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Representation of the Concept "School Violence" in the Mirror of Contemporary American Cinema (1992–2020)

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Abstract

The problem of school violence is becoming more and more urgent worldwide. Aggressive attitudes in schools are gaining more and more momentum, and are increasingly becoming the social norm. This article is devoted to the peculiarities of the representation of the concept of "school violence" in the American film industry. The authors attempt a hermeneutical analysis of specific contemporary American films (1992–2020) in order to distinguish the representative image of school violence. The article considers the dynamic, socio-cultural, political, and gender aspects of school violence, which have qualitatively changed as compared to previous decades. The authors conclude that modern U.S. film production, related to the research field, create a world picture, full of bullying, armed attacks, triggered by different motives: revenge, rivalry, humiliation, self-affirmation, etc. The authors also reflect on the features of violence representation in various genres: thriller, horror, and drama. The article is written as part of a study funded by the grant of the President of the Russian Federation for state support of young scientists – Ph.D. Project MK–1716.2020.6 "Problem of school violence in the mirror of modern Russian and American media: comparative analysis", carried out at the Rostov State University of Economics.

Keywords: hermeneutical analysis, cinema, film, school, violence, bullying, shooting, the USA.

1. Introduction

The problem of school violence has recently been actualized by discussions in scientific research community at the international level. The demonstration of cruelty, aggressive attitude of peers not only to each other, but also to teachers is becoming more and more frequent, acquiring the status of an established social model and a global problem.

Today, the United States of America occupies a leading position compared to other countries, in the scale of violence in schools. Disturbed by the situation, scientists from different research areas (teachers, sociologists, psychologists) are actively looking for "new" effective ways to prevent and combat school violence. Meanwhile, cinematography represents the problem on screen, perhaps aiming to understand, rethink and uncover some answers.

Undoubtedly, the topic of school life has always interested film directors, and the US film industry has exploited this issue, using a variety of storylines, ignoring the fact that sometimes negative consequences are possible.

Researching the impact of violence scenes featured in the audiovisual arts is of particular significance, since exposure to such scenes may have the most powerful emotional effect on the

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viewer. Although the depiction of violence has been inherent in all stages of the cultural development of the American arts, it is not a once and for all fixed constant – the ways of artistic understanding and representation of violence change as the cultural content develops.

Thus, the theme of teenage cruelty brings up the urgent need to consider the dynamic, social, cultural, political, and gender aspect of school violence, which has drastically risen since the late 20th century.

2. Materials and methods

The materials of our research are films produced in the United States between 1992 and 2020 on the theme of school; our objective was to carry out a generalized hermeneutic analysis of visual media texts concerning the representation of school violence in modern American cinema (including: analysis of stereotypes, ideological analysis, identification analysis, plot analysis, character analysis, etc.). The fundamental basis of the hermeneutic analysis of media texts is the methodology developed by A. Silverblatt ([Silverblatt, 2001](#)) and U. Eco ([Eco, 1979](#)). In our opinion, the hermeneutic approach is the most effective construct in the focus of the study of the historical, political, ideological, social, cultural, gender context.

3. Discussion

The research of the peculiarities, causes and functional purpose of the representation of school violence in the mirror of contemporary American cinema, which is in the focus of culture, education, and society, is becoming increasingly important in modern studies of American scientists.

Evaluating the scale of violence scenes in American films, C.A. Anderson, B.J. Bushman, B.D. Bartholow argue that “Violence in screen entertainment media (i.e., television, film, video games, and the Internet), defined as depictions of characters (or players) trying to physically harm other characters (or players), is ubiquitous” ([Anderson et al., 2017: 140-147](#)).

Numerous studies have been devoted to the analysis of the school life representation in American audiovisual media texts ([Acland, 1995](#); [Anderson, 2002](#); [2003](#); [2008](#); [2015](#); [2017](#); [Ayers, 1994](#); [Bauer, 1998](#); [Bender, Plante, 2018](#); [Burbach, Figgins, 1993](#); [Bushman, 2016](#); [Bushman, Gollwitzer, 2015](#); [Bushman, Jamieson, 2013](#); [Coker et al., 2015](#); [Dalton, 2005](#); [Fedorov et al., 2017](#); [2018](#); [Trier, 2001](#), etc.).

It should be noted that the greatest contribution to the development of the study of the phenomenon of the impact of violence in film and television on the younger generation has been made by American scientists. As Cecilia von Feilitzen (professor at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, coordinator of the UNESCO International Chamber of Children, Youth and Media) notes, in the United States, about three thousand studies in this area have been carried out since 1920. Meanwhile, a lot of studies on aggression triggered by watching films and television violence show that media violence does play an important role ([Feilitzen, 2010: 175-176](#)).

Over the past fifty years, a significant amount of theoretical and experimental research has been carried out in the field of the impact of violent scenes in cinema, proving that they tend to increase aggressive behavior in the short term ([Anderson, 2003](#); [2008](#); [2015](#); [2017](#); [Bushman, 2016](#); [Bushman, Geen, 1990](#); [Bushman, Huesmann, 2001](#); [Huesmann et al., 1997](#); [Thomas, 2014](#), etc.).

The researchers' attention is focused on issues of protection against violence in the media ([Edwards, 2001](#); [Hermann, Finn, 2002](#); [Hill, Drolet, 1999](#); [Peterson et al., 2001](#), etc.); violence and bullying among schoolchildren, etc. ([Olweus, 1991](#); [Roffey, 2000](#); [Smith, Sharp, 1994](#), etc.).

Of particular interest in the aspect of the problematic of our research are the researches concerning the study of the influence of violence scenes in films on the younger generation, the analysis of the extent of correlation between the consumption of media texts featuring violence and the disposition to aggression and violence later in real life. The viewpoint that in fact there is a direct correlation, is supported by many American researchers.

Thus, according to the opinion of a number of eminent American researchers in the field of media psychology C. Anderson, L. Berkowitz, E. Donnerstein, even short-term exposure to violence in the media can increase the likelihood of aggressive behavior in reality for at least three different reasons. "Media violence produces short-term increases by priming existing aggressive scripts and cognitions, increasing physiological arousal, and triggering an automatic tendency to imitate observed behaviors. Media violence produces long-term effects via several types of learning

processes leading to the acquisition of lasting (and automatically accessible) aggressive scripts, interpretational schemas, and aggression-supporting beliefs about social behavior, and by reducing individuals' normal negative emotional responses to violence (i.e., desensitization)" (Anderson et al., 2003: 81).

The American research team has been monitoring the television preferences of teenagers' groups for 22 years. Their findings included that watching violence on television is a factor by which one can expect violent or aggressive behavior in later life, and it surpasses even such generally accepted factors as parents' behavior, poverty or race (Cannon, 1995: 19).

The presence of a steady connection between the manifestation of physical aggression and viewing violence scenes on the screen has been emphasized by scientists T. Coker, M. Elliott, D. Schwebel and others, who conclude that "the association between physical aggression and media violence exposure is robust and persistent; the strength of this association of media violence may be at least as important as that of other factors with physical aggression in children, such as neighborhood violence, home violence, child mental health, and male gender" (Coker et al., 2014: 82-88).

Nevertheless, as a comprehensive analysis of various studies shows, some scholars believe that some studies of the association of media violence with violence in life have certain methodological flaws and their conclusions are highly exaggerated, which contradicts the well-established traditional approach in the context of the results of the study of the phenomenon of influence on-screen violence against the younger generation (Fedorov, 2005; Ferguson, Kilburn, 2009; Freedman, 2002; Pinker, 2002).

We have reviewed a number of meta-analyses written over the past 30 years which reflect the general consequences of violence in the media (Anderson, Bushman, 2002; Bushman, 2016; Bushman, Anderson, 2001; Paik, Comstock, 1994; Wood et al., 1991, etc.).

One of the most recent meta-analytical reviews was carried out in 2016 by B.J. Bushman. This meta-analysis has aggregated, for the first time, numerous studies that have investigated the link between exposure to violent media and hostile appraisals (for example, perceiving the indistinct acts by others as aggressive actions). This meta-analysis includes 37 autonomous studies involving over ten thousand participants (Bushman, 2016: 605-613).

Researching the American scientific literature on the key issue of our study, we have come across a newer article describing an interesting experiment by the same author, Effects of Exposure to Gun Violence in Movies on Children's Interest in Real Guns (Dillon, Bushman, 2017). As in the U.S.A. more children die by accidental gun use than children in other developed countries, the authors argue that one of the factors, that can trigger children's interest in guns, is exposure to media containing guns. The experiment tested whether children (aged 8 to 12) who watch a film containing guns will handle a real gun longer and will pull the trigger more times than children who see the same film not containing guns. The scientists findings are not shocking however very disturbing: they found that "children who saw the movie containing guns also played more aggressively" (Dillon, Bushman, 2017). Moreover, they conclude that "this experiment shows that children who see movie characters use guns are more likely to use guns themselves" (Dillon, Bushman, 2017).

The viewpoint is shared by many researchers, in particular, psychologists, pediatricians, and educators. They are warning that "mere presence of guns can increase aggression, an effect dubbed the "weapons effect" (Bushman, Jamieson, 2013). Statistics says that violence in American films has more than doubled since 1950, and gun violence films, rated as suitable for teens (PG-13), has more than tripled (!) since 1985. Alarmingly, "by including guns in violent scenes, film producers may be strengthening the weapons effect and providing youth with scripts for using guns... many scientific studies have shown that violent films can increase aggression. Violent films are also now easily accessible to youth (e.g., on the Internet and cable)" (Bushman, Jamieson, 2013).

A consistent conclusion from studies, experiments, meta-analyses evaluating the impact of violent scenes on the screen on the teenagers' manifestation of aggression in real life, is that the presence of violence in films can amplify the risk of violent behaviour, aggressive thoughts or emotions in life (Anderson et al., 2003; Bushman, Jamieson, 2013; Cannon, 1995; Dillon, Bushman, 2017; Patrick, Plante, 2018; Romer et al., 2017, etc.). This finding is extremely important despite the fact that much remains to be investigated in order to clarify the understanding of these effects, mechanisms and factors that can influence them.

However, in the course of our preliminary research, no comprehensive analysis of the problem of specifically school violence in the mirror of American film production was found. Violence in films, the degree of influence of scenes of violence on the younger generation and level of aggression in American visual media texts has been researched with the focus on the interpretation of mainly psychological consequences (Anderson, Berkowitz, Donnerstein, 2003; Bushman, 2016; Bushman, 2017; Bushman, Jamieson, 2013; Coker, Elliott, 2014; Dillon, Bushman, 2017, etc.).

Meanwhile, the problem of overcoming and defending from the negative impact of scenes of bullying and school shootings on the younger generation remains open.

Today, there is an active search for the most effective tools to oppose the screen violence on the school grounds.

In our opinion, the capacity of the media education technology (Fedorov et al., 2019; Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2020; Gálik, 2019; 2020) needs to be fully used in this aspect. In particular, the hermeneutic analysis of the problem of school violence in visual media texts can be effectively used to develop the media literacy of the teenage audience.

4. Results

Taking into account the above-mentioned aspects of the symbolic "conversion" of violence in the process of its presentation on film, we can now proceed to the specifics of viewing visual material in the context of specific circumstances of the place and time "here and now."

We have made a generalized hermeneutic analysis of the U.S. films (1992–2020) featuring scenes of school violence.

Location, historical, religious, cultural, political, and ideological context

1. Historical context

a) the features of the historical period of the creation of a media text, the market conditions that contributed to its conception and creation, the degree of influence of the events of that time on a media text

The relevance of the theme of school life in American cinema is clear: the majority of the cinema audience is teenagers. There are numerous comedies about the difficulties of adolescent age, dramas about the rehabilitation of rebellious students by teachers– enthusiasts, revenge against peers for bullying and teachers for lack of understanding; the school thriller as a genre is gaining special popularity. "The bulk of thrillers about school and university were structured in such a way that a minimum amount of screen time was given to classes ... the plot was often based on bloody crimes, revenge, physical and psychological violence, student fights, riots, hooliganism, vandalism, etc. (*Graduation*, 2008; *Sorority Row*, 2009; *The Riot Club*, 2014; *Bad Kids Go to Hell*, 2012, etc.)" (Gorbatkova, 2018: 90). In general, school films containing scenes of violence exist in fairly wide range of genres.

Both schoolchildren and teachers are victims of violence and / or its source (*Dangerous Minds*, 1995; *187*, 1997; *Teaching Mrs. Tingle*, 1999); *Freedom Writers*, 2007; *Detachment*, 2011, etc.). In some cases, with the help of high pedagogical skill, sympathy and involvement, the characters do manage to overcome difficulties and achieve mutual understanding, often – they do not.

Since the 1990s, in the United States the acute social problems of bullying, hazing and school shooting have grown dramatically.

In terms of bullying in film plots, there is a rather stereotypical representation: a clear hierarchy of the student community – the younger are always offended by the elders, the weak are abused by physically strong ones, and this is not only part of everyday life for many students (*Bang– bang, You Are Dead*, 2002; *All Cheerleaders Die*, 2013; *Middle School: The Worst Years of My Life*, 2016, etc.), but they are often intertwined with a tradition, kind of an initiation ritual (*Dazed and Confused*, 1993, etc.), sometimes leading to tragic consequences. Culturally and historically, hazing is a kind of modern equivalent of the ancient rites of initiation associated with joining a closed male community, be it a primitive age class, a student fraternity or a sports team, as well as joking relationships adopted among young people. Although the term is relatively recent, the phenomenon itself, combining a legalized form of group violence and a way of establishing an intragroup hierarchy, is very old (Con, 2009: 52).

b) *the way awareness of historical events of a particular period promotes the understanding of the media texts*

Since the end of the 20th century, the United States of America has been engulfed in yet another wave of vigorous discussions about the gun sales, and the increasing cases of its use by schoolchildren and students in educational institutions. The controversy was exposed by the The Columbine High School massacre in 1999. Armed with guns and homemade bombs, two senior students murdered 12 students and one teacher, injured by gunshots more people, and then committed suicide. At the time, it was the deadliest school shooting in U.S. history, however not the first one. Armed attacks by schoolchildren on their teachers and peers took place before and after this incident, but it was this terrible event that became especially known, largely due to its coverage in various media, it also inspired some documentaries (*Bowling for Columbine*, 2002) and feature films (*Zero Day*, 2003) about school violence.

The drama *Zero Day* (2003) restores the chronicle of those terrible events, telling how two teenagers were preparing their retaliation, planning, buying weapons, making bombs, practicing shooting, consciously approaching their goal. A kind of "reconstruction" of events based on open data on the police investigation, eyewitness memories and video diaries that the teenagers kept.

For the most time, the film is portrayed through their video diaries, they are filming themselves, and sometimes their families and friends also get into the lens. Supposedly, the main motive for the attack is school bullying and a desire for revenge, however, the film does not give unequivocal answer to the question "why?".

Just as the film *Elephant* (2003) does not give such an answer. The storyline is following different characters living their usual school day, which, unexpectedly for all but two prepared teenagers, ends in tragedy. The future victims are of various types: popular among peers and rejected by the school community. Mockery and attacks on the weaker or outcasts belong to ordinary school events: just like lunch or a class. But the melancholic mood, at the beginning created by autumn landscapes and classical music, by the end of the story is replaced by panic and fear. The cast includes mostly new or non-professional actors. The artistic value of the film was praised by film critics and received the Palme d'Or at the 2003 Cannes Film Festival.

In the film, the reasons for what happened are outlined only hintingly: the main characters are being bullied at school; they freely buy weapons by mail; a film about Nazi is on television; on the eve of the shooting, one of the characters is playing a violent video game, shooting everyone in his way.

Many accounts have been made by society in an attempt to explain what drives teenagers in such moments. What makes them cold-blooded killers. Why, instead of other options for solving their problems, school students decide to take lives of their peers, teachers and, finally, themselves.

The pedagogical community to a large extent blames the impact of media containing scenes of violence on the immature psyche of teens. "Prolonged exposure to such media portrayals results in increased acceptance of violence as an appropriate means of solving problems and achieving one's goals. American media, in particular, tend to portray heroes using violence as a justified means of resolving conflict and prevailing over others. Television, movies, and music videos normalize carrying and using weapons and glamorize them as a source of personal power" (Council..., 2009: 1496).

The violent images created by the media including films not only revive the debate about social issues in society, but also provoke the emergence of "copycats" who used the Columbine massacre as a template that could be implemented. The character of the film *Hello, Herman* (2012), following the example of shooters he saw in the media, enters his school and kills thirty-nine students, two teachers, a police officer and sends a video with a message to a journalist, wishing to get publicity. The ratings of TV news covering this event are off scale, and the death penalty, to which the shooter is sentenced, broadcast live, breaks all records.

In search of answers to questions how this could have happened and who is to blame – school, parents, society, age, mental disorder, easy access to weapons, violent video games or something else, often the film image of the main characters – hunted, disconnected teens begins to appeal to many of their peers in real life. The film *April Showers* (1999), also based on Columbine High School shootings, reflects upon the dramatic consequences for the survivors of the attack and victims' family and friends.

Of all the armed attacks, Columbine attack stands out as a cultural divide. Firstly, it was the second largest media in the last decade of the 1990s, surpassed only by OJ Simpson's car chase. Secondly, it was the deadliest school shootout in history at the time (Toppo, 2009).

Thirdly, the shooting changed the behavior of school workers, police departments, students and potential attackers.

The Columbine attack led to following consequences:

- it provided a template for planning and executing gunfire in school;
- it "inspired" subsequent shooters who wanted to avenge past humiliation and social exclusion;
- it "set up a record" in the number of victims, which subsequent attackers sought to surpass;
- Harris and Klebold achieved mythical status for a certain group of teens, the perpetrators either admitted to being linked to Columbine themselves, or evidence of Columbine's influence (including obsession with attackers) was found by the police. The "investigation by ABC News has identified at least 17 attacks and another 36 alleged plots or serious threats against schools since the assault on Columbine High School that can be tied to the 1999 massacre" (Thomas, 2014).

2. Sociocultural, ideological, religious context

a) *ideology, worldview of the authors of these media texts in the socio-cultural context; culture of the world depicted in media texts*

Undoubtedly, the authors of American films have the opportunity to adhere to the position of unconsciously documenting violence and to deny the possible negative impact of violent scenes on the younger generation, however, in fact, the ultimate result does not necessarily have to be associated with the authors' conscious intentions. The awareness or unconsciousness in the author's position does not really matter; what is important is the media product, the main attribute of which is the explicit violence in its variety.

Religious connotation in films featuring school violence is not typical. Although some films do have it. For example, in scenes showing school shooting, many characters appeal to God for help and mercy. Or, it is the church that provides room for rehearsal of the school play on bullying and violence after the protests of parents and administration (*Bang Bang You're Dead*, 2002).

Nevertheless, the film *I'm Not Ashamed* (2016), based on the entries in the diaries of one of the victims of the shooting at Columbine School in 1999, tells the story of a schoolgirl who, studying alongside future murderers, is looking for a way to God. For her religious searches and frequent mentions of Jesus, she is considered a "black sheep." In general, the film is not focused on school violence as such, yet the life of the protagonist, ends tragically: she was one of the first to be shot in the school shooting. The filmmakers allege that what happens is revenge for her faith, revenge on God:

"Do you still believe in God?" asks Harris.

"You know I do," Rachel answers.

"Then go be with him," Harris says before firing the fatal shot.

The story of Rachel J. Scott was also covered in other media as well.

b) *the worldview of the people, depicted in media texts, the hierarchy of their values; how these media texts reflect, strengthen, inspire, or form relationships, values; behavior, myths*

The attitudes of the main characters are mostly negative. They are focused on violence and cruelty, pessimistic moods are associated with feeling of loneliness, weakness, uselessness, lack of respect and recognition from others. The characters are often depressed, anxious, miserable.

The value system of school students represented in films includes the following: competition, independence, ferocity, cynicism, hostility, revenge, violence, cruelty, rudeness, hooliganism, crime, disrespect for other people, longing for recognition, superiority, popularity among peers. At the same time, the values of the characters— teachers are mostly positive: respect, kindness, sympathy, justice, traditions, steadfastness, decisiveness, however, there are also cases of inclination towards immoral behaviour: revenge in response to aggression, aggression, cruelty, bodily punishment.

The main stereotype of success in this film environment: self– affirmation.

3. The structure and techniques of storytelling in the media texts under study

Schematically, the structure, representativeness, ethics, features of genre modification can be presented as follows:

a) location and time in feature films: the United States of America, 1992–2020.

b) the environment typical for these media texts, household items: more often the environment is a school, classrooms, school hallways, school yard, students' homes, city streets.

c) genre modifications: drama, thriller, horror.

d) (stereotypical) techniques of storytelling: the varieties for constructing the composition are different, students and teachers are shown during lessons, and breaks, in the location of school and the surrounding area, in their free time.

e) typology of characters: middle or high school students, teachers of different ages and beliefs. Character's age: on average from 11 to 60 years old. Level of education: for students: secondary school education, for teachers – higher education. Social status, profession: a student, a teacher. The character's marital status: as a rule, not accentuated. Characters' appearance, clothing, vocabulary: popular students, as a rule, look attractive: fashionably dressed, self-confident, well-built physically, but not always intellectually or morally developed. Outcasts are most often portrayed as "downtrodden", unhappy, frail, poorly or unattractively dressed, outcast. A lot depends on the "clique" that a character belongs to.

(dialogue in the cafeteria)

"– Oh, excuse me? You can't just sit where you want.

– Why not?

– Who are you with?

– "With"?

– You have to be a varsity or a cheerleader to sit at this table. Or know everybody.

– That table's for the druggies, stoners, deadheads, burnouts, and the hippies. That one...preppies. Then you have the skateboarders and skateboard chicks. The nerds and techies. Up against the wall, the wiggers, hip hoppers, rednecks, goths and all manner of freaks, troublemakers, losers, sluts, gays, floaters and the trops.

– "Trops"?

– Troglodytes? Freakiest of the freaks!

– Where do you sit if you just want to have lunch?" (*Bang Bang, You're Dead* (2002).

A significant change in the life of the characters of media texts and the problem that has arisen (breach of the usual life):

The storyline of the life of the schoolstudents' characters is reflected in several directions: a) the transformation of a schoolboy who, at first glance, seems to be a naive fool or a loser, into a cruel, aggressive "action man", often resorting to terrible crimes; b) transformation in the inner world, outlook of the hero after being bullied; c) opposition of the character – school student to violence, cruelty, harassment.

Some other features are characteristic of teachers' images: the search for effective ways to build a model of interaction with students, based on the development of optimistic value orientations; positive changes in life.

Solution to the problem:

– Student characters. A significant change in the characters' lives occurs as a result of experienced trauma (usually deadly dangerous) or under the influence of psychological/pedagogical rehabilitation. Some aggressors achieve their intended goals: make themselves known; self-affirm in society; fight against bullying.

– Teacher characters: the teacher finds the appropriate approach to students, achieves personal happiness; or, under the influence of events, the teacher becomes disappointed/indifferent.

5. Conclusion

Today, in the United States of America, the problem of school violence, armed attacks by adolescents on school peers and teachers is of an acute social nature, since cases of bullying and school shooting have become systematic.

Using the examples of specific contemporary films (1992–2020) featuring school violence, we made an attempt to hermeneutically analyze the concept of "school violence" in the mirror of cinema, and draw a number of conclusions.

– Representation of school violence is often intertwined in the US films (1992–2020). Recently, the problem of the relationship between media violence and aggressive behavior of minors has become the subject of heated discussions in the scientific research field. The consistent conclusion of numerous studies by psychologists, psychiatrists, doctors and educators is that the

frequent viewing of violence scenes in media has a decisive influence on emotional insensibility, and aggressive behaviour.

– American filmmakers, since 1999, have been documenting teenage violence and murders based on the real tragedy that occurred at Columbine School (mass shooting) as one of the main events in the cultural and historical context of the United States (*April Showers*, 1999; *Bowling for Columbine*, 2002; *Heart of America*, 2002; *Elephant*, 2003; *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, 2011, etc.). Unfortunately, exposure to violence in media, including feature films may also act as a kind of role model, a model of behavior in real life for adolescents inclined to violence. Police investigations have proved that Columbine massacre played a decisive role in the later school shooting in the United States (Thomas, 2014).

– The film authors tend to graphically document violence incidents, and, regardless of the author's position or attitude to film characters – teen audiences are exposed to a media product, the main "content" of which is the demonstration of violence. Moreover, the commercial potential, the sad fact that "violence sells", also influences filmmakers' narration.

– Contemporary American films in the field of our research create for the target audience, a world picture immersed in bullying, teenagers' armed attacks, triggered by various motives: revenge, rivalry, humiliation, self-affirmation, etc. A specific feature of films is the connection with the real event. In most stories, violent suppression of the abuser is a natural form of revenge.

– The genre palette allows one to demonstrate violence from different points of view, from the perspective of a thriller, horror, and drama. The storyline of the films typically involves cruelty, revenge, aggression of students towards each other, towards teachers, less often teachers use violence against students, mainly as a response; armed attacks and murders are often demonstrated within the walls of an educational institution.

– The representation of school violence in American visual media texts in general seems to be twofold. On the one hand, it reflects an optimistic worldview, penitence, re-thinking, awareness, comprehension. As a result, the main character gets back on the "right" path, circumstances change for the better, the reason for violence decreases or disappears. As a rule, this is facilitated by teachers (*Freedom Writers*, 2007; *Detachment*, 2011; *Bang Bang You're Dead*, 2002, etc.).

On the other hand: pessimistic moods, negativity, aggression, revenge, lynching, cruelty, punishment, victims, outcasts, hopelessness, weapons, mass killings, etc. The outcome of conflict situations is tragic (*April Showers*, 1999; *Bowling for Columbine*, 2002; *Elephant*, 2003; *Heart Of America*, 2002; *Middle School the Worst Years of My Life*, 2016; *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 2011; *Zero Day*, 2003; etc.).

– *Stereotyped narrative techniques are the following:*

- for the school target audience – in negative contrast, creating a negative message;
- for a wider audience: storylines personify the relationship between teachers and students, accompanied by the manifestation of aggression, violent actions, to a greater extent, in relation to teachers.

– In many cases, in films, the victim characters always respond with violence to violence, the boundaries between "victim" and "villain" are blurred. The filmmakers try to find explanation for school shooters' terror acts thus making their portraits ambiguous and sometimes even arousing compassion which raises controversy in the analysis of the film's impact on teenage audience.

Bullying and school shooting often become a specific way of personal revenge or fulfillment of adolescent needs for respect and recognition. Media violence is increasingly penetrating American society; in practice, there is neither effective age rating system for viewing and selling audiovisual products, nor a control system for showing scenes of violence on the screen; moreover, despite all the efforts of individual teachers, the media education efforts remain insufficient in this direction.

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