

Alfred Hitchcock shocked the world with his film *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), once he killed off Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) half way through the film. Her sister, Lila Crane (Vera Miles), would remain untouched even after Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) attacked her and her sister's lover. Unlike her sister, Lila did not partake in premarital sex, and unlike her sister, she survived the film. Almost 20 years later audiences saw a very similar fate play out in *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978). Laurie Strode (Jamie Lee Curtis) managed to outlive her three friends on Halloween night. Once she slashed her way through Michael Myers (Nick Castle), Laurie would remain the lone survivor just as she was the lone virgin. Both Lila and Laurie have a common thread: they are both conventionally beautiful, smart virgins, that are capable of taking down their tormentors. Both of these women also survived a male murder and did so by fighting back. Not isolated to their specific films, these women transcend their characters to represent more than just Lila Crane or Laurie Strode—but the idea of a final girl, establishing a trope within the genre. More importantly, final girls like Crane and Strode identified key characteristics that contemporary audiences wanted out of women including appearance, morality, sexual prowess, and even femininity. While their films are dark and bloodstained, these women are good and pure, at least until the gruesome third act fight. The final girl is the constant within the slasher genre, since its beginning with films like *Psycho* and *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960). As the slasher genre evolved from classical to revisionist, with films like *Halloween* and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974), the final girl continued to serve as the key piece of iconography within the slasher film. While she is always the main trope and sole survivor of the slasher film, cultural context has altered the way that she is portrayed. Her physical appearance has remained the same, but her workings within the mode of victimhood has evolved. Often moving from victim to victor, standing over the body of her male counterpart.

This essay examines how the final girl stood the test of time within the slasher genre, all the while the role of women in the United States evolved. It breaks down iconography and its relation to the public's perception of a genre, the cultural happenings around these women that allow them to survive, and how femininity is established within the slasher film. At the same time, this essay focuses on the female form and cross-gender identification within these films too. By examining both Carol J. Clover's essay "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film" and Thomas Schatz's essay "Film Genre and the Genre Film," my essay dives deeper into how genre theory and feminist film theory intersect. These two texts, and many more, work together to determine how the final girl portrays a modern woman on the big screen and within the public eye, one stab at a time.