

# [The the women on the screen”. this](https://assignbuster.com/the-the-women-on-the-screen-this/)

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The representation of women within horror films is aparticularly controversial subject and has generally failed to evolve over theyears despite the open disapproval of the subject from the public as well aswithin the media industry itself. Gender and its representation has often beena crucial aspect of horror films, previously the only role women played in manyof the iconic horror films was running around in a sense of dismay, half nakedbefore screaming and being brutally murdered, emphasising the fact that theywere overly sexualised and objectified, playing no role of substance within thefilm itself. I will be dissecting this one-dimensional representation which canbe separated into two distinct categories and has undoubtedly had a negativeeffect on a huge number of people. Women within horror films, specifically women that wereopenly sexualised were often represented within mainstream horrors films duringthis period particularly negatively.

Also in the 1970s, final girls and victimsalike suffered from what Syracuse University professor Kendall Phillips calls” sexualized terror,” where any woman who was sexually active waskilled off, normally in a particularly barbaric way. The promiscuity and senseof liberation within primarily young female characters is clearly emphasisedand portrayed as negatively as possible. This is emphasised in one of the mostwell-known films from this era, The Texas Chainsaw massacre. The 1974 Americanhorror film was directed by Tobe Hooper and written and co-produced by Hooperand Kim Henkel.

This is a prime example of how women were represented in horrorfilms, one of the main characters Pam is blatantly sexualised, she wears morerevealing clothing and throughout the film and contrasts one the characters whoshe is portrayed alongside who is evidently more conservative. Even the poster from the original 1974 film features an image of Pam screamingin terror behind the films antagonist ‘ Leatherface’, reinforcing the idea that themajority of women within horror films are portrayed as nothing more than “ damselsin distress” and are positioned simply for the male gaze. Theorist Ann Kaplanreinforces this message saying, “ Within the film itself, men gaze at women, whobecome objects of the gaze; the spectator, in turn, is made to identify withthe male gaze, and to objectify the women on the screen”. This in emphasised inthe narrative of the film itself, the three male protagonists meet a swift yetbrutal death whilst the women in film are tortured and their deaths are prolongedfor a significant amount of time. Even during their unnecessarily prolongeddeath scenes the women are presented for the female gaze. The cult classic  was even remade in 2003 much to the delight of the fan basethe fil had built over the decades, yet despite the time between the two filmsand the huge strides made in feminism and equality there is still a clear andpurposeful representation of the overly sexualised young women in the film. Sexualityis the biggest and most clear psychoanalytic desire targeted in this and otherhorror films.

From the occasional sex scene amongst the teens, to the almostnon-existent choices of costume for the female characters as they run from thekillers, it is obvious that the film is playing to those desires. Laura Mulveyspeaks about the subject in her article Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema asshe discusses women as images in film, “ Traditionally, the woman displayed hasfunctioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screenstory, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium”(Mulvey751).  This is clearly the case in thisfilm in which Jessica Biel stars as the main girl.  The audience is supposed to lust over thefemale victims and the killer also has sexual desires for these characters. However, as society developed and alongside it so didfeminism, it appeared there was a turning point in mainstream horror films. Neve Campbell in Scream the 1996American slasher film directed by Wes Craven and written by Kevin Williamson, isregarded as the first non-virgin, purposely sexualised character that survivesthe seemingly inevitable death that women seemed to face prior to this inhorror films.

Campbell, whose character Sidney Prescott is clearly sexualisedin the film, survives her attacker. Her mother however, who is clearly seencommitting adultery within the film, consolidating the idea that sexualisedcharacters are less likely to survive, evidently isn’t so lucky…     I believe “ Scream” portrayedmany of the stereotypical aspects of a slasher horror film from this era, butthe main character (Sidney Prescott) subverted the stereotype that femalecharacters within the genre of horror had been attempting to escape fordecades. Sexuality and a sense bravery for women for a long time were mutuallyexclusive and even now there is a distinct lack of overt, uninhibited womenwithin this genre enjoyed by a vast array of people, many of which are women.///As mentioned above, the slasher films draw a comparison between sex and death, something that Wes Craven commented on during his 1996 hit film Scream. In aslasher film if you have sex then you die, the ultimate response to theultimate immoral act – sex before marriage or some form of sexual transgressionis a sure fire way of stepping into the killer’s line of sight. This became ofconvention of horror films over the years and became almost expected. Scream, while being a humorous commentary on the path the slasher film took, is alsorecognition from within the genre of the very things that make the genre tick.

While not being an attempt to right the wrong it certainly is a knowing nod tothe audience that we know what’s going on, we know the rules.