

# Acceptance of violence in tv and media



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The development of technology such as television, internet and radio, has led us to an important understanding of the surroundings in which we live in, surroundings which are mostly represented by the media, to an audience. As members of this media audience we are being constantly flooded with the notion of crime and violence by the use of technology. The notion of news is travelling very fast and it is present in every household with access to technology, and the media prioritise crime and violence as their central theme and broadcast it in order to attract a larger audience (Newburn, 2007). MacDougall (1968: 12) states that ‘ At any given moment billions of simultaneous events occur throughout the world... All of these occurrences are potentially news. They do not become so until some purveyor of news gives an account of them. The news, in other words, is the account of the event, not something intrinsic in the event itself’

Thinking of the simple fact that when people watch television, there is always a slight chance that the channel they are watching will present a violent act, making people think that the media is a very powerful influence upon crime and violence (Potter, 2003). However, the media producers, in response to the public’s voice, claim that violence on television is just a reflection of the violence that occurs in society. Although it is perceived as being overrated and altering the reality, violence in the media is claimed by the producers as being just a response to the demand of it (Potter, 2003).

Taking into consideration the last argument, the question ‘ Why do people accept and enjoy watching violence in the media?’ arouses. It can relate to the fact that most media audiences are drawn into violent imagery just because it challenges their imagination, as in the case of video games. On

the other hand it may presume just the simple notion of fitting in with the character and experiencing a fantasy of their own (Goldstein, 1998).

Furthermore there are three main theories that I will be focusing on in order to reach for an answer to the question ‘ Why people enjoy watching violent representations in the media?’, and these theories are based on the psychoanalytical approach, transgression or carnivalesque approach, and the sociological approach.

A popular belief is that audiences are drawn into attending movies by their misleading or altered advertising campaigns. Producers often refer to a film as reaching out to their audience by these campaigns, and it stands in the hand of the producers how they represent these campaigns to a specific audience (Turner, 1999). It is also a fact that millions and millions are spent on publicity and advertising for new movies, but it is not always the case that the audience is drawn into them. Getting in touch with the audience is the hardest part for producers and it is only made through careful planning and exposure of the new production in such manner that the audience will react in a positive way (Turner, 1999).

Metz (1982) described his experience as a member of the cinema as seeing the audience trying to reach out in the action of the movie, becoming part of it. To have a better understanding of how audiences confront with the thin line between reality and imaginary, we need to have a better focus at the unconscious level and its process of watching a production. By taking a closer look at the psychoanalytical approach, mostly interested in dreams, there is a correlation between film and dreams that offers a new perspective to researchers for the Freudian theories and the way in which the

unconscious works (Turner, 1999). Metz (1982) stated that the boundary between reality and imaginary is fading away for the audience, and the gap between these two has been described by Freud as “ the location of desire” and it is covered by media productions (Turner, 1999: 131).

The psychoanalytical approach emphasizes on the notion of ‘ look’ upon the audience, audience which is also referred as ‘ the spectator’ (Turner, 1999: 131). This notion takes a very much influence within the Freudian and post-Freudian theory as it stands in the individual’s power to self-define him and establish a certain relation with the surroundings. Based on this notion, therefore the audience is not only performing the action of viewing, but they also get caught within the story of the media production and inflict certain values and strengths, which make them accountable for a position of power. This position of power is described by Freudian theory as being one such of a position of a voyeur, which in other terms “ makes an object of” those caught unwittingly in the power of his gaze’ (Turner, 1999: 131).

Graeme Turner (1999) argues that we as human beings we always identify within characters that we see on the screen, such as heroes or heroines, in order to feel self-accomplished. The psychoanalytical approach identifies two main categories of audiences, first category being argued by Metz (1982) as being the simple identification with the notion of cinema, seeking out the mystery revealed by the screen. For the second category, Metz (1982) argues that the cinema stresses out the viewer’s perception with the vision of the camera. Based on these arguments, the audience finds itself in a position of confusion and distortion between reality and imaginary, as the

media tends to influence their behaviour in society in such manner that they establish an audience-media relationship (Turner, 1999).

Laura Mulvey (1975) argued that in relation to violent representations of crime and the psychoanalytical approach, the media is shaped around the principles of narcissism and voyeurism. Mulvey (1975) also believed that these two principles are main feature for the film industry in order to establish the audience-media relationship. The psychoanalytical approach also established a connection of human sexuality to the notion audience-media relationship. Media productions also focused on the revealing of the female body and using it as a tool, whilst the male viewer is thought to be central to the notion of spectator.

Violent representation in the media appears in many ways, and the media has always been taken for granted as a source of trust by presenting their stories and revealing the true nature of the environment. By the simple method of how media releases their stories, part of the audience does not take into consideration the fact that these stories react at an unconscious level and sometimes violent representations can lead to instigation. The media is a powerful tool that by using the right set of words and images can alter the audience into believing what they want them to believe. People choose to watch violence in the media, not as a source of comfort, but most of the times as a precaution to have a better understanding of the society in which they live in and to know how to behave or react (Goldstein, 1998). It is up to every individual how he reacts to the set of imagery and words, although the media is already offering a certain perspective.

Jeffrey Goldstein (1998) stated that ‘ An undeniable characteristic of violent imagery is its emotional wallop. It gives most people a jolt.’ (Goldstein, 1998: 216). Based on this argument, the notion of violence for some audience represents a part of interest, an incentive. Not only that it reacts as an incentive, but audiences that enjoy violent representation, according to Goldstein (1998), emphasize a great understanding in their own personal lives the notion of violence. For some it might be just the fact of seeking the thrill of experiencing the good guy or bad guy experience. On the other hand the joy of watching violent representations of crime might be expressed as ‘ an outcome of the “ civilizing process” ’ (Elias, N., Dunning, E. cited in Goldstein, 1998: 217), outcome that stands between the lack of opportunity and real life experience. . Violence in the media appears in a more exciting way for others, thus the attraction for violent imagery results as desire to overcome their state of mind.

Moving on to the sociological approach in order to explain the desire to watch violence in the media, we take into consideration the work of Stuart Hall (1973), who sought the media as a challenge and tried to expose a new theory about how the production is made, how it is broadcasted and how it is absorbed by the audience. In short terms he explains the process of encoding and decoding of messages and images. Stuart Hall (1973) explains that the media-audience relationship works through the help of the sender, the message and the receiver. He argues that the media creates his own message and sends it across to the audience, but the audience itself might not perceive the transparent message that should be received. Martin Innes (2004) developed a social understanding of the signs and sign system of risk

perception, also referred as “ signal crimes”, and it focuses on the way people interpret and define threats to their security. Mass media is a useful tool in analysing the signal crime methodology, as it provides information in how certain news can shape critical events into signal crimes (Innes, 2004). The central idea of the signal crimes perspective is that every person is entitled perceive their own understanding of crime, thus violence in the media occurs as a criminogenic risk.

“ The [media violence] debate has been profoundly masculine in orientation. One of the most significant challenges of the future is to shift the terms of debate away from the dominant, but limiting, models of free speech and censorship, which derive from masculine ideas of aggressive journalistic realism on the one hand and of paternalistic protectionism on the other”(Cunningham, 1992: 71). Media takes an important place in our lives, as it constantly providing us public culture, although in terms of violence it might be in some cases risk aware, or if it just only to satisfy ourselves by stepping out of the boundaries of reality ( Carter, 2003). Taking for instance the news industry, it is their number one priority to sell violence and keep it on the front page of their newspapers or on television. The question that arouses on these premises is why do violence sells? Most of the times the audience’s perception lies in the factor of security and integrity, therefore the notion of violence for them stands in terms of their own security, how safe they feel in their private home or in the street (Carter, 2003).

The carnivalesque or transgression approach has its roots in Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1941) theory as he describes it as a speech-genre that manifests across different cultural grounds, especially in carnival. He describes a

carnival as being a pass for everything, where audiences and actors takes place with no difference aside them. Also the notion of carnival was stripping people of rank, thus making everyone participating with equal status, boundaries between rich and poor disappearing. The whole purpose of the carnival was to allow people to express thoughts and creativity in a free manner (Bakhtin, 1941). Following these arguments, we can perceive media as being the central theme in terms of the carnival, however audiences participating only as audiences. By the representation of violence in the media, taking into account Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque, we can also consider that media is an instigation to push our limits and exceed the normal routine by joining their own "carnival".

Media is considered to be a useful tool in mass control, by sending out transparent messages, by instigating people or by simply revealing the society itself. In other cases, like videogames, the audience is drawn into violence as it offers a source of impersonation by taking the place of a bad guy or good guy and seeking justice and adventure by committing violent acts. It can relate to the fact that videogames fill the gap between place of desire and reality, as it also offers a sense of strength and puts the individuals in a place of complete control and power (Carter, 2003). As with the development of technology, people are drawn into films that include violence as it offers a different understanding of the social surrounding and that is with the help of special effects. Looking at horror movies or science fiction movies, special effects play an important part to the media-violence-audience effect. It is recognised that the acts of grotesque that appear on



screen are unacceptable, but however that is what people are drawn into, too see the world with different eyes (Carter, 2003).