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# History in Media

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## **Feminism and the Effects of Horror Films on the Movement**

By Brooke Denham

The first thing that comes to mind when we think of the 1960s are the changes that society underwent due to race, gender, sex, sexual orientation, and a whole slew of other social aspects. One of the biggest catalysts for change in the 1960s and well into the 1970s was feminism, where conversations over the roles and duties of women came into play and shifted into fitting how women were viewed as the common standard versus what the previous masculine ruling society deemed appropriate. We saw women go from wives, mothers, and homemakers to advocates for reproductive rights, equal access in the workplace and schools, and freedom outside of the house. However, the continued oppression of these feminist movements can be seen, enshrined forever in the portrayal of women in film, specifically horror, and their place in saving their own little world. The idea of women being victims or damsels in distress to be saved by a strong, gripping man, who seemingly wins the woman as a reward, was common in the horror genre of the mid-twentieth century and is still common today. However, since the late-1970s, horror has progressed into a new role, the “final girl horror,” allowing that damsel in distress to make her own way and save herself, periodically allowing her to be the last woman standing. But the changes the horror genre underwent between the 1950s and 2000s were very dramatic and showed the shift of women going from property and something to

protect to the sole survivor who outsmarts the killer and empowers others to do the same. This essay will outline the basics of the feminist movement, introduce the 1950s and 1960s horror, specifically the films *Psycho* (1960) and *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), and usher in the horror genre's later years and the changes that it went through to become more inclusive.

### ***The Feminist Movement & Opposition***

Feminism, like any movement, has waves, the first wave occurred after the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment's ratification in the 1920s, which granted women the right to vote, and the second wave came to fruition in the mid-1960s right alongside the Civil Rights Movement and the Chicano Labor Movement. Feminism's first wave can be dated back to the first Woman's Rights Convention in 1848; however, feminism has ties that extend as far back as the French Revolution (1789-1799).<sup>1</sup> The Abolitionist Movement of the early to mid-1800s follows in similar footsteps, and we see one of the first bites of attempted freedom from women like Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) and Lucretia Mott (1793-1880), who were banned from speaking or voting at the first World Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840.<sup>2</sup> Harassment from their male counterparts following the breaking of said rules led to the creation of the Women's Rights Convention, designed by Mott and Stanton where over three hundred women convened and created their own Declaration of Independence in a sense, including rights like "women's education, rights to property, and organizational leadership."<sup>3</sup> From this time period, the term "suffragette," which was a "woman who advocates suffrage (or voting) for women,"

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<sup>1</sup> Kerri L Alexander, "Feminism: The First Wave." *National Women's History Museum*, 5 Apr. 2021, [www.womenshistory.org/exhibits/feminism-first-wave-0](http://www.womenshistory.org/exhibits/feminism-first-wave-0). Accessed 13 Nov. 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander, "Feminism: The First Wave"

<sup>3</sup> Alexander, "Feminism: The First Wave"

emerged.<sup>4</sup> The inclusion of women of color was severely lacking, leading to the formation of groups such as the American Woman Suffrage Association, whose leadership consisted of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825-1911) and Sojourner Truth (1797-1883).<sup>5</sup> In 1916, feminism took off when Margaret Sanger (1879-1966) opened the first birth control clinic in the United States, which garnered immediate backlash, but ultimately it led to what we now know as Planned Parenthood.<sup>6</sup> Despite this shift towards women's equality, the ratification of female voting rights did not come until late 1920 when the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution passed. After that, feminism seemed to diminish since many women saw it as the ultimate feminist win.<sup>7</sup> Alice Paul (1885-1977) took feminism one step further; in 1923, she introduced the first attempt to pass the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which was shot down due to women being afraid that the protections they had up until this point would be dismissed if ERA was pressed too hard.<sup>8</sup> With the dismissal of ERA around 1923, the first wave of feminism closed. However, between the first wave and the incoming second wave in the 1960s, the fight for feminism continued. Substantial contributions to the movement began, including the arrests and fining of women for short dresses or "revealing" bathing suits and the establishment of the All-American Girls Baseball League in the Spring of 1943 following the involvement of America in World War II (1939-1945). Phillip Wrigley (1894-1977), of the Wrigley Gum Company, established an American-Canadian baseball league to replace baseball players like Joe DiMaggio and Yogi Berra, who were drafted or signed up to serve in the war.<sup>9</sup> The All-American Girls Baseball League

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<sup>4</sup> "Suffragette." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/suffragette>. Accessed 14 Nov. 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander, "Feminism: The First Wave"

<sup>6</sup> Alexander, "Feminism: The First Wave"

<sup>7</sup> Alexander, "Feminism: The First Wave"

<sup>8</sup> Alexander, "Feminism: The First Wave"

<sup>9</sup> Jeneane Lesko, "AAGPBL League History." AAGPBL Players Association, 2014, <https://aagpbl.org/history/league-history>. Accessed 13 Nov. 2022.

(AAGBL) consisted of over six hundred women spread across fifteen teams between 1943 and 1954 when the league was officially dissolved. Nonetheless, over those eleven years, AAGBL players underwent strict enforcement, such as attending “charm school” with Helena Rubenstein, who also managed the upkeep of the women’s feminine image to the public.<sup>10</sup> There were also strict rules about maintaining a feminine appearance on and off the field by wearing only dresses and skirts, adhering to the six-inches-above-the-knee rule, wearing lipstick at all times, maintaining long hair, getting dates and eating only at places approved by chaperones, amongst other strict rules.<sup>11</sup> When men returned from the war, women were no longer needed to entertain Americans and were forced back to the “homemaker” lifestyle, which, in part, led to the second wave of feminism in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

As previously mentioned, women pursued this small source of freedom during World War II, as they not only participated in baseball but were able to experience economic independence due to securing factory jobs that were traditionally only held by men. During their employment, they received “maternity leave, childcare, and counseling” per the unions that helped women get these manufacturing jobs.<sup>12</sup> When men returned from war and women were terminated from their jobs, the disparities in pay began to gain attention; men were getting paid more in the new post-war era than women were paid during the war for the same work.<sup>13</sup> The post-war era saw an increase in social uproars over societal gender inequalities, which led to an increase in publications in 1959 outlining the importance of women in the world while also addressing the continued oppression and silencing of women when it came to their husbands, fathers, grandfathers,

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<sup>10</sup> Lesko, “AAGPBL League History.”

<sup>11</sup> “AAGPBL Rules of Conduct.” AAGPBL Players Association, <https://aagpbl.org/history/rules-of-conduct>. Accessed 13 Nov. 2022.

<sup>12</sup> “What Was the Second Wave Feminist Movement.” DailyHistory.org, 28 June 2021,

[https://dailyhistory.org/What\\_was\\_the\\_Second\\_Wave\\_Feminist\\_Movement](https://dailyhistory.org/What_was_the_Second_Wave_Feminist_Movement).

<sup>13</sup> “What Was the Second Wave Feminist Movement.”

brothers, etc.<sup>14</sup> However, between the first and second wave of American feminism, a French feminist by the name of Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) published a book in 1949 called, “The Second Sex” where she outlined the role of women as the “inferior sex” compared to men. Fourteen years later, American housewife, journalist, and activist Betty Friedan (1921-2006) published “The Feminist Mystique,” which used “The Second Sex” as a starting post into deeper thoughts regarding breaking the boundaries of women as more than simply wives and mothers, but as women fitting into the everyday workforce.<sup>15</sup> “The Feminine Mystique” sold over three million copies, mostly to mothers who would begin to express the same outrage as those who would comprise the second wave of feminism.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962) and colleagues worked with the League of Women Voters and alongside representatives of the Democratic Party in an effort to rally women who felt silenced by the men in their life since her husband, Former President Franklin Roosevelt’s (1882-1945) presidency.<sup>17</sup> Mrs. Roosevelt did not stop her advocacy until her death in November of 1962, meeting with Former President John F. Kennedy (1917-1963) numerous times to discuss his legislation affecting women and leading discussions in JFK’s Women’s Bureau.<sup>18</sup> In 1963, with the Women’s Bureau pushing for legislation and having heard the turmoil from “The Feminine Mystique,” President Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act of 1963 into law, making it illegal to pay women less than men. Shortly after, two more pieces of legislation

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<sup>14</sup> Three books published in 1959 were crucial to the women’s movement: “A Century of Struggle” by Eleanor Flexner, “A Century of Higher Education for American Women” by Mabel Newcomer, and “Women and Work In America” by Robert Smuts. “Part I - A Passion for the Possible - Feminist Majority Foundation.” Feminist Majority Foundation, 15 June 2020, <https://feminist.org/resources/feminist-chronicles/the-feminist-chronicles-1-a/>. Accessed 7 Sep. 2022.

<sup>15</sup> “What Was the Second Wave Feminist Movement.”

<sup>16</sup> Kerri L Alexander, “Feminism: The Second Wave.”

<sup>17</sup> “Part I - A Passion for the Possible - Feminist Majority Foundation.”

<sup>18</sup> “Part I - A Passion for the Possible - Feminist Majority Foundation.”

passed. First, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which “prohibited the discrimination of a person in the workplace based on race, sex, religion or national origin,” and the second, legislation being, *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965), which “prevented anyone from limiting a woman’s access to contraception or other methods of birth control;” the latter of which served as a focal point in the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision which “protected a woman’s right to an abortion” at a federal level.<sup>19</sup> As previously mentioned, up until 1963, the Women’s Bureau had dismissed ERA, which bundled the issues women had faced into one bill, which had consistently failed in Congress. Esther Peterson, the head of the Women’s Bureau, wrote a letter in 1963 to Senator Carl Hayden (1877-1972), thanking him for helping the ERA progress in Congress, despite it never passing. In this way, many consider 1963 a “banner year” for the feminist movement, starting the launch of feminism across the world, but especially in the United States.<sup>20</sup> Women rallied around organizations like the National Organization for Women (NOW) to further advance legislation that would consider them equal to their male counterparts, especially since more women were joining the workforce and focused on careers rather than families.<sup>21</sup> From the 1960s and into the 1970s, the feminist movement progressed from “equal rights feminists” to “radical feminists,” going from wanting the same treatment as their male counterparts to wanting to change the foundation of the United States from a patriarchal society, feminists argued that if men continued to rule, women would never escape the oppression they faced.<sup>22</sup> During this time, men either aligned with women and supported the movement or fought against the movement in order to keep the status quo, with women as wives and homemakers purely for men’s entertainment, pleasure, and need. The Women’s Rights Movement lived up to its name by challenging women’s rights to abortions, education,

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<sup>19</sup> Kerri L Alexander, “Feminism: The Second Wave.”

<sup>20</sup> “Part I - A Passion for the Possible - Feminist Majority Foundation.”

<sup>21</sup> Kerri L Alexander, “Feminism: The Second Wave.”

<sup>22</sup> Kerri L Alexander, “Feminism: The Second Wave.”

gendered roles, and equal pay in the workplace, as well as many other things focused on feminist freedom. Similar to the difficulties real women faced in America, movie women were facing difficulties of a different variety.

### ***Female Portrayals in Horror Films***

1950s and 1960s horror films seemed to follow the idea of men aligning with the women around them or fighting back, with no in-between. Women were either the victim or the suspect, who needed reforming, commonly coming from a strapping young man. Many of the horror films from the 1950s that portrayed women as antagonists failed to portray them as regular human beings, rather casting them into roles that used them as vessels for some form of animal or demon, such as in *La Bruja* (1954) where Lilia de Valle is transformed from a terrible witch into a beautiful young girl to exact revenge on her creator's enemies; *The She Creature* (1956) where Marla English is changed from her beautiful self into an old sea creature that her boss uses to commit murders; and *Cat Girl* (1957) where an ancient curse over her familial inherited house turns Barbara Shelley into a leopard that kills anyone she wishes dead.<sup>23</sup> The implications that the horror genre portrayed women as monsters out for the kill follows the same pattern as the anti-feminist movements of the time where women were considered the antagonist for trying to give up the "good life" they were given with kids and an excellent, hard-working husband who provided them with a comfortable life. The additional portrayal of women as witches is something still used today; the difference is that in the 1950s, it was seen with a negative connotation which made the female out to be the villain. It was not until the 1960s that women antagonists were given the role of plain old serial killers, but in this decade, we also see an increase in the victimization of women

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<sup>23</sup> *La Bruja*, directed by Chano Urueta (Columbia Pictures, 1954); *The She-Creature*, directed by Edward L. Cahn (American International Pictures, 1956); *Cat Girl*, directed by Alfred Shaughnessy, (Insignia Films, 1957).



whose only salvation lies at the hands of men. Some of the films that feature heroic men include Mitch from *The Birds* (1963), who saves Melanie from birds in the attic of the Brenner home; and Van Helsing from *The Brides of Dracula* (1960), when he saves Marianne from Dracula and subsequently frees all of the brides Dracula had acquired.<sup>24</sup> This idea that a woman's survival is dependent on a man, or that a man ultimately has to put a "vile and terrible" woman down, is a common theme in the horror genre and almost always includes some name-calling with descriptors of women that are less than ideal and derogatory. In these films, women who are not the typical mother and wife and are out to make their own money are victimized and labeled as bad guys or hopeless victims and are not characters meant to be taken seriously. It is also important to note that the women chosen to play these roles are socially beautiful, adding a sort of "don't trust beautiful women" theme and turning said women into something physically revolting, like a monster, to add to this connotation.

### ***Psycho***

A film that holds a lot of ammunition for feminists and the feminist movement is *Psycho* (1960). Directed by Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980), who was known as a master of horror and a great thriller filmmaker, *Psycho* follows Marion Crane (played by Janet Leigh), who steals a large sum of money from her employer, claiming to take it to a bank for deposit, but instead packs her things and heads from her hometown of Phoenix, Arizona to California where she plans to meet up with her longtime boyfriend, Sam, who just so happens to be married, but seeking a divorce. The entire drive down, Marion is struck with visions of what her boss thinks of her and what he is telling the police and she is constantly paranoid about the authority figures around her. Once in California, she

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<sup>24</sup> *The Birds*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock, (Universal-International Pictures, 1963); *The Brides of Dracula*, directed by Terence Fisher, (Universal-International Pictures, 1960).

stops at a motel where she meets Norman Bates (played by Anthony Perkins), who subsequently dresses as his mother and kills Marion. He later tries to do the same to her sister Lila before Sam intervenes and takes Norman down, where he is finally arrested.<sup>25</sup> The film uses the same form of victimization against not only Marion and Lila, but also Bates' mother. Marion is supposed to be seen as a thieving, lying, manipulating homewrecker who steals from her employer and breaks up the common nuclear family by sleeping with a married man. We are not really supposed to feel bad for her, but see her as the real "villain" of the movie until her murder. The "voice" of Bates' mother demeans Marion, insinuating that she's a cheap, skimpy woman who wants Bates and nothing else, despite her staying at his motel.<sup>26</sup> We view Mrs. Bates as a cruel woman, but at the end of the film, it is explained that this is not necessarily true. Mrs. Bates, who has been dead for the entire film, married a man prior to her death who was not Bates' father, and in a jealous rage, having finally not gotten his mother's full attention, Norman kills her and her new husband.<sup>27</sup> Audiences are meant to believe that Mrs. Bates kills Marion in the infamous shower scene. However, upon Lila's arrival and her discovery of Mrs. Bates' body, it is learned that Norman has kept her body to cross-dress as her when he kills his victims by giving the impression that Mrs. Bates is the murderer, when really, he has a mental illness, and his mother's voice is a creation of his mind.<sup>28</sup> Bates uses his mother as a scapegoat, giving off the inference that a protective and controlling mother who raises her son with no father present will become overprotective and overbearing in her love for her son. The mother's control can be used as an example of Mrs. Bates being cast in the role of victim and suspect, which, as previously mentioned, was the dominating perception of women in horror films. Before the big reveal, audiences think of Mrs. Bates as very cruel and belittling, and it can be assumed that it's

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<sup>25</sup> *Psycho*, Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, (Paramount Pictures, 1960).

<sup>26</sup> *Psycho*, Directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

<sup>27</sup> *Psycho*, Directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

<sup>28</sup> *Psycho*, Directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

not just towards Marion but towards any woman that comes to the motel that shows interest in Norman. Later, she is seen as a victim of her son's anger. Not only has she been murdered by him, but she was not properly laid to rest. Her coffin is buried without her body, and she is kept, decomposing, in her own fruit cellar, to be used as a catalyst for Norman's continued rampage. Same thing with Marion; she is seen as the enemy when she steals from her boss and runs off to be with her married boyfriend. There is a lot wrong with this picture; portrayed as a thief and an adulteress, she is also guilt-ridden—seeing that she ran—but also plagued with guilt visions. When Marion is murdered, she is seen as a true victim whose family and boyfriend defend her by showcasing her as a loving girlfriend and sister, someone to love and trust with their life. Both women (Marion and Mrs. Bates) are only seen as the victims of Norman Bates at the end of the movie.

Another piece of ammunition for feminism surrounds Lila and Sam, who are romantically involved after the death of Marion, who is, surprisingly, now considered a supporting character, insinuating that women are disposable and can be traded in for another. The film portrays numerous women as victims of Norman Bates who are to be saved by men like Sam or Detective Milton Arbogast. Like the real-life women that influenced these characters, Mrs. Bates, Marion, and Lila are examples of the assumption that by straying from domestication and family life women could ruin society.

### ***Rosemary's Baby***

Another feminism indulgent film of the 1960s is *Rosemary's Baby* (1968). The film was directed by Roman Polanski (b.1933), who in 1969, lost his pregnant wife, Sharon Tate, to the Manson family, along with four other friends staying with her at the time.<sup>29</sup> This

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<sup>29</sup> Roy, Jody M. "Glamorized Hatred: Our Obsession with Serial Killers," In *Love to Hate: America's Obsession with Hatred and Violence*, (Columbia University Press, 2002) 89–113. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/roy-12568.10>.

violence against a woman in Polanski's life adds context that women are meant to be viewed as inferior to men that they are either married to or victimized by. *Rosemary's Baby* follows this same theme by trailing Guy and Rosemary Woodhouse (played by John Cassavetes and Mia Farrow, respectively), who move into an older New York apartment building in order to expand their family. Once there, Rosemary starts to experience societal and beauty pressures from her husband when she cuts her hair, making her look more "masculine," but also when she doesn't want to have dinner with their older neighbors, the Castevets anymore because of the difference in generations, and therefore topics.<sup>30</sup> Rosemary later feels odd about the food Mrs. Castevet makes and, during her pregnancy, the smoothies Mrs. Castevet has her drink.<sup>31</sup> A lot of the things that Rosemary says she is skeptical about, Guy is quick to dismiss and very aggressive in his dismissing; after she is confirmed to be pregnant, he is very aloof and cold towards her.<sup>32</sup> One of the biggest forms of victimization Rosemary faces in the film is when she is drugged via a chocolate mousse dessert from Mrs. Castevet, which Guy manipulates her into finishing. After passing out from the dosing, she comes in and out of consciousness, going between dreams of being on a yacht and in a church when in reality, she is in bed with Guy, surrounded by their neighbors from the apartment. When Rosemary wakes up the next morning, she is covered in scratches, and Guy seems to admit that he had his way with her to try for a baby again and got carried away. Rosemary is appalled by the idea of this, and later in the film, it is revealed that the devil used the disguise of Guy to sleep with Rosemary against her will and produce the Antichrist.<sup>33</sup> Keeping in mind that the film is set in the early 1960s, *Roe v. Wade* (1973) had not gone into effect, meaning that the concerns and choices Rosemary should have about her own body, and reproductive system are nonexistent unless her husband, Guy, a

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<sup>30</sup> *Rosemary's Baby*, Directed by Roman Polanski, (Paramount Pictures, 1968).

<sup>31</sup> *Rosemary's Baby*, Directed by Roman Polanski.

<sup>32</sup> *Rosemary's Baby*, Directed by Roman Polanski.

<sup>33</sup> *Rosemary's Baby*, Directed by Roman Polanski.

male, is present. When Rosemary expresses concerns to her friends about her pain, they assure her to go to a different doctor than the one recommended by her husband. The doctor, Guy, and Mrs. Castevet all dismiss her friends' advice and the advice of maternity books and instead claim her pains are normal and feed her "vitamin filled" drinks and foods, and are relentless in the pursuit of keeping her away from "normal" and outside medical advice and treatment.<sup>34</sup> As the film progresses and Rosemary starts to claim she is experiencing demonic activity, Guy and the Castevets make Rosemary out to be insane, until she delivers the son of Satan. The film concludes with her viewing her son for the first time who, a neighbor then claims, "has his father's eyes" when Rosemary complains about them and her realizing that everything, she had suspected leading up to the moment has been true and that her paranoia has not been in vain, however she has no choice but to accept the outcome of her life because she is alone against the whole apartment building and her husband.<sup>35</sup> *Rosemary's Baby* is an example of "paranoia cinema" that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in which a main protagonist (often a woman) has an "insane" theory about something that proves to be true. In this case, the theory is that Rosemary is at the center of a satanic cult and is being used as the catalyst to bring about a new devil, and she is proven correct by the end of the film.<sup>36</sup> The whole film explores the woman's role in the patriarchal society and how the decisions she should be able to make about her own body are not hers to make. Likewise, it can be implied that the same shot of her apartment building at the beginning and end of the film supports an acceptance of this patriarchal world. By using the same shot, it is implied that despite the horrors Rosemary faces throughout the film, nothing will change because men still rule the world and women are just living in it, despite most women facing the same hardships (maybe not as severe as Rosemary) no one will change

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<sup>34</sup> *Rosemary's Baby*, Directed by Roman Polanski.

<sup>35</sup> *Rosemary's Baby*, Directed by Roman Polanski.

<sup>36</sup> *Wheeler W. Dixon, Film Noir and the Cinema of Paranoia*. (Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

anything because women are considered soft and weak and will just accept their fates which women during the early to mid-1900s had done because they were tricked into believing they would never be able to rise to the occasion.

### ***The Texas Chainsaw Massacre***

Another film that encompasses some issues surrounding the women's rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s is Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* from 1974. The main character, Sally Hardesty (played by Marilyn Burns), and a group of her friends head to Texas to check on Sally's grandfather's grave after a series of grave robberies, but they run out of gas in their van not long after arriving in the deserted area. After being turned away at a gas station, they visit an old house of the Hardesty family. Two of Sally's friends run off and find another house, the Sawyer house, where they look for gas generators and try to contact the owners to beg for some gas. They are the first to die at the hands of Leatherface, and following the quick and brutal deaths of most of the group, Sally is left alone. She flees to the gas station again, where the worker eventually subdues her violently and takes her to the Sawyer house, introducing her to a family of local cannibals, of which Leatherface is the center. Sally is the only one to escape after suffering through a dinner where she is nearly force-fed human remains by the men.<sup>37</sup>

One of the most notable features of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is that the only women present in the film are victims of the chainsaw-wielding villain. An interesting viewpoint of the film comes from a blog by Joe Corr, who draws similarities between the family in the film and the idea of the nuclear family that so many anti-feminists argued for. Corr's idea stems from the fact that the Sawyer family is made up of all seemingly degenerate men, with

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<sup>37</sup> *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Directed by Tobe Hooper (Bryanston Distributing Company, 1974).

no females present other than the rotted corpse of a grandmother.<sup>38</sup> The nuclear family is laser-focused on the idea of a man, woman, and children, and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* seems to stray from this, even insinuating that no women in the house can lead to violent and horrifying mass murder. There is a strong patriarchal sway in the film, with Sally suffering the brunt of the Sawyer grandfather's hunger for blood, as seen when Sally's finger is cut for him. The Sawyer family and their dwelling can be seen as the result of women "abandoning" their posts and fleeing the household to find freedom in the American world. Similarly, Leatherface, in the dinner scene, is portrayed as wearing a mask with garish makeup along the eye holes and mouth, taking on a more "feminine" appearance. Since he is the one doing the butchering of people in the household, in this respect, he can be seen as the woman of the household, cooking their meals after he has captured the meat. Corr also suggests this, claiming that Leatherface not only cooks and prepares the meals but is also "chastised for letting his brother run amok" and is seen as the "servant" of the house, similar to how women of the 1960s saw themselves.<sup>39</sup> The view of Leatherface as passionate and confident when no one is around but submissive behind closed doors is a prime example of how women are characterized at this time. Likewise, Sally is seen as the leader of the group, but she is the victim of this "degenerate nuclear family," having been beaten and held hostage. Despite being seen as meat, she is also construed as the placeholder of the only female in the family, even placed there by Leatherface to move away from the role himself slowly.

### ***Final Girl Trope***

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<sup>38</sup> Joe Corr, "Slaughterhouse Sexuality: Queering the Sawyer Family in Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*," Medium, Accessed March 20, 2023. <https://doi.org/https://mandysweats.medium.com/slaughterhouse-sexuality-queering-the-sawyer-family-in-tobe-hoopers-the-texas-chainsaw-massacre-8085807c0cd7>.

<sup>39</sup> Corr, "Slaughterhouse Sexuality."

Later, between the late-1970s and the mid-1990s, we see an emergence of the “Final Girl Trope,” which was coined by Carol Clover in her 1992 book, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* where she explores the use of a woman in horror films.<sup>40</sup> When thinking of the term “final girl,” some that come to mind for horror fans include Sidney Prescott from the film *Scream* (1996), Nancy Thompson from *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), and Laurie Strode from *Halloween* (1978). There are similarities between these characters that can be inferred based on the “final girl” trope. Most of these girls are brunettes, leaving the stereotypically sexually active blonde friend to provide an excellent death scene.<sup>41</sup> Another stereotypical factor of these girls is that they are the “good girl,” “girl-next-door” teenagers, who are most commonly virgins (both *Halloween* and *Scream* confirm that their “final girls” are). Likewise, these girls never appear nude, and they abstain from drugs, drinking, and smoking.<sup>42</sup> The “final girl” is intelligent enough not to suffer the same fate as her peers, but they may also suffer a fate at the hands of a theory called “Sudden Sequel Death Syndrome,” which states that having survived one’s killer, a “final girl’s” life expectancy—should she show up in a sequel—drops significantly which, unfortunately, is the case of Nancy Thompson in *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors* (1987), and Alice Hardy in *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> Part II* (1981).<sup>43</sup> Pre-1970s, for a brief moment, audiences saw women being heroes or the last ones standing; it isn’t until this trope that women are seen as the ones to pull through to the end of a film.

Furthermore, in 2007, Merriam-Webster adopted a definition for the Bechdel Test, which is a series of criteria that determines if a work of fiction, like a TV show or a movie, is inclusive towards women. This criterion includes if two women are

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<sup>40</sup> “Final Girl,” TV Tropes, 11 Sept. 2022, <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/FinalGirl>.

<sup>41</sup> Carol J. Clover. *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992).

<sup>42</sup> Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws*.

<sup>43</sup> Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws*.



involved in the work, if the women talk to each other, and if their discussion includes a topic not involving a man.<sup>44</sup> Many of the older works mentioned here do not fit within that criteria, but in modern society, there are more examples, such as *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2022), where the discussion of survival and sisterhood eclipses the discussion of the few main men in the film, including the killer.<sup>45</sup> There are a number of demeaning words said by either the killers or someone around these girls that can further irritate the feminine population; however, the anger empowers these women to strive for success both on screen and off. “Final girls” are at times angered enough to get violent and chop the antagonist’s head off or unload a gun into the killer. The “final girl” trope is meant to empower women to do anything they want, even if they believe they cannot; since these “final girls” can kill their pursuers, why should a woman not be allowed to get a factory job if she wants?

Women have always struggled with their place in the patriarchy; this is seen throughout history books and films. Not only has this been proven by the examples presented here, but there are also women like Lorraine Warren (1927-2019), who, through the 1960s and 1970s, had her clairvoyance questioned by men who thought she was just using her “gift” for fame and money. However, Lorraine now has a new generation of men and women who idolize her due to her story being told in “The Conjuring” film universe. Many actresses in Hollywood have argued for more women in films rather than the one or two recurring roles, and feminism has even come to include the idea of the Bechdel Test. Horror films have scare tactics that are used to frighten and shock their audiences, and a lot of the terror and gore that they use feature young women who are utilized for their sex appeal or as a plot device. As seen over the past decades, women are either the antagonist, not “human,” or they are the hopeless victim left to be slaughtered or made to feel like they are losing

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<sup>44</sup> “Bechdel Test,” Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, Accessed 5 Oct. 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Bechdel%20Test>.

<sup>45</sup> *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, directed by David B. Garcia (Netflix, 2022).

their minds. Over the past twenty years or so, the genre has shifted just a little bit to fit the “final girl” idea, where said young woman takes the killer down or survives whatever trouble affects the group she is a part of. The “final girl” trope is something that has garnered success despite still being a part of the victimization of these girls; however, it seems to be more self-sustaining, efficient, and useful for young girls and women to be seen as a “hero.” Regardless, the horror genre and film alike have led to the radicalization of women to fight for what they believe they deserve, no matter what the cost.

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