

Portrayals of Sexual Violence in Popular Hindi Films, 1997–99

Srividya Ramasubramanian^{1,2} and Mary Beth Oliver¹

An exploratory content analysis was conducted to examine portrayals of sexual violence in popular Hindi films. Nine films were randomly selected from box office hits (1997–99). The findings suggest that moderate sexual violence is depicted as fun, enjoyable, and a normal expression of romantic love. Victims were more likely to be women rather than men, and sexual violence committed by heroes was a common portrayal, particularly moderate violence such as harassment of women with whom the heroes ultimately became romantically involved. Severe sexual violence was portrayed as criminal and serious, whereas moderate sexual violence was treated as fun and romantic. Results are discussed in terms of script theory and social learning perspectives.

KEY WORDS: Hindi films; content analysis; India; sexual violence; eve-teasing.

The incidence of sexual violence against women is greater in societies that have male-dominated ideologies and a history of violence, as is the case in India (Burt, 1980; Check & Malamuth, 1985; Linz & Malamuth, 1993). The number of registered cases of sexual crimes against women in India increased from 67,072 in 1989 to 84,000 in 1993 (“Crimes Against,” 1996). In 1995 alone, more than 25,000 cases of molestation and 12,000 cases of rape were reported in the capital city of New Delhi (West, 1996). It is estimated that well over 80% of sexual crimes go unreported (“Atrocities Against,” 2002). For example, only 7,643 of the estimated 50,000 instances of violence against women were reported to the police even in Kerala, a South Indian state with the highest women’s literacy rate (“Atrocities Against,” 2002).

One specific form of sexual harassment called “eve-teasing” is prevalent, especially in urban India.³ The term *eve-teasing* is used to refer to sexual harass-

ment of women in public places such as the streets, public transportation, parks, beaches, and cinema halls. This type of public harassment by a lone man or gangs of men includes verbal assaults such as making passes or unwelcome sexual jokes; nonverbal assaults such as showing obscene gestures, winking, whistling, and staring; and physical assaults such as pinching, fondling, and rubbing against women in public places (“Eve-teasing,” 1999; Stevens, 1984). In addition, in several instances eve-teasing has been followed by more violent assaults such as rape and murder. In trying to construct the profile of an eve-teaser, it is interesting to note that about 32% of eve-teasers are college students (“Films,” 1998).

The severity of these incidents coupled with their high prevalence resulted in the legal declaration of eve-teasing as a punishable offense by the state government of Tamil Nadu in 1999, where it was announced that offenders would be penalized with up to 1 year of imprisonment or a fine of Rs. 10,000 or both (“Ordinance,” 1999). Despite the seriousness of these incidents, research suggests that they are frighteningly commonplace. For example, a recent survey revealed that approximately 90% of college women in New Delhi have experienced sexual harassment in some shape or form (“Films,” 1998). Yet, it is estimated that only about 1 in 10,000 eve-teasing occurrences are reported to the police (“Atrocities Against,” 2002).

¹Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania.

²To whom correspondence should be addressed at College of Communications, Pennsylvania State University, 115 Carnegie Building, University Park, Pennsylvania 16802; e-mail: srivi@psu.edu.

³Although it is entirely possible that the word *eve-teasing* might refer to the biblical story of Adam and Eve, we prefer to spell *eve-teasing* with a small “e” rather than a capital “E” because this is the spelling used by Indian journalists.

The primary reasons why women abstain from reporting incidents of sexual violence are the unwieldy medicolegal process, concerns about continued violence, and fear of stigmatization (Prasad, 1999).

Mass Media and Sexuality in India

The variables that give rise to sexual violence in India are undoubtedly numerous and complex. However, for feminist media scholars, the idea that popular cinema plays a significant role in shaping notions about gender roles and gender identities within the Indian context is of special interest and concern (Bagchi, 1996; Ram, 2002). Cinema has been a dominant medium in India because of the sheer size and reach of its indigenous film industry. The Indian film industry produces about 800 feature films annually—the highest in the world (National Film Development Corporation, n.d.). Not only does India produce the largest numbers of films in the world, but also a sizeable amount of film consumption is common among almost all age groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, and geographical locations within India (Derne, 1995). It is estimated that every week approximately 90–100 million Indian viewers go to the cinema halls to watch films (Nair, Barman, & Chattopadhyay, 1999). Many cinemagoers ritualistically make as many as 20–30 visits to the cinema hall in a month and repeatedly view a favorite film several dozens of times (Derne, 1999; Khare, 1985). Moreover, Indian films are popular not just in India but also amongst the Indian diaspora in countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Fiji, Dubai, and Singapore (Bist, 2002). Indian-made films constitute the majority of the films watched by Indians; only about 5% of Indians watch non-Indian (mostly Hollywood) films (Anjum, 2002).

Apart from cinema halls, films also reach the Indian household through countdown shows on television that feature film-based song-and-dance hit numbers (Nair et al., 1999). In addition, access to cable television has also grown very rapidly in the last decade, with a penetration of over 50% of the urban Indian market as of 1997 (Nair et al., 1999). Furthermore, over 85% of the cable television operators routinely screen two films a day through their own private local channels to attract their customers (Nair et al., 1999).

The importance of sexual portrayals in motion pictures is particularly relevant to Indian audiences, not only because these portrayals are viewed in abun-

dance, but also because issues of sexuality are rarely discussed in other contexts (Derne, 1999). According to Derne (1999), Indian film portrayals form a “privileged arena for construction of sexuality” for the common person, and serve as primary sources of information about how men and women are to behave in sexual relationships (p. 548). A recent study sponsored by UNICEF and Save the Children Fund in the Indian subcontinent showed that the film medium is influential, especially with teenaged boys, in teaching notions about masculinity, power, and violence in relationships with women (Poudyal, 2002). Similarly, researchers in the North American context have found that children and adolescents use media narratives (especially teen magazines and prime-time television programs) as sexual scripts for learning about dominant norms concerning gender, love, and sexuality (Carpenter, 1998; Pardun, 2002; Ward, 1995; Wood, 2001; Wood, Senn, Desmarais, Park, & Verberg, 2002).

Feminist scholars are particularly concerned that popular films in India too often portray women in stereotypical roles of subordination—accepting sexual violence as a normal part of relationships with men (Dasgupta & Hegde, 1988; Gandhi & Shah, 1992). Further, they have pointed out that men’s abuse of women is often glorified within Indian cinema (Derne, 1999). More specifically, critics have pointed out that the repeated glamorization of eve-teasing in films as a macho manifestation of a tough-acting, college student hero, who initially upsets the heroine but finally wins her attention, has fostered a climate supportive of such acts in real life (Birla, 2001; “Films,” 1998; Ravindran, 2001). Although many critics have voiced concerns, very few researchers have dealt with sexually violent portrayals in Indian films. In a rare study of its kind, Derne (1999) conducted a qualitative content analysis study of a selected few Hindi films in which violence and sexuality were often intertwined. Derne (1999) suggested that these films conveyed the notion that force and physical aggression were legitimate means of expressing romantic love. Therefore, sexual violence was not only “normal” but also “expected” in romantic relationships between heroes and heroines.

Links Between Media and Sexual Violence

Although little systematic research has explored the causal influences of Hindi films on sexual violence in India specifically, there is research in other cultures,

particularly North America, that has explored the role of consumption of media portrayals of sexuality on viewers' behaviors. In this regard, some researchers have suggested that there is no causal relationship between access to sexually explicit material and the incidence of sexual crimes (Kutchinsky, 1991), that effects are observed only for individuals who are predisposed to be aggressive (Zillmann & Sapolsky, 1977), or that harmful effects are observed only for explicitly violent portrayals (Donnerstein, Linz, & Penrod, 1987). However, results of meta-analytic research suggest that there is a relationship between media consumption of sexually explicit materials (and particularly violent materials) and a number of variables related to sexual violence (Allen, D'Alessio, & Brezgel, 1995; Allen, Emmers, Gebhardt, & Giery, 1995). These analyses reported that exposure to sexually explicit media (both violent and nonviolent) was associated with increased rape-myth acceptance and with increased subsequent aggression, especially among angered participants (Allen, D'Alessio, et al., 1995; Allen, Emmers, et al., 1995). In addition, researchers have also reported that consumption of sexually explicit media (both violent and nonviolent) may lead to increased sexual callousness—the disregard or contempt for a woman's right to deny sexual access (Zillmann & Weaver, 1989). Similarly, other researchers have argued that consumption of media portrayals of sexual violence may lead to target desensitization—the belief that certain individuals are appropriate, natural, and safe targets of violence who are deserving of aggression (Check & Malamuth, 1985; Donnerstein & Berkowitz, 1981). Behavioral effects of exposure to sexually explicit material can take the form of imitation of new behaviors as well as lowered inhibitions to try out already learned behaviors (Russell, 1988). Finally, other researchers have examined the idea of sexual objectification, and have reported that the viewing of pornography can lead some male viewers to interpret subsequent interactions with women in inappropriate sexual or erotic terms (McKenzie-Mohr & Zanna, 1990).

In summary, although most of the research on the effects of sexual portrayals suggests that some types of explicit images, particularly those that contain aggression, can lead to harmful effects on viewers, there are some inconsistencies in the literature that have made it difficult to determine causal effects. These differences have been attributed to the types of stimulus materials employed, the types of populations studied (e.g., rapists/noncriminals, hypermasculine men,

whether or not the participants are under the influence of alcohol, propensity to use force), the environment, and additional cultural factors (Harris & Scott, 2002). Despite these factors, however, meta-analytic research that synthesized the body of literature in this area suggested that exposure to media portrayals of sexually explicit material can have a variety of effects on viewers' attitudes and behaviors, many of which are causes for concern (Allen, D'Alessio, et al., 1995; Allen, Emmers, et al., 1995; Harris & Scott, 2002).

The Present Research

Given the dearth of research on the effects of sexual violence with respect to popular Indian films and the need to investigate the effects of sexually explicit media amongst diverse populations, there is a need for research in the area of mediated sexual violence in India. The literature on effects of filmed sexual violence generally supports claims that Hindi films may be a contributory factor in sexual harassment. However, this would be true only if Hindi films actually depicted the types of images that are thought to play a role in influencing notions about sexuality in the Indian context. Hence, the first step in exploring this issue is to examine the types of portrayals that are commonly depicted in the films. At this point it is unclear if popular films meant for mass consumption would have any sexually violent material in the first place. In particular, because popular Hindi films are viewed by people of all age groups (rather than just by adults), one might expect that Hindi films would be unlikely to show sexual images. On the other hand, if Hindi films do provide an outlet for "discussions" of sexual behaviors that serve to reinforce traditional views of women, then one might expect that Hindi films would be likely to show violence against women as normal and perhaps even enjoyable.

Consequently, the purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the manner in which popular Hindi films portray sexual violence and the way in which violence might be associated with gender and romantic love. Specifically, we examined the following research questions:

RQ1: What proportion of sexual scenes contains violence?

RQ2: Is there a relationship between gender and likelihood of being the primary victim of sexual violence?

RQ3: Is there a relationship between character role and likelihood of being the primary perpetrator of sexual violence?

RQ4: Is there a relationship between severity of sexual violence and character role of the primary perpetrator of sexual violence?

RQ5: Against what type of character roles are heroes most likely to perpetrate sexual violence?

RQ6: Is there a relationship between scene type and severity of sexual violence?

METHOD

Sample

A sample of nine full-length feature films was randomly selected from a population of top-10 box office hits in the Hindi film industry released in the years 1997, 1998, and 1999.⁴ Within each of these 3 years, three films were randomly selected. Because we were interested in mass entertainment, especially films viewed by adolescents, films rated “U” (universal audience) and “UA” (public viewing with parental guidance for children under age 12) were included in the study but those rated “A” (films restricted to adult audiences) were excluded (National Film Development Corporation, n.d.; see Table I for a list of the films analyzed).

Units of Analysis

Two units of analysis were examined in this study: characters and sexual scenes. A scene was defined as a division of the film that presents continuous action in one place such as a single situation or unit of dialogue in the film (e.g., love scene or fight scene). Because we were interested in examining the nature of violence within the context of sexual interactions, only sexual scenes (both violent and nonviolent) were coded. The entire film was watched to locate the presence of sexual scenes. One hundred and eight such scenes were included in this study. A sexual scene was defined as one in which two or more characters were involved in activities such as having sex, kissing, petting, initiating or suggesting sexual contact, displaying nudity, engaging in sexual talk, bathing in an erotic way, wearing provocative or revealing clothes, or shown as a sexual object of gaze. This included actual depictions, suggestions of, and preparation for sexual activities. No

⁴While we were making a random selection of three of the top-10 box office hits of 1997, the film *Virasat* was selected at first but it was not accessible. Therefore, it was replaced with another randomly selected film, *Border*.

Table I. List of Films Analyzed in This Study

Year	Film title
1997	<i>Pardes</i> <i>Border</i> <i>Hero No. 1</i>
1998	<i>Bandhan</i> <i>Pyaar To Hona Hi Tha</i> <i>Kuch Kuch Hota Hai</i>
1999	<i>Biwi No. 1</i> <i>Hum Aapke Dil Mein Rehte Hain</i> <i>Sarfarosh</i>

instances of homosexual relationships were portrayed in any of the films selected. Therefore, only heterosexual relationships were considered within the scope of this study. Also, because we were interested in examining sexual interactions between individuals, two or more characters had to be present in a scene for it to be considered as a sexual scene. For example, a woman undressing for a bath was not considered for the study, but if a man undressed a woman, it was included within the study.

The second unit of analysis was the character. Seventy-seven characters were coded in this study. Only those characters who were shown speaking and were present in a sexual scene were included in the study. Characteristics of characters, such as gender and type of character role, were coded. Characters were observed for the entire film before coding their characteristics.

Coding Scheme

A coding scheme was created for the variables of interest: presence of sexual violence, primary perpetrators/victims, gender, character role, severity of sexual violence, and fun/seriousness of scene.

Presence of Sexual Violence

Sexual scenes were of two types: mutually consenting scenes and sexually violent scenes. Mutually consenting scenes were those in which the characters involved showed interest in or expressed no objection to engaging in the sexual behavior, and there was no harm to any of the people involved. In contrast, a sexually violent scene was any sexual scene

where there was actual depiction of, suggestion of, or preparation for sexual violence. Sexual violence was defined from the victim's perspective as any forced sexual act that was inappropriate, offensive, and/or harmful. Offensiveness to the victim was assessed using verbal and nonverbal expressions of disapproval, anger, or disgust (e.g., saying no, crying, pushing away, clenching fists). This included (but was not limited to) acts such as rape, verbal comments, kissing, disrobing, touching, staring, rubbing against, and obscene gestures. Rape was defined as the actual depiction of, suggestion of, or preparation for forced sexual intercourse.

Sexual violence was not just limited to rape but also included sexual harassment, eve-teasing, and domestic violence. Sexual harassment was defined as inappropriate, offensive, and/or harmful sexual behavior within the context of a workplace or academic environment wherein a power differential existed between the parties involved. For example, the sexual harassment of a student by a professor or of a subordinate by a boss was coded as sexual harassment. Eve-teasing was defined as sexual behavior displayed in public places (especially between strangers or acquaintances who are not committed to a relationship) that was inappropriate, harmful, and/or offensive to the victim. Domestic violence was defined as sexual aggression (e.g., forced kissing, disrobing, pinching) between couples that were in an intimate, committed sexual relationship (e.g., boyfriend/girlfriend, fiancé/fiancée, husband/wife) where the victim was hurt and/or offended by the sexual act.

Severity of Sexual Violence

Sexually violent scenes were further categorized as severe or moderate. Severe violence included actual depictions of, suggested, attempted, or preparation for rape or eroticized murder. Moderate sexual violence included all other forms of sexual violence, sexual harassment, eve-teasing, and domestic violence—that did not involve rape or murder.⁵

⁵It is important to point out that our use of the terms *severe* and *moderate* is not meant to imply that “moderate” acts are trivial. Rather, both severe and moderate acts are understood to represent sexual violence. However, our use of the term *severe* in this context refers to acts such as rape and murder that are extreme forms of sexual violence that result in lasting physical harm to the victim.

Primary Perpetrators/Victims in a Sexually Violent Scene

All sexually violent scenes had at least one perpetrator and one victim. The perpetrator was the one who initiated sexual aggression. A perpetrator was defined as someone who actually used, suggested the use of, attempted to use, or made preparations for using aggression in a sexual context. The victim was defined as the character who expressed lack of consent to the sexual act and/or was harmed by the act. It is important to note that sexual violence was defined more in terms of the harm caused to the victim rather than the intention of the perpetrator. This meant that even if the perpetrator did not intend to cause harm to the victim, it was considered as sexual violence if the victim was harmed.

Character Role

Every character was coded as playing one of five character roles: hero, heroine, villain, comedian, or supporting character. A hero was defined as a character who played the role of the main, leading, male protagonist of the film. The heroine was defined as the main, leading, female protagonist in the film. The villain was anyone who was an antagonist (man or woman). A comedian is a character who is similar to a “sidekick” in Hollywood films. A comedian was one whose role in the narrative was to provide comic relief (man or woman). Supporting characters included anybody who did not fall into the classification of hero, heroine, villain, or comedian. In a given film, more than one person could play these roles. For example, there were some films with two heroes.

Fun/Seriousness of the Scene

To understand fully the context within which sexuality was introduced into the plot of the films, it was crucial to code for the type of scenes that depicted sexuality. The sexual scenes were classified as either fun scenes or serious scenes. Serious scenes included drama, action, and mystery. Fun scenes included comedy, romance, and song–dance. Romance was defined as scenes that showed sexually attracted, dating, engaged, or married couples interacting with each other in a romantic fashion. Action was defined as scenes that showed fights, physical aggression, or violence. Comedy was defined as scenes that depicted

jokes and humor. Song-dance scenes were defined as musical episodes accompanied by dances by characters in the film. All other scenes were coded as drama scenes. Typically drama scenes showed conflict, were dialogue-oriented, and involved emotions such as anger or sadness.

Coding Reliability

All coding and data reported here was conducted by the first author who was trained in coding procedures and was familiar with the descriptive booklet.⁶ To examine reliability, a secondary coder fluent in the language of the films but unaware of the specific research hypotheses independently coded six of the nine films. Intercoder reliability was calculated by computing the percent agreement for the five variables examined in this study: presence of sexual violence (83%), character role (78%), severity (95%), gender of character (93%), and fun/serious (78%).⁷

RESULTS

Presence of Sexual Violence

The first research question concerned the prevalence of sexual violence. An examination of the sexual scenes analyzed showed that slightly less than half of the sexual scenes (40.7%, $N = 44$) contained violence (see Table II). The most common form of sexual violence depicted was eve-teasing (57% of sexually violent scenes, $N = 25$). Approximately 11% of the sexually violent scenes contained severe sexual violence such as rape or eroticized murder ($N = 5$). It should be noted here that one film (*Border*) showed

⁶In this study, the primary coder was responsible for coding all of the data that were presented in this paper. The additional coder was employed as a way of assessing the primary coder's reliability. Although researchers often have coders resolve disputes and arrive at a mutual decision, there are numerous instances where an additional coder is employed as a means of reliability computation or where multiple coders were employed, with their independently coded data collected after reliability checks had been conducted (e.g., Fouts & Burggraf, 1999; Larson, 2001; Sharrer, 2002; Schlenker, Caron, & Haltzman, 1998).

⁷There was disagreement among the coders concerning the unit of analysis for two of the sexual scenes. This disagreement is reflected in the reliability indicators. Gender was coded as male/female. There was some disagreement between coders regarding the gender of transvestites, bisexual persons, and transgendered individuals that reduced the reliability of this measure.

Table II. Summary of Results

Sexual scenes	
With violence	40.7%
Without violence	59.3%
Gender of primary victims of sexual violence	
Women	77.0%
Men	23.0%
Character role of primary victims of sexual violence	
Heroines	95.0%
Other roles	5.0%
Primary perpetrators of sexual violence	
Heroes	67.8%
Villains	32.2%
Primary perpetrators of moderate sexual violence	
Heroes	78.2%
Villains	21.7%
Portrayal of moderate sexual violence	
Fun	69.2%
Serious	30.7%

only mutually consenting sexual scenes whereas *Hero No. 1* depicted 72.2% of the sexual scenes as violent. However, most films depicted approximately 40% of the sexual scenes as sexually violent, suggesting that although there is clearly variation in the percentage of sexually violent scenes portrayed, the majority of these films contained a substantial proportion of sexual scenes containing violence.

Gender and Primary Victim of a Sexually Violent Scene

The second research question asked if there was any relationship between gender and the primary victim in sexually violent scenes. A chi-square test of the primary victims in sexual scenes revealed that women were more likely than men to be victims. Namely, of all victims coded in sexually violent scenes, 77% were women and 23% were men, $\chi^2(1, N = 43) = 12.30$, $p < .001$, $V^* = 0.29$ (see Table II). For example, in *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, a typical college-based eve-teasing is used as a means to enhance the sexual appeal of the heroine Tina (played by Rani Mukherjee). When Tina enters the college campus wearing a very short mini-skirt and tight top, she is accosted by a gang of men in her college who stare at her legs, whistle, hoot, and make lewd remarks at her even though she expresses her disgust at their behavior. However, it appears that the intention of the scene is more to invite the audience to view the heroine as a sex object rather than to empathize with her experience.

Character Role and Primary Perpetrator

The third research question focused on the relationship between the character role (hero vs. villain) and the primary perpetrator in sexually violent scenes. A chi-square analysis of heroes and villains showed that heroes (67.8%) were more likely than villains (32.2%) to be the primary perpetrator in sexually violent scenes. However, these differences only approached statistical significance, $\chi^2(1, N = 28) = 3.57, p = .06, V^* = 0.13$ (see Table II). For example, films such as *Biwi No. 1* and *Hum Aapke Dil Mein Rehte Hain* show the hero eve-teasing women by singing lewd songs, making sexual remarks, and touching the heroine in sexual ways despite knowing that the heroine does not like these acts. On the other hand, in *Pardes*, the evil, villainous boyfriend tries to force his fiancée to have sex with him and rips off parts of her clothes after taking her to a hotel room. However, such depictions are much fewer than instances where the hero is the perpetrator.

Character Roles and Severity of Sexual Violence

The fourth research question examined the relationship between character of the primary perpetrator and the severity of sexual violence portrayed. A chi-square analysis of character role and severity of sexual violence revealed that villains were more likely to be featured as perpetrators of severe sexual violence whereas heroes were more likely to be featured as perpetrators of moderate sexual violence. Specifically, primary perpetrators in severe scenes were more often villains (80.0%) than heroes (20.0%), whereas primary perpetrators in moderate scenes were more often heroes (78.2%) than villains (21.7%), $\chi^2(1, N = 28) = 6.39, p < .05, V^* = 0.48$ (see Table II). In films such as *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* and *Hero No. 1* there are several instances in which the hero eve-teases attractive young women to win their attention. These acts are treated in a very casual and trivial manner. However, later in the same film (*Hero No. 1*), the hero is shown enraged when the villains try to rape another young girl in the streets. The sexual violence in the latter scene is dramatized as something evil and wrong.

Character Role and Primary Victim

The fifth research question focused on the types of character roles against whom heroes were most

likely to perpetrate sexual violence. All sexually violent scenes where the hero was the primary perpetrator were selected for this analysis. A chi-square analysis of the primary victims in these scenes revealed that heroines (95%) were much more likely to be the victim than were other characters (5%), $\chi^2(1, N = 19) = 15.21, p < 0.001, V^* = 0.85$ (see Table II). For example, a typical scene showing a boy-girl romantic confrontation using eve-teasing can be seen in *Hero No. 1*. The hero waylays the unsuspecting heroine (both are strangers to each other until this point in the story) at the airport, follows her around to the train station, makes obscene passes at her, rubs against her body, and even sits on her lap in the train, even though all through the sequence, the heroine constantly expresses her disapproval of these actions by the stranger (hero). As the entire encounter is against the background of a catchy song-and-dance sequence, the sexual harassment is presented to the audience as light-hearted fun.

Severity of Sexual Violence and Fun/Seriousness of Scene

The sixth research question asked if there was a relationship between severity of sexual violence and the type of scene. The findings suggest that severe sexual violence is more likely to be portrayed as serious whereas moderate sexual violence is more likely to be portrayed as fun. Specifically, a chi-square analysis revealed that severe crimes were more often portrayed as serious (80.0%) than as fun (20.0%) whereas moderate crimes were more often portrayed as fun (69.2%) than as serious (30.7%), $\chi^2(1, N = 44) = 4.64, p < .05, V^* = .33$ (see Table II). For instance, in *Bandhan*, the hero (played by Salman Khan) constantly eve-teases the heroine (played by Rambha), but the entire situation is couched in slapstick comedy, which distracts the viewer from the sexual harassment per se. On the other hand, later in the same film when the villains stop the heroine in an isolated field and eve-tease her, the scene takes on more serious proportions with dialogue and drama rather than song and dance.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study lend support to the idea that a substantial proportion of sexual scenes in popular Hindi films depict sexual violence, even in those

films meant for viewing by audiences of all age groups or with parental guidance if under 12 years. However, it is not just the amount of sexual violence in the films that is cause of concern but also the nature of these portrayals.

First, these films indicate a gender divide when it comes to perpetrators and victims of sexual violence. Almost all films show female characters as victims of sexual violence, whereas male characters are shown as perpetrators of these incidents. This seems to be consistent with traditional gendered beliefs in India that women should be submissive and men should be aggressive in social relationships. This repeated pairing of women with violence is problematic because it might reinforce existing beliefs that it is acceptable to aggress against women and that women should tolerate violence from men.

Another aspect of these portrayals that is a cause for concern is that the perpetrators of sexual violence were not just villains, but also heroes. Heroes were somewhat more likely than villains to be the primary perpetrators in sexually violent scenes. It is a cause for concern that heroes, who often represented the essence of "ideal manhood" and male sexuality, were often perpetrators of sexual violence. This lends some support to the idea that being aggressive is depicted as "being manly."

The idea that heroes would be shown engaging in sexual violence is cause for concern, as social learning perspectives suggest that when likable, attractive characters such as heroes perpetrate sexual violence on screen, they are more likely to be imitated by viewers. That is, research on social learning from media portrayals suggests that viewers are more likely to emulate behaviors that they see in the media when the modeled behavior is portrayed as rewarded (or at least not punished; see Bandura, 1994). This line of reasoning suggests that film portrayals of women as victims of sexual aggression are particularly problematic because such behavior might be learned and imitated by the viewers. In addition, the viewer's modeling of a media character's behaviors is particularly likely to occur when the character is portrayed as attractive, likable, and heroic. In terms of the present research, this suggests that Indian male viewers may be especially likely to emulate sexually violent behavior perpetrated by heroes.

Heroes and villains differed in the types of sexual violence that they perpetrated. Heroes were more likely to perpetrate moderate crimes such as eve-teasing, sexual harassment, and domestic violence, whereas villains were more likely to perpetrate se-

vere crimes including rape and eroticized murder. Thus, moderate sexual violence seems not to be condemned and might even be rewarded. As we saw above, heroes, by definition, seem to protect moral good and to fight evil. Therefore, the association of heroes with moderate sexual violence may run the risk of sending a message to viewers that only severe crimes are bad and that moderate sexual violence is not bad (and may be even perceived as good). Therefore, these findings suggest that only rape and eroticized murder might be considered crimes by the audiences, but that eve-teasing, sexual harassment, and domestic violence may be socially acceptable sexual behaviors. Furthermore, moderate sexual violence is often depicted in the context of fun and happiness, whereas severe sexual crimes are depicted as serious and dramatic. This pairing of fun with moderate sexual violence implies that such crimes are not bad but enjoyable for all involved.

Moreover, the finding that heroes more often aggressed against heroines than against any other characters is consistent with the argument that aggression is portrayed as a desirable attribute in Hindi films. It should be noted that in all the films in this study, the hero and heroine were romantically involved. This suggests that it was appropriate, normal, and perhaps even romantic for men to aggress against the women with whom they were romantically involved. From the perspective of sexual script theory, these portrayals may suggest to viewers (especially young adults, adolescents, and children) that these recurring themes of violence among romantically involved couples in the media represent acceptable ways of behaving in sexual relationships. The films analyzed in the current study were not adult films but those rated U and UA. Thus, it is highly likely that these films' audiences include younger age groups who are also likely to be learning social norms related to gender and sexuality. Moreover, as mentioned previously, eve-teasing statistics report that about one third of the perpetrators in real life are college-age youth ("Films," 1998). This situation suggests that social learning and sexual script theories might be at work although clearly, experimental research needs to be conducted to determine the specific nature of the effects that these films may be having on their viewing audiences.

Although the results of this study indicate that moderate sexual violence such as eve-teasing, domestic violence, and sexual harassment by men against women is very often portrayed as appropriate, enjoyable, and romantic, there are several limitations that deserve attention and suggest directions for future

research. First, only top-10 box office hits were chosen for the analysis. It can be argued that more (or fewer) types of films could have been included in defining what is popular. However, the use of top-10 box office films allowed for the examination of films that are clearly popular among a wide viewing audience both within India and amongst the Indian diaspora in countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Singapore, and Dubai.

Second, we examined popular films in the Hindi language only and did not include regional Indian language films. Even though there are very large numbers of films produced each year in regional languages (especially Telugu and Tamil), their popularity and audience reach is smaller than that of Hindi films. Nevertheless, future researchers could benefit by including these two-regional-language films to get a regional sample of sexually violent portrayals.

Another limitation of this research is the small sample of films analyzed. This limitation reflects the fact that Hindi films often average 3–4 hr in length, which makes them time-consuming to analyze. However, the longer film length meant that the numbers of scenes and characters analyzed in a given film were also proportionately higher. Nevertheless, future studies would undoubtedly benefit from the inclusion of a larger sample of films.

An additional limitation of this study is that we coded only sexual scenes within the films. Although the use of sexual scenes as a unit of analysis was appropriate for the questions examined in this study, it restricted the generalizability of our findings because it was not possible to say whether sexual scenes contained more or less violence than the nonsexual scenes. On the one hand, the potential effect of sexual violence may largely depend on the amount of violence in the film overall, with violence in the sexual scenes only arguably having different effects than violence running throughout all types of scenes. On the other hand, one might argue that any portrayals of sexual violence have the potential to affect viewers. Nevertheless, an examination of violence across all scenes, sexual and nonsexual, should be taken into consideration by future researchers.

Finally, a content analysis such as this one can only describe the portrayals that exist on screen. The method is limited in its ability to predict attitudinal and behavioral changes that could result from exposure. At best, the results can only be seen as indicative of the likely effects on the audience. We cannot in any way claim that the increase in sex crimes is due to the sexual violence portrayed in films.

Such conclusions are best made using experimental methodologies.

Despite these limitations, the results of this exploratory study seem to suggest that Indian films tend to present moderate forms of sexual violence to its audience as normal, fun, and heroic. The effect that such sexually violent portrayals have on viewers is an area of study that is deserving of research attention. Overall, our data support the criticism that eve-teasing in Indian films is not generally portrayed as a crime that ought to be punished, but rather as an act of romantic love aesthetically woven into the narrative as fun and enjoyable.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors thank Srinithya for her assistance in data collection. They also thank Joan C. Chrisler and the anonymous reviewers for their detailed and valuable comments.

REFERENCES

- Allen, M., D'Alessio, D., & Brezgel, K. (1995). A meta-analysis summarizing the effects of pornography: II. Aggression after exposure. *Human Communication Research, 22*, 258–283.
- Allen, M., Emmers, T., Gebhardt, L., & Giery, M. A. (1995). Exposure to pornography and acceptance of rape myths. *Journal of Communication, 45*(1), 5–26.
- Anjum, Z. (2002, February/March). Hollywood calling. Bollywood falling. *Aaj Magazine*. Retrieved August 13, 2002, from <http://www.aajmag.com/hollybollywood.html>
- Atrocities against women on the rise in state. (2002, April 11). *The Hindu*. Retrieved August 12, 2002, from the Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe database, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
- Bagchi, A. (1996, December 18). *Women in Indian cinema*. Retrieved August 12, 2002, from <http://www.cs.jhu.edu/~bagchi/women.html>
- Bandura, A. (1994). Social cognitive theory of mass communication. In J. Bryant & D. Zillmann (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (pp. 61–90). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Birla, P. (2001, March 31). *Helping kids get street-smart on sex education*. Retrieved August 18, 2002, from the Health Education Library for People Web site: http://www.healthlibrary.com/news/25_31_march/31_sex.htm
- Bist, R. (2002, October 12). *Bollywood takes on the world*. Retrieved December 6, 2002, from *Asia Times* (Online) Web site: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/DJ12Df01.html
- Burt, M. R. (1980). Cultural myths and supports for rape. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 38*, 217–230.
- Carpenter, L. (1998). From girls into women: Scripts for sexuality and romance in *Seventeen* magazine, 1974–1994. *Journal of Sex Research, 35*, 158–168.
- Check, J. V. P., & Malamuth, N. M. (1985). An empirical assessment of some feminist hypotheses about rape. *International Journal of Women's Studies, 8*, 414–423.
- Crimes against women rise in India. (1996, August 27). *Xinhua News Agency*. Retrieved February 11, 2002, from the

- Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe database, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
- Dasgupta, S. D., & Hegde, R. S. (1988). The eternal receptacle: A study of mistreatment of women in Hindi films. In R. Ghadially (Ed.), *Women in Indian society: A reader* (pp. 209–216). New Delhi, India: Sage.
- Derne, S. (1995). *Culture in action: Family life, emotion and male dominance in Banaras, India*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Derne, S. (1999). Making sex violent: Love as force in recent Hindi films. *Violence Against Women*, 5, 548–575.
- Donnerstein, E., & Berkowitz, L. (1981). Victims' reactions in aggressive erotic films as a factor in violence against women. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 41, 710–724.
- Donnerstein, E., Linz, D., & Penrod, S. (1987). *The question of pornography: Research findings and policy implications*. New York: Free Press.
- Eve-teasing—The menace refuses to die. (1999, June 12). *The Hindu*. Retrieved August 12, 2002, from the Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe database, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
- Films, TV serials have contributed to increasing acts of eve-teasing. (1998, September 22). *The Hindu*. Retrieved February 11, 2002, from the Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe database, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
- Fouts, G., & Burggraf, K. (1999). Television situation comedies: Female body images and verbal reinforcements. *Sex Roles*, 40, 473–481.
- Gandhi, N., & Shah, N. (1992). *The issues at stake: Theory and practice in the contemporary women's movement in India*. New Delhi, India: Kali for Women.
- Harris, R. J., & Scott, C. L. (2002). Effects of sex in the media. In J. Bryant & D. Zillmann (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (2nd ed., pp. 307–331). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Khare, V. (1985). The Dinman Hindi film inquiry: A summary. In B. Pfeleiderer & L. Lutze (Eds.), *The Hindi film: Agent and re-agent of cultural change* (pp. 139–148). New Delhi, India: Manohar.
- Kutchinsky, B. (1991). Pornography and rape: Theory and practice? Evidence from crime data in four countries where pornography is easily available. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 14, 47–64.
- Larson, M. S. (2001). Interactions, activities and gender in children's television commercials: A content analysis. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 45, 41–56.
- Linz, D., & Malamuth, N. M. (1993). *Pornography*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- McKenzie-Mohr, D., & Zanna, M. P. (1990). Treating women as sexual objects: Look to the (gender-schematic) male who has viewed pornography. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 16, 296–308.
- Nair, N. K., Barman, A. K., & Chattopadhyay, U. (1999, December 15). *Study on copyright piracy in India*. Retrieved August 11, 2002, from the Government of India Department of Education Web site: http://www.education.nic.in/htmlweb/cr-piracy_study
- National Film Development Corporation. (n.d.). *Cinema history*. Retrieved February 11, 2002, from <http://www.nfdcindia.com/history.htm>
- Ordinance against eve-teasing issued. (1999, July 30). *The Hindu*. Retrieved February 11, 2002, from the Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe database, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
- Pardun, C. J. (2002). Romancing the script: Identifying the romantic agenda in top-grossing movies. In J. D. Brown, J. R. Steele, & K. Walsh-Childers (Eds.), *Sexual teens, sexual media: Investigating media's influence on adolescent sexuality* (pp. 211–225). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Poudyal, R. (2002, June 12). *Boys on film: Challenging masculinities in South Asia*. Retrieved August 11, 2002, from <http://www.id21.org/society/6arp1.html>
- Prasad, S. (1999). Medicolegal response to violence against women in India. *Violence Against Women*, 5, 478–506.
- Ram, A. (2002). Framing the feminine: Diasporic readings of gender in popular Indian cinema. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 25(1), 25–52.
- Ravindran, V. (2001, September 10). Victims of whims. *The Hindu*. Retrieved August 12, 2002, from the Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe database, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
- Russell, D. E. (1988). Pornography and rape: A causal model. *Political Psychology*, 19, 41–73.
- Scharrer, E. (2001). Tough guys: The portrayal of hypermasculinity and aggression in televised police dramas. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 45, 615–634.
- Schlenker, J. A., Caron, S. L., & Halteman, W. A. (1998). A feminist analysis of *Seventeen* magazine: Content analysis from 1945 to 1995. *Sex Roles*, 38, 135–149.
- Stevens, W. K. (1984, March 17). For women of India, a rite of spring is sour. *The New York Times*, p. 24. Retrieved February 11, 2002, from the Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe database, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
- Ward, M. (1995). Talking about sex: Common themes about sexuality in the prime-time television programs children and adolescents view most. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 24, 595–615.
- West, J. (1996, August 11). Police 'tease' is slapped in jail: India applies the law to curb gropers. *Sunday Telegraph*, p. 25. Retrieved February 11, 2002, from the Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe database, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
- Wood, J. (2001). The normalization of violence in heterosexual romantic relationships: Women's narratives of love and violence. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 18, 239–261.
- Wood, E., Senn, C. Y., Desmarais, S., Park, L., & Verberg, N. (2002). Sources of information about dating and their perceived influence on adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 17, 401–417.
- Zillmann, D., & Sapolsky, B. S. (1977). What mediates the effects of mild erotica on annoyance and hostile behavior in males? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 35, 587–596.
- Zillmann, D., & Weaver, J. (1989). Pornography and men's sexual callousness toward women. In D. Zillmann & J. Bryant (Eds.), *Pornography: Research advances and policy considerations* (pp. 95–126). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.