

VIOLENCE AGAINST
WOMEN ON
NETFLIX

by

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the prevalence and context of violence against women to understand how heavy viewing of violence against women in films may influence real-world opinions about violence. According to cultivation theory, high-frequency viewers of television are more susceptible to media messages. In this thesis, I sampled ten popular films from Netflix and used content analysis to examine what, how, and to what frequency violence against women was portrayed. Themes were assessed by examining variables such as the circumstances before the act(s) of violence, the outcome of the violence (injuries, etc.), reactions to the violence by the offenders and victims, and the effects the violence had on each of them going forward to analyze the context about the violence.

I found that violence against women was most prevalent in action films with physical violence (41%) occurring most frequently, while there was little to no violence in comedy and romance films with one exception. Three themes were found when assessing the context of the films: Violence for comic relief vs. traditional violence against women, violence against women for the pursuit of the greater good, and deprivation of liberty vs. sexual empowerment. This study improved our understanding of how violent media may negatively viewer perceptions of violence, which could, in turn, affect viewer actions, while also increasing awareness about potential inaccuracies in portrayals of violence and victims on-screen.

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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ON NETFLIX

Recent data has shown an increase in instances of violence against women, more specifically intimate partner violence and sexual violence, which could be attributed to women's increased exposure during the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns across the world (*The Shadow Pandemic*, n.d.). It is difficult to determine a true estimate of violence towards women due to underreporting from victims and witnesses, but according to the World Health Organization, almost a third of women globally experience either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime (*Violence against Women*, 2021). Violence against women produces many negative outcomes in addition to physical harm; for example, Grose et al. (2020) found that women and girls who experienced gender-based violence (GBV) were at increased risk of contracting STIs, having unplanned/unwanted pregnancies, and accessing abortions.

Violence against women is shown through various mediums, and criminologists have begun to explore television and movie depictions of violence. Media research suggests that consuming media violence is not the reason that offenders commit crimes, but that some media messages may influence attitudes about violence against women, the consequences of the crime committed, and increase aggressive behaviors in viewers. For example, a review of studies on the effects of media violence on attitudes, emotions, and cognitions concluded that viewers retain information from violent films because they use action, pacing, and sound techniques to grab the attention of its viewers (Rule & Ferguson, 1986). Those same studies also suggest that the

connection between media violence and aggression depends on cognitive skills, as people interpret violent media messages differently, and the content they consume may influence their behaviors, particularly aggressive behaviors. Another study investigating the relationship between media violence and violent behavior found that fictional television and film violence were threats to public health because they increased real-world violence and aggression in the short- and long-term (Huesmann & Taylor, 2006). Because previous research has shown a relationship between viewing violent media and beliefs about violence, it is important to analyze the content of violent media.

Millions of people participate in the mass consumption of crime entertainment, including books, podcasts, and documentaries. A study by Kennedy (2018) on responses to *Making a Murderer*, a popular Netflix series, reveals that viewers' emotions are intertwined with the content they consume, which in turn impacts their beliefs about the criminal justice system. In an article written by the Washington Post, viewership statistics and industry experts reveal that many of Netflix's popular shows "spotlight gruesome violence, often committed against women" (Zeitchik, 2019). However, the context of violence against women in television media has rarely been systematically studied. The representation of violence against women on Netflix could lead to harmful and incorrect perceptions of violence in the real world.

Violence against women, coupled with Netflix's widespread influence on viewers, may result in audiences perceiving crimes against women to be more commonplace, and in some circumstances acceptable. From a theoretical viewpoint, cultivation theory, which purports that audiences who frequently watch television are more likely to accept media depictions as reality, may explain if and why this is happening (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Research can also inform policy changes to limit the effects of viewing violent media on beliefs and attitudes about crime.

Thus, I will study the prevalence and context of violence against women in the media by analyzing popular Netflix shows from the year 2020.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Violence Against Women by the Numbers

According to The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, violence against women is defined as any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women and girls, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life (*Beijing Conference*, n.d.). The five main categories of violence against women include sexual violence, human trafficking, female genital mutilation, child marriage, and intimate partner violence. UN Women estimates that in 2018, one in seven women from the ages of 15 to 49 had been physically or sexually abused by an intimate partner or husband, a number that has increased during the global pandemic. Most of the data on violence against women maintains that intimate partner violence is the most prevalent violent crime against women. For example, the National Crime Victimization Survey shows that women experienced more violent victimization from well-known/casual acquaintances and partners from 2015 to 2019 than from strangers (*Bureau of Justice Statistics*, 2019).

In addition, about 15 million girls between the age of 15 to 19 have endured forced sex during their lifetimes, including armed conflict (*UNICEF Data*, 2017). Human trafficking, defined as people taken by force, fraud, coercion, or deception, also involves many women experiencing sexual exploitation. UN Women states that 72% of all trafficking victims worldwide are women and girls, and 4 out of 5 of those women are trafficked for sexual

exploitation (*Explore the Facts*, n.d.-a). Another type of violence against women is female genital mutilation, defined by the UN as procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons, that result in many health risks. As estimated by UNICEF, 200 million women and girls ages 15 to 49 (In 30 countries where representative data is available) have experienced female genital mutilation with the majority being cut before 5 years old (*Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting*, 2016). In terms of the risks of child marriage, girls who marry at young ages are at a greater risk for intimate partner violence than those who marry later (*Explore the Facts*, n.d.-a). Last, stalking is a particular form of violence against women that involves an intentional pattern of repeated, intrusive, and intimidating behaviors that cause the target to feel harassed, threatened, and fearful (Miller, 2012). The CDC claims that 16% of women in the US have been stalked at least once in their lives and about 54% of victims experienced this before 25 years old (CDC, 2021).

Perpetrators of violence against women are likely to be male intimate partners, according to the World Health Organization (*Violence against Women*, 2021). Miller (2012) found that most stalkers are in their 30s, and previous research suggests younger men are more likely to commit violence against women, which could be due to an increase in the number and frequency of relationships (*Perpetrator Risk Factors*, n.d.). Personality, attitudes about women, and previous experience with women (such as past sexually aggressive encounters) influence situations where potential perpetrators will offend (Gidycz et al., 2007). There is evidence to show that the majority of offenders arrested for rape were repeat offenders and committed various other crimes including battery, and child physical and sexual abuse, which suggests that there is a relatively small portion of men responsible for a substantial amount of the violence (Lisak & Miller, 2002). Other risk factors include traditional gender role beliefs and personal history of or exposure to

abuse (Abbey & Jacques-Tiura, 2011; Gidycz et al., 2007; *Perpetrator Risk Factors*, n.d.).

According to the WHO, women and girls endure high levels of violence that stem from gender inequality, which exposes them to dangerous practices that include female genital mutilation, and child/early forced marriage (*Violence against Women*, 2021). The organization also states that harmful gender norms, especially those related to masculinity, contribute to men and boys perpetrating violence (*Gender and Health*, n.d.).

The negative consequences of violence against women have been well-documented. Not only are the victims affected by violence, but bystanders also experience negative consequences. The World Health Organization explains that children in families where violence occurs “may suffer behavioral and emotional disturbances” (*Violence against Women*, 2021). As reported by the WHO, violence may negatively affect a woman’s physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health and in some cases increase the risk of contracting HIV (*Violence against Women*, 2021). The social and economic consequences of violence are widespread as many women experience “isolation, inability to work, loss of wages, lack of participation in regular activities and limited ability to care for themselves and their children” as a result (*Violence against Women*, 2021). As researchers and policymakers alike continue to work towards the prevention and reduction of violence against women, media depictions of violence against women should continue to be examined.

Current Influence of Media on Perceptions of Violence Against Women

Previous research has discussed how media depictions of crime can affect perceptions of violence and the criminal justice system. An analysis of the audience’s responses to the Netflix series *Making a Murderer* revealed that viewers engaged with the show in multiple ways and did not receive the same crime messages (Kennedy, 2018). For instance, different viewers had

varying opinions about the criminal justice system even though they watched the same Netflix series. Among viewers, responses included “anyone could be wrongfully convicted,” and “a flawed criminal justice system disproportionately victimized racialized individuals, those experiencing poverty, and those lacking educational opportunities”. This suggests that media violence can be interpreted in various ways, which should be further examined. A content analysis of Turkish Television series found that despite some positive content, the shows contained “a lot of harmful and damaging content including violence, drama themes, committing the crimes as a problem-solving method, solving problems illegally, ignoring family values, and discrediting state organization” (Ustundag & Dogan, 2021). They also found that the rates of harmful content were higher than the rates of positive content, suggesting that violence is prevalent in Turkish television media.

Cultivation theory might explain better how viewing media affects audiences. Cultivation theory, first proposed by media scholar George Gerbner, states that audiences who recurrently watch television are more inclined to accept media depictions as reality. Gerbner and Gross believed “viewers are exposed to more violence and therefore are affected by the Mean World Syndrome, the belief that the world is a far worse and dangerous place than it actually is (“Cultivation Theory,” 2011).” In the documentary *The Mean World Syndrome: Media Violence & the Cultivation of Fear*, Gerbner summarizes his work on violent media and its effect on the American public, claiming that audiences who are exposed to media violence can experience increased fear, anxiety, pessimism, and heightened state of alert in response to perceived threats, which has been corroborated by other researchers who believe depression, anger, PTSD, and substance use also were risks of to viewers (“Mean World Syndrome,” 2021). Though Gerbner focused on television, some researchers have extended his theory to other forms of media like

newspapers, photographs, films, and social media (Morgan et al., 2015; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010).

The consequences of viewing violent media have been well-documented by researchers. An experiment conducted by Turner et al. (1986) found that watching television created a long-term increase in the aggressive behavior of boys. In another study, researchers found that heavy exposure to violence may be related to “favorable attitudes toward, and increased tolerance of aggression” (Rule & Ferguson, 1986). Aggression was not the only consequence of viewing violent media. Not only does the data suggest that the more habitual ritualized use of television may predict aggression in men, but it also found that men who watched violent television programs for entertainment or relaxation had a “more calloused attitude or high tolerance for aggression” (Haridakis, 2006, p.247). Similarly, an experiment by Krafka et al. (1997) showed that women who viewed films with violence were desensitized to the violence of a mock rape trial when they acted as the jurors. One group of women exposed to mildly sexually explicit, graphically violent stimuli for four days in a row were less sensitive towards the victim in the simulated rape trial. This suggests that frequent or heavy exposure to violent content can influence attitudes consistent with cultivation theory.

Another consequence of violent media is fear. Fear of crime is a “complex psychological process that impacts perceptions and behavior” (Fox et al., 2009). Because people witness crimes and see the adverse results, they become afraid and may begin to take measures that prevent them from becoming a victim as well. This phenomenon is called vicarious victimization, “where individuals have not been personally victimized but are indirectly exposed through others or media outlets that publicize crime victimization or are conscious of the potential for crime victimization” (Fox et al., 2009). Watching violent media constantly could cause unnecessary

hysteria amongst viewers who may believe that they are at a greater risk of victimization because seeing others being harmed repeatedly might create the misconception that violence is on the rise. One study found that having “too little fear could leave women unnecessarily vulnerable to victimization, but having too much fear may lead to social isolation and withdrawal” which is what happens to many women who face direct victimization (Spohn et al., 2017). In some cases, watching someone else being victimized caused witnesses to behave negatively. For example, a study on the effects of witnessing sexual harassment on women showed that the witnesses themselves became angry subsequent to observing the act. These witnesses were more likely to conduct workplace deviance (such as saying hurtful things at work or taking things from work without permission) as a result of psychological and physical health symptoms stemming from witnessing sexual harassment (Dionisi & Barling, 2018). This would suggest vicarious victimization could have several adverse risks and witnessing victimization in media could initiate similar psychological consequences and fears of victimization.

Media Depictions of Violence Against Women

Research has shown that certain traits are assigned to perpetrators and victims of violence against women in television and film that could lead to misinformation about violence against women and create harmful perceptions of offenders and victims. Rader and Rhineberger-Dunn (2010) suggest that characterizing victims in specific ways can change audience perceptions of victimization and victim blame. For example, when analyzing four crime dramas, they found that some beliefs about victim-blame may increase due to viewing a victimization experience on film that does not align with what is portrayed in real-life images of crime. In their study viewers believed violence was an interpersonal problem between the victims rather than a social problem. The authors suggest that if we learn most of what we know about crime and victimization from

television, and if 60% or less of victims are portrayed as innocent in the shows analyzed, some people might view the other 40% of victims who were deemed “unlikeable” as responsible for their own victimization, leading to the spread of misinformation and victim-blaming. Rader and Rhineburger-Dunn (2010) also found evidence to suggest that in crime dramas, negatively portraying women who knew their offenders made them seem more responsible for their victimization than the “completely innocent” victim attacked by a stranger.

These portrayals of who exactly is a victim can be misleading, “Missing White Women Syndrome”, could contribute to media misinformation about violence and crimes against women. Missing White Women Syndrome is defined as extensive media coverage of missing persons who are young, white, upper-middle-class women or girls. Depictions of white women in television shows about crime focused on their occupations, education, and familial status, while depictions of female victims of other races focused on their troubled past, lack of education/career, poverty, and other unsympathetic or non-existent narratives which may lead to victim-blaming and erasure of violence victims of color (Slakoff, 2018).

In summary, research suggests that there is a relationship between violent media and attitudes about violence and should be further examined; specifically, more research is needed about the context of depictions of violence against women. Previous research concludes that there are long-term consequences of frequently consuming media violence such as increased aggression and desensitization. Streaming media services such as Netflix may be contributing to the problem. About 70% of viewers binge watch Netflix, meaning they watch a lot of or all of a show (*27 Fascinating Facts About Netflix*, n.d.). A key component of cultivation theory is “heavy watching” and with Netflix’s auto-play feature, this new way of watching television and films could be affecting how media is consumed. With the increase of violence against women during

the pandemic, research is needed on how beliefs about violence against women are formed and influenced. In this thesis, I begin this task by examining popular Netflix films for content about violence against women.

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the prevalence and context of violence against women in the popular/most-watched film on Netflix, to understand how heavy viewing of such content may influence and contribute to real-world opinions about the violence. Content analysis as a methodology was chosen for this study because of its ability to examine what, how, and to what frequency violence against women is portrayed on Netflix, leading to a better understanding of influences on real-life perceptions of crime. Content analysis is a research methodology used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within the data. According to (Krippendorff, 1989), content analysis differs from other social research techniques as it focuses on unobservable data (such as themes, concepts, and messages) through its symbolic qualities that trace anecdotes, correlates, or consequences of communication rather than just easily observable descriptions of the scenes in the films. Because this methodology allows for both qualitative and quantitative analysis, researchers can “make inferences about the messages within the texts, the writer(s), the audience, and even the culture and time of surrounding text” (*Population Health Methods: Content Analysis*, 2021). Themes represented in media reflect opinions about the current societal issues like violence against women; therefore, using content analysis allows for observing the prevalence of violence against women in Netflix films and analyzing the scenes more deeply to examine details of the victims and offenders, the context of the scene, and the reactions that may impact audiences’ attitudes about violence against women. For this study, I focused on a condensed list of the most popular and most-

watched movies on Netflix in 2020 to provide a deeper, more insightful analysis of the films and create meaningful inferences about the themes of violence against women and impacts implied.

Data

The data for this study are films from the streaming service Netflix. According to *The Global Internet Phenomena Report*, (2018), Netflix is available in all but four countries and is the top video streaming site in the world. As of 2019, there are just under 150 million subscribers, which does not account for the many more viewers who do not pay for the service but share the account with paying members, i.e., they still “have” Netflix (*27 Fascinating Facts About Netflix*, n.d.). This was the most inexpensive way to analyze popular films that the masses are consuming. Competitors like Hulu, Amazon, HBO GO, and Disney + are also influencing the streaming service market, but Netflix still has the most subscribers, and the numbers of users continue to increase (Feldman, 2018).

For this thesis, I watched ten movies on Netflix. A full list of the films is provided in Appendix A. The final list of movies in the study was created from two movie lists. The first set of movies is from a list of Newsweek.com’s 25 most-watched Netflix films of 2020. Newsweek collected data from “streaming statistic aggregator Flix Patrol and Netflix’s own daily top 10 Charts” and was last updated on December 30th, 2020, by Samuel Spenser (Spenser, 2020). The second set of movies came from the Forbes.com list of the most popular Netflix films of 2020, which used data from Netflix’s Top 10 system for 2020 (Bean, 2020). Every film that was included in both lists was sampled for the study (10 films). Movies that were excluded from this study included films from only one list (22 films), two documentaries, and two animated films. The documentaries (*The Social Dilemma* and *American Murder: The Family Next Door*) were not used as documentaries are a different genre of film, documenting real events, that would

require a different type of analysis. The animated films (*Over the Moon* and *The Grinch*) were not analyzed because animated movies are also a unique genre, and targeted to children, thus the “G” rating indicates there is no violence in the film to be examined. The lists were combined to ensure there was sufficient time to properly engage with and analyze the data, specifically the context of violent incidences in each film. Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA)’s film rating system and film genres from the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) are included to examine the prevalence of violence against women in certain types of films and to reflect on why ratings are impactful in deciding how much violence is portrayed and who is most likely consuming this content.

Analysis

The unit of analysis is the *scene*, and a codebook (Appendix B) was created to organize and define the variables. For this study, I used the UN General Assembly’s definition of violence against women to identify scenes where violence occurred. To assess the prevalence of violence against women in the films, the quantitative portion of the content analysis method accounted for each instance of violence, type of violence listed, how many times each category of violence occurred in each film, and across the different films, and the number of instances of other types of violence (i.e., violence not covered by the definition of violence against women) depicted in the films. Other variables that were investigated included the location of the violence, if a weapon was used, if bystanders witnessed the violence, the victim-offender relationship, whether the victims or offenders are the protagonist or antagonist in the film, and the duration of the violent scene. These variables were included to provide more context about the violence that may influence a viewer’s perspectives on violence against women in the real world. I also coded the victims’ and offenders’ demographic information, as previous research has shown that

perceptions of victims and offenders are affected by race, class, and other characteristics. All quantitative analyses were documented using Microsoft Excel.

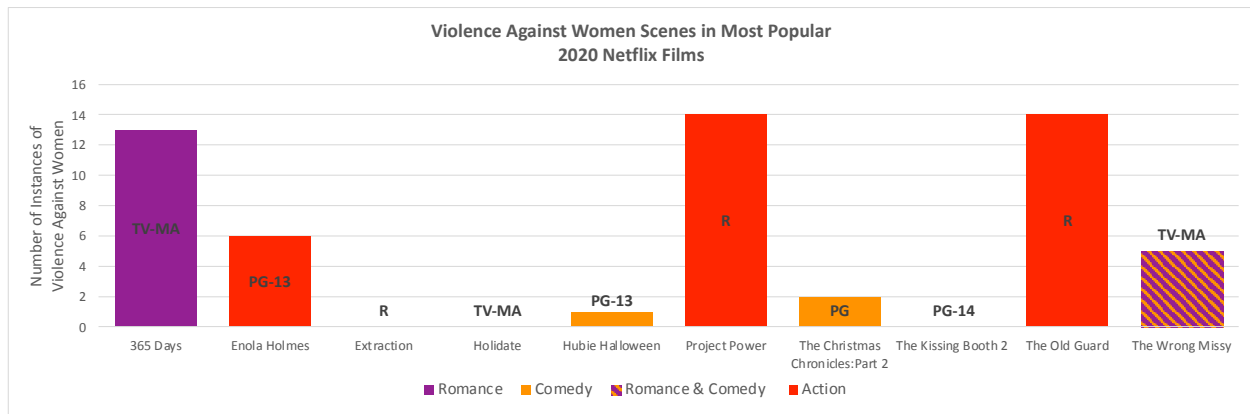
In addition to the quantitative analysis, rich descriptions of the scenes were needed to fully understand the context of the violent act. To assess the themes surrounding violence against women that may influence beliefs and attitudes about the violence, variables such as the circumstances before the act(s) of violence, the outcome of the violence (injuries, etc.), reactions to the violence by the offenders and victims, and the effects the violence had on each of them going forward (e.g., profound effect vs. minor part of the film that is not addressed further) were analyzed. After initial analysis, I grouped scenes into meaningful categories to examine commonalities across movies. A deeper analysis of these may tell us how audiences may act and react to similar situations in real life, particularly if they are seeing these images and concepts repeatedly in films. For example, if hitting a woman is depicted as a joke or unimportant, perpetrators of violence might become desensitized to the act of violence. Or, if the perpetrators receive consequences for their violent acts, audiences may be persuaded to not commit violence against women. Finally, I coded for any justification given for the violence, which also may influence viewer perceptions about violence against women.

FINDINGS

The first objective of this study was to evaluate the prevalence of violence against women in popular Netflix films from 2020. First, I will discuss the quantitative findings from the analysis of the movies. These 10 films represented three central genres: action, romance, and comedy. Violence against women was presented differently in each genre. Figure 1 shows that movie genres including comedy and romance contained little to no violent scenes, except for the romance films *The Wrong Missy* (a romantic comedy) and *365 Days* (which Netflix classifies as an erotic drama). In *The Wrong Missy*, many of the violent scenes analyzed were physical, abrupt, and ended quickly. In *365 Days*, the dramatic and graphic nature of the plot allowed for more mature violent material than the typical romance film. Every violence type in the codebook occurred in *365 Days*. Action films, often combined with adventure, crime, and fantasy themes, portrayed the most violence against women, except for *Extraction* which did not have violent scenes against women.

Figure 1

Violence Against Women Scenes in Most Watched/Popular 2020 Netflix Films



Violence against women is prevalent in the action/thriller/sci-fi themed films, and in two of the romantic films, justifying their mature or “R” ratings. Violence in action films is expected but in romance films, can negatively influence audiences and specific instances will be discussed later for further context.

As well as instances of violence, several variables were analyzed including violence type, victim-offender relationship, and what weapons, if any, were used. As discussed earlier, UN Women claims that violence against women manifests in physical, sexual, and mental forms, focusing on five main categories of violence against women including child marriage, female genital mutilation, intimate partner violence, human trafficking, and sexual violence (*Explore the Facts*, n.d.-b). As shown in Table 3, physical violence was the highest violent type (41%) in these films, but sexual violence only accounted for 1% of the violent instances. While the mental violence [emotional (5%), psychological (8%), and threat of violence (14%)] and the physical violence (41%) are portrayed accurately, one of the main types of violence in the real world was hardly depicted on-screen (sexual violence with a 1%). Table 3 displays that relationships between the victims and offenders tended to be strangers (64%) or captor/hostage (19%) when in

reality, an offender is likely someone the victim knows, typically a male intimate partner as documented by the World Health Organization (*Violence against Women*, 2021). Weapons were not often used when committing acts of violence (42% of offenders used no weapons), but when they were, guns (34%) were the weapon of choice.

Table 3

Descriptive Data from Scenes About Violence Against Women in Popular Netflix Films

<u>Variables</u>	<u>Frequency (%)</u>
Violence Type	
Coercion	6%
Deprivation of Liberty	15%
Emotional	5%
Physical	41%
Psychological	8%
Sexual	1%
Stalking	9%
Threat of Violence	14%
Victim-Offender Relationship	
Acquaintances	9%
Friends	3%
Captor/Hostage	19%
Partner or Ex-Partners	5%
Strangers	64%
Location	
Public	33%
Private	67%
Weapon	
Gun	34%
Knife	8%
Other	15%
No weapon	42%

Number of Bystanders	
No Bystanders	34%
1-9	33%
10-19	10%
19 and over	21%
Unknown	2%
Protagonist	
Victim	76%
Offender	24%
Antagonist	
Victim	4%
Offender	88%
Unknown	8%

Offenders were mostly antagonists, but almost a fourth of the protagonists (24%) committed violence against a woman at some point. For the most part, this violence was in self-defense, and the offenders in those cases had previously been victimized. Sexuality, marital status, education, and the number of bystanders had no real bearing in the analysis of the context of violence in the movies.

The last portion of the quantitative analysis displays the demographics of the victims and offenders in these films. Table 4 shows that most of the scenes in action films depicted violence against women (64% of total instances), but unlike previous media depictions, the movies in this study do include people of color, subverting the usual ideals of the “perfect victim”. As stated by (Slakoff, 2018) previously, women of color are often depicted negatively, thus creating unsympathetic or non-existent narratives, as opposed to their white counterparts who are portrayed as more intelligent, more desired, and more likely to be working women viewed as undeserving of victimization. Most victims were white and wealthy, but some were also women

of color from poor and middle-class socioeconomic statuses. The victims were teenagers or adult women (except Andy in *The Old Guard* whose age is unknown, but she is depicted as an adult), similar to real-life violence against women as estimated by UN Women (1 in 7 women ages 15-49 have experienced physical or sexual abuse by an intimate partner).

Table 4

Demographics from Quantitative Analysis of Violence Against Women in Popular Netflix Films

<u>Offender Characteristics</u>	<u>Frequency (%)</u>	<u>Victim Characteristics</u>	<u>Frequency (%)</u>
Gender of Offender			
Female	15%		
Male	84%		
Unknown	1%		
Age of Offender		Age of Victim	
Less than 18	8%	Less than 18	26%
18-59	89%	18-59	74%
60 and over	1%	60 and over	0%
Unknown	1%	Unknown	0%
Race/Ethnicity of Offender		Race/Ethnicity of Victim	
Afghan	1%	African American	33%
African American	9%	Asian	2%
Italian	17%	White-Polish	21%
White-Polish	1%	South American	2%
Sudanese	16%	White-Unknown	40%
White-Unknown	48%	Unknown	2%
Unknown	7%		
Sexuality of Offender		Sexuality of Victim	
Bisexual	1%	Heterosexual	27%
Heterosexual	27%	Homosexual	0%
Homosexual	0%	Bisexual	7%
Unknown	72%	Unknown	66%
Marital Status of Offender		Marital Status of Victim	
Single	23%	Single	49%

Married	0%	Married	7%
Widowed	0%	Widowed	2%
Unknown	77%	Unknown	42%
Education of Offender		Education of Victim	
Highschool	1%	Highschool	19%
College	5%	College	2%
Postgraduate	1%	Postgraduate	2%
Unknown	92%	Unknown	77%
Employment of Offender		Employment of Victim	
Criminal Background	54%	Criminal Background	14%
Professional	12%	Professional	28%
Mercenary/Superhero	6%	Mercenary/Superhero	16%
Government/Military	10%	Military	12%
Other	3%	Non-Professional	9%
Unknown	16%	Unknown	21%
Perceived Social Class of Offender		Perceived Social Class of Victim	
Poor	0%	Poor	14%
Middle-Class	3%	Middle-Class	5%
Wealthy	28%	Wealthy	44%
Unknown	70%	Unknown	37%

The characters, victims, and offenders, alike came from various occupations and walks of life including students, doctors, mafia bosses, military officers, and businesspeople. Victims tended to be adult wealthy white women (44% perceived to be wealthy, 61% total white ethnicity), which is typical of media's portrayals of victims. However, the main victim in *Project Power*, an action film that shares the most instances of violence, was a poverty-stricken, teenage, African American girl from New Orleans. Offenders in the action genre, where the most instances of violence against women occurred (62%), were mostly white men (84% male and 65% white), with younger men being the usual perpetrators of violence (Miller, 2019; *Violence against Women*, 2021), but there

were instances of people of color and women inflicting the violence on the victims (15% of offenders were female with 33% those being African American and using self-defense). This could mean that movies are showing a more diverse picture of violence against women as lead characters are becoming more diverse, reflecting the true nature of crimes against women rarely shown in past films. About a fourth of the offenders were perceived to be wealthy, though class status was largely unknown. Over half of the offenders had some sort of criminal background including mafia bosses (13%), terrorists (19%), and henchmen (13%). The three films with the most instances of violence were all heavily tied to crime in some form, especially some form of kidnapping, which supports previous research identifying that majority of offenders engage in various other crimes (Lisak & Miller, 2002).

Overall, these films followed previous media depictions of victims and offenders, but some presented violence against women differently. For example, the narratives seemingly follow the plot of young white males, typically intimate partners (especially true for *365 Days*), as being the perpetrators of violence against women. However, many of the female leads were or had been involved in crime, came from different educational backgrounds and occupations, and were of different races (i.e., not shown as the “perfect victim” as had previously found in media depictions of violence against women). Negative connotations associated with women of color and victimization on-screen deviated from past depictions suggesting that media messages about who is portrayed as a victim are diversifying.

The second main objective of the analysis was to expand upon the quantitative data by adding rich descriptions of the scenes to wholly assess the themes surrounding violence against women that may influence viewer beliefs and attitudes about the violence for viewers. Out of the seven films that displayed violence against women, two were comedic films that portrayed

violence as physical humor, three were action films that portrayed violence as a means to accomplish their missions/goals (usually portrayed as fighting for good over evil), and one was a romance film that depicted violence as justifiable when romance is at stake. Below, I discuss one film from each genre in detail.

Traditional Violence Against Women in Film vs. Violence as Comic Relief

Slapstick humor was used in the films that depicted violence as comic relief, although the violence was not aimed at women in particular, but was a product of the genre itself, with violent scenes averaging about 1.84 minutes of total runtime. There were no long-lasting effects on the characters who were victims of violence in the comedies and romances, and violent scenes lacked the depth needed to have any significant influence on the behaviors of audiences.

Slapstick is a form of physical comedy characterized by broad humor, absurd situations, and unruly, vigorous, usually violent action (Casper, 2015). Slapstick is used in *The Wrong Missy* to display physical violence in a humorous light for audience's entertainment.

In this film, male protagonist Tim “thinks he's invited the woman of his dreams on a work retreat to Hawaii, realizing too late he mistakenly texted someone from a nightmare blind date” (Spindel et al., 2020). Because Tim texted the wrong “Melissa”, he has to continue the trip with Missy to impress his boss, as he is in line for a substantial, competitive promotion. His main competitor Jess, his ex-wife Julie, and her new beau are also at the retreat. Tim endures several embarrassing situations that he blames on Missy. In the end, Missy actually helps Tim get the job and they fall in love.

Before they discover they are in love, however, Missy believes Tim and Julie have unresolved feelings for each other and decides the two should have “breakup sex” to see if she is correct. All three of them are intoxicated from marijuana as they attempt a threesome, which

goes awry quickly. Suddenly Julie is knocked off of the bed by Missy and elbowed off the bed by Tim. She tries to get back in the bed, only to be kicked in the head by Missy. Eventually, she gives up and silently excuses herself. Tim and Missy are unaware they were hitting Julie and never acknowledge the physical attacks. These random attacks were added to the sex scene for comic relief for the audience's enjoyment. Everyone moves on, with the violence having no obvious effects on the characters, and audiences likely interpret these acts as humorous, accidental, and inconsequential rather than serious in a real-life context.

Another example of physical violence as humor also happens and ends abruptly. In the scene, several beachgoers are playing a game of musical chairs. Komante (a quirky side character who participates in several gags throughout the film) pushes a girl out of the way to proceed to the next round of the game. The victim is angry and cusses at him but everyone else around them continues their actions and never acknowledges the violence before the scene ends. This abrupt act of violence contributes nothing to the progression of the plot, there for audiences to laugh at.

In the comedies analyzed, violence was subtle and used as a joke. Using slapstick humor in films, especially when aimed towards women, may suggest to viewers that physical violence is acceptable if it is considered funny and disregarded by viewers as jokes. Experts in television violence conclude that comedic violence is often used to convey potentially serious messages and portraying violence as "funny or happy, or sugar-coating the pill, does not change this fact nor the fact that people do not necessarily discount violence that occurs in a comic context" (Signorielli & Gerbner, 1995). Research suggests that media violence depicted as humorous is not beneficial to viewers and does not ease the harsh realities of violence.

Violence Against Women in the Pursuit of the Greater Good

In the three sampled action films, violence against women is centered around self-defense and the pursuit of the greater good. In most instances, victims fought back, asserting that violence against women will not be conducted without retribution. Victims were depicted as capable and formidable opponents, except for *Enola Holmes*. This film had feminist undertones but portrayed how men and women alike believed women to be inferior, which was the social norm in England in the 1880s. Despite the negative connotations surrounding women's rights at the time, the main character, Enola, helps the women's suffrage movement. The movie promotes the idea that though violence against women happens in the pursuit of the greater good, a positive outcome for women's rights may be worth the risk of violence. This message may be positive for audience attitudes towards social injustices in our current times, but also reaffirm that men can be violent, especially when gender norms are being threatened.

Gender was not the focal point of the violence in the other action films, and if a woman was harmed the offender believed was justified to achieve their goals rather than a purposeful, gendered attack. For the most part, themes of good vs. evil pushed the narrative of who had power in these films, rather than the demographics of the victims and offenders. Unlike previous research, the lead female characters who are victimized are not portrayed as innocents or unlikeable characters (e.g., Robin the drug dealer in *Project Power* and Andy the mercenary in *The Old Guard*) (Rader & Rhineberger-Dunn, 2010). Both are described as flawed and portrayed as relatable people in dangerous situations where they happen to become victims.

The Old Guard portrays several examples of women who are fighting for the pursuit of good and justice. IMDb summarizes the plot as:

A covert group of tight-knit mercenaries with a mysterious inability to die have fought to protect the mortal world for centuries. But when the team is recruited to take on an emergency mission and their extraordinary abilities are suddenly exposed, it's up to Andy and Nile, the newest soldier to join their ranks, to help the group eliminate the threat of those who seek to replicate and monetize their power by any means necessary.

Essentially, a pharmaceutical CEO named Merrick has found that these superheroes can regenerate after purposely attacking them and filming their survival. He wants to experiment on them for “the betterment of the world” and “financial gain”. The protagonist Andy, the oldest immortal and leader, wants the group to stop being mercenaries, as she believes their mission to save the world is pointless. They soon find that a new immortal exists (Nile) and venture to save her before the military can experiment on her. Along the way, Andy, and Nile both struggle with killing and are not sure that what they are doing is making an impact on humanity. Nile believes getting paid to kill (outside of the military) is heinous and against her religion, while Andy no longer believes in being a mercenary when killing their enemies has no significant impact on those her team intends to save. It is revealed to Nile through a series of news clippings and research collected by Copley that Andy and her team fight for good, such as saving a family of refugees “whose daughter would discover the technology for the early detection of diabetes... and that woman’s grandson would save 317 people from the Khmer Rouge death camp in Cambodia... and another man preventing an accidental nuclear exchange likely saving civilization as a result” (Prince-Bythewood, 2020, 1:29:04). After realizing what the immortals have done, she decides she will join them. In the end, Andy is shown that she should not give up fighting because her past actions over the thousands of years have contributed significantly to the world.

The majority of the violence in *The Old Guard* is physical and the violence against women is not due to gender. The immortals are unable to die, so attacking them only goes so far.

In the journey to figuring out her purpose, Andy faces several obstacles. When she finds Nile, she is confused and doesn't want to join the immortals. In the scene where they meet, Andy knocks Nile out, as it was easier to save her from the military if she was unconscious. Andy is nonchalant about the violence, as she believes it's for Nile's own good, not because she is an inherently bad person who does not care about the violence she inflicts. It is also easier for Andy to "kill" Nile for a while because attempting to explain immortality and God to a new immortal seems tiresome when there are bigger problems to focus on, like freeing the immortals. Several scenes depict Andy and Nile fighting each other because they think they are doing the right thing; Nile thinks she's saving herself from her "captor" and Andy thinks she is saving Nile from her real captors (the Marines or Merrick).

One scene in the film may reflect ideas about gender norms and violence. A flashback scene from Andy's past reveals she was with another immortal woman named Quynh in Salem during the witch trials. Because the two are immortal, the townspeople believe they are doing the right thing and killing the "witches". They spectate the violence and become even more afraid when Andy and Quynh do not die and believe they must be separated. Quynh is placed in an iron maiden and thrown into the ocean where she has been drowning over and over again for the past 500 years. The townspeople felt justified in their actions because of their beliefs that these women are evil, and God would want them to punish them. This is another example of people harming others for the "greater good". Quynh and Andy being women seemingly had no impact on their judgments concerning good vs. evil, but still, violence against women was committed suggesting an underlying negative treatment of women was a product of the rigid gender roles of the time. This reflects the evil woman hypothesis, which argues that "leniency is reserved only for women who meet the traditional female model. Women who do

not conform to this model are subjected to harsher treatments, as they are being punished for not only their bad behavior but also for their deviation from their expected role” (Freiburger, 2020). This theory would explain why Quynh and Andy being “witches” could have incited fear in the townspeople that resulted in conducting violence on these women. However, the modern examples of violence in the film do not appear to consider gender.

Lastly, there is a scene depicting Andy being betrayed and shot by a fellow immortal named Booker because he wants to find out how the immortals die. He didn’t know that her immortality had run out, and she was actually wounded from the shot. He suspected Andy also would not want to be immortal any longer, so he believed that experimenting on her was positive. His accomplice, Copley, is not fazed by this violence against Andy because he believes that immortal DNA is the key to saving lives on Earth. He views her shooting as a means to subdue her for easier capture. Both realize they’ve made a mistake, as Merrick is greedy and corrupt, but they originally thought sacrificing Andy’s well-being had a positive outcome for her and humanity. Overall, saving lives was the goal of the immortals in the movie, but in the pursuit of wellness and justice, many of the women were harmed along the way.

Previous research on science fiction films has shown “that powers can be seen as the embodiment of femininity which jeopardizes masculinity and the patriarchal society that is based on it” (Abouddahab & Paccaud-Huguet, 2011). Evidence found in this study is consistent with this literature, especially with Andy’s character during the Salem Witch trials. She became evil in the eyes of the townspeople as an immortal woman who could not be defeated in their lifetime. It did not matter that she and Quynh fought amongst men to save the world; the unknown was too much, and they were punished for behaving outside of the gender norm. Though gender mattered in the flashback scene, modern-day scenes portrayed Nile fighting in the military alongside men

with no issues, with her femininity viewed as an asset in war. Andy, as the leader of mercenaries of men only until Nile's arrival, was portrayed as a formidable opponent, never backing down when she needed to defend herself even near death. It has been suggested that "as long as there is not a faithful representation of women in science fiction films, there cannot be a faithful representation of female criminality" and that movies play a role in society that could twist reality and influence the way people see the world (Abouddahab & Paccaud-Huguet, 2011). *Extraction*, an action film that had no instances of violence against women, had a strong female leader similar to Andy's leadership role over the immortals in *The Old Guard*, depicting the women as equals or even in charge of the men in the pursuit of good. Not only that, in *Project Power*, the main antagonist is a female doctor who inflicts violence against other women, challenging the long-standing narrative that only men are the evil villains who can cause harm to women. In recent action films, female leads are behaving in ways that they never have before, showing a more diverse representation of women's empowerment in the struggle between good and evil.

Deprivation of Liberty vs. Sexual Empowerment

365 Days portrayed violence against women for a total of about 17 minutes of the film, vastly more than the other romantic films in the study (*The Wrong Missy* with a total of 1 minute and 33 seconds and *Holidate* with none). The film has the second-highest total of violent scenes (13) and included every type of violence in the study codebook. The most prevalent types of violence included physical (41%), deprivation of liberty (15%), and the threat of violence (14%). As discussed earlier, a previous study showed that heavily depicted dramatic and graphic themes in films increase desensitization to the content and contribute to less sensitive attitudes towards victims (Haridakis, 2006; Krafka et al., 1997). The depiction of violence in *365 Days* reflects the

findings of this study. Netflix's description of the movie states "A woman falls victim to a dominant mafia boss, who imprisons her and gives her one year to fall in love with him", suggesting the woman protagonist is a victim who at least initially does not consent to the man's advances.

After not seeing Laura for 5 years, Massimo has his henchman kidnap her and take her to his mansion. Laura awakens in a strange place, where a giant portrait of her is displayed. She is startled by Massimo, a man she's never even met. She was drugged and faints when she sees him. Massimo does not question giving Laura a sedative, and he rationalizes that she fainted because of her heart condition and attempts to calm her down. His selfishness could have killed Laura, but because he thinks he loves her, he disregards his negligence as a consequence of pursuing his beloved. In the next scene, Laura continues to fight Massimo, and he physically assaults her until she quiets down. He thanks her for her cooperation, as if she isn't a prisoner in his house.

Another scene shows Laura being groped without her consent, but Massimo states, "I will not do anything without your permission...wait until you desire me and come to me yourself" (Bialowas & Mandes, 2020). Here he implies that she is in control of advancing the sexual relationship, yet his actions mere seconds earlier suggest otherwise. The line between the illusion and the actual presence of free will is blurred. Laura attempts to stop Massimo by obtaining his gun but is quickly disarmed and once again not in control of her liberty. In the same scene, Massimo threatens that Laura should not provoke him because he will tie her up, and states that he is unable to be gentle because he is "not used to tolerating disobedience." Massimo doesn't consider his threats and confinement of Laura as wrong as long as he doesn't have sex with her

without her consent. This scene blurs the lines of consent for viewers, although consent is absent if someone is being held captive.

There is a constant push and pull between Laura being unwilling to cooperate and giving in to Massimo's demands to receive some semblances of freedom (i.e., access to her laptop and cellphone, walking around "freely" without the bedroom door locked). In one scene she is trying on lingerie when Massimo barges in. She teases him and threatens that he will not get to see her dressed that way again if he does not leave the room. He chokes her against a mirror, and she becomes angry at his display of power, storming out of the fitting room. He catches up to her and she agrees to make the situation less hostile if she can have her laptop and phone. Laura acquiesced only to regain some of her freedoms, not because she genuinely wanted to pursue a relationship with Massimo.

At this point in the film, the plot begins to change with Laura seemingly regaining some power. She teases Massimo in the shower, knowing he cannot have sex with her without his consent, which results in Laura being choked by Massimo. When they travel to the next place, she is carried on the private plane kicking and screaming. She is held down with seatbelts and he touches her breast and vagina, but then stops. She appears to like the attention, but she was restrained against her will before he touched her. In the next scene, she teases him again, but when she tries to leave the hotel room, she realized the door is locked. He teaches her a lesson by cuffing her to the bed and making her watch other women perform fellatio on him. Laura is confused and upset by her punishment but continues to tease Massimo. She decides she is ready to have sex with Massimo, but he doesn't penetrate her like he threatened he would and tells her to get dressed. Generally, these scenes were meant to show Laura coming into her own sexuality, but in reality, Massimo is still in control of her and decides when, where, and how she will be

touched. Everything occurs on his terms, but Laura believes she has some sort of power over his emotions.

Combining the themes of a desire to escape and sexual empowerment is a harmful message to show vulnerable audiences. The film essentially romanticizes Stockholm Syndrome, “the paradoxical development of reciprocal feelings between hostages and their captors, which is approximated to enhance the hostages’ ability to cope with their captivity” (Egu, n.d.). The authors provide examples to explain why this phenomenon may occur such as trauma bonding, family history involving violent relationships, lack of social and economic resources, and power imbalances. Though the movie attempts to push the narrative that the main offender (Massimo) has morals that strongly oppose violence against women (for example, he refuses to work with human traffickers, whose victims were described as female refugees as young as 12, and also killed a man who sold girls to a brothel), he continues to hold Laura captive until she no longer fights him about his decisions and their “relationship”. Though Laura “loves” him, in the end, she does experience the classic consequences associated with violence against women such as isolation, inability to work, fear, and mental and physical disturbances (*Violence against Women*, 2021). Happily-ever-after endings like hers are not likely in reality but victims in similar circumstances may believe this is the norm and experience negative consequences in response. This film reinforces the notion that violence against women may be interpreted as an interpersonal issue between partners where victim-blaming from audiences can occur (Rader & Rhineberger-Dunn, 2010), rather than a social issue that needs resolution such as better ways to protect women who could potentially be, stalked, kidnapped, trafficked, or abused such as Laura was. Consistent with cultivation theory, other studies have shown that men who watch violent television habitually have a more unsympathetic attitude about aggression and are even desensitized to the violence

(Haridakis, 2006). There is also evidence that watching stereotypical sex roles in movies increases the acceptance of sexual stereotypes and rape myths for young women and men (Polo-Alonso et al., 2018). This suggests that the way Laura was portrayed could negatively impact how women view their roles in relationships. In addition, impressionable adolescents may adopt rape myths by viewing Massimo's beliefs about consent. Watching media like *365 Days* could increase aggressive behaviors from offenders by normalizing or even encouraging potential offenders to pursue the girl of their dreams using similar methods as Massimo.

CONCLUSION

The goals of this study were to assess the prevalence and types of violence against women in film, analyze the context of the violence in films, and reveal how cultivation theory can help us understand how content affects viewers' beliefs about violence. The most prevalent violent type was physical violence, conducted mostly by white men who had committed other types of crime, similar to real-world data on violence against women. Similar to previous studies, wealthy white women from various occupations were more likely to be portrayed as the victims, but women of other races and economic statuses were also depicted as victims in the films studied here. However, violence was committed mostly by strangers in the films, misrepresenting the reality that the offender is usually someone the victim knows, continuing the narrative that women should be the most afraid of facing victimization from people they do not know.

Previous studies have studied violent media and attitudes about violence in-depth but have not fully explored the context in which the violence occurred. This study focused on the circumstances and behaviors exhibited by the characters to gain a clearer picture of the media messages and what those messages may encourage. In this study, three genres of film emerged when analyzing the data: comedy, action, and romance films. When assessing the prevalence, it was found that romance and comedy films had little to no violent scenes. In the few instances of violence from these genres, physical violence was for comedic purposes and had no lasting effects on the victims. Overall, violence against women was most prevalent in sampled action

films, but not in the traditional context of violence against women. The violence typically is a result of the victim being in the way of the offender's objective (i.e., Merrick trying to study immortality in *The Old Guard*, Art saving his daughter in *Project Power*).

In the sampled comedic films, violence against women is centered around slapstick humor. Previous literature on media violence and comedy showed that viewing this type of violence did not ease the impact of the act of violence (Signorielli & Gerbner, 1995). This suggests that including violent physical humor in cinema hinders the spreading of positive messages about how to handle violence against women, and audiences may leave with the impression that the violence was unnecessary to the plot and inappropriate. There is limited literature on the effects of slapstick humor on beliefs about violence against women and should be further examined to see if repeatedly watching physical humor have any adverse effects, especially for female viewers.

There was evidence found in the action genre that suggests that when it comes to films that focus on good vs. evil in the modern era, gender has almost no influence on the justifications for the violence committed against victims. Except for one flashback scene from *The Old Guard*, action films portrayed the female lead characters as heroes who happened to be victims of violence throughout their separate journeys. Saving the world and happening to be a woman who was a victim of violence in the process might be perceived as better than the past depictions of victims as unlikeable characters that were found to influence victim-blaming in previous studies (Rader & Rhineberger-Dunn, 2010). Viewers in that study held little empathy for victims and held them more responsible for their victimizations. Science fiction movies, like *Project Power* and *The Old Guard*, demonstrate that representing women as equals or as genderless could promote positive change needed to lessen violence against women and harmful beliefs

surrounding violence in the future. On the other hand, there could be negative consequences if the takeaway message becomes that women are expected to fight back. In reality, victims avoid emotional, financial, and personal risks associated with police intervention and legal proceedings because they are often re-victimized in the process, even by the police (Htun & Jensenius, 2020). Also, in the past women had, and continue to have to prove their victimization (through "active resistance" so it could be determined whether she was forced against her will and un-consenting) to the courts to receive justice for crimes done to them such as sexual assaults (Burgin, 2019). These films could reinforce the idea that fighting back is the best and only solution in many circumstances where it could be dangerous and that victims must convince others of their victimization to receive justice from the system.

Cultivation theory explains how viewers perceive certain messages and are influenced because of the oversaturation of violence against women in film. Thus, filmmakers should be conscious about how their portrayals could be interpreted. Many of the producers of *The Old Guard* and *Enola Holmes* were women who may have played a role in how the victims were represented as strong, inspiring female leads with purpose. A prolific reviewer on IMDb writes "a pert role model of her age, her Enola is an inspiration feels authentic, merely due to the actor's exuberance and alacrity..." about the main character of *Enola Holmes*, Millie Bobby Brown (*User-submitted review of "Enola Holmes,"* 2020). Continuing to produce more content where women are not shown as weak and unlikeable could change the way audiences perceive women in real life.

Cultivation theory is appropriate for studying violence against women in the media, but it could also be coupled with other perspectives. Some argue that the theory focuses too much on the effects of media influence and does not emphasize who is being influenced and why. George

Gerbner considered viewers as passive, but according to experts on cultivation theory, Gerbner did not investigate the “alternative and variant meanings of media violence-in terms of either what they expressed or how they were interpreted” (Ruddock, 2011 as cited in Morgan et al., 2015). The analysis of *Making a Murderer* showed there is a need for criminologists to study how audiences actively interpret crime and justice media content because not all people engaged with the content in the same way, which influenced their opinions of crime and the criminal justice system (Kennedy, 2018).

For example, lived experiences or the lack of lived experiences may change the way different viewers receive the messages being shown on Netflix. Morgan et al. (2015) state that as networks for minorities increase, their chances of seeing themselves portrayed on television also increase, possibly creating a divide between “their own” media content and the new networks. Knowing who is watching the content, why they are watching, and understanding how their individual experiences shape the way they view media messages could be key to repairing damaging attitudes towards violence against women and promoting healthier ideals. Core beliefs and attitudes are hard to change but can change with the repeated viewing of specific content. More research is needed about who is being influenced (and how) when watching content involving violence against women. Knowing the target audience and making sure the content is realistic, informative, and digestible for that particular audience would be beneficial for spreading awareness about the signs and consequences of violence against women.

The majority of the literature on media violence tries to explain exposure to media violence and the harmful effects of that exposure but rarely discusses the ways in which studying more “positive outcomes” of exposure to media violence could be beneficial (Gunter, 2008). For example, there have been several studies on the relationship between media violence and

aggression, especially amongst the adolescent population, but few examine how exposure to media violence was beneficial by depicting women overcoming their victimization. These messages could spread awareness about violence against women and present effective coping and exit strategies. Gunter (2008) states that several studies of the effects of rape depictions in violent films “have found that such depictions can shift the attitudes toward rape, victims of rape, and rapists” and “violent films were evaluated in such a way as to draw or not draw viewers’ attention to the degrading nature of the scenes in which women were attacked. This manipulation produced more sympathy for the woman in rape cases...” After watching, empathy for the victims on simulated rape trials increased. Studies like these often only examine effects immediately after exposure to the content but demonstrate that attitudes about violence are affected by media depictions. This suggests there is a need for longitudinal studies that further investigate the impact that repeatedly watching media violence against women has on viewers and how the media can improve its messaging.

The outlier, *365 Days*, is a romance film that showed a significant number of scenes portraying violence against women that could negatively influence the audience’s ideas about healthy relationships due to its glamourization of captivity and the romanticization of the captor. The gradual progression of Laura’s agency being regained, after several scenes where she is depicted as teasing Massimo, convinced her that she was now sexually empowered. In reality, she was never in control, and viewing this type of message could be dangerous. Characters like Andy and Enola were inspiring, and Laura could be seen as unlikeable and potentially shamed for being a victim, unlike the women from the other films. Critics of the film disapproved of Laura’s reactions to her captivity some even suggested her character was unrealistic and unrelatable. One reviewer describes Laura as

laughably bad and has no depth to her at all, she is so weak, and you really wonder why you should care about her in the film. Then there is the main guy who is probably even worse, he is so aggressive towards her and unlikeable, the fact that these two people would have any type of relationship is absurd and is hard to watch as it is all the film gives to you (*User-submitted review of "365 dni,"* 2021).

Consistent with previous studies, audiences have little sympathy for those they almost deem deserving of their victimization (Rader & Rhineberger-Dunn, 2010). Harmful messages like these can shape the way viewers act in unhealthy relationships and should be further studied to assess if behaviors shown on film are repeated in real life. In addition, some studies have shown that indirect victimization (vicarious victimization) has negative consequences. For example, those who witness others being victimized may experience adverse effects themselves such as psychological health issues, withdrawal, and negative behaviors like anger and aggression (Dionisi & Barling, 2018; Spohn et al., 2017). Fewer movies like *365 Days* and more movies like *Enola Holmes*, which promotes women's empowerment, should be produced for audiences to learn more accurate messages about women's victimization. There should also be more research about why some women are considered more worthy of their victimization. Are women who are considered heroes and advocates who fight back (Andy and Enola) now considered the "perfect victims" rather than the traditional young white woman, Laura?

Recently, UN Women produced a film entitled *The Shadow Pandemic* narrated by humanitarian and actress Kate Winslet, a public service announcement to raise and spread awareness about the increased violence against women as a result of the global pandemic (Winslet, 2020). This film portrays the realities of violence against women and girls while providing a way to reach advocates and victims who need resources to make it safer for women to thrive in healthy environments. These films and others like could help potential offenders

understand the effects that violence has on women, which could prevent future violence by reducing the stereotypical portrayals of violence against women that do not further the story's plot beyond unnecessary violence (much like what was done in *The Wrong Missy*). With the help of filmmakers, criminologists, and women all over the world who share their experiences, this study's findings could influence filmmakers to accurately portray representations of violence against women, depicting them fighting for justice and themselves.

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APPENDIX A

FILM LIST TABLES

Table 1

Condensed List of Most-Watched/Popular Movies of 2020 on Netflix

<i>Movie Title</i>	Year Released	MPAA Rating	Genre
<i>365 Days</i>	2020	TV-MA	Drama, Romance
<i>Enola Holmes</i>	2020	PG-13	Action, Adventure, Crime
<i>The Christmas Chronicles: Part 2</i>	2020	PG	Adventure, Comedy, Family
<i>Holidate</i>	2020	TV-MA	Comedy, Romance
<i>The Old Guard</i>	2020	R	Action, Adventure, Fantasy
<i>Project Power</i>	2020	R	Action, Crime, Sci-Fi
<i>The Kissing Booth 2</i>	2020	TV-14	Comedy, Romance
<i>Extraction</i>	2020	R	Action, Thriller
<i>Hubie Halloween</i>	2020	PG-13	Comedy, Mystery
<i>The Wrong Missy</i>	2020	TV-MA	Comedy, Romance

Table 2*List of Movies Excluded from Study*

Movie Title	Year Released	MPAA Rating	Genre
<i>The Social Dilemma</i>	2020	PG-13	Documentary, Drama
<i>American Murder: The Family Next Door</i>	2020	TV-MA	Documentary, Crime
<i>The Spongebob Movie: Sponge on the Run</i>	2020	PG	Animation, Adventure, Comedy
<i>A California Christmas</i>	2020	PG-13	Comedy, Drama, Romance
<i>The Devil All the Time</i>	2020	R	Crime, Drama, Thriller
<i>Work It</i>	2020	TV-14	Comedy, Music
<i>Love, Guaranteed</i>	2020	TV-PG	Comedy, Romance
<i>Feel the Beat</i>	2020	TV-G	Comedy, Drama, Family
<i>The Christmas Chronicles</i>	2018	PG	Adventure, Comedy, Family
<i>The Princess Switch: Switched Again</i>	2020	TV-G	Comedy, Drama, Family
<i>#Alive</i>	2020	TV-MA	Action, Drama, Horror
<i>Operation Christmas Drop</i>	2020	TV-G	Comedy, Family, Romance
<i>The Sleepover</i>	2020	TV-PG	Action, Adventure, Comedy
<i>Despicable Me</i>	2010	PG	Animation, Adventure, Comedy
<i>The Angry Birds Movie 2</i>	2019	PG	Animation, Adventure, Comedy
<i>Spenser Confidential</i>	2020	R	Action, Comedy, Crime
<i>How the Grinch Stole Christmas</i>	2000	PG	Comedy, Family, Fantasy
<i>The Lorax</i>	2012	PG	Animation, Adventure, Comedy
<i>Angel Has Fallen</i>	2019	R	Action, Thriller
<i>The Willoughbys</i>	2020	PG	Animation, Adventure, Comedy
<i>Mr. Peabody & Sherman</i>	2014	PG	Animation, Adventure, Comedy
<i>The Lost Husband</i>	2020	PG-13	Drama, Romance
<i>Code 8</i>	2019	Not Rated	Action, Crime, Drama

<i>Space Jam</i>	1996	PG	Animation, Adventure, Comedy
<i>Over the Moon</i>	2020	PG	Animation, Adventure, Comedy
<i>The Grinch</i>	2018	PG	Animation, Adventure, Comedy

APPENDIX B
FILM DATA CODEBOOK

1. Movie Title

Film's official title as reported by IMDb

2. Year

Year of release as reported by IMDb

3. MPAA Rating

Film's rating per Motion Picture Association of America meant to gauge films intended audience found on IMDb

4. Genre

Films genre as reported by IMDb

For each scene depicting violence against women, each of the following variables was coded for:

5. Timestamps

- Approximation of the beginning of scene and end of the scene.

6. Type of Violence

A. Physical Violence

- Hurting or trying to hurt someone by hitting, kicking, burning, grabbing, pinching, shoving, slapping, hair-pulling, biting, denying medical care or forcing alcohol and/or drug use, or using other physical force. It may include property damage

B. Psychological Violence

- Involves causing fear by intimidation; threatening physical harm to self, partner, or children; destruction of pets and property; “mind games”; or forcing isolation from friends, family, school, and/or work.

C. Emotional Violence

- Includes undermining a person's sense of self-worth through constant criticism; belittling one's abilities; name-calling or other verbal abuse; damaging a partner's relationship with the children, or not letting a partner see friends and family.

D. Sexual Violence

- Any sexual act committed against the will of another person, either when this person does not give consent or when consent cannot be given because the person is a child, has a mental disability or is severely intoxicated or unconscious as a result of alcohol or drugs.

E. Threat of violence

- A statement of an intention to inflict pain, injury, damage, or other hostile action on someone in retribution for something done or not done.

F. Coercion

- The practice of persuading someone to do something by using force or threats

G. Deprivation of Liberty

- When someone is both under continuous supervision and control and not free to leave.

H. Stalking

- Unwanted and/or repeated surveillance by an individual or group toward another person. Behaviors are interrelated to harassment and intimidation and may include following the victim in person or monitoring them.

7. Location

Whether the incident was in a public or private space.

8. Victim(s)

Number of victims who experienced the act(s) of violence.

9. Offender(s)

Number offenders who committed the act(s) of violence.

10. Demographics of Victim

A. Age,

B. Perceived race/ethnicity,

C. Perceived sexuality

D. Marital status,

E. Education

F. Employment

G. Other indicators of SES (e.g., large home, clothing, etc.)

11. Demographics of Offender

A. Age,

B. Perceived race/ethnicity,

C. Perceived sexuality

D. Marital status,

E. Education

F. Employment

G. Other indicators of SES (e.g., large home, clothing, etc.)

12. Victim(s)-Offender(s) Relationship

The relationship between the victim and offender. Intimate partner, family, acquaintance, or stranger.

13. Bystander (s)

Anyone, not a victim or offender present at the time of the act and does not take part.

14. Bystander Reaction

Actions done by the bystander after the act and any reactions to the violence.

15. Weapons

Anything designed or used for inflicting bodily harm or physical damage

16. Protagonist

The is the victim or offender a leading character or one of the major characters in fictional text.

17. Antagonist

The is the victim or offender the principal opponent or foil of the main character.

18. Circumstances Before Violence

Descriptions of scenes before the act occurs.

19. Outcome of Violence

Description of scenes after the act occurs. Reactions of the victim, perpetrators, and any bystanders after the act(s).

20. Explanation for Violence

The cause or basis for an act committed either explicitly stated or inferred.

21. Effects of Violence on Victim

Reactions and actions of the victim after the act occurred.

22. Effects of Violence on Offender

Reactions and actions of the offender after the act occurred.

23. Number of Instances of violence against women

24. The number of acts (s) of violence against women in the entire film.