

# Media Violence

# In-Class Debate #1

Media violence is a serious problem

VS

The problem of media violence is exaggerated

Ref. Haugen & Musser, 2009

# In-Class Debate #2

Media Violence Should Be More Regulated

VS

Media Violence Should Not Be More Regulated

Ref. Haugen & Musser, 2009

# In-Class Debate #3

Video game violence is a serious problem

VS

The problem of video game  
violence is exaggerated

Ref. Haugen & Musser, 2009

# Difficulty in Defining Media Violence

Media violence is evaluated on the basis of different criteria:

- Modality
- Explicitness
- Visibility of injuries
- Use of weapons
- Type of character involved
- Perceived acceptability
- Etc.

Ref. Boyle, 2005: xi

# Difficulty in Defining Media Violence

**Definition:** “Depiction of a credible threat of physical force or the actual use of such force intended to physically harm an animate being of a group of beings” (Wilson and al. in Boyle, 2005: 23)

**Critique:** Neglects non-physical violence (verbal aggressions, psychological abuses, stalking, etc.)

# Different Types of Media Violence

- Slapstick physical violence (cartoons, comedies)
- Fictional violence (psychological thrillers, slasher films, action movies, horror movies)
- News reporting of real-world violence
- Religious texts
- Sports coverage
- Video games (repetitive and immersive)
- etc.

# Different Depictions of Violence

- Perpetrator is depicted as a deviant or a hero
- Victim is depicted as deserving or undeserving
- Violence is glamorized or criticized
- Violence is moralized (right/wrong) or purely aesthetic
- Violence is contextualized or decontextualized

Ref. Boyle, 2005



# Violence: an Ideological Category

“Violence is a behavior that takes on particular meanings (for the perpetrator, victim and others) in relation to the specific social, political and cultural context in which it is enacted” (Boyle, 2005: xiii)

# Violence: a Subjective Phenomenon

- People do not necessarily agree on the definition of violence
- People can have different perceptions of a violent media production

# Does Media Violence Lead to Aggressive Behavior?

Some statistical studies show correlations between media violence and aggressive behaviors

**BUT**

Correlation does not necessarily imply causation

Ref. Boyle, 2005: 5

# Weakness of the Effect Model

- Ignores that viewers are able to make choices and that they should be held responsible for their actions
- Considers that viewers are passive and uncritically accepting of media content
- Is concerned by what media texts are doing to people instead of by what people are doing with media texts

Ref. Boyle, 2007: 15

# Media Became a Scapegoat for Violent Behavior

Blaming media for real-life violence is a way to avoid public debates about :

- association of masculinity with aggressiveness
- mental health problems
- access to firearms control
- etc.

# Effects of media violence

- Media violence shapes and reflects the way we make sense of violence, crime, and justice in the context of our daily lives.
- Story-telling and image-making can distort real life experiences of violence.

Ref. Boyle, 2007: 13, 183

# Racist Representations of Violence

- Black and ethnic minority perpetrators OR victims of serial murders are underrepresented in media texts, because the serial killer is often elevated to the status of folk hero
- There is no reluctance to represent black and ethnic minority men as perpetrators of other violent or sexual crimes
- Black or ethnic minority victims from both sexes are underrepresented

# Gendering the Debate on Media Violence

- The way we define violence and criminal acts reflects our positioning in other debates on gender and sexuality
- Men are perpetrators and victims of violence 96% of the time



# Gendering the Debate on Media Violence

- Violent representations construct men as powerful, dominant, and aggressive and women as vulnerable and passive
- Marital rape, child abuse, and domestic violence remain mostly invisible in fictions
- Only women's deaths are sexualized in fictions
- In television news, the gender of male perpetrators and victims is rarely pointed out while the gender of female abusers is often emphasized and their femininity put into question
- Men's violence is generally normalized, while women's violence is problematized or stigmatized

# Violent Women

Violent women are:

- guilty of both breaking the law and transgressing gender norms
- threats to the essentialist definition of women as biologically nurturing, passive, and vulnerable
- threats to the patriarchal society based on gender binaries and on the domination of men

Ref. Boyle, 2005: 94-100

# Mainstream Portrayals of Violent Women

Work to contain these threats by:

- denying violent women's agency and focusing on their victim status (Homolka)

OR

- denying their gender and depicting them as unnatural women (Charlton)

Ref. Boyle, 2005: 101-108

# Violent Women

- Women's violence is socially accepted when it comes to saving or avenging children
- Women's violence is considered the most 'unnatural' when it comes to harming or killing children (infanticide)

Ref. Boyle, 2005: 118-119

# The Slashers Movies

- Sexualize women's deaths
- Normalize male dominance and violence

BUT

- Viewers are not encouraged to identify with the killer, but rather with the female survivor

Ref. Clover, 1992

# Femme Fatale of the Film Noir



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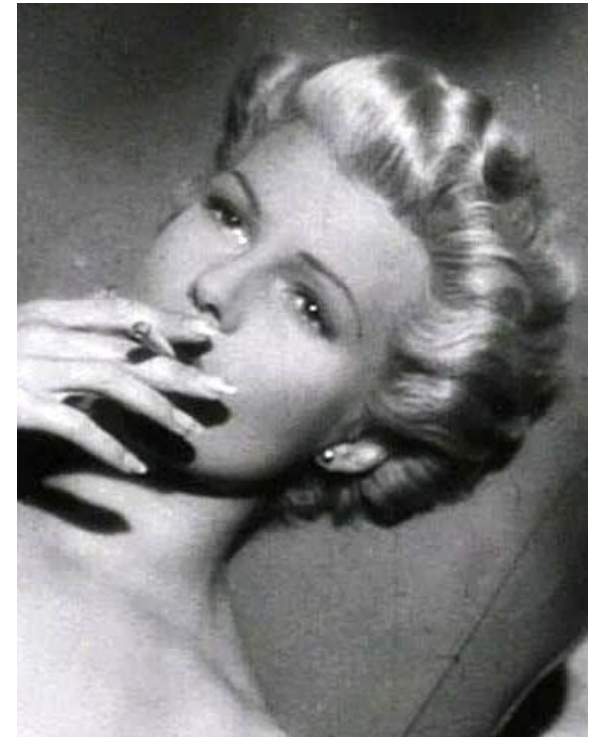


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# The Slasher Killers



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# Debates on Pornography & Violence

## ANTI-PORNOGRAPHY

- There is a causal relationship between pornography and male violence against women
- Pornography *is* violence against women
- Women enjoying pornography are conditioned to see gender inequalities as sexy
- Pornography should be eradicated or censored

Ref. Boyle, 2005: 29-40

## ANTI-CENSORSHIP

- There is no direct link between pornography and male violence against women
- Representations of rape or murder cannot be considered as 'real' rape or 'real' murder
- The problem of violence in pornography is exaggerated
- We should acknowledge the agency of female performers, men's responsibility for their actions and the complex pleasure that pornography can provide



# Debates on Pornography & Violence

Most of heterosexual and commercial pornography:

- depicts sexuality in a male-dominant framework and teaches attitudes about gender, sexuality, pleasure, and resistance (Jensen in Boyle, 2005: 38)
- Normalizes violent acts in a way that can discourage women from saying “no”

# Is the Internet a New Medium for Violence?

- Because of the Internet's lack of regulation, violent videos and photos are easily accessible online
- Violent videos and photos are sometimes imposed on Internet users
- Online anonymity encourages people to watch, share, or post violent material

# References

- Boyle, Karen. 2005. *Media and Violence*. London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage publications.
- Clover, Carol. 1992. *Men, Women and Chain Saws. Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Haugen, David M. and Susan Musser (eds). 2009. *Media Violence*. Farmington Hills: Greenhaven Press.
- Staiger, Janet. 2005. "Violence, Horror and Sexually Explicit Images". Chap in *Media Reception Studies*, pp. 164-185. New York/London: New York University Press.

# Additional Resources

- Portrayals of violent women:
  - [Baise-moi](#) (2000)
- Examples of femme fatales in Neo-noir:
  - [Fatal Attraction](#) (1987)
  - [Basic Instinct](#) (1992)

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