

British board of film classification

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



Although people have argued for many years whether audiences worldwide are strongly effected by particular films and whether their actions are controlled by what they are exposed to on screen, they cannot argue that media has an increasing control over our every day lives. Censorship does not only affect what we watch in films but is widely used to restrict and restrain what we are exposed to by the media. It is widely argued whether this actually benefits the people involved, the world. A strong argument from both sides can be expressed and put forward.

I will take a closer look into both sides of this argument and expose the strengths and weaknesses of both. The BBFC (British Board of Film Classification) was set up to restrict what people could watch on screen. Their intentions were to restrict certain age groups or types from experiencing scenes of violence, sex, nudity, swearing etc. Their argument was that certain films or scenes in various films were not suited for certain groups. They believe that what these people are exposed to in the media via television, cinema and home viewing of films directly effected their actions.

This has been argued for many years and a range of theories have been submitted. The audiences that are exposed are seen as either passive audiences or active audiences. An active audience is one that seems to watch the film, comprehend what violence/swearing is necessary and why that type of viewing has been included in the film. The active audience can deal with controversial material and at the end of it all, distinguish between right and wrong and morals and ethics. So what defines a active audience and how are some audiences active and some passive?

Stuart Hall and David Morely argued their idea called the 'Encoding Decoding Model'. This argues that the person exposed to this controversial material will react depending on their social positions, gender, age, sexuality, ethnicity, occupation, experience and beliefs. To an extent this is true. An upper class woman would not be expected to watch a film like 'Die Hard' because this film is not the type that would appeal to her. Her category of social class do not react well to violence, bad language etc because of their upbringing.

A person of a lower social class would react differently because they face violence and bad language in their every day lives. It is a part of life so this makes it less shocking for this person. The argument against censorship can be brought forward here. If what Hall and Morely are correct in their suggestions then surely censorship is a not as important as people think. People from different genders and social groups are not restricted from films for this reason on the whole. They can be protected by cuts of the films but there cannot be a socio economic group A and B added to a film to stop lower social class to view.

Most films are censored because of the basic violence, sex, nudity and swearing in the film. If this violence however contributes to the plot of the film, making it realistic and trying to express a point then the BBFC can sometimes bypass some of the controversial material. In the film 'Platoon' 1986 the director, Oliver Stone includes a violent scene where Chris Taylor (Charlie Sheen) starts to shoot the floor in front of a young Vietnamese disabled child. This scene show Chris in a very destructive and brutal mood

which he does not seem to care about the wellbeing of the poor innocent boy.

The scene then develops into Chris realizing the full implications and extent of his actions and is emotionally overrun. This is contrasted quickly with the sharp strong violence seen as Bunny (Kevin Dillon) viciously beats the head of the young boy with his rifle. This scene was included in the 15 rated movie because it was seen through the eyes of Chris and not Bunny. This puts a whole different perspective on the scene. Oliver Stone tries to portray the horrific scenes which unfolded at Vietnam in this time.

The scenes shown are included to show the reaction of Chris to the violence encountered in the scene. If the scene has have been through the eyes of Bunny then the film would have included unnecessary violence which does not tie in with the rest of the film. This would have been cut in the movie.

The film was passed for a 15 because it was decided that children of this age would be able to see the perspective the violence is aimed at and distinguish whether the violence was necessary.

This also ties in with the effects debate where the audience is seen as either passive or active. The Hypodermic needle model' or sometimes called 'The silver bullet model' (1982) talks about how the audience is controlled by the media. The model talks about how the media influence people so much that they can control their action and influence their lives. The theory has been developing for many years now. Even Plato, the Greek philosopher excluded new dramatists to his republic because he thought they greatly influenced

the people. He said 'one should be cautious in adopting a new kind of poetry or music, for this endangers the whole system

Lawlessness creeps in there unawares. ' This kind of model has been worrying people for many years but nowadays only seems to crop up when a horrific and unfamiliar crime appears. This normally links with an unusual killing of some kind. If a original murder occurs which bears resemblance to a recent film they seem to blame the censors for not limiting the violence more. Examples of this are films like Rambo and Childs Play. Childs play was linked with the killing of Jamie Buldger by Robert Thompson and John Venables.

They suggested that the children were influenced by this film and killed Jamie Buldger because of the actions in the film. They believed that the children did not see killing as immoral and wrong. There was not substantial evidence that the children even watched the film never mind were influenced by its controversial material. The uses and gratifications model argues that the media cannot have control over an active audience and that they can chose whether they take in the violence.

Herta Herzog was one of the earlier researchers of this method and quoted '... ven the most potent of the mass media content cannot ordinarily influence an individual who has 'no use' for it in the social and psychological context in which he lives. The 'uses' approach assumes that people's values, their interests, their associations, their social roles, are pre-potent, and that people selectively 'fashion' what they see and hear to these interests'. This basically states that a person is intelligent to decide whether the

controversial incidents in films affects them or whether they can bypass if and control their own life without being influenced.

The typical horror movie has a range of controversial material included in the films. The stereotypical horror movie seems to include a lot of graphic killings in them. This is a job for the censors to limit or restrict the sheer amount of detail without making the movie unrealistic. The film *Scream* (1996) directed by Wes Craven was very controversial in the type of killings that were included in the movie. The killer in *Scream* was 'originally' wearing a mask. This mask was a very integral part of the film. The mask helped make the film famous.

If you walked up to a person in the street with one of the masks now they most likely would be able to tell you that the mask belonged to the film *Scream*. The aftermath of the film was enormous as people in America were found to be copycatting the film, going out and murdering people wearing the *Scream* masks. What people did not pick up on was that the film followed a line of the stereotypical thriller film in which the victim was a woman. Most films have victims who are young, good-looking, slim women. This is argued to tie in with society where men are dominant and women are still overlooked.

This is a point that is argued by Laura Mulvey who argues the active/male, passive/female debate. She mentions that the audience identifies men as the dominant person and therefore relate to him. He is seen as strong and powerful where as the female is seen as weak and in many films is there for the male to look at or kill. Although this does in a way relate to society which

is also seen to project men as the dominant sex, should this be encouraged in film? Screen censors such as the BBFC are encouraged to cut out any controversial material which could result in the mind being influenced to a certain belief.

Surely this could also include the common spectacle of male domination in society and women as seen as inferior. This is an argument that is still ongoing and is strongly linked to the 'Silver Bullet Model' and the 'Uses and Gratifications Model'. The question still remains, do the media strongly influence our lives and actions or have we got the intelligence to overcome potential 'problem' material and realize what is morally right for us. Overall I believe that film censorship is for the better but that we as a society have the intelligence to follow our morals and ethics and 'do the right thing'.

I do not think that a controversial film can have that much bearing on a person's life so to influence their actions. I believe in a world without film censorship would be unethical and could lead to parents letting their younger children be exposed to media which could harm them. I mean this in a way that could affect them so that they are scared and shocked by strong violence or strong language and not that of them going on a mass killing spree wearing scream masks because they watched *Scream* last Saturday.