

# Violence



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VIOLENCE IN THE MOVIES (Theoretical Perspectives) of Introduction The movie industry constitutes one form of entertainment in the popular culture and has been a great influence on society in general because of its portrayals of certain events in life. It is a powerful tool in mass-media medium and one of the most contentious issues about the industry is the depiction of violence in films, whether physical, verbal, sexual violence or otherwise. It is often shown in its extreme forms such that it brought on howls of protests from the public and it led the film industry to exercise forms of restraint through self-censorship and a code. This paper tackles the topic of violence in films over different time periods and how these films differ. Each film is discussed using the theoretical perspectives of how violence occurs in a society.

#### Discussion

The film industry has many types of films or genres, and one of these is the gangster or criminal movies which portray the lives and exploits of criminals. These portrayals can often be too realistic for comfort although films which depict violence continue to enjoy its popularity. In this paper, the two films being considered for discussion are the “Gangs of New York” and also “There will Be Blood” in which the former was made in 2002 but the time period of the film was in 1863 while the latter film was made later in 2007 and its time setting was in 1902. It is just a mere coincidence the two selected films featured the same actor, Daniel Day-Lewis.

This paper adopts the theoretical perspective of differential association theory in terms of explaining the violence in these two films. This particular theory best explains and is thought to be the most credible or realistic among several theories propounded regarding crime causation. Other

theories may explain deviant behaviors in society but the differential association theory is right on the dot on why people commit crimes, which is due to their learned behavior.

This theory states that people commit crimes because of their association with criminals via social interactions with these criminals, in which crimes are not viewed as inherently evil. In the film “Gangs of New York” the main protagonists learned how to be violent due to their prior associations with crime leaders. Bill Cutting (Daniel Day-Lewis) learned to be violent to enforce leadership of a crime gang under his mentor, Boss Tweed. On the other hand, Amsterdam Vallon (Leonardo DiCaprio) also learned to be violent due to his association with some underworld and unsavory characters, namely the former allies of his murdered father and with his involvement in the criminal organization of Boss Tweed. The historical period in this film was during the Civil War (1861-1865) in which the proliferation of gangs was compounded by the problems caused by the civil war in which people were being drafted and riots ensued because of resistance to it. A view of society at this particular time in history is one of anarchy due to a lack of authority. In the film “There Will be Blood” the violence portrayed is rather that of an individual, instead of gang violence committed by groups of people. This time period coincided with a time in American history when ambitious people were out to make a fortune for themselves. This was the period of the Industrial Revolution in which new inventions opened up many possibilities for enriching oneself and capitalism runs rampant where bold people can get fabulously rich. It was the case of a gold prospector who turned oil man because saw he an opportunity in the demand for oil as new automobiles

required oil (black gold) to run them and oil was there for the taking. The theory of differential association had been revised and refined to help it explain individual violent crimes such as that committed by Daniel Plainview (also played by Daniel Day-Lewis). He murdered Henry the impostor and also Eli the pastor when he inexplicably goes into a rage.

### Conclusion

The differential association theory posits that people become violent through association with other violent people and mimic their violent, and also often criminal, behaviors. While this theory neatly explains group behavior of people, such as when banded together in gangs, it does not sufficiently explain individual crimes such as that exhibited by Daniel Plainview.

However, revisions to the theory such as the addition of a sufficient motive for an individual to commit the crime or violence helped to explain away some of its original shortcomings within social context (Britt & Gottfredson, 2003, p. 40). This is the case of Daniel Plainview, his violence motivated by greed and ambition to get rich. The significance of the theory is that violence is basically just a learned phenomenon (learning process acquired through association) from socialization.

### Reference

Britt, C. L. & Gottfredson, M. R. (2003). Control theories of crime and delinquency. Edison, NJ, USA: Transaction Publishers.