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AN INVESTIGATION

into the likely social effects
of the exposure of the general public
to the portrayal of
Sex and Violence in the Modern Media.

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CHAPTER ONE :-

INTRODUCTION

In this essay I propose to explore the possible and probable effects of media sex and violence in their various forms. To do this it has been necessary to investigate the various theories put forward on the subject and to try and define the different types of sex and violence. Why they are even included in any given work has also proved to be an important factor.

On the subject of the portrayal of explicit sex, it has to be said that pornographic displays differ from each other in many ways and along many different dimensions; so do displays of violence and aggression. These differences may lead to entirely different consequences and to lump all types of material together can only lead to confusion. The nature of the media may also play a powerful part in determining the effects produced; pictures, photographs, television, films and written material all have their own peculiarities and affect people in different ways. Last but not least, human beings differ from each other in many ways, and what may affect one person may have no effect on another, or even quite the opposite effect. Men do not necessarily behave in the same manner as women, extroverts as introverts, educated as uneducated persons,- the number of dimensions along which people differ from each other is embarrassingly large. In addition to this we must also consider the duration of exposure to the material under investigation; a single exposure to a short pornographic film may have quite different effects from repeated exposures to many different films.

Previous experience is also relevant; showing a pornographic film to a person who has never come across this type of material may have entirely different effects to those which follow from showing the same material to a

person who has seen many such films. There is a famous law in psychology, (the Weber - Fechner Law) which states in essence that perception of stimuli (visual, factual, auditory etc.) is a function of the amount of stimulation already present; a single candle lit in a dark room is very noticeable, while an additional candle lit in a room which already contains one hundred lit candles will hardly be noticed. Age and sexual experience generally also come into the picture, along similar lines; a middle-aged and sexually experienced person will react differently to the showing of a pornographic film than would an inexperienced youth. (2,p38)

On the subject of actual and probable media violence, Raymond Williams raises several questions. How many items involving violence appear as a proportion of total output ? What attitudes to violence appear in these items? Are there cases where the apparent moral attitude is contradicted by the actual presentation ? Although never checked in a continuous way or over the whole communication field, over seven thousand violent acts or threats have been recorded on television programmes in New York in one week. It is often argued that it is not the appearance of violence which matters but the attitude to it within the work. On the other hand, the place of any one theme, however handled, within the general distribution of interests in the culture as a whole, is surely also important. Simple ' quantity counts ' can be useful in showing the distribution of interests. It is argued, for example that violence ought to appear because it is part of real life, it is then relevant to ask its proportion in real life as compared with its proportion in the media. Any count in our own society would show that the proportion in communications is much higher than the proportion in the rest of our living. (1,p118)

On the question of attitudes to violence there is, for example, the difference between 'Westerns' and 'Crime plays', defined as the difference between stylization and black-and-white simplicity in the former and complexity and realism in the latter. In moral attitudes the central lesson of the western is that good triumphs over evil through violence, the manly as well as the only course of action. The villain's case is never stated, no sympathy is invited for him and the hero never gains from his deeds.

In crime stories there are three kinds of explicit values; Firstly, that crime does not pay because the law has vast resources. Secondly, that the activities of the law and criminals are not in fact dissimilar. Both sides cheat and bully where necessary. Thirdly, that appearances are deceptive; a person may look harmless and yet be a criminal (though hardly ever the other way around). Man is often not responsible for his deeds ... he cannot help himself. While the law must be upheld, the criminal can evoke sympathy.

I think it is possible, to cite the film 'Blade Runner' as one of these 'crime plays'. Apart from the 'Sam Spade' style voice overs by Deckard there are many similarities with the whole genre. There is a lot of violent action in the film, some extreme and even hideous. However, the so-called villains in this case, 'the replicants', have their case clearly stated leaving plenty of scope for sympathetic feeling. In its sympathy for the androids 'Blade Runner', takes the approach of Mary Shelly's Frankenstein. The androids rebelling against their destiny, suffer more, work harder to be 'human' and are more successful at it than most people. The androids are complex, not merely

pathetic victims. They kill unnecessarily as well as for survival. When Batty kills Tyrell, his creator, he is a child reunited with his father, wildly turning a kiss into a skull-crushing murder, and the androids own deaths combine moments of sad beauty and berserk ugliness. When Batty refuses to kill Deckard at the end of the film, he is not only asserting the value of life over revenge, but breaking out of his role as programmed killer. (6, P2)

'Blade Runner' also bears out the idea that the activities of the law and the criminals are not dissimilar. Deckard kills the replicants every bit as violently as they kill people (and perhaps for not as good a reason). We also have present the idea that appearances are deceptive. 'Priss' one of the female replicants, while capable of child-like seductiveness is also capable of terrible violence.

A further difference between 'westerns' and 'crime plays' is that in the former the impact of violence is dulled because there are no close-ups at the kill and also because the emphasis is on opposing sides rather than individuals. In crime plays there is no attempt to evade the consequences of violence, the camera stays with a man who has been hit. In 'Blade Runner' the death of one of the replicants is even shown in slow-motion.

The regular message of 'crimeplays' is that crime does not pay; may in fact be begging the question of what paying actually is. That the criminal is caught may be one conclusion. That in the process of crime there has been 'pay' and satisfaction may often be another. The whole moral affect can then be deeply confused. On disturbing human themes, it is possible and even probable that there

will often be conflict between the formal moral ending or intention and the actual experience most strongly expressed.

On the subject of violence and immorality Noel Stevenson of Independent Television had this to say;

As soon as you suggest that television can make people violent or immoral you are at once dealing with an area of values on which there are enormous pressures, - our home, our neighbourhood, our religious groups, our industrial groups - all virtually speaking are against violence, against immorality, I think myself that television has very little effect in any of these.

A sociologist, Dr Mark Abrams said on the same subject;

The abundance of noxious material in the mass media is beyond dispute, but does it lead to direct, imitative behaviour on the part of ordinary average children? Does it create among them a general climate of undesirable values? The available evidence from research on these points among children is slight and often negative. It appears that when maladjusted and well-adjusted children are exposed to identical amounts of violent mass-media content, the former, unlike the latter show a marked preference, derive distinct satisfactions from it, and in the process of consumption their problems are sustained rather than resolved. Since media violence apparently intensifies the difficulties of the maljusted and frustrated, a strong case can be made for removing such material. The strength of the case however depends largely on two considerations. Firstly, how many of our children are maladjusted and frustrated? If it is low, one or two per cent, then the introduction of censorship could hardly be justified. While if it is high, twenty-five per cent or more, the case would be answerable. Unfortunately, this information is not available.

Dr. Hilde Himmelweit, psychologist said,

If year after year, one gives children a diet in which these elements feature rather largely there is no question that their view of society, that violence is a rather ordinary thing, that conflicts can best be solved by physical violence may gradually make an impact on the children. I would have thought that this was a risk not worth taking. (1, P120).

If we stand on protecting 'the immature' we shall have to accept that in fact all work, good, bad and indifferent will have to undergo scrutiny. (Thus, great masterpieces may never be seen in the light in which they were intended, and there is also the question of who does the scrutinising?). It is argued that effect can be judged in terms of the kind of audience addressed: something alright for adults may be wrong for children. This may be generally true, but in practice it seems that it is impossible to confine most work to any one group whatever the intention, the actual audiences to some extent overlap, quite apart from the natural overlap of adolescence.

Moreover, within each audience, whether of adults, adolescents or children there will be wide differences of character and stability which may have everything to do with the actual effect, for example, a psychopathic adult may be more easily affected, and may as a result do more damage, than a very young but secure child.

CHAPTER TWO:-

THEORETICAL OPINION

Due to the great variety of opinion on the effects of media portrayal of sex and violence, I feel it is important to consult scientific theory before forming my own opinion. Alexander Pope wrote a very interesting verse on the subject:

Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
As to be hated needs to be seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face;
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

This little verse seems to lead into the first of the theories I would like to discuss, that of incitement leading to the copy-cat syndrome. New behaviour is partly acquired by copying others; an obvious example is the imitation of a character such as 'Batman' by children. Sometimes this can have tragic consequences. After watching 'The Good the Bad and the Ugly' a twelve year old boy recreated the hanging scenes in his garden shed. But the make believe went wrong, when a cardboard box on which he was standing crumpled and he was found unconscious hanging from a wooden beam.

Numerous experiments have demonstrated the tendency for novel acts to be imitated. Typically a filmed model will be shown hitting, kicking and threatening a large inflated clown doll, and most children when observed in a playroom will be found to imitate these acts if there happens to be a similar doll handy. (Bandura, 1973).

Although the research has usually been with children imitation probably also occurs in adults. This sort of

imitation is illustrated by the annoying tendency for crime prevention films to be followed by a wave of break-ins. 'Break-in' was a television programme in which a former burglar showed in detail how to enter property. The aim was to advise people on how to stop housebreaking but within hours of the programme going out 'carbon copy' burglaries were being reported. (2,P 57)

Critics of imitation theory point out that it merely shapes the form that the inevitable occurrence of aggressive and anti-social acts will take. In other words, without the prompting provided by modelled examples, crimes will still be committed even if in a different way and at a different time.

Another criticism concerns the rational element of choice in imitation. For example, children are noted to be far too sensible to copy the aggressive acts of 'Tom and Jerry'. Similarly acts of imitative aggression demonstrated under experimental conditions are dismissed as merely play and likened to the playful fighting of young animals. Nevertheless, even if imitation involved no more than this there would always be the chance that use would one day be made of the aggression learned. Basically, it is all a question of probabilities. (2, P 58).

Closely related to imitation theory is the theory of 'identification' or 'wanting to be like'. It is argued that we tend to identify with people whom we respect and admire, and that consequently we are likely to be influenced by their actions as a result. The B.B.C. implies acceptance of the theory since one of its recommendations to producers is to avoid portraying 'bad habits' such as smoking in

'good' characters. The complement of this tends to occur with American television since tobacco companies often veto smoking in any 'undesirable' characters who appear in the programmes which they are sponsoring. Copying the hairstyle and clothing of a film or pop star is often given as an example of the effect of identification. The potential dangers of this tendency to imitate heroes may be illustrated by reference to the cold blooded killers who become cult figures, for instance Bonnie and Clyde, or Billy the Kid.

Another similar theory talks about 'Disinhibition'. Viewing violence is claimed to have the effect of weakening one's inhibitions, thus making the expression of violence more likely. How this might work is not clear but seeing aggression in others appears in some way to make the act less unthinkable than before. In a sense, a deviant act is legitimised by its very portrayal, especially if it is done in a way that conveys permissiveness or acceptability.

In the case of the portrayal of sex or pornography as opposed to violence there is a parallel to disinhibition: Stimulation or triggering theory. Sexual excitement aroused by pornography is claimed to stimulate people into action to act out their fantasies. Nevertheless, if resulting actions are modelled on those portrayed in the pornography then this would appear to be an example of imitation, and if the actions indulged in are already part of a person's repertoire then it would seem to be a case of disinhibition.

Another angle on theory involving effects on personal inhibitions is stated by 'Sensitization' theory, because of

its shock value, the witnessing of extreme violence may actually result in an inhibition of aggression. After seeing horrifying acts of cruelty a person's attitude against aggression may harden. This shock value provided by pornography is claimed to have a similar effect on some people causing them to reject it. In fact the position is rather more complex than this. There is also believed to be a polarization effect with prevailing attitudes being held more strongly after sudden exposure to pornography. Thus while exposure may result in a change of attitude toward greater permissiveness for the sexually experienced, the opposite effect is claimed for the inexperienced. (2, P60)

Another possible danger of media violence is stated in a theory developed by Gerbner and Gross in 1976. They discuss the probability that, by painting a picture of the dangers that might exist in the outside world, excessive media violence might be likely to arouse anxiety and so lead to a paranoid attitude and mistrust of others. They point out that the world of television drama is indeed a violent one, in which during prime time viewing, more than half the main characters are involved in violence and at least a tenth of them in killing. Because for many people television with its implicit acceptance of violence as social reality provides a 'window' to the real world, a heightened sense of danger and insecurity is felt to develop. The warning is given that acceptance of violence and passivity in the face of injustice may be consequences of far greater importance than occasional displays of aggression.

At the other end of the theoretical spectrum are the beneficial effects from witnessing sex and violence as

suggested by the theory of Catharsis. 'Catharsis' is derived from the greek word for purgation, meaning to dissipate or purge an emotion. Dramatic art on stage has always been thought to release strong emotions harmlessly through identification with the actors and events depicted in the play. Aristotle wrote in 'The Art of Poetry' that drama is a representation ... 'in the form of actions directly presented, not narrated; with incidents arousing pity and fear in such a way as to accomplish a purgation of such emotions'. It is argued that after being frustrated people often daydream about getting revenge. The story of 'Papillon' describes how a man in solitary confinement spent his time planning revenge; he did not think he could have survived without his 'outlet'. After escaping he did not find it necessary to act out his plans. After watching a violent film some people report feeling more relaxed than before. If true, this could be due to catharsis (but equally well it could be due to the distracting effects of the film, with the viewer being carried away by the excitement which may stop him thinking about his troubles, and so provides relaxation.)

There are many other claims for catharsis, the finding that aggressive people tend to watch a lot of violent programmes has been explained in terms of their need to drain off aggressive impulses. Nevertheless, there is little evidence that catharsis is responsible for this effect, and the majority of experiments point to a tendency for people to be more rather than less aggressive after watching or even participating in violence. Violent criminals tend to become more aggressive with repetition of their acts, in the famous case of 'Jack the Ripper' it was reported that his later victims were increasingly mutilated. (2, p62)

As catharsis is to violence, the 'safety - valve' or 'substitution' theory is to sex and pornography. It is argued that pent-up sexual desires, if they cannot be expressed in the normal way, may be satisfied by just looking at pornography. If so, then pornography offers a very useful and beneficial outlet for such people, and especially for the sexual pervert with illegal or socially unacceptable desires. But equally well exposure to pornography may further increase the strength of the unacceptable urges, and there seems no reason why sooner or later the person will not want to act out his fantasies. To suggest that pornography might serve instead of the deviant act could possibly apply in the case of minor sexual variations such as voyeurism, but hardly for the more 'active' and involved sex crimes such as rape and sadism.

Another theory concerned with the effects of pornography is that of 'Satiation'. It is argued that if pornography were freely available then it would lose much of its appeal, which at present is largely dependant on its 'novelty' value, and the fact that it is a 'forbidden' fruit. In the US Commission report of 1970, Lipton and Greenwood suggest that exposure to obscenity is an inevitable part of growing up and that it may even serve a purpose.

Although ... somewhat far-fetched, it seems possible that graded exposure may immunize us in somewhat the same fashion that exposure to bacteria and viruses builds resistance. Nevertheless, the question arises as to why people should be required to immunise themselves against the 'harmful' effects of pornography and how this can be separated from the potentially beneficial effects. (2. p63)

CHAPTER THREE:-

PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE

In assessing the impact of sex and violence in the media, it is necessary to consider whether realistic or fantasy violence is more likely to affect viewers. No very clear answer emerges from the evidence, although effects have been shown to exist for both types of material. Does identifying with an aggressor lead to violence? Again no definite conclusions can be drawn. However, violence used in a righteous cause does seem to increase viewer aggression more than violence used in a bad cause. I think this point is born out, at least on a sympathetic level in the film 'The Hardcore Life'. 'Van Dorn' in pursuit of his daughter, who has been led astray into the world of hardcore pornography, poses as a film producer in order to locate one of the people who was in a film with his daughter. When he finds him, he beats him up to extract information about Kristens whereabouts. However, after obtaining the information, he gives the youth an 'extra' kick. This gratuitous act only receives sympathy from the audience introducing a new point, that the nature of the enemy in the portrayal of violence may also be of importance, thus the abuse of a lowlife such as a pornographic movie stud is unlikely to provoke offense in the audience, explaining the sympathetic reaction.

Another important point in my research that never seemed clearly defined is what exactly constitutes violence anyway. From the wide variety of films we are constantly bombarded with it is obvious that the term covers many different things. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines violence as:

'Violent conduct or treatment; violent feeling or language; vehemence; intimidation, by threat of unlawful exercise of physical force'.

So the dictionary definition includes much more than the obvious blaring guns and fighting of 'Robocop' and 'Total Recall'. Though this is the most obvious and easily labelled form of violence there are much more subtle forms. There is the emotional and sexual violence portrayed in 'Carnal Knowledge'. Roundly criticised for its clinical precision and a seeming lack of depth 'Carnal Knowledge' was stimulating nonetheless for its expose of the ruination brought about by the exercise of traditional male values; and the films underlying topic, love was convincingly politicised - linked to the traits of greed, self interest and combativeness in American life. Love, could mean never having to say you were sorry, but could also involve a psychological brutality that is fully integrated into our day to day existence. (11, P1)

There are also the various types of sexual violence portrayed in 'The Hardcore Life' and 'Cruising'. These films detail rape, perversion, abuse through pornography and prostitution. 'Cruising' actually links back to a point made earlier on the theory of imitation. In the film, Al Pacino's character, as an undercover cop is exposed to the world of underground homosexuality. He has to pose as a member of this deviant society until a murder case is solved. While undercover he has to adopt the overcompensating 'macho' uniform of the homosexual society; but the big comment made at the end of the film is that after the case is solved and he can go home, the clothes go

with him. The implication being that this prolonged exposure to a deviant way of life has not left him completely unaffected.

As in the case of violence, the words 'sex' and 'pornography' are in need of clarification in terms of their portrayal. There are many uses for 'sex' in the media from the blatant porn, to its use to hold peoples attention in a less than captivating part of a film, to where sexual implications or associations are what hold the audiences interest even though they may not realise the significance of what they are watching.

In the past, the flesh film was a comfortable genre, unassuming and predictable. It was a very tightly constructed type, working within narrow confines. In his essay 'twenty - six propositions about skin flicks', Fred Chappell points out that the flesh film has traditionally been characterized by poverty of the imagination. Perhaps we couldn't always guess what would come next, but we were, for the most part, a shot or two ahead of the film. Certainly nothing occurred that we had not expected.

The films plots, if in fact they had plots, were always extremely simplistic, never corrupted by imagination. In 'Contemporary Erotic Cinema', William Rotsler lists the classic sex film plots:

- (1) A woman alone at home becomes aroused by reading or by handling some phallic-shaped object, masturbation follows. A man arrives, is invited inside and sexual play begins.
- (2) A farm girls gets excited watching animals copulate. She then runs into a farm hand or a travelling salesman and sexual play begins.

- (3) A doctor begins examining a woman and sexual play begins.
- (4) A burglar finds a girl in bed and rapes her or vice-versa.
- (5) A sunbather or skinny dipper gets caught and seduced.

Rotslers list, while not fully satisfactory, does indicate the genre's basic simplicity, although we should perhaps add the automobile - pickup plot, the costume adventure epic story and one or two other basic formulae.

In 'The Unembarrassed Muse' Russel Nye says that the popular audience needs predictability in its entertainment, and the plots of sex films answered this need. In its characters also the sex film was predictable. The male characters, most often relatively unimportant figures and easily replaced by various devices or creatures, tended to be indistinguishable from each other. They generally fell into two types; either in the catalogue description, 'good-looking young studs, well-built and well hung' or ageing, paunchy, hairy and unattractive sorts. The women in flesh films were also predictable. We pretty much knew what they would look like and we knew they wouldn't be able to act. They may not always have been battered and tatooed, as Fred Chappels suggests, but we suspected they weren't the 'fabulous continental models' they were billed as. Bust size, rather than acting ability was the criterion for stardom. (5, P133)

Personally I would not put these early 'Flesh Films' in the same bracket as the out and out pornography that currently shows at the local ghettos. This earlier genre had humour and a semblance of a plot etc., which made it a far less

offensive sort of material, I shall attempt to prove the existence of these differences but to do so it will be necessary to make some summary of the effects of the 'sexual revolution':

It gets harder and harder to find someone who will say a good word for pornography. Angry feminists, chagrined liberals, Henry Miller and Pauline Reage fans all agree that this is not what we meant, not what we meant at all, while legions who never wanted the genie let out of the bottle in the first place feel both outraged and vindicated.

For men, the most obvious drawback of traditional morality was the sexual scarcity - actual and physical - created by the enforced abstinence of women and the taboo on public acknowledgement of sexuality. Sex was an illicit commodity and whether or not a sexual transaction involved money, its price almost always included hypocrisy; the 'respectable' man who consorted with prostitutes and collected pornography, the adolescent boy who seduced 'nice girls' with phoney declarations of love (or tried desperately to seduce them) the husband who secretly wished his wife would act like his fantasies of a whore, all paid in the same coin. Men have typically defined sexual liberation as freedom from these black market conditions. The liberated woman is free to be available; the liberated man is free to reject false gentility and euphemistic romanticism and express his erotic fantasies frankly and openly; by extension, the liberated entrepreneur is free to cater to those fantasies on a mass scale.

The sexual revolution has simply institutionalized a more advanced form of hypocrisy: instead of saying one thing

and doing another, the game is to say and do the same thing but feel another, or not feel at all. As an ideology the 'fuck it and suck it' phase of the sexual revolution may be passe; as a mentality, it is nonetheless big business.

Like all popular culture, pornography is shaped by its social setting, and the relaxation of the obscenity laws has not only brought it out in the open but has inspired new genres, chief of which is the X-rated movie. Partly because of the logistics of movie going and partly because the movie industry has thrown off censorship of the crudest most anachronistic sort, porn movies have retained an air of semi-respectability, fuzzing the line between art and out and out smut. They turn up at art houses where they are known as 'erotic films'. (5, P217)

There is a distinct difference between the earliest clips, (the afore mentioned 'flesh films') which were amusing, whimsically naughty, and later sequences, which contained progressively less warmth and humour and more mechanical sex. Today's porn is based on the conceit that taboos are outdated, that the sexual revolution has made us free and innocent - a fiction that can be maintained, even for the length of a movie, only at the cost of an aggressive assault on all feeling. Not only do most porn movies fail to build tension or portray people and situations in a way that might involve the viewer, they use a variety of techniques to actively discourage involvement. Clinical close-ups of sexual acts and organs are one such ploy, a Brechtian disjunction between visual image and soundtrack is another. The first commercial porn movies often presented themselves as documentaries about sex-education, the history of sexual mores, pornographic film making and so on - a device that had an important formal function as

well as the obvious legal one. Narrators pedantic voices would super impose themselves on orgy scenes, calling your attention to the grainy texture of the film, blank-faced young girls would explain in a bored monotone why they acted in porn movies - 'Its the bread really, I guess I dig it sometimes ... It's hard work actually' - while in the background, but still on camera, another actress fellated a colleague with the business like competence of a plaster-caster.

Sexual partners in porn movies rarely make noise, most often they perform silently like fish in an aquarium. When there is dialogue, its purpose is generally to break the mood rather than heighten it, In the opening scene of 'Deep Throat' for instance, the heroine enters her apartment and is cheerfully greeted by her roommate, who just happens to have a man's head buried in her crotch. He looks up to see what is happening - but Roomie firmly guides his head back down to business. Then she lights a cigarette and says 'Mind if I smoke while you're eating?' a line that just might be the definitive statement of the porn aesthetic.

'Deep Throat' was allegedly different, the porn movie everybody had been waiting for - the one that had a plot and characters and humour, being praised for its concern for female sexual gratification and its socially valuable message that the so called missionary position is not the only way to have sex.

True, it has certain peculiarities that distinguish it from the average porn flick. It may not have a plot, but is should get some sort of award for the most grotesque

premise: The heroines clitoris is in her throat. Its not hard to see how that fantasy got started. Linda Lovelace (the star) is fresh and freckle-faced, comes on like a cut rate viva, sighs, there must be more to life than screwing around, gets genuinely upset about her predicament and hangs around for the entire movie, all of which makes her a character, at least by porn standards. The film also boasts a lot of moronic jokes. (Linda to doctor, who is making light of her problem: Suppose your balls were in your ear? Doctor: Then I could hear myself coming) (5 P 219).

However, the most crucial point is that films like 'Deep Throat', dont seem to be effective as the sexual stimulant that after all, they are supposed to be. They are unimaginative and deliberately and perversely destroy any semblance of an atmosphere in which most people's sexual fantasies are likely to flourish.

In a further attempt to shed light on the subject of pornography, Eysenck and Nias have the following to say:

In the case of words like pornography; erotica; perversion; deviance etc, no definite clear cut meaning is obvious and they are used by different authors with different implications. While the terms "erotica" or 'erotic' may be more accurately used to denote the great variety of sexual practices and types of fore-play which are common in our society, the term pornography might be best used in connection with practices which are believed to be harmful to either the victims or the people engaged in them. Thus rape, child-molestation, sadistic behaviour and bestialism would fall under this category; Fellatio or 69 would not. There are of course grey areas in which the verdict would be doubtful; would fetishism which may render its practitioners incapable of ordinary sexual reactions or of companionate relationships to be considered sufficiently harmful to qualify for the status of pornography?

The words perversion and deviance are analogous to that of pornography and erotica; the former being connected with harmful practices but not the latter, which could be reserved for unusual but not essentially harmful types of behaviour.

CHAPTER FOUR:-

**INVESTIGATING THE CONNECTION
BETWEEN SEX AND VIOLENCE**

In our discussions so far we have talked about sex and pornography as if they were strictly comparable, most critics will probably feel that we are dealing here with quite different entities and this view is fairly apparent in the reports of two US Commissions on violence and pornography respectively. Violence is deplored by practically everybody; there are very few people who would defend the increase in lawlessness violence, vandalism etc. that is apparent in modern society. There are some exceptions, writers like the rather absurd 'Frantz Fannon', who's advocacy of violence has given him a rather unsavoury reputation, but even they would seek to justify violence in a more political context than is appropriate to ordinary muggings and rapes. Gallup polls have again and again shown the concern of the man in the street with urban violence, putting this in the top few problems that he considers to be besetting our civilization at the present time.

Pornography on the other hand does not seem to present anything like the same kind of problem and indeed many people see nothing wrong with the portrayal of perfectly normal and ordinary human intercourse in the great variety of ways in which it can be achieved. Some writers have greeted pornography as some great liberation of the spirit, some removal of unnecessary and malevolent censorship, a re-birth of freedom and loss of inhibition that ought to be welcomed rather than criticized.

Whether, these thinkers would include the portrayal of sex involving children or animals, the showing of rape, bondage and beating, or the enacting of sado-masochistic practices is perhaps another question. What people may question however,

is whether the portrayal of any kind of sexual activity involving consenting adults should be regarded as 'bad' in the same sense that violence, which inevitably involves non-consenting adults and children is clearly 'bad'.

There is an obvious difference along the lines suggested but it may not be as clear-cut as at first thought. There is good evidence to show that physiologically and psychologically there is a close connection between violence and sex some pornographic films may stimulate violence, and violent films may stimulate sexuality. It is easier to separate concepts like these in the abstract than to dissect them in the living organism; we will have to get used to the idea that to stimulate sexuality by overt representations of 'abnormal' sexual acts is likely to increase violence as well. This ineluctable fact will have to be faced by those who talk freely about the flowering of a sexually non-repressed civilization, there is a danger that setting people free to 'fuck in the streets' (in the somewhat inelegant words of the schoolgirl writing in the childrens issue of Oz that was the cause of a famous court trial for indecency) may also set them free to beat each other up in the streets. Whether the advantages of the former might not be offset by the dis-advantages of the latter is a decision that everyone must make for themselves. (2 P32).

There are two issues at stake here, one is factual, concerning what actually happens, and the other is an ethnical one, concerning what our actions ought to be. Unfortunately the literature existing on the subject shows that these two things have often been mixed up in an unholy melee, with the writers ethical and moral preconceptions and judgements influencing his view of what the facts are. In theory it is possible to hold that the portrayal of

violence and sex in the media has no effect on people, but is wrong on ethnical and moral grounds, just as it is to believe that such portrayal is wrong and also has effects on other people. Similarly, one might hold that such portrayal did have effects on people, but was not morally wrong and should be encouraged. In actual fact the literature is almost devoid of protagonists who hold views dissociating values and effects; the great majority of those who believe that the portrayal of violence and sex is wrong also believe that it has an effect on people, while the great majority of those who believe it is not wrong do not think it has an effect. The association of value judgement and factual judgement seems to oversimplify greatly a very complex situation. If we start with certain moral imperatives, whether religious or anti-censorship, we are unlikely to be swayed by rational argument, or by appeal to fact, and indeed we are likely to interpret facts in line with our preconceived ideas. The actual situation is somewhat akin to the essence of a Greek tragedy, in that perfectly good and sound principles are opposed to each other; the situation is far removed from the black and white contrast so beloved by the adherents of moral (or immoral) positions. The claims of artistic expression etc., are perfectly valid in their own right; but so are claims for protection of the individual, and for the preservation of moral and ethical values. Clearly no acceptable solution is likely, but some compromise is essential if only to prevent the violent swing of the pendulum from utter permissiveness to large-scale repression and back. (2, P34).

Screen violence is respectable now in a way that screen sex will never be. Violence in the death wish society, is somehow clean, despite the fact that blood and guts make

much more of a mess on the carpet than the pale by-products of sex. You must join private clubs or go to grubby ghettos to see some aspects of celluloid sex; there are no private violence film clubs, because violence in its most gratuitous forms can find a place on the big screen.

Sex is 'cleansed' by violence in the mind of the middle-aged movie brat, it seems, and the sex which stands the best chance of getting on film these days is rape (see 'Extremities' or 'The Accused') which can be justified by censors and other ruling minds as less harmful to public morals than straightforward and consenting lust - because rape shows sex as an undesirable experience for a woman, and therefore is not conducive to the corruption and arousal of a nation's future wives and mothers.

As for the effect that violent sex as the celluloid norm might have on male audiences - well, as the Bible and boastful folklore has it, men are in such a constant state of animal rampancy (which may come as a surprise to the wealthy purveyors of sex aids and the harassed agony aunts consoling sex-starved wives) that such displays of aggression make little difference. (4 P 140)

It is not only explicit sex and violence that may have a strong effect on viewers, but the subtle underlying values therein portrayed. The suggestions made by examination of who is abused and who does the abusing, their motives etc. may be as powerful as bucket loads of gore. The sound of screaming has always shrieked through cinemas to some extent, but in the early thirties Tod Browning filmed 'Dracula' heralding an increase in decibels produced. The films fatalistic acceptance of the supernatural hit a nerve in one of the waves of humdrum hysteria that ripple

incessantly across fortress America, and its massive success caused a mad rampage through Poe's, Stevenson's and Shelly's black-edged back pages.

In Britain, Hammer films led the way in horror when they took to Dracula, Why? - because he appeared to be a gentleman? Anyhow Hammer hatched dozens of Dracula flicks throughout the fifties, sixties and seventies, Their films ran the gamut from the garbage to the almost great - some of them were every bit as good as the Grandiose American efforts. You could not be sure who would get bitten and who would survive. They were just predictable enough - you could be sure of a big no expense spared, stake through - the - heart smorgasbord at the end and you could be sure that a lot of attractive girls would bare their throats to the man in the dark cloak before the lights would go up. In the early Hammers the bitten would be ladies who never knew what nibbled them and could somehow be retrieved from phantom to fiancée in the last reel.

Although the Hammer films showed less flesh than a bikini, they were more sexual; the throat is a neglected thing of beauty and the act of baring it to famished fangs was a provocative and predatory gesture that stayed on the safe-side of the censors scissors where a spoken invitation could be cut. No one ever went to a Hammer horror to see men biting girls because there was nothing to see, the count and his cloak and the camera knew that less was more and conspired to those elegant ends. The one carve up you could count on was the stake-out at the end - the count out for the count. (4, 141).

Thus we have established one part of the sexual appeal of monster formula movies, but there is another more subtle

association. Their power seems to be essentially related to the dark fountain head which physically moves those masses in world-wide film and TV audiences who desperately struggle with the most universal and in many ways, the most horrible of personal trials: the sexual traumas of adolescence. Sex has a central role in many popular formulas but sexuality in horror movies is uniquely tailored to the psyches of troubled adolescents whatever their age.

Adolescents find themselves trapped in an unwilling change from a comparatively comprehensible and secure childhood to some mysterious new state which they do not understand, cannot control, and have some reason to fear. Mysterious feelings and urges begin to develop and they find themselves strangely fascinated with disturbing new physical characteristics - emerging hair, budding breasts etc.

The Key to monster movies and the adolescents who understandably dote upon them is the theme of horrible and mysterious psychological and physical change; the most important theme is the monstrous transformation which is directly associated with secondary sexual characteristics and with the outset of erotic behaviour. This transformation is less obvious, and perhaps for this reason more powerful in 'King Kong' (1933) than in most formulaic monster movies. Kong himself is safe while hidden deep in the prehistoric depths of Skull Island, but an unappeasable sexual desire (made explicit in the cuts restored in the film's most recent release) turns him into an enemy of civilization until trapped on the world's highest phallic symbol he is destroyed.

Generally in monster formula movies the monsters are sympathetic, in large part because they themselves suffer the change as unwilling victims, all peace destroyed by the horrible and psychological alterations thrust upon them. Even Dracula, in a rare moment of self-revelation is driven to comment 'To die, to be really dead, that must be glorious ... There are far worse things awaiting man than death'. Much suffering arises from the monsters' overwhelming sense of alienation; totally alone, he painfully embodies the adolescents nightmare of being hated and hunted by the society which he is so desperate to join.

Various aspects of the monsters attack are clearly sexual. The monster invariably prefers to attack individuals of the opposite sex, to attack them at night, and to attack them in their beds. The attack itself is specifically physical; Dracula, for instance, must be in immediate bodily contact with his victim to affect his perverted kiss. Ernest Jones explains the vampire myth largely as a reflection of mysterious physical and psychological development which startles many adolescents - nocturnal emissions:

A nightly visit from a beautiful or frightful being, who first exhausts the sleeper with passionate embraces and then withdraws from him a vital fluid. All this can point only to a nocturnal and common process, namely to nocturnal emissions accompanied by dreams of a more or less erotic nature. In the unconscious mind, blood is commonly an equivalent for semen ...

As well as the vampire's bloodletting of women who suddenly enter into full sexuality are the werewolf's bloody attacks - which occur regularly every month (with the arrival of the full moon) - are certainly related to the menstrual cycle which suddenly and mysteriously commands the body of every adolescent girl. (5 P149).

Two of the most important features normally associated with monster movies are the closely related searches for the 'secret of life' and 'that which man was not meant to know'. Monster movies unconsciously exploit the fact that most adolescents already know the 'secret of life' which is indeed the 'forbidden knowledge' of sex. The driving need to master the forbidden knowledge of the secret of life, a need which seems to increase in importance as the wedding day approaches is closely related to a major theme of monster movies; marriage.

The marriage theme, and the complex interrelationship of various other formulaic elements, may be best approached through a close analysis of two seminal classics, 'Frankenstein' and 'Dracula'.

Two events dominate the movie Frankenstein (1931), creation of the monster and celebration of the marriage of Henry Frankenstein and his fiancée Elizabeth. The fact that the first endangers the second provides most of the conflict throughout the movie, conflict much richer and more powerful, when the key thematic relationship between the two is made clear; creation of life. As Frankenstein's perverse nightly experiments are centred on the creation of life, so is the marriage, as the old Baron twice makes clear in a toast (once immediately after the monster struggles out of the old mill, again after he is destroyed at the end of the film), 'Heres to a son to the House of Frankenstein'.

The movies horror is fundamentally based on the fact that the monster's life has come without benefit of a mother's womb. At one point, Frankenstein madly and pointedly gloats over his solitary specifically manual achievements: 'the brain of a dead man ready to live again, in a body I made with my own hands, my own hands.'

Significantly, the monster himself is pitifully sympathetic, suffering as adolescents believe only they can suffer, from unattractive physical appearance, bodies they don't understand, repulsed attempts at love, general misunderstanding.

Though endowed by his single antagonistic parent with a 'criminal brain' the monster is clearly guilty of little but ugliness and ignorance, and is by any reckoning less culpable than the normal human beings surrounding him.

'Dracula' has a much more mature approach to womankind. It obviously enough is a seduction fantasy vitally concerned with the conditions and consequences of premarital indulgence in forbidden physical relations with attractive members of the opposite sex. Of all the movie monsters, Dracula seems to be the most attractive to women, and his appeal is not difficult to understand, for he embodies the chief characteristics of the standard gothic hero: Tall, dark, handsome, titled, wealthy, cultured, attentive, mannered, with an air of command, an aura of sin and suffering, perhaps most important of all he is invariably impeccably dressed. Dracula seduces Mina Harker the fiancée of the films 'hero', thus working a change in her that does not go unnoticed or unappreciated by her innocent fiancée. 'Mina you're so like a changed girl. So wonderful' - Mina agrees that she is changed, and on the romantic terrace, alone with her fiancée beneath the moon and stars begins, one is certain, the first physical aggression of their courtship. John is suitably impressed. 'I'm so glad to see you like this'.

The thematic importance of innocent victim turned monster, like Mina, Dr Frankenstein's creation, King Kong,

the wolf-man etc points directly to one of the most commonly observed and perhaps least understood phenomenon of monster movies; in those classics which are best loved and closest to true art, the audience clearly identifies with the monster. Child, adult or adolescent, in disembodied fascination, we all watch the first Karloff monster who stumbles with adolescent clumsiness, who suffers the savage misunderstanding and rejection of both society and his creator Henry Frankenstein, who's fumbling and innocent attempts at love with the little girl by the lakeside turn to terrible, bitter and mysterious tragedy. Clearly, the monster offers the sexually confused adolescent a sympathetic and at best tragic imitation of his life . (5 P 156)

Although most of the sexual overtones in these films are very subtle. I doubt anyone who picks up on them would be likely to suffer any undesirable side effects. While the adolescent, those most likely to be affected if anyone is, would be a minority of the audience, I would suggest that this effect would be cathartic, and thus more likely to be beneficial than anything else. Maybe giving them the idea that someone or something else, even if only fictional, can suffer in a way similar to them, could help them to deal with there problems.

CHAPTER FIVE:-

**SOME CONCLUDING
ARGUMENTS**

Despite the preponderance of sex and violence in the media, it must be remembered that it also offers many models of kindness, bravery and generosity. The argument that television and film act as a sort of moral or immoral tutor cuts both ways. If television programme makers ought to be fearful of copy-cat violence, might they also be permitted to be hopeful of copy-cat virtue?

Violence and sex are not the only or even the chief cause of complaint about television, but with violence, as with complaints about bad taste, sexual immorality, language and much else, television is in the dock not only for its own transgressions, but also as the most vivid portrayer of a world which is the cause of much worry, fear and regret.

The worries about violence tumble over into wider unhappiness about the ways in which human beings behave to each other and how this is represented on the screen. The cry that there is too much violence seems often to be a howl of rage that people are not as one would wish them to be, that things are not as they once were and that television not only shows this but at times appears to relish it.

On the danger of imitation by the immature, teenagers, usually considered to be the group most likely to be spurred into action by watching violence, are the lightest watchers of television. Viewers aged 16 to 20 are outnumbered by as much as seven to one by the over 55's. This does not make care for the young any less important. It does, however, point to the problem of trying to fulfil a service to all viewers. (15,P4)

One clear category of complaint is from those who are shocked, frightened or upset by individual violent incidents. This

situation can be improved by giving viewers more and clearer information about what they are likely to experience in particular programmes so that they come across material which is not to their taste as rarely as possible.

Eric Moonman offers a fairly damning opinion of the portrayal of violence by media services in 'The Violent Society'

Assassinations, hijackings and riots have all taken place on television before an audience of millions. The issues become obscured by the sheer drama of the events being played out: frequency breeds contempt, or at the very least indifference. Hijackings are still sufficiently rare to attract high ratings; overturned cars, stone throwing and burning cars have all become so familiar as to be boring. It is an appalling comment on contemporary society that matters which should revolt the consciousness have become models for the criminal, the terrorist and the desperate judged in terms of their entertainment value by the general public.

This opinion that the sensitivities have become dulled by becoming used to violence is too one sided a view. He has ignored some conspicuous ways in which they have not, also from the news service: The response to the Ethiopian appeal, Live Aid, children in need etc., demonstrate that people are sensitive as never before to the hardships and unhappiness of others.

In a letter to the Director General of the B.B.C. in regard to the news service it was stated that:

Violence does exist in our society and I would expect you to report it when it occurs. However, there is a difference between holding up a mirror and using a colossal magnifying glass. Very few people in Britain have seen a violent death in real life, yet we are constantly shown them on the screen as if they were quite a common place thing.

This letter was one of many that said that the world in reality is not as the world seen in television. Of fiction, they felt that it exaggerated the badness and violence of people; of the news, they asked in effect, 'Is it really this bad?'

News, whether in the press or on television, does not seek to reflect the whole of life. It aims to report those things which have happened to-day which had not happened yesterday and which are sufficiently important or exceptional as to be worth bringing to general notice. A safe bus journey would not make the news, a bus accident probably would; a day of modest progress at the office would not, a mighty take-over would.

News does tend to be a catalogue of what has gone wrong in the world because what has gone right is routine. But viewers don't put the rest of their life in abeyance just because they are watching the news. They know that most bus journeys are safe, that most days there is not an earthquake, that there are no riots in most places in the world etc. (15 P3)

Even if television does present an overly violent picture of the world, it is by no means clear what effect this has. People take different messages away from different programmes. Some argue strongly that it makes us put an even greater premium on orderliness in the world, that it reinforces the status quo, confirming and fortifying us in our common values, strengthening social controls.

The B.B.C. Wyatt Committee concluded that while there may be no simple cause and effect relationship between screen violence and violence in real life, it seems reasonable to

assume that the more violence we see depicted on television, in films or newspapers the more we become used to it. The committee agreed that in most cases violence on television was unlikely to make people less violent. There has to be some interaction between the medium and its milieu.

This places heavy responsibility upon the shoulders of programme makers but, it is not a reason to abandon the proper reporting of violence, nor to exclude it from drama or feature films. For instance, 5,000 people are killed on the roads in Britain every year. Many more are injured, some terribly. In spite of this enormous toll, we do not ban the motor vehicle, because it brings great benefits both economic and in individual freedom of movement. In television there is even no direct harm to life and limb. (15, P12)

The Wyatt Committee went on to make several recommendations towards which I feel very sympathetic. They felt there was at present too little information about the amount of different kinds of violence on television. Such monitoring as there was gave no proper indication of context, mood, participants and so on. In an effort to do justice to an intractable area, a highly complex research design has been devised, with special emphasis on defining violence, on the context of violence and on reliability. Definitions of violence tend to be subjective and inevitably vary widely. Research is needed to differentiate between inter-personal aggression, aggression against property and verbal aggression.

The context of violence is equally important and can either justify or condemn its occurrence. Efforts need to be made to guard against monitors reading in their own prejudices and pre-conceptions. (15. P23)

The majority of these conclusions and recommendations are equally applicable to screen sex. There are a few points however that I would like to comment on. 'Big Screen Sex' even in its most gratuitous form, probably only has some sort of titillating effect, which strikes me as unlikely to incite any terrible repercussions. In the case of explicit pornography of the sort that finds its home in the various ghettos, due to its social unacceptability (try explaining your presence in the ghetto to the average wife or girlfriend). I would imagine that the people who frequent these places on a regular basis must have some predisposition toward this type of material, and I don't believe it fair to blame all the evils of the world on the media. As well as this, due to the theoretical proposition that it is not the actual sexual content of a work that causes arousal, but the fantasies sparked off by viewing it, it could be suggested that censored scenes may become arousing through the activation of fantasy. We all know that banning things causes public interest, everybody wants to know what all the fuss is about, thus even censorship has its dangers. There are also the beneficial medical uses of celluloid sex as demonstrated in the use of such material in sex therapy.

In seeking to protect children and yet provide a full rich service of programmes for all the public broadcasters have to strike a balance. At one extreme is the argument that because broadcasters cannot determine who is watching and when, there is little point in worrying about times of transmission. More or less anything goes at any time. At the other, those who say that because children may be watching at any time, then nothing should ever be transmitted which is not suitable for young children.

This is the kind of problem which is common in democratic societies where interests have to be balanced: to suppress or to liberate; to control or to make free; to give people the power to choose or to protect. It is a problem we should relish. There is little violence on television in the Soviet Union. Free broadcasting in a free society somehow has to reflect the world as it seems and not to stifle significant talents.

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