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*Faculty Publications*

GEORGE GERBNER

*The Film Hero: A Cross-Cultural Study*

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## Preface

THIS IS A REPORT of the first international study of feature film content, conducted by analysts of six countries. Such a cooperative study was first proposed by Professors Georges Friedmann and Edgar Morin at the International Sociological Association conference in Moscow in 1958. The methodology and instrumentation were developed under their direction the following year at the Centre d'Études des Communications de Masse, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Études, in Paris. The procedures were discussed and revised through a series of conferences attended by the study directors of the participating national teams. The analyses were conducted between 1960 and 1963. The final meetings among analysts dealing with some additions to the study, treatment of data, and interpretations of results took place in Sestri Levante, Italy, in June, 1962, and in Evian, France, in August, 1966.

Each national team was responsible for recruiting and training its own analysts along lines laid down at the international meetings, conducting its own study and sharing the results with all other teams. This report is based on data received by the U.S. team and processed on the IBM 7090 computer.

The manual used in the analysis was a 115-page document containing 73 questions about each film and 134 questions about each principal character ("film hero"). A report of the findings must necessarily be selective. Relevance to dimensions considered significant, internal consistency and comparability across countries were the major bases for selecting findings to be reported here.

Although the purpose of this report is to present the inter-

national data with a minimum of interpretation from other sources, and thus to permit a variety of interpretations by the other teams, the report in its present form has not been reviewed by the international collaborators and must be considered as representing the views of the U.S. investigators.

The project was made possible through the sponsorship and grant support of UNESCO, the International Sociological Association and the National Science Foundation. The active participation and sustained interest of the national teams of analysts was, of course instrumental to its completion. In addition to the initiators, credit for directing the analyses reported here goes to Professor Claude Bremond (France), Professor Tulio Seppilli (Italy), Professor Bajic Baja (Yugoslavia), Professor Kazimierz Zygulski (Poland), Professors Ludvik Svoboda and Jaromir Kucera (Czechoslovakia) and their associates. The Institute of Communications Research, University of Illinois, and the Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania, provided space, facilities and institutional support. Mrs. Marjorie Collens and Dr. Wendell Shackelford gave able assistance in conducting the U.S. analysis and in processing the international data. A large group of analysts and assistants contributed to the study.

The development of smooth cooperation and cordial relationships among communications researchers East and West was one outcome of this project. That alone has made the study worthwhile.

## Introduction\*

THERE IS PROBABLY NO area of social theory and policy which is so widely debated and in which so few decide so much for so many with so little systematic and reliable knowledge about the actual state of affairs as the sphere of cultural production.

Selective tastes and habits of participation limit each of us to risky and often faulty extrapolation about the cultural experience of communities. Fragmentary exposure to cultural "imports" may further distort rather than enhance the development of a comparative perspective. Market studies and audience surveys provide little or no insight into the images of life represented in the vicariously experienced "worlds" of mass-produced cultures. And, finally, even the most perceptive and sophisticated critical judgments based on individual views of selected works, useful as they are for many purposes, cannot encompass systems of messages inherent in large aggregates representing the general flow of cultural production.

Informed theory-building, policy-making and the interpretation of many types of social response require general and comparative indicators of the prevailing climate of the man-made symbolic environment. Such indicators are representative abstractions from the collectively experienced total texture of

\*This introduction in expanded form appears as Chapter 5, "Toward 'Cultural Indicators': The Analysis of Mass Mediated Public Message Systems," in *The Analysis of Communication Content; Developments in Scientific Theories and Computer Techniques*, edited by George Gerbner, Ole R. Holsti, Klaus Krippendorff, William J. Paisley and Philip J. Stone (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1969).

messages, relevant to certain investigative purposes. Their development requires 1) a generalized scheme applicable to the investigation of the broadest terms of common cultivation in different cultural communities, and 2) making these terms salient to elements of existence represented in public message systems. Philosophers, historians, anthropologists and others have, of course, addressed themselves to such problems before. But the rise of the institutionalized and corporately managed cultivation of collective consciousness by mass media has given a new urgency and significance to the inquiry.

The term "cultivation" is used to indicate that the primary concern of this study was not with any kind of direct communication "effects" but with the collective context within which, and in response to which, selections and interpretations of messages take place. In that sense, a message (or message system) cultivates consciousness of the terms required for its meaningful perception. Whether I like it or not, or agree or disagree, is another problem; first I must attend to and grasp what it is about. Just how that occurs, how items of information are integrated into given frameworks of cognition, is another problem. Our interest here centers on the fact that any attention and understanding cultivates the terms upon which it is achieved. And to the considerable extent to which these terms are common to large groups, the cultivation of shared terms provides the basis for interaction among people otherwise isolated from each other.

The terms of broadest public interaction are those available in the most widely shared message systems of a culture. Increasingly these are mass-produced message systems. That is why mass media have been called the "agenda-setters" of modern society. They determine what publics will attend to which issues and aspects of life, and in what shared cultural perspectives and common contexts.

The terms "common," "shared," "public" or "collective" cultivation do not necessarily mean consensus. On the contrary, the public recognition of subcultural, class, generational and ideological differences and even conflicts among scattered groups of people require some common awareness and cultivation of the issues, styles and points of divergence that make public contention and contest possible.

But the "cultural revolution" is not only a Chinese slogan. It is also a fact of social life whenever a particular political-industrial order permeates the sphere of public message production. A change in the social bases and economic goals of message mass-production leads, sooner or later, to a transformation of the common symbolic environment that gives public meaning and sense of relevance and significance to human activity.

This study was, therefore, concerned with the overall patterns and boundary conditions within which the processes of individual cognition, message utilization and social interaction occur in different societies. The approach was directed toward answering some general questions about the broadest terms of collective concept-formation given in films as a part of mass-produced public message systems: What perspectives and what choices do they make available to different national communities? With what kinds and proportions of properties and qualities are these choices weighted? What are some underlying structures in these message systems that are not apparent in their separate component units?

What distinguishes the analysis of public, mass-mediated message systems as a social scientific enterprise from other types of observation, commentary or criticism is the attempt to deal comprehensively, systematically and generally—rather than specifically and selectively or *ad hoc*—with problems of collective cultural life. This approach makes no prior assumptions about such conventionally demarcated functions as "information" and "entertainment," or "high culture" and "low culture." Style of expression, quality of representation, artistic excellence or the quality of individual experience associated with selective exposure to and participation in mass-cultural activity are not considered critical variables for this purpose. Informative or entertaining or both; good, bad or indifferent by any standard of quality—these are selective judgments applied to messages quite independently from the social functions they perform in cultivating certain assumptions about life. Conventional and formal judgments applied to selected communications may be irrelevant to the presentation and ordering of what *is*, what is *important* and what is *right* in the context of mass-produced message systems addressed to whole communities.

There is, however, an important difference between the ways "fiction" and "non-fiction" deal with life. Reportage, exposition, explanation, argument—whether based on fact, fancy, opinion or all of these—ordinarily deal with specific aspects of life or thought extracted from total situations. What gives shape, focus and purpose to the "non-fictional" mode of presentation is that it is analytical; it implicitly organizes the universe into classes of subjects and topics, and it devotes primary attention to one or more of these subjects and topics.

The usual purpose of fictional and dramatic modes of presentation is to present situations rather than fragments of knowledge. The focus is on people in action; subjects and topics enter as they become significant to the situations.

From the point of view of the analysis of elements of existence, values and relationships inherent in large message systems, fiction and drama thus offer special opportunities. Here an aspect of life, an area of knowledge, a set of roles, characteristics, values and themes appear imaginatively re-created in their significant associations with total human situations. The requirements that make specific subjects secondary to telling a "good story" make the selection and treatment of those subjects reveal the fabric of assumptions underlying the story-telling process.

The purpose of the analysis, unlike that of critical commentary based on respect for the integrity of selected works, is to extract systems of assumptions and propositions characteristic of the imaginary "worlds" of all stories. In exchange for the dramatic richness of individual works of art, we gain insight into the system of "raw materials" and representational elements of which they are all composed. The study of a system *as system* reveals features, processes and relationships expressed in the whole, but not necessarily in its parts.

The systems of assumptions and propositions found in this study derive from films produced in a limited period of time in the six countries collaborating in the project. The selection of the films was governed by year of production or exhibition regardless of quality or popularity. So, again unlike most literary or dramatic criticism or personal participation and judgment, this analysis focuses on the record of institutional behavior in the cultural field. It examines the dynamics of message-production

characteristic of social systems and the process of image-cultivation in a community rather than in selective individual experience and response.

### *Limitations*

Limited as it was to motion pictures, and to productions representing one or two years of feature film output in each country, the study leaves several important questions for further investigation to explore. One is whether verbally expressed propositions can represent cultural assumptions imbedded in pictorial imagery. This is a basic problem of the "translatability" of codes and modes of communications, or of the extent to which, and the ways in which, the medium is the message.

Another question which only further comparative study can answer is whether films present general cultural propositions or only those of film. A more directly relevant and also unresolved question is whether the analysis of one or two years of film output is primarily a "benchmark" against which trends in subject matter and changes in style might be measured, or whether it reveals deeper structures underlying swift currents of cultural change. Our assumption was that the general composition and structure of elements of existence represented in these message systems are related more to social structure and media organization than to trends in technique or fashions in style, while some specific features, such as subject matter and role distributions, reflect more current cultural tendencies within the same institutional contexts. Again, further and broader comparative studies are needed to resolve these questions.

This was an initial exploratory step toward the construction of general and comparative cultural indicators, subject to many exigencies and limitations, some of which are noted in the next section and elsewhere in this report.

### *Procedures and Samples*

Trained native analysts of the U.S., France, Italy, Yugoslavia, Poland and Czechoslovakia, working under the direction of a social scientist in each country, selected a total of 341 full-

length feature motion pictures and 667 principal characters for detailed analysis. All analysts used the same instruments and coding procedure.

The agreement of two or more analysts (usually at least two out of three) was necessary for coding. On scale items, mean responses of two or more analysts were recorded. After the initial training period and a few practice codings, most of the items included in the analysis lent themselves to unambiguous interpretation and unanimous replies among members of each team.

It must be accounted a weakness of the study, however, that for lack of opportunity between-teams inter-coder reliability was not tested. The U.S. team undertook to secure independent analyses of several films in each country and thus to catch and correct major differences in interpretation and coding among the teams. This procedure led both to the elimination of items that appeared to be subject to different interpretations, and to increased confidence in the remaining results. Nevertheless, levels and standards of recognition and coding may differ on types of items that permit more than one response or that call for judgments of personality or motivation. On these types of items, each team, acting as its own control, establishes a national norm; relative deviations from that norm may be considered more reliable and comparable across countries than absolute differences.

The films selected for analysis were to represent at least one year's production of full-length theatrical motion pictures in each country. Limitations of time and resources and the large number of films produced made it necessary to limit the U.S. and Italian film samples to less than the total production. The United States sample consisted of the first one hundred films exhibited in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, after January 1, 1963. About two-thirds of these films were produced in 1962, and the rest in 1963. The one hundred films amounted to 74 percent of the average annual production for the years 1960-63.

The Italian sample of 60 films represented a random selection of half of all Italian films produced in 1960. The French sample of 80 films contained all that were available, or 98% of French full-length feature films produced in 1960. The Polish sample

of 44 films also contained all those available for analysis, or 96% of the entire Polish film production for both 1960 and 1961, almost evenly distributed between the two years. Czechoslovakia's 33 films and Yugoslavia's 21 films represented all the full-length feature films produced in those countries in 1960. Co-productions (about one-fifth of the French and Italian samples) were classified according to the nationality of the director.

Of the 341 films in which the 667 "film heroes" analyzed acted out their roles, the largest "hero" population was that of U.S. films with 207, and the smallest was that of Yugoslav films with 41. After much discussion of who is a "hero" it was decided to analyze only the leading character or characters in each film who played the most important, individualized and clearly differentiated roles. Although all of them received top billing in the films, analysts reported that 75% of the French, 67% of the Czechoslovak, 63% of the Italian, 57% of the Yugoslav, 41% of the Polish and 40% of the U.S. "heroes" analyzed were played by "famous stars" in their respective countries.

"Hero" is used here simply to stand for principal character, whether heroic or villainous or neither, and whether male or female, except where specifically differentiated.

## The Worlds of Film

THE FABRIC OF COLLECTIVE mass-produced imagery is woven by many hands from many yarns. But the "raw materials" that go into these yarns derive from and reflect cultures and social structures. Certain universal elements of existence, such as time, place and milieu, and some characteristics of storytelling, such as plot, style and outcome, provide the historical and physical setting and the social and fictional "climate" in which the heroes of film come to life. These also cultivate certain assumptions in public imagination about what is likely to take place when, where and how.

### *Past, Present and Future*

The major action of most films takes place in "the present." But such glimpses of the past and visions of the future as different countries present in their films appear to reflect national perspectives and world market conditions.

Table 1 compares the films' time of action by countries and by historical periods. Films set in the decades after World War II dominated the screen time of all countries. Action contemporary with the time of production ("the present") was the rule in more than half of the films of every country except Yugoslavia. Yugoslav films depicted the largest number of war and postwar themes and Italian films devoted the largest share of attention to the distant past. The ancient world (up to about 400 A.D.) provided the setting for 3% of American films, 18% of Italian films and none of the others. The next fifteen centuries were represented by 8% of American films (mostly 18th Century and

TABLE I  
Selected Characteristics of Sample Films, in Percents,  
by Country

	United States	France	Italy	Yugoslavia	Poland	Czechoslovakia
<i>Time of Major Action</i>						
Before 1900	11	4	35	—	9	3
1900 to WW II	15	5	2	5	16	9
World War II	7	10	8	38	23	18
After World W II	66	89	68	57	73	70
<i>Cosmopolitanism</i>						
Depicts action						
outside country	46	21	37	14	18	6
Principal character— <sup>a</sup>						
not a national	28	12	37	7	6	—
speaks with accent	16	19	8	10	8	—
an ethnic	1	—	—	5	3	16
<sup>a</sup> With respect to producing country						
<i>Locale</i>						
Urban or suburban	58	73	43	53	41	42
Provincial	16	18	10	19	32	18
Rural	12	14	13	9	14	30
<i>Setting</i>						
Aristocratic or wealthy	30	20	25	—	4	—
Middle class	44	60	27	19	16	9
Common	17	39	18	67	52	79
Poor	6	7	8	5	—	12

post-Civil War), 4% of French films, 17% of Italian films (almost all set in the Middle Ages), 5% of Yugoslav films, 9% of Polish films and 3% of Czechoslovak films.

Italian films (some backed by American money for an international market) reached back to resurrect the legendary past. One out of every three Italian films played in ancient lands, at times of mythological or biblical antiquity or in the middle ages: the times of fabulous "epics."

Only one in every ten American and Polish films, and even fewer of the others, dealt with stories reaching back to the distant past. History in U.S. films began with Cleopatra, jumped to mutinies on the high seas of an imperial era, and then to Indians

and gunfighters back from the Civil War. A Polish "spectacular" dealt with the defeat of the Knights of the Teutonic Order (disguised as missionaries!) at the hands of the allied Polish, Lithuanian, Russian and Czech forces. French historical films portrayed the swashbuckling escapades and intrigues at the courts of Louis XIII, Henry III and Henry IV. A Czech drama related the story of young workers inspired by the Paris commune to organize a desperate strike in the midst of a cholera epidemic in Prague.

As we come to the period within living memory, the selection of time and historical association becomes even more sensitively attuned to current perspectives. World War I, the Twenties and the Thirties each provided the setting for about 5% of American films; together they appeared on the American screen more often than World War II and its aftermath. In European films, the relationships were reversed. World War I backgrounds and themes were fewer in European films than in American. But the shattering decade of World War II, liberation and reconstruction far outnumbered the first 40 years of this century as the setting of European films.

The complexion of the portrayals also tended to be different. The "roaring Twenties," small town nostalgia and big city crime were characteristic of pre-World War II American films. The European films that did go back to the prewar era dwelt more on provincial boredom and bigotry, urban depression and strife and the climate of constricted lives, thwarted aspirations and political repression.

U.S. films dealing with World War II and postwar themes occupied not only a smaller share of total screen time than in the other countries, but, unlike those of Europe, tended to feature personal adventure, comedy and newsreel-type spectacle. The larger proportion of Pacific settings enhanced the exotic flavor of wartime portrayals.

The frequency and complexion of wartime and postwar European films appeared to be related to each country's own efforts to liberate the nation and to set it on a new course, as seen from the vantage point of the late Fifties. Out of common ingredients—the social content of the war, national trauma, the experience of invasion, occupation, collaboration and resistance

and the circumstances of liberation and reconstruction—each film industry composed its own perspective to fit current mood and purpose. The most successful resistance and liberation movement, that of Yugoslavia, inspired the largest number of portrayals in both war and postwar categories, accounting for 63% of all screen time. Poland was second with a combined war-postwar 39%. Although at the time of the study Italian neo-realism had passed its peak, the postwar years that had inspired that movement still provided the setting for 17% of Italian films, a share of attention exceeded only by Yugoslavia.

France led with the highest percentage of contemporary settings. U.S. films followed, including some 5% portraying the Korean War, returning soldiers, and various "cold war" themes. Visions of the future appeared in no more than 3% of the films of any country.

#### *National and Social Setting*

U.S. films depict global interests and cosmopolitan characters on an Americanized canvas. Nearly half portrayed major action abroad. (Table 1). Nearly one out of every three principal characters was either a foreigner or an American abroad; 16% spoke broken English or with an accent. Those that did represent American minorities, however, did not exhibit any ethnic or religious culture other than "American."

Only Italian films compared to those of the U.S. in the frequency of non-national locales and characters. Many of these Italian films, however, depicted ancient sites and legendary figures that pre-date the existence of national states.

Western films generally led those of Eastern Europe in global scope and international flavor. The multi-national states of Eastern Europe, especially Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, portrayed the largest proportion of minority characters as representative of a specific culture or religion within the producing country.

When U.S. films went abroad for a setting, they went to Western Europe (24%), to Asia, Africa and the Pacific (18%), to the Western Hemisphere outside the U.S. (9%) and to Central and Eastern Europe (8%). The French and Italian geographical distributions were similar outside their own territories, except

that 8% of Italian films portrayed U.S. settings. Eastern European films, produced for a more limited market, were the most parochial. However, films produced in Eastern Europe used Western locales more often than films of the West used Eastern European locales.

American films were the most cosmopolitan, but the French were the most metropolitan. Table 1 also shows that seven out of ten French films had an urban or suburban locale (more than half in Paris). Nearly six out of ten U.S. films were placed in big cities or their environs. The big city was the major source of locales in all countries' films. Provincial life was the most prominent in Polish films, and rural settings in Czech films.

French film settings were not only the most contemporary and metropolitan, but also the most glamorous, frivolous, disreputable and mobile. Places of entertainment and amusement were significant to the action in 41 percent of French films, compared to 28 percent of U.S. and 15 percent or less of the other countries' films. Entertainment and the arts provided occupation to one in five French film characters—more than anything else, and more than anywhere else. The underworld—hangouts of gangsters, informers, racketeers—was the habitat of one in ten French film characters, compared to one in sixteen U.S. and Italian film characters and even fewer in the others. Mobile settings were scenes of major action in more than half of all French films, but in only one-third of U.S. and one-seventh or less of other films. On the other hand, an environment which in itself was inhuman, hostile or dangerous to health and well-being figured prominently in only 6% of French films, compared to 8% of U.S., 18% of Czechoslovak, 20% of Italian, 32% of Polish and 33% of Yugoslav films.

The social class character of the settings was determined by explicit portrayal of neighborhood, home or social environment. Table 1 compares percentages of films in each country in which major action occurred in one or more of four clearly identifiable types of environment.

Definitions of "class" were the subject of considerable debate by the various national teams. The Eastern Europeans maintained that conventional class categories referred only to the portrayals of the "old order" in their countries. A compromise

attempted to strike a balance. Income and style of life within a society became the principal criteria, rather than a more technical definition of class, with the category "common" expressing the actual majority life style in each country. In this scheme, therefore, "middle class" becomes weighted toward a business and professional environment.

The Western countries portrayed predominantly upper and middle class settings in their films (with Italy somewhat under-represented in the middle categories because of the large number of historical epics). In the West, U.S. films led in their portrayal of elite settings, and French films in their portrayal of both middle class and common settings.

In the films of Eastern Europe, settings representing the life styles of the majority dominated the portrayals. Table 1 shows the shifting balance of socioeconomic milieu from West to East. It also reveals that the representation of common and poor settings was highest in Czech and lowest in U.S. films. (The mythical setting of many Italian films and the psychological focus of many Polish films reduced the number of clearly delineated locales in the films of those countries.)

#### *Plot, Style and Outcome*

Certain characteristics of plot, style and outcome provide clues to the general dramatic framework in which characters act out their roles. The claim to historical or documentary authenticity may be seen as one indication of style and intention. Explicit claims or clear evidence that historical events play a major role in the story, or that main characters are modeled after individuals known to have existed in real life, provided the basis for the tabulations shown on Table 2. The films of Eastern Europe, and particularly of Czechoslovakia and Poland, claimed most frequently to represent "the way it really happened."

Such a claim would imply seriousness of purpose and a style that strives for credibility. As we can see in the table, problem drama—mostly social and psychological themes treated in a serious manner—characterized nearly half of the films produced in Eastern Europe, less than a third of those made in the West, and only 12% of French films. Tragic plots were also somewhat more frequent in Eastern Europe.

The comic film as a genre, and plot as the source of comedy, were, on the other hand, most numerous in France and Italy. Table 2 compares these percentages. Poland, which had the highest proportion of problem dramas and the second highest incidence of tragic plots, also produced the fewest comedies.

TABLE 2  
*Characteristics of Plot, Style and Outcome, by Country*  
(Percents)

	United States	France	Italy	Yugoslavia	Poland	Czechoslovakia
Claims historical or documentary authenticity	35	34	25	43	95	97
Problem drama	29	12	27	43	52	45
Tragic plot	26	31	30	33	43	48
A comedy	27	49	45	33	18	33
Comic plot	25	31	33	29	14	27
Film ending, clearly						
Happy	48	34	48	33	18	67
Unhappy	15	19	10	24	23	6
Hero's final fate, clearly						
Happy	54	37	53	32	20	72
Unhappy	21	28	22	20	26	9
Final outcome brings hero						
Success in love	41	38	50	12	17	35
Failure	11	30	6	5	12	9
Material success	10	16	45	15	14	7
Failure	7	14	15	7	4	7
Moral success	26	27	20	37	27	73
Failure	3	17	3	—	11	11

The balance of style and plot characteristics within each country's films is also shown in Table 2. U.S. films and plots were balanced between comedy and problem drama, and comic and tragic plots; there was a sprinkling of epics. Comedies predominated in France and Italy, but the source of comedy was not necessarily the plot; comic and tragic plots were about evenly balanced in both countries. (A separate examination of roles showed France and Italy leading with 26% each in the proportion of comic characters, compared with 13% or less in all other

countries.) Italy, of course, had the highest percentage of epic dramas.

In the countries of Eastern Europe, problem dramas outnumbered comedies and tragic plots exceeded comic, with the greatest imbalance of both in Poland.

How did it all end? The answer, as may be seen in Table 2, is most clear-cut—and happy—in Czechoslovakia, followed by the U.S. and Italy. It is the most inconclusive and unhappy in Poland. The large number of Czech films devoted to young people, animals and sports, and the Polish propensity for tackling stark and baffling problems, probably account for these findings.

Despite the comic tone of many French films, only a little more than one-third had clearly happy endings. More French and Polish film characters suffered an unhappy final fate than did those of the other countries.

Some consequences of the outcomes are also indicated in the table. U.S., French and Italian film endings brought success in love and affection to more principal characters than reaped wealth or moral rewards. Moral success, on the other hand, was the dominant consequence of the outcomes of Czechoslovak, Yugoslav and Polish films. (The moral success of Polish characters was no more frequent than that of French and U.S. characters, but Polish success in love was much less frequently indicated.) Material success was a major feature of the outcome only in Italian films.

Failure in love and moral downfall loomed largest in the romantically most turbulent world of French films. The ratio of clear-cut romantic success to failure was most favorable in Italy, the U.S. Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, and the least favorable in France and Poland. In the latter two countries' films, the prospect of moral success outweighed the chance of moral failure by only 27 to 17 and 27 to 11 percent respectively; no other countries' films showed such a delicate balance of moral risks. Failure in U.S. films, when it befell a major character, was most likely to be romantic, secondarily material and rarely moral. In Italian films, failure led more often to loss of fortune or possessions than to romantic or moral downfall. And Polish and Czech film characters suffered both romantic and moral failure in about the same proportion.

## The Heroes of Film

THE HEROES OF THESE "WORLDS" of film—those who played the leading and most clearly differentiated roles, whether hero or villain, male or female—reflected the dramatic structure of the stories. Lone (and primarily male) heroes came from about half of the Italian films. Pairs of male heroes came from one out of four U.S. and one out of five Yugoslav and Czechoslovak films. More than two heroines came from nearly half of all French films.

Two principal characters, one male and one female, were selected from 31% of U.S., 22% of French, 20% of Italian, 29% of Yugoslav and Polish, and 24% of Czechoslovak films. These patterns of selection suggest that the populations analyzed may represent not only different dramatic structures but also varying social relationships and personality types on whom attention is focused.

We have already noted that even though nearly half of all U.S. films depicted action abroad, nearly three-quarters of the leads played Americans. Except for Italian films, in which myth and history confounded nationality, native heroes outnumbered foreign locales by margins similar to or greater than that of U.S. films.

Minority cultures were represented by characteristics other than foreign or regional accents in 16% of Czechoslovak and 5% of Yugoslav but few or none of the other films. Non-whites of all nationalities comprised 7% of U.S., 5% of Italian and few or none of other film leads.

### *Male and Female; Young and Old*

The world of popular fiction and drama is a man's world. Active and powerful roles are usually male roles. Romantic

and domestic plot requirements generally determine the size and character of the female population. When such requirements are central to the action, more female characters appear in leading roles.

Table 3 shows the percents of male and female leads in each country's films. The ratio of the sexes favors men by different margins. Films with the highest number of romantic, marital and domestic entanglements—the French—provided leading roles for the largest percentage of women. (Men still led six to four.) Downbeat love, broken romance, stories of inner struggle made Polish films second in percent of female characters. Tales of war and adventure reduced the female lead population of Italian, Yugoslav and Czechoslovak films to about two for every eight men. A more even mix of these elements left the U.S. ratio of sexes about two males for every woman.

The active male in the prime of life is the hero of most of these tales. The prime of life in the world of films is the age of youthful independence, capable of adult exploits but relatively free from family responsibility. As we see in Table 3, the majority of leading characters in all countries was under 30. Children appeared in leading roles in a high proportion of Czechoslovak films. Young adults numbered almost half of all French leads.

### *Social status—West and East*

*West.* Only when social status was clearly delineated was a character assigned to a class. "Top leadership" included men and women of extreme wealth, nobility or hereditary positions and power. This made Italian and French films lead in the top category, as may be seen in Table 3. The upper-middle class elite was composed mostly of persons of acquired wealth or power, most prominent in French and U.S. films. Middle class status included professionals and the intelligentsia, most numerous in the West in U.S., Italian and French films, in that order. Lower class, service and physical labor leading characters numbered more than one-third of Italian, about one-fourth of French and one-tenth of U.S. film characters. The four-way status distribution, then, bulged in the middle two categories in U.S. films, in the top two categories (with a substantial number at

TABLE 3  
 Characteristics of Selected Leading Characters  
 (Percents)

	United States	France	Italy	Yugoslavia	Poland	Czechoslovakia
Male	67	59	79	78	68	84
Children	9	2	1	2	3	23
Adolescents	13	6	18	19	14	19
Young adults (under 30)	42	48	41	41	35	19
Total under 30	64	56	60	63	52	62
Aristocratic, top leadership elite	11	28	29	—	15	1
Upper middle class political and cultural elite	25	28	8	27	22	3
Middle class professional, intelligentsia	27	17	21	46	53	3
Lower middle class, workers, peasants, laborers	10	23	37	—	36	15
<i>Education:</i>						
Higher	12	11	8	12	33	16
Secondary	5	8	8	29	29	31
Primary	4	13	22	29	30	43
(where it could be determined)						
<i>Occupation:</i>						
Entertainment and the arts	18	22	12	5	8	4
Military	12	3	10	10	6	—
Professional	12	7	8	10	8	8
Commerce and industry	7	13	4	7	3	10
Housewives	7	—	—	5	—	—
Government (non-military)	6	8	9	7	8	12
Agriculture	5	3	13	—	11	11
Illegal activities	5	10	14	2	3	—
Students	4	10	4	24	20	26
Laborers	3	3	7	10	9	24

the bottom) in French films, and in the top and bottom categories in Italian films.

*East.* The analysis of social status in the Eastern European countries was confounded by different measures applied to repre-

sentatives of the "old order" and those of the new "classless society." The Yugoslav analysts solved the problem by classifying those with measurable incomes or clear status (73% of all characters) into two categories, showing 27% in the higher and 46% in the lower group. The Czechoslovak analysts assigned mainly representatives of the "old classes" to the four-way scheme, with workers and peasants most numerous; 85 percent of Czechoslovak film characters (not shown in the table) were simply termed "classless."

Polish analysts classified fictional characters two ways. These were combined in Table 3 into the single four-way scheme for comparative purposes. However, a separate account of each might be indicative of the two standards of social status in Eastern European films.

The "old order" was represented by 27% of all Polish leading film characters. Of these 15% were at the top, and 3% in the upper middle, 5% in the middle (professional, intellectuals, etc.), and 12% at the bottom. The "classless" classification system showed the "cultural, intellectual and power elite" represented by 19% (included in the upper-middle elite of Table 3), "members of the intelligentsia" 48% (included in the third category in the table), and workers and peasants with 24% (included in the bottom category). The percents total more than 100 because some characters appeared in more than one class role.

So, the "old order" in Polish films, unlike in those of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, portrayed the ruling classes and the proletariat in nearly equal proportions, reflecting the greater Polish emphasis on historical themes. Films of the "new" Poland featured many "intellectuals" in both elite and middle categories. The overall status distribution bulged in the middle and lower categories.

#### *Education and Occupation*

Table 3 also shows the percent of characters identified as having primary, secondary or technical, or higher education. Relatively few U.S. and Western European films made explicit

reference to the education of leading characters. When education was indicated, college or university backgrounds dominated in U.S. films. The proportion of Western film characters shown as having received only secondary or primary education paralleled the proportion of middle and lower class representation we have already seen.

Education generally played a significant role more frequently in Eastern European plots and characterizations. Polish films especially exhibited the intellectual status bestowed upon leading characters by showing the largest proportion of them—one in three—as having higher education. As we shall see later, the favorite occupation of Eastern European film characters was being a student.

What—if anything—do heroes and villains of the worlds of film do for a living? “Men and women of leisure” were the most numerous in French and American films, numbering one in five and one in six leading characters, respectively. Italian film characters living comfortably with no visible means of support were one in ten and Eastern Europeans one in sixteen or less.

The choice of occupation—and the significance of work—represent important departures in story-telling and characterization. Table 3 shows the percent of principal characters in each of the ten most frequent screen occupations in each country.

Half of all U.S. movie leads were in show business (entertainment and the arts), the military, the professions and commerce. French film characters were mostly in entertainment and the arts, and in business—both legal and illegal—but rarely in the military. Italian heroes of many film epics rebelled and robbed, tilled the land, entertained, fought and ruled or served the state.

In the films of Eastern Europe, the dominant hero type was first and foremost a student. In Yugoslav films he also fought with the partisans, pursued a profession and worked in a factory. In Polish and Czech films the majority studied, labored in factory or field and worked in professions, the government or the arts.

Housewives as such were featured in the top five occupations only in U.S. films. These included mostly domestic dramas, comedies and an exposé of the aberrations of a group of suburban women. Workers were, of course, most numerous in the films of Eastern Europe and ranked last in the U.S. Farmers, however,

appeared more often in Italian than in Polish or Czechoslovak films, and rarely or not at all in the others.

Students, as we have noted, ranked highest of all occupations in each of the countries of Eastern Europe. Their numbers ranged from one in every four Czechoslovak to one in every ten Polish and Yugoslav screen characters. Students ranked fourth in the films of France, and next to the last (above laborers) in the U.S. Although, as we have seen, about one in five major U.S. characters were children or adolescents—and higher education figured in the characterization of more than one in ten—only one in 26 appeared as a student.

Heroes and Heroines

The composite personality profile of U.S. film heroes may be seen on Figure 1. As a whole, they stood out most in being *bold, attractive, clean, intuitive* rather than *logical, emotional and unusual*. Male heroes differed most from feminine leads in the sex-linked traits of being more *masculine, tough, tall and rational*, not as *good, sensitive, emotional or young*.

The over-all Italian personality profile was influenced by the fact that film heroines comprised only 21 percent of the lead population, compared to 32 percent in U.S. films. Therefore, "masculinity" was a more outstanding composite trait than in

Personality Traits

THE RECORDING of selected characteristics of film heroes on scales indicating direction and intensity was decided on late in the course of the analysis and could be carried out in three countries only. Nevertheless, even this incomplete personality analysis sheds some comparative light on the composite personality structures of various film hero groups.

Analysts' judgments of personality traits were recorded for all U.S. and Italian leading characters, and for male Czechoslovak film heroes. The ratings of two or more analysts were combined into a single mean rating for each character on each of 26 scales, defined by contrasting adjectives, representing a variety of personality characteristics.<sup>1</sup> The mean ratings on these 7-point scales were tabulated for the film heroes of the three countries by sex, class and other selected characteristics.

Since rating standards may differ among teams of analysts, relative deviations of groups of film heroes from the norms established for all characters in each country were also tabulated. Comparisons of these relative deviations, in which each team of analysts acted as its own controls, should prove more reliable as indicators of cross-national differences than the comparisons of absolute mean scores.

<sup>1</sup> The theory and methodology of the "personality differential" is discussed in Charles E. Osgood, "Studies in the Generality of Affective Meaning Systems," *American Psychologist*, 17:10-28 (1962). A similar study, including factor analysis of ratings, is reported in George Gerbner, "Images Across Cultures: Teachers in Mass Media Fiction and Drama," *The School Review*, 74:212-29 (1966).

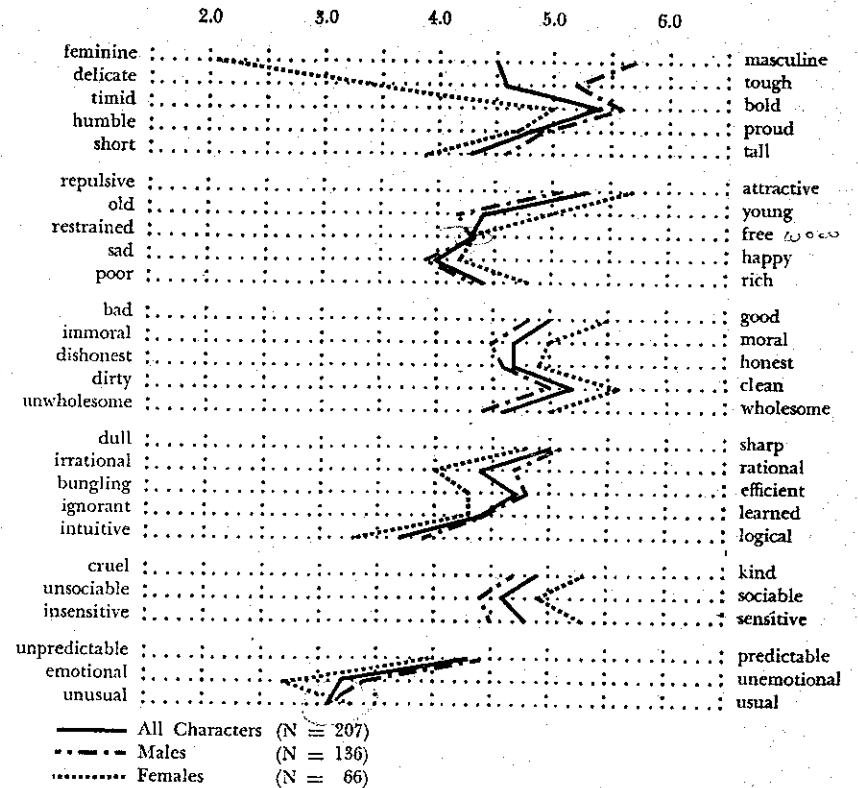


FIGURE 1  
U. S. Film Personality Profiles; Mean Ratings of all Characters, Males, and Females

the U.S. (See Figure 2.) Measured by the Italian team's own coding standards, however, the Italian hero was rated outstandingly *bold*, *attractive*, *emotional* and *unusual* (as was true of the U.S.), and also very *free* and *wholesome*, despite being not particularly *moral*, *honest*, *clean*, *kind* or *predictable*.

Aside from sex-linked traits, Italian heroines differed most from Italian heroes in being *attractive* and *clean*, but more *dishonest*, *cruel* and *unpredictable*.

Comparing U.S. and Italian *male* characters, in terms of their deviations from the countries' own ratings for all characters, few marked differences are seen. A similar comparison of U.S. and Italian *female* characters, however, shows the Italian heroine stands out in her own fictional world as being *bold*er than the

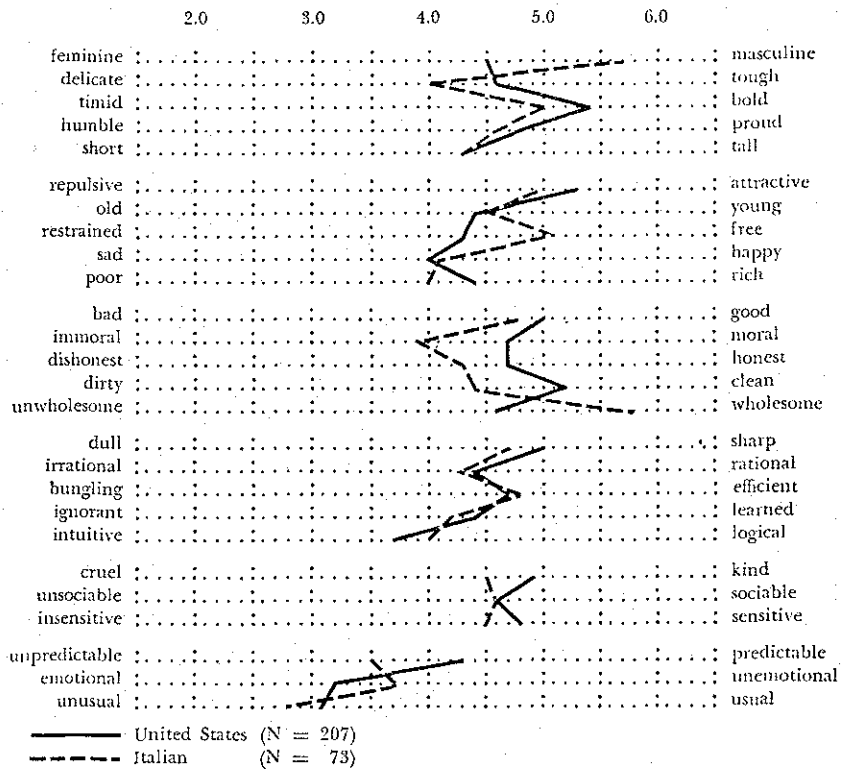


FIGURE 2

Italian and U. S. Film Personality Profiles; Mean Ratings of all Characters

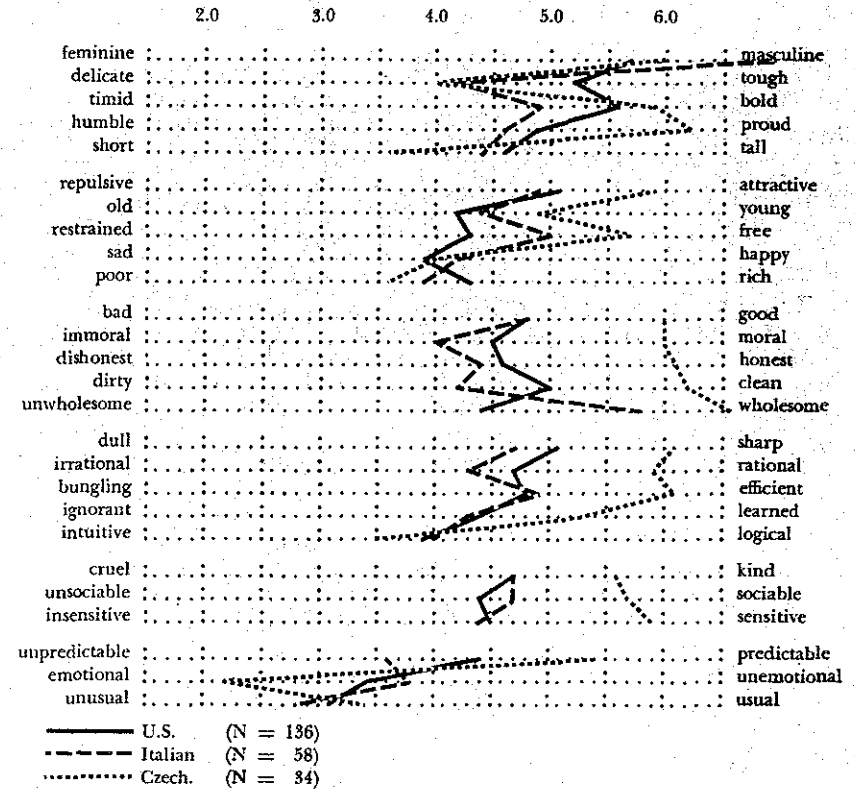


FIGURE 3

U.S., Italian, and Czechoslovak Male Film Personality Profiles; Mean Ratings

norm, whereas the U.S. heroine was more *timid*, and as being even less *honest* and *kind* than the Italian norm, whereas American film heroines rated slightly above their own country norm on these traits.

Only male characters were rated on the Czechoslovak film personality scales. The comparisons of their mean ratings with those of U.S. and Italian males (Figure 3) shows a tendency of high Czechoslovak ratings on moral, intellectual and social scales. The ranking characteristics of Czechoslovak heroes were their wholesomeness, cleanness, emotionality and pride. They were rated not as *tall* and not as *rich* as either U.S. or Italian heroes, but they were judged more *moral*, *honest*, *sharp*, *rational*, *efficient* and *learned* by wide margins.

Social Class Differences

In considering social class differences, and especially deviations from the personality norm for all characters, it is important to note that the baseline showing the norm for all characters is not necessarily the average of those in the three social classes. For example, 73% of U.S. film characters exhibited clear evidence of class status; the rest were not assigned to a social class, but were included in the norm for all characters.

The personality profiles of upper and middle class U.S. film heroes had no marked distinguishing characteristics, aside from the fact that the upper class naturally was rated richer. The lower class film hero profile, however, differed from the others on more than relative poverty. As may be seen on Figure 4,

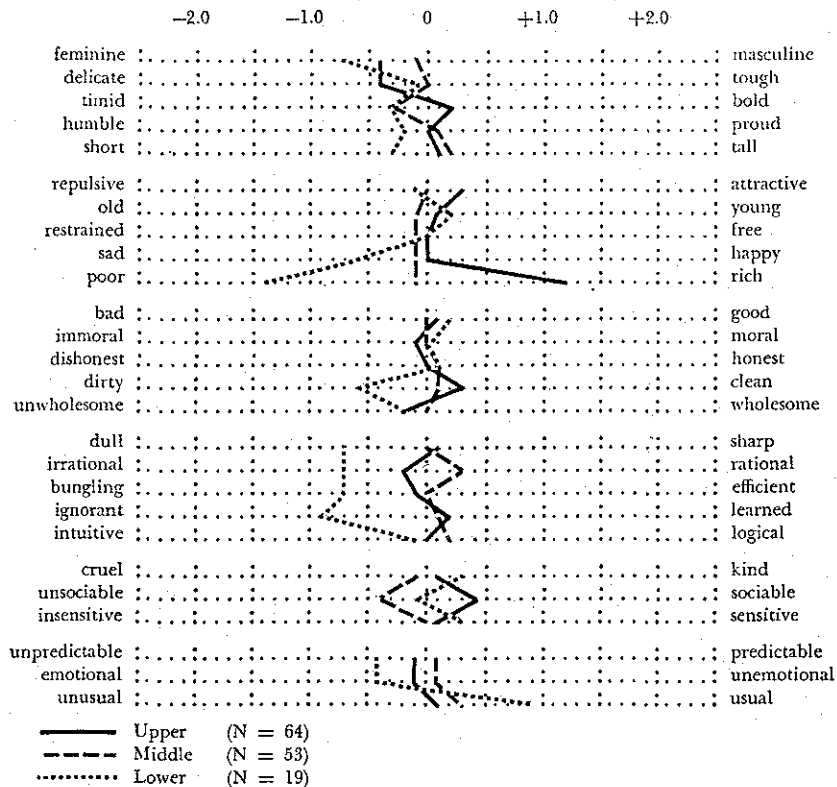


FIGURE 4

Deviations in Personality Profiles of U.S. Upper, Middle and Lower Class Film Characters from Mean Ratings for all U.S. Film Characters

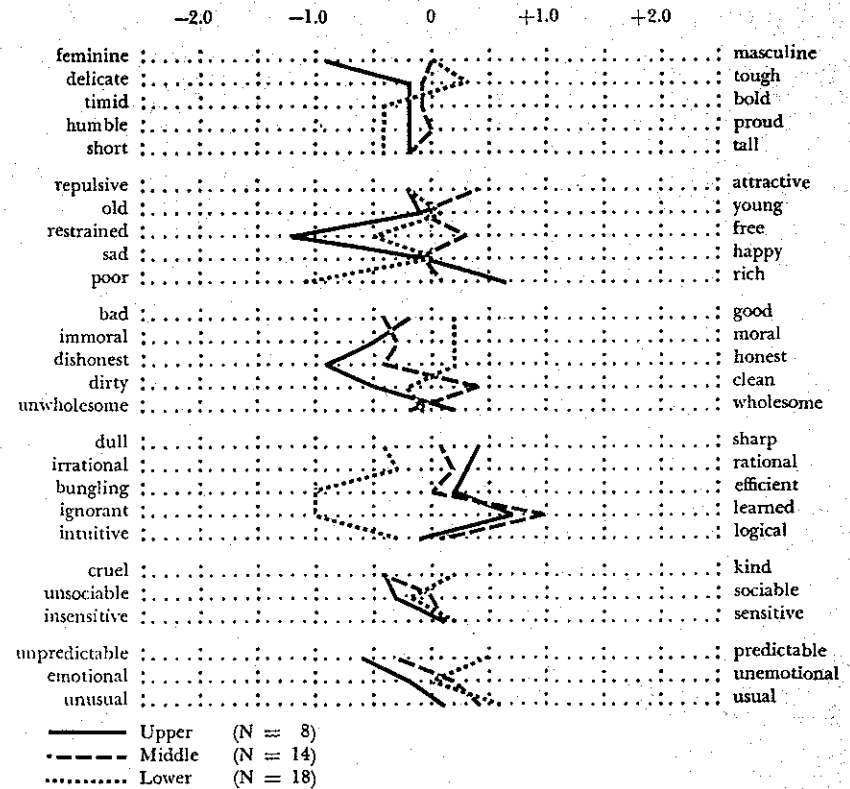


FIGURE 5

Deviations in Personality Profiles of Italian Upper, Middle and Lower Class Film Characters from Mean Ratings for all Italian Film Characters

the composite image of the lower class hero was shorter in stature than that of the average upper or middle class character and also appeared relatively *sad*, *dirty*, *dull*, *irrational*, *bungling*, *ignorant* and, of course, *poor*.

Class differences in the composite personality profiles of Italian heroes are shown on Figure 5. The smaller and more *feminine* upper class also appeared more *restrained* and more *dishonest* than the others. Along with the middle class, it was relatively *learned*. In comparison with the deviation of U.S. upper class film characters from all characters in the same films, the relative honesty, cleanness, kindness, sociability and lack of freedom and the slight but consistent superiority of intellect of the Italian upper class hero was particularly apparent.

The Italian middle class hero's only distinguishing characteristics were their relative freeness and cleanness. Compared to the portrayal of American middle class film hero, each in its own fictional environment, the Italian middle class appeared much more *learned* and somewhat freer, but also a little less *good*, *moral* and *honest*.

The lower class hero of Italian films presented a more clearly differentiated profile in being relatively inferior in intellectual but somewhat superior in moral qualities. The lower class hero of Italian films differed most from the upper class hero of the same films in being rated substantially freer (but by not as much as the middle class), more *bungling*, more *ignorant*, and, of course, poorer. A comparison of upper and lower class personality differences in U.S. and Italian films (with the upper class means as the baseline), indicates that these class differences favored the lower class hero in Italian films on most traits. Italian lower class characters differed from Americans particularly in including more males and in standing out in their own fictional environments as being relatively freer, cleaner, more *honest*, more *predictable*, more *sociable*, less *sad* and less *poor* than their American film counterparts.

### Non-White Heroes

The composite personality profile of the 11 U.S. non-white leading characters stands out favorably on most traits. Although the differences are slight, the non-white U.S. film hero is more *proud*, *young*, *good*, *moral*, *honest*, *clean* and *efficient* than the norm for all. These deviations stand up when U.S. white and non-white males alone are compared.

Deviations in personality profiles of U.S. and Italian non-white film characters from each country's own mean for all film characters are compared on Figure 6. The Italian non-white ratings are based on only 4 characters. Non-whites in Italian films stand out from all Italian heroes in their boldness, and in being considerably more *happy*, *honest*, *clean*, *wholesome*, *learned*, *kind*, *sociable* and *sensitive* in their own fictional environments than non-white heroes do in U.S. films. However, the Italians also tend to be rated somewhat more *immoral* and *bungling*,

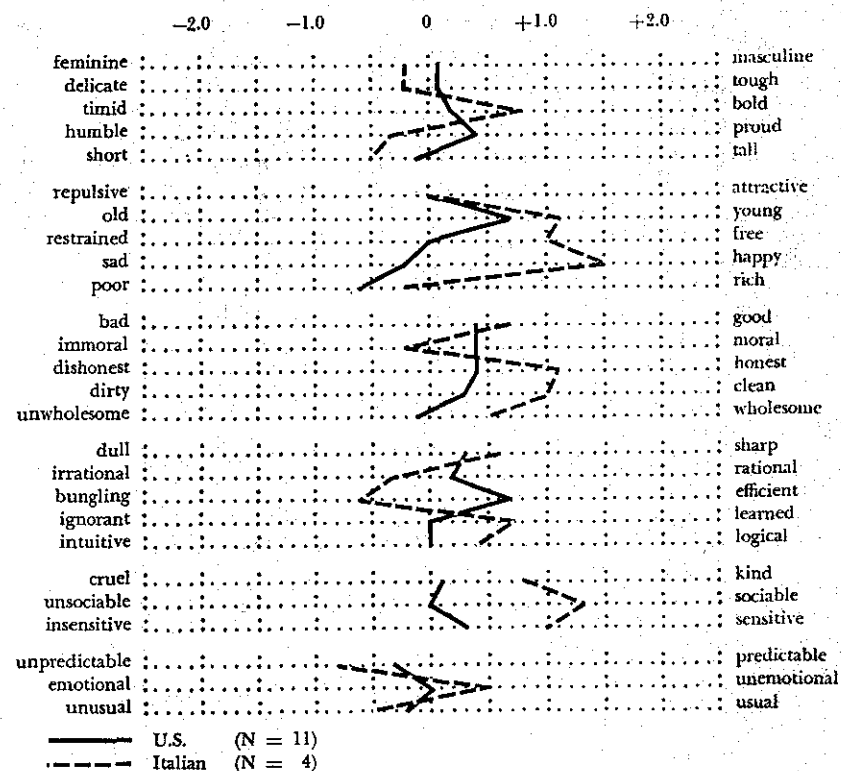


FIGURE 6

Deviations in Personality Profiles of U.S. and Italian Non-White Film Characters from Each Country's Own Mean for White Film Characters

rather than *efficient*, compared to their own norms and to the U.S. non-white heroes' deviations from theirs.

### "Foreign" Heroes

The composite personality profile of the non-American U.S. film hero did not differ markedly from that of the American hero in U.S. films. The most sizeable deviation was that foreign heroes in U.S. films appeared rather *efficient*.

By comparison, Italian films appeared to be almost xenophobic. Figure 7 compares deviations in personality profiles of U.S. and Italian non-national heroes from each country's own mean for

native leading characters. It is clear that females dominated the proportionately larger "foreign" hero population of Italian films, and that Italian film non-nationals were seen in a much less favorable light than the nationals. Aside from being rated relatively *humble* and *sad*, the Italian "foreigners" also rated lower on moral, intellectual, social and emotional traits than either the nationals of Italian films or the non-Americans of U.S. films.

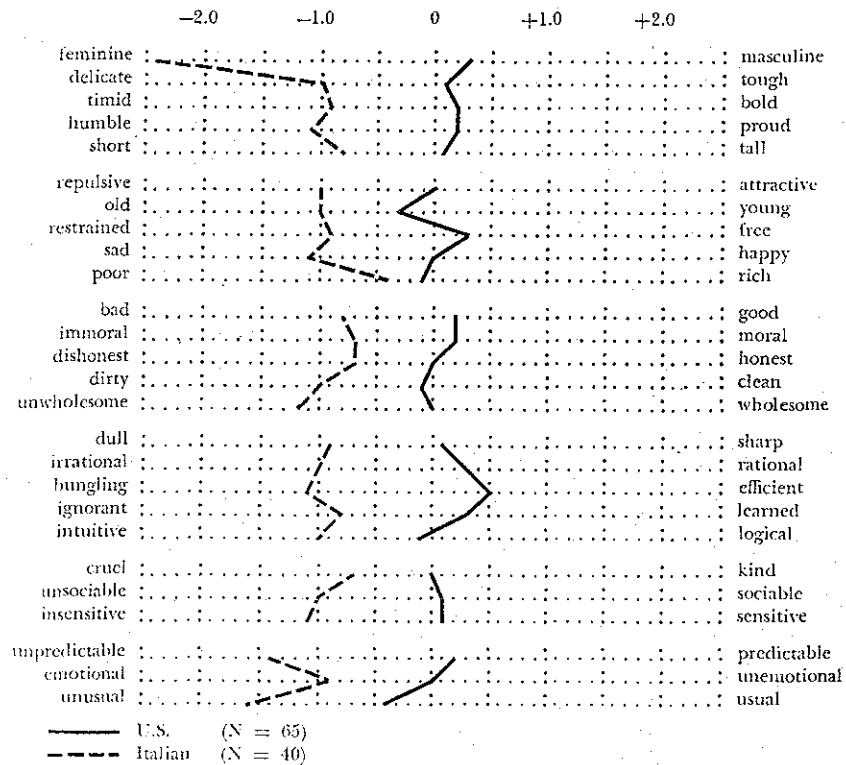


FIGURE 7

*Deviations in Personality Profiles of U.S. and Italian Film Characters Whose Nationality Is Not The Same As The Producing Country From Each Country's Own Mean For Native Characters*

## Value Hierarchies

ANALYSTS WERE GIVEN a list of 20 "goals and values," and were asked to indicate any and all that were sought or opposed by each leading character. They also recorded whether the character clearly achieved the goal (or realized the value), failed, or reached no clear success or failure in relation to it. This section presents only what film characters sought. What they opposed and how they succeeded are discussed below in connection with selected themes.

This, then, is a study of positive value choices and of hierarchies of generalized motivations. In this type of analysis, each team develops its own level of recognition of relevance and significance, and acts as its own control. These levels are not necessarily the same for all teams. Thus, we can get a more reliable and comparable indication of relative than of absolute frequencies of value choices.

Which goals and values motivated most of the leading characters of each country? How did males and females differ in the relative frequencies of their value choices? Some of the answers are to be found in Table 4.

*United States.* Romance, affection, family and the values of personal morality, integrity and wealth motivated more characters—both men and women—than did the other goals. Heroes and heroines did not differ much in their value choices; the greatest frequency differences (in amorous and affective goals) were in the expected direction. The only male-female contrasts of substantial frequency and rank difference show that many more male than female heroes were motivated by 1) "money and material goods," 2) "ambition, will for power" and 3) were

TABLE 4  
The Search for Goals and Values, by Sex, in Order of U. S. Rank for All Characters, in Percents

Goals and Values	United States		France		Italy		Yugoslavia		Poland		Czecho-slovakia						
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F					
	All	All	All	All	All	All	All	All	All	All	All	All					
Sought by Characters	54	74	59	65	72	57	67	59	16	11	15	33	37	33	39	83	46
Sexual and amorous goals	29	43	34	18	13	16	5	0	4	6	11	7	9	5	8	87	58
Friendship, affection	28	12	22	15	12	14	17	27	19	6	33	12	7	5	6	24	17
Money, material goods	28	21	26	12	8	11	33	13	29	22	11	20	25	21	23	84	92
Honesty, charity, altruism	28	23	26	20	24	22	10	7	10	3	—	2	16	5	12	48	50
Family	26	26	26	26	19	23	—	—	—	6	—	5	7	—	5	84	75
Honor, pride, self-respect	16	12	15	12	5	9	5	7	6	13	22	15	9	16	11	13	—
Self-preservation	15	8	12	12	8	11	—	—	—	6	11	7	7	5	6	79	58
Ambition, will for power	15	3	11	13	11	12	14	7	12	9	—	7	4	—	3	19	—
Vengeance	10	9	9	9	1	6	—	—	—	—	11	2	11	5	9	6	17
Artistic	12	3	9	6	4	5	—	—	—	3	—	2	2	—	2	6	—
Evil goals	8	9	8	17	16	17	5	—	4	16	—	12	16	5	12	81	75
Independence	8	8	8	5	2	4	12	7	11	25	—	20	7	5	8	53	42
Political or social	8	8	8	17	6	13	5	2	6	19	44	24	7	11	8	8	8
Comfort, well-being	7	11	7	13	5	10	2	—	1	6	11	7	13	16	14	31	17
Glory, fame, prestige	9	3	7	2	1	2	2	—	1	3	—	2	2	6	3	16	33
Scientific	8	3	6	7	—	4	3	—	3	9	11	10	11	—	8	73	67
Respect for legality	7	3	6	6	4	5	14	7	12	22	—	17	29	—	20	15	17
Patriotic	5	6	5	—	2	1	5	—	4	—	—	—	2	6	3	—	—
Religious	3	—	2	11	5	8	2	—	1	6	—	5	7	—	6	81	83
Community	136	66	207	121	83	204	58	15	83	32	9	41	47	19	71	62	12
(N Characters)																	

portrayed as seeking "vengeance" and "evil goals." Whether really more heroines than heroes seek "glory, fame, prestige" in U.S. films, as these data seem to indicate, is interesting to contemplate but not safe to conclude from the relatively few characters of either sex who chose those values.

Upper and middle class characters dominated the general value standards of the world of U.S. films. The upper class—aristocrats, rulers, tycoons of all times and places portrayed in U.S. films—rose above the general standard in their pursuit of "artistic" values and in being frequently driven to "vengeance." Compared to the norm, they rarely sought—or perhaps needed—money, friends and power. (See Figure 8.)

Middle class characters stood substantially above the national norm only in their pursuit of money, but the few lower class leads sought wealth even more. "Independence" and "political and social values"—sought only by about 8% of all—were rarely middle class goals.

The lower class in U.S. films numbered 10% of all characters. As a group, it sought sex, friendship, money and comfort substantially more often than the norm. Few lower class film characters were shown pursuing "family" values, "honor, pride, self-respect," "ambition, will for power," "vengeance" or "scientific" goals.

The characters who were outside of any regular class structure were among the most colorful. They stood out in pursuing goals of "honesty, charity and altruism," "ambition and will for power," "glory, fame, prestige" and the values of "science," "religion" and "community." (These account for the U.S. norm being above the mean frequencies of class ratings on these values, as shown on Figure 8.)

*France.* Heroes and heroines of French films prized "independence," "comfort, well being" and "community" values higher than did those of U.S. films (Table 4). But they cared less about "friendship, affection" and "honesty, charity, altruism." They sought (or needed) the goal of "self preservation" less frequently than Americans, and fewer French than American film heroes pursued goals of "science." French male characters, however, sought "family" values and "honor, pride, self-respect" more often, and "evil goals" less often, than their American counter-

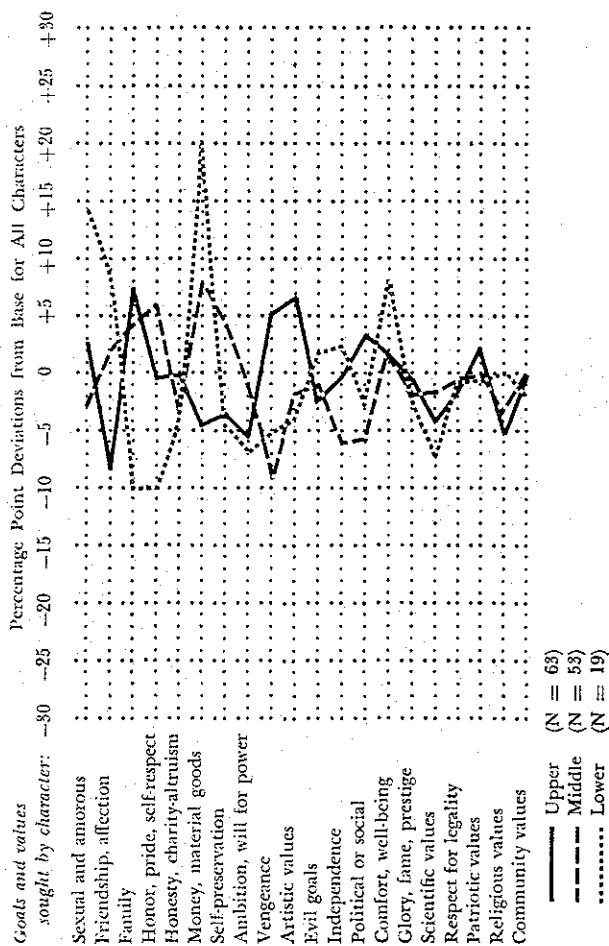


FIGURE 8  
Class Differences in Value Choices of U.S. Film Characters, Percentage Point Deviations of Upper, Middle, and Lower Class From a Baseline of all Characters

parts. French film heroines were portrayed striving for "vengeance" more often, and for "glory, fame, prestige" or "artistic" values less often, than U.S. female leads.

Males and females were closer to one another in their value choices in French than in American films. The principal differences were that fewer French film heroines than heroes pursued comfort, fame and art.

Relative class deviations in value choices were generally less pronounced in French than in American films. (Not shown.) The upper class hero of French films did not seek "honor, pride, self-respect" as frequently as the others, or as the hero of American films or those of other nations. Middle and lower class French heroes were among the most family-oriented and the least concerned with power or glory. The lower class hero of French films stood out in choosing values of honor and honesty more often and patriotism less often than their national norm. Those not classified as part of any recognizable social structure sought power, "vengeance" and "evil goals" more than the others.

*Italy.* Value choices of Italian characters (Table 4) reflect an adventurous world of struggle for love and country and for wealth and its sharing. Friendship and family received less emphasis. The values of "honesty, charity, altruism" ranked second (after "sexual and amorous" goals), higher than in the U.S. or France. "Vengeance" ranked fourth (along with patriotism), the highest rating of all countries.

The third ranking value was money. Italian male characters sought wealth about as much as Americans did, but Italian heroines pursued it much more. Italian women were also portrayed as less honest and charitable than the men, and more often possessed of "evil goals."

Italian upper class characters sought "evil goals," money, comfort, vengeance, safety and friends (but not family) more often than the norm (Figure 9). Compared to all Italian film characters, they disdained "patriotic," "political or social" and altruistic values. The lower class value profile showed above average concern for money, comfort and the law. It remained for the relatively numerous Italian out-of-class characters to lead in upholding political and social aims as well as those of "honesty, charity, altruism" and "family."

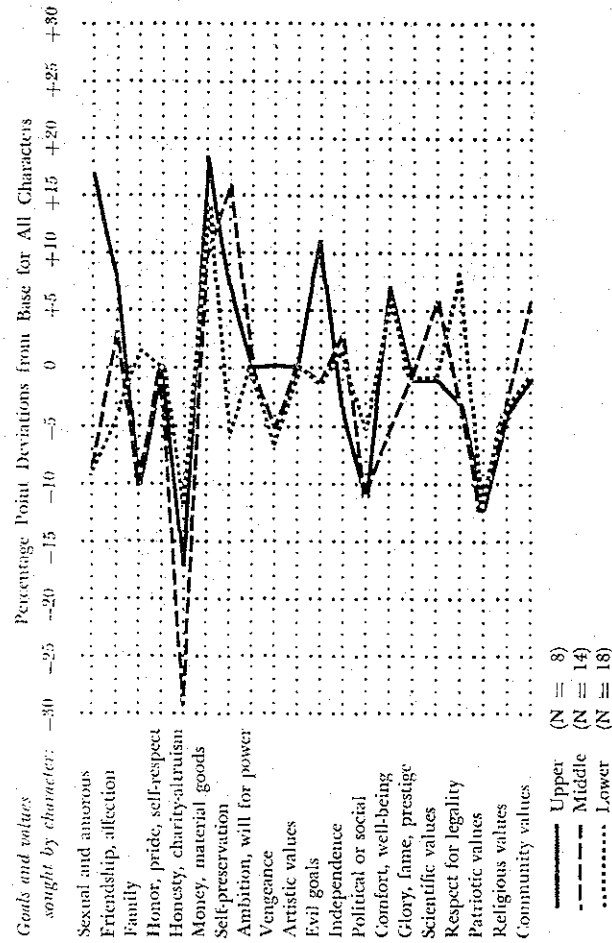


FIGURE 9  
Class Differences in Value Choices of Italian Film Characters; Percentage Point Deviations of Upper, Middle, and Lower Class from a Baseline of all Characters

*Yugoslavia.* Prominent in the value profile of Yugoslav film characters (Table 4) were themes of war and partisan struggle, dangerous and inhospitable environments, and homes and neighborhoods of the common people. The most frequent goals of leading characters were those of "comfort, well-being," "self-preservation," "honesty, charity, altruism," "political or social" and "patriotic" values. Patriotism ranked above romance only among Yugoslav film heroes, self-preservation above wealth only among Yugoslav and Polish film heroes.

It fell to the male to uphold "political or social," "community" and "family" values and to seek "independence" and "vengeance" more often than the female. Heroines sought more personal goals of comfort, money, safety and the arts.

Yugoslav film characters of upper class status stood above the norm in striving for romance, legality, money, family and scientific values (not shown). Those of middle class status (including professionals), the only other "class" recognized by Yugoslav analysts, valued friendship and comfort much more, and patriotism and legality much less frequently than the norm. The goals of "vengeance" and "independence" were left for those outside of any social structure to seek most often, and money, comfort and glory to pursue least often.

*Poland.* As we can see in Table 4 a mixture of romance, altruism, love of country, glory, family and independence were the leading motives of Polish film heroes and heroines. Like the Yugoslavs, Polish film characters sought "self-preservation" more often than money, and they prized "patriotism" even higher. They led other countries in seeking "glory, fame, prestige," and in pursuing "artistic" values.

Men shouldered the burdens of patriotism and legality; women sought safety more often. Lower class characters (not shown), the only class coded for values separately in Polish films, stood above the norm in altruistic and artistic values, and in seeking friendship, money, power and glory.

*Czechoslovakia.* The world of Czechoslovak films was more youthful, positive and lower-class than all others. Its leading values (Table 4) were "honesty, charity, altruism," "friendship, affection" and "community." "Independence" and "ambition, will for power" ranked next, and as high as or higher than in

any other country's films. "Respect for legality" ranked highest here among all countries. "Political or social" values ranked after those of Italian and Yugoslav characters.

Heroines differed from heroes in choosing romance more often than friendship, science and art more often than power or glory, and in being less frequently motivated by political or social aims, revenge or the need for self-preservation.

Lower class characters of Czechoslovak films, the only ones coded for values, prized "honesty, charity, altruism" most of all (not shown). But they rose most above the norm set by all Czechoslovak characters in "patriotic," "family," "political or social" and in material interests, and in seeking "friendship," "independence" and "vengeance" more often, but respecting legality less often, than most others.

## The Sense of Life

THIS SECTION GROUPS relevant findings around the portrayals of love and sex; friendship; family and marriage; community, nation, social morality; war; violence and crime; art, science, culture; and religion. It is followed by a summary which brings together the highlights of the study of films and the film hero, and concludes with a discussion of the sense of life's chances in the "worlds" of film.

### *Love and Sex*

"Sexual and amorous goals" ranked first in the value hierarchies of U.S., French, Italian and Polish film heroes. In Yugoslavia "sexual and amorous goals" ranked fifth, and in Czechoslovakia tenth. However, among Czechoslovak film *heroines* romance ranked second only to "honesty, charity, altruism." This was the only significant rank order difference on this value between the sexes, except that female characters generally tended to choose it more frequently than males.

There were no class differences in the ranking of "sexual and amorous" goals in the West, even though lower class characters in U.S. and upper class characters in French and Italian films tended to choose them in greater proportions. The European film pattern of upper class film hero preference for "sexual and amorous goals" was manifested in rank order differences in that direction in Yugoslavia, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Thus only American films appeared to attribute a greater sexual desire to lower class than to other film heroes.

"Winning the love of another" was an important theme in about half of all U.S. and French films, but only one-third or less of the others. Love usually led to marriage, or the promise of marriage, except in French films. Selected aspects of love are shown in Table 5. Four out of ten French films (the largest proportion in any country) portrayed the love of couples who

TABLE 5  
*Selected Aspects of Love and Family Relations*

Important Theme (Percent of Films)	United States	France	Italy	Yugo- slavia	Poland	Czecho- slovakia
Love of married couples	32	43	12	9	5	33
Love between married and single person	13	30	23	5	2	12
Transfer of love from one to another	7	43	12	10	11	3
Jealousy, infidelity	15	28	8	5	11	6
Adultery	12	24	3	—	2	9
Breakup of love	11	21	5	—	9	—
Sex without love	24	48	20	10	7	3
<i>(Percent of Characters)</i>						
Fails in love (for any reason)	9	17	8	12	23	8
Hurt or destroyed by love	3	9	1	2	14	—
Relations with family other than spouse—						
good	10	11	21	12	20	19
poor	5	7	8	—	8	8
Relations with spouse—						
good	17	13	8	2	5	16
poor	5	11	7	2	8	8
Family conflicts because of—						
values	17	13	8	5	4	26
money	11	4	10	7	8	3
personality	9	12	10	2	3	11
jealousy	8	22	6	2	6	8
Conflicts lead to separation, divorce	15	22	6	10	6	4

were married, but not necessarily to each other. The same number of films involved the transfer of love from one person to another. Three out of ten involved love between a married and a single person. All these entanglements were much more frequent in French films than in those of the other countries. Not surprisingly, so were themes of jealousy, infidelity, adultery, marital and romantic breakup and the pursuit of sex without love.

Most of those who sought sexual and amorous goals in U.S., Italian and Czechoslovak films achieved their aims. The road to romantic fulfillment in the worlds of French, Yugoslav and Polish films were more troubled. American film heroes and heroines faced marital and other obstacles about half as frequently as the French, and they reached their romantic goals most of the time. The French succeeded less than half as frequently as they tried. Italian and Czechoslovak characters had fewer marital entanglements.

Opposition to love, the need to sacrifice love to other values or duties, and a variety of other obstacles inhibited or defeated the majority of those who played romantic roles in Yugoslav and Polish films. A tragic sense of love in French, Yugoslav and Polish films is reflected in the finding that for every character who was "redeemed by love" there was one or more "hurt or destroyed by love." In the other countries, three or more were "redeemed" for every one "hurt" by love.

### *Friendship*

The goals of "friendship, affection" ranked second in the value hierarchies of both U.S. and Czechoslovak film characters. "Friendship, affection" ranked fifth among French and lower among the other film heroes.

Those who sought friendship in U.S. and Czechoslovak films generally found it (not shown). The *theme* of friendship played an important part in two-thirds of all Czechoslovak films, but in only one-third or fewer of the other countries' films. The "positive role and victory of friendship" was a theme in 14% of U.S., 64% of Czechoslovak, 22% of French, 10% of Yugoslav and Polish, and 5% of Italian films.

*Family, Marriage*

"Family" ranked third in the value hierarchies of U.S. and French characters, fifth in those of Polish heroes and lower among the others. Male-female differences were surprisingly slight. Apparently no more film heroines than heroes espouse "family" goals.

Class differences were substantial only in U.S. and Italian films, and went in opposite directions. U.S. upper class characters ranked "family" second only to "sexual and amorous goals"; U.S. lower class characters ranked "family" sixth; and U.S. middle class characters ranked it between the two. Italian upper and middle class characters ranked "family" last, but Italian lower class characters ranked it fifth.

Selected aspects of family and marital relations are given in Table 5. The margin of generally "good" over "poor" family relations was the smallest in French and U.S. films. The most frequent source of family discord was a clash of values (often generational) in U.S. and Czechoslovak films, marital infidelity and jealousy in French films, and money in the films of the other countries.

Marital relations suffered where amorous conflicts or harsh circumstance, or both, intruded upon the family. The principal characters of American films, a high proportion being newlyweds, lived in harmony with their spouses by a margin of 3 to 1. The ratio was 2 to 1 in the same direction in Czechoslovakia, less favorable in France and Italy, and 1 to 1 in Yugoslavia. Marital discord outnumbered portrayals of marital harmony 2 to 1 in Polish films.

The torrid love life of French film heroes led to separation of partners or to divorce for 22% of characters, while the troubles of Polish film couples resulted in separation or divorce for only 6%. The U.S. rate was 15%.

*Community, Nation, Social Morality*

The balance of emphasis on "political or social" and "patriotic" values and those of "community" was generally on the side of the film heroes of Eastern Europe and Italy. Yugoslav males

ranked "political or social" values above all others. Italian and Czech characters ranked them farther down. In U.S. and French films these values were ranked near the bottom.

Patriotism ranked second (after social values) in the hierarchy of Yugoslav male heroes; it also ranked second (after "sexual and amorous goals") among Polish males. It was also high for Italy and Yugoslavia, but far down the list for Czechoslovakia, and even lower for France and the U.S.

"Community" was a high-ranking value only in the films of Czechoslovakia, whose youthful heroes ranked it fourth. The next highest rank for "community" values was thirteenth among French heroes. In the world of U.S. film characters, "community" ranked last.

Table 6 compares selected political, social and legal themes and motivations and amplifies the value analysis. It shows political, patriotic and human rights themes appearing most frequently in the films of Eastern Europe. Champions of human rights, revolutionaries, and resistance fighters, as well as victims

TABLE 6  
*Selected Aspects of Political, Social, Legal and Patriotic Goals*

	United States	France	Italy	Yugoslavia	Poland	Czechoslovakia
<i>Important Theme (Percent of Films)</i>						
Political	6	6	3	14	18	21
Patriotic	5	11	3	10	23	12
Prejudice, intolerance	3	6	—	14	18	3
<i>(Percent of Characters)</i>						
Struggle for human rights	4	1	4	3	17	9
Revolutionary or resistance fighter	2	2	6	12	9	9
Victim of prejudice, discrimination	4	5	4	10	17	7
Habitual or professional lawbreaker	12	14	11	5	6	4
<i>Motivated by—</i>						
Nationalism	3	7	21	12	24	9
Ideal of Justice	13	17	33	12	23	62

of prejudice or discrimination, were most likely to be heroes of Polish, Yugoslav or Czechoslovak films, with Italians having a slight edge over French or Americans. Habitual or professional law-breakers, on the other hand, were most numerous among French, American and Italian film heroes.

The pattern of community and political or national goals involve aspects of social morality and justice. The virtues of "honesty, charity, altruism" also dominated the value hierarchies of Eastern European and Italian film heroes. These virtues ranked above all others in Czechoslovak films. They ranked second in Poland, Yugoslavia and Italy, fifth in U.S. and ninth in French films.

Table 5 also shows the percentages of heroes motivated by a sense of nationalism and by some ideal of justice. The former motivated more heroes of Polish and Italian than of other films. The latter appeared to be an especially dominant driving force of Czechoslovak heroes whose nationalistic motivations were the least frequent among the Eastern European film characters.

Qualities of community orientation and social morality may be reflected in the personality structure of heroes who play politically active roles in the stories. The personality profiles of 8 U.S., 10 Italian and 8 Czechoslovak characters playing such roles were tabulated separately. The relative deviations of these characters from each country's norms for all characters are shown in Figure 10.

All political activists or functionaries exceeded their national norms in qualities of boldness, tallness, efficiency and logic. Of the three countries' heroes, the U.S. "political" deviated from the norm in as many unfavorable as favorable characteristics, while the Italian and Czechoslovak political heroes deviated on many more favorable than unfavorable characteristics.

The politically active hero in U.S. films was shown as relatively the least *attractive*, the most *bad*, and the most *unwholesome* and *irrational* of the three countries' activists. His most favorable deviation was his sociability, and his most unfavorable deviation was his cruelty.

The Italian political hero stood out from other Italian film characters and from the "politicals" of the other two countries in being the boldest, the happiest, the most *good*, *moral* and *kind*.

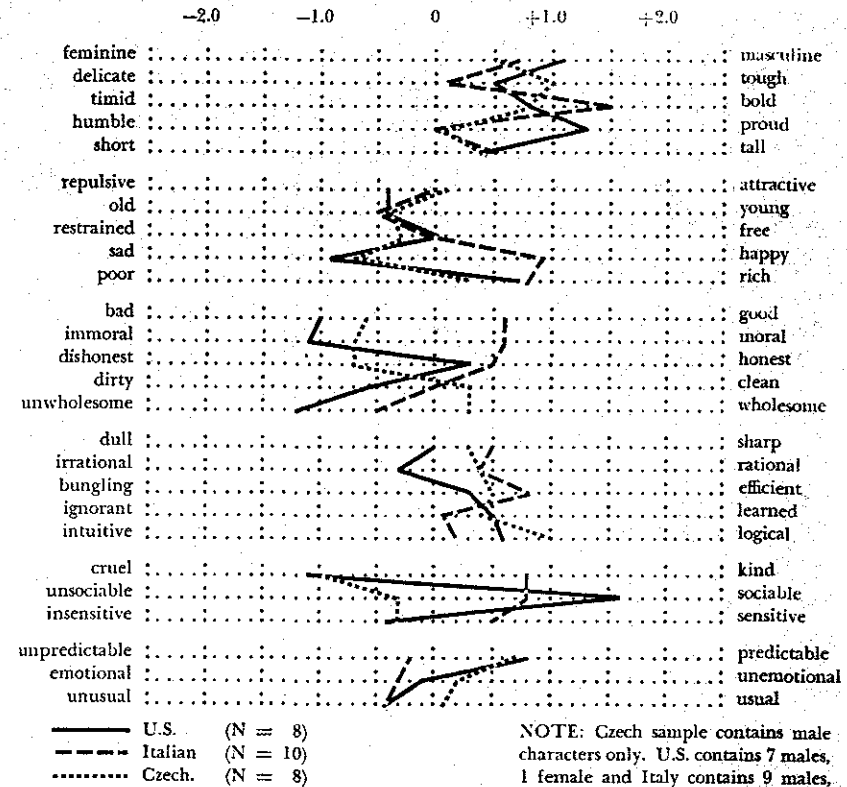


FIGURE 10

*Deviations in Personality Profiles of U.S., Italian, and Czechoslovak Film Characters Active in Political Organization or Leadership From Each Country's Own Mean For All Characters*

The Italian political hero's most favorable deviation in his own fictional setting was his boldness, and the least favorable was his lack of wholesomeness.

The Czechoslovak political hero or functionary presented a different composite personality profile. Compared to the rest of the Czechoslovak film population, as well as to the politicals of the other two countries, he rated relatively *tough*, *clean*, *wholesome* and *logical*, but also *dishonest*, *unsociable*, and as *cruel* as the politically active hero of American films. On most other traits he rated between the U.S. and Italian "political."

*War.*

Table 7 shows selected aspects of war portrayal. The theme of war loomed largest in Yugoslav and Polish films, as did wartime settings. U.S. films were fourth in frequency of war portrayal, but first among all countries in the frequency of military men as leading film characters. (See Table 3.)

U.S. war films included past and future wars on all continents and ranged from spectacular epics to comedies on the inconvenience and pathos of army life. French war films dealt more with occupation and home front resistance, and typically portrayed small people acting out roles of conqueror, collaborator and resister locked in implacable but senseless struggle. Italian war films were sharply divided between sagas of legendary or historical conflict and stories of partisan adventure or national defeat. Yugoslav and Polish portrayals dealt with many aspects of war at the front, in the rear and under Nazi occupation, and stressed the devastation and criminality of the occupation. Czechoslovak films contained the fewest battle front portrayals (not shown) but a high proportion of home front themes.

*Violence and Crime*

Films without scenes of physical violence were rare in all countries except Czechoslovakia. Table 7 shows that only 2% of Italian, 5% of French and 7% of U.S. films were free of violence. The proportions were slightly higher in Yugoslav and Polish films, despite their more frequent portrayal of war. Italian films were by far the most and Czechoslovak films the least violent. The frequency of overt violence was generally higher in the films of Western than of Eastern Europe.

The percentage of films depicting murder on the screen was two to three times as high in Western as in Eastern Europe. Atrocities and torture were most frequent in Italian films. Lethal weapons were used with fatal results by 16% of U.S., 13% of French and 18% of Italian leading characters, compared to 10% of Yugoslav and Polish and 4% of Czechoslovak leads. On the other hand, participation in organized social violence such as war, also highest in Italian films (20% of characters), was in the

TABLE 7  
*Selected Aspects of War, Violence and Crime*

<i>Percent of films portraying:</i>	<i>United States</i>	<i>France</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>Yugoslavia</i>	<i>Poland</i>	<i>Czechoslovakia</i>
War at the front	18	19	13	43	36	9
Home front in wartime	1	5	—	9	16	12
War crime	4	4	8	27	14	9
<i>Percent of characters:</i>						
In army in wartime	9	3	11	2	9	5
Partisan in wartime	1	1	8	17	4	—
<i>Percent of films:</i>						
Showing no physical violence	7	5	2	10	14	39
Showing murder enacted	23	28	28	9	14	9
Showing torture and atrocities	17	17	40	29	18	18
<i>Percent of characters:</i>						
Resorting to violence for—						
defense, protection	16	17	25	12	26	9
other sanctioned,						
legal ends	18	13	38	17	14	7
illegal, immoral ends	13	12	18	7	9	4
<i>Important Crime Themes</i>						
<i>Percent of films:</i>						
Riches gained fraudulently, underhandedly	16	7	2	5	2	—
Treating psychology of criminal	12	7	3	5	4	3
<i>Percent of characters:</i>						
Gain money, wealth by illegal means	7	13	10	2	2	7
Habitual or professional lawbreaker	12	14	11	5	6	4
Lives in company of racketeers, etc.	6	10	6	—	1	—
<i>Motives for criminality: (Percent of characters)</i>						
Misery, great need	1	3	8	2	3	3
Ambition	7	11	15	2	4	7
Group solidarity	1	8	1	—	3	3
Anger, jealousy, revenge	8	6	10	7	6	—
Protection of self or public	9	4	1	—	3	—
Offender punished by law	4	10	14	7	9	3

roles of 17% of Yugoslav and Polish but only 8% of U.S., 4% of French and less than 2% of Czechoslovak characters.

Between 11 and 15% of all leading characters committed murder (whether shown on the screen or not) in all but Polish and Czechoslovak films. Reasons for violence of all kinds committed by principal characters is shown in Table 7. Violence for illegal and immoral ends was pursued by more Italian, U.S. and French film characters than by the others.

Other relevant findings show "illegal activities" the leading occupation of Italian film heroes (third in France, seventh in the U.S., lower elsewhere), and, not surprisingly, "respect for legality" ranking lower in the value hierarchies of the same Western heroes than of the others.

Table 7 compares selected aspects of the portrayal of crime. It shows private criminality of a habitual or professional nature, mostly for material ends, most prevalent in U.S., French and Italian films. The social and emotional content of criminality (misery, ambition, anger or jealousy or revenge) was most prominent in Italian films. Protectors of self or the public resorted to criminal acts most often in U.S. films. It was also in these films that relatively frequent resort to crime and violence by a leading character was the least frequently punished by law.

#### *Art, Science, Culture*

Entertainment (including the arts) was by far the favorite occupation of U.S. and French film heroes, but "artistic" goals ranked tenth and fourteenth, respectively, in their value priorities. Italian heroes chose entertainment as an occupation in third place after illegal activities and agriculture, and ranked "artistic" values lowest of all.

Among Eastern European film characters, entertainment and art occupations ranked generally lower than in the West. Polish heroes ranked such vocations after that of student, farmer and worker. However, they prized "artistic" goals higher than did the others—eight in the order of values. If "sensitivity" counts as an artistic trait, of the heroes rated on personality scales the Czechoslovaks rated highest, Americans next and Italians lowest. The order of ratings on intellectual qualities was the same.

Selected aspects of artistic, scientific and cultural interests are shown on Table 8. "Student" was the favorite occupation of Eastern European film heroes by even greater margins than entertainment was the leading film hero occupation in the West. French heroes, who led in entertainment as a vocation and in the frequency of student roles among Western characters, showed "cultural interest or respect for cultural values" in the same proportion (one in four) as did those of Poland who led in the rank order of preference for "artistic" values. One in five Czechoslovak heroes exhibited cultural interests, and the same proportion sought scientific values. Scientific as a value choice ranked generally low, but among Czechoslovak heroes was thirteenth in their hierarchy of values.

TABLE 8  
*Percent of Principal Characters Engaged in or Seeking Goals Related to Science, Art, Cultural Interests, Study and Religion*

	United States	France	Italy	Yugoslavia	Poland	Czechoslovakia
<i>Principal characters:</i>						
Seek scientific values	7	2	1	2	3	19
Seek artistic values	9	6	—	2	9	8
Show cultural interest	10	25	1	10	26	20
Portrayed as students	4	10	4	24	20	26
Seek religious values	5	1	4	—	3	—
Practice religion	6	9	26	2	9	—
Identified as member of denomination or sect	13	14	51	15	18	7

#### *Religion.*

Religion ranks even lower in the fictional world of U.S., French, Yugoslav and Czechoslovak film heroes than do art and science. But it ranks higher than both among Italians, and lower than art but the same as science among Polish film heroes.

"Religious values" were pursued by similar percentages of heroes in U.S. and Polish as in Italian films, but had their highest rank in the value priorities of Italians (eleventh) and Poles (eighteenth). An examination of the tabulation by sex shows that Polish heroines prized "religious values" highest (sixth

in the rank order), and Italian males next (eleventh). Religion as a goal appeared to motivate heroines more than male heroes in U.S. and Polish films, only heroines in French films, only male heroes in Italian films and no heroes of either sex in Yugoslav or Czechoslovak films.

Priests, monks, ministers or other religious were nearly 5% of leading characters in Polish films, nearly 2% in French and Italian films, less than one in a hundred in U.S. films, and none in the others. Overtly agnostic, atheistic or anti-religious behavior was observed in about 3% of U.S., French and Italian film heroes and in none of the others.

Table 8 shows other selected aspects of religious involvement. Half of all Italian film heroes were identified as members of a religion, and more than half of those were shown as practicing their religion. Less than one in five Polish and fewer of the other film heroes were so identified, and less than one in ten was shown practicing religion in any but Italian films.

A further breakdown of religious affiliation shows U.S. film heroes about equally divided among Catholic, Protestant and other religions; French, Polish and Czechoslovak heroes mostly Catholics; and Italian two-thirds Catholic and one-third ancient and primitive religions. The proportion of Jewish characters equaled that of Catholics in Yugoslavia (17%) but was about 1% or less elsewhere.

## Summary

**I**MAGINATIVE CULTURAL representations, like memories, range over time and space selectively. Most film heroes inhabited the contemporary scene in the producing country. Only Yugoslav films were set during and immediately after World War II more frequently than in the "present." Only Italian films frequented the distant past of legendary antiquity. The films of Eastern Europe, but not those of the West, dwelt on World War II and its aftermath as the great watershed of history, rather than as just another war.

The world of American films was the most global, cosmopolitan and affluent, while that of Italian films was the most spectacular. The French hero's environment—urban, glamorous, mobile, disreputable—included the highest number of "middle class" and "common" settings in the West. More than the West, Eastern European films tended to portray places of work, hardship and struggle and to claim documentary authenticity.

The heroes were mostly male nationals of the producing country. Sex and age distributions served dramatic rather than social requirements. The proportion of heroines followed the emphasis on romantic involvements (with French and U.S. films in the lead). The majority of leading characters in all countries was under 30 years of age.

The class structure of the film hero population was difficult to establish. In general, however, U.S. and Western European film heroes were likely to come from among the rich, the care-free and the powerful while Eastern European film heroes came from the ranks of the intelligentsia, workers and peasants. Show business itself was the single most frequent source of occupation

of U.S. and Western European film heroes; the leading occupation of the Eastern European film heroes was that of a student. Military occupations were frequent in U.S. and Yugoslav films, agricultural roles in Italian and Polish films and laborers in Polish and Czechoslovak films.

An analysis of group differences in personal characteristics of U.S. and Italian heroes of both sexes and Czechoslovak males suggested that, aside from some expected sex and class deviations, Italian heroines appeared in more tragic, active and unsympathetic roles than their U.S. counterparts, Czechoslovak heroes were distinguished for moral and intellectual virtues and the "foreign" nationals of Italian films were portrayed in a generally unfavorable light. The lower class heroes of U.S. films appeared shorter in stature, dirtier and intellectually inferior to others in the same film, while the lower class heroes of Italian films were superior to the others in moral and social qualities.

The analysis of goals and value choices showed romantic motivations dominating the value hierarchies of most film heroes. Honor and independence ranked higher among French heroes than among others. Honesty, patriotism and social and political goals generally ranked higher among Italian and Eastern European film heroes than among the others.

The relatively high social content of Eastern European and—to a somewhat lesser extent—of Italian films was reflected also in the personality profiles of leading characters playing politically relevant or active roles. Much of this social content was inherent in the way war was often portrayed: national struggle for existence in Eastern Europe, sagas of the fight for justice and against tyranny in many Italian films, human tragedy and futility in French films and foreign adventure in exotic lands in American films. The portrayal of violence and crime was also strongly affected by the type of social content prevalent in the films. Personally motivated criminality and violence were more characteristic of U.S. and Western European films and socially motivated transgressions in Eastern European films, with Italian films having the largest share of both.

Whatever else drama and fiction do, they present and cultivate an implicit calculus of the odds for happiness and success of various kinds, and of the chances of satisfactory personal relation-

ships. Table 9 shows selected ratios of success and failure, and provides a rough measure of the risks of life in the various "worlds" of film.

The representation of a sense of life's chances did not appear to follow conventional plot styles. For example, nearly half of all French films were classified as comedies and the same proportion of Czechoslovak films had tragic plots. But comic or tragic treatment does not necessarily determine the human substance of what really happens in the fictional "world" of films.

TABLE 9  
*Ratios of Success to Failure in Final Film Outcomes*

<i>Film Outcomes</i>						
Film ending is clearly happy/unhappy	3.2/1	1.7/1	4.8/1	1.4/1	1/1.3	10.9/1
Fate of principal characters is clearly happy/unhappy	2.5/1	1.3/1	2.5/1	1.6/1	1/1.3	7.5/1
In occupation, characters succeed/do not	3.6/1	3.7/1	6.5/1	5.1/1	2.5/1	2.9/1
In love and affection characters attain success/failure	3.7/1	1.3/1	8.9/1	2.4/1	1.4/1	3.6/1
In material things characters attain success/failure	1.4/1	1.1/1	3.0/1	2.0/1	3.0/1	1/1
Outcome brings moral success/failure	7.6/1	1.5/1	9.2/1	*	2.5/1	6.7/1
Relations with families good/poor	2.0/1	1.6/1	2.4/1	*	2.6/1	2.3/1
Relations with spouses good/poor	3.2/1	1.2/1	1.2/1	1/1	1/1.7	2.0/1

\* Incomplete data

A tragic sense of life was the most pronounced in Polish and French films: the average chances of the heroes' happiness, success and satisfactory personal relations were little higher than one-and-a-half to one. These chances were better than two to one in Yugoslav films, better than three to one in U.S. films, and

better than four-and-a-half to one in Italian and Czechoslovak films.

Breaking new ground in international collaboration in communication research, this study explored the fictional "worlds" of films and their heroes in one year's productions of six countries. The analysis yielded some comparative measures along selected dimensions of time, place, social, personal, value and thematic characteristics projected into national and world cultures by the films studied. The limitations inherent in a pioneering expedition into a complex domain of imagery and imagination suggest caution in interpreting the results. They are, at best, guidelines and benchmarks for further comparative study.