Violence in Film
Part 1

Communication Studies 142 – Film as Communication

Spring 2022

- Violent genres have existed since the "dawn" of film:

- Westerns, war, gangster, and horror movies.

- Over the years violence in film as been researched in regards to:

- 1) Historical depictions in different eras.

- 2) Economic functions in the media economy.

- 3) Its prevalence in particular genres.

- 4) Its symbolic function in contemporary visual culture.

- 5) …and most importantly, on the effects of viewing violent films.

- Over 200 studies with more than 43,000 subjects point to a link between media violence and aggressive attitudes and behaviors in **susceptible** individuals.

- Susceptible?
- Already have violent fantasies,
- Have had a abusive upbringing,
- Have trouble identifying the bounties between real life and fictional media worlds.
- They are more likely to immerse themselves in violent media.
- They see violence as a valid way of solving problems,
- They usually do not understand the lasting negative consequences in the form of bleeding, bruising, broken bones, emotion suffering, etc.
- One reason for this is that most media death if often quick and painless.

- Most people who complain about how violence in films might effect people, are usually referring to strong, "over-the-top" violence,

- However, research has shown that it's actually more "sanitized" violence that causes more problems for susceptible individuals.

- Violence as a "cathartic" experience?

- There are those that say viewing violence helps "purge" an individual's violent thoughts and actions.

- The idea of cathartics as an emotion "safety valve" was first presented by Aristotle in *Poetics*.

- However, he was <u>not</u> referring to violence, but the feeling of pity and fear by watching a tragic play.

- Also, there has been no scientific studies that supports the cathartic theory in regards to screen violence.
- The study of causality of violence, because of a "normal" person being exposed to film violence, is very complex as there are so many factors in play when trying to study this area that one single factor is impossible to isolate.
- History:
- Degrees of screen violence and what audience view as acceptable vs. not acceptable has, and will, change over time.
- When *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* were released in 1931, they were considered too gruesome and many cities and towns edited out scenes before screening the films for their patrons.

- Movie violence has two components:
- 1) The act itself and,
- 2) How the act is filmed, edited, and sound applied to the scene … the *stylistic* components.
- Violence (guns, fighting, stabling, etc.) has been a part of film stories since the beginning of fictional film…
- However, starting in the 1960's the depiction of violence changed stylistically dramatically.
- Why?
- From 1932 to 1968 films were expected to follow *Production Code* administered by the *Production Code Administration*.

- The PCA (Production Code Administration):
- 1) Set rules of what could **not** be shown in regard to sex, brutality, gruesomeness, etc.
- (Notice: the term *violence* was not used by the PCA)
- 2) If a film did not follow the PCA code, the PCA would not be given a *Code of Approval*.
- 3) Without a *Code of Approval*, exhibitors would not show the film.
- 4) The PCA was formed in Hollywood, by the studios themselves, to hold back the United States Congress which was about to establish a code itself which the studios would then have to follow or face consequences.

- Before the 1960's films would stylistically find a way to represent violence (like it also did with sex);
- Bowling balls being knocked down in place of a gangster being tommy gunned, a teddy bear among the wreckage of a plane for a dead child, a drummer in a band playing an aggressive solo for a person being beaten.