

Death proof essay

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You are startled, it has come down to the last woman, tattered clothes, breast falling out over the place, and the scream that makes the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. You have just sat through a typical slasher movie where there was a group of sex crazed teenagers out camping were they probably should not have been.

The first ones to get massacred; are the first ones who wandered off in to the woods to get busy with each other. All of them are met with the same fate, except for the one who is pure, waiting for Mr. Right to marry her. She becomes the sole survivor that gets chased all over the place and barley escapes at the very last minute.

Almost every horror/slasher film follows the same old rules that have been in place since the beginning of the typical slasher film. What makes audiences want to watch the same plot of a movie over and over again? Why is it that they use same type of woman to be the sole survivor in every one of these films, are they essentially the same? For the movie to work and be popular it has to follow the set guide lines set forth by dated horror movies. It is these rules that are followed that keeps us coming back over and over again to watch the same movie. The movie " Death Proof" is an attempt to recreate the old double feature, grind house movies that were shown at the drive inn's all over America. The only difference is the rules are changed and we get a different experience of the typical slasher movie. The question is what has changed and why, do we like it? Many people have given their input about what does the gender role play in a slasher film? We are going to explore the thoughts of some of these authors and try to figure out what they mean. Linda Williams article, " Gender, Genre, and Excess" state that <https://assignbuster.com/death-proof-essay/>

there three things that you need to take into consideration when talking about slasher films, sex, violence, and emotion. She goes on to tell us that all three of these subjects are relevant in our infamous slasher films.

Without one, the others can't stand alone, and if they do it makes for a bad film. Linda argues that, This argument holds that when the girl-victim of a film like Halloween finally grabs the phallic knife, or ax, or chain saw to turn the tables on the monster-killer, that viewer identification shifts from an abject terror gendered feminine to an active power with bisexual components. A gender confused monster is foiled, often symbolically castrated by an androgynous, final girl. (7) It seems that all of these slasher films have this in common. The masculine, non-sexual woman ends up as the last survivor that has to battle through an eternity of torture to either kill the monster, or at the last minute get away with not much of their life intact. Is this formula so popular because these movies are geared towards men and not women? Do men get excited by the torture of women and leave the movie all wound up and ready to tackle the world, I think this holds a little bit of water, and this why these films are made the same way over and over again. Does "Death Proof" fall into this generalization, yes and no? In the beginning it has the right formula, but then things get twisted. Barry S.

Sapolsky in his article, "Sex and Violence in Slasher Films: Reexamining the Assumptions" argues that the amount of violence acts against women and also the amount of time women spent being tortured in slasher films is increasing over time. The amount of sexual behavior is also more prominent as time passes; this seems to make for enjoyable slasher films. Sapolsky goes on to state, "The present study revealed that screen time devoted to <https://assignbuster.com/death-proof-essay/>

females in fear was significantly longer than that for males. Slasher films in the 1990s feature females in terror more than two and-one-half times longer than males" (10). He also backs this up with, " The latest generation of slasher films contains more acts of violence, and it focuses on victims in terror for longer periods of screen time" (8). It seems that the more sex and violence in slasher films is what the public likes.

If we add more to every film and it makes more money than maybe this is true. So the more we torture and maim women for longer periods of time, the more we like the movie. The gender bias seems to be un-noticeable until you start to examine these movies in a certain way, maybe through the eyes of someone else. You end walking away with a different perspective than you once had, or assumed. What would we get if we took 90% of the movie and geared it towards women, sex, torture, and car chases? It sounds like a new formula that might still work. You get all of the sexual stuff with horror, muscle cars, and gender torture.

Would this appeal to both of the genders when watching this? The comparative movie " Death Proof" tries to accomplish all of that. Jeffrey A. Brown tells us in his article, " Gender and the Action Heroine: Hardbodies and the Point of No Return" that in order to be the male hero in a movie you have to have an excess of muscles. He goes on to state that you have to be built like Jean-Claude Van Damme or Sylvester Stallone to be in these movies. The male hero has these standards to live up to while the woman is expected to over feminine, be rescued, and make sure the men are seen as masculine.

Brown makes sure to inform us, " With their obvious emphasis on masculine ideals, action films in the 1980s seem to deny any blurring of gender boundaries: men are active, while women are present only to be rescued or to confirm the heterosexuality of the hero" (52). Brown expands on this theory further by stating, While the natural distinction of male/female gender roles has been brought into question by other action heroines, most notably in *Aliens* and *Terminator 2*, only to be recovered by a heterosexual logic that dictates that any woman who behaves in a manner so heavily coded as masculine must be a man in drag, *Point of No Return* reemploys a feminine masquerade to further emphasize the performative nature of gender roles. (54) What this tells me is that our movies have to establish specific gender roles in order to be liked. A macho male movie can't have a 150lb, five foot two, hero. He had better look like Arnold Schwarzenegger. On the reverse side if a woman is playing the hero she must be a lesbian, social reject or a man dressed in drag.

Men are not going to want to watch a movie with a blonde bimbo with big boobs beat up everyone, or kill every one. Men better have oversized, steroid induced, Mr. Universe bodies, and women better be frail, soft-spoken, blonde hair, big breasts, and needs to be rescued at every turn. Carol J.

Clover in her essay, " Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film"

Discusses the common role that women play in the early slasher films. She argues that women that are feminine and sexually active are the first ones to be slain by the overly masculine male serial killer. While the good girls that have some masculinity in them are the sole survivors that do battle with killer in the last part of all these slasher films. Through her essay she talks <https://assignbuster.com/death-proof-essay/>

about all the facets of slasher films of the 70's and 80's. How the male slasher, never a women, has issues with sexuality and there for slays these woman that they might have an attraction to, " The Killer with a few exceptions recognizably human and distinctly male; his fury is unmistakably sexual in both roots and expression; his victims are mostly women, often sexually free and always young and beautiful ones" (205). When you read Carol's article she brings up strong points from the movies she references.

They all seem to have the same ending plot, the last part of the movie is a female being tortured by various means while trying to escape. She goes on in further detail to state, The final girl is boyish, in a word. Just as the killer is not fully masculine, she is not fully feminine—not, in any case, feminine in the ways of her friends. Her smartness, gravity, competence in mechanical and other practical matters, and sexual reluctance set her apart from the other girls and ally her, ironically, with the very boys she fears or rejects, not to speak of the killer himself. (204) So if you are the smart girl, virgin, with a good head on your shoulders, you should be prepared for a long role in the movie getting chased around and tortured to within an inch of your life. To put this essay into perspective, the killers never use guns; it is always a knife or weapon that requires the killer to get up close and personal with their victims.

If a victim ever does get a hold of a gun it goes off at the wrong time, or not at all, and had no effect. It seems that using a knife signifies the act of rape with the knife being thrust into the victim as a form of penetration, and when the woman screams it might be perceived as the woman having an orgasm. Eventually by some grace of god they make through the night escaping

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death at every turn, to be rescued. The first to die are sexually active, age 18-24, black (if there are any in the movie), and physically attractive. This means that our normal slasher film that has been remade over and over again, with little changes, is racist and gender biased. All of these authors make believable statements about our common American slasher films. Not all of us believe that their views about gender in slasher films are true.

Take for example "Death Proof," which the rules are twisted around and we still like it. To backup my views we need to take a look at the movie. In the movie we have Kurt Russell who is a well known action movie star that always plays the bad ass that never shows signs of weakness. He is a stocker that kills five women in the first part of this movie in an early 70's black Chevy Nova. In the second part he finds four women to stock, and he has a new black car, a late 60's black Dodge Challenger. He ends up chasing down three of the women, who are test driving a 1971 white Dodge Charger.

One of the women is a stunt woman in the movies and is playing ships mast (riding on the hood of the car at high rates of speed) when Kurt starts smashing in to the car in an attempt to kill them. The black woman that is driving ends up shooting Kurt in the arm, and the tables are turned. What happens next is very different and unusual for the typical slasher film, to fully understand we need to take a look at a scene sequence. After Kurt is injured he speeds away and the three girls catch up to him.

You see the white challenger in the background gaining distance, and this brings panic to Kurt. He has a look of fear on his face and he is wounded. The camera is centered on the challenger gaining on Kurt, but is blurry in the

background. Kurt Russell is known for playing roles as a hard ass in action films, without fear, and doesn't show signs of weakness.

When he had thought he lost the pursuing car, he showed a brief moment of relief. This was very short, because as soon as he realizes that the car is back in pursuit the tension is relevant by the change in his composer. For the villain to become the victim is not normal for this type of slasher film. The camera is then centered on the driver of the white challenger, showing her as the main focus. The good looking black woman is shown in the background enjoying herself, not looking scared at all. This shot is focused on the driver with the back seat passenger off to the side. They both are black females, which I have never seen in a slasher film, especially when they are after the slasher.

This portrays a change in the common, stereotypical, last woman standing, slasher film. For three women, that were once being stocked by Kurt, whom tried to kill them, to change the roles around is very unusual, especially for one white woman and two black women. This tells me that the intent is to put a spin on the old style slasher films that we have become accustomed to. Kurt has the look of fear in his eyes. He is clenching his teeth in fear and is starting to whimper like a little girl. No music playing, just the thrilling sound of motors revving fast and loud thunder as they race down the street. Sense the roles have reversed, Kurt has started to show his famine side more and more.

With his past imagine in his numerous action movies, you would never expect this sort of role. The white challenger has gotten so close you can

hear the woman screeching with excitement. The car is swerving over towards the driver's side of Kurt's car.

The landscape seems arid, with a two lane freeway, with other cars of in the distance blurred out. The front end of the Dodge Challenger is completely trashed; the headlight buckets are hanging out like in the movie short circuit, when number 5 gets vandalized. For some reason it seems as though the cars have been given a personality. They are being used as weapons, smashing into each other, just like getting up close and personal. The girls then pull up along the side of Kurt's car on the driver side.

You notice blood splatter on the windshield from when he was shot in the arm buy the black woman with curly hair that is the driver. They are keeping pace with him and taunting him by speeding up a little then backing off. All the girls have a crazed look in their eyes. The black driver with curly hair is yelling obscenities at Kurt. Kurt really pours on his new female side by starting to plead with girls. He is so scared that he starts to apologize and states that he was just playing.

You still hear the same sounds of the cars racing down the road. The camera is looking through the passenger side window looking at Kurt with him centered and the girls move in and out of the center shot. This is the epitome what is not supposed to happen. The tuff guy is never supposed to plead for his life and show this kind of weakness. The females watching are most likely on the edge of their seats cheering for the girls, while the men are focused on the car chase with all the excitement.

The white Challenger swerves and crashes into Kurt on the driver's side, sending him off the road. The camera is centered down the road showing the effects of the collision, the cars spilt down the middle, only the girls stay on the road and Kurt is sent into the ditch. The girls have now gained the upper hand and are using it to their advantage by running him off the road. The camera is off to the side, looking into the front window at an angle as to put the white blonde in the front, while the driver is off to the side and the other black woman is in the back seat. They are all cheering and slapping the dash and pounding on the roof, showing signs of their excitement. At this moment the girls are like little kids, cheering and laughing without any cares.

They are alongside him again after the collision. They are still taunting him. Kurt is centered in the shot and the view is like you are riding in the passenger seat with him. It is like they took all the slasher rules and did the exact opposite to get the same effect. The girls continue to keep him driving in the ditch. The camera has switched to an aerial focused on Kurt being kept in the ditch.

He is struggling to keep the car under control. Seems like a power struggle, three girls in one car picking on a lonely man in one car. The ironic thing is that the girl's car is a white Dodge Challenger and Kurt's is a black Dodge Charger. The girls stay at his side. Kurt says "That's it," He locks his arms out and clinches the steering wheel to almost brace for an impact. He has had enough and is getting ready to act out of desperation.

There is a movie billboard in the middle of nowhere that he is about to crash through. The sign reads "Open at midnight, Starlite, Drive-in Theatre, Bill

Pullman and Carmen Electra, " Scary Movie 4" and " Wolf Creek," John Jarratt and Cassandra Magrath. " The camera is in the back seat looking forward through the front windshield with the billboard centered. Kurt screams as he is about to crash through it. The irony of this shot is that it is an advertisement for a double feature movie that opens at midnight. Grind house films was trying to remake the old style double feature films that this sign represents—it was on purpose. The twist is " Wolf Creek" is an Australian movie with Australian actors doing a spinoff of American horror films by combining " The Hills Have Eyes" and " The Texas Chainsaw Massacre. " " Scary Movie 4" is a spoof film of American horror movies, which is the same as " Death Proof" in a weird sort of way.

The camera pans down with a swift motion as Kurt slams on the breaks in a desperate attempt to elude the girls. He is starting reach the end of what he can handle and tries one last time to escape. The girls take evasive action as they have to swerve to avoid a bad collision. The white car goes left as the black car goes right.

The girls are startled by the looks on their faces as they all brace themselves. The view is from the front of the car, looking through the front window, centered. The view is this way so you can see the reactions of all the girls at once as they get a little scared.

The girls have to go left up a ramp to avoid rolling over. The black car is barely in the shot, shown going right. You see from the back seat, centered on a gate they are going to crash through.

They all try to brace for impact. Sounds of panic are heard. Kurt is relieved that he has escaped. He yells out with excitement. As we look in from the front the car you can tell a big burden has been lifted. Finally he escapes the torture and he regains a little bit of some control. We are on the driver side of the car looking in at Kurt centered. He becomes overjoyed and he says “ Jesus fucking Christ, It’s about time.

You can tell that his stress level has dropped, as he looks in the mirrors for signs of the girls. The camera has shifted to the passenger side of Kurt car, close up. The camera starts to zoom out and as we zoom out we are shown the white Dodge Challenger on the hill, running along side of the black Dodge Charger. Music starts in; it gives you the exciting feeling that there is more to come. The chase is not over and the girls are not going to give up.

We are now back to being centered on the white Challenger with the black driver with curly hair. She repeats a couple of times “ Please don’t dead end. We are shown a little bit of nervousness from the driver because of the unknown.

She shows a little bit of fear, all of their facial expressions have all changed back to fear as to be a little human still. The road doesn’t dead end, it starts to descend back to the road that the black car is on. The girls see Kurt as the roads join back together. They show the driver as she is relieved that the road didn’t dead end and they can still get their revenge. We turn back looking at Kurt from the passenger seat. He is so excited that he has escaped that he starts in on some hysterical laughing. Just then you hear the roar of the white Detroit muscle car off to the side, as it screams towards the

driver's side of the Kurt's car. Kurt doesn't realize that they are about to smash into him until the very last moment.

When the girls hit Kurt, it sends the black car, rolling. No more music, just the clash of the steel meeting the asphalt. The front windshield is ejected and some other side window.

The girls showed determination like any good stalker would and finally got their victim. The camera then focuses on the white girls butt as she heads towards the black car. Soon the other two join in and all you see is girl's behinds heading towards the black car.

The black car is destroyed. The way Kurt screams reminded me of the screams you hear just before the blonde with big boobs gets gutted by the killer. The view goes back to the passenger seat of the black car. Kurt tells the girls to be careful because his arm is broke.

Just as he says this they rip him out of the car and you hear a nasty crunch sound, as if they broke his arm more. By him asking for compassion shows that he has defiantly had things turned around on him. He is no longer the killer, but the victim and pleads for his life. Each one of the girls takes their turn punching him in the face. The camera changed views so many times so fast almost every hit has a short pause to show their facial expressions.

The girls have the look of joy every time they punch him. The good looking black girl with straight hair is a model and after one of the strikes she is shown shaking her hand, like she hurt it but keeps hitting Kurt. He gets a

beat down like no other. These three girls take great pleasure in kicking his ass.

The way they pause for every hit just adds to the destruction of the once killer, now victim. When he finally falls, all the girls raise their arms and shout for joy because they just beat there would be assassins ass. The credits then start, with a short pause, we are shown the girls again, it's not over yet. Music starts in like some sort of fast paced, celebrating, japanamation stuff.

The girls are all celebrating and cheering as they circle him. The pretty black, straight hair, model is shown lifting her right leg in the air, doing something like a scissor kick. The camera is zoomed in on her crotch, but the sun is creating a glare.

If there was no glare you might be able to see something. I think this is showing the girl that would be slain first, the pretty sexual model, is the one that is going to kill the once killer. With her leg in the air she comes down with her heel right on the face of Kurt.

You hear a nasty crunch. We are lead to believe that this the fatal blow. The director took all the rules, threw them out the window and still made a film that both sexes would want to see again and again. The killer was massacred by three girls that were once the victims. When the average person decides to watch a movie they want to be entertained by it.

What makes for good entertainment? Some like romance, drama, suspense, action, and some horror. Whatever you fancy to be entertained by, all you

care about is that it keeps you entertained. When you watch a movie most times you don't care about analyzing it to figure out what keeps people coming back for more. In all the old slasher movies like, " Psycho," " Friday the Thirteenth," and " Nightmare on Elm Street," we are entertained by sex crazed teenagers and adolescents that end up being the first victims for the slasher. The good all American girl that remains pure is always the sole survivor. What about this is entertaining to us? Is this plot what keeps us entertained? What would happen if we changed the rules, would we still like it? I think that after watching the same gender biased roles played out over and over the same way, gets boring and old.

In the movie " Death Proof" it starts out like the typical slasher film, but then we are thrown a curve ball. When we see a known macho action hero start to plead for his life, like a typical sex crazed teenager, I think we want to see him tortured and maimed. In the end two black women and one white woman changes the gender and race rules of the typical slasher film and make it work. I love the old fashion, no special effects, car chase, but at the same time I felt myself wanting to see the villain get tortured and eventually killed. Is because we are de-sensitized to the common slasher plot? I think so; it is refreshing to see a twist on the typical, over done, old rules, slasher movie.

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