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The stereotypic portrayal of women in slasher films: then versus now

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THE STEREOTYPIC PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN SLASHER FILMS: THEN VERSUS
NOW

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
In partial fulfillment of the
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In

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By
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Abstract

In entertainment, the media manager often portray various social groups, including women, in certain negative ways and as having more negative qualities than other traditional social groups, such as white males. These portrayals provide viewers with ways of thinking about and acting towards members of a particular group, thus affecting communication and perception. This research seeks to analyze data on horror film stereotyping in a new way not by merely observing stereotypes of women in horror film, but by examining the content across time-periods and societal change. A textual analysis compared 16 total films, 8 original films versus the later remakes of each film. This helped analyze the female stereotypes that exist within horror films as well as society. Results showed that the majority of the female stereotypes found in the original films still existed in the remakes. Thus, even though the media representatives say that stereotypic portrayals have changed over the last few decades, social stereotypes of women still exist today.

Chapter 1

Introduction

In a study of horror films and female stereotyped behavior, Zillmann and Weaver (1996) established that “girls and female adolescents [in horror films] who are witnessed displaying fearfulness and protective need in the face of terror on the screen are more favorably evaluated by male and female peers and non-peers than their counterparts who are witnessed displaying no distress” (p. 87). This display of fear is merely one example of feminine stereotyping in that viewers expect that females will remain afraid and helpless. Stereotyping in entertainment can also exist in television. Many scholars would argue that the portrayals of women in television and film have changed over the last few decades because of the feminist movement; however, stereotypes of women continue to be present in the media that millions of Americans view daily (Media Awareness Network, 2008). These stereotypes can exist in all forms of media content, from entertainment to the evening news. For the purpose of this analysis, I will specifically be observing the stereotypes of female characters in the slasher film genre to answer the question: Have stereotypes of women in film really changed over the years or are women still objectified and viewed in the same stereotypic manner that they were decades ago?

Like most other genres of film, horror films convey social messages about certain time-periods or historical time frames; however, unlike other genres, horror films delve into deeper context. Price states that horror films:

“explore more fundamental questions about the nature of human existence, questions that, in some profound ways, go beyond culture and society as these are organized in any given period or form. Here lies the special significance of horror, the factors that truly differentiate it from the other genres and that make it conform most deeply with our contemporary sense of the world” (Prince, 2004, p. 2).

The anxiety and inner terror produced by the horror genre taps into the heart of human nature.

Within horror films, the definition of what it means to be human is unclear. Characters in the

horror genre often take on animalistic forms or act on the most basic animal instincts and desires; murder, violence, and sex. These characters, most often the villains, often return to wreak havoc on society and challenge or violate the viewers' boundaries of human behavior and the very existence of human beings (Prince, 2004). Emotional distress and the psychological violation of human nature in the cognition of viewers has changed in transition from classic horror films to the modern American slasher film, primarily with the production of *Psycho* in 1960. The final scene of the film closes on Norman's smiling face, which Hitchcock described as enduring madness that could not be explained. According to Prince (2004),

“This is a deeply disturbing admission, which undermines our belief in rationality and an existence whose terms can be controlled or, at least, understood. In its savage assault on the audience and its belief systems, *Psycho* furnished the signpost for modern horror and for our contemporary sense of the world. Monsters today seem to be everywhere, and they cannot be destroyed” (p. 4).

Modern slasher films have continued to redefine and challenge what it means to be a human being; however, they have also commented on what it means to be male and female. For example, men are often praised and revered for their sexual prowess; however, women are often punished for sexual promiscuity. In slasher films, the final girls who survive at the end of the film always remain virgins. Those that engage in sexual behavior often die at the hands of the killer. As a whole, society has become more accepting of women's equality to men; therefore, the goal of this analysis then, is to observe whether this societal view has impacted the horror film industry over the last few decades. I will observe the comparison between slasher films produced from 1960 to 1985, termed the Original films, versus the same film produced later (1998 to 2008), referred to as the Remake of each film. This will help explore the female stereotypes that exist within early horror films and more recent horror films, and how these presentations may or may not reflect the ideology of the time period during which producers created the films. Though many researchers have studied this topic at length, this is a new way to

look at this area because it is not merely observing stereotypes of women in horror film, but it is conducting this study across time and societal change. Though social scientists have conducted previous studies on the original films used in this study, this analysis will produce its own original, important, and valid results. By comparing the re-examination of the original films to the examination of the remade films, I will be able to observe whether or not the same social stereotypes still exist in the media today, or if they have really changed as the media representatives claim they have.

The two primary theories guiding this research are stereotype theory and feminist film theory. Both theories are important to mass communication studies, and in particular this thesis topic for two reasons. An abundance of research has found stereotypes to exist in media, with negative effects. Entertainment media outlets often portray specific groups, such as women, in negative ways or as having more negative qualities than the dominant social group. Such portrayals establish context and ways of thinking about and interacting with members of another group, in turn affecting communication socialization (DeFleur & Dennis, 1998). When the dominant group labels another social group with specific negative characteristics or behaviors, scholars refer to the label as a stereotype. Feminist film literature often uses the concept of social labels of women, often applied by men, to defend its theories. Men in power often apply social labels to women, that affect social stereotyping of women, and in return, affect communication. Feminist criticism of slasher films studies how the lives of women in film relate or do not relate to the changing lives of real women in society (Boyle, 2005). Thus, this research will primarily use stereotype theory applied to media studies. The research will then use feminist film theory to reinforce the analysis of stereotype theory in relation to slasher films. Feminist film theory will provide the research a lens through which to view media while simultaneously taking into consideration societal ideologies.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The Slasher Film

“The telling of horrifying tales is as old as the human capacity to tell tales. The modern horror film is merely the latest form of such story telling” (Weaver & Tamborini, 1996, p. 15). Early film producers realized the potential success of these scary tales in film. According to Weaver and Tamborini (1996), American film producers developed the horror movie genre in the 1930’s with such films as *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*. Audiences love to be scared, surprised, and frightened; therefore, it was only a matter of time before the horror film industry would look for new and exciting ways to thrill viewers. This natural progression led to a new sub-genre of the horror film called the slasher film.

The forefather of the American slasher film is the Italian slasher film known as Giallo. Scholars originally used the term giallo to refer to the early Italian thriller and mystery novels. “Mario Bava’s 1962 Hitchcockian thriller, *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* (*The Evil Eye*) is usually attributed to be the first cinematic giallo, although there has been a number of Italian thrillers prior to this which could loosely have been defined as such” (Luther-Smith, 1999, p. 1). In 1969, Italian filmmaker, Dario Argento defined the modern slasher film with the production of *L’Uccello dalle Piume di Cristallo* (*The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*). These films all share the common characteristics of allure, mystery, and madness. The height of the Italian slasher film genre came in the early 1970s and eventually began to decline after 1975. On the other hand, the American slasher film became extremely popular in the early 1980s as a result of several American slasher films of the 1970s based on stories originally found in the Italian giallo (Luther-Smith, 1999).

According to Hutchings (2004), misunderstanding of slasher films often arises from the failure to produce a concrete definition. In relation to US horror of the late 1970s, some scholars and members of popular media have used other terms to describe slasher films. “The trade magazine *Variety* coined the term ‘teenie-kill pic’, Vera Dika has proposed ‘stalker film’, and Roger Ebert uses the term ‘women-in-danger films’” (p. 194). Schneider defines the slasher film as “a horror film in which isolated psychotic individuals (usually males) are pitted against one or more young people (usually females) whose looks, personalities, and/or promiscuities serve to trigger recollections of some past trauma in the killer’s mind” (Hutchings, 2004, p. 194).

According to Muir (2002), Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960) provided the greatest American influence on the American slasher films of the 1970s. It provided a mold that portrayed a traumatized killer with various mental problems who stalks and murders his victims. Though slasher films all seem to have this element, the plot lines may vary, each often incorporating its own unique element. For example, *Black Christmas* (1974) and *When a Stranger Calls* (1979) both utilize modern technology of the time, the telephone. In *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), slasher producers used cannibalism to add yet another unique, grotesque quality to the 1970s slasher genre. Perhaps *Halloween* (1978) is the predominant “psycho on the loose” story. Because of its ability to draw the audience to the slasher film genre, *Halloween* became the highest grossing independent film ever produced until 1990. The popularity of *Halloween* also spawned several other similar slasher storylines such as *Prom Night* in 1980.

The slasher film typically involves a killer who stalks and graphically murders a series of victims in a typically random, unprovoked fashion. The victims are usually teenagers or young adults who are away from mainstream civilization or far away from help. These films typically begin with the murder of a young woman and end with a lone female survivor who manages to

subdue the killer, only to discover that the problem has not been completely solved (Rockoff, 2002).

In a slasher film, the killer usually uses unconventional weapons such as blades, chainsaws, and blunt objects. Rarely, if ever, does the killer use guns as in action films. Often, the killer is able to withstand most or all of his victims' attempts to defend themselves, sometimes because of either explicit or implied supernatural abilities. Thus, even after being shot, stabbed, electrocuted, or burned, he is able to continue stalking his victims. However, the misconception about the killer's supernatural strength often permeates the slasher film genre. "With a few exceptions, the killer in slasher films is overtly asexual, aside from the brief bouts of voyeurism which tend to precede the murders, and his/her gender is left ambiguous" (Rockoff, 2002, p. 6). On the other hand, from the viewer's perspective, it is imperative that the killer be male, even though his identity is often unknown until the end of the film; therefore, throughout the film, it is up to the viewers to subjectively decide that the killer is male based on assumption of social norms and the perspective through which filmmakers tell the story.

Perhaps one of the most misunderstood and questioned aspects of the slasher film, is the use of a subjective perspective and point-of-view. For example, filmmakers often use the music tone or sequence to warn the audience, but never the victims, that the killer is coming, thus leaving the audience subjectively to interpret the events, music, or scenery in order to create or fill in the gaps of the storyline from their own point of view. Scholars, however, believe that the use of a subjective camera represents the killer's point-of-view; therefore, filmmakers force the audience to participate in the murders and identify with the killer rather than the victims. Rockoff (2002) claims that, "This subjective view allows audiences to feel involved in the 'game' of the slasher – the major points of which are figuring out just who and where the killer is, and when and how he will strike – heightening both their enjoyment and excitement" (p. 15).

According to Adam Rockoff (2002), “in the majority of slasher films, the killer is an ordinary person who has suffered some terrible-and sometimes not so terrible- trauma. It is because of this past injustice that he seeks vengeance- and the bloodier the better” (p. 6). Often a back-story also explains why he focuses primarily on a particular type of victim or a particular location. Slasher films can often begin with a flashback or prologue that illustrates the killer’s horrible past. Slasher films often use these past information or flashback scenes in the beginning of the films for two reasons. First, the producers want to attract the audience’s attention from the very beginning of the movie and make them want to know how the killer will get his revenge. Second, filmmakers want to explain to the audience why the killer is the way he is. Very few slasher films assume that the killer is born inherently bad or evil; therefore, it is important to explain to the viewers what happened to make the killer unleash his fury (Rockoff, 2002). In this flashback, the killer often witnesses a devastating event or he is the victim of a humiliating prank or tragic event. Often it is the anniversary of such an event that triggers the killer’s desire to kill those who directly caused his pain or those who might symbolically represent them. He often returns to the place of the event, or one similar to it, to seek his revenge. Holidays and special occasions, such as Christmas or a high school prom, are also times when killers often seek revenge for past atrocities. The killer’s vengeance for such events usually tends to center around an attractive young woman whom he tortures and victimizes through random acts of violence, often referred to as “The Final Girl” (Rockoff, 2002, p. 13).

According to Hutchings (2004), some critics of slasher films view the violence against women as nothing more than a reaction against feminism. He says:

“For film critics, and especially those on the left, the slasher was too often a reactionary and regressive development, especially in comparison with earlier social-critical U.S. horror films. In particular, the slasher offered a conservative moralism regarding sexuality which was itself just one part of a broader turn to the right that took place in American film and American society towards the end of the 1970s (p. 193).

In the beginning of the film, filmmakers usually establish the final girl as overtly tough, resourceful, and determined. Despite her friends or relatives, whom she often finds dead or mangled in some way, the final girl manages to survive in the end of the film, often after some sort of final struggle with the killer. Many scholars and feminist film critics have discussed the overt masculinity of the final girl. In *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, Carol Clover says that, “The Final Girl, is on reflection, a congenial double for the adolescent male. She is feminine enough to act out in a gratifying way, a way unapproved for adult males, the terms and masochistic pleasures of the underlying fantasy, but not so feminine as to disturb the structure of male competence and sexuality” (Rockoff, 2002, p. 13). The masculinity is usually a sign of competence or strength, rather than anything related to gender or sexual preference. On the other hand, these final girls can often be prone to many different social stereotypes throughout the film. These stereotypes often work to lead her towards her demise, but she ultimately resorts to masculine behaviors in order to survive in the end. Before one can understand how these social stereotypes affect women in horror film, first it is important to understand the concept of a stereotype.

Stereotype Theory

Social Scientist, Walter Lippmann, first used the term stereotype in 1922 to refer to an image that individuals hold in their heads about a specific topic. In his critically acclaimed book, *Public Opinion* (1922), Lippmann explains that the way things are in the real world are often not the same as the images that exist in the minds of individuals within a given society, yet the dominant group perpetuates the inaccurate images. He acquired the actual concept of a stereotype from the idea of the printing press. As the paper passes through the press, the press produces exact copies according to what the press manager has specified the print should look like. Much like powerful players in society, the media directors can determine how society views

specific groups within that society (DeFleur & Dennis, 1998). He stated that, “In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture” (Kanahara, 2006, p. 306).

After Lippmann coined the term stereotype, many other social science theorists used the concept with a variety of explanations; however, they all seem to focus around the same idea of cultural and superficial beliefs or generalizations about a specific group or subgroup within a given society (Kanahara, 2006). Most often, social scientists defined a stereotype as a negative idea or image thought to be true of every member of a specific group. Stored schemas in the minds of citizens provided by media and governmental messages facilitate these images. These beliefs become shared knowledge between members of the same society and culture. In general, “stereotypes function to keep minority people in positions of low power and prestige” (DeFleur & Dennis, 1998, p. 482).

Ford and Tonander (1998) stated that “...traits which differentiate a social group from people in general are more likely to be judged as stereotypical than traits which are less differentiating” (p. 373). This means that the dominant group tends to label traits or characteristics of another group, that stand out as unique, as stereotypic of a particular group. Stereotypes tend to separate individuals into certain subgroups within society based on a particular group membership. Thus, one might conclude that society, itself, is partially responsible for forming the group concept of a stereotype. In society, stereotypes become comfortable and easy ways for those in the majority to refer to those in the minority. They are unrealistic at times, but they are also unreliable generalizations that give rise to negative feelings and associations of negative qualities with certain groups. For this reason, prejudice often finds its way into society through stereotypes (Kanahara, 2006). On the other hand, the very need of

the dominant group to achieve self-esteem enhancement can affect the stereotype formation of a particular subordinate or minority group drastically. This means that those members of the dominant group may often put down on members of another group in order to make themselves look better to society. The dominant group needs to believe that it is better than those that are different from them (Ford & Tonander, 1998).

This trend becomes crucial to understand as social comparison becomes more important in social group interaction and as tensions arise causing greater conflict between groups struggling for normative status in society. According to McKillip, DiMiceli, and Luebke (1977), there are two different categories of intergroup interaction. They call the first category the universal stereotype. This means that individuals have a tendency to judge those within their group more positively than they do members of other groups. For example, men tend to view other males more favorably and in fewer stereotypic ways than they often view women. McKillip, DiMiceli, and Luebke (1977) refer to the second category as the reciprocal stereotype. This implies that members of the majority may often form stereotypes out of anger, resentment, or confusion. This occurs when members of the majority observe a certain minority group engaging in non-socially sanctioned behavior that. For example, “in our culture men are taught the need for dominance and competence while women are taught warmth and expressiveness. The reciprocal stereotype thus develops that men are competent and assertive while women are submissive, and that women are warm and gentle while men are cold and rough (McKillip, & DiMiceli, & Luebke, 1977, p. 82). When people deviate from these social norms formed by stereotypes, others become angry and resentful towards that individual or group. In return, this can often lead to further negative stereotyping.

Researchers generally claim that stereotypes are tools that allow those in the majority to keep those in the minority in positions of limited or subordinate power, particularly through

messages to other members of the majority group facilitated by the mass media outlets. Even though women are technically the majority of the world's population, society has revered males as the dominant social group. Therefore, television shows directed at a target male audience, might be more inclined to portray negative stereotypic portrayals of female characters or ones that reinforce a stringent idea of what a woman should be. Even though the media messages and portrayals of stereotypes have drastically decreased in severity over the last few decades, they still exist in society today, and they still serve a facilitating purpose for prejudice. According to DeFleur and Dennis (1998), "The process is still there, however, serving as the foundation on which meanings leading to prejudices and biases toward various categories of people can be learned from exposure to mass-communication content" (p. 483). Thus, it is important to understand how stereotype theory relates to the mass media messages of today and how the media managers help to form and facilitate these stereotypes.

Entertainment and news programming continue to present certain depictions of stereotyped groups, such as women, in its content. These portrayals often show such stereotyped groups as having less favorable characteristics than those members of the dominant majority, such as heterosexual, white males. This further aids the public, especially majority groups, in subscribing to stereotypic beliefs if they exist across all media. For those in the viewing audience who have had little or no contact with a given stereotyped group, these messages and portrayals through television and film can create "constructions of meaning" and further solidify stereotypic views about certain social, economic, or ethnic groups. Because of this overall stereotyping within the different media outlets, viewers of the mass media have incorporated certain stereotypes about various social groups into their ways of thinking. In turn, this can often affect how members of the majority communicate and respond to members of a stereotyped group. Incorrect or invalid assumptions about certain group characteristics may affect communication.

Overall, the process of stereotype formation by the mass media managers hinders the communication process. If a member of the majority holds preconceived notions about the behaviors of a particular group, then he or she might hold back or refrain from interacting with that group. If forced to interact with a member of the stereotyped group, the member of the dominant group might change his own behavior or alter the way in which he communicates in order to avoid a confrontation (DeFleur & Dennis, 1998).

Though confrontational situations are often easily avoidable, according to the Media Awareness Network (2008), media stereotypes are often unavoidable. Stereotypes, however, can be particularly damaging. Stereotypes can over simplify vast differences among groups to very simple and often unfair generalizations. They can also create misconceptions and incorrect assumptions about a particular group in society. Media directors can also use and enforce stereotypes to reinforce the ideas of those in power. Of course, the most damaging aspect of the media's perpetuation of stereotypes is social inequality and prejudice that they can often cause within a society (Media Awareness Network, 2008).

Individuals often use stereotypes in the media to differentiate between the characteristics of two particular groups, such as men and women, without focusing on the legitimacy of the claims themselves. Often in the media, women become the stereotyped group and men become the group who stereotypes (Rettew, Billman, & Davis, 1993). Researchers believe that understanding media stereotypes is important because stereotypes lead to discrimination among the sexes. They hope that their research will provide information that will help minimize public evaluations based on misinterpretations by the media.

Stereotypes of women found in the media often come from other aspects of life, as well. For example, the sports industry establishes the stereotypes of female athletes first and then the media content further perpetuates them. According to Schmalz and Davison (2006), "because of

its aggressive and highly competitive nature, sports falls on the masculine end of the scale. Given the social construction of gender and the characteristics associated with “acceptable” gender behavior, the consistent finding that boys have higher physical self-concept than girls is not surprising” (p. 336). The media directors are partially responsible for these stereotypes that exist in the sports industry by further perpetuating the stereotypic portrayal of female athletes or strong powerful women in general as masculine, abnormal, undesirable, and socially unaccepted. The more media content perpetuates these stereotypes, the more it will affect the way in which social groups communicate with one another and discriminate against one another. Often times for women, descriptions such as warm, loving, feminine, and virginal are the only roles that the media allow them to play (Media Awareness Network, 2008, p. 2). Though Schmalz and Davison’s study does not directly involve media content, it does show that different media outlets perpetuate these stereotypes throughout its content when constructing images of female athletes, which one could apply to women in general. Though many studies, such as Schmalz and Davison’s, seem to analyze social stereotypes of women, the researcher in this study was unable to find other studies that used stereotype theory as a theoretical foundation for studying slasher films.

In particular, media programming often portray women as nothing more than “the femme fatale, the supermom, the sex kitten, or the nasty corporate climber” (Media Awareness Network, 2008, p. 2). Television and film also typically portray an unrealistic view of the ideal woman. Media content presents the image that women can maintain the perfect figure, perfect hair, and perfect makeup, even while engaging in seemingly grueling and masculine activities. From this perspective, stereotypes of women are, in fact, not much different from those that existed decades ago, the idea that women should remain beautiful, proper, and gentle at all times. This

extends to horror films. Research shows that social stereotypes portrayed in horror films can affect the social perceptions of its viewers.

“Watching horror films is said to offer viewers a socially sanctioned opportunity to perform behaviors consistent with traditional gender stereotypes” (Weaver & Tamborini, 1996, p. 184). When the media, particularly the film industry, repeatedly expose viewers to social stereotypes of violence against helpless women, social acceptance of the behavior occurs. Thus, “early work on this topic found that males exposed to a sexually violent slasher film increased their acceptance of beliefs that some violence against women is justified and that it may have positive consequences” (p. 184).

In the horror genre, the stereotypic characteristics of beauty, gentility, and morality permeate the slasher film. According to Rockoff (2002), “One of the most enduring images of the slasher film is that of the beautiful heroine screaming with fear- as the killer rapidly approaches. These post-modern damsels in distress, who have been collectively referred to as the “Final Girl,” are usually the lone survivors of the killer’s rampage” (p. 13). In a study conducted by Sapolsky, Molitor, and Luque (2003), researchers observed the 10 most commercially successful slasher films of the 1990s. Results showed that the films portrayed female characters in more instances of fear, screaming, and cowering, than the male characters.

Sexual morality is also a stereotypic category of behavior that women fall into in the slasher film. According to the legendary “scream queen” Jamie Lee Curtis, “There’s a sexual factor, yes. They kill the loose girls and save the virgins in most of these movies” (Rockoff, 2002, p. 14). This further perpetuates the social stereotype in horror films that women are to remain sexually reserved and virginal, if they want to survive. The viewers expect those women who survive to remain proper and virginal, whereas those who are sexually promiscuous often die at the hands of the killer. This plays to the larger misogyny that often exist within stereotype

theory analysis. Males can engage in sexual activity and still succeed in life; however, film stereotypes sexually active females as promiscuous harlots who deserve to die or fail in some aspect of survival.

Cowan and O'Brien (1990) conducted a study on this very subject. They conducted a study in which they coded 56 slasher films. They focused on violence directed towards specific characters, male versus female. They found that the films portrayed male and female victims equally in frequency. On most measures, the non-surviving female characters were more frequently more sexual or appeared more sexual than the surviving females as well as the non-surviving males within each film. Overall, Cowan and O'Brien (1990) found that "In slasher films, the message appears to be that sexual women get killed and only the pure women survive" (p. 194).

According to Weaver and Tamborini (1996), traditional gender-role stereotypes also exist throughout horror films. For example, the male characters are far more likely to choose to act aggressively and to attack or fight the killer of their own choice. Female characters, on the other hand, are far more likely to run away from the killer and only engage in physical combat when absolutely forced to defend themselves. Women are also shown expressing fear and panic for much longer time-periods than male characters. These stereotypes serve to reinforce gender norms in the minds of its viewers. Weaver and Tamborini claim that the very nature of horror films often activates certain cognitive images in the minds of the viewers; therefore, viewers are likely to connect stereotyped gender roles to violence and submission. This key point is one that feminists argue is detrimental to the female gender. By perpetuating these social stereotypes, film representations help keep women submissive.

Stereotypes may also exist for certain subgroups within a larger category of individuals, for example, feminists exist in the larger category of women. For women, certain subgroups,

such as feminists, may work against formation of relationships with men in a male dominated society. These stereotypes in the media for certain subgroups, particularly in television and film, can act as a threat to the men in society, thus perpetuating negative stereotypes. Traditionally, researchers have found that men tend to reduce women in television and film to three basic categories: homemaker, professional, and sex object. Researchers have also found that men tend to feel threatened when certain subgroups, of women, such as feminists or female athletes, express non-stereotypic behavior in the media. These two subgroups of women in particular can threaten men's economic success and physical strength (DeWall, Altermatt, & Thompson, 2006).

Particularly important to researchers are the social implications that make this kind of research important. For women, gender discrimination remains a problem in society today. Even though societal values may have seemingly changed over the years, media content, particularly film and television, still easily and regularly allow the expression of sexism and prejudice. The media ingrain these stereotypes into the minds of many individuals from all walks of life and it ultimately affects the way one interacts with women on a daily basis. It becomes evident that people still treat women differently than men in society today. The media messages that the film industry portrays can also cause unconscious or unintentional social stereotyping of women (Agars, 2004). This unconscious social stereotyping is often the criticism of feminist film theory. For this study, feminist film theory reinforces stereotype theory and provides a window through which to discuss stereotyping of women in slasher films.

Feminist Criticism and Feminist Film Theory

Feminism seeks to explain how women find their own power in a world filled with social stereotypes and stigmas. Particularly, according to Knight (1995), feminist film theory is very much political in nature. "It seeks to expose, not to perpetuate, patriarchal practices" (p. 39). It is about fighting for equal rights for women as a distinct social group, equal to men in every way.

“Identifying male sadism, especially toward women, and holding men at least theoretically culpable for such acts as rape, wife beating, and child abuse are major achievements of modern feminism” (Clover, 1992, p. 226). Because of the women’s rights movement, feminists argue that female portrayals in the media should change. King (2007) argues, “As women assume authorial control and industrial power, and as audiences demand new images in old-fashioned genres, the representation of women should continue to change” (p. 2). Before the representations can change, it is first important to understand these representations of women, what they mean, and to understand where they fit into scholarly theory.

Feminist film theory emerged from an effort to find a place for women within film theory. Feminists felt a need for scholars to explore images and representations of women, as well as female spectators. According to Knight (1995),

“The examination of the representation of women in cinema, the idea that “woman” is a sign, the question whether there is such a thing as women’s desire, or a feminine language, or a subject-position for women as cinema spectators-these and other topics in the history of feminist film theory have tended to emerge as responses to theory, or to conceptualizations of desire, language, spectatorship, subjectivity, and signification which are seen to be patriarchal, phallogentric, and/or phallogcratic” (p. 40).

Traditionally, media presentations are historically counter to the ideas of feminism, particularly in film. In the beginning, feminist film critics were disappointed with the way feminist studies seemed to ignore feminist work and critiques of film. Perhaps this was a reflection of the unique status that feminist film studies occupied, as a member of both feminist studies and general film studies. “Indeed, in its emerging years in the 1970s and early 1980s, feminist film theory was more connected to film theory than it was to feminist theory” (Mayne, 2004, p. 1257). Thus feminist film theory seemed to depart from other fields of feminist theory specifically to expand upon images of women in film, rather than in all media.

Feminist film scholars have discussed the misogyny of the mainstream media, and particularly the film industry, which often classifies women as objects. However, they do note that the female roles in film today have expanded beyond their original stereotypic roles that existed several decades ago. In the early years of media, filmmakers produced movies that operated under a social value system designed to regulate women's sexuality, keeping them virgins only for men to use them for pleasure and domination. They were to have no real sexual desires of their own, but were merely there to serve the male desires. Feminist film scholars identify the way the camera follows women on screen as sexual objects, a concept called the "male gaze." Noted feminist scholar Carol Clover discusses "the monstrosity of women in horror films as reflections of collective fears about women's power over men" (King, 2007, p. 1). Some scholars have even suggested the specific portrayal of rape throughout the mainstream media and film industry as more sensitive due to the post-feminist age.

According to recent studies, slasher films may actually be working to decrease aggression towards females in society. Some researchers think this to be a reaction of Hollywood filmmakers who no longer wish viewers to see them in the same misogynistic light as their predecessors. Clover (1992) argues that men's reactions to the women's movement helped direct the slasher film towards stories that involved the females rescuing themselves. In fact, modern slasher films of the 1990s often portray male characters as jokes or helpless bystanders (King, 2007). However, this does not mean that the audience abandons the male characters in support of the female characters. On the contrary, viewers often form a bond with the killer instead.

Feminist film criticism of slasher films suggests that the viewer often watches the film through the eyes of the killer as he stalks the female victim or "final girl." The simple fact is that the victim, or the inevitable hero, is usually female, yet the majority of the audience for slasher films are male. Feminists often claim that the reason for this is that the slasher film allows male

viewers to live out carnal fantasies in the safety of a dark theater (Boyle, 2005). This cathartic reaction to slasher films often allows men to step outside themselves, release social tension, and mentally act out their aggressions towards females. Thus, feminist film theory often observes the audience for slasher films, male versus female viewers, as much as it analyzes the context of the actual films. While the slasher film has helped portray women as strong in the end, it still contributes to the problem of stereotyping. In analysis of this stereotyping, feminist film theory often discusses the role of women as embodied by fetishism or simply portrayed as a mere projection of the male desire (Mayne, 2004). As a result of the male desire, women are inevitably placed into an ironclad gender role defining them as the overtly feminine victims.

The slasher genre, however, was the first genre to confuse these traditional gender roles and portray women as heroes, not victims. However, “the most compelling evidence of the relative misogyny of slasher films, aside from the sheer volume of their violence, is the proportion of time spent watching young women cower, scream, or run in terror as assailants hunt them down” (King, 2007, p. 5). Filmmakers show the hero or “final girl” as a victim at some point in the film. This point illustrates why feminist theory claims that even though the media professionals say that portrayals of women have changed in the last few decades, stereotypes still exist, specifically portraying women as cowardly, weak, and dependent on a man. Therefore, even though on the surface the presentation seems to have improved, the deeper underlying meanings are still largely negative. “Carol Clover cautions against reading the final girls of slasher as products of feminism. Those stories are authored by men, organized around the concerns of confused young men, and littered with images of powerless girls” (King, 2007, p. 16).

In *The Women Who Knew Too Much*, Modleski (2005) explains that feminist theorists often analyze the elements of love and fear in slasher films, particularly in the films of Alfred

Hitchcock. Hitchcock often portrays women as victims of the men they love. Sexual violence is key to feminist analysis of the films of Alfred Hitchcock. “In film studies, Hitchcock is often viewed as the archetypal misogynist, who invites his audience to indulge their most sadistic fantasies against the female. Some critics have even argued that Hitchcock’s work is prototypical of the extremely violent assaults on women that make up so much of our entertainment today” (Modeleski, 2005, p. 15).

In *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, Clover (1992) explains that there have been some developments in the portrayal of female characters in horror films since the mid-1970s, mainly the female hero. The female characters take on more protagonist roles. These characters have also become more significant in the modern genre than they were in earlier horror films. Filmmakers have given female characters more autonomy and allowed them to become more resourceful, witty, and clever than their predecessors. “It is not only in their capacity as victims that these women appear in these films. They are, in fact, protagonists in the full sense: they combine the functions of suffering victim and avenging hero” (Clover, 1992, p. 17). Clover also suggests a turn of fate in the modern slasher film. She explains that over the last 20 years, traditional masculinity does not count for much in the slasher film. The killer inevitably kills the men who insist on taking charge and becoming the hero.

This study sought to explore the claims of progress in representing women in entertainment today by analyzing the social stereotypes that surround them in the slasher film genre. It attempted to find out if stereotypic portrayals of women in slasher films have changed from the original films to the later remakes. I brought these two concepts together by examining slasher films from two different time-periods that are based on the same story line. This study attempted to show that even though the media managers claim that there are fewer stereotypes about women in film today, that social stereotypes of women are still present in film.

Research Questions

RQ 1 - Are the portrayals of women different in the original films than they are in the remakes even though the story lines are the same?

RQ 1 a –Are women classified as victims in both the original films and remakes? Does the victim become the hero in the remakes?

RQ 1 b – Are women in slasher film remakes only masculine when they are forced to be masculine? Are they originally portrayed in the same stereotypic ways before crisis forces them into a more masculine role?

RQ 2- If the social stereotypes of women in slasher films have changed from the original films to the remakes, then do new stereotypes of women in slasher film exist?

Chapter 3

Methods

Explanation of Textual Analysis

For the purpose of this study, I conducted a qualitative textual analysis of sixteen films. According to Silverman (2005), textual analysis works well in qualitative research studies that are primarily concerned with organizing and categorizing large amounts of information. He also claims that studies using textual analysis as a method should not conclude with statements of fact, but rather, they should look for pieces of information within the texts that allow the researchers to make generalizations about a group, culture, or society. In this case, I will be organizing large amounts of information gathered from the films and using this information to make generalizations about the portrayal of women in slasher films. Jensen and Jankowski (1991), also agree that textual analysis can be a useful research tool that can be used to draw out meaning through interpretation of one or more texts, including film as used in this study. It can also reveal information about a culture or group who are represented in particular ways throughout the works, such as women.

Textual analysis is a strong research method that allows for likely interpretations about a group. McKee (2003) claims that texts are any item that researchers use to make meaning from. Most researchers use textual analysis to determine differences in relationships among items with a fundamental similarity. From his point of view, McKee (2003) explains that in textual analysis, the researcher should be able to view a body of work and make note of similar characteristics that continually arise from each individual text. In addition, researchers could also observe these texts as an entire body of work or as individual works within the larger group; however, the texts should have a recurring theme that is present throughout the entire group. In this textual analysis, the researcher looked for differences in the relationships between stereotypic portrayal of female

characters between original films and their later remakes that share a fundamental similarity in plot, dialogue, and storyline.

Sample

For the purpose of this textual analysis, the researcher selected eight original slasher films that all were later remade, for sixteen total films. The films were selected based on the definition of a slasher film, previously defined in the literature review, as a specific type of horror film in which psychotic individuals stalk or kill many young people, usually women, in a variety of ways. This study analyzed all of the films presented in Table 1. These films were selected because they were the only slasher films that possessed an original film and a later remake from 1960 to the present that met all of the requirements of a slasher film. Originally, twenty films were selected; however, *The Boogeyman* (original and remake) was excluded from the study because it belonged more to the supernatural sub-genre of horror, rather than slasher. *House of Wax* (original and remake) was also excluded because the original film, produced in 1953, fell outside the scope of the definition of a slasher film, as previously defined. Appendix A lists a complete filmography and synopsis of each film.

Procedure

In order to analyze the themes and stereotypes in each of the films, this textual analysis incorporates the use of coding sheets that were used to record the information while viewing the films. All sixteen films were watched in their entirety. Notes were taken of various traits belonging to the female characters. For each of the films, the examined characteristics were broken down into sections. Likewise, any personality traits that are not stereotypical of women in slasher films were also noted. Examined characteristics are broken down into the following

areas: behaviors, interactions with others, intelligence of the female characters, and physical appearance.

First, behavior was observed, specifically fighting behaviors and behavior in moments of high stress or fear, including dialogue during these stressful times. These types of behavior can include hand-to-hand combat or struggle with the killer, running away from the killer, or simply screaming or not fighting back at all. Because women's behaviors are the most overt pieces of information, they may be good indicators of when the films are presenting gender stereotypic information. According to *The Language of Communication- Dictionary and Research Guide* (2008), "Behavior refers to the actions or reactions of an object or organism, usually in relation to the environment. Behavior can be conscious or unconscious, overt or covert, and voluntary or involuntary" ("Behavior," 2008).

Second, the researcher observed interactions with others. "Interaction is a kind of action which occurs as two or more objects have an effect upon one another. The idea of a two-way effect is essential in the concept of interaction instead of a one-way causal effect" ("Interaction," 2008). Specifically acts of violence against female characters, female death related to sexual promiscuity, and dialogue, "a reciprocal conversation between two or more persons" ("Dialogue," 2008), were observed in this category. The researcher observed how the sexual morality or social values attributed to women in slasher films between time-periods.

Third, the intelligence of the female characters was examined. Intelligence is "property of mind that encompasses many related mental abilities, such as the capacities to reason, plan, solve problems, think abstractly, comprehend ideas and language, and learn" ("Intelligence," 2008). Specifically, this research observed if women appeared to engage in critical thinking when trying to solve problems or stop the killer. It also observed the dialogue between characters during the critical thinking process. This allowed the researcher to observe whether women seem to find

solutions independently, an overtly masculine characteristic, or do they still rely on a man to save them and remain the victim.

Finally, the physical appearance of women as they behave in various situations throughout the film was examined. When engaging in physically demanding or grotesque activities, do the women remain looking beautiful or “lady-like”? This allowed the researcher to establish if the women remained overtly beautiful in both time-periods, or if they had become more masculine in the remakes. Overall, this study seeks to establish if the original films portray women in a different way than the remade films.

After film viewing and observation were completed, all categories from the original films were compared to those of the remakes. An overall analysis of common themes found in the original films as a whole compared to the common themes in the group of remakes was completed. The comparison between coding sheets provided clear data supporting and/or nullifying claims made by media directors today in regards to the stereotypic portrayal of women.

Table 1

Complete List of Slasher Films Examined in this Study

Film	Original Date	Remake Date
Black Christmas	1974	2006
Halloween	1978	2007
Prom Night	1980	2008
Psycho	1960	1998
Texas Chainsaw Massacre	1974	2003
The Hills Have Eyes	1977	2006
The Hitcher	1986	2007
When a Stranger Calls	1979	2006

Chapter 4

Results

Behavior Categories

The first category examined was behavior. Within this category, three subcategories of stereotypic behavior were coded: fighting behaviors, behaviors in moments of high stress or fear, and dialogue during times of stress and fear.

Fighting Behaviors

In analyzing fighting behaviors, overall the original films do not show the female characters, including the final girl, fighting back against the killer in any sort of way. The female victims run, hide, or scream, but they do not fight back. In the remakes, the overwhelming majority of films portrayed the final girl as fighting back against the killer or killing him or her in some instances; however, in almost all of these films, the final girls are shown in extreme fear before, during, or after they kill or fight with the killer at the end of the film. Incidentally, the supporting female characters in the remakes do not fight back against the killer. They seem still to portray the helpless stereotypes that existed in the original films. The theme is one of general helplessness and fear, even with the final girl. Over time, this theme has remained fairly consistent.

Three of the eight original films differ from the above generalization. In *Black Christmas* (1974), the final girl, Jess, kills her boyfriend whom she thinks is the killer; however, filmmakers do not show this fight scene; rather, it is implied. They merely show the dark, dank basement as Jess stumbles around shaking in fear. During the fight scene, the viewer only hears the noises of a struggle and a woman's scream before Jess is shown cowering behind her dead boyfriend's body. In *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), Ethel, the mother, and Lynne, the older sister, fight back against the mutants when they first break into the trailer; however, the mutants overpower them

and kill them both. They fight back in order to save the baby and younger sister, Brenda, who are trapped in the trailer with the mutants. Conversely, one of the remakes differed from the group as a whole. At the end of *Prom Night* (1980), Kim, the final girl, manages to defeat the killer and save her boyfriend without help from anyone. She single handedly fights the killer, wrestles with him, and leads him outside where he is shot and dies. However, she realizes that the killer is her boyfriend as he dies in her arms and the film closes with her crying. In *Prom Night* (2008), the final girl, Donna, does not fight back against the killer at the end. She crawls away from the killer as he pulls on her ankle. She tried to kick him but she fails. Eventually, the police officer shoots the killer actually saves her. This is ironic because the original *Prom Night* was one of the exceptions in which the final girl did fight back and destroy the killer; therefore, the portrayal shifted from strong to helpless as time progressed.

Behavior in Moments of Stress and Fear

In observing moments of high stress or fear, the original films portrayed the female characters to be very jumpy, anxious, and nervous. During these times, the female characters seem to take directions from the male characters rather than taking charge of the situation themselves. In the remakes, the portrayals in general are pretty much the same as the original films within this category; however, there are a few exceptions to each group. In the original film, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), Sally takes charge of the search for her missing friends in the woods. She decides that they should leave the car and start looking for their friends and also decides which direction to start looking in. In *The Hitcher* (1986) Nash takes charge of the situation and does not rely on the man to do the thinking for her. She decides what they are going to do next, and how they are going to stop the stalker and convince the police that they are not murderers. In the remakes of *The Hitcher* (2007) and *When a Stranger Calls* (2006), the final girls are strong, independent, and able to take charge of the situations without depending on men.

In *The Hitcher* (2007), Grace decides the course of action much the same way described of Nash, the main female character in the original film. In *When a Stranger Calls* (2006), Jill is left without any help at all; therefore, she must take charge and make decisions for herself. The only male help she can rely on comes to her through a policeman's voice on the telephone. The interesting factor in all of these exceptions is that, again, each film still portrays each one of the strong and independent female characters as fearful, distressed, or helpless for the majority of the film.

Behavioral Dialogue

The last section in the behavior category is dialogue. In the original films as well as the remakes, the female characters mostly seem to gasp, scream, cry, repeat the name of a missing friend during times of stress, or plead with the killer to stop. There seems to be no real dialogue during these times. Even when the killer may speak to them in person or on the phone, there is often no real conversation in which the women speak back. In addition, when the females do speak during times of stress or fear, they still somehow manage to maintain their femininity and gentility. For example, in *Halloween* (1978 & 2007), Laurie repeats the names of her friends as she enters the dark, silent house. She also screams and cries when she finds a body, often pleads with the killer, Michael, to stop attacking her, and constantly yells for help. In *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974 & 2003), Sally and Erin, the final girl in each film, both run through the woods yelling their friends' names and screaming for help from anyone who can hear them.

On the other hand, each group of films contained three exceptions. Interestingly, they were the same films in each group. In *Black Christmas* (1974 & 2006), *Psycho* (1960 & 1998), and *The Hitcher* (1986 & 2007) the female characters all seem to be more forceful and aggressive in their dialogue during times of stress. They leave behind the gentility in order to get their point across when speaking to others about the urgency about a particular issue. For

example, in *Back Christmas* (1974 & 2006), the women use aggressive language to explain the urgency of the situation to the police, who do not take their story of a Christmas stalker seriously. Barb asks the police officer, “Well what the hell are you planning to do about it.” They also use strong language with as each other as they debate if they should leave the sorority house in the snow to find safer shelter. In *Psycho* (1960 & 1998), Lila is very forceful with the sheriff in trying to explain the importance of finding her sister, Marion. She tells him that she knows there is something wrong at the Bates Motel and that if the sheriff does not take care of the situation, then she will find out what happened to her sister by herself. Lila tells the sheriff, “I want you to do something about it. I’m sorry if I seem over anxious, It’s just that something is wrong out there and I have to know what.” In *The Hitcher* (1986 & 2007), Nash and Grace, the lead female in each film, take charge of the situation and often use aggressive language to instruct their male counterpart how to proceed and what to do in order to survive the stalker. Grace tells Jim that they cannot rely on the police that they must rely on themselves to get away. She also tells the police that they should not be wasting their time talking to Grace and Jim, but that they should be out there trying to find the killer before he kills someone else. Grace says, “Are you kidding? Why are you wasting your time in here with me? You should be out there looking for him. He is going to kill more people.”

Interactions with Others

The second category examined was Interactions with others. Specifically, I observed general interactions with others, acts of violence against female characters, death or misfortune of female characters related to sexual promiscuity, and dialogue during interaction.

General Interactions

In the general interactions section, the original films as well as the remakes, portrayed female interaction in the same stereotypic ways. The female characters were very well-mannered

when speaking to members outside of their social group, very loving and caring towards their friends and families, they gossiped to one another about boys, they shopped, and they even showered together. All sixteen films, the originals and the remakes, exhibited these general interactions between the female characters.

Acts of Violence against Females

The second section in this category explores acts of violence against female characters. In regards to violence, there seemed to be two primary themes: torture and prolonged victimization. Torture consisted of physical, psychological, and emotional forms. Killers seemed to put women in situations where they were forced to watch the murders of boyfriends and friends, forced to play phone games, and forced to hide. These themes were found across time periods. However, revenge and punishment for past atrocities in the killer's life, or the sexual obsession of the killer with the female characters motivated killing the women in the original films more than in the remakes. In the remakes, the killers seemed to take more pleasure in killing victims, which served as an additional motivation for murder.

The results also showed that in both groups of films, the female characters were also subjected to prolonged victimization by the killer. Women seemed to be brutalized during violent or death scenes more often than do the male characters. In general, female death scenes were longer and more dramatic than the death scene of a male character in both the original films as well as the remakes. However, in one instance, one of the original films actually brutalized the final girl more than did the remake. In *The Hitcher* (1986), the killer ties the Nash, final girl, to two 18-wheeler trucks and brutally rips her body in half. In this film, the male character becomes the survivor at the end of the film and kills the stalker. On the other hand, in the 2007 remake, the main male character, Jim, is the one that the killer rips in half between two trucks as Grace is forced to watch. Grace becomes the survivor who kills the stalker in the end, in true final girl

fashion. The stalker manages to escape the armed police car and traps grace inside after setting it on fire. She manages to escape the flames, walks right up to the killer and shoots him in the head. Although each of the final girls in these films is victimized in a different way, they are both tortured and stalked by the hitcher in the same way. He plays and teases each one of them by following and stalking them, a characteristic found in many slasher films.

Usually before the killer commits an act of violence against his female victim, he watches her or stalks her in some way or fashion, usually viewing her as a sexual object. This type of stalking is another form of prolonged victimization. The killer usually psychologically victimizes the woman for an extended amount of time by forcing her into an uncontrollable stage of paranoia and terror. Scholars refer to this as the “male gaze.” For example, in *Black Christmas* (1974 & 2006), the killer stalks the women from inside the sorority house through cracks in the wall. He watches them from the attic or closets before he kills them. In the remake, he even watches them take a shower through a hole in the bathroom floor. In *Halloween* (1978 & 2007), Michael also stalks his victims before attacking or killing them. He follows the women on their walk home from school and while they babysit. This characteristic of the male gaze is also found in *Psycho* (1960 & 1998). Norman Bates watches Marion take a shower through a hole in the hotel room wall before brutally killing her. I found this characteristic within six of the eight original films, excluding *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and *The Hitcher* (1986), and in seven of the eight remakes, excluding *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003). Therefore, a total of thirteen of the sixteen films contained this quality. Again, this shows very little if no change in the section of violence against female characters from one time period to the next.

Sexual Promiscuity

The third section within interaction is female death or misfortune related to sexual promiscuity. In the group of original films, not all of the films show female characters engaging

in sexual activity or promiscuous behavior; however, those films that do show the female characters engaging in such behaviors usually show these women dying as a result of their immorality. Four of the eight original films, *Halloween* (1978), *Prom Night* (1980), *Psycho* (1960), and *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), show female characters engaging in sexual activity, and each time, the killer murders them immediately or shortly after their sexual encounter. In the remade films, only three films, including *Black Christmas* (2006), *Halloween* (2007), and *Psycho* (1998), show female characters engaging in sexual behavior; however, again, each time the female character has sex or acts promiscuously, she dies shortly afterwards. Postcoital death seems to involve issues of morality, social values, and social justice at the hands of a crazed killer, unlike violence against women, which seems to be something that the women cannot control. Sexual promiscuity, and its consequences, seems to be something that they can control and are forced to take responsibility for, and the killer punishes them for their sins. Though sexually promiscuous women seem to be more responsible for their own demise, it does not make their death any less violent than the killings of virgins.

Dialogue during Interaction

The last element of the interaction category is dialogue during interactions with others. In the originals and remakes, the women often use vulgar language, except in *When a Stranger Calls* (1979 & 2006), and curse when talking with their male and female friends, but adults often correct their language and remind them of proper manners. In *Black Christmas* (1974 & 2006), the house-mother, Mrs. MacHenry, reminds the sorority girls that it is unladylike to speak profanely saying, “Girls, watch your language. It’s not ladylike,” and the male characters generally seem shocked or disgusted when the women use vulgar language towards them. The female characters in the original films also talk about the stereotypic female things like gossip, other girls, boys, beauty, sex, cheerleading, school, and babysitting. The females, however, can

also be very confrontational with one another, usually arguing over a man. The women can also be very sarcastic and headstrong when speaking to others, particularly those in authority positions. For example, in *Black Christmas* (1974), Barb is very rude, vulgar, and inappropriate while speaking to the police officers. She curses at them and tells them that they are not doing their job properly. She also talks dirty to them and uses very sexually explicit language. The police officer asks for the phone number to the sorority house and Barb tells him that the number is, “Fallacio 2-0-8-0,” implying that he could receive oral sex at the sorority house. These characteristics seem consistent across timeframes.

Intelligence

The third category examined analyzed the intelligence of the female characters, specifically during times of critical-thinking and problem-solving. Dialogue was again analyzed in order to determine the level of intelligence that the female characters used in the critical thinking and problem-solving processes, as well as, the intelligence used while speaking.

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

The first section analyzes intelligence during the critical-thinking and problem-solving process. In most of the original films, the female characters do not seem to exercise good critical-thinking skills in solving their problems, rather they seem to rely on emotions to guide them rather than logical thinking, often leading to their demise. They often run into dark rooms, or hide in places where the killer can find them, or run in the opposite direction of a large group of people that could help them. In short, their ideas for salvation often fail. The female characters of the original films often come across as damsels in distress who cannot think for themselves. For example, in *Black Christmas* (1974), Jess, the final girl, knows that the killer is in the house with her. The police officer on the phone tells her that they have traced the call to the separate phone line in Mrs. MacHenry’s room. He also tells her that the killer is in the house, and instructs her to

put the phone down and walk out of the front door; however, she puts the phone down and runs up the stairs, where she knows the killer is, screaming her friends' names. In *Halloween* (1978), Laurie runs down the street yelling for help, and she screams as she runs throughout the house, which only serves to alert Michael to where she is hiding. In the final scene, she hides in a closet where Michael can easily get to her and where she cannot get away. In *When a Stranger Calls* (1979), the babysitter, Jill, quickly figures out the caller can see her and that she needs to call the police when he starts to describe the way she looks and asks her if she has been upstairs to check on the children. In comparison, only three of the eight remade films portray female characters, including the final girls, as ignorant or helpless to solve a problem by themselves, *Black Christmas* (2006), *Halloween* (2007), and *Prom Night* (2008).

The majority of the remade films portray the female characters, particularly the final girls, as intelligent and very skilled at problem solving. For example, in *When a Stranger Calls* (2006), Jill thinks to run to the guesthouse to use a different phone line when the main line in the house has been compromised. She also finds a way to get the children safely away from the killer without help from anyone else.

Three of the eight original films, however, portray very intelligent female characters that are capable of solving the problem critically and logically. In *Psycho* (1960), Marion trades in her car for a new one to make herself harder to track, and her sister Lila is the one who comes up with the plan to go to the hotel with Marion's boyfriend pretending to be married so that they can investigate the scene. In *The Hitcher* (1986), the female character, Nash, is the one controlling all of the decisions as to how they should proceed next. She decides where they are going next, what they are going to do when they get there, and with whom they are going to make contact. She also helps explain the situation to her male counterpart in terms that he will understand during times of extreme stress.

Dialogue during Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

The second section to this category is dialogue during the critical thinking and problem solving processes. Overall, the original films do not use any real dialogue during the critical thinking process or problem solving. Rather, they rely mostly on female screams, pleading, or a suspicious inner-dialogue. The inner-dialogue usually comes in the form of thinking, debating options inside the character's mind, or the inner most thoughts of the character, all of which the viewer hears. For example, in *Psycho* (1960 & 1998), as Marion is driving, the audience hears her inner thoughts of paranoia as she tries to construct a getaway plan. She hears what her boss will be saying about her. She imagines the conversation between her boss and the police. Her boss describes her as a hard working young woman, and that the whole situation is a shock to him. She imagines the client whom she stole the money from saying, "I ain't about to kiss off \$400,000. I'll get it back, and if any of it is missing, I'll replace it with her fine soft flesh." The exception to this rule is *The Hitcher* (1986), in which the female character instructs the male character on how they are going to get away and what they are going to do next, as mentioned earlier. The male character tells Nash to get out of the car and then asks her, "So what do we do now?" She answers, "No, I'm not getting out of the car. They won't hurt me. We are going to talk to them by radio and turn ourselves in."

As for the remade films, half of them used the same kind of internal, illogical dialogue that was present in the original films, while the other half produced a very clear and intelligent dialogue during moments of critical thinking and problem solving. For example, in *Black Christmas* (2006), the girls are very argumentative with each other when trying to decide what their next course of action should be. They take the time to present their plans of action and debate the pros and cons of each one. The housemother wants to leave, but the Kelli says, "We are not all here. If we were, then I would go. We are safer staying together. We are sisters, so act

like it.” Another sister yells back to the housemother, “I’m not leaving Lauren, you bitch.” In *Halloween* (2007), Laurie tells Michael that she wants to help him and that they can be a family again in order to get him to lower his guard so that she can escape. She says, “I want to help you. I just don’t know how.” In *The Hitcher* (2007), Grace begins to fight with her boyfriend while trying to solve the problem, explaining to him that the whole situation is his fault and that she told him not to pick up a hitchhiker in the first place. Grace says, “Why did you have to offer the guy a ride? You could have just listened to me.” Last, Jill finds the children from their hiding place and calms them down by explaining to them what they need to do in order to get away from the killer in *When a Stranger Calls* (2006). She tells them, “Hi, I’m Jill. I’m the babysitter. It’s ok. Stay right here.” She also instructs them, “Go out the window right there.”

Physical Appearance

The final category examined the physical appearance of the female characters, specifically their general appearance throughout the film as well as their physical appearance while fighting or engaging in grotesque activities. For general appearance, female characters in both the original films as well as the remakes remained youthful, beautiful, thin, sexy, well-groomed, neat, nicely-dressed, and very well put together throughout the film even in the moments of their death or final struggle with the killer. Female characters even seem to wake up looking beautiful. They have perfect hair and makeup, their clothes are not ripped or tarnished, and they do not sweat during strenuous activity. This was another theme or trend found across time periods, with very little variation.

Additionally, both the original films as well as the remakes allow the female characters to maintain their beauty while fighting. Even in death, filmmakers give the females an almost angelic or wholesome look. For example, in *Halloween* (1978), Laurie survives a brutal attack from Michael and manages to escape with only a single rip in the sleeve of her shirt and mildly

disheveled hair. In *Psycho* (1960 & 1998), Marion has an almost angelic and innocent look on her face after Norman kills her in the shower. She lies on the floor of the solid white bathroom with a somber look on her face as if she were merely sleeping with her eyes open. Also, in *Prom Night* (1980 & 2008), the women are shown with very little blood on them. Even after the killer brutally murders them, the film shows them lying on the ground still looking beautiful in their prom dresses with perfect hair and makeup and their dresses almost completely intact and unharmed. Each group of films, however, has one exception to this trend. In the original group, Sally, the final girl from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), is covered completely in blood and looks disgusting and grotesque. She does not retain the traditional standard of beauty. In the remake group, Laurie, the final girl in *Halloween* (2007), looks completely grotesque during her final struggle with Michael as dirt and blood cover her body.

Research Questions

The first question seeks to generalize the information gathered in each category of film by asking if the portrayals of women are different in the original films from those of the remakes. There are eleven sections within the four categories of examined characteristics. Of the eleven sections, only three presented stark differences between the original films and the remakes: fighting behaviors, intelligence during the critical thinking process, and dialogue during the critical thinking process. A quick reference to these differences can be found in Table 2.

In fighting styles, the original films depicted helpless females who did not usually fight back, whereas the remade films presented stronger women, final girls, who frequently fought back against their attackers in some way. As for the intelligence factor, during the critical thinking process, the original films presented women who seemed like ignorant damsels in distress whereas the remade films more often portrayed intelligent women who were very skilled in problem solving. Dialogue during the critical thinking process also presented interesting

results. Overall, the original films seemed to have either no real dialogue or a suspicious inner dialogue during the critical thinking process. On the other hand, four of the remade films portrayed women's critical thinking dialogue in the same way, but the other four films portrayed presented the female characters with a very strong dialogue during these times. Thus, the majority of the portrayals of women are the same from the original group to the remake group; however, some differences are present.

Under the first research question, there are two sub-questions: 1) Do the films classify women as victims in both the original films as well as the remakes and 2) Does the victim eventually become the hero in the remade films? The answer is yes to both sub-questions. Women play the role of the victim in both the original films as well as the remakes. In the remakes, however, the victim often becomes the hero. This is particularly the role reserved for the final girl. The final girl is more celebrated as a survivor of the original films, but more glorified as a hero in the remade films. The final girls, in the original films, seem to be the lucky survivor who was rescued by someone else or who managed to get away with a little luck, whereas they seem to create their own fortune in the remakes. For example, in *When a Stranger Calls* (1979), the police officer saves the final girl from the grasps of the killer. The second sub-question asked if the female characters in the remade films only engage in masculine behaviors when a situation forces them to be masculine. Subsequently, it also asks if the films portray women as having more feminine characteristics in the beginning parts of the film until a crisis forces them to be more masculine, just as the original films did. As in the original films, the women of the remade films remain overtly feminine and beautiful before a brutal death, direct attack by the killer, or violent fight scene occurs forcing them to convert to more masculine behaviors in order to survive. The final girl in the 2006 remake of *When a Stranger Calls* saves

herself by staying alert, brave, and by fighting back against the killer. The message here is that masculinity can save one's life, but femininity cannot.

Table 2

Differences in Results between Originals to Remakes

	Original Films	Remade Films
Fighting Behaviors	Majority of women do not fight back against the killer	Majority of women fight back against or attack the killer
Critical Thinking and Problem Solving	Women seemed to rely on emotions rather than good critical thinking and problem solving skills. They run into dark places, hide in places they should not, etc.	Women seemed to be intelligent and skilled problem solvers.
Dialogue During Critical Thinking and Problem Solving	Original Films and half of the remakes portray no real dialogue during critical thinking. Sometimes, an inner dialogue is used.	Second half of the Remakes portray very clear intelligent dialogue during critical thinking

The second research question asks if social stereotypes of women in slasher films have changed from the original films to the remakes, then do new stereotypes of women in slasher film exist. As discovered in analysis of the first research question, only three coded sections differed from the original films to the later remakes: fighting behavior, critical thinking and problem solving ability, and dialogue during the critical thinking process. Therefore, new stereotypes for female characters in slasher films might include a woman who is classically stereotypical in her behavior, dialogue, and appearance, but who has evolved to include the more masculine traits when forced to use them in situations such as fighting, taking charge of the situation, or problem solving. The new stereotype may imply that in order for a character in a slasher film to survive, especially a female character, she must be both masculine and feminine.

Nevertheless, this comes at a point during which her masculinity is acceptable, maybe even necessary to ensure survival. The classic stereotypes portray women as beautiful, overtly feminine, weak, helpless, dumb, in need of rescue, and incapable of or unwilling to fight back. They cower, scream, run, and hide. The new stereotype of the remakes seems to incorporate masculinity, but still makes use of the original stereotypes throughout the films in some way or another. The final girl can be masculine to survive, but she must still be feminine. Overall, the classic stereotypes seem to permeate the original films, and there is seemingly a new definition of the final girl stereotype that incorporates masculinity, while still making use of some of the elements of the classic stereotype.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusions

Discussion

This study explored the claims of media directors of progress in representations of women in entertainment today by analyzing the female stereotypes in the slasher film genre. It attempted to observe any changes or similarities in the stereotypical portrayals of women in slasher films from the original films to the later remakes. By doing so, this study attempted to show that even though the media representatives claim that there are fewer stereotypes about women in film today, that social stereotypes of women are still present in film. This topic becomes important when discussing the affects of media on societal views and behaviors towards a particular group within that society. For example, when slasher films repeatedly expose viewers to social stereotypes of violence against women, social acceptance of the behavior occurs. Thus, Weaver and Tamborini (1996) found that males who viewed slasher films increased their acceptance of violence against women. For this reason, it was important to point out that social stereotypes of women have changed, but not as much as media representatives would like society to think.

Overall, this study found that the majority of traditional stereotype elements existed in both sets of films with the exception of three categories. This suggests a slight shift in the portrayal of women across time. Specifically, these changes occurred in women's fighting behaviors, intelligence during the critical thinking process, and dialogue during the critical thinking process. During fight scenes, the original films portrayed women as helpless, whereas the remakes portrayed strong women who could take care of themselves. In addition, in the original films, the women did not seem to fight back, whereas the remakes showed women who could defend themselves if forced to do so. As for intelligence, the original films portrayed the

women as ignorant or unintelligent whereas the remade films most often portrayed woman as intelligent problem solvers. This shows that women are beginning to be represented as intelligent and capable of thinking for themselves just as men do. In respect to dialogue during critical thinking, the original films seemed to have either no real dialogue, or an inner dialogue. On the other hand, half of the remade films allowed the female characters to have very strong dialogue. In both the original films as well as the remakes, women played victimized roles; however, the victim, specifically the final girl, often becomes the hero in the remakes. As in the original films, the women of the remade films also remain feminine and beautiful before killer attacks them and forces them to act more masculine in order to survive.

Sexual morality is also a stereotypic category of behavior that women fall into in the slasher film. The virginal girls are those that survive in the end. Again, this further perpetuates the social stereotype that women who survive must remain proper and virginal, whereas those who are sexually promiscuous often die. Overall, the results showed that this stereotype is not as prevalent today in the remakes as it once was in the original films; however, it does still exist. In the remakes, less than half of the films actually portrayed women in a sexual situation at all, but for the few that did, the women were always killed shortly after engaging in sexual activity just as in the original films. This leaves the impression that women are being sexualized less than they once were; however, when they are sexualized, they are portrayed in the same negative way that they were in the original films.

In the final analysis and observation of the results, a new stereotype seems to have formed in the remakes or the traditional conception of what females do, has shifted. To explain this very concept, Clark (1969) created four chronological stages of media representation for social groups. In the first stage, called the non-recognition stage, the group is not represented at all in the media. In this study, women were clearly represented in both the original and the

remakes. The second stage, ridicule, involves stereotyping of social groups, the primary focus of this study. In Clark's third stage, regulation, the media represents groups in limited socially acceptable roles. This stage is more evident in the original films, than in the remakes. Women are portrayed in certain stereotypic and socially acceptable roles like the beautiful victim, helpless, scared girl, immoral slut, or the damsel in distress. While these traits are also seen in the remakes, they appear to be more blatant in the original films. In Clark's fourth stage, respect, the group is represented in the complete range of positive and negative roles that exist in everyday life (Hart, 2000).

In the remakes, the women are portrayed with the same negative stereotypes as in the past; however, they are also allowed to fight back and save themselves at the end. They seem to incorporate masculinity, but still exploit the original stereotypes throughout the films. The final girl must be both masculine and feminine to survive. Overall, the classic stereotypes seem to exist in both the original films as well as the remakes, however, the remakes express a new definition of the final girl stereotype that incorporates masculinity. Therefore, the portrayal of women seem to be in a transition period from the regulation stage to the respect stage of representations. Though they are starting to be represented more realistically, there is still not an equal balance of positive and negative characteristics. Women are most shown in a negative light throughout the film until they are forced to become masculine and save the day. A more realistic and balanced representation and a good portrayal of women would show a woman who is equally masculine and feminine in her behaviors and actions throughout the film, not merely at the end when she needs to survive.

While both the original films and the remakes share common classic stereotypes, the remakes clearly have a new evolved sense of the final girl as a stronger woman. Many scholars attribute this change or evolution of portrayals to the influence of the resurgent slasher films of

the 1990's. The slasher film made its comeback beginning with *Scream* in 1996. Following *Scream*, a series of teen slasher films burst onto the screen with massive popularity; however, something was different about these films from the traditional slasher films of so many years before. The dynamics and the rules were different from what they had once been. Teens seemed to be less concerned with morality, virginity, or sexual promiscuity. Also, the idea of the final girl came to incorporate a stronger female who often survives based on group dynamics rather than surviving all alone. In 1998, the *Halloween* story made its way back to the screen as a resurgent film in *Halloween H2O: 20 Years Later*. This time, Laurie Strode, the final girl in the original *Halloween* film, is 20 years older and she is not afraid to fight back against the killer. Though she has now become strong and masculine, she is also terrified, fearful, paranoid, and helpless at times. She works together with her son, and a small group of others who help her throughout the film, to defeat Michael; however, it is ultimately Laurie who takes charge and kills Michael by herself at the end of the film. According to Hutchings (2004),

“While these films still generally hold on to the idea of having a central female protagonist, she is rarely as isolated here as she is in the likes of *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th*. Instead, and this is particularly true of *Scream* and the *I Know What You Did Last Summer* films, it is the young protagonists acting in concert with each other who manage to defeat the killer” (p. 214).

Thus, the strong female persona of the final girl and the interesting new group dynamics of the resurgent films could have strongly influenced the remakes of the original films. This could be the reason that the remakes still incorporate traditional and classic stereotypes, but also include a new final girl stereotype as well. They attempt to remain true to the plot line and overall feel of the original, but are still influenced by contemporary film elements and thinking.

Thus, it appears that feminist theory has had an impact on modern media today; however, stereotype theory is still very relevant in media today. It seems that the media directors, particularly the film industry, has paid attention to feminist film criticism, and thus, they have

tried to create a stronger version of women today by creating the masculine final girl in the resurgent and remade films; however, many social stigmas and stereotypes of women still exist throughout slasher films today. According to stereotype theory, viewers who watch the same type of message repeatedly, often form certain opinions about specific groups if they are constantly portrayed in the same way by the media outlets. Therefore, even though feminists now get to see a stronger, more masculine final girl in the end of the film, she may still be subject to the same social stereotypes throughout the film. This in turn explains to the viewers that a woman can be strong and survive in the end, but that she may be an exception to the rule due to her blatant adherence to social stereotyping throughout the rest of the film.

Limitations

Textual analysis is a tool used in qualitative research studies that organize and categorize large amounts of information. Researchers can also use it to draw out meaning through interpretation of various texts, including film, as used in this study. It can also reveal information about a particular societal group through specific representations. This study provided some very compelling and important results due to textual analysis; however, there are limitations to the study that the researcher could have improved upon.

First, this study only used one researcher to examine characteristics in the films; therefore, the interpretations were open only to one researcher's abilities. Textual analysis relies on only one person's interpretation of the text; therefore, the results are subject to the person's lens and may fall subject to the vulnerabilities of the researcher. Textual analysis can also be a very subjective process; therefore, a more quantitative method may have been more objective because it makes use of multiple people's interpretations while at the same time maintaining intercoder reliability. Second, this study did not take into account how the mass audience responds to or interprets the meaning of stereotypes within the slasher film genre. Perhaps this

study could have incorporated the use of surveys, interviews, or focus groups to analyze if and how other viewers perceive social stereotypes of women in slasher films. Next, two sets of films were left out of the study that were not mentioned above. During the course of the project, two more remade films were released into theaters, *My Bloody Valentine* (2009) and *Friday the 13th* (2009). Because the study was almost complete and the researcher had limited means to view the remade films, still in theaters, the researcher chose to leave these two films out of the study. Therefore, one limitation would be the time constraints surrounding this project. This study may have produced even more meaning-rich data if it was conducted on a more longitudinal time frame. Lastly, as mentioned above, it is important to understand the influence that the resurgent films had on the stereotypic portrayal of female characters in the remade films; therefore, it would have been beneficial to also code several resurgent films and include that data in the results section in order to further justify and explain the new final girl stereotype.

Future Research

Future research should definitely include the resurgent films of the 1990's. Like the original films and the remade films, the resurgent films are also another sub-genre of slasher films. Researchers could study how the resurgent films influenced the remade films and why filmmakers may have felt the need to steer away from the classic stereotypes of the original films. One might observe why the resurgent films seem to incorporate stereotypes present in both the original films as well as the remakes. Why do they include classic as well as new stereotypes, and how did this affect the remakes? This type of future study could be very complimentary to this study that was just conducted. The resurgent films also tend to bring about a new representation of the male characters. Men are often portrayed in the resurgent films as the characters that die more frequently than do the female characters. This characteristic is often carried out in the remakes of the original films; therefore, future research might include a

comparison between the portrayals of men and women within the slasher film genre. This could analyze the idea that a more balanced portrayal of female characters often leads to a more stereotypic portrayal of male characters. If this is the case, then future research could establish what this shift in the balance of power between men and women has done to affect the slasher film genre as a whole.

Future research might also expand this type of study to explore the societal impact of stereotyping women in slasher films. An expanded version of this study might include a section within the literature review about the psychology and cognitive affects that slasher films have on their viewers. Further, part of the methods might include conducting actual surveys, interviews, or focus groups to analyze these cognitive effects first hand. This type of addition to the study would further aid the bridge connecting this research about social stereotyping of women in slasher films to real social implications observed first hand from viewers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study is important for a variety of reasons. First, it explores stereotype theory. Stereotype theory is important to understand when analyzing how people communicate and interact with one another. It is also important to understand stereotype theory when comprehending how people think about one another and how they arrive at their individual and collective ways of thinking about others. Media has been found to have an impact on the conception of groups in a number of ways and affect the way individuals think about another group. Adoption theory states that long-term social changes, often due to the media, arrive when large numbers of individuals adopt a new way of thinking about an issue or group of people. In today's society, the media play a very important and influential role in the socialization process through which people understand the world in which they live, shaping perception and thought (DeFleur & Dennis, 1998). Modeling theory also explains that individuals obtain new social

behaviors by observing and mimicking the behavior portrayed in the media. Next, social expectations theory states that people learn social norms and social roles through exposure to the way that the media organizations portray social groups. All of these media theories are important when understanding social stereotypes because they can set into motion a stereotype formation in society. According to DeFleur and Dennis (1998), “Accumulation theory predicts that where information and interpretations supplied by media programming are relatively persistent, consistent and corroborative, minimal changes in individuals can add up over time to significant changes in populations” (p. 489). Thus, over time, stereotypes, constantly presented by slasher films, can have an impact on the way a large number of the population views women in film and in the real world.

Second, this study mainly explores the social stereotyping of women. As defined above, stereotypes help build negative impressions and images about women, not only in the media, but also in everyday society. People are influenced by the portrayals of women that they see in film, no matter how unrealistic the film may seem. Overall, women were portrayed as overtly feminine. Even in the remakes, the women were feminine throughout the film, and were only masculine when being forced to fight or defend themselves in order to survive. In slasher films, both in the original films and the remakes, this study found that women often were portrayed as jumpy, nervous, fearful women who called out and screamed in terror. They always remained beautiful, young, and well groomed. They were also frequently brutalized and tortured, and they were often killed because of their sexuality.

The message seems to be that good women are almost supposed to be asexual, and that sexual women are bad. This seems almost as ridiculous as the idea that violence can be fun for women in film, an almost pornographic ideal. Given the high level of exposure of young people to this message, this message is particularly problematic. The target audience for slasher films is

often the teenage group who are still forming their own ways of thinking about sexuality, masculinity versus femininity, and society in general. Slasher films seem to reinforce the idea that female sexuality is problematic and costly. This can often lead to the classic sexual stereotype that classifies sexually promiscuous men as studs, but terms sexually promiscuous women sluts or whores.

These stereotypic portrayals give society a false impression of what women are or should be. When people watch slasher films, or media in general, they take into account how women are portrayed; therefore, if women are consistently portrayed in the same way, then stereotypes become normal ways of thinking about a particular group in society. This can lead to discrimination and underestimation in school, the work place, the home, and other social settings. While not every audience member may take the portrayals of women in slasher films literally, as they watch the films, they unconsciously retain thoughts about specific groups of individuals. This means that as the viewers watch the same stereotypes portrayed in multiple venues, whether it be in television, film, or print, then they start to incorporate these thoughts into their actions towards another group of people.

Overall, the genre has changed its portrayal of female characters slightly. The women in the remakes have seemingly become more masculine and aggressive, but only when circumstances force them to do so, otherwise, they often revert to the same classic stereotypes portrayed throughout the original films. It seems that even though the media representatives say portrayals of women in films have changed over the last few decades, it would appear that they really have not. Many of the old stereotypes still exist, along with several new stereotypes, in slasher films today. Thus, the media organizations have not come as far as they would like feminist film critics to believe. They are merely introducing the same images to a new generation of slasher film viewers in a less overt way.

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Appendix A: Filmography

Black Christmas (Original)

- Release Date: December 20, 1974
- Director: Bob Clark
- Producers: Gerry Arbeid and Bob Clark
- Writer: Roy Moore
- Company: Film Funding Ltd. Of Canada
- DVD Released by: Somerville House
- Plot Summary:
 - It is time for Christmas break, and the sorority sisters make plans for the holiday, but the strange anonymous phone calls are beginning to put them on edge. When Clare disappears, they contact the police, who do not express much concern. Meanwhile Jess is planning to get an abortion, but her boyfriend, Peter, is very much against it. The police finally begin to get concerned when they find a 13-year-old girl dead in the park. The police set up a wiretap to the sorority house, but will they be in time to?

Black Christmas (Remake)

- Release Date: December 25, 2006
- Director: Glenn Morgan
- Writer: Glenn Morgan and Roy Moore
- Producers: James Wong and Glenn Morgan
- Company: Dimension Films
- DVD Released by: Genius Products, llc.
- Plot Summary:
 - In the 1970's, a boy named Billy was born with yellow skin and his dysfunctional mother rejects him. He witnesses his mother and her lover killing his father and burying him in the basement. They lock him in the attic alone for his entire childhood. When he is a teenager, his mother sexually abuses him and she becomes pregnant with a baby girl whom she names Agnes. During Christmas, Billy escapes, kills his mother and stepfather, and blinds one eye of Agnes. Authorities declare him insane and send his sister to an orphanage. In the present

day, Billy escapes from the Clark Sanatorium to spend Christmas with his family. Meanwhile, Clement University has turned his former house into the Delta Alpha Kappa sorority house. When three sisters vanish, the others receive weird phone calls and believe something is wrong, but they find that they cannot escape.

Halloween (Original)

- Release Date: October 25, 1978
- Director: John Carpenter
- Writers: John Carpenter (screenplay) and Debra Hill (screenplay)
- Producer: Debra Hill
- Company: Compass International Pictures
- DVD Released by: Anchor Bay Entertainment
- Plot Summary:
 - On Halloween 1963, the small town of Haddonfield is shocked when six-year-old Michael Myers returns from trick-or-treating and for some unknown reason stabs his older sister to death with a big kitchen knife. His parents find him staring into space with the bloody knife in his hand. Sent to a mental institution, Michael spends the next 15 years just sitting, still staring into space despite the best efforts of his Doctor, Dr. Samuel Loomis. Now, on October 30th 1978, something triggers Michael off and during a storm manages to steal a car from Dr. Loomis and Nurse Marion (who was coming to take Michael to a court to keep him locked up) and goes back to Haddonfield where he steals a white mask. There, Laurie Strode, Michael's younger sister, finds that Michael is stalking her during the day (at school, at her home etc - but she does not know who he is.) Dr. Loomis arrives, and with the Sheriff, frantically looks for Michael. He does not know that Laurie is baby-sitting Lindsey and Tommy and that Laurie's friends Annie, Lynda and Bob are disappearing one by one.

Halloween (remake)

- Release Date: August 31, 2007
- Director: Rob Zombie
- Writers: Rob Zombie (screenplay) and John Carpenter (1978 screenplay)
- Producer: Malek Akkad, Andy Gould, and Rob Zombie

- Company: Dimension Films
- DVD Released by: Genius Products, llc.
- Plot Summary:
 - Same plot as the original film

Prom Night (Original)

- Release Date: July 18, 1980
- Director: Paul Lynch
- Writer: William Gray (screenplay) and Robert Guza Jr. (story)
- Producer: Peter Simpson
- Company: Quadrant Trust Company
- DVD Released by: Alliance Atlantis
- Plot Summary:
 - For six years, Hamilton High School seniors Kelly, Jude, Wendy, and Nick have been hiding the truth of what happened to ten-year-old Robin Hammond the day someone discovered her broken body near an old abandoned convent. The foursome kept secret how they taunted Robin - backed her into a corner until, frightened, she stood on a window ledge... and fell to her death. Though it was an accident, the then-twelve-year-olds feared that they would be held responsible and vowed never to tell, but someone else was there that day, watching, and now, that someone is ready to exact murderous revenge-on prom night.

Prom Night (Remake)

- Release Date: April 11, 2008
- Director: Nelson McCormick
- Writer: J.S. Cardone
- Producer: Neil Moritz and Toby Jaffe
- Company: Alliance Films

- DVD Released by: Sony Pictures
- Plot Summary:
 - In Bridgeport, the deranged high school teacher Richard Fenton is obsessed by the teenager student Donna Keppel; she witnesses him murder her family to stay with her, but Richard is arrested and sent to prison for life. Three years later, the traumatized Donna is feeling better but is still under psychological treatment and taking pills. On her prom night, she goes with her boyfriend Bobby and two couples of friends to the Pacific Grand Hotel for the party. But the psychopath Richard has escaped from prison and is lodged in the same floor in the hotel chasing Donna, stabbing her friends and staff of the hotel that cross his path.

Psycho (Original)

- Release Date: June 16, 1960
- Director: Alfred Hitchcock
- Writers: Robert Bloch (novel) and Joseph Stefano (screenplay)
- Producer: Alfred Hitchcock
- Company: Shamley Productions
- DVD Released by: Universal Studios Home Entertainment
- Plot Summary:
 - Marion Crane is a young secretary whose boyfriend, Sam Loomis, has troubles paying off a debt and his wife's alimony. One day, a rich client of her boss buys a house with \$40,000 in cash. To fix her problems, Marion steals the money and heads out to California to live her dream life with Sam. On her way, she gets lost in a bad storm and stops at the Bates Motel, where the proprietor, Norman Bates, lives a very troubled life with his dominating mother, whom he lives within their house on the hill next to the motel. A week later, Marion has vanished and no one can find her or the stolen money, not even Sam, her sister, Lila, or a private detective whom her boss has hired to find Marion and the money, but a deadly secret is waiting for them to discover inside the Bates house.

Psycho (Remake)

- Release Date: December 4, 1998
- Director: Gus Van Sant
- Writers: Robert Bloch (novel) and Joseph Stefano (screenplay)
- Producer: Brian Grazer and Gus Van Sant
- Company: Imagine Entertainment
- DVD Released by: Universal Studios Home Entertainment
- Plot Summary:
 - Same as plot as the original film

Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Original)

- Release Date: October 1, 1974
- Director: Tobe Hooper
- Writers: Kim Henkel and Tobe Hooper
- Producer: Ronald Bozman
- Company: Vortex Inc.
- DVD Released by: Pioneer Entertainment
- Plot Summary:
 - In 1974, a group of five friends head through the back roads of Texas to their grandfather's grave. Among them are Sally Hardesty, and her invalid brother Franklin. They encounter an unpleasant hitchhiker who slashes both himself and Franklin with a knife. The others manage to eject the hitchhiker from the vehicle, but shortly afterwards, circumstances force them to stop and wander over to a small house looking for gas. What none of them realize is that this house is the home of Leatherface and his demented family of cannibalistic psychopaths. One at a time, Leatherface murders the teens in horrifying ways. Sally soon finds herself at Leatherface's home and escapes the demented cannibal and chainsaw.

Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Remake)

- Release Date: October 17, 2003
- Director: Marcus Nispel
- Writers: Kim Henkel and Tobe Hooper
- Producers: Michael Bray and Mike Fleiss
- Company: New Line Cinema
- DVD Released by: New Line Home Entertainment
- Plot Summary:
 - In 1974, a group of college kids head to Dallas through the back roads of Texas. On the way, they encounter a young hitchhiker who shoots herself with a revolver. The kids contact the sheriff, who takes a long time to come down to meet them. Two of them wander over to a large homestead, which they discover to be the home of a clan of psychopathic cannibals, including the sheriff and the people at the roadside stand. Leatherface, a 6'4' giant wearing a blood-splattered apron and a mask of human skin, who carries a chainsaw, also lives here. One at a time, the young college students fall prey to the demented Leatherface and the cannibalistic inbreeds, until only one girl remains - Erin. She must stay alive long enough to reveal the horrible secret of Leatherface to the world.

The Hills Have Eyes (Original)

- Release Date: July 22, 1977
- Director: Wes Craven
- Writer: Wes Craven
- Producer: Peter Locke
- Company: Blood Relations Company
- DVD Released by: Anchor Bay Entertainment
- Plot Summary:
 - While traveling in a trailer through the desert to California, the retired detective Big Bob Carter stops in an isolated gas station with his family for fueling and rest. Bob is traveling with his wife, his son, his two daughters, his son-in-law, and his granddaughter. When they leave the gas station, the stubborn driver takes a shortcut through a nuclear testing site and wrecks his station wagon. With the

family stranded in the middle of nowhere, the two men walk on the road trying to find some help. An insane and sadistic member of a deranged evil family that lives nearby the spot captures the father, while the son-in-law returns to the trailer. During the night, the cannibals attack the Carter family. Absolutely trapped by the murderers, they have to fight to survive.

The Hills Have Eyes (Remake)

- Release Date: March 10, 2006
- Director: Alexandre Aja
- Writers: Alexandre Aja and Gregory Levasseur
- Producers: Wes Craven, Marianne Maddalena, and Peter Locke
- Company: Craven-Maddalena Films
- DVD Released by: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment
- Plot Summary:
 - Same plot as the original film

The Hitcher (Original)

- Release Date: February 21, 1986
- Director: Robert Harmon
- Writer: Eric Red
- Producers: Edward S. Feldman and Charles Meeker
- Company: HBO Pictures
- DVD Released by: HBO Home Video
- Plot Summary:
 - A relentless serial killer stalks a young man who is transporting a car to another state. The stalker eventually frames the driver for a string of murders. Chased by police and shadowed by the killer, the driver's only help comes from a truck stop waitress.

The Hitcher (Remake)

- Release Date: January 19, 2007
- Director: Dave Meyers
- Writer: Eric Red and Jake Wade Wall
- Producers: Charles Meeker and Alfred Haber
- Company: Focus Features
- DVD Released by: Universal Studios Home Entertainment
- Plot Summary:
 - While driving through the New Mexico Desert during a rainy night, the college students Jim Halsey and his girlfriend Grace Andrews give a ride to the hitchhiker John Ryder. While in their car, the stranger proves to be a psychopath threatening the young couple with a knife, but Jim succeeds to throw him out of the car on the road. On the next morning, the young couple sees John in another car with a family, and while trying to advise the driver that the man is dangerous, they have an accident. While walking on the road, they find the whole family stabbed in the car, and John sees that the driver is still alive. He drives to a restaurant seeking for help, but the police blame Jim and Grace to the murder and send them to the police station. However, John kills the policemen and pursues the couple, playing a tragic and violent mouse and cat game with Grace and Jim.

When a Stranger Calls (Original)

- Release Date: October 26, 1979
- Director: Fred Walton
- Writer: Steve Feke and Fred Walton
- Producers: Doug Chapin and Steve Feke
- Company: Columbia Pictures Corporation
- DVD Released by: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment
- Plot Summary:
 - High School student Jill Johnson agrees to baby sit while the Dr. and Mrs. enjoy a night out. After they leave, telephone calls from a stranger begin to disrupt her quiet evening of study. At first, the unidentified caller says nothing

that leads Jill to believe that a friend is playing a joke. After several similar calls, she becomes unnerved and calls the police; the phone calls continue. Finally, an eerie voice on the other end of the line asks ominously "Have you checked the children, lately?" It now appears that the stranger can see her. By this time, the police are tracing the calls. More calls continue as the stalker asks, "Why haven't you checked the children?" Jill, by now frightened nearly out of her wits, screams into the receiver. Again, the phone rings, but this time it's the police who have successfully traced the call. "Jill," the detective says, "we've traced the calls... They're coming from inside the house!"

When a Stranger Calls (Remake)

- Release Date: February 3, 2006
- Director: Simon West
- Writer: Jake Wade Wall (screen play) and Steve Feke
- Producers: John Davis, Ken Lemberger, and Wyck Godfrey
- Company: Screen Gems
- DVD Released by: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment
- Plot Summary:
 - Same plot as the original film ¹

¹ All Filmography information from the international movie database (imdb.com).

Vita

Chad Brewer was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in 1982. The son of a high school teacher, Chad quickly learned the importance of academics. He attended St. Thomas More private school, in Baton Rouge, from kindergarten through eighth grade. After leaving St. Thomas More, Chad attended Catholic High School and graduated with honors in 2001. Louisiana State University accepted Chad's application for enrollment in the Spring of 2001. He spent the next four years attending class full time as well as working part time in child-care and recreation facility management. In 2005, Chad graduated with a Bachelor of Science in psychology.

After graduating from LSU, Chad took two years to work full time for the Recreation and Parks Commission for the Parish of East Baton Rouge, BREC. For two years, Chad served as the Senior Assistant Area Supervisor of Community Events and Program Development. He developed advertising campaigns for recreation community events, worked with communications department to develop accurate press releases, and worked with community sponsors to raise funds for Community Events. He also became the senior coordinator of department recruiting efforts throughout East Baton Rouge Parish. He also organized public programming for youth, adults, and individuals with physical and mental disabilities throughout the community, and organized and supervised large scale Summer Camp Programs, After School Programs, and Special Needs Camps for children with disabilities.

For most of his time at BREC, Chad felt that he was working in the public relations field. In the Fall of 2007, Chad decided to enroll in the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University to earn a master's degree in mass communication with a concentration in public relations. He will graduate in May of 2009 and plans to work in public relations, particularly in corporate or political special event planning.