

American Booty

MPAA should change the NC-17 rating for sake of art and ... cash



"I watch, hunched over Christie, panting, as Sabrina lifts her hips repeatedly in Christie's face and then I have to lie back, spent but still hard ... and I close my eyes, my knees weak and shaking.

"... A half hour later I'm hard again. I stand up and walk over to the armoire, where, next to the nail gun, rests a sharpened coat hanger, a rusty butter knife, matches from the Gotham Bar and Grill and a half-smoked cigar; and turning around, naked, erection jutting out in front of me, I hold these items out and explain in a hoarse whisper, 'We're not through yet'..."

— from Bret Easton Ellis' "American Psycho"

The above passage, which has been translated into easily the most controversial movie scene of the 2000 spring season, will never make its way to the big screen. The book is a dark, sardonic tale of a Wall Street raider/serial killer named Patrick Bateman, proud owner of the above-mentioned coat hanger and nail gun.

The scene was trimmed from the film adaptation by director Mary Harron in order to save the movie from the dreaded "NC-17" designation, handed down by the Motion

Picture Association of America, which determines what rating a movie will get in its public release. Instead, the scene lives on the Internet for those few who care to view Harron's uninterrupted vision.

The film's Web site, www.americanpsycho.com, provides the menage-a-trois scene that was originally part of the 97-minute movie, opening April 7 nationwide.

It's a beautiful, telling piece of filmmaking and (though I won't see the entire version for a few weeks) the scene fits the spirit of the book, with Bateman admiring himself in a ceiling mirror, envisioning the threesome as part of an art-porn film.

The MPAA initially gave "American Psycho" a rating of NC-17, more or less a kiss of death to any movie, as the designation has come to symbolize a movie loaded with pornographic material. While NC-17 was created to eliminate the stigma of the X rating, which is inexorably linked with porn even today, the stink of sex still hangs.

In theory, the MPAA can slap a movie with the rating for any number of offenses, such as gruesome violence or particularly potent language. Violence, depicted like never before in "Saving Private Ryan," usually slides. Language nearly forced Neil LaBute's "Your Friends and Neighbors" into the NC-17 rating, though it's not any worse lyrically than most films.

Here's the rub: The MPAA is horribly subjective, more concerned with the spirit of the objectionable material than the objectionable material itself. In "Saving Private Ryan" those were our boys out there getting

their arms blown off. And they were fighting the Nazis. And it was directed by Steven Spielberg, who does not get the NC-17 rating.

In "The General's Daughter" a dead woman spends a good deal of time naked and tied to stakes out in the middle of a military base. And that was OK because it was a symbolic reference to her rape, which we see later in the movie.

"American Psycho" carries with it no patriotic message, no backdoor paean to the poor treatment of women.

The MPAA objected to the threesome because it's particularly narcissistic and without love. Curiously, the violence in the film, which has been toned down from the book, wasn't an issue.

It's an objection in total contrast to the Tom Cruise/Nicole Kidman scene in "Eyes Wide Shut," which featured a mirror, as well. MPAA said OK to that scene, maybe because Cruise and Kidman were married. So no two movies are judged the same.

Of course "Eyes Wide Shut" had NC-17 problems of its own: A high-brow orgy required computer effects to mask over some exposed genitalia to avoid the rating.

Had he lived, director Stanley Kubrick would have accepted the rating just to keep his vision intact. With Kubrick's clout, he probably could have kept it. His distributor, Warner Bros., also had the money to take a loss.

Harron doesn't have that reputation, and the movie's distributor, Lions' Gate, can't afford to have "American Psycho" tank. So it ends

up grouped in the same category as "Romeo Must Die."

Of course it's a farce that either movie gets an R rating. Under current restrictions, a 12-year old, as long as he's accompanied by his 18-year-old sibling, could see any R-rated movie. "American Psycho" is as adult a film as they come; "Eyes Wide Shut" is the same.

In fact, no children should see those films, under any circumstances — not because it isn't suitable, but there just isn't much for them to get out of it. Film is supposed to go beyond the superficial image of Tom and Nicole grinding away.

Filmmakers ought to have means of communicating their deeper significance without fear of the dreaded porn rating, with which the public equates NC-17.

This is not a battle over censorship. It is a battle over money. So the rating name has to change. Or a new rating has to be discovered.

Now I understand what an overabundance of ratings does, and how meaningless it's been in the television industry. But the problem with the NC-17 rating is the NC: No children. And it hurts creativity. The idea of the rating simply is offered in the wrong direction. Consider an adult rating or the "A" designation.

The NC-17 rating carries with it the idea that if a child were to catch a glimpse of it by accident, he or she would be irrevocably scarred. An adult rating speaks more plainly to what the film really is: adult in theme, adult in content, adult in spirit.

It's the same idea as the NC-17 rating, but with different language

and different execution. In marketing, it makes all the difference, which is what the movie business is about when it comes to getting a film made. Sad, yes, but true.

If Lions' Gate could guarantee a good dollar showing on "American Psycho" with the NC-17 rating, it wouldn't cut it down to an R. An adult rating makes the movie seem less a gynecological loop and more a film that embodies ideas and concepts critical to and for contemporary life.

There is, of course, the idea that anyone should see anything, which is a parent's right to decide, I suppose. But there'd be little point in a 10-year-old's seeing "Eyes Wide Shut," nor would it do him any good.

Innocence is given far too unfair a rap in today's world. But so are movies. Even if "Psycho" had kept the clip and stayed at NC-17, no one would convince me it even approaches the visceral nature of Ellis' words.

If you want to read the entire passage on which the edited movie scene is based, go ahead and start on page 173 of the book.

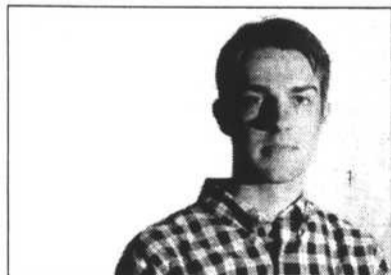
While you read, know this: Any child of any reasonable age could walk into Barnes & Noble and pick a copy. We don't legislate man's imagination in the bookstore. Film, a medium of art, deserves the same fair shake, at least more than it gets now.

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Queen of class

Nebraskan on MTV's 'Springer Break' makes UNL proud despite loss



"Tony, why didn't we see you showing off your washboard abs and perfect butt on MTV's 'Springer Break?'"

I have been overwhelmed with questions like that since last weekend when MTV did its annual spring break coverage from across the globe. The answer is simple: I didn't go anywhere for spring break. Luckily, another beautiful student represented the University of Nebraska-Lincoln on "Springer Break: King and Queen."

For those of you who haven't caught the show, couples compete for the crown by doing a variety of exciting tasks. Jerry Springer was the show's host, and as if that weren't reason enough to watch, the show has couples exchanging swimsuits in a VW Bug, and last year the finalists had to sport a whipped cream bikini.

I was eager to see how MTV could top past years as I settled in to my La-Z-Boy, with my Pecan Sandies in one hand and a Colt 45 in the other.

Watching "Springer Break" this year became more personal for me the moment Jenni walked onstage. When Jerry announced she was from the University of Nebraska, I did what I do whenever I'm supporting a Husker: I put on my oversized red foam cowboy

hat and red overalls and yelled my support at the TV. She did not disappoint.

Her first test basically was to shake her butt and get audience support. She advanced. Her next test would be to find her partner while blindfolded. She advanced.

In the "Wet Dream" competition (when you put MTV and Jerry Springer together, don't expect subtle sexual innuendo) she and her partner had to jump in a kiddie pool and bathe each other. The couple with the weakest audience applause would be eliminated.

She advanced, but not without injury. Those of you who saw it know what I'm talking about. Jenni got kicked in the face by her partner. Not to worry: Jenni tells me they were both drunk, and she didn't feel a thing.

Before I go any further explaining her television appearance, let's get to know "that girl from Nebraska" a little better. Her name is Jenni Eitzman and she is a 22-year-old fashion merchandising major from Scottsbluff. She works at Hooters.

She broke up with her boyfriend after she got back from break but swears it had nothing to do with the appearance on the program. Her parents haven't seen the show yet, but she's giving them the tape for Easter. When asked if she ever would date a DN columnist she said, "It depends." I'll take that as a yes! (Jenni: Now that you've seen the picture, well, you know my number.)

She went down to Cancun with friends and simply went to the audition to be on the show. She had her picture taken and filled out a questionnaire. At

the final audition there were 30 guys and 12 girls. They paired up, danced and she made the cut.

Stakes were high in the final round: Three couples would be eliminated after the first competition. She was instructed to punish her partner for being a "royal pain in the ass." Jenni spanked him a couple times, there was some confusion, and then he kissed her. It did not go over well with the crowd — they got booed and eliminated.

Don't blame that one on Jenni; blame it on the show's producers. They told the couple to do that to spice up the show for the finals, but it backfired. Jenni was not upset, but actually relieved, and that's why we love her. She left the stage with her dignity, while the winner paraded around in nothing but whipped cream.

Jenni doesn't think she could've done it, and as much as I would've enjoyed watching her try, I'm glad she didn't. She was the classiest contestant, and Nebraska can be proud. A hot Nebraska woman hasn't seen that much national TV exposure since Eric Crouch's mom was cheering in Memorial Stadium.

Jenni left the show with her pride, a picture with Springer and, in her words, a "crappy tie-dyed MTV T-shirt." She has no regrets and a great story to tell her, or possibly our, children. Some girl from Omaha flashed her breasts and won on a different MTV show, but that's cheap. Jenni may not have won, but in the hearts of all Nebraskans she'll always be our queen of spring break.



Megan Cody/DN

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