

Martin Lindved

Anne Bettina Pedersen

Engelsk Almen

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Could it be that One Monster has created Another? –The Final Girl in 1980’s Slasher Films and *Halloween* (2018) as a Representation of Ideals and Social Issues in 1980s’ America as well as Contemporary America.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1981, film critic Roger Ebert wrote the following in his review for *Friday the 13th Part 2*:

”This movie is a cross between the Mad Slasher and Dead teenager genres; about two dozen movies a year feature a mad killer going berserk, and they're all about as bad as this one”.

Ebert’s observation relates to the 1980s being the decade known for slasher films like this

film, as this film itself was far from the only sequel in the *Friday* franchise. While this franchise has a total of eight films released between 1980 and 1988, *Halloween* (1978) also had a sizable franchise of five films released before 1990. Likewise, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) managed to have five films released during the 1980s despite being released later in the decade. This collection of films all roughly match Ebert's description because they have similar plots about a group of people being murdered by a specific individual with a specific weapon. There is therefore reason to believe that this expresses a trend in the 1980s. Other than having similar plots, these types of films would also often conclude with a single surviving female character. Reasons for having such character may speak of an attempt to either express or appeal to contemporary values of the 1980s' America. In 2018, *Halloween* (2018), a film marketed as a direct sequel to the 40-year-old original film with the same title, was released. Like the original, this film starred Jamie Lee Curtis as Laurie Strode, and like the original film this one was also about a killer named Michel Myers who kills people on Halloween. This similarity seems to suggest that there is still reason for including such character and follow such structure films of the 1980s had. Furthermore, the film being marketed as a direct sequel to the original film may suggest a comparison can be made between ideals and society of the late 1970s through the 1980s to then contemporary America. In *America On Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality at the Movies* (2009), Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin argue that genre films "reflect social concerns" (28). Amongst genre films, horror films especially reflect the dominant ideology of a society:" the horror film's emphasis on the threat posed to "normality" by the monstrous reinforces social ideas about what is considered normal" (28).

It is the intend of this thesis to examine examples of 'Final Girls' of slasher films from mainly the 1980s to then be compared with *Halloween* (2018) for the sake of understanding both how contemporary ideals and issues have been reflected and then also to

consider how these have been represented. The assumption is that a dominant ideal is dictated through the survival of the female leading character. The character would therefore in of herself possibly be an ideal given that she is the lone survivor of the film and must therefore in some way be different from the rest of the characters. Furthermore, it is also assumed that an evolution of both the character as well as slasher films will be reflected given 40 years of difference. However, by being a direct sequel to one of the earliest slasher films, *Halloween* (2018) may not represent current society since it may favor a reliance on nostalgia.

Similarities between this film and its counterparts of the 1980s may suggest contemporary America and 1980s' America to have similar social concerns. This examination requires therefore an understanding for the definition of the slasher film, and it moreover requires an understanding for especially the Final Girl character. It is believed that it is through the representation of the Final Girl character that a difference or similarity to current America and the 1980s' America can be seen. With the assumption that an evolution of the character has occurred, the character may in reflection represent current standards. This would therefore imply differences between the Final Girl of *Halloween* (2018) and the Final Girl of slasher films from the 1980s. *Halloween* (2018) has been chosen for comparison due to the film being connected to a film that is considered to be the originator of slasher films. Another reason for choosing this film for this thesis is due to the film featuring Laurie Strode, the Final Girl of the original *Halloween* (1978). For the 1980s, films released in franchises like *Halloween*, *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* have been chosen due to the popularity of these franchises considering their multiple installments.

This thesis will begin by clarifying the historical background of the 1980s' slasher film. This means that the political climate of the time may be of importance as it may have been reflected in slasher films, general horror films and other genre films released in the 1980s alike. Given the attention to the Final Girl, an understanding for how feminism was

thought of during the 1980s' America will also be required. In relation to specifically the slasher film, it is important to clarify the genre's origin before attempting to define the genre itself. This is due to the possibility that there may have been films that retrospectively influenced the slasher genre. Following this, the definition of the slasher genre is required for the sake of comparing the recent *Halloween* film to its predecessor's. As the slasher film itself was inspired by films before it, it is possible this recent film will maintain elements defining it to be a slasher film. By doing so, the option to compare the film's reflection of social ideals to that of the films from the 1980s will become possible. Additionally, it is believed that the Final Girl character-type is a defining element as well. It is acknowledged that the definition may have changed. For the definition to have changed would furthermore signify a change in the slasher film may have occurred. With a completed understanding for the slasher film as well as the Final Girl, the aforementioned collection of films will be examined with an emphasis on the Final Girl. For the sake of clarity, similarities between these examples will be accounted for and categorized. Such categorization will then later be used in comparison with however the Final Girl is represented in *Halloween* (2018).

The Reagan Era in Films of the 1980s

According to John Kenneth Muir in his book *Horror Films of the 1980s* (2007), American pop culture was cynical in its depiction of current issues due to an "apocalypse mentality" (6). This mentality, Muir explains, was caused by the Cold War posing the possibility for nuclear annihilation. While this cynical mentality was expressed with the beginning of punk and death metal in music, Muir also argues that films of the time likewise reflected it. Such films were *The Final Conflict* (1981), *Dead Zone* (1983), *Night of the Comet* (1984), *The Terminator* (1984), *Miracle Mile* (1988) and *The Seventh Sign* (1988). While these films

depict doomsday scenarios, Muir says that other fears were likewise expressed in films of the time. Such was the fear the AIDS epidemic caused, which was represented in films like *The Thing* (1982), *The Fly* (1986) and *Prince of Darkness* (1987). However, Muir points to the Republican Party to have been the most iconic element of the 1980s: “if you love the 1980s, you can thank the Republican Party. And similarly, if you dislike the 1980s, you can thank the Republican Party” (7). Most importantly, Muir argues that there is a connection between horror films of the 1980s and President Ronald Reagan who was in office from 1981 to 1989. Muir writes: “if we subscribe to the theory that horror movies always reflect the fears of their historical context and their time, then the horrors of the 1980s are surely a reaction (either pro or con) to the dramatic political, cultural and economic changes Reagan instituted during his time in office” (7). Concerning this connection to horror, Muir says that Reagan’s two terms reflected a disconnect between ideals and reality: “Reagan became famous for selling an illusion, for appearing to do one thing, while actually doing something entirely different” (7-8). Furthermore, Reagan was said to be nostalgic for the 1950s which was reflected in his policies. This nostalgia along with the high production of sequels during the 1980s simultaneously expressed a desire for simplicity and escapism the American people possessed. This longing for the past as a form of escapism was demonstrated by both the election of Reagan and with films like *Back to the Future* (1985), a film about a teenager who travels back in time to the 1950s where his parents then were his age (Wilkinson 2019). Muir explains that Reagan was chosen because of Jimmy Carter, the president during the 1970s. Carter was the president during the conclusion of the Vietnam War, and he was known for his blunt honesty with the American public. Muir says that Reagan was chosen because of the public’s dissatisfaction with Carter: “it was easier and less tiring to believe the image of America as ‘the shining city’ than to grapple with serious problems” (10).

The following explains Reagan's policies that reflected said disconnect between ideals and actuality: Reagan wanted to downsize the Federal bureaucracy, but he ended up later inflating it to be of a number than before his term; Reagan also promised to lower taxes which he was initially successful at, but he later raised taxes again to be even higher than before. The reason for this was because the downsizing he achieved resulted in "a precipitous drop in federal revenue" (9). Finally, Reagan instated a policy he called 'Reaganomics'. This policy not only limited budgets for social services, but it also simultaneously lowered taxes for "wealthy individuals" (9). The limitation for budgets resulted in the number of poor individuals being increased by five million. Muir also believes that Reagan's politics reflected the man himself as he calls Reagan "a man of contradictions" (9): while being favored by conservatives, Reagan did not regularly go to church. Also, while he spoke highly of family values, Reagan was the first divorced American president. In relation to feminism, the women's movements also received a huge setback due to the termination of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in 1982. This was problematic due to this amendment preventing discrimination on the basis of sex and gender (Benshoff & Griffin 2009, 286).

While aforementioned horror films reflected the fear of AIDS and nuclear war, the following horror films reflected both the fear caused by Reagan (White 2016) as well as the disconnect between ideals and reality: *Poltergeist* (1982) is about a suburban family unknowingly living on top of an Indian graveyard since they were not informed of this when they bought their house; *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) is about a teenage girl who learns that the monster that chases her was created by an event the adults tried to keep hidden; *Day of the Dead* (1985) is about how repeating and ongoing social issues are ignored instead of faced; *Return of the Living Dead* (1985) ends with the film's setting getting nuked by a careless government which leads to the zombie outbreak being spread further; *The Stepfather* (1987) is about a man killing in an attempt to actualize his ideal image of 1950s suburbia;

They Live! (1988) is about a man discovering that mankind is subconsciously being controlled by aliens through manipulative marketing; *Society* (1989) is about a teenage boy who discovers that his family is part of an upper class society which preys and literally absorbs members of the lower class; and finally, *Parents* (1989) is about a boy who discovers that his parents are cannibals.

It was also during Reagan's time in office that The National Organization of Women (NOW), which was formed in 1966 and was considered to be "the mainstream, moderate voice of middle class American feminism" (Benshoff & Griffin 2009, 279), became persecuted by conservative media. This was on the basis of the organization supporting the notion that women were being oppressed by being confined in their homes as housewives. It was therefore the organization's goal that these women could have equal rights and possibly be part of the work force (279). This understanding of feminism came from the second wave which had its origin in the 1960s. This form of feminism "began in response to the pressures placed on American women after World War II" (278-9). To free women from being systematically oppressed by being locked in their houses as housewives naturally disagreed with Reagan's patriarchal family values. It was the goal for these values to "return the country to the ideals and ideologies of an earlier era" (286) These values were supported by fundamentalist Christian groups like the Moral Majority and conservative Republicans (283). Concerning this backlash against feminism, figures of conservative media gleefully ridiculed the politics of NOW. There was televangelist Jerry Falwell who attempted to demonize the movement and their politics by calling them 'the National Organization of *Witches*'. There was also conservative radio personality Rush Limbaugh who attempted to associate feminism with fascism by calling feminist 'feminazis' (286-7).

In addition to this backlash, Benshoff and Griffin believe that the slasher film intended to profit from this negative opinion of feminism. They say this because they believe

that films about a dangerous person hunting women with a weapon of phallic shape became especially popular during the 1980s (289). As horror films of the time reflected Reagan, Muir argues that slasher films especially reflected the two-faced dichotomy “evident in the nation’s political and social discourse” (11). This can be argued due to the certain structure of a slasher film: first, carefree teenagers who has sex and do drugs are introduced. Then, these teenagers get brutally murdered one after another. Muir writes that slasher films: “invited viewers to voyeuristically enjoy nudity and gore, but then slapped the viewers down for doing so, warning that such ‘dangerous’ behaviors could result in an untimely death” (11). Muir finds it therefore ironic that conservatives of the time protested against these films: the “display of vice (drugs and sex) would invariably precede the slice-and-dice” (11) and the films would therefore seemingly have the murdering of these carefree teenagers function as a form of capital punishment. To have showcase of promiscuous teenagers meet graphic deaths, writes Muir, made these films work like conservative cautionary tales “carried the conservative (and contradictory) theme that if you sin, punishment shall be meted out” (11).

The Origin and History of the Slasher Film

In *Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film 1978-1986* (2002), Adam Rockoff argues that to consider the macabre as a form of entertainment is nothing new. He believes that the Theater of the Grand Guignol, a theater in Paris that focused on reenactments of violent historical acts, was “the earliest modern antecedent of the slasher film” (34). In connection to this theater, Rockoff argues how the enjoyment of represented violence is common for a society that views itself to be civilized. However, “our bloodlust did not wane, it just took on a different incarnation” (34).

Concerning film history, Rockoff says that the 'gore film' of the 1960s is the precursor to the slasher film. Films like H.G. Lewis' *Blood Feast* (1963) became financially successful by both being controversial and also by being cheaply produced. Rockoff explains that the film had a budget of just 24,000 dollars, that the film itself features excessive amounts of nudity and violence, and Rockoff also clarifies that Lewis secretly got his own film banned in Florida for the sake of causing free publicity. Furthermore, he also invested in provocative marketing stunts like handing out barf bags. Such bags had text on them with the name of the film and the recommendation that the bag was needed when watching *Blood Feast* (46). Rockoff argues that it was this controversial marketing strategy, having a small budget to produce the film and said film featuring sex and violence that proved inspirational and later crucial for the eventual slasher film's success. Rockoff supports this further by presenting George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) as an example of achieving financial success by being a cheap production. He also presents the 'roughie' film *Scum of the Earth* (1963) as an example of a film that features many scenes with sex and violence in them (44-9).

Around the same time came rape and revenge films like *The Last House on the Left* (1972). This film grossed 18 million dollars at the box office despite its content "attracting and disgusting audiences". Rockoff acknowledges that Wes Craven and Sean Cunningham both worked on this film and would both later go on to start the two biggest slasher film franchises of the 1980s: Craven would go on to direct *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and Sean Cunningham would be the one to direct the first *Friday the 13th* (54-55). Rockoff also mentions *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978) and explains why this film did not inspire sequels or imitators like films of the slasher genre would: slasher films function as escapism by having their violence be unbelievable but enjoyable. Meanwhile, rape and revenge films like *Grave* had realistic depictions of assault. This was in contrast to the campy slasher films

considered unnerving. Rockoff writes: “prolonged rape scenes made viewers uncomfortable and angry, while mutilations and decapitations left them cheering for more” (90). Regardless, slasher films as well as rape and revenge films were likewise hated in England. This outrage resulted in such films getting banned as part of an initiative referred to as the ‘video nasties’ controversy. Rockoff believes that this reaction must be seen in connection to social concerns of the time: this regarded the case of The Yorkshire Ripper, a serial killer who was active in England from 1975 to 1980. However, despite these attempts to blacklist slasher films, the home video market had its start in the 1980s and gave consumers the option to rewatch films (Muir 2007, 13-4). Rockoff writes: “the boom in affordable video cassette recorders created a demand for product” (29). Thus, many low-budget slasher films and exploitation films that otherwise could not receive theatrical release were instead released directly on video (29-30). Concerning the blacklist initiative, to label films like *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) and *I Spit on Your Grave* as ‘video nasties’ in order to discredit them may instead have boosted their popularity as a form of free publicity.

While Rockoff says that *Halloween* (1978) defined the slasher genre, it is only because it encompasses elements from films that came before it (70). Such films include: the Canadian *Black Christmas* (1974), which has stylistic techniques of the slasher genre. This film is even regarded to have been the pioneer of *Halloween* (1978), since it has elements such as: an isolated setting, a Killer whose identity and motive remains unknown and the film even has certain scenes filmed from the Killer’s point of view (59-61). Another film of importance is *The Redeemer: Son of Satan!* (1978). This film has an isolated setting and a Killer who seemingly punishes a group of young adults for having committed crimes such as one member of this group being a homosexual (63). Then there is *The Town that Dreaded Sundown* (1976). This film is both based on a true story similarly to *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977) while it is also a film with a hooded Killer (64;68). Lastly, there is *The Toolbox*

Murders (1977). This film has a Killer who murders attractive women by using specific tools like nail guns, power drills and hammers (65).

The Making of Halloween

In light of these films that had elements that would become defining for the slasher genre, Rockoff acknowledges that *Halloween* (1978) did not invent the genre singlehandedly. Instead, Rockoff clarifies, the film was only significant due to it being “the first to create a paradigm by bringing [said elements] together in a single film” (78). By the film therefore intentionally encompassing many of the elements listed above, Rockoff says that the making of *Halloween* was a calculated business decision (71). Rockoff writes: “[Halloween] is the blueprint of all slashers and the model against which all subsequent films are judged” (78).

The film having a small budget of only 300.000 dollars was therefore inspired by examples set by the aforementioned *Living Dead*. To stay below this restricting budget was therefore required, and it was the promise to do so that got John Carpenter hired as the film’s director. Carpenter succeeded and the film went on to gross 50 million dollars (71). Additionally, the film was initially going to be titled *The Babysitter Murders*, a title similar to films like *The Toolbox Murders*. The reason for why this title was changed to *Halloween* was due to this title naturally connoting “haunting images of ghouls, mystery, death and, most importantly, evil” (74-5). Furthermore, while Jamie Lee Curtis is now iconic for her portrayal of Laurie Strode, Carpenter initially wanted a different actor for this role. Curtis was however chosen due to her being the daughter of Janet Leigh who famously played Marion Crane in *Psycho* (1960). Thus, the casting of the inexperienced Curtis was a free publicity stunt since the small budget did not allow them much for marketing (75). Regarding the film’s Killer, Michael Myers shared certain traits with past Killers. Traits included: having a recognizable

identity like The Phantom Killer from *The Town that Dreaded Sundown* and using a common tool such as a large kitchen knife as a weapon like the Killer from *The Toolbox Murders*. Concerning his mask, Rockoff explains that it was intentionally designed to lack details as well as have nothing noticeable about it. This was because the design was inspired by a book Carpenter read, a book about psychopaths wearing masks in order to appear unnoticed (76). This lack of humanity also correlates with Michael seemingly being indestructible. This indestructibility, according to Rockoff, sets Michael apart from past Killers like Leatherface who is capable of getting hurt. An intended reason for why Michael is indestructible is because he is meant to be an incarnation of everlasting Evil. This indestructibility would later be adopted and further exaggerated by Killers in slasher films to come like Jason Vorhees and Freddy Krueger. Both would make the Killer's implied immortality a defining element of the Slasher film and its Killer because this immortality would naturally guarantee future installments (80).

Definition of the Slasher Film

Rockoff broadly defines a slasher film to be a film which features a Killer murdering attractive young people with a tool or bladed weapon in a number of different creative ways (12). Meanwhile, Benshoff and Griffin consider the slasher genre to be a low-budget subgenre of horror that favors extended emphasis on showing the deaths of female over male victims (289). Rockoff disagrees with this understanding and states that men and women are killed equally due to death in slasher films is unisex. Additionally, he disagrees with these films being intended as cautionary tales like Muir said. Rockoff argues that the characters first being sexualized and then getting gruesomely killed is rather a question of exploitation than morality (24). What may have caused the impression that women's deaths were favored

may have been the advancements in special effects as well as advancements in what could be shown on film (17). Regardless, Rockoff believes that the success of *Halloween* popularized the structure of a slasher film, and he says that the film's influence can be seen in other genre films like *Alien* (1979). Here, the monster's behavior resembles that of a Killer in a slasher film opposed to aliens of science fiction films attacking with laser weapons (88-9). He also says the same concerning Ripley having agency like a Final Girl from a slasher film. By being recognizable, it is therefore possible to further clarify the elements of the slasher film's structure.

The Killer is the first element, and he functions like the threatening element of the film. Rockoff writes that even when the identity is kept hidden, as seen in the original *Friday the 13th* (1980), this character can be classified to be male, one who "epitomizes masculinity to ludicrous extremes" (13). This form of masculinity is exemplified by the character being indestructible, demonstrating an aggressive nature and also being strong enough to string up his victims as well as have said victims function like booby traps. Commenting specifically on the implied masculinity of the female Killer in *Friday*, Rockoff writes: "the killer drives a beat-up truck, wears work boots and a flannel shirt, is adept with both a knife and ax, and has the strength to toss the corpse of a full-grown woman through a glass window" (13). Rockoff also argues that the Killer is asexual despite the Killer demonstrating voyeuristic tendencies when looking at victims through windows (13). As solidified with Michael, the Killer is also immortal for practical opposed to logical reasons. Rockoff writes: "their indestructibility was less of a thematic choice than a practical measure. To maximize the profitability of their series, producers had to ensure that their killers – on whom the success of their series hinged – were immortal" (13). This coincides with Muir's observation concerning the 1980s being the decade of branding and name recognition. The

eight *Friday* films, five *Nightmare* films, four *Halloween* films¹, three *Silent Night, Deadly Night* films and two films respectively in series like *Prom Night*, *Critters* and *Hellraiser* supports this observation (13-14). There is however disagreement concerning the Killer as sexually frustrated. Benschhoff and Griffin believe that this is represented through the Killer's weapon being a phallic symbol. They also believe that the Killer's point of view allows the sexually frustrated viewer to identify with the sexually frustrated Killer (289). As Rockoff disagreed with the Killer being asexual, Rockoff disagrees with the Killer being sexually frustrated. Using Myers as an example, Rockoff argues that the Killer neither represses his sexuality nor represents repressed sexuality of any of the film's other characters because such aforementioned repressed sexuality is not implied in the film. Rockoff furthermore compares the Killer to the shark from *Jaws* (1975) in order to argue that the Killer kills because "that is simply what he does" (78). To read the Killer as sexually frustrated is therefore, according to Rockoff, an unwarranted analysis (78). Concluding this with the Killer's motivation for murdering, Rockoff believes that the Killer in line with his swift approach to killing acts without motivation: "they simply go about their duty, which is killing, with systematic precision, uncaring, emotionless and unmerciful" (14).

The second element is the Killer's weapon of choice which Rockoff states may vary but is rarely a ranged weapon (14). Such weapon may therefore either be a bladed weapon like a sword or an ax or it may be something that can penetrate like a spear or a pitchfork. Furthermore, the Killer may use household items like corkscrews, but he may also have an iconic weapon like Freddy Krueger has his glove. Rockoff writes: "any sharp object that can penetrate a victim seems to do the trick" (16). The close proximity is however important to the genre's name because the weapon of choice *slashes* (15). Regarding the supposed sexual frustration of the Killer, Rockoff comments on how "the knife's phallic

¹ Counting the second and fifth film and excluding the first film as it was released in 1978.

blade becomes a symbol of violation, entering the victim's body in a painful, bloody and unnatural way" (17) Furthermore, Benshoff and Griffin agree with Rockoff that the murder weapon is usually a utilized tool, but unlike Rockoff they believe that the weapon is intentionally phallic and therefore represents the Killer's sexual aggression (289). While acknowledging the knife to be phallic, Rockoff does disagree: "the knife (...) is not a surrogate penis" (17).

The third element concerns the point of view. Rockoff refers to this as the eyes of the Killer and how this affects the viewing of the film: "the prevailing theory states that a subjective camera (...) represents the point of view of something. In the case for slasher film, that something is the killer, thereby making the audience vicarious participants in the murders and forcing them to identify with the villain, not the victim" (24). By therefore sharing the Killer's perspective and identifying with him, the female victim is isolated in his gaze and thus, she is emphasized to be the primary victim. In *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992), Carol Clover refers to this element as the I-camera. However, in connection to the process of identification Clover clarifies that a transition occurs between the Killer and the film's remaining female lead during the climax (45). In addition, Clover expresses in the preface to her book dissatisfaction to the cover of her book being changed: at one point, this cover was a close-up of a Killer but was then changed to instead be a close-up of a scared woman. Clover explains how the former example positions the receiver as "the object of what looks to be a psychotic attacker", but in the latter cover "we are positioned as the subject, doing something to cause the look of apprehension in the woman's eyes" (ix). Thus, the point of view connects Killer and Final Girl.

The fourth element relates to bloody special effects. As clarified, advancements in both what could be shown and in what could be done with special effects had changed for

the 1980s. The special effects are meant to enhance the violence to an unrealistic level for the sake of entertainment (Rockoff 2002,17).

The fifth element is an 'isolated setting'. This setting must be universally recognized by the adolescent audience while also be a place that can be isolated so that the characters are trapped with the Killer (19). Thus, a suburban neighborhood or a summer camp are often used as examples thereof. Rockoff also explains that this setting can appear isolated by lacking helpful adults.

Regarding adults, this is the sixth element and Rockoff says that there are three types of adults in a slasher film: there is the ineffective authority who may ignore the danger or reject the main characters' concern, the wise elder who offers advice on how to defeat the Killer and then there is the Killer himself (19).

The seventh element is the 'past event'. This can be a scene that is about an event that took place years prior to the events of the rest of the film. It can therefore function as the motivation for the Killer. This event can be in the opening scene of the film and can therefore be used to quickly gain the audience's attention (20;22). Typically, this event may be related to either a holiday like Christmas or Halloween, but it can also be related to a ceremony like a graduation or a prom. Rockoff writes that these specifics: "signify the return of some traumatized psychopath who is out for vengeance" (21).

The eighth element is the surviving female lead of the film known as the Final Girl who has her own segment with notes from contributors such as Adam Rockoff and Carol Clover who invented the term. There are likewise additions by Laura Mulvey regarding the portrayal of female characters in films for male viewers. What is significant about this character is how it works like a male surrogate and also how it can work like a feministic hero.

The Final Girl as a Male Surrogate

Clover invented the term and defines the Final Girl as: “the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and perceives the full extent of the preceding horror and of her own peril; who is chased, cornered, wounded; whom we see scream, stagger, fall, rise, and scream again. She is abject terror personified” (35). Clover believes that the Final Girl is a male surrogate appropriate for: “mostly young men, typically teenagers” (xii). The Final Girl is, as Clover writes: “a congenial double for the adolescent male. She is feminine enough to act out in a gratifying way (...), but not so feminine as to disturb the structures of male competence and sexuality” (51). She believes that the character having a “boyish name” is meant to indicate that the character is a transformed male (xii; 40; 52) However, Rockoff disagrees by stating: “for every androgynous name (...), there are two gender specific ones” (23). Rockoff’s point can be supported by looking at the three big slasher franchises of the 1980s for this thesis: while there are three Final Girls with androgynous names (Chris from the third *Friday* film, Rennie from the eighth *Friday* film, and Jamie from the fourth and fifth *Halloween* films), there are eight Final Girls with gender specific names (Nancy from the first and third *Nightmare* films, Kristen from the third *Nightmare* film, Alice from the fourth and fifth *Nightmare* films, Alice from the first *Friday* film, Ginny from the second *Friday* film, Trish from the fourth *Friday* film, Tina from the seventh *Friday* film and Laurie from the first and second *Halloween* films). While the Final Girl may therefore possess what Clover perceives to be male traits like being a mechanic (39), the character is also supposed to be feminine by being “smaller and weaker than the killer” (40). Once again, Rockoff disagrees with Cover that the Final Girl is intended to be a male surrogate for a male audience: “if the travails of the Final Girl are a face-saving way for the predominantly male audience to vicariously enjoy the victim role, what can account for those slasher in which

there are two survivors, both a man and a woman?” (22). Rockoff’s observation can be supported by seven out of the 16 films chosen for this thesis (*Halloween*, *Nightmare 4*, *Friday 4*, *Friday 5*, *Friday 6*, *Friday 7* and debatably *Friday 2*) having a male and female survivor. Clover explains that the Final Girl is made recognizable and distinguishable from the other characters by being sexually inactive, being shown to be aware of danger and also by being shown to be intelligent and resourceful (39). Clover argues how this makes the Final Girl similar to the Killer as: “her smartness, gravity, competence in mechanical and other practical matters, and sexual reluctance set her apart from the other girls and ally her, ironically, with the very boys she fears or rejects, not to speak of the killer himself” (40).

Concerning her interactions with the Killer, Clover believes that the two characters are linked by both being sexually frustrated. Clover explains that it is when the Final Girl faces the Killer and attacks him with his own phallic weapon that a symbolic castration of the Killer and masculinization of herself occur. Thus, writes Clover, the Final Girl “has not just manned herself; she specifically unmans an oppressor whose masculinity was in question to begin with” (49). Clover agrees with the notion of the Killer’s weapon being phallic. She considers the weapon to be an extension “of the body that bring the attacker and attacked into primitive, animalistic embrace” (32) and compares weapons such as knives to animalistic traits like fangs and claws. Clover emphasizes also that the confrontation between Final Girl and Killer is a metaphor for the Final Girl achieving sexual selfhood through ‘the assumption of the phallus’. The Final Girl therefore completes her transition from being gendered as a helpless female to be gendered as the autonomous and masculine male. It is however the Killer’ tragedy “that his incipient femininity is not reversed but completed (castration) and the Final Girl’s victory that her incipient masculinity is not thwarted but realized” (50).

There are methods in which the portrayal of a female character like a Final Girl can avoid invoking fear of castration for the male viewer. In *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1990), Mulvey considers the importance of having a male character being romantically involved with the female character. By identifying with this character as a surrogate, the male viewer can indirectly have the female character (840). In relation to examples with female characters who do not have love interests, Mulvey clarifies that the female character's portrayal can be exaggerated as a form of fetishization. This can be done by for example having her be sexualized or by the character having a "substitution of a fetish object" (840). Such substitute is in this context interpreted to be a phallic object and thus, this example aligns with Clover's understanding of the character functioning as a male surrogate due to the character having a metaphorical penis. By therefore being masculinized, Mulvey explains that the character is changed from representing a repressed figure to instead be "a fetish so that [the character] becomes reassuring rather than dangerous" (840).

The Final Girl as a Feminist Icon

Clover disagrees with the reading of the character as an empowered female. Even though critics have praised Ripley from the *Alien* franchise, Clover believes that to consider characters like this one to indicate feminist development is "a particularly grotesque expression of wishful thinking" (53). As the character is a male surrogate, the character cannot represent anything related to a representation of feminism or women in general. Clover does acknowledge that the character has since the release of her book appeared in pop culture other than slasher films, and she believes this may have resulted in different interpretations. The Final Girl has therefore "in her wanderings become a rough sketch of her former self" (x). While the term seems to now refer to, as Clover puts it, a 'female avenger'

or ‘triumphant feminist hero’, Clover argues that the term still refers to and encompasses the same character she would rather call a ‘tortured survivor’ or ‘victim-hero’. The latter she says requires emphasis on ‘victim’ because the character remains “chased and almost caught, hiding, running, falling, rising in pain and fleeing again, seeing her friends mangled and killed by weapon-wielding killers, and so on” (x). To have the character victimized for roughly the first hour before overcoming the Killer in a fashion Clover would rather attribute to luck than skill, thus calling the character an ‘accidental survivor’, remains intact despite modern incarnations, says Clover (x). However, Benshoff and Griffin say that it is not unusual to consider the female lead of a slasher film to be inspirational for being proactive. They do nevertheless regard the character’s preserved virginal status to indicate “an old-fashioned model of proper womanhood” (289). In contrast, there is the documentary about 1980s’ American horror films, *In the Search of Darkness* (2019). Participants thereof like producer Phil Noble Jr. believe that women who have suffered from traumatic experiences find these female leads of horror films to be appealing because these characters survive. According to director Sean Cunningham, these characters are significant because they develop from being victimized to then overcome their attacker. Producer Heather Wixson argues as well that horror films with female leads were focused on women confronting their fears. She acknowledges that these characters can be considered from a fetishized perspective but believes that she herself was attracted to these films because they portray women being faced with challenges they eventually overcome. This documentary also has interviews of actors who have played Final Girls, mainly Heather Langenkamp (Nancy from the *Nightmare* franchise) and Caroline Williams who played Stretch in *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (1986). Williams says that the great thing about being the female lead of a horror film is that you are a proactive action hero whose actions affect the plot of the film. She argues this by explaining how her character becomes motivated to pursue Leatherface after having been dry humped by

his chainsaw. Williams even says that this dry-humping scene is a feministic moment because her character is portrayed to be in control of the situation. Concerning the Final Girl being a male surrogate and thus be masculine, Williams believes that a Final Girl is to be considered female since the character is portrayed by a female actor. Regarding the term “Final Girl” itself however, Williams does not care for it because she considers it to be “fan’s shorthand”. Langenkamp also dislikes the term due to feeling it is gender-specific: “it is still differentiating between a Final Boy and a Final Girl. We are going to be judged on how we fought the monster and not on the gender that we were when we fought him” (2:24:55). Additionally, Actor Lori Cardille from *Day of the Dead* (1985) expresses an interest in gender fluidity and is curious how modern standards and understandings regarding genders may eventually affect horror films. Williams seems to agree with this since she is also interested in how transsexual actors and other LGBTQ figures will be represented in future horror films.

There are also more contemporary contributors who view the Final Girl as a feminist icon. For example, Valerie Thompson (2019) reconsiders Jennifer Hills from *I Spit on Your Grave* as a Final Girl. Thompson believes that women can identify with the character by relating to the character being violated. Thompson writes that Jennifer is to be recognized as “the true final girl” because the character first deals with something as disturbing as rape and then succeeds in getting her revenge. What Thompson may not realize is that she is then saying that Jennifer is a feminist icon by acting like a Killer. Regardless, this article supports Clover’s notion about how the term has since her inventing it been given a different meaning that indicates empowerment. Thus, Thompson can call Jennifer a Final Girl by considering the character as an empowered female despite Jennifer not matching Clover’s definition, since Jennifer is not a sole survivor of a group of characters. Another article (Kennedy 2020) concerns how female characters in horror films are changing: “We’re trading in our

screaming victims for battle-hardened warriors and angels of vengeance” writes Kennedy, thus using terminology signifying empowered female characters. She writes about how female characters in horror films have generally been used to reflect contemporary social issues. Of female characters from 1930s as well as 1940s horror films, Kennedy says that these characters “spoke to social anxieties rooted in the racism of the time”. Meanwhile, Kennedy write that female characters from 1980s’ horror films spoke to “our social preoccupation with female virtue and the burden of morality and decency being disproportionately heaped on women”. Kennedy concludes by regarding female characters of recent films like *The Invisible Man* (2020) and *Promising Young Woman* (2020), where vengeance and confrontation are main themes in such films. Additionally, Kennedy says that the Final Girl in these films is different by being “the thing that goes bump in the night”. Thus, Kennedy like Thompson sees the Final Girl in a way that is similar to the Killer. A third article (Lattila 2019) discusses *Revenge* (2017), a film that by plot resembles *I Spit on Your Grave* because it is also about a young woman taking revenge after having been violated by a group of men. Concerning the portrayal of contemporary Final Girls as seen in this film, Lattila writes: “[they] defend their right to express their sexuality while still defeating the bad guys, just like their 80s sisters did”, while she also calls Laurie from specifically *Halloween* (2018): “a boozy, gun-toting badass grandmother we all wish we had”. Like Kennedy, Lattila uses discourse to support the Final Girl to be empowered. Stacy Rusnak writes: “the contemporary Final Girl is often understood through the lens of fantasies of empowerment and neoliberal ‘Girl Power’ discourse” (2020, 2). It appears therefore possible that the Final Girl can be considered empowered through usage of such discourse. Where contributors from the documentary focused on the Final Girl being a feminist icon by being proactive and overcoming her traumatic experience, these articles focus on the Final

Girl being a feminist icon by the character getting revenge and by the character being as unmerciful as the Killer.

Thus, the Final Girl can be considered a feminist icon due to overcoming the Killer, but she can also be considered a male surrogate by being victimized, chased and kill the Killer with the Killer's weapon. Thus, there may be a disconnect between the character being a feminist icon and being fetishized by having a phallic object that can be interpreted as her transitioning from female to male. Because the terms contradict each other, it appears that the character cannot simultaneously be a male surrogate and a feminist icon. Going by Rockoff denying the weapon to be a surrogate penis, to regard the character as a feminist icon may depend on the individual's opinion of this object. The weapon may therefore instead only symbolize the demise of the Killer because it is the weapon the Killer has used to kill with. However, the weapon being viewed to be symbolic of the Final Girl becoming masculine remains optional. This will be considered in following examination of 1980s' slasher films' Final Girls. Clover's definition of said character, the character's fetishization and likelihood to either be a male surrogate by being victimized and utilize Killer's weapon and the possibility that the character is a feminist icon by being proactive will be examined.

ANALYSIS

The Final Girls of the 1980s' Slasher Films

Observations of Final Girls were made during the viewing of films in the three franchises, *Halloween*, *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. The examination will concern minor as well as major examples of Final Girls. The minor examples have for clarity's sake been grouped together while the major examples stand separately. Meanwhile, the order will be *Halloween*, *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and thus the characters will not

be grouped together across franchises. This is due to several characters being named the same, like Alice from the first *Friday* film and Alice from the fourth and fifth *Nightmare* films. The major examples across the three franchises are: Laurie from the first and second *Halloween* films, Nancy from the first and third *Nightmare* films and Alice from the fourth and fifth *Nightmare* films. As part of the minor examples, characters appearing similar to Final Girls or initially believed to have been the film's lead in a similar fashion to Marion Crane from *Psycho* have also been accounted for. These latter types of characters will be referred to as 'Marions' for the sake of clarity. Afterwards, some of the characters have been grouped by similarities between. Rockoff's elements defining the slasher genre have also been considered when relevant. For clarity's sake, the films of each franchise are mainly referenced by writing which film they are in the franchise. This is opposed to having their full title written out whenever mentioned.

Final Girls from *Halloween*

The minor examples for the *Halloween* franchise are Rachel from the fourth and fifth films, Jamie from the fourth and fifth films and Tina from the fifth film. Of these, Rachel is the closest to being a Final Girl despite not being the sole survivor of *Halloween 4* (1988) since she survives together with Jamie and other characters.

Rachel is a babysitter like Laurie is in the original *Halloween*. This can be seen in a scene where Rachel assists a group of children trick or treating while her friends are free to have sex. Furthermore, Rachel also attempts to protect Jamie from Michael during the film's climax. She functions like a Final Girl by surviving, although she does not defeat him. Additionally, Rachel is shown to be sexually inactive during the fourth film. This can be argued as her boyfriend is cheating on her and is then later killed by Michael. It is also

revealed during a conversation she has with Kelly, the girl her boyfriend Brady is sleeping with, that Rachel has lost boyfriends prior to him. By therefore having had relationships but now being currently unavailable, Rachel is sexually inactive as a congenial double for the male viewer. While having had survived the fourth film, Rachel is killed by Michael during the fifth film. Thus, she therefore functions like a Marion in this film.

Following her death, Tina, her best friend, seemingly becomes the film's focus and thus female lead. This is later revealed to not be the case when she gets killed while protecting Jamie. It is furthermore not possible to define Tina as a Final Girl because she is both shown to lack awareness for danger when she is driving with Michael, thinking he is her boyfriend. It is furthermore also believed that Tina is sexually active with her boyfriend.

Jamie is however the closest to Clover's understanding of a Final Girl because she is the one to discover Rachel's body and react with terror in the fifth film. Furthermore, Jamie is sexually inactive due to the simple reason of her being a child. Jamie also has a direct connection to the Killer by being his niece. She is therefore the daughter of Laurie and even runs away screaming for help in the fourth film like her mother did in the first film. In terms of awareness, Jamie's supernatural connection to Michael and her reacting when Rachel is being killed despite not being in the same place as her would suggest Jamie to be aware of elements only the viewer would also be aware of.

Laurie

Laurie Strode is a major example of a Final Girl because she is the female survivor in what became regarded as the first slasher film. She can therefore be considered to have been the character Final Girls following her, along with the term itself, was inspired by. Additionally, she survives both films she appears in that were released during the 1980s, and she is also the

main character of each. Thus, she is the Final Girl twice. The reason for why she does not appear in the fourth or fifth film is because she dies prior to the fourth film. This detail has been acknowledged but will also be discounted due to *Halloween* (2018) ignoring all past sequels and lore thereof. This includes Laurie being Michael's sister.

Laurie is shown to be aware of danger throughout the first film: she sees Michael standing outside her classroom before he disappears; she appears uncomfortable when she observes a car driving by; she sees Michael ahead of her while her friend Annie is distracted; she sees Michael standing by a laundry line and is afterwards uneasy when answering her phone. Showing Laurie to be aware while other characters like Annie lacks this awareness makes Laurie identifiable to the viewer as the main character. Laurie maintains this awareness for the second film where she manages to trick Michael by filling her bed with pillows while she herself has escaped due to suspecting he was coming for her. This act implies that she is also resourceful.

Laurie remains sexually inactive. "guys think I'm too smart" she says to her friend Annie (25:20). She does however show interest for a character named Ben Tramer who does not appear in the film. Laurie is therefore a character who shows interest in having a relationship that would be acceptable by a heteronormative norm while she is never shown to have one throughout this first film. Thus, she is feminine enough without disturbing the male viewer's identification with her. As Clover writes about Laurie, she is the sole survivor while her friends are killed by Michael whose deaths are connected to sex (25): Annie is killed in her car as she is about to go to her boyfriend, and Bob and Lynda are both killed after having had sex. The sequel continues this trend by also having two characters, Budd and Karen, killed after having had sex. The conservative idea of being virginal leading to survival while giving into temptations is meant with punishment would almost prevail with Laurie if it was not for a key moment in the first film where she is seen smoking a joint with Annie. This

seems in retrospect to be atypical behavior for the virginal lead of a slasher film who does not fit conservative ideals, and it may suggest a difference in characterization of the female lead of slasher films have taken place since this film. It should also be noted that this horror film came out before Reagan became president.

Another element that seems important to Laurie that both Rachel and Tina had as well was that she is a babysitter. Thus, Laurie spends parts of the climax trying to protect the two children in her care while she is also being hunted by Michael. This maternal nature has since been considered an iconic element of her character: Nick Castle, the actor who plays Michael in the original as well as the latest film, argues in the documentary *In Search of Darkness* that Laurie's desire to protect the two children she is babysitting while she is also dealing with being attacked by Michael makes her likable to the viewer since this behavior demonstrates her selflessness. This sets Laurie apart from those Final Girls who by being the sole survivor of the film only have to think of their own safety. While not included in this collection but still important, Ripley in specifically *Aliens* (1986) also demonstrates a selfless nature when protecting Newt during that film's climax. This portrayal may have been inspired by Laurie. Thus, by also being the first Final Girl, Laurie may be the character who inspired how women should be portrayed in following genre films.

Laurie can also be observed to be resourceful when she in the first film uses various handy tools and objects against Michael such as a needle and a coat hanger. However, while Laurie does grab Michael's knife after each time having attacked him, she drops it when thinking he is dead and does not manage to use the Killer's own weapon against him. Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that Laurie in neither film can be credited for having killed Michael. Instead, it is Dr. Loomis who kills Michael in both. She may stop Michael briefly and it is also acknowledged that she shoots him blind with a gun in the second film. However, Loomis is still the one to defeat Michael in each film: in the first,

Loomis shoots Michael several times until Michael falls out of a window and lands flat onto the lawn. In the second film, Loomis turns on some gas, lights a match and blows up the room with Michael in it. For clarity's sake, Michael escapes at the end of the first film and is meant to have been killed by the end of the second film which is why the third film in the series has a new story. Regardless, Laurie never succeeds in overcoming her attacker on her own despite her being one of the first Final Girls. This would suggest this detail of the Final Girl dealing with her attacker alone may be a result of a repetition from film to film throughout the 1980s that must have led to Clover's interpretation of the character as a male surrogate. Laurie can therefore be argued to not be a male surrogate given that she only remains a victim reacting with terror and never completely manages to overcome her attacker. Yet, she could by surviving and protecting children be considered a feminist icon despite being saved by a male character. It can also be argued that she is not fully a proactive character, because she would without Loomis' interference have been killed by Michael like Rachel was in the fifth film.

Final Girls from *Friday the 13th*

It must be clarified that this series does not seem to have any major examples of Final Girls because none of the female characters make noticeable reappearances in sequels. Besides Jason, Tommy would be the only other major character in this franchise given he is in the fourth, fifth and sixth film. If any character can be considered a major character in this franchise it would have to be Tommy because he is in the fourth, fifth and sixth film. This character is however portrayed by different actors for each film. This examination will instead concern the individual examples of Final Girls or female characters alike and how the series may reflect contemporary trends or standards of slasher films.

Annie is the hitchhiking girl in the opening of the original *Friday the 13th* and she is also the first character, apart from characters seen in the opening 'past event' to get killed. By being the first character in the film, Annie ends up being a Marion because she is later killed. She also demonstrates a lack of awareness by not understanding the Killer's intent before it is too late.

Alice instead ends up being the sole survivor of this first film. She is sexually inactive and demonstrates being aware when she hears her friend Brenda scream for help. She also appeared aware of signs of danger during the sequence where she is all alone while making coffee. In a scene where she plays strip-monopoly she is about to unbutton her shirt before being startled by a gust of wind opening the door behind her. Thus, Alice is appropriately feminine while never being completely sexualized like the other female characters. Therefore, she can be considered as a congenial double. By later discovering the bodies, run from the Killer and by successfully killing the Killer with the Killer's weapon, Alice can be considered a male surrogate given she completes her masculine transition. She may however not work as a feminist icon because she is later pulled into the lake by the ghost of Jason and then later wakes up in a hospital. Thus, she cannot be considered proactive since she seemingly does not escape this traumatic experience by her own means. Lastly, Alice becomes a Marion in the sequel by being killed before the opening credits. Furthermore, she is killed after having been naked in the shower and thus, her being killed after being nude may be connected to a conservative understanding.

Ginny is arguably not a sole survivor of the second *Friday* film: she survives the encounter with Jason together with her boyfriend, but after Jason jumps through the window behind her, Ginny wakes up as she is taken to an ambulance alone while asking for her boyfriend. By being saved by authorities, Ginny may not be a proactive character, although she does experience a traumatic experience. Ginny is furthermore an atypical Final

Girl: she demonstrates partial nudity when being shown in her bra during a scene where she changes clothes, and she is also seemingly sexually active with her boyfriend. There is even a scene with her drinking in a bar and thus, Ginny may not fit the conservative ideal. Yet, she is shown to be resourceful when attempting to psychologically manipulate Jason into thinking she is his mother by wearing her sweater, a decision she makes after having quickly deduced the connection between her attacker and the discovered shrine with the decapitated head and aforementioned sweater. Ginny is viewed to be victimized because she mainly tries to escape her attacker while discovering the bodies of her friends. Her using a chainsaw against Jason counts as proactive because it implies her competence and capability in defending herself. However, her plan to manipulate him fails and she is saved by her boyfriend intervening. It is then while Jason and boyfriend Paul are fighting that Ginny uses a big knife to hit Jason and seemingly kill him. Despite using a phallic weapon, Ginny is arguably not a male surrogate due to her having a boyfriend who may fulfill such role.

Boyishly named Chris is the sole survivor of the third film. She is different from past female characters in this franchise because she is the first female character to have an established connection to the Killer. This refers to a flashback of her being assaulted by an unknown person. It is then later revealed that this unknown person was Jason. This 'past event' is also not the opening scene of the film nor is it related to giving the Killer a motivation. Instead, this past event gives the female character a different reason to fear the Killer, while it may also motivate her to overcome him and her trauma. Chris is quickly determined to be the character who will become the film's Final Girl because she shows an awareness for signs of danger she does not share with the other characters. This includes examples like the crime scene where Jason murdered a married couple in their home which she drives by, the barn whose doors closes without explanation as well as commenting on a car door being closed earlier. She is also resourceful when attempting to hang Jason with a

rope. Chris could be considered a feminist icon by having had said traumatic experience and by overcoming Jason. However, the film ends similarly to the last two films: Chris, after having defeated Jason, sleeps in a boat in the lake. She then seemingly wakes up and sees that Jason is still alive and has come back to chase her. However, this turns out to have been her imagination. She is then pulled into the water by what appears to be the ghost of Jason's mother. After this, Chris is shown taken away by authorities. To summarize, the character defeats Jason, a jump scare occurs and then the character is taken away by authorities while not understanding what occurred prior to this. Thus, Chris ultimately lacks being proactive. She can also be regarded to be victimized by reacting with terror to finding the bodies of her friends. However, a modern understanding would argue her to be a feminist icon because she gets revenge on her attacker by killing him. With that said, Chris using Jason's axe could be considered as her completing her transformation.

The fourth film has three characters of interest: Sara, Trish and Tommy.

Tommy is the one to kill Jason, Trish is the closest to a Final Girl and Sara functions like a conservative cautionary tale. Sara initially appeared to become the sole survivor because she was established to be sexually inactive and she is also shown to be aware: she gives impression of being a virgin during her conversation with the sexually active Sam, and she is paranoid when she during a scene at the lake thought that Sam was in danger. Yet, Sara ends up having sex with a character named Doug. She then discovers his body and is killed herself. Sara seems to therefore reflect 1980s' conservative ideals. Trish is meanwhile the last surviving female character, yet she survives with her brother Tommy. Trish seems inspired by the portrayal of Laurie from *Halloween* given that it is illustrated that she is protective of her younger brother. However, she is ultimately saved by Tommy who is also the one to kill Jason. Prior to this conclusion, Jason had Trish pinned down to the ground with Jason on top of her. This moment seems to therefore depict Trish as a victim who needs to be saved.

Concerning the definition, Trish is sexually inactive as well as shown to be aware of danger. This is illustrated in a scene with her brother Tommy: while Tommy is made masculine because he is trying to fix their car, Trish gets weary of their surroundings due to hearing something approaching them. She may not be a male surrogate as such would be attributed to either Tommy for killing Jason or Rob for being the closest to being in a relationship with Trish. Yet, this latter is not throughout the entire film since this character is killed by Jason while urging Trish to run away during the climax. This scene also demonstrates Trish to be 'abject terror personified' when she reacts with terror to Robb being murdered. The same can be said for when she discovered Doug's body in an earlier scene and later finds the other bodies. Given that she is not the one to kill Jason, it is difficult to consider her to be especially proactive. She is therefore most noticeable for possibly showing Laurie's influence in other franchises apart from *Halloween*.

The fifth film is unique for being a film that seemingly has Jason in it until it is revealed to be an imposter. Furthermore, it once again has two female characters while Tommy is again the one to kill the Killer: Pam is the surviving female character and Robin who like Sara from the last film seems to be another cautionary tale. Robin was initially believed to become the surviving female character solely due to her name being boyish when she was initially introduced as "Rob". Thus, Clover's theory about how a boyish name indicates which character is going to be the Final Girl is proven faulty. Robin does however remain noticeable: she denies stuttering Jake's affections and then when going to bed strips down to wear nothing but a thong. To appear so sexualized makes her considered as a fetishized image. It is then when Robin is in her bed that she sees Jake's dead body next to her. Before being swiftly killed, she screams at the sight of this abject. She may be a cautionary tale like Violet, another female character in this film, who dies while listening to her music and thus this observation can support the understanding of these films following

conservative values. These characters can by that logic be viewed as sinners who not only go nude to bed and listen to pop music, but also ridicule fragile masculinity by denying a man's affections as seen when Robin laughs in response to Jake showing her interest. Concerning Pam though, she is the one to discover the bodies of aforementioned to which she reacts with terror. She is arguably not proactive because she is seen cowering in mud and screaming while the Killer approaches her opposed to running away. Pam is then saved by a child character named Reggie who is operating a forklift that hits the Killer. She is however shown to be resourceful when she during the climax sees a bed of spikes below and tries to trick the Killer to fall on them. Yet, this plan does not work until Tommy contributes to it. By Pam not being in a relationship with any character, she seems sexually inactive. Nevertheless, both Tommy and Reggie, the boy who drove the forklift, function as surrogates for the male viewer because they also survive and are furthermore more proactive than Pam. She is meanwhile victimized, and she is only a Final Girl by being the surviving female character. However, even this can be debated because the film ends with Tommy seemingly about to kill Pam, having become Jason himself. There is even before this a misleading dream sequence of Tommy killing Pam.

The sixth film is noticeable for having Megan. This character survives the film, can be considered proactive throughout, is sexualized and she also ends up being in a relationship with Tommy. Because of this, Tommy may function as the viewer's surrogate. Megan is an uncommon character due to her openly sexual interest in Tommy was initially believed to eventually make her a cautionary tale. This does not occur despite a scene of her forcing Tommy into her lap while driving a car which also includes a point of view shot of her crotch. Because Megan drives the car with Tommy's head pushed down onto her crotch and due to Megan in the climax saving Tommy and killing Jason, she is both proactive as well as fetishized. As it was stated at the beginning of this segment, her fetishized portrayal

may motivate a male viewer to use Tommy as their surrogate so that they can vicariously have Megan.

The seventh film has Tina who is noticeable for having telekinetic powers. It is possible that her character has been inspired by Carrie from the film of the same name. Despite her powers, she is however initially kept under control by her mother as well as her doctor who turns out to exploit her. This is even continued during the film's climax where it is seemingly the ghost of her father who defeats Jason and not herself. Tina may not function like a male surrogate because she ends up being in a relationship with Nick. Nick is therefore the surrogate the viewer may identify with in order to possess the fetishized Tina. Concerning her resemblance to Carrie, Tina may be a character that is usually seen in occult films. This is believed because female characters in occult horror films like *Carrie* (1976) or *The Exorcist* (1973) are typically portrayed to be more open to supernatural influence. Clover writes that while slasher films code aggressive behavior to be masculine through their usage of weapons invoking phallic symbolism, occult films code emotional openness and vulnerability to be feminine (101). Thus, Tina's powers may metaphorically be viewed to be her emotions, making her an exaggeratedly female character. It is also through her powers that she can see future events. Thus, Tina demonstrates being very aware. She may be identifiable as the Final Girl by the viewer being familiar with the structure of a slasher film. Regarding defining her as a Final Girl, Tina remains sexually inactive while she does form a relationship with Nick that seems platonic opposed to sexual. Therefore, their relationship may not overstep conservative ideals of the times. Given examples of her proactive nature when saving Nick from Jason and her having a traumatic 'past event' like losing her father, an event she blames herself for, there is reason to argue her to be a feminist icon. She could because of her powers be seen as an empowered female, although empowered in a literal sense. By having such

powers and never assuming a phallic weapon, there is no transition nor reason to argue her to be a masculinized character.

Boyishly named Rennie from the eighth film seems to have been inspired by past example Tina as well as Laurie. Like Tina, Rennie has experienced a traumatic event that is the reason for her being constantly observed by a patriarchal male character, her uncle and teacher. This character is then revealed to have been responsible for her trauma: he tried to teach her how to swim by throwing her into a lake and nearly drowned her. It was then in this moment that Rennie saw the ghost of Jason as a child, which is the same ghost Rennie has been seeing throughout this film. Thus, this flashback reveals the connection Rennie as a Final Girl has with Jason as the Killer. However, unlike Laurie who gladly accepted a joint from her friend, Rennie not only rejects drugs but is later forcefully drugged by two junkies in a back alley. Same two junkies are then killed by Jason who by doing so saves Rennie from being raped by them. By also being sexually inactive while she develops a platonic relationship with male surrogate Sean throughout the film, Rennie seems to correspond to a conservative ideal. A character named Tamara contrasts with Rennie: this character is a drug-addict who tries to drown Rennie and have sex with her teacher. She is after this attempt then killed by Jason. To be killed in light of her actions seems to only invoke the conservative message of Rennie being a positive example. There seems to be other signs of conservative awareness within the film, such as seen with a female character named J.J who likes to play rock music. Jason then murders this character while she was trying to play music. By Clover's definition, Rennie should be a transformed male by having a boyish name, yet Sean seems to be the male surrogate of the film by being in a relationship with her. This indicates her to be a heterosexual female character. Going by Clover's understanding of interpreting a character's physical weakness as a sign of femininity, Rennie can due to her being assaulted by the junkies and later saved by none other than Jason be regarded to be a feminine

character. While Rennie seems to be intended to be interpreted as a female character, she may function like a feminist icon if her rebelling against her patriarchal uncle is viewed as her being proactive. Regardless, Rennie is a Final Girl by being the last surviving female character of the main cast.

The *Friday the 13th* films of the 1980s reflect contemporary conservative ideals while also lacking iconic female characters by having a male character appear as the main character in three films. This appears ironic because the original Killer of this franchise was a woman before being replaced by the male Jason, who himself was originally dead and therefore his mother's motivation for her actions. Likewise, the male Tommy is the only character who returns multiple times. Tommy can especially in the fourth film be considered to function like a surrogate because he in a scene from this film voyeuristically enjoys Sam and her boyfriend through his window. In said scene, Sam and her boyfriend are viewed through Tommy's point of view. Thus, the audience is asked to identify with Tommy as their surrogate. Out of this collection of female characters, Megan is most noticeable for defying expectations by being an openly sexually active and proactive character. However, her being different may not be a coincidence since the sixth film is defined to be a horror comedy. The film even appears to be a parody given the opening title card satirizes James Bond. In light of this comedic tone, Megan may be regarded to be the exception that proves the rule of the conservative ideal represented with virginal characters like Rennie.

Final Girls from *A Nightmare on Elm Street*

The *Nightmare* franchise has major examples like Nancy and Alice. Nancy. The second film of this franchise, *Freddy's Revenge* (1985), has been excluded for reason of having a male lead and because it is a film deserving an analysis utilizing queer theory that would not befit

this thesis' purpose. For clarity's sake, the male lead's name is Jessie, which is an androgynous name. Regarding social issues, this film seems to reflect homophobia: in this film, Freddy Krueger seems to function like an allegory for a monstrous gay man who wishes to forcibly possess Jessie's body against his will. This reflection may have corresponded with the 1980s' ideals for masculinity along with the ongoing fear caused by the AIDS epidemic.

Concerning minor characters, there is Tina from the first film and there is also Kristen from the third and fourth films. Tina is a Marion who initially appears to be the main character. This is argued since the character, like Annie in the first *Friday* film, is the first character introduced. Meanwhile seemingly being the main character, Nancy is introduced to be a supporting character. Tina being killed can be regarded to have been an attempt at surprising the viewer, while also solidifying Freddy as a dangerous Killer. That Tina is not going to be the Final Girl can by Clover's logic be foreshadowed by the character being sexually active with her boyfriend. Tina even dies after having had sex and thus the film signals a conservative ideal. Kristen seemingly shares this mistake since she dies in the fourth film after having been established to have a boyfriend and not be virginal. Her not being as virginal as she seemed to be in the third film can possibly be suggested by her being a smoker in the fourth film and also by her having a boyfriend. However, her being a smoker may not have been intended to have been regarded as such. It is instead likely that Kristen being a smoker and then main character Alice becoming a smoker after Kristen's death was done to illustrate that Alice has inherited a part of Kristen's soul. Kristen is furthermore regarded to be a minor example because she is never fully a Final Girl: she survives in the third film together with two other characters while Nancy dies, and Kristen dies in the fourth film while protecting Alice. She also spends the third film being part of a group opposed to be a proactive character.

Nancy

This segment will first examine Nancy's character from specifically the first film and will thereafter examine the character as seen in the third film. The viewer may be aware of Nancy being the Final Girl in the first *Nightmare* film when she refuses to sleep with Glenn and thus demonstrate being sexually inactive. However, Nancy technically becomes the Final Girl after Tina dies since Nancy is then the only adolescent female character left in the film.

Nancy also demonstrates a level of awareness when in class seeing the ghost of Tina. Nancy noticing something dangerous in a classroom setting may be inspired by *Halloween* where Laurie solely noticed Michael standing outside the window. Nancy stands apart from past examples by wanting to kill the Killer instead of wanting to escape him. This can be proven by how Nancy plans her attack on Freddy by wanting to drag him out of her dreams and into her own world. She even arranged various traps for him he could encounter while chasing her. It is this and how Nancy purposefully lunges herself towards Freddy in order to grab him that makes Clover consider her to be the "grittiest of the Final Girls" (38). These actions support Nancy being a proactive character. By her planning to kill Freddy and setting traps for him she is also the character controlling the climax opposed to just being chased by the Killer from one place to another like former characters like Ginny. Concerning this, even though Nancy acts proactively in the climax, she is chased by Freddy throughout the film. Thus, the film stands apart from past films by having the Final Girl targeted and chased by the Killer multiple times opposed to this chase only happening in the climax. Furthermore, Nancy is arguably fetishized for the viewer when being naked in the bathtub. Despite being sexually inactive, Nancy is briefly shown to be naked in a shot from this scene. There is even a shot done between her spread legs as Freddy's glove emerges between said legs. Yet, she is not killed like past examples would have suggested. Concerning her defeating the Killer, Nancy uses a technique her boyfriend taught her and therefore does not use the Killer's

weapon against him. Regarding her character in this first film, it appears difficult to argue her being either a male surrogate or masculinized. Having a boyfriend but not being sexually active with him does however create the option to view her as a congenial double. However, because Nancy does not as such assume a phallus in this film, there is little argument for her having a transition. Nancy is therefore possibly a proactive feminist icon opposed to a male surrogate.

In the third film, Nancy is a helpful adult who gives the adolescent characters advice on how to defeat the Killer. Furthermore, Nancy has a connection to Freddy despite her not being the Final Girl. As such, the film does not seem to have a Final Girl given that the survivors encompassed a group of characters. Although, Nancy's connection to Freddy may still be considered as a 'past event' that gives her motivation. Nancy being a helpful adult while the other adults at the hospital does not believe in Freddy Krueger supports Rockoff's point about the type of adults existing in a slasher film. Despite being helpful and despite the film being titled after these dream warriors, Nancy is killed by Freddy and it is the doctor and Nancy's father burying Freddy's remains that defeats Freddy. Thus, patriarchal figures and not supernatural powers defeat the Killer as it was also the case with psychic Tina back in the seventh *Friday* film. However, Nancy does save the other characters briefly by stabbing Freddy with his own gloved hand. Thus, Nancy assumes the phallus and by Clover's definition becomes masculinized. While sharing scenes with the male doctor, a romantic connection between them is not clarified. Therefore, the male doctor may not be a surrogate for the audience. In terms of surrogates, the mute Joey who shows sexual interest in a nurse may be considered identifiable for the male viewer when later having a sexual encounter with her. Yet, this sequence suggests conservative ideals as this turns out to be a dream sequence with Freddy being disguised as said nurse luring Joey. It may therefore function as a conservative cautionary tale as Joey let himself be tempted and was then, by this

understanding, strapped to a bed and roasted over hellfire as his punishment. Returning to Nancy, she is proactive because she gives the teenage characters a method to fight back against the Killer. Thus, she may therefore be viewed as a feminist icon. Unlike the first film though, the climax concerns them trying to save Joey from Freddy. It is therefore not a chase but rather a fight. However, Freddy does manage to defeat some of the teenagers individually in this climax despite them using their powers.

Alice

Alice from the fourth *Nightmare* film seems inspired by specifically Ripley from the *Alien* franchise. This is believed because she in the climax, wanting to save her boyfriend, says to Freddy: “Get away from him, you son of a bitch!” (01:13:55). This line is similar to Ripley’s line from *Aliens* (1986): “get away from her, you bitch!” (02:03:24). It is therefore likely that Alice in the fourth *Nightmare* film, *The Dream Master* (1988), is inspired by Ripley. While the original *Alien* was released around the same time as *Halloween*, it is possible that *Aliens* was further inspired by slasher films since this film was released in 1986. Returning to *Alien*, there is also the possibility that this film was inspired by the same catalogue of films that inspired the creation of *Halloween*.

Alice is an empowered Final Girl who viewed through a postfeminist perspective could be seen as a feminist icon. This is believed because she by the climax of the film has become powerful enough to fight Freddy in physical combat in order to avenge her dead friends. Alice may therefore be closer to an action hero given that she even finishes the fight with the one liner: “rest in hell” (01:21:31). However, her transformation could by a male viewer be considered a fetishization of her character. Her boyfriend Dan, whom she meets during the film, can even be considered a vehicle the male viewer may identify with so

they can through him possess Alice. Her character may even be further criticized by pointing out that she involuntarily inherited her powers from her friends when Freddy killed them. Thus, Alice is powerful because of their deaths. She can therefore be criticized for being a blank slate who becomes an amalgamation of the characters around her. Regarding her initial characterization, Alice's outfit changes throughout the film for the sake of suggesting character development. In the beginning of the film, she is conservatively dressed in a long dress that covers her entire body, later she wears a combination of said dress and a brown leather jacket and by the end she is wearing a black leather jacket and jeans. She also goes from having her hair loose to have it in a ponytail. Alice's development and final form may be indicative of contemporary feminism and independency for women. Avenging the death of her friends by choosing to fight Freddy opposed to avoid or escape him gives reason for viewing her as proactive. Alice even survives both films she appears in unlike Nancy and Kristen. However, Alice is simultaneously a literal vehicle of the aspects the other characters possessed while she herself had little character originally. Her character development was therefore forced upon her. While she is not a male surrogate, as her boyfriend would most likely instead be considered so while she herself is fetishized, Alice seems to be an attempt at intentionally creating a feministic character that may appeal to women of the time.

That Alice is to be viewed as a female character is maintained in the fifth film because she is in this film pregnant. Once again, Alice is not a male surrogate due to this aspect cannot be seen as masculine. Furthermore, Alice being pregnant suggests that she has been sexually active. Alice functions throughout the film as a maternal figure because of her interactions with the dream version of her son. She even in the opening of the film has a nightmare about being Amanda Krueger, a nun who was raped by inmates of an asylum and who was also Freddy's mother. Meanwhile, the film is about Alice's unborn baby being possessed by Freddy and thus, the understanding of Alice even being Freddy's mother is

indicated. Concerning her as a Final Girl, Alice is not the film's sole survivor due to her friend Yvonne also surviving. Yet, Alice does lose her boyfriend Dan. Returning to her pregnancy, this aspect may be related to contemporary standards regarding women's right over their own body: the pregnancy itself is made grotesque due to its connection to Freddy along with the doctors believing that Alice is hysterical as well as delusional. There is even Alice's friend Mark who suggests that she should get an abortion. Furthermore, Freddy being birthed as a baby by his mother during a dream, and also him exiting Alice's body in his adult form during the climax may indicate Freddy as an abject in connection to the film's representation of pregnancy. Regardless, the film emphasizing Alice to be a female character prevents her from being a congenial double. Yet, she appears to be a proactive character given that she successfully prevents Freddy from killing her friend Yvonne. It is also in this scene that Alice stabs Freddy with a pipe through the mouth and arguably attacks him with a phallic weapon. This does however not masculinize due to the pipe not being the Killer's weapon. Regarding the method Alice uses to defeat Freddy, her friend Yvonne frees the spirit of Freddy's mother who then arrives to absorb Freddy into her womb. The Killer is therefore defeated in a feminine way not fit for a male surrogate because it lacks an aspect that could be interpreted to have masculinity. Instead of the Killer being castrated, the Killer becomes infantile and arguably loses independency.

In conclusion, Alice is an empowered, proactive and decisively feminized Final Girl. She seems intended for a female audience through her femininity invoking social issues of the time and through being inspired by characters like Ripley, while also being an attempt at enticing male viewers by way of portraying her akin to an action hero. She could therefore from a modern perspective be described to fit the type of 'battle-hardened warrior' and 'angel of vengeance' Kennedy referred to.

Seven Categories of Final Girls

The first category is about Final Girls who try to escape the Killer. It includes the following characters: Laurie, Rachel and Jamie from the *Halloween* franchise; Alice, Ginny, Chris, Trish, Pam and Rennie from the *Friday* franchise; and Kristen from the *Nightmare* franchise. These characters are victimized by the Killer, react with horror when finding dead bodies and they then kill the Killer in self-defense. They may represent Clover's quintessential understanding of the Final Girl.

The second category is about Final Girls who try to fight the Killer. This refers to those characters who willingly choose to seek out the Killer instead of trying to escape him. Those who get cornered and attack in self-defense, like Ginny using her chainsaw, do not count. This category includes Tina from the seventh *Friday* film, Nancy from the first and third *Nightmare* films and Alice from the fourth and fifth *Nightmare* films. These characters are aware of the danger they face, but they still choose to oppose the adult Killer.

The third category is about Final Girls who tries to protect others. They may also act to save others from the Killer. The following characters are included in this franchise: Laurie and Rachel from the *Halloween* franchise; Trish, Tina and Megan from the *Friday* franchise; and Nancy, Kristen and Alice from the *Nightmare* franchise. While not being a Final Girl in the third *Nightmare* film, Nancy acts to save Kristen from Freddy trying to swallow her. It is then in the fourth *Nightmare* film that Kristen sacrifices herself in order to protect Alice. Also, Tina from the fifth *Halloween* film dies while trying to protect Jamie. By trying to protect others and demonstrate selfless nature, it is possible that these characters have been inspired by Laurie.

The fourth category is about Final Girls who either possess supernatural powers or demonstrate supernatural abilities. This category includes Jamie from the fifth *Halloween*

film, Tina and Rennie from the *Friday* franchise and Kristen as well as Alice from the *Nightmare* franchise. Despite characters like Kristen, Tina and Jamie having supernatural abilities, the Killer is ultimately defeated by patriarchal figures. To have these characters be supernatural may suggest they otherwise would be defenseless against the Killer.

Furthermore, they are still feminine in the matter of being smaller and weaker than the Killer as Clover says. To make the female characters supernatural both underlines Clover's point about women of occult films being emotionally open while it also mystifies them.

The fifth category is about Final Girls with parental figures either opposing them or trying to control them. This includes Megan, Tina and Rennie from the *Friday* franchise and Nancy, Kristen and Alice from the *Nightmare* franchise. Megan barely counts since her father, a police officer, is not successful in restricting her. Tina and Rennie both have a male figure who controls their life and whose control they eventually break free from. Meanwhile, Nancy's mother is an alcoholic who prevents Nancy from being with her boyfriend by putting bars in front of Nancy's window and locking the house and throwing away the key. While Nancy's mother knows of Freddy Krueger, she still refuses to help. When telling Nancy of Freddy being killed and showing Nancy his glove, Nancy's mother is trying to reassure Nancy that Freddy is dead and thus not a threat to her. This is despite Nancy already knowing that Freddy is a threat because he has already killed her friend. Nancy's mother's blind denial of Freddy's existence and well-meaning intention may reflect Nancy Reagan's well-meaning yet blissfully ignorant anti-drug slogan: "Just say no" (McGrath, 2016). Kristen's mother, who is briefly introduced in the third film while also being suggested to be of the upper class, seems to express disappointment in her daughter. Ironically, Kristen's mother can also be compared to Nancy Reagan because she ignores Kristen's concerns and in secret drugs her daughter with sleeping pills, leading to Kristen blaming her for getting her killed. It is the character's ignorance to her daughter's concerns

that makes her comparable to Nancy Reagan. Finally, Alice's father is a heavy drinker who is shown to berate his daughter. Alice is even shown fantasizing about being able to stand up to him. These examples may reflect disapproval the younger generation of 1980s' had of conservative ideals and possibly President Reagan's patriarchal ideals, since the Final Girl is shown standing up to these controlling parental figures.

The sixth category is about Final Girls who lose their boyfriends. This includes: Rachel from the fourth *Halloween* film; Alice and Chris from the *Friday* films; and Nancy and Alice from the *Nightmare* films. To have the female lead lose her boyfriend may make her seem more vulnerable and alone, thus more like the Final Girl Clover defined.

Lastly, the seventh category is about Final Girls who get a boyfriend during the film. This includes: Megan, Tina and Rennie from the *Friday* films, and Alice from the fourth *Nightmare* film. As it has been described, the boyfriend may function as a surrogate for the male viewer who may identify with the character for the sake of possessing the fetishized Final Girl.

These observations lead to the following conclusions for each character: Pam's main motivation is to escape; Laurie, Rachel and Trish all try to escape the Killer while protecting others; Jamie has supernatural abilities but tries to escape the Killer; Alice from the first *Friday* film and Chris lose their boyfriends and try to escape the Killer; Ginny, who arguably loses her boyfriend since he is not with her at the very end, tries to escape the Killer; Megan tries to protect the boyfriend she gets during the film while her father in vain tries to control her; Rennie is a character with seemingly supernatural abilities, who has a controlling patriarchal figure she manages to escape from, and she gets a boyfriend during the film; Nancy actively fights back against the Killer, has a controlling parent, loses her boyfriend and tries to protect others; Kristen has a bad relationship with her mother, has supernatural

powers, tries to escape the Killer and protects Alice by sacrificing herself; Tina has supernatural powers she uses in order to protect the boyfriend she gained during the film from the Killer she is trying to kill, and she also has a controlling parental figure; lastly, Alice from the fourth and fifth *Nightmare* film tries to fight the Killer with her supernatural abilities in order to save the boyfriend she gained during the first film but loses in the next, and she has a bad relationship with her father. That the first category regarding trying to escape the Killer is the only category Alice from *Nightmare* is not in correlates with the understanding of her possibly being an attempt at creating a feministic icon in slasher films. It is with these observations in mind along with the definition of what makes a slasher film a slasher film that *Halloween* (2018) will be analyzed. Given that Laurie and the original *Halloween* inspired slasher films of the 1980s, it will be considered if the portrayal of Laurie Strode as well as this film as a whole has been inspired by the 1980s.

ANALYSIS PART 2: The Return of the Slasher Film

Contemporary America in a Contemporary Slasher Film

As the film is set in 2018 and therefore takes place 40 years after the events of the first film, the film reflects contemporary America and therefore not social issues of the late 1970s. However, contemporary America resembles the 1980s due to having a controversial president who was previously known as a TV-personality. This same president was also elected by the Republican Party and beloved by conservatives and Christians despite not himself reflecting their political ideals. It therefore seems likely that the film may have similarities with the social issues represented in 1980s' horror films. Yet, decades have passed since and social issues are not the same. Where slasher films of the 1980s could have teenagers be slaughtered by a Killer, contemporary America has multiple cases of mass shooters every year.

According to gunviolencearchive.org, there were a total of 337 mass shootings in 2018 alone. In the last 4 years before 2018, 2014 has the lowest count of instances of mass shootings with only 269 reported cases. Meanwhile, 2016 has the highest number of instances of mass shootings with 382 cases. Between 2014 and 2017, there have been a total of 1.332 cases of mass shootings. As of May 27th, there have been 141 mass shootings in America this year, with 355 deaths among teenagers aged between 12 and 17. In comparison, a masked Killer killing a handful of people in one night seems like the lesser impressive concept for a horror film. The concept of a slasher film not being impressive to modern time's reality is referenced early in the film by a character named Dave: Dave, Vicky and Allyson, who is Laurie's granddaughter, are walking to school as they talk about the events of the first film and how traumatic of an experience it must have been for Laurie. The pot smoking Dave comments: "Is it though? All things considered, there're a lot worse things that's happening today and, I mean, like, a couple of people getting killed by one guy with a knife is not that big of a deal" (00:17:21). When then being informed Laurie was almost murdered, Dave replies with: "and she escaped, and they caught him and now he's incarcerated. I'm just saying, like, by today's standards" (00:17:35). Dave is not the only character who shows little sympathy for Laurie's tragedy, as even her daughter and granddaughter do the same: her daughter, named Karen, is more concerned with blaming Laurie for having forced her to use firearms and been taken away from her. Allyson meanwhile has a better connection to Laurie than Karen, but still tells Laurie to stop focusing on Michael: "all this hiding, all this preparation, for nothing. It took priority over your family. It cost you your family (...) say goodbye to Michael and get over it" (00:20:17). Furthermore, the British podcasters show a bigger interest in Michael than Laurie, as seen with their conversation with her: "we want a glimpse inside his mind. That's why your story is so important to us" (00:12:34). When Laurie asks about what story they refer to, they reply with: "three failed marriages, rocky

relationship with your daughter and granddaughter” (00:12:45). Laurie then summarizes the following: “Michael Myers murdered five people, and *he’s* a human being we need to understand. I’m twice divorced, and *I’m* a basket case” (00:27:57). Laurie therefore clarifies that the podcasters are interested in humanizing Michael while they think of Laurie to simply be unstable for having been divorced and having her daughter forcibly removed from her care. Laurie is considered unstable for having failed as a wife and as a mother, while serial killer Michael is sympathized. The understanding that Laurie is a woman who suffered through a traumatic experience caused by a male figure she refuses to forget may reflect contemporary cases in the #MeToo movement, such as Christine Blasey Ford who testified against Kavanaugh on accounts of sexual assault (Joho 2018).

Furthermore, the film even seems to demonstrate a form of conservative ideology comparable to the 1980s’ America. Uncharacteristically for a slasher film, there is no nudity apart from the flashback of Michael killing his sister which is a clip taken from the original film and put into this one. Likewise, there are no sex scenes followed by brutal murder. The closest to such happens with Vicky and Dave who cuddle with each other while both being fully clothed. Furthermore, Dave and Vicky are both drug addicts as they had originally planned to spend Halloween being stoned with each other. To then have them killed, implies them to be conservative cautionary tales. Finally, despite Laurie being told by Karen that: “the world is not a dark and evil place – it’s full of love and understanding” (00:43:37), Laurie is proven to be right when Michael does escape and goes on a killing spree. It is because Karen knew how to operate firearms and because Laurie had designed her entire house to withstand an invasion that Michael is defeated. The main characters operating firearms in their fight with Michael who meanwhile still only uses melee weapons may reflect a political agenda regarding favoring The National Rifle Association of America (NRA). Characters opposing firearms and vigilantism, like Ray when he is telling Laurie to

put down her gun after she has broken into his and Karen's home, functions mostly as comic reliefs. It is however not uncommon to have firearms be used by main characters in slasher films, as seen with Loomis for instance using a gun to shoot and seemingly defeat Michael in the original *Halloween*. The same can be said for how Michael was defeated by being shot multiple times by a firing squad consisting of locals and police in the fourth *Halloween* film. This favoritism for characters using firearms for self-defense makes the actual danger of a Killer in a slasher film questionable: were a man wearing a mask and carrying a knife to enter someone's private home in America, intending to kill, the perpetrator would most likely be shot dead the owner using their gun. Furthermore, because the man entered with a concealed identity while carrying a knife, the shooter would most likely be acquitted in court for having acted in self-defense. This may however be why slasher films uses 'isolated settings' so that the characters can be in danger. The usage of firearms to defeat the Killer may also be another reason as to why Freddy and eventually Jason were made nearly indestructible. Returning to isolating a setting for a slasher film, smart phones likewise belittle the horror of a slasher film because they afford the option to immediately get help. This may be why there is a scene in *Halloween* (2018) where Allyson's boyfriend drops her phone into a punch bowl, thus destroying it. To disabled phones has even been done in slasher films of the 1980s, such as the fourth *Friday* film where Trish tries to use a phone to call for help. She fails in doing so because Jason has cut the cord. Thus, disabling phones was even done in a time before smart phones for the sake of creating an isolated setting.

Defining Halloween (2018) as a Slasher Film

There is no mistaking that this film is a slasher film given it is sequel and thus part of a slasher franchise. With that and along with an attention for nostalgia, the film uses

recognizable elements of the *Halloween* franchise. These include actor Jamie Lee Curtis returning to play Laurie Strode, the film taking place in the same setting as the original, and the film having Michael Myers who has his iconic mask, outfit and weapon. There are even shots in the film referencing shots from the original. Allyson seeing Laurie outside her window in class mirrors the scene from the original film where Laurie saw Michael standing on the street outside of her class. There is also the moment where Michael thinks he has killed Laurie and then discovers that her body is gone, which compares to the ending of the original where Michael was the one who was missing. There are also characters like Dr. Sartain who Laurie directly calls the new Loomis. Lastly, there are even sequences such as Allyson running from house to house screaming for help like her grandmother and Jamie did in earlier films. While this latter example may not have been intended as a reference, the former examples seem to have been intended for the sake of recognizability. While this film then showcases elements referencing the original slasher film as a form of branding, question remains how this film by its own elements – that being Killer, Killer's weapon, point of view, bloody special effects, setting, types of adults, past event and Final Girl – functions like a slasher film.

The Killer is Michael Myers who in the film appears the way he is recognized from the original. As it was the case with the original film, Michael seems indestructible by surviving being shot in the face as well as surviving being run over by a car. It is even implied he survives being burned alive at the end of the film since he does not appear in the last shot of the blazing basement. Where Rockoff said that this became a trend for slasher films while it was not the intent for the original, it seems here to in fact be for the sake of setting up a series. This can be argued because two sequels, *Halloween Kills* (2020) and *Halloween Ends* (2021) have already been announced. Michael furthermore demonstrates aggressive masculinity by being strong enough to easily throw his victims around. He is

furthermore strong enough to impale a teenager named Oscar onto a fenced gate as well as nail Dave to a wall. Michael is also capable of breaking Laurie's front door without suffering from sustainable injuries. While nothing concrete can be said concerning Michael's sexuality, he does demonstrate voyeurism when seen looking through a window into a house with a young woman he then goes to kill. By Rockoff's argument that the Killer does not need a motivation to kill, Michael fulfills this when he in a scene walks from house to house, killing people with seemingly no direction. To counter Rockoff, this would actually differentiate Michael from past Killers, including himself: while Jason's motivation can be said to have been to avenge his mother and Freddy's motivation was to get revenge on the parents who killed him, Michael's motivation in the second, fourth and fifth film was to get revenge on the one who escaped him during the last film. This is then why Michael kills Rachel in the fifth film and later wants to kill Jamie. However, Michael may have intended to eventually go to Laurie's house, but there is seemingly no point during the film where he appears to be informed of her location. Despite all this, there seems to be little difference between Michael in the 2018 film and the Michael from specifically the original film since he seems to kill because he is a Killer. This lack of difference may be the intent given that actor Nick Castle returned to play the role. Although, the one noticeable difference may be when Michael approaches a crib with a crying baby in it: it occurs after he has killed a woman, most likely the mother of the baby. Michael walks towards the crib, stops, seemingly looks at the baby while holding his knife in his hand and then leaves. Michael sparing the baby may have been intended to either give Michael some humanity or to suggest he has a preference of who he kills. This preference meanwhile does include children as seen with the boy Michael strangles to death as one of his first victims in the film.

Michael uses a knife as his main form of weapon in this film. He does however also use other tools like the hammer he finds in a shed, but he switches to a kitchen knife he

finds inside the house afterwards. Reason thereof may be recognizability on the filmmakers' part since Michael's main weapon in the original was also a knife. Concerning the knife in phallic terms, it is a sharp object that can easily penetrate like Killers' weapons often can as Rockoff said. The possibility to read Michael to be sexually frustrated by way of using said knife is therefore as possible here as it was in the original film.

There are also examples like and similar to I-camera. The sequence where Michael goes on a randomized killing spree shot in a one-take could be considered an example of identification with Killer. Sparing the baby may therefore have been related to this identification by the understanding that the viewer would not want the baby to die. Rockoff believes that such usage of point of view may align the viewer with the Killer, thus making them feel as if they are partaking in these murders. This understanding seems applicable to this scene. There are also cases of using this with other characters: when Karen is looking for Allyson there is a point of view shot from her perspective when she is looking up the stairs. There is then a cut to a shot of Laurie jumping out to surprise her and Karen being scared. There is also the end of the film where there are cuts between the three survivors, Laurie, Karen and Allyson, to then Michael looking up at them from the burning basement. Cutting between these two perspectives seems reminiscent of Clover's book's two covers because it cuts between object and subject. However, the difference here is that Michael is the one being killed by the three survivors.

There is a limited usage of special effects that is usually just blood smeared on faces. The lack thereof may reflect the film's small budget only being 10 million dollars. Grotesque special effects seem reserved for cases where the kill occurs off-screen. This includes the body of an employee at a gas station seen with his jaw ripped loose, and, more creatively, an officer's decapitated head with a flashlight lighting it up like a jack-o-lantern. Sound effects have been used to imply the grotesqueness, as seen with the boy killed in a car

and the woman killed off-screen in the kitchen during the one-take sequence with Michael. Furthermore, characters like Dave and Vicky are killed off-screen: Vicky dies by being stabbed, but the stabbing occurs outside of the frame. Meanwhile, Dave is seen grabbing a knife, but his body is then later found nailed to a wall. The most effective death seems to be the murder of a woman where her head is smashed down onto a counter. This was effective because the impact implied instant brain injury since it immediately cuts off her scream. It was however followed by an unimpressive computer-generated effect of the knife impaling her through her throat. In terms of gore, there is the scene where Michael stomps Sartain's head causing it to splash. Yet, his body is later seen with his head inexplicably intact, seemingly not matching the former special effect.

The setting is mainly the suburbia of Haddonfield. With such setting along with scenes taking place at the school and at a Halloween party at the school, the film's location is universally recognizable to an adolescent audience. In terms of isolation, the night of Halloween where multiple people dress up in costumes makes it easy for a Killer to hide. This may have been the purpose of the one-take sequence. For Allyson to then feel helpless and run for help after having seen Oscar's dead body makes sense. However, unlike Laurie in the original and Jamie in the fourth film, neighbors do aid her when she runs to knock on doors. Where it made sense in the original for the neighbors to not assist Laurie when she knocked on their doors because they must have thought it was a Halloween prank, Allyson getting help may reflect contemporary standards different from those reflected in the original film. Therefore, the neighbors helping Allyson represent a different kind of adult opposed to Rockoff's three types, being one who is supportive. Other settings include Laurie's house and the hospital Michael is kept in. Both settings are designed to be isolated.

However, all three types of adults are in this film: Michael is the Killer, Laurie is a wise elder who offers advice on how to defeat the Killer and the cops are incompetent

and unhelpful. Regarding the cops, there is the scene with two cops in their car talking about sandwiches while Michael within their view kills Sartain. Ironically, the two cops comment on seeing the car, but they do not assist. This implies that even the most helpful authority figure is even incompetent. For example, Sartain himself is unhelpful when he kills the otherwise helpful officer Hawkins and suddenly reveals that he wishes to understand Michael. The two podcasters likewise seem incompetent since they arguably cause Michael's outrage by showing him his mask. Ray can also be considered incompetent due to an early line of him saying he accidentally spilled peanut butter onto his penis while making a trap. Karen can even herself be regarded to fit this category because of her not initially taking Laurie seriously.

The film has multiple 'past events': there is the opening scene of the podcasters interacting with Michael. Showing his mask as the podcasters do in this scene may be the event that motivates Michael. Regardless, the scene may entice the viewer due to Michael's recognizable mask being shown. Another 'past event' could be Karen's childhood memories that explains why she dislikes her mother. This is shown with a brief flashback. Then there is the flashback of Michael killing his sister while there lastly is also the events of the first film that function as a past event for Laurie.

The Three Final Girls of Halloween (2018)

This film has three surviving women by the end of the film, which seems unusual in comparison to the slasher films of the 1980s. There are cases where the Final Girl survives with her boyfriend like Tina from the seventh *Friday* film, and there are also cases where she survives as part of a bigger group, like Pam in the fifth *Friday* film or Kristen in the third *Nightmare* film. In such cases, the character being the film's Final Girl was due to said

character being the last surviving female character. Furthermore, if a Final Girl returned in a sequel, she would either be a Marion, be a mentor who then dies as a sacrifice or be the Final Girl again. Nevertheless, having three women survive who each can be considered as Final Girls seems unique to this film. Returning to the film possibly reflecting contemporary social issues such as the #MeToo movement, having three generations of women work together to overcome a traumatizing male attacker may have been the intent. As Jess Joho writes in her article: “[Myers] (as a symbol of patriarchy) is hell bent on silencing three generations of Strobe women (Laurie, Karen, and Allyson), who bond together to end *his* tyrannical predation” (Joho 2018). Joho also points out that the film’s male characters all prove either incompetent or unhelpful to the three main characters.

Allyson

Allyson is the most similar to the Final Girls of the 1980s’ slasher films in terms of age and behavior. She is the sole survivor of her group of friends (excluding her boyfriend who disappears from the film), she reacts with terror to seeing Oscar’s body impaled on a gate and she spends the climax running away from the Killer. This behavior supports the understanding of considering her victimized. By leaving her boyfriend, Allyson also arguably belongs to the grouping of Final Girls who lose their boyfriend. It is however by her own choice and not by him being killed. In fact, Allyson making herself independent from a male character also occurs with her disowning her friend Oscar for kissing her. Oscar, meanwhile, seems like a character designed to be a comment on contemporary standards regarding boys feeling entitled to girls. This is interpreted because Oscar forces himself on Allyson while telling her she deserves better. When Allyson pushes him off, he responds with: “but you are not with Cameron anymore?” (01:08:50), implying entitlement over Allyson. Allyson is

therefore a teenage character who chooses to be sexually inactive. She did not for instance have a traumatizing experience making her unavailable like Chris in the third *Friday* film had nor is she made sexually inactive by being a minor like Jamie. By leaving Cameron after he cheated on her at the party and quickly disown Oscar when forcing himself onto her, Allyson is unique compared to former examples by choosing to not have a love interest opposed to said love interest being forcibly taken from her by the Killer. Her choosing her own independency makes her a proactive character that may be considered a feminist icon for this reason. However, her proactive character is part of her being independent from male characters and therefore not in terms of dealing with the Killer.

Allyson also demonstrates being resourceful when she is trapped in the police car with the unconscious Michael by the dangerous Sartain: in an attempt to escape, Allyson lies to Sartain about Michael having said a specific word to her and she will only tell Sartain if he stops the car. Sartain then stops the car and asks Allyson if the word was the name of Michael's sister Judith. This seems to trigger Michael since he wakes up and attacks Sartain. It is then while Michael is killing Sartain that Allyson escapes into the woods. While not having planned Michael would awake, Allyson's lie did help her escape. Allyson does however not demonstrate an awareness for signs of danger, as seen in her first encounter with Michael: while walking away from Oscar, she hears him crying for help. Opposed to take his pleas seriously, Allyson disregards it initially and appears unaware of Michael's presence. Allyson may therefore appear to the viewer as a Final Girl through her relation to Laurie, which is established early in the film where she is going to school with her two friends. This scene could also be compared to the scene of Laurie talking with her two friends in the original film and thereby, Allyson being a central character is implied through recognition.

There is an example of playing with expectations when it is early in the film revealed that Allyson and her then-boyfriend Cameron wants to dress up like Bonnie and

Clyde for Halloween with a twist. The twist is then later revealed to be that Allyson dresses up as Clyde while Cameron dresses up as Bonnie. From the Halloween party and onward the rest of the film, Allyson is dressed in this costume opposed to a sexualized outfit similar to the one worn by the unnamed girl Cameron ends up kissing at the party. While this choice may create the option to do a reading of Allyson as masculine, it also by being a boyish costume gives the option to interpret queer culture represented in the film. Regardless, this observation relates back to the Final Girl-actors who hoped to see trans culture represented in future horror films in a positive light. Returning to the costume's relation to queer culture, Allyson's disinterest for male characters and her boyfriend wearing a drag costume could make her regarded to be viewed as a queer character herself. Her costume may however also allow the option to see her as fetishized for the male viewer.

While Allyson can be viewed as a proactive feminist icon, her lack of love interest and costume possibly fetishizing her character also allow the option to see her as a male surrogate. She can be viewed to be masculinized by wearing the costume, but Allyson becomes fully masculinized when she takes the big knife in the climax and attacks Michael with it. By assuming this phallic weapon after having been victimized, Allyson can be interpreted to fulfill her transition in becoming fully masculine. Allyson spotting the knife even seems to happen by chance opposed to skill, making her an accidental survivor. There is even an intended emphasis on this since the film's last shot is of the knife in Allyson's hand.

Karen

While Allyson may be a new Final Girl in place of Laurie, who in turn is a returning Final Girl, Karen is different by being both a mother to Allyson as well as a daughter to Laurie. Thus, she acts to protect her daughter while she herself is also protected by her conservative

and controlling mother whom she has a bad relationship with. She may be the most atypical of the Final Girls, although she does lose her husband by having him killed by Michael, as it has happened to past Final Girls like Nancy in the first *Nightmare* film. Despite this, where former Final Girls ended up rebelling against their parents' control, Karen is in reverse: she strongly disagrees with her mother until she agrees and contributes to the climax: she takes her rifle that has her initials and readies herself as Michael is about to approach. Karen then starts to plead for help, which causes Michael to appear. She then quickly changes her attitude as it gets revealed she was only pleading to lure him out. Then she shoots him in the head. This is another case where expectations are being played with since her pleading for help correlates with her reluctance. By appearing weak in order to lure Michael, Karen uses the understanding of victimization and helplessness to her advantage. Thus, her attack on the Killer is planned and not accidental luck and she can therefore be considered proactive. However, while acting victimized to lure Michael, she does become victimized when grabbed by him and is then saved by her daughter. Also, her efficiency with a rifle, showcased experience in physical combat, and husband being so emasculated (as seen when Laurie gives Karen a big rifle and gives him a small pistol) he cannot function as a male surrogate for her, support the understanding of her being considered a male surrogate who is neither fully feminine nor fully masculine in her performance. This understanding may however be countered by her acting maternal to her daughter.

Laurie

Jamie Lee Curtis returning as Laurie Strode may have been intended as free publicity for the film, similar to her involvement with the original. However, she is not the sole focus of this film due to her daughter Karen and granddaughter Allyson. Different reasons for this can be

speculated: having the young Allyson may simply have been in order to appeal to an adolescent audience since Curtis by having been close to 60 may not have had the same appeal. Be that as it may, Laurie Strode was the first Final Girl and she will now be examined as this thesis' last Final Girl.

Compared to Final Girls of the 1980s, Laurie still protects others like she did in the original film. This is demonstrated when she urges her daughter to go into the basement while Michael approaches. By initially intending to face Michael on her own as she has planned to do for 40 years, this Laurie is different from her original version by actively wanting to kill the Killer. She may in fact be the strongest example of such Final Girl given she explains to officer Hawkins she has been wishing for Michael to escape so that she could rightfully kill him. Aligned with this, this Laurie seems especially proactive: as soon as she hears about the bus accident from where Michael escaped from, she starts preparing by locking her house, turning on her police radio and opening up for her hidden basement. Afterwards, she breaks into her daughter's house to both test as well as warn her. When Laurie then later hears on the police radio a call about a domestic disturbance, she promptly drives to the reported address because she suspects Michael will be there. When she arrives, she quickly informs everyone nearby to leave the area. She is then shown to be right about her suspicion when she sees Michael through a window of the house. She shoots in hopes of killing him, but realizes she shot a mirrored reflection. After Michael has escaped and the police has arrived, Laurie criticizes these authority figures for being ineffective. When her daughter is later causing a commotion, Laurie loudly yells her name and makes everyone go quiet. This Laurie may therefore be the most proactive Final Girl.

However, arguments can be made for her functioning like a feminist icon as well as a male surrogate. She can be viewed as an empowered female character by both being proactive, protective of her loved ones and overcome a traumatic event. However, Laurie

succeeds thanks to accepting the help of her daughter and granddaughter. This may suggest an interpretation of Laurie overcoming her trauma by opening up and removing herself from her own isolation. The image of her house wherein she has been isolated in and now has isolated Michael within may represent this. This makes her different from a character like Alice from the *Nightmare* franchise who succeeds through relying on the power her friends have given her.

Laurie can meanwhile also be interpreted to be a male surrogate given her efficiency in close combat and experience with firearms. In addition to this, being a character who had a traumatic experience and then became near an action hero in preparation for the return of the one who caused said event makes her comparable to Sarah Connor from specifically *Terminator 2* (1991), a character clearly inspired by Final Girls of slasher films. Regarding Laurie being isolated, her preference for rifles may metaphorically reflect her distance to others and her hostility. This observation along with acknowledging that this Laurie lives in an isolated location like Jason did in the second *Friday* film leads to a comparison between this Laurie and the definition of a Killer in a slasher film. A comparison that not only seems to correlate with the postfeminist understanding of a feminist icon, but also seems intended by the filmmakers given the podcasters' observation about the relationship between Laurie and Michael: "could it be that one monster has created another? (...) both exist in isolation, feathered by their own fear and hatred of one another" (00:09:02).

Furthermore, there are specific moments where Laurie is visually associated with Michael as seen with aforementioned examples of her standing outside Allyson's classroom and disappearing from the lawn like Michael did in the original. Her stalking Michael around her own house with a rifle even suggests Michael to be her prey. There is also the moment when she saw Michael in the reported house: when she sees Michael through the window of this house, Laurie reflects a Killer's voyeuristic tendency to view their

victim through windows. This sequence also suggests a placement of I-camera, having Laurie be the subject and Michael be her object. Additionally, the reveal that Laurie was only seeing a mirrored reflection of Michael further suggests herself to be a Killer because she is looking at a mirror that happens to reflect Michael. Furthermore, Laurie is even possibly indestructible given she survives having her head smashed into a door as well as hitting the ground from the first floor. It is the resemblance to the first film here that suggests that Laurie is as durable as Michael. However, to have a character become the Killer has been done prior to this film: the fourth *Halloween* film ended with Jamie killing like Michael had done, and Tommy was suggested to become the new Killer by the end of the fourth *Friday* film to then suggestively be the new Jason by the end of the fifth *Friday* film. Yet, the difference between this Laurie and these examples is that this Laurie acting like a Killer is not presented in a negative way. As mentioned, it is by Laurie having spent 40 years preparing herself and her daughter for the possibility that Michael may return that leads to them defeating him in the film. Laurie disappearing from the grass in context of being a reference to the original may even function as something celebratory for the audience, given the immediate usage of music in this scene. Her obsession with revenge seems rewarded. Reason for not demonizing Laurie to act like a Killer may relate to branding as well as demonstrating that fans who love slasher films care more for identifying with the Killer opposed to the Final Girl. Regardless, Laurie's similarity to a Killer may suggest the ongoing recognizability and popularity of Killers in slasher films but it may also as stated correlate with the postfeminist focus on regarding a Final Girl as a feminist icon by the character getting her gritty revenge.

Nevertheless, question remains how this Laurie can be compared to Clover's definition of a Final Girl. This depends on the character being sexually inactive, drug-free, aware, resourceful, able to discover dead bodies with horror, victimized, weaker than the Killer, and finally being masculinized by assuming a phallus that completes the transition to

masculinity. First, Laurie is sexually inactive in the film. While having been married and having a daughter she does not develop a romantic relationship with any character in the film. Thus, she can be confirmed to be portrayed as sexually inactive throughout the film. Second, it is established in the scene at the restaurant by Karen commenting on Laurie drinking from a glass of wine that Laurie may have been an alcoholic. A conservative ideal is made clear by Karen commenting on Laurie's drinking, and Laurie can be confirmed to otherwise be drug-free. Third, Laurie is shown aware of danger as stated with her reaction to her hearing about the bus crash. Where this method was used to establish Chris in the third *Friday* film to be the Final Girl, it may not count here given that Laurie is by name recognition identified to be a Final Girl. Fourth, Laurie is resourceful given her arsenal of weapons, her house and method of planning. This does however work for the argument of considering her as a fetishized portrayal of a female character and further argue her to be a male surrogate. Fifth, Laurie discovers Ray's body while searching for Michael. Yet, this is different from Allyson discovering Oscar's body because Laurie is hunting Michael opposed to being hunted herself. Thus, this point does not fully apply to Laurie while it does seem addressed within the film. Sixth, there is reason to argue that Laurie is victimized given her trauma and her emotional reaction to Michael as seen at the restaurant. Seventh, while being capable with a rifle, Laurie is still weaker than Michael given he can easily throw her around. She can even be considered as an accidental survivor when she manages to shoot his fingers off with her shotgun, making him retreat from choking her. Eighth, Laurie attacks Michael from the shadow with a large knife. To suggest that Laurie has therefore completed her masculine transition depends on the evaluation of the knife being a fetishized object and of it being a surrogate penis. This can be argued given Laurie attacks Michel with this knife. It is also this knife Allyson later uses.

It is with these observations concluded that Laurie, despite being a character in a modern film set in a contemporary time of 2018's America who may even reflect contemporary social issues regarding the #MeToo movement, is indeed comparable to Clover's original understanding of the Final Girl she formulated by using examples from the 1980s. It has previously been confirmed that elements of this sequel film were comparable to the definition of the slasher genre, and it was speculated that this similarity may have been intended for the sake of branding and nostalgia. However, Laurie fitting Clover's original definition may not have been due to nostalgia. Clover's definition not connoting female empowerment being applied so well to Laurie may contrast with the view of seeing her as a feminist icon and reflection of contemporary issues for women. The character exemplifies having been inspired by slasher films and can be considered as a male surrogate as well as a feminist icon.

DISCUSSION

The examination of specifically Laurie concluded that she despite the modern context was comparable to Clover's definition of the Final Girl. It was therefore acknowledged that this similarity to characters from the 1980s reflecting a different time may have been due to the genre being slasher. Therefore, other contemporary female characters in contemporary genre films will be briefly considered. The understanding is that if a character can be a male surrogate then it may contrast with the understanding of it being a feminist icon.

Rey from the later *Star Wars* films can be considered a male surrogate by way of her being a Jedi, a role previously only male characters had. She also has a lightsaber as well as a staff, both fetishized objects that may be determined to be phallic. To give a female character a phallic object as a weapon in a genre film seems common as the same has been

done with characters like Wonder Woman. This character's portrayal has meanwhile also clearly been fetishized in its presentation, both by her outfit showing bare skin but also by the character being played by an attractive actor.

As seen with Wonder Woman, to fetishize a character's appearance or behavior has been done throughout films of the superhero genre with characters like Black Widow from various *Marvel* films and Gamora from the *Guardians of the Galaxy* films. The latter is even a character who is victimized by her father Thanos while the former, Black Widow, sacrifices herself for a male character in *Avengers: End Game* (2019). There have been attempts at creating characters specifically characterized as female like Captain Marvel in the film of the same name and likewise with *Ghostbusters* (2016). However, while *Ghostbusters* can be criticized for being an example of female characters in place for male characters, thus an arguable congenial double, both films have been met with heavy criticism because of their feministic angle. According to Adrienne Tyler in her article, the negative reception of *Captain Marvel* (2019) was focused on the film as well as Brie Larson herself, the actor playing the titular character, for being feministic. They disliked Larson for being a vocal feminist and for the film being so feministic it seemingly damages the entire *Marvel* film franchise (Tyler 2019). In connection to male surrogates, Captain Marvel can even be criticized by being a superhero similar to male superheroes. To have the female superhero act like a male superhero is damaging to gender equality, according to Benshoff and Griffin: "the films represent women's equality as the opportunity to be just as physically violent and brutal as men are allowed to be. Even though the films feature female leads, they arguably do so by endorsing patriarchal attitudes about masculine prowess and violent privilege" (299). They extend this criticism to even include action heroes like Lara Croft from *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001). A more modern equivalent to this action film would be the latest *Charlie's Angels* (2019) film that was also criticized for being feministic. Furthermore, the film's

director, Elizabeth Banks, sparked controversy by claiming the film's flop was because of male viewers. Banks claimed that male viewers were not interested in seeing female-lead films for the reason of them being female-lead. While she acknowledged female-lead superhero films like *Wonder Woman* were successful, she claimed it was due to these types of films belonging to a "male genre" (Harvey 2019). Despite the 'Girl Power' discourse, this film and the latter *Tomb Raider* both feature fetishized portrayals of female characters that according to Mulvey should be enticing to male viewers.

This backlash against feminism seems similar to that of the 1980s and therefore, the slasher film may return to be a respond to this. This would be ironic given *Halloween* (2018) may be the first with its two announced sequels. However, as the concept of a slasher film is not affective in a modern context, as Dave in the film acknowledged, it may not occur. Furthermore, the slasher genre being the answer to the backlash of feminism in the 1980s as Benschhoff and Griffin said it was can be debated. They argue that the slasher film is the answer to the backlash because they think these films have a high number of female deaths compared to male deaths. Additionally, they believe these female deaths are fetishized and thus take up more screen time than the male deaths. However, the statement that slasher films generally have more women being killed than men seems to be incorrect: by the slasher film being known for having a specifically female survivor, logic dictates that there will at least be one less female death than the collected male deaths. Using the eight *Friday* films since they have a total of 112 deaths, 66 of these are men while 46 are women. Furthermore, only the seventh film with the psychic Tina, has more female deaths than male deaths. Their argument that slasher films emphasizes women's deaths over men can also be debated. Looking at the eight *Friday* films: while there in the first film is an emphasis on showing Marcie with a hatchet in her face, the same could be said for Jack getting an arrow through his neck. Meanwhile in the third film, there is an emphasis on the death of a male character named

Shelly by it being dragged out for comedic effect. In the same film, a female character goes into a barn and is killed off-screen. As stated, the eight *Friday* films are used as an example for having a high kill count and therefore have the most data to work with. Meanwhile, *Nightmare* has a much smaller number, but the kills here are for the most part, from the third film on onward, instead emphasized by being thematic to the person murdered opposed to interested in the victim's gender. Thus, this thesis agrees with Rockoff that death in a slasher film is unisex. However, an argument supporting Benschhoff and Griffin's belief may be to argue that the Final Girl character by being sexually inactive, cautious and sober promotes a conservative ideal. Yet, cases where the Final Girl is controlled by a parental figure she later rebels against could be interpreted as an expression of disagreement with conservative ideals the adolescent audience may feel express their own disagreement with the older generation. Additionally, as discussed with Alice from the fourth *Nightmare* film, there seems to also have been attempts at making empowered female characters. However, this character was inspired by Ripley from specifically *Aliens* and may therefore have been only an attempt at commercial success. It is more likely these films were made for the sake of gaining financial success opposed to purposefully degrade feminism. As Rockoff writes: "the reason for their production is almost always economic (...) slasher films make money. And they make money for one reason – because people enjoy them" (30). Slasher films were often successful because of their small budget giving them huge earnings in comparison. This is continued to contemporary times with especially films by Blumhouse Productions: *The Gallows* (2015), a found footage-film with none of the actors in it being noteworthy, had a budget of 100.000 dollars and grossed 10 million dollars during its opening weekend (Bentley 2015). Its success despite its poor critical reception may have been due to viral marketing created for the film (Reading 2015). Such marketing seems similar to H. G. Lewis' barf bags. Were the slasher film to return in a modern time and gain success, it would most likely correlate with

economics opposed to criticize contemporary understanding of feminism. *Halloween* (2018) and its coming sequels may indicate this point.

In addition, Clover's definition of the Final Girl may be criticized for not having had enough films to create her definition from. Yet, this is in light of her book being released in 1992, thus, she has not had later films to examine originally. As it was examined with the 1980s' examples, not all Final Girls fit her definition. Furthermore, these examples could be regarded as feminist icons from a postfeminist perspective, and this even included examples like Jennifer Hills who is not otherwise considered a Final Girl. Meanwhile, modern Final Girls like the main character from *Revenge* (2017) can be criticized by using Clover's definition: the main character of this film is first sexually active, then raped and then takes revenge through violent means. To have been victimized first and then be violent by using phallic weapons supports the understanding of considering this character as a male surrogate, while also making her fetishized to the viewer. To then have a character be either a male surrogate or a feminist icon seems to depend on the discourse and not the characterization of the character itself. That a character from the late 1970s like Jennifer Hills can in a contemporary time be considered a Final Girl suggest a disconnect between Clover's original definition and the believed understanding the term has gained through a postfeminist perspective.

While the slasher film was popular during the 1980s, the genre does not seem to be as popular in the modern day when looking at popular American horror films of the last five years. Furthermore, they all focus on female-centered conflicts with female main characters. This includes *The VVitch* (2015), *Suspiria* (2018), *Hereditary* (2018), *Midsommar* (2019), *Gretel & Hansel* (2020) and *The Invisible Man* (2020). *The VVitch* is about a young girl who is blamed for being a witch and by the end becomes a witch herself; *Suspiria* is also about a girl who becomes a witch while she is studying at a dance academy; *Hereditary* is

about a woman dealing with the death of her mother as well as her daughter; *Midsommar* is about a girl dealing with the grief of losing her parents while being on a holiday where she becomes empowered by becoming part of a cult; *Gretel & Hansel* is about a young girl dealing with a witch while protecting her younger brother; and *The Invisible Man*, while being classified mostly as a thriller, is about a woman dealing with her abusive and stalking spouse whose actions make other characters question her sanity. By being centered on women and issues they deal with, contemporary horror films still seem to represent social issues by use of female characters facing dangerous situations. These films dealing with occult themes correlate with them presenting female-centered issues, but this is nothing new: horror films have even in the 1970s focused on issues facing women. Examples thereof would include *The Exorcist* (1973), *The Omen* (1976) and *Carrie* (1976). Additionally, these modern examples like the 1970s' examples are all written and directed by men, suggesting little change has occurred behind the camera. However, *The Babadook* (2014), a film about a woman dealing with being a single mother to her son, is acknowledged for being written and directed by a woman but it is an Australian film. While the supernatural element some Final Girls of the 1980s possessed could not be found in *Halloween* (2018), several of these modern examples deal with female characters being empowered in supernatural ways. This can be argued as three of these examples directly deal with witches, of which two films (*The Witch* and *Suspiria*) deal with the main character being empowered by being a witch herself. To have the main character be empowered by being a witch may illustrate a new trend. This can be argued by considering the original *Suspiria* (1977), wherein the covenant of witches controlling the dance school are villains for the main female lead. This female lead is herself also not a witch. Thus, to illustrate witches as empowered female is comparable to *Halloween* (2019) creating a positive relation of Larue being a Killer.

Returning to slasher films being the answer to the backlash against feminism, a different interpretation considers that the three surviving female characters in *Halloween* (2018) may intend to promote feminism. Aforementioned films like *Ghostbusters*, *Captain Marvel* and *Charlie's Angels* certainly indicate that there is a trend in focusing on female empowerment in female-lead films. The criticism of these may in fact be proof of this trend. Moreover, *Halloween* (2018) is not the only recent female-lead slasher film. Films like *Black Christmas* (2019), *Happy Death Day* (2017) and *Happy Death Day 2U* (2019) all center on female characters dealing with Killers. Related to slasher films, there has even been made a sequel to *I Spit on Your Grave* titled *I Spit on Your Grave: Deja Vu* (2019). Similar to *Halloween* (2018), this new *Grave* film even has Camille Keaton return to play Jennifer Hills. It even has the same director as the original. As rape and revenge films, according to Rockoff, are not marketable due to their content, this sequel coming now may confirm this contemporary trend of having women star in leading roles in genre films that may reflect female empowerment. The possibility that these characters in these slasher films can be defined according to Clover's original definition of the Final Girl may still be possible, which by her understanding prevents the option to consider these seemingly empowered female characters as such. These characters may therefore still be read as male surrogates, but it may also be possible to consider them as feminist icons through a postfeminist perspective allowing 'Girl Power' discourse. Lastly, to promote feministic themes may actually be the main reason for making these films as examples like aforementioned *Ghostbusters*, *I Spit on Your Grave: Deja Vu*, *Black Christmas* and *Charlie's Angels* were not financially successful.

CONCLUSION

This thesis examined how *Halloween* (2018) as a slasher film reflects contemporary America how it reflects the 1980s and how it resembles slasher films from the 1980s and their *Final Girls* alike. In relation to this, the examination for the 1980s' slasher films reached the following conclusion: the eight *Friday* films and the three *Halloween* films seem to promote conservative ideals more than the five *Nightmare* films. This is argued because these two franchises have characters like Sara and Robin (and every character whether male or female having sex) be seemingly punished for breaking conservative ideals by the uncaring and masculine Jason and Michael. Thus, these characters become cautionary tales. While the Killers represent hypermasculinity in each franchise, characters like Jamie and Tina represent an exaggerated understanding of femininity. This hypermasculinity may also be viewed as a form of fetishization while it may also reflect contemporary expectations and viewpoints for each: men are silent tough guys who get things done while women are irrational, otherworldly, but ultimately ineffective and therefore need men to save them. Additionally, having an exaggerated female character like Tina may also express horror films' ability to reinforce dominant social ideals by contrasting and threatening normality with the monstrous. Meanwhile, the *Nightmare* franchise has the lecherous Freddy Krueger, who preys on teenage boys, teenage girls and even children, be defeated by empowered female characters like Nancy and Alice. Defeating him may therefore be comparable to rebelling against conservative parents, thus reflect a generation's disagreement with their elders and their ideals. It was also noted that while the fourth *Nightmare* film from 1988 promotes a feminist ideal, the eighth *Friday* film from 1989 promotes a conservative ideal. Thus, slasher films released late in the 1980s so close to each other did not reflect the same ideals.

Regarding how *Halloween* (2018) represents its contemporary American, the following was concluded: the lack of nudity and sex, the implied justification of Laurie's

paranoia, the use of firearms against foreign invaders and the film having promiscuous teenagers be punished suggest that this film aligns with an ongoing conservative ideal similar to that of the 1980s. Where the 40-year-old films reflected a time of conservatism, this modern film seems to advocate it. While this may not have been the intent, the film does seem to reflect contemporary social issues. This includes suggesting Laurie's traumatic experience is tame compared with contemporary social issues and also the possibility that Laurie's trauma involving assault can be reflective of women in the contemporary #MeToo movement and their trauma involving assault. Given NOW faced backlash from conservatives in the 1980s and given the American president of 2018 being both as controversial and beloved by the conservative right like Reagan was in the 1980s, the film's reflection of 2018's America seems to resemble 1980s' America. This similarity may have been intended in order to invoke nostalgia given it is a sequel to a 40-year-old film. However, it should be noted that similarities, also regarding the Final Girl, may be due to an intentional attempt at invoking nostalgia.

Regarding the Final Girl as seen in *Halloween* (2018), the following was concluded: Allyson reflects contemporary standards by being independent and representing queer culture, but she is also by being abject terror personified, victimized and masculinized the closest to Clover's original definition. As Clover used 1980s' examples for such definition, Allyson's similarity to former Final Girls may account for the filmmaker's awareness of such films. They may have intended to reflect a classical understanding of Final Girl infused with contemporary standards. Meanwhile, Karen was different by being seemingly intentionally victimized only to then be shown to be in control and is therefore different from Clover's understanding. Finally, it was possible to see Clover's definition reflected in the film's portrayal of Laurie while she could also be regarded as a feminist icon.

In conclusion, it is possible to regard the film to illustrate contemporary social concerns while it also through its usage of the Final Girl character possibly promotes a feministic message concerning a relation to social concerns regarding contemporary feminism. While doing so and in relation to the Killer, the film also has a Final Girl being similar to Rockoff's definition of a Killer in terms of behavior in a positive way. This may make this Final Girl regarded as a male surrogate, but it may also be an example of a fusion between Final Girl and Killer for the sake of promoting an independent form of female character. Thus, it is the understanding of the Final Girl that has changed opposed to the character herself, and it is this change that has made it possible to regard a relation between the representation of the character to contemporary ideals. Whether the film is successful due to its representation of female character or whether the film is successful due to nostalgia is both debatable given contemporary backlash against contemporary feministic films and given other attempts at gaining financial success like *Ghostbusters Black Christmas* failed at the box office. However, despite the film's relation to nostalgia for the original, it still reflects contemporary America, one that has similarities with 1980's America.

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