

Film studies essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Presenter: Welcome, the aim of my presentation today is to establish how women are represented in ‘ slasher’ films by studying A Nightmare on Elm Street, Halloween and Psycho.

Firstly, we must recognize the definition of a ‘ slasher’ movie. A slasher film is a subgenre of horror film, and at times thriller, typically involving a mysterious psychopathic killer stalking and killing a sequence of victims usually in a graphically violent manner, often with a cutting tool such as a knife or axe. – Item 1
Presenter: Typically in ‘ slasher’ films, women are often the victims, and are stereotyped as subordinate and often fearful. This stereotyping of women in ‘ slasher’ films has ensured that audiences now expect women to be helpless and vulnerable, and of course the victims. This has been criticised by feminists and although most women are portrayed as the victims, in terms of Propp’s character types, women can sometimes be displayed as the hero.” Girls and female adolescents [in horror films] who are witnessed displaying fearfulness and protective need in the face of terror on the screen are more favorably evaluated by male and female peers and non-peers than their counterparts who are witnessed displaying no distress” – page 87
Item 2
Play “ A Nightmare on Elm Street” clip
Item 3 – Sheila’s death
Presenter: This idea of a helpless female victim is a typical convention of the ‘ slasher’ film.

Women are constantly degraded, as a killing often occurs after sexual activity. The victims are often young, attractive and typically blonde females. Some theorists argue that women in ‘ slasher’ films are punished for engaging in pre-marital sex, suggesting that sexual activity would constitute in death. In the ‘ slasher’ film, the final girl who survives will always be a

virgin – whereas the girls who engage in sexual activity will die a gruesome death in the hands of the killer.

Play “ Friday the 13th” clip item 4 – sex in a tent
The Final Girl is usually the last woman standing. A woman who is resourceful, intelligent and feisty. She has witnessed her peers (male and female) being killed and she will be in the final confrontation with the killer. But rarely sexual and rarely sexually active.

The Final Girl also brings into view the virgin/whore dichotomy. The sexually active women die and die, on camera, in the most violently gratuitous fashion possible. – item 5
Presenter: Feminism in the 1970s and 80s had a huge impact on film. A feminist theory was that men became psycho killers because of a grudge he held on a woman due to a failed relationship. This woman was frequently his mother or an ex girlfriend. Therefore, the female is viewed as the cause of this, and is therefore punished throughout the film.

This is shown in Psycho. Play “ The truth about mother” – Psycho clip item 11
Presenter: In “ Halloween” the final girl is named “ Laurie” – the name is unisex, which immediately connotes the fact that she does not conform to the usual female stereotypes in horror films. Laurie is conveyed as virginal and masculine and is often seen dressed in turtle necks which emphasises this masculine side to her. Some feminist critics, according to historian Nicholas Rogers, “ have seen the slasher movies since Halloween as debasing women in as decisive a manner as hard-core pornography. – item 12
Presenter: The director of the Halloween series, John Carpenter argues that Halloween is “ merely a horror movie”” The one girl who is the most

sexually uptight just keeps stabbing this guy with a long knife. She's the most sexually frustrated.

She's the one that's killed him. Not because she's a virgin but because all that sexually repressed energy starts coming out. She uses all those phallic symbols on the guy. – item 12
Presenter: Women are constantly being objectified in the ' slasher' film. Laura Mulvey believes that film audiences have to view characters from the perspective of a heterosexual male and that the body itself becomes an object of desire for a man. She also argued that the passive and submissive nature of females in horror movies were a form of pleasure for the male audience through scopophilia or voyeurism.

The villain of the ' slasher' film is typically always a male who is suffering a masculinity crisis, and in order to restore his masculinity, he goes on a killing spree. Play " Shower scene" Psycho – item 6: Mulvey argues that in classic hollywood films in particular women are merely represented to provide visual pleasure to men , and the audience is constructed in a manner where they are all expected to be men. This male gaze is both voyeuristic and fetishistic.

– item 7
Presenter: The final girl in Nightmare on Elm Street is the lone survivor of her killer Freddy Kreuger.

Carol Clover notes that the final girl typically displays virginal characteristics, which applies to Nancy. Throughout the film, Nancy becomes more phallic and masculine. At the beginning she shows fear of her victim and towards the end of the film, she begins to fight back. Nancy is attacked by the villain in the bath – which is the ultimate symbol of phallic power. This has connotations of rape, as Nancy is obviously naked in the bath. The villain

drags Nancy underwater against her will, and the villain's hand appears coming out of the bath, and the villain's fingers are blades, which clearly penetrate the skin, again highlighting the power of the villain.

Play “ bath scene” – Nightmare on Elm Street – item 8
Play “ ending scene” – Nightmare on Elm Street – item 9
Presenter: Some would argue that there is no ultimate ‘ final girl’ in ‘ Psycho’. In terms of Clover’s ‘ final girl’ theory – Vera (Marion’s sister) represents the investigator, but does not qualify to be a true ‘ final girl’ as to defeat the killer she needs the help of the hero, Sam, and does not actually do anything physical to overcome the killer. When she sees that Norman Bates’ mother is actually a corpse, she screams, highlighting fear and showing that she fits into the ‘ damsel in distress’ character type. In this same scene, Sam is shown restraining Norman Bates, highlighting the patriarchal power and showing that he is actually the dominant character. Presenter: In the very first shot of the film “ Psycho” we see a shot of our protagonist Marion lying on a bed with a male above her.

This immediately has connotations of gender and power – as this shows that he is the dominant male. Marion then begins to talk about marriage, suggesting that women are dependent on men to stay happy. The simple fact that this opening scene is in a hotel bedroom has connotations of sex. Marion is also wearing lacy underwear which emphasises her femininity. The underwear is black – emphasising the fact that this is indeed a horror film, and connoting that she is in some form of danger. ‘ Tits and ass’ shots are also used, further emphasising the objectification of females and male domination.

'Psycho' is understood to be 'the granddaddy of the slasher movie' – and the sexualisation of women in Hitchcock's films has ever since become a convention of the 'slasher' movie. We find that from the very beginning Hitchcock wants us to see that women are objects of sexual desire that are to be sought after. Marion is shirtless twice within the first eleven minutes of the film. – item 10Presenter: Typically, women are often shown to be screaming in the 'slasher' genre. The scream is usually shrill and high-pitched and the woman's scream is now a form of iconography for the 'slasher' movie.

This highlights the subordinate position of women, and close-up shots are often used to show fear on the female's face. The term "scream queen" refers to the typical 'damsels in distress' in horror films – known for their iconic scream. Presenter: In conclusion, we must ask ourselves whether the position of women has changed in the 'slasher' genre. Women have been subject to many representations within the horror, from damsels in distress, to a masculine hero. As I have established, female empowerment is demonstrated in 'Halloween' through the character of Laurie, and in 'A Nightmare on Elm Street' through the character of Nancy – whereas there is no definite final girl in 'Psycho'.

Feminist theories are said to have changed the position of women in modern horror movies, however women are still presented as 'sluts' and are punished for their sexual activity and illegal drug use.