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MURDER AND MAYHEM AT THE MOVIES[*]

by

Wes Shipley
Gray Cavender
Arizona State University

ABSTRACT

Politicians and the public alike blame an array of social problems on movies, which they claim are increasingly violent and graphically violent. In this paper, we analyze the five top-grossing films in a one year period in each of the past four decades (i.e., 1964, 1974, 1984, and 1994). Our analysis, which is based on a careful coding of these films, focuses on acts of violence, graphic violence, and death. We find that violence, graphic violence, and death increases across the four decades, although not in a perfectly linear trend. We also find that the violence is limited to particular genres.

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the film industry in the early 1900s, Americans have had a love/hate relationship with the movies. Movies are revered as one of our most popular media forms. Many newspapers provide a running account of the gross receipts of the week's top films, and, for many fans, movie stars are the American equivalent of royalty. At the same time, however, movies are reviled as dangerous, especially to youth. They were a prime suspect in the finger-pointing that followed the Columbine tragedy. More recently, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission blasted the film industry for marketing R-rated movies to minors.

For critics of the film industry, there are two major issues. First, critics argue that movies may instill antisocial values in the viewing audience, especially a youthful audience. They suggest that movies and other popular media convey messages that affect our behavior. The concern is that who we are is shaped in a negative way by these messages.

The second criticism and the focus of our analysis is the concern that movies are too violent. This criticism includes the twin claims that movies are increasingly violent and that the graphic nature of that violence is increasing as well.

Obviously, these criticisms represent two sides of the same coin: what we see at the movies shapes our behavior, and what we see is more and more violence. For example, kids who see too many violent, criminal images at the movies may commit violent crimes, either tomorrow or in the future. Specifically, critics contend that violent crime has risen over the past several decades in the U.S. They blame the increase in crime and violence on a number of criminogenic (i.e., crime generating) factors, but chief among them are popular media such as the movies. It is no coincidence, critics argue, that the increasing level of violence in society parallels the increasingly violent content of films.

Both criticisms are so commonplace as to verge on being assumptions. In reality, of course, these criticisms raise empirical questions. In this paper, we address the second criticism in a rather straightforward manner. We ask, "Are movies really becoming more violent?" "Is the graphic nature of film violence on the increase?" To answer these questions, we analyze the violent content of the five top-grossing films in one year intervals across four decades (i.e., 1964, 1974, 1984, and 1994).

In the sections that follow, we first discuss the putative relationship between film and violence.

We also discuss the claim that movie violence is on the increase. Next, we explain our method (i.e., how we chose the films and operationalized violence and graphic violence). We then present our findings about the violent content of films across these four decades. Finally, we discuss the implications of our findings.

THE MOVIES AND VIOLENT BEHAVIOR

We have long been a nation that is obsessed with pop culture. Commentators suggest that the media that comprise pop culture help to shape our identity, both individually and as a nation (Anderson 1990; Bailey and Hale 1998). This is variously seen as both a good and a bad thing.

Movies are one of the most popular and most enduring of our media. Once they began in the early 1900s, movies enjoyed an explosive popularity. In 1904 there were no movie theaters in the U.S. By 1910, there were 5000 theaters, and the moviegoing audience numbered 26 million patrons per week, about one-fifth of the population (Gomery 1992:19-20). Americans clearly had discovered a medium that was dear to their hearts.

Indeed, movies even help to define what it means to be an American. In the early 1900s, for example, recent immigrants were among the most loyal moviegoers, and the medium was a key component of their socialization (Gomery 1992:21). Similarly, women became loyal fans in the 1910s, and movies helped to define the "New American Woman" in U.S. society (Gomery 1992:31). Beginning in the late 1950s and thereafter, movies became a defining purveyor of youth culture (Snyder 1995).

However, the very fact that the movies helped to shape the identities of these populations prompts some critics to condemn them. The film industry has been blamed for antisocial behaviors that range from sexual promiscuity to un-American activities to juvenile delinquency (Krutnik 1991; Kidd-Hewitt 1995; Clarens 1997; Todd 2000). Of course, movies are not unique in experiencing such criticism. Over the years, many popular media have been blamed for antisocial behaviors. Critics have posited relationships between comic books and juvenile delinquency (see Nyberg 1998), between music and drugs (see Gray 1989), and between television and violence (Gerbner and Gross 1976; see Surette 1998).

Despite these broad condemnations of popular media, movies and, more recently, television are frequent targets of criticism. And, although the criticisms cover a variety of behaviors (e.g., sexual and other social mores), complaints about crime and violence perennially underlie the attacks on movies and on television as well (Allen, Livingstone, and Reiner 1997; Beckett and Sasson 2000; Todd 2000; Rafter 2000).

While criticism of crime and violence in film is not new – as early as 1917 movies were blamed for juvenile delinquency (see Allen, Livingstone, and Reiner 1998:54) – the amount and the volume of criticism has been pronounced over the past four decades. Given these deeply felt concerns, not surprisingly there literally are thousands of scholarly studies of the relationship between popular media and violence (Livingstone 1996; Taylor and Willis 1999:156). Movies and television frequently are the subjects of these studies (Kidd-Hewitt 1995).

Many studies focus on the relationship between movie violence and real life behavior. Some studies conclude that people who watch violent movies are more likely than those who watch non-violent movies to exhibit a short term increase in aggressive behavior (Bjorkquist 1985; Black and Bevan 1992). Other research suggests that watching violent movies is an aspect of long term socialization, and produces affects that range from criminal behavior to a desensitization to violence (Blumer and Hauser 1933; Snyder 1995).

Over the years, researchers in numerous studies have tried to explain the link between violence in

media and violence in the real world. Three explanations seem to be the most prevalent. The first explanation suggests that we learn through observation. This is based on Bandura's (1971) classic social learning theory. A second explanation suggests that the more violence we see, the more we become desensitized to it. The notion here is that, with repeated exposure, we become more comfortable with situations that formerly caused anxiety (Linz, Donnerstein, and Penrod 1988). A third explanation suggests that we see so much violence depicted in the media that we overestimate its presence in the real world, and become unreasonably fearful. Gerbner and Gross (1976) popularized this explanation in their media cultivation thesis, which claims that much of what we know is based upon what we see in the media.

The most recent comprehensive study of the relationship between media and violence focuses on television. However, the study is relevant to a discussion of movie violence. The National Television Violence Study (1997) is one of the largest, most representative samples of television content ever analyzed. Between October 1994 and June 1995, researchers monitored 23 frequently viewed broadcast and cable channels seven days a week from 6am to 11pm. They conducted a detailed content analysis of 2500 hours of TV programming. Researchers conclude that three problematic effects characterize the depiction of television violence: viewers may learn aggressive attitudes and behaviors; they may be desensitized to violence; they may become fearful (National Television Violence Study 1997:5). These problematic effects concur with the three explanations that we discussed above. Researchers note that, while television violence rarely is graphic, among the most violent (and graphically violent) programs are movies, theatrical releases later aired on premium cable channels (National Television Violence Study 1997:110). The study concludes that TV (including movies shown on TV) depicts a large amount of violence, and that these depictions are highly problematic.

Recent studies, which reach similar conclusions, fuel critics of the entertainment industry. One study suggests that G-rated animated movies, which are targeted to young audiences, have become more violent over the years, and especially in the 1990s (Yokata and Thompson 2000). Similarly, violence in animated TV shows, a staple of children's programming and very popular among boys, also has increased (Rutenberg 1/28/2001:A1). Some of these cartoons are so graphically violent that the Nickelodeon channel refuses to air them; media critic George Gerbner notes that such violence is so prevalent that Americans are becoming desensitized to it (Rutenberg 1/28/2001:A16). In one last study, The Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA), a non-partisan research organization, conducted an exhaustive analysis of 1998's most popular movies, TV series, and music videos. According to the CMPA study, audiences of these popular media saw a serious violent act every four minutes (Fiore 9/23/1999:B8). U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman said the CMPA study confirms the common belief that "...the culture of violence is alive and killing in America today," and poses a substantial threat to children (Fiore 9/23/1999:B8).

Thus, concerns about film violence now infuse the political agenda. In 1995, U.S. Senator (and presidential candidate) Bob Dole called movies "nightmares of depravity" (Leland 12/11/1995:46). Columbine and other tragic, high profile incidents that involved "young people killing young people" renewed concerns about violence in film and other media (see Glassner 1999). These concerns intensified when the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) released the results of a study which condemned the film industry for marketing R-rated movies to youthful audiences (Rosenbaum 9/12/2000:A1,20). FTC Chairman Robert Pitofsky characterized these marketing practices as "deplorable" and a cause for concern (Rosenbaum 9/12/2000:A20). Prompted by the timing of the study, movie violence became an issue in the 2000 presidential election: Democrats and Republicans alike condemned Hollywood for violence in movies, and for marketing violent movies to youth (Rosenbaum 9/12/2000:A1). Politicians from President Clinton to Vice President (and presidential candidate) Al Gore condemned the practices and threatened to sponsor legislation if the movie industry did not stop the abuses (Rosenbaum 9/12/2000:A20). The Republicans even attacked the Democrats for not attacking Hollywood enough: being soft on crime has given way to being soft on violence in the movies as a campaign issue (Perez-Pena 9/21/2000:A22).

Several interesting points emerge from the FTC study. First, as he condemned the movie industry, Chairman Pitofsky enumerated the same three problematic effects that were noted in the National Television Violence Study (1997), and which generally are used to explain the link between media and real

world violence (Rosenbaum 9/12/2000:A20). Second, even as he enumerated these effects, Chairman Pitofsky acknowledged that academic research has not definitively demonstrated a link between movie violence and violent behavior in the real world (Rosenbaum 9/12/2000:A20). Finally, the newspaper report about the FTC story noted that, according to public opinion surveys, 80 percent of U.S. adults believe that there is a link between violence in the real world and violence depicted in the media (Rosenbaum 9/27/2000:A15).

What is noteworthy here is that Americans overwhelmingly believe that there is a relationship between movies or other popular media and violent behavior, especially among youth. And yet, the research is somewhat ambivalent. Perhaps human behavior is more complicated than a simple cause (movie messages) and effect (real violence) relationship (see Taylor and Willis 1999). Or, even if such a relationship exists, it may be methodologically difficult to demonstrate given the variety of stimuli to which we are exposed (Hirsch 1981). Or, it may be that the causal arrows go in the other direction: ours is a violent culture, so our movies are violent; indeed, moviegoers develop a taste for movie violence (Gitlin 1991; McKinney 1993).

Scholars note that Hollywood's pre-occupation with violence is not new. Historically, violence sells (Gitlin 1991; Newman 1993). Even so, there are economic inducements for movies to be more violent today. For example, the violent action in "blockbuster" films needs no translation, which makes their international distribution more lucrative. Profitability is important in the U.S. market as well. Teenage boys, a major demographic target for the film industry, like violent action movies; Hollywood responds (Sparks 1996). The increasing violence in animated television programming also targets boys; there are program tie-ins with action figures which are marketed to boys (Rutenberg 1/28/2001:A16).

Most scholarly research focuses either on why movies are so violent, or the effects of that violence on real behavior. There are fewer studies which specifically address the increase in movie violence. The studies that address the topic tend to attribute an increase in violence to particular movie genres. For example, Molitor and Sapolsky (1993) analyze "slasher films," a relatively new genre. Molitor and Sapolsky (1993) conclude that violence in "slasher films" increased from an average of 40 violent acts per film in 1980 to an average of 47 acts per film in 1985 to an average of almost 70 violent acts per film in 1989. They add that "slasher films" depict extremely graphic violence, including explicit details of violent attacks and their aftermath (Molitor and Sapolsky 1993).

Studies also focus on the crime genre and the violent content of such films. Allen, Livingstone, and Reiner (1998) analyze crime films released in England between 1945 and 1991 (most of these films were made in the U.S.). Although the authors find no significant increase in the overall number of crime films (the genre consistently averages about 20 percent of film output in any given year), they do find that the level of violence, and particularly of graphic violence, in the crime genre increases from the 1960s to 1991 (Allen, Livingstone, and Reiner 1998). Similarly, depictions of the effects of violence (trauma to victims) also increase (Allen, Livingstone, and Reiner 1998).

Pundits and the public alike make two assumptions about movie violence. First, critics assume that movie violence somehow is related to violence in the real world. Second, critics assume that movies are becoming more violent and more graphically violent. In this paper, we address the second assumption: are movies really becoming more violent, and is the violence of an increasingly graphic nature?

METHOD

Our objective is to determine if the amount of, and the level of, graphic violence are increasing in Hollywood films. The assumption that "movies are increasingly violent" suggests a

temporal dimension for our research. Accordingly, we analyzed movies over a period of time. In this paper, we analyze one year's worth of films in each decade over a period of four decades.

As we noted, some researchers focus on the amount and level of violence in specific genres. Although genre research produces useful insights, we are more interested in the violent content of films that are seen by the most people, regardless of genre. Some scholars, including some who focus on genres, use a "most popular film" approach in their research (see Wright 1975). They and we are interested in the films that have "the widest resonance with popular consciousness" (Allen, Livingstone, and Reiner 1998:64). We analyze for violent content the five top-grossing films in one year intervals in each of the past four decades.

When we first conceptualized the study, the most recent box office data available referenced 1994 films. Similarly, the most recent videos widely available were 1994 films. Thus, 1994 became our end date and, for reasons of symmetry, we chose movies from 1984, 1974, and 1964.

Initially, we referenced two sources to determine the five top-grossing films in our target years: <u>Film</u> <u>Facts</u> (Steinberg 1978) and <u>Box</u> <u>Office</u> <u>Hits</u> (Sackett 1996). As an aside, the two sources do not always agree in their rankings of the five top-grossing films in a given year. The disagreements are due to each source's decision about the year in which a film should be counted when the film plays in theaters over a two-year period. Because the data for the later decades were incomplete in <u>Film</u> <u>Facts</u> (Steinberg 1978), we relied on <u>Box</u> <u>Office</u> <u>Hits</u> (Sackett 1996) to determine the films for analysis. Here, we encountered a problem not uncommon in film research (the "out-of-print video" problem; see Allen, Livingstone, and Reiner 1998). *The Trial of Billy Jack*, the number five top-grossing film in 1974 according to <u>Box</u> <u>Office</u> <u>Hits</u> (Sackett 1996), was out-of-print and unavailable in our video rental outlets. As a replacement, we used a film listed in <u>Film</u> <u>Facts</u> (Steinberg 1978) as one of its top five-grossing movies of 1974: *The Sting*. Indeed, <u>Film</u> <u>Facts</u> (Steinberg 1978) listed *The Sting* as the number one film of 1974.

Our next decision involved the matter of a definition of violence. Although thousands of studies examine violence in the media, there is no one commonly accepted definition of violence (see Newman 1998). For our analysis, we use the definition employed in the National Television Violence Study (1997). Violence is "any overt depiction of a credible threat of physical force or the actual use of such force intended to physically harm an animate being or group of beings" (National Television Violence Study 1997). We modified this definition by excluding mere threats of violence from our analysis.

This modified definition offers several advantages. It is used in the National Television Violence Study (1997), which is one of the most recent and comprehensive studies of violence in the media. It allows us to code actual behaviors, not threatening behaviors, which simplifies coding and calls for fewer interpretations. Finally, the definition includes animate beings as well as people. This was relevant because of cartoons in the television study, and it also becomes relevant for some films in our analysis.

Next, we defined graphic violence. Our definition is informed by research that addresses graphic violence in terms of blood and gore, trauma to a victim, and realism in these depictions (see Molitor and Sapolsky 1993; Allen, Livingstone, and Reiner 1998). Because critics condemn not just violence but graphic violence, which they claim also is on the rise and which is assumed to be more problematic, we created two definitional categories: one category is for non-graphic violence; the other category is for graphic violence. Category 1 Violence includes those acts that do not depict obvious injury, blood, or trauma realistically. Category 2 Violence includes those acts that depict obvious injury, blood, or trauma realistically. We also wondered if deaths were on the increase, so we counted the deaths that were depicted in these films. Following the same logic that we used in terms of categories of violence, we divided deaths into non-graphic deaths (Category 1 Deaths), and graphic deaths (Category 2 Deaths).

Our coding instrument was straightforward, if detailed. Following other film research (Molitor and Sapolsky 1993; Allen, Livingstone, and Reiner 1998), we literally counted violent acts. We coded punches, kicks, stabs, gunshots, explosions, or related acts which were directed at animate beings in the movies that we analyzed. In addition to Category 1 and Category 2 Violence and Death, our analysis also includes the

computation of ratios, for example, deaths to violent acts, or graphic violence to all violent acts.

We offer a coding example for purposes of illustration. Toward the conclusion of *Goldfinger*, one of the films in our analysis, a scene features a pitched battle between Goldfinger's forces and U.S. military personnel outside of the gold depository at Ft. Knox. When shot, the combatants simply fall down; they could be sleeping. We coded this scene as a Category 1, non-graphic depiction. In contrast, a scene in *True Lies* exemplifies a Category 2, graphic violence depiction. A man falls from a truck and is run over by the truck. In slow motion, the camera captures the truck's wheels as they run over the man; we see his body twist and contort in pain. The trauma to the human body in this scene is portrayed in a graphic, realistic fashion.

With subject films, relevant definitions, and a coding instrument in place, we began the analysis. We conducted a close analysis of the films, which necessitated heavy use of the remote control to stop, rewind, replay, and code the violent acts in the films.

We are satisfied with our method of analysis, although an obvious limitation pertains to the number of films that we reviewed in each year. A deeper cut into each year's top-grossing films – say, ten films instead of five – might produce different results than those we will present. The five top-grossing films might be an aberration, or they may enjoy some violence-oriented marketing niche that does not persist as one delves deeper into each year's films. Perhaps future research can dig deeper into the list of successful films and reveal more information on this point. In any case, we think that a detailed coding of violence and death in five films per year for four decades yields many insights.

Our research addresses issues of violence, graphic violence, and whether the movies increasingly depict these acts. We began the analysis with four specific research questions: (1) Are movies becoming more violent? (2) Are movies becoming more graphically violent? (3) Are there more deaths in movies? (4) Are there more graphic deaths in movies?

ANALYSIS

1964	Gross
Mary Poppins	$45,000,000
Goldfinger	23,000,000
The Carpetbaggers	15,500,000
My Fair Lady	12,000,000
From Russia With Love	9,900,000

The five top-grossing films of 1964 contain a total of 144 violent acts, or an average of 29 violent acts per film. On closer analysis, however, the films are diverse in their violent content. For example, *Mary Poppins* and *My Fair Lady* each depict only four violent acts, while *From Russia With Love* depicts 70 violent acts. Indeed, just over three-fourths (76%) of all violent acts across the five films occur in *Goldfinger* and *From Russia With Love*. There are only two acts of graphic violence (one percent of the total) in the five films. Both occur in *From Russia With Love*.

The five films in 1964 depict a total of 41 deaths, for an average of eight deaths per film. Two films, *Goldfinger* and *From Russia With Love*, account for all of the deaths that are the result of violent acts. Approximately 28 percent of the 144 violent acts result in death. There are no Category 2 deaths (graphically violent) in 1964.

Most of the violence in 1964 occurs in the two James Bond films. There are only two acts of graphic violence, and they are relatively tame by today's standards, and no graphically violent deaths. The Bond films focus more on depicting a suspenseful or an ingenious way to kill,

rather than on the graphic details of the act.

1974	Gross
The Sting	$68,500,000
The Towering Inferno	52,000,000
Blazing Saddles	47,800,000
Young Frankenstein	38,800,000
Earthquake	35,800,000

The five top-grossing films of 1974 contain a total of 168 violent acts, or an average of 34 violent acts per film. These films also are diverse in their violent content. Violent acts are somewhat more evenly distributed across the five films in 1974: *Blazing Saddles* depicts the most violent acts (76) followed by *Earthquake* (45 violent acts), *The Towering Inferno* (24 violent acts), and *The Sting* (18 violent acts); *Young Frankenstein* depicts the fewest violent acts (five). The majority of the violent acts (156) are not graphically violent. Twelve acts (seven percent of the total) are graphically violent in the 1974 films.

The five films depict a total of 44 deaths, or an average of nine deaths per film. Most of the deaths occur in two "disaster" genre films, *Earthquake* (27 deaths) and *The Towering Inferno* (10 deaths). Approximately 26 percent of the 168 violent acts result in death. Of the 44 deaths, 38 are in Category 1 (not graphic). Six deaths are depicted in a graphic manner (Category 2).

The 1974 films depict more violent acts and deaths. There also are more graphically violent acts and graphically violent deaths. The films are becoming more violent, although large amounts of graphic detail are not yet evident.

1984	Gross
Ghostbusters	$130,200,000
Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom	109,000,000
Beverly Hills Cop	108,000,000
Gremlins	79,500,000
The Karate Kid	43,400,000

The five top-grossing films of 1984 contain a total of 307 violent acts, or an average of 61 violent acts per film. Once again, the films are diverse in their violent content. *Gremlins* contains the fewest violent acts (22), while *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* depicts the most violent acts (141, or 46 percent of the year's total). *The Karate Kid* depicts 82 violent acts and *Ghostbusters* and *Beverly Hills Cop* each depict 31 violent acts. There are 16 acts of graphic violence in 1984 (Category 2). While this is an increase over the two previous time periods, the increase is rather modest given the substantial rise in total violent acts. Indeed, only five percent of the violent acts depict graphic violence.

Deaths actually decline in the 1984 films. There are 38 deaths, or an average of approximately eight deaths per film. One film, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, depicts half (19) of the deaths. Twelve percent of the violent acts result in death. While the total number of deaths decreases in 1984, more deaths (10, or 26 percent of the total) are graphically depicted (Category 2).

The films in 1984 depict more violent acts and more graphically violent acts. However, these Category 2 acts decline as a percentage of overall violence. Graphic deaths also increase, although total deaths decline.

1994	Gross
The Lion King	$298,900,000
Forrest Gump	298,100,000
True Lies	146,300,000
The Santa Clause	134,600,000
The Flintstones	130,500,000

The five top-grossing films of 1994 depict a total of 223 violent acts, or an average of 45 acts per film. Once again, the films are characterized by diversity in their depiction of violence. For example, *The Santa Clause* depicts only one violent act. Two films, *True Lies* (111) and *Forrest Gump* (71), depict the vast majority (82 percent) of the violent acts. The graphic detail of violence (Category 2) increases in 1994. There are 64 acts of graphic violence, and they constitute a larger portion (29 percent) of all violent acts than in the earlier decades.

The five films depict 76 deaths, or an average of 15 deaths per film. One film, *True Lies*, accounts for approximately 82 percent of the deaths (62). In 1994, 34 percent of the violent acts result in death. There are 47 graphic deaths (Category 2) in 1994. This represents an increase in terms of raw numbers. Moreover, more than half (62 percent) of the deaths are now of a graphic nature.

DISCUSSION

Research Question 1 asks, "Are movies becoming more violent?" The results of our analysis indicate that, yes, overall, in terms of violent acts, the movies in our sample became more violent over the four decades under review. However, this is not a perfectly linear trend: the five films in 1984 depict more violent acts than those in 1994. Otherwise, as we can see in Table 1, in each decade the films that we analyze depict more violent acts than films in the comparable year of the previous decade. And, in any case, the 1994 films depict more violent acts than those in 1964 or in 1974.

Table 1: Violence Measures of Top 5 Grossing Films by Year (1964-1994)

	1964	1974	1984	1994
Total Violent Acts	144	168	307	223
Average Violent Acts per Film	29	34	61	45
Distribution of Violent Acts	Mainly 2 films: *Goldfinger* and *From Russia With Love*	More evenly distributed	Mainly *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*	Mainly 2 films: *True Lies* and *Forrest Gump*
Category 1 (Nongraphic) Violence	142	156	291	159
Category 2 (Graphic) Violence	2	12	16	64
Ratio of Graphic to Total Violence	2:144 = 1%	12:168 = 7%	16:307 = 5%	64:223 = 29%
Total Deaths	41	44	38	76
Average Deaths per Film	8	9	8	15
Distribution of Deaths	All in 2 films: *Goldfinger* and *From Russia With Love*	Mainly in 2 "disaster" films: *Earthquake* and *The Towering Inferno*	Half the deaths in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*	Mainly *True Lies*
Category 1 (Nongraphic) Deaths	41	38	28	29
Category 2 (Graphic) Deaths	0	6	10	47
Ratio of Graphic to Total Deaths	0:41 = 0%	6:44 = 14%	10:38 = 26%	47:76 = 62%

Research Question 2 asks, "Are movies becoming more graphically violent?" As we can see in Table 1, the answer is yes: the number of acts of graphic violence increases in every decade under review. Moreover, with the exception of 1984, the ratio of graphically violent to total acts of violence increases in every decade as well. Again, 1984 is something of an outlier. The 1984 films depict so many acts of violence that, even though there also are more graphically violent acts, the ratio of Category 2 Violence to

all violent acts is smaller than in the films of 1974. A comparison of the beginning and last decades under review is especially revealing. Not only do the acts of graphic violence increase from two (1964) to 64 (1994), but by 1994 more than one-fourth of the violent acts are graphically violent acts (29 percent).

Research Question 3 asks, "Are there more deaths in the movies?" The answer is, overall, yes, the movies became more deadly in the decades under review. Again, because of 1984, there is not a perfectly linear trend. Indeed, the 1984 films represent an anomaly: far and away the largest number of violent acts, but the fewest deaths. In contrast to the downturn in 1984 (38 deaths), the 1994 films evidence a substantial increase in deaths (76). Moreover, as a ratio (deaths to violent acts), over one-third of all violent acts in the 1994 movies result in death.

We offer two explanatory comments about the non-linear nature of the films in 1984; both address the mix of films that year. First, as compared with the other years, all five films in our sample from 1984 depict relatively large amounts of violence. For example, even *Gremlins*, the least violent film in 1984, contains many more acts of violence than the "less violent" films in the other three decades. Second, a young adult film like *The Karate Kid* or a comedy like *Ghostbusters* may be violent but, at the same time, less deadly. Thus, the films in our 1984 sample contain many violent acts, but few that end in death.

Research Question 4 asks, "Are there more graphic deaths in the movies?" In terms of both raw numbers and ratios (Category 1 to Category 2 deaths), the answer is yes, there are more graphic deaths in each decade (see Table 1). Again, the end points tell the story: there were no graphic deaths in the 1964 films, but there were 47 graphically violent deaths in the 1994 films. Moreover, 62 percent of all deaths were graphic deaths (Category 2) in 1994.

As Table 1 clearly reveals, over the four decades under review, the movies in our sample are increasingly violent and more graphically violent. A caveat is in order, however. Our data also reveal that the depiction of violence and death is not equally distributed across all movies, but rather is usually clustered in one or two films in each period.

Scholars suggest that some movie genres are more violent than others (Molitor and Sapolsky 1993; Allen, Livingstone, and Reiner 1998). Our analysis agrees. Movies in two genres – action and disaster – depict the most violence. The two disaster films in 1974, *Earthquake* and *The Towering Inferno*, depict 40 percent of all violent acts and more than 80 percent of all violent deaths. Across the four decades under review, the action genre, which includes spy films (see Bennett and Woollacott 1987), is even more violent. These films – *Goldfinger* and *From Russia With Love* in 1964, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* in 1984, and *True Lies* in 1994 – depict a disproportionate amount of the violent and graphically violent acts and the violent deaths which we coded in our analysis.

Two films in our analysis merit additional comment. Both movies are known as hyphenates; that is, they cross genres (Maltby 1995). *Blazing Saddles* (1974) is a comedy-western, and *Gremlins* (1984) is a comedy-horror movie. These hyphenate films, which emphasize humor, depict a substantial amount of violence. *Blazing Saddles* depicts the most violent acts (44 percent of all violent acts) of the films in 1974; almost one-fourth of all deaths in the 1984 movies occur in *Gremlins* (the gremlins die). Moreover, some of the action films in our sample also depict violence in ways that are sometimes humorous (see King 1999). Scholars are critical of media presentations that pair violence and humor. The concern is that such a pairing is doubly problematic: it reinforces violence and diminishes its seriousness (National Television Violence Study 1997; also see Zillman and Bryant 1991).

At the same time, however, we should note that in each period under review, several films appear which depict little or no violence. In 1994, for example, although there is a good deal of

violence and much of it is realistic and graphic, there are three relatively non-violent films. This is an important point because it demonstrates that, notwithstanding the concern about violence in movies, there are very popular – indeed, top-grossing – movies that depict little or no violence.

CONCLUSION

We began this analysis by stating a anomaly: Americans seem to be enamored of popular media and, at the same time, to fear them. Nowhere is this more obvious than with the movies. Box office receipts continue to rise, but Americans blame the movies for a host of social ills. Hollywood even became an issue in the 2000 presidential campaign.

In this paper, we assessed the criticism that movies are becoming more violent and more graphically violent. We analyzed one year's worth of movies from each of the last four decades. Our findings agree with the conventional wisdom and the scholarly research. The movies in our sample became more violent and depicted more acts of graphic violence. Movies also depicted more deaths, and more graphically violent deaths.

Of course, we cannot infer from our findings that movies caused the tragedy at Columbine or the other problematic behaviors that critics blame on Hollywood. We did not focus on such "cause and effect" relationships. Todd Gitlin (1994) and other social critics may be correct in the assessment that modern life is more violent and that our popular media, including the movies, reflect that reality. Moreover, as spokespersons for Hollywood note, although movie violence may be increasing, crime, even violent crime, has declined over the past decade.

This is all to say that the relationship between the movies and real life is more complicated than simple questions of "cause and effect." Yes, as our analysis demonstrates, the movies are increasingly violent. However, rather than simple finger-pointing or Hollywood bashing as a campaign strategy, perhaps other issues should be the focus of future scholarship.

For example, one point is clear from Columbine and similar incidents: most of the assailants were boys. Perhaps this is due to biology or to child-rearing practices (see King 8/22/1999:A26 for a discussion of playground violence among boys). But, recall the studies about how television markets graphically violent cartoons to boys, and that animated movies increasingly are more violent as well. Again, there is no simple cause and effect relationship but rather, many factors, including culture, which produce both gender and a propensity to violence. In any case, we must pay more attention to the relationship between images of masculinity (including what it means to be a movie hero) and violent behavior. Scholars increasingly include such issues in their research agendas in terms of film (Sparks 1996; Cavender 1999; Rafter 2000) and real life (Messerschmidt 2000).

A related issue is Hollywood's and our penchant for violent movies. Many scholars note that "violence sells," whether it is newspaper accounts of Jack the Ripper more than a century ago (see Walkowitz 1982; Gitlin 1991) or the latest summer action movie blockbuster. Scholars now address such films and their attraction to movie audiences (King 1999).

We end on a related and perhaps more upbeat note. Violence is not evenly distributed in the films that we analyzed. Rather, violence, especially graphic violence, clusters in certain movie genres (e.g., action films). This is troubling because action movies are so popular among teenage boys. However, such films also are among the most expensive to produce. There are some indications that action films are slipping a bit in box office appeal. This may be a function of the quality of particular films, or an indicator that the genre is wearing thin. In any case, the box office success of other, less violent films may be a harbinger of shifting sensibility in the audience and in Hollywood.

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YOU'VE GOT MAIL! YOU DON'T WANT IT: CYBER-VICTIMIZATION AND ON-LINE DATING[*]

by

Robert Jerin
Beverly Dolinsky

Endicott College

ABSTRACT

This paper provides an analysis of victimization risk by women who use Internet dating services as a means of pursuing interpersonal relationships. Specifically, the paper is a study of women's opinions of the risk they may encounter and the prevention measures employed by women who use such services. The actual victimization experiences of women who currently use Internet dating services is also detailed.

INTRODUCTION

On-line dating Internet sites are the newest devices being used to help people find love and companionship. The use of on-line dating services is described as booming and there are many Internet sites whose sole purpose is the business of helping individuals find romantic partners. Skriloff and Gould (1997) list 42 such sites in their 1997 book devoted to assisting women to be successful in "flirting, dating and finding love on-line" (title page). One of the more popular sites is Match.com (www.match.com/main/dating_tips.cfm) that boasts of approximately 100,000 active members and is used by over two million individuals (Benson, Harrison & Koss-Feder, 2000).

As on-line dating has become mainstream, people have started to debate its effect on social relationships. The popular literature is filled with mixed messages, describing either the value of on-line dating in helping people meet Mr./Mrs. Right or warning of its danger to the individual's safety. Interestingly enough, there is a noticeable lack of systematic research specifically examining on-line relationships. Katz and Aspden (1997) have noted that with the development of each new form of communication technology, there have been critics espousing its evils. They note that such innovations as the telegraph, telephone, and automobile have all radically altered society. With these innovations has come the debate as to whether the improvements in the quality of life such technology brings overrides possibly detrimental changes in relationships and society as a whole.

As with these earlier technologies, Internet communication has its advocates and critics (When cupid uses a cursor, 1999; Katz & Aspden, 1997; Merkle & Richardson, 2000; Parks & Floyd, 1996). Advocates argue that genuine and meaningful communication can occur, and in fact can be enhanced, using on-line methods (Merkle & Richardson, 2000). Some claim that this method actually harkens back to the old days of courtship (Benson, Harrison & Koss-Feder, 2000; Canon, 1997). Unlike face-to-face relationships that are typically initiated based upon physical attractiveness and spatial proximity, on-line dating allows individuals to talk and truly get to know each other's backgrounds, opinions and life goals prior to deciding whether to meet each other. Accordingly, Merkle and Richardson (2000) have described computer-mediated relationships as occurring through an inverted developmental sequence. That is, individuals get to know each other first and then later discover whether there is a physical attraction. How often computer-mediated relationships lead to face-to-face relationships remains to be determined (Cooper & Sportolari, 1997; Schnarch, 1997).

A second major argument for the value of on-line dating is its ability to allow individuals to "meet" each other from around the world. On-line communication is said to be creating an Internet "global village" and with this individuals have more choice and hence more of a possibility of meeting someone who reflects the attributes of their ideal lover (Katz & Aspden, 1997; Krakowka, 1998; Skriloff & Gould, 1997).

The critics charge that computer-mediated communication and relationships are shallow, impersonal, and potentially dangerous. The majority of dangers discussed in the popular and professional literature deal more with the deterioration of meaningful social relationships as compared to criminal victimization issues. Most of the charges are anecdotal and based on personal impressions and case studies (Katz & Aspden, 1997; Parks & Floyd, 1996). For example, Ann Landers has warned her readers to be wary of on-line romance because she has received

approximately 250 letters from individuals who have described their emotional, and in one instance, physical trauma as a result of using computer-mediated communication methods (Stein, 1996).

Actual and perceived risk of victimization as a result of engaging in on-line relationships has as yet to be systematically investigated. The purpose of this study is to explore the actual and perceived risk of victimization of women who use Internet dating services as a means of pursuing interpersonal relationships. The types of cyber-victimization investigated include threatening email, obscene email, spamming (receiving a multitude of junk email), and flaming (on-line verbal abuse). Other forms of traditional victimization studied include unsolicited phone calls, letter or gifts, stalking, vandalization, and physical harm.

In addition to surveying women on their victimization experiences as a result of using on-line dating services, women were also asked about the safety precautions they use when engaging on-line dating services. The popular literature and on-line dating services all provide precautionary advice. Such precautions include: (1) never giving out a home address; (2) never giving out a home phone number; (3) meeting in a public place; (4) telling a friend of the meeting; (4) never going home with the individual; and (5) reporting individuals who violate the rules to the dating service (Cyberangels.org, 2000; Match.com, 2000; Swoon.com, 2000; Skriloff & Gould, 1997). Women were asked whether they were aware of each of these precautions and whether they actually used them. Finally, women were asked to evaluate the perceived risk of using an on-line dating service.

METHOD

Participants

A computer survey of a randomly selected international sample of female customers of three popular Internet dating services was conducted over a monthlong period. The purpose of this research was to specifically study victimization of women who engage in on-line dating. The three services advertised that over one million individuals used them. The survey instrument was developed after reviewing available information on stalking, cyberstalking, and dating violence prevention. After an initial mailing to 140 possible participants, the survey was revised. The survey was then emailed to 1400 female members of the dating services. The survey required approximately 10 – 15 minutes to complete and was administered with guarantee of protecting participants' anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality.

To select a representative sample of participants using Internet dating sites, the authors used a clustered sampling method. Establishing age group limitations (i.e., 18 – 27, 28 – 37, 38 – 47, 48 and above) as the only profile requirement, the dating sites' selection services provided a randomly selected list of members. The first 350 members in each age group were then emailed the survey. Of the 1400 surveys that were sent out, 154 were returned as undeliverable or went to email addresses for other sites (i.e., pornographic and international dating services). Of the remaining 1246 surveys, 134 were completed resulting in a 10.75 percent participation rate.

The sample characteristics were well reflected in the participation characteristics. Nearly equal numbers were found in the age group categories that were used in the selection process (See Table 1).

Table 1: Age of Respondents

Age	Frequency
18 – 27	24
28-37	29
38-47	31
48-61	24
Missing	26

Regarding marital status, 44.5 percent of the respondents classified themselves as single, 46.1 percent were divorced, 7.8 percent were separated and 1.6 percent were married. The vast majority of the respondents were Caucasian (85.4 percent). Two percent of the respondents were African-American, 6.2 percent were Asian, 1.5 percent were Hispanic, and 4.6 percent were of other ethnicity. In regards to education of the respondents, slightly over half had college and/or advanced degrees (51.2 percent).

The survey respondents were also equally distributed across the length of time categories established. Using three categories (see Table 2), the participants were listed as being new to on-line dating (less than one month), having some experience with on-line dating (one month to six months), and being experienced in on-line dating (greater than six months).

Table 2: Respondents' Length of Using On-line Dating Services

On-line Dating Length of Use	Frequency	Percent
Less than or equal to one month	42	32.3
Greater than one month to six months	40	30.8
Greater than six months	48	36.9

Survey instrument

The survey asked women to describe their perceived risk, knowledge and use of safety measures, and any victimization experiences as a direct result of the use of an on-line dating service. A list of possible detrimental cyber-victimization experiences were developed by using the safety precaution information provided by the Internet dating services and Internet sites dedicated to on-line safety (Cyberangels.com, 2000). The forms of victimization examined can be broken down into cyber-victimization and stalking. Forms of cyber-victimization included: (1) receiving threatening email; (2) receiving unsolicited obscene email; (3) receiving a multitude of junk e-mail (spamming); (4) experiencing verbal on-line verbal abuse (flaming); (5) receiving improper messages on message boards; (6) receiving electronic viruses; and (7) being the subject of electronic identity theft. Forms of stalking included: (1) being followed or spied on; (2) receiving unsolicited letters or written correspondence; (3) receiving unsolicited phone calls; (4) having someone stand outside their home, school or workplace; (5) being left unwanted items; (6) having property vandalized; (7) experiencing the destruction or harm of something loved; and (8) encountering physical harm. If any of these forms of victimization or stalking occurred, participants were asked to indicate the number of times. They were asked if they were frightened by this behavior and if they feared bodily harm.

In addition to victimization experiences, participants were asked if they had read the safety precaution message provided by the Internet site. They were also asked which, if any, of the safety precautions they had used: (1) meeting at a public location; (2) telling a friend of the meeting; (3) never leaving or going home with someone they met; (4) never giving out a home address; (5) never giving out a phone number; and (6) reporting people who violate dating rules to the dating service. Finally, respondents were asked to rate their perceived risk of using an on-line dating service (i.e., no risk, minimal risk, acceptable risk, moderate risk, or extreme risk).

Statistical Analysis

Basic descriptive statistics were calculated for each of the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Frequency, Chi-Square, and Spearman Rho Correlation analyses were also conducted for the forms of victimization and stalking experienced by respondents, safety precautions used, and the perceived risk of using on-line dating services.

RESULTS

The basic thrust of the analysis was to examine perceived risk, victimization and stalking experiences, and knowledge and use of safety measures by females who use on-line dating services. The majority of respondents perceived the risk of using on-line dating services to be within minimal or acceptable levels (See Table 3). Length of time using on-line dating services did not change perceptions of risk (Chi-square [4, $\underline{N}$ = 115] = 4.167, $\underline{p}$ = .384). Perceptions of risk also did not vary between different age groups (Chi-square [12, $\underline{N}$ = 108] = 5.57, $\underline{p}$ = .936).

Table 3: Respondents Perception of Risk Using On-line Dating Services

Perceived Risk	Percent
No Perceived Risk	9.5
Minimal Risk	37.9
Acceptable Risk	36.2
Moderate Risk	13.8
Extreme Risk	2.6

Table 4 analyzes the frequency of cyber-victimization experienced by users of on-line dating services. The age of the respondent and their education level did not influence cyber-victimization experiences. The analysis did show a difference in cyber-victimization experiences based upon the length of time one uses a dating service. Specifically, the results indicated that the longer one uses the service, the greater the chances one will receive on-line verbal abuse (Chi-square [2, $\underline{N}$ =129] = 8.069, $\underline{p}$ = .018), obscene email (Chi-square [2, $\underline{N}$ =128] = 13.083, $\underline{p}$ =. 001), threatening email _(Chi-square [2, $\underline{N}$ =128] =5.342, $\underline{p}$ =. 069) and junk email (Chi-square [2, $\underline{N}$ =128] = 22.914, $\underline{p}$ =000). The amount of variance explained by on-line dating experience is: (1) on-line verbal abuse (Spearman Correlation [$\underline{N}$ =129] = .250, $\underline{p}$= .004); (2) obscene email (Spearman Correlation [$\underline{N}$ = 128] = .317, $\underline{p=}$. 000); (3) threatening email (Spearman Correlation [$\underline{N}$ = 128] = .193, $\underline{p=}$. 029); and (4) junk email (Spearman Correlation [$\underline{N}$ = 128] = .384, $\underline{p=}$.000).

Table 4: Frequency of Cyber-Stalking Behaviors Experienced by On-line Dating Users

Forms of Cyber Stalking	Frequency
On-line Verbal Abuse(Flaming)	21
Threatening E-mails	11
Obscene E-mails	36
Junk-Emails (Spamming)	21
Electronic Virus	4
Improper Messages on Message Boards	2

The increase in cyber-victimization did not translate into a significant amount of traditional stalking behavior among the groups. Among current users the incidents of stalking that had occurred were almost negligible. Table 5 summarizes the frequency of traditional forms of stalking behaviors experienced by the respondents using on-line dating services.

Table 5: Frequency of Traditional Forms of Stalking Behaviors Experienced by On-line Dating Users

Traditional Forms of Stalking	Frequency
Followed or spied on	4
Unsolicited letters	3
Unsolicited phone calls	4
Standing outside home, school or workplace	1
Leaving unwanted items	1
Vandalizing property	1
Destroying or harming something loved	1
Physical harm	1

With respect to respondents' knowledge of on-line dating safety precautions, 84 percent stated they were aware of such precautions. However, it is interesting to note that many respondents never read the safety messages provided by the on-line services (34.7 percent) and, of those who did, only 57.4 percent found the messages helpful.

The percentage of respondents who used the various safety precaution measures recommended by on-line dating services ranged from 44 percent to 90 percent (See Table 6). With the exception of giving out one's phone

number, over 80 percent of the respondents consistently reported using the various safety precaution methods. However, the use of safety precaution measures did vary across different age groups. Respondents age 38 and older are more likely to tell a friend of the meeting (Chi-square [3, $\underline{N}$ =104] =7.73, p=. 052) and to meet in a public location (Chi-square [3, $\underline{N}$ = 106]= 7.50, p=. 057). Older respondents are also less likely to give out a home address (Chi-square [3, $\underline{N}$ = 105] = 9.32, p=. 025).

Table 6: Safety Precautions Used by On-Line Dating Users

Safety Precaution Used	Percent
Meet in a Public Location	89%
Tell a Friend of the Meeting	90%
Never Give Out Home Address	82%
Never Give Out Phone Number	44%
Never Leave or Go Home with "Date"	84%

Women who have greater experience with the dating services also employ more safety measures. They are much more likely to meet in a public location (Chi-square [2, $\underline{N}$ =110] = 11.367, p=003) and are more likely to have told a friend about the meeting (Chi-square [2, $\underline{N}$ = 108] = 9.884, p=. 007). Further analysis of these findings indicates a moderate correlation between experience and the use of safety measures. The amount of variance explained by on-line dating experience is: (1) meeting in a public location (Spearman Correlation [$\underline{N}$ =110] = .253 , p=008) and (2) being more likely to have told a friend about the meeting (Spearman Correlation [$\underline{N}$ = 108] = .232, p=.016).

Even though some correlation exists, as can be seen in Table 7, there is no significant difference between the groups in their perceived risk of using the various on-line dating services. The research also finds that there is no difference in giving out phone numbers, going home with a person, and giving out home addresses based upon length of experience in using on-line dating services.

Table 7: Perceived Risk of Using On-line Dating Service

Length of Use	No Risk	Minimal Risk	Acceptable Risk	Moderate Risk	Extreme Risk
Less than or equal to one month	5	16	12	3	0
Greater than one month to six months	3	13	17	5	2
Greater than six months	3	15	12	8	1

DISCUSSION

Dating modalities are continuing to evolve. As has been observed, "a major trend in the 20th century has been the expansion and differentiation of the courtship process" (Makepeace, 1997: 29). This continues to be true in the 21st century with the use of Internet dating services. This research has shown that the Internet is also expanding the ways women can be victimized. Even with the Internet as the intermediary, victimization of women still occurs within dating and developing interpersonal relationships. Moreover, there are expanding forms of victimization, what we call "cyber victimization." Flaming, obscene emails, and spamming are all novel methods of victimization that use the web and email. However, traditional forms of victimization are also finding a new home. Sexual harassment, intimidation, and stalking opportunities may occur because of this new communication medium.

The research also shows that women do recognize safety issues and are careful with their encounters over the Internet, especially once they have gained experience using on-line dating services. Older users also tend to be more cautious and many respondents commented that they see no greater danger in on-line dating than in traditional

blind dating. Some even found meeting people on-line to be safer than other ways of meeting possible dates. We have also found that the greater the experience a woman has using an Internet dating service, the more likely she is to be cyber-stalked. While the behaviors encompassing the definition of cyber-stalking may seem inconsequential, the trauma they can induce is not.

The greater the experience of women with the Internet, the more precautions they use. This suggests that Internet on-line dating services would be serving their customers better if they provided professional crime prevention guidelines that were required reading before someone joined the service. The messages the on-line services employ now seem to be inadequate. They may do this because they fear losing customers or they may not know the risks. While almost all of the victimization that occurred seems to be minor, the ability of individuals to use the Internet to locate and do serious physical as well as psychological harm is increasing. The use of the Internet has widened the shear number of individuals with whom people can come in contact.

This research creates as many questions as it answers. Using email solicitation is a relatively new way of studying social behavior. With this new method, limitations are expected (Cho & LaRose, 1999, Tse, 1998). These limitations include the method of sampling and the low response rate that can impact both internal and external validity. It is recognized that non-probability sampling is acceptable when probability sampling is not feasible (Babbie, 1990). Such is the case when sampling web users (Kaye & Johnson, 1999). In our specific case of women using dating services, the population is unknown and the ability to do random sampling is impossible. The model we used involved deliberate sampling across three different websites to ensure a wide range of individuals as recommended by Cook and Campbell (1979: 77) where they state "deliberate purposive sampling for heterogeneity is usually more feasible than random sampling for representativeness."

This study also is limited in its sample response rate. We recognize that the low response rate can impact external validity, and this has been acknowledged by researchers using on-line surveying (Cho & LaRose, 1999). While our response may initially seem very low, it may not be. Sampling on the web and using email to contact subjects make it impossible to distinguish between those who actually received and declined to respond to a survey and who never received the survey at all (Kaye &Johnson, 1999).

It would also be reasonable to assume that most women who have been victimized over the Internet may have stopped using it. Identifying those women who have been victimized and gathering data on their experiences is imperative. We also acknowledge there is a need for information on individuals' experiences with on-line dating and how it compares to traditional methods of meeting romantic partners. There has been very limited research systematically examining the nature of cyber-relationships (Fagan, 2001; Griffiths, 2000).

Additional inquiry into cyber-victimization is the only way to develop better prevention methods. While the web and email both offer individuals tremendous potential for positive experiences, victimization through this new medium can have the same impact as traditional victimization. This research indicates that women can be victimized by this new medium in many ways. Gaining an understanding of the types of victimization that can occur, its frequency and severity, and establishing effective crime prevention modalities for potential victims is increasingly important.

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DYKES, GANGS, AND DANGER: DEBUNKING POPULAR MYTHS
ABOUT MAXIMUM-SECURITY LIFE[*]

by

Marsha Clowers
John Jay College of Criminal Justice

ABSTRACT

Although the number of incarcerated females is rapidly increasing, few of us will have actual contact with women in a correctional setting. For the most part, our ideas about female inmates and the prisons they are housed in come from filmic images – images that, though highly accessible to the public, depict inaccurate accounts of prison life. From the use of unlikely characters and their corresponding improbable behavior to the maintenance of insecure facilities and impossible happenings, the four films reviewed for this article propagate common, negative stereotypes of inmates. After providing numerous filmic images of inaccurate depictions, the author provides counterexamples based on her own work in a maximum-security prison as an educator of female inmates. More than being wrong, celluloid portrayals of female prisoners inspire additional marginalization of a group who, though convicted of serious crimes, will eventually be released into society.

INTRODUCTION

At a reception in the winter of 1998, I overheard a Dean at Marymount Manhattan College talking about the college's participation in an inmate education program. Marymount was part of a consortium of colleges that sent its professors to Bedford Hills Correctional Facility – New York State's only maximum-security facility for women. Immediately, I applied to teach in the program, and by June of 1998, I was standing in front of my first incarcerated class.

Though I thought that I had no expectations about what I would experience as a penal educator, most everything I witnessed on my first visit surprised me. The women were articulate, kind, and eager to learn. Soon, going to the prison became one of my favorite activities. Naturally, I was disappointed when few people shared my enthusiasm for my volunteer work. After all, I was working in a maximum-security prison sans guard, communications equipment, or weapon. To others, all that protected me from "them" was faith – faith and reality. To tell the truth, my students on the inside are among the brightest, the best, the most dedicated that I have ever had. They read the assignments, they memorize the syllabus, and they hunger for knowledge.

And so, when repeatedly my involvement with the prison was not only questioned, but criticized, I decided to try to determine the source of such negative attitudes by examining the portrayal of incarcerated women in four films: *Chained Heat*, *Red Heat*, *Fugitive Rage*, and *Angels in Chains*. Appendix A contains the plot synopses for each of the films.

UNLIKELY CHARACTERS AND IMPROBABLE BEHAVIOR

Aside from sharing the experience of being incarcerated, female prisoners have much in common. They are likely to be black or Hispanic, poor, uneducated, abuse survivors, single parents, and in poor health (see for example, Brownell, 1997; Fletcher, Shaver, & Moon, 1993; Marquart, Merianos, Cuvelier, & Carroll, 1996; Richie & Johnsen, 1996; Turnbo & Murray, 1997). At Bedford, the population is 51 percent Black, 28 percent Hispanic, and 19 percent White, with the remainder being Asian. The average age is 34 years. Over 75 percent are mothers, and less than 50 percent finished the 12th grade prior to incarceration (College Bound Task Force, 1997).

Since none of those characteristics were accurately portrayed in the films viewed for this project, I will begin by focusing my analysis on the celluloid depictions of inmates. First, despite the fact that women of color are the majority group in most American prisons, *Chained Heat* was the only film to include black inmates, one of whom was promptly stabbed to death by an entire cellblock of white women. In keeping with stereotypes, the women were portrayed as belonging to an ethnically defined gang, and only the gang leader had speaking lines, which were minimal. The leader did serve a role in the overthrow of the prison administration at the conclusion of the film, but she was able only to accomplish this feat with the assistance of her white peers. Viewers of these films are presented with completely inaccurate portrayals of the ethnic backgrounds of most incarcerated women.

Thus, the main characters in each of the films were white females who were assigned one of the following three roles: the violent, sex-crazed victimizer who furthers the goals of a corrupt prison administration; the innocent victimized limpet who is used as a sexual pawn or to incite the anger of other inmates; and the beautiful young heroine-to-be, wrongly imprisoned and in pursuit of justice for herself and her peers. This last character, of course, is the object of the sexual desires of the warden, correctional officers, and other inmates. Based on the work of Manatu-Rupert (1999), that each of these character types is highly sexualized is not surprising; females, especially black females, are often presented as sex objects in film.

As much as the cast lusts after the inmate protagonist, they fear the wrath of the sex-crazed victimizer. For example, in *Red Heat*, an inmate known as Sophia routinely rapes other inmates, steals from those in her cell block, and facilitates the evil deeds of her girlfriend, the prison warden. It is Sophia's job not only to assault each of the new arrivals to the facility, but also to force them into sex acts with the warden and correctional officers. Although *Chained Heat*'s Erika becomes slightly less predatory by the film's end, opening scenes show her forcefully fondling new arrivals. We later see her cruising through communal showers watching the women bathe themselves and each other as she decides who her next victims will be.

Communal showers and living areas, which will be discussed later, encourage frequent occurrences of rape and group sex. Only in *Fugitive Rage* were the inmates occasionally segregated from one other, so orgies and punishing assaults were orchestrated by the likes of Sophia and Erika in the cell blocks on a regular basis. Though prone to violent ends – Sophia was shot in the back by her warden girlfriend – the violent, sex-crazed victimizer character has the most freedom and the easiest time on the inside.

The second inmate type – the hapless victim – was also a staple of each film. This character is routinely victimized for the purpose of impressing others. For example, in *Red Heat* Sophia destroys a possession of the victim Barbara and then rapes her with a plunger to show the new inmates what will happen to them if they do not succumb to her commands. Later, in order to win favor with a guard, Sophia allows Barbara to be raped by him. She concludes the assault by murdering Barbara and hanging her body from the laundry room ceiling.

In addition to being used as pawns, the victimized also serve to inspire other inmates to action. For instance, the sight of Barbara's brutalized body suspended over the linens sparked the inmate protagonists into planning a rebellion against the murderous Sophia and her counterparts. Similarly, Josey – the victimized inmate in *Fugitive Rage* – is violently beaten to provide future justification for her cellmate's attack on the evil officials that are threatening them both. In *Angels in Chains*, in which Charlie's Angels pretend to be inmates for the purpose of gathering information about the facility's corrupt administration, the Angels redouble their efforts after seeing the character played by Kim Basinger forced into a prison-based prostitution ring. In the end, Basinger's character is released and she gets a job as a secretary for the Angels. The martyr character's existence incites other inmates to action and allows sexual predators to display their power without having to attack the final type of inmate: the beautiful heroine-to-

be, wrongly imprisoned and in pursuit of justice.

In *Chained Heat*, Linda Blair, as the character Carol, epitomizes this role. She is young, attractive, refuses the advances of her fellow inmates and guards, and wishes only to address the flaws in the facility where she is incarcerated. For example, when Carol – who is wrongfully incarcerated for vehicular homicide – discovers that her warden is creating video tapes of himself having sex with inmates in his office and running a prostitution ring composed of her peers, she hatches a plan to smuggle the tapes to outside law enforcement. In the process of achieving this objective, her confidant, the victimized limpet Val, is bludgeoned to death by another inmate. Val's murder motivates Carol to expose the warden and to orchestrate an escape attempt *en masse*. In the end, the once shy and retreating Carol succeeds in delivering the tapes to the police, killing the corrupt guards, and facilitating the escape of most of her counterparts.

Charlie's Angels also embody the character of the militant heroine. The Angels are perfect for this role because they are sent to the prison by their crime fighting boss and thus completely innocent of any crime. Moreover, the Angels appear as glamorous and polished in their form-fitting prison issued garb as they do in their civilian clothing. Taunted by the warden and correctional officers, they suffer multiple indignities in the hopes of bettering the lot of the other inmates. Inspired by the suffering of their incarcerated peers, the Angels ultimately facilitate the release of over 50 percent of the inmates and receive commendation from the governor.

Of course, many films display the victimizer, victim, and heroine characters, and one can find similar individuals in prison. At issue is the degree of the behaviors portrayed. For example, based on my knowledge, rape occurs infrequently in female institutions. In fact, when I inquired about the likelihood of such an event, the inmates laughed at me. Rape, either between inmates or between correctional officers and inmates, was characterized as rare. It happens, but not often.

This is not to say that there is no sexual contact between female inmates. Though prohibited by prison regulations, research suggests that approximately 50 percent of incarcerated women will adopt homosexual behavior during the length of their sentence for an array of reasons. In order to replicate the structure of the society from which they have been removed, women form couples. Women become partners for the purposes of companionship and affection, just as they might on the outside and, occasionally, women trade sex for protection, for resources, or out of a need to belong to a group.

Although incarceration does not insure rape, prison life can be violent, but not to the extent portrayed in the films I viewed. If those movies accurately depicted the rate of assault in our penal institutions, society would not have to worry about how to house the burgeoning numbers of incarcerated females – they would all kill each other in less than a year.

In the films I analyzed, not only did blatant incidents of inmate violence go unpunished; they were encouraged by the institutions' administrations. In reality, violent expressions insure "tickets," a permanent recording of inappropriate behavior on one's record. As an example of how undesirable a ticket can be, the issuance of one ticket at any time during a prisoner's incarceration means that the recipient will never be considered for residence in the honor dorm – the most comfortable, autonomous living quarters. Tickets result in "lock down" (confinement to one's cell) and the loss of privileges, including the right to attend special and educational programs. Furthermore, the few inmates I have observed being aggressive or unpleasant were shunned by their peers – especially by the women in special or educational programs.

But aggressive behavior brings more than blight on one's permanent record. Aggression insures confinement to a place multiply known as "SHU," "Special Housing Unit," or "The Box." And as if time in solitary confinement were not punishment enough, women enrolled in educational or special programs who visit The Box do not receive excused absences for the class meetings that they miss. Violence is not encouraged or unpunished.

Of course, there is an occasional incident, but they typically bear no resemblance to celluloid events. For example, after one of the women I work with "disappeared," I learned that she was in solitary for smashing a commode with a woman's face. The other inmate had flushed some personal property of my acquaintance's down that same toilet, and so my student exacted a punishment for which she was also punished. Her attack was not motivated by a need for power, in order to frighten other inmates, or in response to an order by a guard. The vast majority of the violent scenes in the films were borne of one of the preceding conditions. In reality, the sex-starved power monger does not exist on the inside.

What happens to the weaker or less popular inmates? They sit alone during group activities. They "hang" in the yard by themselves. They walk to work alone. Though occasionally the target of taunts and verbal threats, I don't know that they are physically harmed. Rather, their peers tend to withhold information and attention from them – two of the most valued commodities of prison life. I am positive that if violence occurred with even half the frequency of the extent to which it occurs in prison films, all of the inmates would be dead or in solitary.

Of the three celluloid inmate characters, the beautiful heroine figure actually is the closest to being accurate. One of the things I initially found the most shocking about the residents of the maximum-security prison I visit were their appearances. The women looked great. In fact, many of them had spent more time preparing their hair and make-up than had I. Only their identically colored green garb reminded me that I was no longer in the presence of civilians. For the most part, the majority of these women were as camera ready as the celluloid protagonists, though behaviorally, they share two major distinctions from their fictional peers.

First, unlike their two dimensional peers, I rarely hear real inmates deny guilt. The two times inmates told me they felt unjustly punished, they did not deny perpetrating crimes; rather, they asserted that they did not perpetrate the crimes for which they were currently incarcerated.

Second, the fictional characters' objective was to curtail the activities of the correctional officers, warden, and predatory inmates, which usually involved the trafficking of drugs and sex. In sharp contrast, the inmates that I work with seek only to work in harmony with the facility's administration and other residents. Without co-operation between all said groups, the special and educational programs at Bedford would not exist. In fact, it is common for close bonds to form between inmate and non-inmate groups. Yet viewers of the films I analyzed would never believe that anything other than exploitation and violence characterize prison relationships.

In sum, the demographic profile of celluloid inmates, their appearances, their behaviors, and their relationships with others are almost entirely inaccurate. Given only those images, it is easy to see why many people on the outside have a "lock 'em up and throw away the key" attitude. In film, from the warden to the newest arrival, nearly every person involved with the penal system is corrupt, violent, and unable of making a positive contribution to society. More than being entertaining, these films are damaging and damning.

INSECURE FACILITIES AND IMPOSSIBLE HAPPENINGS

As inaccurate as the images of female inmates and their behaviors are, depictions of the maintenance of prisons and their policies are just as unrepresentative. The regulation of inmates' behavior and depiction of daily routines, along with the presentation of the prison environment, have little in common with the realities of incarcerated life – especially maximum-security life.

As previously mentioned, Bedford Correctional is indeed a maximum-security facility. Every minute of every inmate's day is structured and under surveillance. The inmates are subject to four "counts" each day, plus an additional four counts if they participate in the educational program. In the morning, at

noon, at supper, and before bedtime correctional officers count each of the facility's 800 residents. If the women are in school, a teacher and an officer each take attendance twice, both before and after the break. Additionally, correctional officers are posted at the entrances and exits of each of the facility's buildings. There is no such thing as unaccounted for movement. Meals, mail, medication – everything is distributed at pre-specified times in pre-determined locations. Furthermore, each inmate is promptly issued a time schedule upon arrival, which dictates what she will be doing every hour of every day for the duration of her sentence. Nothing about life at Bedford is mysterious, ambiguous, or surprising.

On the other hand, everything about celluloid penal life and the regulation of the inmates is unpredictable. Unbelievably, *Chained Heat*, *Red Heat*, and *Fugitive Rage* all include as a significant plot development the traffic of inmates in and out of both their cell blocks and their respective facilities. In *Chained Heat*, viewers are quickly introduced to the goings-on of the warden's office. Outfitted with a full-sized hot tub, liquor, and all the amenities of a luxury hotel, the room is also heavily equipped with hidden cameras. In return for sex, the inmates are allowed freely to travel in and out of his office and the rest of the institution. Additionally, the warden video tapes his interactions with inmates and then sells the tapes to pornography outlets. Furthermore, it is made clear to viewers that the correctional officers are not only aware of, but actually facilitate these activities. Here we find multiple violations of prison policy, security, and contact with inmates. Questions of morality aside, that sort of behavior would be logistically impossible in a real prison.

Depictions of inmate treatment grow even more outrageous when we learn that the assistant warden regularly rounds up the inmates deemed most sexually desirable by the warden, outfits them in glamorous underwear, shoes, and evening gowns, directs their escape from the prison, and loads them into a limo, where they are delivered to the warden's opulent home. Incidentally, the prisoners escape by removing a large, circular cover hiding a large hole in the wall, step through it, and drive away. Because no fencing surrounds the facility and there are no guards posted outside (as is the case with the other fictional facilities), the escape is fairly anticlimactic. Once at the warden's home, a champagne and caviar poolside party commences with the inmates serving as the warden's prostitutes to his prison suppliers.

A similarly implausible scene is repeated in *Angels in Chains*. Correctional officers recruit inmates from the general population, dress them in provocative clothing, and inform them that after attending three parties – three sexual exchanges with prison suppliers – they will no longer have to dig potatoes from the fields. Again, this behavior involves the trafficking of large numbers of inmates to the warden's home on the outside.

Equally inaccurate, though not as dramatic, are depictions of inmates' daily lives. Though inmates at Bedford Hills undergo an intensive daylong orientation immediately upon their incarceration, only *Red Heat* included an orientation scene. But instead of being geared toward the healthy adjustment of the prisoners, the three-minute lecture is nothing more than a series of threats issued by a screaming warden.

Atypical as the orientation session is, it prepares viewers for further discrepancies. As has been mentioned earlier, the women of Bedford have mandated daily schedules. However, only in *Angels in Chains* did the inmates have work assignments. None of the women were seen participating in educational or special programs; incarcerated time was seemingly without structure. In accordance with stereotypes and in stark contrast to reality, the celluloid women served remarkably easy time. Furthermore, although counselors and rehabilitation specialists are staples of real prison life, none of those figures appeared in any of the movies.

Additionally, counts, a staple of prison existence, were not present in any of the movies. And unlike Bedford, where all of the women are locked in their cells at night, only one of the films, *Fugitive Rage*, included a lock-down scene. Instead, women were confined to cells only when sentenced to a stay in solitary. As alluded to earlier, because the women rarely experienced periods of confinement, group violence and orgies were common occurrences. Interestingly, again with the exception of *Fugitive Rage*,

the films' facilities were constructed to accommodate group showers, sleeping quarters, and recreational areas. While fights and sexual assault took place in the sleeping and recreational areas, the showers were used for playful, soapy caressing. So aside from the fact that viewers are expected to believe that the inmates run free like so many hyper gerbils in a converted fish tank, we are also expected to accept that the same group of women who try to beat the hell out of each other in the open, under the watchful eyes of the guards, can't wait to strip down and teasingly splash water on each other's breasts. These scenes were most prevalent in *Red Heat* and *Chained Heat*.

Finally, perhaps the most striking affront to reality concerns the celluloid appearance and regulation of the penal facilities. Although it is not clear whether any of the institutions are maximum-security, the security measures displayed to viewers are less than minimal. For example, in *Chained Heat* the lighting is never brighter than dim, creating many shadows and dark halls in which inmates can engage in inappropriate conduct. Combine that darkness with the smog from the inmates' chain smoking, and visibility is significantly reduced. Indoor smoking, however, is another of the behaviors restricted at Bedford – no one wants the inmates to have the ability to start a fire, which is what eventually happens in *Chained Heat*.

Additionally, the living areas are sordid, dirty, and demoralizing. Graffiti and shackles decorate the walls, and corridors are booby-trapped with trip wires. The very air is heavy with depression and despair. In sharp contrast, Bedford assigns numerous women to daily, thorough cleanings. Women sweep, swab, and scrub continually. In my Bedford classroom an inmate enters at least once each night to empty my trash can – which is always barren. As soon as the last student vacates the room, a woman enters to sweep. My classroom on the inside is cleaner than my civilian quarters. Moreover, due to the poverty and poor living conditions that plagued my students prior to their incarcerations, for many Bedford is the best home they have ever had, far from celluloid depictions.

During rare moments of lighting, viewers see that the inmates in *Chained Heat* – just as in the other films – are clad in low-cut, tight fitting, short prison-issue garb or are allowed to wear civilian clothing. Moreover, in *Red Heat*, Sophia's shirt is torn open to the waist during the day, exposing a flimsy red camisole. At night, in a scene reminiscent of a boutique ad, the inmates all wear revealing lingerie. At Bedford, women are restricted to wearing green on at least half of their bodies. They choose from pants, shirts, skirts, and or dresses, and then have the option of replacing one of those items with street clothes. Without these restrictions, inmates could theoretically walk out of the facility. In contrast, the films' women look like cheaply clad club-kids out for a night on the town.

Other security-related compromises are even more outrageous. As previously described, the celluloid inmates experienced few difficulties leaving their facilities. Similarly, three civilian characters found it nearly as easy to break in. The first break-in attempt, though unsuccessful, occurs in *Chained Heat* in a large holding cell where detainees are about to be processed and housed in the prison. Just prior to being searched and given a uniform, correctional officers discover a transvestite among the group. When his entry is denied, he screams, cries, and rolls on the concrete floor, but to no avail; he is eventually returned to the outside. It would be next to impossible for a male successfully to hide among females awaiting incarceration.

The next two break-in attempts are more successful. After discovering the location of his girlfriend's wrongful incarceration, the boyfriend of the film's protagonist breaks into the facility portrayed in *Red Heat*. Once inside the prison (viewers are not privy to how this feat is accomplished), the young man quickly discovers a single electrical switch which, once flipped, completely disables the facility's security and communication systems. Ironically, of all the films, the prison in *Red Heat* is most obviously depicted to be maximum-security. When the inmates realize what has happened, they swiftly set about releasing their peers from solitary confinement, attacking the guards, and starting fires. In fact, the entire administration appears helpless as the women merely walk away from the correctional inferno. To

characterize those happenings as anything other than impossible would be an understatement.

The final impossible break-in occurs in *Fugitive Rage*. Shortly after having been incarcerated for the attempted murder of her sister's killer, our protagonist, Tara, is visited by an FBI agent who informs Tara that her record will be expunged in return for the assassination of a drug dealer – the target of her original murder plot. Though cooperation would insure immediate release, she refuses, and returns to her cell. Once there, her lovely limpet cellmate, Josey, tells Tara that she was incarcerated after the removal of her husband's penis – an act of retaliation against an abusive husband. Josey immediately wins the affections of Tara, and when the FBI agent returns again to hire Tara for the hit, she agrees, but with a stipulation. During her release, she demands that Josey be placed in solitary confinement so that she can be protected from the other inmates and also be released if Tara can kill her prey. Tara subsequently is released into the custody of the FBI agent and the opportunity for numerous sexual escapades. In the end, the drug dealer is killed and both Tara and Josey are released.

DISCUSSION

"Wise up, kid. In here, it's not a matter of what you know, it's who you know, how you know." These words of wisdom were spoken by victimizer Erika to protagonist Carol in *Chained Heat*. But if you watch these films, you won't know anything about the inside. From depictions of the inmates and their behavior, to the lack of security and impossible happenings of the celluloid facilities, the content of the four films viewed for this project can at best be described as misleading, and at worst, as damaging. Since "visual images have a persuasiveness beyond any vocabulary in or outside a given film," the depictions are dangerous (Manatu-Rupert, 1999, p. 5); given time and exposure, consumers "see" the celluloid world as reality. According to Manatu-Rupert's interpretation of Bandura, viewers' attitudes are formed in response to the images presented on television and film, which, in this case, are totally misleading:

Filmic visuals stimulate acceptance, not contemplative thinking . . . and because of film's ability to simulate reality so persuasively, the images tend to appear "real" to viewers. If analysis is not brought to bear on the images, then for all intents and purposes, they are real for many, and this, indeed, poses serious problems (Manatu-Rupert, 1999, p. 17).

The films reinforce society's stereotypes about female prisoners: that they are violent, worthless, sex-crazed monsters totally unworthy of humane treatment, much less educational programs. But unlike their film peers, most of today's incarcerated females will leave their penal homes someday to become our neighbors, our co-workers, and our fellow community members. In order for that transition to be successful, many incarcerated women are in desperate need of special programs – programs for parenting, substance abuse treatment, and education. Just like their civilian counterparts, inmates need educational interventions in order to be the best citizens that they can be. Based on the images presented in these films, there is little reason for taxpayers to support the allocation of funds for the rehabilitation of incarcerated women. It is for this reason that the films are so disturbing. While their inaccurate portrayals of prison life are initially humorous, the possibility that the public will be less disposed to react favorably to the need for the special programs that long have been linked to lowered recidivism rates is upsetting.

Yet there is one disquieting similarity between the films and incarcerated life. In *Chained Heat* we hear the warden announce, "You know, the worst kinds are in here, murderers, prostitutes, dopers, perverts." In New York State, those crimes are, indeed, equated. Due to the severity of the Rockefeller Drug Laws, persons convicted of murder one are incarcerated with first-time, non-violent drug mules and usually receive shorter sentences. Hauntingly, especially for the women experiencing the nightmare, in film and in reality, the penalty for taking someone's life is no more severe – is sometimes more lenient – than the penalty for carrying a controlled substance. And the accuracy of that portrayal is nothing short of tragic.

ENDNOTES

* Direct correspondence to Marsha Clowers, Ph.D. John Jay College of Criminal Justice,
Department of Speech & Theatre, 899 10th Avenue, Room 336 #5, New York, New York 10019 (E-mail:
mclowers@faculty.jjay.cuny.edu).

1. There is one notable exception. In the 1920s, the warden of Atlanta's Federal Penitentiary was given a 1-year sentence at his own facility because he was caught accepting bribes from the inmates. In return, he released them to gamble in Atlanta's clubs. Unlike the real inmates, however, the celluloid inmates were forced from the facility.

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APPENDIX A

1. *Chained Heat* (1983)

What these women did to get into prison is nothing compared to what they'll do to get out! From the producer of *The Concrete Jungle* comes another explosive look at the violence, cruelty, and corruption of women in prison. A startling and explicit saga exposing the vicious reality of life behind bars, *Chained*

Heat stars Linda Blair (*The Exorcist*), Stella Stevens, and Playboy cover girl Sybil Danning as opponents in a stunning clash of wills.

Carol (Blair) is the newest inmate of the women's correctional facility, sent up for accidentally killing a man in a car. For Carol, the transition from student to prison inmate is a nightmare, with horrors beyond her ability to bear. The warden (John Vernon) is fond of filming himself in his hot tub with beautiful inmates. The warden's assistant (Stevens) is the leader of a drug trafficking and prostitution ring – selling drugs to the inmates and selling the inmates to men. Inside the prison walls, the white faction, led by Erika (Danning), and the black faction, led by Duchess (Tamara Dobson) strive to dominate the prison's drug and prostitution ring.

Carol is unwillingly caught in between – a pawn in the brutal fight to increase or finally expose the corruption that threatens all their lives. Explosive action!

2. *Red Heat* (1985)

Linda Blair, Sylvia Kristel, and Sue Kiel are inmates in trouble in *Red Heat*. It's a sizzling and steamy action film that burns with intrigue, romance, and adventure.

Chris Carlson (Blair) is an American visiting her future husband, an Army Lieutenant stationed in West Germany. The handsome couple is relaxing at a lush resort when East German police kidnap her and take her across the border – an extreme case of mistaken identity.

Chris is taken to Zwickau, the infamous women's prison known for its heinous brutality and bizarre psychological torture. Under the endless, broiling, and intense questioning, she confesses to being a spy for the CIA in exchange for her free release. But it's a lie – Chris is sentenced to three years! The violent legend of Zwickau proves to be true. Led by a beautiful Sophia (Kristel), the inmates are sadistic to each other, but save their sickest twists for the newest prisoner. Meanwhile, Chris's fiancé, who is getting no assistance from the U.S. Embassy, commandeers his own fighting force for an all-out rescue attempt. n an action-packed shoot-out behind the Iron Curtain, it's a fight for freedom the American way.

3. *Fugitive Rage* (1995)

Rage against the machine. Tara McCormick (Wendy Schumacher) takes justice into her own hands. When a notorious mobster is acquitted for the murder of her younger sister, Patricia pumps his chest full of lead and lands behind bars with a bounty on her hand. But prison bars can't hold her or her cellmate (Shauna O'Brien) as they make their desperate escape. Now it's the two against the mob and the law with nowhere to turn but each other.

4. *Angels in Chains* (1976)

The Angels infiltrate a corrupt Southern prison and are forced to join guest star Kim Basinger in the warden's bordello.

A REVIEW OF "TORTURE THROUGH THE AGES"[*]

by

Christine Farina
Richard Stockton State College of New Jersey

The *Tropicana Hotel* in Atlantic City held a museum exhibit this summer titled "Torture through the Ages." The exhibit explored the often disagreeable, nearly unbelievable account of man's inhumanity to man, featuring actual devices of torture used on people such as ourselves centuries ago. While an effective educational exploration, the exhibit's unspoken message had an unsettling but compelling appeal: the off-centeredness of the human animal and its complex social failures.

Upon entry to the exhibit, one is treated to a vast room lined on its perimeter with both texts and devices. The viewer can take hours to wind through the exhibit, reading and viewing, but as I observed that summer day, most of the patrons' invested time was in the pursuit of comprehension. The patrons, with their mouths agape, emitted frightened empathetic gasps for air, and a sublime aesthetic fascination was revealed on their faces as they stood transfixed before each device pondering the inherent cruelty. As I looked at their faces, I imagined the questions and comments that must have been racing through their minds:

"Who thought of that?"
"That's got to be excruciating."
"How long did that torture last/with what frequency was it used?"
"Could you die/live from that torture?"
"What could they have done to deserve this punishment?"
"What was wrong with these people?"

The question of torture offends our modern sensibilities. Groups such as Amnesty International exist to protect people from such heinous acts. We, Westerners, look at torture as a frightening expression of sick mindedness, but see it as an artifact from a bygone and intellectually inferior age. We are incredulous to learn that torture still occurs worldwide. Some of the devices such as the neck-screw, a collar with a spike that is tightened into the victim's throat until asphyxiation, were used as capital punishment appallingly close to the modern day; the neck-screw had its reign in Spain ended in 1976.

And yet, that torture exists is a cruel and bizarre manifestation of the human condition. Torture is used as both a punitive and corrective measure, aiming primarily at the infliction of great pain. Severe pain marshaled, not in the pursuit of death, but as a means of "dangling" the victim near death without the relief that death would bestow. What is it that causes this abuse of humanity? Could it be a severe self-hatred, a fear of political impotence, or a need to control and subjugate a marginal population to the will of the powerful? Can an explanation of torture even be reduced to a single theme?

The use of torture devices in Europe may be traced back as far as 1180 AD when knights returned from the First Crusade. The knights had both seen and experienced every torture represented in this exhibit. Some of the devices are simple. The use of chains to place the human body in uncomfortable and excruciating positions that led often to a slow and painful death was a common punishment for political prisoners. The "stocks," a wooden yoke for the hands and/or the feet, was used primarily on whores or thieves. Placed in a social setting, such as the town square, the wrong-doer suffered from both the discomfort of the stock and humiliation at the hands of the public as the whole community could heap abuse upon the wrong-doer.

The exhibit also displayed devices of a more fierce and formidable nature. Thumb screws consist of a screw for each fingernail that twist into the soft flesh underneath until the nail is entirely raised. The "iron boot" involves pouring hot lead over a human foot placed in a cast. Two variations of the "rack" were displayed. The pulling rack held victims horizontally and pulled their arms and legs out of their sockets extremely slowly. The hanging rack suspended victims in the air by their arms, which were tied

behind their back and then pulled upwards. These punishments have a common design in that they refuse to offer death, though prolonged and repeated encounters with these tortures, as was often the case, usually led to death. Is this an unfortunate byproduct? What is the purpose of pushing a person to the brink of death and pulling back?

Suspected witches had another host of devices to endure, most of them aimed at eliciting a confession. Continental Europe applied more brute force in these examinations, peaking during the Spanish Inquisition. In England, suspected witches were tried under civil law, making excessive tortures inapplicable, and ending with a hanging as opposed to Continental Europe's more popular "burning at the stake."

For witches, and other victims of torture, conditions in the dungeons were also torturous. Most people, because they were poor and could not afford to pay for a more "expansive" cell of three by six feet, were forced into one-by-one-by-six feet cells. These upright coffins were dark, dank cells with raw sewage rising and falling around the prisoners' feet, inviting rats and their related diseases. Actions as inconsequential as scratching an itch were prohibited because the prisoners' arms were restrained in these cells.

Witches were routinely lashed or poked with forks. Some torturers used devices with retractable prongs, so that when the pricking occurred, a witch would not scream in pain, thus proving her to be a witch. Other implements on display at the exhibit included: (1) the dunking machine, where victims were held under water until moments away from drowning, at which time they were pulled out into the air long enough to catch a few gasps of air before being dunked again; (2) immersion into boiling oil; (3) the "hook," which was a device that hung the victim just inches from the ground; (4) the "wheel," on which a naked woman was tied with her face out and rolled to her death; and (5) the Iron Maiden, a coffin shaped device filled with spikes that would pierce, but not kill, victims when the lid was closed.

The lurid appeal of torture maintains its grip on the modern imagination. Wax museums and exhibits such as this one at *The Tropicana* continue to attract viewers. While many of these instruments of torture have been on display before, a few rarely seen pieces of human history were exhibited, making this show more comprehensive than others. The logical flow from each presentation supplied an accurate and compelling look into the odder, more vitriolic aspects of human nature. Evocative and thorough, *The Tropicana* exhibit of torture enjoyed overall success in meeting its goals to inform, entertain, and purvey a compelling enigma of the human condition.

ENDNOTE

* Direct correspondence to Professor Christine Farina, Richard Stockton State College of New Jersey, Communication Studies, P.O. Box 195, Pomona, NJ 08240.

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