

Murder, Mayhem, and the Media

Content Analysis #3 Assignment Instructions

Murder Film Analysis

For this assignment, you are to watch a film of your choosing where serious violence (lethal or non-lethal) is portrayed as a major part of the film. Please note that this assignment requires a current viewing- even if you have seen the film a lot of times, you are to watch it again between now and when you write the paper, rather than going from memory.

You should treat your viewing as more of an *analysis* than a leisurely watching. You may even need to watch it more than once, or rewind and re-watch certain sections, just as you would likely need to do with a song, or if you were analyzing passages in a book.

You will *code* for certain things as you go through the movie, which is your method of data collection. I have listed below the codes you are to use, and this will also help with the structure of your analysis. I suggest creating some sort of code sheet with these items, plenty of space for making notes, and keep it right with you as you watch the movie. Pause and make notes as you observe something notable, rather than waiting at the end. Or, watch the film once and then go systematically through again for coding, pausing as needed.

At the end of the watching/coding, you will write up an analysis of the film based on your observations. The analysis should include sections (with subheadings) regarding the items you coded. It should have an introduction, body, conclusion, and be well-written (i.e. proper grammar, edited thoroughly for typos and other errors, collegiate-level). Please follow the following guidelines for format:

- a. The paper should be between 4 and 6 pages, typed, and double-spaced, using 12 pt. font.
- b. Include page numbers
- c. Avoid extraneous spacing. Points will be deducted for this.
- d. Include a title page with the title of the movie, our class name, and your name
- e. Turn in the paper on Blackboard.

Coding Strategy:

- 1. Provide an abstract of the plot of the movie (1 pg. or less).**
- 2. The violent offender(s)**
 - a. The character(s): Who is the main violent offender(s) in the movie, and describe the nature of their violence. Talk about some specific incidences, as well as overall violent actions.
 - b. What are the demographics of the offender (i.e. age, race, social class, occupation, education)? Some of these might not be detectable, but might be implied (i.e. perhaps the killer is a brain surgeon but specific educational attainment was not explicitly

- stated- you know he has advanced education). Others might be undetectable entirely (i.e. the killer wears a mask the entire movie so you don't know his race).
- c. Describe the main offender(s)'s physical appearance.
 - d. The mental status: How is the main offender (or all of them, if multiple offenders) portrayed in terms of mental stability? For example, is she/he portrayed as being psychopathic or otherwise mentally unstable? Conversely, hyper intelligent? Relatively normal? List specific clues or overt themes regarding the mental status throughout the film, including what sort of emotions you believe it is supposed to garner by viewers (i.e. sympathy, fear, loath).
 - e. The violence: How is the offender's(s) actual violence portrayed? Is it portrayed as gratuitous? As justified? Realistic? Unnecessarily or unrealistically gory?

3. The victim(s):

- a. The character(s): Who is the main victim(s) in the movie, and describe why they are being targeted. If there seems to be mutual violence, with no clear-cut offender and victim, discuss this. Talk about specific incidences of their victimizations as well as general themes.
- b. What are the demographics of the victim (s).
- c. Discuss the main victim(s) appearance. See above for details.
- d. The mental status: How is the victim(s) being portrayed in terms of mental stability? List any specific examples to illustrate your observations.
- e. Emotional connection with victim(s): What sort of emotions do you feel the viewer is supposed to have toward the victim (i.e. sympathy/empathy, apathy)?
- f. Victim responsibility: Does the film portray the victim(s) as responsible in any way for the violence perpetrated against him/her/them? List specific examples if so. If not, why not?

4. Other characters:

- a. How were others characters portrayed? List some of the main characters, their roles, and how they were portrayed in general and in comparison to the offender(s)/victim(s).

5. Other thoughts:

*You could potentially code for dozens of categories of things, producing thousands of items of data. Other than these three major categories, what other themes did you notice in the movie regarding characters, the violence, the neighborhood/community/organization on which the plot centered, etc? In your conclusion, be sure to discuss generally how you think the movie portrays the events it is based on and how it counters or is consist with the media's tendency to sensationalize violence.

Notes: Be sure to include specific examples throughout your analysis. For example, if you conclude that the violent offender is portrayed as "crazy," discuss things such as "For example, as he was entering the house to find his victim, he had a crazed look in his eye

and was smiling. Jim was obviously supposed to look deranged to make viewers believe he was crazy.”

In the event that your movie has multiple characters in either category (victim or offender), select the main ones. For example, there are lots of violent people in Pulp Fiction. I would focus my analysis on John Travolta and Samuel L. Jackson as offenders, but would also have to discuss Marcel Wallace, and as for victims- tricky- but I would probably lean to a more general discussion about how diverse the victims were, but all younger men, and then would focus on the types of reasons they were being victimized.