

Media – critical research



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Do filmmakers use the final girl theory in the representation of woman in slasher movies and does this representation change over a period of times?

The aims of doing this research is to find out the use of Carol . J. Clover's " final girl"(FG) theory in slasher movies.

Before researching on this theory I have undertaken some background research on the representation of women in films and mostly horror genre. Traditionally the roles of women were portrayed as weak and eye candy. They are in a way of useless who needed to complete by a man. Male characters are likely to act as a strong and intelligent protector to females with a very high possibility within the dominate character. This concept built deeply into audience's mind which appeals in mostly earlier genre of movies. Supported by my secondary research on book research (The Cinema Book) this is what we called as the stereotypical women.

These rules are still appeal to movie that out now and quite a lot to fine in Chick Flick and Drama. However, by investigating slasher movies from the 1970s traditionally rules are not exactly fit in all the women that representation in this type of movies. The similarity of women being in a slasher movie and the other genre are the lead female characters usually would be young and pretty. They would be good looking and famous to attract man audience's attention to the cinema. This refer to the principle that Laura Mulvey suggested in her book " visual pleasure & Narrative Cinema" of male gaze.

This principle analyses how the point of view from a man to the attacked by a female character. On the other hand, these girls are not as defenseless and

weak as they used to be in the other genres. " Watch any slasher movie, and tell me what gender the survivor is? It's a woman." By " yellow jacket" who replied on my question in an internet forum.

All the repliers in the internet forum suggested and agreed women to be cleverer and organize that male in a slasher. These is why I come across with the Final Girl(FG) theory by Carol J. Clover in her book - Men, Women and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film suggested in her study of modern horror movie in1992. In identifying the final girl in slasher movies, Clover suggested they noted as usually smarter, more conscientious, and more morally purer than her cohorts, who are usually stupid, sloppy and have an image of " slutty" girl in the movies.

It is a horror film trope that specifically refers to the last person alive to confront the killer. Occasionally they will have a sharing history will the killer. We can see many examples in lots of different slashers such as Halloween(1978) had Laura to fight with the psycho killer Michael who are brother and sister, Sidney killed Billy who represented as her boyfriend and actually is the killer of her mother in Scream(199) and particularly Nancy in the Nightmare on the Elm Street(1980) who planed out how to build booby trap and set them as to lure Freddy which he came to her. Freddy's dead was cause by her mother. That is the reason why people in the horror. com forum think women in slasher s have the capability to absorb what's going on and they take action to make themselves survive.

I also come across with the idea of " stick and run" action that women usually take in slashers (they hit the killer and get away, then repeat.). A

man is not represented as a hero to protect her away more. They became protagonist flip the role around as the men were useless in this genre of movies.

This theory also leads to both of my interviewee and focus group developed with two type of female in slashers with their point of view from the audience.* The first type they suggested is clever and independent girl. She did not believe only a male hero can save her from dangers and actually fight back to the killer. This type of girl portrayed stronger than they used to in the history. “ She is like seventy- five percent of the world’s women: smart and independent” said by Sara in my focus group. These girls used to dominate in the slasher and taking the lead role of the story which refers to the FG theory. AS Clover suggested FG do alive in the movie because she isn’t distracted by sex/drugs/alcohol.

“ The one who filmmakers emphasis to survive is normally the young pretty girl that represented differently for all of her friends.” Suggested in my interview by Miss Bennett. They usually pure, virginal and relied on herself to help surviving which unlike the second type of girl.* This type of girl possibly did get as much attention as the FG do in a slasher. Suggested by Donato Totaro (degree of film study in Columbia University and written essay for offscreen.

com.) that they are usually ones who have rejected men like those in the audience in the past. Being the “ hotties” in the movie they appeal to the view of male gaze concept as a sex object to the male audiences. They

normally being kill at the beginning of the movie by acting as the slutty girl who does drugs and let her looks get ahead in life that surrounding the FG..

“ They die not because they’re woman. Its because they are not thinking and hope their looks will help them out.” Suggested in my forum reply and “ They are there to be kill” by a male in my focus group. Also with my own opinion is their action makes the audiences think they deserved to be kill terribly.

This refers to Nancy Kyle (as Annie Brackett in Halloween) who purse Laura to go out at night and Drew Barrymore(as Casey Becker in scream) who flirting with the killer through a phone. For further research of this project I investigated base on the changes of the data that I found on the upward paragraphs. I suggested to my questionnaire, interviews, forum debating and also the focus group about their opinions on the changes of these representation of women in slasher movies that they suggested to me above. The answers that they reply to me are the following. I realize that changes would occur within their interests (as to the audiences interest) and also to the society.

“ As women got more and more equal right in society, they got more and more equal right in film” by Mr. Wightman in my focus group. women are now taking much more dominated role in movies which is totally different from they 60s and earlier 70s. This refer to more equal right act suggested in the 80s such as the New York’s Women Against Pornography(WAP) were argues with this sexual equal issue at that time.

However, I am not going to come across it in this essay because this will drive me away from the question. Anyway, this changes possibly explain the

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reason of the rise of slasher movie and the stronger role given to women. As well as the rise of the sexual equal the feminism come across also due to women as now earning as much as men do. This is why the representation of women in slasher in 70s and 80s changes slightly to 90s and till now. In some of my internet research people were debating about women in the earlier would scream, run and took the killer by luck but from the mid 90s had graduated to screaming but to fight back with a stronger characteristic.

“ I have noticed a growing trend from the more passive female character in movie(Laurie in Halloween spent a lot of time running away) to the more active female characters in today's film. These also accept my own analysis to the movies I have watched that female character are more independent and male are being look down in this type of film. I also noticed that female character developed through sequel as well. By referring to Halloween Laurie changed with shorter hair and more independent with a mothering character in H20 in1998: Sidney also change hair and clothing style to a more sexually look and when look at the back of her in Scream2 and 3 it is difficult to identify her gender.

They are more active because they are now tougher and braver for finding out they true and actually chase back to the killer which tried to end up the danger by herself. We discussed in the focus group that these changes occurs might due to the expansion of slashers target market. It is now by statistic a noticed increase on female audience to the cinema. This driven the importance of male gaze a bit further that it was in the past.

" Once the men and women are equal, they are not targeting on one type of audience. They can't really tread women to be weak and useless that are not appeal to a lots of women out there." By an As female student in my focus group. As conclude they also get bored with stupid women in slasher movie " When they walk in the house and it was dark.

They don't turn the light on. This really annoyed me." And " So stupid when they know somebody actually being killed in the house and should run away and get help but they actually go back in the house and open the door with a evil in the room."

To what extent, are this changes to slasher movies now still supporting the use of the final girl theory that Clover suggested in 1992? To evaluated I will suggested the development on the lead women characters is a yes to the final girl theory. It is because being more clever and independent is following the pattern of a final girl should go as to a " muscline" and heroic woman. Passive woman is already a pass for the slasher trend. As women are suggested to be more important and seen as the protagonist more it will fit in this theory. However it has a identifying change of using the FG theory by the audiences' expectation on the characters. The trend of movie is now changing so quick that audiences always want new concept and characteristic in same type of movies.

For example in Saw2 the character of a killer was actually a female and Scream 2 one of the killers was Billy's mother. This explain female are not have the exact equal role to male as " They make it like a woman killers but at the end is a man controlling her". These affected me to notice in my

primary research that people are normally attracted with surprise. I can say slasher movies might be now reaching the decline in the film market.

Another example of the extensional is the use of FG in Final Destination2 and 3. the lead female characters in these movies were given the visual prediction of what is going on in a way to avoid dangers and help with others.

However they used to have a protector with a male character. This is an interesting view which lead to an argument between male and female in my focus group about the right on the domination of women in movies. The males debated that it is risky to suddenly flip the traditional role of gender around and make a woman in the lead role on a movie. As to this idea the females argued back with " introduce a woman happening do the same thing as the man used to do they should because this is what we expected to see." In a way to " show off that women can handle better than the boys" However both of they agreed with hoping to look for a very different kind of women representation in the coming movies and bored with the repetitive pattern of slasher and predictable ending of the final survivors. At lasts my research lead to a think of predicting the future slasher trend within the film industry.

I don't have enough data to forecast the future change of women characters in a slasher and to identify the world expectation of the coming type of female represent in a slasher but I think it will be interesting when filmmakers are mixing the traditional through with new idea to form a new concept of women representation. I am looking forward to this, who will know the future!