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**Rituals of Retribution:
From the Traditional to the Contemporary**

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Abstract

Durkheim saw public rituals of punishment as acts of emphatic denunciation that provided a focus for the outrage and righteous indignation of the moral community. Foucault saw the public execution as an ‘act of terror’ inflicted on the body of the criminal, to be replaced by a “gentler” treatment of the soul of the offender as well as the body, made possible by the penal system. It will be argued first of all that public execution was abolished, not for humanitarian reasons, but because these public degradation ceremonies could no longer be counted on to induce the desired combination of indignation and awe, as audiences became more sophisticated and therefore capable of questioning the process, and even of sympathizing with the persons being executed. Secondly, it will be demonstrated that public execution has now been replaced by the contemporary revenge drama, represented by the “Dirty Harry” movies and others that enact contemporary rituals of punishment to arouse these emotions of outrage, indignation and fear, while controlling for the possibility of any alternative perspectives that would undermine these kinds of reactions.

Rituals of Retribution: From the Traditional to the Contemporary

Public rituals of retribution are as old as the hills, and while traditional public hangings and torture have largely disappeared, new forms seem to emerge to take their place.

Durkheim saw public rituals of punishment as acts of emphatic denunciation that provided a focus for the outrage and righteous indignation of the moral community. Foucault saw the public execution as an 'act of terror' inflicted on the body of the criminal, to be replaced by a "gentler" treatment of the soul of the offender as well as the body, made possible by the penal system. It will be argued first of all that public execution was not abolished for humanitarian reasons, but rather because such public degradation ceremonies could no longer be counted on to induce the desired combination of moral indignation, fear and awe, as audiences became more sophisticated and therefore capable of questioning the process, and even of sympathizing with the persons being executed. Secondly, it will be suggested that public execution finds an equivalent in the contemporary revenge drama, represented by the "Dirty Harry" movies and others that enact contemporary rituals of punishment to arouse these emotions of outrage, indignation and fear, while controlling, within the context of the narrative, the possibility of any alternative perspectives that would mitigate such reactions. It is further suggested that the emergence of these contemporary ritual displays in the 1970's may be associated with a renewed spirit of punitiveness, particularly in the U.S., as indicated by the reemergence of capital punishment since the 1970's in particular, and the escalating rates of imprisonment in the absence of equivalent increases in crime. In the process, it is hoped that this discussion will also contribute some further insight into the relationship between crime and culture.

Durkheim believed that those who were identified as offenders were those who had violated their society's sacred moral order. Such a violation was necessarily experienced as a source of outrage and righteous indignation by all right-thinking members of that society, and necessarily the cause of passionate, hostile reactions. According to Durkheim, "In the first place, punishment consists of a passionate reaction," and vengeance is its primary motivation. (1964, p 85). He states that people punish to: "...make the culpable suffer particularly for the sake of making him suffer."

For Durkheim, the public ritual of punishment was the vehicle for arousing these emotions, and harnessing them in the service of the values of that society, and therefore in the service of social solidarity. Durkheim acknowledged that there were substantial differences between the traditional and the modern responses to crime, and that modern urban societies are fundamentally different in the basic character of their social solidarity. However, he felt that the courtroom drama retained many ritual elements not unlike those found in traditional public rituals. This view is supported by more contemporary “labeling theorists,” (cf. Goffman, 1963; Matza, 1969) who describe courtroom processes, which at least formally remain public events, as a form of “degradation ceremony” that serves the purpose of stigmatizing the defendant as a criminal. Durkheim also pointed out that, while it is presumed that retribution is now determined in accordance with rational-legal principles, the pronouncements of the judge upon sentencing will often express very strong moral sentiments, and even moral outrage. As well, punishments are regularly reported in local newspapers when cases are deemed sufficiently outrageous, and are followed by public expressions of outrage and demands for more severe sentences.

For Foucault, the public execution was an ‘act of terror’ inflicted on the body of the criminal. It was designed to show the wrath of those with the power to punish, according to ‘retaliatory markers,’ of wounding, maiming, torturing and killing, while striking fear into the hearts of those who might dare to go against them. With the advent of the more modern penal system, the length of imprisonment becomes the measure of punishment. Foucault also refers to a shift in focus from the body to the soul of the criminal. Transformation of the offender presumably becomes the goal, more than destruction of the body. This change in focus is associated with a change in conceptions of justice. The purpose of the “justice system” becomes more a matter of “correction;” finding the underlying causes of criminal behavior and correcting them, to ensure that the behavior will not reoccur. This is a new, ‘gentle way of punishment,’ says Foucault (1977, p. 104) that seeks to be

as unarbitrary as possible, while nevertheless still making the crime unattractive for potential as well as actual offenders. As such, it represented a new kind of disciplinary power that relies on training and correction rather than displays of raw power. Punishment is, rather, justified in utilitarian terms, with an emphasis on the presumed “educative” benefits. This approach presumes rationality on the part of the punishers, who will use the best and ‘gentlest’ means to retain power and maintain social control. At the same time, he presumes the rationality of potential offenders, who will weigh their options before considering criminal acts.

Rationality on the part of the broader public is also presumed. They are expected to understand that training and correction are preferable to displays of force, and that their role is passively to accept this model for punishment. Justice systems became bureaucratic organizations, characterized by formally defined patterns of activity, and clearly defined rules and regulations for every occasion. In other words, justice systems strove to achieve the characteristics of the ideal bureaucracy, as described by sociologist Max Weber, that: “succeeds in achieving the exclusion of love, hatred, and every purely personal, especially irrational and incalculable, feeling from the execution of official tasks.” (M. Weber, as quoted in R. Bendix, 1960).

Nevertheless, we have seen that emotional and punitive sentiments have not disappeared, and have in fact even increased dramatically in the U.S. in recent years. This persistence, and even amplification of what Richard Snyder (2001) calls the ‘spirit of punishment,’ despite a hundred years of efforts to rationalize them, is the question that we set out to answer. Having followed the course of other developed countries in the development of a penal system, and in the abolition of capital punishment, that most purely punitive measure by the mid 1970’s, how could the U.S. turn right around and become increasingly punitive?

One part of the answer to this question comes from Phillip Smith, (1996) in an article entitled “Executing Executions.” Smith believes that it was not the shift toward greater control

of the offender – of his soul as well as his body - made possible by the advent of the penal system that led to the end of public hangings (as argued by Foucault). Rather, it was the increasing tendency of those sentenced to the gallows, through their performances in this role, to undermine the very meanings of their public execution, as a moral act of renunciation, and as a means to induce terror in the populace.

Smith makes the case that those who were executed were coming increasingly to undermine one or the other of these justifications. On the one hand, victims who appeared to have been wronged, or appeared weak and frail, or deeply repentant, would drain the ritual of its moral force, and make it impossible for the audience to maintain a sense of outrage. Smith describes the case of an Eliza Fenning, who was executed in London in July of 1815. Eliza was a 20-year-old cook convicted on questionable evidence of attempting to poison her master's family. As described in an account of the time, quoted by Smith, Eliza appeared for her execution: "neatly dressed in a white muslin gown, a handsome worked cap, and laced boots," and declared that: "Before the Just and Almighty God, and by the faith of the Holy Sacrament I have taken, I am innocent of the offence with which I am charged" (from Smith, 1996, p.242). This was reported to have aroused great sympathy among the crowd, to the point where its moral indignation ended up being directed at a man in the crowd who was not wearing a hat, and, further, made some sort of disrespectful remark that led other men in the crowd to take hold of him and shake him by the ears.

The presumption of the public execution to induce fear and awe was undermined by the reactions of eighteenth century "highwaymen" in England. Smith describes the performance of the famous highwayman Dick Turpin, who "spent his last days "joking, drinking and telling stories," and who "went to his execution wearing a new suit of clothes, joked with the hangman and threw himself off the gallows" (Smith, 1996, p. 245). The lack of fear or humility in the face of death displayed by men such as Turpin clearly undermined any claims of the

deterrent value of these public executions. Says Smith: “The mob, responding with laughter and badinage to the rake or sympathy and respect for the saint, made the failure of executions to deter, warn or dramatize morality visibly and witnessably so” (p. 247).

Michael Ignatieff (1978) also refers to the increasing willingness of the crowd to make judgments as to the rightness of the execution. He states that: “All such rituals (of public punishments) depended for their effectiveness as a ceremony of deterrence on the crowd’s tacit support of the authorities’ sentence.” (p. 21) He goes on to describe the kinds of reactions that could occur among spectators:

Moreover, the crowd had a highly developed sense of the rights due to the condemned, and if any of these were abridged, they were quick to vent their wrath on the authorities, especially if the condemned also happened to contest the justice of the execution itself. This double sense of outrage, at rights ignored and at offenders wrongfully sacrificed, drove the Tyburn crowd attending the execution of the silk weaver who cut looms during the Spitalfields agitation of 1769 to attack and destroy the sheriff’s house after the execution. What irked them particularly, one of them told a gentleman bystander, was that the sheriff had not even the decency to give the men time to say their prayers. (Ignatieff, 1978, p.22)

Smith believes that performances by individuals to ‘subvert the degradation ceremony of their execution,’ and the willingness of crowds to make their own judgments, were made possible by the emergence of individualism from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries, in turn resulting from urbanization and industrialization, which had detached people from their stable homogeneous rural communities, and left them relatively rootless and alienated in the emerging city. At the same time, says Smith, new narrative forms in the arts gave victims and audiences a new repertoire of action and interpretation to draw on, and a means to mock the traditional cultural pretensions of the elite of the time. Smith argues that it was the growing

unpredictability and potential subversiveness of these performances by victims of public executions that led to their cessation. He quotes pamphlets by reformists of the time who refer to this phenomenon, and suggest various remedies. Smith's argument points more to the importance of the actual content of the ritual element of punishment. He also draws attention to the complexity of the ritual acts surrounding punishment and the meanings they convey; an aspect not fully recognized by Durkheim. To quote Smith once more: "Narratives, working through ritual, can be considered causal, in that they confer moral and political status and authority, allocate identity, offer plans for action, comment on and define social relationships and prompt *emotional and cognitive responses in individuals and groups*. (p. 239, emphasis mine)

Smith makes reference to the contemporary escalation of executions in the United States, but has difficulty accounting for it, or for the rise in the general level of punitiveness, particularly in the last 3 decades. Smith points out that, with a very few exceptions, prisoners now move along death row in a passive, resigned state, without theatricality, and in relative anonymity. However, his focus on the concrete ritual of execution leads him to miss the contemporary dramatizations of punishment that display clear parallels with traditional public executions.

While public rituals of punishment have been discontinued, (though there have been calls in the U.S. recently for the return of public executions) the public announcement of the sentence does partially fulfill the function of the formerly public event. However, far more significantly, I believe that the mass media in the U.S., including the news media, television and film, has inundated the public with narratives of vengeance and of execution that provide an outlet for, and an incitement to, punitive and vengeful impulses. The crime drama of course has a long history. However, crime dramas traditionally followed a basic pattern of violation, discovery, punishment and resolution still found for example in the "Law and Order" group of television series. In this genre, the police search for clues, collect evidence, and finally track down and arrest suspects,

who are then to have their day in court. 'Law and Order' varies from the traditional model by following a case through the court process to the eventual verdict and pronouncement of sentence. Thus, while still retributive in nature, the program shows police work performed with skill and integrity, and then exposes its audience to some of the subtleties of determining legal guilt when dealing with complex moral issues.

This traditional crime drama narrative began to be supplanted by a narrative of vengeance, or "crime-and-punishment" drama, in which criminals are essentially executed in a manner that provides its own moral justification, while controlling for any possible reaction from the audience, such as sympathy for the one being executed, or respect for the one who dies well, or revulsion toward the executioner, that might detract from this moral justification. .

A landmark film of this type was *Dirty Harry*, starring Clint Eastwood, which appeared in 1971. It is not the only film of this type by any means, but is widely regarded as a landmark crime film. It is identified by Nicole Rafter as the initiator of the "cop film genre," for example (2000, p. 73). Its impact and its popularity is reflected in the fact that it led to four sequels over the next 17 years, and could be said to have led to numerous imitators, including the movie *Death Wish*, identified in the following discussion as well, starring Charles Bronson, that was also followed by four sequels.

Eastwood plays Harry Callaghan, a tough street cop who knows who the bad guys are, and is contemptuous of formal police procedures, police and government bureaucracy and the courts. They are seen to just get in the way of his quest to 'get' the guilty. The plot revolves around a killer who is trying to extort payment from the city. Harry pursues him vigorously, and finally catches him, shoots him in the leg, and then stands on the wounded leg in order to force him to reveal the location of the killer's latest hostage victim. The courts, however, set the killer free, because his rights have been violated, and key incontrovertible evidence against him has been ruled inadmissible. Harry predicts the man will strike again, and

sure enough, he kidnaps a busload of schoolchildren and holds them for ransom. Harry tracks him down, shoots and wounds him after another lengthy chase. The killer is lying on his back with his gun beside him. Harry stands over him, pointing his gun, and repeats the famous speech that subsequently became a part of the culture.

“I know what you’re thinkin’. Did he fire six shots or only five? This is a 45 magnum, the most powerful handgun in the world and would blow your head clean off. So you’ve got to ask yourself one question. Are you feeling lucky, punk?”

This is an exact repeat of the same lines delivered in a scene near the beginning of the movie. In that scene, where Harry stands over a would-be bank robber he has just wounded, the man decides against grabbing the gun, Harry pulls the trigger, and the hammer clicks on an empty chamber. On the second occasion, the killer reaches for his gun, Harry pulls the trigger, and kills him. The killer falls into a stream behind him, and looks grotesque as he floats away downstream. The last shot shows a still angry-looking Harry, as he takes off his badge, and throws it into the water.

While this is the basic story line, there are all sorts of iconic messages along the way, to do with the difficulty of being a policeman – the movie begins with a scroll of names of police officers killed in the line of duty. We soon learn that one of Harry’s partners has been killed in the line of duty, and another seriously injured. We hear of references to police being called “pigs,” and so on. There are also various references to the general state of crime and lawlessness in the streets; e.g., we learn that Harry’s wife was killed by a drunk driver. Finally, examples of what is portrayed as incompetence on the part of the police administration and the mayor’s office occur throughout. This was a very successful movie, with four sequels, and a host of imitators that became increasingly violent and heavy-handed. It also displays what I have identified as the six basic characteristics of this genre of revenge drama:

1. The hero is presented to the audience as an everyman,

a sympathetic character up against a justice system that is inefficient, ineffectual, and corrupt, and a society rife with violent crime. Dirty Harry is a policeman who is nevertheless scornful of the police bureaucracy and the justice system. Heroes of subsequent films in this genre often are even less attached to the police force or other legitimate authority. They are policemen on suspension, ex-policemen, ex-soldiers, or even total vigilantes, acting completely on their own. The vigilante movie could almost be seen as a sub-genre, beginning with “Death Wish,” which appeared in 1976. The hero of this film, played by Charles Bronson, is described as a “pacifist,” whose wife and daughter are attacked by thugs. The wife is killed, and the daughter is left in a coma. The police and courts are portrayed as unable to avenge their deaths, and so our hero buys himself an arsenal of guns, hunts the thugs down, and kills them. Adding a further twist to this scenario, our hero makes it his mission to kill more thugs, and we find him wandering into dark alleys waiting to be attacked, then killing his attackers

A more recent variation on the vigilante theme was the nasty little movie: “In the Bedroom”, which appeared in 2001. Our hero is a small-town doctor whose son is killed by the abusive ex-husband of the son’s “older” girlfriend. The justice system is presented as yet again unable to enact the necessary vengeance. This is followed by scenes suggesting the breakdown of the relationship between the doctor and his wife. After some intense brooding, this physician, in clear violation of the Hippocratic oath, lures the ex-husband into his car, drives him out to a remote location, cold-bloodedly executes him and buries the body. He is helped by an old friend (neighbor) a man his age, and we are also given intimations that this was what was needed to save the wife from her grief, and to save their marriage.

This movie, with a strong cast, received five academy award nominations, and was reviewed positively by most

critics, who typically would not reveal the “surprise” ending, presumably so as not to dilute the emotional impact of the vengeance ritual at the end. For example, well-known critic Leonard Maltin (2003 *Movie and Video Guide: Signet: 2002*) describes it as follows: “Quiet, observant film explores how grief affects a longtime married couple and the people around them.” Viewers are allowed to learn, on their own, as the story unfolds, that grief can be relieved through cold-blooded murder in the name of vengeance. The small-town, middle-class setting for this vengeance drama, wherein a doctor, sworn to save lives, is to be cheered on for deliberately taking a life, sends the message that vengeance is the “natural” response, even for people who are otherwise the height of respectability.

2. The heroes of revenge dramas will generally have a personal involvement in the case. Justice, defined as retribution, is not just an abstract principle for them. Rather, it is grounded in a personal sense of injury and loss, and a felt need for some kind of vengeance. In some cases, they will be “after” a criminal who has directly harmed them or someone close to them. More often they have a more general kind of “chip on their shoulder” related to harm they or someone close to them may have experienced at the hands of criminals, like Harry, who has lost partners to crime. Others have lost friends or family members. In other cases, they may just believe that friends or family are in danger. Plenty of pathos will surround the establishment of this interest, as the audience is invited to share in the hero’s grief, suffering or worry, and feel empathy for him.
3. The hero knows who the villain or villains are, beyond a shadow of a doubt. There are no grey areas. A number of scenes will be devoted to establishing this character as utterly evil, with no redeeming qualities and no possibility of redemption. Even in the absence of any direct evidence of crimes committed, they will be rude, threat-

ening, and display insolent attitudes.

4. Our hero kills the villain without compunction and without regret. Typically the killing scene is set up to elicit cheers from the audience. We see in 'Dirty Harry' that he could easily have kicked the gun out of the killer's reach. However, he chooses to dare the man to try to reach for his gun, so providing the excuse to kill him. The lack of any sense of guilt or regret by the hero of *Death Wish* is underlined by his enthusiasm for further killings. The lack of compunction on the part of the doctor in "In the Bedroom" is demonstrated by the degree of premeditation. It is clear that he has planned his actions through careful disposal of the body. Also, there is no indication of regret afterward.
5. The villain always dies badly. Often his last act will be an act of cowardice or deceit, or an attempt to kill the hero or someone else. There will be a buildup to the final killing scene so that it has quite a climactic quality, designed to elicit cheers from the audience. If the object of our vengeance narrative has henchmen, then each of them must be dispatched before the true object of our outrage can be dealt with. The killing will take place in approximately hierarchical order, with regular henchmen being killed first, then the lieutenant, then finally the lead villain.
6. The execution solves everyone's problems. Our hero achieves righteousness through the act of execution. In the case of Harry, the throwing away of the badge at least suggests his disdain for any disciplinary action if he stayed in the police force. In many other cases, even this kind of suggestion of possible consequences for cold-blooded killing is absent. Any presumed victims, or friends or family, have their suffering eased by the hero's actions. Often, there will be scenes in which victims express their profound gratitude to the hero. As well, the suggestion is at least made that problems for the community, such as crime problems, have been resolved through this "cleansing" act.

This genre of the vengeance movie thus provides a complete, dramatized, narrative version of ritual punishment, as described by Smith, that meets the criteria set out by Durkheim for a successful ritual punishment and degradation ceremony. The audience is provided ample opportunity to experience outrage and indignation toward the offender for the crimes committed. It is also able to share in the gratification that the vengeance is expected to bring, through identification with a sympathetic “everyman” character, who is a far cry from some anonymous designate of the penal system, performing his function in the depths of some remote institutional structure, let alone the dark figure of the traditional hooded hangman. Also, our hero is himself a victim of criminals, and invites our empathy for that reason.

How much can we say, however, about the impact of these movies in and of themselves? On the one hand, the increase in capital punishment in the U.S. does seem to follow upon the appearance of these movies. The “Dirty Harry” series of films emerged, from the original Dirty Harry in 1971 to Magnum Force in 1973, The Enforcer, 1976, Sudden Impact, 1983, and finally The Dead Pool, 1988. In the meantime, executions in the U.S. began to increase in the 1980’s. While not a single person was executed in 1976, that number had increased to 16 by 1979, escalating steadily to a high in 1999 of 98 executions (Death Penalty Information Centre, 2007). In Canada, on the other hand, where these movies were also extremely popular, capital punishment was abolished in 1976 and that abolition continues to this day.

It may help to look at this somewhat tenuous association between vengeance movies and capital punishment in a slightly broader context. Other social and cultural forces were at work during this time period, from the 1970’s to the 1990’s. In terms of cultural influences, we need to include the emergence of what Barry Glassner calls the “culture of fear,” that arguably contributed to the sense of moral outrage among Americans. Glassner asks: “Why, as crime rates plunged throughout the nineties, did two-thirds of Americans believe they were soar-

ing? How did it come about that by mid-decade 62 percent of us described ourselves as truly desperate about crime—almost twice as many as in the late 1980s, when crime rates were higher?” (1999, xi). He argues that these rising fears are due at least in part to the manner or style of media coverage.

Glassner identifies two basic themes often reflected in media coverage. First, he says, “scenarios substitute for facts” (3). Isolated events or familiar occurrences are presented in such a way that they seem to represent imminent and terrifying threats. Notice how these impressions coincide with the iconic images that are presented early on in the “Dirty Harry” film, the scroll of names of fallen police officers, the partners killed in the line of duty, wife killed by a drunk driver, and so on. Second, as Glassner describes it, “bad people substitute for bad policies” (6). For example, crime, poverty, and desperation grow worse as social programs are cut back; institutionalized racism continues to permeate the system as focus is placed on “street crime,” gang activity, and the “war on drugs.” This kind of scenario is also reflected in films such as *Dirty Harry*, where evil is so dramatically personified in the identities of bad people, with never a reference to contributing social conditions.

On the subject of social conditions, a factor contributing to a rise in punitive attitudes could well have been the emergence of a power elite during the “Reagan years” in the 1980’s, and continuing with the presidency of George W. Bush, with a renewed interest in manipulating the symbols and rituals of punishment for the sake of social solidarity and its own continued domination. During Reagan’s time in office, George W. Bush, who was Governor of Texas at the time, approved the execution of 153 people, including a number whose guilt was very much in question. He also seemed to have virtually eliminated the right of appeal for death-row inmates, and famously argued that capital punishment “saves lives.” This elite, subsequently culminating in Bush’s two terms as president, relied heavily from the outset on a law-and-order mentality that reflects the kind of self-justifying retribution that animates the “*Dirty Harry*” series.

In summary, then, ritualized dramas like the “Dirty Harry” movies can be seen, if not to cause, then at least to awaken and amplify punitive impulses in the population, aided by the “reach” of modern mass media, to ensure that virtually everyone in the society is exposed to these dramas. In the meantime a state of fear has already been induced in a populace already struggling with ambivalence over their own violent impulses. These factors together would account for the very widespread and increasing acceptance of capital punishment alluded to earlier. Punitive attitudes can be expected to be weaker or stronger among the populace, depending on the degree of “fit” with their own experience – the extent to which they experienced a punitive child-rearing for example, adherence to religious beliefs that further the spirit of punishment, exposure to a punitive educational system, and even to punitiveness in their place of employment. For example, in a military or paramilitary type of organization (types of organizations that employ a much higher percentage of the workforce in the U.S. than in most other countries) authoritarian and punitive attitudes would be common.

One could argue that dramatized punishment rituals provide for an expression of the general level of anger and frustration that are simply a part of life in modern society; a harmless outlet for social aggression. However, they may also serve to further desensitize and brutalize their audience. As described by Clarence Darrow, famous American jurist: “The impression (from the punishment of criminals) must be to harden the heart and conscience, to destroy the finer sensibilities, to cheapen human life, to breed cruelty and malice in endless ways and unknown forms.” (Darrow, 1972)

Conclusion

Revenge dramas like Dirty Harry and its successors can be seen as means to stimulate powerful emotions of moral outrage and indignation on the one hand, and fear and awe on the other that were once aroused by public rituals of punishment, like public hangings. The controlled setting allowed for

in such drama allows for the elimination of the troublesome elements that led to the cessation of public executions. First, any possibility that the audience will come to sympathize with the victim of the exercise is carefully eliminated. In a dramatic context, any possibility of sympathy or respect for the object of ritual punishment can be prevented. The renunciation can therefore be complete, and any possibility of uncertainty or guilt about pleasure in his death is removed. It is clear, as indicated by the certainty of the executioner, that this is the final solution, which restores the balance and brings closure. At the last, the victim can be made to die badly, so that there need be no question of the deterrent value of the final punishment.

A number of questions for further research arise from the observations included in this paper. One set of questions emerges around the question of legitimacy. For example, it is made clear that Dirty Harry is acting as a policeman, doing his job, bringing law and order, even if his relationship with the “justice system” is somewhat ambivalent. The Charles Bronson character in the *Death Wish* series has less legitimacy, but is still portrayed as acting justly. At the other end of the spectrum are characters such as the central character in *Taxi Driver*, from the same decade as Dirty Harry and *Death Wish*, who are clearly acting outside the law. More recent versions of these themes, like the TV series *Dexter*, and the film: *The Punisher*, expressing these kinds of themes seem deliberately to walk the line between legitimacy and illegitimacy. Another area for further research involves the broader question of interaction between media and society. To what extent can media be seen to cause attitudes or behaviors, or merely to reflect what is already there? The differences between Canada and the U.S. with regard to retributiveness, while media exposure is much the same provides for an interesting case in point. A starting point for this exploration would be the finding from extensive research on the effects of media violence on children, to the effect that children are more affected to the extent that they experience violence in their own lives. Other factors to consider might involve social factors or social conditions, such as inequality. Other research questions could be related to the emergence and interaction of

different crime genres in recent film history, and developing relationships between and among film genres.

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