Sex and Violence in the Slasher Horror Film:
A Content Analysis of Gender Differences in the Depiction of Violence

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The slasher horror film has been the subject of frequent criticism based on the assumption that female characters in these films are more likely to be the victims of serious, graphic violence that is juxtaposed with explicit sexual imagery. The purpose of this study was to address limitations inherent in previous analyses of slasher films and examine whether gender differences exist in the nature of violent presentations. A content analysis of several indicators of violent and sexual content was conducted using a random sample of 50 slasher films that were released in North America between 1960 and 2007. Findings suggested that there are several significant gender differences in the nature of violent presentations found in slasher films. In general, female characters were more likely to be victims of less serious and graphic forms of violence, but were also significantly more likely to be victimized in scenes involving a concomitant presentation of sex and violence.

INTRODUCTION

The track record of horror films tells you maybe Hollywood should just release horror movies to be successful. I can't think of a more consistently performing genre at the box office. (Paul Dergarbedian, Exhibitor Relations, cited in Germain, 2006, p. R2)

A critically ignored and often reviled genre, the horror film and its subgenre, the "slasher" film, has proven to be a popular and financially profitable enterprise for filmmakers (Pinedo, 1997). In particular, the slasher film, characterized for its formulaic portrayals of male killers, helpless female victims, and depictions of nudity, sex, and graphic violence achieved noteworthy levels of popularity in the 1970s and 1980s. John Carpenter's (Hill & Carpenter, 1978) *Halloween,* a major franchise in the slasher genre, is considered one of the most financially successful independent films, earning $47 million against a $325, 000 production budget (Box Office Mojo, n.d.)**.** While the popularity of the slasher genre of horror was considered to have peaked in the mid-1980s and run its course by the early 1990s (Clover, 1992; Rockoff, 2002), the release of *Scream* (Konrad & Craven, 1996) re-invigorated audience interest. Between 2004 and 2006, box office tracking data show that an average of 20 horror films were released a year (Bowles, 2007).

The popularity of this subgenre has attracted criticism from researchers who have singled out the slasher film based on the assumption that these films contain an abundance of eroticized

violence against female characters (e.g., Linz, Donnerstein, & Penrod, 1984). Specifically, it has been argued that women in slasher films are more likely to be the victims of serious, graphic violence and this presentation of violence against women is more likely to be concomitant with sexual content (Clover, 1992; Linz et al., 1984). Numerous studies have reported an association between portrayals of sexually-oriented violence against female characters in film and a range of negative effects on male viewers including an increase in negative attitudes toward female victims, distorted beliefs about women and sexuality, and increased aggressive behaviour against women (Barongan & Hall, 1995; Dexter, Penrod, & Saunders, 1989; Linz, Donnerstein, & Adams, 1989). Within extant literature that examines the impact of media violence, the nature of violent presentations has been identified as an important moderator of violent media effects on real-world aggression (Huesmann & Taylor, 1996). That is, characteristics of violent presentations that attract a viewer's attention, such as the concomitant presentation of sex and graphic violence, will strengthen the negative impact of violent media effects (Huesmann & Taylor, 1996).

Contrary to the criticisms raised by some researchers (Linz et al., 1984), early content analyses of slasher horror films have concluded that there was neither proportionately more violence against women in slasher films nor more frequent juxtapositions of sex and violence involving women compared to men (Cowan & O'Brien, 1990; Molitor & Sapolsky, 1993; Sapolsky, Molitor, & Luque, 2003; Weaver, 1991). In this paper I argue that the methodology of these studies is characterized by systematic problems that nullify the researchers' conclusions and that the past assumptions about the nature of violence in slasher films thus remain untested. Given the empirically-demonstrated adverse effects of sexually violent media and the continued popularity of slasher films, there is a pressing need to re-examine the nature of violent content in this subgenre. The purpose of the present study was to conduct a quantitative content analysis of slasher horror films. Specifically, this study seeks to examine the portrayals of violence against female characters and address the limitations inherent within previous studies. To provide a sufficient background of the relevance of this study to the larger research on violent media, several issues will be discussed including: (1) a definition of the slasher film and summary of the major criticisms concerning the subgenre, (2) an overview of the violent media effects literature, (3) a review of existing research on slasher films, and (4) a discussion of the limitations of this existing research.

The Slasher Genre of Horror Film

The origins of the slasher film have traditionally been traced back to Alfred Hitchcock's (1960) *Psycho,* which, in its infamous shower scene, introduced the basic slasher components of the male killer and the helpless female victim (Clover, 1992). Familiar franchise titles released in the 1970s and early 1980s, including the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974), *Halloween* (Hill & Carpenter, 1978), and *Friday the 13th* (Cunningham, 1980), would introduce what would eventually become generic components of the subgenre. Some typical components frequently evident in the slasher film include a past accident or failed prank that sets the murders in motion, frequent depictions of nudity and immoral behaviour by victims, unfamiliar locations, sudden death scenes designed to maximize shock, and a final surviving female character (Clover, 1992; Jones, 2008, April 16). Molitor and Sapolsky (1993) have formally defined the slasher film as:

A commercially-released, feature-length film containing suspense-evoking scenes in which an antagonist, who is usually a male acting alone, attacks one or more victims.

The accentuation in these films is on extreme graphic violence. Scenes that dwell on the victim's fear and explicitly portray the attack and its aftermath are the central focus of the slasher film. (p. 235)

Although this horror film subgenre is characterized by its emphasis on graphic violence, it has been argued that the nature of violent presentations found in slasher films differ for female and male characters. In this regard, two specific criticisms have emerged in the literature (Clover, 1992; Linz & Donnerstein, 1994; Molitor & Sapolsky, 1993). First, the slasher film has been labelled as a misogynistic subgenre in which women are more frequently shown in states of terror and are disproportionately depicted as victims of serious and graphic violence as compared to men. Second, slasher films have been accused of containing violent presentations in which graphic violence against women is frequently juxtaposed with sex and nudity (Clover, 1992; Linz, Donnerstein, & Penrod, 1984; Linz, Donnerstein, & Penrod, 1988). Clover (1992), for example, has argued that while male and female characters die at relatively equitable rates, *only* death scenes involving female characters are likely to include sexual content.

Violent Media Effects and the Slasher Horror Film
A large body of research spanning over four decades has empirically illustrated that a relationship exists between media violence and real-world aggression (Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podoloski, & Eron, 2003; Paik & Comstock, 1994). Researchers have observed that exposure to sexually violent media (i.e., films, music videos, television episodes, song lyrics) leads to (a) decreases in negative emotional responses to violent stimuli, or emotional desensitization (Linz, Donnerstein, & Adams, 1989; Linz et al., 1984; 1988); (b) increases in adversarial sexual beliefs and aggressive thoughts (Barongan & Hall, 1995; Johnson, Adams, Ashburn, & Reed, 1995; Peterson & Pfost, 1989); (c) negative views of and decreases in sympathy for female victims (Krafka, Linz, Donnerstein, & Penrod, 1997; Linz et al., 1984; 1988; 1989); and (d) increases in male stereotypic dominance behaviours (Mulac, Jansma, & Linz, 2002; Golde, Strassberg, Turner, & Lowe, 2000).

The previously identified criticisms of the slasher subgenre rest upon assumptions about how violence is portrayed in these films. The effect of violence in the media on viewers is moderated by a number of factors. Based on an extensive review of the literature, Huesmann and Taylor (2006) argued that characteristics of the presentation of violence are a moderator of violent media effects. Consistent with this observation, Kunkel and Wilson (1995) have stated that "violence can be presented in a variety of ways, and there is substantial evidence that many differences in message characteristics may hold important implications for the impact of particular violent scenes on viewers" (p. 284). For instance, studies report increases in aggression when violence is portrayed as justified (Berkowitz & Powers, 1979) or is committed by attractive characters (Huesmann, Lagerspetz, & Eron, 1984).

Characteristics of violent media content that attract viewer attention, such as graphic violence or sexual imagery, may then increase the negative effects of viewing violence in the media. According to Bandura (1994), depictions of violence that do not attract viewer attention will have little effect. Social information processing theories also argue that more frequent and salient presentations are more likely to be encoded and incorporated into cognitive scripts, or mental blueprints that organize and guide behavioural responses (Huesmann, 1988). In addition to attracting viewer attention and facilitating the encoding of violent cues, the juxtaposition of

graphic violence against women with sexual content may increase the negative outcomes observed in the violent media effect literature. Frequent violent presentations characterized by concomitant depictions of sexual and violent imagery may increase emotional desensitization by habituating viewers' responses to this content, thereby removing the "punishing nature of consequences of media aggression" (Huesmann & Taylor, 2006, p. 404).

In summary, literature on violent media effects suggests that the nature of violent presentations in film moderates the negative effects of media violence on viewers. The juxtaposition of frequent and serious graphic violence against women with explicit sexual imagery in violent scenes is the characteristic of violent presentations in slasher films that is purported to increase negative effects associated with viewing violence. However, the criticisms of slasher films rest on the assumption that this particular subgenre is significantly more likely to feature this type of violent presentation. Furthermore, these criticisms are premised on the assumption that scenes involving concomitant portrays of sex and violence are more likely to involve female characters than male characters.

Content Analyses of Slasher Films
To date, four analyses of the nature of violent presentations in slasher horror films have been conducted. In the first study, Cowan and O'Brien (1990) coded indicators of sexual behaviour, personality traits, and survival outcomes associated with characters across 56 films. The researchers also coded for both "sex present" and "sex prior" categories to measure the juxtaposition of sex and violence. Results revealed that female characters were not more likely to be victimized and in fact were more likely to survive acts of violence compared to male characters. However, the researchers also found that a relatively large proportion of non-surviving characters were engaging in sexual activity either prior to or immediately preceding their victimization.

The failure to find significantly more violence targeted against women in slasher films was replicated in subsequent studies. Weaver (1991) focused on the violent and sexual content of scenes across 10 slasher films, while Molitor and Sapolosky (1993) analyzed violent, sexual, and sexually violent interactions across 30 slasher films released in 1980, 1985, and 1989, respectively. No differences in the rates of violent victimization between male and female characters were observed in either study. Molitor and Sapolsky found that male characters experienced a significantly higher number of deaths and injuries as compared to female characters. Furthermore, neither study reported significant gender differences in the likelihood of violent assaults being juxtaposed with sex or nudity. Both studies did, however, note that death scenes involving female characters were significantly longer than comparable scenes of violence involving males.

More recently, Sapolsky, Molitor, and Luque (2003) compared depictions of sexual and violent content among the 10 most commercially successful slasher films released in the 1990s to a sample of 10 Action/Adventure films. Using the same coding protocol from their previous study (Molitor & Sapolsky, 1993), Sapolsky et al. found that male characters in slasher films were twice as likely to be victims of violence as compared to female characters. Nonetheless, the average length of violent acts against female characters was once again reported to be significantly longer than acts of violence against male characters. Although the researchers reported that the juxtaposition of sex and violence in slasher films was infrequent, comparisons

of gender and victimization between slasher horror films and Action/Adventure films indicated that the proportion of female victims in slasher films was significantly higher.

Limitations of the Existing Research

Although these findings seem to contradict the assumption that slasher films feature frequent violent presentations characterized by a disproportionate amount of eroticized violence against women, three major limitations characterize the research: (1) sample size and selection, (2) selected units of analysis, and (3) the operationalization of variables. First, the sample size for two of the aforementioned studies was small (Sapolsky et al., 2003; Weaver, 1991), raising concerns about the extent to which findings can be generalized to the subgenre. The sample size in the Molitor and Sapolsky (1993) study is adequate; however the decision to sample the most commercially successful films may raise problems with sample bias and interpretation of the findings (Molitor & Sapolsky, 1993; Sapolsky et al., 2003). Films featuring frequent presentations of extremely graphic violence may appeal to a smaller audience, generating lower box office revenues. Thus, the findings in the existing research may not reflect the true nature of violent presentations characteristic of the slasher subgenre.

A second major limitation of these studies concerns the selection of unit of analyses. In two of the studies (Cowan & O'Brien, 1990; Weaver, 1991), the unit of analysis is not the violent act. The film character was the unit of analysis in the Cowan and O'Brien (1990) study, and Weaver (1991) used the scene as his unit of analysis. Given that the action in this type of film can change rapidly within a particular scene, measuring violence only at the scene-level would likely fail to adequately capture the nature and frequency of violent acts. Although the studies conducted by Molitor and Sapolosky (1993) and Sapolsky et al. (2003) included the act or interaction as the unit of analysis, the researchers only coded one act per character regardless of the number of violent acts committed against him or her. This particular approach certainly underestimates the frequency of violent acts, particularly with respect to female characters given that in many slasher films, the surviving character is a woman who has survived repeated attacks.

Perhaps the most serious limitation with the research is the lack of clear operationalization of variables. None of the existing studies have provided an operational definition of violence, opting instead to code a finite number of indicators or modes of violent acts. Only two of the studies included non-physical forms of violence and, in these particular studies, the only form of non-physical aggression that was measured involved verbal abuse (Molitor & Sapolsky, 1993; Weaver, 1991). This operational definition of violence would presumably underestimate other forms of violence, such as stalking, intimidation, or confinement, which one might anticipate would be more frequently committed against women.

The Present Study

Existing research on the nature of violent presentations in the slasher film are hampered by sampling and measurement problems that limit their ability to adequately address criticisms against this subgenre of horror film. As such, the assumption that slasher films feature frequent violent presentations characterized by juxtapositions of graphic violence against women with sexual content remains untested. In general, the purpose of the present study was to examine several characteristics of violent presentations in slasher horror films that have been the subject of criticism including (a) the frequency of violence, (b) the seriousness and degree of harm associated with violent acts, (c) the graphicness of violence, (d) the duration of violent acts, and

(e) the extent to which violence is juxtaposed with sexual content. A quantitative content analysis was conducted with a random sample of 50 slasher films released between 1960 and 2007. The specific research purposes were as follows:

1. To determine whether the nature of violent presentations involving female characters in the slasher genre of horror films differs significantly from violent presentations involving male characters on the following aspects: (a) frequency of violence, (b) seriousness of violence and degree of harm, (c) graphicness of violence, and (d) duration of violent acts.
2. To determine whether scenes of violence involving female characters are more likely to involve the concomitant depiction of sexual imagery.

METHOD

Sample

The sample consisted of 50 randomly selected slasher horror films. The population of films was identified using the Power Search feature on the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), an online movie reference website. To identify a sampling frame of relevant films, the online search included films released from 1960 to 2007. The year 1960 was chosen as the starting point as Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), generally regarded as an early predecessor to the slasher film, was released in this year. The search was conducted within the horror genre and excluded films that mixed genres, such as horror/comedy films. To narrow the sampling frame, several keywords pairings were included in the search process using the "and" Boolean operator, including "slasher", "masked killer", "gore", "blood-splatter", and "psycho-killer." In addition, the search was limited to films that had a North American theatrical or video release; films made for television were excluded. Lastly, the search was limited to films that had a minimum of 100 votes on IMDb.

The second step of the search process involved an examination of the plot summary and plot keyword for films to determine that they were indeed slasher horror films. Each film was evaluated using the definition of slasher film outlined earlier in this paper. The search process described above identified 231 film titles. These films were ordered alphabetically and numbered accordingly. Using a random number table, a total of 50 films were randomly selected for coding.

Definitions

Three major types of behaviours were examined across the films – violence, sexual behaviour, and sexual violence. For the purposes of this study, the definition of *violence* was adopted from the National Television Violence Survey (NTVS) (Wilson, Kunkel, Linz, Potter, Smith, Blumenthal, & Berry, 1997; Wilson, Kunkel, Potter, Donnerstein, Smith, Blumenthal, & Berry, 1998) and a study conducted by Mustonen (1997). Violence included:

> Any overt depiction of (1) physical actions intentionally causing or designed to cause harm to another person, (2) implicit threats, non-verbal behaviour, outbursts of anger, or forms of psychological intimidation intended to cause fear, and (3) any depictions of physically harmful consequences that resulted from off-screen means. Violence did not include cruelty or violence towards animals.

Sexual behaviour included any depiction of nudity or partial nudity, voyeurism and/or exhibitionism, and physical intimacy between characters including intimate kissing, sexual caressing or foreplay, and sexual intercourse. In addition to general violence, a specific type of violence, sexual violence, was also examined in the current study. Sexual violence included any depiction of intercourse or sexual touching that involved either verbal or physical coercion, rape, or acts of sadomasochism.

Units of Analysis

Variables were measured using the approach adopted by the NTVS (Wilson et al., 1997; Wilson et al., 1998) and described in several sources (Smith & Boyson, 2002; Tamborini, Skalski, Lachlan, Westerman, Davis, & Smith, 2005; Wilson, Colvin, & Smith, 2002). Specifically, depictions of violence, sexual behaviour, and sexual violence were measured at three levels or units of analysis. First, information was measured at the level of the act or the PAT-level interaction. A PAT-level interaction involves a perpetrator (P) engaging in a particular type of act (A) against a particular target (T). A new PAT-level interaction is created whenever the perpetrator (P), act (A), or target (T) changes. For instance, if the antagonist in a film began to strangle a victim and the victim responded by striking the antagonist, two separate PAT-level interactions would be coded (Smith, Nathanson, & Wilson, 2002; Tamborini et al., 2005; Wilson et al., 1997; Wilson et al., 2002).

The second level or unit of analysis was the scene. The operationalization of a scene was adopted from the approach used by Weaver (1991). A scene was defined as:

> An uninterrupted sequence of [*thematically-related*] behaviours occurring within a given physical context in the absence of lengthy edits or cuts to other characters or events. Transitions from one physical content to another rather than movement within a single physical context represented the beginning and ending parameters of a scene. (p. 388)

The narrative of slasher films is often characterized by frequent quick edits. As such, an edit to different characters or locations in the middle of a scene did not constitute the ending parameter for coding. If the thematically-related events or actions that constituted a scene were interrupted by an edit to another location or character for at least 60 seconds, then the scene was coded as complete. Using this definition, four types of scenes were identified based upon the primary type of action or content: (1) Violent content, (2) Sexual content, (3) Sexually violent content, and (4) Violent and Sexual Content. A scene was classified as "Violent and Sexual Content" if it contained depictions of both violent and sexual behaviours within the same scene parameters. For example, in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, the shower scene would be categorized as Violent and Sexual Content because the character was undressed and showering when she was attacked. Each scene could potentially contain several thematically-similar PAT-level interactions (Smith et al., 2002; Weaver, 1991; Wilson et al., 1997; Wilson et al., 2002).The third level or unit of analysis was the overall film-level. Several variables pertaining to the entire film were measured, including the running length (in minutes), release date, and the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) rating. In addition, overall patterns of findings were also measured at the film level (e.g., Number of violent scenes, Number of violent PAT-level interactions).

Measures

    Film-Level and Scene-Level Measures
Two variables describing the sample films were coded from each film's respective IMDb page – running length (in minutes) and year of release. In addition to these variables, the overall number of scene categories (Violent, Sexually Violent, Sexual, and Violent and Sexual) and PAT-level categories (Violent, Sexually Violent, Sexual) were also coded for each film. Based upon the definition provided earlier, coders identified scenes containing violent, sexually violent, or sexual content and categorized them into one of four scene categories based upon the primary content (Violent Scene, Sexually Violent Scene, Sexual, Violent and Sexual). The length of each scene (in seconds) was also recorded. Coders then identified PAT-level interactions within each scene.

    PAT-Level Measures
Violent Interactions: Each violent interaction was measured by seven variables in the coding protocol. The source or initiator of each violent act, or *Source of Violence*, was coded as either *Antagonistic* or *Defensive*. The source of a violent act was coded as *Antagonistic* if the act was initiated with no prior provocation and the act was initiated with hostile intent. A violent act was coded as *Defensive* if it was initiated as a response to a prior act of aggression against the character with the intent of protecting one's self from future harm. Each violent PAT-level interaction was assigned to a category that indicated the type or *Mode of Violence* employed. Fifteen categories or modes of violence were included in the coding protocol. One category, Psychological Aggression, reflected forms of psychological violence such as threats, harassment, and intimidation. Four categories were created to reflect moderate or non-lethal forms of aggression (Abduction, Confinement, or Kidnapping, Threatening with Weapons, Grabbing or Restraining, and Fist-fighting, Pushing, or Striking). Several additional categories reflected more serious or lethal forms of violence (see Appendix 1).

    An index of the *Graphicness of Violence* was adopted in the current study from a measure used in previous research by Potter and Smith (2000). Briefly, Potter and Smith (2000) have described graphicness as involving both the depiction of physical alteration or harm to the body and the camera framing of violence or "putting the viewer in the action" (p. 302). The index of graphicness used in the current study contained three-subscales: (1) Level of Graphic Content, (2) Framing of Violence, and (3) Framing of Impact. The *Level of Graphic Content*, which referred to physical changes or alterations to a victim's body as a result of a violent act, was measured on a five-point Likert scale (*1 = None*, *5 = Extreme*). The second scale of the index, *Framing of Violence*, referred to the proportion of the screen filled with the image of the violent act and was measured on a four-point Likert scale (*1 = None*, *4 = Close-up*). Lastly, the *Framing of Impact*, or the proportion of the screen filled with an image of the aftermath or results of a violent act, was similarly measured on a four-point Likert Scale (*1 = None*, *4 = Close-up*). Scores on the index ranged from 3 to 13, with higher scores indicating more graphic portrayals of violence (See Appendix 1 for a description of all values).

    Three additional measures of the nature of violent presentations were included in the coding protocol. The *Degree of Harm Depicted*, which referred to the level of physical consequences resulting from a violent PAT-level interaction, was measured on a five-point

Likert scale (*1 = No Injury Depicted*, *5 = Critical Injury*). Coders were also required to indicate whether the consequences of a violent act were not depicted onscreen. In contrast, the *Seriousness of Violence Depicted* referred to the amount of physical force used by the perpetrator against the target in a PAT-level interaction and was measured on a five-point Likert scale (*1 = No Physical Force*, *5 = Lethal Force*) (See Appendix 1 for a description of all values). Scores on this measure progressed in terms of the amount of physical force exerted against the victim. Coders were also required to indicate whether the act of violence was depicted on- or off-screen. The *Character Gender* of the perpetrator and the victim was coded for each violent PAT-level interaction (Male, Female, or Unknown). Finally, the *Length of Violent Interactions* was coded in seconds.

Sexual Interactions: Four variables pertaining to sexual behaviours in the films were included in the coding protocol. Each depiction of a sexual act was categorized based upon the *Mode of Sexual Content*. There were five modes of sexual content, which included: Voyeurism or Exhibitionism, Intimate Kissing, Affectionate Touching, Intimate Touching, and Intercourse. The *Gender of Characters* involved in the act was also coded (Male Only, Female Only, Both Male and Female). Two additional variables pertaining to the depiction of nudity in sexual acts were also included. The *Level of Nudity* measured the extent to which nudity was depicted (No Nudity, Partial Nudity, Full Nudity). Lastly, *Nudity and Gender* indicated the gender of characters depicted as nude in a sexual act (Male Only, Female Only, Both Male and Female).

Sexually Violent Interactions: Seven variables pertaining to sexually violent acts were included in the coding protocol. The nature or *Mode of Sexual Aggression* included six categories: Threatening Sexual Behaviour, Forced or Coerced Sexual Touching, Intercourse via Verbal Coercion or Threat, Intercourse via Physical Coercion, Intercourse via Threat with Weapon, and Sexual Torture. The *Use of Sexually Derogative Language* (Yes, No) during the commission of sexually violent acts was also measured. In addition, the *Gender of Victim and Perpetrator* (Male, Female), *Degree of Harm Depicted*, *Seriousness of Violence Depicted*, *Level of Nudity*, and *Nudity and Gender*, were also measured for sexually violent acts.

Coder Training and Reliability
Five undergraduate students and the primary investigator coded all of the films in the sample. Prior to the coding process, the undergraduate research assistants were introduced to and received training in the coding process. During the first stage of the training process, the primary investigator reviewed the coding protocol and then the undergraduate research assistants viewed the original *Friday the 13th* (Cunningham, 1980) and applied the coding protocol under the supervision of the primary investigator. Subsequently, the results of the coding were reviewed and discussed. In the second stage of training, the undergraduate research assistants independently viewed and coded the film, *Friday the 13th: Part 3* (Miner, 1982). Both films used in these stages of training were selected from the original sampling frame. Results of the coding were reviewed and discussed to ensure an acceptable level of agreement.

To ensure interrater reliability, as part of the third stage of training, three undergraduate research assistants coded a random sample of five films from the original sampling frame (*Halloween*, *The Hills Have Eyes*, *Scream 2*, *Wolf Creek*, *Wrong Turn*). Each reviewer independently viewed the five films and completed the coding protocol. Their results were recorded on separate coding forms. A comparison of the reviewers' records reflected the

consistency with which information in the films were recorded in the coding protocol. Fleiss' kappa was calculated for those variables requiring coders to assign categorical or finite ratings to film content. The Fleiss' kappa is an adaptation of Cohen's kappa that measures the rate of agreement between two or more independent coders taking into account the agreement occurring by chance (Fleiss, 1971). Intraclass correlation (ICC) was used to measure interrater reliability for those variables measured on a ratio scale. Reliability values ranged from 0.74 to 0.92 for the variables, indicating substantial to strong agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977).

<div align="center">Results</div>

Film-Level Variables

Table 1 presents the list of 50 films included in the current study. The sample included films from several popular slasher franchises (*Friday the 13th*, *Halloween*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Saw*, *Scream*), lesser known titles (*The Initiation*, *Nail Gun Massacre*), and recent remakes (*The Hills Have Eyes Part II*). Not surprisingly, the release dates of films corresponds with the fluctuating popularity of the genre, with over half of the films in the sample being originally released between 1980 and 1989 (58.0%, $n = 29$). Nearly a quarter of films in the sample were released between 2000 and 2007 (24.0%, $n = 12$), following the re-emerging popularity of the slasher film in the wake of *Scream* (Konrad & Kraven, 1996). On average, the running length of films in the sample was 94 minutes ($M = 94.02$, $SD = 9.91$), with the length of films ranging from 74 minutes to 121 minutes.

Scene-Level Variables

A total of 755 relevant scenes were identified in the current study. Specifically, there were 566 scenes of violence across the 50 films in the current sample, which comprised 75.0% of coded scenes in the study. On average, there were 11 violent scenes per film ($M = 11.32$, $SD = 4.40$; range = 4-30). Sexual content and sexually violent content was depicted much less frequently. A total of 99 scenes (13.1%) involving depictions of sexual content were identified, while only 21 scenes of sexually violent material (2.8%) were identified. There were approximately 1.98 scenes depicting sexual content per film ($SD = 1.99$; range = 0-10), and there was less than one sexually violent scene per film ($M = 0.42$, $SD = 0.67$; range = 0-2). Additionally, there were 69 scenes involving the concomitant presentation of violent and sexual material in the current sample (9.1%), with an average of 1.38 scenes of sex and violence per film ($M = 1.38$, $SD = 1.40$; range = 0-6).

Violent PAT-Level Interactions

There were a total of 1363 violent PAT-level interactions identified across the 50 films. As previously mentioned, the source of violence in each interaction (*Antagonistic*, *Defensive*) was coded to distinguish acts of violence initiated in self-defence or self-protection from violent acts initiated by the antagonist in the films. Over three-quarters of violent interactions were instigated by the antagonist (78.2%, $n = 1066$) while only 21.4% ($n = 292$) of PAT-level violent interactions were acts of retaliation or self-protection initiated by victims. For five PAT-level-violent interactions, the source of violence could not be identified. The remaining analyses in this section will focus on the PAT-level interactions that were instigated by the antagonist.

Mode of Violence

The mode of violence depicted in each PAT-level interaction is presented in Table 2.

Given the nature of the subgenre, it should not be surprising that the most common form of violence identified across the films was slashing or stabbing (35.6%, $n = 379$). As illustrated in Table 2, violence in slasher films also frequently involved various forms of psychological aggression (e.g., intimidation, stalking or chasing) (11.0%, $n = 117$) and grabbing or restraining

Table 1: Film Sample List

Film Title	Year	Film Title	Year
April Fool's Day	1987	Intruder	1989
Black Christmas	1974	Madman	1982
The Burning	1980	Malevolence	2004
Cherry Falls	2000	Maniac	1980
Christmas Evil	1980	Mountaintop Motel Massacre	1986
Don't Go in the House	1980	My Bloody Valentine	1981
The Driller Killer	1979	Nail Gun Massacre	1985
Friday the 13th Part 2	1981	A Nightmare on Elm Street	1984
Friday the 13th Part 4	1984	A Nightmare on Elm Street 4	1988
The Funhouse	1981	Prom Night	1980
Graduation Day	1981	Saw II	2005
Halloween	2007	Saw III	2006
Halloween II	1981	Scream	1996
Halloween VI	1995	Scream III	2000
Happy Birthday To Me	1981	Silent Night, Deadly Night	1984
Hatchet	2006	Sleepaway Camp	1983
He Knows You're Alone	1980	The Slumber Party Massacre	1982
Hell Night	1981	Sorority House Massacre	1986
High Tension	2003	Terror Train	1980
The Hills Have Eyes	1977	Texas Chainsaw Massacre	1974
The Hills Have Eyes Part 2	2007	Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning	2006
House of Wax	2005	The Toolbox Murders	1978
The House on Sorority Row	1983	Urban Legend	1998
I Know What You Did Last Summer	1997	Valentine	2001
The Initiation	1984	Visiting Hours	1982

victims (10.8%, *n* = 115). In some instances, the mode of violence could not be ascertained from the scene and was labeled Unknown (3.1%, *n* = 33) or the mode of violence was not easily categorized and was labeled Other (5.4%, *n* = 58).

To examine gender differences in the nature of violence, a chi-square analysis was conducted. For chi-square analyses, the expected cell frequencies must be greater than 1 and 80% of cells should have expected frequencies greater than 5. In cases where this requirement is violated, a common practice is to collapse categories within the variable. The Mode of Violence variable contained 15 categories and the expected cell frequencies requirement was not met. As a result, the 15 categories in Mode of Violence were collapsed into three broad categories. Psychological Aggression, which has been previously described, was left as an independent

Table 2: Mode of Violence Depicted

Mode of Violence	Frequency	Percentage
Psychological or Non-Physical Aggression	117	11.0
Abduction, Confinement, or Kidnapping	53	5.0
Threatening with Weapons	47	4.4
Grabbing or Restraining	115	10.8
Fist-fighting, Pushing, or Striking	111	10.4
Hitting with Blunt Tools or Weapons	41	3.8
Choking or Strangling	51	4.8
Poisoning	3	0.3
Chopping, Dismemberment, Slashing, or Stabbing	379	35.6
Drowning	6	0.6
Burning or Setting on Fire	17	1.6
Self-inflicted Injury	5	0.5
Self-inflicted Injury Under Duress	5	0.5
Post-mortem Mutilation	5	0.5
Unknown	33	3.1
Other	58	5.4

Table 3: Gender Differences in PAT-Level Violent Interactions

	Gender of Victim		Test
	Male	Female	
Mode of Violence			$\chi^2 (2) = 102.50$***
Psychological Aggression	9.8% ($n = 11$)	90.2% ($n = 101$)	
Moderate Aggression	38.5% ($n = 124$)	61.5% ($n = 198$)	
Serious Aggression	58.5% ($n = 340$)	41.5% ($n = 241$)	
Graphicness of Violence			
Level of Graphicness	$M = 2.40$	$M = 1.82$	$t (983.76) = 6.74$***
Framing of Violence	$M = 2.86$	$M = 2.99$	$t (994.48) = -1.96$
Framing of Impact	$M = 3.12$	$M = 3.25$	$t (1044) = -2.44$
Total	$M = 8.38$	$M = 8.04$	$t (986.34) = 2.75$**
Degree of Harm	$M = 3.60$	$M = 2.57$	$t (997.99) = 9.21$***
Seriousness of Violence	$M = 3.99$	$M = 3.03$	$t (892.41) = 10.08$***
Length of Violence	$M = 0.92$	$M = 1.04$	$t (889) = -3.45$***

*Note: *$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.*

category. Four modes of violence were re-coded into the category Moderate Aggression (Abduction, Confinement, or Kidnapping, Threatening with Weapons, Grabbing or Restraining, and Fist-fighting, Pushing, or Striking). The remaining categories were collapsed into the category Serious Aggression[i].

As shown in Table 3, although there were more violent interactions involving female victims, there were significant gender differences in the nature of violence experienced by characters in the current sample, $\chi^2 (2) = 102.50$, $p = .001$. Consistent with observations across

the literature that women in slasher films are generally depicted in states of fear and terror (Clover, 1992; Molitor & Sapolsky, 1993; Sapolsky et al., 2003), forms of psychological aggression, including intimidation, stalking, or chasing, disproportionately involved female characters (90.2%, $n = 101$). Female characters were also significantly more likely to be victims of more moderate forms of aggression, such as being confined or grabbed, as compared to male characters (61.5% vs. 38.5%). Comparatively, male characters (58.5%, $n = 340$) were victims of more serious forms of aggression, such as stabbing, strangulation, or burning, as compared to female victims (41.5%, $n = 241$).

Gender of Perpetrator and Victim
As expected, the perpetrator of violence in the vast majority of violent PAT-level interactions was male (72.8%, $n = 776$). In less than 10% of violent interactions, the perpetrator of violence was female (6.3%, $n = 67$), and in 20.9% of cases, the gender of the perpetrator was unknown ($n = 223$). Comparatively, in over half of the violent interactions, the victim was female (51.7%, $n = 551$) while in 46.4% of violent interactions the victim was male ($n = 495$). In five interactions, the gender of the victim was unknown and in an additional 15 interactions, violence was targeted at both a male and female victim, simultaneously.

Graphicness of Violence
To determine whether gender differences existed in the *Graphicness of Violence* in slasher films, four independent-sample *t*-tests were conducted. Because pairwise comparisons were conducted without the use of an omnibus test, a conservative approach, the Bonferroni correction, was taken to correct for family-wise error rates. With respect to the *Graphicness of Violence* and gender, an initial level of significance of .05 was chosen and divided by the number of sub-scales and the total score (4). This resulted in a critical value of .0125 that was applied in determining statistical significance for the independent-samples *t*-tests.

As illustrated in Table 3, significant differences were observed for the Level of Graphicness sub-score, with violence against male characters involving higher levels of graphicness ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 1.48$) than those involving female characters ($M = 18.2$, $SD = 1.28$), $t (983.76) = 6.74$, $p < .001$. Non-significant trends were observed for both the Framing of Violence and Framing of Impact sub-scores. Ratings for the Framing of Violence appeared higher for acts of violence against female characters ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 1.00$) than those for male characters ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 1.13$), $t (994.48) = -1.96$, $p = .05$. Similarly, the ratings for the Framing of Impact appeared higher for acts of violence against female characters ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.83$) than those for male characters ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.92$), $t (1004) = -2.44$, $p = .015$. Lastly, the overall scores for *Graphicness of Violence* were significantly higher for violent acts against male characters ($M = 8.38$, $SD = 2.12$) than those for female characters ($M = 8.04$, $SD = 1.85$), $t (892.41) = 10.08$, $p < .001$.

Degree of Harm Depicted
An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to determine whether there were gender differences in the *Degree of Harm Depicted* as a result of violent acts[ii]. Table 3 demonstrates that male characters were depicted as suffering significantly higher levels of harm as a result of violence ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.70$) as compared to female characters ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 1.83$), $t (997.99) = 9.21$, $p < .001$. According to this finding, although male characters experience fewer acts of violence, they suffer more severe consequences in slasher horror films.

Seriousness of Violence Depicted

An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to determine whether there were gender differences in the *Seriousness of Violence Depicted* in violent PAT-level interactions[iii]. Analyses indicate that the ratings of *Seriousness of Violence* were significantly higher for acts of violence against male characters (*M* = 3.99, *SD* = 1.28) as compared to female characters (*M* = 3.03, *SD* = 1.58), *t* (892.41) = 10.08, *p* < .001. This result indicates that increasingly more serious levels of physical force are used in violent presentations involving male characters in slasher horror films.

Duration of Violence

An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to determine whether there were gender differences in the *Duration of Violence* (in seconds) for violent PAT-level interactions. Evaluations of statistical assumptions indicated that there were problems with normality of the distribution for *Duration of Violence* and a logarithmic transformation was conducted, which largely reduced the problem. Results showed the violent interactions involving female victims were significantly longer in duration (*M* = 1.04, *SD* = 0.51) as compared to those violent interactions that involved a male victim (*M* = 0.92, *SD* = 0.48), *t* (889) = -3.45, *p* = .001.

Sexually Violent PAT-Level Interactions

In the current study, 21 scenes involving sexually violent content were identified across the sample of 50 films. Within these 21 scenes, a total of 22 sexually violent PAT-level interactions were coded. The most frequent forms of sexual violence were *Forced or Coerced Sexual Touching* (63.6%, *n* = 14) and *Intercourse via Physical Coercion* (22.7%, *n* = 5). In all 22 sexually violent interactions, the victim was a female character and the perpetrator was a male character. Nudity was seldom depicted in sexually violent acts (*No Nudity*; 68.2%, *n* = 15), but when nudity was depicted in these interactions, only female characters were shown in any state of undress. Mean levels of *Degree of Harm Depicted* (*M* = 1.45, *SD* = 0.51) and *Seriousness of Violence Depicted* (*M* = 1.95, *SD* = 0.90) were relatively low for sexually violent interactions. As compared to general violence, the results illustrate that sexual violence was depicted infrequently across the current sample of slasher films. No further analyses were conducted with sexually violent interactions.

Sexual PAT-Level Interactions

There were 99 scenes involving Sexual Content and an additional 69 scenes involving Violent and Sexual Content. Across these scenes, a total of 188 sexual PAT-level interactions were observed and coded. As illustrated in Table 4, the most common mode of sexual content depicted in the films was *Voyeurism/Exhibitionism* (55.9%, *n* = 105), or scenes depicting characters undressing or in various states of undress. *Intimate kissing* was the next most frequent mode of sexual content (18.1%, *n* = 34), while scenes depicting actual *Intercourse* were less frequent (8.0%, *n* = 15). Nearly half of sexually-themed interactions involved only female characters (46.3%, *n* = 87), whereas less than 10% of sexually-themed interactions involved only a male character (9.0%, *n* = 17).

Slasher films are reputed for their brazen depictions of nudity. Consistent with this expectation, the majority of sexually-themed interactions involved some level of nudity. In over 40% of sexually-themed interactions, there was at least Partial Nudity of characters (43.6%, *n* = 82) and, in an additional 39.4% of sexually-themed interactions (*n* = 74), there was a depiction of

Full Nudity. A chi-square analysis was conducted to determine whether gender differences existed in the portrayal of nudity in sexually-themed interactions. Not surprisingly, depictions of either Partial or Full Nudity were significantly more likely in scenes involving only female

Table 4: Sexual PAT-Level Interactions

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Mode of Sexual Content		
Voyeurism/Exhibitionism	105	55.9
Intimate Kissing	34	18.1
Affectionate Touching	16	8.5
Sexual Touching	18	9.6
Intercourse	15	8.0
Gender of Characters		
Only Female Characters	87	46.3
Only Male Characters	17	9.0
Both Male and Female Characters	84	44.7
Depiction of Nudity		
No Nudity Depicted	32	17.0
Partial Nudity	82	43.6
Full Nudity	74	39.4
Gender and Nudity		
Only Female Characters	120	76.9
Only Male Characters	11	7.1
Both Male and Female Characters	25	16.0

Table 5: Gender and the Depiction of Nudity

	Gender			
	Only Female Characters	Only Male Characters	Both Male and Female Characters	
Depiction of Nudity				χ^2 (4) = 20.89***
No Nudity	12.5% (*n* = 4)	9.4% (*n* = 3)	78.1% (*n* = 24)	
Partial Nudity	48.8% (*n* = 40)	11.0% (*n* = 9)	40.2% (*n* = 33)	
Full Nudity	58.1% (*n* = 43)	6.8% (*n* = 5)	35.1% (*n* = 26)	

*Note: *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01, ***p* < .001.*

characters than in scenes involving only male characters or scenes involving both male and female characters, χ^2 (4) = 20.89, *p* < .001. As shown in Table 5, over half of scenes containing depictions of Full Nudity involved only a female character (58.1%, *n* = 43), while only 6.8% of scenes containing Full Nudity involved only a male character (6.8%, *n* = 5).

Concomitant Presentation of Sex and Violence
As stated above, a total of 69 scenes involving the concomitant presentation of both violent and sexual content were observed and coded. In addition, there were 21 scenes involving depictions of sexually violent content. These two categories of scenes were combined to produce a category reflecting the concomitant presentation of both violent and sexual content (*n* = 90). Within these 90 scenes, there were 131 observed violent interactions, 70 sexually-themed interactions, and 22 sexually violent interactions. A chi-square analysis was conducted to examine whether there were gender differences among victims in scenes that did or did not involve a concomitant presentation of sex and violence. Scenes involving depictions of both violent and sexual content were combined with scenes involving depictions of sexual violence and compared to scenes involving only violent content. Female characters were significantly more likely to be victims of violence in scenes involving a concomitant presentation of sex and violence (64.1%, *n* = 84) as compared to male characters (35.9%, *n* = 47), χ^2 (1) = 7.87, *p* = .005.

An additional chi-square was conducted to examine whether the frequency of concomitant presentations of sex and violence has changed over time. Based on the year of release, a categorical variable, Time of Release, was created with four categories (1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s). Due to low cell frequencies, categories were collapsed, resulting in a dichotomous variable (1970s to 1980s, 1990s to Present). Results indicated that the frequency of concomitant presentations of sex and violence did not significantly differ from period of the 1970s to 1980s (13.0%, *n* = 77) and the period between the 1990s and 2007 (11.9%, *n* = 54), χ^2 (1) = 0.29, *p* = .59.

Moderating Effect of Time of Release

According to Baron and Kenny (1986), a moderator is "a qualitative (e.g., sex, race, class) or quantitative (e.g., level of reward) variable that affects the direction and/or strength of the relation between an independent or predictor variable and a dependent or criterion variable" (p. 1174). Baron and Kenny proposed that a moderator effect could be represented by an interaction in an analysis of variance (ANOVA). Given that the sampling frame adopted in the

Table 6: The Juxtaposition of Sex and Violence

	Juxtaposition of Sex and Violence		Test
	Yes	No	
Gender of Victim			$\chi^2 (1) = 7.87**$
Male	35.9% ($n = 47$)	49.0% ($n = 448$)	
Female	64.1% ($n = 84$)	51.0% ($n = 467$)	

Note: *$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

current study contained films from a broader timeframe than what was available to previous content analyses of slasher films, the time period of release for films may be a moderator of the relationship between victim gender and characteristics of violent presentations. To test for the potential moderator effect of time of release, a 2 x 4 ANOVA was conducted for each aspect of violent presentations examined in this study (Frequency, Seriousness, Degree of Harm, Graphicness, Duration) with Gender of Victim (Male, Female) and Time of Release (1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s) as the independent variables. No significant interactions between Gender of the Victim and Time of Release were observed in any of the ANOVA analyses, thus indicating that the time period in which a film was released did not moderate the relationship between gender of the victim and the nature of violent presentations.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to address the limitations inherent in previous analyses of slasher horror films and examine whether gender differences exist in the portrayals of sexual and violent content. Contrary to the findings reported in previous research, the current analysis suggests that there are several differences in the nature of violent presentations involving male and female characters. Male characters in slasher horror films are more likely to experience relatively quick, graphic, and serious acts of violence. Comparatively, female characters are more likely to be victims of less serious and less graphic forms of violence, such as stalking or confinement, with increased cinematic focus on depicting close-up states of prolonged terror. Women in slasher films are also more likely to be featured in scenes involving sexual content. Specifically, female characters are far more likely to be featured as partially or fully naked and, when sexual and violent images are concomitantly present, the film's antagonist is significantly more likely to attack a woman.

Consistent with previous criticisms of slasher horror films, female characters were victims of violence more frequently than male characters. This discrepancy in the research can be explained in part by the methodological differences between this study and past research. The approach to measuring violent acts or PAT-level interactions in the current study allowed for the coding of multiple acts of violence against a single character. Comparatively, in previous studies (Molitor & Sapolsky, 1993; Sapolsky et al., 2003), only a single act of violence was coded for each victim. In addition, the operationalization of violence employed in the current study was broader than definitions adopted in past content analyses. The inclusion of less serious forms of physical aggression (e.g., restraining, confining, threatening with a weapon) and non-physical forms of aggression (e.g., threats, stalking, chasing) accounted for the higher frequency of violence against female characters. Various forms of psychological aggression coded in this study almost exclusively involved female characters.

For example, in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974), over approximately the last 30 minutes of the film, there were a total of nine scenes incorporating 18 distinct PAT-level violent interactions against the final surviving female character. The violent interactions included abduction and confinement, hitting with a blunt tool, threatening with a weapon, slashing or cutting, grabbing or restraining, and stalking or chasing. There were approximately 17 minutes of direct violence in these last 30 minutes of the film against this single character. Based on the coding approach outlined by Molitor and colleagues (Molitor & Sapolsky, 1993; Sapolsky et al., 2003), only a single violent interaction would have been coded, vastly underestimating the frequency of violence against this female character.

Gender differences were also observed in the nature of violent presentations. Contrary to past criticisms of slasher films that have asserted that women experience brutal forms of violence, the current study suggests that female characters experience less serious forms of violence than male characters. Coder ratings for both the Seriousness of Violence Depicted and Degree of Harm Depicted were significantly lower for female characters. In addition, the violent acts involving female characters were significantly less graphic, contradicting the assertion that women are brutally murdered in slasher films. Specifically, when female characters were attacked or assaulted, the violence depicted was less likely to show graphic changes or harm to the victims' bodies.

Although portrayals of violence against female characters were less serious and graphic, this study does reinforce concerns about women being frequently depicted in states of abject terror and helplessness. Violent presentations involving female victims were significantly longer in duration in slasher films as compared to interactions involving male characters. Numerous scenes in the films involved female characters being chased or stalked for significant periods of time. Similarly, depictions of more moderate forms of violence, such as confinement, were generally prolonged acts of violence that disproportionately involved female characters being forcibly held against their will and terrorized. Non-significant trends in the findings also suggest that there may be gender differences in the framing of violence and its impact. On the index measure of Graphicness of Violence, the coder ratings for both the Framing of Violence and Framing of Impact appeared higher for violent acts against female characters, suggesting that when female characters are attacked in slasher films, the camera may be more likely to offer close-ups of the attack and the victim's reaction and suffering.

Past research has also raised specific concerns about exposure to scenes that mix sexual and violent content (Clover, 1992; Linz et al., 1988; 1989). In the current study, violent presentations involving sexual aggression were infrequent, which has been reported in the past analyses of slasher films (Molitor & Sapolsky, 1993; Weaver, 1991). The concomitant presentation of sex and violence was also less frequent, yet the relative infrequency of sexual content does not necessarily refute criticisms of slasher films. The current study did not involve a comparison sample of films, a limitation of past content analyses of slasher films noted by Linz and Donnerstein (1994). In light of the absence of a comparison sample, it is inaccurate to say that sexual content or scenes of sex and violence are infrequent. However, findings in this study showed that scenes involving a juxtaposition of both violent and sexual imagery were significantly more likely to involve a female victim than scenes that only depicted violence. Simply put, when sex and violence were mixed in slasher films, the audience was more likely to see a woman as the victim.

Implications and Future Research

Given findings in the extant literature that have identified the nature or characteristics of violent presentations as a moderator of violent media effects (Huesmann & Taylor, 2006), there is a need to accurately identify the content of popular media formats such as the slasher film subgenre. The literature on sexually violent material has been largely based upon experimental research wherein film stimuli are selected on the basis of containing explicit sexually violent material (Linz et al., 1984; 1988; 1989). As stated previously, the assertion that slasher films are comprised by frequent portrayals of sex and violence had not been adequately tested. Without knowing the extent of this type of content in films, it limits the ability of researchers to generalize their findings to the entirety of a subgenre and raises questions about whether concerns over particular forms of film violence are warranted.

Results from the current study suggest that research findings from the sexually violent media literature may indeed be generalized to the slasher subgenre. Moreover, the findings from this study point to specific aspects of the violent presentations in slasher films that, when linked back to violent media effects, may be singled out as problematic. Specifically, frequent depictions of women in prolonged states of terror may reinforce traditional gender schemas of women as helpless and, as a result, may serve to normalize aggression or hostile attitudes toward women. Frequent concomitant presentations of sex and violence that primarily involve female characters may also reinforce traditional gender schemas of appropriate female sexual behaviour.

According to observational learning and social information processing theories, we attend to and encode information in our social environment that we organize into schemas or scripts, which guide our behavioural responses (Huesmann, 1988). Prolonged or repeated exposure to violent media imagery, in general, may be organized into schemas that shape attitudes about the appropriateness of aggression in particular circumstances and appropriate targets of aggression (Baron & Richardson, 1994). According to Bem's (1981; Mulac et al., 2002) gender schema theory, which outlines the cognitive framework underlying gender stereotypic roles, traditional gender schemas typically conceptualize women as more sexual, attractive, and submissive, but also as less capable and intelligent. Prolonged depictions of women in states of fear, being repeatedly stalked or assaulted, and in various states of undress, may serve to reinforce stereotypical schematic representations of women. From a gender schema theoretical perspective, the sexually violent material that comprises slasher horror films might reinforce

traditional sex-stereotypic conceptions of women (e.g., lower intelligence, sexual promiscuity), thus increasing the possibility that viewers might judge the female characters as perhaps facilitating their own demise.

Given that a great deal has been written about the nature of sexual content in slasher horror films, future research endeavours should take an opportunity to more closely examine the portrayals of women and sexuality in horror films. In her discussion of the "Final Girl", the surviving female character sometimes observed in slasher films, Clover (1992) maintained that it was the idealized virginal qualities that distinguished this female character from other non-surviving female characters. The implication that has been drawn from this observation is that female characters who defy traditional gender schemas by engaging in assertive and/or promiscuous sexual behaviour are punished in these films for their transgressions. The results that have emerged in this study show that female characters are more commonly featured in scenes involving both sexual content and the concomitant presentation of sexual and violent content. Subsequent studies could examine the portrayal of primary characters in slasher films and code and characterize these character portrayals based upon their consistency with existing gender schemas (e.g., slut/Madonna, vixen/moral, intelligent/stupid). This approach would allow researchers to investigate whether these films portray more adverse consequences for female characters who defy these traditional gender schemas.

Finally, in the current study, a large sample of films was coded and analyzed and the sampling frame from which these films were selected did include films that were released in the years following the completion of the original content analyses of slasher films. The most recent prior content analysis of slasher films conducted by Sapolsky and his colleagues (2003) included films released up to the year 1998, whereas the current study sampled films up to the year 2007. The inclusion of films released after the time period sampled by these original studies does raise the possibility that the nature of violent presentations or the frequency of sexual content has changed since these studies were conducted. For example, some research has indeed suggested that graphic violence has increased in Hollywood films over a four decade period (Shipley & Cavender, 2001).

Additional moderator analyses did not reveal any time-related changes in the observed gender differences on any of the variables measuring either the nature of violent presentations or sexual content. Only 12 films (24.0%) included in this sample were released between the years 2000 and 2007. In addition, two-thirds of the films in this sample were available for sampling when the original content analyses were conducted. Nonetheless, future studies of the portrayal of sex, violence, and gender in the media should use stratified sampling approaches.

CONCLUSION

Past criticisms of slasher films have been premised on the belief that presentations of violence involving female characters are more likely to feature graphic and eroticized violence. Such negative responses to this subgenre of horror film have gained merit in light of research illustrating that exposure to violent and non-violent sexual media can produce negative appraisals of women. Although a great deal of research has examined the effects of violent and non-violent sexual media, relatively fewer studies have identified the frequency with which this type of content is depicted in the media. The current study has filled a gap in this research

literature by improving upon previous content analyses of slasher horror films. Contrary to past conclusions, there does indeed appear to be significant differences in the nature of violence against female characters in the contentious world of the slasher film.

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[i] The following modes of violence – Self-inflicted injury, Self-inflicted injury under duress, and Post-mortem mutilation – were excluded.

[ii] In 4.2% (*n* = 44) of violent PAT-level interactions, the Degree of Harm or consequences of violent acts were not depicted onscreen. These interactions were excluded from the independent-samples *t*-test analysis.

[iii] In 14.7% (*n* = 156) of violent PAT-level interactions, the violent act was only implied and not directly depicted on screen. These interactions were excluded from the independent-samples *t*-test analysis.