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
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

Ref. Boyle, 2005: 62
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

Ref. Boyle, 2005: xii, 7
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

Ref. Boyle, 2005
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)

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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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

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

Ref. Boyle, 2005: 29-40
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

Ref. Farhi in Haugen and Musser, 2009: 181
References


Additional Resources

• Portrayals of violent women:
  – Baise-moi (2000)

• Examples of femme fatales in Neo-noir:
  – Fatal Attraction (1987)
  – Basic Instinct (1992)