

Learning the Language of Justice Through Play

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ABSTRACT

Video games are often seen as a medium for entertainment. However, there is an emerging genre of video games that are designed to raise awareness about important social issues like poverty, immigration, and war. These games use persuasive strategies for engaging communities in conversations about human rights issues. This paper provides analyses of the educational strategies of twenty-one human rights video games on the *Games For Change* website. Our analysis reveals that the ways these games increase cognition, increase empathy and teach affective responses, as well as teach players how to participate in social change processes, serve to educate for behavioral change. Through this medium, players are immersed in simulations which give them a language to not only understand the dynamics at play in issues such as deportation, but also offers players insight into how to change these dynamics and why it is important.

Keywords: prosocial games, social change, educational strategies, human rights

INTRODUCTION

Playing video games is a popular form of American entertainment, and according to the Entertainment Software Association's Essential Facts report, 67% of households possess video game playing devices with the average age of a gamer being thirty-five. In 2016, according to this report, video games were a 30.5-billion-dollar industry. Additionally, ninety-one percent of U.S. children ages 2-17 play video games (Van Camp, 2011). Given this popularity, many scholars have studied the cultural and social impact of mainstream video games because, until recently, the suspicion was that they negatively affect players contributing to anti-social behaviors (De Simone, 2014; Passmore & Holder, 2014). Some gaming scholars have begun to focus on the positive benefits of playing video games, also known as prosocial games, and note the need for more research in this area (Casvean, 2016; Flanagan, 2006; Passmore & Holder, 2014). While some prosocial game scholarship focuses on the benefits of playing video games,

other prosocial game scholarship such as ours, asks questions about how video game play can promote social change. Human rights video games are a narrow subset of social change types of games. We suspect that understanding the strategies used in this narrow subset of social change games can provide insight into how game makers are communicating to audiences not only about the significance of human rights issues, but also ways to think about addressing social justice. Some video game designers and organizations are trying to use this popular medium specifically to raise awareness about a number of different kinds of pressing human rights issues around the globe. One such organization is called Games for Change. Games for Change was founded in 2004. Their mission is to empower “game creators and social innovators to drive real-world change using games that help people to learn, improve their communities, and contribute to make the world a better place” (www.gamesforchange.org). The website is a portal for housing prosocial video games on topics designed to raise awareness (at the least) about important social issues like poverty, immigration, and war. The list of video games has filters, and at the time of this research, human rights games were one such filter a person could choose. Many of these games can be found on the website Games for Change (www.gamesforchange.org).¹

Human rights were an important part of the founding of America and because of this, according to the United States State Department website,

a central goal of U.S. foreign policy has been the promotion of respect for human rights . . . The United States understands that the existence of human rights helps secure the peace, deter aggression, promote the rule of law, combat crime and corruption, strengthen democracies, and prevent humanitarian crises. (United States Department of State, n.d., para. 1)

More broadly, the United Nations with its headquarters in New York City, is an international assembly of countries committed to world peace. It was formed in the aftermath of the human rights violations of WWII, according to the organization, United for Human Rights (2018). The founding of the United Nations integrated “all legal traditions” of the world and agreed to a common Universal Declaration of Human Rights that insist on “inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world” (United for Human Rights, 2018, para. 1) to prevent future human devastation. It is clear from the game descriptions and game designs that the Games for Change human rights games align with these common definitions in their classification of their games in this category.

Given the popularity of video games in America, and the potential of

video games to promote prosocial goals, we ask how such video games are designed to support a human rights' ideal, and if they are effective in this regard. The medium of video games engages players in narratives where they have options to occupy different identities and roles, think through complicated rules and goals, and become immersed in situations altogether different from their own. Video games designed pro-socially not only immerse players in educational stories, but they give players a reality to navigate that can potentially increase empathy toward social issues and encourage players to contribute to making global social change.

To improve education about human rights through video games has real potential, not only because gaming is appealing to a younger generation of digital natives, but also because the medium of video games has potential to tap into cognitive, affective, and behavioral learning domains. Given the educational and social justice opportunities of human rights video games and the lack of research on prosocial video games, our aim is to examine the educational components of twenty-one of these human rights video games on Games for Change and thereby contribute to both scholarship and advocacy. Our overall research question asks how these video games use strategies to educate audiences about human rights issues. We explore this question through qualitative content analyses of the video games.

Video Games as Learning

Popular discourses about playing video games are divided into positive and negative claims about effects. Negative effects are considered antisocial because they manifest in attitudes and behaviors like aggression, hostility, and violence. According to De Simone (2014) who defined antisocial behavior as “a broad term used to refer to any type of behavior that is enacted by one person against another person, group of people, or inanimate objects with the intention of harm,” and prosocial as supportive and helpful behaviors toward individuals or groups (p. 82). What both sets of discourse share is the assumption that people learn through video game play. In other words, video games influence. They operate on simulation and representation, allowing players to enter into many different possibilities interactively which can culminate in, “expanding new horizons, particularly new ways of thinking, doing, and being” (Squire, 2008, p. 24). Gee (2016) writes that “in playing and learning video games, language and literacy are fully situated in images, actions, interactions, and dialogue” (p. xi). Playing video games engages both body and mind. In this way, the medium of video games help develop 21st century skills, such as problem solving, critical thinking, and creativity. For example, Squire (2008) writes about the importance of video games for developing 21st century skills. He uses the example of *Civiliza-*

tion, a game in which players create their own civilizations. In the game, players are in charge of a civilization from 4000 B.C. to the present day. Squire writes that the game teaches a different approach to world history, moving away from “grand narratives” to instead having students learn through themes and patterns. As Squire writes, *Civilization III* can offer “a story of advantageous global trade networks, resources, technologies, and limited opportunities for population expansion. The game also offers opportunities to think about broad domestic decisions (e.g., “guns vs. butter”) and foreign policy decisions (isolationism vs. trade)” (p. 19). Squire writes that game-based learning can allow students to move from novices, to expert gamers, to perhaps producers or video game designers as they participate in 21st century learning.

Some research on prosocial video games exists, which sheds some light on this path. Passmore and Holder (2014) conducted a comprehensive literature review on video games designed to increase prosocial behaviors. One important trend they found in this review is the number of scholars who use the General Learning Model (GLM) to explain video games as educational. This model was developed by Buckley and Anderson in 2006. Buckley and Anderson (2006), in researching the effects of violent video games on people who play them, noted the broad range of learning that occurs through playing video games and developed the GLM. In the process of building their model, they note that video games are used in traditional classroom settings, workplace and corporate training settings, military settings, and other socialization-oriented settings. In educational settings specifically, Buckley and Anderson (2006) discussed evidence of educational video games that teach both cognitive and emotional or affective behaviors (p. 365). Briefly, research reveals that video games are useful as educational tools because they are participatory, they are designed to gain attention, they build in repetition and practice, they show people attitudes and steps necessary to adopt behaviors, they are motivating, and they are designed so that players feel competent about the tasks they are asked to perform (Buckley & Anderson, 2006, p. 367). Their GLM model is based on social learning and social cognitive theories. As they write, social learning theories explain how people learn either directly or through observing others and social cognitive theories account for how people learn scripts. According to Buckley and Anderson (2006),

People can learn many complicated behaviors, attitudes, expectations, beliefs, and perceptual schemata through observation and participation in video games. And, as they observe and perform these new behaviors, they are learning scripts. Scripts are organized sets of knowledge that define situations and guide behavior. (p. 368)

As Buckley and Anderson (2006) describe, the GLM model begins with input variables that are personal and situational. These input variables impact a person's response through one or more of the interrelated internal states: cognition, affect, and arousal. The outcomes of the GLM model account for types of learning (facts, behaviors, perceptual and decision schemata, and personality changes) as well as duration of learning (long or short term). In the end, Buckley and Anderson (2006) underscore that video games do teach and that content matters. In fact, using GLM, as Greitmeyer and Osswald (2010) point out, impacts "the kind of associations that are activated by a video game depends on the content of the game played" (p. 212).

The GLM model is one commonly used educational framework. But like others, we also see education from a constructivist orientation as valuable. Marone (2016) offers a theoretical model he calls playful constructivism, to help scholars explain how video games educate. Playful constructivism, as Marone (2016) conceives it, is based on learning theories of situated cognition, social constructivism, and constructionism, and it integrates play, game design, and participation. Marone draws from Anderson, Reder, and Simon's (1996) ideas of situated cognition to show that learning is an outcome of interaction in a social setting rather than a process confined to the mind. Important to the claim that video games educate is Ackerman's (2001) argument that learning happens in situations and is not detached from them. Using Brede (1997), Marone (2016) includes constructivism's ideas to explain learning not as acquired but as actively assembled through experiences with objects, interactions with persons, and situations, in this case, as players interact with games. Players enter the stories and challenges of game worlds, repeatedly engage challenges, fail in a risk-free environment, and develop knowledge and skills through the engagement. As Marone (2016) writes, "solving meaningful problems is an essential component of any engaging digital game, but a carefully crafted gaming and learning experience is not focused exclusively on performance, but also on experience" (p. 4). Marone (2016) offers this theory so that;

[S]cholars may explore the construct of "playful participation," looking into the social interactions and discourses engendered by games . . . or examine, compare, and contrast how learning is constructed in such environments and how it may be transferred from one setting to another. (p. 13)

We hope to find that learning human rights through prosocial video games transfers.

Video games on GFC add a visual dimension to issues such as poverty, war, and immigration. They are teaching players about these issues through engaging them in play. The medium of the video game offers a space to introduce players to issues and create simulations in which players navigate these worlds. For example, in the video game *I Can End Deportation (ICED)*, players take on different identities of people affected by immigration law, including legal permanent residents, asylum seekers, students, and undocumented people. Throughout the game, players make moral choices about how to answer questions by immigration officers. They have to decide how to answer questions to avoid being thrown in detention or be deported. In the process, players learn about the language of immigration, and the barriers that those affected by immigration law face.

The GLM model and Playful Constructivism inform this study as both explain video games as educational. If education happens through situated experiences, repetition, failure and play, interactions, and foster change in cognition, affect, and arousal that result in acquiring facts, behaviors, perceptual and decision schemata, and behavior, these ideas help us examine the educational designs of human rights video games.

Prosocial or Serious Games

In order to better understand these human rights games, it is important to situate them within the larger genre of prosocial and serious games. These games use entertainment media to communicate a serious message (Gee, 2003). For prosocial games, we employ the definition Passmore and Holder (2014) describe where “prosocial acts are necessary to advance in the video game, provide models of, and give direction for, prosocial behaviour” (p. 213). As Flanagan (2006) observed, there exist very few video games with such prosocial values intentionally designed into the technologies. One video game she points to that does this is *Peter Packet*, which comes from the non-profit organization, NetAid, whose mission is to eliminate poverty. *Peter Packet* is designed to raise awareness about issues people in Haiti, India and Zimbabwe face and to create change as “players help Peter Packet dodge viruses and hackers in order to help the in-game characters communicate with international contacts such as teacher organizations” (p. 494). Since Flanagan’s (2006) observation, more prosocial videogames have been created. Passmore and Holder (2014) categorize these as video games from advocacy organizations.

Prosocial Games and Empathy

One of the educational advantages of prosocial games is their ability to

evoke empathy in players. For this analysis we use Alder and Towne's (1996) definition of empathy as three ingredients: perspective taking - the cognitive ability to temporarily inhabit another person's viewpoint, emotion - the ability to affectively experience another person's feelings, and "concern for the welfare of another person" (p. 117). In many video games, players are required to identify with characters in the game. Empathy in prosocial games asks players to infer mental states and experiences of characters in game. For example, in the human rights video game *Against All Odds*, players take on the role of a refugee fleeing her home country and starting a new life in a foreign country. In the process, players learn about and occupy the limited choices that refugees have. The game is designed to increase empathy through perspective-taking, placing the player in the role of someone who has been displaced and must navigate a new world. As Happ, Melzer, and Steffgen (2015) write, "While the affective component of empathy involves an emotional response to another's affective state, the cognitive component involves understanding another's feelings" (p. 81). In this way, affect and cognition are linked. Importantly, Harrington and O'Connell (2016) found that playing prosocial games was associated with higher levels of empathy in children. They also found that prosocial games led to positive affective relationships and cooperation. Thus, there is the potential of prosocial and serious games to have impacts outside of the medium of the games.

Prosocial Games and Behavioral Change

A dictionary definition of behavior involves an observable act of a human. Definitions of culture often include behavior, and as Conrad and Poole (2005) describe, behaviors are noticed when something abnormal or unusual happens. In other words, behaviors are observable and we learn them as we learn our cultural norms. There is evidence that serious and prosocial games can change behavior (Baranowski, Buday, Thompson, & Baranowski, 2008). For example, Greitemeyer and Osswald (2010) found that playing prosocial games was related to increases in prosocial behavior. These authors acknowledge the body of research that suggests that playing violent video games may lead some players to act more aggressively. However, in their research, they found that the opposite was also true. Playing prosocial games had real-world consequences by increasing players' behavior outside of the game. Additionally, research suggests that playing serious games, or games designed for educational purposes or for social change, can increase student motivation to learn in school (Gee, 2003). Play is an important dimension of social development because it allows children to "experiment with social experiences and simulate alternative emotional

consequences, which can then bring about feelings of resolution outside the play context” (Granic, Lobel, & Engels, 2014, p. 67). These dimensions of video games support the GLM model as well as the potential of prosocial and serious games to impact prosocial behavior, such as increasing empathy for those people experiencing dire circumstances, such as poverty and displacement. Further, this research suggests the potential of behavioral change, such as becoming an advocate for those in need.

ANALYSIS

In order to better understand the educational strategies of the human rights video games found on the Games for Change website, we categorized the games according to the learning dimensions that the games employed. *Cognition* refers to the strategy of increasing players’ knowledge or understanding of a particular human rights issue. *Empathy* refers to the strategy of increasing the player’s understanding of a human rights issue by having the player engage in perspective-taking. By playing a character that is in the role of disempowerment, such as a refugee fleeing a war-torn country, players are involved in a process of empathy. *Behavioral change* refers to engaging players in a set of steps to show them the skills needed to participate in social change. These behaviors include calls to action, such as donating money to nonprofit organizations or writing letters to Congress to end human rights abuses.

We selected video games on the GFC website that were categorized as games about “human rights.” Twenty-one games were in this category. However, while the games fall into the category of human rights, it is unclear from descriptions of the games who the target audience is. While mainstream video games follow a rating system which communicates to gamers what the age level of the players should be, the games on GFC do not follow this convention. With that in mind, we speculate that these games are targeted toward a general gaming audience, which can include players from all ages.

In the following sections, we describe the different educational domains that were present in the 21 human rights video games. See Appendix 1 for list of games.

Cognition

All of the video games had the goal of educating players about pressing antisocial social issues, including poverty, war, and immigration. Many of these games included additional educational content, like a companion website or curriculum, which were designed to extend the educational bene-

fits beyond the game itself. As the GLM and Playful Constructivism explain, it is through the process of play that players develop cognition. Having the additional resources allows players to delve deeper into the topics. Additionally, teachers can find ways to integrate these topics into their curriculum. For example, *That's Your Right* is a digital card game designed to teach middle school and high school students about the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments of the American Constitution. Players are faced with scenarios in which they need to make decisions about how these scenarios would affect their ability to apply the amendment. The game is part of a larger curriculum of the Annenberg classroom which aims to provide resources for civic education.

Mars Generation One: Argubot Academy is a game set in 2054 when there is the first human settlement on Mars. Players have to make lots of decisions about their civilization. Players learn about how to construct good arguments that include collecting evidence, matching evidence to claims, applying reasoned thinking, and discussing proposals collaboratively. Research on the game suggests that students who play it for three hours with two hours of instruction can gain one year of learning in argumentation. The educational version of the game comes with instructional resources so that teachers can integrate the game into their classrooms.

In addition to offering curriculum on a companion website, another strategy for increasing players' knowledge about human rights topics was to embed educational materials into the medium of the video game. For example, *Never Alone (Kisima Ingitchuna)* is a game that explores the cultural folklore of the Iñupiat Native Alaskan people. Throughout the game, players take on the role of Nuna, a young girl, and her arctic fox companion as they set out to find the source of a blizzard that threatens her community's survival. As players move through the game, they are presented with puzzle challenges. The video contains short documentaries that tell stories about the Iñupiaq people.

Decision-making

Eighteen of the twenty-one games used decision-making as the main strategy for educating players. As the GLM model suggests, decision-making and problem-solving are important for cognition because they help players to develop a set of scripts that define situations. Through the process of playing the video game, players are shown steps necessary for completing tasks as well as the consequences of making different choices. For example, *1979: Black Friday* is described as a "choice-driven, narrative game" in which players take on the role of photojournalist Reza, who is based on the real-life of Michel Setboun. In the narrative, Reza returns to

Tehran in 1978 during the Iranian Revolution against the ruling of the Shah. The video game includes real-life photos from the revolution as well as audio speeches of the Ayatollah Khomeini. Throughout the game, players take photos and are given background about the real-life images. The players also encounter moral situations where they are tasked with making decisions about how to proceed. For example, in one part of the game, players choose to have Reza take part in a protest or take pictures. We learn that Reza is eventually thrown in prison and he is confronted with sharing information about participants in the Revolution or risking having his brother tortured. While this video game is not part of an educational campaign, the subject of the game itself is designed to not only educate players about the historical reality of the Iranian Revolution but also engage them in play that forces them to make difficult choices in dire situations. The game serves two functions, then, to educate about historical events and to engage players in moral decision-making in times of crisis.

In human rights games, decision-making became important for engaging players in simulations in which choices made in the game led to different outcomes. For example, *Endgame: Syria* is a news-game which includes simulations to explore real-world events. The game takes place over two weeks and the goal is to explore options open to Syrian rebels as they struggle for peace. As promotional materials state, “each choice the user makes has consequences—the types of military units you may deploy, the political paths you choose to tread”. Choices may impact the current situation as well as the final outcome.

In another example, *Wildfire* is designed to address the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Throughout the game, players are tasked with ending poverty, increasing gender equality, protecting the environment, and combatting illiteracy. Players make decisions about how to allocate their resources. In the process, they learn about how difficult these issues are. One interesting aspect of this game is that it includes a real-time twitter feed from the United Nations. Adding this element is designed to add some real-world context to the game.

Decision-making strategies were also used to teach about more general concepts such as greed. For example, *Neocolonialism* is a game that puts the player in a position of power, rather than disempowerment. The goal is to ruin the world for personal gain and thereby learn what neocolonialism means as well as what it does. As *Neocolonialism’s* promotional materials state, the game, “encourages players to exert political pressure and capital to gain an economic advantage over their rivals” (<http://www.games-forchange.org/game/neocolonialism/>). In each turn, players have the options to buy votes, negotiate with other leaders, and manipulate currency. During the game, players build factories, mines, and establish free trade agree-

ments, to acquire as much capital as possible. Similarly, *Sweatshop* is a game in which the goals are to make a factory successful through making clothes and exploiting labor. Throughout the game, players are faced with moral dilemmas, such as how to balance the needs of the workers with the task of making as much money as possible. According to promotional materials, the game is “littered with real facts about the fast fashion industry and aims to provoke teenagers into thinking about their fashion choices more carefully” (<http://www.gamesforchange.org/game/sweatshop/>). These games educate players about how capital can be attained through corruption, an abstract concept in traditional learning contexts made clear through playing characters, learning scripts, repetition, decision-making, and story.

Empathy

While all of the games were designed to increase players’ understanding of human rights issues, sixteen of the twenty-one games used empathy as a design strategy for engaging players in a process of perspective taking. One strategy for increasing empathy was to have players take on different roles to experience human rights situations. For example, *Inside the Haiti Earthquake* is an online simulation game in which users can experience what it was like after the Haitian earthquake in 2010. According to promotional materials, the game is designed to challenge players’ assumptions about relief work in the aftermath of disasters. In the game, players take on the role of aid worker, survivor, and journalist and navigate the aftermath of the disaster. Players are faced with different choices and in the game they are confronted with the consequences of these choices and must learn the scripts to make these choices. For example, when the player takes on the role of a survivor, the player has to make decisions about whether to sift through the rubble for other survivors or to head to the center of town to find relief. This game is an example of transmedia, because the video game is a companion to a documentary. One of the interesting approaches in this game is that it is promoted as a simulation—there are no scores and instead the goal is to experience what it is like to play these roles. In this way, one of the learning strategies is to increase empathy.

Another exemplar of empathy designed into video game play is *The Migrant Trail*, a simulation game about the life of migrants and border patrol agents on the U.S.-Mexico border. The game is part of a transmedia campaign called *The Undocumented*. The transmedia campaign includes a film and an interactive map that shows deaths from migrants crossing the border. In the game, players can choose to play as migrants or border patrol agents. When players choose to play as migrants, they purchase supplies for their journey and try to avoid border patrol agents who will kill them if they

are caught. When players choose to play as border patrol agents, they drive patrol cars looking for migrants. When they capture a migrant, they have to make decisions about how to ensure that migrants receive proper care. Here, the goal is to prevent deaths and injuries. One aspect of the game is that players gain insight into two sides of an issue. Through perspective-taking, emotions, and concern that these positions create, players learn a more complicated appreciation of the brutal conditions that migrants face, as well as the tough decisions border patrol agents must make.

In addition to taking on different roles, another strategy for increasing empathy was to incorporate real-life stories into the games. For example, *Against All Odds*, released in 2005, was developed by the United Nations Higher Commissioner on Refugees and the goal is to educate the public about what it is like to be a refugee. In the game, the player takes on the role of a refugee and progresses through twelve stages, from fleeing one's native country to adapting to a new life in a foreign country. Similar to other games analyzed, this game has educational companions, including information about the history of asylum and refugee testimonies. There is also a teacher's guide that provides direction on how to integrate the game and concepts into the classroom. In this process, the goal is for players to develop empathy for the plight of refugees, while also learning more about the history of asylum seekers.

Increasing empathy through using real-life stories was also a strategy in *Liyla and the Shadows of War*, which is about the invasion of Gaza and the challenges that are faced with those trying to survive. The game uses black and white animation to engage the players in the process of trying to survive amidst the war. The video game includes a companion website (<http://liyla.org/resources>) that offers resources and a facts page that shows the real-life photos on which the animation in the game was based. Additionally, *Syrian Journey* is a game that explores the experiences of Syrian refugees. The project includes a news game, in which the outcomes of the choices are based on real-life stories of Syrian refugees. The project also includes videos of survivor stories as a way to increase players' empathy.

Behavioral Change

Along with cognition and empathy, seven of the human rights video games included the additional strategy of behavioral change. This behavioral change came in the form of a call to action, such as sending letters to Congress or donating money to nonprofit organizations that work with human rights issues. In the following sections, we provide an overview of the games that aimed to change players' behaviors.

In the video game, *Darfur is Dying*, players can engage in real-world

actions, such as sending letters to Congress about the situation in Darfur. This game was released in 2006. In the game, players choose a member of a Darfuri family, such as a son, daughter, or parent that has been displaced by the war in Darfur. During the game, players are tasked with traveling from a refugee camp to collect water. In the process, players try to avoid being captured by the militia. If the player is captured, they risk dying. If they are able to avoid the militia, they bring the water back to the camp for watering crops and building huts. Once the water runs out, the player goes back to fetch more water. In the end, the goal is to provide water for the camp for seven days. Through the process of playing the game, players become aware of how dire the situation in Darfur is. Real-world action was embedded in the game, as players could send a letter to President Bush urging him to support the people in Darfur or urging Congress to pass legislation to support Darfurian refugees. In an interview with Susana Ruiz about the importance of the game, Neys and Jansz (2010) found that the goal was to increase access to information about Darfur through the medium of the game. Additionally, as they write, the game is “meant to serve as an entry into the crisis for an audience which would probably not use other resources to access the information” (p. 233). Thus, the goal of the game is to target an audience who may not otherwise be exposed to the situation in Darfur.

Half the Sky is a Facebook video game, released in 2013, that was part of a larger transmedia effort from Nikolas Kristoff and Sheila Wu. The media includes a PBS series on women’s rights issues, a book, and the video game. According to its promotional materials, the game is a “game-based adventure that aims to reach mainstream audiences to raise awareness and donations to empower women and girls around the world” (<http://www.gamesforchange.org/game/half-the-sky-movement-the-game/>). In the game, players “move through a series of quests and stories related to real-world challenges that women and girls face, with issue-specific solutions provided by seven non-profit organizations” including the United Nations Foundation and World Relief. Throughout the game, players can choose to donate real money toward specific issues women face globally, such as increasing access to education and clean water. The game is also intended to be viral, since players are encouraged to share the game with their social networks.

In *Homeland Guantánamos* players take on the role of an undercover journalist who is tasked with solving the mystery behind the death of a detainee, Boubcar Bah, who died while in custody. In the game, players go through a 3-D tour of the facilities. Throughout the game, players encounter real-life video stories of those who have been detained. The goal of the game is to uncover the details of Boubcar’s death. The companion website offers ways to take action, from sharing the website and games with others

to hosting a discussion with the community. The website includes videos of detainee stories, as well as a virtual memorial wall of detainees that have died. On this site, users can offer words of support. Finally, the site offers ways that users can donate money to help raise awareness about the human rights issues on Guantanamo.

ICED: I Can End Deportation is intended to teach players about the different plights that different categories of immigrants face. The object of the game is to become a citizen of the United States. According to the game description, “as an immigrant teen, you are avoiding ICE officers, choosing right from wrong and answering questions on immigration. But if you answer questions incorrectly, or make poor decisions, you will be detained with no respect for your human rights” (<http://www.icedgame.com/#0>). *ICED* includes a companion website (<http://www.icedgame.com/#4>) that includes ways for users to continue learning about human rights and immigration. Players are encouraged to become a member of a Facebook group, post a link to the game on their social media, learn about and sign the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or write about *ICED* on one’s blog. The companion website also includes a PDF of curriculum that helps teachers teach students about human rights and immigration. The curriculum provides background information on immigration, has in-class lessons and homework assignments, and is aligned with New York State and New York City Social Studies and English Language Arts Standards.

Two of the seven games were designed to educate players on how to become producers of information. In *On the Ground Reporter: Darfur*, players take on the role of a reporter who is exploring the villages and campsites in Darfur to better understand the culture and people. The game uses real footage and the game is designed as an adventure game which engages the player in learning about some of the root causes of hostilities in Darfur. At the end of the game, players produce their own version of the story. *Ayiti: The Cost of Life* is a game published by Global Kids. The goal of the game is to manage a rural family of five in Haiti over four years. Throughout the game, players are tasked with allocating resources so that the family can survive. This game is part of Global Kids’ initiative to develop curriculum and train youth to create video games that are geared toward education other youth around the world. It includes a lesson plan: <http://www.olpglobalkids.org/pdfs/ayiti/GlobalKidsAyitiLessonPlansFull.pdf>. The objectives of the lesson plan include using an online game to better understand the socio-economic situation in Haiti and understand how poverty can be an obstacle to education; help players develop budgeting and resource allocation skills; and learn ways to advocate about confronting poverty in Haiti.

Finally, *Phone Story* is “an educational game about the dark side of

your favorite smart phone” (<http://phonestory.org/>). There are four games that educate about the ways in which materials are collected, labor is exploited, excessive e-waste is produced, and how consumerism propels this process. The revenue from the game is donated to non-profit organizations that work to stop the problems players come to know. Ironically (or predictably), the game was banned from the App Store. *Phone Story* includes an educational website that provides additional information about the impact of smartphone production and consumption. For example, the game has a section designed to raise awareness about Coltan, a rare mineral that is used in several electronic devices. Coltan is found in the Congo and there are reports that child labor is used to mine for the mineral. The goal of the game is to raise awareness about how consumers are complicit in the dark side of the smartphone.

DISCUSSION

Motivated by the educational and social justice opportunities of human rights video games as well as the lack of research on prosocial video games, we undertook an analysis to contribute to both scholarship and advocacy. Our analysis of the GFC human rights games reveals that these games educate players in the following ways. First, the games increase cognition through decision-making and problem solving. Like popular video games, to play the game is to learn the scripts, language, and moral stories inherent in global human rights issues. Second, these games often include the choice or the requirement to play different kinds of characters involved in survival, oppression, or other pressing global social issues. Through this perspective-taking, players’ empathy about human rights issues increase. Players of these GFC games also learn affective *responses* to these issues, which is important in light of social change and behavioral change.

In addition to cognition and empathy, seven of the games taught players how to participate in social change processes such as letter writing, donating money, and creating, thus educating for behavioral change. Many of these games are part of a transmedia package of educational materials from and for the educational community who work with and communicate with youth about human rights issues. We imagine that educators seeking 21st century educational methods incorporate these games into their lessons so that students watch documentaries, play games, play video games, and create social change solutions. While analyzing the curricular use of these games was outside the scope of this work, we recognize the potential for these games to be integrated into classrooms. Future research could look at implementation of these games for educational purposes. While it is unclear how widespread these games are, the fact that they are designed with an

educational lens suggests their potential to be integrated. Furthermore, these efforts offer communities of educators resources and tools based on sound theoretical learning models. Even though this is a small niche of games, we see the importance of work that this community of educators are doing. Through the design of the materials and the contemporary content of the games, this group of committed educators brings hope and inspiration and a progressive learning model to their students. In the process, they are lighting the way for the next generation of human rights activists.

Using the theoretical models of GLM and Playful Constructivism, our 21 games included cognition and affect as part of design and content of the games, which supports prosocial video games content as educational. These easily contribute to the use of the GLM model for game scholarship, specifically the interrelated internal states of, cognition, affect, and arousal. Our analysis does not include short versus long-term learning. We are especially cautious here because we suspect that players do not engage in as much repetition as they do playing popular mainstream video games, partly because of the production value (human rights video games are not as slick) and partly because educational contexts are limited, leisure less so. In terms of the way video games educate as can help players feel competent about the tasks they are asked to perform (Buckley & Anderson, 2006, p. 367), but are uncertain. The content of these human rights games may not support feelings of competence because these problems, while real, are massive and remote. While the Entertainment Software Association's Essential Facts reports the average age of gamers as 35, the likelihood is that educators have youth playing these human rights games. Twitter is not known as a youth platform. Those being educated do not make money enough to donate, often can't vote, nor do much letter writing to their congressional representatives. The players may learn the skills for activism but may not play to the level of competence for a variety of reasons. Playful constructivism was also a useful model to explain how video games educate because we assume players learn as they interact with the games and game goals, especially given the 21st century skill sets and expectations some teachers use. To that end, the games in our analysis that have the most educational potential are those that combine all three aspects of cognition, empathy, and behavior change in one game.

CONCLUSION

While the analysis presented here offered insight into how some human rights video games may help players to enter into new domains of learning about social justice, future research is needed to better understand if these strategies are effective. We analyzed the educational strategies of

the video games, but did not look at how actual players may respond to these strategies. Future research should include audience analysis to better understand if these educational strategies have the intended effect. Additionally, it would be helpful to interview the teachers who are integrating these materials into their classrooms. This analysis would be useful for understanding the different ways that these learning domains are activated in educational settings. Also, our sample size is limited to a small number of video games and future research could look at more examples within this genre. This analysis could help to discern what kinds of game designs are the most useful for teaching about human rights.

Despite these limitations, there is much to be learned about using the medium of video games to teach about human rights and social justice. Video games are appealing to a younger generation who may not have first-hand experience with issues such as war, poverty, or immigration. However, through entering different gameworlds, they are able to engage in these situations through a process of simulation. As playful constructivism suggests, video games allow players to learn through the challenges presented in the game, have the experience of failing in a risk-free environment, and develop knowledge and skills. Additionally, as the GLM model proposes, video games are participatory and they help develop players' skills through gaining attention and offering the steps necessary to adopt similar behaviors. It is plausible, then, that these games can have an impact in not only increasing players' empathy toward human rights issues, but also providing them with the necessary steps to work toward real social change.

NOTES

1. Our initial analysis of games were those housed on the Games for Change website. However, some of these games have since been moved to The Advocates for Human Rights (<http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/games>).

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APPENDIX 1. HUMAN RIGHTS VIDEO GAMES

Title	Year	Theme
1979 Revolution: Black Friday	2016	Moral Choices in Time of Crisis
Against All Odds	2005	Refugees
Ayiti: The Cost of Life	2006	Children, Poverty, Education
Darfur is Dying	2006	Refugees
Half the Sky Movement: The Game	2013	Women's rights
Homeland Guantamos	2008	Prisoners of war
ICED – I Can End Deportation	2008	Immigration
Inside the Haiti Earthquake	2010	Disaster & Relief
Endgame: Syria	2012	War
Liyla and the Shadows of War	2016	Children & War
Mars Generation One: Argubot Academy	2014	Critical thinking and persuasion
Neocolonialism	2013	Politics
Never Alone (Kisima Ingitchuna)	2014	Atmosphere/Environment
On the Ground Reporter: Darfur	2010	War, Investigation, Communication
Parable of the Polygons	2014	Moral Choices
Phone Story	2011	Social/Politics, Video Games
Syrian Journey	2015	Refugees
Sweatshop	2011	Ethics, child & cheap labor
That's Your Right	2014	Human Rights
The Migrant Trail	2014	Migrants & Border Patrol
Wildfire	2010	United Nations Millennium Development Goals