An Investigation of the Relationship Between Violence and Emotion Perception: Evidence from Turkish Cinema

Semra Keleş, İzmir University of Economics, semra.keles@ieu.edu.tr

Filiz Mergen, İzmir University of Economics, filiz.mergen@ieu.edu.tr

Abstract

Violence has been a significant phenomenon throughout human history and has been studied across various disciplines. With the rise of interdisciplinary approaches, it has become a central issue in many fields. Adapting a psycholinguistic perspective, this study examines how films with violent content influence people's perception of emotions. It was hypothesized that the violent content in film the participants saw would alter their perception of the emotional content of the words they were shown. To this end, they performed a rating task on a list of positive, negative, and neutral words before and after watching a violent film. A comparison of pre- and post-ratings revealed that valence ratings decreased for all word types after watching the film, while arousal ratings remained unchanged. These findings suggest that exposure to violent content can influence how emotional words are perceived. The results provide valuable insights into the impact of violence on emotional processing.
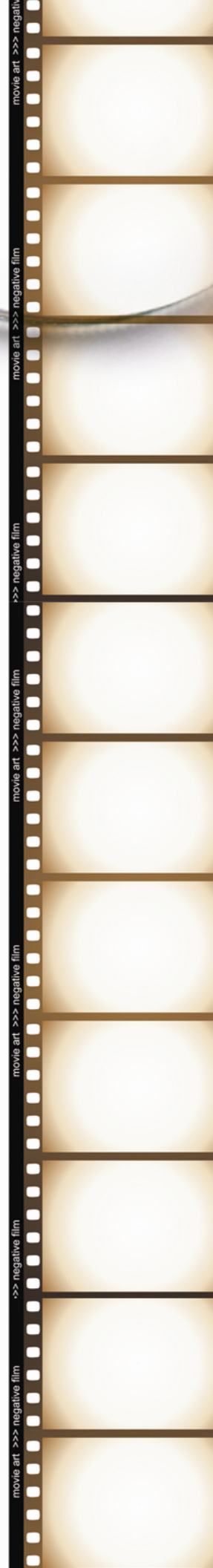
Keywords: violence; cinema; emotion perception; language; word rating; psycholinguistics

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Introduction

Human emotions have been investigated extensively. Once thought to be a potential risk to logical thinking, they were later considered to have a central role in our lives, particularly in decision-making. There has been a surge in interest in emotions in a variety of disciplines including the fields of medicine, psychology and sociology. Recently, a growing tendency towards interdisciplinary approaches, however, has made emotion phenomena the topic of disciplines such as psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, marketing, advertising, and cinema. In this study, we investigated emotion perception in terms of violence in cinema.

When examined from evolutionary background, emotions have emerged as primitive reactions to environmental stimuli to ensure the survival of the species. This entails approaching favorable stimuli to enhance happiness and well-being, and withdrawing from potential threats (Taylor, 1991). This idea has been in the center of all our interactions with the environment, but emotions gradually transformed and later evolved into more sophisticated conceptualizations in modern societies. In other words, emotions developed as simple responses

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but eventually became a controlling force in our lives. Research, which has confirmed the view that emotions regulate our responses in the society we live in, is based on the evidence that they have a critical role in decision-making processes in brain damaged (Damasio, 2005) and healthy individuals (Clore & Huntsinger, 2007). It has been shown that emotional stimuli influence the way we make decisions in a number of different ways. As predicted by *affect-as-information hypothesis* (Clore et al., 2001), we assign a value to an event, person, thing etc. when we actually experience them, thus proving information for use in future encounters. This means affective states and real life experiences co-occur, influencing judgements on whatever has been experienced. In support of this view, Bhalla and Proffitt (1999) showed that the amount of weight the participants were carrying affected their judgements of the slant of the hill, i.e. they estimated the slant larger as the weight increased. This was taken as evidence for the fact that affective states the participants were experiencing (i.e. carrying heavy backpacks) influenced their estimations regarding the slant of the hill. Similarly, Clore and Huntsinger (2007) reviewed the literature on how emotions influence our decisions and concluded that emotions are pervasive in humans' lives, affecting our judgements and thoughts. More specifically, Clore and Huntsinger (2009) maintain that the valence of emotions (i.e. positive or negative) influences our decisions in different ways. For example, positive emotions help us to see life from a broader perspective and evaluate everyday experiences more globally, while negative

emotions restrict our vision and lead to a more local evaluation. This view has received considerable support from resrach on emotion words regarding how the mood of the participants exerts influence on their rating of emotion words. A great deal of evidence emphasizes mood-congruent evaluations of the emotional load of words by participants, i.e. they are more likely to rate words as more positive when in positive mood, and vice versa. For example, Pratt and Kelly (2008) induced positive or negative mood by giving feedback about the participants' eligibility for the study. Following this, they asked them to rate emotion words. The results showed that pleasant or unpleasant feedback influenced their ratings such that they were marginally higher when participants were in positive mood while they rated the words as more negative in negative mood. Olafson and Ferraro (2001) reported similar findings in a different task design in which the participants, induced into a positive or negative mood using appropriate music beforehand, determined whether the words were real words or pseudowords. The participants were faster in their responses to positive words when in positive mood. In negative mood, however, they responded faster to negative words. Codispoti, Surcinelli and Baldaro (2008) extended these results to physiological reactions obtained after exposure to positive and negative emotional states. Having the participants watch pleasant, unpleasant and neutral films, they assessed the autonomic reactions of the participants such as heart rate and sweating as well

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as word ratings. Their results confirmed that the mood induced by the specific film they watched influenced their autonomic reactions and subjective ratings.

Based on the extent of influence emotions exert on our judgements, we aimed in this study to reveal the extent to which violence, associated with experiencing negative emotions, would influence the perception of emotion words. Previous research has mainly focused on how violence on media has impact on the behaviours of the individuals (Anderson, 1997; Anderson& Bushman, 2002; Bushman,1995, Eron, 1982; Huesmann et al., 2003). In this study, we investigated emotion perception of verbal stimuli. In emotion research in the field of psycholinguistics, participants' perception of emotional content of verbal stimuli is investigated through a variety of methods. One such method, emotion word ratings, which reveals the influence of verbal emotional content on individuals, is used in this study.

Violence

Violence is a phenomenon that has emerged in parallel with the history of humanity. Having long been a part of human existence, it is considered to be directly related to human culture. It has been conceptualised differently by societies based on various criteria, and the structure of violence has varied across societies, making it difficult to provide a monolithic definition. Debarbieux (2006, pp. 26-27) defines violence as "a phenomenon that changes according to a certain period, social environment, and particular conditions". According to the

World Health Organization (WHO), on the other hand, violence is "the situation where physical force or power is intentionally applied to another person in the form of threat or reality, potentially causing injury, death or psychological harm to the person exposed". Based on these definitions, it can be said that violence involves physical, emotional and verbal acts (Mutlu, 1997, p. 55). Violence can also be examined in terms of narrow and broad sense (Ünsal, 2007, pp. 31-33). As such, it is either directed against an individual's bodily integrity, or directed against a group of people as abstract pressures whose physical and mental consequences are difficult to measure. This distinction by Ünsal deals with violence in a much more comprehensive way and includes many acts that are frequently encountered in daily life.

Violence can be seen from the eyes of the victim, the perpetrator, the actor, and the witness of violence, or from a wider social, cultural and psychological perspective. Thus, it can be defined differently according to various factors (Köknel, 2000, p. 20). However, violence does not generally occur for a single reason, but is a multifaceted phenomenon. An important consideration is that power is the central idea in all definitions of violence, be it physical, emotional, verbal or in some other form. Violence can be variously defined as causing fear and harm, doing evil, inciting negative thoughts, applying pressure, tormenting, attempting to attack, and inflicting material and moral damage (Keleş, 2015, p. 182).

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Violence permeates into life to such an extent that it has even appeared in different genres, and is implicitly or explicitly presented in the narratives ranging from mythology to cinema. It is generally used to increase dramatic effect and bring the narrative closer to realism. For example, as well as being one of the indispensable elements of not only action-adventure, western, war and drama films, it is also found in melodramas and comedy films.

Types of Violence

The concept of violence and its types have been discussed by many authors and classified in different ways. Emphasizing that human beings have an innate tendency to destroy, Fromm (1964, p. 24) stated that various types of violence result from the distinction between different, unconscious impulses that lead to violence. According to Fromm (pp. 25-27), violence may be either reactive, vengeful, compensatory or it may involve bloodlust. The World Health Organization, in the violence report published in 2002, defined violence as self, interpersonal and community violence, and it was underlined in that report that violence is deliberate and has consequences such as injury, death, psychological harm, developmental delay and deprivation. It was further stated that threats are also considered acts of violence, even if they do not cause physical damage, as is the deliberate abuse of authority (WHO, 2002, p. 4). Based on these definitions, we can classify violence as physical, emotional, economic, verbal, symbolic and sexual.

The aim of physical violence is to harm living things and property and to destroy the integrity of their existence by using power and brute force. Ünsal (2007, p. 31) argues that "physical violence is unique", and defines it as "a harsh and painful act directed from outside against the bodily integrity of individuals." It may be either strong or weak, and the most common form of violence is physical violence. Emotional violence is considered as any attitude that negatively affects the psychological health of individuals, upsets, hurts or shocks them, causing the individual to feel under pressure and threatened while psychological violence aims to harm the victim's self-esteem, to intimidate, to make him/her feel powerless and helpless, and that he/she is under control (Güz, 2007, p. 89). Economic violence, on the other hand, occurs when people's economic power, social status and role are deteriorated by factors such as high inflation rates, unemployment and insufficient social security opportunities, leading them to become over-reactive, thus causing social turmoil. Verbal violence consists of malicious verbal acts, expressions used to harm others or take revenge (Karabağ, 2010, p. 21). It occurs when a person uses a humiliating, hurtful or threatening language, involving gossiping and slandering. In symbolic violence, there is an accomplicity between those who are subjected to it and those who practice it. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 167), symbolic violence is defined as the roles and obligations of those in a particular society, embedded, accepted unquestionably by tacit consent in that society. It is experienced in the absence of

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physical power, which puts violence and power on the same scale, but which differentiates between the type of violence used and how it is used. Symbolic violence mainly manifests itself the most in the mass media. Visual, audio and written media impose in people's minds a world associated with fear and violence. The violence we witness in the news, in TV series and in movies not only activates latent violence inherent in us all, thus enabling us to re-experience it, but also familiarizes us with new violence codes (Aydın, 2012, pp. 4-5). In this sense, the violence that the audience is exposed to in the movies can be considered a form of symbolic violence.

Lastly, sexual violence is sexual harassment and assault against children, young people, women and other individuals, ranging from cursing and gesturing to rape (Köknel, 2000, p. 203). Here, sexuality is used as a threat, a tool of intimidation and control directed by the strong against the weak. Sexual assault is at the core of violence against women. "Sexual violence" refers to incidents when sexuality is used as a tool to control, monitor, humiliate, degrade and punish women, or when the woman is subjected to any kind of sexual act against her will or by force. According to the results of the research on this issue conducted by Ayşe Gül Altınay and Yeşim Arat in Turkey in 2007, 14 % of women reported being forced into sexual intercourse against their will or by force at least once, 67 % of whom were also subjected to physical

violence (Altınay & Arat, 2007, p. 87).

Sexual harassment, on the other hand is the most common type of violence inflicted by the powerful on the weak, and can occur at home, at school, in public places such as parks and streets, or at work. The most common sexual violence behaviors are sexual abuse of children or spouses within the family, generally of women by men, forced exposure to images or sounds of nudity and sexuality, or acts of rape. The Feminists regard rape as a power issue, reinforcing the dominance of men over women, rather than being a purely sexual act, and considers it similar to terrorism (Gürhan, Erdoğan, Seyran, 2020, p. 62). Although anyone, regardless of gender, may be exposed to sexual abuse and violence, it is more commonly aimed at women (International Labour Organization, 2019).

The Relationship between Cinema and Violence

Creating an inherent association between humans and violence led to the idea that violence and culture, which emerged as a result of man's attempts to transform nature, are identical (Büker and Kıran, 1999, p. 17). Violence, as part of culture, has long been defined as an indispensible part of narratives and storytelling in literary and artistic works, folklore, fairy tales, operas and theater plays. The reproduction of violence at the artist's hand through different styles and different media dates back to ancient times. Therefore, throughout the ages it co-existed with, and was reshaped by culture. Unlike other types of media, cinema plays an

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important role in this sense as it uses sound and image together in the formation, reflection and transformation of culture, which makes it a key form of media in the portrayal of violence. Violence in cinema is not a recent phenomenon, it is as old as the the history of cinema itself so much so that violence was the central theme even in the first films. *The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots* (1895), which Thomas Edison shot with a kinetoscope, George Melies's *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), and Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) can be given as examples of early displays of violence in films. Other examples are Griffith's two works, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Intolerance* (1916).

The use of violence in the cinema paralleled the increase in thematic films and the development of technology over time. When sound was developed for the cinema, music and effects were added to the movies, increasing the realism in portrayals of violence, particularly in war movies. The developing cinema technology produced the scenes of violence with different effects, and films were regarded as being more realisitic, aestheticized and consequently, more worth-seeing. Bearing in mind that familiarity with violence breeds desensitization to it, the amount of violence naturally increased in the cinema over time. Similarly, in Turkish cinema, there have been violence scenes since the first Turkish films was

produced. For example, *The Claw* (1917), by Sedat Simavi, which is considered one of the first themed films in the history of Turkish cinema, also featured scenes of violence.

In the "Yeşilçam" period, during which an unprecedented number of films were produced, distributed and seen in movie theaters, violence was an indispensable element in the narrative of the films. Even in the melodrama and comedy films, typical genres of this period, violent elements were extensively used. Physical, verbal, psychological, economic and sexual violence were frequently seen in the films of this period. In her research on the position of women and violence in Yeşilçam films in 1998, Nilgün Abisel examined 103 films and concluded that "direct brute force is often used against all characters in Yeşilçam films associating it with violence as an integral part of reality, and as not being questioned in people's constructed fictional worlds (2005, pp. 312-313).

As of 1980s, social events started to be a trend in the cinema, with people's life stories as central themes. Different types of violence were in focus, supported sometimes by sound and image, sometimes only by sound or presented in the stories of the victims.

Since the 90s, two types of films, popular and independent have emerged in Turkish cinema. This was partly because particular themes were seen from various perspectives in different films in cinema. These two film types show differences in the way violence is

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displayed. In the indepentent films, directors presented violence-related stories of people, particularly those living in metropolitan cities. There was cinematographic success in the way these films were able to reflect the violent atmosphere of the films, however, the problem was that they presented violence as real, ordinary, aesthetic, normal and acceptable.

In conclusion, it can be said that violence has always been present in Turkish cinema since the early 2000s, both in popular and independent films.

Within the context of the relationship between cinema and violence, Gerbner's concept of "happy violence" should be given a consideration. Violence, which is almost in every narrative, from mythology to innocent tales to stories, is legitimized by the use of cultural symbols in an attempt to diminish tragic endings. Therefore, "happy violence", which is rapid, stylish, exciting, painless and effective, is designed to avoid upsetting the audience, while bringing a happy ending (Gerbner et al., 1999, p. 344). In other words, when presented without pain and punishment, which are typical characteristics of true violence, violent scenes become sterilized and more acceptable. For example, in movies, all problems can be solved with violence, which often occurs without serious consequences (Stossel, 1997). This means that violence, when left unpunished or legitimized by being displayed as an ordinary fact of life, has an impact on the audience, orienting it to accept violence normal in real life.

Materials and Methods

The current study aimed to investigate whether watching a film with violent content would have any influence on the participants' perception of emotion. To this end, the participants rated a word list containing positive, negative and neutral words before and after watching a violent film titled "*In the Bar*"[1] (2006) by Serdar Akar. The film involves an intense display of various forms of violence such as sexual, physical, emotional, verbal and symbolic violence. In the film, violence is portrayed as both an element of crime and a method to eliminate it. The fact that characters who use violence throughout the film are violently punished at the end of the film serves as a catharsis for the the audience. We hypothesized that the film content would have an impact on the audience's emotional perception and thus, their ratings for negative emotion words would increase in the post-ratings as compared to pre-ratings. Also, the film was expected to influence the ratings of positive and neutral words, and lead to a decline in the post-ratings.

The film is about the gratuitous violence that a group of young friends, aged between 18 and 25, are exposed to one night in Istanbul. These young people (named Nail, Nil, TGG, Aynur, Aliş, Sevgi, Pelin and Cenk) live a peaceful and happy life. Being young and hopeful, they are firmly attached to life although each has their own life struggles and problems that they try to solve. While returning home after drinking their last beer at the bar one night, these young

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people, who have future plans such as marriage, graduation from university, and establishing a happy life, become the subjects of violence. Targeted by a group of five armed man aged between 20 and 45, they are beaten, tortured and raped until the morning, with their hands and feet tied and mouths covered. Their kidnappers, without any clear purpose, are determined to take revenge on these innocent young people for everything they perceive was missing in their own lives.

The film deals with human relations in a restricted area, in this case, a bar, and focuses on the sharp contrast between insiders and outsiders. The events taking place inside are shaped by the intervention of outsiders, who trigger violence and disrupt the order of the insiders. The film presents the outsiders as the source of violence by positioning them as the "other", and in this way, builds tension (Erkılıç & Erkılıç 2013, p. 216).

The characters from outside are seen as "others" in the film, and consist of men who, in a sense, have failed to become individuals, and have been ousted from the society they live in, and are almost objects of it. They belong to lower class, work in menial jobs, and have no education. They want to escape their own little worlds and join the outside world, which they only see from a distance. However, in any attempt they make to be a part of that world, they are reminded that they do not belong. Failing to establish their own character and being imprisoned

in their own lives, they are an example of masculinity relegated as secondary, according to R. W. Connell's theory. This theory holds that hegemonic masculinity provides a powerful framework to explain how the concept of masculinity is structured within society, and how it contributes to the hierarchical organization of masculinity and femininity (2002, p. 142).

Applying this theory to the film In the Bar, it can be understood that violence can be described not only as individual perversion or pathological behavior, but also as the cultural codes of gender. The narrative structure of the film features two opposing forms of masculinity: On the one hand, there are urban, educated, relatively self-confident young men who are close to the hegemonic masculinity model with their heteronormative relationships; on the other hand, there are lower-class male characters who will always view this model from the outside, who can never reach it or be part of it. The extreme violence that Selim and his friends use against the younger men, therefore, is not only the result of momentary anger, but also an outburst of their sense of being excluded, humiliated and deprived by this hegemonic masculinity. As Connell points out, hegemonic masculinity leads to the domination not only of women but also of different forms of masculinity. In the film In the Bar, Selim complains bitterly that he is not allowed into the bar, that he is humiliated because of "not being like the others". His complaint that he would be stopped by the "jerk" at the door if he were to try to go into that bar again reveals his sense of isolation and lays bare the cultural norms that shape

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masculinity. Here, Selim sees the bar as the desired life, and its occupants as possessing the type of masculinity that he can never attain. Bourdieu (2001, p. 29) defines masculinity is something that other men recognize and approve of. In In the Bar, Selim finds no approval either from the urban men or the system as a whole. For this reason, he feels compelled to create his own space where he can establish his power through violence. For example, he resorts to violence after Nail scores a goal on the football field, suggesting that it is at the point where power is shaken that violence comes into play. This complies with Arendt's (1970, p. 56) findings on the violence-power relationship.

The sexual violence applied in the later scenes is directed at women's "physical and symbolic belonging to the other". In particular, Nil's virginity becomes increasingly evident throughout the narrative, clearly indicating the notion of male ownership over the female body. Selim's rape of Nil is not only an act of violence; it is also an attempt to damage the "other's" masculinity, to dominate him, and to compensate for his own "deficient" masculinity. According to Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, men constantly seek approval in their own hierarchy, and this is seen in the dialogues between Selim and his friends, as they create an environment in which they judge each other based on their masculinity, and constantly try to establish a hierarchy of power. Selim's taunts to his friends, such as "you can't do anything",

or his threat to Nil, "your wife is mine", indicate a process in which masculinity must be constantly re-established, often through violence.

In the film In The Bar, Kaufman's triad of violence can also be directly observed, i.e., sexual and physical violence directed at women, conflict between men leading to humiliation, and at the level of the individual man or woman, the sense of complicity and inner collapse, particularly seen in the character of the Apprentice. These themes intertwine in the narrative structure of the film, which positions violence not only an action, but also a form of identity construction. The film also shows that masculinity is not only an identity, but it is also a fragile position, which is dependent upon the individual's own behaviour, and open to threats. Any crisis in the masculine subject requires him to confront not only women, but also his own social class and cultural position. The violence inflicted on criminals in prison at the end of the film is presented as a form of "deserved" revenge by the hegemonic masculinity system, however, it in fact points to the existence of a cycle in which violence itself is reproduced. On the one hand, the audience is encouraged to identify with the victim, while on the other hand, by applauding the perpetrator punishment's, thus, they are participating indirectly in the reestablishment of the hegemonic order. In this context, the film In The Bar is not only a "narrator of violence", but also a narrative of a masculinity shaped by the crisis of hegemonic masculinity, and the reaction to this crisis with violence. By interweaving the cultural, socio-

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economic and sexual dimensions of masculinity, the film reveals the effects of male domination on both women and men.

The film is one of the most striking depictions of the violence caused by the social "failure" to produce masculinity. Men who cannot establish legitimate masculine identities in urban life are dragged into a competition for masculinity, leading them to be caught up in a cycle of shame, and resorting, in turn, to more violence as they fail to fulfil the expected masculine ideals. This cycle descends into a never-ending spiral of violence spreading in all directions. Therefore, the rape scene should be read not only as an act of physical violence, but also as a cinematic representation of masculine domination and hegemonic masculinity.

In his sexual assault on Nil, the character Selim constructs masculinity through power and control, in a manner consistent with Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity. The scene become more than a rape, as it is romanticized through the camera's gaze, silence, and the characters' facial expressions, bringing the audience emotionally closer to the attacker. Throughout the film, sexual violence and rape are shown from the male perspective. A grievous assault on a woman's body and soul, this act is conveyed from the rapist's perspective rather than the woman's, and so prevents the audience from feeling the victim's pain, instead involving them in the attacker's pleasure; as Mulvey and many feminist theorists have noted,

the violence contained in the gaze in cinema often results in rape or murder, which makes the cinematic construction of the male perspective extremely disturbing. According to Oskay, in some pornographic films, sexual excitement and satisfaction are provided entirely through the display of violence; the deliberate omission of acts related to sexual intercourse after scenes of rape or sexual violence (Oskay, 2000, p. 359) is designed to promote viewers' fantasies, and makes women seem like a tool that men can treat as they wish, for sexual satisfaction. Watching the display of violence against women opens the way to the viewer's own use of violence and acts as a form of preparation for this behavior in the future (Oskay, 2000, p. 368). The film, In The Bar, aims to evoke similar emotions via violent rape scenes.

The female characters in the film are depicted as university-educated individuals between the ages of 18-25 from middle-upper income families, who have active social lives involving nightlife and alcohol. Most of them are sexually experienced, which was rare in Turkey when the film was released. These women, who live ordinary lives, are labeled as "immoral" or "whores" when viewed from the perspective of lower socio-economic class men. Their relaxed and casual behavior is open to abuse by men, who see them as "women willing to have sex with anyone they meet", which leads to the legitimization of humiliation, profanity, and even rape. The male characters in the film become aggressive when their own masculinity is questioned, and they tend to use language that objectifies women and normalizes violence. This is

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emphasized in the rape scene, where the subjective shooting angle shows the scene through the eyes of the rapist, the torturer, encouraging our enjoyment and our empathy with him (Smelik, 1998, p. 84).

The scenes of violence in the film do not create any sense of purification. On the contrary, when violence is presented as being acceptable, the audience perceived it as legitimate (Oskay, 2000, p. 376). The hostility felt towards women in particular and towards all "others" in general has spread to daily and ordinary experiences and is perceived as normal, with no questioning of this anger and violence. Without challenges to either overt or covert violence, ordinary people are intimidated and threatened (Akbal Süalp, 2005, p. 8).

As Abisel (2000, pp. 204-205) points out, there is a noticeable tendency to naturalize and legitimize violence in cinema narratives. The analyses reveal that violence is presented as normal part of daily life in these films, and is thus accepted by the audience. This is especially true in representations in which female characters are forced to live in a world under constant threat, and in which insecurity contributes to normalizing violence. One of the most serious effects of this form of representation is the possibility of reinforcing the fears of female audiences about public space and restricting their social mobility. The presentation of violence in a normalized manner can cause viewers to become desensitized to real-world violence, as

they become more accustomed to such behavior over time.

The film In The Bar claims to narrate violence, but, in fact, it produces it and the viewer is expected to enjoy it (Akbal Süalp, 2009, pp. 133-134). The phenomenon of violence in the film is addressed from the perspective of the aggressors rather than from that of the victims, prompting the viewer to focus on the psychological and social motivations of the perpetrator. An interesting paradox emerges in the finale of the film: Justice, which the court system cannot provide, is established through individuals taking revenge into their own hands, that is, by creating a new cycle of violence. While this situation reflects a vicious circle feeding more and more violence, it also shows that the distrust in the justice system pushes individuals to provide their "own justice". In this way, the film raises the following important question: Can violence ever become a legitimate tool to achieve justice? Using this argument, perpetrators are able to justify their behaviour to themselves in the final scenes, and this position offers a striking criticism of normalizing violence in society.

Participants

Forty participants took part in the experiment. They were students recruited at a private university in İzmir, Turkey. Their field of study was radio and television programming, and they were given the rating task as part of their in-class activity. All were matched for age and university degree. None reported any neurological or psychological health problem. They were

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given no bonus or extra credit for their participation. The Ethical Committe gave approval for the study.

Stimuli and Procedure

The experiment consisted of two phases: The first phase involved rating emotion words. In the second phase, which took place a week later, the participants first watched a movie with a violent content before rating the same word list.

The word list consisted of a total of sixty words (20 positive, 20 negative and 20 neutral). They were taken from Bradley and Lang's (1999) *Affective Norms for English Words*, and were translated into Turkish by the researchers. The participants were asked to rate the words on a 5-point Likert Scale according to their valence such that 5 indicated positive, 3 neutral and 1 negative valence. The rating was performed in two separate sessions (with a one-week interval), one before watching the film and another one after watching it. Following the first rating session, the participants watched a film directed by a famous Turkish director, Serdar Akar. The main topic of the film was five violent men's extreme treatment of violence on a group of couples in a bar in Ankara, Turkey. After watching the film, they were given the same word list and were told to rate the words again. We hypothesized that the violent content of the film would influence the participants's perception of emotion words, leading them to change ratings of the words' valence.

The participants completed the sessions at their own pace with no time limit set. Two participants' ratings were found unreliable by the experimenters and discarded. Beforehand, they were given no detailed information regarding the nature of the experiment, but were briefly instructed about what to do and the aim of the study.

Results

We conducted a paired samples t-test to identify any differences in the ratings before and after watching a film with violent content. When the participants' overall ratings were compared in terms of the valence of words on the list, a significant difference was found between pre-and post ratings of words, (t (59) = 2.09, $p=$ .041). However, arousal ratings did not differ before and after watching the film, (t(59) = -.98, $p=$ .333). In order to further examine the effect of valence, one-way ANOVA was performed on the data. Significant difference was found between positive, negative and neutral words when pre- and post rating results were considered (All p's < .001). No significant difference was found between positive and negative words in terms of arousal (All p's> .50).

		Positive words	Negative words	Neutral words
Valence	Pre-rating	4.04 (*std* .61)	2.23 (*std* 2.22)	3.24 (*std* .48)
	Post-rating	3.27 (*std* .47)	1.82 (*std* .27)	2.62 (*std* .41)

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Arousal	Pre-rating	4.03 (*std* .60)	2.64 (*std* .43)	3.20 (*std* .47)
	Post-rating	3.62 (*std* .33)	3.48 (*std* .23)	3.09 (*std* .37)

*Table 1:*Pre-and Post-ratings for Emotion and Neutral Words

Discussion

Violence, despite being regarded as a phenomenon to be avoided either as a victim or a perpetrator, has become a part of human history. It has been implemented in a variety of ways and has influenced human communities differently. Its effect on human psychology, and how it is used to manipulate humans has become the topic of extensive research. Similarly, how emotions permeate human life in every respect has attracted the attention of many disciplines. This study taps into the close interaction between violence and perception of emotion. To reveal this relationship, we investigated how exposure to violent scenes would modulate perception of emotional content of words. First, the participants completed a rating task with positive and negative words on a Likert Scale. A week later, they watched a film with violent content and re-rated the same words. We hypothesized that watching violent scenes would impact their perception of emotion words, particularly positive words, and lead to lower ratings.

A comparison of the pre- and post-tests revealed that valence ratings were different while arousal ratings remained the same across two sessions, partially confirming our hypothesis.

These results provide evidence that the participants' perception of emotion words has altered after viewing a film with violent content.

In our study regarding the phase before they watched the violent film, the participants rated positive words the highest on the scale, followed by neutral words, while negative words were rated as the lowest. This result is consistent with the literature and is attributed to our inherent tendency to approach positive stimuli as it fosters happiness and well-being, and to avoid potentially life-threatening negative stimuli. This notion has found considerable support in the literature. Positive stimuli, be they verbal (Kissler and Koessler, 2011) or nonverbal (Schacht and Sommer, 2009), generally have priority in processing, while negative stimuli, despite catching immediate attention, are processed slower in case of threatening content. Also established in the literature is the principle that both positive and negative emotions play a substantial role in guiding our decisions about everyday experiences. Known as *affect-as-information hypothesis* (Clore et al., 2001), an experience with emotional stimuli is associated with a particular affective value, and coded in the memory accordingly, guiding us in the future into making certain decisions when we encounter similar experiences. In support of this view, Bhalla and Proffitt (1999), asked participants to estimate the height of a hill, and found that participants' estimations of the height of a hill was substatially influenced by the weight they carried. Similarly, in the absence of a physical difficulty as in Bhalla and Proffitt's study,

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positive and negative mood may make a difference in participants' responses to positive or negative words, such that positive mood leads to make positive judgements while in negative mood people are more likely to evaluate things negatively. In Pratt and Kelly (2008) study, for example, word ratings differed according to the participants' mood induced by the experimenters. When in positive mood, they rated words as more positive and vice versa. Olafson and Ferraro (2001) manipulated the participants' mood using specific types of music, and obtained similar results, confirming mood effects on the participants' decisions. In our study, a similar emotional background (specifically a negative one) was created by exposing the participants to different types of violence in the extreme to see whether their decisions would be manipulated as a consequence. Indeed, the results confirmed our hypothesis such that they rated positive words as less positive, and negative words as more negative. This also applies to changes in the participants' judgements of neutral words as well. The significant correlation between the ratings of different types of words can be taken as evidence for the manipulative power of emotional experiences.

We found no significant difference between the ratings of arousal between pre- and post-tests. We interpret this result as habituation and desensitization caused by recurring violence. A great deal of research puts emphasis on the cathartic effects of venting emotions, particularly

anger and agression. Catharsis from this perspective leads to psychological relief on the part of the performer or the viewer of anger and agression (Bushman, 2002). Thus, individuals may tend to resort to violence in search of relief, which, in turn, either leads to desensitization or legitimization over time. This view can be associated with what Gerbner calls *happy violence* (Gerbner et al., 1999), which was the main theme in the film that was used in our study. According to this view, violence becomes acceptable, as it is used and witnessed until it eventually becomes an accepted feature of life. This may account for the arousal ratings which remained unchanged across the ratings in our study.

Conclusion

A majority of studies in the literature have investigated the impact of violent films on individuals' behavior. Approaching violence from a different view, this study focused on the effects of violence on emotion language perception. The results showed that exposure to violent scenes affected the audience's perception of the emotionality of the words. It is well-established in the literature that emotional content of stimuli, be it verbal or non-verbal, enjoy processing advange, and have a strong influence on our decisions. More specifically, positive emotions broaden our perspective, while negative emotions constrict it. In this study, this view was supported by a comparison of the pre-test and post-test results. More specifically, in the pre-test participants' ratings for positive words were higher than negative and neutral words. In

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the post-test performed after watching the movie, it was observed that mean ratings of positive words decreased significantly. Also, there was a significant decrease in the ratings of negative words, meaning that the participants' perception of emotionality was altered as a result of exposure to film violence. This result was taken as support for the hypotheses of our study.

The findings of this study suggest that violent media consumption can have profound effects not only on behavioral levels but also emotional perceptions of language. Future studies can expand the scope of this relationship by examining the effects of different types of violence (e.g., symbolic, psychological) on emotional perceptions and contribute to a deeper understanding of the effects of violent media experiences on societal and individual levels. In light of these results, it can be concluded that how violence is presented through media should be carefully considered and the potential negative effects of such content on viewers should be minimized.

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ENDNOTES:

[1] Director: Serdar Akar, Writers: Serdar Akar, Volkan Sümbül, Emre Özdür. Producer: Serdar Akar, Alev Gezer. Cinematography: Mehmet Aksin. Music: Selim Demirdelen. Editing: Aziz İmamoğlu. Casting: Harika Uygur.

[2] [Editor's Note: There are relevant studies on violence in Turkish cinema especially against women such as Havuzlu (2001), Erdal Alptekin (2015), Söğüt (2020) and Kazancı (2025).

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