

**Horror, *Halloween*, and Hegemony:
A Psychoanalytical Profile and Empirical Gender Study of the “Final Girls” in the
Halloween Franchise**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine how the perceptions of femininity have changed throughout time. This can be made possible through a psychoanalysis of the main character of *Halloween*, Laurie Strode, and other female characters from the original *Halloween* film released in 1978 to the more recent sequel announced in 2018. Previous research has shown that horror films from the slasher genre in the 1970s and 1980s have historically depicted men and women as displaying behaviors that are largely indicative of their gender stereotypes (Clover, 1997; Connelly, 2007). Men are typically the antagonists of these films, and display perceptible aggression, authority, and physical strength; on the contrary, women generally play the victims, and are usually portrayed as weaker, more subordinate, and often in a role that perpetuates the classic stereotypes of women as more submissive to males and as being more emotionally stricken during perceived traumatic events (Clover, 1997; Lizardi, 2010; Rieser, 2001; Williams, 1991). Research has also shown that the “Final Girl” in horror films—the last girl left alive at the end of the movie—has been depicted as conventionally less feminine compared to other female characters featured in these films (De Muzio, 2006; Lizardi, 2010). This study found that Laurie Strode in 1978 was more highly rated on a gender role scale for feminine characteristics, while Laurie Strode in 2018 was found to have had significantly higher rating for masculine word descriptors than feminine. The results show that examining femininity throughout generations of women in this classic slasher film franchise can therefore help determine how gender stereotypes have changed within the forty-year time span between the 1978 and 2018 *Halloween* films as a function of time and age.

Keywords: horror films, *Halloween*, stereotypes, femininity, Final Girls

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Horror has been one of the most complex and widely influential genres of film for decades (Di Muzio, 2006). In the United States, there are few forms of media that are as pervasive in American society as cinematic entertainment, and horror in particular has remained one of the most enduring facets of the movie industry. The longstanding popularity of the horror genre throughout time emphasizes its relevance as a reflection of American culture as it changes and evolves. Many classic horror films are widely watched today and have maintained large cult followings; however, horror as a whole has lost some of its critical distinction since the genre reached its pinnacle in the late 1970s and early 1980s when horror franchises like *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Halloween*, and *Friday the 13th* were first released (Lizardi, 2010). This gradual decline in the reputation of many classic horror films is largely due to the new waves of criticism that have emerged in recent years from both horror fans and film reviewers (Clover, 1997).

One popular subgenre of horror in particular—the slasher film—has become the primary focus of this latest influx of harsh scrutiny (Connelly, 2007). While the reasons behind slasher films being negatively received in recent years have varied widely with each release, one consistent criticism has been centered around the films’ controversial portrayals of gender (Lizardi, 2010). Previous research has shown that horror films from the slasher genre in the 1970s and 1980s have historically depicted men and women as displaying behaviors that are indicative of their gender stereotypes (Clover, 1997; Connelly, 2007). Men are generally illustrated as the villains, portrayed as violent, aggressive, and with dominating

personalities (Firestone, 2006). Women generally play the victims, and are portrayed as weaker, more subordinate, and often in a role that perpetuates the classic stereotypes of women as submissive to males and more sensitive to trauma (Clover, 1997; Lizardi, 2010; Rieser, 2001; Williams, 1991). Most classic slasher movies fit into this mold of hegemony: in *Friday the 13th*, *Scream*, and *Halloween*, among others, all feature male antagonists who slay unsuspecting and defenseless women.

The stereotypical traits that both male and female characters possess are critical to the making of these movies, as they often work to help facilitate their plots (Lizardi, 2010). While the storylines vary, the standard plots almost always feature young female victims who are murdered by male antagonists (Reiser, 2001). This narrative is perceived by many as overdone, and the characters that conform to the molds of the defenseless female victim and callous male villain have long since become clichés (Clover, 1997; Lizardi, 2010). Some critics see these characters as “hyper-emblemized versions of their ideological positions,” and as on-screen embodiments of antiquated gender stereotypes (Lizardi, 2010).

Historically, women have been seen as the weaker and less capable sex, and their societal roles have reflected that as they were denied rights and freedoms for hundreds of years. In slasher films, female characters are once again put in positions that portray them, first and foremost, as victims of male violence (Clover, 1997). Many women in these films are represented in a manner that capitalizes on their lack of independence and that objectifies them for their bodies (Lizardi, 2010). The recurrence of these figures in modern slasher films are problematic, as they work to reaffirm many of the “normal” hegemonic social positions of men and women in society that America seems to have outgrown, especially when taking into account the misogyny that is at the root of many of these roles (Lizardi, 2010). The

normality of the female victim and male antagonist has become so pervasive that it is rare to see a slasher film that deviates from that pattern.

While John Carpenter's classic 1978 film *Halloween*, one of the most iconic slasher series to this day, conforms to the previous hegemonic standard, a recent sequel of the franchise released in 2018 might be an evolution from that pattern. This sequel, produced by David Gordon Green, takes place forty years after Carpenter's 1978 original and features both of the previous main characters: Laurie Strode and Michael Myers. Although Laurie Strode supposedly died in *Halloween 4: The Return of Michael Myers*, released in 1988, she is very much alive in the most recent film, which does not take any previous *Halloween* sequels into account (Green, 2018). Laurie Strode, the heroine, maintains a role throughout the franchise that has been coined by Carol Clover as the "Final Girl." Clover, a horror film and gender expert who wrote the popular novel *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, defines the "Final Girl" as a strong female character who is typically the last girl surviving. The "Final Girl" is able to keep herself alive to the end of the film and ultimately works to dispatch the killer in an oftentimes fatal confrontation (Clover, 1997). In the *Halloween* franchise from Carpenter's 1978 film to Green's 2018 sequel, there has been a noticeable change in Laurie Strode as the "Final Girl." Strode has demonstrated a perceptible personality transformation throughout the four-decade-long interlude between the films. In Green's 2018 film, Strode lacks the stereotypical traits of weakness and helplessness that other female characters in older and less contemporary slasher films possess; instead, she is illustrated as being more resourceful, more calculated, and more willing to fight to survive. The shift in Strode's character away from previously accepted gender stereotypes from 1978 to 2018 emphasizes

the importance of studying how slasher films have been reimagined from one generation to the next.

As the plots, characters, and settings of more recent slasher film adaptations differ from their older counterparts, it can reflect movement and growth both culturally and societally in how femininity has been perceived (Lizardi, 2010). By identifying changes in previously accepted ideologies in film throughout time—like the shift in how women are portrayed in horror movies—viewers can observe how some cinematic progressions are reflective of the cultural atmosphere in the United States as standards of femininity evolve (Lizardi, 2010). While the connections between the portrayal of women in slasher films and the changing definition of femininity in American society could be dismissed as trivial or superficial, the fact that slasher films have a tendency to reflect historical perceptions of gender introduces a sense of cultural relevancy: “The gender-identity game, in short, is too patterned and too pervasive in slasher film[s] to be dismissed as supervenient” (Clover, 1997). Carol Clover affirms that the catalyst for many of the changes observed in female characters in slasher films are rooted in psychology (1997). There is a significant connection between psychology and gender in the *Halloween* franchise specifically, as the construction of characters and the general plot of the films are heavily invested in psychological principles (Clover, 1997; Lizardi, 2010).

Understanding how Laurie Strode and other central female characters have changed throughout four decades from *Halloween* 1978 to the 2018 sequel can be made possible through a psychoanalysis of the characters and an investigation into the general relationship between psychology and gender. Psychology and film theory can help explain the power dynamics seen between men and women in slasher films which can then, in turn, make the

gender roles and stereotypes more apparent. If analyzed through a lens of feminist film theory, many slasher movies have strived to preserve a representation of women that is now virtually obsolete in America. Female characters in slasher films have been at the mercy of a misogynistic narrative about women that has been preserved for centuries (Clover, 1997).

If a female character in a slasher film is in a dangerous situation, she rarely fights back, but is often portrayed as being unintelligent, weak, or hysterical in the face of danger. Slasher films often associate femininity with victimhood and depict women as their stereotypes, as pitifully helpless, overly emotional, unwaveringly prudent, and strictly puritanical: "...angry displays of force may belong to the male, but cowering, crying, screaming, fainting, trembling, begging for mercy belong to the abject female" (Clover, 1997). Regarding their roles in these films, it is not uncommon for young female characters to play the role of a babysitter or more nurturing figure, as it maintains the image of women as the archetypal caregiver, as a nurturing, accommodating figure (Clover, 1997). Perhaps due to the historical durability of the character for male audiences, it should be noted that the male antagonist deviates from his normal form constantly, while female characters rarely do: "If the killer has been over time variously figured as a shark, fog, gorilla, birds, and slime, the victim is eternally and prototypically the damsel" (Clover, 1997). Despite the "heroine" status of many women in these movies, females in slasher films often seem to exist for the purpose of facilitating the innermost desires of both male audience members and male characters. Slasher films are notorious for playing into banal clichés of women by illustrating them chiefly as sexual objects, which is assumed to be for the pleasure of the male viewer, as women on-screen are slain in ways that are often sexualized (Williams, 1991).

Author Carol Clover also mentions that these movies ultimately use the male antagonist to punish female characters for demonstrating their sexuality by killing them whenever they exhibit any perceived promiscuity. She states that "...femininity is more conventionally elaborated on and inexorably punished in an emphatically masculine environment" (Clover, 1997). Whether the reason behind the male antagonist's drive to kill stems from potential sexual impotence, the inability to cope with their own sexuality, or is perhaps representative of Hollywood's old-fashioned opinion that female sexuality should be censured, the fatal end result remains the same for female characters. This theme of men punishing feminine sexuality is prevalent throughout John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978). In *Halloween*, antagonist Michael Myers successively kills the friends of the main character Laurie Strode, Annie and Lynda, as they are about to engage in what Myers considers sexually illicit acts. Laurie's friend Annie is murdered in the car on her way to her boyfriend's house, and Lynda was alluding to intimacy with her boyfriend, Bob, when she was murdered (Carpenter, 1978). All of the aforementioned women had, or were about to have, a similar encounter immediately before their deaths, making the implicit engagement in sexual acts a prerequisite for the murder of a female character in this film: "...either "rescuing" or punishing the woman for her desire is carved out for the male spectator" (Reiser 371). These scenes reinforce the cinematic emphasis on the dated understanding that female sexuality should be repressed, reprimanded or, in this case, silenced.

Although female characters are often the center of attention when it comes to evaluations of gender in slasher films, male characters are stereotyped as well. Men in slasher films nearly always exhibit traits that are unwaveringly and undeniably characterized as what American culture views as "masculine": stoicism, aggression, assertiveness, lack of

emotional sentiment, etc. Carol Clover states that "...slasher films present us in startlingly direct terms with a world in which male and female are at desperate odds but in which, at the same time, masculinity and femininity are more states of mind than body" (Clover 22). The purposeful way that the faces of male antagonists are portrayed in slasher films preserve many of the qualities that have been deemed societal norms for men. Michael Myers in *Halloween* in both 1978 and 2018 conforms to these stereotypes as well.

Further, Michael Myers and other antagonists from slasher films (i.e., *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Scream*) all wear masks or have some form of visible facial disfigurement. It can be inferred that the consistent mutilation, scarring, or general concealment of the countenances of male villains is symbolic of how men are encouraged to hide their true emotions in order to uphold a specific societal standard (Huddleston, 2005):

...the audience, when gazing upon the often-emotionless features of the mask, is given a glimpse into the disturbed psychosexual world of the man it is meant to conceal. Thus, throughout these films, the mask seems to allow the slasher to hide who he is, compensate for who he is not, and enable him to release the anxiety created by his own sexual repression. (Huddleston, 2005).

This emotive suppression mirrors the stoic ideal of masculine behavior that has been maintained for centuries, as unconcealed sentimentality often carries the negative connotation as being a sign of weakness or even femininity. In slasher films, it can be inferred that the suppression of emotions in male antagonists can actually lead to their inability to cope with strong feelings, many of which are correlated with sexuality, and would ultimately become the catalyst for their desire to kill in order to feel a release of these

emotions. In applying psychoanalysis to Michael Myers, the reasons behind his murderous urges and how they are inspired by stereotypes associated with gender can be clarified.

Psychoanalyst Karen Horney speaks about the harmful effects of emotional repression in men. She asserts that "...man becomes destructive because of a blockage in growth" (Horney, *Feminine Psychology*, 1993). Michael Myers, in Carpenter's 1978 *Halloween*, provides evidence for this theory as Myers's murder of his older sister, Judith, directly correlates with his first indirect sexual experience and subsequent emotional repression. The brutal murder of his older sister would end up being his first kill in a spree of slayings that would continue throughout the span of his life (Carpenter, 1978). In the opening scene, Myers, after watching as his older sister engaged in sexual acts with her boyfriend, murdered her in what some film experts believed to be an attempt to gain either cathartic release of, or control over, his own innate sexual frustration (Huddleston, 2005).

After the cold-blooded murder of Judith, Michael continues to kill women that he sees as reflections of his older sister. In doing this, he is likely engaging in a vain attempt to control the intense emotions that he was experiencing: "...so Michael's sexual anger toward his sister drives him to kill her—and after her a strong of sister surrogates" (Clover, 1997). In the beginning of the movie, Michael is home alone with only his sister and her partner; the parents of the Myers siblings are not present, and it is assumed that Judith was in charge of supervising six-year-old Michael while their parents were gone. In the event of Judith taking care of Michael, which did not seem to be an unusual arrangement given the casual behavior of the characters throughout the opening scene, it can be deduced that Michael likely saw Judith as a highly maternal figure, maybe even more than he considered his actual mother to be. Matricide is not an uncommon theme in slasher films, and regarding the relationship

between a boy and his mother or another character that takes on a maternal role, the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud is especially relevant.

Freud's neurological and psychoanalytical theories have dominated the conversation between scholars and horror fans for years. One of his theories, the Oedipal complex, has been extremely popular in recent studies, especially when applied to the characters *Halloween* (Huddleston 219). The Oedipal complex is based off of a Greek myth written by Sophocles, which told the story of a man named Oedipus Rex. Rex, who eventually became the king of Thebes, unwittingly killed his father and unintentionally married his mother (McLeod, 2018). The story is often used as a foundation to explain how instinctive desires located within the deepest corner of one's subconscious can influence individual behavior. The theory asserts that all children harbor a clandestine sexual desire towards a parent of the opposite sex, whilst simultaneously developing a rivalry with the same sex parent (McLeod, 2018).

Many argue that Michael Myers is, symbolically, an on-screen incarnate of Oedipus Rex (Clover, 1997; McLeod, 2018). The Oedipal complex states that boys will focus their inborn sexual desires onto the parent of the opposite sex—in this case, the mother—and will begin to harbor feelings of jealousy and emotional rivalry towards the father as they subconsciously view the father figure as competition for the mother's affection (McLeod, 2018). The subconscious will to kill the dominant male and possess the mother or maternal figure (that may be represented by his sister and caretaker, Judith), is evident in Myers. Although the boy, in the classic definition of the Oedipal complex does identify with the father in this stage of development, he still fantasizes about removing the paternal figure in order to take his place with the mother. Focusing on this aspect of Myers's life enables

viewers to trace the origin of his neurosis back to the maternal relationships in his life (Huddleston, 2005).

Myers's psychosis remains constant throughout Carpenter's original 1978 *Halloween*, and remains present in Green's modern 2018 sequel. In the most recent film, Myers continues to violently slaughter young girls perhaps, as the theory suggests, in a desperate attempt to remedy the lingering desire that he had for his sister due to his unresolved Oedipal complex (Huddleston, 2005). Because the complex that was at the root of his issues was never resolved, Myers's murderous urges did not disappear after the murder of his sister despite being detained in a mental institution for an extended period of time. Instead, his need to kill seemed to be reignited by Laurie Strode, who plays Myers's other sister in some adaptations of *Halloween* and bears a strong resemblance to Judith. Myers's interest in Strode further emphasizes the theory that he, despite his increasing age throughout the first movie, seems to be trapped in the psychosexual stage of life where the Oedipal complex is most prevalent (Carpenter, 1978).

The Oedipal complex explains why Myers may have attacked Judith after witnessing her being intimate with her boyfriend, as his attachment to his maternal figure was, in this situation, being compromised. If those feelings were not alleviated after he killed Judith, it would seem logical to Michael to continue to try and relieve his feelings of sexual repression by killing those who reminded him of his sister or other women who he witnessed engage in explicit acts. Myers's subconscious, if being dictated by an unresolved Oedipal Complex, is a strong driving force for his actions (Huddleston, 2005). Myers's actions can be explained through Freud's psychoanalysis, but how the behavior and evolution of Strode can be explained is an entirely different concept. While the Oedipal complex explains the male

subconscious, the Electra complex is a concept attributed to renowned psychoanalyst Carl Jung, is a prevalent theory used to explain the female perspective (McLeod, 2018).

In the Electra complex it is stated that young girls will also identify with a parent of the opposite sex (McLeod, 2018). Because the girl associates more with the parental figure in her life at a young age, she will begin to develop what Jung calls “penis envy,” which stems from the child’s belief that she has been castrated (Horney, *Female Psychology*, 1993). Freud considered the emotional intensity of the Electra complex to be more advanced than what males would experience during the Oedipal complex, thus resulting in females developing weaker, more submissive personalities; unsurprisingly, this assumption has been widely denounced, and is one of the theories that lead to Freud’s psychoanalytical views of women being so heavily and frequently criticized (Horney, *Female Psychology*, 1993). Although Freud did introduce a multitude of brilliant theories to the field of psychology, his assumptions concerning the female psyche were often inaccurate, and were likely affected by gender bias. At one point in his career, Freud actually admitted that his knowledge of female psychology may have been distorted by his sexist misconceptions (Lotto, 2001).

In response to Freud’s prejudice, acclaimed psychoanalyst Karen Horney constructed a multitude of works in which she refutes many of his concepts and theories from a female perspective: “The psychology of women has hitherto been considered only from the point of view of men” (Horney, *Female Psychology*, 1993). Her interest and expertise in feminine psychology make her work invaluable to the analysis of gender slasher films, particularly concerning her point of view on the Electra complex. According to the Electra complex, when the female notices her lack of a male reproductive organ, she becomes captivated with the idea of it, and enraged by its absence on her own body, causing her to develop a

“castration complex” (Horney, *Feminine Psychology*, 1993). The castration complex develops in young girls as a compulsion to demonstrate that they possess an adequate or equivalent phallic symbol (Horney, *Feminine Psychology*, 37). As girls age, the “unwelcome idea of being fundamentally lacking in this respect gives rise to passive castration fantasies, while active fantasies spring from a revengeful attitude against the male” (Horney, *Feminine Psychology*, 37). In slasher films, this idea is particularly relevant, and can be seen as manifesting in the female protagonist’s weapon of choice. In most classic slasher films, the heroine’s preferred medium of defense is not a gun, but a knife or another distinctively phallic symbol.

The utilization of a knife (or rather lack thereof) can be an extremely symbolic method of dispatching a killer or victim in slasher films. The shape and limitations of items like knives or other blades render them phallic in nature due to the mechanics of the weapon. They are often thought to be used as surrogate devices for sexual penetration in many films, as attackers impale their victims with the phallic objects, evoking the sense that they are a fatal demonstration of a fundamentally sexual act (Clover, 1997). In the original *Halloween*, knives are used continuously throughout the film by both Michael and Laurie Strode (Carpenter, 1978). In Myers’s case, his use of the phallic weapon is used in an attempt to achieve a sexual release that he cannot achieve in any other way: “The killer’s phallic purpose, as he thrusts the drill or knife into the trembling bodies of young women, is unmistakable” (Clover, 1997). It is significant to note, however, that not every character killed in the 1978 *Halloween* is murdered with a knife (Carpenter, 1978). The other female victims, Annie and Lynda, who were Laurie’s best friends, were both asphyxiated, although the killings still managed to seem provocative in nature (Carpenter, 1978). Myers’s lack of

willingness to not use a knife to murder Annie and Lynda could be due to his Oedipal complex; he attempts to find sexual and emotional release through the murder of surrogate women who remind him of his sister (i.e., Laurie—not Annie or Lynda), so the application of a knife on Strode's friends would be useless.

Unlike Michael using a knife to murder his victims, the utilization of a phallic weapon by the female represents a purpose that is entirely different from the male. Strode stabs Michael at the close of the 1978 film several times. In applying psychoanalysis in the form of the Electra Complex, it can be said that Strode is experiencing the effects of the "castration complex" as she attempts to end Myers's murder spree: "...the castration, literal or symbolic, of the killer at her hands. The "Final Girl" has not just manned herself; she specifically un-mans an oppressor whose masculinity was in question to begin with" (Clover, 1997). In stabbing Myers with a variety of phallic symbols, including a knitting needle and a wire clothing hanger, Strode acts out the fantasy of essentially castrating the male. The literal act allows them to figuratively make Myers equal to her on a sex-gender level, whilst simultaneously fulfilling her unconscious desire to possess her own male organ (Clover, 1997). Strode's employment of phallic weapons represents an individual power-dominance exchange from the male to the female. Given women in slasher films have been repeatedly characterized as weak, powerless, and the mercy of the male villain, this exchange is extremely important in both the 1978 *Halloween* and the more recent sequel.

Laurie Strode from 1978 to the 2018 sequel displays a significant change in behavior. The 2018 *Halloween* begins by establishing how Myers has been locked away in a mental institution for forty years following the nearly fatal fight between him and Laurie Strode. Although Myers spent the time locked away, Strode had not been able to move on from her

past traumas. She spent the years after her narrow escape from Myers as a teenager preparing herself and those around her for a future encounter that was, in her eyes, inevitable (Green, 2018). The extensive research and planning that went into Strode's preparation for Myers's return caused many to believe that her early trauma had driven her to insanity. While Strode does not exhibit the female gender stereotypes that are usually so pervasive in slasher films for women, she still is impacted by other characters' gender bias. Instead of believing the eventual danger that Myers would present to Strode and those around her, friends, family, news reporters, and associates all assumed that she was hysterical. The fact that Laurie Strode is a woman facing the aftermath of a tragic event likely played a role in others not believing her story and assuming that she was simply in hysterics.

This was not helped by the fact that, after her encounter with the infamous killer in her early teens, Strode became obsessed with self-defense. She trained her body and her mind relentlessly, understanding that she needed to know how to protect herself (Green, 2018). Strode fortified her surroundings, taking advanced security measures that seemed gratuitous to even her family, leading them and the rest of the world to believe that she was slowly sinking into madness (Green, 2018). She became incredibly reclusive, hiding away in a remote location. Those who came into contact with her became aware that she was exhibiting a number of what they believed were indicators of mental illness. Those who knew her, or knew of her, were convinced that she was suffering from a form of mental neuroses. They assumed that she had endured an ordeal so disturbing that it had made her mentally unstable (Green, 2018). Regardless of Strode's convictions of her own lucidity, it cannot be denied that she did display, on the surface, several signs of neurotic behavior.

Neurosis is a psychological disorder, but not one that causes the affected individual to completely lose touch with reality (Baird). Psychanalyst Karen Horney explains that most mental neuroses stem from stress and panic (Horney, *Neurosis and Human Growth*, 1991). Some of the symptoms include intense anxiety, impaired daily functions, depression, and abnormal fear (Baird). For Strode, even her own daughter believed her to be unwell and caught up in a delusion that was centered around her obsession with Myers due to past trauma (Green, *Halloween*. 2018). Due to his incarceration in a mental facility for nearly four decades, the rest of the world had moved on; Laurie Strode, however, seemed stuck in the past and was considered by others to be crazy (Green, *Halloween*). Laurie herself did nothing to combat these accusations, but only gave dire warnings to those who would listen, insisting relentlessly that Myers would return and, when he did, it would be with a vengeance (Green, 2018). Laurie Strode primed herself for what she believed would be an inevitable and fatal confrontation. She became enormously independent, and relied solely on her own wits, refined intuition, and meticulous planning to survive.

She adamantly rejected any form of external help or attention, even from her own relatives. Horney emphasizes that extreme sovereignty is a common personality trait in patients suffering from neurosis: “All the needs and qualities they acquire are directed toward this major need of not getting involved. Among the most striking is a need for self-sufficiency. Its most positive expression is resourcefulness” (*Our Inner Conflicts*, 1966). Strode’s actions do narrowly align with Horney’s explanation of neurotic behavior in that she learned to rely exclusively on herself, becoming incredibly practical and autonomous in her determination to survive against all odds (Green, 2018). Strode also extensively prepared her daughter for the future confrontation with Myers, which caused her daughter to develop a

great deal of anger and resentment towards her mother for depriving her of a normal childhood. Strode's relationship with her daughter and granddaughter became, after many years of this isolating behavior, essentially nonexistent. Strode continued to put her need for security above the needs of her family, which is another symptom of neurosis: "Essentially, these people protect themselves against their enormous fear of living, their basic anxiety, by keeping themselves all closed up and they maintain their feeling of security by withholding in themselves" (Horney, *Feminine Psychology*, 1993). Laurie Strode distanced herself consistently from her loved ones throughout the film, demonstrating a crucial need to establish separation between herself and others, which she felt was a necessary sacrifice for survival (Horney, *Our Inner Conflicts*, 1966).

While it may have kept the Strode women alive in the end, this emotional disassociation caused Laurie's daughter to resent the frigid upbringing she experienced from her mother's erratic behavior (Green, 2018). Karen Horney asserts that this type of emotional detachment is common in individuals with neurosis who experienced a trauma at a young age (Horney, *Our Inner Conflicts*, 1966). Among those struggling with a trauma-oriented neurotic disorder, "There is a general tendency to suppress all feeling, even to deny its existence" (Horney, *Our Inner Conflicts*, 1966). Strode fits this description, blatantly refusing to instigate or even attempt to maintain long-term association of any kind, as self-sufficiency is one of the most important need to fill. Although it is made evident in the film that Laurie Strode detached herself from those that she loved for their own protection and well-being, those individuals did not willingly acknowledge her sacrifices, instead viewing them as signs of mental health issues that were a product of her past (Green, 2018).

By estranging herself from any affection or personal relationships, Strode seems to almost revel in her isolation. Horney describes this as what can be summed up into a “fear of dependency” (Horney, *Feminine Psychology*, 1993). Perhaps due to her distressing past, Strode may have felt that she was entirely alone as the sole survivor of Myers’s murderous spree, and developed an exaggerated need for self-sufficiency. She refused to accept help from anyone, and denied any possible fame, glory, or monetary gain that was offered to her in exchange for her story. She determinedly depended on her own reserves, largely prohibiting herself from displaying any signs of weakness, financial or otherwise (Green, *Halloween*). While Strode did display an assortment of signs indicating possible neuroses, and although the majority of supporting characters believed her to have lost her grasp on mental sanity, Laurie Strode was right about Michael Myers’s eventual return all along (Green, 2018).

For the past forty years, Myers had been biding time to make his escape, eager to return to kill Laurie, the one and only victim that had ever gotten away alive (Green, 2018). Laurie somehow had known that she was going to have to face Myers again, and was readily prepared for the encounter. When she heard the news that Myers had escaped, Strode immediately went on the offensive. Although surrounding family and acquaintances still did not believe that he would return, they finally became aware that Strode was not crazy at all (Green, 2018). This assumption that Strode had been crazy is inferred to be propelled by the stereotype that women often fall into hysterics in situations of stress or danger. This narrative has been perpetuated by the cyclical plot of previous slasher film storylines; although many horror films do not document what happens to the “Final Girl” after her encounter with the antagonist, the behavior displayed by the majority of female characters in horror films is

indicative of women being unable to cope with the trauma (Clover, 1997; Lizardi, 2010).

With that said, based on previous research, it is unsurprising that the individuals surrounding her that were aware of her past had just assumed that she had succumbed to her trauma and was not mentally stable (Clover, 1997; Connelly, 2007; Lizardi, 2010).

While she did face accusations of hysteria not uncommon for women to encounter in the contemporary time period and was not believed for a period of time, Strode eventually was able to prove that her actions were not at all unfounded. Given the cinematic insight into Strode's actions since Myers's incarceration, the film made it clear that she exhibited clarity and awareness in her actions and confirmed that she no longer played the role of the terrified young woman that she did in Carpenter's 1978 *Halloween*. Instead, she had visibly evolved into an individual who was set on surviving against all odds. Strode's decision to take her life into her own hands demonstrated great strength of character, and largely defied the gender stereotypes emphasized in previous films. The older, transformed Laurie Strode in the more recent *Halloween* film is the antithesis of the weak, helpless, and defenseless "Final Girl" that many slasher films have entertained. She was incredibly capable, as to Laurie Strode, "Every new fear requires a new set of defenses" (Horney, *Our Inner Conflicts*, 150). Her character development mirrors the cultural progress made in American society regarding the how the perception of women has evolved throughout the years.

Other female characters in the 2018 *Halloween* film represent a similar progression in how female characters have historically been illustrated in classic slasher films. Female characters in the 2018 *Halloween* release are not overtly sexualized, or cast fruitlessly into the film as dispensable objects waiting to be slaughtered by the male antagonist (Green, 2018). This film serves as an echo of a more progressive American society and a broader and

more accepting definition of femininity, and introduces the beginning of the end of on-screen female victimization in horror movies. In a period of time where thousands of women who have survived various traumas at the hands of men are now finding the courage and strength to speak up, Strode is an emblematic feminine symbol of strength and a cinematic indicator of a change in era—not only in terms of the gender politics historically associated with slasher films, but in present society, where real women everywhere are confronting their predators (Joho).

The characters and the general proceedings of the new *Halloween* sequel seem to function as a form of sociopolitical commentary on the climate of modern feminism. The evolution of Laurie Strode revokes the archetypes previously associated with the female lead in classic slasher films, and Strode, the “Final Girl,” has redefined what it means to be as a woman in the lead role of a horror movie. She is no longer the terrified teenage girl destined for a brutal massacre, nor is she the eternally frightened victim made at the last moment into an accidental heroine. The final end scene between Strode and Myers capitalizes on this, as it differs significantly from Carpenter’s original vision (Green, 2018). Laurie Strode does not run scared in an attempt to escape the nightmare that is Michael Myers, but rather faces the danger directly, refusing to be a victim any longer. Based on the behavioral differences between the 1978 film and the current one, it seems that Green’s *Halloween* is a response to the feminist culture of today (Joho). It accentuates the importance of the liberation of female sexuality, as seen in the relationships pursued by Strode’s young granddaughter, Allyson Nelson. Nelson stands up to the men in her life, establishes herself as an equal, and fights against the silencing of women that has been upheld through the countless murders of other female victims in similar horror films (Joho).

Across the forty-year time span of the iconic *Halloween* franchise, Michael Myers attempted to silence multiple generations of Strode women. Despite his on-screen efforts, the “Final Girls” in the new sequel fought against the soundless, yet ubiquitous, patriarchal symbol that he represented. Laurie Strode, her daughter, and her granddaughter united together in the new film against the imminent threat of Michael Myers, similar to the ways in which many women have come together to fight against the misogyny and male tyranny that lingers in the 21st century (Joho). Through considerations of many psychological aspects of conventional slasher films, and intensive psychoanalytical evaluations of her character, it can be established that Laurie Strode has become a figure of resistance to the mainstream character configuration of the weak-willed, weak-minded female victims who were physically exploited for male viewers (Clover, 1997).

Overall, contemporary slasher films, like Green’s 2018 *Halloween*, have made significant strides towards being more inclusive, and working to more accurately reflect the modern social attitude regarding gender and sexuality, especially for female roles. Compared to other classic slasher films, such as Carpenter’s 1978 *Halloween*, the 2018 adaptation rejects the previous version of what would be considered an orthodox portrayal of the “Final Girl.” Green’s sequel has revealed evident improvements in the depiction of femininity in the subgenre of slasher films, as it entirely alters the recurring pattern of the plot that has persisted since the mid-20th century:

There are in fact some remarkable developments in the sex-gender system of horror since the mid-1970s. Chief among these is the emergence of the girl hero, a development of which Andrew Tudor writes: ‘It is true, of course, that female protagonists are more significant in the modern genre, and that they were permitted

more autonomy and resourcefulness than were the 'heroines' of earlier films.' Clover, 1997.

Laurie Strode, in the original *Halloween* compared to the current release has demonstrated an undeniable character progression that has exemplified what will hopefully become permanent growth in future "Final Girls." Strode's characteristics can no longer be defined as exhibiting traits that are just stereotypically feminine. She demonstrates a variety of traits that would have been previously characterized as belonging primarily to men, such as independence, aggression, fearlessness, lack of emotionality, and the ability to thrive after trauma (Clover, 1997).

Green's 2018 *Halloween* has revolutionized a character that had been recognized and adored for decades without stripping her of what made her so remarkable and memorable. He helped the character of Laurie Strode begin the process of washing away the enduring stain of misogyny that had influenced nearly every female character in slasher films since the 1970s and 1980s. Femininity in the past was consistently associated with weakness and victimhood, but Green's film worked to rewrite these outdated character tropes (Green, 2018). While the newest *Halloween* was left open-ended, revealing to the audience that the three Strode women were ultimately not successful in defeating Myers for good, the future looks brighter for these women overall (Joho). The latest film in the everlastingly popular *Halloween* series succeeded in reconstructing the conventional framework of the "Final Girl," paving the way for future heroines who can help to re-write and reimagine the traditional narrative, and demonstrate a deeper change in culture for many iconic slasher films to come.

Purposes of the Current Study and Hypotheses

Although identifying qualitative research about the evolution of femininity in the United States is valuable when investigating an evolution in gender roles, more information is needed to comprehensively understand if the “Final Girls” in slasher films can accurately depict this change in ideology. In order to uncover changing perceptions and attitudes about gender from one generation to the next (as is demonstrated in the 1978 to 2018 *Halloween* film) quantifiable data is needed. Conducting research on how exactly the way that participants view female characters in slasher films have changed would provide substantial evidence to support our qualitative claims, and would provide a more developed understanding as to which aspects of femininity have evolved over time. In order to provide additional evidence for these inferences, viable research is needed to substantiate how this shift is reflected both culturally and societally.

While the evolution of the “Final Girl” Laurie Strode from the 1978 *Halloween* to the 2018 sequel is believed to be the result of the social and cultural advancements of gender roles in present American society, there has been little research done to support this conclusion (Clover, 1997; Lizardi, 2010). In order to determine if there is a connection between how women have been perceived in slasher films across a four-decade-long time period, our study was proposed to measure if the “Final Girls” in the new 2018 *Halloween* film—Laurie Strode (2018) and her granddaughter, Allyson Nelson (2018)—were perceived as having less stereotypically feminine characteristics than the previous “Final Girl”—Laurie Strode (1978)—in the original *Halloween* film. The purpose of the following study is to determine how the perceptions of femininity have changed throughout time as a function of time and age.

Determining if there have been any advancements regarding the perceptions of femininity can be made possible through a psychoanalysis of the main character of *Halloween*, Laurie Strode, from the original *Halloween* film released in 1978 to the more recent sequel announced in 2018. While the film shows varying opinions about Laurie's mental state from previous trauma (ranging from sympathetic to dismissive of her "being crazy") and her actions (which seem to be even more masculinized when compared to the original), very little research has previously examined perceived gender stereotypes in film as the slasher genre has evolved. Therefore, the *Halloween* franchise can be used as a cross-sequential comparison of one character who is depicted across different generations. The most recent film parallels the inevitable trauma of Laurie's granddaughter, Allyson Nelson, in the newer sequel. Thus, gender comparisons of perceived masculinity and femininity (both between generations and across one generation) can be explored in films that link characters across multiple decades.

Examining the evolution of "Final Girls" Laurie Strode in 1978, Laurie Strode in 2018, and her granddaughter, Allyson Nelson, in the 2018 version of *Halloween*, using film stills of different facial expressions (fear vs. non-fear) that can be rated on a gender role scale can help determine how gender stereotypes have evolved over time as reflected by the films. As previously stated, the depictions of Laurie Strode and her granddaughter differ substantially from the typical "Final Girls" that many classic slasher films have entertained. In the more recent *Halloween*, Strode and Nelson both display more traditionally masculine or androgynous characteristics in both their appearance and behavior. In order to determine if this progression can be quantified, the "Final Girls" in the 1978 and 2018 *Halloween* films can be measured on a gender role scale in two different expressions each—fear and non-

fear—to determine how feminine or masculine they are perceived. When determining the gender characteristics of a psychological profile, one of the most commonly utilized scales for analyzing gender stereotypes is the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) (Carver, Vafaei, Guerra, Freire, & Phillips, 2013). The BSRI scale, developed by Sandra Bem in 1944, measures different aspects of hypothesized psychological gender traits, and essentially is used to determine how stereotypically masculine or feminine a psychological profile can be (Carver, Vafaei, Guerra, Freire, & Phillips, 2013).

The original BSRI contained 60 adjectives that described general personality traits: there were twenty masculine descriptors, twenty feminine descriptors, and twenty neutral descriptors. Recent studies have found that shorter versions of the BSRI are more reliable in research studies, so for this project, the shorter version of the BSRI was used. This version contains thirty character descriptions in total (Carver, Vafaei, Guerra, Freire, & Phillips, 2013). Ten of the characteristics were stereotypically feminine (e.g., affectionate, sympathetic, gentle), ten were stereotypically masculine (e.g., independent, forceful, dominant), and ten were considered to be “filler” terms due to their overall gender neutrality (e.g., truthful, conscientious, conceited). On the gender role scale used in this study, the questions were rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never or almost never true) to 7 (always or almost always true). The BSRI was listed on an online survey that was preceded by an online consent form.

During the study, participants were shown three images on the screen one at a time of Laurie Strode (1978), Laurie Strode (2018), and Allyson Nelson (2018). After viewing an image, participants were asked to rate the images on the BSRI scale online. Due to the survey being online and available to all participants who register, each participant had as much time

as they needed to rate each image still. Each participant had the option of choosing to take the BSRI in either the fear condition or the non-fear condition, though they were not aware of which specific condition they were participating in. In being exposed to either fear or non-fear image stills, the scores on the BSRI demonstrated whether or not participants viewed the “Final Girls” as being more or less conventionally feminine; fearful expressions are more stereotypical for female characters in slasher films, as opposed to non-fearful expressions, which have been characterized as being more unconventional and less feminine (Clover, 1997). It was hypothesized that Laurie Strode in 2018 and Allyson Nelson in 2018 would be scored as less feminine and as having more masculine characteristics on a gender role scale compared to Laurie Strode in the original 1978 *Halloween* (Clover, 1997). It was also hypothesized that the image stills of the “Final Girls” in the non-fear condition would all be rated as less feminine than the image stills in the fear condition (Clover, 1997).

Method

Participants

A total of 53 undergraduate students from a small, liberal arts college in the southeastern United States were sampled from the psychology research participation pool and upper-level psychology courses and served as participants in exchange for extra credit or course credit, as determined by their instructor. The sample consisted of 36 female students, 11 male students, and 6 non-binary or transgender students who ranged in age from 18 to 27 years.

Materials

Film Stills of Halloween (1978; 2018) Characters: Participants were exposed to three separate film stills of characters from the movie *Halloween* (1978), and the sequel of

Halloween (2018). The images depicted the main character Laurie Strode in 1978, Laurie Strode in 2018, and Laurie Strode's granddaughter, Allyson Nelson in 2018. There were two separate stills of each aforementioned character in *Halloween* (1978) and *Halloween* (2018) that showed that character with both a fearful expression and an expression of non-fear. The expressions were categorized into two separate conditions: a fear condition and non-fear condition. In each condition, there were three image stills, for a total of six in both conditions. For the fear condition, an image still of a fearful Laurie Strode in 1978, Laurie Strode in 2018, and Allyson Nelson in 2018 were shown. Three film stills of the same characters were shown in the non-fear condition, but all with non-fearful expressions. To guarantee that one image was not more influential than the other, they were all similar in size, color, and background.

Shortened Bem Sex Role Inventory Scale (BSRI): Participants' reactions to the film stills were rated on an online version of the shortened BSRI. The BSRI was a scale developed by Sandra Bem in 1944 to collect quantifiable research on gender roles. The scale measured different aspects of hypothesized psychological gender traits, and was used in this study to determine how masculine or feminine a psychological profile can be. The shortened BSRI was made up of 30 personality characteristics and used a seven-point Likert scale to rate each of the six stills in the two separate conditions. Ten of the character descriptors in the BSRI scale were stereotypically feminine (e.g., affectionate, sympathetic, gentle), ten were stereotypically masculine (e.g., independent, forceful, dominant), and ten were neutral (e.g., truthful, conscientious, conceited). Rating the "Final Girls" by their image stills on the BSRI was meant to determine how gender (referring to the social constructs of masculinity and femininity) could be measured. Participants were asked to rate the images on the BSRI scale by choosing the adjectives that best described how the emotions (fear or non-fear) of the character in that

image caused them to be portrayed, as well as how masculine, feminine, or androgynous the characters appeared by using descriptive adjectives on the BSRI (Bem Sex Role Inventory Scale). The BSRI was formatted into a questionnaire on *SurveyMonkey*, so that it was virtually available to all participants in the study. The scores were used to observe if there was any quantifiable difference in the portrayal of gender stereotypes throughout the *Halloween* films from 1978 to 2018 as a function of age and time.

Design and Procedures

The current study employed a 3 x 2 x 3 mixed factorial ANOVA, in which the between-groups factor varied between the depictions of two emotional displays (fear, non-fear), and the within-group factor was varied on three levels based on film portrayals of the “Final Girl” (Laurie Strode (1978); Laurie Strode (2018); Laurie Strode’s granddaughter (2018), whose life paralleled the perilous events of Laurie Strode’s from the original film). For each portrayal (measured by film stills that depicted an emotion from a particular character), the perception of gender for each still was the main dependent measure, and data was collected online using the BSRI (Bem Sex Role Inventory).

Participants were instructed to visit the online SONA system through the Florida Southern College Psychology Department, where they were able to take the test in the condition they chose at their own pace. Upon beginning the test, they were asked to virtually sign an informed consent form. After this, each participant was shown a total of three images each throughout the test that varied depending on which condition (fear; non-fear) that they chose with their own discretion: Laurie Strode (1978), Laurie Strode (2018), and Allyson Nelson (2018) exhibiting facial expressions of either fear or non-fear. After viewing the randomized image from the film of one of the characters, participants were asked to rate each

image that they were exposed to on the BSRI. The participant would first view the randomized image, and then rate the image on the seven-point Likert scale in the BSRI on how stereotypically masculine, feminine, or gender neutral they perceived the image to be.

After participants finished rating each of the film stills, the data were collected from the BSRI questionnaire formatted on *SurveyMonkey*. In being exposed to either fear or non-fear image stills, the scores on the BSRI demonstrated whether or not participants viewed the “Final Girls” as being more or less conventionally feminine if they were shown with fearful expressions, which is more stereotypical for female characters in slasher films, as opposed to non-fearful expressions, which are more unorthodox in slasher films, and are hypothesized to represent a more masculine or androgynous character when compared to other depictions based on similar sociocultural characteristics (e.g. Clover, 1997). Finally, participants were debriefed.

Results

Our study formed a 3 x 2 x 3 mixed factorial ANOVA, in which each participant was shown three image stills in total: one of Laurie Strode in 1978, Laurie Strode in 2018, and Laurie Strode’s granddaughter Allyson Nelson in 2018, with the between-groups factor varied between depictions of two emotions (fear, non-fear), and the within-group factor being how they were rated as feminine, masculine, and neutral on the BSRI. Participants’ scored perception of gender for each still was the main dependent measure.

Using a pairwise comparison, it was revealed that there was no significant main effect between the types of emotions (fear vs non-fear) on participants ratings on the BSRI, $p = n.s.$ The rated perceived femininity of Laurie Strode in 1978 was higher than her 2018 character; however, while the data was approaching significance, it ultimately was not, $p = n.s.$ After

the initial analyses, during a post-hoc comparison in which Laurie Strode was throughout forty years collapsed across both types of emotion (fear vs. non-fear), Laurie Strode in 1978 was more highly rated for feminine characteristics, while Laurie Strode in 2018 was found to have had significantly higher rating for masculine word descriptors than feminine, $p = .01$.

There were no significant effects identified in Allyson Nelson's data, $p = n.s.$

[INSERT FIGURE 1 & 2 HERE]]

To summarize, the data somewhat validated our hypotheses. There was no significant impact on participants' gender perception of a character based on their emotion (fear vs non-fear). However, there was a significant difference in perceived femininity between the "Final Girl" Laurie Strode in John Carpenter's 1978 *Halloween* film and David Gordon Green's 2018 sequel. Laurie Strode in 1978 was rated on the BSRI scale as being more feminine and less androgynous than Laurie Strode and her granddaughter, Allyson Nelson, in 2018, although our data did not show that this difference was significant. However, our results did demonstrate that Laurie Strode was rated as significantly higher in masculine characterized word descriptors than Laurie Strode in 1978. These results will indicate that there is a progressive evolution in perceived femininity as a function of time and age as demonstrated by the change in the "Final Girl" in a classic slasher film and its more contemporary sequel.

[INSESRT FIGURE 3]

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to determine how perceptions of femininity have changed throughout time by examining the appearance and behavioral progression of the "Final Girls" Laurie Strode and her granddaughter in the popular *Halloween* franchise over forty years. This progression was quantified in the current study as we examined how

stereotypically feminine the “Final Girls” were identified from the original *Halloween* film in 1978 to its sequel in 2018. Our hypotheses stated that Laurie Strode (2018) and her granddaughter, Allyson Nelson (2018), would be scored on BSRI gender role scale as being less feminine and having more masculine characteristics than Laurie Strode (1978). It was also hypothesized that the “Final Girls” in the non-fear condition would all be rated as less feminine and more masculine than in the fear condition (Clover, 1997).

To summarize the results, we found that there was no significant impact on participants’ gender perception of a character based on their emotion (fear vs non-fear). With that said, there was a significant difference in perceived femininity between the “Final Girl” Laurie Strode in John Carpenter’s 1978 *Halloween* film and David Gordon Green’s 2018 sequel. Laurie Strode in 1978 was rated on the BSRI scale as being more feminine and less androgynous than Laurie Strode and her granddaughter, Allyson Nelson, in 2018. However, while this data was approaching significance, it ultimately was not. Our results did demonstrate that Laurie Strode was rated as significantly higher in masculine characterized word descriptors than Laurie Strode in 1978.

Consistent with the first hypothesis, Laurie Strode in 2018 was scored as having the highest ratings for masculine characteristics. Previous research has supported the conclusion that the concept of femininity in horror films has progressed over time (Clover, 1997; Lizardi, 2010). “Final Girls” in slasher films, while they have been stereotyped and victimized in the horror genre historically, are generally reflective of how gender stereotypes have evolved since the peak of the genre in the 1970s (Clover, 1997). This result demonstrates that a change throughout time occurred in the “Final Girls” in the *Halloween* franchise, as Strode became a more androgynous figure throughout the forty years between

Carpenter's *Halloween* and Green's 2018 sequel. It also supports the notion that the character development for "Final Girls" in slasher films mirrors the advancements made in society regarding how women are perceived, and that the concept of femininity has evolved.

While there was no significant data collected on Laurie Strode in 1978 as being higher rated by feminine descriptors, what did impact participants' gender perception was the age of Strode from 1978 to 2018. The results of this study also indicate not only a change in an audiences' perception of femininity for Final Girls in slasher films, but how an audiences' perception of women change as they grow older (Koenig, 2018). This data could be representative of audiences becoming less compassionate toward women as they age and adhere less to societal standards. It seems that there is evidence to support the inference that as women age and confer less with normative beauty ideals, they are considered to be less feminine and less desirable (Gosselink et al., 2008). When researching attractiveness throughout the course of a woman's life, researchers found that prevailing attractiveness stereotypes persist even into old age, meaning that to maintain beauty, one must appear to be young (Gosselink et al., 2008).

Because youthfulness is correlated with femininity, this may be why Laurie Strode was rated as having more masculine characteristics. This demonstrates that societal standards for women to appear a certain way in order to be rated as "feminine" still exist. These data represent a double standard, as age does not maintain such a pervasive beauty requirement for men as it does women (Gosselink et al., 2008). In having participants rate Strode in 2018 as being more masculine due to her age, it may signify that the audience views Strode less sympathetically due to her older and more coarsened appearance in the newer film. While

these results do represent progression in the genre, it also introduces a connection between age and femininity that can be explored in future studies.

Regarding the appearance of the “Final Girls,” participants did find the fear or non-fear expressions to be significant regarding the characters’ femininity. Because there were no perceived differences between fear and non-fear expressions in the “Final Girls” in *Halloween*, the results of our study did not support the second hypothesis. Although previous research states that fearful expressions are associated more with femininity in slasher films, our data did not show that participants perceived fearful expressions on the image stills to be any more feminine than non-fearful expressions (Clover, 1997; Connelly, 2007; Lizardi, 2010). While progress has occurred in society regarding how women are perceived based on the stereotypical feminine traits they are expected to possess, and previous research has inferred that the “Final Girls” in horror films would embody this progress, rating the facial expressions of Laurie Strode in 1978 and 2018, in addition to Allyson Nelson in 2018, did not prove to be significant (Clover, 1997; De Muzio, 2006; Lizardi, 2010).

Based on the results of this study, we can conclude that the portrayal of “Final Girls” in slasher films has evolved as a result of the cultural shift in how femininity is defined. While expressions of fear may not be significantly associated with women and female stereotypes, “Final Girl” Laurie Strode in 2018 and her granddaughter, Allyson Nelson, being rated as having less stereotypically feminine characteristics and as being more androgynous compared to Laurie Strode in 1978 represents a shift away from traditional gender stereotypes for women. This study shows that there is still progress to be made regarding how females are perceived based on their depictions in slasher films and in society;

however, our results demonstrate significant changes in how femininity has been defined across multiple generations of women.

Although the results of this study somewhat supported our hypotheses, possible limitations of this study must be taken into consideration. One possible limitation includes potential inconsistency with the image stills provided for participants to rate on a gender role scale. Due to copyright infringement issues, we were unable to clearly capture stills of plain fear and evident non-fear at specific moments in the film. Because we adapted screenshots of the film from an online search engine, the stills may not exactly parallel expressions of fear and non-fear as they were originally intended, and there may be slight variations in color and background that could impact participants' ratings. If future researchers were able to collect image stills from specific scenes in *Halloween* 1978 and *Halloween* 2018 that were more similar in background and expression, it could possibly influence the results.

Further, the time frame in which this study was conducted is another limitation to consider. Amid a global pandemic, students are working remotely and without breaks during the fall and spring academic semesters. Due to social distancing measures, implementing this experiment virtually may have impacted the results. Researchers were not able to provide in-person instructions or answer any relevant questions that participants may have had as they filled out the online gender role scale. Instead, participants were instructed to fill out the scale on their own time, and not with live virtual instruction. Perhaps in future research, when the pandemic has passed and social distancing measures are no longer in place, individuals could take this study and replicate the methods when in-person research proceedings are normalized once again.

This study provides support for the evolution of femininity as a function of time and age as portrayed by the ratings on a gender role scale of “Final Girls” in slasher films throughout multiple generations. In an age of progressive movements for women and a fight for gender equality, these results are important to analyze, especially through slasher films, which have a history of stereotyping characters based on their genders. Modern cinematic entertainment is one of the most pervasive and widely utilized forms of media in the United States; examining how the art of film can reflect reality provides a significant depiction of the way that art is able to imitate life, as well as demonstrate how impactful films can be in influencing human perceptions of the world. Our results imply that the depictions of women in slasher films are evolving as a result of cultural and societal changes of how femininity is perceived. In order to determine more ways that film and culture intersect and influence one another regarding progressions of gender in the United States, the topic of this study should be further explored.

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Figure 1. Average perceived masculine, feminine, and neutral ratings of Laurie Strode in 1978 as participants scored her character profile on the BSRI in both fear and non-fear conditions.

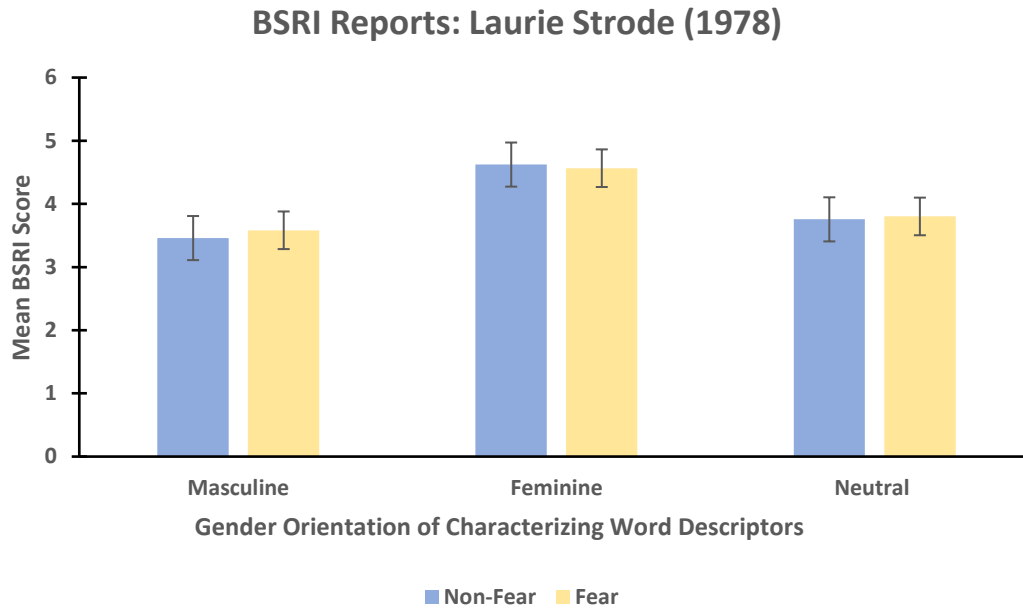


Figure 2. Average perceived masculine, feminine, and neutral ratings of Laurie Strode in 2018 as participants scored her character profile on the BSRI in both fear and non-fear conditions.

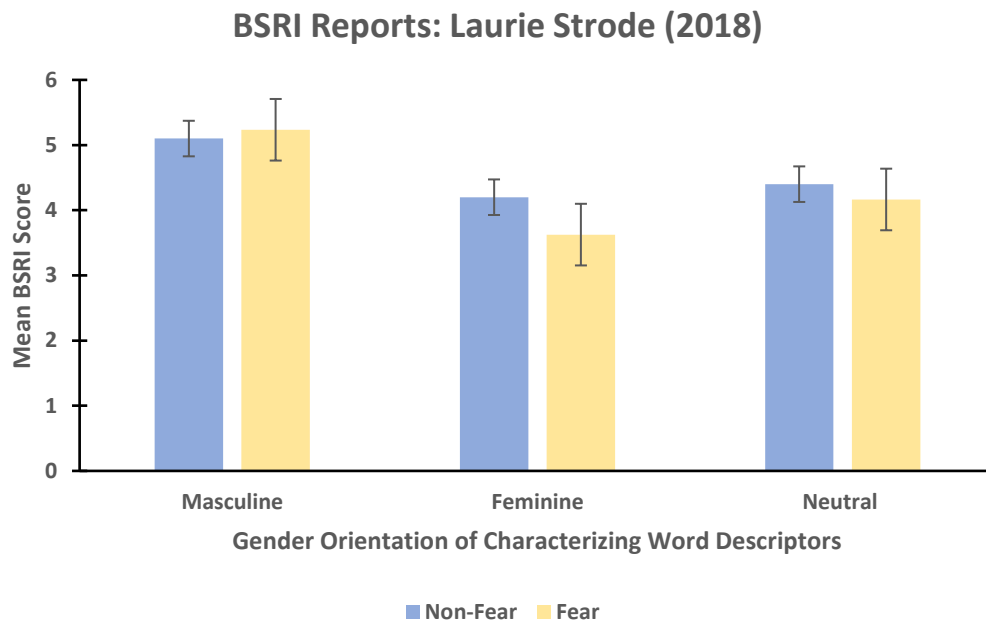
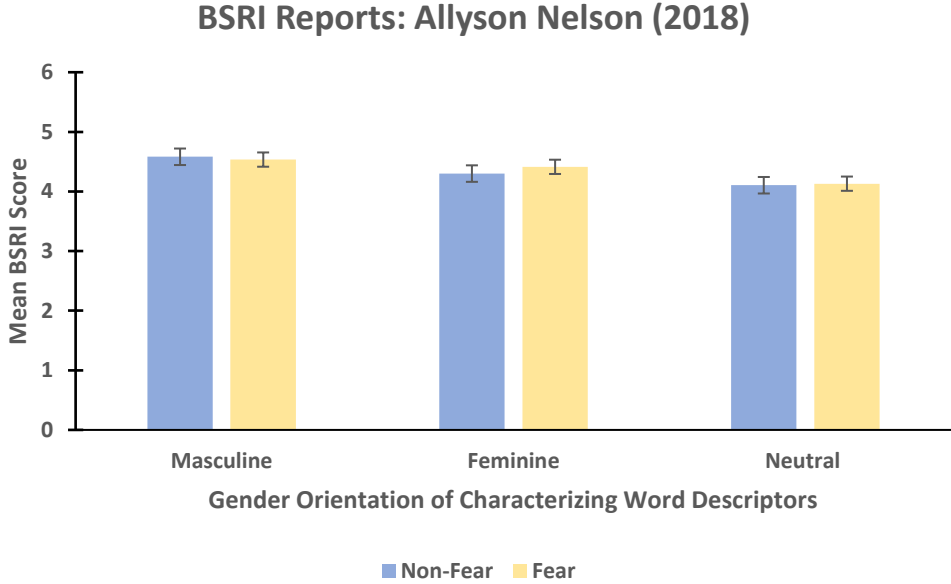


Figure 3. Average perceived masculine, feminine, and neutral ratings of Allyson Nelson in 2018 as participants scored her character profile on the BSRI in both fear and non-fear conditions.



Appendix A

Film stills of *Halloween* characters of Laurie Strode (1978), Laurie Strode (2018), and Laurie Strode's granddaughter, Allyson (2018)

Laurie Strode (1978) – Fear



Laurie Strode (1978) – Non-Fear



Laurie Strode (2018) - Fear



Laurie Strode (2018) – Non-Fear



Allyson Nelson (2018) - Fear



Allyson Nelson (2018) – Non-Fear



Appendix B

Bem Sex Role Inventory Scale (BSRI) Word Descriptors:

Instructions: Respond to each of the following statements using a scale from 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never true) to 7 (always true) in the format of an online survey.

Items for evaluating Masculinity	Items for evaluating Feminine	Non-typed items
1. Defends own beliefs	2. Tender	3. Conscientious
4. Independent	5. Sympathetic	6. Unpredictable
7. Assertive	8. Sensitive to other's needs	9. Reliable
10. Strong Personality	11. Understanding	12. Jealous
13. Self-sufficient	14. Compassionate	15. Sincere
16. Leadership abilities	17. Eager to soothe hurt feelings	18. Secretive
19. Risk taking	20. Warm	21. Adaptable
22. Dominant	23. Affectionate	24. Conceited
25. Willing to take a stand	26. Loves children	27. Tactful
28. Aggressive	29. Gentle	30. Conventional

Appendix C

Bem Sex Role Inventory Rating Scale with Likert Scale Questions

Please rate how truly you believe the characteristics below reflect the person in the image from 1 (never or almost never true) to 7 (always or almost always true).

1. Defends own beliefs

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

2. Tender

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

3. Conscientious

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

4. Independent

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

5. Sympathetic

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

6. Unpredictable

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

7. Assertive

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

8. Sensitive to other's needs

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

9. Reliable

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

10. Strong personality

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

11. Understanding

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

12. Jealous

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

13. Self-sufficient

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

14. Compassionate

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3

- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

15. Sincere

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

16. Leadership abilities

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

17. Eager to soothe hurt feelings

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

18. Secretive

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

19. Risk taking

- 1 - never or almost never true

- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

20. Warm

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

21. Adaptable

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

22. Dominant

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

23. Affectionate

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

24. Conceited

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

25. Willing to take a stand

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

26. Loves children

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

27. Tactful

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

28. Aggressive

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

29. Gentle

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

30. Conventional

- 1 - never or almost never true
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 - always or almost always true

Appendix D

Fear Condition: Laurie Strode (1978)



Respond to each statement on a 7-point Likert scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never True	Rarely True	Not often True	Neutral	Often True	Almost always True	Always True

1. Defends own beliefs
2. Tender
3. Conscientious
4. Independent
5. Sympathetic
6. Unpredictable
7. Assertive
8. Sensitive to other's needs
9. Reliable
10. Strong personality
11. Understanding
12. Jealous
13. Self-sufficient
14. Compassionate
15. Sincere
16. Leadership abilities
17. Eager to soothe hurt feelings
18. Secretive
19. Risk taking
20. Warm
21. Adaptable
22. Dominant
23. Affectionate
24. Conceited
25. Willing to take a stand
26. Loves children
27. Tactful
28. Aggressive
29. Gentle
30. Conventional

Appendix E

Fear Condition: Laurie Strode (2018)



Respond to each statement on a 7-point Likert scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never True	Rarely True	Not often True	Neutral	Often True	Almost always True	Always True

1. Defends own beliefs
2. Tender
3. Conscientious
4. Independent
5. Sympathetic
6. Unpredictable
7. Assertive
8. Sensitive to other's needs
9. Reliable
10. Strong personality
11. Understanding
12. Jealous
13. Self-sufficient
14. Compassionate
15. Sincere
16. Leadership abilities
17. Eager to soothe hurt feelings
18. Secretive
19. Risk taking
20. Warm
21. Adaptable
22. Dominant
23. Affectionate
24. Conceited
25. Willing to take a stand
26. Loves children
27. Tactful
28. Aggressive
29. Gentle
30. Conventional

Appendix F

Fear Condition: Allyson Nelson (1978)



Respond to each statement on a 7-point Likert scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never True	Rarely True	Not often True	Neutral	Often True	Almost always True	Always True

1. Defends own beliefs
2. Tender
3. Conscientious
4. Independent
5. Sympathetic
6. Unpredictable
7. Assertive
8. Sensitive to other's needs
9. Reliable
10. Strong personality
11. Understanding
12. Jealous
13. Self-sufficient
14. Compassionate
15. Sincere
16. Leadership abilities
17. Eager to soothe hurt feelings
18. Secretive
19. Risk taking
20. Warm
21. Adaptable
22. Dominant
23. Affectionate
24. Conceited
25. Willing to take a stand
26. Loves children
27. Tactful
28. Aggressive
29. Gentle
30. Conventional

Appendix G

Non-Fear Condition: Laurie Strode (1978)



Respond to each statement on a 7-point Likert scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Not often	Neutral	Often	Almost always	Always
True	True	True		True	True	True

1. Defends own beliefs
2. Tender
3. Conscientious
4. Independent
5. Sympathetic
6. Unpredictable
7. Assertive
8. Sensitive to other's needs
9. Reliable
10. Strong personality
11. Understanding
12. Jealous
13. Self-sufficient
14. Compassionate
15. Sincere
16. Leadership abilities
17. Eager to soothe hurt feelings
18. Secretive
19. Risk taking
20. Warm
21. Adaptable
22. Dominant
23. Affectionate
24. Conceited
25. Willing to take a stand
26. Loves children
27. Tactful
28. Aggressive
29. Gentle
30. Conventional

Appendix H

Non-Fear Condition: Laurie Strode (2018)



Respond to each statement on a 7-point Likert scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Not often	Neutral	Often	Almost always	Always
True	True	True		True	True	True

1. Defends own beliefs
2. Tender
3. Conscientious
4. Independent
5. Sympathetic
6. Unpredictable
7. Assertive
8. Sensitive to other's needs
9. Reliable
10. Strong personality
11. Understanding
12. Jealous
13. Self-sufficient
14. Compassionate
15. Sincere
16. Leadership abilities
17. Eager to soothe hurt feelings
18. Secretive
19. Risk taking
20. Warm
21. Adaptable
22. Dominant
23. Affectionate
24. Conceited
25. Willing to take a stand
26. Loves children
27. Tactful
28. Aggressive
29. Gentle
30. Conventional

Appendix I

Non-Fear Condition: Allyson Nelson (2018)



Respond to each statement on a 7-point Likert scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never	Rarely	Not often	Neutral	Often	Almost always	Always
True	True	True		True	True	True

1. Defends own beliefs
2. Tender
3. Conscientious
4. Independent
5. Sympathetic
6. Unpredictable
7. Assertive
8. Sensitive to other's needs
9. Reliable
10. Strong personality
11. Understanding
12. Jealous
13. Self-sufficient
14. Compassionate
15. Sincere
16. Leadership abilities
17. Eager to soothe hurt feelings
18. Secretive
19. Risk taking
20. Warm
21. Adaptable
22. Dominant
23. Affectionate
24. Conceited
25. Willing to take a stand
26. Loves children
27. Tactful
28. Aggressive
29. Gentle
30. Conventional

Appendix J

Debriefing Script

“There is some evidence to support that horror movies are accurate reflections of gender in society (Clover, 1997; Lizardi, 2010). Some researchers have found that the characters in one slasher film franchise in particular, Halloween, have shown that gender stereotypes have changed throughout time as seen through the portrayal of the “Final Girl”, Laurie Strode, in the original Halloween film in 1978, to the most recent sequel in 2018. In this experiment, we wanted to further investigate if changes in perceived femininity could be shown through the ranking of film stills of Laurie Strode in 1978 to 2018 and her granddaughter in 2018. In the present experiment, we investigated the changes in perceived femininity in classic slasher film franchise as a function of age and time. We collected stills of three female characters showing different emotions (fear vs. non-fear) in the Halloween film franchise from 1978 to 2018, and then asked you use a gender role scale (BSRI) to rank how masculine, feminine, or neutral the individuals in these images appeared depending on their emotional state (fear vs. non-fear). Based on previous research, we hypothesize that the “Final Girl” Laurie Strode in 1978 will be rated as more feminine than Laurie Strode and her granddaughter in 2018 (Clover, 1997). We will use the Likert scale that you answered on to determine if this assumption is correct, and if it is, we will use the results to add to the current research on how characters in slasher films can be used to show an evolution of gender stereotypes throughout time, as well as contribute to the existing body of research that demonstrates how film can be a pervasive predictor of shifts in culture, especially regarding gender roles and stereotypes. This experiment will provide more evidence to suggest that there has been a viable and noticeable change in how “Final Girls” are portrayed in films, which will indicate that there has been an evolution of perceived femininity from 1978 to the modern day. Thank you very much for participating. Do you have any questions?”

Appendix K

Demographic Survey

INSTRUCTIONS: Please answer the questions as honestly and as accurately as possible. Your responses will be completely anonymous because your name will not be associated with your data at all

Tech ID #: _____

Major: _____

Age: _____

Minor: _____

Current GPA:

Gender (circle one):

- a. Female
- b. Male
- c. Non-binary
- d. Prefer not to answer

Expected grade in course? (circle one)

- a. A
- b. B
- c. C
- d. D
- e. F

Race/Ethnicity: (circle one)

- a. American Indian or Alaskan
- b. Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- c. Asian
- d. Black or African American
- e. Hispanic
- f. Non-Hispanic / white
- g. other

Expected amount of time needed to prepare for this course and complete coursework for this course outside of class? (Circle one)

- a. 0-1 hrs
- b. 2-3 hrs
- c. 3-4 hrs
- d. 4-5 hrs
- e. 5-6 hrs
- f. 6-7 hrs
- g. 7 or more hrs

Class Standing: (circle one)

- a. Freshman
- b. Sophomore
- c. Junior
- d. Senior

Primary reason for taking the course?

(circle one)

- a. BA/BS requirement
- b. Schedule convenience
- c. Elective/Interest
- d. Grade Redemption

Secondary reason for taking the course?

(circle one)

- a. BA/BS requirement
- b. Schedule convenience
- c. Elective/Interest
- d. Grade Redemption