

Censorship laws and cultural norms

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



The 1960r's film, Psycho challenged censorship laws and cultural norms at the time of its release. Movies and film influence the perceptions and ideas of the mass culture, especially in America by portraying underlying attitudes and beliefs that the culture holds. Because of this, film has made itself an integral component of the culture by influencing it with the underlying themes which are already present but are often unspoken.

While censorship was stricter in the past, the idea of censoring ideas and thoughts has and always will affect the society in which it takes place. While film has always held an important part in American culture, current trends in censorship have greatly changed the way in which films are produced and what their content really is.

Alfred Hitchcock was a respected director from the 1920r's into the late 50r's with many intricate films with large budgets such as Notorious in 1946 and Vertigo in 1958. His films were known for their stunning visuals and ingenious psychological plots. Therefore, Psycho came as such a shock in 1960 (Absolute Crime).

In Hitchcockr's film, Psycho, there was a blatant push against censorship which was more of a statement to what censorship was becoming more than it was about having such content in his film. Hitchcock wanted to push limits and continue to pave the way for freedom of expression in film which was pointedly stifled at the time. We often see this when it comes to any expression which goes against the views of the general public or even more, the views of the government. Psycho was daring for its day, almost a joke

from Hitchcock as he did everything which wasn't allowed or would be seen as obscene (Greenbaum).

This sentiment from Hitchcock can be seen again in an interview he gave BBC Show Monitor in July 1964 where he talks about the film being taken too seriously and, in his eyes, it was rather amusing. The film was meant to be crazy and absurd, shocking but to the point of amusement for the audience (Brooks).

Hitchcock was able to push aside all these restrictions with his masterpiece of misdirection, horror and ironic humor.

This film provided many risqué ideas as well as imagery which would have been very shocking for the time in which it was produced. The lead actress, Marion, is seen in lingerie as well as having a naked body double for her shower scene, although it is blurry, so no real nudity is seen. There is also blood on Marion as well as in the shower, but since the film is in black and white, it is not particularly gruesome (Psycho, Hitchcock).

Transvestitism is also something which this film appeared to show through the antagonist, Norman, dressing up as his mother to kill his victims. While his dressing as his mother appears to me more of an illusion towards his dissociative identity disorder rather than transvestitism or being transgender, this is another key aspect of the film which was toeing the line in film production for its time as this was still seen as ? unacceptable in society.

<https://explorethearchive.com/alfred-hitchcock-and-the-making-of-psycho>

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by equating cross-dressing with a form of mental illness so severe that its only logical manifestation is violence.

“ WE ARE ALL IN OUR PRIVATE TRAPS”: TRANSPHOBIA IN HITCHCOCK’S PSYCHO

Psycho was instrumental in pushing boundaries in film simply by being able to get past the censors for its time while still being full of provocative and risqué content. The opening scene in which you see a shirtless man and lingerie clad woman in a bed was a definite test of the censorship regulations at the time. It took what had previously been only suggestive sexual undercurrents and made them absolutely upfront within seconds of the film beginning. This pushed the narrative on sexuality in films to come (Robb). Overall, Psycho was able to capture almost all the integral aspects of slasher films into one and push them without getting the film banned entirely.

The claim of Psycho’s ability to capture the integral aspects of a slasher film is based somewhat on the fact that Psycho holds the title as the probable first slasher film to be produced, giving it the automatic advantage of setting the stage for what is known today as the hallmarks of a good slasher film. In other words, Psycho would have to capture the important aspects of a slasher film as it was creating the genre by its existence.

Some of the hallmarks or traits of a slasher film are the type of killer as well as the violence. The killer is usually a man whose identity is concealed by a mask or costume which prevents the audience from seeing who he is until the culmination of the film. This is seen in Psycho through the hiding of

Norman as the killer until the final scene. The violence is usually bloody in excess, often the killer hunts down and kills his victims with a knife or other sharp tool. Again, Psycho contained this trait almost exactly. Norman kills his victim with a knife, although there is no chase scene (Harris).

Another integral aspect of most slasher films is the strong, leading heroine. Although slashers are often criticized for being misogynistic, they're one of the few film genres that primarily feature strong, independent female leads. Psycho captured this through having Marion Crane as a strong lead character. The biggest way in which slasher films have changed this aspect has been by keeping the heroine or the "final girl" until the end of the film so that she can confront the killer (Harris).

When Psycho was in the works, Alfred Hitchcock sent the script for Psycho to the MPAA but was required to remove profanity as well as tone back the implied incestuous relationship between the characters of Norman and his mother. Twenty or even ten years earlier, there is no way the MPAA would have allowed Hitchcock to commence production, but it was now the 1960s and the mindset of Production Code officials had shifted along with the cultural changes happening around them (Howell.) This shows the advancement and change in the film industry based off time alone, which changes people's views as to what is deemed acceptable.

The change in societal ideals can be seen in Psycho's rating. When the film was first released, it would have received a rating of R in accordance to MPAA guidelines. Today, the film hardly holds more than a PG rating as there are far more violent and grotesque films which are produced (Deseret News).

In 1968, the Motion Picture Association of America set guidelines and rules for rating films. While these were not enforced by law, most public theaters would not show films without a rating. Ratings for films are almost an alternative for censorship in modern films because if something is too violent or explicit in a film, it will simply receive a higher rating before being shown in the theaters rather than being banned all together. These ratings provide a way for children and those who do not want to be exposed to certain content, to avoid said content and rather choose something which has been rated as safe or appropriate. Both of the changes within the MPAA influenced the remake of Psycho almost forty years later.

Pushing Censorship to Get more Viewers

In 1998, Psycho was remade by Gus Van Sant. This remake follows the original film quite closely when it comes to identical scenes and dialogue. While this 1998 remake follows the original in many aspects, the change in culture and censorship in the thirty-eight-year difference is visible. One of the biggest differences is in the way in which the famous shower scene is done. The original film does not show nudity outside of the form of a naked person through the steam, but the remake shows nudity. This shows the progressive changes which the film industry had undergone through the year. This is also characterized by the use of color during the shower scene which makes it more graphic and the blood more realistic (Psycho, Van Sant).

The 1998 remake of the film stayed close to the storyline of the original while still pushing the censorship limits for its time by making scenes racier

as well as more graphic. The 1960r's Psycho, while it did show a woman in lingerie, did not show excessive nudity or violence because this was not characteristic of the time.

What has been the focus of censorship through the years has changed dramatically in many ways, especially in the United States. When film was first becoming a thing, the emphasis seemed to be primarily on censoring anything which was visually explicit, be it violence or sexual. There has been a cultural shift towards acceptance of the human body and sexuality on-screen which is in stark contrast to the years past in which it would have been obscene to even have a somewhat unclad person in a film. While the total prohibition and censorship of the human body is extreme, current films often exploit their ability to have these things on-screen and as a result, it almost comes off as degrading and offensive most often to women as they are so sexualized in film. Also, in the early day of film there were strict regulation on the voicing of opinions or making of jokes about figures in power, usually political figures or the church.

This is the idea that censorship, which puts restrictions on what can said, written, or put into film, puts a damper on peopler's ability to express their thoughts and ideas and therefore, restricts their freedom of speech and expression. In Hitchcockr's film, Psycho, there was a blatant push against censorship which was more of a statement to what censorship was becoming more than it was about having such content in his film. Hitchcock wanted to push limits and continue to pave the way for freedom of expression in film which was pointedly stifled at the time. We often see this when it comes to

any expression which goes against the views of the general public or even more, the views of the government.

Things which are not politically correct or go against societal norms are often discouraged. This is seen through the production of movies which are obscene or violent which are allowed or even encouraged to be shown in theaters while movies which hold political, moral, or religious ideas in the forefront are often passed over. This shift in censorship trends shows how far society has come since the days in which Psycho hit the screens. While it may seem very tame in today's ideals of what is extreme or risqué in film, Psycho really created a sensation and stir which would be almost impossible to replicate in American society today because of the change in societal and moral ideals. Psycho's pushing of boundaries and rules simultaneously pushed the next generation and the generation after to continue changing the narrative around film as an expression of ideas and art and changed American film forever.