

Why Hollywood Is Dumping Explicit Sex Scenes

The web publication The Independent reports, "New research, commissioned by Warner Brothers, has suggested that women now tend to decide what films a couple should see. These same women, according to the polls, are uneasy with scenes which might be thought to stray into the explicit, or exploitative, or inappropriate in some way."

In other words, sex doesn't really sell.

Movieguide has been telling the entertainment industry this for a long time. Twenty years of our annual reports to the entertainment industry have shown that explicit sex is a death knell when it comes to attracting a general audience. Of course, R-rated sex movies can reach a limited audience, like R-rated horror movies can, but if you have a funny story of light romance, such as *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* or *The Runaway Bride*, that will reach a much wider audience. Thus, it makes really good business sense to leave out explicit sex.

Studios are beginning to take note, in part because international audiences feel the same way. In fact, to even get your movie into many countries, you must cut out the explicit sex. If dialogue in a sex scene is part of the story, it makes good business sense just to dump the explicit sex in favor of a scene that can be shown internationally.

While many men, privately looking at their computers, may be hooked on pornography, most women usually don't appreciate going to a movie with a guy who's gawking at a naked woman on screen. Explicit sex is simply not popular with general audiences, especially family audiences who can sell four or more tickets instead of just one or two.

Explicit sex tends to result in an R rating. So perhaps

Hollywood moguls are finally learning that R ratings seriously reduce their box office returns. While they still make many R-rated movies, their biggest budgets are reserved for PG and PG-13 movies. These are the ones they hope will sell internationally.

The next lesson the major studios need to learn is about language. This year Disney leads all studios in average box office sales per movie by a wide margin. It has one movie with excessive foul language, *The Fifth Estate*. It made less than \$3 million—a monumental bomb. Disney is averaging \$181 million per movie (\$216 million if you remove *The Fifth Estate*).

On the other end of the spectrum, 62 percent of Sony's movies have excessive foul language. It's averaging only \$67 million per movie. It recently reported major losses in its movie division after a dismal summer season. Its biggest flop was *White House Down*, with 38 obscenities and 18 profanities (and it still managed a PG-13 rating).

Disney seems to have learned this lesson, as shown by its two most recent offerings, *Thor: The Dark World* and *Frozen*. Why can't the other major studios in Hollywood learn the same lesson?

Many a time, people who see Hollywood movies come away saying, "That would have been so much better without the foul language." A movie they would have recommended to friends will go unmentioned because they don't want to advise their friends to go see something loaded with offensive language. Again, the same is true for overseas audiences. Vulgarity simply does not help the box office. In fact, it hurts it.

No wonder each year Movieguide's annual box office study shows that movies with no foul language make the most money!

Hollywood has been hurt by declining DVD sales. It has been helped by rapidly growing international audiences. If explicit sex and vulgar language reduce your international audience,

the only reason to keep it is because (a) you want to degrade your potential audience, (b) you want to appeal to a limited audience or (c) you're a short-sighted businessman. These folks may find it harder and harder to remain employed with major movie studios.

Even movies with just a few obscenities hurt themselves. In the Golden Age of Hollywood, many stories (including ones for mature audiences) were told and told well without a single vulgar word. That includes war movies, gangster movies and more. They did great business, even overseas. Today, the famed director Steven Spielberg added vulgarity to the movie *Lincoln* that was not even used in the 1860s. No doubt this kept many people away from the movie, including myself.

You can make great movies, even about tough subjects, without stooping to add explicit sex and foul language. You'll make more money if you do. I'd love to see the results of a simple poll: Would you like less vulgarity in movies and on television? Movieguide thinks the answer will be yes, by a large majority.

Please help us get the word out to Hollywood that moviegoers want more wholesome entertainment. We have made great progress already, but much more needs to be done and can be done.

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