

Slasher genre essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The slasher genre started in the late 70's as a sub-genre to horror. It began with a very specific target audience: teenage boys who were able to experience safe, vicarious thrills through the consumption of slashers as a media product. However, this relationship between the slasher genre and its demographic has since greatly evolved thanks to concepts such as post modernism, gender neutrality and audience sophistication. With the introduction of a female demographic, the relationship has morphed to incorporate their larger audience.

Slasher films were first designed as a ' safe scare' - in which their audience could experience the rollercoaster of fear of a crazed killer massacring sinful teenagers without any of the danger. A set of conventions were developed, creating a formula for slasher films to follow, including stereotypical, gendered roles - the male psycho murderer, the virginal final girl, the promiscuous best friend. There was also the constant of the ' peaceful setting', such as a quiet neighbourhood, where the masochistic murders would be carried out. Slasher films as a genre play on the common demonian of society's morbid curiosity and their audience's fascination with brutal killings. They also play on the audiences fear that this could be my neighbourhood', and worked at making the films directly relatable to their target audience.

For example, in Wes Cravens ' Halloween' of 1978, the final girl and her two best friends are babysitters, a role to which many teenagers can relate. Slasher utilise the idea of person identity, and the ways in which their audience can relate to the genre. The success of this choice of audience relationship can be quantified through the commercial success of the genre -

especially in the first 20 years of the genre, production costs were low and box office returns were considerably higher. For 'Halloween', a slasher from cycle 1, while production costs were only \$320,000, \$70 million was made overall. These returns of around 100% proved the success of the way in which slashers films were being designed to appeal to their target audience. However, as time went on and the second cycle of slashers was introduced, production costs made a great increase as there became a higher demand from the audience for a higher quality of production.,

Towards cycle 2, there became a slight shift in the demographic. The rise of TV shows such as 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer' starring Sarah Michelle Gellar as a strong female lead, 'weaned' females onto the slasher genre. This saw an increase of females in the target audience, meaning no longer could the slashers be based on a teenage male demographic. This somewhat forced an amount of gender neutrality in to the genre, with 1996's 'Scream' seeing Neve Campbell portray an empowering final girl - a far cry from Laurie of 'Halloween'. This continued the idea of personal identity - the female portion of the demographic were able to draw inspiration from the female leads and the slasher genre was no longer purely about providing an outlet through which the teenage male population could experience their thrills. This was further reinforced by a slight shift in conventions.

While in 'Halloween', Dr. Loomis must come to Laurie's rescue, in 'Scream' it is instead Gail who comes to Sidney's rescue, even using the Killers phallic weapon against him and exclaiming 'Not in my movie'. The idea of the final girl being left in a quivering heap come the end of the film was gone, replaced with someone who the new female audience could draw from. This

success was again quantified with a skyrocketing box office return of \$173 million for 'Scream', whose production cost was only \$15 million. The slasher genre began to recognise its audience's intelligence and knowledge of the genre and began marketing to this. The idea of post modernism also comes into this, again specifically in Scream, where in the audience is somewhat rewarded for their knowledge of Slasher films. This understanding furthered the relationship between the target demographic and the genre as the audience was made to feel as if they were being acknowledged, appreciated and directly marketed to.

However, the idea of post modernism could only be taken so far and limited the franchises - while slashers from cycle 1 were franchises including up to eight films, in cycle 2 franchises were limited to two or three. This causes the inevitable fade out of post modernism in slashers in the 00's, only to be restarted by the reboots such as 'The New Nightmare' in 2012. However, cycle 3 lacked the understanding between the audience and then genre that cycle 2 had established. Some conventions were disregarded, with films failing to follow the formulaic layout of the genre. The audience become somewhat ignored and seeked other ways in which they could experience the same thrills which first made the slasher genre so popular. With the decrease of popularity of slasher films, with new movies going straight to DVD as opposed to being box office hits, came the increase in popularity of the first person shooter games and PRGs. Although not quite the same, games such as 'Call of Duty' and 'World of Warcraft' allowed the male teenage demographic to experience the same 'safe scare' of enjoying all the thrills of guns and killing but from the safety of their bedrooms. Slasher films

struggled with new ideas and creating original material and because of this lost a large portion of their audience and therefore, their once roaring popularity.