

## The Use of Popular Videos in Treatment

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During the past few years I have seen an increase of the use of popular movies and other professionally produced videos in general treatment. One topic that seems addressed quite often in general practice and talks, appears to be domestic violence. However, certainly we do not hear much about sex offender treatment and the use of video — neither at ATSA conferences nor in its publications. (There has been talk about it on the ATSA list serve, however.) Only once at a CCOSO conference can I recall the showing of such videos -- when I spoke about sex offender treatment as the development of conscience.

Since current and past videos may well offer rich fare that can help us grab the awareness of our clients, I would like to beat the drum again about the issue.

First, of course, there are professional films that have been developed expressly for work with sex offenders. Most often these videos address healing for our own molested clients and for other victims: e.g., Eliana Gil' s Healing Sexual Abuse — the Recovery Process from KCET Video; and Varied Directions International' s Four Men Speak Out On Surviving Child Sexual Abuse. There are also some films on offenders (e.g., Offender-Victim Communication: A Face to Face Session from Safer Society Press and Both Sides of the Coin, again from Varied Directions International.

What I don' t see very often, however, are references to the use of commercially produced dramatic films in sex offender treatment programs. For instance rarely have I heard a presenter talk of the use of the movie, Short Eyes (about a molester in a NYC jail over a weekend — not a pleasant film but poignant and aversive — from Lightning Video, 1985; DVD & VHS). Perhaps this is because when we see commercially produced dramatic movies we do so for recreation of some sort and do not want to be dragging our work around when we relax. Or perhaps movies that are clinically relevant are often too painful to see on a regular basis (e.g., Bastard Out of Carolina) and we avoid them, most especially in our already difficult work settings.

In any case I urge us all to consider using dramatic films and to spread the news about these to each other — perhaps through some CCOSO and/or ATSA mechanism yet to be developed. (The ATSA list-serve is clearly one way to do this and has been used so occasionally, but it does not reach every one of us and can be anecdotal and chatty about films' usefulness.)

To demonstrate a specific relevance and usefulness, I would like to mention two movies that I use consistently to address the issue of the manipulation of victims by offenders.

The first is a Canadian “ sleeper” I came across eons ago entitled, The Bay Boy. (Sadly, I find, it is available only on VHS). The film is a murder mystery starring Keifer Sutherland (when he was an adolescent) wherein his character, Donald, witnesses a murder. A sub-plot in the movie involves an attempt by a priest, visiting his small Canadian hometown, to molest the boy. The priest had recently arrived from the Congo missions. He is introduced to Donald and another boy by the Pastor in the sacristy after they had served Mass. The visitor waxes serious in asking the boys to consider a vocation as a missionary priest. In doing so he uses Donald' s first name. As the two boys left the church later, Donald' s friend wondered aloud to him how the priest knew his name. Naï ve to the core, Donald did not respond. His face went blank. Later in the movie we learn that the priest had done his homework and had asked a nun who taught in the parish school about him.

In a later scene has the priest holds a clearly concocted contest with a bunch of the boys, including Donald, asking questions ever so Catholic and requiring that the lads raise their hands before answering. Guess who consistently gets picked to answer and who wins the prize of visiting Father at his (quite nutty) family' s farm? The priest is self-effacing and says that Donald might not like to make such a visit and is not bound to do so. However, within the Catholic culture of the day, the boy had been presented with a great honor and neither he nor his parents balked at all.

At the end of the first day there, Father tells Donald that he has to share a bed with Father since all the other beds in the house are taken. The scene in bed as the priest leads the talk into the topic of sex and “ showing” love is archetypal. His insensitivity to Donald' s discomfort is as blatant as is his own self-centeredness and his unrelenting

commitment to a clearly sexual goal. Donald avoids molestation and gets out the place the next day with great adroitness.

As Donald is leaving the house to get into the family' s old pickup, Father comes out of the house and calls Donald back to say a few words to the boy. He gives the boy a gift and says, " I hope that you will pray for me." Donald says he will and leaves. The camera focuses on the priest' s blank, dead face. It is a great time to wonder aloud to clients what is going on in the priest' s head — and to get them to speculate about it later.

The next scene shows Donald in the bus taking him home. There is some well sung Gregorian chant in the background while Donald opens the gift and finds a prayer book. He throws it out of the bus' s window while going over a bridge. The camera follows the missal' s fall into the water. The symbolism is not too subtle. The music, the " Tantum ergo" so identified with Catholic religious services, was also in the background in an earlier scene as Donald served Mass said by the priest. The words, " tantum ergo sacramentum," " therefore so great a sacrament," may be seen to refer to Donald' s innocence and his connection with the Church.

It is so clear: the boy' s faith, with which he was so involved before, went into the drink along with the book. With some poignancy I use this video with the Catholic priests I treat — as well, of course, with most other molesters of both boys and girls. The point is that sexual abuse can have spiritual as well as emotional consequences. It is my experience that the priests do not need the point explained to them, however.

Another film that shows a similar process of grooming is The Summer of ' 42 (VHS & DVD). The great thing about using this film is that it is a cultural icon of a boy' s bittersweet first love. With the right coaching/education of clients, it can also be seen as the clear manipulation of a nai ve and willing fifteen year old boy, Hermie, by a beautiful and needy twenty-five year old woman.

The very beginning of the film is a manipulation of the audience itself with romantic and wistful theme music, shots of a simpler, clearer and more innocent way of life along with the intriguing voice-over of Hermie as an adult. It also shows fairly serious aftereffects through the words of Hermie as he reflects on the effect Dorothy, a woman ten years older than he, had on him. Most people, without acute attention, do not hear Hermie' s ambivalence.

Early on in the movie we find that the boy' s friends are clearly aware of his attraction to the older woman. There follows a scene wherein Hermie happens upon her just after she drops a load of groceries. He gallantly and affectedly offers to help — and then ends up carrying a clearly too-heavy load of groceries to the woman' s cottage on the edge of town. The dialog between the two, and her blithe ignorance of the boy' s humorous struggle porting the goods, shows her complete lack awareness of the boy' s youth and gallant affectations. The following conversation in her home can be seen to have more than a few double meanings and certainly qualifies as an effort to use the boy to fill her time and to connect with him. She clearly, during this scene, treated Hermie as a peer (e.g., telling him that she had gotten a long letter from her husband).

Later she meets Hermie while he is standing in line with other teens at a movie theater. She asks him to come over later in the week to help her with some tasks. When he does so, she, in swim attire, ends up having him carry some boxes up a ladder to her attic. This is no Herculean task and might make one wonder what was afoot. At one point she wants to look in the attic, too. Hermie holds the ladder as she climbs up it, the camera showing clearly his interest in certain of her body parts as they pass him by. His wonderment is clearly facilitated by Dorothy' s exhibitionism.

The next poignant scene is when Hermie comes to her house for an evening. He walks in and cannot get an answer as he calls out to Dorothy. He walks over to a table and finds a telegram that reports the death of her husband in the war. The table also has a bottle of liquor on it and a smoking cigarette. Dorothy then comes in, obviously having been crying. She eventually moves closer to him; at her advance they slowly dance a bit and she kisses him.

Then she takes him by the hand to the bedroom and eventually they have sex. There is no talking but Dorothy is clear about what is going to happen. The scene is not especially graphic when it gets sexually serious; the camera pans to the window and its moving curtains. I wonder, however, whether the scene would be shot quite the same way in our

period (of 11165 PC and following.) Afterwards there is again no talking save when Hermie leaves and Dorothy says, " Good Night, Hermie."

He comes back the next day or so and finds the house empty, with a note on the door wishing him the best and that he have no great suffering in his life.

This film is rich in elements of grooming and manipulation, much as The Bay Boy. The catch in The Summer of ' 42 is that it is so memorable a story for so many people. Up front it is the story of one' s first love. It is the tale of seduction that involved a promise of maturity nurtured by need and grief. When I first told friends (and some colleagues) of my approach to the film, " a story of molestation and manipulation," I was accused of being hysterical. Part of a usual, positive and uncritical reaction of so many to the film was that the story is seen, I suppose, as heterosexual and touching, bittersweet. My usual response to such balderdash is to talk of informed consent (which discussion is currently aided by the recent studies of how long it takes for teens' brains to mature). To further stem the tide of outrage here, I wonder aloud what one' s attitude would be if the genders were reversed or if Dorothy were replaced by " Dave" whose behavior with Hermie was identical.

The film is also a story all of us have heard numerous times with many offenders who refuse to see the impact on themselves after such a " sexual experience" and its connection with their offenses. When clients react with this kind of denial, I always wonder to them why any man would tell such a story of his youth. Is it braggadocio? Many of the scenes show him as an inept, bumbling doofus that was in the right place at the right time. Is it to brag about how touching the episode was? Let' s see: Dorothy was wrapped in grief and booze, had ignored his real level of maturity, used him as a distraction, had a smoke after sex, and left him a " Dear John" letter tacked to a door as a farewell. Oh, yes, and by the way, you can see the movie as touching only if you ignore the powerful ambivalence Hermie shows during the opening narration to the film. Such serious cynicism can engender very good discussions and help clients see the point.

Much can be done with the right movie. It can often be a way of confronting serious cognitive distortions about power and manipulation, about informed consent, about a victim' s own thinking errors, trauma and the assumptions our clients have about sexuality and its function and impact. This all can happen while capturing offenders' interest and involvement, hopefully giving them a chance to distance themselves for a while from the defensiveness and fear of already knowing, on some level, that what they did was wrong.