



LUST **FOR** CAUTION

# Cinematic Sex Doesn't Sell – Nor Even Artistically Impress!

Content Ratings, Box Office,  
Critical Reviews, and Movie  
Awards

# Questions

- What role does graphic sexual content have in mainstream cinema?
  - Does it increase box office?
  - Or critical acclaim?
  - Or movie awards?
- How does the threefold impact of such content compare with other strong or mature content, such as violence?

# Questions

- How is such “objectionable” or “exploitative” content related to female participation in the making of a film?
  - Producers
  - Directors
  - Writers
  - Actors
- Do women make different films?
- Is sexual content actually a manifestation of a gender-biased film industry?

# Consider the Following Facts

- Female actors more likely to have been models; male actors more likely to have had actual training
- Movie stars more often male, and female movie stars have much shorter careers and earn far less money
- Male outstanding performances more likely to appear in award-winning films

# Consider the Following Facts

- Male actors have a much higher probability of being the protagonists in blockbuster movies
- As female actors get older they tend to perform in fewer and less attractive roles
- Within the same film, female actors are more likely to reveal more of their bodies than are men

# Past Research

- R-rated films may earn less box office but get higher critical evaluations and win more movie awards
- Strong violence, but not graphic sex, may enhance box office; violence with mild sex may be optimal regarding financial performance
- Some indication that graphic sex/nudity harms box office

# Current Investigation

- Method
  - Sample
  - Success criteria
  - Cinematic predictors
  - Statistical controls
- Results
  - Linear effects
  - Curvilinear effects
- Discussion



# Method

- Sample:
  - 914 fiction films (870 live and 44 animated) released from 2001 to 2005, inclusively
  - Documentaries, standup comedy films, and re-releases omitted
  - All had detailed content ratings available on Screen It! ([www.screenit.com](http://www.screenit.com))



# "TAKEN"

(2009) (Liam Neeson, Maggie Grace) (PG-13)

## At-A-Glance CONTENT SUMMARY

Alcohol/Drugs	HEAVY
Blood/Gross Stuff	MILD
Disrespectful/Bad Attitude	EXTREME
Frightening/Tense Scenes	MODERATE
Guns/Weapons	EXTREME
Imitative Behavior	HEAVY
Jump Scenes	NONE
Music (Scary/Tense)	EXTREME
Music (Inappropriate)	NONE
Profanity	MODERATE
Sex/Nudity	HEAVY
Smoking	MINOR
Tense Family Scenes	HEAVY
Topics To Talk About	HEAVY
Violence	EXTREME

- One of Bryan's former agency coworkers jokingly asks if Lenore still has a "hard-on" for Bryan, and then repeats that phrase.
- While nothing explicit is seen and nothing ultimately happens Sheerah thanks Bryan for saving her life, all while dressed in just a robe in her hotel room.
- After just meeting Peter outside the airport in Paris, Amanda tells Kim that he's "hot" and that she's going to sleep with him. She adds that she's heard French guys are amazing in bed, and tells Kim that she (Kim) has to lose it (her virginity) sometime, so it might as well be in Paris.
- About some bravado that Stuart is displaying, Bryan matter-of-factly tells him, "Now is not the time for d\*ck measuring."
- One of Bryan's associates states that Marko and the others kidnap young women, addict them to drugs, and then force them into prostitution.
- An out of focus magazine cover in the background of a shot appears to show (partially) a female model on the front and possibly the side of her bare butt (it's too out of focus to tell).

- We see miscellaneous hookers on the street, soliciting business in standard attire, including views of cleavage. Bryan then approaches one, pretending to be a client (nothing explicit is said, but the talk is about paid sex).
- Bryan pays (as do other men) to enter a hooker pavilion of sorts, where various drugged young women are located behind hanging sheets or blankets. Looking for Kim, Bryan peers into the various areas, mostly seeing the strung out women, but he does spot one man behind one such woman, seated, but the view is brief and it doesn't appear that anything explicit is seen. When mayhem breaks out there, various women flee, and we briefly see one in her panties as she runs off.
- A classic style statue shows bare breasts.
- A comment is made that Kim will pull in a large sex slave bid due to being a virgin.
- We see a bikini clad abductee (front and rear view in her thong bottom) who's being auctioned to the highest bidder. We then see Kim dressed in a similar but not quite as revealing outfit for the same purpose.
- Bryan finds Kim in a bra in the presence of the man who bought her for sex.

# Method

- Success criteria
  - Box office
    - US domestic gross ( $M = 46.95$ ,  $SD = 61.55$ , range 0.02 to 436.47,  $N = 914$ ): log transformed
    - UK gross (in millions of pounds sterling,  $M = 5.44$ ,  $SD = 8.98$ , range 0.02 to 65.30,  $n = 671$ ): log transformed
    - non-US world gross ( $M = 74.55$ ,  $SD = 107.74$ , range 0.34 to 741.86,  $n = 300$ ): log transformed
    - estimated US net (gross minus budget:  $M = 6.26$ ,  $SD = 52.18$ , range -174.345 to 340.61,  $n = 873$ ; but same results for half gross minus budget)

# Method

- Success criteria
  - Critical evaluations
    - Metacritic score ( $M = 50.55$ ,  $SD = 17.76$ , range 6 to 94;  $N = 914$ )
    - Movie-guide ratings (2 items;  $M = 2.29$ ,  $SD = 0.62$ , range 0.50 to 3.75;  $n = 911$ ;  $\alpha = .75$ )
    - the two correlate .75

# Method

- Success criteria
  - Movie awards
    - Oscar awards (= 2) and nominations (= 1) in categories of picture, director, writing, and acting ( $M = 0.26$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ , range 0-10,  $\alpha = .77$ )
    - Golden Globe awards (= 2) and nominations (= 1) in categories of picture, director, writing, and acting ( $M = 0.36$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ , range 0-12,  $\alpha = .84$ )

# Method

- Cinematic predictors
  - Film content (from Screen It!):
    - 15: alcohol/drugs, blood/gore, disrespectful/bad attitude, frightening/tense scenes, guns/weapons, imitative behavior, jump scenes, scary/tense music, inappropriate music, profanity, sex/nudity, smoking, tense family scenes, topics to talk about, and violence
    - 6-point scale from none to extreme



# Method

- Cinematic predictors
  - Female involvement
    - Producers (ca. 7,000): 22.58% female
    - Directors (ca. 980): 5.83% female
    - Writers (ca. 2,450): 11.77% female
    - Actors (ca. 49,000): 32.38% female

# Method

- Statistical controls
  - MPAA ratings
    - 28 G, 126 PG, 386 PG-13, and 374 R
    - R with profanity ( $r = .64$ ), sex/nudity ( $r = .49$ ), blood/gore ( $r = .48$ ), smoking ( $r = .40$ ), drugs/alcohol ( $r = .35$ ), disrespect ( $r = .34$ ), violence ( $r = .27$ ), and guns/weapons ( $r = .24$ ; all  $ps < .001$ ).
    - sex/nudity negatively with both G ( $r = -.35$ ) and PG ( $r = -.47$ ) (both  $p < .001$ ), but almost zero with a PG-13 rating ( $r = -.03$ ), hence the baseline

# Method

- Control variables
  - Release date
    - zero-one dummies for 2001-2005
    - even distribution: 172, 202, 181, 176, and 183 ( $\chi^2 = 2.93$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = .5707$ ).

# Results

- Linear
  - Individual items
    - Zero-order correlations

Table 1  
*Pearson Correlations Between Cinematic Success Criteria and Screen It! Content Assessments*

Content assessment	Box office				Film critics		Movie awards	
	US	UK	WD	NT	MC	MG	OS	GG
Alcohol/drugs	-.20***	-.19***	-.29***	-.14***	.03	-.02	.09**	.12***
Blood/gore	.04	.02	.03	-.03	.00	-.05	.05	-.01
Disrespectful/bad attitude	-.00	-.05	.04	-.06	-.01	-.05	.02	-.02
Frightening/tense scenes	.14***	.17***	.18**	.08*	.09**	.10**	.06	-.01
Guns/weapons	.11***	.06	.23***	-.05	-.03	-.06	.01	-.05
Imitative behavior	.07*	-.05	.00	.04	-.19***	-.18***	-.11***	-.11**
Inappropriate music	.00	-.08	-.01	-.01	-.11	-.12	.00	.01
Jump scenes	.13***	.08*	.04	.07*	-.09**	-.11***	-.07*	-.08*
Profanity	-.27***	-.24***	-.37***	-.20***	.01	-.04	.04	.06
Scary/tense music	.26***	.17***	.26***	.07*	-.07*	-.05	-.09**	-.15***
Sex/nudity	-.26***	-.23***	-.31***	-.21***	-.01	-.09**	-.01	.08*
Smoking	-.26***	-.15**	-.18**	-.18***	.22***	.17***	.18***	.20***
Tense family scenes	-.03	-.06	-.08	.03	.21***	.26***	.14***	.17***
Topics to talk about	-.12***	-.07	-.08	-.03	.27***	.26***	.12***	.10**
Violence	.11***	.05	.19**	-.01	-.05	-.06	.02	-.05

*Note.* US = US gross ( $n = 914$ ); UK = UK gross ( $n = 671$ ); WD = world gross ( $n = 300$ ); NT = US net ( $n = 873$ ); MC = Metacritic score ( $n = 914$ ); MG = movie-guide ratings ( $n = 911$ ); OS = Oscar ( $n = 914$ ); and GG = Golden Globes ( $n = 914$ ).

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Box office

Content assessment	US	UK	WD	NT
Alcohol/drugs	-.20***	-.19***	-.29***	-.14***
Blood/gore	.04	.02	.03	-.03
Disrespectful/bad attitude	-.00	-.05	.04	-.06
Frightening/tense scenes	.14***	.17***	.18**	.08*
Guns/weapons	.11***	.06	.23***	-.05
Imitative behavior	.07*	-.05	.00	.04
Inappropriate music	.00	-.08	-.01	-.01
Jump scenes	.13***	.08*	.04	.07*
Profanity	-.27***	-.24***	-.37***	-.20***
Scary/tense music	.26***	.17***	.26***	.07*
Sex/nudity	-.26***	-.23***	-.31***	-.21***
Smoking	-.26***	-.15**	-.18**	-.18***
Tense family scenes	-.03	-.06	-.08	.03
Topics to talk about	-.12***	-.07	-.08	-.03
Violence	.11***	.05	.19**	-.01

Film critics

Content assessment

MC

MG

Alcohol/drugs

.03

-.02

Blood/gore

.00

-.05

Disrespectful/bad attitude

-.01

-.05

Frightening/tense scenes

.09\*\*

.10\*\*

Guns/weapons

-.03

-.06

Imitative behavior

-.19\*\*\*

-.18\*\*\*

Inappropriate music

-.11

-.12

Jump scenes

-.09\*\*

-.11\*\*\*

Profanity

.01

-.04

Scary/tense music

-.07\*

-.05

Sex/nudity

-.01

-.09\*\*

Smoking

.22\*\*\*

.17\*\*\*

Tense family scenes

.21\*\*\*

.26\*\*\*

Topics to talk about

.27\*\*\*

.26\*\*\*

Violence

-.05

-.06

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Movie awards

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Content assessment

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OS

GG

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Alcohol/drugs

.09\*\*

.12\*\*\*

Blood/gore

.05

-.01

Disrespectful/bad attitude

.02

-.02

Frightening/tense scenes

.06

-.01

Guns/weapons

.01

-.05

Imitative behavior

-.11\*\*\*

-.11\*\*

Inappropriate music

.00

.01

Jump scenes

-.07\*

-.08\*

Profanity

.04

.06

Scary/tense music

-.09\*\*

-.15\*\*\*

Sex/nudity

-.01

.08\*

Smoking

.18\*\*\*

.20\*\*\*

Tense family scenes

.14\*\*\*

.17\*\*\*

Topics to talk about

.12\*\*\*

.10\*\*

Violence

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.02

-.05

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# Results

- Linear
  - Individual items
    - Zero-order correlations
    - Standardized partial regression coefficients

Table 2

*Standardized Partial Coefficients ( $\beta$ s) for Cinematic Success Criteria Regressed on Screen It! Content Assessments Controlling for MPAA Ratings and Release Year*

Content assessment	Box office				Film critics		Movie awards	
	US	UK	WD	NT	MC	MG	OS	GG
Alcohol/drugs	.01	-.01	-.10	.02	-.02	-.00	.07	.04
Blood/gore	.15**	.10	.12	.07	-.00	-.05	.08	-.01
Disrespectful/bad attitude	.01	-.03	-.05	.00	-.05	-.06	-.03	-.04
Frightening/tense scenes	.00	.20**	.08	.11	.24***	.27***	.22***	.15*
Guns/weapons	.06	.08	.29**	-.06	.03	.00	-.01	-.02
Imitative behavior	.11***	.01	.06	.11**	-.12***	-.09**	-.10**	-.09*
Inappropriate music	.11**	.01	.11*	.08*	-.07*	-.04	.03	.02
Jump scenes	.01	-.04	-.03	.07	-.17***	-.20***	-.09*	-.04
Profanity	-.10	-.18**	-.39***	-.15*	-.13*	-.10	-.06	-.10
Scary/tense music	.21***	.00	.03	-.07	-.07	-.04	-.27***	-.21**
Sex/nudity	-.06	-.08	-.10	-.14**	-.05	-.12**	-.14**	-.03
Smoking	-.11**	-.04	-.01	-.09*	.18***	.15***	.12**	.14***
Tense family scenes	.07	-.05	.00	.07	.05	.12***	.07	.12**
Topics to talk about	-.03	-.04	-.02	.01	.17***	.18***	.03	-.02
Violence	-.08	-.15	-.11	-.01	-.14*	-.12	.04	.00

*Note.* See Table 1 for key to abbreviations and corresponding sample sizes.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Content assessment	Box office			
	US	UK	WD	NT
Alcohol/drugs	.01	-.01	-.10	.02
Blood/gore	.15 <sup>***</sup>	.10	.12	.07
Disrespectful/bad attitude	.01	-.03	-.05	.00
Frightening/tense scenes	.00	.20 <sup>**</sup>	.08	.11
Guns/weapons	.06	.08	.29 <sup>**</sup>	-.06
Imitative behavior	.11 <sup>***</sup>	.01	.06	.11 <sup>**</sup>
Inappropriate music	.11 <sup>**</sup>	.01	.11 <sup>*</sup>	.08 <sup>*</sup>
Jump scenes	.01	-.04	-.03	.07
Profanity	-.10	-.18 <sup>**</sup>	-.39 <sup>***</sup>	-.15 <sup>*</sup>
Scary/tense music	.21 <sup>***</sup>	.00	.03	-.07
Sex/nudity	-.06	-.08	-.10	-.14 <sup>**</sup>
Smoking	-.11 <sup>**</sup>	-.04	-.01	-.09 <sup>*</sup>
Tense family scenes	.07	-.05	.00	.07
Topics to talk about	-.03	-.04	-.02	.01
Violence	-.08	-.15	-.11	-.01

**NO CONSISTENT IMPACT ACROSS ALL CRITERIA**

Content assessment	Film critics	
	MC	MG
Alcohol/drugs	-.02	-.00
Blood/gore	-.00	-.05
Disrespectful/bad attitude	-.05	-.06
Frightening/tense scenes	.24***	.27***
Guns/weapons	.03	.00
Imitative behavior	-.12***	-.09**
Inappropriate music	-.07*	-.04
Jump scenes	-.17***	-.20***
Profanity	-.13*	-.10
Scary/tense music	-.07	-.04
Sex/nudity	-.05	-.12**
Smoking	.18***	.15***
Tense family scenes	.05	.12***
Topics to talk about	.17***	.18***
Violence	-.14*	-.12

Content assessment	Movie awards	
	OS	GG
Alcohol/drugs	.07	.04
Blood/gore	.08	-.01
Disrespectful/bad attitude	-.03	-.04
Frightening/tense scenes	.22***	.15*
Guns/weapons	-.01	-.02
Imitative behavior	-.10**	-.09*
Inappropriate music	.03	.02
Jump scenes	-.09*	-.04
Profanity	-.06	-.10
Scary/tense music	-.27***	-.21**
Sex/nudity	-.14**	-.03
Smoking	.12**	.14***
Tense family scenes	.07	.12**
Topics to talk about	.03	-.02
Violence	.04	.00

Table 3

*Pearson Correlations Between Female Crew/Cast Proportions and Screen It! Content Assessments*

Content assessment	Producers	Directors	Writers	Actors
Alcohol/drugs	.02	.04	.04	.08*
Blood/gore	-.25***	-.13***	-.22***	-.32***
Disrespectful/bad attitude	-.20***	-.08*	-.13***	-.22***
Frightening/tense scenes	-.16***	-.15***	-.20***	-.34***
Guns/weapons	-.26***	-.17***	-.25***	-.45***
Imitative behavior	-.06	.01	-.05	-.02
Inappropriate music	-.03	.07*	-.01	.03
Jump scenes	-.13***	-.12***	-.13***	-.11**
Profanity	-.09**	-.00	-.08*	-.00
Scary/tense music	-.20***	-.18***	-.25***	-.36***
Sex/nudity	-.02	.05	.03	.19***
Smoking	-.04	.02	-.03	-.11***
Tense family scenes	.07*	.09**	.12***	.18***
Topics to talk about	.08*	.12***	.08*	.10**
Violence	-.28***	-.19***	-.31***	-.43***

*Note.*  $N = 914$  for all correlations.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

# Correlations with Budget

- More women in cast/crew, lower costs:
  - Producers:  $-.09$  with female proportion
  - Directors:  $-.10$  with female proportion
  - Writers:  $-.10$  with female proportion
  - Actors:  $-.22$  with female proportion
- Yet, the latter has the highest positive correlation with sex/nudity
- Is sex in cinema because sex is cheap?

# Another Issue

- Content scores are not independent, some exhibiting considerable shared variance
  - e.g., sex/nudity positively correlates with alcohol/drugs ( $r = .57$ ), blood/gore ( $r = .23$ ), disrespectful/bad attitude ( $r = .24$ ), imitative behavior ( $r = .20$ ), inappropriate music ( $r = .30$ ), profanity ( $r = .63$ ), smoking ( $r = .32$ ), and talk topics ( $r = .17$ ), but negatively correlated with frightening/tense scenes ( $r = -.19$ ), scary music ( $r = -.27$ ), and jump scenes ( $r = -.07$ ; all  $r$ s significant at .05 level or better).



# Results

- Linear
  - Individual items:
    - Zero-order correlations
    - Standardized partial regression coefficients
  - Factor scores

# Principle Components Analysis with Varimax Rotation

- **Violence/Fear:** violence (.91), frightening/tense scenes (.85), scary music (.85), guns/weapons (.82), blood/gore (.81), disrespectful attitude (.64), and jump scenes (.62):  $\alpha = .89$
- **Sex/Indulgence:** drugs/alcohol (.78), profanity (.76), sex/nudity (.75), and smoking (.74):  $\alpha = .79$
- **Topics/Issues:** topics to talk about (.83) and tense family scenes (.83):  $\alpha = .50$
- **Corrupting Youth:** imitative behavior (.82) and inappropriate music (.71):  $\alpha = .45$

Table 4

*Standardized Partial Coefficients ( $\beta$ s) for Cinematic Success Criteria Regressed on the Four Content Factors Controlling for MPAA Ratings and Release Year*

Content factor	Box office				Film critics		Movie awards	
	US	UK	WD	NT	MC	MG	OS	GG
Violence/fear	.29 <sup>***</sup>	.13 <sup>**</sup>	.29 <sup>***</sup>	.07 <sup>*</sup>	-.09 <sup>*</sup>	-.08 <sup>*</sup>	.01	-.10 <sup>**</sup>
Sex/indulgence	-.21 <sup>***</sup>	-.21 <sup>**</sup>	-.33 <sup>***</sup>	-.24 <sup>***</sup>	.07	.01	.12 <sup>*</sup>	.13 <sup>*</sup>
Topics/issues	.03	-.05	-.02	.10 <sup>**</sup>	.21 <sup>***</sup>	.29 <sup>***</sup>	.14 <sup>***</sup>	.14 <sup>***</sup>
Corrupting youth	.16 <sup>***</sup>	-.01	.13 <sup>*</sup>	.13 <sup>***</sup>	-.19 <sup>***</sup>	-.15 <sup>***</sup>	-.07	-.09 <sup>*</sup>

*Note.* US = US gross ( $n = 914$ ); UK = UK gross ( $n = 671$ ); WD = world gross ( $n = 300$ ); NT = US net ( $n = 873$ ); MC = Metacritic score ( $n = 914$ ); MG = movie-guide ratings ( $n = 911$ ); OS = Oscar ( $n = 914$ ); and GG = Golden Globes ( $n = 914$ ).

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Box office

Content factor	US	UK	WD	NT
Violence/fear	.29***	.13**	.29***	.07*
Sex/indulgence	-.21***	-.21**	-.33***	-.24***
Topics/issues	.03	-.05	-.02	.10**
Corrupting youth	.16***	-.01	.13*	.13***

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Film critics

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Content factor

---

MC

MG

---

Violence/fear

–.09\*

–.08\*

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Sex/indulgence

.07

.01

---

Topics/issues

.21\*\*\*

.29\*\*\*

---

Corrupting youth

---

–.19\*\*\*

–.15\*\*\*

---

---

Movie awards

---

---

Content factor

---

OS

GG

---

Violence/fear

.01

–.10\*\*

Sex/indulgence

.12\*

.13\*

Topics/issues

.14\*\*\*

.14\*\*\*

Corrupting youth

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–.07

–.09\*

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# Results

- Linear
  - Individual items:
    - Zero-order correlations
    - Standardized partial regression coefficients
  - Factor scores
- Nonlinear
  - mean-deviation form
  - linear and quadratic terms

Table 5  
*Standardized Partial Coefficients ( $\beta$ s) for Cinematic Success Criteria Regressed on Linear and Quadratic Content Factors  
 Controlling for MPAA Ratings and Release Year*

Content factor	Box office				Film critics		Movie awards	
	US	UK	WD	NT	MC	MG	OS	GG
Violence/fear								
Linear	.29***	.13**	.29***	.06	-.10**	-.09*	-.02	-.11**
Quadratic	.11***	.07	-.02	.11**	-.06	-.07*	-.08*	-.08*
Sex/indulgence								
Linear	-.19***	-.18**	-.33***	-.22***	.07	.00	.10	.11*
Quadratic	.03	.10	-.00	.20***	.12**	.09*	.03	.03
Topics/issues								
Linear	.03	-.04	-.02	.11**	.20***	.27***	.13***	.12***
Quadratic	.01	-.04	-.04	.01	-.03	.01	.04	.06
Corrupting youth								
Linear	.21***	.03	.13	.15**	-.23***	-.20***	-.10*	-.11*
Quadratic	-.05	-.05	-.01	-.03	.03	.05	.02	.01

*Note.* US = US gross ( $n = 914$ ); UK = UK gross ( $n = 671$ ); WD = world gross ( $n = 300$ ); NT = US net ( $n = 873$ ); MC = Metacritic score ( $n = 914$ ); MG = movie-guide ratings ( $n = 912$ ); OS = Oscar ( $n = 914$ ); and GG = Golden Globes ( $n = 914$ ).



Content factor	Box office			
	US	UK	WD	NT
Violence/fear				
Linear	.29***	.13**	.29***	.06
Quadratic	.11***	.07	-.02	.11**
Sex/indulgence				
Linear	-.19***	-.18**	-.33***	-.22***
Quadratic	.03	.10	-.00	<u>.20***</u>
Topics/issues				
Linear	.03	-.04	-.02	.11**
Quadratic	.01	-.04	-.04	.01
Corrupting youth				
Linear	.21***	.03	.13	.15**
Quadratic	-.05	-.05	-.01	-.03

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Film critics

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Content factor

---

MC

MG

---

Violence/fear

Linear

-.10<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

-.09<sup>\*</sup>

Quadratic

-.06

-.07<sup>\*</sup>

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Sex/indulgence

Linear

.07

.00

Quadratic

.12<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

.09<sup>\*</sup>

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Topics/issues

Linear

.20<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

.27<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

Quadratic

-.03

.01

Corrupting youth

Linear

-.23<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

-.20<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

Quadratic

.03

.05

---

---

Movie awards

---

---

Content factor

---

OS

GG

---

Violence/fear

Linear

-.02

-.11\*\*

Quadratic

-.08\*

-.08\*

---

Sex/indulgence

Linear

.10

.11\*

---

Quadratic

.03

.03

---

Topics/issues

Linear

.13\*\*\*

.12\*\*\*

---

Quadratic

.04

.06

---

Corrupting youth

Linear

-.10\*

-.11\*

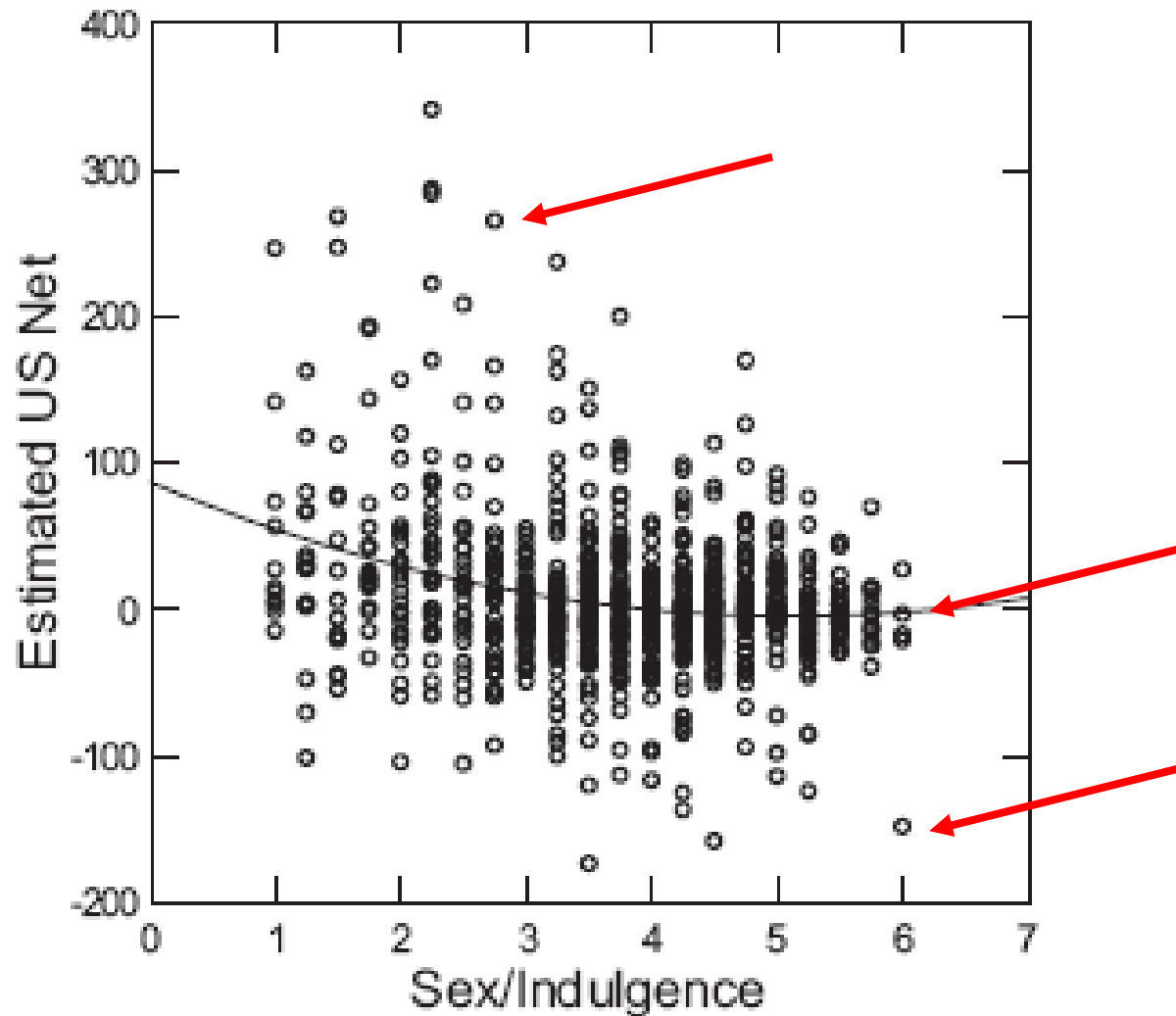
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Quadratic

.02

.01

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*Figure 1.* The scatterplot for estimated U.S. net as a function of the film's score on the sex/indulgence factor. The least-squares bit-fit curve depicts the second-order polynomial (linear and quadratic terms).

# Inferences

- If the goal is to maximize gross box office, violence/fear is the optimal content, especially US and worldwide

# Discussion

- Why doesn't sex sell?
  - At one time the belief might have been true, but it is no longer so
  - Sex does indeed sell, and maybe even impress, but the effect is utterly contingent on a host of more elusive factors
  - Perhaps sex and nudity never had any substantial economic or artistic benefits, but rather it was one of those self-perpetuating urban myths – surviving because of conspicuous exceptions

# Illustration: *Titanic*

- This 1997 film has “heavy” sex/nudity yet was highest grossing film in US history!
- Yet once adjustment made for inflation:

- *Gone With the Wind* (rated G by the MPAA on re-release, minor sex/nudity)
- *Star Wars* (PG, no sex/nudity)
- *The Sound of Music* (G)
- *E.T. The Extraterrestrial* (PG, no sex/nudity)
- *The Ten Commandments* (G)
- *Titanic* (PG-13, heavy sex/nudity)
- *Jaws* (PG, mild sex/nudity)
- *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (G)
- *Doctor Zhivago* (rated PG-13 for mature themes)
- *Ben Hur* (G)



Top 10 among current 914

- *Shrek 2* (PG, mild sex/nudity)
- *Spider-Man* (PG-13, moderate sex/nudity)
- *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* (PG-13, mild sex/nudity)
- *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (PG-13, minor sex/nudity)
- *Spider-Man 2* (PG-13, mild sex/nudity)
- *The Passion of the Christ* (R, minor sex/nudity)
- *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (PG-13, minor sex/nudity)
- *Finding Nemo* (G, no sex/nudity) *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (PG, no sex/nudity)
- *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (PG-13, no sex/nudity)

# An Artistic Justification?

- Sex/Indulgence does correlate positively with Oscars and Golden Globes
  - Yet this may be the result of not sex per se but rather its association with other edgy content, such as alcohol, drugs, and smoking, which have stronger connections with honors
- Topics/Issues provides a far more reliable route to critical acclaim and movie awards

So When Is Cinematic Sex  
Not Gratuitous?