

From *Titanic* to *Star Wars*: A Derridean Deconstructive Analysis of the Minimization of  
Violence in the 25 Top Grossing Films of All-Time

By

Melissa S. Tatlock

A Thesis Submitted to  
Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts in Criminology.

April, 2009, Halifax, Nova Scotia

Copyright Melissa S. Tatlock, 2009

Approved: Dr. Michele Byers  
Supervisor

Approved: Dr. Diane Crocker  
Committee Member

Approved: Dr. Chris McCormick  
External Reviewer

Date: April 14, 2009



Library and  
Archives Canada

Published Heritage  
Branch

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

Bibliothèque et  
Archives Canada

Direction du  
Patrimoine de l'édition

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

*Your file    Votre référence*

*ISBN: 978-0-494-50627-1*

*Our file    Notre référence*

*ISBN: 978-0-494-50627-1*

#### NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

#### AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

---

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

From *Titanic* to *Star Wars*: A Derridean Deconstructive Analysis of the Minimization of Violence in the 25 Top Grossing Films of All-Time

By Melissa S. Tatlock

**Abstract**

This thesis examines how representations of violence are minimized in the narratives of Hollywood blockbuster films. I analyzed the 25 top grossing films of all-time, worldwide, as of July 2003 to demonstrate whether and how they use a variety of strategies to potentially minimize a viewer's perception of the violence they contain. My analysis is framed by poststructuralism, specifically informed by Derridean deconstruction. Following Derrida's suggestions for deconstructing texts, I take this analysis beyond merely counting the number of incidents of violence, as more traditional content analyses do, to provide my own reading and interpretation of the different meanings of violence represented in the film narratives. My analysis revealed four strategies of minimization being employed within the selected film texts: legitimizing violence by portraying the aggressor as having a "legitimate" motive (i.e., self-defense); camouflaging violence by portraying the violence with humorous undertones; justifying violence by representing the violence as a conflict between good and evil; and disguising violence by representing the violence with a low level of graphicness. My research demonstrates the importance of critically analyzing and deconstructing the complex and differing meanings of violence represented in film, representations that are shown to be hidden and minimized through the use of these strategies.

April 2009

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude and thanks to my supervisor Dr. Michele Byers and committee member Dr. Diane Crocker for their patience, guidance and support throughout this long and difficult process. It was a pleasure to work with both of you.

I would also like to thank Saint Mary's University for the generous graduate funding awarded to me and the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada for a Canada Graduate Scholarship that helped fund my research.

I also want to thank my parents, Linda and Tom for all of their love and encouragement. You truly are the best parents in the world.

Finally, to my loving husband Matthew, I wish to express my deepest appreciation for the endless love and support you gave to me from the very beginning. Thanks for constantly being there when I needed a shoulder to cry on or simply a hug to get me through the day.

## Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract .....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iii
Table of Contents .....	iv
List of Tables .....	vi
Introduction	
Violence in Film .....	1
Thesis Statement and Research Questions .....	2
Chapter Outlines .....	3
Section 1.0 .....	5
1.1 Literature Review	
The Portrayal of Violence in Film: A Review of the Literature .....	9
Prevalence of Violence in Film .....	10
Representations of Violence in Film .....	14
Conclusion .....	28
1.2 Theoretical Framework	
Poststructuralism .....	30
Derrida's Vocabulary of Deconstruction .....	35
Conclusion .....	48
1.3 Methodology	
Data Collection .....	49
Quantitative Methods .....	54
Coding the Data .....	55
Qualitative Methods .....	61
Conclusion .....	68
Section 2.0: Analytical Chapters .....	70
2.1 Theme 1: Legitimizing Violence	
Thematic Analysis .....	71
Legitimizing Violence .....	73
Conclusion .....	85
2.2 Theme 2: Camouflaging Violence	
Thematic Analysis .....	87

	Camouflaging Violence .....	89
	Conclusion .....	94
2.3	Theme 3: Justifying Violence	
	Thematic Analysis .....	97
	Justifying Violence .....	99
	Historical Fiction Films .....	100
	Fantasy/Science Fiction Films .....	104
	Conclusion .....	112
2.4	Theme 4: Disguising Violence	
	Thematic Analysis .....	114
	Disguising Violence .....	116
	Conclusion .....	126
	Conclusion	
	Research Contributions .....	127
	Representations of Legitimate Violence and the Academic Literature ...	130
	Representations of Camouflaged Violence and Academic Literature....	131
	Representations of Justified Violence and the Academic Literature .....	133
	Representations of Disguised Violence and the Academic Literature....	134
	Suggestions for Future Research .....	137
	References: Sampled Films .....	140
	References .....	143
	Tables .....	154
	Appendix A: The Portrayal of Violence in Film – Codebook .....	164
	Appendix B: Film Synopsis .....	167
	Appendix C: Characters and Actors Names .....	176
	Appendix D: Maritime Film Classification System .....	179

## List of Tables

Table 1	Type of Violence
Table 2	Prevalence of Violence in Each Film
Table 3	Level of Force used to commit Violence
Table 4	Distribution of Violent Actions among Films, by Genre
Table 5	Distribution of Violent Actions among Films, by Rating
Table 6	Presence of a Motive
Table 7	Type of Motive Used
Table 8	Intentionality
Table 9	Hero Status
Table 10	Villain Status
Table 11	Presence of Humour
Table 12	Type of Humour Used
Table 13	Character Attributes
Table 14	Type of Character
Table 15	Race of the Character
Table 16	Social Class of the Character
Table 17	Degree of Injury Inflicted on the Victim(s)
Table 18	Signs of Blood
Table 19	Framing

## Introduction

### *Violence in Film*

After the terror attacks of September 11, debate throughout the country centered on whether that disaster spelled the end of the era of hyperviolent movies. When the planes hit the World Trade Center the imagery looked like a Hollywood action movie, and it made many people hope that the mindless violence of much contemporary film might finally diminish. After September 11, how could one watch a helicopter in *The Matrix* crash into a skyscraper and explode in a fireball? How could one watch the White House explode and New York skyscrapers erupt in *Independence Day* (1996)? How could directors make such images in the future? These questions have mainly a rhetorical force. The history of American film gives us the answers: people will. The appeal of all of this is undying. Ultraviolence is an embryo that lay inside the body of American cinema for six decades until it emerged. It had always been there, and, like the masked killers in slasher films that never lie down dead, it keeps coming on (Prince, 2003, p. 289).

Violence has been and still is a recurrent theme in Hollywood blockbuster films: “violence figures very strongly in the popular movies of the American mass entertainment media” (Newman, 1998, p. 40). The U.S based Center for Media and Public Affairs conducted a content analysis to examine how much violence is portrayed in different media venues: television programs, television movies, theatrical films, and music videos. They sampled the 50 top grossing theatrical films from 1998 to 1999 and found that a total of 2,319 violent acts were portrayed in these films, with an average of 46 violent acts per film (Prince, 2003, p. 273). As illustrated by this study, films released in theatres, or at least the top grossing films, contain a lot of violent imagery in their narrative.

Many critics and scholars question why there is so much violence in film. However, Hollywood producers often respond to this question by stating that a lot of



violent entertainment receives a favorable reception and is popular amongst viewers, which is evidenced by the millions of dollars Hollywood blockbuster films make just in their opening weekend in theatres across North America. As Prince (2003) argues, “movie violence has become a saleable commodity for the film industry” (p. 271).

The popularity of violent entertainment is apparent not only in North America but also throughout the world. Zillmann (1998) argues that because box-office success for a:

cinematic production is the ultimate behavioral measure of the appeal of such entertainment, there can be no doubt that fictional superviolence is an enormous attraction. Moreover, there can be no doubt that this phenomenal appeal is not limited to audiences in the Western world, but universal. The attraction of superviolent entertainment is evident cross-culturally (p. 180).

While many viewers are attracted to violent entertainment, they have different reasons for finding it appealing. Audiences that watch “images of violence, death, and dying do not share a single motive – some viewers seek excitement, others companionship or social acceptance through shared experience ... others wish to see justice enacted ... and for some, the immersion in a fantasy world is its primary appeal” (Goldstein, 1998, p. 222). The reasons specified by Goldstein (1998) are probably not the only reasons why viewers are attracted to violent entertainment. However, they do seem to explain why at least some viewers spend their money and free time watching violent films. If viewers keep spending their money and free time watching violent films, mainstream filmmakers will continue to make films with violent content.

### ***Thesis Statement and Research Questions***

My research offers a critical quantitative and qualitative analysis of the portrayal of violence in the 25 top grossing Hollywood blockbuster films of all-time, as of July

2003. In this thesis, I argue that the meaning of violence represented in film narratives is complex and needs to be critically deconstructed by documenting the ways in which particular strategies of minimization are used within these films; strategies that might impact viewer perceptions of such violence. Throughout this research, I explore several questions: What is the prevalence of violence portrayed in the sampled film? Is the amount of violence in the sampled films associated with their particular genres as well as their ratings? Is violence minimized within the narrative structure of the film texts selected for study? If so, what strategies do I read as being employed in these films to minimize the violence? Do the sampled films use binary oppositions when portraying violence and, if so, how do these binary oppositions develop into a violent hierarchy? Are binary oppositions used in the sampled films in order to minimize the portrayal of violence? How does the context (time and place) of the film's production affect my reading of the violence represented within it as well as the strategies of minimization employed? Are there intertextual links between the film texts I have selected for study in relation to the strategies of minimization employed? These research questions are derived from the information I collected based on my reading of the relevant academic literatures and from the theoretical framework of poststructuralism, particularly the work of Jacques Derrida.

### ***Chapter Outlines***

My thesis is organized into two sections:

Section 1.0 is comprised of three chapters: Literature Review, Theoretical Framework and Methodology. In chapter 1.1, I provide a review of the academic

literature on the portrayal of violence in film in order to situate my research in the context of other scholarly work. It is important to note that I do discuss some research that examines violence in television. Although film and television are completely different mediums, I resort to briefly discussing some research on television because I am limited in the critical literature that is available on violence in film. In chapter 1.2, I discuss how poststructuralism, particularly Jacques Derrida's work on deconstruction is used as the theoretical framework in my research. In chapter 1.3, I outline the qualitative and quantitative research methodologies I use in my analysis of the portrayal of violence in film.

Section 2.0 discusses both my quantitative and qualitative findings. This section is divided into four chapters pertaining to the following four themes: Chapter 2.1 - "Legitimizing Violence," Chapter 2.2 - "Camouflaging Violence," Chapter 2.3 - "Justifying Violence," and Chapter 2.4 - "Disguising Violence." In these four chapters, I discuss each of the themes in detail. I discuss the findings from the quantitative content analysis and also discuss the qualitative findings of the intertextual, contextual and deconstructive reading I perform on the sampled film texts.

In the final chapter of this thesis, I return to the review of the academic literature and theoretical framework that inform this thesis. First, I discuss, what I believe, are the contributions of my research. Next, I discuss the research findings in relation to prior scholarly work that has examined the representations of violence in film. To conclude, I offer suggestions for future research.

## Section 1.0

Chapter 1.1 is a review of the literature on violence in film, focusing on scholarly work that discusses the portrayal of violence in film. First, I review the quantitative studies that examine the prevalence of violence in film. Second, I critically review the qualitative studies that examine representations of violence in film. Overall, the objective of this chapter is to review this literature in order to situate my research in the context of other scholarly work.

In chapter 1.2, I discuss the theoretical framework I adopt for this research: a poststructuralist perspective. Throughout this chapter, I examine poststructuralism and discuss its usefulness to my examination of the minimization of violence in film. I begin by providing a brief description of the underlying assumptions of poststructuralism. Next, I explain how my research draws on the work of French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1973, 1976, 1978, 1979, 1981a, 1981b, 1982, 1984, 1988a, 1988b). In particular, I explain how I draw upon Derrida's vocabulary of deconstruction, including: "binary opposition," "violent hierarchy," "plurality of meaning," "context," and "intertextuality." The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how this vocabulary of deconstruction provides my research with the conceptual tools needed to study the minimization of violence in film texts.

In chapter 1.3, I describe the qualitative and quantitative research methodologies that I use in my analysis of the portrayal of violence in film. First, I discuss and provide a list of my data set: the 25 top grossing films of all-time, worldwide. Second, I describe quantitative content analysis and how it informs my research. I also provide an overview

of the codebook that outlines the content categories and subcategories that I use to measure violence in film. Third, I describe the qualitative component of my research methodology and explain how it informs my thesis. To begin, I organize the patterns obtained from my quantitative analysis into themes using qualitative content analysis. Then, using a form of poststructuralist textual analysis, I analyze the themes using a Derridean deconstructive analysis, which involves performing intertextual and contextual reading of the films in my sample and a deconstructive reading of their binary oppositions. The aim of this chapter is to describe the research methods I believe can answer my research questions the best.

My thesis is organized analytically around a series of terms. Therefore, I believe it is necessary to briefly introduce these terms and to explain how they fit together in my research. The terms of my analysis are: content categories, patterns, themes, and strategies. In my research, I conduct a content analysis of the images of violence portrayed in film. According to Rose (2001), there are four steps that need to be followed to conduct a content analysis: 1) finding your images; 2) devise your categories for coding; 3) coding the images; and 4) analyzing the results. These four steps to conduct a content analysis relate specifically to how these terms of analysis are used in my research.

After choosing the images to analyze: the images of violence in film, the next step to conduct a content analysis is “to devise a set of [content] categories for coding the images [of violence]” (Rose, 2001, p. 59). Some of the “content categories” I use to code the violence in film are developed specifically for this research, while others are borrowed from previous research on “violence in film.” In my research, a total of 17 content categories are used to code each of the images of violence, which include: (a)

degree of injury (subcategories include: none, mild, moderate, or extreme); (b) signs of blood (none, mild, moderate, or extreme); (c) framing of violence (close-up, long shot or not shown); and (d) framing of the impact (close-up, long shot or not shown) (see pp. 57-60 of this thesis for a more detailed list of the content categories I used to code the violent images in the sampled films).

After the coding, the final step in conducting a content analysis is to analyze the results. To quantitatively analyze the results, I count the coding categories by producing frequency distributions in SPSS. From these frequency distributions, I can discover “patterns” in my data by examining the number of occurrences in which a coding subcategory repeats itself across the sampled films. An example of some of the patterns discovered from coding the images of violence are: 68 percent depicted no physical injury, 89 percent depicted no signs of blood, 85 percent of the violent acts were framed in long shot, and 85 percent framed the impact to the victim in long shot.

A more detailed analysis of the results can be obtained by exploring the relations between different content categories, which can be done either quantitatively or qualitatively. For my research, I rely on qualitatively exploring the relations between the content categories, which results in the discovery of “themes” in my data. To do this, I need to organize the patterns, based on the similarities that exist between the content categories into larger groups called themes. For example, the theme “disguising violence” is formed from a number of content categories: “degree of injury,” “signs of blood,” “framing of violence,” and “framing of impact.” The patterns within these content categories illustrate that the sampled films rarely portray any injuries, rarely portray any signs of blood, and frame both the violence and impact in long shots. Thus, I

conclude that the similarities between each of these patterns reveal that the violence is portrayed with a low level of graphicness. Representing the violence as low in graphicness can be seen as one possible strategy to disguise the violence in film. Therefore, disguising the violence by representing it with a low level of graphicness is recognized as one of the many possible “strategies” that can be used to minimize the portrayal of violence in film.

## 1.1

## Literature Review

***The Portrayal of Violence in Film: A Review of the Literature***

The literature on the portrayal of violence in film develops from at least two major strands of research. The first is the quantitative research of scholars such as Browne, Webb, Fisher, Cook, McArthur, Peek-Asa, and Kraus (2002), Bufkin and Eschholz (2000), Jenkins, Webb, Browne, Afifi, and Kraus (2005), McArthur, Peek-Asa, Webb, Fisher, Cook, Browne and Kraus (2000), McIntosh, Murray, Murray and Manian (2003), Monk-Turner, Ciba, Cunningham, McIntire, Pollard and Tuner (2004), Oliver and Kalyanaraman (2002), and Sapolsky, Molitor and Luque (2003). Each of these researchers or research groups quantitatively examines the prevalence of violence in different samples of film texts using content analysis. The second strand of research develops from the qualitative tradition and includes researchers such as Browne et al. (2002), Bufkin & Eschholz (2000), Clover (1987), Collins (1992), Kim (2004), Knaus (2005), McArthur et al. (2000), Naremore (2001), Parks (2003), Potter & Smith (2000), Potter & Warren (1998), and Projansky (2001). Each of these researchers critically analyzes representations of violence in a wide array of film texts using qualitative methods. All of the studies I discuss in this review are valuable to my research because they help me to situate my research in the context of other scholarly work.



### *Prevalence of Violence in Film*

To study the prevalence of violence in film, some researchers used quantitative methods to count the number of incidents of violence depicted in, for example, the top grossing films from a particular year (Browne et al., 2002; Bufkin & Eschholz, 2000; Jenkins et al., 2005; McArthur et al., 2000), film previews (Jenkins et al., 2005; Oliver & Kalyanaraman, 2002), war films (Monk-Turner et al., 2004), comedy films (McIntosh et al., 2003), and slasher films (Sapolsky et al., 2003). Although these studies examine the prevalence of violence in different samples of film texts, each reached the same conclusion: Violence was a prevalent theme in all the types of films studied. For example, in their content analysis of the 100 top grossing films of 1994, McArthur et al. (2000) found that 2,184 violent images were depicted in these films, which “corresponds to one violent action approximately every five minutes” (p. 121). They found that every film in their sample, with the exception of one, contained at least one act of violence. Similarly, Browne et al. (2002) and Jenkins et al. (2005) found that violence was overwhelmingly prevalent in their sample of top grossing films from the year of 1994. In their content analysis, Browne et al. and Jenkins et al. found a total of 2,184 violent actions and 2,143 violent actions respectively. The findings from these three quantitative studies show that an overwhelming number of violent acts are portrayed in Hollywood blockbuster films.

Bufkin and Eschholz (2000) conducted an examination of the prevalence of violence in film by looking specifically at sexual violence instead of analyzing violence in general. Using content analysis, Bufkin and Eschholz measured the prevalence of rape in fifty of the top grossing films of 1996. They found thirty sex scenes in the fifty films

analyzed with only five (17 percent) of these scenes portraying rapes. These findings reveal that sexual violence (i.e. rape) is not as prevalent in the films studied as physical violence.

In examining the prevalence of violence in film, some researchers quantitatively counted the number of incidents of violence depicted in different or specific genres of film such as: action, comedy, drama and other, which included musicals, horror and fantasy films (Browne et al., 2002; Bufkin & Eschholz, 2000), comedy films (McIntosh et al., 2003), war films (Monk-Turner et al., 2004), and slasher films (Sapolsky et al., 2003). For example, using content analysis, Browne et al. (2002) “profile the violence that occurs in the films that compose the most popular (top-grossing) genres of 1994: comedy, drama, and action” (p. 351). Findings from this study showed there were a high number of violent acts portrayed in the films from all three genres studied:

The 14 action films with 658 violent acts had the highest mean (47.0 violent acts per film)... Comedy (41 films) displayed 586 violent actions and had the lowest mean (14.0 violent actions per film) among the 3 genres. Drama’s 26 films had 437 violent actions and a mean of 16.8 violent actions per film (pp. 354-355).

Based on these findings, Browne et al. stated that the most striking finding from their analysis of these films was the “recognition that violence in American film is not concentrated especially in the action genre but that it is widely distributed across the spectrum of popular types” (p. 366). In fact, the comedy and drama films in their sample accounted for more than 60 percent of the violence found in their analysis. This study shows that high levels of violence exist across the genres of film they studied.

In examining the prevalence of violence in film, some researchers examined whether the amount of violence in the sampled films was associated with their ratings.

For example, in their study of the 100 top grossing films of 1994, Jenkins et al. (2005) examined whether a possible relationship exists between the amount of violence and a film's rating. In their sample, 30 films were rated PG, 32 films had a rating of PG-13 and 36 films were rated R. Findings for their study showed that there were a total of 414 violent acts depicted in the PG rated films, 607 violent acts in the PG-13 films, and 1122 violent acts depicted in the R rated films. Their quantitative analysis showed there was a relationship between violence and ratings. Their findings showed that the "total average number of violent acts for each rating category increased from PG (14 acts) to PG-13 (20 acts) to R (32 acts)" (p. 514). However, when the researchers examined the range in number of violent acts for each rating category, their findings showed that the relationship between violence and ratings could only be considered a weak relationship. In fact, the range of violence in the PG rated films and the R rated films were quite similar: "PG films contained anywhere from a single act of violence to 97 acts of violence; R films were remarkably similar, ranging from 1 to 110 acts" (p. 514) and the PG-13 films contained violent acts ranging from 1 to 63 acts. These researchers were able to conclude that the amount of violence in the sampled films was not associated with their ratings.

Oliver and Kalyanaraman (2002) reached the same conclusion in their analysis of the prevalence of violence in 106 movie previews with ratings of G/PG, PG-13 and R. Within their sample, 24 of the previews were for G/PG rated films, 20 of the previews were for PG-13 rated films and a total of 61 previews were for R rated films. Findings from this study showed that overall the "majority of previews contained violence, and these portrayals were common across MPAA ratings (G/PG, PG-13, and R)" (p. 283).

Oliver and Kalyanaraman suggest that the findings from their analysis illustrate that many “movie previews unambiguously imply that what is ‘coming to a theatre near you’ is a film filled with images of violence” (p. 297), regardless of the films rating. Both Jenkins et al. (2005) and Oliver & Kalyanaraman (2002) show that high levels of violence exist across all different ratings of films they studied and, therefore, conclude that the rating of a film was not a good predictor as to whether the film was going to contain violence within their content.

The studies mentioned above have proved useful to my research. Each study has contributed a significant amount of knowledge about violence in film to the academic literature in their specific field. These studies illustrate the importance of analyzing the prevalence of violent portrayals by quantitatively examining the number of incidents of violence in different samples of film from a variety of different genres and/or ratings. Reviewing these studies led me to ask the following questions in my research: Do the films selected portray physical violence? Do the films selected portray sexual violence? What is the prevalence and rate of violence portrayed in the films selected for study? How would the films (individually) selected for study be classified in terms of genre? Are particular genres, as represented by particular films within my data set, associated with particular types or amounts of violence? Under what ratings are the films studied classified? Is the amount of violence in the films I have selected for study associated with their ratings?

### *Representations of Violence in Film*

Researchers often rely on qualitative methods in order to conduct in-depth analyses of how violence is represented in film texts. Researchers have examined representations of violence in a wide variety of film texts including: crime films, fantasy films, science fiction films, slasher films, and “post-feminist” films such as *Thelma and Louise*. Within this broad area of research, scholarly work has branched out into different areas. For example, some researchers have developed critical analyses of: (a) representations of violence against women in film (Cuklanz, 2000; Projansky, 2001); (b) the relationship between violence and representations of masculinity (Cuklanz, 2000; Tasker, 1993; Trice & Holland, 2001); representations of the “violent woman” (Dole, 2001; Grindstaff, 2001; Neroni, 2005; Vares, 2001); (d) the different ways in which violence is depicted in film (Browne et al., 2002; Bufkin & Eschholz, 2000; Clover, 1987; McArthur et al., 2000; Potter & Smith, 2000); and (e) the minimization of violence in film (Bufkin & Eschholz, 2000; Clover, 1987; Collins, 1992; Kim, 2004; Knaus, 2005; Naremore, 2001; Parks, 2003; Potter & Warren, 1998; Projansky, 2001). Of particular interest to my research are the last two research agendas outlined above: the depiction of violence in film and the minimization of violence in film.

Scholarly work has qualitatively examined representations of violence in film in order to describe the different ways in which violence is depicted in these texts. From this scholarly work, researchers have revealed many different ways to describe the manner in which violence is depicted in film, including: intentionality (Browne et al., 2002; McArthur et al., 2000), seriousness (Browne et al., 2002; Bufkin & Eschholz, 2000), and graphicness (Browne et al., 2002; Clover, 1987; Potter & Smith, 2000).

Examining a film's content for the different ways in which violence is depicted is important because, as Wilson et al. (2002) state, "an act of violence may be perceived quite differently if it is situated in a scene with, [for instance], a great deal of blood and gore rather than one devoid of such injury" (p. 15). Thus, it is important to examine the different ways that have been shown to describe the manner in which violence is depicted.

One of the first ways that has been shown to describe the manner in which violence is depicted is intentionality. The commission of an act of violence by an aggressor can be portrayed as either intentional or unintentional. An act of violence was assessed as intentional when the aggressor was portrayed as purposely committing the violent act (Browne et al., 2002). In contrast, an act of violence was assessed as unintentional when the aggressor accidentally committed the violent act (Browne et al., 2002). In a qualitative study by Browne et al. (2002), these researchers examined how violent acts were depicted in the 100 top-grossing films of 1994. To do this, the study explored whether the aggressor was portrayed as intentionally or unintentionally committing acts of violence. Findings from their study showed that the aggressor was overwhelmingly portrayed as intentionally committing the violent act. Likewise, McArthur et al. (2000) found in their analysis of the 100 top grossing films of 1994 that "violence was 10 times more frequently the result of intentional rather than unintentional acts, with 1991 intentional and 193 unintentional violent actions identified in the entire sample" (p. 121). The findings from these two studies show that, "for whatever reason, the initiator [of the violence] almost always intended to do harm to someone else" (Browne et al., 2002, p. 357).

The second way that has been shown to describe the manner in which violence is depicted is the seriousness of the violent act. The seriousness of the violence is measured by the degree of force used by the aggressor. According to Browne et al. (2002), to commit a violent act, the aggressor can be portrayed as using minimal force (i.e., pushing and punching), moderate force (i.e., hitting the victim with a weapon), and lethal force (i.e., potentially deadly violence). In their study, Browne et al. (2002) examined the depiction of violent actions in their sample of films by analyzing the seriousness of the violence. Findings from their study showed that, of the 2,184 violent acts portrayed in their sample, almost half (44 percent) of the aggressors used lethal force, whereas 37 percent of the aggressors used moderate force and less than a quarter (19 percent) used minimal force. Furthermore, Browne et al. found differences in the degree of force used across the three genres that comprised their sample: action, drama and comedy. The action films and dramas contained higher levels of violence involving lethal force whereas the comedies contained higher levels of violence involving only moderate force. Browne et al. concluded that the higher percentage of violent acts involving lethal force (48 percent) in the action films was due to the “genre magnifying the spectacular elements of the classic western and war film: ensemble fighting and pyrotechnical explosions” (p. 358). As for the drama films, they concluded that lethal force (45 percent) was most often used because of the “number of films in this genre that focus on such social problems as gangs, alcoholism, and drug abuse” (p. 358). In contrast to the action films and dramas, the comedies often portrayed the aggressor using a moderate degree of force (44 percent). Using moderate force reflects the comedy genre’s “long-standing generic conventions such as slapstick (humor [relying] on loud, crude, yet harmless,

back-and-forth slapping, hitting ... and boisterous horseplay between characters) and practical jokes (tricks played on characters to taunt, frustrate, or upset them for the fun of it)" (pp. 358-59). These findings reveal that, in most cases, the violence contained in these films was often portrayed as serious; however, as illustrated by this study, the seriousness of the violent acts was related to genre.

Similarly, Bufkin and Eschholz (2000) found that acts of violence are often portrayed in a serious manner. Using content analysis, Bufkin and Eschholz examined the nature of rape depictions in the 50 top-grossing films of 1996. From their analysis, they found a total of five depictions of rape in the films *A Time to Kill*, *Sleepers* and *Eye for an Eye*, with all five depictions of rape involving extremely brutal and sometimes lethal force. Bufkin and Eschholz concluded that the "fact that each of the five rapes was extremely brutal exemplifies the myth of the sadistic, psychologically disturbed rapist who preys on innocent victims for "sick" enjoyment" (p. 1332). Bufkin and Eschholz believe that "this unidimensional movie picture of rape may help to perpetuate the real problem of rape and sexual abuse in our society by ignoring the reality of most real life rapes" (p. 1317), that is, most rapes are usually perpetrated by known, "normal" assailants. The findings from these two studies show that acts of violence portrayed on screen are frequently represented in a very serious manner, usually involving lethal force that could potentially result in the death of the character.

The third way that has been shown to describe the manner in which violence is depicted is the graphicness of the violent act. An act of violence is considered to be graphic when the act "puts viewers into the action and shockingly depicts physical harm to the victims" (Potter & Smith, 2000, p. 302). The level of graphicness is directly



related to the framing of the violent action and the amount of blood and gore shown. In terms of framing, a filmmaker can show the action in close-up, long shot or off-screen.

As Potter and Smith (2000) state:

An extreme close-up of the perpetrator's finger squeezing the trigger, a close up of the perpetrator's evil eyes, and a close up of the bullet tearing through the flesh of the victim signal high graphicness. The same violent act would appear to viewers to be less graphic, if it were shown in a long shot. Graphicness can be further reduced by moving the action off screen, that is, viewers could hear the shot of a gun and the sound of a body hitting the ground, but the screen does not present this action (p. 302).

Thus, the level of graphicness can vary substantially by changing the way in which the violent act is framed. In terms of blood and gore, a filmmaker can show extreme, moderate, or mild amounts of blood and gore or not at all. As Potter and Smith state, a violent action is portrayed in a non-graphic manner when the victim is shown simply falling "to the ground when shot: the victim looks the same as before being shot except she is lying down with her eyes shut" (p. 302). In contrast, a violent action is portrayed in a highly graphic manner when the victim is shown "lying on the ground in a growing pool of blood flowing from gaping holes in the victim's flesh" (p. 302). Thus, a violent act's level of graphicness can vary substantially by controlling the amount of blood and gore depicted on-screen.

In their qualitative analysis of the most popular films of 1994, Browne et al. (2002) also examined the depiction of violent actions by analyzing the level of graphicness portrayed. Findings from their study showed that, of the 2,184 violent acts in their sample, the majority of the violence was low in graphicness, which means the films rarely depicted any blood or gore on-screen. Furthermore, findings showed that there were differences in the level of graphicness shown in the action, drama and comedy

genres. In the comedy genre, over half (51 percent) of the violent acts did not depict any blood or gore on the victim as a result of the violent act. Browne et al. believe that the “omission of explicit details of injury, [that is, blood and gore] ... appears to be a strategy for the preservation of comedic effect” (p. 360). In the drama genre, slightly less than half (44 percent) of the violent acts did show a mild amount of blood and gore but the “physical impact on the body [only resulted] in bruising or bleeding but [did] not plainly show any open wounds” (p. 360). Similarly, in the action genre, over half (54 percent) of the violent acts showed mild amounts of blood and gore as a result of violence. Based on this finding, Browne et al. believe that the “standard language of the [action] genre such as fast cutting and rapid action contributes to the lack of attention to impact and injury” (p. 360). The findings from this study reveal that the representation of violence in the top-grossing films of 1994 is overwhelmingly non-graphic in nature. As Browne et al. state, so far as the graphicness of “bodily injury from violent action is concerned, violence in Hollywood cinema would be the real-life equivalent of a high-speed 100-car wreck on an American freeway that resulted in cuts and broken bones. Hollywood flesh is indeed a special effect” (p. 361). So, as Browne et al. illustrate, the violence represented in the Hollywood film narrative is usually always serious in nature but rarely is ever graphic, which shows Hollywood’s fixation on inaccurately portraying the “true” consequences of violence.

Unlike the previously cited studies of graphicness, Clover (1987) did find many instances where violence is portrayed in a highly graphic manner. In her qualitative analysis of slasher films, Clover found differences in the graphicness of the violent deaths of males and females. According to Clover, males and females are equally killed in

slasher films. However, what differs is the death of a male victim is often portrayed less graphically than the death of a female victim:

The death of the male is always swift; even if the victim grasps what is happening to him, he has no time to react or register terror. He is dispatched and the camera moves on. The death of a male is moreover more likely than the death of a female to be viewed from a distance, or viewed only dimly (because of darkness or fog, for example), or indeed to happen off-screen and not be viewed at all. The murders of women, on the other hand, are filmed at closer range, in more graphic detail, and at greater length (pp. 200-01).

For example, in her analysis of the film *Halloween II*, one scene clearly illustrates the difference in the level of graphicness in the depictions of the death of a man versus the death of a woman. In this scene, an orderly and nurse sneak off to the therapy pool in order to have sex. As the orderly leaves the pool to check the temperature, which Michael Myers (Tony Moran), the killer, intentionally turned up, viewers immediately get to witness the death of the male orderly: “We see the orderly killed in two shots: the first at close range in the control room, just before the stabbing, and the second as he is being stabbed, through the vapors in a medium long-shot” (p. 201). After killing the orderly in a non-graphic manner, Michael Myers moves on to killing the female nurse in a highly graphic manner:

The nurse’s death, on the other hand, is shot entirely in medium close-up. The camera studies her face as it registers first her unwitting complicity (as the killer strokes her neck and shoulders from behind), then apprehension, and then, as she faces him, terror; we see the knife plunge into her repeatedly, hear her cries, and watch her blood fill the therapy pool (p. 201).

In this violent scene, the death of the female nurse was framed in close-up and the depiction of blood spilling into the pool around her make this a highly graphic portrayal of violence. In contrast, the death of the orderly was framed in long shot and there were

no traces of blood coming from his wound, therefore, his death would be considered low in graphicness.

The studies reviewed above have contributed a significant amount of knowledge to the academic literature about violence in film. These studies illustrate the importance of qualitatively analyzing the different ways to describe the manner in which violence is depicted in a wide sample of films such as intentionality, seriousness and graphicness. In my research, I examine the depiction of violence in film and, in addition, I examine how particular strategies are used to minimize the portrayal of violence.

Scholarly work has examined representations of violence in film by qualitatively examining how violence is minimized in film. Research in many different areas such as criminology, film studies, cultural studies, and other areas of the humanities, has shown that there are many ways in which film violence can be minimized. From this research, three specific strategies have been shown to minimize the portrayal of violence in film. The strategies of minimization identified in this literature include: self-defense (Clover, 1987; McCaughey, 1997; Parks, 2003; Projansky, 2001), good and evil (Bufkin & Eschholz, 2000; Kim, 2004; Knaus, 2005) and humour (Collins, 1992; Naremore, 2001; Parks, 2003; Potter & Warren, 1998). Although the studies I refer to do not specifically use the term “strategies of minimization,” I believe that their findings suggest that these strategies of violence result in the minimization of that violence.

The first strategy that has been shown to describe how violence could be minimized is “self-defense.” When conducting an analysis of the representations of violence in film or television, Parks (2003) argues that it is necessary to distinguish between offensive and defensive violence. Defensive violence will often be represented

as either self-defense (protecting yourself) or third-party defense (protecting other people such as friends and family). Distinguishing between offensive and defensive violence is important because, according to McCaughey (1997) and Parks (2003), self-defensive behaviour can be seen as a legitimate response to violence, especially when women are portrayed as defending themselves against male aggression.

The representation of self-defense as a legitimate response to the threat of violence is clearly evident in Projansky's (2001) critical analysis of the post-feminist film *Thelma and Louise*. Projansky argues that the film *Thelma and Louise* "offers at least four potential responses to sexual assault, each linked to women's self-preservation in a context of gendered and sexualized oppression: run from it, ignore it, defend oneself and get revenge for it, and learn from and about it" (p. 122). In one of the most pivotal scenes of the film, the scene where Thelma (Geena Davis) is raped in the back seat of a car by Harlan (Harvey Keitel), Louise's (Susan Sarandon) response to stop the rape from continuing was to defend Thelma, which Projansky calls "friend-defense" (p. 128), by eventually shooting Harlan in the back with a gun. Similarly, in her analysis of slasher films, Clover (1987) found a trend in these films in which the "survivor, or Final Girl" (p. 201) is portrayed as fighting back against the crazed killer. In the last scene of the slasher film *Halloween*, the "final girl" Laurie (Jamie Lee Curtis) is shown running away from the killer, Michael Myers. As Michael Myers enters the house where she is babysitting, Laurie begins to fight back and defends herself by stabbing him with a knitting needle. As Michael lies on the floor, presumably dead, Laurie goes upstairs to rescue the children but unknowingly, Michael is right behind her. Taking refuge in a closet, Laurie begins to bend a coat hanger into a weapon, which she eventually uses to defend herself by

stabbing the killer in the eye. Representing violence in the context of self-defense and third-party defense, as illustrated in the films *Thelma and Louise* and *Halloween*, is recognized by these scholars as an acceptable and legitimate use of violence and, based on my interpretation, the violence can be read as minimized in the context of my usage.

The second strategy that has been shown to describe how violent portrayals could be minimized in film is “good and evil.” An aggressor is classified as good “when they acted benevolently and were motivated to help others” (Wilson et al., 2002, p. 16). In contrast, an aggressor is classified as evil “when they acted primarily out of self-interest with little regard for others” (Wilson et al., 2002, p. 16). Classifying the aggressor as either good or evil often results in the violence being represented as a racialized conflict (Kim, 2004; Knaus, 2005). More specifically, the good/evil binary that is present in film is often reinforced by other social entrenched binaries, such as White/Black. In fact, “White” characters are more often portrayed as good and “Black” characters are portrayed as evil.

In a critical analysis of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001, 2002, 2003), Kim (2004) examines these films representations of good and evil. Kim found that within these films “goodness correlates to whiteness, both racially and as color scheme ... [while] evil is invariably black and savage” (p. 875). Therefore, in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, the filmmaker represents the violence as a battle between the good “White” characters and the evil “Black” characters. Kim argues that in this trilogy of films, the binary opposition of White/Black was used to signify good and evil. More specifically, Whiteness, in terms of skin colour and environmental surroundings is used to represent “good.” In contrast, Blackness, in terms of the dark colour of a character’s skin as well

as her/his dark environmental surroundings are used to represent “evil.” Throughout these films, the “White” good characters were in a constant violent battle with the “Black” evil characters who were trying to destroy the world. Similarly, in his critical analysis of *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, Knaus (2005) found representations of good and evil common to those described by Kim (2004). Knaus found that this film positions a large group of “White” characters up against a large group of “Black-skinned” creatures in which they violently battle each other in hand-to-hand combat. In summarizing his analysis of this film, Knaus states that:

To contrast the goodness of the main actors [who were all “white”], hordes of nameless people of color serve the familiar role of enemy. Perhaps we should not be surprised that the Orcs, Goblins, Trolls, Ringwraiths, Nazgul, and even the men who support the evil regime are dark skinned or dark clothed (p. 55).

Portraying Black or dark-skinned characters as representations of evil may affect how the violence committed against these evil characters is perceived. In fact, throughout the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, an act of violence committed against these evil Black characters would be interpreted as just and acceptable, especially when the good “White” characters were portrayed committing this violence. By representing the violence as just and acceptable, a viewer’s interpretation of the violent act, in my view, can be minimized.

In contrast to the findings of Kim (2004) and Knaus (2005), Bufkin and Eschholz (2000) did not find that Black or dark-skinned characters are portrayed as the evil aggressors of violence. Instead, in their analysis of the top-grossing films of 1996, Bufkin and Eschholz found that the six evil rapists in their sample were represented as White, “sadistic, disturbed, lower-class individuals who prey on children and the vulnerable” (p. 1317). In their research, Bufkin and Eschholz found many instances

where the good/evil binary was not reinforced by the White/Black binary. For example, in the film *A Time to Kill*, the White/Black binary was disrupted by representing some “Black” characters as good and “White” characters as evil. Although the findings do not support those of Kim (2004) and Knaus (2005), Bufkin and Eschholz did find that when a character is portrayed as evil, regardless of their race, the violence committed against them by a good character, in most cases, would be interpreted as just and acceptable. For example, in a textual analysis of the rape scene in the film *A Time to Kill*, Bufkin and Eschholz state:

The offender’s racist attitudes, intoxication, and disheveled appearance in conjunction with the absolute innocence of the brutally raped Tanya dramatize the battle between good and evil that constitutes the plot of the movie and *justifies* the killing of the offenders in a courthouse by Tanya’s father (p. 1335; emphasis added).

This finding shows that the portrayal of a violent act can be perceived differently when it is represented as a justifiable response to the violence of an evil character and, as a result, the violent act can be read as minimized.

The third strategy that has been shown to describe how violent portrayals could be minimized in a film text is “humour.” Potter and Warren (1998) state there are certain cues that allow viewers to recognize a scene as humorous. The most obvious cue is laughter such as a laugh track and/or the characters laughing, however, “in order for laughter to signal humor, it must be clear that those laughing find the situation funny” (p. 93). For instance, if a character laughs after every act of violence he/she commits, and no other characters are laughing, this act of violence would not be considered humorous even though there is laughter. This point is illustrated by Potter and Warren:

“Perpetrators might find their actions funny, but no one else does. For example, the



sadistic perpetrator, such as the Joker on Batman, finds his actions very funny, but the victims and the audience find no humor in the violence” (p. 93). Therefore, all characters involved in the violent incident must find the incident funny in order for the violent act to be considered humorous. Another cue for humour is based on the tone or mood in which violence takes place. An act of violence will be interpreted as humorous when viewers are clearly being told through the tone and mood of the scene that the violence is not to be taken seriously. An example of this can be found in any of the *Three Stooges* films. Throughout a *Three Stooges* film, there are usually many depictions of violence, however, “because of their farcical [and exaggerated] nature, the audience recognizes that these [violent] portrayals are meant to be humorous” (Potter & Warren, 1998, p. 93). Therefore, the tone of a scene offers important cues as to whether the violent scene will be interpreted as humorous. In their analysis of television programs, Potter and Warren (1998) found that some of the violence (31 percent) portrayed in their sample was presented in a humorous context. Most of the violence was seen as humorous when it was presented as farcical in nature. They found that the comedy television programs portrayed more violent acts in a humorous context than the non-comedy television programs. In fact, “within the comedy genre, 85.9% of the violent acts were in a humorous context. Within non-comedy programs, there were still 253 violent acts presented in a humorous context, but this accounted for only 6.2% of all violent acts in those shows” (p. 50).<sup>1</sup> In conclusion, representing an act of violence as humorous

---

<sup>1</sup> It is important for me to acknowledge that television and film are completely different mediums. However, I will only discuss this literature on the presence of humour in television as a framework for what may appear in film.

through laughter and tone “undermines the seriousness of the enacted violence” (Browne et al., 2002, p. 359) and, as a result, minimizes how a viewer may interpret that violence.

The presence of humour in a film is not exclusive to the comedy genre. In fact, comedic violence can be found in other genres such as action, fantasy, and science fiction. A possible reason for the presence of a humour can be explained by the fact that films have increasingly become made up of bits and pieces of genres rather than being made up of one “pure” genre. This refers to what Parks (2003) calls “generic hybridity.” In Parks’ study of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, she comments that: “In *Buffy* violence is fickle. This is related in part to the generic hybridity of the series: its ‘spasms of viciousness’ are punctuated by the conventions of the soap opera, horror, comedy, music video, action, and sci-fi genres” (p. 122). This idea of “generic hybridity” can be found in many different film texts and can “occur within scenes as well as across scenes, sometimes oscillating on a line-by-line basis, or across episodes” (Collins, 1992, pp. 345-346). As a film moves through the different generic conventions, the violence depicted will change depending on shifting generic codes. As Naremore (2001) puts it, a scene of violence portrayed in a film can be “frightening, perverse, and funny [all] *at the same time*” (p. 13; emphasis in the original). Thus, when comedic conventions are activated, this results in the act of violence being interpreted as humorous rather than a serious form of violence and, as a result, a viewer’s perception of the violence can be minimized.

The studies reviewed above have contributed a significant amount of knowledge to the academic literature by critically analyzing representations of violence in film. These studies illustrate the importance of qualitatively analyzing the strategies of violence such as self-defense, good and evil, and humour. By doing this, research can

identify how these and other strategies may be used in a film text to minimize the portrayal of violence within their narratives. Reviewing these studies has led me to ask the following questions in my research: Is violence minimized within the narrative of the films selected for study? If so, what strategies do I read as being employed in these films to minimize the violence? How are these strategies of minimization manifested in the text? What effect do these strategies of minimization have on the film text? How might we read these strategies of minimization as being meaningful to the film text? Do the strategies of minimization employed in the films appear consistently across genres or are some of these strategies frequently associated with a particular genre? Do the strategies of minimization employed in the films appear consistently across ratings or are some of these strategies frequently associated with a particular rating (i.e., a lower rating such as G and PG films)?

### ***Conclusion***

As evidenced by this review, there are many different ways that the portrayal of violence in film has been studied by academics. The scholarly works I have reviewed represent a diverse collection of studies that examine violence in film. In particular, I have reviewed two strains of research that examine the portrayal of violence in film: first, quantitative studies that examine the prevalence of violence in films and second, qualitative studies that examine representations of violence in film, which focus on the depiction of violent portrayals and the minimization of violence. Performing this review of the literature helped me to situate my research in the context of other scholarly work.

The next chapter discusses how poststructuralism, particularly the work of Jacques Derrida, is used in the development of a theoretical framework for my research.

## 1.2

## Theoretical Framework

***Poststructuralism***

Poststructuralism is a movement that emerged in France during the late 1960s. Poststructuralism does not have one fixed meaning. Instead, poststructuralism consists of a vast range of theoretical positions developed from the work of such theorists as Jacques Derrida (1973, 1976, 1978, 1979, 1981a, 1981b, 1982, 1984, 1988a, 1988b), Roland Barthes (1968, 1977), Julia Kristeva (1967/1980, 1986), and Michel Foucault (1972, 1979, 1980). The work conducted by these theorists varies, however, as poststructuralists they each perform “explicit critiques of the central figures and the cardinal concepts of structuralism” (Stam et. al, 1992, p. 23). The critique performed by Derrida is thought to have launched the poststructuralist “movement:” “It is Derrida who is often associated most closely with post-structuralism, precisely because it is he who has most carefully investigated and exposed the contradictions and paradoxes upon which structuralism is formed” (Young, 1981, p. 15). In this chapter, I outline the critique and revisions Derrida made to structuralism and discuss how these have been useful to my research.

The beginnings of poststructuralism are often located at a conference held at John Hopkins University in Baltimore in 1966 where Jacques Derrida presented a paper entitled “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” (Rorty, 1995). This conference “set out to offer a critical introduction to structuralism as what American critics might have viewed as another ‘approach’ to literature, presumably to be welcomed as an alternative to weary native versions of formalism” (Adams & Searle, 1986, p. 79).

Instead, Jacques Derrida used this conference as a platform to introduce his idea of deconstruction and to “offer an incisive critique of the notion of “structure” ... in which Derrida called for a “decentering” of structures” (Stam et al., 1992, p. 23). To understand Derrida’s work, it is thus necessary to briefly review the foundations of structuralism.

Poststructuralism critiques and radically revises many of the key assumptions of structuralism, mainly developed from the work of the structural linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. One of the fundamental insights of structuralism, which is also fundamental to poststructuralism, is de Saussure’s “research on the nature of language inspired by the theory of the ... sign” (Lechte, 1994, p. 149). The linguistic sign, according to de Saussure (1959), is the “combination of a concept and a sound-image” (p. 67). The “concept” component of the linguistic sign refers to the mental construct that the sound-image conveys to the reader (Chandler, 2002). The “sound-image” component of the linguistic sign refers to the “psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses” (de Saussure, 1959, p. 66). de Saussure replaces the term sound-image with signifier and replaces the term concept with signified; the linguistic sign is composed of a signifier (sound-image) and a signified (concept). For example, “the three black marks *C—A—T* are a signifier which evoke the signified “cat” in an English mind” (Eagleton, 1996, p. 84; italics in original).

For de Saussure, one of the most important aspects of the language system is the notion that:

There are only differences...Saussure argued that language is nothing more than a series of phonetic differences matched with a series of conceptual differences. Concepts, therefore, are purely differential, defined not by their positive content, but rather by their relation with other terms of the system: Their most precise characteristic is in being what the

other[s] are not ... (as cited in Stam, Burgoyne & Flitterman-Lewis, 1992, p. 18).

In the language system, “everything depends on relations” (de Saussure, 1983, p. 121). de Saussure claims that the meaning of signs is not intrinsic but is purely relational. That is, each sign in the language system “derives its meaning from its difference from all the other signs in the language chain. [For example,] it is not anything intrinsic to the signifier ‘whore’ ... that gives it its meaning, but rather its difference from other signifiers of womanhood such as ‘virgin’” (Weedon, 1987, p. 23). de Saussure (1959) states that within the language system there are only differences, however, differences are only visible in the comparison of two signifiers (sound-images) or two signifieds (concepts): “Although both the signified and the signifier are purely differential and negative when considered separately ... when we consider the sign in its totality, we have something that is positive in its own class” (p. 120). Therefore, it is not possible to speak of the difference between signs when comparing two signs with each other:

When we compare signs with each other, we can no longer speak of difference; the expression would not be fitting, for it applies only to the comparing of two sound-images, e.g., father and mother, or two ideas, e.g., the idea “father” and the idea “mother”; two signs, each having a signified and signifier, are not different but only distinct. Between them there is only opposition. The entire mechanism of language ... is based on oppositions of this kind and on the phonic and conceptual differences that they imply (p. 121).

Throughout the book *Course in General Linguistics*, de Saussure highlights how the language system is composed solely of functional differences and oppositions (Chandler, 2002). An example of the opposition between two signs can be seen when comparing “rich” and “poor.” In order for the word rich to have any meaning, it is necessary for the word poor to stand in opposition to the word rich. That is, the meaning of rich is relative

to the meaning of its opposite, poor. The relationship between two signs is therefore oppositional. Derrida, however, does not believe you should be satisfied with accepting the relationship between two signs as oppositional. Instead, Derrida believes it is necessary to expose the inadequacies and contradictions of these oppositions through what he calls “deconstruction,” which I discuss later in this chapter.

Another important aspect of de Saussure’s theory of the sign is his belief that the meaning of the signifier is “fixed.” Therefore, for de Saussure, the meaning of a sign will always be present in the signifier because the meaning of the signifier cannot be changed. For de Saussure (1959), the “signifier ... is fixed, not free, with respect to the linguistic community that uses it. The masses have no voice in the matter, and the signifier chosen by language could be replaced by no other” (p. 71). However, Derrida does not take the same position. In fact, according to Eagleton (1996):

Derrida questions Saussure’s view of the sign as a neat symmetrical unity between one signifier and one signified. For a signified is really the product of a complex interaction of signifiers, which has no obvious end-point. Meaning is the spin-off of a potentially endless play of signifiers, rather than a concept tied firmly to the tail of a particular signifier. The signifier does not yield us up a signified directly, as a mirror yields up an image: there is no harmonious one-to-one set of correspondences between the level of the signifiers and the level of the signifieds in language (pp. 110–111).

In general, Derrida claims that a signifier produces only other signifiers, instead of a signified. According to Bennington and Derrida (1993), “every signifier functions by referring to other signifiers, without one ever arriving at a signified. Look up the signified of an unknown signifier in the dictionary and you find more signifiers, never any signifieds” (p. 33). For example, if you were to look up the meaning of the word “cat” in the dictionary, the definition you will find is: “any of a family (Felidae) of



carnivorous usually solitary and nocturnal mammals (as the domestic cat, lion, tiger, leopard, jaguar, cougar, wildcat, lynx, and cheetah)” (Merriam-Webster Online, 2008). However, in order to understand this definition, you need to know what the words “carnivorous,” “nocturnal,” “mammals,” “lion,” “tiger,” etc, mean. Therefore, it is necessary for you to look these words up in the dictionary, but you will only find other signifiers. This process continues in a circular fashion and will never result in you arriving at a final signified or “true” meaning. This circularity underscores Derrida’s argument that meaning is never fully present in a sign and thus, can never be fixed.

Derrida claims “that a meaning can never be completely fixed or determined” (Ijsseling, 1995, p. 96) because this would imply that meaning can never change. For Derrida, the problem with de Saussure’s idea that the meaning of a signifier is fixed is that it “does not account for the plurality of meaning or changes in meaning. It cannot account for why the signifier ‘woman’ can have many conflicting meanings which change over time” (Weedon, 1987, p. 24). Derrida adopts de Saussure’s fundamental idea that in language there are only differences. However, Derrida incorporates his own additional elements into this idea of “difference.” To do this, Derrida “replaces the fixed signifieds of de Saussure’s chains of signs with a concept of *différance* in which meaning is produced via the dual strategies of difference and deferral” (p. 25). The term *différance*, as coined by Derrida, uses the French verb *differer* which can mean either “to differ” or “to defer” (Derrida, 1973):

The French verb *differer* bears two quite distinct significations. One has a reference to spatiality, as the English “to differ” — to be at variance, to be unlike, apart, dissimilar, distinct in nature or quality from something.... The other signification has a reference to temporality, as in the English “to defer” — to put off action to a future time, to delay or postpone (Allison, 1973, p. 82).

Derrida's term *différance* implies that "meaning is always both dependent upon a signifier's *difference* from other signifiers and constantly *deferred* from one signifier to another in an endless chain" (Burr, 1995, p. 105–106, emphasis added). Thus, a signifier's meaning will always depend on its difference from other signifiers, it will always be deferred. Derrida strongly argues that meaning can never be fixed, which implies there can never be a "truth."

### ***Derrida's Vocabulary of Deconstruction***

Drawing from the work of Derrida, my research is provided with an extensive vocabulary to aid in the study of my perception of the minimization of violence in film texts. From this vocabulary, I draw upon Derrida's ideas about texts and meaning and how they are connected to what he calls "deconstruction."

Since Derrida first introduced deconstruction, many commentators (Barry, 1995; Berman, 1988; Chandler, 2002; Kamuf, 1997; Phillips, 2006; Wolfreys, 2004) have attempted to define it as either a method of reading or a school of criticism. However, Derrida has never presented deconstruction in a way which allows it to be defined precisely. In fact, Derrida (1988a) has commented that "all sentences of the type, 'deconstruction is X' or 'deconstruction is not X', *a priori*, miss the point, which is to say that they are at least false" (p. 4). Although Derrida has never provided a definition of deconstruction, this has not stopped many commentators from attempting to provide a definition of their own. Many of them have attempted to understand deconstruction in a way that allows them to define it as a method for reading a text. Derrida (1984) however,

continually stated that he did not believe deconstruction could function as a method of reading:

I am not sure that deconstruction can function as a literary method as such. I am wary of the idea of methods of reading. The laws of reading are determined by that particular text that is being read. This does not mean that we should simply abandon ourselves to the text, or represent or repeat it in a purely passive manner. It means that we must remain faithful, even if it implies a certain violence, to the injunctions of the text. These injunctions will differ from one text to the next so that one cannot prescribe one general method or reading. In this sense deconstruction is not a method (p. 124).

For Derrida, the act of reading a text must be “singular.” Therefore, a reader cannot attempt to establish a theory of reading consisting of specific methods “which could then be practiced on any number of texts in the same predictable manner” (Wolfe, 1998, p. 54). For Derrida, the strategy of a deconstructive reading should be contoured to a specific text, rather than adopted as a general method that could be applied to all texts (i.e., philosophical texts, literary texts, cultural texts, etc.).

Even though Derrida proclaimed that deconstruction could not be made into a method for reading, he did demonstrate “some typical deconstructive moves” (Norris, 1987, p. 19) when engaging in the deconstruction of various literary texts. These typical deconstructive moves consisted of:

Dismantling of conceptual oppositions, the taking apart of hierarchical systems of thought which can then be *reinscribed* within a different order of textual signification.... The vigilant seeking-out of those ‘aporias’, blindspots or moments of self-contradiction where a text involuntarily betrays the tension between rhetoric and logic, between what it manifestly *means to say* and what it is nonetheless *constrained to mean*. To ‘deconstruct’ a piece of writing is therefore to operate a kind of strategic reversal, seizing on precisely those unregarded details (casual metaphors, footnotes, incidental turns of argument) which are always, and necessarily, passed over by interpreters of a more orthodox persuasion. For it is here, in the margins of the text – the ‘margins’, that is, as defined by a powerful

normative consensus – that deconstruction discovers those same unsettling forces at work (Norris, 1987, p. 19).

These typical deconstructive moves can be seen as a “kind of *general strategy of deconstruction*” (Derrida, 1981b, p. 41). In my thesis, I use these typical deconstructive moves to deconstruct the binary oppositions that appear in the selected film texts.

“Binary oppositions” and “violent hierarchy” are important terms in the vocabulary of deconstruction. According to Derrida, Western thought is structured “around a series of binaries in which one member of the pair is privileged, and the other is fixed in a secondary position. The subordinated item of the pair is inevitably conceived only in opposition to the privileged term; it delineates the boundaries of the privileged concept by showing what the privileged concept is not” (Eichner, 2001, p. 36). Derrida deems it necessary for all theorists to question the “structure of binary oppositions. He invites us to undo the need for balanced equations, to see if each term in an opposition is not, after all, an accomplice of the other” (Sarup, 1989, p. 43). Derrida shows that some theorists, particularly the work of de Saussure and Claude Levi-Strauss, adopt binary oppositions such as signified/signifier and speech/writing throughout their work and do not attempt to expose the contradictions and inadequacies within these oppositions. For instance, “structuralism was generally satisfied if it could carve up a text into binary oppositions (high/low, light/dark, Nature/Culture and so on) and expose the logic of their working” (Eagleton, 1996, p. 115). Thus, Derrida has been extremely critical of structuralism for not attempting to deconstruct these types of binaries.

A general strategy of deconstruction often involves identifying binary oppositions that are embedded in a text. According to Derrida (1981b), this general strategy attempts to “avoid both simply *neutralizing* the binary oppositions of metaphysics and simply

*residing* within the closed field of these oppositions, thereby confirming it” (p. 41).

Instead, Derrida states:

We must transverse a phase of *overturning*. To do justice to this necessity is to recognize that in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis*, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiological, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand. To deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment (p. 41).

Besides identifying the binary oppositions that are embedded in a text, the general strategy of deconstruction is also concerned with acknowledging that binary oppositions always entail a violent hierarchy, where one side of the binary is always privileged over the other. An example of a violent hierarchy is evidenced in the binary opposition of man versus woman:

According to Derrida, the relationship between “man” and “woman” is one of the primary binaries that structures Western thought. The category “man” is privileged over “woman” and is conceived of as “normal” and “whole.” In contrast, “woman” is seen only in contrast to the privileged male term and only defines the boundaries of the category “man” through what is *not* woman: for example, if women are weak, men must be strong; if women are irrational, men must be rational (Eichner, 2001, p. 36).

For Derrida, this and all binary oppositions need to be deconstructed. Deconstructing a text involves overthrowing and transforming violent hierarchies by dismantling and exposing their contradictions.

The move to deconstruct these binary oppositions begins “first by a *reversal* of the opposition.... But this is not sufficient: the opposition is not to be simply reversed ... there must be a transformation of the hierarchical structure. Thus, reversal is followed by a second phase of reinscription, displacement, or reconstruction” (Evans, 1991, p. 52). The purpose of this second phase is to discover any contradictory aspects in the text that will help to dismantle these oppositions. According to Eagleton (1996):

Derrida's own typical habit of reading is to seize on some apparently peripheral fragment in the work – a footnote, a recurrent minor term or image, a casual allusion – and work it tenaciously through to the point where it threatens to dismantle the oppositions which govern the text as a whole. The tactic of [deconstruction] ... is to show how texts come to embarrass their own ruling systems of logic; and deconstruction shows this by fastening on the “symptomatic” points, the *aporia* or impasses of meaning, where texts get into trouble, come unstuck, offer to contradict themselves (p. 116).

Identifying the contradictions that exist within binary oppositions helps to dismantle the violent hierarchy of meaning that often results from these oppositions. For example, a film text may disrupt the binary opposition hero/villain when the hero is portrayed as suffering from an internal struggle between good and evil. More specifically, the hero, who is often portrayed as “good” and willing to risk his/her life to save others is sometimes portrayed as being unable to resist the power of evil. In such cases, a contradiction exists within the hero/villain binary: the hero is frequently portrayed as committing both good and evil acts throughout the text.

In my thesis, I deconstruct binary oppositions such as hero/villain, White/Black and lower class/upper class found in my selected film texts. I also attempt to dismantle the violent hierarchies that result from these binary oppositions in order to show how the film texts may disrupt traditional binary oppositions. The ideas I have taken from Derrida's vocabulary of deconstruction have led me to ask the following research questions: Do the films selected use binary oppositions when portraying violence? If so, how do these binary oppositions (e.g., hero/villain) develop into a violent hierarchy within the film texts (e.g., how is the “hero” privileged while the “villain” is marginalized)? Are binary oppositions used in the films I have selected for study in order to minimize the portrayals of violence? Among the films selected, are certain binary

oppositions prevalent within or exclusive to a particular genre? If so, how do these binary oppositions develop into a violent hierarchy within that particular genre? In what ways can these binary oppositions and the resulting violent hierarchy be deconstructed? How does deconstructing such binary oppositions and overthrowing the violent hierarchies therein potentially change the reading of a film text?

In poststructuralist theory, the “context” of a given text is recognized as a fundamental element in how the text communicates meaning to its readers. That is, many poststructuralists believe that a text cannot signify in a unified way across different times, places and readings. Instead, many poststructuralists, including Derrida, believe that all signifying relationships are contextual. This pluralistic way of looking at meaning, which is fundamental to Derridean philosophy, allows readers to develop multiple interpretations of any text and also allows for meaning to change depending on the context in which it is produced and consumed. The idea that meaning is plural and contextual is one that I have taken from Derrida.

For Derrida, the meaning of a text is dependent on its “context.” In fact, Derrida (1979) writes that “no meaning can be determined out of context” (p. 81). That is, the meaning of signs depends on the “context of production and the ... context of reception” (Bennington & Derrida, 1993, p. 86). Derrida argues that the context in which the “signifier, word, or text occurs ... is variable and boundless” (Lapsley & Westlake, 1988, p. 63). The context of a text is constantly changing and thus, “can never be absolutely determined or saturated” (Derrida, 1982, p. 33). Derrida’s ideas regarding meaning and context are summed up by Culler (1982):

Meaning is context-bound but context is boundless ... meaning is context-bound, so intentions do not in fact suffice to determine meaning;

context must be mobilized. But context is boundless, so accounts of context never provide full determinations of meaning. Against any set of formulations, one can imagine further possibilities of context (p. 128).

That is, context is constantly changing and, therefore, there are always more potential contexts through which the text can be read. Through the constant changing of context, the meaning of a text will change. However, because context is constantly changing, no particular meaning can be pinned down as “true.”

Derrida’s emphasis on the idea that meaning is plural and contextual is related to the deconstructive concept of “iterability.” For Derrida, the concept of iterability refers to how the meaning of a sign “must always be repeatable or reproducible” (Eagleton, 1996, p. 112). In fact, Derrida believes that iterability is “essential to meaning” (Wheeler, 2000, p. 10). Without iterability, a sign would have no meaning because it could not be repeated in other contexts, and thus, would not remain legible or functional after the author is absent. According to Critchley (1992):

The written sign always exceeds its context; for it must, by virtue of its iterability (repeatability), perdure beyond the present moment of its inscription and even after the death of its author. Furthermore, a text can be quoted in other contexts, and enter into new contexts (p. 34).

In order for a sign to have meaning, it has to be recognizable even if the prior meaning changes. However, as soon as a sign is repeated in a new context its meaning will change. The idea that the meaning of a sign changes when it is interpreted in a new context leads into the second feature of Derrida’s concept of iterability, which is “alteration.” The concept of iterability, as coined by Derrida, means both the ability of a sign to be repeatable, as well an acknowledgement that with every repetition there will be an alteration of the prior meanings of the sign. “Iterability” suggests that “for a thing to be what ‘it’ is, it must be able to be repeated.... The important point ... is that repetition is



never pure; it always leads to alteration. To repeat something is to alter it, to make a difference” (Lucy, 2004, p. 59). An example of Derrida’s idea of iterability is provided by Eagleton (1996) in a passage in which he discusses how the meaning of the sign “cat” will change when located in a new context:

It is difficult to know what a sign ‘originally’ means, what its ‘original’ context was: we simply encounter it in many different situations, and although it must maintain a certain consistency across those situations in order to be an identifiable sign at all because its context is always different it is never absolutely the same, never quite identical with itself. ‘Cat’ may mean a furry four-legged creature, a malicious person, a knotted whip, an American, a horizontal beam for raising a ship’s anchor, a six-legged tripod, a short tapered stick, and so on. But even when it just means a furry four-legged animal, this meaning will never quite stay the same from context to context (p. 112).

This example demonstrates how the sign is always repeatable in order for the sign to be understood. However, with every repetition of a sign, there will also be an alteration of that sign when located in a new/different context.

Iterability allows for readers to interpret the meaning of a sign differently. This also reveals why Derrida believes meaning is always indeterminate and emphasizes that no context can ever provide proof of a final meaning. In fact, according to Lechte (1994), “if meaning is related to context, there is, with respect to the very structure of language, no proper context to provide proof of a final meaning” (p. 109). Because a sign or text can be read at a different place and a different time (i.e., in a different context), the sign or text can have no final meaning that reflects a singular “truth.”

Derrida claims that the process of reading a text involves revealing the endless chain of meaning that appears within the text, however, the meaning can only reflect each reader’s interpretation (Hollinger, 1994). The readers’ interpretation of a text can never

be final, and, as a result, the reader can never claim that their interpretation is correct.

For Derrida:

The idea of a or the correct interpretation presupposes a number of conditions that are unrealizable, namely, that a text or an event is objective and determinate because it refers to objective reality or has a determinate meaning or the author or actor had determinate intentions that can be objectively discovered. Derrida denies these assumptions (Hollinger, 1994, p. 101).

It is important to recognize that the readers' interpretations of a text can never be correct because as soon as a reader claims their interpretations are the right one this would imply that meaning is fixed. For Derrida, the meaning of a text will always be open to reinterpretation. Thus, different readers can develop different and even conflicting interpretations of the same text. An example of this is illustrated in "Plato's frequent presentation of writing as a drug, *pharmakon*. This Greek word can mean either "poison" or "cure" and, as with a drug, which way it is taken (translated) makes a lot of difference" (Sarup, 1989, p. 58). It is important to notice that there are two possible ways to interpret this Greek word and thus, which way a reader interprets the word will result in a change to its meaning.

Although Derrida believes that the context is variable and boundless, for my research, I focus solely on the context of production and the context of my reception. The context of production refers to the time and place of the film text's production. Therefore, the meaning of the violence being produced in the film texts may have been influenced by: (a) who made the film (e.g., writer, producers, director, actors); (b) the year the film was made (e.g., whether there were any political or economic circumstances that may have occurred around the time the film was being made that could have

influenced the meaning being produced by the filmmakers); (c) the country in which the film was made; and (d) the studio or network that provided funding for the film.

The context of reception refers to the time and place of a particular reception of the film text. Understanding the meaning of violence in the different film texts depends upon who is examining the film, where and when. As argued by Mayes-Elma (2006), a viewer will interpret a film text “from his or her own perspective due to his or her background, socialization, morals, values, assumptions, and so forth. As a result, each [viewer] may interpret the same pieces of data [in the film] differently” (p. 70). In summary, different viewers will understand a film text differently depending on the experiences they bring to the viewing of a film. However, for my research, I will only be able to account for my own interpretations of the film texts. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the same viewer may have different interpretations of a text depending on the different place and time the viewer reads the text. For example, my own interpretations of the sampled film texts may change and be different after I conduct this research project.

The ideas of plurality of meaning and context I have taken from Derrida’s vocabulary of deconstruction led me to ask the following research questions: How does the context (i.e., time and place the film was produced) of each film affect the violence represented within it? How does the context (i.e., time and place the film was produced) of each film relate to the strategies of minimization employed? How do I read the meaning of the violent actions portrayed as shifting when compared across different historical contexts of the films production (e.g., how does the meaning of a punch change when compared across the different decades the films were produced in [70s, 80s, 90s, &

2000s])? How does the time and place in which I view the films (i.e., context of my reception) affect my interpretation of the violence portrayed (i.e., what experiences did I bring to the viewing of the film that could affect my interpretations of the violence)?

Different forms of poststructuralism (i.e., Foucauldian theory, psychoanalytic forms of poststructuralism, deconstruction) can be differentiated from one another according to how they theorize the production of meaning in language (Weedon, 1987). For Derrida, the production of meaning is theorized according to the “relationship between different texts” (Weedon, 1987, p. 22), which he refers to as “intertextuality.” Intertextuality is another important concept I have taken from Derrida’s vocabulary of deconstruction. Julia Kristeva is usually credited with coining the term intertextuality. According to Kristeva (1967/1980), the concept of intertextuality proposes that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; in addition, any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (p. 66). All texts borrow material from other texts and may transform this material by creating new and different meanings from it. The concept of intertextuality is recognized by many poststructuralists as a key feature in “every” text (Barthes, 1977; Derrida, 1976; Kristeva, 1967/1980). In fact, according to Sarup (1989), “just as signs refer only to other signs, texts can refer only to other texts, generating an intersecting and indefinitely expandable web called intertextuality” (p. 57-58). The idea that texts refer to other texts is illustrated by Derrida’s (1976) statement that “there is nothing outside the text” (p. 163). According to Brooker (2003), this statement can be understood in two different ways:

As countenancing a narrow formalism that sees nothing – neither a ‘real world’ nor ‘context’ – outside of the (single) text, or as affirming the play of meaning across interconnected texts. Derrida’s writings would suggest the second: an understanding of the inevitable interweaving of textual

threads across the borders of single texts and of the textual representation of all thought (p. 250).

Interconnection is an important feature of all texts for Derrida. In fact, all texts are intertextual in that “they bear along with them a whole network of articulated themes and assumptions whose meaning everywhere links up with other texts, other genres or topics of discourse... Writing, in short, is *intertextual* through and through” (Norris, 1987, pp. 25-26). Although Derrida rarely explicitly uses the term intertextuality in his work, the concept has come to be associated with his assertion that a relationship exists between various texts, one in which a text is interconnected to all other types of texts (Ijsseling, 1995). Examining how a text is interconnected to other texts is precisely what I will examine in my reading of the portrayal of violence across my data set.

For Derrida, intertextuality is an important component of a deconstructive reading, and therefore, provides my research with “a way in which to read the [film] text through all other texts ... which inform its production both implicit and explicitly” (Byers, 2000, p. 23). In fact, deconstruction suggests that all readers understand texts intertextually.

According to many poststructuralists:

No text can be read outside its relations to other, already extant texts. Neither the text nor its reader can escape this intertextual web of relationships that causes the reader to have certain expectations about both the content and the form [i.e., genre] of the work(s) he or she is reading.... In poststructuralist accounts of the relationships between texts, texts are assumed to refer only to other texts and not to any empirical, nontextual reality (Childers & Hentzi, 1995, p. 159).

The intertextual relationship between various texts can take on a variety of forms (Ijsseling, 1995). For the purposes of my research, it may involve: the filmmaker of the text borrowing and transforming the material of a prior text, a previous role of a film star being carried over from one film to another by the viewer’s “filmic memory” (Denzin,

1994), or the viewer's previous experiences with other film texts within the same genre or rating, which may cause viewers to have certain expectations about the film text. Thus, it is necessary in my capacity as both a reader and scholar to provide a reading of the texts I am studying, specifically film texts, based on the intertextual relationships that are characteristic of every text.

The importance of the concept of intertextuality and how it connects to deconstruction has led me to ask the following research questions: Are there intertextual links between the films I have selected for study; for example, are there intertextual links in the way that the violence is portrayed within these film narratives? Are there intertextual links between the films I have selected for study in relation to the strategies of minimization I see as being employed? What intertextual links exist within and across genres represented in my sample of films, in relation to the violence portrayed as well as the strategies of minimization employed? How might the intertextual links that exist within and across genres encourage me, as a viewer, to have certain expectations about both the content and the form of films belonging to particular genres? What intertextual links do I see existing within and across films with the same ratings, in relation to the violence portrayed in the films as well as the strategies of minimization employed? How might the intertextual links that exist within and across films with the same ratings encourage me, as a viewer, to have certain expectations about the content of films belonging to particular ratings?

## ***Conclusion***

Working within Derrida's vocabulary of deconstruction, I argue that the narratives or stories that filmmakers tell about violence do not exist in "real" space and can never make up some "truth" about violence. Instead, the meaning of film violence will always be dependent on the context in which it is produced and understood. In this thesis, I explore how a variety of strategies such as motives, humorous undertones, good and evil, and graphicness are portrayed in these blockbuster films. I argue that these strategies are (or are not) successful in minimizing how I, as a viewer, perceive the violence contained in the film narrative. To do this, it was necessary for me to answer the research questions I have posed thus far. To answer these research questions, certain methods of analysis are required to conduct an examination of the violence represented in the selected film texts. The methods of analysis I use in this thesis are discussed in the next chapter.

## 1.3

## Methodology

***Data Collection***

For my research, I analyzed the twenty-five top grossing films of all-time, worldwide, as of July 2003 drawn from the list provided by the website <http://www.boxofficereport.com>. In order for a film to be classified as a top grosser, it had to have grossed over \$200 million in revenue at the worldwide box office (Box Office Report, 2003). Based on this criteria, 261 films on this list were considered “top grossing.” My sample was limited to the top 25 grossing films of all-time taken from the list of the 261 top grossing films. Because I was restricted by time and financial resources, I chose the top 25 in order to create a reasonable sample size. The 25 films selected for my analysis were (see Reference List for complete references of all the films):

- (1) *Titanic* (1997)
- (2) *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003)
- (3) *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (2001)
- (4) *Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace* (1999)
- (5) *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002)
- (6) *Jurassic Park* (1993)
- (7) *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002)
- (8) *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001)
- (9) *Finding Nemo* (2003)
- (10) *Independence Day* (1996)



- (11) *Spider-Man* (2002)
- (12) *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope* (1977)
- (13) *The Lion King* (1994)
- (14) *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982)
- (15) *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003)
- (16) *Shrek 2* (2004)
- (17) *Forrest Gump* (1994)
- (18) *The Sixth Sense* (1999)
- (19) *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003)
- (20) *Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones* (2002)
- (21) *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004)
- (22) *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (1997)
- (23) *The Passion of the Christ* (2004)
- (24) *Men In Black* (1997)
- (25) *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi* (1983)

The individual grosses of these twenty-five films ranged from \$572.9 million to \$1,835.4 million. The films grossed \$20,359.1 million, in total, worldwide.

The twenty-five films chosen for my research varied in terms of genre, year of production, and Maritime Film Classification rating (Alcohol & Gaming Authority, 2005). The films selected for my sample differed generically, however, the most common genres were fantasy (11 films), science fiction (11 films) and historical fiction (3 films). The year in which these films were released to theatres ranged from the 1970s to 2000s. The majority (64 percent) of the films selected had a rating of PG. The diversity of the films

in my sample allowed me to examine whether the strategies of minimization used in a film text appeared consistently across genres and years of production or whether some of these strategies were associated with a particular genre or era.

The unit of analysis for my quantitative analysis was: an act of violence. My objective for this part of the research was to code each film for all portrayals of violence. To do this, it was necessary for me to operationalize the concept of violence so that it could be coded and measured. I reviewed the studies related to the portrayal of violence in film and television and from these I chose a definition for violence to use in my research. In my research, I used the following definition of violence taken from the National Television Violence Study (NTVS) (1997). Violence is defined by NTVS as:

Any overt depiction of a credible threat of physical force or the actual use of physical force, with or without a weapon which is intended to harm or intimidate an animate being or a group of animate beings. The violence may be carried out or merely attempted, and may or may not cause injury. Violence also includes any depiction of physically harmful consequences against an animate being (or group of animate beings) that occur as a result of unseen violent means (p. 41).

This definition was particularly useful for my thesis because it allowed textual violence that occurred off-screen to be coded in my analysis. Coding violence that occurred off-screen was important for my analysis because I posited that portraying violence off-screen could be a way to minimize viewers' perceptions of violence in the sampled films. In films, violence may be portrayed off-screen through the use of shadows, vocal sounds expressing pain, or by the use of certain sounds that signify punching, slapping or fighting even when such acts could not be seen. Although viewers are unable to view these violent acts, violence that occurs off-screen is communicated to and likely understood by many viewers, and was therefore, I felt, a necessary part of my analysis.

It was necessary for me to add to the definition used in the National Television Violence Study (1997) in order to fully capture the types of violence portrayed in my data set of films. The NTVS (1997) definition of violence allowed me to examine physical violence but excluded sexual violence. It was necessary, therefore, for me to incorporate additional elements into their definition to allow me to examine both physical and sexual violence. Also excluded from the NTVS definition of violence were those acts or behaviours not committed with the intent to cause harm. I wanted the definition I used to include any violent act, even those that could be considered accidental.<sup>2</sup> My final definition of violence was:

Any overt depiction of a credible threat of physical [or sexual] force or the actual use of physical [or sexual] force, with or without a weapon which is intended to harm or intimidate an animate being or a group of animate beings. The [physical or sexual] violence may be carried out or merely attempted, and may or may not cause injury. Violence also includes any depiction of [physically or sexually] harmful consequences against an animate being (or group of animate beings) that occur as a result of unseen violent means. [Also, the violence depicted may be the result of an intentional or purposeful action or it could be the result of a non-deliberate action such as an accident] (p. 41).

When I first started to quantitatively code for violence using the NTVS definition, I had not fully considered forms of violence that are more often considered in qualitative studies of mediated violence. As a result, I did not include these other forms of violence in my coding definition. However, upon conducting the qualitative component of my research, I realized that there were other categories I could have coded for even though they are not traditionally considered “violence” by other researchers that take a more

---

<sup>2</sup> Violent behaviour portrayed as an accident will be identified by observing the perpetrators actions towards the victim before, during, and after the incident. When the perpetrator did not display any signs of violent intent towards the victim and when it was not reasonable to assume such intent, the incident was considered an accident. For example, if the perpetrator unintentionally caused harm to the victim, then any force experienced by the victim was not deliberately applied, and therefore, was an accident.

quantitative approach to the analysis of violence in film. For example, in a study of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Parks (2003) argues that it is necessary for research on mediated violence to redefine our definition of violence to include such categories as “representations of social alienation, state-sanctioned aggression ... self-defense [and].... the historical exclusion of people of colour from prime-time drama” (p. 130).

Following the definition laid out on p. 54, I coded a total of 797 acts<sup>3</sup> of physical and sexual violence, of which six acts of sexual violence were in the end excluded from my analysis due to the limited number of such incidents (see Table 1). In the end, a total of 791 acts of violence were analyzed. In my sample, the film that presented the most violent content was *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003) with a total of 52 acts of violence. The film with the least amount of violence was *The Sixth Sense* (1999) with a total of six acts of violence (see Table 2). From these 791 acts of violence, just under half (44 percent) of the aggressors used extreme force, 37 percent of the aggressors used mild force and almost one quarter (20 percent) of the aggressors used moderate force (see Table 3).

In my sample, three films were classified in terms of genre as historical fiction, 11 films were classified as science fiction and 11 films were from the fantasy genre. Findings from the quantitative analysis showed that a total of 81 violent acts were depicted in the historical fiction films, 313 violent acts in the science fiction films and 397 violent acts were depicted in the fantasy films. From my sample of films, the 11 fantasy films had the highest average number of violent acts, with 36 violent acts per film. The sampled science fiction films had the second highest average, with 28 violent acts

---

<sup>3</sup> When a film breaks up an act of violence by switching to a different scene, I coded this as a separate act of violence. However, when multiple acts of violence were depicted within one scene, I coded this as one act of violence (e.g., a battle scene).

per film and the historical fiction films had the lowest average, with 27 violent acts per film (see Table 4). Based on these findings, I concluded that high levels of violence were portrayed across the different genres of films I sampled. However, the average amount of violence was found to be higher in the fantasy genre. Therefore, I concluded that the fantasy genre was associated with having a higher level of violence within their content.

In my sample, three films were rated G, 16 films were rated PG, five films were rated 14A, and only one film had a rating of 18A. There were no films in my sample with an R or A rating. From my quantitative analysis, I found a total of 91 violent acts depicted in the G rated films, 489 violent acts in the PG films, 172 violent acts in the 14A rated films, and 39 violent acts in the one 18A rated film. The total average number of violent acts in the sampled films for each rating classification slightly increased from G (30 acts) to PG (31 acts) to 14A (34 acts) (see Table 5). Based on this finding, I concluded that portrayals of violence were common across the different ratings of the sampled films and, therefore, the rating of a film was not a good indicator as to how much violence a film would contain within their content. This finding was consistent with Jenkins et al.'s (2005) claim that "all rating categories include a great deal of violence and thus are not particularly useful for parents who care about violence" (p. 516).

### ***Quantitative Methods***

The method I employed in this research to quantitatively examine the violence in the selected film texts was content analysis. The development of content analysis as a research methodology "has, in essence, been influenced by the development of mass media and by international politics.... Content analysis has grown in significance –

particularly with the meteoric expansion of mass communication – in the first half of the twentieth century” (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak & Vetter, 2000, p. 55). Content analysis is a “technique for gathering and analysing the content of text. The ‘content’ refers to words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideals, themes, or any message that can be communicated. The ‘text’ is anything written, visual, or spoken that serves as a medium for communication” (Neuman, 2000, p. 272-273). Content analysis is used to study many forms of communication, such as books, magazines, films, television programs, newspapers, and laws (Maxfield & Babbie, 2001), and therefore, was considered an appropriate method to use to study films.

### ***Coding the Data***

The fundamental objective of quantitative content analysis is “to show patterns or regularities in content through repetition” (Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1991, p. 50). Specifically, I employed quantitative content analysis to examine the manifest content of film texts through the coding of the “visible, surface content of communication” (Maxfield & Babbie, 2001, p. 332) in order to reveal patterns in my data. Coding for the visible, surface content of any text involves “attaching a set of descriptive labels (or ‘categories’) to the images” (Rose, 2001, p. 59). To do this, I constructed a codebook that describes the content categories and subcategories needed to code for the manifest content of the film texts in question. In this codebook, I assigned each of the subcategories a numerical value. For example, in regards to the content category: type of violence, the first subcategory was physical violence, which was assigned the numerical

value of 1 and the second subcategory was sexual violence, which was assigned the numerical value of 2.

To begin the coding process, I watched each film in its entirety in order to familiarize myself with it. Then, I watched each film a second time. During the second viewing, I paused the tape every five-minutes, took notes and coded the violence that had occurred during the preceding five-minutes according to my codebook. Coding each film in these five minute segments provided me with a way to keep my large amount of data manageable. Once the coding was completed, I transferred my quantitative findings to SPSS, a statistical software package for the social sciences, in order to produce frequency distributions, which helped discover the patterns in my data. Using the statistical software program was beneficial to my research because SPSS made it easier for me to summarize and describe my data in a manageable form (Maxfield & Babbie, 2001).

For the purpose of my research, I planned to have a total of 19 content categories be used to code the image of violence. However, I ended up excluding the three content categories related to sexual violence because less than one percent of the violent acts depicted in the sampled films were coded as sexual. In the end, a total of 17 content categories were used to code the violence; some of the content categories were developed specifically for this research, while others were borrowed from previous research on violence in film (Browne et al., 2002; Clover, 1987; McArthur et al., 2000; Parks, 2003; Potter & Smith, 2000; Potter & Warren, 1998; Projansky, 2001). Thus, I coded for the portrayal of violence in my selection of films according to the following codebook (see Appendix A):

1. *The type of violence.* Each of the sampled films was analyzed to determine the type of violence portrayed in their content, either physical violence or sexual violence.
2. *The seriousness of the violence.* Each act of violence was measured to determine the level of force used by the aggressor in the commission of the violence against the victim. Subcategories included: mild force (grabbed, shake, bitten, pushed, hit, kicked, tied up, chased), moderate force (struck with object, choked, beaten, fighting), or extreme force (shot, stabbed, battle, murdered, set on fire, electrocuted).
3. *Intentionality.* Each violent act was measured to assess whether the aggressor intentionally (purposeful) or unintentionally (accidental or playful) committed violence.
4. *The presence of a motive.* Each violent act was measured to determine whether the aggressor was portrayed as having a reason or motive to commit the violent act.
5. *The type of motive used.* If the aggressor was portrayed as having a reason or motive to commit the violent act, then the violent act was coded to identify what type of motives the aggressor was represented as having, such as security and survival (e.g., self-defense or third-party defense), social control and law and order (e.g., police arresting a suspect), world domination (e.g., taking over the world), winning and success (e.g., sporting event), or revenge (e.g., an eye for an eye) (Ball-Rokeach, 1972).
6. *The degree of injury inflicted on the victim.* The severity of the physical injury inflicted on the victim as a result of the aggressor's violent actions was measured according to the following subcategories: none (no depictions of injury to the victim), mild (cuts, knocked unconscious, broken bones), moderate (stabbed, shot, hospitalized, caught on fire, electrocuted), or extreme (death).



7. *Signs of blood.* The amount of blood depicted on-screen as a result of the injury inflicted on the victim was measured for each act of violence: none (no depictions of blood), mild (several drops of blood or cuts), moderate (heavy bleeding or deep wound), or extreme (heavy amounts of blood) (Potter & Smith, 2000).
8. *The race of the character.* All characters involved in the violent act (i.e., aggressors and victims) were coded based on their “race.” This content category was measured by four subcategories, which included: White, Black, other, or unknown.
9. *Hero status.* Each of the violent acts was coded to assess the hero status of the aggressor or group of aggressors. The classic hero, as defined by Neal (2007) “starts out as an ordinary, imperfect individual beset by character flaws and weaknesses common to all of us.... Once in the extraordinary world or situation, the hero exhibits extraordinary abilities, talents or powers.... The hero usually exemplifies society’s highest values: ... bravery, loyalty, friendship, persistence and kindness” (p. 22).
10. *Villain Status.* Each of the violent acts was coded to assess the villain status of the aggressors. A villain is defined as “one supreme enemy who is dedicated to the hero’s death and destruction of the good. The villain serves the dramatic role of a worthy opponent who challenged the hero team, creates ongoing conflict and requires the heroes to fight back, thus bringing out the best in them” (Neal, 2007, p. 122).
11. *Character Attributes.* The “attributive qualities” (Wilson et al., 2002) of both the aggressor and victim were coded for each violent act, which included: good, evil, neutral, or unknown. The aggressor was coded as good “when they acted benevolently and were motivated to help others [while an evil character was identified] when they acted primarily out of self-interest with little regard for others” (Wilson et. al., 2002, p. 16). A

character was coded as neutral when their “orientation could not be ascertained from the context of the plot” (Wilson et al., 2002, p. 16).

12. *The type of character.* The physical characteristics of both the aggressor and victim, such as human, animal, fantasy, or unknown, were coded for each violent act.

13. *The social class of the character.* All of the characters involved in the violent act, both the aggressor and victim, were coded to determine their social class: upper social class, lower social class or unknown. For my research, social class was defined as “the relative location of a person or group within a larger society, based on wealth, power, prestige, or other valued resources” (Kendall, 1999, p. 73).

14. *The presence of humour.* Acts of violence were coded to determine whether they were presented as humorous. A humorous act of violence was defined as one in which the “use of speech, actions, or behaviors [were] intended to amuse the self, another character, or the viewer” (Wilson et al., 2002, p. 17).

15. *The type of humour used.* If it was determined that the violence was portrayed as humorous, then the violent act was coded to identify what type of humour was used in the scene, which included: laughter (heard from the aggressor, the victim, and/or other characters during or after the violence was committed), the tone of the scene (viewers are clearly being told through the tone and mood of the scene that the violence is not to be taken seriously) or upbeat music playing in the background.

16. *The framing of violence.* The level of detail shown on-screen of the aggressor committing the violent act with or without the use of a weapon was coded according to the following subcategories: close-up (with over half of the screen being consumed by an

image of the aggressor and/or weapon), long shot (the violence was shown in the background or without any close-ups) or not shown (Potter & Smith, 2000).

17. *The framing of the impact of the violence on the victim's body.* The level of detail showing the aggressor or the weapon used by the aggressor impacting and damaging the victim's body was measured for each act of violence. Subcategories included: close-up (with over half of the screen being consumed by an image of the victim being physically harmed by the violence), long shot (the victim was shown on the receiving end of the violence in the background or without any close-ups) or not shown (Potter & Smith, 2000). Coding the images of violence according to these 17 content categories and their respective subcategories provided me with a summary of descriptive information on the portrayal of violence in film that helped me to answer the research questions I have posed.

The purpose of the quantitative content analysis portion of my method of analysis was to discover patterns in the film content in order to organize my data into themes that could be explored qualitatively. Beginning my research with a quantitative content analysis was beneficial because it allowed me to reduce a large amount of data and make it more manageable in order to study it qualitatively. Lutz and Collins (1993) conducted a study of 600 photographs that appeared in the magazine *National Geographic*. They began their qualitative research with a quantitative content analysis. These researchers provided a justification for beginning their qualitative research with a quantitative content analysis, which can be applied to my research:

Although at first blush it might appear counterproductive to reduce the rich material in any photography to a small number of codes, quantification does not preclude or substitute for qualitative analysis of the pictures. It does allow, however, discovery of patterns that are too subtle to be visible on casual inspection and protection against an unconscious

search through the magazine for only those which confirm one's initial sense of what the photos say or do (p. 89).

By using quantitative content analysis, I was able to reveal common patterns in my very large data set by coding the violent images and looking for repetition in my data. After the quantitative analysis was completed, I then organized the patterns into themes using qualitative content analysis.

### ***Qualitative Methods***

While quantitative content analysis was a valuable method for revealing patterns in the film content of my data set, the major component of my research was qualitative. Qualitative research is defined as the “nonnumerical examination and interpretation of observations, for the purpose of discovering underlying meaning and patterns of relationships” (Babbie & Benaquisto, 2002, p. 496). One of the fundamental objectives of much qualitative research is to “investigate certain issues or themes in detail” (Macnamara, 2003, p. 15), which helps the researcher discover underlying meanings in their data. Thus, in order to discover and investigate themes, I employed a qualitative content analysis.

Qualitative content analysis is defined as a “research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). Using qualitative content analysis, I conducted a thematic analysis in which I coded the “underlying, implicit meaning in the content of the texts” (Neuman & Wiegand, 2000, p. 265). To discover themes in the sampled film texts, I needed to organize the patterns, based on the similarities that exist between the content categories into larger groups, which are called

themes. To begin to discover themes, I first needed to retrieve the list of patterns obtained from my quantitative analysis of the sampled films. Once this list of patterns was obtained, I directed my attention to the first or starter pattern on the list (e.g., the first pattern on my list was that 68 percent of the violent acts in my sample depicted no physical injury being inflicted on the victim). Next, I read through the list of patterns until I identified every pattern that was similar to this first/starter pattern (e.g., from my list, 89 percent of the violent acts depicted no signs of blood on the victim; 85 percent of the violent acts were framed in long shot; and 85 percent of the violent acts framed the impact to the victim's body in long shot). Once every pattern relating to the starter pattern was identified, this provided me with my first theme, which I later call "disguising violence." While selecting the patterns related to the starter pattern, it was necessary to keep some notes as to why I thought these patterns were similar (e.g., given that my sample of films rarely portrayed the victim as injured, rarely portrayed any signs of blood, and framed both the violence and the impact of the violence in long shots, I concluded that the similarities between each of these patterns was that they measured the level of graphicness, more specifically, the violence was portrayed with a low level of graphicness).

I kept repeating the same procedure outlined above until I had assigned every pattern to a theme. The final step in coding for themes was to name the themes I had identified by looking over the conceptual similarities I had noted throughout the coding procedure (e.g., based on the fact that the similarities between the patterns for injury, blood and framing were that the violence was portrayed with a low level of graphicness, I concluded that representing the violence as low in graphicness was one possible strategy

to disguise the violence in film. Thus, I named the theme “disguising violence” (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). This coding procedure outlined the necessary steps to take in conducting a qualitative content analysis in order to discover themes in the selected film texts.

To qualitatively analyze the themes, I used a form of poststructuralist textual analysis, which derived from my theoretical framework. An additional research methodology was essential for this research because, as Reiner (2002) argues, quantitative content analysis:

collate ‘message attributes’ according to characteristics set a priori by the observer. But what in the abstract may seem to be the ‘same’ image may have very different meanings within particular narrative genres and contexts of reception. How viewers interpret images of ‘violence’, for example, is not just a function of the amount of blood seen or number of screams heard. The same physical behaviour, for instance a shooting, means different things to any viewer depending on its placement in different genres.... It will be interpreted differently if the violence is perpetrated on or by a character constructed in the narrative as sympathetic. How audiences construe violence will vary according to their own position vis-à-vis the narrative characters (Reiner, 2002, pp. 378-79).

Therefore, using a form of poststructuralist textual analysis, a Derridean deconstructive analysis, I was able to capture the different meanings of violence portrayed in the sampled film texts. The methods of a Derridean deconstructive analysis I used to qualitatively analyze the themes involved performing an intertextual reading of the films, a deconstructive reading of the binary oppositions and a contextual reading of the films.

A Derridean deconstructive analysis provided me with the foundation that was necessary to take apart a film text. To analyze the binary oppositions that were embedded within the film texts, I used Derrida’s general strategy of deconstruction. I used Derrida’s deconstructive moves to deconstruct binary oppositions relating to

violence that were embedded within the themes identified above. For example, in my research, I deconstructed the following binary oppositions: hero/villain, White/Black and lower class/upper class. The typical deconstructive moves used to dismantle binary oppositions by Derrida begins “first by a reversal of the opposition ... [followed by] a transformation of the [violent] hierarchical structure. Thus, reversal is followed by a second phase of reinscription, displacement, or reconstruction” (Evans, 1991, p. 52). For my work, this second phase involved identifying how the film text contradicts itself so that these binary oppositions could be disrupted and dismantled. For example, in my sample of films, the binary opposition of hero/villain was often disrupted by portraying the heroes as involved in an internal struggle between good and evil, in which the heroes were unable to resist the powers of evil.

Secondly, using a Derridean deconstructive analysis allowed me to perform an intertextual reading on my sample of films. An intertextual reading does not involve reading each film as if it was a unique or single entity in and of itself. As Gray (2005) argues:

The singular text, by itself and studied in a vacuum, cannot truly help you, for ‘the text itself’ is an abstract, yet ultimately non-existent entity, wished into creation by analysts. The text can only ever exist through, inside, and across other texts, and through its readers (p. 3).

Thus, I read the film texts in my sample intertextually. While intertextuality can take on a variety of forms, I focused on three forms in my thesis: borrowing and transforming the material of a prior text, my filmic memory of an actor in a different film, and my intertextual familiarity with other texts (filmic, televisual, literary) that shared similar generic structures with the texts in my data set.

I recognized the filmmaker of a text borrowing and transforming the material of a prior text such as films, television programs and literary texts, as one form of intertextuality. With regards to the film texts in my subset, some had borrowed and transformed the material of comic books and novels (e.g., *Men in Black*, *Spider-Man*, *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, the *Harry Potter* films) while other films borrowed from the Christian Bible (e.g., *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*, *The Passion of the Christ*). Other filmmakers borrowed archival footage from the historical past and integrated this footage into their film's content, which was best illustrated in the film *Forrest Gump*. In this film, archival footage was used in a scene in which the main character, Forrest Gump (Tom Hanks) received an honorary medal from President Lyndon Johnson. This film used CGI-techniques to digitally edit Forrest Gump into archival footage so that he could accept the medal and shake the President's hand. In my research, I identified some of the films in my sample that intertextually borrowed and transformed material from prior texts in order to determine whether I read the intertextual references as having an affect on the violence portrayed.

Another form of intertextuality is when an actor/actress in their current role is read in relation to their previous roles in other films. An actor's portrayal of a character in one film may influence how viewers perceive the actor in another/later film. An example that illustrates a viewer's "filmic memory" is found in an article by Denzin (1994), in which he performed a deconstructive reading of the film, *The Morning After*, which stars Jane Fonda as Alex Sternbergen. In Denzin's (1994) reading of this film, he posed the following question:

What viewer does not bring images of Jane Fonda doing aerobics to the film's opening scene, or recall her performance as Bree, the prostitute in



*Klute* (1971), or her earlier image as a sex-doll in the 1968 film *Barbarella*? It is not possible to just see Fonda as Alex.... [Therefore], no film as a text is ever free from the effects of other texts (p. 190).

In my research, I identified how my filmic memory of an actor's portrayal of a character in a prior film influenced how I perceived the actor in a particular film from my sample.

My intertextual familiarity with other texts that share similar generic structures was recognized as another form of intertextuality. Intertextual familiarity with other films from the same genre can influence how a viewer interprets a text.

Thus, before reading the ... text at hand, readers have already had constructed for them a set of expectations, desires, assumptions, and meanings for the text, and it is only through and among these meanings that this 'new' text will come to make sense (Gray, 2005, p. 26).

This set of expectations, desires, assumptions, and meanings come about because of a viewer's previous experiences with other texts from the same genre. For example, my previous experiences with other animated films, such as *Aladdin* (1992) and *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) may have caused me to have certain expectations of the animated films in my sample. Therefore, I recognized genre as a powerful intertextual tool used by viewers and filmmakers to understand film texts:

Each genre has its own 'common sense' rules that, by and large, we internalize and use to make sense of future texts. When we express eagerness to watch the next Bond film, or quickly change the channel to avoid the latest Madonna video, we prove a proficiency with the generic codes of the Bond film and the Madonna brand of pop music respectively, a proficiency for which intertextuality is directly responsible (Gray, 2005, p. 28).

Intertextuality helped me to explain how my previous experiences as a viewer affected my interpretation of the meaning of the violence in my selection of film texts. My interpretation of the violence may have been affected, for example, because of certain expectations I had about how the violent content should be portrayed in particular

genres.<sup>4</sup> Within my intertextual reading of the themes, I identified how violence as well as how strategies of minimization were represented intertextually across the selected film texts.

Thirdly, a Derridean deconstructive analysis allowed me to perform a contextual reading of the film texts. I felt that it was important to analyze context because context is a fundamental element in the way a film text communicates meaning. For Derrida, context is variable and boundless (Lapsley & Westlake, 1988), however, because my research examines film, I focused specifically on the contexts of production and reception in my work (Bennington & Derrida, 1993). Thus, it was important for me to identify some of the contexts of production and reception of the selected film texts. By context of production, I refer to the time and place of the film text's production. Therefore, understanding the meaning of violence in the films studied depends, I suggest, in some way upon who was producing the film text, where and when. In terms of the context of production, the meaning of the violence in film may have been influenced by: (a) who made the film (e.g., writer, producers, director, actors); (b) the year the film was made (e.g., whether there were any political or economic circumstances that may have influenced the meaning being produced by the filmmakers); (c) the country in which the film was made; and (d) the studio or network that provided funding for the film.

---

<sup>4</sup> For example, as Jonathan Gray (2005) points out and exemplifies, a viewer's previous experiences can affect their interpretation of the film text: "Taking the case of James Bond, they explain that most readers viewing or reading a Bond text have already encountered this character elsewhere, from merchandising, ads, and texts within the Bond franchise. From reading these texts, then, most readers will have some concept of what a Bond film or book is likely to entail: it will tell a tale of international espionage, involving larger-than-life megalomaniac villains from corrupt Communist nations or less-developed countries, trips to exotic locations, debonair womanizing, a black-tie gambling scene, and an elaborate display of gadgets, stunts, and phallic imagery. One could expect good fun and lots of action, but should not hope for intense social realism.... Effectively, 'inter-textuality' prepares us for the text, and prepares the text for us, so that any resulting meaning, power, or effects that 'the text' may be seen to possess are in part a function of the already-read" (pp. 25-26).

As for the context of reception, this refers to the time and place of a particular reception of the film text. Understanding the meaning of violence in the different film texts depends in some measure upon who was viewing the film text, where and when. Different viewers receive and understand a film text differently depending on the experiences they bring to the viewing of a film. Also, the same viewer may receive a different understanding when the same film was viewed in a different time and/or place. In my research, I cannot account for how “other” viewers receive and understand these film texts. My research can account only for my own interpretations of how I receive and understand these film texts. For my research, the context of reception refers to my interpretations of the meaning of violence derived from my reading of the sampled films. In summary, how images of violence in film come to be produced and understood by viewers was what I understood as constituting context for the purpose of this thesis.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has addressed the research methodologies I found best suited to answer the research questions I posed in my thesis research. A quantitative content analysis was chosen to help quantitatively identify patterns in my dataset. Once the patterns were identified, I organized the similar patterns into themes using a qualitative content analysis. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods offered me “the best of both worlds and, further, that a combination of quantitative and qualitative content analysis methodologies is necessary to fully understand the meanings and possible impacts of media texts” (Macnamara, 2003, p. 6). I found it necessary to expand on my quantitative content analysis to include a poststructuralist textual analysis to

qualitatively analyze the themes identified in the sampled film texts. Using both a quantitative content analysis and a qualitative textual analysis provided me with a more complete way of understanding how particular strategies were portrayed in these films in order to minimize how I, as a viewer, might perceive acts of violence.

## Section 2.0

### Analytical Chapters

In this section, I present both the quantitative and qualitative findings of my research. In my research, I have identified an important set of themes that runs through the portrayals of violence within my sample of films. From my analysis, four overarching themes emerged from the film texts. These themes were: “legitimizing violence,” “camouflaging violence,” “justifying violence,” and “disguising violence.”

In the next four chapters, I offer my own “reading” of the 25 top grossing films of all time. My reading of these film texts, which Derrida argues is based on “context of reception” (i.e., time and place of reception), is dependent upon my social and historical background. Other viewers from, for example, different countries and in different time periods (such as in 20 years from now) may have different interpretations about the violence in these same film texts. Because context, for Derrida, is variable and boundless, both those who produced these films and others who have watched them may disagree with my assessments and interpretations. However, this does not weaken the value of my research because it is not my intention to reveal the producers “true” meaning or to provide a generalizable account of how viewers may interpret the violence in these texts.

## 2.1

## Theme 1: Legitimizing Violence

This chapter presents both my quantitative and qualitative findings relating to the theme “legitimizing violence.” First, I present the descriptive findings obtained from the quantitative content analysis and explain how some of the content categories form the theme “legitimizing violence.” Second, I present the analytical findings for this theme that stem from employing a poststructuralist textual analysis. Throughout this chapter, I argue that portraying an aggressor as having a “motive” to commit violence may affect whether viewers will perceive an act of violence portrayed in a film as being legitimate and acceptable. In my view, the portrayal of violence is more likely to be mitigated when the aggressor is presented as having a “legitimate” motive to commit a violent act.

*Thematic Analysis*

There are many ways in which films can portray violence as legitimate. From my thematic analysis, I found one possible strategy to legitimize violence: to represent the aggressor as having a “legitimate” motive to commit a violent act. In my thematic analysis, the theme I identified as “legitimizing violence” was formed from five content categories identified in my quantitative analysis: “presence of a motive,” “type of motive used,” “intentionality,” “hero status,” and “villain status.” Based on the thematic analysis of the content categories, I concluded that they all measured the reason or motive for the commission of violence.

In the films studied, aggressors were frequently portrayed as having a motive to commit a violent act. In fact, a pattern was revealed wherein slightly over half of all violent acts (53 percent) depicted the aggressor as having a motive to commit violence (see Table 6). The aggressor committing the violent act was typically motivated by one of two reasons: to ensure security and survival or for world domination. Specifically, 38 percent of the violent acts in the films studied were committed by an aggressor for the purpose of security and survival, such as protecting and/or defending themselves or another character. In addition, 32 percent of the violent acts were committed by an aggressor for the purpose of world domination. In some instances, the aggressor was motivated to commit a violent act for the purpose of social control and/or law and order (18 percent). Other, although more rarely used, types of motives included revenge (7 percent) and winning in sports (6 percent) (see Table 7). For the content category “intentionality,” the quantitative findings revealed a pattern wherein the intentions of aggressors committing violent acts were overwhelmingly regarded as being purposeful in nature (93 percent). That is, for whatever reason, the aggressor almost always planned to inflict harm on the victim. This supports the findings of Browne et al. (2002) and McArthur et al. (2000) who also found that aggressors were overwhelmingly depicted as intentionally committing violence. Another, although much more rarely depicted intention of the aggressor was play (1 percent). In some instances, the aggressor unintentionally committed violence against the victim, which was coded as an accident (6 percent) (see Table 8). For the content category “hero status,” the majority of aggressors (78 percent) did not meet the criteria necessary to be coded as a hero. Only 19 percent of the aggressors met the criteria necessary to be a hero (see Table 9). As for the content

category “villain status,” 78 percent of aggressors were not classified as villains; only 19 percent of aggressors were depicted as villains (see Table 10). In summary, my quantitative analysis revealed patterns wherein the sampled films portrayed the majority of aggressors as committing the violence for the purpose of security and survival or world domination, portrayed their intentions as purposeful and characterized the aggressors as neither heroes nor villains.

Overall, my thematic reading of these five content categories suggested that portraying an aggressor as having a motive to commit violence was an important strategy in determining whether the portrayal of violence was perceived as legitimate. The presence of these content categories in so many films led me to ask why the strategy of “motive” might have been so often portrayed and what affect it might have on the way they might be read. These questions helped me conduct an in-depth qualitative analysis examining the ways in which the strategy “motive” was portrayed in the sampled films in order to try to legitimize the violence and whether it affected how I perceived the violence in the films sampled.

### ***Legitimizing Violence***

My intertextual familiarity with other films “with the [same] generic codes” (Gray, 2005, p. 28) led me, “the reader to have certain expectations about both the content and form [i.e., genre] of the work [I am watching]” (Childers & Hentzi, 1995, p. 159). That is, I have certain expectations about whether and how the sampled films would portray aggressors as being motivated to commit a violent act. Based on my experiences as a viewer of other fantasy and sci-fi films, I expected the sampled films would mitigate



violence by portraying aggressors as having a legitimate motive to commit violence. Furthermore, I expected that aggressors who were portrayed as “heroes” in the films would be depicted as having legitimate motives to commit violence whereas the “villains” would not be depicted as having legitimate motives to commit violence. After screening the films in my sample, I found that my expectations were indeed an accurate representation of what took place in these films.

In my sample of films, aggressors were frequently portrayed as being motivated to commit violence. As indicated by my quantitative findings, aggressors were often motivated to commit violent acts for reasons of security and survival, such as self-defense and third-party defense, or for world domination. Upon further in-depth analysis, I recognized a pattern in which the films frequently portrayed their heroes as purposefully committing violence for the reasons of security and survival. In contrast, another pattern emerged in which villains were often portrayed as purposefully committing violence for the desire for world domination. These patterns were significant in helping me understand whether the films presented the violence committed by the heroes and/or villains as legitimate. In my reception of the film texts, the portrayal of violence was more likely to be mitigated and deemed acceptable when the aggressor was portrayed as having a “legitimate” motive to commit a violent act.

I interpreted aggressors as using acceptable and legitimate forms of violence when they were heroes and/or were shown committing violence for the purpose of protecting and defending their own lives and/or the lives of other characters. An example of this is found in the film *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002).<sup>5</sup> This film

---

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix B for a detailed synopsis of all 25 films in my sample.

takes place during Harry's (Daniel Radcliffe)<sup>6</sup> second year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. In this film, Harry and his friends, Ron (Rupert Grint) and Hermione (Emma Watson) face many dangers, including a dark force that is terrorizing the students and staff at the school by, literally, petrifying them. The scene from *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* that best illustrates the common pattern of a hero committing a violent act for the purpose of security and survival occurs when Harry fatally stabs a basilisk, a large snake-like creature, in the head with a knife. Harry's motives for committing this act of violence are self-defense and third-party defense. Because Harry Potter is the hero of this film and went above and beyond the call of duty to protect the life of his friend Ginny Weasley (Bonnie Wright), I interpreted his act of violence as being legitimate. As illustrated by this example, "motive" was a successful strategy in my reading of the minimization of violence when the violent act was committed by a hero for the legitimate purpose of security and survival.

In contrast, I did not interpret aggressors as using acceptable and legitimate forms of violence when the character was portrayed committing violence for the purpose of taking over and/or destroying the world. In the sampled films, the majority of aggressors who were shown as being motivated to commit violent acts by a desire for world domination were portrayed as villains. Because of this relationship, I did not interpret villains as using legitimate forms of violence. An example from the films in my sample that illustrates a villain committing a violent act for the purpose of world domination is found in the film *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace* (1999). In the film, the Trade Federation, secretly led by the evil Darth Sidious (Ian McDiarmid), plans to invade

---

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix C for a complete list of all the characters I discuss throughout this research and the names of the actors/actresses that play the character.

and take over the peaceful planet of Naboo. To stop the Federation invasion, Queen Amidala (Natalie Portman), her security team, two Jedi knights, a young Anakin Skywalker (Jake Lloyd), and an army of Gungans form an alliance. The scene from *The Phantom Menace* that best illustrates this common pattern occurs when Darth Maul (Ray Park), an apprentice to the Sith Lord Darth Sidious, goes to the planet of Tatooine to kidnap Queen Amidala. However, in order to capture Queen Amidala, Darth Maul must fight with Qui-Gon Jinn (Liam Neeson), a Jedi knight, who is protecting her. Darth Maul attacks Qui-Gon using his light-saber. This scene of violence depicts the aggressor, Darth Maul, committing a violent act for the purpose of world domination: he has been ordered to capture Queen Amidala and bring her back to Naboo, where the Trade Federation will force her to sign a treaty. Because Darth Maul is portrayed as being motivated to commit the violence for the purpose of world domination, I did not interpret the act of violence he commits as acceptable and legitimate. As illustrated by this example, the motive of world domination was not a successful strategy in the minimization of violence when it was portrayed as being committed by a villain for the illegitimate reason of taking over and destroying the world.

An interesting point about this example was how viewers were clearly directed to read Darth Maul as one of the film's villains. The filmmakers appear to draw upon intertextual references from, for example, the Christian Bible in portraying Darth Maul as a villain. Darth Maul's physical appearance drew heavily from traditional depictions of the Christian devil. The character was depicted as having a red face and horns growing out of the top of his head. While watching this film, the red face and horns of Darth Maul caused me, as a viewer, to conjure up images of the devil as described in the Bible.

Thus, I read the intertextual reference to the Christian devil as a clear indication that viewers were supposed to see Darth Maul as a villain.

Portraying an aggressor as having a legitimate motive to commit the violence had a major affect on my reading of a film by shifting the meaning I attributed to violent acts. When I compared and contrasted two identical acts of violence, such as stabbing another character with a sword, my reading of these acts changed when one was portrayed as legitimate and the other was not. An example of this in my data set is found in the films *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002) and *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003). Both of these films portrayed an aggressor stabbing another character with a sword. Therefore, in my quantitative analysis, I coded the two acts of violence the same way. Upon further analysis, it became apparent that the meanings I drew from these acts of violence were not the same, even though these acts of violence were initially coded that way. In *The Return of the King*, the strategy “motive,” in the form of self-defense, was used to minimize the violence of a stabbing incident. In contrast, in *The Two Towers*, the strategy “motive” was present but I did not interpret the violence as minimized because the aggressor was not portrayed as having a “legitimate” motive to commit the violence.

Consider the stabbing in *The Return of the King*: Eowyn (Miranda Otto) uses her sword to cut off the head of the “fell beast.” I interpreted this violent scene as one in which Eowyn has committed a violent act for the purpose of security and survival. This scene begins in the midst of a battle between approximately 50,000 orcs and 6000 human horsemen under the command of King Théoden (Bernard Hill). As the 6000 horsemen begin to defeat the orcs, approximately twenty massive elephant-like creatures carrying

archers join the battle and start to shoot arrows at the horsemen. As King Théoden orders his men to reform the lines, a large dragon-like creature called a “fell beast” swoops down from the sky carrying the Witch-King (Lawrence Makoare), lifts King Théoden and his horse into the air and then throws them to the ground. King Théoden is pinned on the ground underneath his dead horse. The Witch-King instructs the beast to “feast on his flesh,” but before the beast can, a Rohan soldier steps between King Théoden and the beast. The Rohan soldier is Eowyn, the niece to King Théoden. The beast attempts to bite Eowyn but she uses her sword to sever its head. Because Eowyn holds the sword and the beast loses its head, I coded this violent scene as Eowyn being the aggressor and the beast being the victim. Severing the head of the beast allows Eowyn to defend and protect both King Théoden’s life and her own. This scene of violence depicts the aggressor, in this case Eowyn, committing a violent act for the purpose of protecting and defending human lives. Because this violent scene portrays the aggressor, Eowyn, committing the violence for the purpose of protecting and defending lives, the meaning I attributed to the violent act changed and, as a result, I interpreted this scene as portraying an acceptable and legitimate use of violence. As McCaughey (1997) and Parks (2003) note, self-defensive behaviour should be recognized as a legitimate use of violence, especially when women are portrayed as defending themselves against male aggression. Portraying violence for this purpose encourages viewers, in my view, to see violence in the context of self-defense and third-party defense as acceptable and legitimate and, therefore, to read the violence as minimized.

Now consider a violent scene from *The Two Towers* in which a couple of Uruk-hai stab Haldir, an elf (Craig Parker) in the stomach and back with their swords.

Throughout this film, Haldir is portrayed as a good character and the Uruk-hai are portrayed as evil. I interpreted this violent scene as one in which the Uruk-hai stab Haldir for the purpose of world domination. This scene takes place during a very large battle between the army of Saruman (Christopher Lee) consisting of 10,000 Uruk-hai, and King Theoden's army, who are joined by an army of elves. While King Theoden's army is retreating to the "Keep," two Uruk-hai approach Haldir from behind and stab him in the stomach and back. The viewer witnesses Haldir being stabbed and eventually dying on-screen. This scene of violence depicts the aggressors committing violence for the purpose of helping their master take over the world. Because of this context, I did not interpret their motive as being legitimate and, therefore, I did not see their use of violence as acceptable.

Interpreting a violent act as legitimate also depended on whether I saw the aggressor being portrayed as a hero or villain. The hero and/or villain status of the aggressor was important to my reading of the strategy "motive" and, thus, revealed one of the primary binary oppositions commonly used in Hollywood blockbuster films: hero/villain. All the films within my sample had at least one identifiable hero and one identifiable villain. The binary opposition of hero/villain in my sample of films was one I considered a "violent hierarchy" (Derrida, 1981b), with the "hero" side of the binary being privileged over the "villain" side of the binary. Within the sampled films, the hero was privileged because heroes were represented as good, honorable, courageous, and virtuous. By contrast, villains stand in opposition to the privileged hero because they were represented as evil, dishonorable, cowardly, and sinful. Within the film narratives studied, the binary opposition of hero/villain was linked to other violent hierarchies, such

as good/evil and honorable/dishonorable which reinforced the original binary. Based on my readings, the majority of the films in my sample did not attempt to disrupt this binary. In fact, most of the films relied heavily upon this violent hierarchical binary in order to legitimize the use of violence by portraying the aggressor as having a motive. However, I did discover a small group of outlier<sup>7</sup> films from the fantasy genre that did disrupt the hero/villain binary in a variety of ways.

In my sample, I found that 19 out of the 25 films<sup>8</sup> did not disrupt the hero/villain binary. In fact, these films consistently relied on this violent hierarchical binary in order to tell their stories. An example that best illustrates this lack of disruption is found in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (2001). In this film, Harry Potter is portrayed as possessing characteristics common to the "classic hero" (Neal, 2007). In the beginning of this film, viewers see Harry as an ordinary boy plagued with flaws and weaknesses. Upon further development of this character throughout the film, viewers begin to see Harry transform into a hero with many extraordinary abilities and talents that he uses in his ongoing battle to resist and overcome evil. To portray Harry as the hero in the film, filmmakers created a villain to stand in opposition to him (Neal, 2007).

In each *Harry Potter* film, there is always one villain that is constructed as a foil for Harry Potter's goodness. The villains are usually portrayed as followers of the evil Lord Voldemort (Richard Bremmer). In the *Philosopher's Stone*, the villain is Professor

---

<sup>7</sup> The outlier films were a small group of films that went against the norm of the majority of the other films in my sample.

<sup>8</sup> The following is a list of the films that did not disrupt the binary opposition of hero/villain: *Titanic* (1997), *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (2001), *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* (1999), *Jurassic Park* (1993), *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002), *Finding Nemo* (2003), *Independence Day* (1996), *Star Wars: The New Hope* (1977), *The Lion King* (1994), *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), *Shrek 2* (2004), *Forrest Gump* (1994), *The Sixth Sense* (1999), *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003), *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones* (2002), *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (1997), *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), and *Men in Black* (1997).

Quirrell (Ian Hart). Within this particular film, I did not observe any disruptions of the binary opposition hero/villain. In fact, this film did not appear to attempt to diverge from or complicate its representations of Harry Potter as the classic hero. Furthermore, the film appeared to maintain a traditional structure in terms of what constitutes a villain, as outlined by Neal (2007), which I saw clearly illustrated when Professor Quirrell/Lord Voldemort was portrayed as constantly attempting to thwart the heroic actions of Harry Potter. Throughout this sampled film, the violent hierarchical structure of the hero/villain binary remains intact, with the hero side of the binary being privileged over the villain side of the binary. Because this film portrayed Harry Potter as a hero, I found that when Harry committed an act of violence it was often legitimized because his motives were unselfish and he was trying to defend and protect the people around him. Within this film, Professor Quirrell and Lord Voldemort are often portrayed as possessing characteristics that commonly define a villain and, as a result, I did not interpret the violence they committed as being legitimate because their motives were for evil purposes, such as wanting to destroy good people like Harry and other wizards.

In my sample, I found that only 6 out of the 25 films<sup>9</sup> disrupted the traditional binary opposition of hero/villain. By disrupting this opposition, the binary no longer entails a violent hierarchy, with the hero side of the binary no longer being privileged over the villain side of the binary. These six outlier films disrupted this binary by portraying either the hero or the villain as having an internal struggle between good and evil. The heroes in these films were often portrayed as attempting to resist becoming a

---

<sup>9</sup> The following is a list of the films that did disrupt the binary opposition of hero/villain: *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003), *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002), *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), *Spider-Man* (2002), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004), and *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* (1983).



hero, which was another way they disrupted the violent hierarchical binary. An example of the disruption of the traditional binary of hero/villain is found in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001, 2002, 2003). In the first film of this trilogy, Frodo Baggins (Elijah Wood), a hobbit from the Shire, is portrayed as a hero who unselfishly volunteers to take a powerful magic ring to the land of Mordor in order to destroy it. I read this unselfish act as being characteristic of a traditional hero willing to sacrifice himself to help the people around him. However, as the trilogy of films continues, viewers get an opportunity to witness the internal struggle that is constantly present in Frodo throughout his journey. This internal struggle manifests itself in the filmmakers' portrayal of Frodo having doubts about whether he can even destroy the ring. Frodo's uncertainty is illustrated when he attempts to pass off the ring to a wizard named Gandalf the Grey (Ian McKellen), who Frodo believes would be able to destroy the ring because Gandalf is more wise and powerful than Frodo.

As the trilogy continues, Frodo's internal struggle develops further; Frodo is portrayed as being unable to resist the temptation of the ring despite his "goodness." Gandalf says this also of himself, that despite his power and wisdom, he would be unable to resist the power of the ring. Throughout the trilogy, Frodo frequently puts the ring on his finger in order to use its power to avoid dangerous situations. Frodo's lack of resistance to the evil powers of the ring become more prominent as the story unfolds. The lack of resistance he shows can be read as being uncharacteristic of a typical hero of the fantasy genre. Every time Frodo places the ring on his finger, he carelessly puts the fate of Middle Earth and all its inhabitants at risk. As Frodo's journey to destroy the ring approaches its end, viewers begin to witness Frodo morphing from heroic ring-bearer into

potential minion of evil. As the third film reaches its conclusion, Frodo is portrayed as becoming more and more possessive of the ring. Frodo's possessiveness is shown in a scene at the end of the film when he decides not to destroy the ring. Frodo is thus shown as losing the internal struggle between good and evil, eventually succumbing to the evil power of the ring. However, Frodo does eventually destroy the ring with help from others and viewers are able to see the good prevail over evil. Frodo's internal struggle shows that he is plagued by character flaws and weaknesses that are common to all humans (Neal, 2007). Because Frodo eventually destroys the ring, he is able to be redeemed for all the mistakes he has made. Throughout this trilogy, Frodo has a difficult time resisting the evil power of the ring, which results in the disruption of the hero/villain binary as well, the violent hierarchy becomes dismantled. However, Frodo is shown at the beginning and at the end of the trilogy as possessing the common characteristics that define a hero and, thus, the binary and the resulting violent hierarchy, where the hero side of the binary is privileged over the villain is reestablished in the end. As a result, I often viewed the violence committed by Frodo as legitimate because he was portrayed as a good character and sometimes as a hero who unselfishly offered to risk his own life in order to destroy the ring and save the citizens of Middle Earth.

Some of the six outlier films also disrupted and dismantled the violent hierarchical binary of hero/villain by portraying the villain as engaged in an inner struggle between good and evil. An example of this disruption is found in *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* (1983). Throughout the *Star Wars* franchise, viewers are able to witness a disruption of this particular binary. When Anakin Skywalker crosses over from the light side of the force to the dark side of the force, he becomes known as Darth Vader (David Prowse,

voiced by James Earl Jones), an apprentice to the evil Emperor. As illustrated by Neal (2007), “Darth Sidious recruits, seduces and damages Anakin, shaping him into Darth Vader, who becomes the primary villain for the remaining three movies” (pp. 130-131). However, in the final film of this franchise, *Return of the Jedi*, Darth Vader begins to reveal another internal struggle, manifested in the portrayal of Darth Vader as having second thoughts about killing his son, Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill). Because of this internal struggle, viewers get to witness Darth Vader commit an act of violence in order to protect and defend the life of his son. When Darth Vader commits this act of violence, I interpreted it as being legitimate because he unselfishly risked his own life in order to protect and defend Luke.

In this particular scene, the internal struggle within Darth Vader is clearly illustrated when he is witnessing Emperor Palpatine (Ian McDiarmid) using a lightning force to electrocute Luke Skywalker. While Luke is being electrocuted, he calls out to his father begging for help. Unable to stand the agony his son is going through, Darth Vader turns on his master and throws Emperor Palpatine into the Death Star’s reactor core. By saving his son, Darth Vader is rescued from the dark side and is shown to be redeemed for his evil wrongdoings; as a result, he reverts to Anakin. By the end of the *Return of the Jedi*, viewers are able to witness Darth Vader’s transformation from the quintessential villain into a heroic character who helps save the galaxy from the evil Emperor. As Neal (2007) notes, “in fantastic stories, as in life, there is hope even for those apparently consumed by evil” (p. 133). Because Darth Vader is rescued from the dark side and the evil Emperor is killed, the *Star Wars* franchise reinforces the notion that heroes and goodness always prevail over villains and evil in the end and, thus, the

hero/villain binary and the resulting violent hierarchy is reestablished in the end. As a result, I viewed the violence committed by Darth Vader against the Emperor as legitimate because he was portrayed as a character who was trying to redeem himself by protecting and saving the life of Luke Skywalker.

### ***Conclusion***

My findings suggest the strategy “motive” was used in the sampled films as a way to represent violence as legitimate and acceptable. Legitimizing violence through the portrayal of particular types of motives was, in my reading, a successful strategy used in the 25 films in my sample. In my sample of films, a motive was considered legitimate when a character, usually the hero, was portrayed as committing the violence for the purpose of protecting and defending their life and the lives of others. Thus, a viewer’s perception of violence could potentially be minimized (as mine was) when the use of violence appeared to be deemed acceptable and legitimate by portraying the heroes as committing violence for purely altruistic reasons. That is, the films were clearly exposing the noble qualities of the heroes, such as courage, bravery, goodness, and honour by representing them as having purely unselfish and legitimate motives to commit violence. In contrast, my findings revealed that a motive was not a successful strategy of minimization when a villain was portrayed as committing violence for illegitimate reasons such as taking over the world and trying to destroy it.

Overall, the strategy “motive” effectively changed the meaning of particular violent acts for me. The meaning of the violence changed for me when the aggressor was portrayed as having a “legitimate” motive to commit violence. Portraying the aggressor

as having a legitimate motive to commit a violent act ended up making me, as a viewer, believe their use of violence was acceptable and should be considered a mitigating factor that minimized my perception of the violence.

## 2.2

## Theme 2: Camouflaging Violence

This chapter presents both my quantitative and qualitative findings relating to the theme “camouflaging violence.” First, I present the descriptive findings obtained from the quantitative content analysis and explain how the content categories form the theme “camouflaging violence.” Second, I present the analytical findings for this theme that stem from employing a poststructuralist textual analysis. Throughout this chapter, I argue that representing the violence with humorous undertones may affect whether the violence is being camouflaged. In my view, the portrayal of violence is more likely to be camouflaged when violence is portrayed with humorous undertones and, therefore, this may cue viewers that the violence they view should not be taken seriously.

*Thematic Analysis*

There are many ways in which a film can camouflage violence. From my thematic analysis, I found one possible strategy to camouflage violence: to represent the violence with humorous undertones. In my thematic analysis, I found that the theme I identified as “camouflaging violence” was formed from two content categories: “presence of humour” and “type of humour used”. Based on the thematic analysis of these content categories, I concluded that their similarities were they measured the humorous undertones of the violence in film.

In my sample of films, violence was rarely portrayed with a humorous undertone. In fact, only 26 percent of the violent acts used the strategy of representing the violence

with a humorous undertone (see Table 11). This finding is consistent with previous research conducted by Potter and Warren (1998). However, from my sample of films, there were five outlier films that represented some violent acts with a humorous undertone. These outlier films included: *Finding Nemo* (2003), *Men in Black* (1997), *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003), *Shrek 2* (2004), and *The Lion King* (1994). These five outlier films accounted for 67 percent of the violent acts that were portrayed as humorous in my selection of films. Within these, the most common type of humour used was portraying the tone and mood of the violence as humorous so that viewers appeared to be cued not to take the violence seriously (62 percent). Other, although rarely used, types of humour included laughter heard from the aggressor, victim and/or other characters (21 percent)<sup>10</sup> and upbeat music playing in the background (11 percent) (see Table 12). However, the three animated films in my sample, which made up the majority of this outlier group, used a combination of portraying the violence in a humorous tone and playing upbeat music in the background. These quantitative findings indicate that the violent content portrayed in these five outlier films was intertwined with humour.

Overall, my thematic reading of these two content categories suggested that representing violence with humorous undertones was an important strategy in determining whether the portrayal of violence, in the five outlier films, was read as camouflaged. The presence of these two content categories in the outlier films led me to

---

<sup>10</sup> It is important to highlight that laughter is not always a clear indicator of humour. For example, in the film *Spider-Man* (2002), the Green Goblin (Willem Dafoe) laughs after committing violence. Initially, I coded this act of violence as humorous. However, upon further examination, I recognized that I needed to recode for humour because it becomes apparent that the violence committed by the Green Goblin is not humorous. The laughter of the Green Goblin is his “signature” and is more maniacal than humorous. In fact, the Green Goblin might be read as a kind of ironic, anti-humorous character, as he turns fun and games into danger. Therefore, it was necessary for me to recode for humour to include only the violent acts that all characters find funny, not just the aggressor (Potter & Warren, 1998).

ask why this strategy might be employed in these particular films and to what affect. These questions helped me conduct an in-depth qualitative analysis in which I examined the ways in which the strategy “humorous undertones” might have been employed in the five outlier films in order to try to camouflage their violence and thus, minimize my perception of it.

### ***Camouflaging Violence***

To begin my qualitative analysis, I examined how my intertextual familiarity with films from similar genres led me to have certain expectations about what the content of the sampled films would likely entail (Gray, 2005). In the films I classified as dramas, I expected the content would focus on dramatic elements and therefore, that these films would not employ humorous undertones as a strategy of minimization as it could interfere with their dramatic tone. Some of the films in my sample could be classified as “action”-oriented and I expected that humour would, again, not be frequently employed as a strategy of minimization. However, I did expect the animated films in my sample would contain violent content that was portrayed as humorous. Based on my previous experiences of other animated films such as *Aladdin* (1992) and *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), I expected the animated films in my sample would employ humour in order to camouflage and, thus, my perception of the violence would be minimized because I would no longer interpret the violence as serious but instead would interpret it as funny. I expected the violence in these films to be portrayed humorously by, for example, playing upbeat music in the background and the characters would be singing along with the music. After reading the three animated films in my sample, I found that my



expectations were an accurate representation of what took place in *Finding Nemo* (2003), *Shrek 2* (2004) and *The Lion King* (1994).

While performing an intertextual reading of the comedy-science fiction film *Men in Black*, I recognized that my memory of the actor Will Smith—developed from my experience of watching him in other texts—kept creeping into my reading. My “filmic memory” (Denzin, 1994) of Will Smith from the television sitcom *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (1990-1996), in which Will Smith plays a comedic role, caused me to have certain expectations about the type of character Will Smith would play in films like *Men in Black* and *Independence Day*. Because Will Smith is primarily recognized as a comedic actor, especially early in his career, I expected the characters he played in *Men in Black* and *Independence Day* would have a comedic edge to them and therefore, that most of the humour that occurred in these films would come from his characters. These expectations were indeed accurate. Accordingly, my filmic memory of Will Smith led me to expect that he would portray the same type of humorous characters in the films *Men in Black* and *Independence Day* as he had in *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*.

In analyzing my data set, I interpreted an act of violence as being camouflaged when I felt I was clearly being cued through the tone of a scene that the violence was not to be taken seriously, when laughter was heard, or when upbeat music was playing in the background. An example of portraying violence as humorous is found in the “G” rated animated film *The Lion King* (1994). This Walt Disney film tells the story of a young lion cub named Simba (voiced by Jonathan Taylor Thomas and Matthew Broderick) who is to be the future King of Pride Rock. Overwhelmed with grief and shame over the death of his father, King Mufasa (voiced by James Earl Jones), Simba flees Pride Rock

and abandons his identity as the future King. After years of exile, Simba is persuaded by an old friend named Nala (voiced by Moira Kelly) to return to Pride Rock in order to overthrow his uncle Scar (voiced by Jeremy Irons) and take his rightful place as King of Pride Rock.

The scene from *The Lion King* that best illustrates the common pattern of animated films portraying an act of violence as humorous occurs when a rhinoceros sits on Zazu the Hornbill (voiced by Rowan Atkinson). This scene begins with Queen Sarabi (voiced by Madge Sinclair) giving young Simba and Nala permission to go play near the waterhole as long as Zazu is with them. However, Simba and Nala want to explore the elephant graveyard so they need to “ditch” Zazu. Simba and Nala sing a song while a herd of elephants dances and sings along in order to distract Zazu so Simba and Nala can get away. During the singing of the song, a pyramid of hippos, anteaters, antelopes, giraffes and a rhino are formed with Zazu on the bottom holding the pyramid up in the air. By the end of the song, the pyramid topples which causes the rhino to sit on top of Zazu. Zazu’s eyes get very large once he realizes the pyramid is about to topple. While the rhino is on top of Zazu, the viewers can hear Zazu saying “I beg your pardon, madam, but ... GET OFF.” The humorous tone of Zazu politely telling the rhino to get off of him was what made the act of violence appear camouflaged. Also, in the background, viewers were able to hear both Simba and Nala laughing at the fact that the rhino fell on top of Zazu and they were able to get away. The humorous tone of Zazu telling the rhino to “get off” and the fact that Zazu was not physically hurt was also telling viewers not to take the violence seriously and, therefore, minimized the violent act of the rhino sitting on Zazu.

In the other 19 films in my sample, the strategy “humorous undertones” was not frequently employed as it was in the more humour driven narratives in the comedies and animated films. However, this does not imply that these films never used the strategy humorous undertones. When action films did use humour, they usually incorporated a humorous act of violence immediately following a very intense fight or battle scene in order to lighten the mood of the scene. By doing this, these films attempted to break-up the intense seriousness of the narrative by incorporating some light-hearted humour. This finding was consistent with Browne et al.’s (2002) argument that humour “undermines the seriousness of the enacted violence” (p. 359). Consider the following example from the film *Independence Day* (1996): The violent scene begins with an intense battle between an alien spacecraft and Captain Stephen Hiller (Will Smith), in which the alien spacecraft is chasing and shooting at Captain Hiller in his fighter jet. After dodging the shots, Captain Hiller has to eject from his fighter jet in order to avoid crashing, which causes the alien spacecraft to crash. After the alien spacecraft crashes, Captain Hiller opens the door to the spacecraft, punches the alien in the face and says “welcome to Earth!” As illustrated by this example, it becomes apparent that this action film moves between and across the conventions of different genres. More specifically, in this violent scene, the conventions of both the action and comedy genres are activated. This relates to Parks’ (2003) idea of “generic hybridity” as cited previously. The humorous tone used when Captain Hiller says “welcome to Earth” was appropriate given the hybrid quality of the film and was an indicator that viewers should not take the violence seriously. Thus, I interpreted the act of violence as being camouflaged. Camouflaging the violence by portraying it with humorous undertones was employed in this film scene as a way of

breaking the tension and seriousness of the previous battle scene and, therefore, minimized my reading of the violent act of Captain Hiller punching the alien in the face.

Camouflaging the violence by portraying it with a humorous undertone had a major affect on my reading of these films by changing the meaning of the violence. When I compared and contrasted two identical acts of violence, such as a shooting, my reading of these acts changed when one was portrayed humorously and the other was not. An example from the selected film texts is found in the films *Men in Black* (1997) and *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003). Both of these films depicted an aggressor using a gun to shoot a victim. Therefore, in my quantitative analysis, I coded both of these acts of violence as a shooting. However, upon further analysis, it became apparent that the meanings of these two acts of violence were not the same. In the film *Men in Black* (1997), the violence was portrayed with a humorous undertone. Because of this, the violence was camouflaged and, therefore, my perception of the shooting was minimized because I no longer interpreted the violence as serious but rather interpreted it as funny. In contrast, in *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), the strategy “humorous undertones” was not employed and, therefore, my perception of the violence was not minimized.

Consider the violent scene from *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003) when a large group of Smiths’ shoots the Keymaker (Randall Duk Kim) in the chest multiple times with their guns. This scene does not employ any strategies, such as humorous undertones, that could affect or minimize how I interpreted the meaning of the violence. Thus, I interpreted the shooting as a serious and deadly act of violence committed by a large group of villains against a character classified as being “neutral.”

Now consider the violent scene from *Men in Black* (1997) in which Agent K (Tommy Lee Jones) shoots Jeebs (Tony Shalhoub), a jewelry store owner, in the head with a gun. I interpreted this scene as humorous because of the fact that Jeebs is an alien and can spontaneously grow back his head. When Agent K shoots Jeebs in the head, green goop flies all over the store but then suddenly viewers can hear Jeebs' voice in the background saying "You insensitive prick! Do you have any idea how much that stings?" while his head is growing back. The victim's comedic response, the fact that the character can grow back his head and did not suffer any realistic consequences as a result of being shot in the head were what made the act of violence appear humorous. I interpreted this violent scene as camouflaging the violence because the humorous tone of the alien Jeebs' words cues viewers not to take the violence seriously and, therefore, minimized how I interpreted the violent act.

### ***Conclusion***

My findings suggest that the strategy "humor undertones" was employed in many animated and comedy films in order to camouflage the portrayal of violence. Camouflaging the violence by portraying it with humorous undertones was, in my view, one potential way to cue viewers that they should not take the violence seriously but rather should interpret the violence as funny. Setting the violence within a humorous tone was, in my reading, a successful strategy in the five outlier films I sampled. Humorous undertones were a successful strategy because, in my view, camouflaging the violence minimized my perception of the violence. Based on my reading of the animated and comedy films, a viewer's perception of the violence could be minimized when the

impact of the violence was camouflaged by portraying the violence with humorous undertones. Portraying violence with humorous undertones ended up making me, as a viewer, believe the violence was trivial and should not be taken seriously.

## 2.3

## Theme 3: Justifying Violence

This chapter presents both my quantitative and qualitative findings relating to the theme “justifying violence.” First, I present the descriptive findings obtained from the quantitative content analysis and explain how the content categories form the theme “justifying violence.” Second, I present the analytical findings for this theme that stem from employing a poststructuralist textual analysis. Throughout this chapter, I argue that portraying violence as a conflict between “good and evil” may affect whether viewers will perceive an act of violence portrayed in a film as justified. As stated by Moore and Cockerton (1996), “when the ‘[evil] guys’ are punished, the violence utilized by the ‘good guys’ to achieve this is often portrayed as justified.... It is suggested that the viewer attributes the ‘good guy’ violence as a justified means to an end” (p. 932). Therefore, in my view, the portrayal of violence in a particular film is more likely to be read as justified when “good” characters are shown committing violence against “evil” characters.

While reading this chapter, the reader will note that there are many similarities and overlap between what I discuss in this chapter and what I discuss in Chapter 2.1: “Legitimizing Violence.” In the “Legitimizing Violence” chapter, my discussion is more simplistic compared to this chapter because it relates specifically to the strategy “motive.” In chapter 2.1, I argue that the hero is often portrayed as having a legitimate motive to commit a violent act, such as for the purpose of security and survival. Furthermore, I argue that the villain is frequently portrayed as not having a legitimate

motive to commit violence, such as for world domination. In chapter 2.3: “Justifying Violence,” my discussion is more complex because it relates specifically to the strategy “good and evil.” Throughout chapter 2.3, I will argue that the strategy “good and evil” is expressed in the sampled films in various ways: as a struggle between social classes (i.e., lower class versus upper class), as a struggle between the human race and evil grotesque creatures or as a racialized conflict between “White” and “Black” characters, which I will discuss in further detail. Although both of these chapters have similarities, I believe their subtle differences are important and, therefore, these chapters are separated.

### ***Thematic Analysis***

There are many ways in which a film can justify violence. From my thematic analysis, I found one possible strategy to justify violence: to represent the violence as a conflict between good and evil. In my thematic analysis, I found that the theme I identified as “justifying violence” was formed from four content categories: “character attributes,” “type of character,” “race of the character,” and “social class of the character.” Based on the thematic analysis, I concluded that the similarities between the four content categories were they measured good and evil.

In my sample of films, the content categories were important indicators that represented the conflict between good and evil. The quantitative findings for the content category “character attributes” revealed a pattern wherein over half of the aggressors (51 percent) were depicted as evil characters and over half of the victims (57 percent) were depicted as good characters. Less frequently, the aggressors were depicted as good characters (31 percent) and the victims were depicted as evil characters (21 percent). In



some instances, the aggressor (15 percent) and the victim (21 percent) were depicted as neutral characters (see Table 13). For the content category “type of character,” a pattern was revealed wherein the majority of the aggressors were depicted as fantasy characters (53 percent) instead of being depicted as human characters (43 percent). Another pattern revealed that the majority of the victims were depicted as human characters (57 percent) instead of being depicted as fantasy characters (39 percent). In comparison, less than 2 percent of the aggressors and victims were depicted as animals (see Table 14). For the content category of “the race of the character,” the quantitative findings revealed a pattern wherein the majority of the aggressors (52 percent) and victims (62 percent) were represented as “White.” In contrast, some of the aggressors (17 percent) and victims (9 percent) were classified as “Black.” However, in some instances, the aggressors (23 percent) and the victims (22 percent) were also classified as Other, a category in which I included non-human characters such as droids and Ewoks (see Table 15). The content category of “social class of the characters” revealed a pattern wherein the aggressors were almost equally classified as being from a lower social class (poor) (49 percent) or an upper social class (rich) (48 percent). Another pattern revealed that most of the victims were classified as being from an upper social class (53 percent) compared to being classified from a lower social class (44 percent) (see Table 16). In summary, my quantitative analysis revealed patterns wherein the aggressors were frequently portrayed as evil; fantasy characters; White; and equally distributed between lower and upper social class. Furthermore, my quantitative analysis revealed patterns wherein the victims were frequently portrayed as good; human characters; White; and from the lower class.

Overall, my thematic reading of the four content categories suggested that portraying the violence as a conflict between good and evil was an important strategy in determining whether viewers would perceive the portrayal of violence as justified. The presence of these content categories in so many films led me to ask these questions: why might the strategy of “good and evil” be portrayed in the selected films and what affect might this strategy have on my reading of the sampled films? These questions helped me conduct an in-depth qualitative analysis of the representation of the strategy “good and evil” by examining how this strategy might be employed in these films in order to try to justify the violence and, thus, minimize my perception of violence.

### *Justifying Violence*

My sample of films expressed the strategy “good and evil” in various ways, sometimes through on-going struggles between lower class and upper class characters, at others through the struggle between the human race and “evil grotesque creatures,” and yet at others through the representation of good and evil as a racialized conflict. Although this strategy was expressed in various ways, each of the films in my sample did portray the recurrent narrative of good prevailing over evil in some way. Upon further analysis, I recognized that the strategy “good and evil” manifested itself in some of the films differently. In the films that used a historical setting or event as a backdrop to tell their story, I found that the strategy “good and evil” was manifested as an on-going struggle between lower and upper class characters. In the films that relied on sci-fi and fantasy elements to tell their stories, I found that the strategy “good and evil” was manifested as a struggle between the human race and “evil grotesque creatures” as well

as through a racialized conflict. Throughout this chapter, I discuss my qualitative findings based on these two subsets: historical fiction<sup>11</sup> and fantasy/science fiction.<sup>12</sup>

### *Historical Fiction Films*

My intertextual familiarity with other films from the historical fiction genre led me to expect that the sampled films would tell the story of good and evil and would tell it in certain ways (Gray, 2005). I expected that the “good” characters would be depicted as humans who commit violence in order to protect the lives of the people they love. In addition, I expected that the “evil” characters would be depicted as humans who commit violence for their own selfish gain. After screening the three historical fiction films in my sample, I found that my expectations were an accurate representation of what took place in these films.

In the three historical fiction films sampled, most of the characters were able to be classified as either good or evil. Upon further qualitative analysis, I recognized a pattern in which the strategy “good and evil” was often manifested in these three films as a struggle between the lower class (poor) and the upper class (rich). More specifically, the lower class characters were depicted as “good” and the upper class characters were depicted as “evil.” However, this observation is contextually dependent; that is, not all

---

<sup>11</sup> The three historical fiction films were: *Forrest Gump* (1994), *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), and *Titanic* (1997).

<sup>12</sup> The fantasy/science fiction films were: *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003), *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (2001), *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002), *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002), *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), *Finding Nemo* (2003), *Spider-Man* (2002), *The Lion King* (1994), *Shrek 2* (2004), *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004), *Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace* (1999), *Jurassic Park* (1993), *Independence Day* (1996), *Star Wars: Episode IV - The New Hope* (1977), *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), *The Sixth Sense* (1999), *Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones* (2002), *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (1997), *Men in Black* (1997) and *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi* (1983).

films represented the characters in this way. There were certain instances where a lower class character was portrayed as evil and an upper class character was portrayed as good. But, in my research, the pattern of depicting lower class characters as good and upper class characters as evil was dominant. This pattern was significant in helping me understand whether the violence committed by the lower class and upper class characters would be portrayed as justified.

I interpreted an act of violence as justified when “lower class” characters portrayed as good committed violence against “upper class” characters portrayed as evil. In most historical fiction films, the “lower class” characters were often portrayed as attempting to prevent the “upper class” characters from using their power and control for evil purposes. Therefore, in some instances, it was necessary for the “lower class” characters to use violence against the “upper class” characters. Thus, I interpreted the violence the good “lower class” characters used as a justifiable response to the evilness of the “upper class” characters. This pattern, related to the strategy “good and evil,” is clearly evident in the film *Titanic* (1997). Within this historical fiction film, the poor characters, such as Jack Dawson (Leonardo DiCaprio) are portrayed as good: heroic, hard working, compassionate, and pure, whereas the rich characters, such as Cal Hockley (Billy Zane), Ruth DeWitt Bukater (Frances Fisher) and Spicer Lovejoy (David Warner) are portrayed as evil: corrupt, callous and villains. Throughout this film, Jack Dawson and Rose Dewitt Bukater (Kate Winslet) are constantly portrayed as having to struggle against the evil forces of Rose’s rich fiancé and mother, who continually attempt to thwart their budding romance. When lower class characters like Jack, commit an act of violence against upper class characters, I read this violence as justified because the lower

class characters were portrayed as good. In contrast, when upper class characters like Cal, commit violence against lower class characters like Jack, I interpreted this violence as not being justified because the upper class characters were portrayed as evil. In this case, “good and evil” was a successful strategy in the minimization of violence.

The social class of the characters was important to my reading of the strategy “good and evil” within the historical fiction films and, thus revealed a common binary opposition: lower class (poor)/upper class (rich). In my sample of historical fiction films, the binary opposition lower class/upper class was one I considered a “violent hierarchy” (Derrida, 1981b), in which the lower class was represented as good and the upper class was represented as evil. Based on my reading of these films, I found that two of the films did not attempt to disrupt this binary.<sup>13</sup> In fact, these two historical fiction films frequently relied on this violent hierarchical binary in order to tell their stories. However, I found that one of the historical fiction films did disrupt the lower class/upper class binary.

From my sample, the film that best illustrates the lack of disruption of the lower class/upper class binary is *The Passion of the Christ* (2004). On the “lower class” side of the binary, the main character, Jesus Christ, is a clear representation of goodness: compassionate, forgiving and a savior. On the “upper class” side of the binary, characters such as the Jewish Priests are clear representations of evil: cruel and corrupt. Within this film, I did not observe any disruptions of the lower class/upper class binary. Thus, the violent hierarchical structure of the lower class/upper class binary remains intact, with the lower side of the binary being privileged over the upper class side of the

---

<sup>13</sup> The following is a list of the historical fiction films that did not disrupt the binary opposition of lower class/upper class: *Forrest Gump* (1994) and *The Passion of the Christ* (2004).

binary. In fact, the film did not attempt to diverge from representing “lower class” characters as good and “upper class” characters as evil. In this film, when a “lower class” character is portrayed as committing an act of violence against an “upper class” character, I read this act as justified because these characters used violence as a way to prevent the abuse of power and control; I, thus interpreted the violence as acceptable. In contrast, when an “upper class” character commits an act of violence against a “lower class” character, I was less or not likely to interpret this violence as justified because the violence these characters used was for evil purposes.

In my sample, only 1 out of the 3 historical fiction films disrupted the binary opposition of lower class/upper class.<sup>14</sup> By disrupting this opposition, the binary no longer entails a violent hierarchy and, therefore, the lower class side of the binary was no longer privileged over the upper class side of the binary. An example of this disruption is found in *Titanic* (1997). This one outlier film disrupts the lower class/upper class binary by representing Rose, an “upper class” character as “good” and heroic. Thus, the relationship between “upper class” and “evilness” in this film is problematized. Representing Rose in this way results in her character transgressing class boundaries so that the lower class/upper class binary is disrupted and no longer signifies good and evil. This film’s portrayal of an “upper class” character as “good” is in contrast to the other historical fiction films in my sample, which often portray “upper class” characters as evil and as committing violence against the less fortunate lower class characters. Because this character (Rose) disrupts the lower class/upper class binary, any violent actions that she may have committed such as punching a man in the nose, in my view, were justified

---

<sup>14</sup> The following is the historical fiction film that did disrupt the lower class/upper class binary: *Titanic* (1997).

because she was portrayed as a good and heroic character who was only trying to help the people around her, especially Jack.

### *Fantasy/Science Fiction Films*

My intertextual familiarity with films from the fantasy/science fiction genres led me to have certain expectations about how the sampled films would tell the story of good and evil (Gray, 2005). For example, I expected that the “good” characters would be depicted as humans who commit violence in order to prevent evil from destroying the world. Furthermore, I expected that the “evil” characters would be depicted as grotesque creatures who commit violence in order to take over the world. In these films, I expected to see both “good” and “evil” characters committing violent acts. However, when good characters committed violence against evil characters, I expected that this violence would be justified because they were attempting to prevent evil from destroying the world and, therefore, I expected that my perception of the violence would be minimized. In contrast, I did not expect the violence to be justified when evil characters were portrayed committing violence against good characters and, therefore, I would not perceive the violence as minimized. After screening the 22 fantasy/science fiction films I sampled, I found that my expectations were an accurate representation of what actually took place in these films.

While performing an intertextual reading of the fantasy film *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, I recognized that my memory of the actor Orlando Bloom kept creeping into my reading. My “filmic memory” (Denzin, 1994) of Orlando Bloom from *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, in which Orlando Bloom plays the

character Legolas, an elf with attributes that made him good and heroic, caused me to have certain expectations about what type of character Orlando Bloom would play in *Pirates of the Caribbean*. That is, because Bloom played a good and heroic character in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, I expected the character he portrayed in *Pirates of the Caribbean* would also be good and heroic. These expectations were indeed accurate.

In the 22 fantasy/science fiction films studied, I was able to easily classify most of the characters as either good or evil. Upon further qualitative analysis, I recognized a pattern in which the strategy “good and evil” was manifested in these fantasy/science fiction films as a racialized conflict between “White” and “Black” characters. More specifically, the White-skinned and/or white clothed characters often signified “good” and the Black-skinned and/or black clothed characters signified “evil.” However, this observation is contextually dependent; that is, not all films represented the characters in this way. In fact, there were certain instances where White characters were portrayed as evil and Black characters were portrayed as good. But, in my research, this pattern of depicting White characters as good and Black characters as evil was a predominant representation in the sampled films. This supports the findings of Kim (2004) and Knaus (2005) who also found that in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, “Whiteness” signified good and “Blackness” signified evil, both in terms of racially and as a colour scheme. This pattern was significant in helping me understand whether the violence committed by the “White” and “Black” characters would be portrayed, in my view, as justified. Thus, in my sample of films, I interpreted a violent act as justified when White-skinned or white clothed characters committed violence against Black-skinned or black clothed characters. In most fantasy/science fiction films, the “White” characters were often portrayed as



attempting to prevent “Black” characters from taking over and destroying the world. Therefore, the violence committed by “White” characters, in my view, would be perceived as a justifiable response to the pure evilness of “Black” characters. The race of a character and/or colour of clothing thus revealed a binary opposition commonly used in Hollywood fantasy/science fiction films: White/Black.

Media texts more broadly construct race as a White/Black binary (Friedman, 1995; Perea, 1997), in which Whiteness is privileged and Blackness is marginalized and/or repressed. In my sample of fantasy/science fiction films, the binary opposition White/Black was one I considered a “violent hierarchy” (Derrida, 1981b), with the “White” side of the binary being privileged and the “Black” side of the binary being marginalized. In the sampled fantasy/science fiction films, the “White” side of the binary was privileged because the colour White was used to signify lightness, purity and goodness. In contrast, “Black” was used as a sign of darkness, danger and evil. Based on my reading, the majority of these films did not attempt to disrupt this binary opposition. In fact, most of the fantasy/science fiction films in my sample relied heavily on this violent hierarchical binary in order to clearly indicate who the good and evil characters were and also to justify the “good” characters committing violence against the “evil” characters. However, I did discover a small group of outlier films that disrupted the White/Black binary in a variety of ways.

In my sample of fantasy/science fiction films, I found that 19 out of the 22 films did not disrupt the White/Black binary.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the violent hierarchical structure of

---

<sup>15</sup> The following is a list of the fantasy/science fiction films that did not disrupt the binary opposition of White/Black: *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003), *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (2001), *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* (1999), *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002), *Jurassic Park* (1993), *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002), *The Lord of the Rings: The*

the White/Black binary remains intact, where “White” characters were privileged and represented as good and the “Black” characters were marginalized or repressed and represented as evil. In fact, these films frequently relied on this violent hierarchical binary in order to tell the story of good prevailing over evil. An example from the films that clearly illustrates a filmmaker’s reliance on the binary opposition White/Black to signify good and evil is found in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001, 2002, 2003).

Portrayals of Whiteness signifying good are present in the representation of characters such as Gandalf the White Wizard (Ian McKellen), Aragorn (Viggo Mortensen), Legolas (Orlando Bloom), Frodo Baggins (Elijah Wood), and Samwise Gamgee (Sean Astin), which are all played by “White” actors. These characters are visually depicted as White-skinned “humans” whose only motivation to commit violence is to protect Middle Earth from being destroyed by Sauron. In contrast, portrayals of Blackness signifying evil are widely depicted in the representation of the faceless Black Riders in their black hoods and horses and the dark-skinned orcs and goblins. Even when an evil character is presented as “White,” such as in the case with Saruman the White Wizard (Christopher Lee), Kim (2004) claims that “his castle of black obsidian and black chamber and palantir tip off viewers to his black heart” (p. 876). The Orcs, for example, are visually depicted as dark-skinned, grotesque, sadistic creatures who enjoy killing. As Knaus (2005) states, the “Orcs and Goblins represent Hollywood’s overarching and historical narrative of people of color as angry, crazed, dark, ugly, thick lipped, and constantly fighting among

---

*Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), *Finding Nemo* (2003), *Spider-Man* (2002), *Star Wars: The New Hope* (1977), *The Lion King* (1994), *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), *Shrek 2* (2004), *The Sixth Sense* (1999), *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003), *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones* (2002), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004), *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (1997), and *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* (1983).

themselves. Not one is light skinned or even “good enough” to wear light colored clothing” (p. 55). Within this trilogy, the violent hierarchical binary of White/Black is not disrupted. In most cases, this film series did not attempt to diverge from representing “White” characters as good and “Black” characters as evil. In this trilogy of films, when a “White” character is portrayed committing violence against a “Black” character, I read this act of violence as justified because these characters used violence as a way to prevent evil from destroying the world and, therefore, I perceived this violence as acceptable. In contrast, when a “Black” character is portrayed committing violence against a “White” character, I was less or not at all likely to interpret this violence as justified because the violence these characters used were for the purpose of destroying the world and, as a result, I did not consider this an acceptable form of violence. As illustrated in this trilogy, “good and evil” was a successful strategy in the minimization of violence when good “White” characters were portrayed committing violence against evil “Black” characters.

In my sample, I found that only 3 out of the 22 fantasy/science fiction films disrupted the binary opposition of White/Black.<sup>16</sup> The disruption of the White/Black binary resulted in the violent hierarchy that exists through this opposition to be dismantled. By dismantling the violent hierarchy, the White side of the binary was not considered privileged anymore and, therefore, the Black side of the binary was no longer marginalized or repressed. These three outlier films disrupted the binary of White/Black by representing some “Black” characters as “good” rather than just “evil.” Therefore, in these films, the relationship between “Whiteness” and “goodness” as well as “Blackness” and “evilness” is problematized. An example of this disruption is found in *Men in Black*

---

<sup>16</sup> The following is a list of the fantasy/science fiction films that disrupted the binary opposition of White/Black: *Independence Day* (1996), *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003) and *Men in Black* (1997).

(1997), in which Agent J (Will Smith), a Black police officer is portrayed as a “good” and heroic character. Within this particular film, Agent J is African-American, dresses all in black and wears black sunglasses. He works for a secret organization, called Men in Black, whose main role is to monitor and police alien activity on Earth. Agent J is portrayed throughout this film as a good and heroic character that ends up saving the world from an evil alien terrorist. Portraying a “Black” character as the “good-guy” and a hero is in contrast to the majority of the other fantasy/science fiction films in my sample, which portray “White” characters saving the world from evil characters typically portrayed as “Black”-skinned or black clothed. Because this character disrupts the White/Black binary in that he is Black and dresses in black clothing, his violent actions, in my view, were considered justified because he was portrayed as a good and heroic character who was trying to protect the world from aliens threatening to blow up the Earth.

Portraying an act of violence as justified had a major affect on my reading of these films, by changing how I interpreted the meaning of the violence. When I compared and contrasted two acts of violence that I had quantitatively coded as identical, such as a stabbing, my qualitative reading of these violent acts changed when I interpreted one as being justified and the other as not being justified. An example of this is found in a comparison of scenes from the science fiction film *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones* (2002) and the fantasy film *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001). Both of these films portrayed an aggressor stabbing a victim with either a lightsaber or sword. Therefore, in my quantitative analysis, I coded both of these acts of violence as stabbings. Upon further analysis, it became apparent that my interpretation of

these violent acts changed when one was justified and the other was not. In *Attack of the Clones*, I felt that, in most cases, the violence was justified because the film portrayed the “White” characters that were represented as good committing violence against the “Black” characters that were represented as evil. Quite often, the “White” characters in these fantasy/science fiction films were narratively constructed as attempting to prevent evil “Black” characters from destroying the world and, as a result, my perception of their commission of violence was minimized. In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, where we witness a “Black” or dark clothed character committing an act of violence against a “White” character in order to fulfill their desire for world destruction, I did not interpret the act of violence as being justified and, therefore, my perception of the violence was not minimized.

Consider the violent scene from *Attack of the Clones* in which Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor), a “White” character that is a clear representation of goodness, uses his lightsaber to cut off the arm of Zam Wesell (Leeanna Walsman), a dark-skinned and dark clothed character that represents evil. I interpreted this violent scene as one in which Obi-Wan’s violent act is justified. This scene takes place in a bar where both Obi-Wan and Anakin Skywalker (Hayden Christensen) are searching for Zam, who earlier attempted to assassinate Senator Amidala (Natalie Portman). Obi-Wan calmly waits at the bar until she appears. Suddenly, Zam creeps up behind Obi-Wan and raises her gun to the back of his head. Before she can fire her gun, Obi-Wan quickly spins around and uses his lightsaber to cut off her arm. As a viewer, I interpreted this act of violence as being justified because Obi-Wan was a “White” character that, throughout the film, signified goodness and was one of the heroes of the film; his only apparent motivation to

commit violence was to protect himself and the Senator. Because Obi-Wan commits the violent act against a dark-skinned character that wanted to assassinate the Senator, I was more inclined to interpret his use of violence as acceptable. Portraying a “White” character that was clearly represented as good committing violence against a “Black” or dark-skinned character that was a clear representation of evil encouraged me, as a viewer, to see the act of violence as justified and, therefore, my interpretation of this violent act was minimized.

Now consider the violent scene from *The Fellowship of the Ring* in which the Witch-King of Angmar (Shane Rangi), a “Black” skinned and clothed character that represents everything that is evil in Middle Earth, stabs Frodo (Elijah Wood), a “White” character that represents the true goodness of Middle Earth, in the shoulder using his sword. I interpreted this violent scene as one in which the Witch-King is not justified to commit the violent act against Frodo. This violent scene takes place on the hill, Weathertop, where Frodo, Sam, Merry (Dominic Monaghan), Pippin (Billy Boyd), and Aragorn are stopping to rest for the night. While resting on the hill, they are attacked by a group of Nazgul. During the attack, Frodo places the magic ring of power on his finger in order to evade the Nazgul, however, the Witch-King is still able to see Frodo and uses a magically poisonous Morgul blade to stab Frodo in the shoulder. I interpreted this act of violence as not being justified because the Witch-King was a “Black” skinned and clothed character who wanted to kill Frodo, a good and heroic white character, in order to get the ring for himself and to help his master, Sauron, take over Middle Earth. Portraying a “Black” character committing violence against a “White” character

encouraged me, in my reading, to not interpret the act of violence as justified and, therefore, my perception of this violent act was not minimized.

In my quantitative analysis, these scenes from *Attack of the Clones* and *The Fellowship of the Ring* were coded as containing identical acts of violence. However, because in *Attack of the Clones* (2002) the act of violence appeared to be justified, my interpretation of its meaning changed and, as a result, I interpreted this scene as portraying an acceptable use of violence. The meaning of a violent act changed when I, as a viewer, interpreted the violent act as justified. As identified in my analysis, interpreting whether a violent act was justified depended on whether the aggressor was depicted as a “White” character trying to protect the world from evil or a “Black” skinned or dark clothed character trying to take over and destroy the world. Thus, the character classification of the aggressors as “White” or “Black” was very important to my reading of the strategy “good and evil.”

### ***Conclusion***

My findings suggest that the strategy “good and evil” was employed in the films in order to represent the portrayal of violence as justified. Justifying violence by portraying good characters committing violence against evil characters was, in my reading, a successful strategy in the films I studied. In my sample of films, the strategy “good and evil” was manifested in the two genres differently. In the historical fiction films, the strategy “good and evil” was manifested as a struggle between the lower class characters, which were depicted as “good” and the upper class characters, which were depicted as “evil.” In the fantasy/science fiction films, the strategy “good and evil” was

manifested as a racialized conflict between “White” and “Black,” with White-skinned and/or white clothed characters signifying “goodness” and the Black-skinned and/or black clothed characters signifying “evilness.” Based on my reading of the film texts, I believe the viewer’s perception of the violence could potentially be minimized when the use of violence was deemed acceptable by portraying good characters (i.e., lower class and White-skinned or white clothed characters) committing violence against evil characters (i.e., upper class and Black-skinned or black clothed characters) in order to prevent evil from destroying the world. Portraying a “White” character committing violence against a “Black” character ended up making me, as a viewer, believe their use of violence was acceptable and justified and, therefore, my perception of the violence was minimized.



## 2.4

## Theme 4: Disguising Violence

This chapter presents both my quantitative and qualitative findings relating to the theme “disguising violence.” First, I present the descriptive findings obtained from the quantitative content analysis and explain how the content categories form the theme “disguising violence.” Second, I present the analytical findings for this theme that stem from employing a poststructuralist textual analysis. Throughout this chapter, I argue that varying the level of graphicness of violence may affect whether the violence is read as being disguised. In my view, the portrayal of violence is more likely to appear to be disguised when violence was portrayed with a low level of graphicness.

*Thematic Analysis*

There are many ways in which a film can disguise violence. From my thematic analysis, I found one possible strategy to disguise the violence: to represent the violence with a low level of graphicness. In my thematic analysis, I found that the theme I identified as “disguising violence” was formed from four content categories identified in my quantitative analysis: “degree of injury,” “signs of blood,” “framing of violence,” and “framing of impact.” Based on the thematic analysis of these content categories, I concluded that the similarities between the four content categories were they measured the varying levels of graphicness of violence in film.

In my sample of films, the content categories were important indicators as to how graphic the violence was. The quantitative findings for the content category “degree of

injury” revealed a pattern wherein the vast majority of the violent acts in the selected film texts depicted no physical injury being inflicted on the victim (68 percent). These films more rarely depicted the degree of injury inflicted on the victim as extreme (13 percent), moderate (10 percent) or mild (9 percent) (see Table 17). As for the content category “signs of blood,” the findings revealed a pattern wherein the vast majority of the violent acts depicted no signs of blood on the victim (89 percent); more rarely they depicted “mild” signs of blood (6 percent) and “moderate” signs of blood (3 percent). They almost never depicted “extreme” signs of blood on the victim (1 percent) (see Table 18). These findings for “blood” were consistent with prior research conducted by Browne et al. (2002). For the content category “framing of violence,” the quantitative findings revealed a pattern wherein the vast majority of the violent acts committed by aggressors were framed using a long shot (85 percent). More rarely, the violence was framed using close-up shots (11 percent); 4 percent of all the violent acts coded were not shown on screen (see Table 19). For the content category “framing of impact,” a pattern was revealed wherein the majority of violent acts framed the impact to the victim’s body using long shots (85 percent), while close-up shots (13 percent) were more rarely used. In 3 percent of the violent acts coded, no impact was shown on screen at all (see Table 19). In summary, my quantitative analysis revealed patterns wherein the films studied frequently downplayed the degree of injury inflicted on the victim, rarely portrayed any signs of blood on the victim, and framed both the violence and the impact of the violence on the victim’s body in long shots.

Overall, my thematic reading of these four content categories suggested that varying the level of graphicness was an important strategy in determining whether the

portrayal of violence was read as disguised. The presence of these content categories in so many of the films in my data set led me to ask why the strategy of “level of graphicness” might even have been employed in these films and what possible affect this strategy might have on my reading of the films. These questions helped me conduct an in-depth qualitative analysis in which I interrogated the ways in which the strategy “level of graphicness” might have been employed in the sampled films in order to try to disguise the violence and, thus, minimize my perception of violence.

### ***Disguising Violence***

My intertextual familiarity with other films that share similar generic structures led me to have certain expectations about how graphic the violent content of the sampled films would be (Gray, 2005). Based on my experiences as a viewer of other films from the same genres, I expected that the films in my sample would contain highly graphic portrayals of violence in their narratives. Therefore, I expected these films to be “filled with images of arteries spurting, limbs mutilated or chopped off, faces exploding, flesh penetrated or torn, and so on” (Rothman, 2001, p. 39). After screening the 25 films in my sample, however, I did not find my expectations to be an accurate representation of what actually took place in these films, with the exception of the film *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) and a few specific scenes from other films such as *The Matrix* (2003), *Titanic* (1997) and *Men In Black* (1997).

Before screening these films, I had expected the “18A” rated films (i.e., *The Passion of the Christ*) to be more graphic than films rated “G” and “PG” (i.e., *The Lion King* and *Star Wars: The New Hope*). I expected the higher rated films would contain

more violence, especially more highly graphic violence, simply because this was likely one of the reasons that the films were given such high ratings in the first place. Within my sample, three of the films were rated “G,” 16 films were rated “PG,” five films were rated “14A,” and only one film was assigned an “18A” rating.<sup>17</sup> When I compare the violence portrayed in these films, the only film to contain highly graphic portrayals was the “18A” rated film *The Passion of the Christ* (2004). I found that the “G” and “PG” rated films rarely (if ever) depicted highly graphic violence within their narratives. As for the “14A” rated films, only one film, *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003) was found to depict violence in a highly graphic manner. Therefore, I concluded that the majority of the films in my sample with the ratings “G,” “PG” and “14A” usually only depicted violence with a low level of graphicness. I read the portrayal of violence with a low level of graphicness as a strategy used in the sampled films to disguise acts of violence. Where the violence was portrayed in a highly graphic manner, by contrast, I read no attempt to disguise the violence.

What distinguishes violent acts from one another in my sample of films was the level of graphicness portrayed in each violent scene. I interpreted an act of violence as being disguised when the graphicness of the violence was portrayed as low. A low graphic portrayal of violence was evidenced by, for example, the depiction of the victim sustaining physical injuries ranging from none to minor, signs of blood ranging from none to mild, and framing the violence and the impact on the victim’s body in long shots. An example of portraying violence with a low level of graphicness is found in the film *Star Wars: The New Hope* (1977). The scene from *The New Hope* that best illustrates an

---

<sup>17</sup> See Appendix D for a table that detailed the Maritime Film Classification System applied to films in theatres.

act of violence being portrayed as low in graphicness occurs when Han Solo (Harrison Ford) shoots Greedo (Paul Blake) with his gun. This scene begins with Greedo, a bounty hunter, approaching Han Solo in a bar while pointing a gun at him. Greedo is there on behalf of Jabba the Hutt (voiced by Larry Ward), to whom Han Solo owes a large debt for a failed smuggling run. Greedo makes his intentions clear to Han: that if he does not give Greedo the money Greedo is going to kill him. At the end of their conversation, they both fire their guns at each other, with Greedo's shot missing and Han's shot hitting Greedo. In this violent scene, both the violence and the impact of the violence are framed in long shot. The viewers do not get to see the bullet penetrating Greedo's body, thus viewers do not see him sustaining any physical injuries. When the gun is fired, a large cloud of smoke appears in front of Greedo so that he is not visible on screen. After the smoke clears, Greedo falls on top of the table and is assumed dead. Because this violent act is portrayed with a low level of graphicness, I interpreted it as being disguised. Here, "graphicness" (or lack thereof) was a successful strategy of minimization.

In contrast, when victims were depicted as sustaining serious physical injuries, which I read based on the depiction of an extreme amount of blood on the victim, and the framing of the violence and the impact on the victim's body in close-up, I interpreted the portrayal of violence as highly graphic. In these instances, I concluded that there was no attempt to disguise the portrayal of violence. An example of portraying the violence in a highly graphic manner is found in the "18A" rated film *The Passion of the Christ* (2004). This film, written and directed by Mel Gibson, depicts the last 12 hours of Jesus Christ's (Jim Caviezel) life on earth before his crucifixion and presents "graphic details of the beating, bleeding, and breaking of Jesus' body" (Pizzato, 2005, p. 371). The scene from

*The Passion of the Christ* that best illustrates the portrayal of an act of violence in a highly graphic manner occurs when two Roman guards whip Jesus multiple times over his entire body. This violent scene, which occurs near the middle of the film, lasts for over 15 minutes. It begins with the two Roman guards chaining Jesus to a cement post in the middle of a courtyard. As bystanders look on, the two Roman guards continuously whip Jesus using many different whipping devices. As Pizzato (2005) notes, when the canes used by the Roman guards “do not bring enough blood, they turn to whips and cat-o-nine-tails with metal hooks that pull the flesh off of Jesus’ bare back” (p. 372). With every crack of the whip, viewers are able to witness deep and large wounds being inflicted upon Jesus’ back, legs and chest. Viewers are given an extreme close-up of the aggressors continuously whipping the body of Jesus. As the two Roman guards continuously whip Jesus, viewers are given an extreme close-up of the different whips brutally slashing and tearing through his flesh. With every impact that tears through Jesus’ skin, a heavy amount of blood is vividly depicted as it splatters across his body, the floor and even onto the guards’ faces and bodies. Because this violence is portrayed in a highly graphic manner, I did not interpret these acts of violence as being disguised in any way. Instead, in my view, violence might be portrayed in a highly graphic manner in order to make it seem more vivid and shocking. In an interview with Diane Sawyer (2004), Mel Gibson expressed these exact sentiments: “I wanted it to be shocking. And I also wanted it to be extreme. I wanted it to push the viewer over the edge. And it does that. I think it pushes one over the edge.” Therefore, because this violence was in no way disguised, my perception of the violent act was not minimized. In the example described above, it is interesting to recognize the graphicness of my own language when

describing this highly graphic scene of violence. The language I used to describe this scene is in fact, replicating the strategy “graphicness.”

Disguising an act of violence by portraying the violence with a low level of graphicness had a major affect on my reading of these films by shifting how I interpreted the meaning of the violence. When I compared and contrasted two identical acts of violence, such as a shooting, my reading of these violent acts changed when one was portrayed as low in graphicness and the other was high in graphicness. For example, both *The Sixth Sense* (1999) and *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003) portrayed an aggressor shooting a victim with a gun. Therefore, in my quantitative analysis, I coded both of these acts of violence as shootings. However, upon further analysis, it became apparent that I perceived the meanings of these two acts of violence differently. Although both of these films used the strategy “graphicness” when portraying violence, these films differed in the way they employed this particular strategy. In *The Sixth Sense*, violence was portrayed with a low level of graphicness. This resulted, in my reading, in the violence being disguised and, as a result, my perception of the shooting in this film was minimized. In contrast, in *The Matrix Reloaded*, the violence was portrayed in a highly graphic manner; the violence was thus not disguised and, therefore, I did not interpret this violence to be minimized.

Consider the violent scene from *The Sixth Sense* in which Dr. Malcolm Crowe (Bruce Willis), a child psychologist, is shot in the stomach by his former patient, Vincent Gray (Donnie Wahlberg). I interpreted this violent scene as one that is portrayed with a low level of graphicness. This scene occurs at the beginning of the film in the scene where viewers are introduced to the characters of Dr. Malcolm Crowe and his wife

(Olivia Williams). They have just returned from a supper where the doctor was honored with an award for the efforts he has made with children. Upon entering their bedroom, the couple becomes aware that they are not alone. In their bathroom is a seemingly disturbed young man who is wearing only his underwear. This young man becomes increasingly upset when Dr. Crowe does not remember him. After a moment, Dr. Crowe realizes that the young man standing in his bathroom is Vincent Gray, a boy he once counseled for apparent hallucinations at the age of ten. When Dr. Crowe recognizes the young man, Vincent expresses his anger that Dr. Crowe did not help him by saying “you failed me” and then turns around to the sink, picks up a gun and shoots Dr. Crowe in the stomach. Dr. Crowe clutches his stomach and falls to the bed in pain. The violent scene fades away with a shot of Malcolm lying on the bed, his wife by his side. I interpreted this violent scene as being disguised because the filmmakers did not visually depict the victim suffering any physical injuries, there were no signs of blood, and the filmmakers framed the violence and impact of the violence on the victim’s body with long shots. Disguising the violence by portraying it with a low level of graphicness, in my view, successfully distanced me, the viewer, from the violence by not realistically depicting the severity of the injury inflicted upon the victim.

Now consider the violent scene from *The Matrix Reloaded* in which an agent shoots Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss) in the chest. I interpreted this scene as one in which violence is portrayed in a highly graphic manner and, therefore, the violence is not disguised. This violent scene begins with an agent and Trinity kicking and punching each other. In order to get away from the agent, Trinity starts to run towards a window while the agent is shooting at her. Then, Trinity jumps through the glass window with



the agent following behind her. As Trinity and the agent are falling to the ground, they begin to fire their guns at one another. They both fire multiple shots, with all shots missing except for one bullet fired by the agent. Viewers are given an extreme close-up of the bullet being fired from the gun; the bullet is seen moving through the air in slow motion. As the bullet slowly moves through the air, viewers are given an extreme close-up of the bullet tearing through Trinity's flesh. As the bullet enters Trinity's chest a large amount of blood is shown oozing out of the bullet wound. The extreme slow-motion of the bullet moving through the air towards Trinity allows viewers to see and experience the violence in an unrealistic way by making viewers look more closely at the violence and see more than they could in "real" time. Portraying violence in extreme slow-motion refers to what is called "bullet time" in reference to *The Matrix* trilogy and other science fiction films. According to Robertson (1999), the "point of "bullet time" is to have the live action slow down so much that, theoretically, one could see the path of a bullet" (p. 1), which is exactly what occurs in this violent scene from *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003).

In my view, not disguising an act of violence by portraying it in a highly graphic manner and in extreme slow-motion has the potential to bring viewers closer to the violence by showing viewers the damage and severity of the injury to the victim's body that they are usually unable to see. As stated by Potter and Smith (2000), a highly graphic portrayal of violence "serves to bring viewers closer to the action and thereby make that action more real or more shocking" (p. 302). In my reading of this violent scene, I was shocked and to some extent devastated while watching the slow moving bullet pierce the flesh of Trinity. I was shocked by this graphic portrayal because the violence was directed towards one of the primary and heroic characters in this film, who

viewers, including myself have become emotionally invested in over the course of the film. Because Trinity is perceived as a hero, I would interpret the violence committed against her as not being legitimate, as discussed in Section 2.1 of this thesis.

In my quantitative analysis, the scenes from *The Sixth Sense* and *The Matrix Reloaded* were coded as identical acts of violence. However, because *The Sixth Sense* was disguised by portraying the violence as low in graphicness and *The Matrix Reloaded* was not disguised by portraying the violence graphically, I found that the meaning of these acts of violence changed in my qualitative reading of them. The meaning of the violent scene from *The Sixth Sense* changed because I perceived the low graphic portrayal of violence as less realistic compared to the highly graphic portrayal of violence found in the scene from *The Matrix Reloaded*. Less realistic portrayals of violence could, in my reading, potentially distance viewers from the violence depicted on-screen; viewers thus might not experience the same emotional affect or reaction that they might have experienced with more realistic and/or shocking portrayals of violence. Thus, viewing low graphic violence is not the same as viewing highly graphic violence. With low graphic portrayals, the actual impact of the violence on the victim's body is rarely ever shown and, therefore, viewers may not give the violent act a second thought because the consequences are not depicted. When watching low graphic portrayals of violence, viewers may just move on to the next scene without any emotional reaction, as if the violence never even happened. Thus, in my view, a viewer's perception of that violence would be minimized.

As identified in my analysis, the level of graphicness varied across the different films I studied. Specifically within the *Star Wars* franchise (1977, 1983, 1999, 2002), a

pattern emerged that appeared to demonstrate how the “context of production” (Bennington & Derrida, 1993, p. 86), with regards to the year of a film’s production affected the graphicness of the violence depicted therein. When I compared and contrasted the violence portrayed in the older *Star Wars* films (1977 and 1983) with the more recently released films (1999 and 2002), I noticed a significant increase in the level of graphicness portrayed in the more recent films. Advances in the special effects technology used could account for this, at least to some degree. With advances in special effects technology, filmmakers have an opportunity to portray violence more graphically and to make it look more realistic with such special effects as Computer-generated imagery (CGI). An example of how the level of graphicness changes as advancements in technology develop is found in a comparison between the films *Star Wars: The New Hope* (1977) and *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones* (2002).

Consider a violent scene from *Star Wars: The New Hope* (1977) in which Ben Obi-Wan Kenobi (Alec Guinness) severs the arm of an alien using his lightsaber. This violent scene begins with an alien trying to pick a fight with young Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill). When Luke does not fight back, the alien pushes him to the ground but before the alien can do anything more to Luke, Old Ben steps in to defend Luke and uses his lightsaber to sever the arm of the alien. In this violent scene, viewers get to observe in a long shot Old Ben swinging his lightsaber but the actual impact of the lightsaber and the severing of the arm of the alien are not shown. The only way that viewers are made aware that “Old Ben” has severed the arm of the alien is when we are shown half of an arm lying on the floor. Because of this, I interpreted the level of graphicness portrayed in

this scene as low and, thus, disguised compared to what was found in the violent scene from *Attack of the Clones*, which I describe below.

In the following scene from *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones* (2002), Count Dooku (Christopher Lee) severs the arm of Anakin Skywalker (Hayden Christensen) using his lightsaber. I interpreted this scene as one that is portrayed in a highly graphic manner, especially when compared to the previously described scene from *The New Hope*. This scene begins with Count Dooku and Anakin Skywalker fighting each other using their lightsabers. As the fight continues, Count Dooku appears to be more skilled with the lightsaber and this skill results in him severing Anakin's arm. Viewers are given a close-up of Count Dooku swinging his red colored lightsaber. As the lightsaber approaches Anakin's arm, viewers are given a close-up of the lightsaber slicing through the arm. With this violent act, there are no signs of blood because when lightsabers cut into a body, the blood instantly dries and, therefore, no blood appears from the wound. Although there are no signs of blood, Anakin is depicted suffering a severe physical injury as a result of the violence. Because this scene shows a close-up image of the lightsaber and a close-up image of the lightsaber severing the arm of Anakin, I thus interpreted this scene as being highly graphic compared to the violent scene from *The New Hope*. However, it is important to mention that the violence in *Attack of the Clones* was not as graphic as it would have been if another weapon had been used; one in which the blood from the injury would have been framed.

As illustrated by the example from *Attack of the Clones*, the CGI special effects allowed George Lucas to fully show in close-up the severing of Anakin's arm in a highly graphic and realistic manner. However, because CGI was fairly new back in 1977 when

George Lucas first created the *Star Wars* films, he was limited in the ways he could portray, for example, the severing of an alien's arm. Therefore, because of this limitation, George Lucas could only portray the severing of the alien's arm in a less graphic manner and, therefore, the image of violence was disguised. The examples from *The New Hope* and *Attack of the Clones* suggest that levels of graphicness depicted in films have changed as groundbreaking advancements in special effects technology have developed.

### ***Conclusion***

My findings suggest that the strategy "graphicness" was used in the films studied as a way to disguise the portrayal of violence. Disguising violence by portraying it as low in graphicness was, in my reading, a successful strategy used in the films I studied. In my sample of films, a low graphic portrayal of violence was manifested in these texts by downplaying the injury to the victim, rarely depicting any signs of blood on the victim, and framing both the violence and the impact of the violence on the victim's body in long shot. Low graphic portrayals of violence were successful because, in my view, disguising the portrayal of violence resulted in my perception of the violence being minimized and could thus also potentially minimize other viewers' perceptions.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I discuss some of the contributions that I believe my research makes, especially in relation to my theoretical framework. Next, I discuss the research findings in relation to prior scholarly work on the representation of violence in film. To conclude, I offer directions for future research on violence in film.

### *Research Contributions*

In my research, I offered an interpretation of the portrayal of violence in the 25 top grossing films of all-time through a Derridean lens. Theoretically, my research provided a framework of analysis that goes beyond merely counting the number of incidents of violence in film to include an examination of the representations of violence by analyzing how a variety of strategies were used to minimize the violence in film. Using Derrida's "vocabulary of deconstruction" as a framework for my analysis allowed me to provide my own interpretation of the violence in films in order to discover the underlying meaning of violence. Furthermore, in analyzing the films through a Derridean lens, I was able to provide an intertextual reading of the film texts, which would have not been possible using quantitative methods alone. In this intertextual reading, I highlighted the ways in which the films in my data set were generically and historically connected to each other as well as to other types of texts such as film, televisual, and literary.

My research supports and expands the literature that argues for researchers to deconstruct the binary oppositions that are present in texts (Derrida, 1981b; Eagleton, 1996; Eichner, 2001; Sarup, 1989). Throughout my analysis of the sampled films, I

discovered that there were many binary oppositions contained within the film narratives. This finding confirms Derrida's assertion that Western thought is structured around "a series of binaries in which one member of the pair is privileged, and the other is fixed in a secondary position" (Eichner, 2001, p. 36), which entails a "violent hierarchy" (Derrida, 1981b, p. 41). In my analysis, I found the following binary oppositions in the sampled films: hero/villain, White/Black, and lower class/upper class. Using Derrida's (1981b) "general strategy of deconstruction" (p. 41), I identified the binary oppositions and analyzed how these particular binaries were disrupted in the film texts. In my analysis, I found that many of the films did not attempt to disrupt these binaries. Thus, by not disrupting these binaries, the violent hierarchical structure of these binary oppositions remained intact and, therefore, one side of the binary (e.g., hero, lower class, White) was always seen as being privileged over the other side of the binary (e.g., villain, upper class, Black). In fact, I found that most films often relied on these particular violent hierarchical binaries in order to tell the story of good prevailing over evil, which is another binary opposition. However, I did discover a few cases where the films did disrupt these binaries. The disruption of these binary oppositions showed that the film texts did not privilege one side of the binary over the other. Thus, by disrupting these binaries, they no longer entail a violent hierarchy. For example, the hero/villain binary was disrupted in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. I found that this particular film disrupted the binary and the resulting violent hierarchy by portraying the hero as suffering from an internal struggle between good and evil. More specifically, the hero, Frodo, was portrayed as "good" and was unselfishly willing to risk his life to save others. However, as these films continued, Frodo was portrayed as being unable to resist the evil power of

the ring. Therefore, the contradiction that exists within the hero/villain binary was that Frodo was frequently portrayed as committing both good and evil acts of violence. I interpreted this binary as being disrupted because in order for a character to be classified as the “classic hero” (Neal, 2007), the character would never commit an act of evil. Portraying a hero committing an act of evil goes against our understanding of what constitutes a “classic hero.”

My research supports and expands previous research that focuses on the importance of media literacy (Lewis & Jhally, 2000; Meyrowitz, 2000; Thoman, 1995). I believe my research illustrates how critically deconstructing what you hear and see in the movies can help viewers to understand the complex meanings of violence depicted therein. I strongly believe my research shows the importance of critically analyzing the complex and differing meanings of violence represented in film, representations that may be hidden and minimized through the use of strategies, such as motives, humorous undertones, good and evil, and graphicness. Being critical, or media literate, about what you are watching is important because, as argued by Parks (2003), watching films can “become an important [educational] tool, providing opportunities for adult and teen viewers alike to unravel and discuss the complex meanings of violence” (p. 119). By critically analyzing what they are watching, viewers may begin to question the images of violence they see in film. Thus, becoming more media literate may mean that viewers will start to critically question and analyze violence that is embedded in these film texts. For example, viewers can question and deconstruct how certain racial and ethnic groups (i.e., African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics) are stereotypically represented in these films and begin to redefine the definition of violence to include



portrayals of racial and ethnic groups as evil and villains as a form of violence.

Redefining the definition of violence to include categories that are not traditionally considered “violence” is important Parks argues. In fact, Parks claims that research on mediated violence should adopt or redefine their definition of violence to include such categories as “representations of social alienation, state-sanctioned aggression ... self-defense [and] ... the historical exclusion of people of colour from prime-time drama” (p. 130), which opens up the possibility for future research on the portrayal of violence in film to include such categories in their definition of violence.

### ***Representations of Legitimate Violence and the Academic Literature***

My research supports and expands prior research that examines the representations of violence in the context of self-defense (Clover, 1987; McCaughey, 1997; Parks, 2003; Projansky, 2001). Parks (2003) argues that most media research “[does] not differentiate between offensive and defensive aggression” (p. 124). In my analysis of the portrayal of violence in film, I did differentiate between offensive and defensive violence as Parks stresses. In fact, in my research, I found that my reading of an act of violence changed when a character was shown committing defensive violence rather than committing offensive violence. McCaughey (1997) and Parks (2003) assert that defensive violence, usually in the form of self-defense, should be seen as a legitimate use of violence. My analysis of the portrayal of violence in film confirmed this assertion.

In my sample of films, defensive violence was often portrayed by depicting the aggressor as having a “legitimate” motive to commit the violent act whereas offensive violence was portrayed by showing the aggressor as not having a “legitimate” motive.

Defensive violence was characterized in the sampled films by portraying the aggressor as committing the violence for the purpose of protecting and defending their life and the lives of others. Therefore, I interpreted this violence as being a legitimate use of violence because it was portrayed in the context of self-defense and third-party defense. Therefore, I argued that the portrayal of violence was minimized when the aggressor was portrayed as having a “legitimate” motive (the motive of self-defense) to commit the violent act.

### ***Representations of Camouflaged Violence and the Academic Literature***

My research shares a few similarities with prior research that examines representations of humorous violence. For instance, in their analysis of comedy and non-comedy television programs,<sup>18</sup> Potter and Warren (1998) found that over one quarter (31 percent) of the total number of violent acts portrayed in these programs was presented in a humorous manner. From the 31 percent of the violent acts that were presented with humour, they found that the majority of the violent acts were farcical in nature, in which the viewers were supposed to find the violence humorous. Similarly, in my analysis, I also found that slightly over one quarter (28 percent) of the violent acts were portrayed with humorous undertones. This was evident when the tone and mood of the violence was represented as humorous and, therefore, I did not take the violence seriously.

Humorous undertones did not appear frequently in the sampled films and television programs in both my study and the research conducted by Potter and Warren (1998). However, both of our research projects did find a select group of films and television programs that portrayed the violence with humorous undertones. In Potter and

---

<sup>18</sup> I believe it is important to reiterate that film and television are completely different mediums. However, I discussed this research of Potter and Warren’s on television as a framework for what I thought might appear in my sample of films.

Warren's study, they found that comedy television programs were more likely to present the violence in a humorous context compared to the non-comedy television programs. This finding reflects what I found in my sample of films. In my analysis, I found that the animated and comedy films in my sample were more likely to portray violence with humorous undertones. However, some of the other films in my sample, like the action-science fiction film *Independence Day*, did portray some of their violent scenes with a humorous undertone. The presence of a humorous undertone in the action-oriented films could be explained by what Parks (2003) calls "generic hybridity." Most films have become made up of bits and pieces of multiple genres rather than being made up of one "pure" genre. This idea of "generic hybridity" is clearly evident in the film *Independence Day*: the intense action sequences of buildings and spaceships blowing up are interrupted by the conventions of the science fiction, drama, romance, and comedy genres. So, as this film moves through the different generic conventions, we, the viewers witness an intense alien invasion scene, then a developing love story, then a humorous scene and the violence depicted changes depending on the shifting generic codes of the hybrid text. Thus, when the generic conventions of the comedy genre are activated, the act of violence will be interpreted as humorous rather than a serious form of violence and, as a result, the violence becomes camouflaged. Therefore, I concluded that portraying violence with humorous undertones resulted in my perception of the violence being minimized.

### ***Representations of Justified Violence and the Academic Literature***

My qualitative reading of the strategy “good and evil” within *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy was consistent with prior findings from studies conducted by Kim (2004) and Knaus (2005). In my analysis of these particular films, I found that this trilogy and other films from my sample often portrayed White-skinned and white clothed characters as good and portrayed Black-skinned and black clothed characters as evil. As Knaus (2005) argues:

The Orcs, Goblins, Trolls, Ringwraiths, Nazgul, and even the men who support the evil regime are dark skinned or dark clothed. The Orcs and Goblins represent Hollywood’s overarching and historical narrative of people of color as angry, crazed, dark, ugly, thick lipped, and constantly fighting among themselves. Not one is light skinned or even “good enough” to wear light colored clothing (p. 55).

I argued that by representing the characters in this way, these films participate in the perpetuation of negative racialized images and the reinforcing of stereotypes that “dark-skinned” people are evil, dangerous, violent, and should be feared. I believe my research helps bring these stereotypes, specifically in regards to violence, to the surface of the reading of film and provides useful tools to help critically deconstruct and question these types of common stereotypes that are found in Hollywood blockbuster films.

In the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, representations of dark-skinned and dark clothed characters as evil mirrors many contemporary representations of terrorists in film and television. As I watched this trilogy, my interpretation of the violence was influenced by my exposure to the “War on Terror.” In the news, viewers are constantly shown images of dark-skinned and dark clothed terrorists sending out videotaped messages threatening Canadians, Americans, British, etc., with unimaginable harm and violence. Thus, it is difficult to watch a *Lord of the Rings* film without conjuring up images of the terrorists in

today's world using the same type of violence depicted in these films. For example, in the *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, a violent scene depicts the Orcs catapulting the severed heads of some fallen Gondorian soldiers. As I was watching this violent scene, my memory had conjured up the images from a videotaped message in which the terrorists had beheaded a hostage. Therefore, based on my "context of reception" (Bennington & Derrida, 1993, p. 86), my interpretation of the violence committed by the Orcs was influenced by my experiences of watching the violence that occurs constantly in Iraq and Afghanistan, by the hands of the dark-skinned and dark clothed terrorists. Thus, while watching the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, I began to see the Orcs as the terrorists and, therefore, purely evil. Because I saw the Orcs as representing the terrorists of today, I found that I interpreted the violence committed against them as a justifiable response to their pure evilness and, therefore, my perception of the violence was minimized.

### ***Representations of Disguised Violence and the Academic Literature***

My research shares a few similarities with prior research that examines the representations of graphic violence in film. For instance, Browne et al. (2002) found that over half of the violent acts depicted in the action, drama and comedy films that made up their sample did not depict any blood or gore as a result of violence. In my analysis, I found that violence was overwhelmingly portrayed with a low level of graphicness. More specifically, the sampled films rarely depicted the victim injured, rarely showed any signs of blood and framed the violence and the impact of the violence in long shot. Therefore, I argued that disguising the violence by portraying it with a low level of

graphicness could successfully distance viewers from the violence by unrealistically portraying the severity of the injury inflicted on the victim. This finding reinforces an argument made by Browne et al. (2002) in which they state “the Hollywood narrative ... denies and mystifies the direct relationship between assault and injury. Hollywood dramaturgy leads up to the violent act but almost never follows it through to its inevitable conclusion. Narrative is cut short” (p. 363). As evidenced by my analysis, I concluded that many of the films I studied also denied and mystified the direct relationship between violence and injury. Portraying less realistic violence could result in a viewer not experiencing the same emotional reaction that they would have experienced with more realistic and/or shocking portrayals of violence and, therefore, the viewer’s perception of the violence may be minimized.

My research also found important distinctions from other scholarly work that examined representations of graphic violence. For instance, my research findings for graphicness ran contrary to Clover’s (1987) finding of how the death of a male victim is more often portrayed less graphically than the death of a female victim. Although highly graphic portrayals of violence were few and far between in my sample of films, when they were portrayed, graphic violence was equally depicted between males and females. Clover found that in slasher films, the violence committed against males were portrayed less graphically, in that, they were often depicted in long shots or off-screen and viewers rarely see any signs of blood. Clover found that the violence committed against females was often portrayed with a high level of graphicness, in that, in slasher films, the violence was often depicted in close-up and a lot of blood was usually shown. However, in my sample of films, the representations of graphicness contradict her findings, as both males

and females were portrayed being inflicted by violence that was highly graphic, more specifically, the injury was shown, there was lots of blood and the violence and impact of the violence was framed in close-up and, therefore, the violence was not disguised. However, even though my findings for the representations of graphicness in film differed from Clover's findings, I believe it is important to explain some of the possible reasons for this difference.

My findings could have differed from Clover's because we sampled different types of film that are guided by different generic structures. In my research, I examined the top grossing films of all-time, which were comprised of fantasy, science fiction, historical fiction, action, comedy, and animated films. In contrast, Clover looked specifically at the slasher film. The different generic structures of my sample of films and Clover's sample could be a possible explanation for why our findings for graphicness differed. Furthermore, in my sample of films, female characters were overwhelmingly outnumbered by the male characters. In Clover's analysis, it appeared, and based on my own knowledge of slasher films, that females played a significant role in these films. In fact, according to Clover, the only character who usually survived the evil killer to move onto the film's sequel was a female or what Clover referred to as the "Final Girl" (p. 201). Therefore, the difference in the number of female characters in my sample and the number of females in Clover's sample could be another possible explanation for why our findings differed for graphicness.

### ***Suggestions for Future Research***

My research findings open up the possibility of future research in different areas. In my research, I relied solely on the definition of violence developed by the National Television Violence Study (1997) to code my sample of films. However, this definition does not fully capture all forms of violence. In using this coding definition, I had not fully considered other forms of violence that are more often considered in qualitative studies of mediated violence. In the qualitative work of Parks (2003), she abandons the traditional quantitative definition of violence to include categories that are not traditionally considered “violence” by other researchers that take a more quantitative approach to coding violence. In fact, throughout Parks’ research, she argues that it is necessary for research on mediated violence to redefine their definition of violence. Parks asserts that a definition of violence should include such categories as “representations of social alienation, state-sanctioned aggression ... self-defense [and].... the historical exclusion of people of colour from prime-time drama” (p. 130). Thus, future research that examines the portrayal of violence in film or television could and should expand their definition of violence to include such categories outlined by Parks.

Because my sample contained films that were generically similar to each other, future research could include a wider selection of films from other genres. For instance, a researcher could sample and analyze the violence in crime, westerns, horror, comedy, fantasy, science fiction, historical and hybrid films. Sampling films from a wider selection of genres would allow the researcher to examine how strategies such as motives, humorous undertones, good and evil and graphicness might be portrayed in and across these different genres and also to examine whether certain genres use particular strategies



more so than others to minimize the perceptions of violence. This future research could also examine other possible strategies that I did not include in my research such as consequences, realism and audiovisual effects.

It is important, according to Derrida, to qualitatively analyze how the “context of production” (Bennington & Derrida, 1993, p. 86), with regards to the year the film was produced, could influence the meaning of the violence being produced. In my research, I found that the year of a film’s production did influence the meaning of the violence being produced, with regards to the level of graphicness portrayed. In my analysis, my findings revealed that the older *Star Wars* films released in the 70s and 80s included less graphic violence than the more recently released *Star Wars* films. As illustrated in my research, this was dependent on the year the film was produced because of, in my view, the advancements that have been made in special effects technology. Therefore, future research could sample a wider selection of films from different time periods such as the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. By doing this, a researcher might be able to identify how representations of violence have changed across the different years these particular films were produced. Future research could identify whether there were any observable patterns in violence depending on the year a film was made; for example, does violence in different films become increasingly more graphic as time has past or has the graphicness of violence stayed relatively the same?

For Derrida, it is important to qualitatively analyze how the “context of production” (Bennington & Derrida, 1993, p. 86), with regards to what country made the film, could have influenced the meaning of violence. However, in my research, I was unable to address whether the country in which the film was made could have influenced

the meaning of violence being produced because my sample of films were limited to the United States. In fact, my sample of the 25 top grossing films of all-time were all made and produced in the United States. As a result, I could not answer the research question I posed that asked how the context (place or country the film was produced) affected the violence represented within the film. Therefore, future research could sample a wider selection of films that were made in different countries such as Canada, England, Australia, India, France, and China. By doing this, research can take into account how the meaning of the violence being produced could have been influenced by what country made the film. Future research could ask: Are American films more likely to minimize violence in comparison with Canadian films, British films or Chinese films? As a result, this research could identify whether there were any patterns in violence that depends on the time and place of the film text's production.

In conclusion, pursuing these research directions allows for both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to be used to help further our understanding of representations of violence in film. Further knowledge about the representation of violence in film will provide for greater understanding of the diverse and complex messages about violence that are often found within film narratives.

## References

## Sampled Films

- Bruckheimer, J. (Producer), & Verbinski, G. (Director). (2003). *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* [Motion picture]. United States: Buena Vista Pictures.
- Bryce, I., Ziskin, L. (Producers), & Raimi, S. (Director). (2002). *Spider-Man* [Motion picture]. United States: Columbia Pictures.
- Cameron, J., Landau, J. (Producers), & Cameron, J. (Director). (1997). *Titanic* [Motion picture]. United States: Paramount Pictures.
- Columbus, C., Heyman, D., Radcliffe, M. (Producers), & Cuarón, A. (Director). (2004). *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* [Motion picture]. United Kingdom, United States: Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Davey, B., Gibson, M., McEveety, S. (Producers), & Gibson, M. (Director). (2004). *The Passion of the Christ* [Motion picture]. United States: Equinox Films.
- Devlin, D. (Producer), & Emmerich, R. (Director). (1996). *Independence Day* [Motion picture]. United States: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox.
- Finerman, W., Starkey, S., Tisch, S. (Producers), & Zemeckis, R. (Director). (1994). *Forrest Gump* [Motion picture]. United States: Paramount Pictures.
- Hahn, D. (Producer), & Allers, R., Minkoff, R. (Directors). (1994). *The Lion King* [Motion picture]. United States: Buena Vista Pictures.

- Heyman, D. (Producer), & Columbus, C. (Director). (2001). *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* [Motion picture]. United Kingdom, United States: Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Heyman, D. (Producer), & Columbus, C. (Director). (2002). *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* [Motion picture]. United Kingdom, United States, Germany: Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Kazanjian, H. (Producer), & Marquand, R. (Director). (1983). *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi* [Motion picture]. United States: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox.
- Kennedy, K., Mendel, B., Marshall, F. (Producers), & Shyamalan, M.N. (Director). (1999). *The Sixth Sense* [Motion picture]. United States: Buena Vista Pictures.
- Kennedy, K., Spielberg, S. (Producers), & Spielberg, S. (Director). (1982). *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* [Motion picture]. United States: Universal Pictures.
- Kurtz, G. (Producer), & Lucas, G. (Director). (1977). *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope* [Motion picture]. United States: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox.
- MacDonald, L., Parkes, W.F. (Producers), & Sonnenfeld, B. (Director). (1997). *Men In Black* [Motion picture]. United States: Columbia Pictures.
- McCallum, R. (Producer), & Lucas, G. (Director). (1999). *Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace* [Motion picture]. United States: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox.
- McCallum, R. (Producer), & Lucas, G. (Director). (2002). *Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones* [Motion picture]. United States: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox.
- Molen, G.R., Kennedy, K. (Producers), & Spielberg, S. (Director). (1993). *Jurassic Park* [Motion picture]. United States: Universal Pictures.

Molen, G.R., Wilson, C. (Producers), & Spielberg, S. (Director). (1997). *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* [Motion picture]. United States: Universal Pictures.

Osborne, B.M., Jackson, P., Sanders, T. (Producers), & Jackson, P. (Director). (2002). *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* [Motion picture]. United States, New Zealand, Germany: Alliance Atlantis.

Osborne, B.M., Jackson, P., Sanders, T., Walsh, F. (Producers), & Jackson, P. (Director). (2001). *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* [Motion picture]. New Zealand, United States: New Line Cinema.

Osborne, B.M., Walsh, F., Jackson, P. (Producers), & Jackson, J. (Director). (2003). *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* [Motion picture]. United States, New Zealand, Germany: Alliance Atlantis.

Silver, J. (Producer), & Wachowski, A., Wachowski, L. (Directors). (2003). *The Matrix Reloaded* [Motion picture]. United States: Warner Bros. Pictures.

Walters, G. (Producer), & Stanton, A. (Director). (2003). *Finding Nemo* [Motion picture]. United States: Buena Vista Pictures.

Warner, A., Lipman, D., Williams, J.H. (Producers), & Adamson, A., Vernon, C., Asbury, K. (Directors). (2004). *Shrek 2* [Motion picture]. United States: DreamWorks Pictures.

## References

- Adams, H., & Searle, L. (1986). Jacques Derrida. In H. Adams & L. Searle (Eds.), *Critical theory since 1965*. Florida: University Presses of Florida.
- Alcohol and Gaming Division. (2005). *Film & video: History*. Retrieved June 30, 2008, from <http://gov.ns.ca/lwd/agd/film/history.asp>
- Allison, D. B. (1973). Footnote. In J. Derrida, *Speech and phenomena: And other essays on Husserl's theory of signs* (p. 82). Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Auerbach, C. F., & Silverstein, L. B. (2003). *Qualitative data: An introduction to coding and analysis*. New York: New York University Press.
- Babbie, E., & Benaquisto, L. (2002). *Fundamentals of social research*. Scarborough, Ontario: Nelson.
- Ball-Rokeach, S. J. (1972). The legitimation of violence. In J. F. Short, Jr. & M. E. Wolfgang (Eds.), *Collective violence* (pp. 100-111). Chicago: Aldine-Atherton.
- Barry, P. (1995). *Beginning theory: An introduction to literary and cultural theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Barthes, R. (1968). *Elements of semiology* (A. Lavers & C. Smith, Trans.). New York: Hill and Wang.
- Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, music, text* (S. Heath, Trans.). New York: Hill and Wang.
- Bennington, G., & Derrida, J. (1993). *Jacques Derrida*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

- Berman, A. (1988). *From the new criticism to deconstruction. The reception of structuralism and post-structuralism*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Box Office Report. (2003). *\$200m worldwide*. Retrieved July 16, 2004 from <http://www.boxofficereport.com/atbon/200m.shtml>.
- Brooker, P. (2003). *A glossary of cultural theory* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: A Hodder Arnold Publication.
- Browne, N., Webb, T., Fisher, K., Cook, B., McArthur, D., Peek-Asa, C., & Kraus, J. (2002). American film violence: An analytic portrait. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 17(4), 351-370.
- Bufkin, J., & Eschholz, S. (2000). Images of sex and rape: A content analysis of popular film. *Violence Against Women*, 6(12), 1317-1344.
- Burr, V. (1995). *An introduction to social constructionism*. London: Routledge.
- Byers, M. (2000). *Buffy the vampire slayer: The insurgence of television as a performance text*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.
- Chandler, D. (2002). *Semiotics: The basics*. New York, New York: Routledge.
- Childers, J., & Hentzi, G. (1995). *The Columbia dictionary of modern literary and cultural criticism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Clements, R., Musker, J. (Producers & Directors). (1992). *Aladdin* [Motion picture]. United States: Walt Disney and Buena Vista Pictures.
- Clover, C. J. (1987). Her body, himself: Gender in the slasher film. *Representations*, 20, 187-228.

- Collins, J. (1992). Television and postmodernism. In R. C. Allen (Ed.), *Channels of discourse, reassembled* (pp. 327-353). Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Critchley, S. (1992). *The ethics of deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Cuklanz, L. M. (2000). *Rape on prime time: Television, masculinity, and sexual violence*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Culler, J. (1982). *On deconstruction: Theory and criticism after structuralism*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Denzin, N. K. (1994). Postmodernism and deconstructionism. In D.R. Dickens & A. Fontana (Eds.), *Postmodernism and social inquiry*. New York: The Guildford Press.
- Derrida, J. (1973). *Speech and phenomena: And other essays on Husserl's theory of signs*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1976). *Of grammatology* (G.C. Spivak, Trans.). Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1978). *Writing and difference* (A. Bass, Trans.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, J. (1979). Living on/border lines (J. Hulbert, Trans.). In H. Bloom, P. de Man, J. Derrida, G. Hartman, J.H. Miller (Eds.), *Deconstruction and criticism* (pp. 75-176). New York: Seabury Press.
- Derrida, J. (1981a). *Dissemination* (B. Johnson, Trans.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.



- Derrida, J. (1981b). *Positions* (A. Bass, Trans.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, J. (1982). *Margins of philosophy* (A. Bass, Trans.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, J. (1984). Deconstruction and the other (R. Kearney, Trans.). In R. Kearney (ed.), *Dialogues with contemporary thinkers: The phenomenological heritage* (pp. 107-126). Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1988a). Letter to a Japanese friend (D. Wood & A. Benjamin, Trans.). In D. Wood & R. Bernasconi (Eds.), *Derrida and différance* (pp. 1-6). Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1988b). *Limited inc.* Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- de Saussure, F. (1959). *Course in general linguistics*. London: Peter Owen Ltd.
- de Saussure, F. (1983). *Course in general linguistics* (C. Bally, A. Sechehaye, A. Riedlinger, Eds.) & (R. Harris, Trans.). London: Duckworth.
- Dole, C. M. (2001). The gun and the badge: Hollywood and the female lawman. In M. McCaughey and N. King (Eds.), *Reel knockouts: Violent women in the movies* (pp. 78-105). Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press.
- Eagleton, T. (1996). *Literary theory: An introduction*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: The University of Minnesota Press.
- Eichner, M. (2001). On postmodern feminist legal theory. *Harvard Civil Rights – Civil Liberties Law Review*, 36(1), 1-77.
- Ericson, R., Baranek, P., & Chan, J. (1991). *Representing order: Crime, law and justice in the news media*. Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press.

- Evans, J. C. (1991). *Strategies of deconstruction: Derrida and the myth of the voice*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language* (A.M. Sheridan Smith, Trans.). New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings (1972-1977)* (C. Gordon, Ed.). New York: Pantheon Books.
- Friedman, S. S. (1995). Beyond white and other: Relationality and narratives of race in feminist discourse. *Signs*, 21(1), 1-49.
- Goldstein, J. H. (1998). Why we watch. In J. H. Goldstein (Ed.), *Why we watch: The attractions of violent entertainment* (pp. 212-226). New York, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gray, J. (2005). *Watching with The Simpsons: Television, parody, and intertextuality*. New York: Routledge.
- Grindstaff, L. (2001). Sometimes being a bitch is all a woman has to hold on to: Memory, haunting, and revenge in *Dolores Claiborne*. In M. McCaughey and N. King (Eds.), *Reel knockouts: Violent women in the movies* (pp. 147-171). Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press.
- Hahn, D. (Producer), & Trousdale, G., Wise, K. (1991). *Beauty and the beast* [Motion picture]. United States: Buena Vista Pictures and Walt Disney.
- Hollinger, R. (1994). *Postmodernism and the social sciences: A thematic approach*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

- Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277-1288.
- Ijsseling, (1995). Deconstruction and ethics. *Ethical Perspectives*, 2(1), 91-103.
- Jenkins, L., Webb, T., Browne, N., & Kraus, J. (2005). An evaluation of the motion picture association of America's treatment of violence in PG-, PG-13-, and R-rated films. *Pediatrics*, 115(5), 512-517.
- Kamuf, P. (1997). *The division of literature: Or the university in deconstruction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kendall, D. (1999). *Sociology in our times*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth.
- Kim, S. (2004). Beyond Black and White: Race and postmodernism in The Lord of the Rings films. *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 50(4), 875-907.
- Knaus, C. (2005). More white supremacy? The Lord of the Rings as pro-American imperialism. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 7(4), 54-58.
- Kristeva, J. (1980). *Desire in language. A semiotic approach to literature and art* (L.S. Roudiez, Ed.) & (T. Gora, A. Jardine & L.S. Roudiez, Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press. (Original work published 1967).
- Kristeva, J. (1986). *The Kristeva reader* (T. Moi, Ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lapsley, R., & Westlake, M. (1988). *Film theory: An introduction*. Oxford Road, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Lechte, J. (1994). *Fifty key contemporary thinkers: From structuralism to postmodernity*. London: Routledge.

Lewis, J., & Jhally, S. (2000). The struggle over media literacy. In H. Newcomb (Ed.), *Television: The critical view* (pp. 439-450). New York: Oxford.

Lucy, N. (2004). *A Derrida dictionary*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing.

Lutz, C. A., & Collins, J. L. (1993). *Reading national geographic*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Macnamara, J. R. (2003). *Media content analysis: Its used, benefits & best practice methodology*. Retrieved July 15, 2007 from [www.masscom.com.au/book/papers/media\\_content.html](http://www.masscom.com.au/book/papers/media_content.html)

Maxfield, M. G., & Babbie, E. (2001). *Research methods for criminal justice and criminology*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.

Mayes-Elma, R. (2006). *Females and Harry Potter: Not all that empowering*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

McArthur, D., Peek-Asa, C., Webb, T., Fisher, K., Cook, B., Browne, N., & Kraus, J. (2000). Violence and its injury consequences in American movies: A public health perspective. *Injury Prevention*, 6, 120-124.

McCaughey, M. (1997). *Real knockouts: The physical feminism of women's self-defense*. New York: New York University Press.

McIntosh, W. D., Murray, J. D., Murray, R. M., & Manian, S. (2003). What's so funny about a poke in the eye? The prevalence of violence in comedy films and its relation to social and economic threat in the United States, 1951-2000. *Mass Communication & Society*, 6(4), 345-360.

Merriam-Webster Online. (2008). *Merriam-Webster online dictionary*. Retrieved June 30, 2008, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>

- Meyrowitz, J. (2000). Multiple media literacies. In H. Newcomb (Ed.), *Television: The critical view* (pp. 425-438). New York: Oxford.
- Monk-Turner, E., Ciba, P., Cunningham, M., McIntire, P.G., Pollard, M., & Turner, R. (2004). A content analysis of violence in American war movies. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 4(1), 1-11.
- Moore, S. R., & Cockerton, T. (1996). Viewers' ratings of violence presented in justified and unjustified contexts. *Psychological Reports*, 79, 931-935.
- Naremore, J. (2001). Hitchcock and humor. *Strategies*, 14(1), 13-25.
- National Television Violence Study (NTVS). (1997). *National television violence study*, 1. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Neal, C. (2007). *Wizards, wardrobes and wookiees: Navigating good and evil in Harry Potter, Narnia and Star Wars*. Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press.
- Neroni, H. (2005). *The violent woman: Femininity, narrative, and violence in contemporary American culture*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Neuman, W. L., & Wiegand, B. (2000). *Criminal justice research methods: Qualitative & quantitative approaches*. Needham, Massachusetts: Allyn & Bacon.
- Newman, G. (1998). Popular culture and violence: Decoding the violence of popular movies. In F. Y. Bailey and D. C. Hale (Eds.), *Popular culture, crime, and justice* (pp. 40-56). Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Norris, C. (1987). *Derrida*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Oliver, M. B., & Kalyanaraman, S. (2002). Appropriate for all viewing audiences? An examination of violent and sexual portrayals in movie previews featured on video rentals. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 46(2), 283-299.

- Parks, L. (2003). Brave new Buffy: Rethinking 'TV violence.' In M. Jancovich and James Lyons (Eds.), *Quality popular television: Cult TV, the industry and fans* (pp. 118-133). London: British Film Institute.
- Perea, J. F. (1997). Black/white binary paradigm of race: The "normal science" of American racial thought. *California Law Review*, 85(5), 1213-1258.
- Phillips, J. (2006). Deconstruction. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23(2-3), 194-195.
- Pizzato, M. (2005). A post-9/11 passion: Review of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. *Pastoral Psychology*, 53(4), 371-376.
- Potter, W. J., & Smith, S. (2000). The context of graphic portrayals of television violence. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 44(2), 301-323.
- Potter, W. J., & Warren, R. (1998). Humor as camouflage of televised violence. *Journal of Communication*, 48(2), 40-57.
- Prince, S. (2003). *Classical film violence: Designing and regulating brutality in Hollywood cinema, 1930 – 1968*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Projansky, S. (2001). *Watching rape: Film and television in postfeminist culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Reiner, R. (2002). Media made criminality: The representation of crime in the mass media. In R. Reiner, M. Maguire and R. Morgan (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of criminology* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Robertson, B. (1999). Living a virtual existence. *Computer Graphics World*, 22(5).

- Rorty, R. (1995). Deconstruction. In R. Selden (ed.), *The Cambridge history of literary criticism Vol. 8: From formalism to poststructuralism* (pp. 166-196).  
Trumpington Street, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rose, G. (2001). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to the interpretation of visual materials*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Rothman, W. (2001). Violence and film. In J.D. Slocum (Ed.), *Violence and American cinema* (pp. 37-46). New York: Routledge.
- Sapolsky, B. S., Molitor, F., & Luque, S. (2003). Sex and violence in slasher films: Re-examining the assumptions. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 80(1), 28-38.
- Sarup, M. (1989). *An introductory guide to post-structuralism and postmodernism*.  
Georgia: University of Georgia Press.
- Sawyer, D. (2004). *Mel Gibson's passion: An interview with Mel Gibson*. ABC  
Primetime.
- Stam, R., Burgoyne, R., & Flitterman-Lewis, S. (1992). *New vocabularies in film semiotics. Structuralism, post-structuralism and beyond*. London: Routledge.
- Tasker, Y. (1993). *Spectacular bodies: Gender, genre and the action cinema*. London  
and New York: Routledge.
- Thoman, E. (1995). The 3 stages of media literacy. *Center for Media Literacy*.  
Retrieved June 30, 2007 from [http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/teachers/media\\_literacy/what\\_is\\_media\\_literacy.cfm](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/teachers/media_literacy/what_is_media_literacy.cfm)
- Titscher, S., Meyer, M., Wodak, R., & Vetter, E. (2000). *Methods of text and discourse analysis*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications Ltd.

- Trice, A. D., & Holland, S. A. (2001). *Heroes, antiheroes and dolts: Portrayals of masculinity in American popular films, 1921-1999*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc.
- Vares, T. (2001). Action heroines and female viewers: What women have to say. In M. McCaughey and N. King (Eds.), *Reel knockouts: Violent women in the movies* (pp. 219-243). Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press.
- Weedon, C. (1987). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Wheeler III, S. C. (2000). *Deconstruction as analytic philosophy*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Wilian, W. (Producer). (1990). *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* [Television series]. Los Angeles, California: Columbia/Sunset Gower Studios.
- Wilson, B. J., Smith, S. L., Potter, W. J., Kunkel, D., Linz, D., Colvin, C.M., & Donnerstein, E. (2002). Violence in children's television programming: Assessing the risks. *Journal of Communication*, 52(1), 5-35.
- Wolfreys, J. (2004). *Critical keywords in literary and cultural theory*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Young, R. (1981). Post-structuralism: An introduction. In R. Young (Eds.), *Untying the text: A post-structuralist reader* (pp. 1-28). London: Routledge.
- Zillmann, D. (1998). The psychology of the appeal of portrayals of violence. In J. H. Goldstein (Ed.), *Why we watch: The attractions of violent entertainment* (pp. 179-211). New York, New York: Oxford University Press.



## Tables

Table 1: Type of Violence

<u>Type of Violence</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Physical Violence	99
Sexual Violence	<u>1</u>
Total	100
N	(797)

Table 2: Prevalence of Violence in Each Film

<u>Film</u>	<u>Number of Violent Acts</u>
Titanic	24
The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King	52
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone	24
Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace	46
The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers	40
Jurassic Park	18
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets	20
The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring	41
Finding Nemo	39
Independence Day	22
Spider-Man	35
Star Wars: Episode IV-The New Hope	35

The Lion King	41
E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial	11
The Matrix Reloaded	46
Shrek 2	29
Forrest Gump	18
The Sixth Sense	6
Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl	48
Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones	29
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	28
The Lost World: Jurassic Park	28
The Passion of the Christ	39
Men In Black	27
Star Wars: Episode VI-Return of the Jedi	<u>45</u>
N	(797)

Table 3: Level of Force used to commit Violence

<u>Seriousness of the Violence</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Extreme Force	44
Moderate Force	20
Mild Force	<u>37</u>
Total	100
N	(791)

Table 4: Distribution of Violent Actions among Films, by Genre

<u>Genre</u>	<u>Number of Films</u>	<u># of Violent Actions</u>	<u>Mean Per Film</u>	<u>Minimum Number</u>	<u>Maximum Number</u>
Fantasy	11	397	36	20	52
Science Fiction	11	313	28	6	46
Historical Fiction	<u>3</u>	<u>81</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>39</u>
Total	25	791	32	6	52

Table 5: Distribution of Violent Actions among Films, by Rating

<u>Rating</u>	<u>Number of Films</u>	<u># of Violent Actions</u>	<u>Mean Per Film</u>	<u>Minimum Number</u>	<u>Maximum Number</u>
G	3	91	30	11	39
PG	16	489	31	18	48
14A	5	172	34	6	52
18A	1	39	—	—	—
R	0	—	—	—	—
A	<u>0</u>	—	—	—	—
Total	25	791	32	6	52

Table 6: Presence of a Motive

<u>Motive</u>	<u>Percent</u>
No	47
Yes	<u>53</u>
Total	100
N	(791)

Table 7: Type of Motive Used

<u>Type of Motive</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Security & Survival	38
Social Control & Law and Order	18
Social Change	32
Winning	6
Revenge	<u>7</u>
Total	100
N	(419)

Table 8: Intentionality

<u>Intentions of Aggressor</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Purposeful/Deliberate	93
Accidental	6
Playful	<u>1</u>
Total	100
N	(791)

Table 9: Hero Status

<u>Hero Status</u>	<u>Percent</u>
No	78
Yes	19
Unknown	<u>3</u>
Total	100
N	(791)

Table 10: Villain Status

<u>Villain Status</u>	<u>Percent</u>
No	78
Yes	19
Unknown	<u>3</u>
Total	100
N	(791)

Table 11: Presence of Humour

<u>Humour</u>	<u>Percent</u>
No	74
Yes	<u>26</u>
Total	100
N	(791)

Table 12: Type of Humour Used

<u>Type of Humour</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Laughter	21
Tone and/or Mood	62
Upbeat Music playing in background	<u>11</u>
Total	100
N	(219)

Table 13: Character Attributes

<u>Character Attributes</u>	<u>Aggressor Percent</u>	<u>Victim Percent</u>
Good	31	56
Bad	51	21
Neutral	15	21
Unknown	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	100	100
N	(791)	(791)

Table 14: Type of Character

<u>Type</u>	<u>Aggressor Percent</u>	<u>Victim Percent</u>
Human	43	58
Animal	1	2
Fantasy	53	39
Unknown	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	100	100
N	(791)	(791)

Table 15: Race of the Character

<u>Race</u>	<u>Aggressor Percent</u>	<u>Victim Percent</u>
White	52	62
Black	17	9
Other	27	28
Unknown	<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>
Total	100	100
N	(791)	(791)

Table 16: Social Class of the Character

<u>Social Class</u>	<u>Aggressor Percent</u>	<u>Victim Percent</u>
Upper Class	48	53
Lower Class	49	44
Unknown	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>
Total	100	100
N	(791)	(791)



Table 17: Degree of Injury Inflicted on the Victim(s)

<u>Degree of Injury</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Extreme	13
Moderate	10
Mild	9
None	<u>68</u>
Total	100
N	(791)

Table 18: Signs of Blood

<u>Signs of Blood</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Extreme	1
Moderate	3
Mild	6
None	<u>89</u>
Total	100
N	(791)

Table 19: Framing

<u>Framing</u>	Framing of Violence <u>Percent</u>	Framing of Impact <u>Percent</u>
Close-up	11	13
Long shot	85	85
Not Shown	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>
Total	100	100
N	(791)	(791)

## Appendix A

## The Portrayal of Violence in Film – Codebook

1. Type of Violence
  - 1.00 = Physical Violence
  - 2.00 = Sexual Violence
2. Seriousness of the Violence
  - 1.00 = Extreme Force
  - 2.00 = Moderate Force
  - 3.00 = Mild Force
3. Intentionality:
  - 1.00 = Purposeful/Deliberate
  - 2.00 = Accidental
  - 3.00 = Playful
4. Presence of a Motive:
  - 0.00 = No
  - 1.00 = Yes
5. Type of Motive Used:
  - 1.00 = Security and Survival (i.e., self-defense or third party defense)
  - 2.00 = Social Control and Law and Order (i.e., police arresting a criminal)
  - 3.00 = World Domination (i.e., taking over the world)
  - 4.00 = Winning (i.e., sporting event)
  - 5.00 = Revenge (i.e., vengeance)
6. Degree of Injury Inflicted on the Victim(s):
  - 1.00 = Extreme (death)
  - 2.00 = Moderate (stabbed, shot, hospitalized, caught on fire, electrocuted)
  - 3.00 = Mild (cuts, knocked unconscious, broken bones)
  - 4.00 = None
7. Signs of Blood:
  - 1.00 = Extreme (heavy amounts of blood)
  - 2.00 = Moderate (heavy bleeding or deep wound)
  - 3.00 = Mild (several drops of blood or cuts)
  - 4.00 = None
8. Race of the Character:
  - 1.00 = White
  - 2.00 = Black

- 3.00 = Other (e.g., race of Hobbit, orcs)
- 4.00 = Unknown

9. Hero Status

- 0.00 = No
- 1.00 = Yes
- 2.00 = Unknown

10. Villain Status

- 0.00 = No
- 1.00 = Yes
- 2.00 = Unknown

11. Character Attributes:

- 1.00 = Good
- 2.00 = Evil
- 3.00 = Neutral
- 4.00 = Unknown

12. Type of Character:

- 1.00 = Human
- 2.00 = Animal
- 3.00 = Fantasy
- 4.00 = Unknown

13. Social Class of the Character:

- 1.00 = Upper Class
- 2.00 = Lower Class
- 3.00 = Unknown

14. Presence of Humour:

- 0.00 = No
- 1.00 = Yes

15. Type of Humour Used:

- 1.00 = Laughter
- 2.00 = Tone and/or Mood
- 3.00 = Upbeat Music Playing in the Background

16. Framing of Violence:

- 1.00 = Close-up (over half of the screen being consumed by an image of the aggressor)
- 2.00 = Long shot (violence was shown in background or without close-ups)
- 3.00 = Not shown

17. Framing of Impact:

- 1.00 = Close-up (over half of the screen being consumed by the victim being harmed)
- 2.00 = Long shot (the harm inflicted was shown in background or without close-ups)
- 3.00 = Not shown

## Appendix B

## Film Synopsis

Film: **Titanic**  
 Rank: 1  
 Year: 1997  
 Gross: \$1,835.4m  
 Genre: Historical Fiction  
 Rating: PG  
 Country: United States  
 Studio: Paramount Pictures  
 Director: James Cameron  
 Producer(s): James Cameron, Jon Landau  
 Cast: Leonardo DiCaprio, Kate Winslet, Billy Zane  
 Synopsis: A love story between a rich girl named Rose and a poor boy named Jack, which is set against the ill-fated voyage of the “unsinkable” Titanic.

Film: **The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King**  
 Rank: 2  
 Year: 2003  
 Gross: \$1,129.2m  
 Genre: Fantasy  
 Rating: 14A  
 Country: United States, New Zealand, Germany  
 Studio: Alliance Atlantis  
 Director: Peter Jackson  
 Producer(s): Barrie M. Osborne, Fran Walsh, Peter Jackson  
 Cast: Elijah Wood, Ian McKellen, Viggo Mortensen, Sean Astin, Billy Boyd, Dominic Monaghan, Orlando Bloom  
 Synopsis: The last film of the Lord of the Rings trilogy continues to show Frodo and Sam’s journey to destroy the ring and the final battle for Middle Earth begins.

Film: **Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone**  
 Rank: 3  
 Year: 2001  
 Gross: \$975.8 m  
 Genre: Fantasy  
 Rating: PG  
 Country: United Kingdom, United States  
 Studio: Warner Bros. Pictures  
 Director: Chris Columbus

Producer(s): David Heyman  
 Cast: Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint, Emma Watson, Ian Hart  
 Synopsis: This film tells the story of Harry Potter, a young wizard who attends his first year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Film: **Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace**  
 Rank: 4  
 Year: 1999  
 Gross: \$925.6 m  
 Genre: Science Fiction  
 Rating: PG  
 Country: United States  
 Studio: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox  
 Director: George Lucas  
 Producer(s): Rick McCallum  
 Cast: Ewan McGregor, Liam Neeson, Samuel L. Jackson, Natalie Portman, Jake Lloyd, Ian McDiarmid  
 Synopsis: Two Jedi knights and a young Anakin Skywalker fight against the evil Trade Federation in order to protect the planet of Naboo.

Film: **The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers**  
 Rank: 5  
 Year: 2002  
 Gross: \$924.7 m  
 Genre: Fantasy  
 Rating: 14A  
 Country: United States, New Zealand, Germany  
 Studio: Alliance Atlantis  
 Director: Peter Jackson  
 Producer(s): Barrie M. Osborne, Peter Jackson, Tim Sanders  
 Cast: Elijah Wood, Billy Boyd, Dominic Monaghan, Sean Astin, Ian McKellen, Viggo Mortensen, Orlando Bloom, Christopher Lee  
 Synopsis: Frodo, with the help of Sam continues his journey to destroy the one ring while the remaining members of the fellowship seek new allies to fight the army of Sauron.

Film: **Jurassic Park**  
 Rank: 6  
 Year: 1993  
 Gross: \$920.1 m  
 Genre: Science Fiction  
 Rating: PG  
 Country: United States

Studio: Universal Pictures  
 Director: Steven Spielberg  
 Producer(s): Gerald R. Molen, Kathleen Kennedy  
 Cast: Sam Neill, Laura Dern, Jeff Goldblum  
 Synopsis: Dinosaurs are cloned on an island, but problems arise when a security malfunction causes the dinosaurs to escape their cages in the theme park.

Film: **Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets**  
 Rank: 7  
 Year: 2002  
 Gross: \$866.4 m  
 Genre: Fantasy  
 Rating: PG  
 Country: United Kingdom, United States, Germany  
 Studio: Warner Bros. Pictures  
 Director: Chris Columbus  
 Producer(s): David Heyman  
 Cast: Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson, Rupert Grint  
 Synopsis: Harry Potter and his friends, Ron and Hermione return to Hogwarts for their second year of school and encounter a dark force that is terrorizing the school.

Film: **The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring**  
 Rank: 8  
 Year: 2001  
 Gross: \$861.7 m  
 Genre: Fantasy  
 Rating: PG  
 Country: New Zealand, United States  
 Studio: New Line Cinema  
 Director: Peter Jackson  
 Producer(s): Barrie M. Osborne, Peter Jackson, Tim Sanders, Fran Walsh  
 Cast: Elijah Wood, Billy Boyd, Dominic Monaghan, Sean Astin, Ian McKellen, Viggo Mortensen, Orlando Bloom  
 Synopsis: A young hobbit named Frodo sets out on a dangerous journey to destroy the one ring with the help of a fellowship of humans, an elf, a dwarf and other hobbits.

Film: **Finding Nemo**  
 Rank: 9  
 Year: 2003  
 Gross: \$853.2 m  
 Genre: Fantasy



Rating: G  
 Country: United States  
 Studio: Buena Vista Pictures  
 Director: Andrew Stanton  
 Producer(s): Graham Walters  
 Cast: Albert Brooks, Ellen DeGeneres, Willem Dafoe, Geoffrey Rush, Allison Janney  
 Synopsis: A father clownfish embarks on a dangerous journey in the Great Barrier Reef to find his missing son, Nemo.

Film: **Independence Day**  
 Rank: 10  
 Year: 1996  
 Gross: \$813.2 m  
 Genre: Science Fiction  
 Rating: PG  
 Country: United States  
 Studio: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox  
 Director: Roland Emmerich  
 Producer(s): Dean Devlin  
 Cast: Will Smith, Jeff Goldblum, Bill Pullman  
 Synopsis: Aliens launch an invasion on planet Earth in order to destroy the human race.

Film: **Spider-Man**  
 Rank: 11  
 Year: 2002  
 Gross: \$808.9 m  
 Genre: Science Fiction  
 Rating: PG  
 Country: United States  
 Studio: Columbia Pictures  
 Director: Sam Raimi  
 Producer(s): Ian Bryce, Laura Ziskin  
 Cast: Tobey Maguire, Willem Dafoe, Kirsten Dunst, James Franco  
 Synopsis: Spider-Man, a.k.a., Peter Parker, uses his powers to stop the Green Goblin from committing crimes in New York.

Film: **Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope**  
 Rank: 12  
 Year: 1977  
 Gross: \$798.0 m  
 Genre: Science Fiction

Rating: PG  
 Country: United States  
 Studio: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox  
 Director: George Lucas  
 Producer(s): Gary Kurtz  
 Cast: Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher, Alec Guinness  
 Synopsis: Luke Skywalker and a group of rebel forces attempt to destroy the Death Star.

Film: **The Lion King**  
 Rank: 13  
 Year: 1994  
 Gross: \$787.4 m  
 Genre: Fantasy  
 Rating: G  
 Country: United States  
 Studio: Buena Vista Pictures  
 Director: Roger Allers, Ron Minkoff  
 Producer(s): Don Hahn  
 Cast: Rowan Atkinson, Matthew Broderick, Whoopi Goldberg, Jeremy Irons, James Earl Jones  
 Synopsis: This animated film tells the story of a young lion cub named Simba who flees Pride Rock and abandons his identity as the future King. After years of exile, Simba returns to Pride Rock in order to overthrow his uncle Scar and take his rightful place as King.

Film: **E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial**  
 Rank: 14  
 Year: 1982  
 Gross: \$769.5 m  
 Genre: Science Fiction  
 Rating: G  
 Country: United States  
 Studio: Universal Pictures  
 Director: Steven Spielberg  
 Producer(s): Kathleen Kennedy, Steven Spielberg  
 Cast: Sean Frye, K.C. Martel, Peter Coyote, Dee Wallace, Robert MacNaughton, Drew Barrymore, Henry Thomas  
 Synopsis: A young boy named Elliot befriends an alien who was accidentally left on Earth by his spaceship.

Film: **The Matrix Reloaded**  
 Rank: 15  
 Year: 2003  
 Gross: \$738.0 m  
 Genre: Science Fiction  
 Rating: 14A  
 Country: United States  
 Studio: Warner Bros. Pictures  
 Director: Andy Wachowski, Larry Wachowski  
 Producer(s): Joel Silver  
 Cast: Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne, Carrie-Anne Moss, Hugo Weaving  
 Synopsis: In the second film of the Matrix trilogy, Neo and the rebel leaders continue to fight against the Machine Army in order to save the human race.

Film: **Shrek 2**  
 Rank: 16  
 Year: 2004  
 Gross: \$679.8 m  
 Genre: Fantasy  
 Rating: PG  
 Country: United States  
 Studio: DreamWorks Pictures  
 Director: Andrew Adamson, Conrad Vernon, Kelly Asbury  
 Producer(s): Aron Warner, David Lipman, John H. Williams  
 Cast: Mike Myers, Eddie Murphy, Cameron Diaz, Antonio Banderas  
 Synopsis: The newly married Shrek and Fiona visit Fiona's parents, the King and Queen of Far Far Away in order for the parents to meet their new and unexpected son-in-law.

Film: **Forrest Gump**  
 Rank: 17  
 Year: 1994  
 Gross: \$679.7 m  
 Genre: Historical Fiction  
 Rating: PG  
 Country: United States  
 Studio: Paramount Pictures  
 Director: Robert Zemeckis  
 Producer(s): Wendy Finerman, Steve Starkey, Steve Tisch  
 Cast: Tom Hanks, Robin Wright, Gary Sinise  
 Synopsis: This film tells the story of a simple man named Forrest Gump who is accidentally present at many of the major moments in American history.

Film: **The Sixth Sense**  
 Rank: 18  
 Year: 1999  
 Gross: \$672.8 m  
 Genre: Fantasy  
 Rating: 14A  
 Country: United States  
 Studio: Buena Vista Pictures  
 Director: M. Night Shyamalan  
 Producer(s): Kathleen Kennedy, Barry Mendel, Frank Marshall  
 Cast: Bruce Willis, Haley Joel Osment  
 Synopsis: A boy who can communicate with dead people seeks the help of a child psychologist.

Film: **Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl**  
 Rank: 19  
 Year: 2003  
 Gross: \$653.2 m  
 Genre: Fantasy  
 Rating: PG  
 Country: United States  
 Studio: Buena Vista Pictures  
 Director: Gore Verbinski  
 Producer(s): Jerry Bruckheimer  
 Cast: Johnny Depp, Geoffrey Rush, Orlando Bloom, Keira Knightley  
 Synopsis: Will Turner and a pirate, Captain Jack Sparrow set out on a quest to rescue the governor's daughter from a group of pirates.

Film: **Star Wars: Episode II – Attack of the Clones**  
 Rank: 20  
 Year: 2002  
 Gross: \$648.3 m  
 Genre: Science Fiction  
 Rating: PG  
 Country: United States  
 Studio: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox  
 Director: George Lucas  
 Producer(s): Rich McCallum  
 Cast: Ewan McGregor, Natalie Portman, Hayden Christensen, Ian McDiarmid, Samuel L. Jackson, Christopher Lee  
 Synopsis: Anakin Skywalker begins his training to become a Jedi knight. However, his training is interrupted when Anakin falls in love with Senator Amidala. While Anakin is protecting the Senator, Obi-Wan discovers a secret Republican clone army.

Film: **Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban**  
 Rank: 21  
 Year: 2004  
 Gross: \$638.8 m  
 Genre: Fantasy  
 Rating: PG  
 Country: United Kingdom, United States  
 Studio: Warner Bros. Pictures  
 Director: Alfonso Cuarón  
 Producer(s): Chris Columbus, David Heyman, Mark Radcliffe  
 Cast: Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint, Emma Watson, Gary Oldman  
 Synopsis: Harry Potter and his friends, Ron and Hermione return for their third year at Hogwarts and have to face the challenges of a convicted murderer, Sirius Black, who has escaped from the Wizards Prison.

Film: **The Lost World: Jurassic Park**  
 Rank: 22  
 Year: 1997  
 Gross: \$614.4 m  
 Genre: Science Fiction  
 Rating: 14A  
 Country: United States  
 Studio: Universal Pictures  
 Director: Steven Spielberg  
 Producer(s): Gerald R. Molen, Colin Wilson  
 Cast: Jeff Goldblum, Julianne Moore  
 Synopsis: A team of scientists attempt to capture and transport cloned dinosaurs back to San Diego, however, problems arise with disastrous results.

Film: **The Passion of the Christ**  
 Rank: 23  
 Year: 2004  
 Gross: \$604.3 m  
 Genre: Historical Fiction  
 Rating: 18A  
 Country: United States  
 Studio: Equinox Films  
 Director: Mel Gibson  
 Producer(s): Bruce Davey, Mel Gibson, Stephen McEveety  
 Cast: Jim Caviezel  
 Synopsis: This film tells the story of the last 12 hours of Jesus Christ's life.

Film: **Men In Black**  
 Rank: 24  
 Year: 1997  
 Gross: \$587.8 m  
 Genre: Science Fiction  
 Rating: PG  
 Country: United States  
 Studio: Columbia Pictures  
 Director: Barry Sonnenfeld  
 Producer(s): Laurie MacDonald, Walter F. Parkes  
 Cast: Will Smith, Tommy Lee Jones  
 Synopsis: Two members of a top secret organization must save the world from being destroyed by aliens.

Film: **Star Wars: Episode VI – Return of the Jedi**  
 Rank: 25  
 Year: 1983  
 Gross: \$572.9 m  
 Genre: Science Fiction  
 Rating: PG  
 Country: United States  
 Studio: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox  
 Director: Richard Marquand  
 Producer(s): Howard Kazanjian  
 Cast: Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher, Alec Guinness  
 Synopsis: In the final film of the Star Wars franchise, the rebels attempt to destroy the second Death Star, while Luke Skywalker fights his father, Darth Vader and the evil Emperor.

Source (Film, Rank, Year, Gross): Box Office Report (2003). *\$200m worldwide*.  
 Retrieved July 16, 2004 from <http://www.boxofficereport.com/atbon/200m.shtml>.

Source (Country, Studio, Director, Producers, Cast): The Internet Movie Database (2007).  
 Retrieved July 16, 2004 from <http://www.imdb.com>

Source (Rating): Blockbuster (2007). Retrieved July 16, 2004 from  
<http://www.blockbuster.ca>

## Appendix C

## Characters and Actors Names

*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (2002)*

- Harry Potter – Daniel Radcliffe
- Ron Weasley – Rupert Grint
- Hermione Granger – Emma Watson
- Ginny Weasley – Bonnie Wright

*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone (2001)*

- Harry Potter – Daniel Radcliffe
- Lord Voldemort – Richard Bremmer
- Professor Quirrell – Ian Hart

*Independence Day (1996)*

- Captain Stephen Hiller – Will Smith

*Men in Black (1997)*

- Agent K – Tommy Lee Jones
- Agent J – Will Smith
- Jeebs – Tony Shalhoub

*Spider-Man (2002)*

- Green Goblin – Willem Dafoe

*Star Wars: Attack of the Clones (2002)*

- Obi-Wan Kenobi – Ewan McGregor
- Zam Wesell – Leeanna Walsman
- Anakin Skywalker (teenager) – Hayden Christensen
- Senator Amidala – Natalie Portman
- Count Dooku – Christopher Lee

*Star Wars: The New Hope (1977)*

- Han Solo – Harrison Ford
- Greedo – Paul Blake
- Obi-Wan Kenobi – Alec Guinness
- Jabba the Hutt – voiced by Larry Ward
- Luke Skywalker – Mark Hamill

*Star Wars: The Phantom Menace (1999)*

- Darth Sidious – Ian McDiarmid
- Queen Amidala – Natalie Portman
- Anakin Skywalker (young) – Jake Lloyd
- Darth Maul – Ray Park
- Qui-Gon Jinn – Liam Neeson

*Star Wars: Return of the Jedi (1983)*

- Darth Vader – David Prowse, voiced by James Earl Jones
- Luke Skywalker – Mark Hamill
- Emperor Palpatine – Ian McDiarmid

*The Lion King (1994)*

- Simba – voiced by Jonathan Taylor Thomas (young Simba) and Matthew Broderick (old Simba)
- King Mufusa – voiced by James Earl Jones
- Nala – voiced by Moira Kelly
- Scar – voiced by Jeremy Irons
- Zazu the Hornbill – voiced by Rowan Atkinson
- Queen Sarabi – voiced by Madge Sinclair

*The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring (2001)*

- Gandalf the Grey – Ian McKellen
- Witch-King of Angmar – Shane Rangi
- Frodo – Elijah Wood
- Sam – Sean Astin
- Merry – Dominic Monaghan
- Pippin – Billy Boyd



- Aragorn – Viggo Mortensen
- Legolas – Orlando Bloom

*The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003)

- Eowyn – Miranda Otto
- King Théoden – Bernard Hill
- Witch-King – Lawrence Makoare

*The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002)

- Haldir – Craig Parker
- Saruman – Christopher Lee
- Gandalf the White – Ian McKellen

*The Matrix Reloaded* (2003)

- Trinity – Carrie-Anne Moss
- Keymaker – Randall Duk Kim

*The Passion of the Christ* (2004)

- Jesus Christ – Jim Caviezel
- High Priest Caiaphas – Mattia Sbragia

*The Sixth Sense* (1999)







- Dr. Malcolm Crowe – Bruce Willis
- Vincent Gray – Donnie Wahlberg
- Anna Crowe – Olivia Williams

*Titanic* (1997)

- Jack Dawson – Leonardo DiCaprio
- Cal Hockley – Billy Zane
- Ruth DeWitt Bukater – Frances Fisher
- Spicer Lovejoy – David Warner
- Rose Dewitt Bukater – Kate Winslet

## Appendix D

## Maritime Film Classification System

	<b>General (G)</b> Suitable for viewers of all ages.
	<b>Parental Guidance (PG)</b> Parental guidance is advised. Theme or content may not be suitable for all children.
	<b>14 Accompaniment (14A)</b> Suitable for viewing by persons 14 years of age and older. Persons under 14 must be accompanied by an adult.  May contain: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• violence</li> <li>• coarse language</li> <li>• sexually suggestive scenes</li> </ul>
	<b>18 Accompaniment (18A)</b> Suitable for viewing by persons 18 years of age and older. Persons under 18 must be accompanied by an adult. Persons under 14 years of age are strictly prohibited from viewing the film.  May contain: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• explicit violence</li> <li>• frequent coarse language</li> <li>• sexual activity</li> <li>• horror</li> </ul>
	<b>Restricted (R)</b> Admittance restricted to persons 18 years of age and over. Content not suitable for minors.  Contains: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• frequent use of sexual activity</li> <li>• brutal/graphic violence</li> <li>• intense horror</li> <li>• other disturbing content</li> </ul>
	<b>Adult (A)</b> Film is not suitable for viewers under 18 years of age because the sole or primary premise for the film is the depiction of explicit sexual activity, graphic nudity, or graphic violence.

Source: Alcohol & Gaming Division. (2005). *Rating guidelines*. Retrieved June 30, 2008, from <http://www.gov.ns.ca/lwd/agd/film/ratingguidelines.asp>

Melissa Tatlock  
10 High Street  
Bedford, Nova Scotia B4A 0C4

March 27, 2009

Annette Sali  
Maritime Film Classification  
40 Alderney Drive, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Dartmouth, Nova Scotia  
B2Y 3Y8

Dear Annette Sali:

I am completing a Master's thesis at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. The thesis title is: *From Titanic to Star Wars: A Derridean Deconstructive Analysis of the Minimization of Violence in the 25 Top Grossing Films of All-Time*. I would like your permission to reprint in my thesis excerpts from the following:


Alcohol and Gaming Division. (2005). *Rating guidelines*. Retrieved from <http://www.gov.ns.ca/lwd/agd/film/ratingguidelines.asp>

The excerpts to be reproduced are: rating guidelines used to classify film/video in the Maritime Provinces (see attached photocopy).

The requested permission extends to any future revisions of my thesis, to the public circulation of my thesis by the Saint Mary's University Library, and to the prospective reproduction of the thesis by the National Library of Canada or its agents.

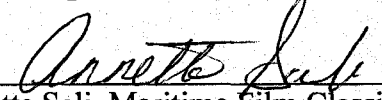
If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign this letter where indicated below. Thank you very much.

Yours truly,



Melissa Tatlock

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE REQUESTED ABOVE:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Annette Sali, Maritime Film Classification

Date: March 31, 2009