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Laurie Strode in the Halloween franchise (1978-2022) : redefining Gender Stereotypes and Horror Conventions

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Laurie Strode in the *Halloween* Franchise (1978-2022): Redefining Gender Stereotypes and Horror Conventions.



Halloween, John Carpenter, 1978



Halloween, David Gordon Green, 2018

Maéva ADAM

Master 2 Langues et Sociétés 2023-2024

Under the Supervision of Dr Marianne KAC-VERGNE



Université de Picardie Jules Verne
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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Acknowledgments..... | 2 |
| Table of Contents..... | 3 |
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Part I: The Gendered Dynamics of Violence..... | 8 |
| 1) Sexualized Violence and a Passive Final Girl..... | 8 |
| 2) Laurie's Brutality and a Shift in Gender Dynamics..... | 14 |
| 3) Violence Against the Patriarchal Society..... | 21 |
| Part II: Societal Norms Associated with Women's Roles..... | 32 |
| 1) The Erotic Women and the Final Girl..... | 32 |
| 2) Motherhood as a Defining Role..... | 37 |
| 3) Conflicting Representations of Laurie as a Grandmother..... | 43 |
| Part III: Hysteria as an Instrument to Discredit Women..... | 50 |
| 1) The Hysterical Final Girl..... | 50 |
| 2) Dismissed but Confident: Laurie Stands Up for Herself..... | 56 |
| 3) The “Crazy Old Woman”: A Stereotype That Never Dies..... | 62 |
| Part IV: Jamie Lee Curtis: The Evolution of Her Career in Parallel with <i>Halloween</i>..... | 70 |
| 1) Jamie Lee Curtis's Horror Roles Compared to the Final Girl..... | 70 |
| 2) Laurie's Impact on Jamie Lee Curtis's Career and on the Horror Genre..... | 75 |
| 3) Jamie Lee Curtis's Impact on Laurie..... | 80 |
| Conclusion..... | 85 |
| Bibliography..... | 88 |

Introduction

“[The horror genre] never dies. It just keeps getting reinvented and it always will”.¹ Indeed, the horror genre has existed since *Le Manoir du Diable* (Méliès) in 1896. It started becoming very popular in the 1920s when many movies such as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Robertson, 1920) were adapting famous pieces of gothic literature. Ever since, it has gone through many different styles, such as supernatural, psychological, or even apocalyptic. The slasher genre in particular is a sub-genre of horror which became extremely popular when it was created in the 1970s. The horror of the 1960s had been focused on reality and psychological thrillers such as *Rosemary's Baby* (Polanski, 1968) and *Peeping Tom* (Powell, 1960), drifting away from the monsters and aliens that thrived during the 1950s. The 1970s and 1980s were a period of high activity for serial killers in the United States who accounted for 120 to 180 deaths per year.² It was the first time that people became truly aware of their existence and thus became afraid of them. There was therefore a growing fear of becoming the next victim of one of these murderers, as well as a fear of what roamed in the neighborhoods that were previously seen as peaceful.³ Slasher movies were inspired by these fears. Although there were a few movies of this style that were made before the 1970s, such as *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960), they did not have the formula that made the genre popular. The movie *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974) was the first to have it. In this film, a group of teenagers is pursued by a masked killer who murders them violently one by one, leaving only one female survivor. This pattern is what became the basis of all 1980s slasher movies.⁴ Although the movie was a success and originated some of the elements that became common in the sub-genre,⁵ it was not the one that launched the sub-genre, mostly because it did not take place in a neighborhood but in a secluded Texan house.⁶

The *Halloween* movie of 1978 directed by John Carpenter was the film that launched a true craze for the slasher genre. It stars Jamie Lee Curtis in her first movie as Laurie, a young girl living in the quiet town of Haddonfield who is attacked by Michael Myers while she is

1 Dave Portner, “Don't Call John Carpenter a Horror Movie Director, Says John Carpenter”, *Interview Magazine*, February 2, 2015. <https://www.interviewmagazine.com/film/john-carpenter-halloween-horror>.

2 Cody Mello-Klein, “Why Are There Fewer Serial Killers Now Than There Used to?”, *Northeastern Global News*, April, 26, 2023. <https://news.northeastern.edu/2023/04/26/serial-killer-decline/>

3 Kelsey Yoor, “Movie Monsters Through the Years: How Does Horror Reflect Historical Fears”, *CBR*, June, 2, 2022: par.10. <https://www.cbr.com/movie-monsters-horror-decade-reflection/>

4 John Bloom, “They Came. They Sawed.”, *Texas Monthly*, November, 2004: par.7. <https://web.archive.org/web/20110708202138/http://www.texasmonthly.com/2004-11-01/feature6.php>.

5 Bloom, “They Came. They Sawed.”: par.7.

6 Stuck Between Stations, “A Nightmare in Suburbia: Suburban Space and the American Horror Film”, *Stuckbetweenstations*, last accessed August 29, 2024: par.8.

babysitting on Halloween night. The movie's success was born of word of mouth, as more and more people started talking about it. It soon became the most profitable independent film release in history, grossing over 70 million dollars.⁷ After such an important success, the horror genre imitated *Halloween* throughout the 1980s, trying to reproduce what it had created. Movies such as *Terror Train* (Spottiswoode, 1980), *Prom Night* (Lynch, 1980), *Friday the 13th* (Cunningham, 1981), *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Craven, 1984) all used the same formula: a female protagonist, a group of friends, and a masked killer. Soon, a sequel to *Halloween* became inevitable and *Halloween II* (Rosenthal) came out in 1981. It was once again a success as it became the second highest-grossing horror film of the year.⁸ Thanks to its incredible success, *Halloween* therefore became a series. A third movie, *Halloween III: Season of the Witch* (Wallace) was released in 1982. Unlike the first two films, it is not a slasher. The original idea was to continue the *Halloween* series by creating for each new movie a different story taking place during Halloween. Therefore, the plot of *Halloween III* is about an owner of a mask company who wants to kill children through the masks that he sells thanks to an ancient ritual. However, the originality of the story was not a success. It was extremely criticized, mostly because the audience was expecting to see Michael and Laurie again, which was not the case. It earned 14 million dollars which made it the lowest-grossing entry in the series so far.⁹ With the failure of this movie, *Halloween* did not return until 1988 with *Halloween 4: The Return of Michael Myers* (Little). Because of earlier criticisms, Michael returned in this movie which acts as a sequel to *Halloween II*, but Laurie did not. However, as the slasher craze had started to die down, the movie only grossed 17 million dollars, which did not come close to the first two films.¹⁰ Two more films were made in an attempt to revive the franchise: *Halloween 5: The Revenge of Michael Myers* (Othenin-Girard, 1989) and *Halloween : The Curse of Michael Myers* (Chappelle, 1995) but they were once again not as successful as before. Ultimately, it is Jamie Lee Curtis who had the idea to make the franchise come back for its 20th anniversary, which led to *Halloween H20: Twenty Years Later* (Miner, 1998). This movie does not take into account the previous events because they did not involve Laurie and instead follows her 20 years after what happened in *Halloween*. *Halloween H20* had positive reviews and gained 55 million dollars, making it the highest-grossing *Halloween* installment at the time.¹¹ Its success is highly due to

7 Ciff Calgary, "Making Halloween (1978): The Film That Changed Horror", October 31, 2022: par.21.

<https://www.ciffcalgary.ca/blog/2022-10-31/making-halloween-1978-the-film-that-changed-horror/>

8 Chris Eggersten, "The 40-Year History of Halloween at the Box Office", *Boxofficepro*, October 14, 2022: par.2.

<https://www.boxofficepro.com/halloween-franchise-box-office-history/>

9 *Ibid.*, par.3.

10 *Ibid.*, par.4.

11 *Ibid.*, par.6.

Laurie's return and the choices that Jamie Lee Curtis made for her character. She gave Laurie the "strong storyline that she deserves".¹² This movie relaunched the franchise and renewed the audience's love for it. However, *Halloween: Resurrection* (Rosenthal, 2002) erased what its predecessor had done by killing Laurie in the first minutes. It was "savaged by critics"¹³ but managed to earn 20 million dollars, mostly because audiences had expected it to follow in *H20's* steps. The franchise was once again revived by director Rob Zombie who created two movies, *Halloween* (2007) and *Halloween II* (2009) that are reboots, that is to say that they revisit the original story. They focus on Michael's life rather than Laurie's. Reviews were very mixed but the movies were overall a success, and allowed the franchise to come back into the spotlight. David Gordon Green then directed one last trilogy: *Halloween* (2018), *Halloween Kills* (2021) and *Halloween Ends* (2022) in which Jamie Lee Curtis came back as Laurie. *Halloween* (2018) was a massive success, besting the total gross of every previous *Halloween* installment.¹⁴ *Halloween Kills* was also a success, and *Halloween Ends* became the third highest-grossing film in the franchise. This was due to Jamie Lee Curtis's return as Laurie since the character had been an important reason why the audience loved the movies so much. The trilogy allowed to once again inject new life into the franchise. Therefore, the *Halloween* movies have been present for 40 years and have never ceased to keep coming out through reboots and remodelings. It is a franchise that has kept on reimagining itself and has therefore taken an important place in audiences' lives. It has evolved throughout the decades with the societal values of its time, giving each movie a different representation of its female protagonist. This paper shall analyze this franchise to determine what significant changes happened in the genre and what these changes imply for female characters. To do so, it will focus on Laurie Strode because she is the character of the franchise that has made the biggest impact on the horror genre and she has been played by the same actress, Jamie Lee Curtis, for 40 years and seven movies. Her character has been through many changes overtime, and therefore allows for an analysis of her evolution.

The corpus selected for this analysis includes seven films of the franchise which are as follows: *Halloween* (1978, directed by John Carpenter), *Halloween II* (1981, directed by Rick Rosenthal), *Halloween H20: Twenty Years Later* (1998, directed by Steve Miner), *Halloween: Resurrection* (2002, directed by Rick Rosenthal), *Halloween* (2018, directed by David Gordon Green), *Halloween Kills* (2021, directed by David Gordon Green) and *Halloween Ends* (2022, directed by David Gordon

12 Aya Tsintziras, "Why Halloween H20: Twenty Years Later Is Better Than People Think", *Gamerant*, March 16, 2022: par.7. <https://gamerant.com/why-halloween-h20-better-than-people-think/>

13 Eggersten, "The 40 Year History of Halloween at the Box Office": par.6.

14 *Ibid.*, par.7.

Green). These are the movies in which Jamie Lee Curtis appears as Laurie Strode. These films were chosen because this paper will use Laurie as a point of reference to analyze the evolution of stereotypes, especially gender stereotypes. The other six productions shall therefore not be used. The movies will be separated in three sections, each representing an era of the slasher genre. The first one is the late 1970s/ early 1980s with *Halloween* and *Halloween II*, the second one is the late 1990s/early 2000s with *Halloween H20: Twenty Years Later* and *Halloween: Resurrection*, and the last one is the late 2010s/ early 2020s with *Halloween*, *Halloween Kills* and *Halloween Ends*. This structure allows for a study of the franchise through a comparison of the different eras that it underwent. With this corpus, this paper shall try to explore how the character of Laurie Strode, from the 1970s to this day, exemplifies the evolution of the conventions of the slasher genre, more particularly in the way that it represents female protagonists. Laurie redefines many of these conventions throughout the decades. She erases the stigma around women's violence and proves that age should not define a woman's appearance. However, she also helps maintain other conventions such as the portrayal of female protagonists in horror as hysterical, and the way in which women's roles always limit their lives.

The previously mentioned horror conventions are the “rules” that horror movies often abide by. They are what define the genre, but they are subjected to change as the genre ages. To redefine is to modify a concept, evaluate or adapt it in a way that is new, whether it be positively or negatively. The films included in the corpus are thus redefining horror conventions as they progressively change the rules and stereotypes of the slasher movie. This concept will be one that is under study in this thesis, and it will be centered on age and gender as they are at the center of the slasher conventions and were therefore subjected to the most dramatic changes. Another concept will be that of violence. Violence is evidently the basis of the horror genre. Although it is not always visibly present in every sub-genre of horror, it is particularly used in slashers. Slashers use violence in a visual manner, as the killer often murders in gruesome ways. It is also used by some of the victims to protect themselves. This thesis will analyze the presence but also the absence of violence, as well as its use by and against the characters, as it often represents a certain imbalance of power between the genders. In addition, the roles of women, as mother or grandmother for instance, will also be analyzed as they are affiliated with certain rules and stereotypes in horror. They define the women they are attached to and cannot be separated from them. Moreover, the concept of hysteria is recurrent in horror, and is very present in the *Halloween* franchise. Laurie is always associated with it in different ways throughout the franchise, but she never manages to evolve out of it.

Hysteria is a concept that was originally considered by Freud as a disease that exclusively affected women.¹⁵ It was recurrent in ancient Greece to believe that the uterus could move around the body and cause several problems.¹⁶ Throughout the 18th and the 19th century, the women who did not fit the ideals of the time, such as those who were intellectual or who did not obey their husbands, would be diagnosed with hysteria. Across history, women were silenced by hysteria, and it is exactly how it has been used in the horror genre as well. Ever since the birth of the “hagsploitation” genre in the 1960s, older women have been portrayed as crazy because they have lost their beauty and youth. Younger women have usually been the “hysterical victims”, like in most of Hitchcock’s movies for instance.¹⁷ *Halloween* uses these stereotypes for the character of Laurie as she goes from crazy teenager to crazy older woman. Hysteria in cinema has been analyzed by scholars before. Julia Kristeva, for instance, in chapter 9: Powers of Horror of her book *The Severed Head: Capital Visions*, explores female representations of mental health through representations of decapitations in art.¹⁸ Moreover, a few analyses about hysteria in cinema can be found, but they rarely talk about it regarding the horror genre. One paper has analyzed Michael Myers’s psychology,¹⁹ but none have mentioned the hysterical representation of Laurie, which is what this paper will develop.

Slasher movies, more generally, have been analyzed by scholars before. For instance, Vera Dika wrote *Games of Terror: Halloween, Friday the 13th and the Films of the Stalker Cycle*²⁰ in 1990, in which she analyzed the slasher formula and the reasons for its popularity. Jim Harper wrote *Legacy of Blood: A Comprehensive Guide to Slasher movies*²¹ which examines the history of the genre and certain conventions such as the masked killer and the main protagonist. More recently, Adam Rockoff’s book *Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film*²² also delved into the slasher conventions and the genre’s history while also explaining its rise to success. Regarding *Halloween* itself, numerous analyses have been done by scholars. Murray Leeder wrote *Halloween (Devil’s Advocates)*²³ which

15 Cecilia Tasca, Mariangela Rapetti, Mauro Giovanni Carta, Bianca Fadda, “Women and Hysteria in the History of Mental Health”, *Clinical Practice and Epidemiology in Mental Health*, CP& EMH vol.8 (2012): 110.

16 Ada McVean, “The History of Hysteria”, *McGill*, July 31, 2017: par.2. <https://www.mcgill.ca/oss/article/history-quackery/history-hysteria>

17 Jessica Beebe, “How Modern Horror Movies Rescued Women From Hitchcock’s Hysteria”, *ScreenRant*, October 3, 2020: par.1. <https://screenrant.com/2020-21st-century-horror-movies-female-protagonistchanges-explained/>

18 Julia Kristeva, *The Severed Head: Capital Visions* (Columbia University Press,2012).

19 Matthew Trask, “Psychoanalysis & The Horror Movie”, *Medium*, October 9, 2016. <https://medium.com/the-nocturnal-report/psychoanalysis-the-horror-movie-f82cc6f5aebf>

20 Vera Dika, *Games of Terror: Halloween, Friday the 13th and the Films of the Stalker Cycle* (Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990).

21 Jim Harper, *Legacy of Blood: A Comprehensive Guide to Slasher movies* (Critical Vision, 2004).

22 Adam Rockoff, *Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film* (McFarland & Company, 2011).

23 Murray Leeder, *Halloween (Devil’s Advocates)* (Liverpool: University Press, 2015).

discusses the context of the film's release, the origins of the holiday as well as Michael Myers's psychology. Analyses of *Halloween* are usually amongst analyses of other slashers and therefore they can also be found in the previously mentioned books. There are not many books devoted solely to *Halloween*. Steve Neale's article “*Halloween*!: Suspense, Aggression and the Look”²⁴ focuses on the movie's use of techniques to create tension and fear, as well as its ability to manipulate the audience's gaze. Moreover, David Roche made a comparative analysis of horror remakes which included a comparison of John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) with Rob Zombie's *Halloween* (2007).²⁵ However, while the first movie has been dissected many times, more recent papers that compare it to the latest movies cannot be found as they have been released very recently. The analysis of Laurie as an older woman and the representation of violence and hysteria in our modern society is therefore yet to be done. The previous work done on horror has not focused on one franchise only. It mostly compared movies from different franchises, which did not allow for a comparison of the different versions of the same character over time.

Some of the concepts which will be used in this thesis have been analyzed before. The most well known author is Carol Clover and her book *Men, Women and Chainsaws*.²⁶ Her work has been useful for this paper as she analyzed gender issues in the horror genre. Her concept of “Final Girl” was especially important. It is the main principle that defines the character of Laurie throughout the movies, although this paper will extend Clover's work who only wrote about the first *Halloween*. Moreover, Hilary Neroni analyzed women in movies and their femininity in relation to violence.²⁷ Her work is essential to understand the stereotypes of violence and how they differ depending on gender. It offers an insight into the concept of violent women in Hollywood. Imelda Welehan and Joel Gwynne examined the concept of aging,²⁸ which provided a great opportunity to analyze the stereotypes linked to aging and the way in which the industry represents older women. However, these analyses are often considering a certain period of time that does not include the early 2020s. Horror has continued evolving after these authors' work and therefore their analyses do not include more recent movies. As a

24 Steve Neale, “Halloween: Suspense, Aggression and the Look”, *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, no.14 (1981).

25 David Roche, “Remaking Horror According to the Feminists or How to Have Your Cake and Eat It, Too”, *Représentations: la revue électronique du CEMRA*, (2017).

26 Carol Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

27 Hilary Neroni, *The Violent Woman: femininity, narrative and violence in contemporary American cinema* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2012).

28 Welehan, Gwynne, *Ageing, Popular Culture and Contemporary Feminism: Harleys and Hormones* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

consequence, this paper shall try to compare the seven *Halloween* movies and focus on Laurie and the evolution of certain gender issues.

To do so, this paper will use the *Halloween* movies and their cultural contexts as they shape the representation of women in horror. It will take into account the influence of societal norms, gender, age and sexuality in the evolution of the character of Laurie. Moreover, it will use the themes that surround Laurie's life, such as trauma, aging and motherhood to show how they reflect the societal atmospheres surrounding each movie and their respective period. It will also take into account Jamie Lee Curtis's growing activism throughout the decades and its impact on the franchise.

While considering the previously mentioned analysis approaches, this paper shall demonstrate through the character of Laurie Strode that the slasher genre has changed significantly through each movie and each decade since the 1970s. As female representations in cinema have started to become more progressive, the horror genre has tried to follow this evolution to offer a less stereotypical version of its protagonists. So as to do so, the first part of this analysis shall focus on the concept of violence and how it is used throughout the movies. It shall determine the way in which the representation of this violence is inherently linked to questions of age and gender, as well as how it has evolved throughout the movies. In a second part, this analysis shall explore the roles attributed to women at different ages of their lives. It shall demonstrate that these roles are associated with stereotypes that are either reinforced or rejected by the representation of Laurie. Whether she is a teenager, a mother, or a grandmother, she is never separated from these roles that are the essence of her character. In a third part, this paper will explore the theme of hysteria and how it affects Laurie throughout the entire franchise. It will show that this theme is far from being removed from the genre because it is so deeply rooted in it. In a last part, we will look at Jamie Lee Curtis's career. First, as a Scream Queen with a comparison of her horror roles to Laurie. Then, by examining how Laurie gave her her career and how she in turn gave Laurie her progressive personality.

I) The Gendered Dynamics of Violence

Violence is the central element that constitutes a horror movie. It is what creates the atmosphere of fear that the audience is seeking. It primarily materializes through the acts perpetuated by the villain throughout the movie. The *Halloween* franchise has lasted for several decades and has therefore employed violence in varying manners. This first part shall demonstrate that the use of violence has significantly evolved throughout the movies. It will explore the way in which it is used against the victims, how it is used by the victims, as well as the meanings which are conveyed by their deaths. Moreover, the characters endure a different degree of brutality, whether it be through physical pain, dying or even surviving. In return, they do not make an equal use of violence to defend themselves. Through a chronological analysis of the movies, this part shall therefore attempt to reveal that the characters' suffering and their own resort to violence depend largely on their age and gender.

1) Sexualized Violence and a Passive Final Girl

Halloween (Carpenter, 1978) and *Halloween II* (Rosenthal, 1981) were both released in the same time period and therefore share similar filmic conventions. In both movies, an important difference can be observed between the characters' deaths. In *Halloween II*, Michael finds a house inhabited by a couple of elderly people. [00:08:44] He does not hurt them at all. The elderly, as well as children, are completely safe from violence. As both of these categories of people were viewed as innocent and defenseless, they were rarely the victims of slasher movies. At the time, these films featured a group of teenagers or young adults as their victims. For instance, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974), *Friday The 13th* (Cunningham, 1980) and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Craven, 1984) are some of the most successful slasher movies of the same period which focused on characters who are in their late-teens to early-twenties. On the other hand, after this encounter, Michael finds a young woman in her twenties who is alone at her house and kills her. [00:12:22] She is not related to Laurie, nor is she a way for him to find her. He seems to have killed her for no reason other than her being a young woman. Male and elderly characters are not the victims that suffer from his extreme violence, women are and more specifically young women.

However, two deaths in *Halloween II* challenge this assumption. The security guard of the hospital, a middle-aged man and Dr. Mixer, an old man are both killed by Michael. Nevertheless, much like the young male characters, the security guard's death is extremely quick and not bloody. [00:40:04] In fact, it is barely visible as it is in the dark. It is not a punishment but rather a necessity for

Michael who is trying to enter the hospital. As for Dr. Mixer (Ford Rainey), it is important to notice that earlier in the movie, Budd the paramedic (Leo Rossi) asks a nurse where he is to which she answers: “He's been at the country club, I think he's drunk.” [00:16:04] When he arrives, he asks for coffee and he struggles for words. It is clear that he is hungover yet he still administers Laurie's treatments. He is in a state which does not allow him to take care of his patients properly, which is why his death is a punishment. Although he is old, he is still killed because Michael kills whom he believes to be sinful. However, it still follows the usual rule which does not allow bloody deaths for male and old characters.



Figure 1: Dr. Mixer's death in Halloween II (Rosenthal, 1981, 00:57:19)

He is killed by a needle in his eye.[00:57:19] There is no blood. This closeup shot is barely a second long and his body is shown in the dark. It is an off-screen death as his body is being discovered here. Nothing violent or gore is shown. Therefore, the deaths do not deviate significantly from the original convention since the changes that occur are justified.

In *Halloween*, Bob and Lynda (John Michael Graham and P.J. Soles), Laurie's friends, are both killed by Michael. Bob is pinned to a door by a knife [01:05:52] then Lynda is strangled.[01:07:42] Bob's death is quick and he does not expect it. However, Michael toys with Lynda by hiding under a sheet and pretending to be Bob then strangling her as soon as she turns her back on him. Similarly, in the second movie, Budd is executed in the blurry background [00:50:40] then Nurse Karen (Pamela Susan Shoop) is drowned in boiling water.[00:52:00]



Figure 2: Karen's body on display in Halloween II (Rosenthal, 1981, 00:52:00)

The shot is quite graphic and gore. It shows her topless in a closeup. She is in the center of the light, on display, as the rest of the background is pitch black. The skin of her face and arms has melted and she has blood all over herself. Michael plays with his female victims and tortures them while his male victims die faster and less painfully.

As previously mentioned, one of the main differences between the characters is that young women are the main victims of Michael's most violent acts. As explained by Steve Neale, "each killing implies punishment of a woman who asserted a sexual appetite".²⁹ He kills the young women of the movie as a punishment for their lust. Michael's very first victim was his sister.[00:05:50] He killed her while she was naked after she had sexual intercourse with her boyfriend. The nudity exposed during her murder became the foundation for his future violence towards Laurie's female friends. When Laurie first starts to notice Michael, he is standing between the white sheets that she has hung in her garden [00:26:37] which has a virginal symbolism and a warning not to taint this virginity with the sin of sex. He intends to punish her too if she makes this mistake. Moreover, Laurie's friend, Annie (Nancy Loomis), stains her clothes with food. She undresses and is left wearing only her underwear. This is the moment when Michael starts to watch her closely.[00:43:06] Then, she is about to join her boyfriend Paul and it is clear that they plan to have sex but Michael does not let this happen. He kills her before anything happens. Similarly, when Lynda and Bob are getting closer, Michael watches them. They have unmistakably dug their own grave at this precise moment. After they have sex, they are both killed.

²⁹ Neale, "Halloween: Suspense, Aggression and the Look": 25.



Figure 3: Lynda's death displaying her nudity in Halloween (Carpenter, 1978, 01:07:41)

Lynda's death is very sexualized. She is bare chested when she is strangled.[01:07:41] The background is very dark, she is the only one in the light which makes her the center of the shot. She was also on the phone with Laurie when she died. She moans loudly and Laurie believes that she is moaning in a sexual manner when she is in fact being killed. Nurse Karen is killed in a very similar situation in *Halloween II*. As she is strangled, her towel slips to reveal her bare chest. These women's sexuality is portrayed as something that has to be punished which was a convention of the slasher genre at the time. As Carol Clover explained, “postcoital death, above all when the circumstances are illicit, is a staple of the genre”.³⁰ For instance, *A Bay of Blood* (Mario Bava, 1971) featured Louise (Brigitte Skay), a young woman killed in a very suggestive position which reveals her naked bottom, after being shown fully naked several times in earlier scenes. The sexualization of these women is therefore inherently linked to their death, which is not the case with their male and older counterparts.

Two deaths from *Halloween II* confirm this link between women's death and sexuality. The nurse who discovers Dr. Mixter's body is killed. She has not displayed any sexual desire during the movie. Therefore, her death is neither sexualized nor violent. She is killed by a needle through her temple and dies instantly. Moreover, Mrs. Alvez (Gloria Gifford), the head nurse, is killed off-screen. She is a middle-aged woman who represents order and virtue. She continuously told Jimmy (Lance Guest), the young paramedic, to leave Laurie's room to make sure that nothing romantic or sexual would happen between them.

30 Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws*, 33.



Figure 4: Nurse Alvez's body being discovered in Halloween II (Rosenthal, 1981, 01:05:45)

Her death was therefore also non-violent. She had a perfusion in her arm that drained her blood which most likely resulted in her falling asleep and dying. In this medium long shot, she is shown in her immaculate white uniform. No gore or violence is shown. She is under a lamp which looks like a halo above her, making her a visual symbol of purity.[01:05:45] As they were both watching Laurie and taking care of her, Michael had to kill them in order to be able to reach her. They were necessary victims. While sexually active young women are punished, characters who help Michael in preventing sexual activities are rewarded with a non-violent death.

The conventions of the slasher genre regarding violence towards young, old, male and female characters do not apply to only one character: Laurie. She is Michael's ultimate goal, the one he is truly after. Therefore, she is special to him and not treated like the other girls. Laurie is the Final Girl, a term coined by Carol Clover.³¹ The "Final Girl" is the woman who is the last survivor. She is "not fully masculine, she is not fully feminine" and therefore different conventions are applied to her character. She is not killed, which is why she is special. While her female friends experience horrible physical pain, she is mainly the victim of a psychological type of violence. She is chased during most of the movie and she discovers her dead friends one by one while realizing that she is now alone to face the killer. These characteristics apply to Laurie's character. She is not a feminine-looking girl and therefore she is not sexualized like the other girls. However, she is more resourceful and she fights Michael in

31 Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws*, 40.

the end. She is the only female survivor as she is the only one allowed to fight back.

When it comes to using violence, young characters are very passive in those two movies. The male characters do not even realize that they are in danger. They have no chance to fight back, they are immediately killed. As for women, they are always in a position of vulnerability in which they do not fight to defend themselves. However, they are not killed as quickly as men which should allow them to resist but violence is not associated with women. According to Hilary Neroni, “violence is a man's realm, as well as a defining characteristic of masculinity”.³² Therefore, these women cannot be violent in any way.

On the contrary, the two main middle-aged men of these movies, Michael and Loomis (Donald Pleasence) are violent. Michael is obviously the villain of the movie but his actions are not even explained. It is unclear why he wants to kill Laurie and her friends. His responsibility is even undermined. He is called “death”, “the shape” and “the boogeyman”. He is dehumanized to appear as a mystical evil creature when he is just a man who does terrible actions. As a man, he does not need any reason or excuse to be violent. Dr. Loomis is very active. At the end of *Halloween*, he shoots Michael six times with no hesitation.[01:26:47] It is this action which stops Michael. He is not afraid to make an excessive use of his weapon. Dr. Loomis appears for only about fourteen minutes in *Halloween*, yet he is the one who saves the day and has the role of the hero in the end. He is an older male whose status allows him to be violent and to kill. Once again, at the end of *Halloween II*, he arrives at the hospital and shoots Michael, but it does not kill him. Therefore, he locks himself with Michael in a room filled with oxygen tanks and lights a lighter.[01:25:40] Here, he uses extreme violence again as they both burn alive.

Laurie's use of violence differs once again from the other characters'. In *Halloween*, she stabs Michael and uses a hanger to poke him in the eye. In *Halloween II*, she shoots him in the eyes. However, she does not overuse violence, she is only defending herself in order to escape. She is the only female character who is able to defend herself yet it is very minimal and never bloody. As Hilary Neroni claimed, “having chastity and a male protector were two commodities that allowed these women [violent women in American cinema] some latitude in the direction of adventure and freedom—and even violence”.³³ Laurie being the Final Girl, she has remained pure and she relies on Dr. Loomis to save her, which allows her to use violence to a certain extent. Moreover, “only the wayward woman who has already transgressed social mores in her dress, behavior, and life style—is considered

32 Neroni, *The Violent Woman*, 45.

33 *Ibid.*, 18.

capable of violence”.³⁴ Laurie is an outcast who does not dress nor behave like other girls her age, she is therefore the only one whom we can expect to see using violence. Moreover, according to Laura Mulvey,³⁵ men are active while women are passive in movies which in this case is illustrated by the contrast between Dr. Loomis and the young women of the film. As Laurie is different and does not fit completely into either feminine or masculine categories, she is neither fully passive nor fully active. She blurs the line between the active males and passive females stereotypes. Women's violence is therefore non-existent, or suppressed while Michael's and Dr. Loomis' is normalized. As the next film featuring Laurie was released at a time when social expectations in Hollywood had changed, the conventions regarding violence in the slasher genre evolved to a certain extent, as this paper shall next demonstrate.

2) Laurie's Brutality and a Shift in Gender Dynamics

Halloween H20: Twenty Years Later does not make a difference in the violence that the characters are victims of in the way that *Halloween* did. The first victim to be killed is an old woman. [00:08:46] Her throat is slashed in a closeup and the blood can be seen very clearly. This first kill is an important statement that defines the rest of the movie. It indicates that former conventions of the genre have been disrupted. Old people used to be safe from violence, it is not the case anymore. Preceding this event is a scene in which a teenager is killed even though it was not necessary for Michael to kill him. His death is quite gruesome. Laurie's boyfriend, Will, is stabbed and lifted off the ground by Michael. Therefore, while men used to be killed mainly in non-violent manners, they can now be the victims of violent deaths in the same way that women used to be. In fact, there are more male victims than female in this movie.

However, it is important to note that most of the men are not tortured on-screen whereas the women are. The justification for the women's deaths is not sexuality anymore. The movie does not contain any nudity and the women are not sexualized. John and Molly (Josh Hartnett and Michelle Williams), Laurie's son and his girlfriend, do not center their relationship on sexuality. The security guard of the school who writes erotic stories is not killed as a punishment for it, he survives. Moreover, Sarah (Jodi Lyn O'Keefe), one of John's friends, is killed on screen. She did not have intercourse with her boyfriend nor did she express any intention of doing so. She is killed only because Michael is trying to reach Laurie's son, not because she has sinned. Therefore, although the women are still

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁵ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Screen* 16, no.3 (1975): 11.

tortured on screen more than the men, there is no sense that they are punished for their sexuality anymore. However, the way in which Sarah dies suggests that there remains a certain inequality between men and women.



Figure 5: Sarah crawling on the floor in Halloween H20: Twenty Years Later (Miner,1998, 01:00:50)

In this shot, Sarah is wounded, crawling on the floor to escape. Michael's shadow indicates that he is approaching and that it is impossible for her to get away from him. She is not sexualized in the way that the women from *Halloween* were but she is in a position of inferiority. Michael is above her while she is in the lowest position possible: on the ground. This closeup of her body with her injury facing the camera as she is crawling portrays her as a wounded prey about to be executed by the hunter. Her begging Michael to be spared adds to this metaphor. She is portrayed as a character who is weak in comparison to her male counterparts who do not beg for their lives. Three male victims are killed off screen in the movie. Unlike Sarah, they are not placed in a position that would make them appear weak. They do not scream nor do they run away and they are not tortured. For instance, her boyfriend is killed off screen. He does not suffer like she does. She is the one who finds his body before being killed, which adds to her torture. Therefore, although the ratio between male victims and women victims is more equal and the violence has shifted from women towards men, there is still a certain discrepancy regarding the power dynamics of women in comparison to men.

This shot of Sarah provides another shift that occurs in this movie. Instead of a high angle shot from Michael's point of view to place the audience on his side and emphasize his dominance, this shot is made from the ground where Sarah is. It places the audience on her side. It almost feels like the audience is crawling with her. It creates an atmosphere of fear as Michael is approaching. Sarah's

crawling is painfully slow and the ominous music is overwhelming as we realize that she will not escape. This movie is much more victim-oriented than killer-oriented. The scene in which Charlie (Adam Hann-Byrd) dies emphasizes this idea.



Figure 6: Charlie's reflection in Michael's eye in *Halloween H20: Twenty Years Later* (Miner, 1998, 00:58:17)

This shot is interesting to analyze in comparison with the shots of the victims seen through Michael's mask in *Halloween*. In previous point-of-view shots in *Halloween*, the audience had to watch the victims through Michael's eyes represented by the two holes of his mask, and therefore identify with him.³⁶ This shot is an extreme closeup of Michael's eye in which we can see Charlie's reflection. The audience watches Charlie in Michael's eye, therefore they do not have to side with Michael anymore. The shift in the point of view that is displayed here is quite significant. The focus is on the terrified victim and how Michael is looking at him in a way that suggests his violent motives. It shifts from “looking at” to “being looked at”.

In terms of violence being used by the characters, some changes have also occurred. The old woman who dies in the beginning is given a chance to fight for her life. She runs, she hits Michael and breaks a window to try and escape. This type of scene used to be reserved to the Final Girl. As for Laurie's boyfriend Will (Adam Arkin), he does not think that there is a reason to panic. As the main male figure, he is the complete opposite of Loomis who used violence. The only time he resorts to violence is when he gets scared and shoots at who he thinks is Michael.[01:06:09] In this scene, he is trying to protect Laurie and he has the capacity to do so since he has a gun. He could find Michael and shoot him dead for Laurie to be safe. However, he panics when he sees someone coming towards them

³⁶ Charles Hart, “Killer POV: First-Person Camera and Sympathetic Identification in Modern Horror”, *Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Media Studies* 9, no.1 (2018): par.13.

and he fires the gun. He cannot use the gun properly as he shot without even thinking or aiming. He shoots the security guard of the school instead of Michael. He drops the weapon and does not check his surroundings, giving Michael the opportunity to kill him. Therefore, he is clearly depicted as incompetent. He could not use his weapon properly nor help Laurie in any way. Unlike Dr. Loomis, he will not be the hero at the end.

The most important change is that of the Final Girl. Laurie takes matters into her own hands. She is the one who takes the lead and she does not need to be rescued. It is indicated in the beginning that Dr. Loomis is dead. This clearly states that there will be nobody to take her place as the hero. Will's death also confirms this idea.



Figure 7: Michael displaying Will's body in front of Laurie in Halloween H20: Twenty Years Later (Miner;1998, 01:06:46)

In this long shot, Michael and Will are placed in the center. Will in particular is the central point. Michael is behind him. They are both facing the camera and Laurie who is watching. Michael is lifting Will off the ground as if he was presenting him to Laurie. He is showing her Will almost as a trophy for her to understand that there will not be anyone left to steal her role as the hero. He is now sure that she will not hide or run as she will be the only one left to fight him.

Laurie is therefore the most violent character of this movie. She does not run away, she faces Michael.



Figure 8: Laurie has decapitated Michael (Halloween H20: Twenty Years Later, Miner,1998, 01:20:29)

This medium shot from the end of the movie is particularly striking. Laurie is standing in the center. She is holding an axe. Behind her is the car that she has driven off a cliff. She is looking at Michael's head which is off-screen, because she has just decapitated him. She has a expression of rage on her face. From the crashed car to the axe and the decapitation, this shot includes many elements that portray Laurie's extreme violence in this movie. Interestingly, *Halloween* ended with a shot of Laurie sat on the ground crying followed by a shot of Dr. Loomis. Here, the movie ends on this exact shot of Laurie in one of her most violent and strongest moments.

These changes in the conventions of the genre indicate that this movie is trying to direct the narrative towards a more feminist approach. When Sarah and Molly are in their bedroom, this idea is made clear through a visual reference.



Figure 9: Sarah and Molly watching *Scream 2* in *Halloween H20: Twenty Years Later* (Miner, 1998, 00:48:08)

They are watching the movie *Scream 2* (Craven, 1997), as we can see on the TV on the left-hand side of the shot. The *Scream* franchise renewed the audience's interest for the slasher genre in the nineties. It criticized the stereotypical slasher conventions related to gender³⁷ while redefining new conventions of the genre during a time of third-wave feminism. It created a new, stronger version of the Final Girl embodied by Sidney Prescott (Neve Campbell). *Halloween H20: Twenty Years Later* follows in *Scream's* steps in terms of remaking the genre. This film is more feminist because film-making at this time had been affected by feminist film criticism, Carol Clover's work for example, and the popularization of gender studies.³⁸ Hence the creation of this improved, albeit imperfect, slasher movie that takes previous gender issues into consideration.

The shot in itself is also an interesting piece of foreshadowing. The shot is divided in two, split perfectly in the middle. Sarah is on the left of the screen, in a similar position as Cici (Sarah Michelle Gellar), the character from *Scream 2* on the TV. Molly is by herself on the right. Sarah being with Cici in the shot foreshadows her death later in the movie as the scene on the TV is the one in which Cici is killed. Molly, however, survives. Sarah is also wearing a red shirt which hints at her bloody death while Molly wears a perfectly white shirt.

The other change that is very important in this movie is that of the role of the Final Girl. Laurie as a Final Girl in this movie has already been discussed. She is the main character and survivor, but the role of the Final Girl as Carol Clover has described it cannot be attributed to her anymore. The Final

37 Valerie Wee, "The *Scream* Trilogy, 'Hyperpostmodernism', and the Late-Nineties Teen Slasher Film", *Journal of Film and Video* 57, no.3 (2005): 47.

38 Roche, "Remaking Horror According to the Feminists or How to Have Your Cake and Eat It, Too": 12.

Girl has a group of friends³⁹ who become the victims of the killer, which does not apply to Laurie in this movie. However, it fits her son John.



Figure 11: John walking with his friends in *Halloween H20: Twenty Years Later* (Miner, 1998, 00:17:35)



Figure 10: Laurie walking with her friends in *Halloween* (Carpenter, 1978, 00:20:42)

This shot of John walking with two friends mirrors perfectly the shot of Laurie doing the same in *Halloween*. Moreover, he is the same age as she was. While Laurie's friends were teasing her for not having a boyfriend, John's friends are teasing him for having an overprotective mother. He encounters the killer multiple times but never fights him to the point of killing him. He survives but in the end, he is saved by Laurie who becomes the hero. In *Halloween*, Dr. Loomis was the one to appear and save Laurie. Here, the woman becomes the savior and the young man becomes the last survivor. The gender stereotypes have switched. John is the actual “Final Girl” of this movie, not Laurie.

The movie *Halloween: Resurrection* attempted to bring Michael and Laurie back for one last time. Since Laurie dies within the first fifteen minutes, the franchise took a completely different turn with this movie. While the reviews of the previous movie were mixed, the reviews for this one were unanimously bad, with a 10% given on Rotten Tomatoes.⁴⁰ The audience was greatly disappointed with what happened to Laurie after everything that she had done in *Halloween H20*. One critic deemed it was a “lame and inglorious farewell”⁴¹ to Laurie as her exit scene did not do her character justice. Indeed, the audience had been rooting for Laurie for twenty four years and she had become increasingly stronger. It did not make sense that she died so easily. While Steve Miner directed

39 Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws*, 35.

40 “Halloween: Resurrection”, Rottentomatoes.com, 2002, <https://www.rottentomatoes.com>.

41 Jake Cremins, “Halloween: Resurrection”, Movie-gurus.com: par.3, <https://www.movie-gurus.com/content/reviews/h/1367/index.html>.

Halloween H20, Rick Rosenthal directed *Halloween: Resurrection*. Rosenthal had previously directed *Halloween II* and it seems like he has kept a version of Laurie that is similar to that of *Halloween II* instead of continuing with the new one she had become in *Halloween H20*.

Jamie Lee Curtis herself did not like the idea of being in this movie. She was the one who suggested that Laurie get rid of Michael definitively in *Halloween H20* because it would fit the woman she had become. Unfortunately, the studio wanted to leave an opening for Michael to return. Jamie Lee Curtis stated, “that's why sadly I'm in *Resurrection*”.⁴²



Figure 12: Laurie is in a mental hospital (*Halloween: Resurrection* (Rosenthal, 2002, 00:05:34))

In this shot, Laurie's hair is messy, she is fully covered again and she is holding a doll which infantilizes her. In comparison with her appearance in *Halloween H20* in which she was powerful looking and more feminine, it is clear here that her character has taken a major step backwards. She has gone back to being the girl who will not use enough violence to defeat the killer on her own, and therefore she dies. As the next movie featuring Laurie was made sixteen years after this one, the conventions regarding violence were once again majorly remodeled, as this paper shall next demonstrate.

3) Violence Against the Patriarchal Society

Halloween (2018) is the first movie of the franchise to include a child's death. A young boy is killed very early, indicating a new major change: not even children are safe anymore. Most of Michael's first victims in this movie are unnecessary deaths. He kills them simply for his own pleasure. He kills

⁴² Extra Quality, “Jamie Lee Curtis on 'Halloween: H20' and 'Halloween: Resurrection' (2012)”, 2021, 8:58 to 9:01, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dN59pa7cyiI>.

two reporters in quite a violent way.[00:40:10] He also chooses a random house and enters it to kill the woman who lives in it.



Figure 13: A woman killed in her house in Halloween (Green, 2018, 00:48:22)

The victim is at the center of the shot.[00:48:22] Michael is standing behind her, barely visible. He is above the victim, in a position of superiority as she is kneeling down. The knife is going through her throat as the blood splashes on the window. The woman was previously looking through this same window, afraid of who might be lurking in the dark outside, but the danger comes from inside. In this movie, Michael is more violent than ever. No one is safe and no place is safe either. This is quite an important shift as there are no rules dictating who can die and who cannot anymore.

However, men's deaths are now more bloody and there are more male victims than female.



Figure 14: A man's body is discovered in a gruesome position in Halloween (Green, 2018, 00:38:09)

In this shot, for instance, Michael has killed an employee of a garage.[00:38:09] The light is very bright. It comes from the right side of the shot and lights the face of the character so that it is very visible to the audience. His face has been hit on the desk. His jaw is shattered and blood pours out of it. It is quite graphic and exaggerated, to the point of giving the character a grotesque appearance. While *Halloween H20* tried to balance the male/ female ratio amongst the victims for more equality, in this movie the typical gendered roles from the very first *Halloween* are reversed. More men die and they die more violently.

It is therefore interesting to understand the meaning behind these men's deaths. One of these men is Oscar (Drew Scheid), Allyson's friend.



Figure 15: Oscar is impaled on a gate in Halloween (Green, 2018, 01:11:27)

In this shot, Allyson (Andi Matichak) finds his body.[01:11:27] The emphasis is laid on his body with the backlight that gives him the appearance of a dark figure. In addition, he is wearing a devil costume. This shot represents him as evil. Before this scene, he had tried to take advantage of Allyson by kissing her while she did not consent. Therefore, this shot paints him as a new version of the sinner. While in the first movie women were punished for their sexuality, he is punished for hurting a woman. He is impaled on the gate as if he was stuck on the “evil” side while Allyson is alive on the other side because she is “good”. The devil costume adds to this image. He is put on display for her, almost like a trophy. An other example is Allyson's father, Ray. He leaves the house to see who is here because he heard a noise. He is armed yet does not manage to shoot Michael or even so much as hurt him. He is killed then shoved into a closet like a piece of laundry. Earlier in the movie, he had rejected Laurie's help, claiming that he could take care of his family. However, this scene proves him wrong. He refused

Laurie's help because he was dictated by a very patriarchal state of mind. He had to be the protector so as not to seem weak. He was not capable of it, he failed, and therefore is punished.

Moreover, Vicky (Virginia Gardner), Allyson's friend, does not receive any help from her boyfriend when she gets killed. Since he did not help her, he is killed too.



Figure 16: Dave is pinned to a wall in Halloween (Green, 2018, 01:02:43)

A police officer discovers his body in this long shot.[01:02:43] He is pinned to the wall as if he belonged with the other paintings, as a piece of decoration. This portrayal shows him as useless. It emphasizes his failure as a boyfriend since he should have at least tried to help Vicky.

Michael's doctor was also killed for not helping a woman. He was supposed to help Allyson but he did not because he had developed feelings for Michael. Therefore, Michael smashes his head with his foot as his is in the lowest possible position, lying on the ground.

The police officers are one last example. They are killed by Michael right after.[01:24:03]

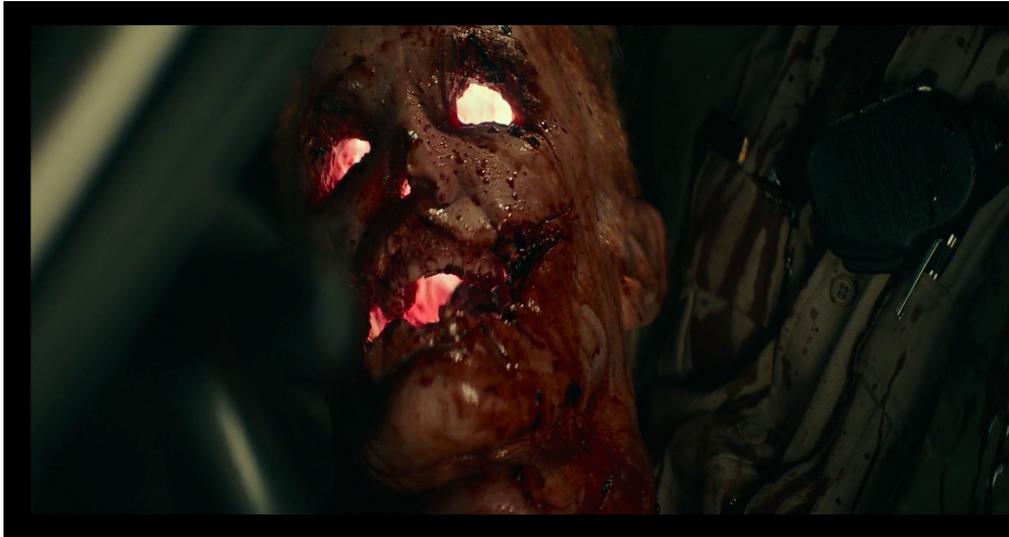


Figure 17: An officer's head is turned into a pumpkin in Halloween (Green, 2018, 010:24:03)

The first officer is sat in the car while the other's head is placed on his lap. This closeup shot shows that it has been carved into a pumpkin and the officer's lamp is lighting it. This is once again very grotesque. They were patrolling near Allyson when she was attacked by Michael yet they did not see anything and they did not help her at all. Not only are all these men violently killed, they are also mocked. Interestingly, the production of the movie started in 2017 which corresponds to the year the MeToo movement erupted on social media. Therefore, this movie is centered around female empowerment and the men who are ridiculed by dying the most violent deaths are those who disappoint women.

The theme of gender reversal amongst the victims can also be noted in Allyson and her boyfriend's appearance.



Figure 18: Allyson and Cameron as Bonnie and Clyde in Halloween (Green, 2018, 00:48:30)

During their Halloween party, they are dressed as Bonnie and Clyde.[00:48:30] However, as shown in this shot, Cameron (Dylan Arnold) is Bonnie while Allyson is Clyde. Their costumes being gender switched is a direct representation of the overall switch in gendered conventions in this film. Allyson is the fighter in this movie, which is a typically male role. Interestingly, the skeletons that are around them in the shot are correctly placed. The skeleton that seems more feminine because of the tiara it is wearing is placed by Allyson's side. It seems to be clapping at her while the other skeleton is looking directly at Cameron with its jaw open in a way that looks like it is scared. The skeletons could therefore foreshadow Allyson's future as a survivor and Cameron's failure as a future victim like the other men of the movie.

Indeed, this movie is oriented towards feminine success as the ending attests. Laurie, Karen and Allyson win. They represent three generations of women who have fought for their lives. There are now three women as survivors while there used to be only one. They have been allowed to defend themselves through violence. All the important male figures have been killed and the women can now be the heroes.

It is interesting to analyze how the characters' use of violence has also changed. The young boy from the beginning uses a rifle and shoots someone. It is the first time that the audience can see a child using violence and it is an important change since children were seen as innocent in the previous movies. Moreover, Michael, as previously mentioned, is more violent than he has ever been. It is worth noticing that he is seen in two distinctive ways throughout the movie.



Figure 19: *The Shape in the darkness in Halloween (Green, 2018, 01:27:26)*

This low angle shot of Michael standing in the dark perpetuates his role as the “shape”.[01:27:26] His features are barely visible. He is dehumanized, even by the characters who call him “this thing” or “it”. However, in other shots, his face without the mask is slightly visible. This had not been done a lot before as it reminds the audience that he is in fact, human. Therefore, Michael oscillates between a faceless monster and a human. The constant shift between the two faces is very powerful. Indeed, he is capable of such terrible violence that we want to believe that he is not real, but he is in fact a human being like the rest of us.

The last element to have changed is the Final Girl. Allyson introduces a new version of the role. She is the one who sees her friends die and who tries to fight back. Her being dressed as a man is also a reminder of the traditional Final Girl who was deemed “masculine-looking”. She is not violent at first, but she quickly becomes violent when necessary to save herself and her family. However, unlike the first version of the Final Girl, she is not a virginal character as she is in a relationship. She does not let anyone mock or disrespect her without talking back at them. She is not an outcast like Laurie was.

In *Halloween Kills*, an interesting change that occurs is that the people of Haddonfield are actively taking part in the hunt to find Michael. The focus is not only on Laurie and her family anymore. They do not want him to be apprehended, they want to kill him themselves. The use of violence by the characters is not as Manichaeian as it used to be in *Halloween*. No one is completely innocent nor bad. Violence can come from any character.



Figure 20: The people of Haddonfield against Michael in Halloween Kills (Green, 2021, 01:34:14)

This shot in particular is quite striking.[01:34:14] On one side is Michael, in the dark as per usual. On the other side, the people of Haddonfield are gathered. They are in the bright light. We can see that they are all carrying some sort of weapon. They are obviously not very prepared as some of them are carrying weapons that are not actual weapons. At first, this does seem Manichaeian as it could be described as the good chasing the evil. However, their violence is sometimes excessive, for instance when they kill an innocent man thinking it was Michael. Therefore, there is a new nuance to the representation of violence. Michael is not the only cruel and unfair character anymore.

In addition, Karen (Judy Greer) undergoes the most interesting character development in terms of the violence she uses.



Figure 21: Karen facing Michael in Halloween Kills (Green, 2021, 01:32:43)

In this shot, she has removed Michael's mask and she faces him.[01:32:43] She is wearing her Christmas sweater, indicating how she does not belong in this Halloween-centered movie. While Allyson and Laurie want to fight Michael, Karen does not. She was raised by Laurie to fight but she has hated her for it. She completely rejects this part of her life and therefore the Halloween holiday itself. In this scene, she is forced to confront him to save her daughter. However, she leads him to the people of the town so that they take care of him. This image of her sweater behind Michael's mask offers a clear parallel. On the one side is Christmas, a very joyful holiday. On the other, Halloween and the face of the monster who has ruined her life. She is forced to use a little violence but will never be as violent as Allyson and Laurie. She cannot be the one who defeats Michael if she does not accept to become violent, as her death in the end demonstrates.

Halloween Ends was the movie that received the worst criticism out of the three. Many people felt like this movie did not belong in the same franchise as the other two. The main reason is that the narrative is not centered around the women anymore.⁴³ Michael's kills are very arbitrary and are devoid of any signification. A new character is introduced, a boy named Corey (Rohan Campbell) who gets close to Allyson. While Allyson was a strong main character who was becoming more violent in the previous movies, she now lives in Corey's shadow since the movie is centered around him. Once Corey encounters Michael, he is not the same anymore. He becomes violent.

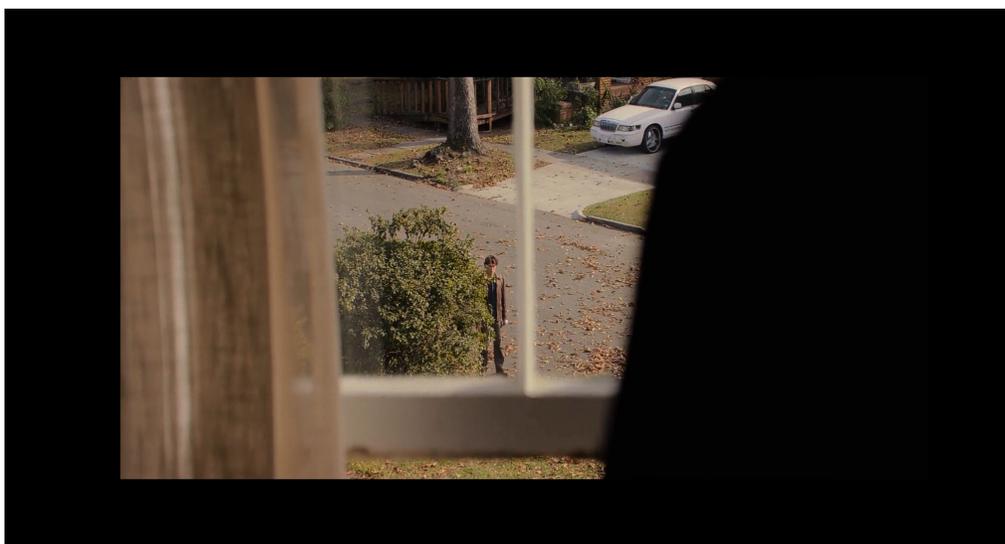


Figure 22: Corey mirroring Michael's behaviour in *Halloween Ends* (Green, 2022, 00:44:56)

In this shot, it is clear that Corey is becoming the new Michael.[00:44:56] He is standing in front of the

43 Brecken Hunter Wellborn, "Halloween Ends' Fails to Pass the Final Girl Baton", Collider, October 23, 2022: par.8, <https://collider.com/halloween-ends-fails-to-pass-final-girl-baton/>.

house, lurking behind the bush exactly as Michael usually does. As Michael is recovering, he is too weak. He uses Corey to bring him new victims to sustain his thirst for blood. Corey represents the way in which a human being can turn into a monster as he undergoes this transformation throughout the movie. Allyson falls in love with him even after Laurie tells her that he is dangerous. She rejects her grandmother for him and she does not hesitate to get ready to leave town with him. In a way, Corey and Allyson become the new Michael and Laurie. Several times throughout the movies, some characters claimed that Laurie has rejected Michael's advances. A woman yells at her, claiming: "you tempted and provoked that man".[00:30:18] They are blaming her, implying that he was looking to approach her and that her running away hurt him, which is why he started killing. Allyson and Corey offer a new parallel version of the story in which the woman has accepted the man.

The theme of female empowerment was therefore not pursued in this movie. Laurie and Allyson's relationship is destroyed because of a man. When Corey stages his death, Allyson immediately thinks that Laurie has killed him. She does not trust her despite what they have gone through together. In this movie, evil is called a "contamination". Laurie tells Michael "I have tried to contain you" as if she was talking about a spreading disease. Here, he fully embodies evil. Corey has been contaminated by Michael. Allyson was then almost contaminated by Corey. When he dies, she is released from his grasp and immediately comes back to Laurie to save her. Her character as we knew it in the previous movies resurfaces as the two women are reunited.

Men's death in this movie can however still be considered as a punishment for failing women. For instance, Allyson's ex-boyfriend, Doug (Jesse C. Boyd), is killed by Michael and Corey.[00:56:50] He was very insistent with Allyson throughout the movie, insisting on talking to her when she disagrees and invading her personal space. He gets killed as a punishment for harassing her. Moreover, Dr. Mathis (Michael O'Leary), is killed at his house.[01:04:32] Allyson works with him as a nurse. He is quite mean towards her and often raises his voice at her. He also refused to give her a promotion and instead gave it to a nurse with whom he is having an affair, which is why he is punished.

Therefore, *Halloween* and *Halloween II* use violence to sexualize women and show them naked as their role is to be looked at. They cannot be violent to fight back. As the Final Girl, Laurie can fight back but not kill, she still has to wait for a man to save her. In *Halloween H20*, women are still placed in positions of inferiority but are no longer sexualized nor the only ones to be killed violently. Laurie has changed significantly. She is very violent and does not need a man, but rather proves that she can

do everything by herself. However, *Halloween Resurrection* overturns these changes by making her once again powerless and even killing her. *Halloween* and *Halloween Kills* offer a new feminist vision of the franchise, using violence as criticism of the patriarchal society. *Halloween Ends* does not entirely follow the same feminist narrative but it provides a new metaphor of violence as contamination. Taking into consideration the elements of analysis provided in this first part, this paper shall next try to demonstrate that women's roles and the way that they are portrayed are closely connected.

II) Societal Norms Associated With Women's Roles

The *Halloween* movies have continuously been using women through different stages of their lives as their primary victims and as their main character. *Halloween I* and *Halloween II* portrayed Laurie and her friends who embodied a different version of the “young woman”. *Halloween H20* and *Halloween: Resurrection* portray a middle-aged Laurie as she takes on the role of a mother. In the last *Halloween* trilogy, Laurie is a grandmother. Through these three different roles and her aging, Laurie's character, as well as the other women of the movies, are subjected to different societal norms. This part shall attempt to reveal that the representation of the female characters in these movies depends on their role as a woman and the societal norms that are attached to each of these roles, as well as on their age.

1) The Erotic Women and the Final Girl

In these first two movies, Laurie and her friends are seventeen-year-old women. Annie and Lynda are very feminine, well-dressed women whose role is to be attractive. According to Laura Mulvey, “women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness”.⁴⁴ Annie and Lynda's appearance is very alluring and they are often displayed as the previous analysis of the scenes of their deaths have shown. Lynda's chest is bare when she dies, for instance. Their role is only to be attractive. Their characters do not have any depth, the audience is not given any information about them apart from their interest in boys and sexual activities.

Women like Lynda and Annie who are displayed in movies have two purposes: to be an erotic object for the other characters and to be an erotic object for the audience.⁴⁵ They are indeed erotic objects for their boyfriends in the movies since their presence revolves around being with them and meeting them to have intercourse. Additionally, they are erotic objects for the members of the audience since they are presented as fashionable and attractive, as previously indicated. Their purpose is that which Laura Mulvey calls the “passive/looked-at”.⁴⁶ They do not fight nor are they active in any way during the movie, their characters' purpose is only to be the victims of Michael. This role contrasts with the “active/looking” which is attributed to Michael. He is the one observing them before killing them. Therefore, through Michael, members of the audience can gain “control and possession of the woman

44 Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”: 11.

45 *Ibid.*: 11.

46 *Ibid.*: 16.

within the diegesis”.⁴⁷ The display of the female characters is a way for the audience to feel as though they are the ones observing them in their vulnerable moments, especially naked, and that they are about to overpower them.



Figure 23: Looking at Judith Myers through Michael's mask in Halloween (Carpenter, 1978, 00:05:36)

During several scenes throughout the movie, the audience is directly placed in Michael's position. When he is about to kill his sister, for example, the camera is not on Judith's side. [00:05:36] There is a medium long shot of her naked body as she brushes her hair in the mirror. She is visible only through two holes in front of the camera while the rest is blacked out. This shot clearly represents Michael's mask. Therefore, the audience has to identify with him and to look at Judith in the way that he does. Their “scopophilic instinct”,⁴⁸ that is to say someone's pleasure in looking at another person as erotic object, is active through the way the women are displayed in the movie.

Although these young women's role is to be attractive and looked at, they cannot express their sexual desires. Indeed, they are supposed to be feminine and pay attention to their appearance but if they act upon their sexual desires, especially out of wedlock, then they should be punished. The representation of women's sexuality in this movie is influenced by Christianity. Therefore, having intercourse before marriage is a sin in the movie that leads Annie and Lynda to death. According to Adina Nack, “most Americans subscribe to a gender ideology in which girls and women are morally and socially demeaned by non-marital sexual encounters, whereas these same behaviours serve to elevate the social statuses of boys and men”.⁴⁹ This double standard between men and women's

47 Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”: 13.

48 Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”: 17.

49 Adina Nack, *Damaged Goods?: Women Living With Incurable Sexually Transmitted Diseases* (Philadelphia: Temple

sexuality leads the women of the movie to be tortured while naked for having “sinned”.

Consequently, women are frequently divided into two stereotypical categories: the “virgin” and the “whore”, or the “good girl” and the “bad girl”.⁵⁰ This dichotomy offers the vision that a female's sexuality is what defines them. The “virgin” expresses her sexuality within marriage and “women who fail to embody this ideal are 'whores’”.⁵¹ These two stereotypes are at the core of slasher movies. As Linda Williams explained, “teen horror films kill off the sexually active 'bad' girls, allowing only the non-sexual 'good' girls to survive”.⁵² The difference between the “good girl” and the young women as “bad girls” is very apparent in *Halloween II* with Nurse Alvez and Nurse Karen.



Figure 24: Nurse Alvez reprimanding Nurse Karen in *Halloween II* (Rosenthal, 1981, 00:31:51)

In this scene, Alvez and Karen are talking.[00:31:51] Karen's long hair is down and she is wearing lipstick. Moreover, her dress is short and tight to reveal her curves. She wears short sleeves and a pink belt to cinch her waist. Nurse Alvez, however, is wearing her hair in a strict tight bun. She wears a jacket over her uniform which covers her whole body and is not tight. She also wears pants while Karen's uniform is a dress that reveals her legs. Karen looks very feminine and attractive while Alvez looks more professional. Karen looks like a fantasy of a pretty nurse while Alvez looks like a genuine nurse. Karen is the sexually active one in the movie that serves as an erotic object. She occupies the “whore” role of the dichotomy. Moreover, Karen is not very professional. She is late and

University Press, 2008), 6.

50 Virginia Braun, Nicola Gavey, ““Bad girls” And “Good girls”? Sexuality and cervical cancer.”, *Women's Studies International Forum* 22, no.2 (1999): par.9.

51 Jonathan Gottschall, Elizabeth Allison, Jay De Rosa, and Kaia Klockeman, “Can Literary Study Be Scientific?: Results of an Empirical Search for the Virgin/Whore Dichotomy.”, *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 7, no.2 (2006): 2.

52 Linda Williams, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess.”, *Film Quarterly* 44, no.4 (1991): 8.

Nurse Alvez warns her to be more serious: “You're a good nurse, Karen, I'd hate to lose you”. [00:32:03] Therefore, Nurse Alvez is the “good girl”, also called “God's police”.⁵³ She is trying to help Karen stay in the right path and stop her from committing any sin. Nurse Alvez is killed by Michael because he needs to reach Laurie, she is a necessary victim. However, Karen is violently killed as a punishment for being a “bad” girl.

While most young women in both movies belong to the “whore” stereotype, it is interesting to note that Laurie does not. As the Final Girl, she is not submitted to the same norms. Her role is not to be an erotic object. Thus, she is not portrayed as typically “feminine”, that is to say that she does not dress in a way that would be appealing to the male gaze.



Figure 25: Laurie and Lynda walking home after school in *Halloween* (Carpenter, 1978, 00:20:14)

In this scene [00:20:14], Laurie is wearing dull colors while Lynda is wearing bright mint green. Laurie wears a cardigan, a turtle neck, a long skirt and tights. She is fully covered, revealing nothing of her body. Lynda is also quite covered but in a very fashionable way. She is wearing high-waisted jeans, her hair is tied with ribbons and she has high heels. The difference between their looks reveals that they do not have the same role. Moreover, Laurie is holding books while Lynda has a bag that does not hold anything school-related even though they just left their class. For instance, she has a hairbrush, a mirror, a comb and a lipstick in her bag. Those are items that are typically identified as feminine and referring to beauty. As previously mentioned, Laurie is not fully feminine and her aspect and intelligence associate her with men.⁵⁴ She is not interested in men or sex. The other characters mock her for her lack of femininity and interest in sexual activities but the movie rewards her for not committing

53 Gottschall, Allison, De Rosa, Klockeman, “Can Literary Study Be Scientific?": 2.

54 Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws*, 40.

any sin since she survives.

Moreover, Laurie is the voice of reason. She reassures Tommy when he is scared by telling him that the boogeyman does not exist. In this sense, she is already taking on the role of a mother. While her friends are out with their boyfriends, she has to take care of Tommy and Lindsey.



Figure 26: Annie leaving Lindsey with Laurie in order to go meet her boyfriend (Halloween, Carpenter, 1978, 00:51:55)

Once again, in this scene [00:51:55], the girls' appearance reveals clearly that their roles are very different. On the left-hand side of the image, Annie is in her underwear wearing a shirt and covered with a blanket. She has previously stained her clothes and is now about to meet her boyfriend. Her appearance is untidy but seductive. On the other hand, Laurie's appearance is sharp. She wears pants and a blouse. She also wears an apron and has a cloth to do the dishes in her hands. Tommy and Lindsey are on her side of the screen, in the background. Her appearance refers directly to that of a housewife. This image emphasizes how as the Final Girl she is different from other girls as she prefers babysitting and taking on the role of a virtuous housewife rather than seeing a boyfriend



Figure 27: Laurie holding a pumpkin with Tommy and Lindsey in Halloween (Carpenter, 1978, 01:00:21)

This particular scene is another suggestion that she is acting as a mother to Tommy and Lindsey as she carries the pumpkin to her stomach, mimicking a pregnant woman's stomach. While the other girls are sleeping with their boyfriends, she has a sort of family that she takes care of. This role of the mother is placed in opposition to that of a sexually active woman, even though one cannot go without the other. However, the role of the mother in opposition to that of the “whore” is more socially acceptable, as this paper shall next develop.

2) Motherhood as a Defining Role

In *Halloween H20* and *Halloween Resurrection*, Laurie's role is no longer that of the young woman as she is now around forty years old. She is a middle-aged woman and most importantly, a mother.



Figure 28: Laurie in sophisticated clothes in *Halloween H20: Twenty Years Later* (Miner, 1998, 00:27:35)

Her appearance has changed significantly. Her hairstyle is tidy and shorter. She wears a skirt that reveals her legs. She is no longer fully covered and her outfit is more sophisticated and feminine. However, compared to her friends in the first movie, she is feminine but never too sexy. She is not an erotic object. According to Imelda Welehan and Joel Gwynne, “in most western societies, the attention paid to sexual activity, sexual expression, and a ‘sexy’ physical appearance has been aimed mostly at young people, and in particular young women”.⁵⁵ Since she is a middle-aged woman, her appearance is feminine but stays within the conventions of what is considered as appropriate for a woman her age to wear.

Furthermore, Laurie breaks with the stereotype of the nuclear family. Traditionally, a “nuclear” family includes a mother, a father and their biological children. Laurie is a single mother, a provider and a girlfriend. However, motherhood is what dictates her life as it is considered as the most important role in a woman's life and what allows her to gain recognition from the patriarchal culture.⁵⁶ Laurie is not shown in any sexual scene. Her relationship with Will is shown through kissing and feelings. Her relationship is not like that of her friends in the first movie which were only related to intercourse. Indeed, “traditionally, female sexuality has been firmly connected with young adult bodies, rendering older female sexuality invisible and taboo”.⁵⁷ Laurie's relationship stops at kissing because she is a middle-aged woman, and most importantly, because she is a mother. According to E. Ann Kaplan, “the

55 Welehan, Gwynne, *Ageing, Popular Culture and Contemporary Feminism: Harleys and Hormones*, 63.

56 Kelly Oliver, “Motherhood, Sexuality, and Pregnant Embodiment: Twenty-Five Years of Gestation”, *Hypatia* 25, no.4 (2010): 765.

57 Welehan, Gwynne, *Ageing, Popular Culture and Contemporary Feminism: Harleys and Hormones*, 67.

fetus renders unimportant woman's work, sex, and mother subjectivities; her body (...) is now to be in service of the fetus".⁵⁸ Even though intercourse does not directly affect motherhood, sexuality tends to be seen as something that undermines a woman's ability to be a good mother. If a woman is having sex out of wedlock, she is not seen as responsible enough to take proper care of her child.

Moreover, when Laurie and Will are kissing on their date night, it is implied that they could have done more than kissing when Will says: "Take off your clothes".[00:52:34] Instead, Laurie calls John to make sure that he has arrived safely at his school trip but he does not answer the phone. Therefore, Laurie rushes to help him. Her role as a mother puts her back on the right track and stops her from going further with Will and becoming a "bad" mother. Laurie chooses her child over her lover. Additionally, she tells Will to leave, to which he answers: "I'm not leaving you". She replies with: "I'm not leaving John".[01:05:48]

When she saves Molly and John, she tells them to leave with the car and call for help. She could have been safe with them but she sacrifices her safety to make sure that her son and his girlfriend are truly protected. She has to make all of her decisions depending on how it will affect her child. Women are always expected to put their children's needs before their own.⁵⁹ This idea is made even clearer when Will dies before her eyes. He is sacrificed because he should not matter to her more than her son. Consequently, Laurie is a mother before she is a woman. Her sacrifices as a woman are necessary for her role as a mother to be socially validated.

In this movie, Laurie is more violent than ever. As mentioned in my first part, women are not pictured as violent. Female violence does not fit society's idea of the feminine.⁶⁰ Since Laurie is the Final Girl, this idea is not true for her. In this particular case, she is allowed to be very violent because of her role as a mother.

58 E. Ann Kaplan, "Sex, Work and Motherhood: The Impossible Triangle", *The Journal of Sex Research* 27, no.3 (1990): 417.

59 Loes Meeussen, Colette Van Laar, "Feeling Pressure to Be a Perfect Mother Relates to Parental Burnout and Career Ambitions", *Frontiers in Psychology*, no.9 (2018): par.2.

60 Neroni, *The Violent Woman*, 59.



Figure 29: Laurie going after Michael in *Halloween H20: Twenty Years Later* (Miner, 1998, 01:09:37)

She is holding an axe and is going after Michael. Her intention is to kill him for good, with no hesitation as her determined walk suggests. She is not running but walking just like Michael does when he is after her. In this scene, the roles are reversed as she is the one hunting her victim.[01:09:36] In this shot, she is in the dark while only the road is lit. She is only a shadow in the middle of the screen. Therefore, she is switching roles with Michael whose nickname is “the shape” in the movies. Her features are barely distinguishable, she resembles Michael. This shot foreshadows the violence she will use in the rest of the movie as it blurs the line between her character and Michael's.

Laurie's violence is manifest from this moment on. She uses an axe and repeatedly stabs Michael. She tricks Michael into thinking that she is hiding in the closet which references the scene in *Halloween* in which she was stuck in her closet. This reference proves that she is even more resourceful than before. Even before knowing whether or not her son is in danger, she takes her gun as a precaution. Once she has attacked Michael, there ensues the classical slasher movie scene in which the police arrives to remove the victims' bodies and take care of the survivors. Police officers in slasher movies usually represent the end of the nightmare and the return to safety. The audience therefore believes that this marks the end of the movie. However, Laurie takes an axe, steals a police officer's gun and the car that contains Michael's body. Her threatening a law enforcement officer is a true indicator that nothing can stop her this time. She almost becomes an antagonist as she goes against the law. Then, Laurie drives away and stops suddenly. Michael's body goes through the windshield. She pushes him down a hill with the car. The car rolls down the hill and she then decapitates Michael with an axe. This ending scene is extremely violent for a woman in a horror film. Final girls tend to save

themselves, not overkill the villain. The only reason that makes this scene possible is that she is a mother and therefore she has to do everything she can to ensure her child's safety, even if that means to kill violently. Indeed, according to Yvonne Tasker, “The maternal recurs as a motivating factor, with female heroes acting to protect their children”.⁶¹ This image of the sacrificing mother who in this case almost loses her humanity for her child is what makes her a “good” mother. While in *Halloween* she was fighting Michael in self-defence, here she does not care for her own safety.

However, although Laurie is portrayed as a good mother for sacrificing everything for her child, her abilities as a mother are still somewhat questioned. Laurie is an alcoholic, which is shown several times in the movie. Her son himself mentions it and tells her: “mom I am not responsible for you”[00:31:58] In this scene, the roles are reversed. He is lecturing her for making a mistake. Him not being “responsible” for her reflects that he is the parent here, which he should not be. Moreover, she is overprotective of John. He repeatedly tells her that he has no freedom but she does not give him any which leads to multiple arguments. Women's legitimacy as single mothers is often questioned⁶² and in this movie, Laurie's aim is to prove her worth as such.



Figure 30: Laurie mirroring her secretary in *Halloween H20: Twenty Years Later* (Miner, 1998, 00:41:28)

In this scene, Laurie's secretary tells her “if I could be maternal for a moment, I don't like to see you like this”.[00:41:28] This scene is interesting for multiple reasons. First, because the secretary is played by Janet Leigh, Jamie Lee Curtis's mother. They are dressed in a very similar manner. Their makeup and hair is also alike. They mirror each other as a middle-aged mother and older mother. This

61 Yvonne Tasker, *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 69.

62 Jane D. Bock, “Doing the Right Thing? Single Mothers by Choice and the Struggle for Legitimacy”, *Gender and Society* 14, no. 1 (2000): 64.

scene gives the impression that Janet Leigh's character, as a mother herself, is giving advice to Laurie on how to deal with motherhood. She is reminding her to take care of herself, not only of her child. Moreover, Janet Leigh famously played Marion in Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), the movie that inspired slasher movies such as *Halloween* itself. In *Halloween H20*, her character's name is Norma, a reference to Norman Bates's mother in *Psycho*. Norma raised Norman cruelly and led him to his homicidal mania. Therefore, Janet Leigh's character represents both the victim and the antagonistic mother of *Psycho*. This scene contains many layers of references that aim at alerting the audience of how Laurie could go from victim to “crazy” woman who ruins her child's life if she does not take care of herself.

Unfortunately, in *Halloween: Resurrection*, Laurie's portrayal implies that she did become mentally unstable. She was placed in a mental hospital alone.



Figure 31: Laurie is in a mental hospital in *Halloween: Resurrection* (Rosenthal, 2002, 00:41:28)

Her appearance has shifted back to how it used to be, devoid of femininity.[00:41:28] Her evolution has been reversed. She is in a blouse and a jacket that covers her entire body. She does not wear makeup and her hair is untidy. It is very similar to the hair she had in *Halloween*. With a doll in her hands, she looks younger. A nurse explains that Laurie did not kill Michael but a paramedic because Michael switched places with him. This opening marks a complete shift for Laurie that drastically changes her image of “good” mother. From the protective mother who would kill for her son, she becomes the “crazy” mother who killed an innocent father of three children. Killing a parent is obviously the very opposite of what she was supposed to do as a good mother.

Michael comes back for her and she manages to trap him on the rooftop of the hospital. [00:12:34] She is about to kill him for good but she wants to see his face to make sure this time that it

is truly him. As she tries to remove his mask, Michael kills her. The way that she is portrayed is once again related to her motherhood. She is not trying to protect her son here and therefore, she is not as violent as before which leads her to making the mistake of not killing him right away. In *Halloween H20* and *Halloween: Resurrection*, Laurie needs her child to be complete. This scene is the very example of that. The child that was her reason to be violent and fight in the previous movie is now absent, therefore she dies within the first fifteen minutes of the movie. However, the portrayal of Laurie evolves one last time as she becomes elderly and defies stereotypical filmic conventions of age, as this paper shall next demonstrate.

3) Conflicting Representations of Laurie as a Grandmother

Halloween offers a progressive image of the older woman and of the grandmother, with Laurie approaching her sixties. She is not the typical, sweet and polite grandmother. She barely has any contact with her family. She is an alcoholic and she raises her voice at people. Her main activity is to shoot mannequins with a rifle.[00:20:47] She does not let people disrespect her and she is not afraid to speak up for herself. When the two reporters come to ask her some questions, she does not let them victimize her.[00:12:45] They tell her that they want to understand Michael and that she has poor relationships with her family, to which she answers: “Michael Myers has murdered five people and he's a human being we need to understand. I'm twice divorced and I'm a basket case?”. She then pushes them out of her house. She clearly does not accept this judgment that implies that “failing” as a woman is worse than a man committing murder. A woman's success should not be based on her romantic relationships, especially since it is not specified whether or not she asked for divorce or her husband did. They simply imply that it was her fault. These reporters could have chosen to write about the story of how she survived but they prefer blaming a woman they have never met. Women are supposed to have perfect family lives and they are seen as “failures” when they don't. It is significant that Laurie strongly disagreed with them. She knows that they are wrong and she does not accept them treating her like this.



Figure 32: Laurie cleaning a rifle in *Halloween* (Green, 2018, 00:21:00)

This shot emphasizes how different she is from the stereotypical image of the older woman. [00:21:00] She is cleaning her weapon which is a very atypical activity for a woman of her age since elderly women are typically seen as non-violent. She also has a big knife attached to her belt. She is therefore heavily armed with quite large weapons. Those are reminiscent of the weapons that hunters use. She is clearly not the prey anymore. Moreover, she is wearing tight jeans and a tank top. This type of outfit is usually worn by younger characters such as Lara Croft because it is more revealing than the outfits usually worn by older characters. Here, she is not trying to hide her aging body behind loose clothes. She is not hiding her hair either. It is a natural grey color, not dyed. She also wears glasses instead of contact lenses. In this movie, Laurie is a character who accepts her aging, in a Hollywood that has usually encouraged women to try and look young forever through hair dye, cosmetics or even surgeries.⁶³ Youthful beauty tends to be the marker of women's femininity. Laurie proves that a woman can age naturally without having to give up on her femininity. Imelda Staunton and Joel Gwynne argue that “narratives of 'successful ageing' are so often based on looking and staying young, rather than accepting (...) the inevitability of age”.⁶⁴ Laurie challenges this idea as she is not concerned about staying young-looking and she does not try to fit the stereotypical appearance of elderly women. It is important for older women who have not altered their appearance to be represented in Hollywood as it deconstructs the stereotype of women having to stay young forever. More representation leads to more normalization.

This movie is one of the first and most successful slasher movies involving an older woman as

63 Imelda Staunton, Joel Gwynne, *Ageing, Popular Culture and Contemporary Feminism: Harleys and Hormones* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 74.

64 *Ibid.*, 19.

the main character. Slasher movies include almost exclusively young people while older people, if present, are usually the villains of the movie. For instance, the movie *X* (West, 2022) involves an old woman who cannot bear her aging body and therefore kills young people whose bodies she envies. The old villain instigates fear because aging itself is a scary phenomenon. In *Halloween*, Laurie proves that despite her age, she can be stronger than younger characters, speak as freely as she wants and embrace her body without hiding it. Jamie Lee Curtis herself has spoken numerous times about changing this outdated stereotype, which may have contributed to Laurie's new appearance. She has claimed that she wants to portray natural-looking older women as much as possible for women to realize that they do not have to change.⁶⁵ Moreover, she appeared topless on the cover of *AARP The Magazine*⁶⁶ when she was fifty years old in an effort, once again, to normalize naturally aging bodies. The shot stops at her shoulders, no nudity is revealed. However, this photo became very controversial.⁶⁷ Imelda Staehelin claimed that “women's ageing bodies provoke particularly strong fear and disgust, as their sexual and aesthetic currency is perceived to diminish”.⁶⁸ These reactions confirm that the sexuality of elderly women is invisible and that the aging body is still hidden. Laurie therefore redefines the image of the elderly woman in this movie.

This portrayal of Laurie as an aging woman is used as an interesting image on the poster of the movie.

65 Hoda And Jenna, “#Jamie Lee Curtis Wants You To Know Aging Is Okay”, 2022, 0:47 to 0:58, <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/dxclK0e7xq0>.

66 Anne-Marie Dorning, “Topless at 50: Curtis Breaks the Mold”, *Abc News*, March 22, 2008, <https://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/story?id=4501692&page=1>.

67 Iris Goldsztajn, “Jamie Lee Curtis Posed Topless on a Magazine Cover at 50 and People “Lost Their Minds”, Apparently”, *Marie Claire*, February 03, 2023, <https://www.marieclaire.com/celebrity/jamie-lee-curtis-topless-aarp>.

68 Whelehan, Gwynne, *Ageing, Popular Culture and Contemporary Feminism: Harleys and Hormones*: 203.



Figure 33: Poster of the movie Halloween (Green, 2018)

Laurie and Michael are in the center of this image. The right side of Laurie's face is visible while Michael's left side is visible. They are the two sides of the same face. This reveals that they share a very similar role in the movie. Moreover, Laurie's wrinkles mirror the marks on Michael's mask. The wrinkles are assimilated to scars. They are the marks of time as well as the marks of what happened to her. The marks on Michael's mask indicate the same things. They have both aged together and have fought each other, therefore they have now grown into two very similar people. This idea is displayed several times in the movie through some of the shots in which Laurie appears.

As previously mentioned, Laurie is portrayed as the hunter instead of the prey. In this sense, she has taken the role that was previously attributed to Michael. When Michael chases her and she falls off the rooftop [01:33:46], he looks at her body on the ground then looks away for a second and she has disappeared. This is one of Michael's signature moves from the previous movies. Moreover, when Allyson is in her classroom and she looks through the window, she sees Laurie standing in the street. When Laurie did the same in *Halloween*, she saw Michael.



Figure 34: Laurie could be mistaken for Michael in Halloween (Green, 2018, 01:37:22)

In addition, in this shot, Laurie is at the center in a chiaroscuro.[01:37:22] Only her face is visible in the darkness. She seems to be lurking in the dark. This type of shot is also usually used for Michael. Laurie changes her role as she starts actively chasing Michael. They are now both hunters. She even breaks into her daughter's house who is scared because she thinks it might be Michael.[00:42:44] Michael and her are more similar in this movie than they have ever been. She is not a passive grandmother as she is as violent and scary as Michael himself.

In *Halloween Kills*, Laurie's role does not change. However, she is barely present in the movie as she is wounded and needs time to heal. The interesting aspect of her role in this movie is that she impacts the other people of Haddonfield. Through what she has done, she inspires them to fight while she is unable to. She becomes their leader and their role model. They want to fight because of her and for her. Tommy, especially, wants to fight for her because he is the little boy she protected when she was younger in the very first movie. She is the representation of justice and of the failures of the authorities. Therefore, the people of the city make her the new face of justice and she becomes a patriarch. She tells Tommy “go find him” [01:02:52] and he obeys while he disobeys the police. She has become a strong character that they look up to and respect, and therefore has succeeded in proving her worth as an elderly woman.

Halloween Ends, as previously mentioned in this paper, has changed certain elements of the portrayal of Laurie as she is not a strong feminine figure anymore. This also applies to her role as a grandmother. It is very apparent in her physical appearance which is significantly different.



Figure 35: Laurie wearing modest clothes in *Halloween Ends* (Green, 2022, 00:20:35)

In this long shot, Laurie is wearing an outfit that is much more modest than in the previous movies [00:20:35]. She is wearing a long shirt with tights, boots, a turtle neck and a jacket. She is completely covered. Although her appearance still seems to encourage a natural aging for women, her outfit fits stereotypical images of elderly women having to hide their bodies. Moreover, her hobbies are now knitting and cooking which are very cliché activities for women her age to do. The change in her appearance may be due to the loss of her daughter in the previous movie and the disappearance of Michael. Since she has an opportunity to live an ordinary life, she is trying to conform to the stereotypical role of the grandmother. Especially now that she has lost her daughter, all she has left is her role as a grandmother. Therefore, she is trying to be the perfect grandmother to Allyson. She does not mention her mental trauma or her alcoholism anymore. As a matter of fact, her personality has not changed too much as she is still the same strong hunter as in the previous movies when Allyson is not present. However, for Allyson, she has molded her appearance to look like the representation of the “perfect” grandmother according to society's standards.

Therefore, the first two movies portray two versions of the role of the teenager. The first one is the attractive feminine girl embodied by Laurie's friends whose role is to be on display. The second one is the the Final Girl who is the opposite. She is not feminine and is not interested in boys but rather in studying. She has a motherly attitude as she takes care of children and reasons her friends. In *Halloween H20*, she is now truly a mother and that role defines her character. Her sexuality is invisible because she needs to be a good mother. She is ready to sacrifice herself for her son. Everything she does in these two movies is directly linked to her motherhood and therefore she does not have any

individuality, to the point where she then dies in *Halloween Resurrection* because she is separated from her son and has nothing to lose anymore. The last trilogy presents two different portrayals of Laurie as grandmother. At first, she does not follow the stereotypical image of the grandmother. She is not a character to be scared of, unlike previous representations of older women in horror. She dresses feminine and does not try to hide her age. However, in the last movie, she is covered and takes on stereotypical hobbies. She has transformed into the image of the perfect grandmother, erasing the progress made by the previous movies. Taking into consideration the elements of analysis provided in this second part, this paper shall next try to demonstrate that the notion of hysteria is repetitively used in the franchise to discredit the female characters, especially Laurie.

III) Hysteria as an Instrument to Discredit Women

Hysteria has historically been viewed as a disorder existing only in women. Physician Hippocrates was the first to use this term as he thought the uterus could migrate and cause several diseases.⁶⁹ Women were therefore believed to be predisposed to mental conditions. Since then, hysteria has been classified as a mental disorder and overused as a diagnosis to explain everything that women did that was deemed abnormal to the patriarchal society. Although it gradually disappeared from the medical field and is not a recognized mental disorder anymore as its misogynistic origins have been proved, it is still used to this day. It is now often employed to describe a woman's exaggerated display of emotions. In slasher movies, hysteria has been present ever since *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960), the movie that started the genre. Norman Bates' mother is portrayed as an old, mean woman who often berates her son, emasculating him. Her sanity is discussed throughout the movie as Norman is encouraged to institutionalize her. Not once is his sanity challenged even though it is revealed in the end that he is the one who has a mental disorder as his mother has been dead all along. He has been dressing up as her and using her as a persona to kill women. Female hysteria has been a recurrent issue in the genre ever since and it therefore appears all throughout the *Halloween* franchise. Laurie is portrayed as a hysterical woman who is never believed nor helped because she is thought to be crazy by her entourage. This part shall therefore analyze how the hysterical woman is a concept that is applied to Laurie throughout these movies and whether or not it evolves as she ages.

1) The Hysterical Final Girl

At the beginning of *Halloween*, Laurie sees Michael hiding behind the bushes in front of her house. [00:23:24] She tells Annie, who does not see anyone and mocks her for “scaring another man away”. Moreover, Annie claims: “I think you're a whacko”. Her fears are dismissed from the very beginning by her own friends, and they immediately label her as mentally unstable. Annie thinks that since Laurie

⁶⁹ Milena Mancini, Martina Scudiero, Silvio Mignogna, Valentina Urso, Giovanni Stanghellini, “Se-duction is Not Sex-duction: Desexualizing and De-feminizing Hysteria”, *Frontiers*, no.13 (2022): par.2.

does not go out and does not date men, she is seeing apparitions of men. Laurie is in fact the only one who sees and he always vanishes before her friends see him. This is why they think that she is not mentally stable. They believe that she is having hallucinations. In fact, she does not believe herself either. She tells herself: “just calm down, this is ridiculous”. [00:27:58] She has internalized the fact that everyone dismisses her worries as well as the belief that she is becoming insane. To Laurie, the movie is like a slow descent into madness. At first, she tells her friends that she is being followed, but then she doubts herself and in the end, since no one believes her, she ultimately thinks that what she saw is an imaginary monster: the “boogeyman”. While she spent the movie reassuring the children she babysits by telling them that there are no such monsters, she ends up believing in this “boogeyman” as she tells Doctor Loomis: “It was the boogeyman”[01:27:24]. This is her only way to cope with what has happened.

The dismissal of women's worries as it appears in *Halloween* with Laurie is presented in the same way in *The Exorcist* (Friedkin, 1973) with Chris. In this movie, a young girl named Regan (Linda Blair) is possessed by a demon. Her mother Chris (Ellen Burstyn) takes her to see a doctor who diagnoses her with a nervous disorder. He claims that it must be caused by depression. Chris disagrees, saying that Regan is not depressed. The doctor does not believe her and asserts that Regan's depression is caused by Chris's recent separation with Regan's father.⁷⁰ Therefore, Chris is never believed, just like Laurie. Just as Laurie's “illusions” are blamed on her lack of relationships with men, Chris's daughter's problems are blamed on her relationship issues with her father. Moreover, Laurie is an independent woman because she does not date or dress like other girls and Chris is independent because she is a single working mother. They do not fit the patriarchal ideals and therefore are not listened to. Both women cannot obtain help from anybody because they are seen as “hysterical” and as people who cannot be trusted. Therefore, Laurie is chased by Michael when he could have been stopped and Regan becomes possessed when the doctors could have helped Chris to save her. In both cases, their lives are in danger because no one believed them.

70 Grace Raith, “The Exorcist (1973) and the 'Female Threat'”, *Flex Your Head*, August 14, 2016: par.5. <https://flexyourheadblog.wordpress.com/2016/08/14/the-exorcist-1973-and-the-female-threat/>

While these movies both portray main characters who are treated as crazy, they also both use lighting to underline their growing madness. The medium of light is used in cinema to provide information about what is happening in the scene.⁷¹ Indeed, in horror movies, light usually represents hope, while darkness represents evil and madness. The scenes that are intended to be scary will therefore usually take place in a darker setting. *Halloween* takes place over a single day. As it begins in the morning and ends during the night, it is a perfect portrayal of Laurie's mental state.



Figure 36: Laurie in the morning (00:26:11) then at night in *Halloween* (Carpenter, 1978, 01:27:10)

The gradual darkening of the day illustrates Laurie's mind as she slowly develops the thought that she is losing her sanity. In the first shot [00:26:11], she is outside during a bright day and the sun is the source of light. In the second shot [01:27:10], she is in an enclosed space, her house, and there is no artificial lighting. The moon is the only source of light, setting the scene in a gloomy atmosphere. Therefore, the darker the movie becomes, the deeper into doubt Laurie goes. This portrayal of a descent into madness through lighting is also seen in *The Exorcist* (Friedkin, 1973).

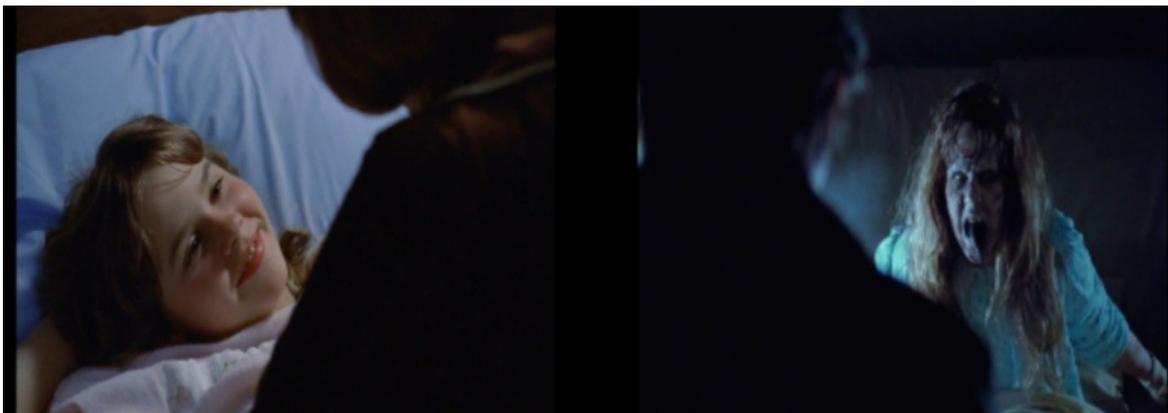


Figure 37: Regan in the beginning (00:24:24) then in the end in *The Exorcist* (Friedkin, 1973, 01:47:50)

71 C.J. Forceville, T. Renckens, "The 'Good is Light' and 'Bad is Dark' Metaphor in Feature Films", *Metaphor and the Social World*, no.3 (2013): p.165.

Indeed, in the beginning of the movie, when we see Regan in her bed at night [00:24:24], a light is always on which signifies that she is not yet possessed. In fact, the previous scene shows that the entire house is lit as though it were the day. Here, Regan's light is very bright and the entire room is lit just like the rest of the house. However, towards the end of the movie [01:47:50] the image is at its darkest because Regan is fully possessed.⁷² Although the same nightstand lamp is on, it does not give the same brightness to the room. Like in *Halloween*, it gives a gloomy atmosphere to the scene as the demon turns the light on and off to scare the audience. Moreover, it is used as a tool to play with shadows and reveal Regan's demon-face through backlighting. The same source of light is used differently in the two shots to give the scenes contrasting meanings. The changing of the lights shows the changes in her personality as everything that the demon makes her do happens when the scenes are darker.

While Laurie, Regan and Chris are portrayed as “crazy”, it is worth noting that in the 1970s, hysteria still appeared in the DSM (the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) in the United States and could therefore still be a real diagnosis given to women by psychiatrists. These characters could have been institutionalized for this disorder. Any type of characteristic that did not fit patriarchy's ideal of women used to be attributed to hysteria. Laurie, as the first part of this thesis has shown, is different from this ideal in many ways. In fact, according to ancient physicians, the cause of hysteria was thought to be sexual deprivation.⁷³ Freud's idea about hysteria was also that it is a disorder caused by a lack of libidinal evolution.⁷⁴ In this line of thought, Laurie's lack of relationships with men is portrayed as the reason why her friends believe that she is mad. While they only talk about their sexual relationships, Laurie talks about studying. When they go out to see their boyfriends, she goes out to babysit. She has no interest in men and she thinks they have no interest in her either as she claims “Guys think I'm too smart.”[00:24:42] In *The Exorcist*, sexuality is also linked to madness. Regan is a little girl and therefore should not be associated with sexuality. However, when the demon possesses her, she says very sexual and inappropriate things to the pastor. This is used to show that she is not a sweet little girl anymore, and therefore that there must be something wrong with her.

72 Priest Amanda, “The Exorcist – Intensity and Direction of Lighting”, *Word Press*, May 26, 2015: par.5.
<https://exorcisteng225.wordpress.com/>

73 Mancini, Scudiero, Mignogna, Urso, Stanghellini, “Se-duction is Not Sex-duction: Desexualizing and De-feminizing Hysteria”: par.1.

74 Cecilia Tasca, Mariangela Rapetti, Mauro Giovanni Carta, Bianca Fadda, “Women and Hysteria in the History of Mental Health”, *Clinical Practice & Epidemiology in Mental Health*, no.8 (2012): p.115.

Moreover, Laurie does not dress like other women, nor does she act like them, as previously mentioned in Part II of this thesis. Her goal is not to have a partner, unlike her friends. This type of independence has historically been seen as madness⁷⁵ as women are expected by standard social behaviors to have a man in their lives and to be feminine, which is why she is mocked. Women who liked to study and read would also be deemed to be “insane”, since they displayed their opinions and thoughts,⁷⁶ and female independence was not accepted in any way. Laurie is depicted as very studious. She is carrying books in her arms when she goes to school [00:11:50] and when talking to her friends [00:20:18] and she is very studious at school. She is concerned because she forgot her chemistry book while Lynda says that she forgets all of her books and does not care about it. Even when she is daydreaming in class, she is able to answer the teacher's questions perfectly. [00:16:00] Therefore, since Laurie has no relationships, does not dress or act like other girls and is very intellectual, she fits the profile of the hysterical woman which is why she is treated as one throughout the movie.

Laurie is not the only female main character of the 1970s who has been portrayed as being different from other girls. Just like her, the character of *Carrie* (De Palma, 1977) is very independent which makes her ostracized. She is mocked by the other female students of her school for not being like them, which is reminiscent of how Laurie's friends mock her for not being interested in men and fashion. However, while Laurie has friends, Carrie is completely isolated. Her situation is caused by her religious and overly strict mother who abuses her. Yet, Carrie shares some characteristics with Laurie: she does not date and she does not dress fashionably. These characteristics are why she is treated as “crazy” by everyone during the movie. The bullying leads to her killing her classmates. As nobody helps her, she loses her mind. Moreover, her telekinetic powers appear after her menstruation, therefore directly associating her madness with her uterus. The representation of hysteria is very similar in *Halloween* and *Carrie*, but while Laurie ends up chasing the monster, Carrie is pushed to become the monster. *Carrie* pushed the idea of the hysterical woman to an extreme. According to Molly Brianna Collins, her character was intended to show that if a crazy woman, who has no male influence in her household, is given power, then she will destroy everything and kill everyone.⁷⁷

In *Halloween II*, everybody now knows that what Laurie claimed in the first movie is true. They know about Michael Myers, but still they do not take her seriously. When she arrives at the hospital,

75 Moore, “Declared Insane for Speaking Up: The Dark American History of Silencing Women Through Psychiatry”: par.2.

76 *Ibid.*, par.2.

77 Molly Brianna Collins, “Carrie's Choice: Contemporary Feminism and Sociopolitical Constructions of Womanhood in Film Adaptations of Stephen King's *Carrie*”, Clemson University (2005).

she asks specifically not to be anesthetized because she wants to stay on the lookout for Michael, but the doctor and nurses do it anyway. From the very beginning, it is shown that she is still not listened to. However, Dr. Loomis is not disregarded in the way that Laurie is. He is never called crazy or ignored, even when he is so consumed by his search for Michael that he gets a young man killed by a car after chasing him thinking that he was Michael.[00:19:06] He is willing to gamble with innocent lives. When the police is not yet sure of the dead man's identity, he claims they do not have the time to wait for the results and therefore he pushes the police to keep looking for Michael. He is the one who leads the police, and not the sheriff. He even admits to a police officer that he has spent so much time with Michael as his patient that he has become obsessed with him. [00:24:03] There is a clear countertransference occurring,⁷⁸ that is to say that he has become too attached to his patient, which is a professional mistake. Yet, his negligence is seen as heroic instead of hysterical. He wants to catch Michael so desperately that he risks other people's lives yet he is not treated as mentally ill. The police follow his orders and let him carry a gun around without questioning him or his sanity. This demonstrates how women and men are treated differently in such situations.

If the first movie shows Laurie's descent into madness, *Halloween II* is a metaphor for her internment in a mental hospital. Freud hypothesized that hysteria was the result of a “psychological scar” triggered by trauma,⁷⁹ which coincides with Laurie's situation. Since she has gone through very traumatic events, the doctor and nurses believe her to be hysterical and medicate her because of it. Therefore, although it is a general hospital, it resembles a mental hospital. Laurie is kept in a room alone and she is not allowed to get out of bed. Moreover, no one is allowed to visit her and the phones do not work. She is completely isolated from the outside. It seems as if she is in a seclusion room as can be found in mental hospitals. No one is allowed in, and she is not allowed out. Laurie's situation evokes all the women who were similarly imprisoned in mental hospitals for “hysteria”, in the 19th century for instance,⁸⁰ and were totally isolated from the outside world. In fact, apart from the medical staff, Laurie seems to be utterly alone in the hospital. There are no other patients, which emphasizes Laurie's loneliness in this situation as no one can help her. The hospital's emptiness is reinforced by its gloomy atmosphere as well as the shots of the halls that are shown to be empty and never-ending. It

78 Natalie, “Primal Scream: Mental Health and the Loomis/Myers Connection in Halloween”, Bloodygoodhorror.com, July 17, 2020: par.7. <http://www.bloodygoodhorror.com/bgh/primal-scream-mental-health-and-the-loomismyers-connection-in-halloween>.

79 Mancini, Scudiero, Mignogna, Urso, Stanghellini, “Se-duction is not sex-duction: Desexualizing and de-feminizing hysteria”: par.4.

80 Moore, “Declared Insane for Speaking Up: The Dark American History of Silencing Women Through Psychiatry”.

seems as though Laurie could not find the exit even if she tried. During most of the movie, she is not fighting against Michael but against the doctors and nurses who keep her locked in her room. She has to play dead in order to escape their watch.[00:59:53]

In 1981 in the United States, hysteria was not in the DMS anymore as it was removed in 1980 since it was no longer recognized as a mental disorder. However, this movie shows that the idea of female hysteria as an issue that needs to be treated still prevails, and that women are rarely listened to and believed. In the 1980s, this idea was recurrent in horror movies. In *Child's Play* (Holland, 1988) for instance, Karen Barclay (Catherine Hicks) gifts her son Andy (Alex Vincent) a doll named Chucky that is possessed by the spirit of a murderer and tries to kill the family. Mrs Barclay believes her son when he says that Chucky is alive but no one else does. She desperately tries to convince Detective Norris (Chris Sarandon) by saying “I'm telling the truth, why won't you believe me?” to which he replies “Because I'm sane Mrs. Barclay, sane and rational”.[00:53:16] Therefore, his first reaction is to immediately claim that she is mentally ill. On the contrary, when analyzing a male lead character, it is clear that men are not treated in the same way, much like Laurie and Dr. Loomis. In *The Thing* (Carpenter, 1982), one of the only horror movies of the 1980s to feature a man as main character, a team of researchers in Antarctica are chased by a shape-shifting alien. When Clark (Richard Masur) and Mac (Kurt Russel) first encounter the creature, they call the rest of their team for help. All of the men come to their rescue without ever questioning them. There is no challenging Clark and Mac's mental health, but there is rather a strong sense of brotherhood.

Therefore, through *Halloween* and *Halloween II*, Laurie's mental health is constantly challenged as hysteria has long been used to discredit women's feelings and has been a staple of the slasher genre since its creation. However, as the next film featuring Jamie Lee Curtis was made at a time when hysteria had started to be criticized as a fabricated theory, its representation changed to some degree, as this paper shall next reveal.

2) Dismissed but Confident: Laurie Stands Up for Herself

In *Halloween H20*, Laurie suffers from the trauma of what happened to her twenty years before. She still fits the profile of the hysterical woman as she does not conform to the patriarchal ideal of women; she is a single mother and the principal of a school. She is therefore still treated poorly, especially by the men in her life. Her son Josh criticizes her for her mental issues, saying she has

“paranoia”.[00:16:25] He even blames her for the fact that his dad left her even though he was an abusive drug addict, therefore implying that her problems are worse than his father's. John and Laurie's relationship is a representation of how women's mental health has been treated by men for decades: he dismisses her and diminishes the importance of her trauma.⁸¹ In addition, he infantilizes her through the way that he talks to her, “that's enough” “I am not responsible for you”.[00:32:01] The roles are reversed, he scolds her as if she was the child. He criticizes her yet he does not help her trust him. He lies to her a lot. For instance, when she finds him outside of school, he claims that he wanted to have lunch when in fact he was there to steal alcohol. He also insists on going on the school trip but Laurie is very scared at the idea of him leaving far away from her. When she decides to make an effort by allowing him to go, he secretly stays at the school instead and organizes a party with his friends. He breaks her trust multiple times, thus reinforcing her fear of seeing something happening to him. He tries to convince her that her worries are not valid yet his actions prove that they are. She even voices clearly what he could do to help her: “I need you to be responsible.” [00:34:20] but he does not do it. Moreover, Michael only appears into Laurie's life an hour into the movie when he starts killing John's friends. Before that, Laurie is made the villain of the movie by John and his friends. He feels as though she is keeping him prisoner and not letting him do anything. Charlie tells John: “Twenty years from now you're still going to be living with her, probably running some weird motel out in the middle of nowhere”.[00:17:36] He is referencing *Psycho* and implying that Laurie is like Norma Bates, the scary abusive mother of the movie. This is an interesting statement as in the movie Norma is not the real villain, her son is. The woman at first seems to be the antagonist but in the end it is the man who is. This parallels Laurie's situation as she is seen as the villain but the real one is Michael.

Laurie's boyfriend and colleague Will is not supportive either. He works in psychology as he is the school counselor yet he does not give her any advice, he laughs it off instead. She asks him “are you tired of my bullshit?” to which he replies “I'm a counselor, I'm attracted to it”. [00:28:30] It is not quite clear whether he is saying that it makes him attracted to her physically or if he means that since

⁸¹ Galen Hope, “A Troubled Past: The Problematic History of Mental Healthcare for Women”, *Galen Hope*, March 27, 2024. <https://www.galenhope.com/mental-health-blog/a-troubled-past-the-problematic-history-of-mental-healthcare-for-women/>

he is a counselor he tends to go towards people who have issues. In any case, he does not seem to be taking her seriously and this statement is very inappropriate as he does not reassure her but jokes instead. He does tell her that she can talk to him about it as he is a “good listener” [00:29:37] but later in the movie, when she tries to tell him about her past, he says “That’s terrible...take off your clothes”[00:52:33]. He kisses her and barely listens. In this instance, he is clearly only interested in sex rather than trying to help her. In addition, when she is later panicking because she finds out that her son did not go on his school trip, he says “this is nuts” and “calm down” [00:55:41]. Once again, he is dismissing her worries. He is a reminder of the doctors that never listened to women's issues and blamed it on hysteria, especially as he is a psychologist himself.⁸² He does not try to understand her. Her family therefore consists of two men, both of whom do not support her. The only other male figure in her life is the school's security guard Ronny (LL Cool J). While he is supposed to keep the school safe, he lets John and Charlie leave the school for lunch although they are not allowed.[00:26:48] When Laurie finds them outside and brings them back to the school, she lets Ronny know that she is angry at him for what he did. When she leaves, he calls her a “psycho” [00:34:20] even though he is responsible for endangering her child. He does not respect her feelings as a mother, but also as the principal who gave him a direct order. His job was to keep John safe, and he has failed. He is then one of the first to get killed by Michael, and therefore he has also failed at keeping Laurie and the school safe. In the same way, Will as a psychologist should be able to help Laurie with her mental health, but is unable to do so. He has also failed in his role. All male figures of her life fail her and treat her as a “psycho”, she cannot count on them. As a result, she is stuck in the school all alone and has to fight by herself.

While in *Halloween II*, Laurie was confined to a hospital, in this movie the “asylum” is the school. Both places are empty and it seems like Laurie is always alone in them. They have corridors that exude a gloomy atmosphere as they are always in the dark. Those corridors are also very long and it seems like she can never find her way out of them. She lives there and works there, she spends her whole time here and barely goes out. While the students can be seen gathered in the school playground

82 Maria Cohut, “Female Hysteria: The History of a Controversial 'Condition'”, *Medical News Today*, October 13, 2020: par.1. <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/the-controversy-of-female-hysteria>

talking, she is looking at them through her window as if she was not allowed outside.[00:18:00] She does not seem to have any friends or acquaintances. Her position as principal also isolates her. She does not stay with the other teachers, she has her own office and she is never seen talking in a friendly manner with anyone. She is never shown talking to anyone but Will, her secretary Norma, and Ronny. As previously mentioned, Will and Ronny are not particularly helpful towards her and therefore even though they are present, she still seems utterly alone. Therefore, during the movie it seems as though she is locked in this place where everyone doubts her, just like an asylum. It is only at the end when she leaves the school to go after Michael and kills him that she sets herself free from everything: the asylum and the cause of her mental health issues, Michael.

In this “asylum”, the only person who offers her help is Norma (Janet Leigh). While Laurie's friends did not believe her in *Halloween*, Norma does notice that she is not well. She offers her some advice and tells her “take care of yourself” [00:41:49]. This change might be due to Norma's age as Laurie's friends were her age but Norma is older. She gives Laurie advice in a very maternal way. Moreover, as she is older she may be experienced enough to understand what a middle-aged mother might be going through. She is the only one who is not judgmental towards Laurie. Therefore, while everyone dismissed Laurie's worries in the first movies, here there is a clear divide between the men who do not support her and still use hysteria against her, and the woman who does support her. Similarly, in *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (Jim Gillespie, 1997), when Julie (Jennifer Love Hewitt) is threatened by a possible killer, her male friend claims that what she is saying is a “crock of shit” [00:41:49] and he does not offer any help while her female friend believes her straight away. However, her boyfriend, unlike Laurie's, helps her to get rid of the killer at the end of the movie. In *Scream* (Wes Craven, 1996), Sidney's friend Dewey (David Arquette) who is a policeman fails her the same way that Ronny does Laurie. He is never there to help her when she is being attacked and he never manages to catch the killer, to the point where she has to do it herself. Her female friend Tatum, on the contrary, does not hesitate to help her, she fights journalists to protect her and takes her to her house so that she is not alone. However, unlike in *Halloween H20*, the male figures of her life never

doubt what she says about the killer and never treat her as “crazy”. Therefore, while slashers of the 1970s shared many rules and had a very similar representation of female main characters, slashers of the 1990s have changed as they represent women in different manners. Some of them have decided to still exploit hysteria by using it to discredit women. Others have chosen to move away from this trend and erased it, preferring to have their female characters be helped instead of alienated.

While Laurie gets support from Norma, it is also interesting to note that she trusts herself too. In *Halloween*, Laurie was so doubted that she ended up not believing herself and thinking that Michael was imaginary, a “boogeyman”. In this movie, it is not the case. Although everyone keeps doubting her words and mocking her, she stands her ground. She knows that Michael is real and that she is in danger, she does not doubt herself one second. First of all, she is aware of her issues. She knows that she drinks too much alcohol and she knows that she has hallucinations of Michael. She is able to recognize when it is real and when it is not. She remains calm and waits for the illusions to stop [00:18:14]. She is also aware that her loved ones are tired of her problems as she claims: “I think I'm losing John.”[00:28:22] This shows that she does know that she has issues due to her trauma and understands that they can be a burden to her family, yet she still considers them valid. When John yells at her that it is over because Michael died in the hospital, she answers that she never saw his remains. Instead of backing down, she trusts her instincts since she knows how inhumanly strong he is. Moreover, when Will tries to convince her that Michael could not possibly come back for her after twenty years, she answers that he waited fifteen years before trying to kill her the first time, implying that he could do it again. Therefore, while she ended up believing her friends who thought that she was making everything up in the first movie, it is not the case anymore in the second one. It is clear that the male characters still consider her as a hysterical woman but she does not give into this idea.

Although Laurie does not surrender to the idea that she is crazy, she is still experiencing conflicting feelings regarding her mental health. This conflict is illustrated by the changes of light throughout the movie.⁸³

83 Okcoolros, “The Representation and Impact of Mental Health in Film: Study Paper Review”, Medium, January 26, 2021: par.4. <https://rosietibbs-co-uk.medium.com/the-representation-and-impact-of-mental-health-in-film-study-paper-review-caf80229b9a4>



Figure 38: Laurie in the morning (00:14:12) then at night in *Halloween H20: Twenty Years Later* (Miner, 1998, 01:09:28)

At the beginning of the movie, she is at her worst mental state. She wakes up screaming from a nightmare [00:14:12] and is clearly panicked. The room is not fully lit but it is still bright because the sun is shining through the curtainless window. The white sheets and her light colored clothes emphasize the idea of brightness yet this is a moment of struggle for her. Those rays of sunshine might signify that although she is having difficulties at this moment, there is still hope for her. She can fight and get over her issues. At the end of the movie [01:09:28], she decides to face Michael and kill him. She finds an ax and searches for him. It is the night and there is no light in the shot except for the small lamps in the background that offer a faint glimpse of Laurie. She is standing strong with the ax in her hand, she does not seem afraid anymore. The darkness of the shot now represents her descent into violence. It implies that she is taking on her darker side, intending to be aggressive to win. Interestingly, this shot could be mistaken for a shot of Michael as he always stands in a similar way in the shadows. This parallel shows how she is becoming as violent as he is. There is a double meaning as on the one side, this shot shows the courage that allows her to protect herself and John but on the other side, the darkness of the scene vilifies her and shows her violence as something negative. Similarly, the last scene of her beheading Michael both shows her courage as well as a negative portrayal of her character because of the high level of the violence. These shots hold the meaning that such extreme violence should not exist. She is not only using this brutality only to protect herself, but to kill him, which is too radical for a woman to do.⁸⁴ In this way, it is a new type of madness. She goes to such extremes to fight Michael that she is willing to commit unthinkable acts and therefore can be considered crazy for it.

Because her violence was seen as madness, in *Halloween Resurrection* she has now been committed to

84 Melissa Dittmann, "Anger Across the Gender Divide", *American Psychology Association*, March 2003. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/mar03/angeracross>

a mental institution. The image of the brave woman is completely erased, the narrative is turned upside down. Indeed, the movie reveals that instead of decapitating Michael, she actually killed an innocent paramedic. This information ultimately depicts her as fully “crazy” because she murdered the wrong person. The violence she used was already painted as wrong and is now even worse since it did not even help her in killing Michael. However, she still does not give up. She manages to escape and find Michael on the hospital's rooftop. She sets up a trap for him but he manages to catch her and kill her. Because she has killed an innocent person before, she is even more willing to take risks to kill him. In this movie, the fact that she does not want to stop chasing him is portrayed as paranoia. She is a “crazy” woman who cannot stop, and it is ultimately the reason for her death, implying that she is punished for not having given up.

Therefore, these two movies still make use of the theme of the hysterical woman. While there is an evolution on a certain level, such as in the support Laurie gets from female characters, she is still challenged by male characters. She is given a new strength that was not there in the previous movies, but it is once again turned into madness in *Halloween Resurrection*. These films show that although the franchise may try to move away from this stereotype, it still finds its way back to it. While the next movies take place as the franchise adopts a more feminist approach, the theme of hysteria is still present in a distinctive way, as this thesis will next analyze.

3) The “Crazy Old Woman”: A Stereotype That Never Dies

Halloween (2018) follows Laurie forty years after the events of the first movie as she struggles with the trauma of what has happened to her. She still lives in Haddonfield but her house is isolated from the rest of the town. She does not have a good relationship with her family as she had trouble raising her daughter Karen who now barely talks to her. Laurie still fits the stereotype of the hysterical woman as she is single and does not have any intimate relationships. She is independent. Therefore, as in the previous movies, she is treated as crazy. Her family is embarrassed by her presence. Indeed, when she joins them for dinner at a restaurant [00:25:30], they infantilize her in the way they talk to her. For instance, they scold her by saying “That's enough Laurie” when she talks about Michael. Karen

talks to her in “elderspeak” which is often used towards older people with dementia.⁸⁵ It consists in talking slowly with an exaggerated tone, thinking that the person cannot understand properly, which results in dehumanizing them. For instance, when Laurie talks about Michael at the beginning of the dinner, Karen tells her “maybe this is a little too much for you, huh?”[00:25:50] in a high-pitched voice, and her husband starts to explain to Laurie why they are celebrating Allyson when she already knows why she is here. It is quite derogatory and shows that Karen considers that Laurie is not sane. She seems afraid that her mother will suddenly break down. They are uncomfortable because Allyson is introducing her boyfriend during this dinner and they do not want him to know that Laurie has issues. It seems as though she is the secret that they keep hidden. Her granddaughter Allyson blames her for losing her family, in the same way that John did in *Halloween H20*. She believes that it is all her fault and tells her to “get over it” [00:20:42]. Therefore, once again, she is not helped but rather treated as crazy and criticized.

While her family does not help her, the people she does not know do not either. Two journalists come to interview her in her home. They purposefully ask her questions about her life although they already know the answers. They mention her troubled relationship with her family, they talk about how her daughter was removed from her custody and ask if she was given back to her, knowing she was not. They claim to remain “unbiased” yet they obviously try to portray her as an unstable woman. They focus on the imperfect elements of her life instead of talking about what Michael did to her. They make her the villain. While Michael was locked in a mental asylum, she is the one they treat as crazy. The male journalist (Jefferson Hall) even mocks her by asking her if she still believes that the boogeyman is real [00:12:00] and mentioning her “failed marriages”. They are compassionate towards Michael and want to understand him but they are judgmental towards Laurie. There is a clear divide between their treatment of men and women as they never call Michael crazy but clearly imply that Laurie is.

As Laurie is still viewed as hysterical, she is still kept in some type of asylum. While in the

85 Stephen M. Marson, Rasby M. Powell, “Goffman and the Infantilization of Elderly Persons: A Theory in Development”, *The Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, no.41 (2014): 2.

previous movie, her asylum was the school, in this one it is her house.



Figure 39: Laurie's house in Halloween (Green, 2018, 00:10:50)

Her house, as previously mentioned, is very secluded. We can see in this shot [00:10:50] that it is in the middle of the forest. It is surrounded by a fence, has a gate controlled with cameras and her door has several locks. It is extremely secure. It almost resembles a military base and she rarely leaves it.



Figure 40: Laurie locking the journalists out in Halloween (Green, 2018, 00:11:11)

In this shot [00:11:11], she is talking to the journalists through her storm door that looks like a fence. It looks like she is imprisoned. This house is the asylum that she is confined into. However, contrary to the school in *Halloween H20*, Laurie has locked herself into this house. This shot shows that she is locking the journalists out rather than being forcefully locked in herself. She knows that she has issues and her family treats her as crazy because of it, but instead of being locked up against her will, she is locked up because she has chosen to do so. It is interesting to note what Michael's environment looked

like in the actual asylum at the very beginning of the movie.



Figure 41: Michael in the asylum in Halloween (Green, 2018, 00:03:54)

Michael is in the center of this shot [00:03:54]. He is in the hospital courtyard. He has a lot of space and autonomy. While he is locked in this place, he seems quite free. The doctor also claims that the patients get “fresh air, sunshine, a view, proper exercise, healthy diet”. [00:03:43] While Michael lives in an asylum, it is ultimately Laurie who appears to be imprisoned and not him.

While Laurie is still seen by other characters as insane, it is not the case with her granddaughter. Allyson is not an outcast and she does not fit the stereotype of the hysterical woman. She dresses feminine, she is not particularly studious and she has a boyfriend. She is the opposite of Laurie. The first time she is attacked by Michael, she screams for help and we can see many people come out of their houses and surround her to help.[01:12:45] Unlike Laurie, she is believed and supported. While the police failed Laurie in the previous movies, in this case they arrive immediately and one of them hugs and reassures Allyson. Since she is not independent in the way that Laurie is, she is treated differently. The only way in which she is called “crazy” is when she sees her boyfriend kissing another girl at a party. She confronts him and he tells her “I don't know what you thought you saw but Kim literally was talking to me”. [00:52:42] He is gaslighting her, a technique of manipulation often used on women that leads the victim to think that they are crazy.⁸⁶ He tries to make her doubt her mental health

86 Porter Braswell, “A Toxic History of Gaslighting: Past and Present”, *Fast Company*, July 12, 2022: par3. <https://www.fastcompany.com/90767823/a-toxic-history-of-gaslighting-past-and-present>

in order to get out of this situation. Therefore, although Allyson is not treated as hysterical in the way that Laurie is, her sanity is still challenged at least once by a man.

Although *Halloween* focused on the characters of Laurie and Allyson, *Halloween Kills* focuses more on the town itself. It does not focus on Laurie's traumas anymore, but on collective trauma. Laurie is recovering in the hospital and her daughter does not want her to leave. She lies to her about Michael still being alive to keep her in the hospital. She is locked up once again. Meanwhile, the townspeople are the ones who have to fight. Tommy Doyle (Anthony Michael Hall) is their leader. He is the little boy whom Laurie babysat and saved in the first movie. He suffers from trauma just like her yet he is not treated like her. He has friends and seems liked by everyone, he is not ostracized. He asks the townspeople to follow him and they do without questioning him. He gathers them and encourages them to hunt and kill Michael with him. In doing so, he goes against the police's orders but they do not stop him. Much like Dr. Loomis in *Halloween II*, he is very reckless as he leads the crowd to kill the wrong man. And just like him, his mental health is not challenged. Karen is the only one who confronts him and says “you took my daughter to chase a killer and an innocent man is dead”.[01:23:42] It is worth noting the choice of words that is used here. Laurie has been called “whacko”, “crazy”, and other related terms, but in this case Karen simply explains to Tommy what he did wrong. Not once does she call him mentally unstable, which reinforces the idea that hysteria is a word used only to describe women.⁸⁷

After focusing more on Tommy Doyle in the previous movie, Laurie returns as the main character in *Halloween Ends* and her “hysteria” takes a different form. The people of the town see her as the neighborhood's “weirdo”. She is called a “freak show” by some teenagers [00:20:39]. She is verbally assaulted and blamed for what Michael did several times. Everyone either avoids her or insults her. The way in which the townspeople view her is very reminiscent of the image of the “crazy old woman” that is recurrent in horror. Older women have been used in horror in a genre called “hagsploitation” to create fear since the 1960s and the movie *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (Aldrich, 1962). In these movies, the main character is often an older woman whose mental health deteriorates until she commits murder. They usually use former Hollywood stars, such as Bette Davis in *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* and their characters suffer from the loss of their fame and beauty. According to Tomasz Fisiak, these characters often have “a trauma that hunts their past” and they

87 Shalome Sine, “On the Sexist Etymology of 'Hysteria' and What Academia Did About It”, *Medium*, September 18, 2025. <https://medium.com/@peacelovetrig/on-the-sexist-etymology-of-hysteria-and-what-academia-did-about-it-ef98815ddb6c>

“gradually succumbs to mental and physical illnesses that strengthen the trauma” which leads to social exclusion.⁸⁸ This profile fits Laurie in this movie. Although there are now other representations of older women, the characteristics of hagsploitation movies can still be found in recent movies such as *X* (West, 2022) which, as previously mentioned in part 2 of this thesis, represents society's fear of ageing women. It portrays an old woman, Pearl (Mia Goth), who attacks young people because she is jealous of their beauty and sexual life. She used to be a beautiful happily-married woman, but now her husband will not sleep with her anymore. Their sexual issues are directly linked to age as they cannot properly move and her husband is afraid of having a heart attack. This movie shows the fear of losing our former life due to age, and in the case of Pearl, becoming crazy because of it. Although Laurie is not meant to scare the audience, she scares the townspeople. The notion of “freak” replaces the “hysterical”. It holds a similar meaning but is more centered around her age because of the heritage of hagsploitation.

Laurie is not the only character to be treated poorly by the town. The young man Corey is the first male character of the franchise who is also called crazy. He is also traumatized because of an accident that occurred while he was babysitting. The child played a prank on him by locking him in a closet. Corey broke down the door which then knocked the boy, pushed him over the staircase banister and killed him. This was the reason why the town started bullying him as they did not accept that this was an accident. Corey meets a group of teenagers at a gas station who ask him to buy them beer as they are underaged. When he refuses, they call him the “psycho babysitter” and say “killed a kid and too pussy to buy us some fucking beer?”. [00:20:00] Their choice of words is interesting as “pussy” usually refers to the female body and implies its weakness.⁸⁹ Moreover, he has a very controlling mother. She insists on knowing who he talks to on the phone, where he goes and what he does. She refuses to let him get a girlfriend for fear of losing him to her. She slaps him but also kisses him on the lips. [01:10:00] Corey sees her as one of the reasons for his social isolation which is why he ultimately kills her to free himself.⁹⁰ Horror movies have a long history of displaying these types of problematic

88 Tomasz Fisiak, “What Ever Happened to My Peace of Mind? Hag Horror as Narrative of Trauma”, *Text Matters* vol.9 (2019): p.2.

89 Jo Livingstone, “The Problem with 'Pussy'”, *Newrepublic.com*, January 24, 2017: par.3
<https://newrepublic.com/article/140063/problem-pussy>.

90 Andrew Dominguez, “Halloween Ends: Who Is Corey Cunningham?”, *Movieweb*, December 10, 2022: par.4.
<https://movieweb.com/halloween-ends-analyzing-corey-cunningham/>

mother-son relationships. Films such as *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960) and *Friday the 13th* (Cunningham, 1980) are only a few examples of portrayals of “crazy” older women who are the reason for their sons' killings.⁹¹ In addition, Laurie and him are linked during the first half of the movie. She helps him because she understands what he is going through as he is ostracized by the town just like her. They share trauma that happened in similar conditions as they both include death and babysitting. Some teenagers even treat them as a duo, calling them “the psycho and the freakshow”. [00:20:38] They follow a similar character development until Laurie realizes that instead of becoming a survivor like her, he became a killer. Consequently, while Corey is the first male character of the franchise to be treated as crazy as Laurie has always been, his issues and killing tendencies were caused by a woman and some of the insults used towards him also refer to women. He is also associated with Laurie. His mental issues are themselves linked to the issues of other women deemed “crazy”.

Therefore, in the first movies, Laurie is treated as hysterical by everyone around her. She is different from other girls and independent, which has historically been deemed as hysteria. She is never helped because no one wants to believe her. In *Halloween H20*, Laurie's mental health is still challenged by men, but she receives help from her female friend. The movie emphasizes how the male characters fail her because they are incapable of helping her. She also knows that she is right, while she questioned herself in the first movie. Moreover, *Halloween* and *Halloween Kills* perpetuate the idea of Laurie as a hysterical woman that has been recurrent throughout the entire franchise. She is still an independent woman with no relationships who is rejected by her town and never listened to. Her family treat her as a senile woman and provide her no help. However, she is no longer forcefully locked in a metaphorical asylum against her will, but she voluntarily isolates herself from the people who mock her. Similarly, in *Halloween Ends*, Laurie is the town's “freak” alongside Corey. While at first, the movie seemed to be evolving towards using the same notion of hysteria for both genders with the introduction of the character of Corey, it still circles back to women by blaming them for his problems, through misogynistic insults or stereotypes such as the “crazy mother”. While Laurie Strode's narrative

91 Peter Breslow, “Norman Bates: A Most Terrifying Mama's Boy”, NPR, July 1, 2008: par.31.
<https://www.npr.org/2008/07/01/91947125/norman-bates-a-most-terrifying-mamas-boy>

highlights the evolution and the persistence of stereotypes of women in horror such as hysteria, it is also important to recognize that it is a character that had a significant impact on the genre. She still inspires many female characters to this day and she has launched the entire career of her actress Jamie Lee Curtis, who kept on playing roles in horror movies that were very different from Laurie, as this thesis will next analyze.

IV) Jamie Lee Curtis: the Evolution of her Career in Parallel with *Halloween*

Jamie Lee Curtis is an actress whose career has spanned several genres. She was first introduced to the public through her role as Laurie and later continued to shoot in several horror movies during the 1980s, earning her the title of “Scream Queen”. Through these different roles, Jamie Lee Curtis's characters presented very different representations of women in horror. After she stopped acting in horror movies, she had roles in comedies and dramas before coming back to *Halloween* in the 1990s and again in 2018. Through the decades, Jamie Lee Curtis and her role of Laurie have evolved significantly. Through an analysis of her career, this part shall reveal how Jamie Lee Curtis first played very different representations of women in horror, then how the role of Laurie impacted the genre and her career and finally, how she ended up influencing Laurie in the later movies while becoming an activist.

1) Jamie Lee Curtis's Roles Compared to the Final Girl

Jamie Lee Curtis first launched her career with the role of Laurie Strode. After the immense success of the film, she was cast in other horror movies. She therefore stayed within this genre during most of the 1980s, and became known as a “Scream Queen”. While in *Halloween*, she is the Final Girl who is different from other girls, her other roles do not share all of the same characteristics. In *The Fog* (Carpenter, 1980), Jamie Lee Curtis plays Elizabeth, a hitchhiker who is picked up by a man, Nick (Tom Atkins) who helps her to get into town. The Final Girl, as explained by Carol Clover, is the protagonist of a slasher who is masculine, resourceful, and intellectual.⁹² She is different from all the other girls. Her personality is mostly defined by her complete lack of sexuality for which she is rewarded at the end as she is the only survivor. While the Final Girl has to be a virgin, in this movie, Elizabeth sleeps with him the same night and stays with him for a few days. She is the opposite of Laurie as she is very feminine, she has relationships and can be seen naked under the sheets after having sex. Nick and her both end up having to investigate the movie's mystery and being attacked by the villains. However, it is Nick who investigates. Elizabeth is always with him but she acts more as support for him rather than a partner. When Nick talks to the coroner [00:49:54], they exclude her from

⁹² Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*.

the conversation. They see her as fragile, they do not want her to be afraid. In fact, it is not the only time as she is excluded from most conversations that are important to the development of the plot. She is in the midst of it because she is in danger yet Nick keeps her apart from everything. In *Halloween* as well, Dr. Loomis participates more in trying to stop and catch Michael while Laurie runs away. Elizabeth is also a very inactive character, what Laura Mulvey called the “passive female”¹. Nick participates in all of the action, not her. While he is saving a little boy, she is waiting in the car. [01:09:06] The only time she is given the opportunity to help is when he comes back to the car with the boy and she has taken the driver's place in order to start the car as soon as they arrive. However, she struggles to start the car for a long time [01:09:25] and ends up losing time instead, emphasizing her helplessness in the story. The rest of the time, when there is action, she does what Nick tells her to as he always gives her orders. For instance, she tries to talk to him by calling him, but without giving her time to speak he says “if anything happens just shut the door”[01:15:42]. Then when the ghosts attack he says “get rid of that” or “get out of the way” [01:17:08]. Laurie is more active since as the Final Girl she is directly attacked by Michael, but she does not fight or try to kill him. In the same way that Nick takes the lead and fights the ghosts, it is Dr. Loomis who gives orders to the police. It is also him who ends up saving Laurie from Michael. Moreover, Elizabeth has no character development. The only piece of information given about her in the entire movie is that she is from Pasadena [00:22:50]. Her name is not even mentioned until she sleeps with Nick. Nick, however, has many scenes in which he talks about himself to her and she listens without talking about herself in return. She has a role that is similar to that of Annie and Lynda in *Halloween*, that is to say that her only purpose is to be looked at. She is only present to provide a love interest to Nick. Laurie's role, on the other hand is not to be looked at as Final Girls do not show their bodies or femininity. They are intellectual, responsible and resourceful. Much like Laurie however, Elizabeth has to wait for the man to save her in the end, she also has the role of the damsel in distress. This character follows the trend of the women of horror movies of the 1980s who do not participate in the action, but rather suffer from it, like Lynda and Annie in the first *Halloween* (1978), and therefore while she shares similarities with Laurie, she is not a Final Girl.

Continuing her horror journey, Jamie Lee Curtis starred the same year in *Prom Night* (Lynch, 1980) in which she once again plays a character who is different from Laurie. She is Kim, a teenage girl whose sister was killed by her friends in an accident a few years before. A killer is now after her friends on prom night to avenger her sister. Kim is a popular girl. Contrary to Laurie, she is the epitome

of femininity. They are opposites yet are both stereotypical slasher roles since feminine popular girls can be found alongside Final Girls, like Lynda and Annie in *Halloween*. Kim is sought by multiple boys who fight over her, she is a dancer and she is elected prom queen. Although it is a slasher and she is the main character, her profile is clearly not that of the Final Girl, and she is not one because the killer does not attack her, only her friends. She is also very inactive. While she is the main character, she is not the one who fights the villain in the end but her boyfriend [01:26:30], just like Laurie and Dr. Loomis. While she manages to pick up the killer's ax, she does nothing with it and waits for the fight to end. Her role in this movie is therefore very unclear, she does not have any defined purpose. She is not attacked but she does not attack either and she is not the killer.

Since Kim does not have a defined purpose in the movie, it is clear that her body and beauty are at the center of her role.



Figure 42: Kim in Prom Night (Lynch, 1980, 00:35:33) compared to Laurie in Halloween (Carpenter, 1978, 00:25:56)

In this scene [00:35:33], Kim is playing tennis. She is wearing a short dress that is quite revealing as it shows her underwear. This scene displays her body as she is moving around in a revealing outfit and many of her scenes have the same purpose. In the second shot from *Halloween* [00:25:56], we can see that Laurie's outfit is the opposite. With the turtle neck, the cardigan and the tights, it covers her completely as the Final Girl does not display her body.



Figure 43: Kim leaving the changing room, *Prom Night* (Lynch, 1980, 00:38:25)

After playing tennis, Kim and her friend take a shower. They are startled by someone breaking a mirror. They venture around the changing room and outside to find who did it. In this shot, [00:38:25] Kim is wearing a shirt which is not buttoned. It reveals her chest as she walks around which sexualizes her. There are also several scenes in which Kim is getting ready or putting on makeup in front of a mirror, which once again are scenes that aim at displaying her beauty. Moreover, she dances many times, including in a three minute-long sequence during prom [00:54:56] which exhibits her moving body. On the other hand, the Final Girl never shows nudity. Therefore, the role of Jamie Lee Curtis's character in *Prom Night* is to be looked at. She illustrates what Laura Mulvey described as the “traditional exhibitionist role of women” who are “simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact”. Kim is also a very passive stereotypical character who is only used to show her body. While Elizabeth shared a few characteristics with Laurie, Kim is her complete opposite.

Kim and Elizabeth were not the last stereotypical horror roles that Jamie Lee Curtis played as she then acted in the film *Road Games* (Franklin, 1981). In this movie, Patrick (Stacy Keach) is a truck driver on his way to deliver meat when he hears about a killer on the radio. He stops at a motel and becomes persuaded that he has encountered the killer. He then sets out to stop him himself. Jamie Lee Curtis plays Pamela, a hitchhiker whom Patrick takes with him in his truck. She ends up following him on his quest to find the killer. This role is very reminiscent of Elizabeth in *The Fog* as they are both hitchhikers following a man on his journey. Patrick and Pamela talk about the killer on the road

[00:39:06]. Patrick is focused on his method, how he does it and how he destroys evidence. Pamela, on the other end, insists on sexual and psychological questions, wondering whether or not the killer has sex with his victims and what he thinks of women. It is the only time she takes part in a discussion about the killer yet he mocks her ideas and focuses back on his own. Pamela is another character who does not lead. It is Patrick who tells her what to do. Moreover, she is not a Final Girl as the killer is not after her and she does not have the same characteristics. She is not overly intellectual or resourceful. Later, they stop at a gas station and see the killer's car. Pamela gets close to it and gets abducted. Therefore, she is gone for the rest of the movie and does not participate in catching the killer. She also becomes the damsel in distress. Patrick finds the killer, fights him and gets him arrested. Then, he saves Pamela. Just like Laurie has to wait for Dr. Loomis to kill Michael and save her, Pamela has to wait for Patrick to find her and save her as well. Once again, Jamie Lee Curtis plays a very passive role in a movie that has a stereotypical active/passive heterosexual division of labor.⁹³ Although she is credited as a leading role, she has very limited screen time and her character has been criticized, described for instance as “pointless and half-dimensional”.⁹⁴ While Laurie runs away and manages to never be caught by Michael, Pamela is kidnapped at her first encounter with the killer. She is much more passive. This was her last role in horror, and was very different from Laurie in *Halloween*.

Therefore, these three characters from the beginning of Jamie Lee Curtis's career are different yet they have the same function. While they sometimes share similarities with the Final Girl, such as how they wait for a man to save them in the end, they are very different from her. They do not participate in the action or in resolving the plot. Their personality is not developed and they do not have any individuality. They are all very passive and serve one purpose: to be looked at. While these three roles were important in Jamie Lee Curtis's career, the role of Laurie remains the most significant for her career. It is the role that launched it and that transformed the horror genre, as this thesis shall next develop.

93 Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”: 7.

94 Noel Penaflor, “Road Games (1981) Revisited Reviex, HubPages, March 11, 2024: par.29.
<https://discover.hubpages.com/entertainment/Road-Games-1981-Revisited-Review>.

2) Laurie's Impact on Jamie Lee Curtis's Career and on the Horror Genre

Laurie Strode was Jamie Lee Curtis's first role as a main character in a movie. Due to the movie's success, it became the most famous role of her entire career. She has claimed herself that she would have no career “if it was not for Laurie Strode”.⁹⁵ It gave her her start⁹⁶ and allowed her to act in several other horror movies, as previously mentioned. Since John Carpenter liked her in *Halloween*, he wrote the character of Elizabeth specifically for her in *The Fog*.⁹⁷ Similarly, the producer of *Terror Train*; Daniel Grodnik, sought her for the lead role based on her performance in *Halloween*.⁹⁸ The role of Laurie allowed her to become an important part of the horror genre. According to her, every movie she has done that made a big impact can be linked back to *Halloween*. Even when she did not want to be part of the horror genre anymore and moved towards comedy, her performance as Laurie still influenced her role selection. For instance, she met John Landis while doing *Halloween* and he later took her for the role of Ophelia in *Trading Places* (Landis, 1983). Then, thanks to this role, John Cleese wrote her the character of Wanda in *A Fish Called Wanda* (Crichton, 1988). Most of her biggest roles were given to her thanks to her role as Laurie. In the 1990s, she was having trouble finding roles after *True Lies* (Cameron, 1994). She finished shooting the movie *Virus* (Bruno, 1999) which she thought was “one of the worst experiences”⁹⁹ of her career and ended up being one of the biggest box office failures of the 1990s. Therefore, in order to get out of her career slump, she had the idea for *Halloween H20: Twenty Years Later* as the 20th anniversary of the franchise was coming. It became one of the best-received *Halloween* films ever¹⁰⁰ and allowed her to get back in the spotlight. More recently, Jamie Lee Curtis came back as Laurie Strode for one last trilogy. Her last movie success had been *Freaky Friday* (Waters) in 2003. The new *Halloween* trilogy was a huge success and once again allowed her to boost her career and therefore get roles in other big productions such as *Knives Out* (Johnson, 2019) and *Everything Everywhere all at Once* (Kwan, Scheinert, 2022). Jamie Lee Curtis has played Laurie all

95 Yahoo Entertainment, “Jamie Lee Curtis Reflects on 44 Years of 'Halloween' Movies”, 2022 ; 1:19 to 1:22, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsLLs8fcwUM>.

96 Angela Williams, “Jamie Lee Curtis says 'Halloween' Launched her Hollywood Career”; *Abc News*, October 19, 2018: par.2. <https://abcnews.go.com/GMA/Culture/jamie-lee-curtis-halloween-launched-hollywood-career/story?id=58592960>.

97 Christopher Fiduccia, “Jamie Lee Curtis Reminisces About Working on John Carpenter's The Fog”, *Screen Rant*, January 7, 2022: par.3. <https://screenrant.com/fog-horror-movie-jamie-lee-curtis-john-carpenter/>.

98 Hammer House of Horror, “Terror Train (1980)”, last accessed august 16, 2024: par.15. [https://hammerhouseofhorror.fandom.com/wiki/Terror_Train_\(1980\)](https://hammerhouseofhorror.fandom.com/wiki/Terror_Train_(1980)).

99 Colin McEvoy, “After True Lies, Jamie Lee Curtis' Career Fell Into a Slump. Here's How She Saved It”, *Biography*, March 20, 2023: par.12. <https://www.biography.com/actors/a43351264/jamie-lee-curtis-career-comeback>.

100 Brian Cronin, “How Jamie Lee Curtis Almost Quit Halloween : H20 Over Michael Myers 'Death Clause'”, *CBR*, October 16, 2021 : par.2. <https://www.cbr.com/halloween-h20-jamie-lee-curtis-quit-michael-myers-death-clause/>.

her life. She has helped her to push her career every time she encountered a slump. She claims that Laurie has become the “permanent ink”¹⁰¹ of her life, that is to say that she is the reason for her career and that everyone remembers her for this role. She is almost always called “*Halloween* actress Jamie Lee Curtis” in newspapers and she believes that it is how she will be named in headlines when she dies.¹⁰²

While Laurie Strode greatly impacted Jamie Lee Curtis's career, she also impacted the horror genre significantly. The Final Girl trope sounded progressive at the time because a woman was leading the entire movie.¹⁰³ While Curtis claimed that she never understood why this trope was so popular until she made the very last movie,¹⁰⁴ Laurie is a relatable character, which is one of the main reasons for her success. She is strong and intelligent, but most importantly, she is vulnerable. According to Jamie Lee Curtis, “that's why the movie worked was because she was so vulnerable and the audience was let in on her vulnerability from the very beginning”.¹⁰⁵ Laurie is an average girl from a suburban area who has friends, goes to school and babysits to earn money. It is easy to identify with her because although she is different from other girls of her age, she is what was seen at the time as the “ideal of American youth”,¹⁰⁶ an ordinary girl from an ordinary suburb. She also cares for the children she babysits, she fights for them, and for her friends. She is selfless, which makes her even more likable. Her personality was mostly given to her by John Carpenter's partner and co-producer Debra Hill. Jamie Lee Curtis claimed that Laurie exists because of Debra.¹⁰⁷ She gave Laurie her braveness and strength. Having a main female character written by a woman was one of the reasons for Laurie's success as it added to her authenticity. Her dialogues and her personality feel real and genuine.

Moreover, Laurie provides a sense of purity and innocence. She is so undeserving of everything that is happening to her that we want her to win. According to Alexandra Ramos, “there is just something so good about watching a girl who everyone, throughout the whole movie, has usually been

101 Clark Collis, “Halloween Ends Star Jamie Lee Curtis Says 'Endings are a Bitch, But so is Laurie Strode’”, *Entertainment Weekly*, October 8, 2022: par.6. <https://ew.com/movies/jamie-lee-curtis-halloween-ends-laurie-strode/>.

102 Popverse, “Jamie Lee Curtis Tribute to 45 Years of Halloween”, October 5, 2023: 18:25 to 18:50.

103 Isabela Sanchez, “How the 'Final Girl' Trope has Evolved Over the Years”, *Me Tea Media*, October 15, 2021: par.2. <https://meteamedia.org/21124/opinions/how-the-final-girl-trope-has-evolved-over-the-years/>.

104 Samatnha Bergeson, “Jamie Lee Curtis Calls 'Halloween Ends' a 'Cathartic' Conclusion to the Franchise – and Her 'Final Girl’”, *IndieWire*, July 16, 2022: par.2.

105 Rotten Tomatoes, “Jamie Lee Curtis on The Legacy of Halloween's Laurie Strode-Part 2”, September 25, 2018: 1:14 to 1:22. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvbePilo_Q0&ab_channel=RottenTomatoes.

106 Syfy, “Jamie Lee Curtis in Conversation: 'We Are All Laurie Strode’”, October 12, 2018: 4:20. [Jamie Lee Curtis In Conversation: "We Are All Laurie Strode" | SYFY WIRE – YouTube](#).

107 *Ibid.*, 4:50.

dumping on [...] survive out of everyone else”.¹⁰⁸ There is a sense of revenge that the audience likes in the fact that Laurie is rejected and mocked yet is the only one to survive. From being mocked, she ends up standing for herself, and that is the type of character development that Jamie Lee Curtis claims makes Laurie stand out from other characters.¹⁰⁹ Before *Halloween*, this sense of revenge was provided in horror often through the sub-genre called rape-revenge. This genre was most popular in the 1970s, before *Halloween*, and includes for instance *The Last House on the Left* (Craven, 1972) and *I Spit on Your Grave* (Zarchi, 1978). In these movies, the female protagonist is sexually assaulted by a group of men and therefore she decides to take her revenge on them by killing them one by one. These characters were strong like Laurie but not because of the same motives. Laurie's strength is innate and reinforced by what she goes through. Rape-revenge characters develop this strength after their attack. The attack on their femininity and sexuality is what pushes them to retaliate. There is a sexual component that is predominant in the story. In *Halloween*, it is the opposite. Laurie is devoid of any sexuality. Her strength comes from her personality and character development. She showed that women could be innately strong without having to be sexually attacked before. Moreover, Laurie is not violent, she only protects herself, as mentioned in part 1 of this thesis. In rape-revenge movies, the woman is violent which prompted controversy.¹¹⁰ As Barbara Creed has mentioned, Jennifer from *I Spit on Your Grave* is seen as monstrous because she castrates the man.¹¹¹ *Halloween* (1978) managed to keep the revenge aspect of rape-revenge movies while removing the sexual component, which made it more successful.

Laurie therefore became an icon of the horror genre and is often named as “the best Final Girl”.¹¹² She participated in launching the slasher genre and taking it into its golden age. She impacted the audiences in such a way that she inspired many movies that have tried to imitate her character to have the same success. *Terror Train* producer Daniel Grodnik wanted his film to be “*Halloween* on a train”.¹¹³ He asked John Carpenter and Debra Hill for their approval and took Jamie Lee Curtis as the main character. However, this character was not a Final Girl as she did not share Laurie's characteristics

108Alexandra Ramos, “4 Reasons Halloween's Laurie Strode is One of the Greatest Horror Movie Characters Ever”, *Cinemablend*, October 12, 2022: par.1. <https://www.cinemablend.com/movies/reasons-halloweens-laurie-strode-is-one-of-the-greatest-horror-movie-characters-ever>.

109Cine Premiere, “Jamie Lee Curtis Recuerda la Premiere de Halloween 1978”, October 20, 2018: 7:44 to 7:51. [Jamie Lee Curtis recuerda la premiere de Halloween 1978 – YouTube](#).

110Eric Nolan Gonzaba, “Behind the Mask: Feminist and Historical Analysis of the Slasher”, *Ericnolangonzaba.net*, last accessed August 16, 2024: par.8. <https://www.ericnolangonzaba.net/slasher/analysis.html>.

111Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous- Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993), 469.

112Shaun Stacy, “The 15 Best Final Girls in Horror Movies Ranked”, *Slash Film*, September 17, 2021: par.41.

113Hammer House of Horror, “Terror Train (1980)”: par.12.

and the movie was not a success. It is clear that after *Halloween*, only the horror movies that contained a Final Girl succeeded as Laurie had become a model. The slashers that became the most famous were those that followed the Final Girl pattern. Victor Miller, who created *Friday the 13th* (Cunningham, 1980), said he went to see *Halloween* once to figure out “what a good horror film would need”.¹¹⁴ His movie follows the same pattern: a group of young people arrive at a camp as counselors, only to be chased by a masked killer. The main character Alice (Adrienne King) is a Final Girl. She is smart, a college student, not really interested in boys, and she is the only survivor who gets rid of the killer. Similarly, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Craven, 1985) also follows *Halloween's* outline. Its protagonist Nancy Thompson (Heather Langenkamp) and her friends all live in a calm neighborhood on Elm Street. They are attacked one by one by Freddy Krueger, a killer who stalks and murders them in their dreams. Nancy is the only survivor and she cleverly gets rid of Freddy by setting traps. Like Laurie and Alice, she is smart and resourceful. In terms of their physical aspect, Alice and Nancy follow Laurie to a certain extent.

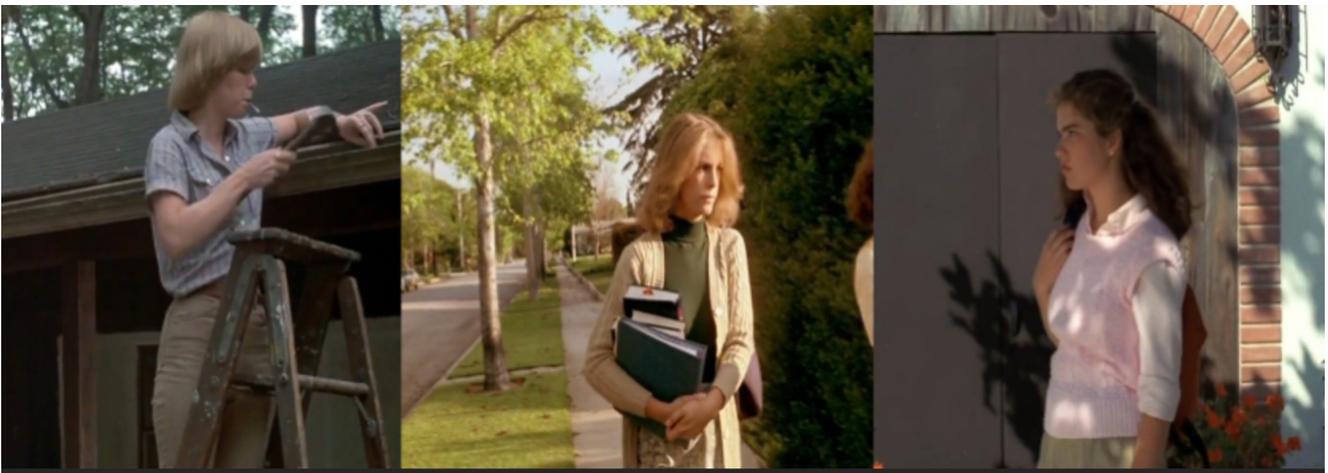


Figure 44: Alice in *Friday the 13th* (Cunningham, 1980, 00:15:26), Laurie in *Halloween* (Carpenter, 1978, 00:24:52) and Nancy in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Craven, 1985, 00:21:35)

The first image shows Alice in *Friday the 13th* [00:15:26]. She is wearing pants and a short-sleeved shirt. She is not as covered as Laurie but just like her she is not very feminine. She fits the “masculine” characteristics often associated with the Final Girl. She has short hair, is not wearing a dress like her friends, and she is doing handy work around the camp with the men while her friends sunbathe. Like Laurie, she also has no relationships with boys. We can see in the middle that Laurie [00:24:52] is more

¹¹⁴“Making of Friday the 13th HQ (documentary)”, September 21, 2017: 2:10 to 2:17. [Making Of Friday The 13th HQ \(documentary\) – YouTube](#).

covered and more self-contained while Alice seems confident. On the right is Nancy in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* [00:21:35]. She is wearing pants, a shirt and a cardigan. This scene is very reminiscent of the scene in which Laurie comes home from school as they both look similar and are carrying their backpacks. The influence of Laurie is more significant visually in Nancy while it is more obvious in Alice's personality. However, Nancy has a boyfriend and we see her kissing him multiple times. Alice can also be seen wearing a swimsuit. It is clear that Laurie had a great impact on other slasher characters but they did not necessarily keep all of her characteristics, especially her puritan body image and absence of romantic life.

Although the slasher craze ultimately died down, Laurie kept on inspiring other Final Girls such as Sidney (Neve Campbell) in *Scream* (Craven, 1996). The movie very clearly shows its inspirations by displaying scenes and references from *Halloween* throughout the movie. The characters watch *Halloween* while they are gathered at a house party and they use it to establish a list of rules to follow in order to survive a slasher [01:13:03]. Two of those rules are as follow: “never have sex” and “never drink or do drugs” which is exactly what Laurie's character stands for. It is clear that *Scream's* inspiration for Sidney is Laurie, and that *Halloween* impacted the movie itself as it has a similar storyline, but that since it is not set in the same decade, it made the Final Girl evolve. Sidney is a new generation Laurie Strode. She is smart, she has friends who are sexually active but she hesitates on taking the leap herself although she has a boyfriend. She does have sex with him in the end yet she does not die because of it. She is more fashionable than Laurie, but still not as much as her friends. She defends herself, but also does not let anyone else save her. *Scream* reads as an homage to *Halloween* that aimed at reviving the genre and making it evolve, especially through a more modern approach of the Final Girl.

Therefore, the character of Laurie has greatly impacted Jamie Lee Curtis's career by allowing her to get very impactful roles throughout her life, but she also impacted the horror genre. She started a wave of Final Girls in the 1980s that were all inspired by her and tried to be as successful as her. Even when the slasher genre declined, other movies such as *Scream* emerged to try and revive it by once again using the *Halloween* pattern. To this day, characteristics of the Final Girl still transpire in many female characters of the horror genre. While Laurie allowed the horror genre to grow and Jamie Lee Curtis's career to launch, Curtis later impacted her character as well, as this thesis will next demonstrate.

3) Jamie Lee Curtis's Impact on Laurie

After *Halloween* in 1978, Laurie Strode launched Jamie Lee Curtis's career, but as she later reprised the role, Curtis impacted her character in return. In the 1990s, as previously mentioned, she had the idea for a 20th anniversary movie which became *Halloween H20: Twenty Years Later* (Miner, 1997).¹¹⁵ She wanted Laurie to be strong and to kill Michael for good. She insisted on this aspect of the movie and truly argued with the writers and producers who did not want her to kill him.¹¹⁶ She fought for Laurie to be the strong character that she is in this movie. She claims that the “whole construction of this story is that this woman stops running, turns back, and faces him”.¹¹⁷ While Debra Hill gave Laurie her courage in 1978, Jamie Lee Curtis is the reason for her strength in *Halloween: H20*. She wanted the audience to see Laurie free herself from the trauma and leave (almost) no chance for Michael to ever come hurt her again, which had not been done before. The movie is amongst one of the most successful of the franchise, it is often named as the best sequel of the series,¹¹⁸ and Jamie Lee Curtis's involvement has largely to do with it. She has been described as bringing “pathos to the role that can only come from decades of life lived, applying a deep emotionality and sense of forced control to the character's actions that elevates every second that she's featured on screen”.¹¹⁹ Moreover, the scene in which Laurie decapitates Michael was her idea¹²⁰ and the reason why she fought with screenwriters. This scene is often regarded as one of the best in the entire franchise,¹²¹ as she is finally given the opportunity to eliminate her monster and free herself. The audience felt like Laurie was given the ending she deserved¹²² thanks to Jamie Lee Curtis, which was not the case before as Dr. Loomis always killed Michael for her.

Moreover, Curtis impacted Laurie the most when coming back in *Halloween* 2018. Laurie was a true character to play for her in the first movie because she was very different from her. She was not

115 Extra Quality, “Jamie Lee Curtis on 'Halloween: H20' and 'Halloween: Resurrection’”: 1:02 to 1:39.

116 Extra Quality, “Jamie Lee Curtis on 'Halloween: H20' and 'Halloween: Resurrection’”: 5:22 to 8:20.

117 *Ibid.*: 6:30 to 6:35.

118 Paul Farrell, “Halloween H20' 25 Years Later: Why the 1998 Film Remains One of the All-Time Great Legacy Sequels”, Bloody Disgusting, August 11, 2023: par.2. <https://bloody-disgusting.com/editorials/3774848/halloween-h20-25-years-later-why-the-1998-film-remains-one-of-the-all-time-great-legacy-sequels/>.

119 *Ibid.*, par.11.

120 Extra Quality, “Jamie Lee Curtis on 'Halloween: H20' and 'Halloween: Resurrection’”: 4:30.

121 Bee Delores, “The 20 Best Scenes from the 'Halloween' Franchise”, Bloody Disgusting, October 27, 2022: par.19.

122 Emily Gagne, “Halloween H20: Twenty Years Later (1998) - The Shockingly Satisfying End Laurie Strode (and Michael Myers) Deserved”, *Hollywood Suite*, October 27, 2020.

particularly intellectual while Laurie was, she was partying when Laurie was not. However, she claims that with time, Laurie and her became one and the same.¹²³ In *Halloween* 2018, it almost feels like she is playing herself. Laurie is not afraid to show her body or wear clothes that are not usually worn by women her age, which is also what Jamie Lee Curtis stands for in real life. On the contrary, in 1978, Laurie's conservative style was far from Curtis's personal taste as she wore more revealing clothes. With time, Jamie Lee Curtis has become an advocate for older women's right to show their femininity in any way they like and wear revealing clothes if they want to without fearing other people's opinion. She wears tight dresses to red carpets, was seen on the cover of *Vogue* in a see-through dress,¹²⁴ and she is also fully covered in other instances. Her style is a statement. She wears whatever she wants to, and encourages other women to do the same. Aging has historically been deemed as negative in cinema, especially for women, as it is often represented as a process of “decline”, of “loss of youth”.¹²⁵ As a result, female celebrities feel that they have to do everything in their power to look younger, especially as when actresses reach the age of 50, they are less likely to be offered a role unless they look younger or play a supporting role.¹²⁶ Jamie Lee Curtis often talks about this issue, alerting people to the “genocide against what is naturally beautiful”.¹²⁷ It is obvious that her approach on femininity has impacted her portrayal of Laurie and her appearance.

123 Collis, “Halloween Ends Star Jamie Lee Curtis Says 'Endings are a Bitch, But so is Laurie Strode’”: par.6. <https://bloody-disgusting.com/editorials/3738340/the-20-best-scenes-from-the-halloween-franchise/>.

124 Evan Ross Katz, “Why I'm Rooting For Jamie Lee Curtis This Award Season – And Always”, *British Vogue*, March 3, 2023. <https://www.vogue.co.uk/arts-and-lifestyle/article/jamie-lee-curtis>.

125Femke De Sutter, Sofie Van Bauwel, “Uncovering the Hidden Bias: A Study on Ageism in Hollywood's Portrayal of Ageing Femininities in Romantic Comedies (2001-2021)”, *DiGest Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, n.10 (2023): par.2.

126Lisa Moore, “Invisible Lives: Where are All the Older Women in Film and TV?”, *The Conversation*, September 24, 2021. <https://theconversation.com/invisible-lives-where-are-all-the-older-women-in-film-and-tv-168012>.

127Jake Smith, “Jamie Lee Curtis Says Plastic Surgery is 'Wiping Out Generations of Beauty’”, *Prevention*, July 21, 2023: par.3.



Figure 45: Laurie in Halloween (Green, 2018, 00:21:00)

In this shot, [00:21:00] Laurie is not wearing clothes that older women are often told they should be wearing. She does not cover herself, she is in a tank top that shows her arms. Women her age are often expected to cover up or wear a lot of makeup. Laurie does not. Moreover, the lighting is striking because it emphasizes the image of a Laurie who does not hide herself. The lighting does not try to hide her body, it helps Laurie to proudly show it and therefore does not vilify her aging body in the way that a dark environment would.



Figure 46: Nana in The Visit (Shyamalan, 2015, 01:01:31)

As a comparison, this character is Nana (Deanna Dunagan) from *The Visit* (Shyamalan, 2015), a woman who pretends to be two children's grandmother to then kill them. She is much more covered than Laurie, with long sleeves and a cardigan. She is not trying to be feminine, but rather to hide her body. While Laurie is standing with self-confidence, Nana is often crouched. In terms of lighting, this

image of Nana is much darker than that of Laurie, which indicates that she is a villain. Her age must be hidden, it is seen as shameful which is why the light, as well as her clothes, cover her. As mentioned in the previous part, older women have historically been villains in horror, just like Nana. The “hagsploitation” genre portrayed older women whose lives were declining as a result of the loss of their youth, leading them to madness and murder.¹²⁸ Ever since the creation of this genre, older women have been used to scare audiences in horror movies. Laurie, however, is not a villain. Jamie Lee Curtis advocating for older women to wear more feminine and revealing clothes and dressing Laurie with confidence instead of following the typical outfits that have been assigned to older women in horror participates in stopping the vilifying of older women. Laurie is a proud survivor and her appearance shows it.

Moreover, Jamie Lee Curtis also makes a statement with her hair. She advocates for “natural beauty”¹²⁹ and has therefore not dyed her hair in a long time. She wants people to accept that hair naturally turns gray and that nobody should be pressured into dyeing it, or feel obligated to do it to follow certain beauty standards. She claims: “why do you want to look 17 when you're 70? I want to look 70 when I'm 70”.¹³⁰ Therefore, Laurie's hair is a natural gray, the same color as Jamie Lee Curtis's. She shows that women can be beautiful without having to hide their aging. In the same way, Laurie does not wear makeup, her hair sometimes gets messy, and her face is not touched up. Jamie Lee Curtis herself had surgery done when she was younger. After a cameraman made a comment about her puffy eyes, she had a cosmetic procedure done to correct it. She felt like she had to maintain a certain physical image to fit Hollywood standards and keep working in the movie industry. However, after the surgery, she was given pills that she became addicted to.¹³¹ She also later became addicted to alcohol. She struggled with her addictions for a decade until she got sober in 1999.¹³² Ever since her recovery, it has become important to her to never give into these beauty standards and to tell her story so that others would not. For this reason, her influence on Laurie's appearance in the latest trilogy is obvious as she does not try to appear younger or hide herself but seems rather confident in her appearance.

Jamie Lee Curtis has gone through traumatic events while she was struggling with addiction.

128 Fisiak, “What Ever Happened to my Peace of Mind? Hag Horror as Narrative of Trauma”: 317.

129 Scott Stump, “Jamie Lee Curtis Once Recalls Burning Her Hair Off Her Head”, *Today*, October 12, 2021: par.2. <https://www.today.com/style/jamie-lee-curtis-recalls-burning-hair-head-rcna2903>.

130 *Ibid.*, par.12.

131 Marc Malkin, “Jamie Lee Curtis Opens Up About Being 20 Years Sober, Going Public With Her Addiction”, *Variety*, November 5, 2019: par.11. <https://variety.com/2019/biz/features/jamie-lee-curtis-sober-recovery-addiction-1203392102/>.

132 A. Pawlowski, “After 25 Years of Sobriety, Jamie Lee Curtis Reveals Best Lessons She Learned in Recovery”, *Today*, January 16, 2024: par.10.

She has used her real life experiences to create this new Laurie. She claims that at her age she has lived life, gone through trauma, and she imbued it into her character.¹³³ *Halloween 2018* is very much a movie about trauma and how to live through it. Laurie, like Curtis, has gone through difficult times and is trying to work through it. The performance that Curtis gave was directly inspired from her own experiences and therefore impacted the character of Laurie. She tries to surpass her trauma and get rid of Michael, like Jamie got rid of her addiction. While, as previously mentioned, Jamie Lee Curtis had nothing to do with Laurie in the first place, in the 2018 trilogy, they are directly related, if not one and the same. She has claimed herself that 44 years later, Jamie and Laurie “ have become an enmeshed unit of a person”¹³⁴. She also believes that *Halloween 2018* is a movie about women reclaiming their lives and that it could help more women come forward and share their stories¹³⁵.

Therefore, Jamie Lee Curtis has grown with the character of Laurie and has imbued her with her personal experiences and values. She built Laurie’s strength in *Halloween: H20* and fought for the character to be exactly as she envisioned it. With time, she started to fiercely advocate for natural beauty and women’s expression of femininity while aging and when she came back as Laurie Strode for the last trilogy, she added her beliefs into the character. Moreover, she used her own personal struggles to fuel Laurie’s desire to reclaim her life which gave *Halloween 2018* a strong feminist message. As she did so, Curtis fused herself with her character who became more and more like her. Laurie Strode would not have become who she was in the last movies without Jamie Lee Curtis.

133 BBC The Social, “Jamie Lee Curtis on Strong Women and Trauma”, October 12, 2018: 2:14 to 2:27. [Jamie Lee Curtis On Strong Women And Trauma | Wee Guides – YouTube](#).

134Jenni Miller, “Jamie Lee Curtis on 'Halloween Ends', her Fans, and Why Michael Myers Ain't Sh*t”, October 15, 2022: par.5.

135 BBC The Social, “Jamie Lee Curtis on Strong Women and Trauma”: 3:10.

Conclusion

To conclude, the films from this corpus show an evolution in the way that violence is used in horror. Women were the main victims of extreme violence in the horror movies of the 1970s. Their deaths served as a reminder for young women to stay virtuous. The women in these movies were often sexualized while they were tortured whereas men did not suffer. Men were killed in order to allow the killer to reach the women who were the real targets. This era of slasher movies was marked by a representation of violence that was mainly aimed at women. They were the victims, and they could not fight back. The violence belonged only to men, who could defend themselves and even kill if necessary. The Final Girl was the emblematic figure of the seventies' slasher because of how she differentiated herself from the other women. As the only survivor, she was smarter and more resourceful than any other character. She is the character that the audience roots for. This pattern was applied to all the slasher movies of this era, they were the rules that created the sub-genre.

However, as feminism progressed, societal perceptions of women changed and the audience was not satisfied with this representation of women anymore. Therefore, with *Halloween H20: Twenty Years Later* came a renewal of the franchise. The movie was aware of the previous rules and wanted to break away from these clichés. *Halloween H20* presented the audience with an improved version of the Final Girl who saves everybody by herself. The sexualization of young women was no longer acceptable and the male figures were not heroes anymore. This movie does not want to glorify the killer. The emphasis is solely on the victims as the audience is placed from their point of view. This is a more progressive film in comparison to the first movie. While it is not perfect, particularly in the way that it tortures women and not men, it is making an attempt at portraying women in a much more positive way than it has ever done before. It shows Laurie fighting rather than going away, and young girls are not only used to be looked at anymore.

The last trilogy of the 2010s and 2020s shows once again a new era of the genre. Indeed, while the previous movie had one heroine, there are now three. Laurie is now with her daughter and her granddaughter. This new portrayal of violence intends to show a certain inter-generational strength, three generations of women fighting. There are no specific rules to violence anymore. The women are as violent as Michael himself and the violence even spreads into the city. While the Final Girl used to be allowed to be violent, in this trilogy anyone can be. As it defies the 1970s' rules of slasher movies, nothing can be predicted anymore. Moreover, it does not simply intend to give women power, it

punishes men who fail them. Most of the deaths in this trilogy are men who could not help the women.

The films of this corpus display an evolution in the use of violence that is inherently linked to the change in societal views of women. The slasher has gone through different waves of feminism and it is clear that as time goes by, it has tried to evolve to represent women in a more positive, empowering way.

This corpus is interesting in that it allowed for an analysis of women in the slasher genre across fifty years of time. Laurie was therefore able to embody all of the stages of a woman's life. She was a teenager, a mother/middle-aged woman and a grandmother/older woman. These roles are each at the center of the representation of Laurie. Each role provides important changes in the way in which she is perceived, which proves how women's roles define how they are portrayed in cinema.

As teenagers, Laurie's friends are erotic objects. The slasher genre in the 1970s presented young women as objects to be looked at. Since Laurie is not feminine-looking, she was deemed "masculine" and therefore escaped this objectification. She is the mother figure of her friend group, the one who is very wise and tries to look out for others.

In *Halloween H20*, she is an actual mother. Her strength is emphasized by the fact that she is a single mother. This movie deals with the stereotypical ideas of "good" and "bad" mothers, presenting the audience with a woman whose extreme violence is justified by her motherhood. It is the only possible justification for her to be so violent, she has to save her child to remain a "good" mother. This idea is pushed very far in that she has to sacrifice everything, she cannot balance her life as a woman with her life as a mother.

Halloween: Resurrection introduces a version of the same mother that is much more negative. She has sacrificed so much that she has even abandoned her child to save him. As she is not with him anymore, she has nothing left. She sacrificed her femininity as well as her motherhood and therefore it seems as though she is left empty. She dies because without her son, she has no justification for her violence anymore.

In the last trilogy, Laurie is a grandmother. She defies all stereotypes of older women. She is the embodiment of natural aging. She is violent to a point where she has started to be portrayed in a very similar way to Michael. With this trilogy, the slasher genre is not simply about gore anymore. It is a statement. It disrupts the societal norms associated with older women in an attempt to change people's minds.

Throughout the entire franchise, Laurie is presented as hysterical. When she is a teenager, none

of her friends believe her when she claims to be followed. She is seen as crazy because she is different and does not conform to the norms of her time. She has no sexual relations, she is an intellectual and she is not feminine. In later movies, she starts to be helped by her female friends, but men still continue to treat her as mentally ill and dismiss all her worries. As she gets older, she starts to conform to the stereotype of the “crazy old woman” that has been recurrent in horror. She is the “freak” of the town that people mock and avoid. Hysteria is a concept that has long be used against women, and although it is not considered an illness anymore, these movies show that it has not yet disappeared. The concept evolves depending on Laurie's age, but the franchise does not progress in that it never erases it.

While Laurie is the most famous character that Jamie Lee Curtis has played, it is not the only one she has portrayed in horror. From *The Fog* to *Road Games*, she has played many other female characters that are far different from the Final Girl. They are characters to be looked at. They are feminine and passive rather than active. They are sexualized when the Final Girl is not. Laurie was the most impactful of her characters in horror. She became a model for the other slashers of the 1980s that tried to imitate her success. Laurie remains the character that gave Jamie Lee Curtis her career. It made her become a Scream Queen and her performance later gave her opportunities in other genres. As Jamie Lee Curtis was able to grow with Laurie Strode, she was later able to impact her character as well. She made Laurie stronger and used her activism to make her a feminist heroine.

The films of this corpus have proved that the slasher genre has evolved tremendously over the past five decades, especially in the way it treats and represents female protagonists. Although Jamie Lee Curtis has announced that she will not return as Laurie Strode anymore,¹³⁶ she continues to play very diverse characters. From her potrayal of IRS inspector Deirdre Beaubeirdre in *Everything Everywhere All AT Once* (Kwan, Scheinert, 2023) for which she used her natural body appearance and clothes typically worn by women of her age, to her latest role of Patricia Tannis in *Borderlands* (Roth, 2024) in which she wears a more atypical outfit while keeping her real hairstyle, she keeps on injecting her activism into her roles in order to create a more progressive and diverse representation of women.

136 Eeamon Jacobs, “Halloween Ends' Star Jamie Lee Curtis Signs Document Swearing She Won't P'lay Laurie Strode Again”, Business Insider, October 2, 2022: par.4. <https://www.businessinsider.com/jamie-lee-curtis-halloween-ends-laurie-strode-last-2022-10>.

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