MACHISMO IN MEDIA RESEARCH:
A critical Review of Research on Violence and Pornography

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Two areas of media research, pornography and violence, are examined with a view to accounting for their discrepant findings, i.e. the effects of pornography are innocuous while those of violence are serious and warrant censorship. Both sets of research are characterized by sexist biases in the way problems are conceptualized and in their research designs. Drawing on a related field, studies of humour, I suggest that reference group theory could eliminate the bias. With respect to current state of knowledge, I treat the contradiction itself as a social fact. The underlying logic of the contradiction, it is suggested, is a machismo orientation defined here as narcissistic pride in sexual virility (pornography) the other side of which is anxiety about male sexual identity (male against male aggression films). Further research on machismo is proposed, similar to F scale research which also looked for unifying dimensions behind apparent contradictions.

Social critics of the mass media of communication have provided abundant documentation of sex biases, stereotypes, and invidious images and themes in our popular culture, but almost no attention has been given to the biases in media research. In the comments that follow, two areas of media research are examined, pornography and violence, drawing on three major investigations: The National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (1969), the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography (1970) and the Surgeon General's Report on Television and Social Behavior (1972). These reports were selected because they are frequently cited in discussions of social policy and in cases involving censorship, but also because they deal with issues central to the reconstruction of knowledge from a non-sexist perspective. Sexuality and aggression, separately or together, are among the first premises of any social theory.

Currently, the Woman's Movement has become more interested in pornography and more critical of research on the subject (Brownmiller, 1975; Russell, 1977) which supports the view that the effects of pornography are largely innocuous and that censorship is therefore unnecessary and undesirable. One objection commonly made about the studies of pornography is that they do not consider sado-masochistic pornography presenting violence as essential to sexual arousal and satisfaction.

The two violence Commissions similarly avoided this conjunction of violence and sex, but arrived at different conclusions about the social effects of media violence and the desirability of censorship. Censorship in some form was indicated, and subsequent discussions of media violence have accepted the view that media violence leads to anti-social behavior (LaMarsh, 1977). At the time the contradiction between these two sets, pornography and violence, went largely unnoticed. Wills (1977) recently revived and commented on it, accounting for the oversight in terms of a “liberal” perspective which is soft on sexual expression but hard on aggression. Wills attempts to resolve the contradiction by aligning the pornography research with the violence research; he is more critical of the former. Whether he is correct in the direction of realignment is problematic, but he is on firm ground in calling attention to the inconsistency and in expecting that these two sets of findings should point in the same direction.

Our concern is two-fold: to examine each set of research for bias, and to explore the contradiction. Both sets of research show sexist biases in the way the problems were conceptualized and the research designed. An alternative framework for future studies is discussed. Finally, we look at the contradiction as a social fact and suggest that its logic is basically a syndrome of machismo. Although this argument is speculative, it shows the need for studies of machismo.
as a complex phenomenon analogous to the F scale, in incorporating manifestly contradictory attitudes.

The term “sexism” here refers to attitudes and social practices based on the assumption that sexual inequality is a natural, biological, universal phenomenon rather than a social and historical one. This assumption supports a sexual division of labor and a wide range of discriminatory legal, political, and economic practices, policies, and traditions.

Machismo refers to an attitude of male pride in sexual virility, a form of narcissism that condones the sexual use and abuse of women, and, in the extreme, violence as a dimension of sexual gratification or instrumental to sexual goals. Like sexism, machismo is not uniform. It varies in intensity and salience among individuals, cultural groups, and larger social collectivities. While sexism tends to be institutional, a form of structural inequity linked to the discrimination against other disadvantaged groups, machismo tends to be motivational and related specifically to sexual relationships.

II

The catharsis hypothesis. Studies of pornography and studies of media violence have been dominated by controversies over the catharsis hypothesis. More Freudian than Freud, who never used the term catharsis, the hypothesis is usually attributed to him because of his theories of dreams, of wit and fantasy, and of sexuality.

According to the catharsis hypothesis, fantasy, dreams and jokes reveal our tabooed wishes which are, in turn, based on instincts sublimated for the sake of peace and social order. Jokes, for example, constitute a safety valve, reducing the tension created by the imperfectly sublimated anti-social forces in the psyche. Art, literature, religion, ideologies, and other symbolic systems have a similar function by providing vicarious experience. By defusing these volatile forces, they avert the possible destructive outcomes. One way or another, through our own projected fantasies or those presented to us through the media, the delicate balance of our inner psychic economy is maintained. We are saved the pain of neurosis. Indirectly, the equilibrium of the social order is maintained as the sources of subversion are temporarily displaced or dissipated. It is this simplified version of the catharsis hypothesis that social psychologists working in the fields of media violence and pornography have tested, using the most rigorous experimental methods possible.

The assumption that anti-social behavior has its origins in human nature, regardless of any institutional arrangements, is not, of course, confined to Freudian thought. It is logically possible to reject the catharsis hypothesis and retain the assumption, as many conservative thinkers, past and present, have done. But alone, the assumption suggests that children should be shielded from experiences that might elicit feelings of hostility, for example, rather than learning to manage these feelings. Strict surveillance and censorship are necessary to save us from ourselves.

The second assumption is that the reduction of one’s drives is socially desirable. “The dominating tendency of mental life, and perhaps of nervous life in general,” Freud wrote “is the effort to reduce, to keep constant or to remove internal tension” (1967; 95). And this, too, is politically divisive. Consider Sorel and, more recently, Fanon who argued that the mental health of the oppressed is harmed by apathy and submission, that the wretched of the earth would benefit emotionally from experiences, however abortive pragmatically, that would raise their levels of aggression. The first assumption separates civil libertarians and their opposite numbers; the second differentiates political “left” and “right.”

But the third assumption is particularly relevant here. It postulates that men have a different sexual nature from women, that in men (a) sex and aggression are linked; and (b) that men have more difficulty than women in controlling their sexual and aggressive drives. Nature,
which made women both powerless and sexually passive, has spared them the need to cope
with hostile impulses or erotic energies too great to be satisfied. That is the problem of
men, and men constitute the crucial test of the theory.

Evidence: pro and con. Studies of media violence have, by and large, failed to support the
catharsis hypothesis (Goranson, 1970; Tannenbaum, 1968). A large number of studies indicate that
exposure to media violence through the mass media increases tension, and predisposes sub-
jects to aggressive behavior. No one has established a direct, causal connection between
media violence and the types or frequencies of violence in real life. Still, the burden of proof has
shifted to those who claim there is no connection (Bogart, 1972-73.)

The position that media violence increases the likelihood of normal people engaging in acts
of violence is based on a stimulus response model of behavior associated with the work of
Leonard Berkowitz on aggression (1962, 1969). Throughout his career, Berkowitz has been more
interested in the nature of aggression than in the mass media, and it has been more by chance than
design that he used examples from the media in his experiments. Nevertheless, his work is
continually cited in discussions of the media as demonstrating strong evidence against the
catharsis hypothesis and for the view that exposure to media violence increases aggression and
ipso facto, violence.

Supporting the direction of Berkowitz's findings, but based on a different theory, modelling,
Bandura and associates demonstrate that we learn patterns of violence from role models in
the media (Bandura et. al. 1963). It is not necessary to be frustrated or angry to become
highly or irrationally aggressive, for these behavioral predispositions are acquired just as we learn
other social habits from examples around us. Like other habits they are absorbed into our
permanent repertoire of responses. They can be activated without apparent cause or obvious
provocation, just by the presence of subtle, forgotten cues in a situation.

Like Berkowitz's work, Bandura's is more a theory of aggression than of communication; its
contribution lies in showing that aggressive behavior is cultural not instinctive. It has had con-
siderable influence in the debates on media violence, particularly the impact of media violence
on children.

A third perspective is illustrated by the work of George Gerbner (1974) and is based on
content analyses of TV programs and studies of media exposure. Gerbner argues that it is not
violence per se that is undesirable, but the messages that accompany it. Whether or not people
are aroused by media violence as Berkowitz contends, or imitate it as Bandura claims, the
programs alter our consciousness by legitimating violence and victimization. The damage is
ideological, especially since the excesses of violence are often on the side of the law, the end justi-
fying the means. Repeated exposure to these socio-political messages throughout our lives creates
a view of reality as dangerous to the citizen, who becomes increasingly dependent on an
authority given extra-legal means to protect the community. Although Gerbner is not able to
prove his case—and it may say more about the political mentality of the networks than of the
audiences—his statistics of the hours children spend watching television and the number of
acts of violence they observe are alarming.

Supporting the catharsis hypothesis is the work of Feshback (1955, 1961, 1969), Singer
(1968), Bramel, Taub, and Blum (1968). Milgram and Shotland (1973)—while not supporting it—
tend to be reassuring, for they demonstrate that despite arousal and propensities to imitate
anti-social behavior there is an intervening, self-inhibiting mechanism which acts as a deterrent.
Hyman (1974) suggests that children may learn sympathy from media violence, while Tannen-
baum (1970) proposes that other variables present in the situation might account for the results.
Several scholars (Ellis, 1974; Howitt and Dembo 1974) have questioned various aspects of the
methodology. But they are, for the most part, dissenting voices. Public, as well as considerable
professional, opinion is tipped in favour of the views of Berkowtiz, Bandura, and Gerbner, who
caution against a permissive policy toward media violence.
Research on pornography is less systematic than research on violence. There are no guiding theories of sexuality comparable to Berkowitz's and Bandura's approaches to violence, but at the conceptual level it is like their's in that the two lines of inquiry share a common weakness, the failure to incorporate any of the literature on communications. For our purposes, the important point is that the pornography findings, based on similar methods of research, are in the opposite direction of those just discussed in connection with media violence.

Exposure to pornographic films creates a mild, short lived erotic response (Byrne and Lambert, 1970); the sexual acts portrayed are seldom, if ever, imitated in real life (Mann, et. al. 1970). Repeated exposure to erotic stimuli results in satiation rather than increased demand (Mann, et. al. 1974), and there is no evidence that erotic messages have altered our consciousness in any way, positive or negative. On all points,—stimulus-response, modelling, and influence on social thought—the pornography research is inconsistent with the violence research. The catharsis hypothesis is not especially endorsed, but, tant de mieux, it has more status here than in the violence work.

Aggressive and erotic humor. One way of resolving the impasse is to examine a related literature where both violence and pornography have been studied, although incidentally to another purpose. Experimental studies of humor offer the opportunity and have the added advantage of having had a similar preoccupation with the pros and cons of the catharsis hypothesis. Indeed, it was in his analysis of wit that Freud (1938) came closest to developing the notion of catharsis. In the humor experiments subjects are aroused by using either aggressive or erotic stimuli. Following that, experimental groups are presented with hostile or erotic jokes, cartoons, or similar material. They are then asked to rate the jokes for funniness. Laughter or ratings of funniness constitute the indices of tension reduction.

Throughout the humor studies, aggressive and sexual humor are used either together or interchangeably, as related or parallel (Prerost, 1975). On the basis of this research, there is no reason to suppose that pornography and media violence are of a qualitatively different order, a notion that might explain the contradictory results.

Separate analyses of sexual (Godkewitsch, 1972) and hostile (Singer, 1968) humor also show that each can and does produce enjoyment, thus adding support for the catharsis model. However, it must be said that many of the humor psychologists are not interested in motivational theory and have been moving in other intellectual directions, for example, cognitive theory. Their findings do not refute the catharsis hypothesis, but to many psychologists the catharsis hypothesis is less parsimonious than other. An objection might be that humor can distort and reverse findings. It could be a mistake to rely so heavily on humor studies as a proof. If it were true that humor cancels, alters, or reverses the direction of responses to violence and pornography, the principle should be generally applicable. And it would follow that a distinction should be made, for example, between straight racist propaganda and racist humor, encouraging the latter as a matter of public policy. Implausible as it sounds, this was the position taken by Norman Lear, producer of the popular TV sitcom, “All in the Family” in defense of the bigotted Archie Bunker. Studies of the program, one in Canada and one in the U.S. (Vidmar and Rokeach, 1974) provided no support for Lear’s thesis. Too many people, it seems, were laughing with Archie, not at him.

Conflict model and reference group theory. The mystery, then, of why the two sets of findings go in opposite directions remains. But the studies of racist humor are important for another reason. They have not been oriented around the catharsis hypothesis, and are not burdened with its presuppositions concerning sexuality. Instead, they draw on conflict theory—the satisfaction of seeing our enemies humiliated—and reference group theory.

A few examples will illustrate the heuristic value of the model. Jews do not find anti-semitic jokes as funny as non Jews do (Wolff et. al., 1934); blacks are less likely to find anti-Negro humor as funny as whites, although liberal whites—low on the authoritarian scale—
may find anti-negro humor more offensive than conservative blacks high on the scale (Middleton, 1959); Canadians find anti-American jokes funnier than their U.S. counterparts, who are more amused by anti-Canadian jokes (La Fave et. al. 1973); and members of each sex find jokes about the other to be funnier than about their own sex (Priest and Wilhelm, 1974). All of these studies focus on inequality, and inequality whether between two races, sexes, or nations, is presumed to be derivative of the social structure, a social rather than a biological fact. Reference group theory postulates that our perceptions of, and responses to, inequality in life or in art, are structured by our own positions in the social structure, as these are modified by our reference group identification.

III

Applying this perspective to a study of pornography would both conceptualize pornography differently and require a different type of experimental design. Pornography would be seen as an extreme form, almost a travesty, of sexual inequality in which women serve as sex objects to arouse and satisfy men and nothing more. In most pornography—omitting those forms intended for a homosexual market—women are always available, cooperative, eager to please, asking for and expecting nothing in return.

Second, the research design would require subjects of both sexes, just as similar studies of racist content would include both black and white subjects. It is, therefore, significant that the experimental research on pornography has been carried out by men using almost exclusively male subjects.

| FIGURE 1 |
| Experimental Studies of Pornography Using Adult Subjects* |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amoroso, Donald</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown, Marvin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preusse, Manfred</td>
<td>(a) 60 male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ware, Edward E.</td>
<td>(b) 56 male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitkey, Dennis W.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byrne, Don</td>
<td>42 married couples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lambeth, John</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis, Keith E.</td>
<td>365 male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braucht, George N.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howard, James L.</td>
<td>32 male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reifler, Clifford B.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liptzin, Myron B.</td>
<td>72 ‘‘mostly married couples’’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kutchinsky, Berl</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mann, Jay</td>
<td>85 married couples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidman, Jack</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starr, Sheldon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosher, Donald L.</td>
<td>(a) 194 single males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) 183 single females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosher, Donald L.</td>
<td>(b) 256 male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katz, Harvey</td>
<td>120 male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tannenbaum, Percy H.</td>
<td>12 male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katzman, Marshall</td>
<td>285 male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The few women in these studies are primarily married women viewing pornography in the company of their husbands. Thus the findings which show that women respond to erotica similarly to men, a difference in degree rather than kind, could well be a function of marital status, the compliance of wives to the wishes and tastes of husbands or husband surrogates, the male investigators. One can only speculate on how different the results would have been if the experiments had been conducted by female psychologists using female subjects separately or in groups but with no men, and certainly not spouses, present. In the absence of such research, the literature we now have is biased through omission.

The studies listed in Figure 1 are only the experimental ones, but the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography conducted surveys of the public in which women were, of course, better represented. Commenting on the findings, the investigators expressed both surprise and pleasure in discovering how liberated women are, how far they have travelled from the Victorian stereotype of themselves as prudish and repressed. Clive Barnes (1970) in an introduction to the report draws attention to the remarkable findings about women:

Perhaps the greatest [surprise]—perfectly evident from the findings—is that women are virtually as interested in erotica as are men.

Using a conflict model, this is tantamount to saying that Blacks are becoming broadminded enough to find some gratifications in racism. For women it may be less of an authentic liberation than a form of what Marcuse (1962) calls “repressive de-sublimiation,” a sexual liberation within repressive roles.

In any event, the instruments used by the investigators perpetuate the myth of female sexual passivity. In one survey respondents were asked if they thought that exposure to pornography “makes men want to do new things with their wives.” The reversal of this question in which women assume some sexual initiative was not asked. Similarly, the statement that sexual materials “lead people to lose respect for women” was not balanced with “lead people to lose respect for men” (Abelson, et. al. 1970). All things considered, the pornography research is, when examined from a conflict perspective, biased in the way we have defined sexism here.

Experimental studies of media violence have a similar pattern. Again, male investigators have, with few exceptions and excluding studies of children, studied male subjects.

Whether the catharsis hypothesis is accepted or rejected, the sexist premise which assumes men have the problem remains. Alternative hypotheses do not question this assumption.

A more balanced representation of subjects might still be misleading if investigators continued to use the same media materials. In many of the experiments, the researchers use scenes from a motion picture, Champion, a story of a boxer; in another, a similar boxing sequence from Body and Soul; and in others, knife fights between men. How much credibility does this type of film have for women? We know from studies of media preferences that women have little interest in such films. Women’s own experiences of violence tend to be within the household rather than in the ring or on the battlefields (Steinmetz and Straus, 1975). The most common experiences of aggression for women are between husband and wife, father and daughter; that is, cross-sexual occurrences in which women do not have a sporting chance. It is interesting to note that in one study (Walters, Thomas 1963) the results were not clear when women were the subjects. The bias of the research is not corrected by merely using more

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1 In an unpublished manuscript and in correspondence with the author, Muriel Cantor has argued that the sexist bias can also be found in studies of children. She observes that the definition and measurements of aggression as violence exclude the verbal aggression of women; more generally, Cantor points out that the various theories of aggression used in these studies have ignored sex-role socialization.
female subjects if the media presentation of violence distances subjects from the start. It is a primary fact of media research that audiences must identify with subjects to be affected by them.

To summarize, by looking at the research on pornography and violence from the perspective of a conflict model and reference group theory, we can see more vividly the sexist bias in the two areas of inquiry. It starts with the catharsis hypothesis, but lingers despite the rejection of the hypothesis. Although many have questioned the validity of the catharsis hypothesis, they

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* Sources given in References.

### FIGURE 2

**Experimental Studies of Media Violence Using Adult Subjects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Type of Media Violence</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Berkowitz, Leonard</td>
<td>Champion</td>
<td>Male college students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corwin, Ronald</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heironimus, Mark</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berkowitz, Leonard</td>
<td>Champion</td>
<td>160 male and female students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rawlings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berkowitz, Leonard</td>
<td>Champion</td>
<td>88 male students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geen, Russell G.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bramel, Dana</td>
<td></td>
<td>42 male and 48 female students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taub, Barry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blum, Barbara</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doob, Anthony N.</td>
<td>Movie gunfight</td>
<td>40 students &quot;both sexes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cimie, Robert J.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doob, Anthony N.</td>
<td>&quot;Movie gunfight in which approximately 150 people were shot and killed in 7 minutes&quot;</td>
<td>40 &quot;male and female students&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirshenbaum, Hershl</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feshbach, Seymour</td>
<td>4 TAT Pictures</td>
<td>123 students &quot;Approximately twice as many men as women&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geen, Russell G.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berkowitz, Leonard</td>
<td>Champion</td>
<td>101 male students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geen, Russell G.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O'Neal, Edgar C.</td>
<td>Champion</td>
<td>108 male students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meyer, Timothy</td>
<td>3 minute knife fight in <em>From Here to Eternity</em> CBS Evening news</td>
<td>200 male students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speisman, Joseph</td>
<td>Documentary film showing &quot;primitive ritual involving a crude operation called 'subincision'&quot;</td>
<td>56 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lazarus, Richard</td>
<td></td>
<td>42 airline executives (sex unspecified)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mordkoff, Arnold</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davison, Les</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walters, Richard</td>
<td>Knife-fight scene from <em>Rebel Without a Cause</em></td>
<td>(a) 28 male hospital attendants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas, Edward</td>
<td></td>
<td>(b) 24 adolescent males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milgram, Stanley</td>
<td><em>Medical Center</em> with variant endings</td>
<td>(c) 32 females &quot;from a hostel for working girls.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shotland, R. Lance</td>
<td></td>
<td>(d) 238 unspecified</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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*Sources given in References.*
have been content with its sexist premises. Indicative of this bias is the use of male subjects, a logic dictated by a notion that for any theory of aggression or sexuality men are the active group; men have the responsibility; and men confront the consequences of their own behavior. Hence, men constitute the test of the theory whatever it is. Any effort to eliminate this bias must go beyond the catharsis principle, which is only one manifestation of a deeper sexist thinking. The conflict model and reference group theory may not be the best alternative approach; but its strength lies in the assumption that social phenomena require social rather than biological explanations.

IV

A sexist bias, however, is not the same as machismo, earlier defined as an attitude idealizing rugged masculinity in response to sexual insecurity (Bergler, 1949). Recall that the problem which initiated this review was the asymmetrical findings between the two sets of research, violence and pornography.

Since one side of machismo is male sexual power, it seems obvious that persons, men or women, high on a scale testing machismo would find pornography acceptable, harmless, and inoffensive, an activity as suitable as any other for leisure time. But attitudes toward pornography would not predict anything with respect to violence without some connecting theory.

A theory which links them, as Freud's does, is supported more by literature and folklore than fact. It is a popular belief and richly elaborated by writers like Norman Mailer (Millett, 1970). But the connection is by no means so clear, for more women are seduced than seized, and gifts and flattery are more common than brute force. In other words, it is not enough to assert the relationship; it must be explained and demonstrated.

If a relationship between pornography and violence was found, we would expect consistent findings, but it is their absence that concerns us, the accident of two literatures developing independently. However it happened it remains a conspicuous dilemma.

To understand the research on violence we must ask whether the responses the investigators found were responses to violence as a genre or to a particular type of violence. In addition, we need to know whether the response to the films was aggression, or whether the aggression was itself a response to another, more immediate, but less visible response.

Several studies (Tannenbaum, 1970; Speisman et. al., 1964) suggest that the emotional excitement created by media violence may be more diffuse than the term aggression implies. It may be that stress rather than aggression is experienced by viewers, and that extraneous variables such as mood and style significantly modify responses. Conceivably, the response found by the investigators was anxiety, and the subsequent aggression an attempt to cope with it.

There is good reason to believe that films such as Champion create anxiety though they are not, therefore, less entertaining and pleasurable. The anxiety is similar to that experienced by participants or spectators of contact sports. These activities can have a strong homosexual element (Beisser, 1967. Toby, 1975). Subjects were viewing two male boxers slugging it out in the ring, periodically locked in embrace, bare body touching bare body, moving steadily toward a climax in which the loser is subdued and prone on the floor. The complete scenario is seen in the recent film Rocky, in which the contender prepares himself by practicing heterosexual abstinence before the big event. War films and Westerns provide similar examples of men made stronger in their aggression when aloof from the society of women.

If we are correct, the other side of machismo is the insecurity men may have about their sexual identity, taking the form of fears of impotence and homosexuality. It is the intervening variable in the violence research and explains why male subjects become more aggressive after viewing media violence between men. The test would be to replicate these studies using punitive attitudes toward sexual impotence and homosexuality as independent or dependent
variables; in either way testing the hypothesis that aggression is a way of dealing with the ambivalence created by the film of boxing.

The humiliation of women and insecurity about sexual identity match the two conclusions emerging from the areas of research examined, one condoning pornography as an innocent pleasure without serious social consequences; the other condemning media violence as leading to senseless and brutal acts in everyday life. The contradiction which seemed so puzzling and which we attempted unsuccessfully to resolve in favor of one or the other now turns out to be the central fact. On a deeper level, the contradiction disappears: the unifying variable is machismo. It is similar in this respect to the authoritarian scale (Adorno et. al., 1950) which contains attitudinal contradictions. This suggests an approach to the study of machismo along the same lines.

Finally, in terms of social policy, it implies that the alternative to cultural censorship of either pornography or media violence is a new perspective on the status of women and the normalization of homosexuality, male or female.

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