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Motion Pictures,
Social Theory
and
Contemporary Film:
A Thematic Content Analysis of Values

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of Communication
and the
Faculty of the Graduate College
University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
University of Nebraska at Omaha

by
Christopher Marsh

April, 1995

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Thesis Acceptance

Accepted for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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Abstract

A content analysis of the ten top-grossing films of 1993 was conducted examining the depiction of the family, the portrayal of violence, and the representation of religion. The results were compared with the "rhetorical vision" of popular motion pictures by film critic Michael Medved. Medved's 1992 *Hollywood VS America* attacked the entertainment industry for its anti-family, pro-violence, and anti-religious messages in film. A thematic comparison indicated that, across the three categories, Medved's criticisms were supported about half of the time by the film sample. A deeper look at the results shows that Medved's criticisms regarding the depiction of the family and the portrayal of violence were largely unsupported by the sample. His observations about anti-family messages were not found in any of the seven films evaluated for family content. The pro-violence content was reported in two of the six films studied for violence. Medved's contention that religion is not represented in popular film was strongly supported, showing agreement in nine of the ten films in the sample. The thesis concludes that, in the areas of family and violence, his criticisms focus on the film content outside of their narrative context. That is, actual "anti-family" and "pro-violence" issues are present in the films, but are treated in such a way as to reaffirm the "traditional values" of contemporary society. It is concluded that, overall, this reflection of accepted ideals is validated by the top-grossing box office status of the films. That popular motion picture content may be an indication of current social standards is discussed. Future areas of research and criticism within the context of social responsibility are considered.

Chapter I

When first introduced at the turn of the century, motion pictures were regarded as a "miraculous" novelty, but as their popularity increased, films drew attention from concerned sociologists (Jacobs, 1939). The content was perceived as a "stimulant and educator," which also could supply movie audiences with "information and ideas (p. 12).

By the 1920s, critics of motion pictures called for regulation of the industry out of concern for its potential negative effects on children and immigrants (Benjamin, 1992, p. 89). Motion pictures were under increased scrutiny, and even referred to by Supreme Court Justice Joseph McKenna in a 1915 ruling as "evil" and "insidious in corruption" in which "prurient interests may be excited and appealed to" (*Mutual*, 1915).

Commissioned in 1928 by William H. Short, executive director of the Motion Picture Research Council, the Payne Fund Studies represented three years of research aimed at determining effects of film on younger audiences (Lowery & DeFleur, 1988). It was determined that motion pictures were influential, but the extent of influence varied for each individual. The results, although ambiguous, were used by reformers as evidence in declaring film content "detrimental" (Leff & Simmons, 1990).

Recently, motion picture content has been the target of entertainment critics for communicating immoral and untraditional values (Medved, 1992).

... Hollywood goes out of its way to trash the cherished values of most Americans. On a number of defining issues, the themes of Hollywood and the values of the public actually head in opposite directions. (p. 258)

The purpose of this thesis is to test this criticism of the motion picture industry. This will be achieved by conducting a thematic content analysis of the films in 1993 with the highest gross revenue, determining what values are emergent in the most-watched films in America.

The Payne Fund Studies are significant for two reasons: First, they are most noted as an historical landmark in the "development of mass communication research as a field of scientific investigation" (Lowery & DeFleur, 1988, p. 34); Second, the introduction of the scientific method into the social sciences coincided with the emergence of film as a popular medium, not simply as an entertainment novelty to be lightly regarded.

The Payne Fund Studies continue to have relevance today in the measurement of learning, attitude change, and emotional stimulation by the viewing of motion pictures. Erosion of moral standards and values due to film content is one continuing issue (Faulkner, 1993; Kehr, 1993; Medved, 1992).

That media, and more specifically motion picture entertainment, have effects on viewing audiences is nearly universally understood in the social research community, although agreement on the depth and range of those effects remains in dispute (Gans, 1993). Gerbner (1969) asserted:

Mass production and distribution of message systems transforms selected private perspectives into broad public perspectives, and brings mass publics into existence. We need to know what general terms of collective cultivation about existence, priorities, values, and relationships are given in collectively shared public

message systems before we can reliably interpret facts of individual and social response. (pp. 140-141)

These are not new ideas. As early as 1933, sociologist Herbert Blumer observed that the infusion of basic human values was "one of the most interesting features of motion pictures" (Lowery & DeFleur, 1988, p. 34).

The importance of values in the study of motion pictures

Values have been generally defined as "beliefs or standards" (Webster's, 1979), and scientifically operationalized as "the most enduring mental templates" (Potter, 1994, p. 10). They have also been linked to "themes" and "morals" for the purpose of conflict resolution in narrative entertainment plots (Potter, 1990; Selnow, 1990; 1986). For the purposes of this research, a value is a "type of belief, centrally located within one's total belief system, about how one ought or ought not to behave. Values are abstract ideals, positive or negative, not tied to any specific attitudes, object, or situation" (Rokeach, 1973, p. 124).

In considering the relevance of the Payne Fund Studies today, it is important to note that Lowery and DeFleur (1988) contend contemporary society bears only a faint resemblance, in terms of media presence, to the simpler times of the 1920s. Today's children and adolescents are surrounded by media content to a degree unimaginable fifty years ago (p. 52).

This research, however, has been predominantly grounded in television and cultivation research (Potter, 1994; Selnow, 1990; 1986).

However, simply because other media, such as radio and television, have become dominant in contemporary society is not sufficient to disregard the subtler presence of film reaching audiences. As Linton and Jowett (1976) observe, "Since the mid-1950s and the advent of television, there has been little or no interest in undertaking detailed analyses of movie content (p. 477).

Following a review of literature (Chapter II), and explanation of research methodology (Chapter III), the present study will examine values embedded in top contemporary films. The purpose is to develop a research agenda for the modern study of film content. This research may be instrumental in further application of various genres and categories of motion pictures.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

[Motion pictures] may be used for evil ... the audiences they assemble, make them more insidious in corruption ... They take their attraction from the general interest, however eager and wholesome it may be, in their subjects, but a prurient interest may be excited and appealed to. Besides, there are some things which should not have pictorial representation in public places and to all audiences.

Opinion of Supreme Court Justice Joseph McKenna,
Mutual Film Corporation v. Industrial Commission of Ohio, 1915

Eighty years after a Supreme Court decision denied motion pictures the constitutional freedom of expression, the content and effects of popular movies on society remain intensely debated issues (Mathews, 1993; Weinraub, 1992; Medved, 1992). Since its earliest beginnings, motion picture film has assumed the roles of informer, educator, historian, and propagandist, to mention a few. But it is the function of entertainment which has enabled film to become the most popular medium in history (Izod, 1988). Wright (1960) explained that the movies' capacity to entertain has drawn the labels *functional* and *dysfunctional*. They have been praised for providing leisurely distraction and contributing to the creation of mass culture. They have also been condemned for cultivating a preoccupation with leisure and lowering the taste of audiences and impeding the growth of a mass culture (Severin & Tankard, 1988, p.296). As Jowett (1990) states:

From its earliest origins to late 1968, the industry always responded to three basic threats: first, the threat of censorship from all sources, but especially the fear of federal government censorship; secondly, the threat to box office receipts, from whatever cause but particularly competitive forms of entertainment; and thirdly, organized public protest over the issue of the 'moral of the movies.' (p. 3)

In order to understand the full implications of the concept "moral of the movies," it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the evolution of social control and motion picture entertainment throughout the twentieth century and the impact of the three prongs of influence previously outlined. Following an articulation of the functions of "popular motion pictures," social effects theory will be applied for the purpose of establishing the entertainment medium's cultural significance.

A Brief History of Motion Pictures and Social Control

"The Art of the Multitudes"

In 1891, William Dickson, an employee of Thomas Edison, developed a method of preserving images onto a strip of celluloid, and then running the strip through a camera "so that it stopped intermittently behind the lens for the registering of images." (Izod, 1988) This process was awarded a patent two years later, and in 1897 the marvel of motion on film began appearing in vaudeville houses, mostly as a novelty. By 1907 nickelodeons, short narratives which cost five cents and lasted approximately fifteen to twenty

minutes, began to challenge vaudeville as the most popular entertainment media for America's working class (Facey, 1974; Izod, 1988). The growth of motion pictures coincided with a number of cultural and technological developments in America (Balazs, 1972), and provided a significant portion of society with an identity of values which had until that time been nonexistent. The turn of the century embodied an era of increased industrialization and urbanization in the United States, as well as a surge in immigration. It was these newest citizens who turned to motion pictures for an affirmation of cultural and community values (Izod, 1988; Jowett, 1976). Unlike the predominantly English-bound literature and music, film was unique in its ability to establish "a popular culture that was national rather than regional, modern rather than traditional" which could be understood without being tied to a language (Jarvie, 1982, p. 253). As the working classes enjoyed film for socialization as well as entertainment, the established citizenry of the middle class also sought a new orientation:

By about 1908 motion picture producers were beginning to recognize that films might appeal to substantial elements of the middle classes by offering them pleasures denied by the old morality. The excitement of entertainment vividly presented was complemented by the assertion of values that Victorianism did not countenance, and the democratic arrangement of the auditoria themselves. The cinema opened up the possibility of conversation with someone in the next seat who might come from an entirely different background from oneself. (Izod, 1988, p.12).

The first major incident of film censorship occurred in 1908, when George B. McClellan, the Mayor of New York City, announced the closing of movie houses during the Christmas holidays, out of concern over immoral themes. This action was in response to pressure from, among others, the International Committee of the Clergy of Greater New York for the Suppression of Sunday Vaudeville. The appeals were made out of concern that the "idle workers," having a day without assignment, would be inclined to gather at moviehouses (Uricchio & Pearson, 1993, p. 32) As Izod further notes:

Indeed it is clear that certain movies did attempt to titillate, and were objectionable to a wider public than the reformers. However, this factor alone does not explain the intensity of the anxiety. As a young medium, movies often presented the new mores uncritically, even enthusiastically ... the reformers confused new patterns of behavior and styles of dress, particularly among young women on the screen, with what by Victorian standards appeared permissive, or even worse. (1988, p. 21)

Faced with continuing threats of censorship, the Motion Picture Patents Company established the National Board of Review. This organization, funded and in cooperation with MPPC, assured the state government as well as sensible-minded audiences that any film bearing its seal of approval contained material appropriate for viewing. Further, local and state licensing regulation continued, and in 1915 the US Supreme Court ruled in *Mutual* that motion pictures were akin to "spectacles" conducted as a business and thereby not possessing the same social value as a free press or

similar outlets for public opinion (Jowett, 1990). As Benjamin (1992) states, "the protection of children, the effects of movies on an impressionable public, and the influence of movies on immigrants were reasons for control and interference with liberty of expression" (p.88). The industry resisted continued censorship with the creation of more self-regulatory bodies, such as the National Association of the Motion Picture Industry, the National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures , and most notably the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association of America , also known as the Hays Office (Jowett, 1990; Schumach, 1964).

The Production Code and The Legion of Decency

Will H. Hays, the postmaster general of the Harding administration, was appointed president of the MPPDA on March 24, 1922. The Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America was leading a movement of escalating criticism from the religious community. In an attempt to improve the image of the film industry, the Motion Picture Producers & Distributors of America, Inc., began establishing more earnest standards in cinema production (Martin, 1970). These efforts resulted in what became known as the *Formula*, which lasted until 1927. The creation of the *Don'ts and Be Carefuls* followed (Jowett, 1990). These devices of self regulation were then replaced on March 31, 1930 by the *Motion Picture Production Code*, "considered to be more a 'philosophy' of producing films, and, as such, was designed to force the producers into a greater awareness of their responsibility and commitment to the public" (Jowett, 1990, p. 15). The Code identified a number of topics and occurrences to be strictly excluded from movies (See

Appendix B). These restrictions included "profanity, suggested nudity, illegal drug traffic, white slavery, miscegenation, venereal disease, childbirth, ridicule of the clergy, and willful offense to any nation, race, or creed" (Martin, p. 18, 1970). To 1934, the Studio Relations office was given the task of enforcing the code, but its decisions could be appealed to a panel of studio representatives who often sided with the producers against the SRO. As Schumach states, the entire process of self-regulation "was like putting Jack the Ripper in charge of a beauty contest" and the pressure for outside regulation continued (1964, p.21).

In April of 1934, one of the most influential organizations to be born of response to film content became known as the Legion of Decency, a predominantly Catholic movement but one which also included Protestant and Jewish representatives (Izod, 1988; Schumach, 1964). At the height of its boycott campaign, the Legion of Decency included approximately 11 million members, dedicated to the policing of immoral content in motion pictures (Martin, 1970). (See Appendix A) The Legion of Decency threatened to completely bypass the federal and state government-imposed regulations and employ economic sanctions against the industry (Facey, 1974). Industry leaders finally succumbed, and the Production Code was empowered to police films (Izod, 1988; Schumach, 1964). The Legion was instrumental in achieving not only a legitimate commitment to the Production Code, but also "a marked change in the content of the Hollywood product in the years following its creation" (Jowett, 1990, p. 18). The MPPDA agreed to the establishment of the Production Code Administration Office (PCA), and it was agreed that no company belonging to the MPPDA would distribute or

release or exhibit any film unless it received a certificate of approval signed by the PCA. Films given this seal of approval were guaranteed to be acceptable entertainment fare (1990, p.18). Despite outcries of censorship from within the film industry, the Code system was interpreted as "voluntary," and motion pictures could still be distributed without the PCA Seal (Leff & Simmons, 1990, p. 160). These films might still be the target of boycotts by watchdog groups like the Legion. The critics of motion pictures accepted this as a major victory, as Reverend Dr. Edward Roberts Moore, Director of Social Action of the Catholic Charities of the Diocese of New York and Secretary of the Council of the Legion of Decency, commented in 1935 on the Legion's impact:

Today the level of the nation's screen entertainment is immeasurably higher than it was before the crusade began . Artistic standards have not suffered-- quite to the contrary. More people are going to the pictures, so all are happy-- the producers who feared the worst; the Legion which sees its objective-- for the time, at least-- attained; and the public which gets better entertainment. (Martin, 1970, p. 69)

Eventually, as social and cultural issues changed in the post-World War II years, the film industry was struggling to expand its representation of more contemporary and mature themes, as well as compete with a new entertainment medium. "Hollywood was fighting for its life as television and other recreational activities captured the minds and pocketbooks of the American public" (Jowett, 1990, p. 25). The only resource it lacked was the legal justification to do so, and that came on May 26, 1952, when the Supreme

Court reversed *Mutual* (1915). Film was recognized as a medium equal to speech and press in its communication of ideas (1990).

More damaging to the system of Code-based censorship was the release of Otto Preminger's *The Moon is Blue* in 1953 without the Code's official seal. In 1948, the Supreme Court had forced the studio corporations to sell off their theaters, thus freeing theater owners to select features not approved by the PCA. These newly independent theater chains booked Preminger's film in spite of the fact that the PCA had denied it a seal and the Legion of Decency had condemned the feature. After Preminger's successful defiance of the Code and the Legion, "courageous filmmakers could now afford to probe once-taboo subjects" (Leff & Simmons, 1990, p. 203). The reluctance of courts to impose restrictions to the film industry remained, as Schumach (1964) noted:

Since 1952 the Supreme Court has been on anticensorship spree that has knocked nearly all the legal props out from under the state and local movie censors. The movie industry has been judged an art, entitled to the freedom enjoyed by books, newspapers, and magazines (p. 185).

This movement continued, and in 1966, Jack Valenti became the leader of the industry's film producers organization, and the restrictions on the representation of mature subject matter ended. "'The first thing I did when I became president of the Motion Picture Association of America,' Valenti proudly recalled a quarter century later, 'was junk the Hays Production Code, which was an anachronistic piece of censorship that we never should have put into place'" (Medved, 1992, p. 282). The new production code, offered by

Valenti "recommended that movies 'keep in closer harmony with the mores, the culture, the moral sense and the expectation of our society'" (Leff & Simmons, 1990, p. 264).

Thus, by the mid-1960s, the American movie industry had achieved a degree of judicial freedom that would allow it to move down previously forbidden pathways.

Now, at long last, the screen was free to explore, with relative impunity, adult subject matter in a mature fashion in the hopes of attracting 'the lost audience'. (Jowett, 1990, p. 22)

It then became necessary for the motion picture industry to revise its rating system, applying labels proclaiming a film as "Suggested for Mature Audiences" (Jowett, 1990). This led to the MPAA Code and Rating Administration, which devised four rating labels for film, presented on October 7, 1968; "'G' (all ages admitted; general audiences); 'M' (suggested for mature audiences-- adults and mature young people); 'R' (restricted; children under 16 required an accompanying parent or adult); or 'X' (no one under 16 admitted)." In the following years "M" was changed to "GP" (parental guidance, later changed to "PG") and the label "PG-13" was introduced in 1984 in response to concerns of growing violence in films such as *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. This stipulated that children under the age of 13 must be accompanied by a parent or guardian (Jowett, 1990, p.26-27). This coding system is in effect today.

The Social Functions of the Popular Motion Picture

It has never been much of a secret that movies influence manners, attitudes, and behavior. In the fifties, they told us how to dress for a rumble or a board meeting, how far to go on the first date, what was right and what was wrong, what was good and what was bad; they defined our problems and suggested solutions. And they still do. (Biskind, 1983, p. 2)

From the 1920s until the 1950s movies were considered the "center" of culture in America (Jarvie, 1982, p. 248). In this role motion pictures fulfilled a number of social functions, and for the purpose of this thesis it is important to briefly examine a few of these functions in order to illustrate the impact of film on society.

Motion Pictures as Entertainment

Oh, God, the movies. For four hours every Saturday afternoon I was taken away from that miserable lonely charnel house of childhood and was permitted to ride beside Don "Red" Barry, swashbuckle beside Sidney Toler, drool over Ann Rutherford and June Preisser, know fear as Kent Smith knew it and shudder helplessly as Rondo Hatton stalked the streets as The Creeper. For four hours, I was in Heaven. (Harlan Ellison, 1989, pp. 4-5)

The experiences which Ellison relates are the most widespread in

examining the appeal of motion pictures. Mendelsohn (1966) defines mass media entertainment as simply "the experiencing of pleasure from the mass media" (p. 15). Jarvie (1982) explains that "common sense tells us that we go to the movies for pleasure -- as a pastime or because particular movies attract us" (p. 248)."

Film as Narrative

The concept of the narrative, an age-old tradition of human interaction for the purposes of recreating everyday events, long preceded the invention of motion pictures at the turn of the century (Wulff, 1993).. But because of its ability to reproduce images and movement, cinema has been regarded from its inception as a major tool in representing reality, for dramatic and entertainment purposes eclipsing the theatre as discourse of narration, of recreating events or telling a story, much in the same way that photographs came to overshadow representational painting for the aesthetics of viewing (Aumont, et. al., 1992; Hurt, 1974). Sony Pictures chief Peter Guber stated in 1993 that "before the printed word, we were passing our heritage through stories. The story is the central focus of the entertainment business" (Tahmincioglu, 1993). The narrative quality of motion pictures has been responsible for its unparalleled popularity at the turn of the century (Izod, 1988), and its continued success (Denzin, 1992).

The Social Construction of Reality

In articulating the unprecedented appeal of motion pictures as popular entertainment, critic Allardyce Nicoll observed in 1937:

... although the cinema introduces improbabilities and things beyond nature ... the filmic material is treated by the audience with far greater respect (in its relation to life) than the material of the stage. What we have witnessed on the screen becomes the "real" for us ... we credit the truth of these pictures even as, for all our professed superiority, we credit the truth of newspaper paragraphs. (Hurt, 1974, p.34)

It was based on this "real" that audiences could *vicariously* identify and deal with subjects and issues outside the realm of their own experiences (Jarvie, 1987; Mendelsohn, 1966; Powdermaker, 1950). Jarvie (1982) defines socialization as "the process of transmitting information that assists individuals in becoming socially competent" (p. 259). As stated earlier, motion pictures enabled a heterogeneous society to transcend the barriers of age and class; "children learn about the adult world, rural dwellers about the city, city dwellers about the country, rich and poor about one another, and so on" (Jarvie, 1982, p. 259). To those aspiring for a change in their social status, the cinematic representations of other classes provided references on which to base choices in dress, language, and behaviors (Mendelsohn, 1966).

In the January 17, 1993 Chicago Tribune, movie critic Dave Kehr observed that "like any adolescent, America spends a lot of time staring into the bathroom mirror, checking for blemishes, preening on strengths, searching for lines of character. America's bathroom mirror is, and has been since they were invented, the movies."

In response to film as "fantasy" for the purpose of an "escape,"

Mendelsohn (1966) argues that motion pictures provide for an "extension of reality," and audiences may use this medium for conflict resolution. "Movies serve similar functions as do legends-- in that they help the individual to interpret himself, others, and society" (p. 98). In this same function, Aumont et. al., (1992) states, "insofar as the cinema is capable of reproducing systems of representation or social articulations, that film (has taken) the place of great mythical tales" (p. 76). Jarvie (1982) adds that, although no longer at the center, "movies still originate myths and formulas of popular culture" (p. 263).

Bormann's Fantasy Theme Analysis

The rhetorical method of explaining the connection between message content and audience consciousness was first suggested by Bales' (1950) research in small group communication. It was then further developed by Bormann's (1972, 1982) theories of large groups and mass communities. Fantasy theme analysis suggests that "individuals, in interacting with others create symbolic realities on the basis of the dramatizations shared by group members" (Foss & Littlejohn, 1986, p. 319). The shared dramatizations may become part of a larger narrative, developing into "rhetorical visions" (Bormann, 1972) Foss & Littlejohn (1986) utilized this analysis in a comparison of fantasy themes in entertainment and the cultural vision of nuclear war. They conducted interviews to determine the impressions, or fantasy themes, individuals held of a nuclear war. They then compared those impressions with the content of the 1983 television movie *The Day After*, about survivors of a nuclear attack. The researchers were attempting

a comparative analysis of two kinds of discourse—public and personal—relevant to the vision of nuclear war. Our general goal was to construct that overall vision from the combined forms of discourse studied (p. 320).

Foss & Littlejohn found that the film had a significant impact in the reality created by its rhetorical vision, both within the context of the narrative and actual event of nuclear war portrayed on television:

"... the film itself may reinforce or add to the vision, especially to the extent that it stimulates interpersonal discussion in small groups, which may prompt further fantasy theme chaining" (p. 318). As Bormann (1982) states.

My claims in 1972 were that fantasies are shared in all communication contexts, that there is a connection between rhetorical visions and community consciousness, that sharing fantasies is closely connected with motivation, and is an important means for people to create their social realities (p. 289).

Cultivation Theory

Researcher George Gerbner presented the idea that narrative entertainment providing information would produce "cultivation, or the teaching of a common world view, common roles, and common values" (Severin & Tankard, 1992, p. 249). The amount of cultivation, or influence, would depend on the amount of exposure to the storyteller. Cultivation theory has been the focus of a considerable body of research (Potter, 1994, 1993,

1991; 1990; Potter & Chang, 1990; Signorielli & Morgan, 1990; Hawkins & Pingree, 1990). Potter (1994) recently provided one example of the cultivation hypothesis: television viewers who say they are exposed to greater amounts of television are predicted to be more likely "to exhibit perceptions and beliefs that reflect the television world messages" (p. 1).

Although the research in cultivation analysis focuses on the effects of television viewing, there exists a significant overlap of experiential concepts between the two mediums. As with film, entertainment has become the predominant format for the presentation of information on television (Postman, 1986). Although motion pictures were superseded by television as the dominant entertainment media, there still exist significant parallels between the two which provide justification for the application of television effects theory and research to film. Mendelsohn (1966) defined mass media entertainment as "the experiencing of pleasure from the mass media in communication" (p. 15). Additionally, both film and television have been "condemned, condoned, and commended" for their use as being "fantasy-escapist" media (Mendelsohn, 1966, p. 41).

Significant differences have also been found between motion pictures and television. Pervasiveness and accessibility of television in American homes have been largely responsible for that medium's eclipsing of cinematic research (Postman, 1986). However, the differences in the experience of film itself are notable, as Linton (1982) states:

Film viewing has relatively isolating and engulfing physical and social characteristics when compared with television viewing. As a result film viewers

tend to lose themselves in the screen world through identification with one of the film characters, while television viewers tend more to recognize characters within the drama as similar to people they know in real life. Film viewing, then, involves an identity loss situation. Television viewers, however, remain more critical and less susceptible to influence. (p. 189)

The physical experience of watching movies in the cinema has also been considered to increase the emotional impact of film. Linton and Jowett (1976) attribute this to 'the darkened theatre, heightened intensity of emotional stimuli and the increased sense of isolation, and the relaxed posture of the film viewer" (p. 577).

Natale (1994) points out that "more people see movies today than ever. They just don't always see them in the movie theatres. Add home video, cable TV and foreign box office, and annual film revenues are northward of \$20 billion" (p. FO3). By articulating the similarities between movies and television and examining a theory that film may be even more influential, then it may be argued that cultivation theory, formerly reserved for television, may also be applied to motion pictures.

Contemporary Criticisms of Motion Picture Content

In deference to the fact that volumes of critiques have been written concerning all facets of motion picture messages and influence, such as violence, sex, representations of race, gender, and religion etc., this section of the review will focus only on criticisms of thematic content in popular films.

That motion pictures have influences on the social construction of reality and on culture is a primary source for concern from critics. As Medved (1992) states, "the power of the entertainment industry to influence our actions flows from its ability to redefine what constitutes normal behavior in this society" (p. 261). Indeed Michael Medved is one of the most outspoken of the film industry's critics; his 1992 *Hollywood vs America* is an all-out indictment of the entertainment business: " ... Hollywood ignores the concerns of the overwhelming majority of the American people who worry over the destructive messages so frequently featured in today's movies ..." (p. 3).

Traditional Family Values

Medved (1992) cites two Mellman & Lazarus public opinion studies from 1989 and 1991 which indicate "Americans show a deeper sense of 'core family values'" (p. 257). He argues that the trend towards these values has not been mirrored by the film industry. Howe (1994) reflects on the past decade's Hollywood fare as "1980s-era yuppie allegories, starring greed-is-good lizards like Michael Douglas, or Iron-John shoot-em-ups featuring hard drinking cops like Bruce Willis, snarling about ex-wives and child support payments" (p. C3).

Kehr (1993) also criticizes the thematic film content of the 1980s as promoting "winning" as the ultimate goal, with no "compassion for the underdog" or "sympathy for the loser, ('Rocky' and 'Rambo')" as well as an appetite to see the losers actively attacked and openly resented ('Beauty and the Beast')"(p. 4).

The spirit embodied in the Legion of Decency is also present in a number of contemporary organizations, most notably People for the American Way, and the Christian Film and Television Commission, conservative watchdog groups which publish their own versions of each year's "Best Films" (Natale, 1994; Fox, 1993).

Table I

The Films of 1993 with the Highest Gross Revenues

Film	Gross Revenue	Content/Type	Rating
1. Jurassic Park	\$337.8 million	Action	PG-13
2. The Fugitive	\$179.2 million	Drama	PG-13
3. The Firm	\$158.3 million	Crime/Drama	R
4. Sleepless in Seattle	\$126.3 million	Comedy/Romance	PG
5. Indecent Proposal	\$105.5 million	Drama	R
6. In the Line of Fire	\$102.2 million	Drama	R
7. Mrs. Doubtfire	\$89.2 million	Comedy	PG-13
8. Cliffhanger	\$84.0 million	Action	R
9. Free Willy	\$77.7 million	Family/Drama	PG
10. Groundhog Day	\$70.8 million	Comedy/Drama	PG

(Source: Facts on File, December 28, 1993)

Statement of Purpose

Although entertainment content issues are the source of continuing debate (Faust, 1993; Sharrett, 1993; Valenti, 1993; Wall, 1993; Medved, 1992), very little contemporary value-based analysis exists (Selnow, 1986, 1990; Linton & Jowett, 1976). Further, the majority of content research focuses on issues of television and cultivation analysis (Potter, 1994).

Entertainment critic Michael Medved has referred to contemporary film content as "an assault on the senses and an assault on the spirit" (Maudlin, 1993, p. 25), and accused the film industry of being out of touch with the values of mainstream America:

As recently as 1939, the movie business still held up the old ideal of artistic achievement, which was touching people's hearts, touching peoples spirits, giving people optimism, and, at times, tragedy. They always sought to connect with an audience. Now the most respected films are often very expensive films that have no chance of making a dime since they refuse to make that connection with the audience. (p. 24)

In his 1992 criticism of the entertainment industry, Hollywood VS America, Medved focuses on three areas of motion picture content: the depiction of the family, the portrayal of violence, and the representation of religion. The pervasive treatment of these issues has "helped to alienate a significant segment of the public" (p. xx).

Medved's book has itself been criticized for "instances of inadequate documentation, unsupported assumptions, skewed interpretations, and sweeping claims based on tiny sample sizes" (Siano, 1993, p.9).

The purpose of this thesis is to test Michael Medved's assertions by conducting a qualitative analysis of the prevalent themes in the top-grossing films of 1993. The criteria for evaluation will stem from Medved's (1992) criticisms in an effort to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How do the top-grossing films of 1993 treat the subjects of family, violence, and religion?

RQ2: Will the treatment of these issues in the top-grossing films of 1993 support Medved's criticisms of the entertainment industry?

Chapter III

Methodology

Fantasy theme analysis, as developed by Bormann (1972), suggests that symbolic realities may be constructed by audiences viewing a dramatization. This exposure may generate into a shared rhetorical vision among those individuals, developed from the narrative elements of the story--the actors, the acts, and the setting.

The content consists of characters, real or fictitious, playing out a dramatic situation in a setting removed in time and space from the here-and-now transactions. Values and attitudes of many kinds are tested and legitimized as common to the group by the process of fantasy chains ... the composite dramas which catch up large groups of people in a symbolic reality, I call a 'rhetorical vision.' (pp. 397-398)

Foss and Littlejohn (1986) applied fantasy theme analysis to the 1983 made-for-television movie *The Day After*. The researchers first interviewed several individuals in an

attempt to determine some of the fantasy themes about nuclear war present in society at large ... we then analyzed *The Day After*, not only to determine if these themes appeared in the film, but to see what additional themes the film embodied (pp. 319-320).

This research will use Foss and Littlejohn (1986) as a reference in analyzing the film sample. The "interview" will consist of the views of film critic Michael Medved, from his 1992 book Hollywood VS America and other published articles (Maudlin, 1993; Medved, 1993; Wall, 1993). Medved's specific assertions concerning the depiction of the family, the portrayal of violence, and the representation of religion in popular film will serve as the thematic criteria by which the films will be evaluated.

Method of Selecting the Film Sample

In order to study the thematic content of popular film, it is necessary to explain the term "popular" and to provide justification of the sample size.

Popular, as stated earlier, in reference to film indicates a motion picture intended for a mass audience, and that film's subsequent earnings in box office receipts. In deciding the year in which popular films would be drawn for analysis, the sample was limited by three considerations;

1. Financial information (in the form of total box office receipts) was not complete concerning films distributed in 1994;
2. Time and financial resources for this research limited analysis to the ten top-grossing films of 1993; and
3. Each of these films is currently available for renting in the video market, providing for convenient analysis.

It is important to note that there exists considerable diversity of genre within the film sample (comedy, drama, crime-drama, action, family fare, and romance). Due to this, films will be evaluated in the thematic categories most appropriate for their content. Films not suitable for a certain thematic

discussion will be disregarded in that category. For example, *Sleepless in Seattle*, a comedy/romance, will not be examined for its portrayal of violence because, simply, it contains no such depictions. Similarly, *In the Line of Fire*, a drama, will be less likely to be analyzed for its depiction of the family. There may exist, however, the necessity for crossover. *The Firm*, a crime/drama, contains violence as well as a plot scenario involving family issues, and will be evaluated by both criteria.

The representation of religion will be examined differently because of Medved's assertion that religion is largely absent from popular entertainment (1992). For this comparison, each of the films will be analyzed in terms of this contention.

The Sample

A brief summary of the plot of each film in the sample:

Jurassic Park: Plans for a prehistoric theme park go awry as dinosaurs, cloned from fossilized DNA, wreak havoc on their creators. Directed by Steven Spielberg; PG-13.

The Fugitive: In this action film based on the television series of the 1960s, Dr. Richard Kimball, falsely accused of killing his wife, by chance escapes from custody. While being tracked by a federal marshall, he searches for the one-armed man responsible for his wife's murder. Directed by Andrew Davis; PG-13.

The Firm: An up-and-coming lawyer lands a dream job with a small but prestigious law firm in the South. The firm attempts to entrench its newest member in its dealings with organized crime. The lawyer must walk a fine line between the law and his own oath of ethics, all while being hunted by the mob and federal agents. Directed by Sidney Pollack; R.

Sleepless in Seattle: A Seattle-based widower is pressured by his 10-year-old son to advertise for a wife on a national call-in radio program, which is heard by a hopeless romantic in Baltimore. The two then begin a fateful cross-country odyssey in search of "magic." Directed by Nora Ephron; PG

Indecent Proposal: A young struggling couple, hoping to finance a dream home by winning it big in Las Vegas, lose everything. They meet a billionaire, offering them one million dollars for one night with the wife. Directed by Adrian Lyne; R.

In the Line of Fire: An aging secret service agent, still wracked with guilt 30 years after witnessing the JFK assassination, undergoes emotional turmoil chasing a presidential assassin, gleefully toying with his demons. Directed by Wolfgang Petersen; R.

Mrs. Doubtfire: A divorced actor, separated from his children, disguises himself as a Welsh housekeeper to be near his kids. Directed by Chriss Columbus: PG-13.

Cliffhanger: A mountain-climber matches wits with a ruthless villain atop a freezing summit. Directed by Renny Harlin; R.

Free Willy: An unhappy child leads a movement to save an unhappy and mistreated exhibition whale. Directed by Simon Wincer; PG.

Groundhog Day: An obnoxious weatherman is doomed to replay one of the less glamorous 24 hours of his life as he covers the Groundhog Day festivities in Punxsatawney, PA. Directed by Harold Ramis; PG.

Chapter IV

Analysis

Michael Medved has stated, "Hollywood no longer reflects--or even respects--the values of most American families" (1992, p. 10). In order to examine the correspondence between this criticism and the rhetorical visions of the film sample, it is necessary to provide conceptual examples of Medved's discourse. The analysis will encompass three areas: the depiction of the *family*, the portrayal of *violence*, and the representation of *religion*.

The Depiction of the Family

A major focus for Michael Medved has been the "assault on the family." The critic has describes the problem as

... grim and poisonous visions that regularly emerge from the entertainment industry. Those antifamily images have become so deeply ingrained in our national consciousness that few Americans can summon the courage or the strength to dismiss them as the destructive distortions that they are. (p. 96)

He has specifically identified Hollywood's "antifamily" messages as "promoting promiscuity, maligning marriage, encouraging illegitimacy, and undermining parental authority" (1992, p. 157).

Medved has quoted an Associated Press media general poll which states that 72 percent of Americans feel there is too much sex in film (Maudlin, 1993). Motion pictures today, he believes, are much more sexual than those of twenty years ago. He accuses the film industry of promoting

"sexual adventurism," and asserts that the only kind of forbidden sex is that which occurs between a husband and wife (Medved, 1992, Maudlin, 1993).

Marriage in film is also unfairly portrayed. There is a hostility to the "nuclear family." Medved (1992) sees in movies deceptive, dangerous, and bizarre messages about marriage and family life. The negative images of these institutions greatly outnumber the positive ones.

The entertainment industry has an equally bleak outlook for parents. Medved also states that if Hollywood provides one hope for the hapless adults, it is the kids. Youth are often responsible for the resolution of conflict. "Teenagers in particular are portrayed as the ultimate source of all wisdom, sanity, and sensitivity and our one hope for redeeming the world" (1992, p. 147).

The Films

There were seven films whose content warranted analysis for "anti-family" messages: *Jurassic Park*, *The Firm*, *Sleepless in Seattle*, *Indecent Proposal*, *Mrs. Doubtfire*, *Free Willy*, and *Groundhog Day*.

The portrayal of romantic or sexual relations is a key factor in four of the movies, most prominently in *Indecent Proposal*. In this story a financially struggling married couple lose what remains of their savings in Las Vegas. Enter a handsome multi-millionaire who wagers that money can buy anything, even love: one million dollars for one night with the young wife. At first, the two are appalled at the suggestion. A sleepless night, however, results in their serious consideration. The money would provide a solution to all of their problems, and the sex would be meaningless. "It

would only be my body," the woman contends. "it wouldn't be my mind, or my heart." After agreeing that their marital bond is "invincible," the couple accepts the offer. Although agreeing that the topic will be treated as though it had never happened, the marriage soon crumbles. The dissolution of the marriage would seem to suggest that there is a very high price for extra-marital sex, even with the consent of the spouse. The relationship between husband and wife is strong, but not infallible. The reward for accepting the proposal is financial security, but with the tortuous bi-product of paranoia and jealousy. Only after the money is given away are the two reconciled. In the film, the only actual depiction of sex occurs between the married couple, albeit graphically on the kitchen floor. The extra-marital affair is left to the audience's imagination, as it is left to the husband's. That money cannot buy happiness is certainly a prevalent theme in this film. The prospect of one million dollars clouds the young couple's judgements, and rationalizations drive their marriage off track. It also should not be considered tantamount to one's self-worth. As the husband explains, "I was afraid that he (the millionaire) was the better man. I know now that he's not. He just has more money."

In the movie *The Firm*, extra-marital sex is a key component in plot development. Based on the novel by John Grisham, a young attorney is hired by a prestigious law firm. He soon discovers that the firm is actually a front for mob racketeering. To ensure his loyalty, the firm's private security hires a prostitute to seduce the married lawyer while on a business trip to the Caribbean. As a senior member of the law firm states, "he never had a chance (to resist temptation)" When presented with photographs taken of his

adultery, he confesses to his wife. Because this was an anonymous affair, he states that "it meant nothing ... I didn't even know her name." The woman becomes very upset, and decides to leave her husband. Both go through considerable misery as a result of this infidelity. In the end, however, the wife comes to her husband's aid, and is an integral part of the plot resolution. This film treats marriage as a sacred commitment, with dire consequences for infidelity. The partnership that marriage creates is also a necessity for the achievement of goals.

In *Groundhog Day*, a shallow, egocentric weatherman is sentenced to repeat February 2nd over and over again. After initially struggling to deal with his predicament, he soon begins to exploit the opportunities a second chance at a situation can bring. On one day, he solicits information from an attractive woman in a cafe. The following (repeated) day, he uses that information to appear as an old high school acquaintance, and seduces the woman. To add to the depravity, he frequently addresses her by the wrong name. This is indicative of the immoral nature of the individual. Despite repeated attempts at seducing his broadcast producer, she refuses to go to bed with him. Even when tempted, she says, "This is a little too fast for me." Eventually he realizes feelings he genuinely holds for her. After professing his love for her, and making a commitment to her, he is allowed to proceed into February 3rd. This reinforces the message that promiscuity is not an admirable quality, and that a deeper, more meaningful relationship should exist between two people before such intimacy occurs.

In *Sleepless In Seattle*, the main character, a widower, describes the relationship with his wife as "magic." In fact the love-at-first-sight

connection is a very strong theme throughout the film. "I knew it the first time I took her hand to help her out of a car. I just knew." His loss is so great that he must relocate with his son to Seattle in an effort to resume his life.

The woman fated to be his love, a magazine writer from Baltimore, is engaged. She finds herself questioning her commitment, because while she feels love for her fiancé, there's no "magic." That true love is a deep and soulful emotion is a clear message of this motion picture, in which the main characters long for each other before they even meet. At the end of the film, when they are finally united, their future is suggested by only a clasp of the hands, a joining of the hearts deeper than any physical connection. Clearly in this movie, sex is not the primary focus in a relationship.

The family is the focus for the remaining three films. Interestingly, each of the films presents a "non-traditional" model for the family.

In *Jurassic Park*, two archaeologists are invited to tour and evaluate a science-created dinosaur theme park. While there they are joined by the two young grandchildren of the park's developer. The male anthropologist, who has expressed distaste for children, is obviously uncomfortable with his company. "I don't like kids; they're dirty." He reluctantly agrees to accompany the children on a tour of the park. After numerous life-threatening experiences, he forms a bond with his unintended charges, promising to protect them. This development of paternal feelings, with his romantic involvement with the female archaeologist, evolves into a suggestion of the nuclear unit: father, mother, daughter, and son.

Free Willy is the story of the bond developed between a captured Orca whale and an orphaned boy. Both characters are separated from their original

family and environment. The child is placed in a foster home, against which he initially rebels. He is typically distant, expecting this to be simply one more place to stay for a while. In a key scene, the couple begins arguing about their difficulties with the boy and his future in the home. Hearing their quarrelling, he becomes alarmed and lashes out, throwing a baseball through a window. The parents run upstairs to his room, concerned but not angry. The boy explains to them that he became scared.

Foster Mother: What are you scared about?

Boy: I don't like you guys fighting.

Foster Father: Adults fight sometimes. But that doesn't mean that anybody gets hurt. I would never hurt Annie, or you.
You should know that.

Both parents persevere, and eventually the boy realizes the opportunity for a safe and caring home. The father, with whom the bonding is the most reluctant, asserts the inclusion of the boy into the family by referring to him as "my son." At the end of the story, both orphans, the whale and the boy, find the family each desperately seeks.

The dysfunctional family is central to the plot development of *Mrs. Doubtfire*. After a separation, the father of three children must find suitable employment and provide a healthy living environment for potential custody. As he explains in divorce court,

I have to be with my children. I haven't been away from them for more than one day since they were born.

Bottom line: I need to be with my children. And I'll do anything to do that.

The tenacious father disguises himself as an English nanny, hired to care for his own children. As the children's caretaker, (s)he becomes a responsible, resourceful parent. The film takes a very direct look at divorce, and the efforts of both parents to maintain a healthy and caring environment for their children. The dysfunctional family is identified as being different inherently only by living arrangements. The message in this story is very strong: as Mrs. Doubtfire explains to an audience of children in the final sequence of the film,

Some parents, when they're angry, they get along much better when they don't live together. They don't fight all the time and they become better people and become much better mommies and daddies for you. There are all sorts of families; some families have one mommy. some have one daddy or two families and some children live with an uncle or aunt and some live with their grandparents and some children live with foster parents, and some live in separate homes in separate neighborhoods in different areas of the country and they may not see each other for days, weeks, months, or even years at a time. But if there's love, those are the ties that bind ... and you have a family in your heart, forever.

In *Sleepless in Seattle*, a child plays an integral part in the development and resolution of the plot. In this story, the son of a widower calls in to a talk radio program, making as a Christmas wish a new wife for his father. When

the father reluctantly re-enters the dating world, the son tries to direct him toward the his destined love in Baltimore, stubbornly bringing the two characters together. The son's insistence on one letter (the *magic* one) is responsible for the eventual connection when he flies away to New York to meet his future mother at the top of the Empire State building. Even when the father asserts the impracticality of travelling cross-country, the son states, "This is the one. I know it. *It's Annie.*" It is presumed that they meet, fall in love, and begin a new life because of the actions of the son. This seems to be indicative of a special quality, an ability of the child to intuit what is best for his father.

The depiction of the family that emerged from the film sample suggests a minimal correspondence with the criticisms of Medved. While the components of the critic's rhetorical vision are present in these films, i.e. dysfunctional families and extra-marital relations, the portrayals are incongruent with Medved's claims. With regards to the families in this sample, "dysfunction" is not presented as a synonym for unhealthy or unhappy. In each film love and/or respect is established in each situation. The children may at times demonstrate insight, but the adults are not the muddling idiots that Michael Medved has forecast they would be. The examples serve more as plot devices, demonstrating a character trait, or initiating action resulting in the re-enforcing of a moral message.

It is also clear that these stories do not condone infidelity. Although it is present within the sample, it serves as a necessary component to plot development. These films treat such actions as being indicative of character

flaws or outright foolishness, and certainly not conducive to personal fulfillment.

The Portrayal of Violence

Medved finds in motion pictures a "cartoon" world of glorified violence, replete with cruel and sadistic villains *and* heroes. The gratuitous gore, numerous body counts and one-dimensional "bad guys" have resulted in a dangerous message for audiences. Violence, he suggests, also often serves as comic relief in contemporary film.

Not only do these films suggest that brute force is a prerequisite for manliness, that physical intimidation is irresistibly sexy, and that violence offers an effective solution for all human problems, today's movies advance the additionally appalling idea that the most appropriate response to the suffering of others is sadistic laughter" (1992, p. 192).

It is clear that Medved is concerned by the casual and unrealistic portrayal of violence in motion pictures.

The Films

Six films in the sample presented content appropriate for this analysis. The films containing depictions of violence and/or villains are *Jurassic Park*, *The Fugitive*, *The Firm*, *In the Line of Fire*, *Cliffhanger*, and *Free Willy*.

The violence in nearly all of the films from the sample is graphic, although to various degrees. The same may be stated for the depiction of the villains in the sample.

In *Jurassic Park*, the predatory nature of dinosaurs like the Tyrannosaurus Rex and Velociraptor result in the rather horrific ends of

some characters. They are certainly villainous, although their situation is not of their own making, and they are only following their instincts. The true antagonists in the film are the greedy and ignorant. The violent deaths of these characters are never graphically shown, but instead suggested by the first leap of an attack or the remains of a victim. The violence is riveting, and creates suspense within the narrative.

The way violence is portrayed is often a device for establishing or maintaining the image of a character. In *The Fugitive*, Dr. Richard Kimball resorts to violence only to apprehend his wife's murderers and to save the life of the federal marshall pursuing him. He does so in an awkward, less-than-dashing manner. He clumsily attempts to subdue another physician involved in his wife's death. At many points in the plot Dr. Kimball has the opportunity to use a gun but chooses not to; the intent of his aggression is never death. When he has a gun pointed at the federal marshall pursuing him, he simply states "I didn't kill my wife." He does not utilize the gun as a means of escape. A second time he comes into possession of a firearm; rather than use it on the man who had murdered his wife and attempted the same on him, Dr. Kimball drops the weapon in a locked mailbox. Violence, for this character, is only resorted to as a necessity.

Violence is important in the shaping of other characters principle to the story. The villainous one-armed man who murdered Mrs. Kimball partakes in violence as a an almost pragmatic matter of task. He indicates that killing Dr. Kimball would be "a pleasure." The federal marshall, seen as an heroic antagonist, is forced to resort to violence only when necessary to save the life of a hostage, and later expresses regret for the killing: "I had to shoot

him. He was a bad man and was gonna kill one of my kids." The violence and villains are both portrayed as ugly and misbegotten in *The Fugitive*, unfortunate circumstances in an imperfect world.

The violence is similarly portrayed in *The Firm*, although the villains appear more sadistic. The violence occurs, again, as a device to indicate character. When an underworld hitman ruthlessly tortures and then murders a character, the action suggests that the hitman is a very bad man indeed. The villains in this film who participate in violence enjoy their craft and display a certain expertise for it. When the young lawyer commits a violent attack on another hitman, it is in self-defense. He is clearly frantic and desperate, horrified by his predicament. The aggression that the hero resorts to is unarmed; the violence by the villains is always perpetrated by firearm. In this film the violence, while graphic, also helps to construct characters within the story.

The films *In the Line of Fire* and *Cliffhanger* take the violence and villains one step further. In both films the violence is indicative of the madness of the villains, who are self-styled personifications of evil. The would-be assassin in *In the Line of Fire* delights in "the game" of planning the President's murder, killing four innocent bystanders and one Secret Service agent along the way. The hero, a himself a veteran Secret Service agent, is forced to match wits and verbal jousts with the villain, and they taunt one another throughout the story.

The body count is the highest in *Cliffhanger*. Twenty minutes into the film, there are four violent murders in ten seconds. The villains are so evil and sadistic that they are as likely to die by each other's hands as by the hero's.

When raising the stakes of a conflict within a group of thieves, the leader turns to his lover: "Do you know what real love is, my darling? It's sacrifice." The villain then cold-bloodedly murders her. When an innocent skier is murdered, one of the heroes protests the senselessness. The villain responds, "Sue me." The violence is equally graphic, and predominantly without consequence: one protagonist is kicked repeatedly in the head and upper body while his attacker announces mock commentary for soccer match. When given the opportunity to gorily dispatch with the bad guy at the last instant, the hero states, "Game's over, ***hole!"

In both of these films "the game" is the central theme of the plot, and although the villains are defeated, they maintain an integrity of character, suggesting perhaps that there may be pride even in evil. Good may prevail, but there is an honor to the psychopath.

Violence is prominently featured in all of these films but *Free Willy*, which is notable for its lack of violence and simplified portrayal of villains. The "bad guys" in this story are clearly greedy and unscrupulous, but it seems to be due more to an ignorance of good, than an embrace of evil. They are the classic "family" villain: their struggles and frustrations are indicative of their attitudes. The villains do not revel in their practices. It can be inferred that on their best days, they are still unsatisfied. They exist in the narrative as a two-dimensional antagonist for conflict. The villains in *Free Willy* inspire contempt and even pity, not hate or fear. The violence is equally two-dimensional; a simple one-punch fist fight is the last resort necessity to end conflict.

The depictions of villains and violence in the film sample obviously are diverse by degree and role within the narrative/plot development. Some of the portrayals, most notably those in *In the Line of Fire* and *Cliffhanger*, seem to correspond with Medved's image of violence in popular movies; the violence and villains are central to the story, and the films are dependent on spectacular violence for the purpose of aesthetics. The other films may be considered at best marginally related, indicating other stylistic choices in moviemaking. The violence in *Jurassic Park*, *The Fugitive*, *The Firm*, and *Free Willy* does not appear to be the selling point of the films. Instead the portrayals of violence and the villains are tied to the suspense within the narrative. Neither villains nor violence is glorified or depicted as desirable or admirable behavior in the resolution of conflict.

The Representation of Religion

That religion is inaccurately and contemptuously represented, if at all, is a major criticism of the entertainment industry for Medved (Maudlin, 1993; Wall, 1993; Medved, 1992). Religious characters are seen as either "corrupt or crazy--or probably both" (Medved, 1992, p. 52). Often the rejection of an organized religion is an indication of personal integrity and courage.

But Medved finds fault most notably with the way Hollywood *doesn't* treat religion:

... protagonists face dire illnesses and long hospitalizations, with life and death hanging dramatically in the balance.

At no point do the main characters, or any of their friends or family members, turn for even one moment to the power of prayer, or ask to see a member of the clergy, or in any way invoke the name of God (1992, p. 73).

In other words, when religion *is* represented it is done so in a derogatory fashion, reducing it to an irrelevant "sideshow." Medved states that although a majority of Americans pray regularly (1992), films do not portray religion in a serious or respectful manner, if at all.

The Films

Due to the nature of Medved's chief criticism, that religion is not represented in entertainment, all ten films were examined. There were four films which did provide specific religious content for analysis: *Jurassic Park*, *Free Willy*, *Groundhog Day*, and *Sleepless in Seattle*.

The year's top-grossing picture, *Jurassic Park*, centers on the struggle of science to control nature. Using fossilized DNA, entrepreneurs attempt to clone dinosaurs for the purpose of building a secure prehistoric amusement park. Creation, the park's curator explains, is "an act of sheer will." At first, the experiment appears to be a marvelous success. In an interesting example of imagery, a cow is lowered into a carnivore's pit; this seems to suggest the sacrifice of religion before science. However, as a result of bad luck and human nature, the creations evolve beyond their imposed restraints. The dinosaurs run amok, wreaking havoc and destruction, resulting in a fatally failed experiment. One of the clear messages in this film is the inability of humans to assume the role of Creator. As one character reasons,

God creates dinosaurs. God destroys dinosaurs.

God creates Man. Man destroys God. Man creates dinosaurs. God help us, we're in the hands of engineers.

The notion of science controlling nature is obviously delusional by the end of the film. Nearly all who would attempt to "play God" are done in by their own creations. The remaining characters must abandon the island, helpless to do little more than let Nature take its course. The representation of religion in *Jurassic Park* is sub-textual, but certainly enduring.

In *Free Willy*, a spirituality not of the mainstream Judeo-Christian philosophies is portrayed. The film focuses on the relationship between an orphaned boy and a captured Orca whale. The whale's caretaker, a Native American, shares with the boy a tribal legend explaining the origin of the Orcas: after a warrior, lost at sea, invoked an inspired prayer, a whale was born from a totem log. This whale then transported the warrior back to his

tribe. In the final climactic scene, the whale (Willy) is hopelessly blocked from any means of escape from its greedy owners. The only chance is an impossible jump from the water over a land barrier. As the whale approaches, both the boy and the caretaker repeat the prayer, although not in conjunction, and the whale miraculously leaps out of the water, over the blockade, and back to the open sea. By petitioning to a higher power, the whale's freedom is granted.

Groundhog Day provides in its content two issues relative to religion. The main character, Phil, perpetually stuck in Groundhog Day, wonders "What would you do if you were stuck in the same place. Every day was the same. And nothing you did mattered?" In a final desperate attempt to leave February 2nd, he drives himself (and an unfortunate groundhog) off a cliff. The next morning, he awakens to the same day. After repeated suicide attempts, he comes to the conclusion that he is no longer mortal. The following exchange represents the only direct reference to religion in the film:

Phil: I'm a god. Not The God, but a god.

Rita: You're not a god. Trust me. This is twelve years of Catholic school talking.

Then, in an endeavor to make a difference, Phil's attempts to change the course of one day through trial-and-error repetition. He is able to prevent an accidental choking, catch a child falling from a tree, and conveniently be on hand to change a flat tire for a carload of elderly women. One event that he is not able to influence, however, is the death of a homeless man. When the man collapses, Phil fruitlessly performs CPR. When the man dies, he looks upward, helpless. If the character would have simply walked away, it

may have implied that "when it's time, it's time." But the celestial reference seems to suggest that there are certain events under the jurisdiction of a higher order which he cannot change, regardless of his foresight.

"Magic" is a popular reference in *Sleepless in Seattle*. Fate, the story indicates, will bring together those that are destined to be together, as in the cases of Annie's mother and father, Sam and his wife (deceased), and the eventual relationship between Sam and Annie. It is due to a lack of "magic" (and her own intuition) that Annie leaves her fiance to meet Sam and his son Jonah. Their "magic" occurs at first sight at the top of the Empire State Building on Valentines Day. The central theme of destiny is certainly endemic to the plot, and suggests the influence of forces non-secular.

It is another scene in *Sleepless*, however, that seems central to Medved's chief criticism:

Jonah: What happens to someone when they die?

Sam: I don't know.

Jonah: Do you believe in heaven?

Sam: I never did believe in the whole idea of an afterlife ... but now I don't know. I have these dreams about your mom we have long talks about you. She knows but I tell her anyway. What is that? It's sort of an afterlife, isn't it?

This conversation suggests a definite ambiguity in regards to religion, and is ironically representative of Medved's assertions. Indeed, aside from the aforementioned references, religion is not portrayed in the rest of the film sample. With the exception of *Free Willy*, prayer is not utilized by any characters, although six of the films from the sample do contain dire

situations of life-and-death, and the name of God is never invoked. The communities represented also share the trait of appearing to be "religion-free zones," and there is no suggestion of a family religion or practice.

The absence of religion in the sample is not as indicative of a character's nature as the presence of the family depiction or the portrayal of violence may be. It is clear that a general sense of Judeo-Christian values and ethics are espoused in the films (The Golden Rule, murder and theft is wrong, etc.), although religious references are scarce.

After analyzing the treatment of the separate subjects of *family*, *violence*, and *religion*, it is important to address the second research question: Will the treatment of these issues in the film sample support Medved's criticisms? Of the thirty possible areas for correlation, there was agreement found between Medved and the film sample on eleven issues (two concerning *violence*, nine concerning *religion*). There were twelve areas of no agreement (seven in relation to *family*, four in relation to *violence*, one in relation to *religion*) Seven points of analysis were not conducted because lack of appropriate content. Overall, the results showed that Medved's criticisms of popular motion picture content were in agreement almost half of the time with the interpretations of the film sample themes. In examining the breakdown of results in the three individual categories, this assessment tends to be misleading.

There was virtually no agreement found between the interpreted content of the film sample and Medved's vision of *anti-family* messages in motion pictures. The projections of glorified, sadistic *violence* were seen in

two of the six films evaluated for that content. However, Medved's criticisms were strongly supported the issue of *religion*; only one film from the sample of ten presented religion in its content as having a bearing on the actors, acts, or setting. (See Table 2)

The values of ordinary Americans, as Medved (1992) interprets them, do seem to be represented in the analyzed film sample. However, the most popular films of 1993 seem to contradict Medved's opinion that

Hollywood ignores the concerns of the overwhelming majority of the American people who worry over the destructive messages so frequently featured in today's movies ... (p. 1)

A discussion of these conclusions and possible implications is the focus of the following chapter.

Table II

**Agreement/Disagreement of the Interpreted Themes in the 1993 Film Sample
with the Criticisms of Michael Medved**

Film	Anti-Family	Pro-Violence	Anti-Religion
1. Jurassic Park	Disagree	Disagree	Agree
2. The Fugitive	•	Disagree	Agree
3. The Firm	Disagree	Disagree	Agree
4. Sleepless in Seattle	Disagree	•	Agree
5. Indecent Proposal	Disagree	•	Agree
6. In the Line of Fire	•	Agree	Agree
7. Mrs. Doubtfire	Disagree	•	Agree
8. Cliffhanger	•	Agree	Agree
9. Free Willy	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
10. Groundhog Day	Disagree	•	Agree

• = Film not analyzed for content

Chapter V

Discussion

Michael Medved (1992) has sharply criticized the film industry for its depiction of the family, the portrayal of violence, and the representation of religion. Initially, a qualitative analysis of the ten top-grossing films of the 1993 would seem to suggest that just under half of Medved's visions of the industry correspond with the interpreted content on the screen. A closer examination of the areas of agreement and disagreement indicate that:

1. Medved's assessment of the *family* and *violence* is not accurate to the 1993 sample; and
2. Medved's views on the depiction of religion are supported by the 1993 sample.

Having compared Medved's criticisms of popular film with the most most-watched movies of 1993, it is important to reach an understanding of the implications of the results; to answer the question: "So what?"

The Depiction of the Family and the Portrayal of Violence

Michael Medved objects to the "destructive messages" that permeate the content of popular films. In part, these destructive messages come in the form of portrayals of the *family*, and *violence*. In looking at the ten top-grossing films of 1993, there clearly exists in the films examples of destructive or undesirable behaviors. These instances, however, tended to serve as an integral part of the narrative; the words and actions of the characters help to tell the story. In the case of *Mrs. Doubtfire*, the dissolution of the marriage is indelible to the plot for two reasons. First, if there were no divorce, there

would be essentially no reason for the father to be separated from his family, and then have to masquerade as a English nanny to see them. Second, the story itself attempts to dispel the negative stigma attached to broken home by speaking directly to children: divorce may be sad and unfortunate, but it should not be a reflection on the worth of an individual parent or child.

Violence was also present in the film sample. Although interpreted as gratuitous in the films *In the Line of Fire* and *Cliffhanger*, it also aided in constructing the identities of characters, providing insight to an individual's nature. The violence was, predominantly, not the focus of the plot in *Jurassic Park*, *The Fugitive*, *The Firm*, and *Free Willy*. It did occur as an instrument of the narrative. The use of violence in these films was arguably no more destructive in its message than the violence in a child's fairy tale such as *The Three Little Pigs* or *Hansel and Gretel*.

It would be simple to count the number of times socially unacceptable actions (adultery, violence, etc.) occur in movies and then base evaluations of "messages" on such frequencies. Instead, it is the *manner* in which these issues are handled that constructs the "message" in a film. It is the end result of such actions within a story which should be examined. In evaluating the messages of a story, a critic should ask the question: Are there consequences for socially unacceptable behaviors? Simply because a narrative contains certain violence or adultery does not necessarily infer such actions are condoned.

The Representation of Religion

Medved's assertions that religion is not portrayed in motion pictures is largely reflected in the sample. Characters in every film found themselves in the middle of great emotional or physical distress, yet only once did characters invoke a religious prayer (*Free Willy*). Medved (1993) attributes this lack of religious representation to "Hollywood's anti-religious bias" (p. 81). This opinion may very well be accurate. Or it may be that the subject of religion is largely avoided because of the diversity of religions in the audiences. The role religion plays in society is articulated by Gaede (1986):

Humans must build and maintain their social worlds of meaning and institutions. Religion, as with all other institutions, is a socially constructed reality. It serves as an agent of social control and solidarity, providing a set of meanings which legitimate and preserve the institutional order. (p. 161)

Such a broad spectrum of deeply regarded beliefs may be difficult to handle without potentially alienating a large portion of the audience. As sociologist Anton Zijderveld notes, "religious definitions of the world have become private and subjective on one hand, and very general and public on the other." Perhaps if the portrayal of religion or the indication of a specific denomination is not a necessity (i.e. the depiction of a priest or rabbi), then it is better not addressed at all.

Conclusions

This study, it should be noted, contains the interpretation of one author. Future studies may include a broader sample from several years, or an overview of the most successful films within a given decade. One may ask how the top-grossing films *of all time* treat *family, violence, and religion*. Whereas this study examined the *product* of motion pictures, a more in-depth look at the production of films may be useful. Filmmakers themselves may answer critics' questions about the portrayals (or lack of) of various themes. Finally, a sample of the ten top-grossing films of a given year may be compared with the films which fell into the ranks of 40-50, to see if differences existed in the thematic portrayals.

Normative theories of media performance would suggest that the film industry has a social responsibility to its audiences (McQuail, 1994). The standards by which motion pictures should be evaluated has been the subject of heated debate for nearly a century, as it continues today. But as Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America, states:

To those who assert the requirement that 'someone must draw a line beyond which movie content cannot go,' I can only reply, 'Wonderful.' But *where* and *how* will the line be drawn and, most important of all, *who* chooses or anoints the people to draw the line? (1993, p. 89)

Valenti then provides a response to this question:

There is a higher authority controlling the marketplace: parents, families, and moviegoers in general. There is a simple solution to the issue of 'how can we get rid of

movies we don't like?' Don't patronize them. Will this work?

Yes. Moviemaking is a marriage between art and business.

Neither can exist without the other. This means that films that fail to attract audiences soon will languish. (p. 89)

Arguably there will always be varying degrees of quality in motion pictures, and amazement will often occur at the lists of films leading the pack of moneymakers. Wall (1993) turns the responsibility back to the marketplace:

Some cinematic moments point to transcendence and to the possibility of grace in the midst of ambiguity. Instead of taking a conventional censorious stance, or issuing another lament about the shallowness of modern entertainment, we should be developing audiences that know the difference between the worthy and the debilitating. (p. 1004)

The purpose of this thesis was to test the criticisms of Michael Medved with the interpretation of content in a sample of popular film from 1993. It is always a necessity to evaluate the powerful elements which can help to shape a culture. It is equally necessary to temper criticism in the name of social responsibility with regard for the freedom of expression and power of the marketplace. Through Hollywood VS America, Medved has propelled himself to the forefront of entertainment critics, making the "decline of traditional values" his cause celebre. The observations of critics should not be considered final declarations to the merit of any form of communication.

Like theory, criticism should serve as a catalyst for inquiry. Perhaps before the researchers ask "*What* are the effects of this popular entertainment content?" they should inquire "*Why* is this content popular?"

It is important to note that Hollywood VS America was published in 1992; Medved (1994) himself has addressed a "change" in popular film, beginning with 1993:

Future historians may, in fact, point to 1993 as a decisive turning point for popular culture, with significant changes in ... motion pictures. The year just passed could well be remembered as the year Hollywood finally got the message, and started to make a serious effort to reconnect with the values of ordinary Americans. (USA Weekend)

It is possible that 1993 was a unique year, in which the majority of films reaching the top ten ranks in ticket sales reflected "beliefs or standards" by which "people ought to behave." The importance of these values, Potter's (1994) "enduring mental templates," is paramount to this research. Medved (1992) seems to presume that popular entertainment cultivates destructive "worldviews, roles, and values." But the top-grossing films of any given year are those which audiences *choose* to attend. This thesis suggests that the most popular films may be chosen because they provide an affirmation of values already existing in audiences. The challenge is to understand the balance between the ability of movies to *construct* social reality and *reflect* social interpretations of reality. In 1993 consumers of motion picture

entertainment actively chose more often the "extensions of reality" (Mendelsohn, 1966) which mirrored "core family values" (Medved, p. 257).

The breakdown of Medved is the generalization of both his criticisms (1992) and his acclaims (1994). By asserting that the entire body of popular films do not reflect the values of ordinary Americans, the critic leaves research nowhere to go. Before social science can examine the effects of entertainment content, it must address the specific selections of the active consumer. Instead of films making a connection with the audiences, it is the audiences who make the connection with particular films. The treatment of issues such as the *family, violence, and religion* in the strongest connections may be invaluable at telling us about ourselves at a given point in time. This may help to solve the problematic vagueness of contemporary value-based research. Rather than applying narrowed operationalizations of societal values onto entertainment content, perhaps the enduring messages of motion pictures can provide indications of the abstract ideals within a culture.

Appendix A

The pledge of Legion of Decency, as reprinted in Leff & Simmons, 1990, p.47.

I wish to join the Legion of Decency, which condemns vile and unwholesome moving pictures. I unite with all who protest against them as a grave menace to youth, to home life, to country and to religion.

I condemn absolutely those salacious motion pictures which, wit other degrading agencies, are corrupting public morals and promoting a sex mania in our land.

I shall do all that I can to arouse public opinion against the portrayal of vice as a normal condition of public affairs, and against depicting criminals of any class as heroes or heroines, presenting their filthy philosophy of life as something acceptable to decent men and women.

I unite with all who condemn the display of suggestive advertisements on bill-boards, at theatre entrances and the favorable notices given to immoral motion pictures.

Considering these evils, I hereby promise to remain away from all motion pictures except those which do not offend decency and Christian morality. I promise further to secure as many members as possible for the Legion of Decency.

I make this protest in a spirit of self-respect and with the conviction that the American public does not demand filthy pictures, but clean entertainment and educational features.

Appendix B

The Motion Picture Production Code, February, 1930

Code

To Govern The Making Of

Talking, Synchronized And Silent Motion Pictures

Formulated by

Association of Motion Picture Producers, Inc. and The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc.

Motion picture producers recognize the high trust and confidence which have been placed in them by the people of the world and which have made motion pictures a universal form of entertainment.

They recognize their responsibility to the public because of this trust and because entertainment and art are important influences in the life of a nation.

Hence, though regarding motion pictures primarily as entertainment without any explicit purpose of teaching or propaganda, they know that the motion picture within its own field of entertainment may be directly responsible for spiritual or moral progress, for higher types of social life, and for much correct thinking.

During the rapid transition from silent to talking pictures they have realized the necessity and the opportunity of subscribing to a Code to govern the production of talking pictures and of reacknowledging this responsibility.

On their part, they ask from the public and from public leaders a sympathetic understanding of their purposes and problems and a spirit of cooperation that will allow them the freedom and opportunity necessary to bring the motion picture to a still higher level of wholesome entertainment for all the people.

General Principles

1. No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil, or sin.
2. Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be represented.
3. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation.

Particular Applications

I. Crimes Against the Law

These shall never be presented in such a way as to throw sympathy with the crime as against the law and justice or to inspire others with a desire for imitation.

1. *Murder*

- a. The technique of murder must be presented in a way that will not inspire imitation

- b. Brutal killings are not to be presented in detail.
- c. Revenge in modern times shall not be justified.
- 2. *Methods of Crime* should not be explicitly presented.
 - a. Theft, robbery, safe-cracking, and dynamiting of trains, mines, buildings, etc., should not be detailed in method.
 - b. Arson must be subject to the same safeguards.
 - c. The use of firearms should be restricted to essentials.
 - d. Methods of smuggling should not be presented.
- 3. *Illegal drug traffic* must never be presented.
- 4. *The use of liquor* in American life, when not required by the plot or for proper characterization, will not be shown.

II. Sex

The sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home shall be upheld. Pictures shall not infer that low forms of sex relationship are the accepted or common thing.

- 1. *Adultery*, sometimes necessary plot material, must not be explicitly treated, or justified, or presented attractively.
- 2. *Scenes of passion*
 - a. They should not be introduced when not essential to the plot.
 - b. Excessive and lustful kissing, lustful embraces, suggestive postures and gestures, are not to be shown.
 - c. In general passion should be treated that these scenes do not stimulate the lower and baser element.
- 3. *Seduction or Rape*
 - a. They should never be more than suggested, and only when essential for the plot, and even then never shown by explicit method.
 - b. They are never the proper subject for comedy.
- 4. *Sex perversion* or any reference to it is forbidden.
- 5. *White slavery* shall not be treated.
- 6. *Miscegenation* (sex relationships between the white and black races) is forbidden.
- 7. *Sex hygiene* and venereal diseases are not subjects for motion pictures.
- 8. *Scenes of actual child birth*, in fact or silhouette, are never to be presented.
- 9. *Children's sex organs* are never to be exposed.

III. Vulgarity

The treatment of low, disgusting, unpleasant, though not necessarily evil, subjects should be subject always to the dictates of good taste and a regard for the sensibilities of the audience.

IV. Obscenity

Obscenity in word, gesture, reference, song, joke, or by suggestion (even when likely to be understood by only part of the audience) is forbidden.

V. Profanity

Pointed profanity (this includes the words, God, Lord, Jesus, Christ-- unless used reverently-- Hell, S.O.B. damn, Gawd), or every other profane or vulgar expression however used, is forbidden.

1. *Complete nudity* is never permitted. This includes nudity in fact or in silhouette, or any lecherous or licentious notice thereof by any other characters in the picture.
2. *Undressing scenes* should be avoided, and never used save where essential to the plot.
3. *Indecent or undue exposure* is forbidden.
4. *Dancing costumes* intended to permit undue exposure or indecent movements in the dance are forbidden.

VII. Dances

1. Dances suggesting or representing sexual actions or indecent passion are forbidden.
2. Dances which emphasize indecent movements are to be regarded as obscene.

VIII. Religion

1. No film or episode may throw *ridicule* on any religious faith.
2. *Ministers of religion* in their character as ministers of religion should not be use as comic characters or as villains.
3. *Ceremonies* of any definite religion should be carefully and respectfully handled.

IX. Locations

The treatment of bedrooms must be governed by good taste and delicacy.

X. National Feelings

1. *The use of the Flag* shall be consistently respectful.
2. *The history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry* of other nations shall be represented fairly

XI. Titles

Salacious, indecent, or obscene titles shall not be used.

XII. Repellent Subjects

The following subjects must be treated within the careful limits of good taste.

1. *Actual hangings* or electrocutions as legal punishments for crime.
2. *Third Degree* methods.
3. *Brutality* and possible gruesomeness.
4. *Branding* of people or animals.
5. *Apparent cruelty* to children or animals.
6. *The sale of women*, or a woman selling her virtue.
7. *Surgical operations*.

RESOLUTION FOR UNIFORM INTERPRETATION 1930

The undersigned members of the Association of Motion Picture Producers, Inc. hereby subscribe to and agree faithfully to conform to the provisions of the following resolution:

WHEREAS, we, the undersigned have this day subscribed and agreed faithfully to conform to a

CODE
TO GOVERN THE MAKING OF
TALKING, SYNCHRONIZED AND SILENT MOTION PICTURES

Formulated by

Association of Motion Picture Producers, Inc., and The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc.

AND WHEREAS, a uniform interpretation of such Code is essential, and for the promotion of such uniform interpretation and consequent universal conformance by ourselves and the personnel of our respective studios it is believed necessary that additional facilities and procedure be established and maintained;

THEREFORE IT MAY BE RESOLVED that we hereby agree to the following methods of operation:

1. When requested by production managers of the Association of Motion Picture Producers, Inc. shall secure any facts, information or suggestions concerning the probable reception of stories or the manner in which its opinion they may be treated.

2. That each production manager may submit in confidence a copy of each or any script to the Association of Motion Picture Producers, Inc. The Association of Motion Picture Producers, Inc. will give the production manager for his guidance such confidential advice and suggestions as experience, research and information dictate, designed wherein in its judgement the script departs from the provisions of the Code, or wherein from experience or knowledge it is believed that exception will be taken to the story or treatment.

3. Each production manager shall submit to the Association of Motion Picture Producers, Inc. every picture he produces before the negative goes to the laboratory for printing. The Association of Motion Picture Producers, Inc. having seen the picture shall inform the production manager in writing whether in its opinion the picture conforms or does not conform to the Code, stating specifically wherein by theme, treatment or incident the picture violates the provisions of the Code. In such latter event the picture shall not be released until the changes indicated by the Motion Picture Producers, Inc. have been made; provided, however, that the production manager may appeal from such opinion of the Association to the Production Committee of the Association of Motion Picture Producers, Inc.

In the event the Production Committee concurs in the judgement of the Association and the production manager still believes that such picture conforms to the spirit and the letter of the Code, he may appeal to the Board of Directors of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc. whose findings shall be final and such production manager and company shall be governed accordingly.

The Production Committee shall be constituted as follows:

Charles H. Christie	William R. Fraser	Warren Doane
Cecil B. DeMille	Sol Lesser	John A. Waldron
E. H. Allen	Irving Thalberg	Joseph M. Schenck
Hal B. Wallis	Ben Schulberg	Carl Laemmle, Jr.
Sol Wurtzel	Charles Sullivan	J. L. Warner
Abraham Lehr	William LeBaron	

The Board of Directors of the Association of Motion Pictures, Inc. may from time to time by unanimous vote make changes in the personnel of this Committee.

When a production manager appeals from a decision of the Association of Motion Picture Producers, Inc. he will so inform its Secretary, who will in rotation designate from the above named Production Committee three members who will immediately examine the picture

in question and render its opinion, as provided for above. The Secretary of the Association of Motion Picture Producers, Inc., in designating the members of any such committee will not include members from studios with business alliances with each other or with the studio whose picture is being examined. In the event any of the three so designated are unavoidably absent from the city, the member or members next in order will be selected, under the same provisions. Any such member so unavoidably out of the city when so designated shall be considered at the head of the list subject to the next call for service.

Reasons Supporting Preamble of Code.

- I. Theatrical motion pictures, that is, pictures intended for the theatre as distinct from pictures intended for churches, schools, lecture halls, educational movements, social reform movements, etc., are primarily to be regarded as ENTERTAINMENT.

Mankind has always recognized the importance of entertainment and its value in rebuilding the bodies and souls of human beings.

But it has always recognized that entertainment can be of character either HELPFUL or HARMFUL to the human race, and in consequence has clearly distinguished between:

- a. Entertainment which tends to improve the race, or at least to recreate and rebuild human beings exhausted with the realities of life; and
- b. Entertainment which tends to degrade human beings, or to lower their standards of life and living.

Hence the MORAL IMPORTANCE of entertainment is something which has been universally recognized. It enters intimately into the lives of men and women and affects them closely; it occupies their minds and affections during leisure hours; and ultimately touches the whole of their lives. A man may be judged by his standard of entertainment as easily be the standard of his work.

So correct entertainment raises the whole standard of a nation.

Wrong entertainment lowers the whole living conditions and moral ideals of a race.

Note, for example, the healthy reactions to healthful sports, like baseball, golf; the unhealthy reactions to sports like cockfighting, bullfighting, bear baiting, etc.

Note, too, the effect on ancient nations of gladiatorial combats, the obscene plays of Roman times, etc.

- II. Motion pictures are very important as ART.

Though a new art, possibly a combination art, it has the same object as the other arts, the presentation of human thought, emotion and experience, in terms of an appeal to the soul through the senses.

Here, as in entertainment,

Art enters intimately into the lives of human beings.

Art can be morally good, lifting men to higher levels. This has been done through good music, great painting, authentic fiction, poetry, drama.

Art can be morally evil in its effects. This is the case clearly enough with unclean art, indecent books, suggestive drama. The effect on the lives of men and women is obvious.

Note: It has often been argued that art in itself is unmoral, neither good nor bad. This is perhaps true of the THING which is music, painting

poetry, etc. But the thing is the **PRODUCT** of some person's mind, and the intention of that mind was either good or bad morally when it produced the thing. Besides, the thing has its **EFFECT** upon those who come into contact with it. In both these ways, that is, as a product of a mind and as the cause of definite effects, it has a deep moral significance and unmistakable moral quality.

Hence: The motion pictures, which are the most popular of modern arts for the masses, have their moral quality from the intention of the minds which produce them and from their effects on the moral lives and reactions of their audiences. This gives them a most important morality.

1. They reproduce the morality of the men who use the pictures as a medium for the expression of their ideas and ideals.
2. They affect the moral standards of those who, through the screen, take in these ideas and ideals.

In the case of the motion pictures, this effect may be particularly emphasized because no art has so quick and so widespread an appeal to the masses. It has become in an incredibly short period the art of the multitudes.

III. The motion picture, because of its importance as entertainment and because of the trust placed in it by the peoples of the world, has special **MORAL OBLIGATIONS**:

A. Most arts appeal to the mature. This art appeals at once to every class, mature, immature, developed, undeveloped, law abiding, criminal.

Music has its grades for different classes; so has literature and drama.

This art of the motion picture, combining as it does the two fundamental appeals of looking at a picture and listening to a story, at once reaches every class of a society.

B. By reason of the mobility of a film and the ease of picture distribution, and because of the possibility of duplicating positives in large quantities, this art reaches places unpenetrated by other forms of art.

C. Because of these two facts, it is difficult to produce films intended for only certain classes of people. The exhibitors' theatres are built for the masses, for the cultivated and the rude, the mature and the immature, the self-respecting and the criminal. Films, unlike books and music, can with difficulty be confined to certain selected groups.

D. The latitude given to film material cannot, in consequence, be as wide as the latitude given to book material. In addition:

- a. A book describes; a film vividly presents. One presents on a cold page; the other by apparently living people.
- b. A book reaches the mind through words merely; a film reaches the eyes and ears through the reproduction of actual events.
- c. The reaction of a reader to a book depends largely on the keenness of the reader's imagination; the reaction to a film depends on the vividness of presentation.

Hence many things which might be described or suggested in a book could not possibly be presented in a film.

E. This is also true when comparing the film to the newspaper.

- a. Newspapers present by description, films by actual presentation.
- b. Newspapers are after the fact and present things as having taken place; the film gives the events in the process of enactment and with apparent reality of life

- F. Everything possible in a play is not possible in a film:
- a. Because of the larger audience of the film, and its consequential mixed character. Psychologically, the larger the audience, the lower the moral mass resistance to suggestion.
 - b. Because through light, enlargement of character, presentation, scenic emphasis, etc., the screen story is brought closer to the audience than the play.
 - c. The enthusiasm for and interest in the film actors and actresses, developed beyond anything of the sort in history, makes the audience largely sympathetic toward the characters they portray and the stories in which they figure. Hence the audience is more ready to confuse actor and actress and the characters they portray, and it is most receptive of the emotions and ideas presented by their favorite stars.
- G. Small communities, remote from sophistication and from the hardening process which often takes place in the ethical and moral standards of groups in larger cities, are easily and readily reached by any sort of film.
- H. The grandeur of mass meetings, large action, spectacular features, etc., affects and arouses more intensely the emotional side of the audience.
- In general, the mobility, popularity, accessibility, emotional appeal, vividness, straightforward presentation of fact in the film make for more intimate contact with a larger audience and for more greater emotional appeal.
- Hence the larger moral responsibilities of the motion pictures.

Reasons Underlying the General Principles

- I. No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrong-doing, evil, or sin.

This is done:

1. When evil is made to appear attractive or alluring, and good is made to appear unattractive.
2. When the sympathy of the audience is thrown on the side of crime, wrong-doing, evil, sin. The same thing is true of a film that would throw sympathy against goodness, honor, innocence, purity, or honesty.

Note: Sympathy with a person who sins is not the same as sympathy with the sin or crime of which he is guilty. We may feel sorry for the plight of the murderer or even understand the circumstances which led him to his crime: We may not feel sympathy for the wrong which he has done. The presentation of evil is often essential for art or fiction or drama. This in itself is not wrong provided:

- a. That evil is not presented alluringly. Even if later in the film the evil is condemned or punished, it must not be allowed to appear so attractive that the audience's emotions are drawn to desire or approve so strongly that later the condemnation is forgotten and only the apparent joy of the sin remembered.

good is right.

II. Correct standards of life shall, as far as possible, be presented.

A wide knowledge of life and of living is made possible through film. When right standards are consistently presented, the motion picture exercises the most powerful influences. It builds character, develops right ideals, inculcates correct principles, and all this in attractive story form.

If motion pictures consistently hold up for admiration high types of characters and presents stories that will affect lives for the better, they can become the most powerful natural force for the improvement of mankind.

III. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation.

By natural law is understood the law which is written in the hearts of all mankind, the great underlying principles of right and justice dictated by conscience.

By human law is understood the law written by civilized nations..

1. The presentation of crimes against the law is often necessary for the carrying out of the plot. But the presentation must not throw sympathy with the crime as against the law nor with the criminal as against those who punish him.
2. The courts of the land should not be presented as unjust. This does not mean that a single court may not be presented as unjust, much less that a single court official must not be presented this way. But the court system of the country must not suffer as a result of this presentation.

Reasons Underlying Particular Applications

I. Sin and evil enter into the story of human beings and hence in themselves are valid dramatic material.

II. In the use of this material, it must be distinguished between sin which repels by its vary nature and sins which often attract.

- a. In the first class come murder, most theft, many legal crimes, lying, hypocrisy, cruelty, etc.
- b. In the second class come sex sins, sins and crimes of apparent heroism, such as banditry, daring thefts, leadership in evil, organized crime, revenge, etc.

The first class needs less care in treatment, as sins and crimes of this class are naturally unattractive. The audience instinctively condemns all such and is repelled.

Hence the important objective must be to avoid the hardening of the audience, especially those who are young and impressionable, to the thought and fact of crime. People can become accustomed even to murder, cruelty, brutality, and repellent crimes, if these are too frequently repeated.

The second class needs great care in handling, as the response of human nature to their appeal is obvious. This is treated more fully below.

III. A careful distinction can be made between films intended for general distribution, and films intended for use in theatres restricted to a limited audience. Themes and plots quite appropriate for the latter would be altogether out of place and dangerous in the former

Note: The practice of using a general theatre and limiting its patronage during the showing of a certain film to "Adults Only" is not completely satisfactory and is only partially effective.

However, maturer minds may easily understand and accept without harm subject matter in plots which do younger people positive harm.

Hence: If there should be created a special type of theatre, catering exclusively to an adult audience, for plays of this character (plays with problem themes, difficult discussions and maturer treatment) it would seem to afford an outlet, which does not now exist, for pictures unsuitable for general distribution but permissible for exhibitions to a restricted audience.

I. Crimes Against the Law

The treatment of crimes against the law must not:

1. Teach methods of crime.
2. Inspire potential criminals with a desire for imitation.
3. Make criminal seem heroic and justified.

Revenge in modern times shall not be justified. In lands and ages of less developed civilization and moral principles, revenge may sometimes be presented. This would be the case especially in places where no law exists to cover the crime because of which revenge is committed.

Because of its evil consequences, the drug traffic should not be presented in any form. The existence of the trade should not be brought to the attention of the audiences.

The use of liquor should never be excessively presented. In scenes from American life, the necessities of plot and proper characterization alone justify its use. And in this case, it should be shown with moderation.

II. Sex

Out of regard for the sanctity of marriage and the home, the triangle, that is, the love of a third party for one already married, needs careful handling. The treatment should not throw sympathy against marriage as an institution.

Scenes of passion must be treated with an honest acknowledgement of human nature and its normal reactions. Many scenes cannot be presented without arousing dangerous emotions on the part of the immature, the young or the criminal classes.

Even with the limits of pure love, certain facts have been universally regarded by lawmakers as outside the limits of safe presentation.

In the case of impure love, the love which society has always regarded as wrong and which has been banned by divine law, the following are important:

1. Impure love must not be presented as attractive and beautiful.
2. It must not be the subject of comedy or farce, or treated as material for laughter.
3. It must not be presented in such a way as to arouse passion or morbid curiosity on the part of the audience.
4. It must not be made to seem right and permissible.
5. In general, it must not be detailed in method and manner.

III. Vulgarity; IV. Obscenity; V. Profanity; hardly need further explanation than is contained in the Code.

VI. Costume

General principles:

1. The effect of nudity or semi-nudity upon the normal man or woman, and much more upon the young and upon immature persons, has been honestly recognized by all lawmakers and moralists.
2. Hence the fact that the nude or semi-nude body may be beautiful does not make its use in films moral. For, in addition to its beauty, the effect of the nude or semi-nude body on the normal individual must be taken into consideration.
3. Nudity or semi-nudity used simply to put a "punch" into a picture comes under the head of immoral actions. It is immoral in its effect on the average audience.
4. Nudity can never be permitted as being necessary for the plot. Semi-nudity must not result in undue or indecent exposures.
5. Transparent or translucent materials and silhouette are frequently more suggestive than actual exposure.

VII. Dances

Dancing in general is recognized as an art and as a beautiful form of expressing human emotions.

But dances which suggest or represent sexual actions, whether performed solo or with two or more; dances intended to excite the emotional reaction of an audience; dances with movement of the breasts, excessive body movements while the feet are stationary, violate decency and are wrong.

VIII. Religion

The reason why ministers of religion may not be comic characters or villains is simply because the attitude taken toward them may easily become the attitude taken toward religion in general. Religion is lowered in the minds of the audience because of the lowering of the audience's respect for a minister.

IX. Locations

Certain places are so closely and thoroughly associated with sexual life or with sexual sin that their use must be carefully limited.

X. National Feelings

The just rights, history, and feelings of any nation are entitled to most careful consideration and respectful treatment.

XI. Titles

As the title of a picture is the brand on that particular type of goods, it must conform to the ethical practices of all such honest business.

XII. Repellant Subjects

Such subjects are occasionally necessary for the plot. Their treatment must never offend good taste nor injure the sensibilities of an audience.

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