

Investigating Vigilante Films and the Public's Acceptance of Vigilantism



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Introduction

The purpose of this research was to determine if a person's acceptance of vigilante films in an urban setting has an influence on their willingness to engage in vigilante behavior.

Research from a 2015 VideoHound Guide to Films Index suggests that over 1,000 films have been produced with the theme of vengeance.

Research shows that viewers are attracted to media sources containing justice oriented themes.

As a result of this project, I hope to gain insight on the reasoning why people engage in vigilantism.

Vigilantism

Vigilantism is when an individual or group of people engage in behavior as a form of vengeance for a perceived injustice.

Criminological definition of Vigilantism: (six necessary features)
Planning/premeditation, private voluntary agency, autonomous citizenship, use of force, reaction to crime and social deviance, personal and collective security.

Cultural Criminology views films as cultural products that provide insight into shared meaning about crime, justice, and punishment.

Attitudes about vigilantism reflect citizens' trust and confidence in law enforcement

There is an evolved cognitive revenge system that imposes retaliatory costs on an aggressor

Methods & Materials

Surveys will be distributed electronically using Google Forms

Surveys will be anonymous and voluntary

Participants include male students from John Jay College of Criminal Justice

Surveys include questions regarding attitudes towards policing, exposure to vigilante films, attitudes towards vigilante films, and personal experiences with the criminal justice system

Series of vignettes are included in the survey based on real cases with varying degrees of violence

Expecting at least 30 participants

Conclusions

Despite the inability to distribute the revised surveys, the preliminary findings do provide some insight as to each participants exposure to vigilante films, their attitudes towards police, and their decision making when presented with vignettes. It can be seen that all the participants have not really been exposed to vigilante movies, thus the influence on their perceptions and behavior would be insignificant. I expect future results to be different as there will be more participants taking the surveys, which provides further evidence and more variety in responses. I expect more participants to have watched vigilante films and have different perspectives on the effectiveness of the criminal justice system. Overall, the results should change dramatically as the preliminary results did not fulfill the task at hand.

Preliminary Findings

From my major capstone last semester, only 6 participants took the survey. Out of the 6, 4 participants indicated they do not frequently watch vigilante movies while the other two indicated they have "never" or "almost never" watch vigilante films. However, all of the participants except for one approved and were accepting of the actions taken by the vigilante in the films. When asked about attitudes towards police, two participants had negative attitudes while the remaining four had positive attitudes. Lastly, none of the six participants have ever engaged in vigilante behavior.



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