At the beginning of each game, the message *Winners Don't Use Drugs / FBI Director William Sessions* flashed on the screen underneath the FBI crest. Fay said seventeen of twenty arcade game manufacturers agreed to carry the message, and predicted it would be included in 100,000 of approximately 750,000 active arcade machines in the United States. Fay felt that the arcade was a powerful space to utilize in order to reach American youths. (Gordon, 1989).

History of Games and the Arcade

In the early twentieth century, penny arcades exploded in popularity and cropped up all over the United States. Coney Island in New York City, New York, being one of the most notable examples. Pinball machines weren't seen until the 1930s, and the *flippers* weren't added until 1947. As pinball became more complicated in gameplay, elaborate artwork and themes were also added, while eventually including electronic components to enhance gameplay (*The Rise and Fall of the Penny Arcade*). On December 10, 1939, Los Angeles, California passed a

proposition that banned “pin-ball games, marble boards, scoop claws and similar devices” in public spaces. The vote declared them nuisances in public spaces and deemed them subject to seizure by police (Harrison, 2018). Los Angeles wasn’t the only city to ban pinball either. New York City, Chicago, and several other major cities across the United States passed bans on the games in the 1940s. In that time, city governments deemed pinball mostly games of chance, and therefore, too similar to gambling. New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia believed pinball was a mafia-run operation and that children were spending the lunch money their parents gave them on the game. LaGuardia issued a swift mandate that called for the seizure of all pinball machines and arrests of owners. The machines were then destroyed with sledgehammers and dumped in rivers (Paul, 2016). Undoubtedly, the perception of pinball and penny arcades was fueled by the perception of the American pool hall – full of drinking, gambling, and fighting (Dundon, 2017). The ban was eventually lifted in Los Angeles on 1974 (Harrison, 2018) and in New York City in 1976 (Paul, 2016).

While cities were smashing pinball games with sledgehammers, researchers were playing in an entirely different league. In 1958, researcher William Higinbotham at Brookhaven Laboratory had repurposed an analog computer and built an interactive display he called *Tennis for Two* (Amos, 2021; Wolf, 2008). Later, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology leveled-up the interactive game with *Spacewar!* in 1962. Ten years later, the Magnavox Odyssey became the first consumer device to let people play a simple black-and-white tennis game on their home television sets (Amos, 2021). Atari founder Nolan Bushnell was inspired by the Magnavox Odyssey and assigned engineer Allan Alcorn to recreate the gameplay. Within months, Atari had a coin-operated prototype that they placed in a neighborhood bar for user testing. Before long,

Atari had *Pong* in restaurants and bars across the country and kickstarted the first generation of video games (The Strong National Museum of Play, 2021).

Pong was a hugely popular game. While the Magnavox Odyssey sold approximately 330,000 units on release, Atari partnered with the department store Sears to release a home version in 1975 called the *Sears Tele-Game* (The Strong National Museum of Play, 2021). Among all *Pong* home consoles, approximately five million units were sold. Several manufacturers in the United States and abroad cloned the simple mechanics of *Pong* in order to release their own “TV games,” including a Japanese toymaker company called Nintendo that had just begun its foray into video games. As more companies released their own *Pong* games, consumer fatigue set in and in 1977 many companies had dropped their *Pong* consoles and left the TV game industry. The market for home video games had officially crashed (Amos, 2021).

As Japan was recovering economically from World War II during most of the twentieth century, major industrial sectors had been bolstered including manufacturing, electronics, computers, and household appliances. Following expanded trade with the United States, video games had been imported to Japan during the *Pong* era. As previously mentioned, Japanese companies became involved in the production of *Pong* clones. Nintendo made their clones for playing at home, while Taito and the American expatriate-formed Sega created arcade cabinets to distribute to amusement spaces in 1973. By 1974, Japan had already begun to export their arcade games. Taito distributed their games to the United States by the American company Midway, and Nakamura Manufacturing Corporation [Namco] joined the game industry by partnering with Atari and later venturing into their own games. Japan saw modest success locally and with their exports, until Taito released *Space Invaders* in 1978. *Space Invaders* became widely popular both in the United States and Japan, even causing a national shortage of the 100-

yen coin in Japan. From that point forward, Japan dominated the arcade export scene with titles such as *Galaxian*, *Pac-Man*, and *Donkey Kong* (Picard, 2013).

Video games were spreading globally with meteoric popularity. While not every city in the United States banned pinball machines in arcades, the ban no doubt contributed to them being overshadowed by video games in arcades. At the end of the 1970s, video games were the main format of games found in arcades. The United States had 24,000 full arcades, 400,000 street locations, and 1.5 million operational arcade video games in 1981. As demand for games increased, so did the complexity of graphics and gameplay. However, by 1982, most games in arcades were derivative works, with games such as *Donkey Kong* being followed up with *Donkey Kong Jr.*, *Pac-Man* followed up with *Jr. Pac-Man*, and *Dig Dug* followed up with *Dig Dug II* (Wolf, 2008). Advances were also being made in the Atari home console, with many of their popular games being recreated for home gameplay through a process called *porting*. Many games had to undergo significant changes in order to accommodate the limited hardware capabilities of the Atari home console, notably with *Pac-Man* where the home port was almost unrecognizable to the arcade version (Montfort & Bogost, 2009). A video game bust followed in 1983, with Atari suffering a fifty percent loss in revenue, and by 1984, the video game industry as a whole had suffered a loss of three billion dollars. Atari was subsequently divided and sold to businessman Jack Tramiel as Atari Corporation and to Namco as Atari Games (Gallagher & Park, 2002).

American vs Japanese Arcades

While American and Japanese video arcades are comprised of many of the same games, their construction, organization, and cultural contexts must be analyzed separately. Cultural

context is key to the differences in American and Japanese gaming cultures, and the spaces each occupy within their respective public spheres.

During the 1980s, America was in the peak of a suburban growth era. In the decades following World War II, many cities were declining in population and economic growth. For example, Chicago, Illinois lost 250,000 jobs and a quarter of the manufacturing industry between 1967 and 1982. Chicago's population dropped from 3.8 million residents to just under 3 million (McClelland, 2019). Suburban neighborhoods were the primary driver of economic and population growth during the 1970s and the 1980s. Metropolitan areas were decentralized, as were jobs and permanent residences. According to a study by Robin M. Leichenko, central city residents in America declined from forty three percent of the total metro population in 1970 to just thirty six percent by 1990. The Midwestern region saw the sharpest decline, comprising forty two percent in 1970 to just thirty four percent by 1990. Jobs within cities declined while jobs within the suburbs and metro areas increased in the 1980s, and population changes among urban and suburban regions suggest that people were following jobs into the suburbs (Leichenko, 2001).

As Americans left cities in favor of the suburbs, shopping malls served as central locations to shop, eat, socialize, and take part in recreational activities (Riisman, 2013). Arcades, as we knew them in the United States during the 1980s, were born out of the expansion of suburban shopping centers. Shopping malls were being constructed rapidly throughout the United States beginning in the 1970s, and in the 1980s developers had erected 16,000 shopping malls across America. Many of these malls were regional or super-regional malls with hundreds of stores, restaurants, and amusement centers including movie theaters and arcades. Teenagers especially flocked to these malls and shopping centers, earning the nickname *mallrats*. The malls

provided a space for teenagers and youths in suburban America, and arcades acted as a dedicated space for teens in public so that they would not disrupt other shoppers within the mall (Riisman, 2013).

America's rapid population growth post-WWII and subsequent urban flight led developers to build infrastructure separately – residential areas and commercial areas were built explicitly separate from one another. However, in contrast, Japan sought to integrate modernized concepts into their established culture. During Japan's Meiji Restoration in 1868, major urban transformation was undertaken. Emperor Meiji established government in Edo, which was renamed to Tokyo. With rapid industrialization and urbanization occurring across Japan and especially in Tokyo, the Japanese elite decided to update infrastructure from a practical rather than aesthetic approach. New infrastructures such as roads and railways were planned to be unobtrusive to established borders and buildings (Hein, 2010).

The Japanese leaders studied Western urban and architectural structure and form and adapted those principles to their own cultural background and current societal needs. The urban planning that started during the Meiji period reinforced the existing model and culture of Japanese society. Government, business, industry, and transportation sites were integrated alongside high-density, multi-functional, and socially-mixed residential areas. Japan ultimately rejected Western models of large-scale urban design or architectural restrictions in favor of locally appropriate methods. Japan's urban planning model had local interests and highly functional construction ingrained within the culture. Their model allows for modernization as well as individual pursuits. Social space dominates Japanese cities and urban planning (Hein, 2010).

In terms of transportation, by the 1980s Americans owned approximately 121.6 million passenger cars, or roughly one car for every two people (White). Japan, on the other hand, had 21 million passenger cars in 1980 (Yagi & Managi, 2016) with a population of approximately 117 million (*Population Total*), which equals approximately one car for every five people. Comparatively, in Japan in 1979, 51.4 million persons used domestic rail transport (*General Outlook*, 1980), which is just under half the national population. Japan's car ownership was considerably lower per capita than America's in the 1980s, presumably due to the robust public transportation system via railways that were established in decades prior. This pedestrian society plays a critical role in the locations of arcades.

Similar to America, arcades in Japan serve as social spaces. Especially for youths, it's difficult to socialize with friends in homes or apartments due to close proximities and possible noise complaints. Traditional Japanese construction prioritizes air flow over insulation, which has carried over into modern construction as well. As a result, noise can transfer through walls in apartment buildings and outside houses (Knight, 2015). Japanese blog *Kansai & Beyond* writes about the modern Japanese apartment experience, saying "If my neighbor spoke in a normal volume, you can hear him. . . I have called the police on my neighbor several times during the hours between 1AM to 4AM. Each time, the police came," (Kansai & Beyond, 2022). In 2021, a Japanese website created a map called the *Dorozoku Map*, where all noise complaints in the Tokyo area involving loud children are represented as brightly colored dots (Santelices, 2021). If children or teenagers are playing games at home and getting too enthusiastic or rambunctious, it wouldn't be unlikely for a neighbor to call the police and file a complaint.

The Japanese arcade allows, and often forces, customers to raise their voices and shout with their friends. Here, children don't have to worry about a neighbor calling the police on them

and their friends for being too noisy. Japanese arcades are highly social environments necessitating a new word in the Japanese lexicon: *gemusementomo*, which translates to “arcade friend,” (DiNitto, 2015). Friendships are made competing against, teaching, or motivating others in the arcade. Japan to this day has a large competitive arcade fighting game scene as well. Players often go out for drinks with their competitors after tournaments (DiNitto, 2015).

Placement of arcades is equally important to their subsequent role in Japanese society. Osaka and Tokyo have arcades located near major train stations, which encourages gameplay for commuters with spare time to quickly play a few games. Suburban and rural areas in Japan have standalone arcades as well, often still within walking or at least biking distance from homes and neighborhoods (Ashcraft, 2017). Another huge difference between American and Japanese arcades is that the major arcades in cities like Tokyo and Osaka are owned by the developers – Sega, Namco, Taito, and Capcom. These companies have been known to release games in arcades and ask for customer feedback before mass public release. This encourages customers to regularly come back to the arcades for a preview of new games that will be released (Munoz, 2020).

The Rise of Home Video Game Consoles

Arcades were still important for gaming enthusiasts in the 1980s and into the early 1990s. Japanese game company SNK released the home console equivalent to the arcade experience in 1990 called the Neo Geo AES. The Neo Geo AES was an attempt to fill a gaming niche that no other home console at the time could fill. The AES could recreate arcade games for home gameplay through the porting process. The quality of these ports was significantly higher than

the Atari home console could provide. The Neo Geo AES was designed to be indistinguishable from the Neo Geo MVS arcade cabinet from a gameplay perspective (Nicoll, 2016).

Benjamin Nicoll in the article *Bridging the Gap: The Neo Geo, the Media Imaginary, and the Domestication of Arcade Games* makes a compelling argument that the Neo Geo destabilized the arcade gaming industry upon release in America. The target audience of their home console was the “hard-core” arcade game player, with popular titles such as *King of Fighters*, *Fatal Fury*, and *Metal Slug* (Nicoll, 2016). Despite the lack of spontaneous gameplay often found in arcades, the Neo Geo AES brought arcade gameplay into the homes of Americans, curtailing the desire to spend more money at the arcade on a game one might own at home.

Despite the dramatic decline in video game sales in 1983 (Gallagher & Park, 2002), a monolith had appeared on the horizon in Japan: the Nintendo Famicom. With a launch price of 14,800 Yen [approximately \$111 USD at the time of writing], Nintendo saw a massive success in the Japanese market. While there was stiff competition in the 8-bit gaming market, the Famicom was different. The controller was a new design that hadn't been seen in the industry before, and the game options were full of strong first-party games. The Famicom had market control by 1985 with the top selling game being *Super Mario Bros.*, and in that same year, the console was remodeled and sold to American markets as the Nintendo Entertainment System [NES]. With a similar library of first-party games translated to English, the NES sold more than 30 million units in the United States [over 61 million units when combined with Famicom sales in Japan] and established Nintendo as an innovator in the gaming industry (Amos, 2021). Nintendo would see titles such as *Super Mario Bros.*, *The Legend of Zelda*, and *Final Fantasy* turn major profit on the Famicom/NES. These titles, as well as games like *Sonic the Hedgehog* from Sega, Nintendo's largest competitor, provided players a unique gaming experience with

humor, playfulness, and more “personality” than some of the hardcore games of the time (Picard, 2013).

In 1983, John W. Trinkaus published an article titled *Arcade Video Games: An Informal Look*. In this brief article, he suggests that the coin-operated gaming industry may be nearing a breaking point with the introduction of home video game consoles. A study he conducted in Fall 1982 at an arcade near a train station in New York City suggests that the arcade games got the most gameplay during morning rush hour, lunchtime, and evening rush hour. He concludes that while the home video game consoles will probably hurt income of coin-operated arcade games, there is still enough popularity with the machines to keep them in business (Trinkaus, 1983).

Arcades as Spaces for Youths

From 1981 to 1983, Americans spent over eight billion dollars in quarters annually to play video arcade machines, with most of these players being teenagers. In a 1983 study mentioned by Wigand et al., interviews with 973 teenagers found that only half the time teenagers spent in the arcade was actually used on playing games. The other half of that time was spent watching others play and socializing. The authors argue that arcades represented a healthy atmosphere where youths who might be ostracized or withdrawn find friends or socialize because the environment of arcades encourages observation and social interaction. Through their own research, Wigand et al. found people who play video games in an arcade engaged in more non-mediated communication than those who prefer to play video games on home consoles. The findings in their study suggest several developmental needs are fulfilled in youths when visiting video arcades and playing video games (Wigand et al., 1986). These findings are backed up with research done in the United Kingdom as well.

A study by Sue Fisher in the United Kingdom in 1990 showed that sixty percent of adolescents studied had visited arcades within the past year, twenty five percent visited arcades at least once per week, and nine percent visited arcades three times per week or more. The study found that video arcades ranked only second to free public spaces as the most frequently visited spaces for leisure. As for the motivations for visiting the arcades, fifty eight percent reported going just to meet their friends. Thirty eight percent reported that they visit just to watch others play games, and notably, seven percent reported going to smoke cigarettes and six percent reported going to drink alcohol (Fisher, 1995).

Despite the small number of respondents reporting that they visit arcades to engage in smoking and drinking, the reputation permeated the collective conscience of parents and adults in the public spaces. Riisman del says the story of the video arcade in suburban America was not one of economic triumph or political compromise, but rather an example of the shifting perception of teens and suburban public space and the new policing of those people and spaces in the 1980s (Riisman del, 2013). While many people embraced the emerging video games with fascination and enjoyment, the mental image of smashed pinball machines and the unsavory behavior found in pool halls of the 1920s still lingered in the minds of parents and adults.

Community Resistance to Arcades

Public fear of teenagers gathering and socializing ran rampant through America. Rumors of mall parking lots being used as a gathering place for young drinkers, vandalizers, and combinations of the two abounded. Fights would break out at malls on occasion, and large numbers of teenagers implied a domination of the space. Stories and rumors of misbehavior and crime circulated newspapers, fueled in part by films such as *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*

which depicted an exaggerated perception of the sexuality of teenagers in the 1980s (Riisman del, 2013).

In turn, these video arcades became places of scrutiny in the American eye. Increased policing and observation drove teens to stay home and play games on home consoles instead of under the surveilling eye of mall security. Many malls feared the growing number of teenagers, thinking they would be “uncontrollable” in numbers too large (Riisman del, 2013). Some communities limited access to arcades to customers aged seventeen or older, while others outright banned arcades in an attempt to protect their community from the dangers of video arcades. Video games were often blamed for increased crime, causing aggression and violence, encouraging school truancy, damaging eyesight, wasting time, disturbing the peace, and being inherently evil (Wigand et al., 1986). In Japan, the story wasn’t entirely different, either. In the 1980s, many arcades in Japan reflected the dimly-lit, low-staffed atmospheres that were present in America. In a 2019 interview, President and CEO of Bandai Namco Hitoshi Hagiwara said, “A lot of arcades didn’t have the staff or were dark with lots of shadowy corners. Incidents happened. Now there has been a big shift toward making arcades safe, wholesome places. They’re much lighter and cleaner, and they always have staff keeping an eye out. It’s a big change,” (Hussain, 2020).

While the move to home gaming in America shifted the mindset of the public away from teen behaviors, arcade owners had to pivot their operations in favor of a broader audience. Arcades made a small comeback as family-friendly venues. The updated arcades favored casual gaming experiences with a focus on players of all ages (Riisman del, 2013). Nolan Bushnell, Atari cofounder, founded Pizza Time Theatre in 1977. Through several iterations of the business, the pizza restaurant and arcade rebranded in 1992 as Chuck E. Cheese and exploded in

popularity (Taylor, 2020). Shifting toward family-friendly atmospheres gave way to new arcades such as the growth of Chuck E. Cheese and Just Say NO! family arcade in Louisville, Kentucky.

A column by *RePlay Magazine* editor-in-chief Marcus Webb titled *Arcadia* appeared in the February 1996 issue of *NEXT Generation*. Webb states that the arcade industry has hit “rock bottom,” seeing a slump starting in mid-1994 that’s only paralleled by the coin-op crash of 1983. He states that gamers are not visiting arcades in nearly any way that they used to, and arcade owners are stating a loss of income between fifteen and fifty percent when compared to 1993. 125 arcade chains affiliated with Time Out, Space Port, and Exhilarama had filed Chapter 11 bankruptcy in November of 1995 (Webb, 1996).

The Japanese Arcade

Arcades in America and Japan seem to mirror each other in many ways up until the 1990s. From there, the gap widens and Japanese arcades are clearly more successful and staying open longer. One of the ways Japanese arcades differ from American arcades is the structure itself. Arcades in Japan are often multi-level buildings with each level consisting of different types of games. In a five-level arcade, the first level would be crane games, pachinko, and casual prize-based games often similar to those within a family-friendly arcade in America. The second level would house rhythm games and racing games, while the third level would contain more hard-core games like fighting games, puzzles, and card games. The fourth level would have simulator games, and the fifth level would be for the classic arcade games (Munoz, 2020). Games in the lower levels tend to be more popular than the games in the upper levels, which helps drive the profit margins up while still allowing space for smaller niches within the arcade clientele (Hussain, 2020).

Another way the Japanese arcades encourage customers to visit is by providing experiences only available in arcades. Crane games are just one example of an experience that cannot be replicated at home. Many arcade games in Japan also encourage the usage and collection of IR-chipped cards that interact with game cabinets to save profiles, share scores, and interact in other ways with the games (Ashcraft, 2017). There are plenty of smaller arcades in Japan as well. One example is Mikado amusement arcade in the Takadanobaba district of Tokyo, which is known worldwide in the fighting game scene for their tournaments in games like *Street Fighter*, *King of Fighters*, and *Samurai Showdown*. Mikado's founder Minoru Ikeda credits the fighting game community and the tournaments for keeping his arcade in business. Ikeda says, "You can only experience the pleasure of competing against other real people and winning and losing at an arcade," (Hussain, 2020).

An additional advantage that Japanese arcades have is their appeal to a wider age range. Since 2010, Japan has seen a rise in elderly customers enjoying arcades. To further encourage this clientele to visit, some arcades have begun offering blankets to elderly customers in case they get cold, decreasing the difficulty on certain games, and providing them with softer chairs for comfort (Ashcraft, 2017).

Third Places

Sociologist Ray Oldenburg coined the term "third place" as an essential fixture of one's social infrastructure, or a space that supports and sustains social life. Specifically, this would be a space outside one's home or workplace, such as a library, park, coffee shop, café, bar, barber shop, church, gym, or mall (Oldenburg, 1989). Third places unify communities and support neighborhoods. Unfortunately, most residential areas post-World War II have been designed to

protect people from community rather than build it. Urban sprawl has led to expansion of consumer space but little room for occupation of space, or building community within the space (Oldenburg, 1999).

Ray Oldenburg writes that maintaining these spaces is critical for a number of reasons:

1. Third places help unify neighborhoods and people get to know one another. In areas where third places are absent, people will live in the same vicinity of others for years without getting to know one another. In some instances, knowing too many people can be seen as nosy.
2. Third places serve as “ports of entry” for newcomers or people passing through. For new residents, a third place is the best spot to get to know people in the area, learn the local culture, and ease assimilation.
3. Third places are “sorting” areas. While the spaces serve to promote a general feeling of association, they are also places where special interests are able to proliferate. One can find someone with similar hobbies and interests within those spaces and serve as outlets for those interests.
4. Third places bridge generation gaps. In prewar days, children and adults would be in soda fountains, diners, family taverns, and neighborhood markets together. Children could learn from adults other than their own parents. Between 1965 and 1985, the amount of time parents spent with children was cut in half, and the amount of time spent with adults outside their homes was reduced to almost zero.
5. Third places help take care of neighborhoods. People were able to keep an eye on each other and the spaces they occupied, and people could do favors for people in

their community. These spaces could also act as gathering places in emergencies or disasters when a social support system would be necessary.

6. Third places facilitate political debate. Historically, these spaces acted as forum for political debate and discussion. Oldenburg wrote his 1996 article that at the time, political literacy was on the decline. Information can be transmitted easier and opinions can be refined when there is room for political forum rather than simply listening to the television.
7. Third places reduce the cost of living. Third places humanize our neighbors and create natural support groups or “mutual aid societies.” We are inclined to work together in a more collectivist manner and collect time-saving, labor-saving, and money-saving help and advice.
8. Third places are entertaining. The sustaining action of conversation can range from passionate to light-hearted to serious and fun. Television offers our principal entertainment today, however, third places offer us entertainment with other humans in a face-to-face setting where we can interact or simply observe.
9. Third places offer friendship. Perhaps not a long-term friendship or a “best friend” per say, but the social atmospheres of third places offer a simpler way of widening our social circle in a fluid and natural manner.
10. Third places are important for retired people. They offer a means to stay in touch with others and feel that they are connected and contributing to their community after they end their careers.

(Oldenburg, 1999).

The closure of third places can have detrimental side-effects on well-being. Finlay et al. explore the implications of the closure of third spaces and health. Neighborhoods with limited access to resources are associated with poorer physical and mental health conditions. Individuals who lose access to services, goods, amenities, and recreation also lose protective factors and a feeling of belonging. These can be increasingly problematic for older adults, children chronically ill, and socioeconomically marginalized (Finlay et al., 2019). A diminished social infrastructure can exacerbate certain societal issues such as isolation, crime, addiction, sociopolitical polarization, inequality, and even contribute to climate change (Klinenberg, 2019).

A 2020 article from City Journal contextualizes the need for the third place during the COVID-19 era: “Psychologically, happy times in third places can help instill Burkean attachments to one’s own home and community. At the societal level, third places build social capital in two ways. Regular patrons often develop strong bonds of familiarity, trust, and friendship, forming the foundation for mutual aid. Third places are also forums for introducing people of different occupations and backgrounds, thus expanding personal networks, disseminating new knowledge, and inspiring a sense of neighborhood unity,” (Ketcham, 2020).

Defining Prosocial Behavior

To precede the next section, it is important to define “prosocial behavior.” While it is not an exhaustive definition, Pfattheicher et al. (2002) defines “prosocial behavior” by how a behavior or action fits within a few key guidelines: i. intentions and motives, ii. costs and benefits, and iii. societal context. “Intentions” refers to the intention to generate positive welfare for others. Batson and Powell (2003) emphasize that “prosocial behavior covers the broad range of actions *intended* to benefit one or more people other than oneself,” (Batson & Powell, 2003).

“Costs and benefits” can be simplified to the “consequences of the behavior,” (Pfattheicher et al., 2002). Including “costs and benefits” as part of the definition necessitates that to be considered prosocial behavior, an action must result in tangible, positive consequences. Finally, “societal context” puts the behavior in terms of the value of the society the action is being taken in. The behavior must face approval: “no more, and no less, than behavior that is valued by the individual’s society,” (Dovidio, 1984).

Video Games and Prosocial Behavior

The connection to violence and video games most often stems from Anderson and Bushman’s General Aggression Model [GAM] which suggests that violent stimuli, e.g. violent video games, increases both short-term and long-term aggressive behaviors in individuals (Allen et al., 2018). Given the diversity of content within video games, Buckley and Anderson sought to update the concept of GAM and created the General Learning Model [GLM] to explain the influence of prosocial content of video games and prosocial behavior. (Zheng et al., 2020).

In 1997, Connecticut Sen. Joe Lieberman referred to violent video games as “digital poison.” In response, Doug Lowenstein, president of the Interactive Digital Software Association, remarked that “parents need to exercise control over what their kids are doing on the Internet, just as they need to exercise control over the games their children play, and how much time they spend playing those games,” (Curley, 1997). Similarly, in 2005, then-Senator Hillary Clinton echoed a quote that “Playing violent video games is to an adolescent’s violent behavior what smoking tobacco is to lung cancer,” (Vitka, 2005). That same year, Senators Hillary Clinton, Joe Lieberman, Tim Johnson and Evan Bayh introduced the *Family Entertainment Protection Act*, which would penalize individuals and businesses who sold M

[mature] or AO-rated [adult-only] games to minors, (Chalk, 2007). Despite the claims made by politicians and media, youth violence rates have steadily dropped while video game consumption grows exponentially. The release of popular violent video games is also associated with immediate declines in societal violence (DeCamp & Ferguson, 2016).

Research has been conducted for decades on the connection between media and violence, often rife with inconsistency. Research often concludes a link between video games and feelings of aggression, although the connections are generally weak or over-simplified (Scott, 1994). However, more recent research suggests that there is less of a link between gaming behaviors and reasoning in real life. Video games are, generally speaking, poor platforms for teaching antisocial behaviors (Garcia et al., 2021).

In fact, recent research suggests that cooperation rates are higher among individuals who play video games for longer periods of time (Mengel, 2014). One of the most important factors in the correlation to prosocial behavior and video gaming is parental involvement. Parents who are more involved with the types of games their children consume tend to be more comfortable with the content they are consuming (Kutner, Olson, Warner, & Hertzog, 2008). Civic engagement is greater in children whose parents are playing games with them, regardless of the level of violent content (Ferguson & Garza, 2011). This suggests that parental involvement in hobbies and media consumed is more important in the resulting behavior of the child rather than the content of the media being consumed. Several studies have shown the antithesis of what most gaming critics have claimed: prosocial thoughts and behavior can actually be increased by playing video games, especially if there is a prosocial theme or message to the media (Gitter et al., 2013).

Parental involvement has proven to be critical to contextualizing violent content, but sibling co-playing is another critical component to the effects of violent content as demonstrated by Coyne et al. (2015). In their study, Coyne et al. found that when siblings play games together, regardless of age, sex, or game content, it strengthens their sibling relationship. Specifically, for males, playing violent video games with brothers decreased sibling conflict (Coyne et al., 2015).

Zheng et al. conclude that multiplayer gaming can promote cooperative behavior in the real world. Players in two-player gaming modes are more inclined to work in cooperation because of their expectation to reciprocate behaviors. The work by Zheng et al. also indicates that single-player gaming has no effect on prosocial or antisocial behaviors (Zheng et al., 2020). Arcade-style violent video games do not diminish prosocial behaviors, as reported by Greitemeyer and Osswald (2010). Extending the gameplay to modern graphics and games with ultra-violent content, the results are still consistent. Tear and Nielsen (2014) found that individuals who played ultra-violent games and those that played non-violent video games exhibited similar prosocial behaviors within their measurements. In fact, they found that individuals who played ultra-violent games tended to donate more money to charities than those who don't play ultra-violent video games (Tear & Nielsen, 2014).

Researchers Harrington and O'Connell sought to find a link between video games and the teaching of prosocial behavior. They acknowledge several studies that find a link between violent video games and an increase in aggression as well as a decrease in prosocial behavior. However, they also acknowledge that several studies before theirs did not maintain controlled variables they deemed crucial such as socioeconomic status or parental education. In their study, they had their participants, all students in the Republic of Ireland aged between 9 and 15 years old, self-record gameplay and the behavior they practiced within their games of choice. They

also formed metrics to measure empathetic behaviors, prosocial behavior, and use of violence. The study was consistent with previous findings that violent video game usage was negatively associated with prosocial behavior, although the link was weak. Similarly, they found that prosocial video games were positively associated with prosocial behavior (Harrington & O'Connell, 2016).

Prosocial behavior and video games are important to analyze as well. Cooperation and friendship can be encouraged through video games, as Verheijen et al. examine in their study using *Mario Kart Double Dash!!* as a barometer for the effects video games can have on friendship quality and social behavior (Verheijen et al., 2018).

Previous research has echoed that of Douglas Gentile (2011) who proposes that there are at least 5 dimensions on which video games affect the players: the amount of play, the content of play, the game context, the structure of the game, and the mechanics of gameplay. Gentile defines content as the nature of the gameplay, whether it's puzzle-based, reading, math, or violent. Context is defined as how the game fits the concepts of gameplay into the narrative, using "capture the flag" mode in *Halo* as an example of contextualizing a well-known game (capture the flag) into the first-person shooter gameplay of the *Halo* franchise. Structure is defined as the *formal features* used to convey information to the players. This most often applies to storytelling elements and implied or explicit information, which has effects on the user interface of the game. Mechanics are defined as the means with which the game is played, whether it's with a handheld controller, mouse and keyboard, motion controls, etc. Gentile explains that each of these dimensions must be examined when critiquing a video game, and determining if a game is "good" or "bad" based solely on one of these dimensions is simplistic (Gentile, 2011).

Just Say NO! Family Arcade

Just Say NO! Family Arcade operated between 1989 and 1996. Owners Jack and Debbie Turner opened the arcade with an anti-drug theme so that it was a family-friendly atmosphere. On February 25, 1989, the Turners opened the Just Say NO! Family Arcade, which was located at 5334 South 3rd Street in Louisville, Kentucky (*RePlay Magazine*, 1989). Jack Turner was given permission to use the anti-drug branding by the Just Say NO! Foundation. According to *RePlay Magazine* (1989), it was, and still is, the only anti-drug-themed arcade in the United States. Before opening the arcade, Turner sent a letter in the mail to the Just Say NO! Foundation explaining the concept of his arcade and requesting permission to use the branding in his arcade. He explained that he would provide a rack with brochures, assistance to people with drug addictions, and information on how to stay off drugs. After several weeks, Turner received a call from a representative at the White House. The individual said his letter had been passed on to Nancy Reagan, who read his letter and expressed her support for his business plan. The representative from the White House also explained that the Just Say NO! branding was in the public domain; therefore, he was free to open his arcade under the Just Say NO! branding without any additional paperwork (Truman, 2022).

Featured inside were posters and a pamphlet display, all of which were donated by local institutions such as the Jefferson County school system and public libraries. Some of the included materials were from the American Cancer Society and Mothers Against Drunk Driving warning of the dangers of smoking and alcohol abuse. Anecdotally, Turner explained that he had young arcade goers quit smoking after visiting. Because there was a no-smoking rule in the arcade, if someone wanted to take a smoke break, they would have to give up their machine and

go outside to smoke. Turner explained that this was the primary motivator for the kids who came to the arcade to give up smoking (*RePlay Magazine*, 1989).

The tokens used in the arcade feature a general prohibition sign overtop a syringe, cigarette, cocktail, and pills encircled with “JUST SAY NO! A FAMILY ARCADE / LOUISVILLE, KY” on one side, and “GAMES PEOPLE PLAY” (TokenCatalog). [Games People Play is a distributor of coin-operated arcade machines and token systems. The placement of GAMES PEOPLE PLAY on the back side of the token indicates that Games People Play manufactured the tokens (Games People Play).]



Left: Just Say NO! A Family Arcade token, front and back sides.

*Images sourced from
TokenCatalog.com*

Initially, Turner had pushback from the community on opening the arcade. Civic groups in Louisville wanted to prevent him from opening an arcade at the Iroquois Manor shopping center, but later came out in support of the anti-drug theme. The opening day saw over 300 customers and interest from church groups for event rental. Turner claims to have turned a profit as early as opening day on the arcade (*RePlay Magazine*, 1989).

Just Say NO! Family Arcade owner and operator Jack Turner first started in the arcade business by installing several coin-operated arcade games which operated within local

businesses, restaurants, and within the University of Louisville campus. Turner's first standalone arcade was the Just Say NO! Family Arcade located in the Iroquois Manor shopping center in Louisville's Iroquois neighborhood. From the beginning, that arcade was set to be a family-oriented establishment. Turner says what he operated what would now be known as a Family Entertainment Center. The inspiration, Turner says, to open an anti-drug themed arcade came from raising his step-son: he wanted to open an arcade and not have to worry about developing a negative reputation within the community, and he wanted to set a positive example and prevent his step-son from partaking in illicit drug abuse (Truman, 2022). "There's nothing else in Louisville that gives kids this message," Turner said to RePlay Magazine in 1989 (*RePlay Magazine*, 1989).

Turner took his role in an anti-drug environment seriously. "I had off duty officers there on a regular basis. It cost me an arm and leg to do it, but they were worth every penny," (Truman, 2022). The officer would park the cruiser out in front of the arcade on days they were present (Truman, 2022). The Just Say NO! arcade quickly grew a reputation as an establishment with no tolerance for illicit substances or unruly behavior. The arcade held to strict rules which they referred to as the "ABC's" – "no alcohol, no bad language, no cigarettes, no drugs, and no exceptions,"



Just Say NO! "ABCs" sign – RePlay Magazine 1989.

(*RePlay Magazine*, 1994). Turner explains that the rules, while sometimes difficult to enforce, encouraged the family atmosphere he was striving for (*RePlay Magazine*, 1994).

Striving to create a positive, family-friendly atmosphere was enough of a success that Turner was able to expand the arcade into a local franchise with two more locations in Louisville: one in the Big's Middletown Station shopping center and one at the downtown Louisville Galleria (*RePlay Magazine*, 1994). The original Iroquois location was located in a shopping strip, which was situated within a residential area (Truman, 2022). Just Say NO! arcade operated as a third place within the neighborhood, as Turner says people from the neighborhood walked to the arcade on a regular basis. Other locations, while they were less pedestrian-friendly, had regular customers who would interact with employees and other customers. Teenagers patronized the arcade on their own, alongside families with parents and children. “[it was like] the old TV show *Cheers*. It was a neighborhood bar. Everybody knew you. Everybody knows your name, that kind of thing. We had customers like that in all of our locations, and that’s something to this day I dearly miss,” (Truman, 2022).

NARC

Some of the games in the arcade included Operation Wolf (*RePlay Magazine*, 1989), Primal Rage (*RePlay Magazine*, 1994), Simple Simon (*RePlay Magazine*, 1994), and WrestleFest (*RePlay Magazine*, 1994). The featured game of the Iroquois Center Just Say NO! arcade location was the 1988 scrolling fighter game *NARC* (*RePlay Magazine*, 1989). *NARC* was produced by Williams Electronic Games, Inc. as a one- or two-player simultaneous side-scroller where the players take on the role of a futuristic police officer. Players are taken through an “urban wasteland of drug dealers, smugglers, crazed killers, and desperate bad guys,” (*NARC*).

The players move through the game in run-and-gun style gameplay with the goal being to take down a criminal empire known as K.R.A.K. Players choose between playing as ‘Hit Man’ or ‘Max Force,’ both equipped with machine guns and rocket-launchers. Players have the option to either arrest or kill the antagonists, which include drug dealers, feral dogs, and homeless people. Eventually, players make their way to the kingpin of the K.R.A.K. operation, called ‘Mr. Big’ (NARC). The game’s promotional flyer advertises the premise of the 2-player cooperative game as protecting innocent civilians from the “junkies, punks, thieves, psychos and murderers” who “must all face the elite team’s special brand of justice,” (Williams Electronics Inc., 1988).

NARC was the subject of both high controversy and high praise when it was released. There were rampant visuals of blood and gore throughout the game, and the graphics were, at the time, hyper-realistic. It was often put in the same category as the also controversial game *Mortal Kombat*. However, unlike *Mortal Kombat*, some parents praised NARC for its anti-drug message (Hill, 2015). One review determines that NARC is decidedly not a game for kids. They recall highly realistic blood and gore, boundless gun violence, and sexual imagery (Conway). The game was also ported to the Nintendo Entertainment System, but the drug content was removed. However, the blood and gore were not censored (Giant Bomb). In the context of the Just Say NO! arcade, it was the centerpiece for its prosocial messaging.

NARC’s Possible Link to Prosocial Behavior

Besides the content of the game influencing prosocial behavior, it would be helpful to examine whether the gameplay mechanics itself promote prosocial behavior. NARC, after all, was a brutally violent video game but it included simultaneous cooperative gameplay (NARC). To determine this link, Verheijen, Stoltz, van den Berg, and Cillessen performed a study to see if

cooperative or competitive gameplay affected friendship quality and social behavior. Their study used the game *Mario Kart Double Dash!!* and the subjects were randomly paired and assigned to solitary, competitive, or cooperative gameplay. At the end of gameplay, they answered a series of questions related to how much they liked their partner, how much they trusted them, and how connected they felt to determine a friendship score. Prosocial behavior was measured through a task at the end of the study where they were given two empty envelopes with ten tickets. One envelope had their name on it and the other had their partner's name. They were instructed that they could put as many tickets in either envelope as they saw fit, but each ticket in their partner's envelope counted as two tickets (Verheijen et al., 2018).

The study found a stronger overall link between friendship level and prosocial behavior with cooperative play than with competitive or solitary play. Positive results between players were even higher if there was prosocial behavior occurring during gameplay. Prosocial behavior during gameplay includes encouragement, teamwork, compliments, and cooperation. However, during cooperative gameplay, there were results on the other end of the spectrum. Players would score lower with friendship level and prosocial behavior if one teammate was excessively dominant or aggressive. While there is a trend toward cooperative gameplay encouraging prosocial behavior, the way the game is played is equally important (Verheijen et al., 2018).

Just Say NO! Arcade as a Prosocial Third Place

Just Say NO! was operating in its neighborhoods as a third place. Given the family-friendly atmosphere, parents were able to trust their children to walk to the arcade and, oftentimes, go to the arcade with them. As Turner stated in his interview, there were customers he knew by name and customers knew each other (Truman, 2022). The Just Say NO! arcades

shared the concept of *gemusentomo* arcade friends that are present in Japanese arcades (DiNitto, 2015). Oldenburg (1999) identifies third places as being a space for friendship, entertainment, and a space for a shared hobby of playing video games.

As previously mentioned, the amount of time spent playing video games tends to correlate positively with cooperative behavior (Mengel, 2014). Children who play video games with their parents are less likely to be susceptible to the negative effects of playing games, even violent ones (Kutner, Olson, Warner, & Hertzog, 2008). Similarly, parents engaging with their children by playing video games together positively correlates with civic engagement in children when compared to children who do not play video games with their parents (Ferguson & Garza, 2011). Given the family-oriented atmosphere of the Just Say NO! arcade and the tendency for one or both parents to play games with their children (*RePlay Magazine*, 1989), it is safe to assume these positive, prosocial correlations would apply in the Just Say NO! arcade. Parents spending time with their children in a prosocial atmosphere with anti-drug messaging likely opened dialogue between children and parents about drug and alcohol abuse, in a similar way that parents playing video games with their children opens discussion on actions experienced in video games and the way they translate to the real world (Kutner, Olson, Warner, & Hertzog, 2008).

Siblings playing video games together strengthens the relationship as noted by Coyne et al. (2015). Again, following the theme of the family arcade, siblings were strengthening their bonds while playing games together. Several games at the Just Say NO! arcade allowed for co-op, including *NARC (NARC)*, *Operation Wolf (RePlay Magazine, 1989)*, *Moto Frenzy (RePlay Magazine, 1994)*, and *WrestleFest (RePlay Magazine, 1994)*. Even if players were playing

against each other instead of cooperatively, this gameplay could improve friendship quality and social behavior (Verheijen et al., 2018).

Jack Turner has provided anecdotal evidence for the effectiveness of the Just Say NO! arcade franchises. As previously mentioned, Turner reported multiple customers who were regular patrons approached him and told him that they had quit smoking. Their reasoning being that smoke breaks cut into too much of their time playing the games and they would have to give up their machines (*RePlay Magazine*, 1989). Strict rules and enforcement from off-duty police kept any unruly behavior to a minimum. “If I ever caught wind of it, I put a stop to it. There were a lot of people that I banned from the facilities. . . There was always a little drama here and there, but that was just nature of the beast. But when people saw that I was serious about it, I think then we started getting a lot more support,” (Truman, 2022). There was community resistance to the Just Say NO! arcade opening in 1989, given that the public perception of arcades was negative. However, as the community noticed that Turner was serious about his commitment to a drug-free arcade that catered to families, the community took notice and supported his business (*RePlay Magazine*, 1989).

Research Shortcomings

The most obvious issue with my research was focusing on qualitative research derived from the owner and operator of the Just Say NO! arcade, Jack Turner. Quantitative research would have been much more effective in making an argument on the effectiveness of the arcade in terms of preventing drug abuse. Future research would ideally require identifying former patrons of the arcade and surveying their recreational tobacco and drug use in comparison with national averages or other local populations who did not patronize the arcade. While this was

part of the original plan, reliably sourcing a pool of individuals who were former patrons of the Just Say NO! Arcade proved to be a difficult task.

Reliance on anecdotal evidence for changed habits is admittedly a weak argument for smoking cessation from teenagers (*RePlay Magazine*, 1989). However, Turner implied that multiple individuals approached him and told him they quit smoking. Assuming these customers were regular patrons, a trusted relationship is implied, suggesting these were genuine accounts.

Wagner & Sundar's research suggests that an individual's response to anti-drug advertising is based on a personal bias rather than persuasion (Wagner & Sundar, 2008). One possible flaw in looking to the clientele of the Just Say NO! arcade is that the individuals who chose to patronize that arcade specifically may have a personal bias against illicit drugs. Instead of transforming the clientele, the arcade could have potentially attracted a specific demographic while individuals who were choosing to partake in illicit drug use were patronizing another arcade where they knew they could partake in drugs, alcohol, and tobacco use on the property.

Conclusion

Arcades and video games in America have a troubled past. From the first pinball machines to the era of home consoles, games were smashed and dumped in a river (Paul, 2016), the home console market crashed (Amos, 2021), and arcade games crashed in 1994 (Webb, 1996). The public perception of arcades was undoubtedly fueled by the seedy underbelly of modern society that was the pool hall (Dundon, 2017).

The fear of video gaming technology coupled with the fears of out-of-control drug use also shaped the American landscape. Drug laws targeted minority groups, including the first anti-drug laws established targeting opium and Chinese immigrants (Mark, 1975) to the anti-cocaine

laws targeting people of color in the South (Hart, 2014). These fears were reignited by the Nixon administration in the 1970s with the establishment of the Office of Drug Abuse Law Enforcement in 1972 and the Drug Enforcement Administration in 1973 (Public Broadcasting Service). These fears were further fueled when Cleveland Browns football player Don Rogers and the University of Maryland basketball star Len Bias both died as a result of cocaine overdoses in June 1986. President Ronald Reagan signed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 in an effort to combat crack cocaine (Lassiter, 2002) and First Lady Nancy Reagan led schools and America's youth to a drug-free lifestyle with the Just Say NO! campaign (The Just Say No Foundation, 1986).

Anti-drug advertising also has a troubled past; however, evidence shows that anti-drug advertising can have more tangible negative effects than video games. One theory is anti-drug advertising makes drug abuse seem more commonplace than it truly is, which leads individuals tend to believe their peers are already using marijuana; making them more likely to take part themselves (Hornik, 2011). Studies have shown that anti-drug advertising can pique curiosity in those who would not have been exposed to drugs otherwise (Wagner & Sundar, 2008) and programs such as D.A.R.E. do not provide statistically significant improvements in drug use among youths (West & O'Neal, 2004).

Louisville's Just Say NO! Family Arcade provided a safe place for youths and families to play games and be entertained without the concern of unruly behavior or illegal substance abuse. Patrons must follow their strict "ABC's" – "no alcohol, no bad language, no cigarettes, no drugs, and no exceptions," (*RePlay Magazine*, 1994). Presence of off-duty police helped enforce and prevent any activity that Turner was trying to prevent, which helped put parents at ease when their children visited the arcade (Truman, 2022).

Just Say NO! arcade acted as a third place for families and teenagers in Louisville, Kentucky. It was a place where youths and families could meet with friends, be entertained, socialize, share a hobby, and meet others within their community. Turner had regular clientele from the Iroquois neighborhood, with whom he was able to form personal relationships with (Truman, 2022). These elements are crucial for a healthy third place (Oldenburg, 1999). Third places help promote prosocial behavior and build communities, just as playing games with others promotes healthy interpersonal relationships (Coyne et al., 2015), (Verheijen et al., 2018).

Despite the positive effects on the community that Just Say NO! arcade may have had, a shifting preference for insulated, home gaming experiences ultimately beat arcades as the preferred source of gaming entertainment.

A resistance to give youths their own space to interact and entertain themselves led to difficulties in arcade businesses to open, operate, and maintain customers. “The story of the video arcade in suburban America is not one of economic triumph or political compromise, but rather an example of the shifting perception of teens and suburban public space and the new policing of those people and spaces in the 1980s,” (Riisman del, 2013). Examination of scholarly research, industry-focused publications, and gaming history paints a complicated picture. The American psyche as it relates to video games vastly opposes the Japanese video game mentality. Japanese arcades are places of socialization with mixed age groups, and spaces for youths to gather and socialize without being a nuisance at home. Opposite of this, arcades in America were more or less a type of designated spaces to contain teenagers, especially in shopping malls.

Through this research, I have found my original hypothesis to be plausible. Third places play a critical role in building community and prosocial behavior. Cooperative and simultaneous gameplay are able to strengthen interpersonal relationships, and when games are played with

children and parents, they positively correlate to prosocial behavior. The Just Say NO! arcades functioned as positive family environments where youths and families could interact within their communities, and parents were able to help their children navigate possible questions about alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug abuse.

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