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Testing the Government

The North Korean government has convinced its people that Kim Jong-Un is a divine leader and that **North Korea is** the most prosperous country in the world. The rest of the world, of course, knows that this is far from the truth. So how are the **citizens** so easily manipulated? Censorship. **They can only see what the government allows them to.** According to the American Language Association, "Censorship is the suppression of ideas and information that certain persons -- individuals, groups or government officials - - find objectionable or dangerous". The word "censorship" itself is derived from the Latin word *cesere*, which means "to give as one's opinion" The act of censoring relies heavily on the subjectivity of the censor, **and that power often ends up in the wrong hands.** While censorship **on a small scale with a fixed test** can be used **to protect citizens**, if it is not **exercised** with great caution, **the government** will ultimately **ensor arbitrarily and manipulate the thoughts of its citizens.**

There are times when limited censorship can be used proactively to protect people. The only time the government should allow censorship is when it is on an extremely small scale and the material it censors is very clearly defined. If the restrictions are not severely limited, people's right to free speech would be in danger.

Here at Analy High School, the administration makes it very clear in our rule book that the promotion of "logos or words" that display profanity are strictly prohibited on campus. In this case, the government's allowance of censorship is miniscule, being that it extends only to the Analy High School campus, and the material being censored is easily determined. Anything a student displays or "promotes" that includes profane language is subject to censorship to ensure the comfort of all students. However, if the government were to allow the censorship of words promoting profanity on a more global scale, pieces of art and works with a greater message that include even a few profane words would be inaccessible. For

example, if profanity were to be censored throughout the United States, a film like *Schindler's List* directed by Steven Spielberg would not be exposed to the public. The larger message that tells a true story about the Holocaust and educates about an important time in history would be hidden simply because it was the director's artistic choice to include some profanity, "We have the f***ing power to kill, that's why they fear us". In contrast to microscopic censorship at Analy, Sean McElwee argues the case to censor all hate speech online in "The Case for Censoring Hate Speech". He emphasizes Facebook's rules that are already in place:

Facebook's strict community standards, which state:

...we do not permit individuals or groups to attack others based on their race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability or medical condition.

While this is relatively small-scale censorship in that it's confined only to Facebook, there are very blurred lines as to what could be censored as hate speech. Who is to judge objectively what an "attack" on others is? These rules are well intended, but if the government allows censorship like this without a perfectly obvious understanding of what is to be restricted, it inherits much more power in prohibiting free speech than it should have. McElwee goes on to argue that hate speech as described above should be banned across the Internet, which would not only violate the requirement of clearly defined censorship, but would also far exceed the description of "small scale" censorship. Extending this blurred restriction to the entire internet would truly violate First Amendment rights, because these rights provided to us by the government are in place to protect the speech we hate the most- for some people, that's hate speech. McElwee even says it in his article, "A true marketplace of ideas must co-exist with a multi-racial society open to people of all genders, orientations and religions, and it can". In order to have a truly free society, the government must allow undesirable material like hate speech on a bigger scale. Only if the government restricts censorship to be practiced on a very small scale and the material being censored is easily distinguishable can censorship be used to protect citizens.

If **governments are** not carefully **monitored, they** could quickly go from censoring certain books for “being offensive” to banning whatever they **choose** simply because **it doesn’t fit their agenda**. Unlike **the defined censorship of profanity at Anally**, if material is barred from the public on the grounds of merely being offensive, a very gray area is introduced **into** the power the government has. Finding something “offensive” is completely subjective, there is no set test that a work of literature or film could go through to deem it offensive or not. It is similar to the test in the United States for deciding whether or not something is obscene and within its legal rights,

The basic guidelines for the trier of fact must be: (a) whether "the average person, applying contemporary community standards" would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest, *Roth, supra*, at 489, (b) whether the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law, and (c) whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value. (**“Three Prong Obscenity Test”**)

This test for obscenity was derived from the **1973** Miller v California Supreme Court Case as the justices tried to establish a test as a precedent for future court rulings. However, it is a test that relies heavily on opinion- part of the test requires an “average person” to decide the value of the material in question. A test for offensive material in deciding whether or not to censor it would also be largely subjective and would give the government great authority over arbitrarily censoring certain works by **simply** labeling them as “offensive”. A poem by Billy Collins expresses this fear of arbitrary censorship:

Some time after the books had been forbidden— The one about the woman and her daughter,

The one about the boy who spoke poorly—^[SEP]And after the smoke from the incinerators had cleared,

It was suggested that censorship be extended

And the ligustrum and the alstroemeria

Because they were difficult to pronounce and spell.

Then the pine tree for its tricky needles and cones

And parsley and red and yellow peppers for no reason at all.

In the poem, what begins as censoring a few books turns into censoring absolutely everything, entire species even, for no reason other than **that** the names were “difficult to pronounce and spell”. Although **censorship as drastic as that might not result**, if the government is allowed to censor material based on largely subjective reasoning, it is plausible that **the government** could censor more and more without a solid base of logic, going far beyond the scope of “protecting” people from offensive material to dictating completely what people have access to.

When the government is allowed to completely regulate what people have access to without bounds, it can manipulate individual thought. If **the government takes** censorship as far as completely eliminating all ideologies other than the one **it** agrees with **and veils all corruption, it can mold a** society to think only what **it** allows them to. Governments that completely **censor** the ideas of other peoples are restricting anything that could provoke people into thinking for themselves- if people have access only to what the government allows, then they will have no means **with which to oppose the ideology of authority. Tom Risen investigated a modern day example of this type of government:**

Pyongyang's government insists that its dictator Kim Jong-un is a heavenly superhero, Americans are evil, South Korea started the region's civil war in the 1950s and that the rest of the world is not as free or prosperous as North Korea. In order to support these teachings, nearly all media from outside North Korea is banned and citizens are discouraged from questioning the government about problems such as famine or its use of slave labor.

The only way the government of North Korea can assure that none of its citizens will have thoughts that aren't patriotic is by censoring everything that might cause them to think that way and allow access only to material that portrays them in a favorable light. If citizens don't have access to anything that disproves what the government tells them, they **will** willingly believe whatever they are told. **Fictional character Winston Smith lives in a society very similar to North Korea's in the novel 1984 by George Orwell and recognizes that his thoughts are not his own. He fondly remembers his mother, "...she had possessed... a kind of purity, simply because the standards that she obeyed were private ones. Her feelings were her own, and could not be**

altered from the outside" (Orwell 241). Winston **is aware** that he's grown up in a society where **the government dictates** his and everyone else's morals that their very thoughts are out of their grasp, and envies his mother for being able to think for herself. Because she didn't grow up in a society where everything was censored from her, she was able to form her own set of opinions and values, unlike Winston who was raised in a world where the government banned nearly everything to manipulate his mind. **Ryogo S reinforces the idea that a government can use censorship to manipulate people's minds and recognizes that the government often uses this power to hide its atrocities from the public in "Altering History with Censorship in 1984 and 2012", "As Orwell mentions, 'who controls the past, controls the present', the dominant power of the authority allows them to provide a bare minimum of information to the public, to hide some of the daunting reality that lies behind the city" (Ryogo S). Hiding "daunting reality" through censorship happens in both North Korea and Oceania, where the governments are able to develop all-encompassing authority to not only mold people's thoughts but to make them ignorant to what it does not want them to see. Almost half of the population of 24 million citizens in North Korea lives in extreme poverty, and yet through censorship, the government is able to maneuver its people into thinking they are the most prosperous country in the world. The same thing happens in Oceania: although most citizens live a very poor lifestyle, the government still succeeds in persuading them to believe they are thriving in a wonderful country. By disguising what's amiss in these societies, the governments effectively forces positive opinions of them into their citizens' minds. When it is without limits, a government that censors material from the public can also censor their very thoughts.**

If censorship is not carefully contained, it can lead to an oppressive government that censors arbitrarily and manipulates people's thoughts. When censorship is **exercised in a very limited way** and goes through an established set of tests that define clearly what can and cannot be censored, it can potentially be used to protect citizens. If the tests are unclear or based on opinion, **the restricting authorities give themselves** leeway to censor arbitrarily. Censorship that goes unchecked will result in the **government** banning

material without reason, and provides a gateway for the government to ban anything that goes against its ideals. When the government takes away anything that could disprove what it is telling its citizens, it **gains control over their very thoughts**. Ultimate government control isn't how we should be governed; **current societies** can attest to the fact that this kind of power often ends up in the wrong hands and results in corruption. We have to be careful of not being kept in the dark, and have to ensure that censorship is put in place only to protect when necessary. We have to protect our individual freedom to think for ourselves.

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