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Jennifer's Body: A Horror in Bad Marketing

Bachelor's thesis in Film studies

Supervisor: Julia Leyda

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Summary:

Jennifer's Body is a 2009 horror-comedy directed by Karyn Kusama. At its initial release the film received unfavorable reviews criticizing its narrative, dialogue, and acting. Nearly ten years later in 2018 *Jennifer's Body* was classified as a cult classic. My aim in this analysis is to further understand both what led to its failed release and its later revival.

My method in this analysis was understanding who the film's intended audience was, and who it was marketed towards. Furthermore, I studied the sociocultural context of the film's release and revival. Thus my analysis is divided into four sections: 1. target audience of the film versus the marketing. 2. The film's reception and film critics within Hollywood. 3. The rape-revenge genre. 4. Feminism.

The results indicate that the initial failed reception stemmed from bad marketing and misunderstood depictions and portrayals in the film. Additionally, the later revival was largely due to the effect the #MeToo movement had on the rape-revenge genre, and fourth-wave feminism's understanding of sexual violence.

Sammendrag:

"Jennifer's Body" er en skrekk-komedie fra 2009 regissert av Karyn Kusama. Ved den opprinnelige utgivelsen mottok filmen negative anmeldelser som kritiserte dens narrativ, dialog og skuespill. Nesten ti år senere, i 2018, ble "Jennifer's Body" klassifisert som en kultklassiker. Målet mitt med denne analysen er å forstå nærmere hva som førte til dens mislykkede utgivelse og senere gjenoppstandelse.

Metoden min i denne analysen var å forstå hvem filmens tiltenkte publikum var, og hvem den ble markedsført mot. Videre studerte jeg den sosio-kulturelle konteksten for filmens utgivelse og gjenoppstandelse. Derfor er analysen min delt inn i fire seksjoner: 1. målgruppen for filmen versus markedsføringen. 2. Filmens mottakelse og filmkritikere innenfor Hollywood. 3. Voldtekt-hevn-sjangeren. 4. Feminisme.

Resultatene indikerer at den opprinnelige mislykkede mottakelsen skyldtes dårlig markedsføring og misforståtte framstillinger i filmen. I tillegg var den senere gjenoppstandelsen i stor grad på grunn av #MeToo-bevegelsens effekt på voldtekt-hevn-sjangeren og fjerde bølge feminisismens forståelse av seksuell vold.

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Word count: 5204

1. Intro

Jennifer's Body is a 2009 horror-comedy directed by Karyn Kusama, written by Diablo Cody, and starred by Megan Fox and Amanda Seyfried. The film depicts Megan Fox as main character Jennifer, a high school royalty, who becomes possessed by a demonic force after a botched virginal satanic sacrifice. The film contains two main plot points: the demonic possession of Jennifer and her killing of boys, and the complicated relationship between Jennifer and her best friend Needy, played by Amanda Seyfried. At the film's release it received unfavorable reviews calling out its unnatural dialogue, lack of narrative, and Fox's acting. Nearly ten years later, in 2018, the film gained a new audience and is now classified as a cult classic. This begs the questions: what was different in 2018 that made the film a success in contrast to 2009? This paper will study the film, its unfavorable initial reception, and revival to further understand whether this was an effect of feminism, the rise of the #MeToo movement, or poor marketing at the time of its release. All of this will be examined through the framework of the male gaze, feministic film theory, and how the Hollywood film industry has been affected by the #MeToo movement.

2. Target audience and marketing

2.1 Male Gaze

Jennifer's Body is a horror-comedy film released in 2009. The film depicts main character, and antagonist, Jennifer who after a botched satanic ritual is possessed by a demonic force. After this possession she is overcome with the, quite literal, need to kill people to maintain her life force. At the time of the film's release, it received a plentiful of disapproving reviews of the film's writing, narrative, plot, and acting. Additionally, many, if not the vast majority, of the reviews included some remark of Megan Fox's physical appearance or the lack of nudity or sexual content in the film. An example of this is Jim Vejvoda who wrote in his review on the website IGN: "If you're just going to this movie to ogle Megan Fox for two hours, you'll likely be pleased... until you realize she's not going to be naked." (Vejvoda, 2009). In fact, the film purposefully implies that there will be nudity, both in its title and in specific scenes, but rather than satisfying the male gaze and providing what the viewer expects, it deliberately denies and rejects it. This is meant to expose how both the characters in the film and the viewers are

a part of the problem, as they are both objectifying and sexualizing Jennifer. The film teases this point throughout the film: using scenes that seemingly lead to nudity or sexual content to then skip the actual nudity. An instance of this is at the 36-minute mark where Jennifer is swimming naked in a lake. In this scene, the cinematography subtly implies that nudity will be shown, teasing the viewers anticipation of glimpsing Jennifer naked. As Jennifer gets out of the lake the camera is set on her feet, then her face, and then it cuts to her fully clothed.



Figure 1

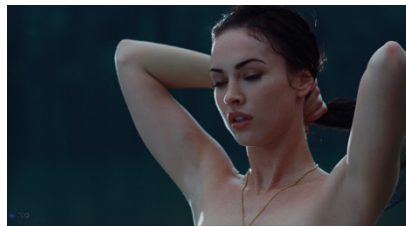


Figure 2

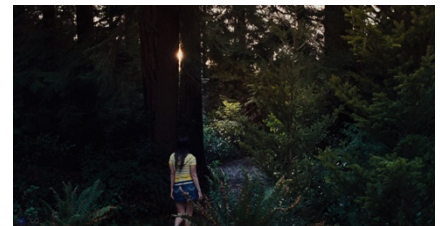


Figure 3

2.2 Narrative

Moreover, the film's main plot is Jennifer murdering the characters in the film that sexualize her. After Jennifer is attacked, she begins to eat people as it strengthens her and keeps her beautiful. But the fact that she only kills boys is a conscious choice she makes. Ben Child writes in *The Guardian* "Half the men-flesh she tucks into belongs to perfectly decent young lads who you end up feeling sorry for", while YouTube essayists Susanna McCullough and Debra Minoff argue that that is precisely the point of the film. Jennifer does not seek out her assailants personally, but rather anyone who merely reminds her of her attackers (The Take, 2021). The violence Jennifer endured is not one that is merely the fault of one evil force, a common trope within the horror genre, but rather a violence that stems from a systematic issue pertaining to the rape culture we live in. When Jennifer lures these men to their deaths, she is glibly honest that she is dangerous and has ill intent, but this is ignored due to her gender and looks. Additionally, Jennifer's character takes on the typically male role by being the attacker as well as the victim. Laura Mulvey theorized the 'male gaze' in film by using Freudian psychoanalysis. Mulvey meant that within traditional storytelling, the female subject is always passive whereas the male subject is active (Doughty, 2017, 532-538). In other words, male characters drive the plot while female characters are driven by the plot. *Jennifer's Body* does not conform to this depiction as both the antagonist and the final girl are women. Ironically, some of

reviews in 2009 could see this break of gender roles but did not see this depiction as feministic.

Brian Eggert wrote in his review on the website *DeepFocusReview*:

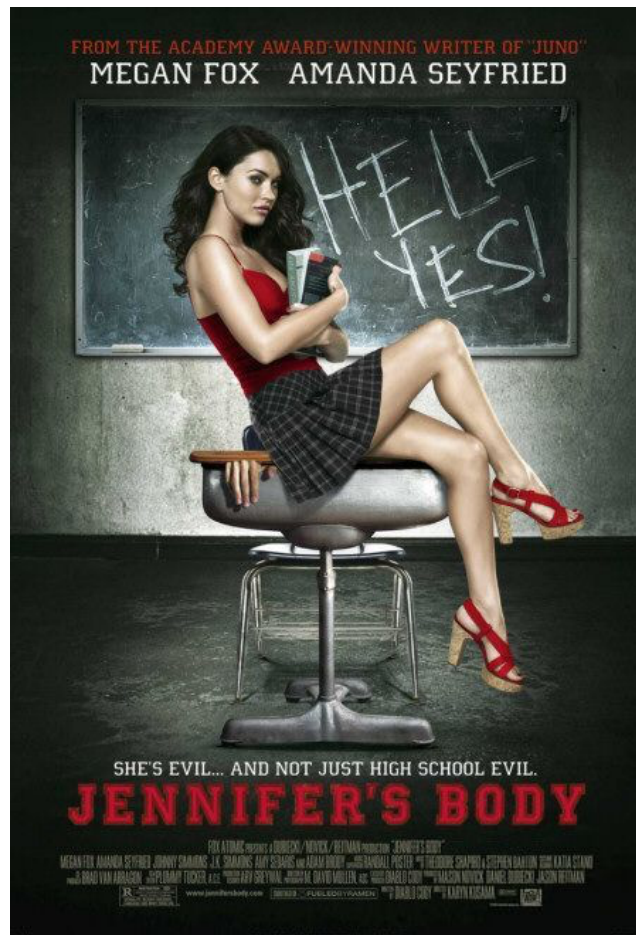
The difference between this and every other teen gorefest is that the usual gender roles are reversed (...) But if Cody and Kusama truly hoped to empower women through these alterations to horror formula, they should've started by choosing an actress who hasn't been objectified by her sex symbol status."

(Eggert, 2009).

Here Eggert implies that because of Fox has a previous history with being sexualized in film, she cannot be feministic. Ben Kooyman argues that this exact ideology is problematic: "While negative feelings about Roth and Cody explains to some degree this resistance towards taking them seriously (...) this resistance also implies a narrow conception of who can and is able to speak on behalf of feminism" (Kooyman, 2015, 186). In other words, Eggert's idea that because Megan Fox has previously catered to the male gaze, she cannot be a part of criticizing it is inherently problematic, as it excludes Megan Fox from expressing her feministic ideas. I would argue that this is exactly why Fox can speak on matters like these, and why the choice of casting Fox as Jennifer was a great one. Because of Megan Fox's personal experience with being sexualized within Hollywood, she better than most understands how it is harmful, unwanted, and hard to escape. Fox even expressed that she especially enjoyed playing Jennifer as she felt that the character spoke to her own treatment within Hollywood. In an interview with *Entertainment Tonight* in 2019 Fox expressed the similarity between herself and Jennifer: "That was really reflective of, I felt like, my relationship with the movie studios at that point. Because, I felt like that's what they were willing to do. To literally bleed me dry and they were willing to sacrifice me physically as long as they got what they wanted out of it." (ET, 2019).

2.3 Marketing

Despite the film's intention to deny the male gaze, centering issues such as consent, assault, and abuse of male power, and its depiction of women, the marketing on the other hand centered the male gaze and was predominantly directed towards teen boys. This is clearly seen in the film's original poster. Adam Brody, who played Jennifer's attacker, commented on the marketing in an interview with Indiewire: "It's about, among other things, the sisterhood that's corroded and you don't have both friends on the poster. It's just her in nothing she wears in the movie" (Indiewire, 2023). Here he is pointing out that both the outfit and the setting depicted in the poster has no relevance to the film. Additionally, director Kusama revealed to BuzzFeed in 2018 that one of the original marketing ideas was for Fox to host an amateur porn site to promote the film (Indiewire, 2018). Cody, Kusama, and Fox have all expressed their frustrations with



the marketing job after the film, but Kusama has spoken up about how the studio ignored her protests even before the film's release, theorizing that the people in charge of the marketing either did not see the film or bother to understand it. Moreover, Cody especially has been open about how she believes this was detrimental to the film's initial failure: "You're disappointing your audience (..) And also you're turning off girls who might have enjoyed the film." (Indiewire, 2018). In other words, the oversexualized advertising did not only repel the intended target audience of teen girls and instead attract teen boys, but then also disappointed the teen boys that did watch the film by not providing the sexualized content.

3 Film critics & reception

3.1 Film critics & gender

An international issue within the film industry is the limited representation of women. This includes in writing rooms, directing roles, cinematographers, editors, and on-screen speaking roles. One less spoken about issue is the lack of female film critics, and what effect this has on the film industry. Martha Lauzen, an internationally recognized expert on employment and representation of women in media, conducted two studies on gender and film critics. *Gender @ The movies* in 2013 and *Thumbs Down* in 2018. Lauzen found that gender played a large role in both *what* films get rated and *how* they then are rated.

For instance, in print, broadcast, and online film reviews 68% of all film critics were male, in addition to this men wrote on average more reviews than women. Meaning that men wrote 71% of all reviews. Moreover, Lauzen's studies found that Female film critics were more likely to write reviews on films with a female protagonist, with 51% of reviews, on the contrary to their male counterpart who only wrote 37% of their reviews on films with female protagonists. Lauzen also found that female film critics were more likely to award higher ratings to films with a female protagonist than male film critics. Female protagonist on average received 74% favorable ratings from female film critics and 62% of favorable ratings from male film critics. In comparison to films with male protagonists, who received 73% favorable reviews from female critics and 70% favorable reviews from male critics. Meaning that female film critics reviewed films with male protagonist and female protagonists nearly identically, while male film critics were 8% less likely to give favorable reviews to female protagonists. Lastly, female film critics were more likely to both mention a female directors name and speak in an exclusively positive way about her, with 52% of their reviews versus 38% of their male counterpart (Lauzen, 2013 & 2018).

Following, Lisa French points out the research done at the documentary film festival in Amsterdam in 2014. Here they found that when selection panels and judging panels lacked female participants, less women were selected for festivals and even fewer won (French, 2015). According to French evidence suggest that film critics and viewers tend to gravitate to films directed or written by the same gender (French, 2015). It is important to note that this

is not inherently problematic, as film is created and viewed through one's own world view. The issue is that when men have more space behind the scenes it in turn means they get more space on-screen and in the industry. Although, including more female writers and directors is incredibly important, the lack of female film critics will make films made by women for women receive harsher reviews. As French writes in her article *The League of men*: "What happens to films made by women: do they miss out on main review slots, skip being reviewed at all, or wind up with mediocre reviews because they are being reviewed by middle-aged men?" (French, 2015).

3.2 Reception

As previously pointed out, some of the reviews in 2009 saw the choices that Kusama and Cody took, but either did not fully understand the point, or did not believe it was executed it well. Ben Child even wrote in his review in *The Guardian* "But Perhaps I'm missing the point? Is Cody just suffering from the inevitable post-Juno backlash here?" (Child, 2009). It is worth to note that Diablo Cody had suffered the same criticism for her two years earlier Oscar nominated film *Juno*. Additionally, Cody has long been subjected to criticism on her career in the Hollywood film industry, as she has openly stated that she was a stripper before becoming a writer. However, this issue will be revisited later. Moreover, Ben Child also pointed out in his review that he saw the attempt at depicting the high-school politics of teenage girls, but that the film lacked courage to do so properly. Another example is Christopher Orr who wrote in *The Atlantic* "While *Jennifer's body* takes a few stabs (...) as a refracted take on friendship between girls, it never gets under the skin" (Child, 2009), while later reviews applaud it for doing exactly that. An example of this is user Ghostsarereal's review on *Letterboxd*: "But while this movie has been written off as a trashy failed experiment in horror comedy, its actually thoughtful, perceptive, and scary examination of what it means to be a teenage girl" (Letterboxd, 2012). Here, it is clear that the new audience that found the film nine years later has understood the film in a completely different way. It is crucial to note that one of the main differences between Ben Child, Christopher Orr, and user Ghostsarereal is their gender.

4. Theme, genre, and the #MeToo movement

4.1 Theme & portrayal

Although *Jennifer's Body* does not give a direct depiction of sexual assault or rape there is an underlying context that it is a crucial part of the film. After a fire in a local bar main character Jennifer gets a ride home from a small local band. When the driver makes a detour into the forest Jennifer, clearly frightened by the implication, tries to avoid being assaulted by saying she is a virgin and that they should find someone else who know “how to [have sex]” (*Jennifer's Body*, 2009). From there they get out of the car, tie and gag Jennifer before dragging her further into the forest. Then they perform a satanic ritual of a virgin sacrifice, not knowing that Jennifer had lied earlier resulting in the demonic possession. Jennifer in this scene is sobbing, screaming, and begging them to stop before being violently stabbed numerous times. The purpose of this scene is to explain how Jennifer was possessed by the demonic force, but also why she primarily kills men.

Some reviewers in 2009 criticized this lack of direct depiction as it is not typical for the exploitation genre. An example is James Berardinelli who wrote in *ReelViews*: “The movie’s R-rating makes all the covering up seem strangely prudish, especially since [the film] fits into the exploitation genre. Coyness does not belong in a movie like this.” (Berardinelli, 2009). On the contrary, Mccullough and Minoff point out:

Last House on The Left (2009), *Irreversible* (2002), and *I Spit On Your Grave* (2010) are just a few in this genre that were initially praised for their depictions of graphic assault by the same critics that missed the point of *Jennifer's body*. But it’s striking that *Jennifer's body*, one of the few examples actually created by female filmmakers, purposely doesn’t detail the facts of the violence and instead represents the complicated feeling of surviving an assault.

(The Take, 2021)

Here Mccullough and Minoff point out that the lack of direct depiction of the rape is an intentional choice from a woman’s perspective of sexual assault. Additionally, Mccullough and Minoff point out that in the scene of the assault the camera takes on the gaze of Jennifer, instead of the typical male gaze or the gaze of her assailants, and that this allows the film to ground itself in the emotional aspect of the assault rather than the act itself (The Take, 2021).

In other words, the way Kusama chose to depict the assault keeps the audience's attention on Jennifer and her feelings, instead of sexualizing and exploiting the assault for shock value or fetishism.

4.2 The rape-revenge genre

The key takeaway though is that although there is a lack of direct depiction of rape, the context of sexual assault is there. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how the rape-revenge genre has changed in the past ten years. According to IMBD there were 99 titles that fit in the rape-revenge genre that were released between 2008 and 2010. Of the top ten ranked popular titles eight out of ten titles included a male protagonist, who had not themselves been sexually assaulted, enacting the revenge. Of the two films that included a female protagonist only one of them, *I Spit On Your Grave* (2010), had been raped themselves and additionally this film received the lowest rating of the ten films. It is also worth noting that *I spit on your grave* (2010) is the only film that included nudity in its film poster. In contrast out of the top ten most popular films between 2018 and 2022, according to IMBD, seven out of ten titles had a female protagonist, who had themselves been assaulted, enacting the revenge (IMBD, 2023). This information alone illustrates how the genre has changed over the ten years. Previously, as Mulvey theorized, the rape-revenge genre predominantly allowed for men to take on the active role whereas the women took on the passive role, even in the revenge of their own assault.

As previously mentioned, one of Mulvey's key ideas is that film promotes within traditional storytelling that the female subject is always passive, whereas the male is active (Doughty, 2017, 532-538). Lisa Funnell provides an example of how this dynamic has effected depictions of rape in film. Here she uses the James Bond film *Dr. No* (1962), where main character James bond learns of lead love interest Honey Ryder's past sexual assault. Upon learning of this assault, the film positions Bond as her protector, or according to Mulvey the active role, giving him a moral justification for killing. Whereas Ryder was positioned in the passive role with no justification for violence, even though she was the victim (Funnell, 2022, 17-19). Meaning, that historically women have been depicted as merely victims who must find a man who can enact vengeance or protect them from assault. Fourth wave feminism and the #MeToo

movement has shifted this idea and depiction. Tara Heimberger argues that the recent emergence of the 'good for her' genre has complicated what counts as a rape revenge film. Heimberger claims the difference between 'Good for her' films and rape-revenge films is the lack of an exploitative tone. That in order for a film to be classified as a rape-revenge genre the film must fetishize female trauma. I would argue that any film that includes a sexual assault and acts of revenge due to this assault classifies as a rape-revenge film. And rather that the rape-revenge genre and rape depictions on screen in general have developed. Which I believe is largely due to the #MeToo movement.

4.3 The rape-revenge genre & the #MeToo movement

The #MeToo movement originated in 2018 when tweets used the hashtag, #MeToo, to speak on the abuse many women had endured from director Harvey Weinstein. This was one of the first times social media had been used in this capacity to speak on social justice, especially on issues pertaining sexual violence. Within two days the hashtag had been used millions of times from women in 85 different countries (The Opportunity Agenda, 2022). One of the key changes this movement created is the very way we view sexual violence. In 2010 a study was released by the national violence resource center on perception of sexual violence. The study entailed interviews with experts and "average Americans" on the understanding of sexual violence, and what the difference was between the two groups. It found that experts emphasized the frequency and nature of sexual violence as common and that the perpetrators were 'everyday people'. Whilst the 'average American' viewed sexual violence as a deviant behavior only caused by mentally disturbed individuals. Here the assumption was that women were responsible for their own safety and needed to protect themselves from these people through avoiding contact and being aware of their choice of clothing (The opportunity Agenda, 2022). This study showed the idea of what is classified as 'rape myths'. These myths included that rape is a trivial event, that women asked to be raped through clothing, promiscuous or flirtatious behavior, or that women often lie about rape.

The #MeToo movement educated the average person's view on what constitutes as sexual violence, and therefore changed the way it is depicted in film. Lisa Funnell points out in the

book *Screening #MeToo* that in mainstream media sexual assault was less taboo in 2016 than it was in 1973 (Funnell, 2022, 30). In other words, previous sexual violence was not permitted to be depicted as it was seen as immoral behavior, but lack of depiction only strengthened the misunderstood notions around sexual violence. Funnell also point out that the rape-revenge genre emerged as a way to pair sexual violence with negative consequences (Funnell, 2022, 136).

As a consequence of the #MeToo genre, rape in film no longer had to be depicted as deviant actions only done by mentally disturbed actants. But rather emphasized the understanding experts had of sexual assault as a violence that was most commonly perpetrated by 'everyday people'. Therefore, allowing the rape-revenge genre to give female viewers a sense of validation through its depictions. Additionally, the genre evolved to not only pair the negative consequences to the perpetrator, but also the entire patriarchal system that maintains this cycle of oppression against women. The intent of blaming women for not protecting themselves, or men for not protecting their loved ones, is no longer in the forefront of the genre.

Lastly, the #MeToo movement affected the way sexual assault is depicted by changing the very way we view sexual assault. Creating sensitive and thoughtful depictions, thinking of real-life victims' feeling and not exploiting their trauma became important notions when depicting sexual violence in film. Amanda Spallaci illustrates this change: "as rape has become more prominent in culture through the circulation of personal testimony on social media and memoir, depictions of rape in cinema have slowly started to change from presentations of rape to representations of rape trauma" (Dethero, 2023, 26), which is something McCullough and Minoff identified in *Jennifer's Body*. The lack of direct depiction of rape is not out of coyness or prudishness, but rather an early representation of this fourth-wave feministic depiction of sexual violence.

5. Fourth wave Feminism, the Horror genre and the female rage film

5.1 Fourth wave feminism

It is important to note that whether or not the film itself is feministic is irrelevant, as defining the film as feministic or not would be impossible. Ben Kooyman illustrates this perfectly in his study on feminism and horror in *Hostels Part II* and *Jennifers Body*:

Certain attributes in these films could be read as feminists and progressive by some, but could be read as misogynistic by others. (...) feminist A might say, Jennifer has to rely on men for her continued well-being and becomes ugly when she doesn't. How can a woman relying upon a man be construed as feminist? Feminist B might say, Jennifer eats boys to remain the woman she wants to be. It's about time a woman uses a man for her purposes. How can that not be feminist?

Kooyman, 2012, 187

Therefore, it is crucial to emphasize and understand that feminism is not a one-size fits all contained ideology, but rather a multifaceted movement with sometimes conflicting perspectives.

Marynell Dethero explains fourth wave feminism as incredibly similar to third wave feminism with one crucial difference: the role social media plays (Dethero, 2023, 15). Third wave and fourth wave feminism largely are concerned with intersectionality, LGBTQ+ rights, sexual violence, domestic abuse, and rape culture. But the technological advancements and accessibility of social media has allowed for more voices to be heard. Additionally, Dethero points out that streaming services have also played a part in the change of theme within film as it changes the very way viewers find and view films. Television shows and film created by or for minorities, or about taboo subjects are more visible due to the streaming services (Dethero, 2023, 24).

Dethero also illustrates that fourth wave feminism views rape as a patriarchal attempt to dominate and control other people bodies, predominantly womens. She further explains that many current political issues lead back to the notion that women and other non-cis-male identifying bodies are both unable to make decisions pertaining their own bodies and

therefore should not have the right to do so (Dethero, 2023, 18). As previously stated, Diablo Cody has found resistance in the film community to be recognized and respected due to her previous career as a sex worker. Third and fourth wave feminists have fought for the rights of sex workers and push a more humane view of the workers within this industry. Additionally, many fourth-wave feminists have criticized the notion that women cannot sexualize their own bodies, but can be sexualized by men. Because of Cody's so-called shameful background, she seemingly was held under a harsher standard, as many of her critics meant that her history as a sex-worker meant that she did not deserve to be as far up in the industry as she was.

5.2 Feminism and the Horror genre

An important point that Kooyman notes is that one of the reasons that *Jennifer's Body* was not seen as a feminist piece is because many do not view the horror genre as able to be feminist. Filmmakers crucial to the horror genre: Hitchcock, Dario Argento, Brian de Palma, have admitted the misogynistic nature of the horror genre and believe it to be a crucial part of their own craft. They believe that horror films are constructed purely to satisfy sadistic fantasies against women. On the other hand, scholar Barbara Creed was especially interested in the 'monstrous feminine' in the horror genre and how this trope challenges gender roles for women (Doughty, 2017, 545). Additionally, Creed points out that the horror genre allows the spectator to feel fear, satisfying perverse desires, within the safety of the cinema or the spectators own home (Doughty, 2017, 545). Heimberger in her examination of the 'good for her' genre and female rage in film points out that much of this genre is located within the horror genre (Heimberger, 2022, 8).

5.3 Female rage in films.

Laura Mulvey suggested that in order for women to take pleasure in stories the female spectator must be awakened (Doughty, 2017, 538). A recent trend within film has been the 'good for her trope' or 'female rage trope'. A trope that originated from the sitcom *Arrested Development* where Lucille Bluth, played by Jessica Walter, reacts to the news of a woman killing herself and her children with the line "Good for her" (*Arrested development*, 2003-2019). Later, this trope has developed into films where women enact their revenge on their, typically male, oppressor through morally unjustifiable actions. Heimberger conceptualizes

this genre as “women characters regaining autonomy, often through nefarious or immoral means, inspires the audience to state cathartically, ‘good for her.’” (Heimberger, 2022, 5). In other words, these films portray complex representation of the oppression and abuse that women endure, allowing the spectators to then experience a catharsis through the depictions of revenge, irrespective of its immorality.

Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci theorized the term “hegemony” to refer to the enforced norms that a society follows. Gramsci meant that hegemonies were negotiated instead of imposed (Doughty, 2017, 337).), and many film scholars later have pointed out the important role film plays in creating and cultivating these hegemonic norms. Although fictive films are exactly that, fictive, the representation it provides plays a large role in what is viewed as the commonsense norm. Expressions such as “that’s just the way things are” are used to legitimize the interest of the dominant groups. Meaning that, when the female subject is always passive in film it furthers the idea that women are submissive and passive by nature, and unable to be anything else. These depictions of women have become so commonsense that any deviations are viewed as liberal ideology or overly fictive. This is clear in *Jennifer’s Body*, as the monstrous teen girl as an antagonist and horny men as victims was seen as ridiculous by reviewers at the time. Previously, female rage has also typically been dismissed as hysterical. It is also worth to note that in the ‘good for her’ film one of the key aspects is that the evil and immoral acts cannot be justified in the same way the typical ‘final girl’ trope can. Heimberger explains this as a crucial point as the self-destructive actions of the protagonist that is both slasher and victim are what validates the viewers rage and provides catharsis (Heimberger, 2022, 33).

Lastly, According to Carl Plantinga, as spectators we have a tendency to sympathize with characters that are subjected to unfair treatment, especially when we relate to this unfair treatment (Plantinga, 2010, 39). in *Jennifer’s Body* Jennifer is just a teenage girl looking for validation, something many teenage girls can understand, and in turn she is victimized. Therefore, the acts of revenge that Jennifer enacts does not elicit sympathy towards her male victims in female viewers, as it did for Ben Child, but rather the female viewers side with Jennifer and her immorality.

Conclusion

So, from a “cringy, flat teen gorefest” to a cult classic: what changed? Throughout this analysis I have been looking at several different factors to further understand what happened between 2009 and 2018. To construct a definite answer on whether this was feminism, #MeToo, or bad marketing would be impossible, as that would require time travel. But most likely all these factors played a pivotal role in the film’s failure and revival.

Looking closer to the contents of the film, the mocking of the male gaze and lack of sexualization of Jennifer made it clear that the film’s target audience was not the male audience it was marketed towards. A blend of Megan Fox’s sex symbol status and historical horror tropes created an expectation both within the studio and amongst viewers. Additionally, the marketing not only attracted the wrong audience, but set the viewers up for disappointment with constructing a wrong expectation.

Moreover, the rape-revenge genre saw large developments over these ten years. The commonsense norm of the victimized woman and male hero seemingly is losing its value with viewers. Moving further from male protagonists dominating the genre to female protagonists, and more importantly victims dominating the genre. Furthermore, fourth wave feminism, including the #MeToo movement played a large role in how we view sexual violence outside of film, but also how sexual violence is then depicted in film. *Jennifer’s body* received backlash for its lack of depictions of rape, but fourth wave feminist argue that that is the right way to depict sexual assault. In order to avoid fetishism of sexual violence, films must tread carefully around how graphic sexual assault is depicted. Especially within the horror genre, as it historically has largely functioned as a medium to satisfy sadistic fantasies according to Hitchcock et. al. Therefore, it is entirely possible that *Jennifer’s Body* was just too early for its time.

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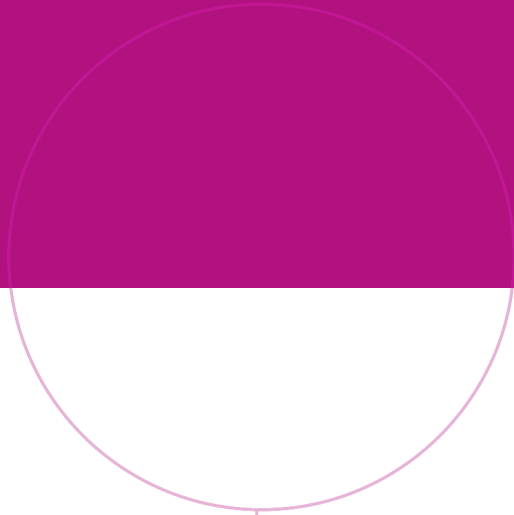
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