

Taste

A Supporting Exegesis

River Lily Lancaster

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Communications (2026)

Abstract

Taste is a practice-based research project asking the question “How can the traditional tropes of the slasher-horror genre be reconstructed to support a feminist viewpoint?” Taste explores this question through a gender-swapped exploration of the traditional slasher-horror screen-writing formula that exposes the genre's misogyny and assumptions of female sexuality. The research centres around a short film guided by Judith Butler's theory of Gender Performance, subversion and parody of masculinity.

Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to acknowledge my supervisor, Patrick Usmar. Thank you for supporting me through this research and believing in me and my ideas even when I wanted to quit repeatedly.

A huge thank you to James, my partner. Your determination in completing your own goals inspires me every day. I couldn't have done this without you believing in me every step of the way.

And to my lovely friend Riley, your constant support means everything.

Table of Contents

Attestation of Authorship	4
Research Question	5
How to interact with this study	5
1. Introduction.....	5
Research Question.....	6
2. Literature Review	7
2.1 An Introduction to the Slasher horror genre and its place in feminist text	7
2.2 The rise of Anti-Feminist culture and the reality of the patriarchal system	9
2.3 Gender performance and Parody.....	11
2.4 Screen Writing and Fiction as Research	12
3. Research Design and Methodology	13
4. Critical Discussion.....	14
4.1 A Reflection on Internalised Misogyny	14
4.2 How can feminists reconstruct the Slasher horror genre?.....	16
5. Limitations of study	17
6. Conclusion	17
References.....	19

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'River Lily Lancaster', written in a cursive style.

River Lily Lancaster

Research Question

How can the traditional tropes of the slasher-horror genre be reconstructed to support a feminist viewpoint?

How to interact with this study

It is recommended that the creative research artefact is read first, followed by a reading of the exegesis. This allows the reader to enter the world of the research, then understand the reasoning and origins behind it.

1. Introduction

As a horror enthusiast and a feminist, I have always had a moral dilemma about how my two biggest interests clash so significantly. I have been both a feminist and a horror enthusiast since my young teens; picture a 12-year-old dressed in black head to toe arguing with the teacher that it was sexist to say she needed a strong boy to lift the chairs after assembly. That 12-year-old would be me.

Throughout my teens I always felt a strong pull to darker aesthetics, horror books, and films as well as true-crime internet content. As soon as I turned 16, I raced to audition to be an actor at Spookers, one of New Zealand's most famous haunted house attractions. It was there where I got to experience firsthand the horror of being a woman in distress. As I stood there, covered in blood, half my face ripped off, screaming bloody murder, I watched as men of all ages laughed at me, grabbed at me, and sexualised me. Although we both knew it was fake, I was alarmed at their reactions. When I tried the next night, to play a “scarier” role of a killer, I was further sexualised by the men that came through the attraction. I found that no matter what role I played, a dominant killer or a submissive victim there was no escaping the sexualisation of being a woman covered in blood.



Spookers Makeup, 2019, age 17



First night at Spookers, 2018, age 16



Spookers Makeup, 2019, age 17

Figure 1: *Three images of researcher in horror makeup, supplied by researcher.*

After working at Spookers, I was no longer interested in true-crime content. I realised that the commodification of true crime and the fanfare that followed victims and their killers was distasteful and harmful. But I could not shake my interest in horror films. Horror does such a wonderful job of reflecting

back to us the fears of a society at the time and breaking down the darker sides of humanity. I felt that if the content were fictional then it could not be harmful.

As I continued my research into the genre throughout my undergraduate degree in film, I realised that this was not true at all. The media we consume plays such a vital role in how people perceive other groups of people and guides people towards certain belief systems with media being fed to us by algorithms we tend to only see one perspective unless we actively seek out another (Hu & Ou, 2025; Metzler & Garcia, 2023). I am extremely concerned about the current far-right, Incel (involuntary celibate), alpha-male and tradwife (traditional wife) perspective that is being fed to young people and that is a central motivation for this research.

My belief is that we must use and reconstruct existing media tropes from a feminist perspective while still maintaining the standard formulas of the genre as to not alienate the existing audience. Minority groups are using horror to create strong political messaging, allowing these groups to feel a sense of unity and empowerment (Liu, 2020; Poulou, 2017). These films allow a release for minorities vengeful anger towards their oppressors. Vengeful anger does not create change, but it does need a release (Elshout et al., 2015; van Doorn, 2018). I believe media is where this anger can be explored and released so minorities can harness useful anger and empowerment to create stable change. We cannot take the violence out of horror films; we can write it from a different perspective.

This research seeks to not only reconstruct the slasher horror genre but to reclaim women's voice in media. Creating a counter narrative against this black mark of the horror genre's history allows women to move forward with dignity and resistance.

Research Question

This research questions how the slasher-horror genre can be reconstructed to reflect a feminist viewpoint. For the entirety of its existence slasher-horror has been deemed anti-feminist due to its violence and sexualisation of women (C. Clover, 1992; Hernández-Santaolalla & Raya, 2021; Welsh, 2009), but that doesn't have to be the case. Slasher-horror films can become feminist texts. The research artefact explores this possibility through the gender swapping of the main character tropes of the genre, exposing the potential for feminist reclamation.

Significance of Study

In a time of rising right-wing anti-feminist rhetoric ideas presented in the media aimed at young men (C. Baker et al., 2024; Gerrand et al., 2025; Rollano et al., 2026; Scott, 2025), it is essential to create media that subverts audiences' expectations and requires them to think critically about traditional gendered norms and tropes in the media they consume. By luring an audience in with the promise of a traditional slasher formula and then swapping the gender roles, it exposes the audience to new ideas and different perceptions

of femininity. Reconstructing traditional media tropes and creating a counter narrative encourages audiences to think critically about the media they consume and how it applies to real life.

2. Literature Review

2.1 An Introduction to the Slasher horror genre and its place in feminist text

Slasher films have been a hotly debated topic in feminist academic spaces since the genre's early conception (Bachmann et al., 2025a; C. Clover, 1992; C. J. Clover, 1987; Cowan & O'Brien, 1990; Hernández-Santaolalla & Raya, 2022; Wellman et al., 2021; Welsh, 2010). *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960) in 1960 led to the slasher genre as we know it in the early 1970s, with films like *Halloween* (Craven, 1978) and *Black Christmas* (Clark, 1974). Slasher films are often defined by their formulaic structure (Kvaran, 2016; Welsh, 2010); A killer, who is almost always a man, hunts down a group of teenagers or young adults and picks them off one by one (Hernández-Santaolalla & Raya, 2021; Kvaran, 2016; Wee, 2006a). The killer always uses either his hands or some sort of phallic murder instrument such as a knife to do the killing, never a gun (C. Clover, 1992; Kvaran, 2016; Rockoff, 2016). The setting is often a small town or a camp, a place where teenagers often hang out and one that feels familiar to the genre's mostly adolescent audience (Kvaran, 2016). The final part of the formula is the most controversial of all in feminist literature. The final girl.

The final girl is the sole survivor of a slasher film; she prevails through all the horror (C. Clover, 1992). The final girl is present in numerous Slasher films, *Halloween* (Craven, 1978), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974) and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Craven, 1984) are some of the most notable from the genre. The final girl narrowly escapes the killer repeatedly while simultaneously watching her friends be brutally murdered, or stumbling across their corpses. The final girl is pure and virginal; she is often shown as smart or nerdy and is the first one to notice that something is not quite right (C. Clover, 1992; Kvaran, 2016; Rockoff, 2016). The final girl is the opposite of her peers who engage in pre-marital sex, drinking, and drug taking. The final girl does not associate herself with this delinquent behaviour and this is her saving grace (C. Clover, 1992; Welsh, 2009, 2010). The final girl represents the 1970s Western societal idea of the ideal woman. She is chaste, intelligent, and innocently beautiful. This fits well with the slasher film's message to its adolescent audience; if you misbehave, there will be consequences (Kvaran, 2016). This messaging, although aimed at all delinquent behaviours, especially applies when it comes to women's sexuality; any women seen kissing, having sex or dressing provocatively were destined to meet a gruesome end, likely half naked (Bachmann et al., 2025; Welsh, 2010).

Content analysis studies have addressed the gender inequality of the genre and found that men are killed just as frequently as women are (Cowan & O'Brien, 1990; Weaver, 1991). So why the big fuss? It is all about the context. When men are murdered in slasher films, they put up a fight but are killed quickly and with little struggle (Welsh, 2009). Women on the other hand are killed slowly, often running away which extends their torture and inevitable end (Kvaran, 2016; Welsh, 2009). Not only are women's murder scenes

drawn out but they are shot differently (Mulvey, 1975). Women's murders are shot with intimate camera shots (closeups, extreme close ups, handheld camera shots) from the killer's perspective, forcing the audience to view the killing from a sadistic voyeuristic perspective (Hernández-Santaolalla & Raya, 2021; Mulvey, 1975). Women's murder scenes are also the only ones that are likely to include sexual content (Welsh, 2009). *Peeping Tom* (Powell, 1960) is one of the first films to take on this voyeuristic point of view. The film itself follows a man who brutally murders women and films their last horrified expressions; these scenes are shown from the man's perspective, as if the viewer is committing the act themselves (Hawthorn, 2003). Audiences found the film so disturbing at the time that it essentially ruined director Michael Powell's career until Martin Scorsese rediscovered the film and staged its restoration in 2023 (Concannon, 2019).

Studies find that even with the genre's gruesome treatment of women, women still enjoy watching slasher films (Kvaran, 2016; Nowell, 2011; Wee, 2006). Despite the final girls' inadequacies as a feminist icon, for decades she was some of the only representation at the time of a woman in a protagonist role (C. Clover, 1992). The final girl, although confined by her purity, was represented as strong and intelligent, something that was not seen often in other genres in the 1980s, with the exception of romance (Nowell, 2011).

This research is driven by the possibility of creating a feminist counter-narrative in the slasher genre. In my research artefact I explore how we can create feminist representation and maintain the genre's key elements while not subjecting women to violence and sexual torture.

Horror is said to reflect the times in that you can look back at a horror film from a certain era and understand how society was functioning at that point in time (Sarti et al., 2025; Siodmak & Scannell, 2022; White, 2023). Kvaran (2016) argues in her socioeconomic analysis of slasher films that the slasher genre not only represents society's fear of serial killers and promiscuous teen culture, but it also represents the socioeconomic state of the world at that point in time. During the height of the slasher genre's popularity in the 1980s there was extreme economic hardship in lower-income areas in the United States (Kvaran, 2016; White, 2023). Kvaran (2016) states that slasher films resonated with adolescent audiences afraid of coming into adulthood in these trying times by providing them with a form of cathartic release. Slasher films were easy and cheap to make; the formulaic structure allowed studios to produce them quickly and on a low budget (Kvaran, 2016). The films that were successful were remade over and over again as sequels; There are five sequels to the original *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Craven, 1984) as well as two spin offs *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* (Craven, 1994) and *Freddy vs Jason* (R. Yu, 2003) as well as a 2010 remake (Bayer, 2010).

The slasher genre tapered off into the late 80s (Kvaran, 2016), with a slight revival in the mid-1990s with Craven's *Scream* (1996) franchise (Wee, 2006). It was not until the late-2000s that the genre took off again (Wee, 2006). Studios began to remake a series of cult classic slasher films, with *Halloween* (Zombie, 2007) being remade in 2007 and its sequel the following year *Friday the 13th* (Nispel, 2009) remade in 2009 and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Bayer, 2010) remade in 2010. This series of remakes coincides with the

2008 global financial crisis and recession; a time of extreme uncertainty. According to renowned horror director, Wes Craven, “Horror films don’t create fear, they release it” (Geraets & Barnes, 2021, para 1), supporting Kvaran’s (2016) assertion that in times of hardship and uncertainty, people turn to a familiar release.

This idea of horror releasing fear is more relevant than ever in contemporary times. Following the Covid-19 pandemic, horror has had a dramatic increase in popularity and critical acclaim (Richardson, 2020). Although slasher films have not reached the popularity they had in the 1980s, they have enjoyed a revival with the newest collection of *Scream* (Williamson, 2026) films and *X* (West, 2022). Horror as a genre has reached new heights of mainstream media with new “must watch” horror films screening regularly (Chmielewski, 2025). Contemporary horror is being used as a vessel for political statements (Pavlov, 2019). Films such as *The Substance* (Fargeat, 2024), *The Platform* (Gaztelu-Urrutia, 2019), *Sinners* (Coogler, 2025) use horror to address issues such as racism, feminism and capitalism, and they resonate with large audiences (Richardson, 2020). In a time of late-stage capitalism when inequality and class divide is at high levels, people are turning to the media for a release and escapism (Avanceña et al., 2021),

With Aotearoa New Zealand’s cost-of-living crisis, arts funding is being cut dramatically (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2026). Artists are turning to making independent, self-funded work, or using crowd-funding sources such as Boosted which reflects how the slasher genre came to be in the 1970s. *Halloween* (Craven, 1978) was made independently and it turned into a genre-defining work. Mirroring that, the newly released New Zealand stoner-slasher horror film *The Weed Eaters* (Devlin, 2025) was created by a group of five independent filmmakers, on a budget of \$19,000 (Chapman, 2025).

I believe contemporary horror’s renaissance makes 2026 the perfect time to delve into the feminist reconstruction of the slasher genre. With the rise of political commentary in contemporary horror (Pavlov, 2019) audiences expect films to have strong messaging. Audiences desire films with political and moral messaging, not only to help them feel understood, but to help them make sense of the world and political happenings around them (Ruiz, 2025; Smith-Richardson, 2025). In her opinion article on the rise of horror Corry (Corry, 2026, para 9) adequately sums up the 2026 revival of horror “Earlier horror films were asking, “What is coming for us?”, but today they ask, “What are we already trapped inside?””

2.2 The rise of Anti-Feminist culture and the reality of the patriarchal system

Anti-feminist culture (colloquially known as the manosphere) is on the rise, and it has become a popular talking point in mainstream media due to Louis Theroux’s Netflix documentary *Inside the Manosphere* (Theroux, 2026). The manosphere is a subsection of the internet made up of men's rights activists, self-proclaimed and aspiring “alpha-males”, pick-up artists and incels (Rollano et al., 2026; Scott, 2025). Many men in the manosphere believe that women gaining equal rights is a threat to their own rights as men (Rollano et al., 2026). Popular manosphere influencers have created online platforms where they share their views of masculinity, what it is to be a man and how they expect women to behave to their

almost cult-like followers (Theroux, 2026). Young men are fed this content via internet algorithms, regardless of whether they seek it out or not (C. Baker et al., 2024).

Data clearly shows that women outperform men academically throughout all years of education in the Western world (Crowther & Briant, 2022; Fortin et al., 2013; Nordin & Stanfors, 2024; van Hek et al., 2016). As a result, they are taking jobs in high-paying fields at a rate not seen before; a 2022 UK based study even found that the gender pay gap had reversed for people of the same socioeconomic group aged 16-24, with women earning more than men (Centre for Social Justice, 2025). Due to the increase in women's financial freedom and higher levels of education they no longer require men to provide for them financially the way previous generations did (Foster & Foster, 2011; Goel & Arora, 2026; Shivani Pandey, 2024). Despite this growth in women's independence in the Western world, society's patriarchal structures remain worldwide (Agarwal & Somji, 2026; Andersen & Frøslev-Thomsen, 2026; Baron & Barrow, 2026; Daskalopoulou & Gurrieri, 2026; O'Donnell, 2026; Schulz et al., 2025; UN Women Australia, 2020; University of Waikato, 2026).

Women's rights that were fought for and obtained only a few decades ago are being threatened and, in some countries, removed completely. In June of 2022, the US Supreme Court overturned *Roe v Wade*, which had protected women's constitutional right to abortion for more than 50 years (Berg & Woods, 2023). Abortion is now illegal in 13 states, and 28 states have abortion bans based on gestational duration, some as little as 6 weeks, a period where most women do not even know they are pregnant (Berg & Woods, 2023; Guttmacher Institute, 2026). In 93 countries abortion on request is illegal (Focus 2030, 2026). If a woman is impregnated and does not want to continue with the pregnancy, she must do so, travel to a place where abortion is legal or risk facing serious infection or death due to unsafe illegal abortions (Kheyfets et al., 2023; M. Yu, 2024.) In other parts of the world woman rights are still at dire levels of restriction. In 2% of countries married, pregnant and parenting women's access to education is limited within the legislative framework (UNESCO, 2022). In 2021 Afghanistan banned secondary and higher education for woman. Women are banned from showing their faces, speaking in public, accessing medial or government care or even leaving the house without a male present, essentially erasing women from public life (UN Women Australia, 2020; UNESCO, 2024)

While men following the manosphere are being told that women's rights are threatening their own, it is clear that is not the case (Agarwal & Somji, 2026; Daskalopoulou & Gurrieri, 2026; Rouquette, 2025; Schulz et al., 2025). Women's rights are being taken away frequently (Guttmacher Institute, 2026; Kheyfets et al., 2023; UN Women Australia, 2020; UNESCO, 2024) and while groups western middle-class women may have obtained some freedom in the way of higher education and financial stability, we are still living within the patriarchy (Agarwal & Somji, 2026; Andersen & Frøslev-Thomsen, 2026; Baron & Barrow, 2026; O'Donnell, 2026; Schulz et al., 2025; University of Waikato, 2026). My research artefact exposes this reality. By switching the gendered roles of the script and confronting violence afflicted on women in the slasher-horror genre I aim to expose the reality of the fear that women live with every day.

2.3 Gender performance and Parody

Gender performance is the theory that gender is not a biological destiny, it is a series of learned behaviours that have changed and adapted to society's perception of "Female" and "Male" over time (Butler, 1990). Performance of one's gender such as girls liking pink and boys liking blue is a learned behaviour and has nothing to do with one's assigned biological sex. Stoller (1968) was the first to identify the distinction between sex and gender; sex being the chromosomes and sexual characteristics one has and gender being the sense of knowing to which sex one belongs (Stoller, 1968). This idea of the separation of sex and gender has been largely accepted by feminists since its origin (Mikkola, 2008).

Judith Butler further expanded on this idea in her work, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity* (Butler, 1990). Butler argues that gender is a performance; we are not male or female, we are performing repeated masculine or feminine acts that over time create the illusion of a stable gender identity (Butler, 1990, 2011). Many queer and transgender individuals found themselves in a disagreement with Butler's take on gender stability, claiming that they did in fact have a stable gender identity, not just an illusion of one (Schep, 2009; Schiapponi, 2024). In an interview with *The Guardian* (Gleeson, 2021), Butler states that *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 1990) was meant to be a "critique of heterosexual assumptions within feminism, but it turned out to be more about gender categories" (Gleeson, 2021, para 1). Butler believes that to secure better futures for women we must rethink what woman means and this means including transgender individuals. She goes on to say that sex is something that is assigned to us at birth and most people never challenge this assignment, but for those who do, they should take power over assignment "We can take over the power of assignment, make it into self-assignment, which can include sex reassignment at a legal and medical level" (Gleeson, 2021, para 7). In a subsequent work, *Bodies that Matter* (Butler, 2011), Butler goes on to clarify her gender-performance theory stating that there is an oppressive dimension to gender performativity; one does not "choose" what gender they perform as, we do so because we are compelled by the oppressive regimes of power and social discourse (Butler, 2011).

Butler explores the idea of parody and subversion in the media to dismantle these gender performances. Parody in Butler's terms refers to performing a certain gender performance to a dramatic extent so that the gender performance becomes the joke. Drag kings often use this parody of extreme masculinity in their performances to gain reactions and laughs from the audience (Aragón Varo, 2013). This parody is also used in the film *Ladies first* (Sharrock, 2026) and is controversially explored in both the *American Psycho* book (Ellis, 1991) and film (Harron, 2000).

This idea of gender performance and parody was foundational in my research. The central characters of the slasher genre, the killer and his victims are dramatic performances of gender. The killer's victims are often young, beautiful, sexually liberated women and the killer is overly masculine, often large, and unmistakably male (C. Clover, 1992; Hernández-Santaolalla & Raya, 2021; Welsh, 2009, 2010). Both are

performing their gender to extremes. In my artefact I used parody to reveal the humour in the slasher genre's extreme gender performances by gender swapping each essential character but maintaining their typical trope within the genre. This allowed me to experiment with a feminist viewpoint of the genre without disrupting the genre's traditional formula.

2.4 Screen Writing and Fiction as Research

Screenwriting is a newly accepted form of academic research (Batty & Baker, 2017). As opposed to prose or poetry, screenwriting had to spend years proving itself as a relevant and usable research method (Batty & Baker, 2017). This has a lot to do with the structural and formulaic writing of a script. It was believed from an academic perspective that this structured way of writing inhibited creativity (D. J. Baker, 2016). A finished script was also seen as only half of the final product with many not considering a script a finished piece of work until it was performed and produced (Batty & Baker, 2017). In response to this special issue 19 of *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, 'Scriptwriting as Creative Writing Research', presented a series of completed screen pieces for the stage and screen under the rubric of verifiable research outputs (D. Baker et al., 2013) Baker argues in this text that academic screenwriting differs strongly from its commercial counterpart (D. J. Baker, 2016) Academic Screenwriting is informed by the researcher's knowledge on an idea rather than commercial demands or the expectations of a wider audience (D. Baker et al., 2013).

Ted Nannicelli argues in his book *A Philosophy of the Screenplay* (2013) that scripts can and should be understood as pieces of literature that are finished by themselves and can be read as such. Nannicelli states "Our screenplay concept has changed over time, that we are now in an historical moment when some screenplays are complete, autonomous works. (Nannicelli, 2013 p.135). Screenplays are now a relatively common form of creative research with many creating screenplays for master and PhD-level studies (Batty & Holbrook, 2025).

Fiction as research has a long history (Leavy, 2022). Many renowned researchers use their findings to create fictional pieces, such as Jenna Blum whose research into holocaust survivors' oral stories lead her to writing her two best-selling novels, *Those who save us* (2004) and *The lost Family* (2018). Blum's research work gave her the knowledge to write moving and realistic portrayals of characters and events in those stories creating a sickening sense of empathy and horror in the readers. Research based fiction allows us to gain access to different social worlds and re-examine them (Leavy, 2022)

The idea of a fictional screenplay as a research artefact was appealing to me as a filmmaker and screenwriter by trade. The method of screenwriting allowed me to experiment with Judith Butler's theory of gender performance and parody in a way I felt was still relevant to the heart of my research of the feminist reclamation of slasher horror. It allowed me access to a new world where the media allows women to behave as men do and allows them to get away with it.

3. Research Design and Methodology

This research is a creative-practice-based study. Practice-based research is defined as research where the researcher must make a creative artefact in order to explore the research question (Candy, 2006). In this study I used screenwriting as my tool to explore and answer my research questions. Screenwriting was used to deconstruct and parody the misogynistic tendencies of the slasher film genre.

I began with my research question and identified the key literature and findings that already existed within the field. I then hypothesised many different outcomes and directions the film could go in. I experimented with several storylines before deciding on the final outcome. Each plotline that was experimented with led me closer to the plotline used for the final screenplay. I then reflected on the process and my findings to answer my research questions.

To experiment within the genre to find my desired outcome I used the main conventions of the genre, such as the final girl and the brutal penetrative stabbing scenes (C. Clover, 1992; Welsh, 2009) and gender swapped them to subvert audience expectations and create a parody of the genre, essentially following Judith Butler's theory on Gender performance and parody (Butler, 1990, 2011). Butler explores the idea of parody destabilizing gender by repeating gendered norms in a comic excess, revealing masculinity and femininity for what they are, gendered performances. I used this parody theory as a basis for my script writing. I found gender swapping to be the best form of parody in this genre as the character tropes are so stereotypically gendered that swapping them changed the feel and the message of the story drastically.

The writing process was constantly changing and adapting as I read more literature and gained more knowledge in the field. I began the process by writing down the key character tropes of the slasher genre (C. Clover, 1992; Kvaran, 2016; Rockoff, 2016);

- Revenge based killer backstory
- The final girl
- The sexually promiscuous girl (who is killed first)
- Hero (The man that steps in to save the final girl)
- Hot girl with little dialogue who dies a gruesome death

I took these tropes and gender swapped them. The “final girl” is Cameron, a naive young man who means well but never takes any action. The “sexually promiscuous girl” is Louis, who jokes about naked women being tortured and eagerly allows himself to be blindfolded and tied up in the promise of sex which ends up being a fatal mistake. The “revenge-based killers” are two young women who have had enough of being ridiculed and talked down to for their feminist ideas and turn to violence to give the men a taste of fear. The “Hot girl with little dialogue who dies a gruesome death” is Luke, a side character with around two

lines and a brutal throat stabbing and finally the “hero” is an older woman who works as a DOC ranger and threatens to take out the girls with her hunting gun.

I then took these gendered tropes and placed them in the environment of a slasher film. Slasher films typically (but not always) happen in an isolated area. I placed the characters in a familiar New Zealand Department of Conservation camping ground, drinking wine and messing around.

When creating these characters, I took great care to make sure they had differentiated voices. The character tropes are essential to the genre, and they each have a stereotypical voice associated with them. I read each line aloud to myself, acting out each character and adjusting when necessary. The practice of reading and acting each line aloud while writing and rewriting it until it felt natural helped to create a steady flow and natural feel to the dialogue. I made the deliberate decision to include swearing and Kiwi colloquialisms to allow the characters to fit in with the film's contemporary themes and characters.

I chose to create a short-film script as it allowed me to write within the time limitations of the study while still maintaining my key ideas at a high quality. The script is 12 pages, around 15 minutes with action included which is the upper limit for a short film in most short film festival circuits (Kerven, 2013). The choice to write a short film as opposed to a feature length film allowed me to create a quality piece of work that was adequately thought through and closely related to the literature I had studied.

4. Critical Discussion

4.1 A Reflection on Internalised Misogyny

This screenplay had many iterations as I worked through the complexities of writing a piece of feminist parody media. I had to write and rewrite as I delved deeper into feminist theory. While doing so I was challenged to dismantle my own internalised misogyny. My brain held on to misogynistic ideas from a life lived as a woman within a patriarchal system. I felt uncomfortable expressing strong negative emotions in my work for the fear of being labelled crazy or hysterical, like Levi is in *Taste* when she shares her feelings about the misogyny of the genre. Writing and researching for this piece forced me to address these ideas from a critical perspective.

The screenplay works to flip the gendered tropes of the traditional slasher-genre formula, creating a lot of female-incited violence. I couldn't stop asking myself, “Why would she resort to violence like this?” It felt crude and unnecessary to resort to violence over something that could just be a hard conversation. I found it hard to suspend my disbelief that something so simple would drive a woman to kill someone so violently. When explaining this issue to my (romantic) partner one night, feeling frustrated with writer's block and the inability to allow myself to write such a violent woman my partner said, “Well isn't that the whole point of your research?”

Men commit acts of violence so frequently in films that it is barely questioned (Ahmed & Elledge, 2023). How often do films start with a shootout scene or a violent kidnapping or a fight? Is it ever hard to believe a man would participate in violence without reason? I had to fight deeply with my internalised misogyny on standards of acceptable behaviour for women. Violence isn't acceptable behaviour for anyone but due to women's positioning in society as "weak and submissive" as well as "motherly and nurturing" it feels wrong to picture a woman taking a life or initiating graphic violence in film without dismantling your own patriarchal standards for how a woman should behave.

During my research I read the novel *The Power* (Alderman, 2016). In the world of the novel, young women have gained the ability to electrocute others by touch; this electrocution can even be fatal. These women did not gain liberation through equality but rather a switch of the traditional power dynamic. Women are suddenly the dangerous and violent half of society; therefore, they hold all the power. The women seize this power and use it to initiate great harm and, in many cases, the sexual abuse of men. In the end society is reformed to a patriarchal structure with women holding all positions of power and men are dismissed as the inferior gender.

I read *The Power* (Alderman, 2016) at the same time as my mother. My mother is a feminist but growing up in the 1980s and 1990s she has fewer radical views on feminism than I. When we discussed the book, she found the violence and sexual abuse to be unbelievable. She simply could not imagine women acting that way if they came into great power. I found this book to be a reflection of the current media landscape. Media is being used as a cathartic release for minorities to shed their anger at oppressive powers, especially in the horror genre (Corry, 2026; Ruiz, 2025; Smith-Richardson, 2025). Films such as *Parasite*, (Ho Joon, 2019) *Sinners* (Coogler, 2025), and Aotearoa film *Mārama* (Stappard, 2025) demonstrate minorities' anger towards their oppressors. Mirroring how slasher-horror was used as a cathartic release for adolescents in the 1980s as they feared reaching adulthood into an unstable climate (Kvaran, 2016; White, 2023). Horror is now being used as a cathartic release for minorities to release their anger (Griffin, 2026; Jesudason, 2017; Liu, 2020; Poulou, 2017). This kind of vengeful anger is not helpful or good for us, but many feel it must be released to move past it to create real systemic change (Elshout et al., 2015; van Doorn, 2018). This is where we can use media as a tool for this release and ultimately a tool for resistance.

History has largely erased images of angry and violent women's resistance or labelled them as mad or hysterical (Brown, 2021; Lewis, 2020; Tasca et al., 2012). The images of women pipe bombing cars and hunger striking in prisons during the suffragette movement have been pasted over with images of peaceful marches and badges with ribbons (Buonsanti, 2023; Lewis, 2020; Winsor, 1914). This concept of the angry women has become relevant in contemporary media with films such as *The Substance* (Fargeat, 2024) exploring ideas of youth, femininity and patriarchy's overall effects on women.

To challenge the internalised misogyny living inside of me I chose to embrace this feminine rage in my research and my screenwriting. To believe that women cannot behave violently or as evilly is to dismiss their strength and rage and to put women back into the soft, weak and nurturing stereotype that has followed them for centuries (Broemer & Grabowski, 2018). To create media that celebrates the rage and the possibility of evil is to celebrate women for all that they are and allows for a necessary release for the vengeful feelings towards the patriarchal oppressors. If men can be adored cult classic killers such as Jason, Freddy Kruger and Michael Myers why can't women?

4.2 How can feminists reconstruct the Slasher horror genre?

The slasher-horror genre lends itself to strong messaging and already has an established audience of both men and women. In my choice to explore this feminist reconstruction through the theory of parody and subversion (Butler, 1990). I found that gender swapping the central characters of killer and final girl allowed me to change the genre's messaging and treatment of women without changing the fundamental formula of the genre that people love so much.

I found that by swapping the traditional roles of the genre I was able to uncover the genres' ability to parody common misogyny. For example, I took sayings such as "You're being hysterical" and "She was asking for it" that are typically used when women experience strong emotions or types of abuse and gave them to my female character, Levi, to say after committing a serious act of violence. This reversal of stereotypical sayings exposes the hypocrisy behind them and men's disregard of women's emotions and experiences. I found that adding an example of the misogyny being used casually by Louis in the beginning of the story e.g.; "I'm sick of Levi's feminist hysterics" when Levi pointed out the very valid point of sexism within the slasher-horror genre, made these later comments even more poignant.

I used the traditional trope of a "strong man" saving a young woman right at the last moment. This was famously used in the Slasher genre in *Halloween* (Craven, 1978) when the police officer that has unsuccessfully been hunting the killer bursts in at the last second, saves the girl and takes all the credit. This was replicated by having a strong female character, who is only seen once before, burst in at the end and save Cameron, our final boy from his fate.

To further solidify the possibility of reconstructing the slasher horror genre to represent a feminist viewpoint, I began the film with a stereotypical slasher- horror formula. A small, feminine, half-dressed woman is being hunted by a large, hulking man. The police officer bursts in to save her last minute, knocking the killer out of the window, but when they go to look for the killer he is nowhere to be seen. It turns out it was all a story shared around a campfire by our male character Louis. Levi points out the ridiculousness and misogyny of the genre and is met with hostile energy from the boys, which is untimely the reason for their own deaths mirroring those of the film before but gender-swapped.

I found this gender swapping use of parody allowed me to create a counter narrative of the genre and explore the possibilities of its feminist form. Films such as *Ladies first* (Sharrock, 2026) have explored

this use of swapping of gender roles to create a counter narrative and expose society's gross mistreatment of women. I found doing this within a genre that experiences extreme discourse and controversy in the feminist academic world gave this swapping of gender roles and power dynamics an even stronger message.

In a time where anti-feminist ideals are on the rise in our youth, with young men consuming the content of Andrew Tate, a famous manosphere influencer who believes that women are inferior to men and should be treated as property (Theroux, 2026; UN Women Australia, 2020), it is crucial that media is created to counter this harmful narrative; especially in genres that have traditionally perpetrated harmful stereotypes against women (C. Clover, 1992; Hernández-Santaolalla & Raya, 2021; Welsh, 2010).

5. Limitations of study

This study is limited by the academic resources available. Studies on contemporary movements such as the manosphere, contemporary female rage and contemporary horror are limited as these ideas are newly emerging, rapidly evolving, and have yet to be studied in depth by multiple scholars.

This study is also limited by the subjectivity of art and feminism; not all people will view this as a feminist reclamation. Despite my research and my belief in intersectional feminism, my worldview is limited by my experience of feminism as a privileged Pakeha woman. Further studies would be required by researchers of all ethnicities to create a successful intersectional feminist piece of slasher work.

6. Conclusion

We know in the 21st century how influential media is. The media we consume, online, in films, in video games affects how we see the world and treat those around us (Arias, 2019; Happer & Philo, 2013). The slasher-horror genre traditionally treated women as objects to sexualise and torture (Bachmann et al., 2025; Clover, 1992). This research seeks to claim the genre and reconstruct it as a feminist piece of media, to erase the black mark that has followed the "anti-feminist" genre for decades (Clover, 1992). *Taste* explores this idea through Judith Butlers Gender performance in parody and subversion by gender-swapping the main character tropes.

I found during the process of writing *Taste* that gender-swapping these stereotypically gendered tropes reveals them for what they are, harmful and distasteful and in some cases ridiculous. When Levi tells Louis he is being hysterical after stabbing him in the mouth. In *Taste* we see Levis comment as obviously incorrect and harmful; in reality, this phrase is used often towards women when they are reacting to abuse or harm inflicted by men. *Taste* not only seeks to reveal and reconstruct the genres misogynistic tropes, but it also seeks to release women's vengeful anger against their oppressors in a safe and entertaining way.

The current political and environmental climate feels so out of control, people feel as if they have no power and are stuck in a constant loop of capitalism (Bettache, 2026; Castaneda, 2023). Media allows people an escape and a release of these feelings (Sopčić & Musil, 2020). We may not be able to attack our

oppressors in real life, but we can experience how it would feel through media, a much safer alternative. The experience of creating *Taste* and the research that supports it leads me to believe that this vengeance rage-based media is an essential release, if we can experience cathartic release in media, we can regulate our anger and turn it into power in the way of effective protest against oppressors.

The slasher-horror genre can be reconstructed through a feminist viewpoint. If we re-write the genre to put women in positions of power and allow them to challenge stereotypical beliefs of how women should act, we can use the slasher-horror genre to empower women. By creating media that allows women to release their vengeful negative anger through media and use the remaining anger and empowerment to advocate for systemic change in real life. Further studies are required to explore the expansive and diverse use of the slasher-horror genre. Due to the subjectivity of art and feminism the research questions will have a plethora of answers, but that is what allows us to grow as artists and allows for the mass reconstruction of the genre, removing the historical black mark on the slasher-horror genre and allowing it to reach its full potential of feminist messaging.

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