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Digital Object Identifier: <https://doi.org/10.13023/ETD.2016.462>

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STICKING TO THE SCRIPT: SEXUAL SCRIPTS IN THE SLASHER SUB-GENRE

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THESIS

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the  
College of Communication  
at the University of Kentucky

By

Jennifer Leann Clay

Lexington, Kentucky

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Lexington, Kentucky

2016

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

### STICKING TO THE SCRIPT: SEXUAL SCRIPTS IN THE SLASHER SUB-GENRE

The “slasher” sub-genre has been immensely popular, even spawning television shows that invoke the familiar slasher conventions. This sub-genre has simultaneously become vilified by media researchers over the years. The slasher has received particular criticism for allegedly reinforcing regressive attitudes regarding female sexuality. This study applies sexual script theory to better understand the messages about sex found throughout the sub-genre. This study utilizes content analysis to study the more recent iterations of the slasher sub-genre including the re-make, the modern slasher film and the slasher television show. This analysis uncovered that the slasher sub-genre has evolved over time. While slasher re-makes reinforce some regressive attitudes regarding female sexuality through scripts, there were also many instances in which these films present a more accepting acceptable view of female sexuality, as well as a healthier view of male sexuality. Furthermore, this analysis uncovered that the slasher films and the slasher television series serve as sites for more favorable attitudes towards female and non-heteronormative sexualities, as well as for the portrayal of a masculinity that is not dependent on the constant desire and satisfactory execution of sex. Finally, the slasher television shows, in particular, provided a more complex look at sexuality by asking prompting deeper questions about the ramifications of changing sexual norms.

KEYWORDS: Slasher, Horror, Sexual Script, Sexuality, Gender

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December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

For years, mass media researchers have wondered about the capacity of media to teach youth certain behaviors. This research has focused on several subjects, most prominently, the ability of media to teach youth how to behave in aggressive or violent ways (Bandura, 1977) or to dramatically alter how safe viewers feel in the world around them (Gerbner & Gross, 1972). That being said, there has also been a large amount of research done on has investigated the ability of media to teach young people about sexuality (Hogben & Byrne, 1998). Some of this research has been conducted on the relationship between teen initiation-initiated of sex and the viewership of mass media. Interestingly, this research has pointed to the conclusion concluded that there is a tangible connection exists between the two (Collins et al., 2004). Indeed, in the U.S., where much sexual education typically emphasizes abstinence, in lieu of teaching adolescents about sex (and how to practice it safely), kids are typically left to learn about sex from the next best sources: media and their peers (Stanger, Hall & Hall, 2011).

Sexual script theory (Simon & Gagnon, 1969) deals with precisely this phenomenon, arguing that youths learn enduring sexual “scripts” through two different sources: socialization and media. On one hand, youth learn these scripts, which are merely a set of norms and expectations regarding sexuality, through their experiences with peers (either by discussing the topic of sex or by navigating sexual behavior with peers). On the other hand, youths are also exposed to these sexual scripts when they consume media; by watching characters navigate sexual behavior and discuss sex on screen, young viewers become familiar with these sexual scripts.

However, it must be noted that exposure to these scripts, however, does not occur in a homogenous ways across different types of media, as suggested by cultivation theorists (Gerbner & Gross, 1972). On the contrary, Marron and Collins (2009) suggest in their analysis of the connection between media viewership and sexual attitudes/behaviors that it is the viewership of high levels of certain genres that carries the that capacity to reinforce certain attitudes/behaviors. For instance, Marron and Collins (2009) found that women who were high viewers of reality television were more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors. One popular genre of media with the capacity to reinforce certain sexual scripts is the genre of horror, in particular, the teen-centric sub-genre of “slasher” films. The horror genre is known for its consistent and largely problematic invocations of teen sexuality. Because of the volume and tone of this sexual content, the slasher sub-genre has the capacity to expose teen viewers, (whose ideas regarding sexuality are still being formed,) to potentially harmful sexual scripts (Linz, Donnerstein & Penrod, 1988).

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Genre

Before examining the slasher sub-genre more closely, it is important to first explain what constitutes a “genre.” On a basic level, a genre consists of conventions, rules, symbols, etc. that appear across a sub-set of media artifacts (Altman, 1999). While genre has been discussed at length by scholars, Altman’s *Film/Genre* (1999) examined the history of genre study with the intent of gleaning meaningful insight about where genre came from, how it has been used and how it has evolved. In his survey of genre history, Altman (1999) described the many purposes of genre, including : “a *blueprint* for creators, a *structure* or framework which influence the creation of films, a *label* utilized by members of the industry, and a *contract* indicative of the audience’s expectations of a film” (Altman, p. 14).

Unsurprisingly, the slasher, though only a sub-genre, adheres to its own set of conventions. Slasher films have become known for their graphic mixture of sex and violence. Many scholars have even critiqued the films for being overtly misogynistic (Linz et al., 1987; Weaver, 1991; Sapolsky et al., 2003). Likewise, some other scholars have argued that the films reinforce antiquated ideas regarding female sexuality (Weaver et al., 2015; Welsh, 2010; Cowan & O’Brien, 1990). Additionally, these teen- oriented horror films are known for reinforcing a moral code, specifically with regard to sexuality (Welsh, 2010; Weaver et al, 2015). With this in mind, the slasher sub-genre is a hotbed for sexual- script invocation. While previous sexual- script literature has examined sexual scripts in the prototypical teen fare, such as teen dramas and primetime cable television

shows (Kelly, 2010; Kim et al., 2007; Van Damme, 2010), no such analysis has been conducted on slasher films, despite the sub-genres' popularity with teens and saturation with sexual content. Given this gap in the literature, this study takes the opportunity to examine the slasher sub-genre, in light of sexual script theory, to uncover potential sexual scripts being reinforced or challenged via this medium.

In addition to expanding sexual-script literature into a new avenue, this study also offers a glimpse into a more nuanced way of examining sexual scripts. Previous literature suggests that particular sexual scripts are reinforced or challenged through a character's invocation via interaction in a particular scene (Kelly, 2010; Kim et al., 2007; Van Damme, 2010; Markle, 2008). On the other hand, as indicated previously, one of the most notable conventions of the slasher sub-genre is the death of female characters who are sexually active, and the framing of the abstinent female protagonist as the hero or "Final Girl." Through the repeated depictions of negative outcomes for sexually active female characters and the valorization of abstinent female characters, these films send the messages that certain sexual behaviors are not acceptable, while others are to be valued. The connection of these outcomes to particular sexual behaviors offers another avenue in which sexual scripts may be reinforced or challenged.

In light of the slasher sub-genre's potential as a conduit for sexual scripts, this study will examine the literature surrounding sexual script theory (as it relates to media) and the slasher sub-genre. Furthermore, this study will uncover which sexual scripts are reinforced and challenged throughout the slasher sub-genre, both through character interaction and, when relevant, through character outcomes.

### **Sexual Script Theory**

Built on the premise of social constructionism, sexual-script theory (Simon & Gagnon, 1969) argues that ideas about sexuality and sexual behavior are formed socially through the reinforcement of particular social scripts. These scripts occur on several levels: cultural, interpersonal and intra-psychic (internal). Cultural scripts detail the guidelines of a particular sequence of events, while interpersonal scripts are for specific social contexts. Intra-psychic scripts, on the other hand, relate to the internal self (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). The invocation of these scripts can either be “traditional” or “progressive.” Traditional scripts reinforce sets of assumptions tied to the notion that sex is “for” men (and men are entitled to pursue it at all times and in all contexts), while women are not supposed to be interested in sex. Contrarily, when the invocation of a new script challenges these norms, the script is viewed as “progressive” (Wiederman, 2005). According to Sakaluk et al. (2014), these scripts inform the way adolescents understand their own sexuality as well as their sexual interactions with others (Sakaluk et al. (2014). Furthermore, these sexual scripts are not merely “how to” guides to sexual interaction; on the contrary, many of these more- “traditional” scripts are just as clear about what type of sexual behavior is not socially accepted. For instance, in Smith’s (2012) study on dominant sexual scripts, the author found that many scripts suggested girls should inhibit expressions of their sexuality. Similarly, Smith (2012) found that if girls are single and engaging in sex, they are likely to be stigmatized for violating the sexual script. This literature also suggests sexual scripts are just as clear about what types of sexual behaviors are unacceptable.

These sexual scripts take root within a culture in two different ways. According to Sakaluk et al. (2014), these scripts are either reinforced: interpersonally (through family

and friends) or through media (Sakaluk et al. (2014). For instance, when participants in Sakaluk et al.'s (2014) study discussed the ramifications of deviating from sexual scripts, (such as the script that men are always ready for sex): "Participants reported that men who turned down sex risked having their sexual orientation questioned or creating the perception that something is wrong with them" (p. 520). As indicated by these findings, individuals who deviate from strongly endorsed sexual scripts risk social judgment and isolation.

Before many young adults have had any real experience with sex, however, they have already been exposed to certain sexual attitudes by seeing these certain behaviors modeled in media (Hoff, Greene & Davis, 2003). Television and film are increasingly becoming sites where youth are exposed to sexual scripts, both progressive and traditional sexual scripts (Kim et al., 2007; Van Damme, 2010, Markle, 2008). Kim et al. (2007) found several recurring sexual scripts across prime-time cable network television shows. For instance, Kim et al. (2007) uncovered the script that suggested men are expected to think first and foremost about sex. Furthermore, in Kim's analysis men were coded as the sexual initiators and were expected to be open about their sexual desires. On the other hand, within the same sample, sexual scripts for women ranged from the script of passively attracting attention of males (forcing them to make the first move) to, the seemingly inescapable script that women are judged for being too overtly sexual or for engaging in too much sex. On a more relational level, Kim et al. (2007) discovered that sexual scripts in television implied that men are expected to crave independence and physical intimacy, while women are thought to crave relationships and emotional intimacy. Unsurprisingly, all these scripts (or some

variation) were present in Smith's (2012) analysis of the sexual scripts found within popular films. The ubiquity of these scripts across both mediated and interpersonal sources ensures teens are saturated with exposure to these particular recurring scripts. Considering that, for some inexperienced young people, the stories in a primetime television show or film may be their first exposure to a sexual script, the study of these sexual scripts is all the more important.

While primetime television shows and films certainly serve as sources for exposure to sexual scripts, teen-oriented and directed shows that are teen-oriented and directed at teens have demonstrated a notable propensity to influence identity formation (Bindig, 2008). Considering this and the high amount of sexual content in youth-centered media such as "MTV" (Smith, 2005), teen-centered television shows are particularly fertile ground for the analysis of sexual scripts. Van Damme's (2010) content analysis of the very popular teen television shows *Gossip Girl* and *One Tree Hill* found the reinforcement of many of the same traditional sexual scripts from the aforementioned literature: males were expected to be hypersexual, while sexually active women who are sexually active were judged for their sexuality. However, a problematic finding across both of these teen-oriented shows was the objectification of female sexuality; in both shows, there were several instances in which the teen female characters used sex as a sort of "prize" or tool to manipulate men. Such a sexual script is a problematic representation of teen sexuality that because it suggests that women are purely sexual objects.

Furthermore, as Van Damme (2010) noted, not all sexual scripts are gendered, and the unisex sexual scripts endorsed by these teen shows are often just as problematic. Throughout their sample, sex was often implied; however contraceptives were rarely used

or discussed. These findings are reflected in previous literature, which suggests that sexual health is rarely discussed, and when it is, it is not discussed in a way which promotes responsible sexual behavior (Hust et al., 2008). As such, in addition to being exposed to many of the same sexual scripts found in primetime television and film, teens consuming this media are being exposed to sexual scripts that neglect safe sex as well.

Despite the aforementioned literature which suggests the omnipresence of traditional sexual scripts (e.g. men are hypersexual, women should not be vocal about sex) (Van Damme, 2010; Smith, 2012; Kim et al., 2007; Markle, 2008), there certainly are media which challenge these sexual scripts. For instance, Markle (2008) noted that the television show *Sex in the City* challenges many traditional sexual scripts with their own counter scripts; in her analysis, Markle (2008) found that female sexual experience is frequently scripted as recreational (a script atypical to the “judged sexuality” script from past literature). Notably, the show also highlighted the consequences of not using protection. In addition, the female characters were not judged for their sexual behavior and they often discussed their sex lives openly. These scripts wholly invert the traditional sexual scripts found in most mainstream television, and suggest that some creators are beginning to challenge these traditional ideals, particularly with regard to female sexuality (Kim et al., 2007; Smith, 2012; Van Damme, 2010).

### **“Traditional” Slasher Films**

It is clear that mass media consumption reinforces certain sexual scripts. However, as indicated in Van Damme’s (2010) study on teen dramas, certain genres not only reinforce sexual scripts more than others, but also reinforce more harmful sexual scripts. The slasher film, a sub-genre of horror films known for its teen protagonists and



graphic depictions of sex, is one genre that undoubtedly carries much potential to introduce and reinforce sexual scripts. Slasher films are defined by the well-known serial killers and/or monsters at the center of the films; in the prototypical slasher film, these villains go on a killing spree, most often preying upon young, irresponsible teens (Trencansky, 2001). Some of the most notable examples of the slasher genre are the *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Friday the 13th* and *Halloween* films (Lizardi, 2010).

One of the defining characteristics of the slasher film is its hypersexual nature; for many, however, slasher films are also known by the perceived amount of sexual violence that permeates the sub-genre (Linz et al., 1987; Weaver, 1991; Sapolsky et al., 2003). In particular, Linz et al. (1987) alluded to their concern that exposure to graphic sexual violence against women (of which they held up the slasher film as a prime example) has the capacity to elicit a lack of empathy, as well as victim blaming.

Others, however, have looked more critically at this unquestioned assumption that sexual violence against women defines the slasher sub-genre. Sapolsky et al.'s (2003) content analysis of 83 different slasher films seems to suggest that sex and violence are rarely overtly linked in the sub-genre; on the other hand, the authors also found that women were victimized more in slasher films than in other genres, and that, when they were victimized, they were given significantly more screen time. Similarly, Weaver (1991) found that, in addition to a lack of sexual violence, men and women did not differ in their rate of victimization; however, Weaver (1991) did find support for the troubling notion that female victimization scenes are significantly longer than those of men. It would seem that while the slasher film is not necessarily the insidious, sexually violent genre espoused, it certainly has a tendency to highlight the suffering of women. This is

especially problematic when examined in conjunction with the formula that so often accompanies female characters' suffering.

In addition to its hypersexual content, slasher films are notable for one particular convention or formula which, in addition to being parodied in films like the *Scary Movie* franchise, has even spawned books on the subject (Dika, 1990). Weaver et al. (2015) breaks down the pop-culture mythology behind this formula. They explain:

“It is a well-known stereotype among slasher fans that the most telling indicator of a bad (and ultimately disposable) girl in the slasher film is sexual activity (Rockoff, 2002). On the other side of this Madonna/whore dichotomy is the Final Girl (Clover, 1992), who, by virtue of her refusal to engage in licentious behavior (e.g., sex, drugs), is rewarded with survival” (p. 32).

Through the Final Girl typology, then, slasher films actually reinforce traditional ideas regarding female sexuality by rewarding chaste female characters and punishing women who engage in sex.

While this formula has been noted by many enthusiasts of the slasher genre, the trope has also been researched by Weaver et al. (2015), who sought to determine whether this convention is as ubiquitous and insidious in its portrayal of female sexuality as slasher lore would suggest. Their own subsequent analyses actually corroborate the existence of such a convention, finding that female characters were disproportionately killed after outwardly exhibiting sexual behavior (compared to male characters), while they disproportionately survived when remaining somewhat sexually pure (e.g. only engaging in mild sexual behaviors like kissing.)

Similarly, Welsh (2010) found a statistically significant difference between how often “deviant” female characters died versus “non-deviant” female characters; meanwhile, the author found no such difference for male characters (which is also consistent with the formula outlined in previous literature). As such, Welsh’s (2010) findings support the theory that women in slasher films are “punished” because of their sexual deviation. Furthermore, Cowan and O’Brien (1990) also found that an expression of general “sexiness” was related to non-survival among female characters, meaning that sexual activity need not occur on screen, but only be implied, in order for the formula to be triggered. These findings coupled with the empirical evidence that scenes of female victimization were significantly longer than scenes of male victimization (Weaver, 1991; Sapolsky et al., 2003) is strongly suggestive support for the theory that there is a formula that is reproduced across slasher films, in particular, a formula that disproportionately “punishes” violation of sexual norms through violence.

Jancovich (1992) on the other hand complicated this sentiment in the book *Horror*: “It is masculinity, not femininity, that is the problem in these films; and this problem is registered in a number of ways. They display an absence of positive or effective male characters. It is the female heroes who engage the killer and defend themselves” (p. 107). In this passage, Jancovich (1992) argues that the stalkers from these slasher films are, in fact, the severest realization of a normalized, aggressive and sex-obsessed masculinity that often culminates in violence against women. According to Jancovich (1992), these films where “Final Girls” so often save the day actually empower women while deriding normative masculinity.

However, it is important to think of these Final Girls in their larger context. Wee (2006) points out that Final Girls rarely survive long after their conquest. They are often killed immediately in subsequent sequels. Such an outcome for these female characters calls into question Jancovich's conceptualization of the often abstinent Final Girl as a "empowered" and progressive. On the contrary, Ryan and Kellner (1988) suggest that the subsequent killing of the Final Girl in the sequel reinforces a conservative mentality in which these empowered, non-normative women face an untimely end because of the danger they present to male power. This complicates the elements of gender and sexuality at play in the character of the Final Girl even further. It is possible that the filmmakers who destroy these progressive female characters are glorifying a progressive femininity/sexuality only to suggest that, in the real world, this ideal cannot be sustained.

### **Modern Slasher Films**

While the previous analysis is important to understanding the slasher tradition, the slasher sub-genre has experienced many changes over time and appears very different in the contemporary moment. However, before taking a closer look at the changes the slasher sub-genre has undergone, it is important to first understand how genres undergo change. Altman (1999) explained and critiqued the many assumptions which have defined genre study, including the notion that genres only experience small and predictable changes throughout their "lifespan." Altman suggests that this approach serves to reframe instances which challenge genre borders, thus allowing theorists to continue in their assertion that genre is concrete, unchanging and inherent.

In his exploration of "genre hybridity," Neale (2000) expanded on the capability of a genre to evolve or even adopt elements of other genres to form a "hybrid genre." In

Neale's discussion of genre, he pointed out many ways in which genre hybridity has been examined by genre scholars. In Neale's discussion of the action adventure genre, for instance, he noted Tasker's (1993) examination of masculinity in these films. Tasker (1993) suggested that in the film *Red Sonja*, humor is utilized in certain scenes in order to call into question certain ideas about masculinity typically espoused by the genre. This observation indicates that the act of combining recognizable elements of a genre with the elements of another is one way in which genre conventions are challenged.

Of course, film isn't the only venue where genre hybridization occurs. Television is a form of media known for its genre hybridity as well. According to Mittell (2004), due to the fact that television has different production processes, industry concerns and audiences than film, successful television shows often don't adhere to single, static genres. On the contrary, television is an entity which encourages the mixing and challenging of conventions from several different genres (e.g. *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*'s utilization of high school drama and horror conventions). Likewise, Mittell (2004) suggests that "genres do not operate by these clear nesting categorizations, but rather through cycles of redefinition and evolution" (p.11).

The slasher sub-genre is no exception when it comes to this tendency of genres to evolve. Today, the slasher sub-genre has transitioned from the classic, formulaic slasher film of the 80's to include modern slasher films that deviate from this formula (Wee, 2006), re-makes of these classic films (Lizardi, 2010) and even slasher television shows. In order to better understand the transition this sub-genre has made, as well as how these changes relate to the reinforcement or challenging of sexual scripts, it is important to take a closer look at these new iterations of the slasher sub-genre.

The re-make is just one of the contemporary iterations of the slasher sub-genre. According to Lizardi (2010) the focus on heightening gore and drama in re-makes of popular slasher films can culminate in the production of an increasingly traditional and misogynistic film. The author argued that films such as the re-make of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* heighten the “punishment” of deviant behavior. The re-make reimagines the first scene such that the characters (excluding the “Final Girl”) are trafficking and smoking marijuana, as well as engaging in illicit sex. This deviant behavior, present in the re-make but not in the original, suggests that the death of these youths, and the survival of the abstaining female character, is an even more overt reinforcement of these traditional scripts.

However, Lizardi (2010) noted that this isn’t the only way slasher re-makes amp up their reinforcement of traditional gendered norms. In keeping with the increased degree of sexual explicitness and portrayal of violence in the media, these films also “punish” female deviance more severely than their predecessors. In particular, scenes of violence against “deviating” female characters were even longer, more gruesome and more frequent in the re-make. For instance, in the original *Last House on the Left* there is much off-screen violence that is alluded to against the girls. However, in the re-make every frame of their suffering is shown, even their rape. While this finding reflects the increased amount of sexually explicit behavior and violence found in today’s media (Bleakley et al., 2012), this focus on the suffering of deviant female characters also re-affirms the notion that slasher films (and slasher re-makes) punish deviant female sexuality (Sapolsky et al., 2003) and even echoes past literature which emphasized the troubling length of scenes depicting female victimization (Weaver, 1991).

The more contemporary or modern slasher, however, differs significantly from the slasher re-make. Wee (2006) described *Scream* as a definitive turning point and rebirth for the slasher sub-genre. As such, films part of and beyond this wave of films may be thought of as “modern” slasher films. This new phase of the slasher sub-genre is notable for its genre mixing (these films often incorporate tongue-in-cheek or parodic humor) and an apparent self-awareness, particularly as it relates to the well-known conventions of the slasher sub-genre (Wee, 2006). Wee (2006) also suggested that the Final Girl changes in very recognizable ways in the modern slasher film. For instance, Sidney, the protagonist of the popular slasher franchise *Scream*, originally adheres to the convention that demands the female hero be sexually chaste in contrast to her friends. However, Sidney eventually loses her virginity. She is, predictably, attacked shortly after, yet evades death and conquers her stalker. It seems, then, that *Scream* overtly invokes the Final Girl formula, as well as its stringent view of female sexuality, and flips it on its head, presenting a Final Girl who is both sexually active and capable. Interestingly, in *Scream* there are two Final Girls: Gale and Sidney. The Final Girls of *Scream* complicate the assertion that Final Girls must be done away with (Ryan and Kellner, 1988). Wee (2006) notes that Sidney and Gale survive multiple films and emerge stronger in every way. In doing so, the Final Girls presented by the modern slasher film *Scream* potentially presents a more progressive model of female sexuality.

### **Slasher Television**

While the production of slasher films has slowed down in recent years, the fascination with the slasher sub-genre has in no way disappeared. In fact, two television shows based on the slasher tradition debuted in 2015. The first is a show inspired by the

popular Wes Craven film series *Scream*, though set in an entirely new town with new characters and a noticeably different plot. The television series begins when a group of popular kids “out” their bisexual classmate by recording her kissing her girlfriend in the backseat of her car and posting the video online for everyone to see. The two ring-leaders of this harassment are murdered the same night, marking the beginning of the slasher’s killing spree and the lead characters’ investigation into the murders. The series embeds slasher-attacks-teen narrative in the modern world with things like snap-chat and social media. Like its namesake, the series directly invokes the many traditions of the slasher film.

The other show is entitled *Scream Queens* and it also invokes the traditions of the slasher film, often parodying them. In doing so, the series puts the assumptions of the slasher sub-genre under a microscope, challenging them by making them appear ridiculous. The self-aware series even stars Jamie Lee Curtis as main character Dean Munsch. Jamie Lee Curtis is considered by many to be the original “Scream Queen.” Curtis famously played Laurie Strode, the Final Girl from *Halloween*. Her presence in the film reiterates the self-awareness of the series. No academic examination has yet been done on the role of gender and sexuality in these television series. That being said, through their hybridity and self-awareness, these shows potentially draw attention to, call into question and often openly mock certain convention/attitudes common to the slasher sub-genre. As such, these shows hold the potential to not only challenge conventions, but in doing so, challenge the sexual scripts connected to these conventions. Consequently, analysis of these and other series that invoke conventions of the slasher genre will lead to



a more thorough understanding of the types of sexual scripts this sub-genre reinforces and challenges, as well as the changes it has undergone.

### **Sexual Scripts in the Slasher Sub-Genre**

In review, sexual script theory suggests that attitudes and norms regarding sex are reinforced (or challenged) through exposure to these scripts within one's social network and through exposure to media. Sexual script theory research has illustrated the power of film, television and, in particular, teen-oriented shows to reinforce traditional sexual scripts such as "women should not be vocal about sex." Likewise, a close examination of the literature surrounding the slasher sub-genre uncovers a formula in which the sexual behavior of female characters is punished via the violence of the film's "monster", and the lack of sexual behavior on the behalf of these female characters is rewarded through the character's survival and depiction as a hero. Similarly, much of the literature surrounding the classic slasher film indicates that the sub-genre is ripe with the vilification of female sexuality. As such, given the presence of these themes regarding sexuality, the slasher sub-genre would appear to be a perfect candidate for an analysis utilizing sexual script theory. In particular, the ubiquity of sexual scenarios and the slasher formula which quite literally "punishes" or "rewards" certain sexual behaviors alludes to the fact that this sub-genre may be a powerful one with regard to the exposure of young adults to sexual scripts. Indeed, if watching the cool, attractive teens of *One Tree Hill* (2003) engage in unprotected, casual sex without consequence reinforces the script that sex is "no big deal" (Van Damme, 2010), a Slasher films' relentless punishment of overt female sexuality (and "reward" of abstinence) contains the potential to similarly reinforce the more traditional sexual script that suggests women should not

engage in overt sexuality. Furthermore, the ways in which the slasher sub-genre has evolved suggests that the new iterations of this sub-genre, through their utilization of self-awareness and humor, offer the potential to challenge these same notions regarding sexuality.

However, there is a long history of research pertaining to messages about sexuality in classic slasher film. While conducting such a study would provide a new way of describing these messages (e.g. sexual scripts), it would not uncover anything novel about a medium which has a well-documented history of providing regressive representations of male and female sexuality. However, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, the slasher sub-genre has experienced a resurgence with the popularity of re-makes, modern slasher films and, most recently, slasher television. Though these new iterations utilize recognizable slasher conventions, they are notably different from their predecessors. Given these observations and the lack of research on this topic, an examination of sexual scripts within these new iterations of the slasher sub-genre is necessary. Such an analysis would provide crucial insight into the nature of the messages regarding sexuality that permeate this sub-genre that targets adolescents and young adults. Are these films and television shows modeling scripts in such a way that challenges traditional sexual scripts or are they perpetuating the same messages which led to the vilification of the classic slasher film?

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The literature regarding slasher films and sSexual sScript theory led me to formulate the following research questions:

**RQ1:** What sexual scripts will be reinforced by (re-make, modern) slasher films, and how will these scripts be reinforced?

**RQ2:** What sexual scripts will be challenged by (re-make, modern) slasher films, and how will they be challenged?

**RQ3:** What sexual scripts will be reinforced by slasher television, and how will they be reinforced?

**RQ4:** What sexual scripts will be challenged by slasher television, and how will they be challenged?

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

#### Methodology

In order to answer these research questions, a mixed methods approach including both quantitative and qualitative content analysis was used, resulting in the analysis of a sample of modern slasher films and slasher television shows. According to Hsieh (2005), “qualitative content analysis is defined as a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (p. 1278). While the quantitative portion of the study made it possible to uncover how often particular scripts occurred, qualitative content analysis took the analysis further than superficial questions like, “are these scripts present?” and “how often do they occur?” Instead, a detailed qualitative content analysis captured which scripts were present, whether they were being reinforced or challenged and how these scripts were reinforced or challenged in order to determine precisely what messages the slasher sub-genre is sending about sexuality. Rather than conduct an exploratory content analysis, sexual scripts common throughout sexual script literature (Kim et al., 2007; Van Damme, 2010; Smith, 2012; Sakaluk et al., 2014) were coded in order to determine whether these films reinforced or challenged traditional sexual scripts. Additionally, one emerging, non-traditional script was included due to its importance for safe and healthy sexuality (*It is important to use protection when having sex*). and scripts which deal with “courtship”, rather than sexuality, were omitted. The scripts included in the analysis can be found in the table below.

1. *Men are always ready for sex (MRS)*

2. *Women should not be vocal about sex or desire for sex (WNVS)*
3. *Women should be judged by others for engaging in recreational sex (WJS)*
4. *sex Sex is “no big deal”(SNBD)*
5. *Women should passively invite male attention (wait for the first move) (WPIMA)*
6. *It’s important to use protection when having sex (IPS)*
7. *A woman’s value is in her physical appearance (WVPA)*
8. *Women are gatekeepers to sex (WGS)*
9. *Men are initiators of sex (MIS)*
10. *Men prefer sexual fulfillment over emotional intimacy (MSOI)*
11. *Men should be skilled at sex (MSS)*

Past slasher literature highlights the fact that regressive ideals about female sexuality are reinforced through the “punishment” of sexually active female characters with death. While this suggests that certain scripts can be reinforced or challenged through the survival or death of particular characters, there is often more nuance to whether a script is being invoked or challenged. In order to capture that nuance, detailed notes were taken on the context in which these scripts occurred. These notes included: the behavior and dialogue of characters, the tone in which the script was invoked, the favorability of the character invoking the script, the reaction of characters to the statement or behavior, the outcomes for particular characters, as well as any other relevant contextual information. A script could be invoked both visually and verbally. If a script was implied without the presence of these visual or verbal cues, the script was not coded.

For example, a positively framed female protagonist calling a female character a “slut” for her sexual history would signify a reinforcement of the *Women should be judged for sexuality* script. However, if the same statement were uttered by a villainous character who is later killed by our slasher, this statement could be evaluated as a challenge of the same script.

In order to examine the aforementioned 11 scripts in their full context, each film/episode served as a unit of analysis. Taking this “big-picture” approach made it possible to note whether a film invoked a script through the outcomes connected to a character’s previous behavior, rather than simply noting whether a script was invoked scene by scene. Each film/episode was watched once. Detailed notes were taken for each scene and scenes which required additional attention were revisited in order to fully capture each script present in the scene. These notes included the time scripts occurred in the film/episode, which scripts were present in the scene, whether the script was challenged or reinforced and information regarding the context surrounding the invocation of the script. Each separate time this script occurred was coded as one reinforcement (or challenge) of the script in question.

### **Sample**

The following conventions of the slasher sub-genre were used in order to compile a sample of slasher films and shows. In order to qualify as part of the slasher sub-genre, the film or television show in question had to utilize the majority of the following conventions: the Final Girl, a killer who acts out of a perceived “injustice,” a slasher who primarily kills with sharp objects such as knives, a prologue that explains the circumstances of the killer’s quest for vengeance, extreme gore and special effects,

settings familiar for a teenage crowd (suburbia, high school, college, camp, etc.) and a subjective point of view (Rockoff, 2002). For this study, slasher films post-*Scream* (1996) were conceptualized as “modern”, as *Scream* is often cited as the film responsible for the rebirth of the Slasher genre (Wee, 2006). Likewise, “re-makes” constituted any slasher film in the modern slasher era (post-1996) that in some way re-boots a classic slasher film (e.g. *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*, *Halloween*).

In order to analyze how scripts are challenged or reinforced throughout the storylines of particular characters, I chose to analyze the top grossing modern slasher franchises (omitting franchises that did not adhere to the previously mentioned criterion): 1.) *Scream*, 2.) *I Know What you did Last Summer*, 3.) *Urban Legend* (“Horror-Slasher”, 2016). This culminated in 9 films total. Additionally, I compiled a sample including every slasher re-make from the highest grossing slasher films of all time (“Horror-Slasher”, 2016). I chose to include only these films due to their popularity, and consequently, their likelihood to impact large audiences. Additionally, I chose to include the two aforementioned slasher television shows, *Scream: The TV Series* and *Scream Queens*. These television shows, the newest iteration of the slasher sub-genre, represent how the sub-genre has evolved and were included to illuminate the messages about sexuality being sent by the sub-genre in the current moment. I conducted my analysis on the first season of each (10 episodes and 13 episodes, respectively). The sample was ultimately composed of the following titles:

1. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (2003)*
2. *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> (2009)*

3. *A Nightmare on Elm Street (2010)*
4. *Halloween (2007)*
5. *My Bloody Valentine (2009)*
6. *Prom Night (2008)*
7. *Scream*
8. *Scream 2*
9. *Scream 3*
10. *Scream 4*
11. *I know What You did Last Summer*
12. *I Still Know What you Did Last Summer*
13. *I'll Always Know What you Did Last Summer*
14. *Urban Legend*
15. *Urban Legend: Final Cut*
16. *Scream: The TV Series*
17. *Scream Queens*



## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

Table 4.1

*Scripts Invoked in Slasher Re-makes*

Script Invoked	Frequency	Challenged	Reinforced
MRS	3	1(33.3%)	2(66.7%)
WNVS	6	5(83.3%)	1(16.7%)
WJS	12	1 (8.3%)	11(91.7%)
SNBD	0	0	0
WPIMA	2	1 (50%)	1 (50%)
IPS	3	0	3 (100%)
WVPA	11	8(72.7%)	3 (27.3%)
WGS	0	0	0
MIS	1	0	1 (100%)
MSOI	5	4 (80%)	1 (20%)
MSS	4	0	4 (100%)

Table 4.2

*Scripts Invoked in Modern Slasher Films*

Script Invoked	Frequency	Challenged	Reinforced
MRS	7	2 (28.6%)	5 (71.4%)
WNVS	8	8 (100%)	0
WJS	9	8 (88.9%)	1 (11.1%)

SNBD	0	0	0
WPIMA	4	4 (100%)	0
IPS	2	0	2 (100%)
WVPA	18	12(66.7%)	6(33.3%)
WGS	7	0	7 (100%)
MIS	7	5 (71.4%)	2 (28.6%)
MSOI	8	8 (100%)	0
MSS	2	1 (50%)	1 (50%)

Table 4.3

*Scripts Invoked in Slasher Television*

Script Invoked	Frequency	Challenged	Reinforced
MRS	15	15(100%)	0
WNVS	18	8(44.4%)	10(55.6%)
WJS	21	14(66.7%)	7(33.3%)
SNBD	0	0	0
WPIMA	11	7(63.7%)	4(36.4%)
IPS	4	0	4(100%)
WVPA	21	21(100%)	0
WGS	7	1(14.3%)	6(85.7%)
MIS	10	7(70%)	3(30%)
MSOI	13	13(100%)	0
MSS	2	1(50%)	1(50%)

**RQ1:** What sexual scripts will be reinforced by (re-make, modern) slasher films, and how will they be reinforced?

As indicated in Table 1 and Table 2, the following sexual scripts were reinforced in re-makes of classic slasher films: *Men are always ready for sex* (MRS), *women should be judged for their sexuality* (WJS), *the importance of protected sex* (IPS), *men are initiators of sex* (MIS) and *men should be skilled at sex* (MSS). Likewise, these sexual scripts were reinforced throughout the sample of modern slasher films: *Men are always ready for sex* (MRS), *the importance of protected sex* (IPS) and *women are gatekeepers of sex* (WGS).

**RQ2:** What sexual scripts will be challenged by (re-make, modern) slasher films, and how will they be challenged?

Once again indicated in Table 1 and Table 2, the following sexual scripts were challenged in re-makes of classic slasher films: *Women are valued for their physical appearance* (WVPA), *Women should not be vocal about sex* (WNVS) and *men prefer sex over intimacy* (MSOI). Additionally, the sexual scripts challenged in the sample of modern slasher films were: *Women should not be vocal about sex* (WNVS), *women should be judged for sex* (WJS), *Women passively invite male attention* (WPIMA), *Women are valued for their physical appearance* (WVPA), *Men are initiators of sex* (MIS) and *Men prefer sex over intimacy* (MSOI).

**RQ3:** What sexual scripts will be reinforced by slasher television, and how will they be reinforced?

As shown in Table 3, the following sexual scripts were reinforced through slasher television: *Women should not be vocal about sex* (WNVS), *the importance of protected sex* (IPS) and *women are gatekeepers to sex* (WGS).

**RQ4:** What sexual scripts will be challenged by slasher television, and how will they be challenged?

Finally, as can be seen in Table 3, the following sexual scripts were challenged by slasher television: *Men are always ready for sex* (MRS), *Women should be judged for their sexuality* (WJS), *Women should passively invite male attention* (WPIMA), *Women are valued for their physical appearance* (WVPA), *Men are initiators of sex* (MIS) and *Men prefer sex over intimacy* (MSOI).

### **Slasher Re-make Analysis**

The tables and results above illustrate a numerical representation of the occurrences in these films that either challenged or reinforced scripts, as well as an indication of whether the script was reinforced or challenged more often. Next, this study will expound further upon these individual statistics as well as the context in which these scripts were reinforced or challenged. The scripts chosen will be discussed due to the fact that they were statistically reinforced more often than they were challenged (and vice versa), though scripts that were reinforced or challenged in similar numbers will be discussed to glean insights about when certain behaviors were acceptable and when they were discouraged. Likewise, certain scripts were not found in the sample, and thus will not be included in the analysis.

The following scripts were reinforced more than they were challenged in the sample of slasher re-makes: in slasher re-makes: *Men are always ready for sex* (MRS),

*women should be judged for their sexuality (WJS), the importance of protected sex (IPS), men are initiators of sex (MIS) and men should be skilled at sex (MSS)*

Throughout the slasher re-make sample, the *Men are always ready for sex (MRS)* script was not very prominent. However, it did occur 3 times, and it was reinforced more often (66.7%) than it was challenged. This script manifested itself in a couple ways. First, characters often made jokes about the notion that men are constantly looking for sex. For instance, in one scene the Final Girl from the *Prom Night* moons over the fact that her boyfriend bought a hotel-room just for the two of them. Her best friend responds, laughing and suggesting that his actions indicate he wants to have sex. She laughs, nodding in agreement. Their casual joking regarding this notion reiterates the normalization of an assertive male sexuality. However, this script was often invoked in a way that went a troubling step further. These instances suggest men were constantly seeking out sex, even in inappropriate and bizarre contexts. The script was invoked in a joking manner by a male character in the re-make of *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*. The character, shortly after discussing his girlfriend's very sick mother, asks with a laugh whether she would like to have sex in a cramped tent. While this joke, at surface value, does not seem insidious, it is the context in which it takes place that is problematic. The fact that this man expresses a desire to have sex so immediately after discussing a serious subject like terminal illness normalizes the notion that men should always be ready for sex, regardless of whether the time and place is appropriate. Since this script was only slightly challenged more often than it was reinforced, it is important to examine the context in which it was challenged. The script was challenged in *Halloween* when a man is shown leafing through a dirty magazine and musing about his desire for sex in the stall of a

public restroom. The audience sees Michael Myers walk in, unbeknownst to the man, and kill him brutally. This negative outcome so clearly connected to the man's sexual behavior serves to discourage this mentality. As such, it would seem that, though the slasher re-make normalizes the notion that *men are always ready for sex* (MRS) slightly more than it challenges it, these films also shed doubt on whether this type of behavior is a positive thing.

The next script reinforced throughout the sample of slasher re-make films is the *Women should be judged for sexuality* (WJS) script. This script occurred 12 times across the sample. This script was reinforced 91.7% of the time. The context by which this script was reinforced is rather grisly. Much like previous slasher literature (Welsh, 2010; Lizardi, 2010; Weaver, 1991; Sapolsky et al., 2003), this content analysis found that there was a punitive attitude towards female sexuality in the slasher re-make. The sexuality of many "expendable" female characters was highlighted. Following these moments, where they discussed sexuality frankly or engaged in sex, these female characters were viciously killed by the slasher in question (e.g. Jason, Michael Myers). Additionally, some of these deaths seemed overtly sexualized. Several female characters were killed while naked or immediately following sex. One of the most disturbing examples of this trope occurred in *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*. After engaging in sex with her boyfriend, Richie, Amanda hears rustling outside of their tent. Amanda throws on a t-shirt while Richie goes to investigate. When Richie returns, Jason has taken the scantily clad Amanda, zipped her up in the sleeping bag and hung her from a tree above a roaring flame. Richie returns to the horrifying scene, becoming trapped in a bear trap that Jason has set up. After allowing Richie to witness his girlfriend's suffering, Jason quickly kills the man by stabbing him

(a mode of murder much more common within the slasher sub-genre). The immediate and horrific killing of the sexually active Amanda paired with the voyeurism of the moment, where both the audience and Richie are forced to watch the girl's horrific demise, further emphasizes her victimization. This death scene calls to mind the voyeuristic nature of the slasher sub-genre (Clover, 1987), in which the camera is invasive, focusing on female characters' most intimate moments (e.g. engaging in sex, when showing) and their suffering. In forcing the audience and even Richie to assume this role, the filmmakers create a spectacle of the woman's suffering moments after engaging in sex. This observation, paired with Jason's choice to kill the young woman in the sleeping bag she had sex in mere moments before, draws a clear connection between the young woman's fate and her sexual behavior. This connection drawn between sexual behavior and the female characters' death starkly sends the message that sexual behavior in women is dangerous and not to be emulated.

Another telling context in which this script was invoked is the motive of the slasher. On several occasions, it was implied that the sexual behavior of the female figures in the killer's life caused their dysfunction. In particular, the *Halloween* re-make highlights young Michael's struggles to understand a teenage sister budding sexually and a mother who is a sex worker. In fact, Michael killed his first victims immediately after being taunted about his mother's sexual behavior and even killed his own sister shortly after witnessing her engaging in sex with her boyfriend. The connection between this extreme violence and the sexuality of women seems to imply that a woman's sexual behavior is not only deviant, but dangerous. These two contexts taken together provide compelling insight into the ways in which female sexuality is depicted as dangerous or

deserving judgment. While, in the previously discussed context, female characters bring suffering on themselves because of their sexuality, this context goes a step further to depict female sexuality as a force that is dangerous to others, or to expound even further, to society. This context suggests that women in maternal roles (e.g. older sisters or mothers) have a responsibility to abstain from such behavior in order to be successful mothers, daughters, etc. By shirking this responsibility and engaging in illicit behavior, these characters pervert the natural order and prompt the youth within their care to become angry and sexually dysfunctional. The combination of these contexts paints a dire picture in which a woman's overt sexuality is dangerous not just to herself, but to society as a whole, and therefore deserving of judgment, even in the form of violence.

A script that was reinforced with much less prominence is the *It is important to use protection when having sex* script (IPS). This script, though it only appeared three times, was reinforced 100% of the time. Interestingly, this script was nearly always invoked humorously. For instance, in the opening scene of *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* Mikey and his girlfriend break away from the group to head into the woods for some alone time. As they quietly excuse themselves, their friends yell after them, "Wear a condom...an extra small one!" before erupting into laughter. Before the friends take the opportunity to crack a joke questioning Mikey's sexual prowess, their comment appears to be a genuine expression of the importance of protection. Though their true intentions became apparent, this does not take away from the moment's reinforcement of protection as the norm. Through their offhand discussion of protection, it is apparent that this topic is one they are comfortable with. The teen's joking and consequential normalization of condom use



stands in stark contrast to high school dramas, which rarely discuss or show the use or protection at all (Van Damme, 2010).

The next major script reinforced throughout the slasher re-make is *Men are initiators of sex* (MIS). This script, once again, was only reinforced nominally as it appeared only once. This script was rare, in part, due to the lack of scenes showing the actual initiation of sex, as well as the lack of frank discussion about specific expectations about sex. Most scenes showed men initiating other types of physical contact (e.g. kissing) or failed to show the beginning of these sexual acts. The one instance of this script, however, was a classic example of the traditional MIS script. In *Prom Night*, Ronnie has purchased a hotel room for Prom night with his long term girlfriend Lisa. As she tries to talk about a strange man she saw earlier, he tells her to “think about me instead” before picking her up, laying her down on the bed and kissing her as romantic music plays and the scene fades out (implying that, from this point, the couple went on to have sex). This interaction, between two characters who have been held up on a pedestal as “good” and “popular” (they are even elected Prom King and Queen) suggests that this is the “perfect” sexual encounter in which he initiates the encounter with her consent and takes control. The romanticization of this scenario reinforces the notion that it is not only normal but ideal for both partners for men to take control and initiate sexual activity. This further paints a picture in which men are expected to want to (and know how to) begin sexual activity with a partner. Consequently, the glorification of this scenario paints alternatives (e.g. men who don’t initiate sex or women who initiate sex) as abnormal or even deviant.

The final script reinforced by the slasher re-make film is *Men should be skilled at sex* (MSS). This script was found 4 times and reinforced 100% of the time. Once again, it would seem that humor is the mechanism used to reinforce this particular norm. In all four scenarios, a man is spending time with either his friends or his significant other and a joke is made regarding a.) how good he is or isn't at sex, b.) his size or c.) how long he will be able to last. We see this, for instance, in *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* when Mikey and his girlfriend casually excuse themselves from their company on a camping trip and his friends yell after them to "use a condom...an extra small one!" He and his girlfriend roll their eyes, laugh, and head to the woods. Their good-natured response to this insult suggests that such taunting is not only okay, but typical. Nearly the same scenario plays out with the much less rebellious teen protagonists of *Prom Night*. When Ronnie and Lisa tell their friends they are headed upstairs for "about five minutes," Bobby responds "Is that all?" The group of friends chuckle at the joke, Ronnie and Lisa included, before parting ways. Once again, the characters do not take the joke offensively, but laugh as though such comments are common. This again reinforces the notion that these expectations regarding a man's ability to "perform" sexually are well known, so much so that they can be joked about comfortably amongst friends.

Altogether, the scripts reinforced within the sample of slasher re-makes revealed some compelling insights. These scripts depicted the hyper-importance of male sexual performance. Men are shown to be constantly in pursuit of sex, though the appropriateness of this mentality is questioned. Likewise, men are depicted to be pre-occupied with their ability to perform satisfactorily to the extent that the attitude is normalized through ribbing between male friends. Furthermore, my analysis reflected

previous research which suggests slasher re-makes reinforce regressive attitudes regarding female sexuality. In particular, slasher re-makes framed female sexuality as dangerous for women, the people in their lives and, in a larger sense, the social order. Finally, the slasher re-make depicted the importance of using protection by normalizing safe sex practices (e.g. abstinence, condom use) through humor.

For the next portion of this analysis, the scripts challenged throughout the sample of slasher re-makes will be discussed. There were three scripts challenged: *Women are valued for their physical appearance* (WVPA), *Men prefer sex over emotional intimacy* (MSOI) and *Women should not be vocal about sex* (WNVS). The first script, *Women are valued for their physical appearance* (WVPA) was invoked 11 times in total and challenged 72.7% of the time. This script was challenged in much the same way that the *Women should be judged for their sexuality* script was reinforced: through punitive actions. Each scene that challenged this script utilized a similar formula: a character framed as anti-social or deviant makes an inappropriate comment regarding a woman's appearance or treats her solely like an object of sexual attraction. For instance, in *Halloween* a man is sitting in a bathroom stall and looking at naked pictures of women in a magazine, muttering about her being "a dirty girl." A moment later, Michael Myers walks in and brutally kills the man. In these scenarios, normative behavior is reinforced by the punishment of non-normative behavior. The framing of these character as "the bad guys" or un-empathetic victims coupled with the apparent "punishment" of their behavior sends the message that such behavior is unacceptable, thus challenging the notion that *women are valued for physical appearance* (WVPA). This indicates that , despite the re-

make's tendency to enforce judgment for female sexuality, it is surprisingly progressive through its objection to the objectification of women.

Another script challenged within the sample of slasher re-makes is *Women should not be vocal about sex* (WNVS). This script was invoked 6 times and challenged 83.3% of the time. This script was challenged through the rather mild discussion of sexuality. While many positively framed female characters were shown speaking about sex, most of these conversations included light joking rather than overt discussion of sexuality. For instance, in *Prom Night* Claire, the protagonist, comments that her friend's dress is "sexy." Her friend, Lisa, retorts that "He's gonna' like it even better when it's off!" While this conversation (and the many others like it throughout the sample) is not a strong exercise of a woman's right to discuss sex openly, their comfort joking about sexuality represents a mild challenge to the WNVS sexual script. This indicates that the slasher re-make is a surprising, if mild, site for the promoting progressive notions about a woman's right to discuss sex openly.

The final script challenged within the sample of slasher re-makes is *Men prefer sex over intimacy* (MSOI). The script occurred 5 times and was challenged 80% of the time. The context surrounding this script was a bit more complex than in the aforementioned scripts. There was a dichotomy between two different types of characters and outcomes: one which encapsulates appropriate behavior and another which demonstrates inappropriate behavior. In the first context, male characters (and protagonists) who are framed positively express interest in women in non-physical ways, offering emotional support and affection. A clear example of this occurs when Quentin, one of protagonists of *Nightmare on Elm Street*, decides to talk to the girl whom he has a

crush on (Nancy). While his friends badger him into “making a move,” he chooses not to be so forward in his advances. Instead, aware that Nancy has lost loved ones recently, Quentin extends an offer of emotional support to her. In this moment he makes it clear that his crush is not built on the desire for sex exclusively, but a desire to be emotionally close to Nancy. In instances like this one, the protagonist or other positively framed male characters model decent and admirable behavior which the audience is prompted to view as endearing and thoughtful. By emphasizing the importance of valuing intimacy, these contexts result in a challenge of the script that *Men prefer sex over intimacy* (MSOI).

On the other hand, there were several instances in which negatively framed characters (e.g. Michael Myers’ first victim, his step father) caused emotional trauma to their wives or girlfriends so they could pursue casual sex. In this context, in which these characters so obviously denigrate the idea of intimacy, these negative male characters were killed moments later. The prototypical example of this script is Michael Myers’ step-father in the *Halloween* re-make. The morning before Michael “snaps” and begins his career of killing, he overhears his mother and step father yelling at each other. During their fight, he informs her that a woman at work has “been giving [him] the freaky eye” and wants to have sex with him. He goes on to suggest that he will have sex with her, throwing Michael’s mother into an understandable rage. Later that evening, once he has passed out drunk in the recliner, Michael slits his step father’s throat. These characters are shown to be “abusers” and “bullies” who cause emotional damage to those around them. Their hateful comments are often ripe with misogyny and an obsession with sex. The link between these characters, their crude behavior and their subsequent death compounds to create a template of *what not to do*. Consequently, it can be surmised that

slasher re-makes surprisingly emphasizes the importance of a balanced masculinity, in which men recognize the value of emotional intimacy.

Though this analysis has already addressed the scripts which were predominately reinforced or challenged, it has not addressed scripts which were reinforced as many times as they were challenged. There was one such script that fit this description in my analysis of the slasher re-make: *Women Passively Invite Male Attention* (WPIMA). This script was only invoked twice, and was reinforced and challenged equally. That being said, the context in which this script was invoked can provide useful insight about the sexual attitudes present within the slasher re-make film. The script was reinforced through the depiction of positive characters who adhere to this norm in which men make the first move and women merely invite romantic interest passively. In particular, Nancy, the protagonist in *Nightmare on Elm Street* is shown to be harboring feelings for her friend Quentin, who the audience learns has a crush on her as well. In an emotional moment before the big face-off with the killer, she stares deeply into his eyes before he takes the cue and leans in to kiss Nancy. The modeling of this behavior by two positively framed characters reinforces this behavior as the norm. However, in *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* the audience observes the character Amanda as she initiates a strip tease to get her romantic interest Richie's attention. Richie is enthralled by the development, but their friend Wade, oblivious to the development, continues talking to them about his new "global positioning system". In this moment, the filmmaker draws a stark contrast between Wade (who is non-sexual and somewhat "uncool") and Amanda and Richie. As such, their behavior, including Amanda's forward sexual advance, is depicted as acceptable. Given the low number of times this script is invoked and the very different ways in which the

script was utilized, it is difficult to come to a conclusion regarding this sexual script within the slasher re-make. However, it can be noted that, from a larger standpoint, this script can be either reinforced or challenged very simply through the modeling of traditional behavior on behalf of positively viewed character or through the forward pursuit of a romantic interest by a female character that has not been maligned. Likewise, the fact alone that the slasher re-make does not wholeheartedly endorse this traditional suggests these films do not endorse a unilateral view on the ability of either men or women to pursue romantic interests.

### **Modern Slasher Film Analysis**

The next part of this study will examine the scripts reinforced throughout the sample of modern slasher films: *Men are always ready for sex* (MRS), *It is important to use protection when having sex* (IPS), *Men should be skilled at sex* (MSS) and *Women are gate-keepers to sex* (WGS). The first script, MRS occurred 7 times and was reinforced 71.4% of the time. There was little evolution between the way this script was reinforced in the slasher re-make and how it was reinforced in the modern slasher film. The script was reinforced through the discussion of men constantly pursuing sex and the framing of sex as a vital “need” for men. A notable example of the reinforcement of this script occurs in *Scream*. After having a fight with her boyfriend Bobby, Sidney (the protagonist and heroine of the series) talks things out with her friends. Sidney blames herself for their argument, telling her friends that she should have been willing to have sex with him. This sentiment, expressed by the strong and intelligent Sidney, serves to reinforce the idea that men require sex at all times and it is up to their partners to provide it. This is mirrored several other times throughout the sample, including when Ray (the

sensitive yet popular boyfriend of Final Girl Julie) tells his friends a story about a couple who got into a fight when the girlfriend decided not to have sex with him and were consequently killed by a mysterious killer. This narrative further normalizes the behavior, reinforcing the script that men require and are always ready for sex. While the invocation of this script looks slightly different in each context, there are many similarities in the way it was reinforced in both the slasher re-make and the modern slasher film. In the re-make, the audience sees male characters casually attempt to initiate sex during inappropriate moments. While such an instance does not occur in the modern slasher film, there is some overlap. In particular, characters from both comment on the notion that men are always trying to have sex. This suggests that, despite the differences between these two iterations of the slasher sub-genre as well as the degree to which they endorse this script, they both recognize the notion that men are inherently driven to prioritize the search for sex above all else and neither strongly oppose this norm.

The second script reinforced within the sample of modern slasher films is *It is important to use protection when having sex* (IPS). This script was scarcely used, appearing and being reinforced twice. However, both were in a very interesting context. In *Urban Legends*, Sasha, a character well-liked by her fellow characters and known for her outspoken attitudes towards sex, gives relationship advice on her radio show. Two separate callers ask questions about the use of condoms and birth control. During their chat, each caller describes some very unsafe sexual habits. Sasha, incredulous at their ignorance, explains the dangers of their behavior and the importance of using protection and contraception. Unlike most scripts, which are reinforced in more nuanced ways, this script uses a very heavy-handed approach to reinforce the importance of having safe sex.



This scene, occurring so early in the film, almost appears like a disclaimer, noting the importance of protection before showing several sexually charged scenes in which protection is not discussed. This heavy handed discussion of protection is notably different than the less serious, humorous discussions of the norm found in the slasher re-make. While, on one hand, this might be viewed as a sign that little has changed in the sub-genre, this isn't necessarily the case. On the contrary, the transition from brief comments normalizing the use of protection to entire scenes dedicated to explaining the importance of protection suggests a shift towards a much more health conscious sub-genre.

The next script reinforced is the *Men should be skilled at sex* (MSS) script. This script was only invoked twice, but was reinforced 100% of the time. This script was reinforced by characters who, through jokes or commentary, make comments or jokes about male sexual performance. For instance, Dewey gets angry with Gale in *Scream 2* when she writes about his sexual inexperience in her book. Disgruntled, he confronts her, reading the quote back to her. Through his discomfort, this scene indicates Dewey's sensitivity regarding the subject of his sexual performance. This script also manifested itself as a humorous insult made by Zoe in *I'll Always Know What You Did Last Summer*. When Colby makes a comment about her "dirty little secrets," she retorts that the only secret is that he's "bad in bed," leading to an outburst of laughter amongst the group. The lighthearted nature of this moment indicates that the comment was not shocking or even particularly insulting. It suggests that these types of "jabs" are commonplace and indicative of the common understanding that men are feel pressure to be skilled at sex. These two contexts together communicate the notion that the *Men should be skilled about*

*sex* (MSS) script is commonplace and men experience anxiety over the pressure to be skilled at sex. Likewise, given that this script was also reinforced within the slasher re-make, it would appear that the slasher sub-genre, at this point, has not evolved much with respect to this script; both the re-make and the modern slasher film frame the pressure to sexually perform as inherent to contemporary masculinity.

The final script reinforced within the sample of modern slasher films is *Women are gatekeepers to sex* (WGS). This script appeared 7 times and was overwhelmingly reinforced at a rate of 100%. This script was reinforced in both subtle and overt ways. For starters, this script manifested itself in the language in which men and women discuss sex. The language used implies that it is a woman's responsibility to decide whether or not sex will occur. This includes statements about a woman "letting" a man have sex and men questioning women about whether they're "ready," regardless of whether they are the party initiating sexual activity or not. This type of behavior frames women as holding the deciding power regarding sex. This script is also reinforced on a more concrete level. Several times, when couples were getting physical and things began to escalate, the women asked the men to stop either because they were "scared" or "not ready." This, combined with the language cues, reinforces the WGS script, a script which wasn't highlighted in the slasher re-make sample.

In addition to the aforementioned scripts that were reinforced, several more were challenged. The first of these scripts is the *Women should not be vocal about sex* (WNVS) script, which was invoked and challenged 8 times. While there were a couple instances in which positive female characters were outspoken about a desire for sex, much of the time this overt expression of sexuality was accompanied by humor which

made this behavior slightly less overt than the clear, unapologetic discussions of sex that we often see from male characters. On one hand, the acceptance of this type of humor denotes an acceptance of female sexuality (and a challenge of the WNVS script). However, the veiling of these sexual comments with humor indicates an underlying sense that a more overt expression of female sexuality would be viewed as somehow inappropriate. Nonetheless, the fact that this script has been challenged several times in both the slasher re-make, then in the modern slasher film suggests that the sub-genre is evolving to promote the healthy verbalization of a woman's sexual desire.

The next script challenged within the sample was the *women should be judged for their sexuality* (WJS) script. This script occurred 9 times and was challenged 88.9% of the time. This script was typically invoked in one of two ways: first, this script occurred when characters who were portrayed negatively made a comment passing judgment on a woman's sexuality. For instance, in *Scream* the audience sees a group of shallow girls, rapidly putting on make-up in the bathroom and talking about Sidney's "slutty" mother who they feel deserved to die because of her behavior. This judgmental behavior is framed as insensitive, cruel and inappropriate, eliciting a reaction of profound sadness from our protagonist, Sidney, thus challenging the script. The other context which accompanied this script was an inter-textual critique of the "premarital sex leads to death" formula so common in horror films and the judgmental view of female sexuality it represents. Several characters overtly mention this fixture of the prototypical slasher film, even commenting on its purpose. A notable example of this context appears in *I Know What You Did Last Summer* when Julie, the "Final Girl" scoffs at Ray's story about a killer who murders a teen couple who decide to have sex. She reasons that the story is

just "a myth meant to warn girls of the dangers of pre-marital sex." This same critique is apparent when the audience witnesses Sidney lose her virginity in *Scream*. Mere moments after having sex, Sidney is attacked, calling to mind the "female sexuality leads to death" formula. However, she is able to metaphorically thwart this script when she outsmarts and defeats the killer. In these situations, the modern slasher film overtly acknowledged the scripts espoused in the classic slasher film (e.g. WJS) and purposely challenged them. This is, of course, in line with past literature (Wee, 2006) which suggests the Final Girl of the modern slasher film is decidedly more comfortable in her sexuality than her counterpart from the classic slasher film. The shift between the slasher re-make and the modern slasher film as it pertains to this script is dramatic. While the WJS script was reinforced many times in the slasher re-make through the depiction of female sexuality as a danger both to the wellbeing of women and those around her, the pivot towards inter-textuality in the modern slasher film prompts the audience to question the very messages about sexuality so prototypical to the slasher genre.

This challenge of traditional scripts continues with the *Women passively invite male attention* (WPIMA) script, which was invoked and challenged 4 times. This traditional script typically denotes women using indirect means to get male attention. This includes, smiling coyly from across the room and other indirect expressions of interest that fall short of actively pursuing male attention (e.g. asking them out, initiating physical contact). While old slasher films were characterized by Final Girls who decline to engage in sexual activity or pursue men actively, this script was notably challenged by the significantly more progressive Final Girls of the modern slasher film. The audience sees Sidney (*Scream*), Julie (*I Know What You Did Last Summer*) and Helen (*I Know*

*What You Did Last Summer*) all initiate physical intimacy with their romantic partners without concern. For instance, in *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, Helen and her friends are hanging out at a bonfire on the beach. The couples decide to part ways and venture to separate parts of the beach to spend some alone time. The audience sees Helen walk up to her boyfriend, Barry, and take off her top. Helen, like the other Final Girls mentioned was able to elude the killer many times and, in the first film, was even able to help thwart the killer. Through the construction of the new Final Girl as capable and yet, forward sexually, the modern slasher film challenged the more traditional notion that women cannot be initiators of sex and should not actively seek male attention. This, of course, represents a noticeable shift from the previously mentioned findings regarding the slasher re-make, in which the script was both challenged and reinforced. Thus, it would seem that in the modern slasher film, the slasher sub-genre grows to more actively challenge the notion that women cannot actively pursue sex.

Yet another sexual script challenged within the sample is *Women are valued for physical appearance* (WVPA). This script was invoked 11 times and challenged 63.6% of the time. This script once again occurred in a couple of different contexts. For starters, the script was challenged by the vilification of unsavory male characters who objectify women. This context was particularly apparent in Sidney's journey to learn more about her mother in *Scream 3*. The audience learns about how Sidney, anxious to become a serious actor, was forced to give sexual favors to get roles in a manipulative executive's horror films. In many ways, Sidney seems to blame him for her mother's fate. This storyline is shown as a tragic story of the negative outcomes of a society in which women are valued solely for their appearance, thus challenging the script. The other context in

which this script was challenged is, once again, through the inter-textual critique of female objectification. Occasionally this manifested itself as a general critique of this behavior (e.g. Helen realizing how dehumanizing beauty contests are at the end of *I Know What You Did Last Summer*), but often this script was challenged by a clear critique of this tendency within the slasher genre (such as the infamous scene in which Sidney tells the killer she doesn't like scary movies because they're filled with "big breasted girls who can't act" and "it's insulting"). Moments like these quite obviously challenge the ingrained notion that a woman's looks are more important than her other qualities. These findings are particularly interesting when examined alongside the discussion of the same sexual script within the slasher re-make. The slasher re-make also indicated a critical view of this tendency to objectify women by vilifying and even enacting violence against those who behave this way. In contrast, however, this critique is taken a step further within the modern slasher film through, once again, the use of inter-textuality. Rather than simply vilifying the behavior, the characters actively draw attention to past tendencies of the sub-genre highlighting the tendency in classic slasher films to focus on women as purely sexual objects.

However, it must also be noted that the challenge of this script, while overwhelming, was occasionally inconsistent. In particular, the *I Know What You Did Last Summer* franchise accounted for nearly every reinforcement of the WVPA script. This suggests that not all franchises are created equal as it pertains to reinforcing and challenging particular scripts. While some of these franchises (e.g. *Scream*) very consciously challenged regressive notions about sexuality perpetuated by classic slasher texts, others fell into familiar traps in depicting female sexuality.

An additional script challenged within these films is the *Men are initiators of sex* (MIS) script which was found 7 times and challenged 71.4% of these times. This script was reinforced when likable female protagonists either a.) spoke openly about their desire to initiate sex or b.) initiated the first move in a sexual encounter. For instance, towards the end of the first *Scream* movie Sidney informs Bobby she would like to have sex before beginning to kiss him. Much like the WPIMA script, the modeling of this behavior from the heroines of these films serves to challenge this traditional script in which men are the sole initiators of sex. Interestingly, this script not only occurred more often in the modern slasher film than the slasher re-make, but it also occurred very differently. While the one occurrence of the script in the slasher re-make romanticized the “traditional” notion that men should initiate sex and women should gladly acquiesce, there is a marked change in the modern slasher film. Positive female characters in healthy relationships initiate sex and even spoke openly and their desire to initiate sex. This represents a powerful shift within the genre, away from the framing of male initiation of sex as best and towards the framing of women as agents of desire and control as normal or even desirable.

The final script challenged within the sample of modern slasher films is *Men prefer sex over intimacy* (MSOI), which was both invoked and challenged 8 times. Throughout the sample, there was a simple dichotomy of good vs. bad. The positive male characters (e.g. the “supportive boyfriend”) demonstrate their interest in relationships built on more than sex by making commitments, being understanding about their partner’s desire to wait on sex and providing emotional support. On the other hand, characters like Damon from *Urban Legend* are deliberately manipulative in order to get

sex and avoid sharing genuine moments of intimacy. The combination of these contexts challenge the idea that such behavior on the behalf of men is appropriate. Interestingly, there is little change in the way this script is invoked and challenged within the slasher re-make and the modern slasher film. Both types of films depict characters who embody these differing ideologies, the supportive, positive male character interested in more than sexual intimacy and the male character who entirely avoids commitment, mistreats women and treats them as valuable only due to the opportunity for sex they represent.

### **Slasher Television Series Analysis**

Finally, it is essential to discuss the sexual scripts present in the most recent evolution of the slasher sub-genre: the slasher television series. First, there were several scripts reinforced across the sample: *Women should not be vocal about sex* (WNVS), *Women are gatekeepers to sex* (WGS) and *the importance of using protection during sex* (IPS).

To begin this section of the analysis, *Women should not be vocal about sex* (WNVS) was invoked 18 times and reinforced 55.6% of the time. This was a particularly interesting finding, as this script was only barely reinforced more than it was challenged. As such, it is important to note when the script was reinforced and when it was not. A close examination of the 18 instances in which this script was invoked reveals some interesting insights. In particular, there is an observable difference between the types of conversations being had about sex by female characters. Some of the conversations are incredibly detailed, crude and elicit grimaces from many characters both male and female. Many of these graphic descriptions of sex come from villainous characters, like Hester from *Scream Queens*. For instance, Hester comments that she “wants her tube



packed” by Chad Radwell, a statement which causes observable disgust in the characters present. In moments like these, the message is clear: overt and graphic discussions of sex by women are inappropriate and will not endear you to your peers. That being said, it is worth noting that there were many instances in which women spoke freely about sex and experienced no ramifications. Characters like the seemingly shallow, yet strong and intelligent Brooke on *Scream: The TV Series* or Grace and Zayday on *Scream Queens* talk about sex with friends, family members and even partners without causing disgust or surprise in others or experiencing any other negative outcomes (e.g. death) as a result of their behavior. On the contrary, the discussions these characters have about sex often have notably positive results. For example, on *Scream Queens* Grace has a frank discussion about sex with her dad. While the conversation is a little uncomfortable at first, by the end of the conversation Grace feels more informed and ready to make a decision regarding sex. By examining each of these seemingly conflicting invocations of the script, certain insights can be drawn. When positive characters discussed sex, it was with a degree of restraint. For instance, when Zayday talks about the possibility of having sex with her boyfriend Earl Gray on *Scream Queens*, they speak in generalities and use euphemisms and other mild language. Even in instances where positively framed characters were more overt in their expression of sexuality, these moments were communicated with relatively mild language and, perhaps more importantly, in private. For instance, in *Scream: The TV Series*, Brooke whispers to Seth Branson, her boyfriend and teacher, that she isn’t wearing underwear. While this moment is comparatively graphic, it is done privately between two people who are sexually involved. On the other hand, moments where female verbalization of desire is mocked or framed negatively (e.g.

Hester's detailed account of sex with Chad Radwell in *Scream Queens*) utilize very detailed, crude behavior and often occur in the presence of others. Thus, it can be surmised that these series allow for some expression of female sexuality and even model potential positive outcomes associated with open discussion of sex. However, in order to remain within the constraints of positive female sexuality, these expressions should use mild language and should be shared in an appropriate time or place.

This finding illuminates an interesting transition within the slasher sub-genre. While both the slasher re-make and the modern slasher film did challenge the notion that women shouldn't be vocal about desire, these verbalizations were often incredibly mild and rarely were they honest discussions or disclosures about sex. Slasher television, however, often displayed genuine and frank discussions of sex. However, there is a caveat to this seeming transition towards more open verbalization of female sexuality. Through the utilization of humor, "oversharing" by discussing sex in graphic terminology and/or in the wrong setting was framed as unsavory behavior which shouldn't be emulated. As such, the transition of the sub-genre into something that is more hybridized, self-aware and humorous has provided space for the sub-genre not to silence the verbalization of female sexuality, but to curb the desire to "overshare" or discuss sex in an inappropriate context.

The next script that was reinforced across the sample is *Women are gate-keepers to sex (WGS)*. This script appeared 7 times and was reinforced 100% of the time, resulting in a heavily endorsed script. This script was reinforced in much the same way it was reinforced in the modern slasher film: through the language surrounding sexual encounters and through the behavior of female characters. For example, many male

characters asked women they were involved with questions before and after engaging in sex (e.g. “Are you sure?”). These statements re-iterate the script in which it is the foregone conclusion that men are unquestionably ready for sex while women are the ones who decide when and if sex is appropriate. Likewise, there were several occasions in which men begin to initiate sex, but positively viewed female protagonists exercise their choice to block access to sex, such as when Pete tries to seduce Grace shortly after another attack has occurred in *Scream Queens*. While she appears obviously interested, she shakes her head and informs him that the timing is wrong and they cannot have sex, thus acting as the gatekeeper to sex within their relationship. Again, there is a similar treatment of this script across both the modern slasher film and the slasher television series. While the WGS script was not invoked in the re-make, the modern Slasher film and the slasher television series both reinforced this script through the language utilized and through the female characters’ drawing of sexual boundaries indicating that norms regarding the woman’s role as gatekeeper has remained important to sexual norms, even as their role as a sexual initiator has grown.

The final script reinforced within this sample is *the importance of using protection during sex* (IPS). This script was invoked 4 times and reinforced 100% of the time. In many circumstances, this script was reinforced in the same manner it was reinforced within slasher re-makes and modern slasher films: with humor. One such instance occurs when Riley reluctantly asks Noah in *Scream: The TV Series* whether he has a condom and he responds with a chuckle: “You know they say if you’re not mature enough to say condom, you’re not mature enough for sex.” Such humor plays on the ubiquitous messages teens receive about the importance of using protection. That being

said, this script was reinforced in a concrete way as well, such as on *Scream Queens* when Chad Radwell, a character who typically models negative behavior, sheds his façade to make a more serious comment. When Chanel suggests that his lack of monogamy is unhealthy, he comments that he “always” uses protection. Moments like these illustrate that using protection is mandatory, not a joking manner. The combination of these approaches culminates in the obvious normalization of using protection. What makes these findings particularly interesting, however, is the way in which these contexts seem to synthesize previously mentioned approaches to the discussion of protection. While the slasher re-make utilized humor to normalize the use of protection, the modern slasher film much more thoroughly (and seriously) emphasized the dangers of sex without protection. In the slasher television series, the creators borrow from both traditions to both utilize jokes which allude to the fact that teens are constantly inundated with messages about “safe sex” and prompt the viewer to take a moment to consider the importance of using protection. These findings illustrate that the slasher sub-genre has evolved to become a site where viewers do receive affirmative messages about safe sex.

Finally, there were many sexual scripts challenged throughout the sample: *Men are always ready for sex* (MRS), *Women should be judged for sexuality* (WJS), *Men prefer sex over intimacy* (MSOI), *Women passively invite male attention* (WPIMA), *Women are valued for their physical appearance* (WVPA) and *Men are initiators of sex* (MIS).

The first script invoked was *Men are always ready for sex* (MRS), which was utilized 15 times and challenged 100% of the time. This script was challenged within this sample in a couple of key ways. First, this script was challenged through the framing of

this norm as inappropriate behavior that should not be emulated. This was accomplished by the depiction of negative male characters who are obsessed with sex and pursue it in any and all contexts (no matter how bizarre or inappropriate). The audience witnesses as male characters who have been established by their behavior as un-attractive, shallow or even potentially evil trying to initiate sex constantly, particularly during inappropriate moments (e.g. in a cemetery). This behavior from characters held up as examples or parodies of poor behavior suggests to the viewer that acting this way is not normal or worth emulating, thus challenging the MRS script. The next way this script was challenged is through the clear indictment of such behavior by positive characters. An obvious example of this is the numerous interventions that Chad Radwell's loved ones attempt to have regarding his obsession with sex on *Scream Queens*. Likewise, this behavior was clearly underscored and assessed as inappropriate within *Scream: The TV Series* as well when Brooke notifies the shallow Jake that he needs to drop "the frat boy act" if he ever wants to get a girlfriend. In these scenarios, the challenge of the MRS script was challenged not only in a nuanced way, but in an overt condemnation of the behavior.

That being said, it is interesting to see how this script has evolved within the slasher sub-genre. In both the slasher re-make and the modern slasher film, the script that suggests men are always ready for sex was reinforced through discussion or joking about a man's persistent need for sex as normal. The slasher television series, however, uses similar techniques to critique the script. Instead of having characters comment on the notion that this behavior is undeniable, in the slasher television series the audience sees positively framed characters draw attention to and even overtly condemn this behavior.

Furthermore, through the slasher television series' use of humor, the audience is prompted to see attempts to have sex in strange or inappropriate places as ridiculous and even disturbing. For instance, Chad Radwell, the prototypical "frat boy" on *Scream Queens* invokes a familiar trope: the college male who is constantly seeking casual sex. However, his relentless obsession with sex leads him to fantasize about having sex with dead bodies, a disturbing fact that is played up for humor. Through this twist on the traditional "frat boy" archetype, the slasher television series uses humor in order to challenge the idea that this version of male sexuality is healthy or morally acceptable.

The next script challenged was the *Women should be judged for their sexuality* (WJS) script, which occurred 21 times and was challenged 66.7% of the time. This script was challenged according to a couple different contexts. First, the script was challenged through the depiction of thoroughly negative characters passing judgment on female sexuality. While one of the most notable, recurring examples of the script is Chanel's hateful commentary on her friends' sex lives in *Scream Queens*, this script is also connected to the death which kicks off *Scream: The TV Series*. Nina, a girl described by even her close friends as manipulative and "crazy", records protagonist Audrey kissing her girlfriend, Rachel, in a car in a nearby parking lot. She posts the video online, outing and humiliating Audrey for her sexuality. In addition to the emotional damage we see Audrey deal with as a result of her humiliation, we also see Nina meet her end moments later. The events of the show clearly demonize Nina's actions, in turn challenging the script that women deserve judgment for sexuality.

The script was also challenged by the depiction of female sexuality from positive characters (and often protagonists) that goes un-judged and un-punished such as when

Brooke handcuffs herself to a bed in the hotel room, with the intent of having sex with Seth in *Scream: The TV Series*. The moment is highlighted with cut-scenes of Emma texting the killer and suspenseful music, all setting the stage for Brooke to be slain in the midst of her sexual expression (according to slasher convention). However, Brooke remains unharmed, indicating a conscious recognition of this convention and a challenge of the WJS script. This suggests that Wee's findings regarding the "new" Final Girl of the modern slasher who can engage in sex without judgment extends to the Final Girls of slasher television as well (2006).

It is worth noting that there are similarities between the modern slasher film and the slasher television series in their invocation of this script. Unlike the slasher re-make, both the modern slasher film and the slasher television series depict characters who judge women because of their sexuality as bullies. However, in the slasher television series, the script is challenged even further by the connection of these characters' behavior and negative ramifications (e.g. Chanel's imprisonment and Nina's death). Furthermore, both the slasher television series and modern slasher film employ inter-textuality to invoke the familiar "female sexuality equals death" formula and challenge it (often through the actions of the new, more sexual Final Girl). This further illustrates how the slasher sub-genre, in its evolution into self-awareness, offers new ways to challenge the scripts found in the classic slasher film and even the slasher re-make.

Though this script was largely challenged, there were still several scenes in which the script was reinforced. It is important to discuss these scenes to draw a more complex understanding of the messages about sexuality being promoted within this iteration of the sub-genre. Interestingly, when this script was reinforced, it was nearly always reinforced

in the same way: through the depiction of the negative impact a woman's un-checked sexuality can have on others. While characters are rarely judged directly for their sexuality with the slasher television series, female sexuality was occasionally framed as the driving force behind catastrophic events (e.g. when Emma's mom reveals that she had a child with possible killer Brandon James on *Scream: The TV Series* and the child is continuing the murders). This context indicates that, despite the slasher sub-genres shift away from the formulaic judgment of sexually active women, this iteration of the slasher sub-genre communicates some anxiety over the dangers of female sexuality (particularly as it relates to their reproductive power).

The next script challenged is the *Men prefer sex over intimacy* (MSOI) script which occurred 13 times and was challenged 100% of the time. Similar to many previous scripts, this script was challenged by the association of the script with negatively viewed male characters and the depiction of positive male characters challenging the script. For instance, the audience observes Jake (a character from *Scream* depicted as misogynistic and manipulative) make fun of Will for being so distraught over his break up, commenting that he should be happy since "the sex must have been pretty Amish". Will, who is generally depicted as a good guy "with a few secrets", is angry at Jake's comment and acts disgusted. This commentary disparaging intimacy from a negatively framed character serves to frame this behavior as immature and negative, thus challenging the script that *Men prefer sex over intimacy*. On the other hand, there are several scenarios where positive male characters behave in a way that values relationships over sex, such as when characters like Pete (the one male character from *Scream Queens* who isn't a



larger-than-life caricature) express genuine affection with the intent to grow emotionally closer to Grace, not just with the intention to “get” sex.

Quite surprisingly, this script was challenged all across the three iterations of the slasher sub-genre. Likewise, in all three versions, the audience witness male characters framed negatively due to their inability to see beyond sex to the importance of intimacy, as well as other male characters framed positively because of their ability to value intimacy. This suggests that, though the slasher sub-genre has undergone many changes in its depiction of sexuality since the end of the classic slasher era, this sub-genre continues to challenge the notion that men should pursue sex above real, emotional closeness.

The next script which was thoroughly challenged is *Women are valued for their physical appearance* (WVPA). This script was both invoked and challenged 21 times. This script was primarily challenged through the framing of this behavior as unacceptable and the parody of this behavior, such as the focus on Chad Radwell’s obsession with female appearance on *Scream Queens*. The viewer watches Chad objectify Chanel time and time again, as he constantly reminds her he values their relationship because she is “hot and rich.” Similarly, on *Scream: The TV Series* Jake discusses the recently deceased Nina, commenting that she always was “just a body,” a comment that elicits condemnation from his friends. In both of these situations this behavior is condemned in both comedic and overt ways resulting in a challenge of this script. An additional way in which this script is challenged is through the “evolution” of characters who come to realize that their objectifying behavior is unacceptable, such as when Chanel of *Scream Queens* tells off a man who cat-calls she and her friends, before explaining the negative

effects of objectification to him. Both of these contexts combine to form a clear challenge of the WVPA script which so often contributes to the reduction of women to sexual objects.

These findings suggest that the modern slasher film and the slasher television series handle this script in comparable ways. While the slasher re-make merely vilifies characters who treat women as sexual objects, both the modern slasher film and the slasher television series utilize a degree of self-awareness to overtly indict the sexual attitudes which have been so common to the classic slasher sub-genre.

An additional script challenged throughout the sample is *Men are initiators of sex* (MIS). This script occurred 10 times and was challenged 70% of the time. Much like the *Women should be judged for sexuality* (WJS) script, this script was also challenged by the portrayal of largely positive female characters initiating physical intimacy, such as the Final Girls from both *Scream: The TV Series* and *Scream Queens* initiating sex with their partners without being judged by peers or being killed. For instance, the audience observes as Brooke, one of the Final Girls from *Scream: The TV Series* initiates sexual contact several times with her romantic interest, Seth Branson and, later, Jake.

Once again, the handling of the MIS script within the slasher television series is very similar to the way it is challenged in the modern slasher film. In particular, both the modern slasher film and the slasher television series follow the “new” Final Girl who initiates sex with their romantic interests without any apparent concern of social judgment or otherwise. This shift, which began in the modern slasher film, differs from the slasher re-make where the MIS script was rarely discussed, and only invoked within one scene where the “traditional” notion of sexuality is reinforced. As such, it would

appear that the slasher sub-genre has evolved to a point where the ability of a woman to pursue sex is not just accepted, but demonstrated by the heroines of the story.

The final script to be discussed is the *Women passively invite male attention* (WPIMA) script, which was invoked 11 times and challenged 54.5% of the time. Because this script was reinforced many times as well, it's important to examine what context distinguishes when the script was challenged vs. when it was reinforced. First, it would appear that this script was nearly always challenged in *Scream: The TV Series* while it was primarily reinforced in *Scream Queens*. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, in *Scream: The TV Series*, a wide array of positive female characters are shown initiating flirtation and even sexual activity with their romantic interests without immediate ramifications. Unlike classic slasher films and slasher re-makes, it does not seem the "Final Girl" of the slasher television series must be chaste or passive in her pursuit of a romantic interest.

However, in *Scream Queens* forwardness on the part of female characters was portrayed as unseemly and inappropriate. Indeed, in moments like these *Scream Queens* identity as a genre hybrid is especially relevant. *Scream Queens* utilizes elements of humor in these scenes to make the behavior appear comical, even ridiculous. Specifically, Dean Munsch attempts to seduce Grace's father, Wes, numerous times. These passes include her placing her hand on his thigh the first time they meet and even wrapping her leg around his as she asks him to be her date to the upcoming Halloween dance. In each of these moments, Dean Munsch's behavior evokes a disturbed look from Wes. Later he even tells her that her "forward behavior was off-putting" to him. Likewise, the show plays Hester's overt sexuality as part of her psychosis, framing her attempts to flirt with

Chad as morbid and graphic. These moments parody the notion of forward female sexuality, indicating that appropriate behavior is to avoid being very forward when trying to get a man's attention. Consequently, while there were slightly more instances challenging the script than reinforcing, it is clear that the active, physical pursuit of romantic interests is not being entirely endorsed here.

When comparing the invocation of this script within the modern slasher film and the slasher television series, there are some profound differences. The Final Girls of the slasher television series are heralded for their open pursuit and sexual advances towards their romantic interests in the same way that the Final Girls of the modern slasher film are. However, from here the two diverge significantly. Utilizing humor, the show *Scream Queens* challenged the script that women can actively pursue men without ramifications. In particular, Dean Munsch is displayed making very overt advances towards several men, many of whom often express disgust or discomfort. While this new branch of the slasher sub-genre does resemble the modern slasher film in the way it frames a woman's ability to actively pursue romantic interests, it is also apparent that the sub-genre is growing more complex, utilizing humor to cast a more critical eye on the progressive ideals it is expected to espouse.

One script from the slasher television series was reinforced the same number of times it was challenged (once each): the *Men should be skilled at sex* (MSS) script. In the slasher television series, this script was invoked similarly to the way the script was invoked in the modern slasher film. This script was once again reinforced through the depiction of a male character upset by commentary on his sexual prowess. Specifically, when Dean Munsch tells Chad that he is "bad in bed" on an episode of *Scream Queens*,

Chad is visibly distraught. Dean Munsch's uses this comment to discourage Chad from pursuing her romantically. As such, this mirrors the sentiment suggested through the scripts invocation in the modern slasher film: that men harbor an underlying anxiety over their sexual prowess. That being said, this script was also challenged once in *Scream: The TV Series*. Will, a character who has been framed as a positive character "with some secrets", lashes out when a classmate makes a joke about his sexual prowess. Emma, his ex-girlfriend, and his instructor chastise Will for his outburst and his classmates look at him as though his behavior was immature and unnecessary. The clear depiction of this behavior as unacceptable suggests that Will's anxiety over sexual performance is not appropriate. While this context would suggest this script is being challenged, the combination of these contexts sends a more complex message that, while it is commonplace for men to experience the pressure to be skilled at sex, a pre-occupation with this anxiety decries a certain immaturity. This is an interesting change from the modern slasher film and the slasher re-make, where this behavior is normalized rather than depicted as inappropriate.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

These findings provide a striking illustration of the ability of a genre (or sub-genre) to evolve. Past research regarding the modern slasher film, in particular the *Scream* series (Wee, 2006), noted the film's self-awareness, its ability to de-construct the conventions of the slasher genre, and in doing so, de-construct the often sexist ideas which have often been inherent to the genre; This analysis supported the ability of the modern slasher film to challenge these traditional notions about sexuality. Furthermore, the same characteristics that the modern slasher film has become known for (critical, self-aware) similarly manifest themselves in the slasher television series, as they challenge many of the same notions about sexuality (e.g. *Men are always ready for sex*, *Women should be judged for sex*), while simultaneously questioning some more progressive ideals about sexuality such as: should one *really* discuss sexuality openly, without concern for appropriateness? Shouldn't a woman with reproductive power be more discerning about the decision to have sex? While women should feel empowered to pursue their romantic and sexual interests, is there a boundary at which this forwardness becomes inappropriate? These moments, in which the slasher television series surprisingly calls into question notions the modern slasher film has routinely championed, offers a potential glimpse into the future of this sub-genre. The slasher television series and *Scream Queens* in particular represent an apparent shift towards the utilization of a more post-modern philosophy where these shows/films question the notion that the promotion of "progressive" sexuality, in which the show often participates, is necessarily positive.

While these changes can be attributed to the logical evolution of a genre, in which many genres becomes self-aware and, in doing so, become critical of the conventions and themes the genre originally espoused (Neale, 2000), these changes can also be understood when placed in their cultural and historical context. The general shift of the slasher sub-genre towards the scripting of a male sexuality that is less sex and performance obsessed, as well as a female sexuality that is more assertive and free of concern over judgment also reflects a changing social climate.

Twenge et al.'s (2015) longitudinal survey found that attitudes towards the expression of sexuality have evolved significantly over time and from generation to generation. Today, Americans are significantly more accepting of sexuality that, mere years ago, would be viewed as "deviant." While this shift has, on one hand, led to a more mainstream acceptance of female sexuality, this has also resulted in a heightened awareness of the damage that hyper-sexual masculinity can have. In recent years, the notion of "rape culture" has become a fixture in the cultural lexicon. While at its core "rape culture" refers to the ways in which rape is trivialized, "rape culture" is often cited as a problem which stems from gender norms in which men are expected to communicate their masculinity through the constant pursuit of often casual and un-emotional sex (Nicoletti et al., 2001). The slasher sub-genre's vilification of a persistent and aggressive sexuality, as well as its depiction of healthy, open female sexuality may be read as a reflection of this shift towards the acceptance of female sexuality and increased anxiety over aggressive male sexuality.

That being said, slasher television is also responsible for another profound step forward in the depiction of female sexuality; within my sample of slasher television

shows, there were two Final Girls who identified as bisexual and were shown navigating intimacy with female partners. This illustrates an enormous departure from even modern slasher film, where LGBT characters are rarely depicted, let alone depicted as primary protagonists with their own relational and sexual concerns. This change, which is not present in the relatively progressive modern slasher film, is indicative of newly changing attitudes about sexuality that emphasize the notion that sexuality exists beyond binary categories. Recent research demonstrates that the social climate in the U.S. has evolved in recent years, culminating in increased acceptance of non-heterosexual behavior (Twenge et al., 2015). However, more recently, bi-sexual individuals have experienced exclusion from both the heterosexual and LGBT community (LaFrance, 2013). That being said, due in part to the effort of bisexual activists (“The Desert Sun”, 2016), bi-sexual individuals are growing in legitimacy and visibility, as people (even celebrities) are increasingly feeling comfortable coming out as bi-sexual (Chandra et al., 2016). As such, it can be surmised that this decision to frame positive and, in the case of Audrey on *Scream: The TV Series*, heroic characters as bi-sexual not only reflects, but furthers this shifting tide of acceptance in the U.S.

Finally, across the iterations of the slasher sub-genre there was the sense of a growing concern for safe sex practices. This increased anxiety over sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy also understandable when examined in its cultural context. Since the early 90s (in the aftermath of the A.I.D.S. epidemic), there were increased efforts to normalize safe sex practices resulting in a substantial increase in condom use among teens. According to a report from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, between 1991 and 2003 condom use in high school students increased by 17% (2016). Thus, the



increased focus on protection in the new iteration of the slasher sub-genre can be understood in relation to a large cultural shift in which the use of protection has become “the new normal”.

### **Future Research**

Since the conceptualization of this study, several more slasher television shows have been created such as *Slasher* and *Dead of Summer*, as well as a slasher-comedy hybrid film, *The Final Girl*. Likewise, shows like *Scream: The TV Series* and *Scream Queens* have been renewed for several seasons, suggesting that the slasher sub-genre is here to stay. As the amount of content grows, it would be useful to continue conducting research to uncover the new messages about sexuality that are being broadcast to teens. Will this sub-genre continue to evolve?

Additionally, it would be useful to conduct an exploratory content analysis of slasher television to examine more closely any “new” scripts that have been missed in past sexual script literature. For instance, social media and technology play a distinct role in the lives of characters within slasher television; one character was “outed” on social media and several characters discuss “sexting”. An exploratory analysis of slasher television would make it possible to uncover modern sexual scripts regarding sexual expression online. Likewise, with the introduction of LGBT characters in slasher television and the stark lack of sexual script research regarding LGBT sexuality, it would also be useful to conduct an exploratory content analysis to discover the sexual scripts pertaining to LGBT sexuality present on these television shows. Furthermore, as slasher films too begin to portray more LGBT characters, conducting an analysis to uncover these more inclusive scripts in film would be very useful as well.

## **Limitations**

There were several limitations to this study. For starters, the sample, despite its large scope, did not cover every possible film/episode from the slasher sub-genre and, thus, could not have captured every nuance present throughout the sub-genre. Furthermore, it must be noted that this study did not utilize a second coder due to the subjective nature of qualitative content analysis. While detailed notes were kept on the context in which each script occurred (including who invoked the script, how others reacted, the outcomes for the character, the tone, etc.), it is possible that certain scripts could have been overlooked or mislabeled. Additionally, as indicated in the “Future Research” section, because this study utilized sexual scripts from existing literature (which primarily discuss heterosexual scripts), there is a large gap in discussion of sexual scripts regarding LGBT sexuality which should be remedied in future studies.

## **Conclusion**

A detailed content analysis of the “new” slasher sub-genre unveiled some compelling truths about the evolution of this media type, as well as the types of messages being conveyed to young adults and adolescents who watch these programs. While classic slasher films have become renowned for their oppressive depiction of female sexuality, it would appear that there is much reason to be optimistic about the state of the sub-genre today. While re-makes of these classic films were guilty of reinforcing many of the same messages about sexuality, there were brief moments where these films deviated from this trend and even promoted more progressive notions of sexuality (e.g. when men objectifying women were vilified). However, in the modern slasher film and the slasher television series, there was a clear shift towards a much more progressive representation

of sexuality through the challenging of many scripts which stifle female sexuality, objectify women and portray men as driven purely by a desire for sex. Perhaps most surprising, and in spite of the many progressive messages about sexuality present in the slasher television series, the slasher television show occasionally challenged the notion that these progressive sexualities are positive through the depiction of characters testing the boundaries of appropriateness. Finally, slasher television offers a powerful site models of progress through the depiction of non-heteronormative sexualities. While there are a myriad of forces which ultimately shape the sub-genre, the evolution of this sub-genre can, in part, be attributed to a changing social climate that accepts female and non-heteronormative sexualities, emphasizes the importance of safe sex and expresses anxiety over aggressive masculinity. In light of these findings, it is my hope that the a new generation of slasher fans will be exposed to more complex and progressive scripts which that will further contribute to the normalization of a much healthier, egalitarian and shame-free view of sexuality.

## Appendix A

Table 4.1

*Scripts Invoked in Slasher Re-makes*

Script Invoked	Frequency	Challenged	Reinforced
MRS	3	1(33.3%)	2(66.7%)
WNVS	6	5(83.3%)	1(16.7%)
WJS	12	1 (8.3%)	11(91.7%)
SNBD	0	0	0
WPIMA	2	1 (50%)	1 (50%)
IPS	3	0	3 (100%)
WVPA	11	8(72.7%)	3 (27.3%)
WGS	0	0	0
MIS	1	0	1 (100%)
MSOI	5	4 (80%)	1 (20%)
MSS	4	0	4 (100%)

Table 4.2

*Scripts Invoked in Modern Slasher Films*

Script Invoked	Frequency	Challenged	Reinforced
MRS	7	2 (28.6%)	5 (71.4%)
WNVS	8	8 (100%)	0
WJS	9	8 (88.9%)	1 (11.1%)
SNBD	0	0	0
WPIMA	4	4 (100%)	0
IPS	2	0	2 (100%)
WVPA	18	12(66.7%)	6(33.3%)
WGS	7	0	7 (100%)
MIS	7	5 (71.4%)	2 (28.6%)
MSOI	8	8 (100%)	0
MSS	2	1 (50%)	1 (50%)

Table 4.3

*Scripts Invoked in Slasher Television*

Script Invoked	Frequency	Challenged	Reinforced
MRS	15	15(100%)	0
WNVS	18	8(44.4%)	10(55.6%)
WJS	21	14(66.7%)	7(33.3%)
SNBD	0	0	0
WPIMA	11	7(63.7%)	4(36.4%)
IPS	4	0	4(100%)
WVPA	21	21(100%)	0
WGS	7	1(14.3%)	6(85.7%)
MIS	10	7(70%)	3(30%)
MSOI	13	13(100%)	0
MSS	2	1(50%)	1(50%)

## Appendix B

### *Codebook of Sexual Scripts*

Code	Description
Men are always ready for sex (MRS)	This script was coded when a male character entreated a partner for sex. As I coded it, this script doesn't merely deal with a man being ready for sex, as that notion is already implied by several other scripts (e.g. Men are initiators of sex), but instead deals with a pre-occupation that prioritizes sex over everything else. Similarly, this script was coded when a character said something which implied this notion or when behavior challenged this same pre-occupation.
Women should not be vocal about sex or desire for sex (WNVS)	This script was coded when a conversation or action reinforced or challenged the idea that a woman should avoid discussing sex or desire.
Women should be judged by others for engaging in recreational sex (WJS)	This script was coded when a conversation or action implied that a woman is "bad" or abnormal for engaging in sex outside of the context of marriage or challenged this idea.
Sex is "no big deal" (SNBD)	This script was coded when a character implied or challenged the notion that sex is not a big deal. Theoretically, this script would manifest itself as a character making a flippant statement which makes light of the decision to have sex or someone challenging that same attitude.
Women should passively invite male attention (wait for the first move) (WPIMA)	This script was coded when it was implied that women should not overtly make contact or initiate sexual behavior with a man. Rather, she should make herself physically appealing and available, enticing the object of their affection to make "the first move". Likewise, this script was coded when a female character challenged this script by actively "making a move".
It's important to use protection when having sex (IPS)	This script was coded when it was implied that forms of protection (e.g. condoms, contraception, abstinence) are important to characters' decision to have sex or when this notion was contradicted (e.g. a character makes a comment disparaging the use of protection).
A woman's value is in her physical appearance (WVPA)	This script was coded anytime it was implied that a female character is valuable or "good" because of her physical attractiveness or characters imply that this attractiveness is more important than her other qualities. On the other hand, this script was also coded when this behavior was discouraged or comments were made that implied that a woman's value comes from other qualities beyond her appearance. Because making judgments about character attractiveness is difficult due to production elements such as

	casting decisions, I restricted the coding of this script to more overt invocations. Instead of coding subtle things such as “Are the writers presenting X character as valuable due to her appearance?”, I coded for moments where the actions and words of others implied this fact (e.g. a boy breaking up with a girl “because she isn’t pretty enough” or another girl commenting on a friend’s lack of attractiveness.)
Women are gatekeepers to sex (WGS)	This script was coded when it was implied that it is a woman’s responsibility to set boundaries regarding sex and say “no” when necessary. This included coding for instances where this norm is contradicted by women becoming initiators and avoiding this gatekeeping role.
Men are initiators of sex (MIS)	This script was coded when it was implied that men are expected to initiate sexual encounters (once again through conversation or action). Likewise, this script was coded when this order was challenged by women initiating sex (or the discussion of these ideas).
Men prefer sexual fulfillment over emotional intimacy (MSOI)	This script was coded when it was implied that sex is more important for men than a relational commitment to someone. This script often accompanied storylines regarding infidelity. Likewise, instances that challenged this devaluing of intimacy were coded as well.
Men should be skilled at sex (MSS)	This script was coded when it was implied through conversation or action that a man should appear to be experienced, knowledgeable about sex. Moments that challenged this anxiety about male performance were coded as well.

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## VITA

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