**Supplemental Online Appendix**

**Appendix A: Movies in Sample**

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| Table A.1: List of Movies in Sample | | | | | |
| Movie Title | Year | | No. of Torture Scenes | MPAA Rating | Gross North American Box Office[[1]](#footnote-1) |
| *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* | | 2017 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 620,181,382 |
| *Beauty and the Beast (2017)* | | 2017 | 0 | PG | $ 504,014,165 |
| *Wonder Woman* | | 2017 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 412,563,408 |
| *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* | | 2017 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 404,468,712 |
| *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* | | 2017 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 389,813,101 |
| *Spider Man: Homecoming* | | 2017 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 334,201,140 |
| *It* | | 2017 | 2 | R | $ 327,481,748 |
| *Thor: Ragnarok* | | 2017 | 2 | PG-13 | $ 315,058,289 |
| *Despicable Me 3* | | 2017 | 0 | PG | $ 264,624,300 |
| *Justice League* | | 2017 | 4 | PG-13 | $ 229,024,295 |
| *Logan* | | 2017 | 1 | R | $ 226,277,068 |
| *The Fate of the Furious* | | 2017 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 226,008,385 |
| *Coco* | | 2017 | 0 | PG | $ 209,726,015 |
| *Dunkirk* | | 2017 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 188,045,546 |
| *Get Out* | | 2017 | 9 | R | $ 176,040,665 |
| *The LEGO Batman Movie* | | 2017 | 0 | PG | $ 175,750,384 |
| *The Boss Baby* | | 2017 | 1 | PG | $ 175,003,033 |
| *The Greatest Showman* | | 2017 | 0 | PG | $ 173,951,145 |
| *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales* | | 2017 | 3 | PG-13 | $ 172,558,876 |
| *Kong: Skull Island* | | 2017 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 168,052,812 |
| *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* | | 2016 | 2 | PG-13 | $ 532,177,324 |
| *Finding Dory* | | 2016 | 0 | PG | $ 486,295,561 |
| *Captain America: Civil War* | | 2016 | 2 | PG-13 | $ 408,084,349 |
| *The Secret Life of Pets* | | 2016 | 1 | PG | $ 368,384,330 |
| *The Jungle Book* | | 2016 | 1 | PG | $ 364,001,123 |
| *Deadpool* | | 2016 | 8 | R | $ 363,070,709 |
| *Zootopia* | | 2016 | 1 | PG | $ 341,268,248 |
| *Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice* | | 2016 | 2 | PG-13 | $ 330,360,194 |
| *Suicide Squad* | | 2016 | 6 | PG-13 | $ 325,100,054 |
| *Sing* | | 2016 | 1 | PG | $ 270,329,045 |
| *Moana* | | 2016 | 0 | PG | $ 248,757,044 |
| *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* | | 2016 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 234,037,575 |
| *Doctor Strange* | | 2016 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 232,641,920 |
| *Hidden Figures* | | 2016 | 0 | PG | $ 169,379,046 |
| *Jason Bourne* | | 2016 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 162,434,410 |
| *Star Trek Beyond* | | 2016 | 2 | PG-13 | $ 158,848,340 |
| *X-Men: Apocalypse* | | 2016 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 155,442,489 |
| *Trolls* | | 2016 | 0 | PG | $ 153,707,064 |
| *La La Land* | | 2016 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 151,101,803 |
| *Kung Fu Panda 3* | | 2016 | 0 | PG | $ 143,528,619 |
| *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* | | 2015 | 7 | PG-13 | $ 936,662,225 |
| *Jurassic World* | | 2015 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 652,270,625 |
| *Avengers: Age of Ultron* | | 2015 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 459,005,868 |
| *Inside Out* | | 2015 | 0 | PG | $ 356,461,711 |
| *Furious 7* | | 2015 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 353,007,020 |
| *Minions* | | 2015 | 1 | PG | $ 336,045,770 |
| *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 2* | | 2015 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 281,723,902 |
| *The Martian* | | 2015 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 228,433,663 |
| *Cinderella* | | 2015 | 0 | PG | $ 201,151,353 |
| *Spectre* | | 2015 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 200,074,609 |
| *Mission: Impossible - Rogue Nation* | | 2015 | 2 | PG-13 | $ 195,042,377 |
| *Pitch Perfect 2* | | 2015 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 183,637,894 |
| *The Revenant* | | 2015 | 5 | R | $ 180,202,163 |
| *Ant-Man* | | 2015 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 180,202,163 |
| *Home* | | 2015 | 0 | PG | $ 177,397,510 |
| *Hotel Transylvania 2* | | 2015 | 0 | PG | $ 169,700,110 |
| *Fifty Shades of Grey* | | 2015 | 0 | R | $ 166,147,230 |
| *The SpongeBob Movie: Sponge Out of Water* | | 2015 | 1 | PG | $ 162,994,032 |
| *Straight Outta Compton* | | 2015 | 4 | R | $ 161,197,785 |
| *San Andreas* | | 2015 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 155,190,832 |
| *American Sniper* | | 2014 | 3 | R | $ 350,126,972 |
| *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 1* | | 2014 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 337,135,885 |
| *Guardians of the Galaxy* | | 2014 | 5 | PG-13 | $ 333,176,600 |
| *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* | | 2014 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 259,766,572 |
| *The LEGO Movie* | | 2014 | 3 | PG | $ 257,760,692 |
| *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies* | | 2014 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 255,119,788 |
| *Transformers: Age of Extinction* | | 2014 | 2 | PG-13 | $ 245,439,076 |
| *Maleficent* | | 2014 | 0 | PG | $ 241,410,378 |
| *X-Men: Days of Future Past* | | 2014 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 233,921,534 |
| *Big Hero 6* | | 2014 | 1 | PG | $ 222,527,828 |
| *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* | | 2014 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 208,545,589 |
| *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* | | 2014 | 3 | PG-13 | $ 202,853,933 |
| *Godzilla* | | 2014 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 200,676,069 |
| *22 Jump Street* | | 2014 | 1 | R | $ 191,719,337 |
| *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* | | 2014 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 191,204,754 |
| *Interstellar* | | 2014 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 188,020,017 |
| *How to Train Your Dragon 2* | | 2014 | 1 | PG | $ 177,002,924 |
| *Gone Girl* | | 2014 | 0 | R | $ 167,767,189 |
| *Divergent* | | 2014 | 3 | PG-13 | $ 150,947,895 |
| *Neighbors* | | 2014 | 0 | R | $ 150,157,400 |
| *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* | | 2013 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 424,668,047 |
| *Iron Man 3* | | 2013 | 3 | PG-13 | $ 409,013,994 |
| *Frozen* | | 2013 | 0 | PG | $ 400,738,009 |
| *Despicable Me 2* | | 2013 | 0 | PG | $ 368,061,265 |
| *Man of Steel* | | 2013 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 291,045,518 |
| *Gravity* | | 2013 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 247,092,705 |
| *Monsters University* | | 2013 | 0 | G | $ 268,492,764 |
| *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* | | 2013 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 258,366,855 |
| *Fast and Furious 6* | | 2013 | 5 | PG-13 | $ 238,679,850 |
| *Oz the Great and Powerful* | | 2013 | 1 | PG | $ 234,911,825 |
| *Star Trek Into Darkness* | | 2013 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 228,778,661 |
| *Thor: The Dark World* | | 2013 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 206,362,140 |
| *World War Z* | | 2013 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 202,359,711 |
| *The Croods* | | 2013 | 1 | PG | $ 187,168,425 |
| *The Heat* | | 2013 | 4 | R | $ 159,582,188 |
| *We're the Millers* | | 2013 | 1 | R | $ 150,394,119 |
| *American Hustle* | | 2013 | 1 | R | $ 150,117,807 |
| *The Great Gatsby* | | 2013 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 144,840,419 |
| *The Conjuring* | | 2013 | 1 | R | $ 137,400,141 |
| *Identity Thief* | | 2013 | 0 | R | $ 134,506,920 |
| *Marvel's The Avengers* | | 2012 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 623,357,910 |
| *The Dark Knight Rises* | | 2012 | 7 | PG-13 | $ 448,139,099 |
| *The Hunger Games* | | 2012 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 408,010,692 |
| *Skyfall* | | 2012 | 2 | PG-13 | $ 304,360,277 |
| *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* | | 2012 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 303,003,568 |
| *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 2* | | 2012 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 292,324,737 |
| *The Amazing Spider-Man* | | 2012 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 262,030,663 |
| *Brave* | | 2012 | 0 | PG | $ 237,283,207 |
| *Ted* | | 2012 | 2 | R | $ 218,815,487 |
| *Madagascar 3: Europe's Most Wanted* | | 2012 | 1 | PG | $ 216,391,482 |
| *Dr. Seuss' The Lorax* | | 2012 | 0 | PG | $ 214,030,500 |
| *Wreck-It Ralph* | | 2012 | 1 | PG | $ 189,422,889 |
| *Lincoln* | | 2012 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 182,207,973 |
| *MIB 3* | | 2012 | 3 | PG-13 | $ 179,020,854 |
| *Django Unchained* | | 2012 | 14 | R | $ 162,805,434 |
| *Ice Age: Continental Drift* | | 2012 | 1 | PG | $ 161,321,843 |
| *Snow White and the Huntsman* | | 2012 | 3 | PG-13 | $ 155,332,381 |
| *Les Miserables* | | 2012 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 148,809,770 |
| *Hotel Transylvania* | | 2012 | 0 | PG | $ 148,313,048 |
| *Taken 2* | | 2012 | 3 | PG-13 | $ 139,854,287 |
| *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2* | | 2011 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 381,011,219 |
| *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* | | 2011 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 352,390,543 |
| *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 1* | | 2011 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 281,287,133 |
| *The Hangover Part II* | | 2011 | 1 | R | $ 254,454,305 |
| *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides* | | 2011 | 3 | PG-13 | $ 241,071,802 |
| *Fast Five* | | 2011 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 209,837,675 |
| *Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol* | | 2011 | 3 | PG-13 | $ 209,397,903 |
| *Cars 2* | | 2011 | 4 | G | $ 191,452,396 |
| *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* | | 2011 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 186,848,418 |
| *Thor* | | 2011 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 181,030,624 |
| *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* | | 2011 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 176,761,185 |
| *Captain America: The First Avenger* | | 2011 | 3 | PG-13 | $ 176,654,505 |
| *The Help* | | 2011 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 769,708,112 |
| *Bridesmaids* | | 2011 | 0 | R | $ 169,106,725 |
| *Kung Fu Panda 2* | | 2011 | 0 | PG | $ 165,249,063 |
| *Puss in Boots* | | 2011 | 1 | PG | $ 149,260,504 |
| *X-Men: First Class* | | 2011 | 7 | PG-13 | $ 146,408,305 |
| *Rio* | | 2011 | 2 | G | $ 143,619,809 |
| *The Smurfs* | | 2011 | 0 | PG | $ 142,614,158 |
| *Alvin and the Chipmunks: Chipwrecked* | | 2011 | 0 | G | $ 133,110,742 |
| *Toy Story 3* | | 2010 | 3 | G | $ 415,004,880 |
| *Alice in Wonderland* | | 2010 | 1 | PG | $ 334,191,110 |
| *Iron Man 2* | | 2010 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 312,433,331 |
| *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse* | | 2010 | 2 | PG-13 | $ 300,531,751 |
| *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1* | | 2010 | 4 | PG-13 | $ 295,983,305 |
| *Inception* | | 2010 | 4 | PG-13 | $ 292,576,195 |
| *Despicable Me* | | 2010 | 0 | PG | $ 251,513,985 |
| *Shrek Forever After* | | 2010 | 4 | PG | $ 238,736,787 |
| *How to Train Your Dragon* | | 2010 | 0 | PG | $ 217,581,231 |
| *Tangled* | | 2010 | 0 | PG | $ 200,821,936 |
| *The Karate Kid* | | 2010 | 1 | PG | $ 176,591,618 |
| *Tron Legacy* | | 2010 | 0 | PG | $ 172,062,763 |
| *True Grit* | | 2010 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 171,243,005 |
| *Clash of the Titans* | | 2010 | 4 | PG-13 | $ 163,214,888 |
| *Grown Ups* | | 2010 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 162,001,186 |
| *Little Fockers* | | 2010 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 148,438,600 |
| *Megamind* | | 2010 | 2 | PG | $ 148,415,853 |
| *The King's Speech* | | 2010 | 0 | R | $ 135,453,143 |
| *The Last Airbender* | | 2010 | 2 | PG | $ 131,772,187 |
| *Shutter Island* | | 2010 | 1 | R | $ 128,012,934 |
| *Avatar* | | 2009 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 749,766,139 |
| *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* | | 2009 | 2 | PG-13 | $ 402,111,870 |
| *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* | | 2009 | 1 | PG | $ 301,959,197 |
| *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* | | 2009 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 296,623,634 |
| *Up* | | 2009 | 0 | PG | $ 293,004,164 |
| *The Hangover* | | 2009 | 1 | R | $ 277,322,503 |
| *Star Trek* | | 2009 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 257,730,019 |
| *The Blind Side* | | 2009 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 255,959,475 |
| *Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel* | | 2009 | 0 | PG | $ 219,614,612 |
| *Sherlock Holmes* | | 2009 | 2 | PG-13 | $ 209,028,679 |
| *Monsters vs. Aliens* | | 2009 | 1 | PG | $ 198,351,526 |
| *Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs* | | 2009 | 0 | PG | $ 196,573,705 |
| *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* | | 2009 | 3 | PG-13 | $ 179,883,157 |
| *Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian* | | 2009 | 2 | PG | $ 177,243,721 |
| *2012* | | 2009 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 166,112,167 |
| *The Proposal* | | 2009 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 163,958,031 |
| *Fast and Furious* | | 2009 | 3 | PG-13 | $ 155,064,265 |
| *G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra* | | 2009 | 2 | PG-13 | $ 150,201,498 |
| *Paul Blart: Mall Cop* | | 2009 | 1 | PG | $ 146,336,178 |
| *Taken* | | 2009 | 6 | PG-13 | $ 145,000,989 |
| *The Dark Knight* | | 2008 | 10 | PG-13 | $ 533,345,358 |
| *Iron Man* | | 2008 | 2 | PG-13 | $ 318,412,101 |
| *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* | | 2008 | 3 | PG-13 | $ 317,101,119 |
| *Hancock* | | 2008 | 3 | PG-13 | $ 227,946,274 |
| *WALL-E* | | 2008 | 0 | G | $ 223,808,164 |
| *Kung Fu Panda* | | 2008 | 0 | PG | $ 215,434,591 |
| *Twilight* | | 2008 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 192,769,854 |
| *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa* | | 2008 | 0 | PG | $ 180,010,950 |
| *Quantum of Solace* | | 2008 | 3 | PG-13 | $ 168,368,427 |
| *Dr. Seuss' Horton Hears a Who!* | | 2008 | 0 | G | $ 154,529,439 |
| *Sex and the City* | | 2008 | 0 | R | $ 152,647,258 |
| *Gran Torino* | | 2008 | 2 | R | $ 148,095,302 |
| *Mamma Mia!* | | 2008 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 144,130,063 |
| *Marley and Me* | | 2008 | 0 | PG | $ 143,153,751 |
| *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian* | | 2008 | 1 | PG | $ 141,621,490 |
| *Slumdog Millionaire* | | 2008 | 2 | R | $ 141,319,928 |
| *The Incredible Hulk* | | 2008 | 3 | PG-13 | $ 134,806,913 |
| *Wanted* | | 2008 | 6 | R | $ 134,508,551 |
| *Get Smart* | | 2008 | 1 | PG-13 | $ 130,319,208 |
| *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* | | 2008 | 0 | PG-13 | $ 127,509,326 |

*Figure A.1. Number of Torture Scenes by Rating and Release Year*

A screenshot of a cell phone

Description automatically generated

**Appendix B: Criteria for Inclusion**

**Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the prevalence and character of torture in popular films. As such, our sample is composed of the twenty most popular films (as measured by North American box-office receipts) each year from 2008-2017.

**Deconstructing “Torture”**

To define torture for our project, we began with the generally accepted definition put forth by the UN and enshrined in the Convention Against Torture (1975):

“…the term ‘torture means any act by which severe pain and suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him [sic] or a third person information or a confession, punishing him [sic] for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.”

The decision to rely on the CAT definition follows the practice set forth in the Ill Treatment and Torture (ITT) database (Conrad & Moore, 2012). Unlike the ITT database, however, we are interested in all forms of torture, not just that committed by the state. Likewise, the world of film requires that we make various accommodations in order to assess the nature of torture in popular media. We explain our various coding decisions below.

***Public Official***

As opposed to the real-life government signatories of the CAT, popular movies often deal with distant galaxies, alternate histories, or beings that have super-powers. As such, what is or is not a “public official” can often be very difficult to define. Take, for example, the villain “Dormammu” from the movie *Dr. Strange*: Dormammu is an immortal being from “The Dark Dimension,” a place that is “beyond time.” The movie describes him as “the cosmic conqueror, the destroyer of worlds. A being of infinite power and endless hunger on a quest to invade every universe and bring all worlds into his Dark Dimension.” In the movie, the titular Dr. Strange goes to the dark dimension, where he is tortured repeatedly by Dormammu himself. Are we to consider Dormammu as the “government” of the Dark Dimension? It does, after all, seem to be a physical space over which Dormammu holds a monopoly on legitimate force. Moreover, one of Dormammu’s many titles is “Lord of the Realm of Darkness,” which likewise implies some form of governance.

For another example, take the events of the 2012 film *The Dark Knight Rises*. After exiling Batman to a foreign prison, the villain Bane and his organization “the League of Shadows” (LoS) effectively take over Gotham for a span of 4-5 months during the course of the movie. During this takeover, the LoS establish security forces, develop a (very flawed) justice system, and even provide basic services to the people of Gotham, albeit inconsistently. The LoS even come to terms on territorial borders with the US government: When some Gothamite citizens attempt to leave across a bridge, a LoS lieutenant tells the National Guard unit stationed there not to allow anyone to cross the bridge or else the LoS will detonate a nuclear bomb they have come to possess. For the rest of the movie, the National Guard and Gotham State Police[[2]](#footnote-2) both enforce this border, with the State Police even firing weapons and blowing up the bridge to dissuade Gothamites from crossing it. It is in this way that, when taken seriously, the LoS occupation comes to resemble a small-scale DPRK or something like the 2014-15 Houthi takeover of Sana’a in Yemen. It certainly isn’t *quality* governance, but one could certainly make the argument that they fulfill many of the baseline functions that we expect governments to perform. Given the above issues, we settled on coding three separate conceptions of “public official,” detailed in the “Variables” section below.

***Severe Pain and Suffering***

What about instances of extreme pain or suffering in which the victims are active and willing participants? What about instances where the victim is threatened with death or extreme pain, but that pain or killing is never actually applied? What about torture that is mentioned, but never shown on-screen? How should we conceive of large-scale or systematic atrocities? Below, we discuss each of these issues as well as our solutions for each, providing examples for clarity.

One specific example is 2014’s *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*. The main plot concerns Bucky Barnes, a childhood friend of Captain America who has since been captured by Hydra (an organization of rogue Nazi scientists) and ostensibly brainwashed to perform covert assassinations for them. After a failed mission, Bucky is interrogated by his handlers who, at the end of the interrogation, suggest that Bucky be “wiped” so they can start again. Bucky leans backwards into a standing apparatus and opens his mouth to allow Hydra scientists to insert a bite guard. Once the apparatus is turned on, it seems to be incredibly painful for Bucky, who screams until the scene cuts. Is this torture? We decided no, because Bucky gave multiple signs of his own active involvement. It could be argued that Bucky’s willing participation is only conditioned by long-term brainwashing or operant conditioning over decades of abuse, but there is no direct evidence for either *given what we see on screen*. There are other examples of victims willingly subjecting themselves to physical harm: one of the super-soldiers from *GI Joe: The Rise of Cobra* willingly allows a poisonous scorpion to sting him under orders from a superior; Fraternity pledges consume deadly amounts of alcohol while absorbing physical and psychological abuse in *Neighbors* and *22 Jump Street*. In every case, however, we decided that willing participants are incapable of being tortured (this also ruled out some of the more salacious scenes in *Fifty Shades of Grey*).

Off-screen torture posed another potential problem. In 2013’s *The Conjuring*, “demonologists” Ed and Lorraine Warren are giving a lecture on demonic possession when they recount the story of Maurice, a French-Canadian victim of possession. In recounting the story, Ed casually mentions that Maurice had been “molested by his father, who had also tortured him repeatedly.” The lecture then turns to describing Maurice’s demonic possession and the results of the Warrens’ intervention. Since we never actually see Maurice’s injuries, we excluded this instance (and other instances like it) from our analysis. An example of off-screen torture that *is* included can be found in 2015’s *The SpongeBob Movie: Sponge Out of Water*, where the plot revolves around recovering a stolen recipe for “krabby patties.” SpongeBob and his compatriots rescue Karen, an anthropomorphized female computer involved in a romantic relationship with one of SpongeBob’s friends. When the heroes burst into the room, they hear Karen shout “I told you I don’t have the formula, you monsters,” implying that an interrogation has been conducted for some time. When SpongeBob and his friends enter the room, an array of implements designed for torturing computers are strewn about the room, including a large magnet, a bucket of water, screwdrivers, and graffiti on the wall reading “CTRL + ALT + DEL.” While the actual torture occurred off-screen, we see the results of the torture on-screen. As such, this scene was included.

Threat of pain or death posed another potential issue. For example, one of the characters in 2015’s *The Revenant* points a rifle point-blank at another character during an interrogation, saying “answer me, or I’ll blow your damn head off!” The combination of threat, the clear ability to carry out that threat, and the interrogation seems to make this a clear-cut case of torture. However, we might write off a case of police officers pointing a gun and demanding that a suspect give up or disarm. These two cases seem intuitively easy to classify, but fundamentally they both involve someone demanding compliance at gunpoint. As we move to the middle of this spectrum (and away from firearms), the distinction becomes less clear, but one fundamental difference persists: in the first example from *The Revenant*, the victim of torture poses no immediate threat to the perpetrator or anyone else. In the second example, police aim their weapons to counter the potential threat faced by an armed suspect.

Finally, how should we conceive of atrocities committed on a massive scale with the intent to coerce? For example, the antagonists of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* destroy what appears to be an entire solar system’s worth of inhabited planets, solely to send an intimidating message to the rest of the galaxy, while the opening scenes of *X Men: First Class* take place in a Nazi concentration camp. Either one of these events (murder so as to coerce a third party into action, or forced hard labor combined with gradual starvation) would be considered torture to their individual victims, but it somehow feels wrong to include such acts alongside more personalized forms of torture. Similarly, how are we to conceive of slavery as depicted in *Django Unchained* or *Lincoln*? Or, to use another example, how are we to perceive of the titular event in the *Hunger Games* series? Children being ripped from their families and forced to fight one another to the death would almost certainly be considered torture.

**What Torture Isn’t**

***“Lawful Sanctions” and Killing***

An illustrative example comes from *Guardians of the Galaxy*: Peter Quill (the main protagonist) is being interred in a space prison and notices a guard listening to Quill’s famous Walkman. Raising objections, Quill jumps through a security door to accost the guard, who responds by shocking Quill with a cattle prod-like device. This action, in and of itself, is certainly not torture; a prisoner has broken free and is rushing toward a guard, who responds with non-lethal force and brings the prisoner to his knees. The guard then proceeds to shock Quill again, which knocks him from his knees to the floor. It could certainly be argued that this second shock is likewise not torture; given the preceding action, Quill could certainly still be considered a threat even from his knees. It is when the guard applies the cattle prod *yet again* (and continues to do so until the scene cuts) that tips this scene into torture; Quill is now unquestionably disabled and can’t be considered to pose a threat to the guard, but the guard continues to inflict pain upon him as a means of punishment.

In one scene from *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 2*, a trio of daughters watch as their mother’s head and arms are torn off and their toddler brother is thrown into a fire. However, the executions are being carried out by the Volturi, a family of vampires that act as a sort of police force among other vampires. The child is an Immortal Child (an all-powerful toddler whose tantrums destroy villages) and is being “destroyed” because it poses a threat, and the mother is being executed for the crime of harboring such a dangerous being. The trio of daughters seemingly arrive for the execution, but they are not forced to be there and arrived of their own volition. As such it’s a shockingly violent scene, but doesn’t qualify as torture.

Again, *The Dark Knight Rises* provides an example of legal killing where pain is the goal: Those found guilty by the kangaroo courts of the League of Shadows face a choice of “death or exile.” When the court’s victims inevitably choose exile, they are forced to walk across thin ice in a vain attempt to cross a massive river in the dead of winter. The movie reveals this as just a crueler form of death sentence; rather than just kill the victim outright, this penalty forces the victims (and bystanders) to undergo additional psychological trauma before their inevitable death.

***Animal Abuse and Other Crimes Against Non-Humans***

The 2015 *SpongeBob Movie: Sponge Out of Water* provides an easy example of non-inclusion when a group of guards torture a tire for comedic effect, threatening to “let some air out of him” and poking it with sticks. 2014’s *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* provides a more nuanced example: a worker at an ape sanctuary facility applies a cattle prod to the cages holding dozens of apes who are clinging to the bars, thus electrocuting them. Later in the movie, these apes will form the vanguard of an ape revolution intended to overthrow humanity. At the moment of the electrocution, however, the apes have yet to receive the drugs which allow them to think, act, and *communicate* on a human level. Thus, *at the time of the torture*, the victims were not yet anthropomorphized and thus the incident is not coded as torture. Were the apes to be tortured after their drug-induced transformation, that would be considered torture.

**A Working Definition of Torture**

Through this process of refinement, we formed our working definition of torture for the scope of our study:

“A torture incident includes any act by which severe pain and suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a specific, unwilling anthropomorphized being who a) is not actively resisting or posing a direct, personal threat to the torturer and b) cannot voluntarily remove themselves from the situation in a reasonable manner. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in, or incidental to lawful or unlawful sanctions, murder, or other forms of killing. It does not include descriptions of off-screen torture incidents in which the results are not shown on-screen.”

**Appendix C: Variable Names and Descriptions (numbered variables = we coded)**

*movie\_ID*

* Numerical identifier from 1-200.

*title*

* The film’s official title, as listed on BoxOfficeMojo.com

*year*

* The year of theatrical release, as per BoxOfficeMojo.com

*total\_gross*

* A movie’s gross earnings in US dollars in the North American market for the calendar year following its release. Numbers are taken from BoxOfficeMojo.com, and are not adjusted for inflation.

*mpaa\_rating*

* The film’s rating as per the Motion Picture Association of America, used to gauge a film’s intended audience. Film ratings are taken from BoxOfficeMojo.com.

*genre(\_1, \_2, \_3)*

* The film’s genre as reported by the Internet Movie Database (IMDB).
* Films are often classified as belonging to up to three different genres. For example, 2012’s *The Avengers* is classified as “Action, Adventure, Sci-Fi.” To preserve data, we coded each genre reported for each film, in the order recorded on IMDB. Thus, the first genre reported (“Action” in the case of *The Avengers*) would be listed under “Genre\_1.”

**1.** *torture*

* Binary variable indicating whether the movie includes a torture scene (1 if yes).
* When movies have multiple torture scenes, a new observation is created to record each scene. Movies without a torture scene contain one observation, with a “0” recorded for the Torture variable.

**2.** *torture\_IRL*

* Binary variable indicating whether the torture depicted in the scene is at least theoretically possible in reality (1 if yes)
  + Mainly, this variable exists to sort out instances of alternate dimensions, talking animals, nonexistent technology, superpowers, etc.
  + Coded “1” as long as torture does not involve the use of fictional powers or technology and the victims and torturers are human. Thus, Bruce Banner can torture someone, but not the Hulk.

**3.** *public\_official\_broad*

* Binary variable indicating whether the perpetrator(s) are (or are acting with the knowing acquiescence of) agents of a government (1 if yes).
* Under this “broad” categorization, we utilize the Weberian conception of states as communities that successfully claim a monopoly on legitimate violence within a given territory. Thus we include all manner of governments on alien worlds, alternate dimensions, and fictional histories of Middle Earth.

**4.** *public\_official\_med*

* Binary variable indicating whether the perpetrator(s) are (or are acting with the knowing acquiescence of) agents of a government (1 if yes).
* Under this “medium” categorization, we include only those governments that exist (or have existed at some point in history) in the real world. Thus we exclude governments in alternated dimensions and fictional universes, as well as fictional countries such as *Black Panther*’s Wakanda.

**5.** *public\_official\_strict*

* Binary variable indicating whether the perpetrator(s) are (or are acting with the knowing acquiescence of) agents of a government (1 if yes).
* Under this “strict” categorization, we include only those governments that a) exist (or have existed) in real life and b) who, at the time of the events in the movie, have ratified the United Nations Convention Against Torture.
* Note: There are some interesting artifacts of this coding decision that warrant mention, as some cases representing real-life governments are excluded, and some cases representing fictional governments are included. For example, US government officials who engage in torture in *Django Unchained* would not be considered public officials in this conception because the UN CAT had yet to be written in the 1850s, much less ratified. For a more recent example, the Indian police officers who torture the main character in *Slumdog Millionaire* are not considered public officials because the Indian government has yet to ratify the CAT. On the other side, Batman[[3]](#footnote-3) *would* be considered a public official in this more narrow conception because a) While Gotham is fake, it exists within the United States in the present day, and b) Batman acts with the complicity and assistance of Gotham PD, even if Gotham PD don’t publicly admit that fact.

**6.** *timestamp*

* Approximate time at which the torture scene begins
* Note: This time should be treated as approximate, since different streaming services seem to have slightly different start times for movies.

**7.** *onscreen*

* Binary variable indicating whether the torture in the scene is shown on-screen (1 if yes).
* Note: Torture is considered to be on-screen only if the scene involves the application of pain. We do not need to see the actual instrument being applied, but the camera should be “in the room.” Scenes in which we see the aftermath of torture would be considered off-screen.

**8.** *multiple\_vic*

* Binary variable indicating whether the torture in question involved multiple victims (1 if yes)

**9.** *multiple\_perp*

* Binary variable indicating whether the torture in question involved multiple perpetrators (1 if yes)
* Note: To be considered a perpetrator, the individual must be directly involved in either the application of pain or subduing the victim. Otherwise, individuals would be considered bystanders.

**10.** *bystanders*

* Binary variable indicating whether there are any non-victims in the immediate area who do not actively engage in torture (1 if yes).

**11.** *num\_bystanders*

* Approximate count of the number of bystanders in a given scene
* This number should be treated as approximate given the difficulty of getting an accurate count in some scenes. We would recommend instead utilizing the categorical conception of bystanders.

**12.** *bystanders\_cat*

* Categorical variable indicating the number of bystanders in a given torture scene.
* Categories:
  + 1 = 1-5
  + 2 = 6-10
  + 3 = 11-25
  + 4 = 25-100
  + 5 = 100+

**13.** *perp\_male*

* Binary variable indicating whether at least one of the active perpetrators of torture is male (1 if yes)
  + We take “active perpetrator” to mean that the individual directly interacts with either the victim or the instruments of torture (i.e., hits victim, or presses a button that electrocutes the victim. Bystanders do not count as perpetrators).

**14.** *perp\_female*

* Binary variable indicating whether at least one of the active perpetrators of torture is female (1 if yes)
  + We take “active perpetrator” to mean that the individual directly interacts with either the victim or the instruments of torture (i.e., hits victim, or presses a button that electrocutes the victim. Bystanders do not count as perpetrators).

**15.** *victim\_male*

* Binary variable indicating whether at least one of the victims of torture is male (1 if yes)

**16.** *victim\_female*

* Binary variable indicating whether at least one of the victims of torture is female (1 if yes)

**17.** *perp\_protagonist*

* Binary variable indicating whether the active perpetrator of torture is the protagonist (or an agent of the protagonist) of the film (1 if yes).
  + We take “active perpetrator” to mean that the individual directly interacts with either the victim or the instruments of torture (i.e., hits victim, or presses a button that electrocutes the victim. Bystanders do not count as perpetrators).
  + We take “protagonist” to mean the character (or set of characters) who, in the judgment of the coders, are:
    - The character(s) most closely followed by the film
    - The primary agent(s) propelling the film’s plot
    - Opposed by an antagonist(s)

**18.** *perp\_antagonist*

* Binary variable indicating whether the active perpetrator of torture is the antagonist (or an agent of the antagonist) of the film (1 if yes).
  + We take “active perpetrator” to mean that the individual directly interacts with either the victim or the instruments of torture (i.e., hits victim, or presses a button that electrocutes the victim. Bystanders do not count as perpetrators).
  + We take “antagonist” to mean the character (or set of characters) who, in the judgment of the coders, are:
    - The character(s) who opposes the protagonist
    - The character(s) who provide obstacles, complications, and conflicts meant to test the protagonist.

**19.** *vic\_protagonist*

* Binary variable indicating whether the victim of torture is the protagonist (or an agent of the protagonist) of the film (1 if yes).
  + We take “active perpetrator” to mean that the individual directly interacts with either the victim or the instruments of torture (i.e., hits victim, or presses a button that electrocutes the victim. Bystanders do not count as perpetrators).
  + We take “protagonist” to mean the character (or set of characters) who, in the judgment of the coders, are:
    - The character(s) most closely followed by the film
    - The primary agent(s) propelling the film’s plot
    - Opposed by an antagonist(s)

**20.** *vic\_antagonist*

* Binary variable indicating whether the active perpetrator of torture is the protagonist (or an agent of the protagonist) of the film (1 if yes).
  + We take “active perpetrator” to mean that the individual directly interacts with either the victim or the instruments of torture (i.e., hits victim, or presses a button that electrocutes the victim. Bystanders do not count as perpetrators).
  + We take “protagonist” to mean the character (or set of characters) who, in the judgment of the coders, are:
    - The character(s) who opposes the protagonist
    - The character(s) who provide obstacles, complications, and conflicts meant to test the protagonist.

**21.** *vic\_white*

* Binary variable indicating whether the victim of torture is “white,” in the estimation of the coders (1 if yes).
  + This variable should be understood as classifying the ethnic background of the *character,* not necessarily the actor who plays said character.
  + When the subject in question is not human (i.e. an extraterrestrial alien or anthropomorphized animal), this variable is coded as -88.

**22.** *vic\_black*

* Binary variable indicating whether the victim of torture is “black,” in the estimation of the coders (1 if yes).
  + This variable should be understood as classifying the ethnic background of the *character,* not necessarily the actor who plays said character.
  + When the subject in question is not human (i.e. an extraterrestrial alien or anthropomorphized animal), this variable is coded as -88.

**23.** *vic\_arab*

* Binary variable indicating whether the victim of torture is “Arab,” in the estimation of the coders (1 if yes).
  + This variable should be understood as classifying the ethnic background of the *character,* not necessarily the actor who plays said character.
  + When the subject in question is not human (i.e. an extraterrestrial alien or anthropomorphized animal), this variable is coded as -88.

**24.** *perp\_white*

* Binary variable indicating whether the active perpetrator of torture is “white,” in the estimation of the coders (1 if yes).
  + We take “active perpetrator” to mean that the individual directly interacts with either the victim or the instruments of torture (i.e., hits victim, or presses a button that electrocutes the victim. Bystanders do not count as perpetrators).
  + This variable should be understood as classifying the race of the *character,* not necessarily the actor who plays said character.
  + When the subject in question is not human (i.e. an extraterrestrial alien or anthropomorphized animal), this variable is coded as -88.

**25.** *perp\_black*

* Binary variable indicating whether the active perpetrator of torture is “black,” in the estimation of the coders (1 if yes).
  + We take “active perpetrator” to mean that the individual directly interacts with either the victim or the instruments of torture (i.e., hits victim, or presses a button that electrocutes the victim. Bystanders do not count as perpetrators).
  + This variable should be understood as classifying the race of the *character,* not necessarily the actor who plays said character.
  + When the subject in question is not human (i.e. an extraterrestrial alien or anthropomorphized animal), this variable is coded as -88.

**26.** *perp\_arab*

* Binary variable indicating whether the active perpetrator of torture is “Arab,” in the estimation of the coders (1 if yes).
  + We take “active perpetrator” to mean that the individual directly interacts with either the victim or the instruments of torture (i.e., hits victim, or presses a button that electrocutes the victim. Bystanders do not count as perpetrators).
  + This variable should be understood as classifying the race of the *character,* not necessarily the actor who plays said character.
  + When the subject in question is not human (i.e. an extraterrestrial alien or anthropomorphized animal), this variable is coded as -88.

**27.** *psychological*

* Binary variable indicating whether the torture in question is designed so as to intentionally inflict psychological pain (1 if yes)

**28.** *physical*

* Binary variable indicating whether the torture in question is designed so as to intentionally inflict physical pain (1 if yes)

**29.** *threat*

* Binary variable indicating whether the torture in question is being conducted so as to neutralize (or progress towards neutralizing) some imminent, specific threat to the life of at least one person in a ticking time bomb scenario (1 if yes).

**30.** *scope\_of\_threat*

* If torture is being conducted to neutralize a threat, this ordinal variable indicates the number of people whose lives are threatened.
* Scale:
  + 0: there is no threat
  + 1: one individual is threatened
  + 2: 2-99 people are threatened
  + 3: 100-999 people are threatened
  + 4: 1,000-9,999 people are threatened
  + 5: 10,000+ people are threatened

**31.** *coercion\_into\_action*

* Binary variable indicating whether the torture in question is intended to coerce the victim(s) into undertaking (or not undertaking) a specific action (1 if yes)

**32.** *information*

* Binary variable indicating whether the torture in question is intended to extract information from the victim(s)

**33.** *punishment*

* Binary variable indicating whether the torture in question is intended to punish the victim(s) (1 if yes).
  + By “punish,” we mean that the perpetrator(s) intend to inflict harm on the victim for the sole purpose of inflicting harm; victims do not need to have aggrieved anyone in order to be the recipient of “punishing” torture.

**34.** *instrumental*

Binary variable indicating whether the torture in question is intended to extract information ***and/or*** coerce the victim into doing something or to gain information on various topics including another character, something that has happened, or something that will happen either specific and imminently like the ticking time bomb paradigm or a more general threat of attack at some potential unknown future time (1 if yes).

**35.** *capability*

* Binary variable indicating whether the victim(s) in question is(are) capable of complying with the perpetrator’s demands (1 if yes).
  + This variable only applies when torture is instrumental (designed to extract information and/or coerce the victim into action). In cases of non-instrumental torture, this value is missing.
  + By “capable,” we mean that the victim(s) either:
    - Holds (or knows how to access) part or all of the information desired by the perpetrator(s)
    - Could plausibly undertake (or restrain from undertaking) action(s) in the method desired by the perpetrator.

**36.** *efficacy*

* Binary variable indicating whether the torture in question was “effective” (1 if yes)
  + This variable only applies when torture is instrumental (designed to extract information and/or coerce the victim into action). In cases of non-instrumental torture, this value is missing.
  + By “effective,” we mean that the victim(s) either:
    - Gave information (or access to information) desired by the perpetrator(s).
    - Undertook (or successfully restrained from undertaking) the actions desired by the perpetrator.

**37.** *saved*

* Binary variable indicating whether the torture in question was ended by the victim either escaping or being “saved” by another character (1 if yes).

*description*

* Detailed text description of the scene.

**References**

Courtenay R. Conrad and Will H. Moore. “Ill-Treatment and Torture (ITT) Dataset Codebook” (2012).

United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, (1984).

1. Box office numbers are sourced from BoxOfficeMojo.com and are not adjusted for inflation. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As per a close viewing of the patch on the officer’s uniform, it appears that Gotham is both a city and a state. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In his various conceptions [↑](#footnote-ref-3)