

The Evolution of Revenge:
Genre, Feminist Theory and Jennifer's Body

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Genre Theory

“The word genre comes from the French (and originally Latin) word for 'kind' or 'class'. The term is widely used in rhetoric, literary theory, media theory, and more recently linguistics, to refer to a distinctive type of 'text'”(Chandler, D). While moving through this discussion and exploration of genre theory it is important to know that the term ‘text’ is not limited to the traditional meaning of the term but covers a wide range of mediums and artforms. Text, as used within genre theory, for the purposes of this paper will refer to films. The use of ‘text’ can be loosely translated without changing its meaning because as the theory has evolved, its umbrella of application has expanded to go beyond its traditional uses within literature.

Classification is at the root of Genre Theory but how a medium, or more specifically a text, is classified is also the cause for a lot of debate among theorists. When we think of ‘genre’ in its most basic form, most often the first categories of classification that spring to mind are those of Comedy, Drama, Romance and Western. Robert Stam, a film theorist, lays out four main problems with putting films into generic categories. He claims that... “extension (the breadth or narrowness of labels); normativism (having preconceived ideas of criteria for genre membership); monolithic definitions (as if an item belonged to only one genre); biologism (a kind of essentialism in which genres are seen as evolving through a standardized life cycle)” (Chandler, D). Stam’s arguments of extension and monolithic definitions are exemplified within cinema as the medium itself evolves over time. As the world gets more complicated, so do movies as they are a reflection of their times. These two concepts of limitations within the theory can be seen when looking at a more modern movie like *‘Back To The Future Part 3’* (1990) - not only is it a comedy but it also contains aspects from other genres such as drama, science fiction,

romance and technically can also be classified as Western. As the world gets more complicated and interwoven, so does the art being produced by it.

But how does one classify a movie? What must the eye observe in order to file away a film, making it digestible enough for future recognition? There's so many parts to just one movie that it's hard to narrow it down to the source. The story, the way in which it is acted, the stylization, the setting, the archetypes of characters and even the time it is set in, altering just one of these can completely change the way in which an audience decodes a film. This leads into Stam's other argument of biologism. In the early days of Hollywood, films were more linear and could be conceptualized more easily than they appear today. As storytelling and filmmaking evolves, we must look at what is most commonly referred to as 'subgenres' to explain how genre classification can get overly complicated quickly for an oversaturated audience. "Contemporary theorists tend to describe genres in terms of 'family resemblances' among texts [a notion derived from the philosopher Wittgenstein] rather than definitionally" (Swales 1990, 49). While some might argue that the movie *'Superbad'* (2009) is simply a 'comedy' movie, others could easily argue that it is in fact a Coming of Age movie with comedic elements. One could push it even further, classifying the movie as a 'Comedic Coming of Age Buddy Pic.' Now we use terms like 'sub-genre' in order to better encapsulate a text's categorization. The 'Buddy Pic' subgenre is a result of the evolution of the comedy genre as a way to better inform the audience of what kind of movie they're buying into. A 'comedy' can be any plot that is subjectively funny, but when narrowed down further to a 'Buddy Pic' the categorization then becomes a film about two friends, usually male, embarking on a haphazard journey.

Stam argues that "subject matter is the weakest criterion for generic grouping because it fails to take into account how the subject is treated" (Stam, 14). 'Treated' being a key term here

because it implies that the way in which a subject matter is viewed by the creator can change the way it is understood by the spectator. As Stam argued, a film should be classified not on the story but HOW a story is told. I propose that genre is classified by framework and the formula of a movie's structure. The typically accepted genres (comedy, drama, romance, western) are only indicators of how that framework will be delivered. The framework is the recurring structures of how a story will unfold. In the movie sphere of 'Romantic Comedies,' although the specific details of the narrative change, the structural patterns of the genre will remain; i.e. love interests meet, something keeps the love interests apart, hope is lost, one or both of the love interests has an epiphany, love interests end up together. While most scholars in genre theory would stay true to there only being about five genres, the expansion of the amount of art produced and over saturation of popular culture, genres must be defined more specifically to reduce classification ambiguity.

Each new movie is a product of its genre and in turn becomes a defining characteristic of the genre itself. The category and the texts evolve together, morphing and recategorizing each other over time. "John Hartley notes that 'the addition of just one film to the Western genre... changes that genre as a whole- even though the Western in question may display few of the recognized conventions, styles or subject matters traditionally associated with its genre' (O'Sullivan et al. 1994). The issue of difference also highlights the fact that some genres are 'looser' -more open-ended in their conventions or more permeable in their boundaries - than others" (Chandler, D). Because the specifics, the minutiae of the films, are always evolving, the audience also begins to define the genre by the texts created within its categorization that contrast with the genre's existing inventory. Steve Neale claims that, "genres are instances of repetition and difference...difference is absolutely essential to the economy of genre'...mere

repetition would not attract an audience”(Neale 1980, 48). The allowance for that difference is a key feature of the sub-genre and allows for sharper and more distinct associations between the spectator and the text. Therefore, these hyper classifications have just as much critical value as the boundaries of the original five genres.

Just as movies are a reflection of their times, so is the same for the genres that they inhabit. The evolution of a genre is directly correlated to how that framework exists within society at the time of its creation or release. “For Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress, 'genres only exist in so far as a social group declares and enforces the rules that constitute them' (Hodge & Kress 1988, 7)” (Chandler, D). Such an evolution can be seen in the framework of the Western film. In the earlier days of the genre, the films included a coded narrative that was built upon a foundation of racist and sexist character depictions. Now, existing in a society with a more progressive perspective there have been films produced within the genre like ‘*Damsel*’ (2018) and ‘*Blazing Saddles*’(1974). These movies are technically classified as Westerns although they break the traditions of the genre in their narrative representations and use of framework. They subverted the patterns of the genre and evolved them into a text that supports the views of the society for which they were created. “Some Marxist commentators see genre as an instrument of social control which reproduces the dominant ideology. Within this perspective, the genre 'positions' the audience in order to naturalize the ideologies which are embedded in the text .” (Chandler, D).

When examining the evolution of a genre it is essential to look at not only the framework or structure of a story but also that structure’s relationship to the audience. When a film positions a narrative for an audience to relate to, it needs to achieve a mapping of their own understanding of the world in order for them to properly decode the film’s true placement within the sphere of

cinema. “Genre theorists might find much in common with schema theorists in psychology: much as a genre is a framework within which to make sense of related texts, a schema is a kind of mental template within which to make sense of related experiences in everyday life. From the point of view of schema theory, genres are textual schemata.” (Chandler, D). A structure is the way in which a story is presented, both the order of events and the perspective the spectator is meant to assume. A baseline narrative is two people meet, they establish a relationship, they fight, they leave but then they find each other again. Within the RomCom genre this narrative is ‘*When Harry Met Sally*’ (1989) whereas within the Horror genre it could become ‘*A Nightmare On Elm Street*’ (1984). A genre is defined by not just the story but the way the audience is walked through the story by its creator, with each new addition of text changing and expanding the boundaries of that classification.

Feminist Theory

When discussing feminist theory, like genre theory, it quickly becomes muddled with the sometimes contradictory definitions developed within the ideologies’ waves of evolution. It also instantly calls upon inherent connotations that have become politicized due to overwhelming inaccuracies in the general public’s understanding of the term. “Feminism counters traditional philosophy with new ways of addressing issues affecting humanity, calling for the replacement of the presiding patriarchal order with a system that emphasizes equal rights, justice, and fairness” (BRILL). In its purest form, feminism is the fight for equality but even that statement could be cause for some debate. In relation to media and visual narratives, what does ‘Equality’ mean?

Focusing on the representation of female or female presenting characters within cinema, from its origin to current releases, there is an obvious disproportionate amount of male to female perspective within the industry. “One of the foundational theories of feminism argues that imagery in media and popular culture often degrades and objectifies women, creating unrealistic social expectations which can hurt relationships between men and women, limit women’s relationships with one another, and even distort women’s relationships to their own bodies” (BRILL). Women, within media and film, have historically been used as narrative tools to propel the plot or create motivation for the male protagonist rather than fully realized three dimensional characters. They are designated props meant to delight the gaze of the assumed male audience. “Mulvey argued that the portrayal of women in various forms of film were primarily aesthetic in purpose. They are presented in ways that appeal to others, notably heterosexual men. [Note that most of the arts and entertainment industries were, and remain, controlled by heterosexual, as well as white, men] From their perspective, sexualizing women (portraying them as objects of heterosexual male desire) was assumed to be most aesthetically pleasing”(BRILL).

Films from the male perspective are usually made for the male perspective. The creator typically walks the audience through the film as they would experience the situation themselves. Through the lens of feminist theory, one can then arrive at the understanding that because of the volume of male forward films, the genres we use to classify movies are widely defined by the male gaze. This constant misrepresentation is both a reflection of the sexism experienced by most women and a reiteration of the ideals that created the inequity of gaze in cinema. “Just as Foucault (1975) suggested of inmates within the panopticon, one of the effects of this situation was that women more readily regulated themselves, striving at sometimes unhealthy and unsafe levels to fit the narrow hegemonic vision of aesthetic beauty. As a result, women expect to be

viewed, judged and visually consumed as objects" (BRILL). The idea of the panopticon, that people who believe they are being watched will alter their behavior in accordance to the spectator's gaze, reveals a key aspect as to the importance of the female gaze being included in popular culture. When women see their gaze, their perspective, represented on screen, or in the media in general, it creates a space for them in which they control the framework. As already established, movies reflect the ideologies of their time and therefore a film that includes the female gaze is an indication of its growing value within its society.

Representation is a broad concept and the representation of women is a multi-layered issue within the film industry. Violence against women is used a lot within the media and because it is mostly created using a male gaze, to serve a male narrative, the viewpoint on violence against women within a societal discourse is laden with an inherently male perspective. The violence done onto women by men is then reinforced and regurgitated back at them for an audience that is also assumed to be male. Women have historically been excluded from narratives about their own trauma. The opening of space for women within their own stories is congruent with the integration of Third Wave feminism within the popular media. While First and Second wave feminism focused on civil liberties, uniting female activists and revealing community within oppression, the Third Wave of feminism focused on reclaiming female power and cultural representation. "The third wave redefined the infantilized and apolitical term 'girl', and turned feminism into a movement about riotous 'grrrls', reclaiming once pejorative terms like 'cunt,' 'bitch,' and 'slut'. It gave rise to judgment-free pleasure and sex, initiated a discussion of masculinity, and worked to transform men" (BRILL). This reclamation created a space in which women were, for the first time, in charge of their own representation. They had a new found power over the narrative and words that were once used to oppress them. However,

within this space created by the Third Wave, it also gave way to polarizing discussions on what their own liberation meant. This is extremely prevalent in inter-feminists' debates about sex and representation of female sexuality. "On the one hand there were the anti-porn feminists, and on the other, there were the women who felt that if feminism was about freedom for women, then women should be free to look at or appear in pornography' (Levy, 2005, pp. 62– 3)" (BRILL). Both viewpoints stand within their own merit, however they both exist within a space where there is little media from the viewpoint of the feminine gaze. Therefore, the examination of actual sexual liberation in popular culture, not female liberation through the lens of the male gaze, has only just begun.

Female creators, directors and writers are reclaiming their own narrative and establishing a new social hierarchy. Cultural and social hierarchies are created when there is a presence of dualism within an ideology. "A dualism is more than a relation of dichotomy, difference, or nonidentity, and more than a simple hierarchical relationship. In dualistic construction, as in hierarchy, the qualities [actual or supposed], the culture, the values and the areas of life associated with the dualised other are systematically and pervasively constructed and depicted as inferior" (Hughes). These dualities include male/female, self/other, hard/soft, light/dark, logic/emotion etc. They are concepts that are defined by their relation to their counterpart. ". . . A dualism is an intense, established and developed cultural expression of such a hierarchical relationship, constructing central cultural concepts and identities so as to make equality and mutuality literally unthinkable" (Plumwood). When we look to deconstruct these embedded codes of language we look to deconstruct the power of existing social frameworks.

Finally, a key aspect in this examination, is how feminist theorist discuss and define rape. "Feminist theories view rape as a manifestation of core male patriarchal values and paternalism.

Brownmiller (1975, p.6) asserted that rape is ‘a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear’” (Jenkins). Rape is about power and dominance and is a means to strip the female of her agency. Although most feminist theorist can agree that rape is used as an oppressive tactic, there is much debate about what specifically constitutes as ‘rape’. For example, some Third Wave feminists have the unfortunate view point that ‘date-rape’ doesn’t constitute as tradition ‘rape’ and put some of the fault on the female victim. The representation of rape within media, mainly created by the male gaze for male spectators, has reinforced this skewed idealism that rape can be negated depending on its individual circumstances instead of a violent tool of dominance upheld by the gender imbalance of societal frameworks. The presence of the male gaze in texts containing male on female rape or violence reiterates a ‘state of fear’ and hinders the female spectators from finding community within shared understanding. By taking away the female voice from their own experiences it keeps them in a lower level of power as the media at large reinforces violence against them. The inclusion of the female perspective represented within narrative structure is the only way to properly educate the spectator on how they should move through the discussion and psychology of rape.

Analysis

Rape is nothing new within media, culture and narrative texts. Going back as far as written word, sexual assault has been represented throughout history. However, the female victim is usually never in charge of the narrative causing women to become oversaturated in their own lack of agency. In Greek Mythology, stories of sexual assault were used to explain the sun and

the stars and usually ended with a woman being punished for the crimes of a man; a sentiment still relevant today due to the overwhelming dominance of the male perspective within the media. Although it may not be intentional, as media and cultural ideals interweave and mirror each other through their evolutionary developments, there has been little done to right this imbalance. The perspective from which rape stories are told matters, as they have the power to influence and evolve the societal standards that created them. “Thomas and Vivian Sobchack note that in the past popular film-makers, 'intent on telling a story', were not always aware of 'the covert psychological and social... subtext' of their own films, but add that modern film-makers and their audiences are now 'more keenly aware of the myth-making accomplished by film genres' (Sobchack & Sobchack 1980, 245)” (Chandler, D). Films and narrative text add to the embedded coding of language and visual art, they therefore stand to be touchstones of culture and society at the time of their creation. From the viewpoint of a victim of sexual violence, the discourse of rape and rape-revenge being led largely by the masculine perspective reiterates the lack of feminine autonomy within their own culture and mythology.

When looking at Rape-Revenge as a genre, to understand where it is now we must first look at where it evolved from. While a subgenre of Horror, Rape-Revenge also has roots in pornography and smut films that included real acts of violence against women. While most film theorists and critics would, rightly, reject such films' cinematic value it is important to note that the exploitation of women in film, specifically violent and illegal films, is a real and frequent occurrence and reveals the dark reality of how film, and media in general, is often used as a weapon against women's liberation and solely benefits its male creators. Because pornography is an oversaturated market, with both legitimate and illegitimate sites peddling films, it's hard to track a linear evolution. Whereas with the Horror genre, instances of change within the

framework are a little easier to spot. However, when examining this evolution, the branch from which Rape-Revenge sprung was actually a subgenre itself. The introduction and establishment of the Slasher film in popular media paved the way for what would later become Rape-Revenge.

Within cinema it is understood that Hitchcock's *'Psycho'* (1960) is the archetype from which all Slashers are descendants. "Its elements are familiar: the killer is the psychotic product of a sick family, but still recognizably human; the victim is a beautiful, sexually active woman; the location is not-home, at a Terrible Place; the weapon is something other than a gun; the attack is registered from the victim's point of view and comes with shocking suddenness" (Clover, 22). The foundation for the Slasher sub-genre set by *'Psycho'* links sexuality and violence in a way that the female characters are punished by the killer as a means of repenting or purification. The heightening of shock and narrative through the evolution of the catalogue has led to the archetype of the 'Final Girl'. "In 1974...a film emerged that revised the Psycho template to such a degree and in such a way as to mark a new phase: *'The Texas Chain Saw Massacre'* (Tobe Hooper). Together with *'Halloween'* (John Carpenter, 1978), it engendered a new spate of variations and imitations" (Clover, 24). Best explained in Joss Whedon's satirical Slasher *'The Cabin In The Woods'* (2012), a Final Girl can die but not necessarily, 'as long as she suffers'. We can see that in these earlier female characters, like Laurie in *'Halloween'* (1978) or Sally in *'The Texas Chainsaw Massacre'* (1974) which has carried through the genre into more recent films like *'Ready Or Not'* (2019). This 'suffering' is set on a sliding scale but the typical tropes include psychological and/or physical torture, betrayal (if the killer is someone the victim knows), and/or watching their friends or family die. All of which culminates into a visual representation at the moment of resolution, signifying the psychological change the violence has caused within the Final Girl. In *'The Texas Chainsaw Massacre'* (1974) our heroine Sally escapes Leatherface on

the back of the pickup truck, covered in blood and laughing chaotically as our cannibal killer mirrors her mania by wildly brandishing his chainsaw in a fit of rage. This manifestation of trauma, whatever its form, marks the Final Girl as having a part of the killer, the violence, with them forever and although they are alive they do not get to walk away clean. She is forced to absorb the violence and to become part of it. (Hooper).

Just four years after *'The Texas Chainsaw Massacre'* (1974) was released, *'I Spit On Your Grave'* (1978) came to theaters. *'I Spit On Your Grave'*, directed by Meir Zarchi, is agreed to be one of the first critically accepted Rape-Revenge films. Its most basic logline on IMDB reads, "An aspiring writer is repeatedly gang-raped, humiliated, and left for dead by four men whom she systematically hunts down to seek revenge" (www.imdb.com). In its most simplistic form, the framework for the genre is in its name - there's a rape and then there is a revenge. "For many, the 'narrative image' of *I Spit...1978* is the scantily clad, blood-soaked female avenger made iconic through the poster (which is replicated on the *I Spit 2010* poster, but appears in neither film). This can be considered rape-revenge's presold concept, or the reduction of the genre down to a saleable image" (Henry). The film was banned in numerous countries due to its graphic depiction of the assaults but even with the social outrage, its framework has persisted. Jennifer, played by Camille Keaton, a beautiful and bright young woman, goes to visit her new lake house and one day, while out in a small boat, she is hit by a speed boat and dragged away by four men who brutally rape and beat her before leaving, believing her to be dead. After her attack, Jennifer, who can barely look at herself in the mirror, tracks and hunts down the men that attacked her and one by one kills them, each time the viciousness of her revenge heightening to a climatic extreme. She hangs one, castrates the second, kills the third with an axe and finally, kills the leader of the heinous pack by cutting him in half with the boat he used to trap her in the first

place. Before administering this final act of justice, Jennifer even uses her attacker's words against him, repeating what he told her during the assault, 'Suck it up, bitch' (Zarchi, M).

The presence of its Slasher predecessor, perhaps even inspiration, is clear in its use of the genre's familiar patterns but breaks away in its formula and intention to create a new category of Horror recognized by critics. It centers around a young beautiful woman, the attack happens away from the protagonist's home in the designated 'Terrible Place', the 'kills' are achieved without guns and the attack happens suddenly and with shock value. The new patterns introduced in *I Spit* (1978) have since become staples within Rape-Revenge and are some of its defining factors. Jennifer's aversion to her own reflection after the attack, which acts a physical manifestation of the crime and a constant reminder of the protagonist's festering rage, along with this idea of 'reclaiming' the weapons, even words, used against the protagonist have become repeating tropes within the sub-genre. However, this reclaiming is being done via a male perspective for spectators that are presumed to be largely male, so is there any rightful reclamation actually happening? Furthermore, within the sub-genre there exists a polarizing view of who should be enacting the revenge. The sub-genre splits between having the victim seek justice or having a male protector, usually a father or boyfriend, collect the pound of flesh in her stead. This latter fulfillment of revenge further reflects the female victim's lack of agency within her own story.

Within the genre's creation there are already juxtaposing realities and perspectives being embedded within the text. There is the unspoken understanding that the violence the audience is being led through is a reality of the world they themselves live in and that the suffering of the female victim is an experience felt by real, actual people. There is then the contextual understanding that this is supposed to be entertaining. Lastly, when the text is presented by a

male perspective it socially reinforces the exploitation of the female body for male pleasure while simultaneously diminishing the real trauma of the female audience. As discussed, the framework of a genre reinforces the ‘naturalized ideologies’ of the culture that created them and so this framework, when observed through the male gaze, reduces female autonomy, keeps them in a state of fear and becomes a manifestation of masculine dominance. The film itself becomes a misrepresentation of trauma and a new visual assault for female spectators.

Rape-Revenge, like all artistic expressions, went through fluctuations in popularity but with the introduction of movies like ‘*Teeth*’ (2007) the genre teetered on beoming a cult parody of itself. The film centers around a teenage girl born with Vagina Dentata, monerous teeth in the vagina canal, which she eventually learns to control to enact revenge on her male attackers. This movie was rejected by critics and reflected the genre’s inability to evolve as well as societies own stalemate on deconstructing rape-culture. Then in 2009, ‘*Jennifer’s Body*’ was released to an audience perhaps not quite ready to receive its criticisms of them. In a male dominated industry, ‘*Jennifer’s Body*’ was one of the first mainstream Rape-Revenge films to be written and directed by women. Written by Diablo Cody, who also wrote ‘*Juno*’ (2007), and directed by Karyn Kusama, ‘*Jennifer’s Body*’ brought a new sense of artistry to the sub-genre and acted as an outlier in the use of framework which would open the genre to finally include the female gaze with a female spectator in mind. For the first time in the Rape-Revenge history, a film was made with female intentions.

In the film, Jennifer (Meghan Fox) is portrayed in the beginning as being a sexually self assured ‘It Girl’ at her high school while her best friend Needy (Amanda Seyfried) is viewed as her mousy, timid and codependent side-kick. Jennifer and Needy attend a concert at a local bar to hear an out of town band play but during the show the bar burns down and in the chaos Jennifer

leaves with the band in their van. It is revealed that the band, who believed Jennifer was a virgin, kidnapped her and tried to sacrifice her to the devil in exchange for becoming famous. They plunge a ritual knife into Jennifer's body as they callously taunt her by singing 'Jenny-20' over her screams. They leave Jennifer for dead, not knowing that by sacrificing a non-virgin they inadvertently joined her soul with a Succubus from Hell, who feeds off of sexual energy and flesh. Jennifer remains beautiful so long as she feeds and it isn't long before Needy discovers the truth behind her erratic behavior and the growing number of missing male students. Throughout the film, in the background the audience can hear the new song by the band growing in popularity as they rise in fame. Their presence is subtle and acts as a reminder to the audience of Jennifer's exploitation. In the end, Needy kills Jennifer and destroys the demon but is bitten in the struggle. Needy is sent to an insane asylum but reveals to the audience that if someone is bitten by a demon and lives, they will possess some of its power. Needy uses this to escape and in the final credits of the film, without any lingering or spectacle of gore, kills the band in their hotel room with the knife they used to sacrifice Jennifer's soul. (Kusama).

Imagery used within the film adds a new layer of metaphor the genre should strive for and in its artistic representation of female trauma, using the female gaze, subverted the genre's assumed male dominance. Its creator accomplished this by reconstructing Rape-Revenge's defining tropes like the film's use of mirrors and reflection. The 'rape' itself here is metaphoric and the film uses the imagery and coded language of the ritual sacrifice of Jennifer's body to symbolize the assault or molestation of her. In this way, the assumed female spectator is not confronted by the act of violence or retraumatized by a visual exploitation of assault. In addition, the victim in Rape-Revenge films experiences a rejection of their reflected image, but in the case of 'Jennifer's Body', Jennifer's reflected image was put at the forefront of the

narrative. As we see in one scene Jennifer stares at herself as she burns her tongue with a lighter, with an almost bored expression on her face which exemplified the dissociation caused by trauma. In another scene, we watch a run-down Jennifer, tired of the slaughter and trying to resist her constant thirst, stare at herself in her vanity and, finally succumbing to her role as a Succubus, she slaps on makeup, smearing it over her face, distraught and manic as she creates the pretty image the world wants to see rather the reality of her distress and pain. In addition, the acts of revenge, while usually enacted on the perpetrators and enablers of the sexual assault, in this film Jennifer takes revenge on all men, everyone who sexualized her and trivialized her nothing more than her physical attributes. The film utilizes this reclamation of the weapon but alters it where Jennifer's own body and sexuality is the weapon, used against and in defense of her.

It is also my interpretation that the knife, first used by the band and then by Needy, comes to represent the film industry and the sub-genre itself. In the hands of the male perpetrators it is used to exploit the female body for art and to catapult the men into fame and artistic merit. Then, by the end of the film, the knife switches ownership to Needy who uses it to kill the band which signifies the switching of narratives from male to female perspectives and the reclamation of female agency. By looking at the film's ending, it is an indication of its creator's intention to deconstruct the patriarchal codes embedded in the genre and to turn it against them, creating a space for a female spectator. Even Jennifer's name, the name of the first Rape-Revenge protagonist, the first female body to be sacrificed for a male agenda and entertainment, seems to underline this comparison.

It is understood amongst current critics and audiences that '*Jennifer's Body*' was ahead of its time and its modifications to Rape-Revenge were not yet ready to be solidified in the genre's

framework. Just a few months after its release two other Rape-Revenge films were produced, *'The Last House On The Left'* (2009) and *I Spit On Your Grave* (2010), both remakes. While too close to *'Jennifer's Body'* to be affected by its social implications, these remakes act as mile markers in the genre's evolution and as remakes are a reflection of the genre's lack of innovation. They also act as a projection of the assumed audience during the time of their release.

“Remaking crystallizes the process of genre repetition, so remakes are particularly useful as objects of study in the analysis of a genre. Most remakes are genre films and they simultaneously revise the codes and conventions of their source films and their genre” (Henry). However, because these remakes came out so close to a genre outlier, where the female perspective is introduced as a means of navigating the framework, these films were made redundant as they reflected a now outdated iteration of the narrative.

The acclaim for *'Jennifer's Body'* came later, recently finding a resurgence in a more willing audience. The film was an undeniable flop in box office terms when it was first released with a 16 million dollar budget and grossing just 31.6 million in distribution sales. The film was also met with harsh critical reviews. A Rotten Tomato's Critical Consensus article entitled *'CRITICS CONSENSUS: JENNIFER'S BODY IS HOT, BUT THE MOVIE ISN'T'* (Ryan, 2009) exemplifies the reaction and misinterpretation of the film by the audience. In an interview on a podcast, Fox herself said of its initial failure, “A lot of it was just about my image at the time and who I was in the media at the time and the backlash to that. The movie never really stood a chance” (Pathania, 2020). A lot of the blame can be found in the film's marketing strategy and the type of spectator it brought in. In regards to the assumed genre target, “...the majority audience, perhaps even more than the audience for horror in general, was largely young and largely male— conspicuously groups of boys who cheer the killer on as he assaults his

victims, then reverse their sympathies to cheer the survivor on as she assaults the killer” (Clover, C.). A film made by women, for women was marketed to a frat boy audience, playing up the sexualization of Fox and leaving out its narrative examinations of feminist and queer ideologies. The contract was broken between film and audience as they sat down expecting the familiar patterns of Rape-Revenge and instead were challenged to deconstruct their own patriarchal perspectives. “Affects such as shame, disgust, rage, and emptiness are commonly evoked in rape-revenge spectatorship, but stepping back to look at the affective power of genre familiarity is another interesting way of approaching affect in the context of the revisionist genre” (Henry, C).

In the case of ‘*Jennifer’s Body*’, the reconceptualization of Rape-Revenge was marketed and viewed by an audience still observing from the now subverted dominate role. Without a way to define the film, the audience could not yet understand its metaphoric value, the language of the imagery and the subtlety of its subversion. Now existing within a reconstructing society, propelled by the Me Too Movement in 2017, ‘*Jennifer’s Body*’ finally reflects the ideologies of the culture. The Me Too Movement, while it went viral in 2017 was first started by Tarana Burke in 2007, two years before the release of ‘*Jennifer’s Body*’, each taking about ten years for the world to catch up with them. Now, due to the groundwork done by Cody and Kasuma, the production of any female driven Rape-Revenge film further cements a framework from the female gaze as part of the genres defining patterns. Movies like ‘*Revenge*’ (2017) and ‘*Revenge Ride*’ (2020), both directed by women, show a shift in the industry and what the expected audience is for this subgenre of horror. “...certainties of the genre—that sexual assault merits a lethal response; that the rape victim bears responsibility for obtaining justice through revenge—start to become eroded. . . In succeeding years, a number of films have intensified this

ambivalence, simultaneously evoking the genre of rape-revenge while refusing to incorporate many of its essential features. The result has been the attenuation of the equation between restoration and revenge.” (Young 2010, 56)” (Henry, C.). This continuing evolution creates a space for female narratives and perspectives, reflects a society that reinforces the framework and promotes positive change in film and spectator ideologies.

The representation and proliferation of violence against women in media, when applying genre theory, reflects the social climate of rape culture and the social response to sexual violence. The view that the woman herself caused the attack, inherited it through her gender and sexuality and that it is then the woman’s responsibility to defend herself, to avenge her feminine purity within cinema is the same societal normalization of violence against women that leads police to ask a victim what she was wearing or how much she had to drink when addressing her assault. The perpetuation of violence, specifically sexual violence, against women is greatly linked to its reinforcement within popular culture. Looking at the Rape-Revenge genre through the scope of Feminist Theory, the only way to reintroduce female agency into a trauma led narrative is to reclaim the tropes used to further female exploitation and a popular culture ambivalent to male on female violence. Within this subversion and deconstruction a genre, benefiting from female trauma, finally includes an honest and artistic retelling of that female experience. With the intention of the creator in line with expression rather than exploitation, as well as an assumed female audience, the use of female perspective in Rape-Revenge films propel the genre into a more evolved and honest portrayal of the narrative as the audience is led through the framework by a gaze that runs parallel to its protagonist - pushing the spectator forward into a new realm of understanding. A Rape-Revenge film, when told by a woman, rejects the exploitation of a

'Jennifer's' body and works to reconstruct social hierarchies through the evolution of media representation.

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