HALLOWEEN'S MICHAEL MYERS: "THE SHAPE" THAT SURVEILS

Laurie: Annie, look!

Annie: Look where? I don't see anything.

Laurie: That guy who passed us in the car before, the one you yelled at!

Annie: Subtle, isn't he?

Second Wave Feminism as it occurred in the 1970s did not happen in a vacuum. Centuries of feminist work compounded, and as a result, sexual liberation spilled over into the 1970s. The rise in 1970s feminist activism is well-documented in Gender Studies literature. Alice Echols' *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* clearly shows the social conditions that led to a radical feminism that took over the zeitgeist of the early 70s. As Echols writes, radical feminism "fought for safe, effective, accessible contraception: the repeal of all abortions laws; the creation of high-quality, community-controlled child-care centers; and an end to the media's objectification of women." (Echols 4) Turning away from what Echols describes as "a socialist revolution . . . and the liberal feminist solution," radical feminism "articulated the earliest and most provocative critiques of the family, marriage, love, normative heterosexuality, and rape." (3-4) The culmination of rapidly spreading feminist movements resulted in a change to how American society views feminism, and this change is mirrored within the early slasher films of the 1970s.

As America entered the decade, feminist movements grew and gained traction. Perhaps most notably, Betty Friedan's "Women's Strike for Equality" on August 26, 1970 helped usher in a new feminism that built off the work of other feminists and gatherings like the Seneca Falls Convention one hundred years earlier. ("Women Strike For Equality") Second wave feminism turned from voting rights to bodily rights. In *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American*

Women, journalist Susan Faludi remarks this movement and its "progress on the twin fronts of employment and fertility" that achieved the mobility and independence for women in the middle of the twentieth century. (Faludi 55) The focus of feminism turned toward individuals and their bodily autonomy.

While feminist thought spread across the country, it was not without its detractors. The introduction of new sociocultural thought brings with it societal anxiety. Seeing the discrepancy between generational values, there were those who blamed women for their own unhappiness because they were "enslaved by their own liberation." (Faludi x) As Dow has argued, social aspirations of sexual purity, heteronormativity, and nuclear families destabilized through the rise of radical feminism. The abandonment of these traditional values in favor of the "violence" of radical feminist causes "produced the rise in slasher movies." (Faludi xi) Faludi introduces the concept of backlash to describe this negative response to the growth of feminism in the United States. In chronicling its history, she writes, "[t]he most recent round of backlash first surfaced in the late '70s on the fringes, among the evangelical right. . . Just when women's quest for equal rights seemed closest to achieving its objectives, the backlash struck it down." (Faludi xix) The anxieties over the newly liberated female body dominated conversations in American society. Going further, she looks at films throughout the twentieth century. If we look back at the films of the 1950s, there is an obvious "backlash cinema" and "independent women are finally silenced by pushing them off screen." (Faludi 138) As Faludi has suggested in her introduction, there were attempts at shutting down any argument for feminism and those reached popular culture through the medium of films. In the seventies, at the start of the slasher subgenre, there was a space where these anxieties could be negotiated for younger audiences.

Sexual liberation was an unknown and caused anxiety over what the future might look like, as well. French philosopher Michel Foucault wrote about proliferation of sexual identities in his book, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One*. He argues that power functions through subjectivity, and sexuality is one of those avenues because "there is no escaping from power." (Foucault 82) To document and express these newfound anxieties, creators turned to various forms of media, including film. Anxieties stemming from heteronormativity could be played out in this medium, particularly within the horror genre. Horror provided a canvas on which to act out society's worst fears. They have historically offered their audiences catharsis, a way to navigate their fears in a controlled environment. The seventies and eighties saw an explosion of slasher films. Due to the growing fear about the consequences of sexual freedom among young people, popular media geared toward younger age groups tackled these social anxieties.

2.1 THE "SLASHER" SUBGENRE

In establishing the rules of the slasher subgenre, it is important to first look at the word and its etymology. The word "slasher" has been in use since the sixteenth century, meaning "one who slashes; a fighter, a bully; a slashing fellow." ("slasher") The use of the word to describe an antagonist has not changed over the last five hundred or so years. However, it was not until the 1970s where it was used to definitively describe a subgenre of film. Its definition also makes sure to include the slasher's main choice of weapon, a blade. ("slasher") In the early slasher films, some form of a blade has always been used. 1974's *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* saw the use of a chainsaw, no doubt having an effect on later slasher films, such as 1978's *Halloween*. Interestingly, in looking at the same entry in the Oxford English Dictionary, its use in newspapers and magazines of the 1970s was interchangeable with "snuff films." ("slasher")

Snuff films, while a similar definition of "slasher," now refer to films with actual murder. ("snuff") Of course, the popular slasher films of the 1970s through today would not be considered "snuff" films by mainstream audiences. Naturally, this type of film may not be socially acceptable and would not be used to describe the slasher subgenre. This deviation to a more universally accepted definition has allowed the slasher film genre to accumulate a cult-like following that has lasted through the last five decades.

While scholar Sotiris Petridis makes the argument that 'pre-slashers' had an influence on John Carpenter's 1978 film, *Halloween*, these earlier films' production "was not so systematic" of the slasher subgenre. (Petridis 9) Slasher films in this particular subgenre follow a set of conventions and expectations that have allowed them to become successful since the 1970s. It is *because* of the particular formula in *Halloween* that has solidified it as a true, original slasher film that has made an impression on the entire genre of horror. Slasher films depicting sexually active American youth almost all feature the same tropes. Sexually active female characters appear to suffer identical fates at the hands of homicidal male antagonists while those who remain chaste or adhere to traditionally feminine domestic roles survive against the almost always male villains. It has become so well-known that the phenomenon was coined the Final Girl trope by Carol Clover in her book, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Final Girls follow a pattern of behavior that toes the line between the traditionalism of the fifties and the growing feminist movement of the seventies. Final Girls exhibit feminist behavior and exercise agency, but they do so while remaining chaste. Even in a violent body genre such as horror, there still exists a conversative message that can be parceled out. In *Projected Fears: Horror Films and American Culture*, Kendall R. Phillips writes that "[i]n the midst of a disco and a growing sexual revolution, the seeds of a new, more conservative

American culture were beginning to sprout. It was in the midst of this cultural sea change that John Carpenter's *Halloween* struck such a sensitive nerve." (Phillips 129) *Halloween* showcases one of the earliest depictions of the Final Girl trope in horror in slashers. The film pits virtuous Laurie Strode against Michael Myers, an escaped mental patient who stalks and kills several of Laurie's promiscuous friends. By doing so, the male killer is a physical embodiment of society's rebuttal against feminist sex positivity.

2.2 AN EVERYMAN AMONG WOMEN

Halloween is one of the most prevalent slasher films from the decade to feature such an antagonist in the form of Michael Myers. As a character with no spoken dialogue in the first film, Myers' lack of facial expressions and looming size are what encompass his entire character profile. It is within the culturally established rules of the horror slasher movie genre to have a masculine-presenting villain. The recurring monster trope solidifies for audiences the monstrous masculinity that is prevalent within popular culture and society at large. Tony Moran, who plays Michael Myers in the original 1978 film, stands at six feet tall with broad shoulders. In the inevitable sequels that followed, filmmakers were sure to cast actors with similar physiques, cementing the uber-masculine image audiences are familiar with today. In the film's credits, Tony Moran was originally not credited for the character of "Michael Myers" at the end. His name was beside "The Shape." (Tyler) The question then becomes how does Michael Myers exhibit autonomy in the film, despite the lack of a name in the credits? Why was it important to Carpenter and the writers to name Myers in the film? Naming a character gives them agency. It justifies Myers' ability to move about the film with intent. However, in leaving out his name in the credits, the writers have relegated Myers to a nameless everyman. The character

objectification of Myers within the written credits is combined with the plain jumpsuit and mask he wears. Michael Myers is not meant to be specific or individualistic as a character. Philips, in referring Michael Myers to a "punishing bogeyman," remarks that this representation of his character "heralds a cultural return to a more conservative set of cultural values." (Phillips 134-135) Myers represents a soulless, everyday monster who lurks within suburban towns.

The rise of slasher films presents an interesting conversation concerning social anxieties. While the films of the first half of the twentieth century focused on mythical or supernatural beings as antagonists, early films like *Psycho, Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and *Halloween* feature seemingly real men as weapon-slinging killers. Fear associated with the possibility of being chased by a slasher happening to a viewer lent itself to the rise and success of these horror slasher films. *Halloween*'s Michael Myers is a prime example of the type of fear that is rendered possible by an uber-masculine everyman. His actions are predicated on and informed by patriarchal values that have been instilled in American society. The slasher films of the latter half of the century mirrored the real-life monsters that murdered dozens of people during those same decades. Coverage of serial killers like Ted Bundy, John Wayne Gacy, and Richard Ramirez dealt a hand in the success of these films as part of the horror genre.

Horror is meant to incite a bodily reaction among its viewers. Filmmakers of the genre hope that those who see their films are left feeling scared, shaken, or with physical symptoms, like nausea and vomiting. In order to achieve these reactions, the film has its roots in real life inspiration. At the time, American hysteria over serial killers (and to an extent, satanism) let them experience and play out that horror in slasher films. In an article for *The New York Times*, Dr. Harold Schechter said, "[p]articular killers who capture the attention of the public reflect the fears of specific eras . . . For instance, Charles Manson represented the 'perfect materialization of

these 1960's fears of these drug-crazed, sex-crazed, demon hippy types'." (Stone Lombardi) Seeing a film like *Halloween* that places Michael Myers so prominently as a dominating male killer evokes anxiety. Here is a character who not only presents a very real threat to the other characters but also who could be anyone. Viewers do not see his face as an adult, so they are left with placing an identity to Myers. This is how Myers is able to function as a typical slasher antagonist and how his character established a slasher mimicry that continued for at least the next two decades.

Myers sports a blank yet unmistakably masculine face mask and represents a patriarchal society's values. The choice of the mask for Michael Myers is a weighted one. Instead of going down the grotesque route, the costume designers opted for a human-like mask. The mask itself was fashioned out of a Star Trek Captain Kirk mask that was stretched and spray-painted white. This choice left Michael Myers with a vaguely similar face that audiences could find somewhat familiar. It was a deliberate choice to keep Michael Myers as human as possible. This is not a monster from the early films of the twentieth century among the likes of Dracula, the mummy, or the creature from the Blue Lagoon, wherein these figures are character-specific and therefore are less likely to be wholly replicated. Michael is fitted in a plain mask with hair and a fitted jumpsuit. Through the costume design, Michael Myers is fashioned into an "everyman." In tying in the medieval morality play of the same name from the fifteenth century, the plot of *Halloween* and Michael's character can be read as a moral warning, a moral "everyman," among 1970s audiences.

However, what makes Myers different is that he has not yet made that leap to "god-like" status at the film's start. Myers can be read as a somewhat organized homicidal slasher. He methodically waits until Halloween night, on the anniversary of his sister's murder, to commit

the murders of Laurie Strode's friends. In his slasher style, Myers opts for a butcher's knife, leading to bloody and chaotic murder scenes. Myers carrying out his morals in this way is what laid the foundation of the male slasher. His motivations show up from his very first scene in the film with his sister, Judith, to the last scene where he somehow survives falling out of a second-story window. In one instance, Laurie and Dr. Loomis, the doctor who has been looking for Michael Myers after his escape from a psychiatric hospital, look out of the window at Michael's seemingly lifeless body. In the next scene only seconds later, Myers' body is gone. This almost supernatural speed of movement suggests Myers' lack of mortality and humanity. He is not subject to the same laws of physics. He can fall out of a second-story window, survive, and maintain his same level of physicality. While his physical body is larger-than-life with unnatural abilities, it is not solely what paints Myers as a slasher archetype. What makes Michael Myers stand out as one of the first slashers is his motivating factor. In the original film, Myers kills almost only female-identifying characters, most of whom are sexually active.

2.3 SEXUAL LIBERATION AS CULTURAL ANXIETY

In a decade of sexual revolution, this liberation was socially transgressive. When Michael Myers stalks and murders his sister and, later, Laurie Strode's friends, he is doing so with a moral motivation. In the act of killing, he is imposing his own patriarchal morals and inflicting punishment upon the characters who cross this socio-moral boundary of sexual purity and sexual agency. The sexual social boundary that society established and has perpetuated for so long cannot be crossed without Americans needing some form of disciplinary action. Contemporary audiences would have expected sexually active teenagers who shirk babysitting duties to receive some form of punishment, even if they did not explicitly say "murder." What does not fit into

this definition of a slasher is Michael's fascination with Laurie Strode, a virginal character who does not fit the archetype of "promiscuous teenager." It is here where his motivation begins to deviate and the audience is left questioning Myers' obsession with murdering a babysitter who, for all intents and purposes, fits into the domesticity that patriarchal society smiles upon. In his fixation on a virginal character who comes to embody the Final Girl trope, Michael's character as a slasher is solidified. He is now focused on hunting down Laurie Strode, who fits into the social hegemonic narrative. The creation of Michael Myers' character introduces to audiences a slasher that inspired (and still continues to inspire to this day) an everyman mimicry in the slasher films of the next few decades. It is important to delve into Michael's motivations regarding Laurie Strode as the film plays out a slasher/Final Girl dichotomy. To understand Myer's preconception with murder and his fascination with Jamie Lee Curtis' Laurie Strode, it is important to look into the first scene with Michael Myers and his sister, Judith.

2.4 VOYEURISM AS A RESPONSE TO ANXIETY

The film's beginning sequence starts with Michael Myer's childhood and his first murder in 1963. In the opening scenes, *Halloween* places the audience within the point of view of a voyeur. As the viewer, we see a teenage girl and boy engaged in a display of affection within a suburban home. They move throughout the house as the camera pans outside, and we only see the teenagers through the windows. The two head upstairs, and it is insinuated that the two have sex while home alone. Keeping with the voyeuristic point of view, we are then shown that we are seeing through the eyes of a child in a Halloween costume as they place a mask over the camera, leaving two eye holes through which the audience watches the rest of the scene. The child's hand grabs a butcher knife, and it is only after the male teenager leaves that we are led upstairs. The

audience later learns that they have taken the point of view of Michael Myers, the film's antagonist and slasher. Michael stalks and kills his sister as she sits topless while brushing her hair.

The entire murder scene is filmed through Michael Myers' point of view, with the camera situated behind the eyeholes of the mask he is wearing. It is also the first and only scene we see of Judith. By showing the audience Judith's semi-naked and post-coital body through child Myer's eyes signals to the audience that this is what American society would identify as a promiscuous teenager. In doing so, the film provokes a 1978 audience to conclude that Judith's death was deserved, a product of a "she was asking for it" mentality. There are no other reasons that the film gives for Michael's act of violence. While some may assume that this opening sequence is designed to show that Michael Myers is without emotion and will commit a horrendous crime at a young age, it is more complex than that. It is not just that he is a violent killer, but he appears to have a killing agenda that directly stems from culturally ingrained gender roles that were the source of a growing social anxiety and that he is doing so through voyeurism. In the scene with his sister Judith, Michael Myers would have been around six years old in 1963, putting his birth year in 1957. He is the byproduct of parents who lived through the social idealism of the fifties and raised Myers with those same ideals in mind. Similarly, young audience members would have included viewers who could have been Michael Myers' peers. The well-established gender roles did not only exist in fiction. Audiences could relate to the same social and cultural norms that are at the heart of Myers' motivation.

Placing the audience into that role of observer and sadistic killer was done so with reason. An audience member is forced to identify with Myers and his motives. It compels the viewer to try to understand why Michael has done what he has. *Halloween* allows a voyeuristic view into

the mind of a slasher. By occupying the observer's gaze, a viewer inhabits the patriarchal values that a character like Michael Myers holds. It complicates the narrative. It would be easy to simply show a knife-wielding slasher in a horror film for the sake of the genre, but the film goes a step further with Myers' character. Audiences must reconcile what they are being shown with why these few particular scenes were filmed this way. Contemporary audiences would have been aware of the sexual social context. Myers targeted his sister who had done nothing toward her younger brother, at least on-screen, that would lead us to believe her death was warranted. Judith simply engaged in consensual sexual behavior. Additionally, Judith's death does little more than serve as a catalyst for Michael's future behavior and character evolution as a true slasher.

Even though Myers is posed as a murderous character, he only targets characters that are seen by contemporary audiences as sexually promiscuous and/or have just had pre-marital sex. The people, mainly women, he murders are all in consenting relationships, and yet, to convince the audience that these women are promiscuous, the effectiveness of Michael Myers' character relies on the pre-existing social biases of a contemporary audience. The shifting paradigm of what was socially and culturally accepted of the earlier decades was changing before the start of this film. An audience viewing this during its initial release would have to contend with that paradigm shift. To desire sex and to be open about it, the film places Myers' victims well within the culturally ingrained and socially arbitrary definition of promiscuity. However, as far as what the film tells us, these women do not sleep with any other characters. They are simply vocal about deriving sexual pleasure from their partners. Because of this, they are targeted by Michael Myers in what has since become a trope, or an established pattern of character and plot, of the slasher genre. Laurie Strode, *Halloween*'s Final Girl, does not vocalize such a desire. This is what solidifies her as a Final Girl.

2.5. OBSERVING THE FINAL GIRL

Fifteen years after the murder of his sister, Michael Myers has escaped from the facility at which he was being held and adopts a blank mask and jumpsuit to begin his reign of patriarchal terror. *Halloween* introduces Laurie Strode, the main character and Final Girl of the film, played by Jamie Lee Curtis. Immediately, Strode is coded as a "good girl" type. She wears modest, conservative clothing with little to no skin showing. Wearing a skirt and stockings, behaviors gendered by society as feminine, the costume designer's choices signal to the audience that Laurie Strode is performing her gender in a way that does not go against the established hegemony. This is where Michael Myers sees her for the first time. As she drops off a set of keys at the Myers' now abandoned home for her realtor father, Myers, who has been standing in the house looking out, catches a glimpse of Laurie Strode. As she walks away with a young boy whom she will be babysitting that night, Myers continues his voyeurism. His actions codify him as an observer, and Laurie is the observed. Based on how Strode is framed as a modestly dressed young woman who appears to carry a domestic or maternal role with this child, it intrigues Michael enough that he continues to follow her around throughout the first act of the film. As Laurie walks away in this scene, presumably to school, the camera is placed right behind the left shoulder of Michael Myers. Different than the eye-hole camera placement of the opening scene, this shot still establishes the same effect as the audience possession of Judith Myers' murder. We hear Michael's breathing. We are placed next to him and are forced to watch Laurie walk away, placing her into an objective male gaze.

It is here where the slasher definition comes into play in regard to Michael's motivation. He spends the entirety of the movie going after sexually active teens, but he also tries to murder Laurie Strode, who is not coded as sexually active or even promiscuous by society's definition.

Michael turns his homicidal attention toward Laurie because she represents the opposite side of the masculine/feminine spectrum. While her costuming is feminine, her gender performativity begins to verge too close toward the masculine as the film progresses and therefore causes another social anxiety that Michael feels he must rectify. It is necessary to assess and deconstruct the scenes with Michael Myers and Laurie Strode's friends in order to appreciate the motivations behind the character relationship between Myers and Strode.

Figure 1: Laurie, Annie, and Lynda.

Once Laurie has left school and is walking home with her friends, Lynda and Annie, Michael continues his fixation and follows them home. As the three teenage girls discuss their plans for that Halloween night, spectators see how the girls' gender is performed. As fashion became more androgynous and slasher films featuring more masculine women grew in popularity, gender became increasingly flexible and less rigid of a construction. Jamie Lee Curtis' portrayal of Laurie Strode featured a Final Girl who opted for androgynous clothing, namely jeans. Combined with a mostly male audience turned the Final Girl into a character that

male viewers related to. The Final Girl is not simply a female heroine. She is "a hero, who rises to the occasion and defeats the adversary with his own wit and hands." (Clover 59) Her clothing affords her mobility, both physically and within her gender.

Laurie's outfit, shown in Figure 1, is coded as feminine while Lynda and Annie are both wearing jeans. Their outfits are more in line with the youth of the seventies and break away from the gender performative fashion of the fifties. The choices of costuming in this scene reflect the differences between the older generations and the younger ones influenced by sexual liberation and second-wave feminism. Lynda and Annie dress more modern in ways that show off their figure as they speak about potential sexual exploits that evening. Laurie, in her feminine garb, makes no comments about a possible sexual interaction. She only speaks about her babysitting duties that evening. In contrast, Lynda directly makes a comment about "[getting] out of taking my little brother trick or treating" so she can meet up with her boyfriend and presumably engage in sexual behavior. (*Halloween* 00:23:23-00:23:26) Immediately after, Annie and Laurie spot Michael Myers watching them from behind a hedge. Instead of performing a more feminine, victim role, Annie shouts at Michael, approaches him, and calls him a "creep." (*Halloween* 00:24:03-00:24:05) Her forward behavior and teasing nature toward Laurie marks her as an aggressive and inflammatory character to the audience that still hold pre-second-wave feminism values, and it can be assumed that her actions are what put her under Michael Myers' patriarchal and homicidal radar. As the film goes on, we see Laurie start to engage in behavior that aligns more with seventies youth than the fifties' ideals. As she spends screen time with Annie, she smokes and changes her outfit to one similar to Lynda's and Annie's, favoring jeans. Michael Myers witnesses this change in Laurie's gender performativity whilst following them in a stolen car, and it is here when his obsession with Laurie grows.

2.6 THE GENDER PERFORMATIVITY OF LAURIE STRODE AND CO.

In the reveal of Laurie's character complexity lies the social anxiety with which Michael has a hard time contending or understanding. Laurie, when we are first introduced to her, is seemingly a flat, static female character who performs her gender in ways that align with gender hegemony. She wears feminine coded clothing. However, as audiences continue to watch her on screen, we see that she is more complex than the simple domestic female main character she appears to be. There are different sides to Laurie that manifest in ways that create tension within Myers. By showing a more dynamic woman that possesses many sides in a slasher film, it sets up the possibility of confusion in those who strictly abide by social conventions. Confusion has the ability to grow into a larger anxiety. With anxiety comes a need to rectify that tension. As the film demonstrates the power of showing Myer's exact point of view, society can look at Michael Myers as the one to address the social discrepancy on screen.

In a scene that follows, Michael is outside of Annie's house listening in and watching her. In a similar way to Laurie, Anne is placed into a subjective spectacle view. After getting her clothes dirty while cooking, Annie takes off her top, and the audience sees her bare back. While there is no full-frontal chest shot, this small snippet still shows Annie in an eroticized point of view. She undressed in the lit kitchen in front of an open window where Michael Myers is watching in his trademark voyeuristic fashion. As Annie throws on a button-down shirt that appears to belong to a man, Michael, in a fit of childish rage, pulls down on a hanging potted plant. It crashes to the ground outside, and before Annie can look over to see what made the sound, Myers has already left.

Spectators who have identified with Michael Myers' fifties idealism can guess what will happen next based on his actions toward his sister at the film's start. The primary urge that

Myers focuses on is sexual desire. To see a female character who is not doing anything explicitly or graphically sexual in nature and to react the way he does, Myers is viewing Annie through a 1950s lens. In his mind, Annie should not have been semi-nude in the full view of whomever may be passing by as he appears to equate nudity with promiscuity. The sexuality of characters and their comfort regarding their own bodies, particularly those who identify as female, irritate and enrage him. This is evident by his murder of his own sister and by his outburst when Annie undresses in the kitchen light in front of open windows. Later on, Annie begins to wash the clothes she dirtied, and spectators see her perform a feminine-coded chore. When Michael watches her from the other side of the door, he does not attack her or have any sort of outburst as he did in an earlier scene. It is because she is performing gender in a non-anxious way. Myers locks Annie in the laundry room to keep her in this household position and away from sexual temptation. He physically imposes his older values on Annie by trapping her in a domestic space. When Annie finds her way out of the laundry room, she makes plans with her boyfriend to hook up and asks Laurie to watch Lindsey as well as the child she is already baby-sitting. In shirking her domesticity and leaving the household, Myers murders Annie for not adhering to socially established gender norms.

2.7 PROMISCUITY VS. DOMESTICITY

As an overall juxtaposing character, the film shoots to Laurie, who is babysitting a young boy and watching *The Thing*, a film from the early fifties directed by Howard Hawks. This editing shows the opposition between Laurie Strode and Annie. Annie was not in the same room as the child she was babysitting, Lindsey. Laurie is on the couch, firmly sat in domesticity, watching a film that nostalgic audiences would have recognized. In this scene, Laurie should not

be causing any anxiety within Michael Myers or the audience based on her behavior. She engages in activities that the child would be interested in on Halloween night, such as carving pumpkins. When Annie arrives to ask Laurie to babysit both children so she can meet up with her boyfriend, Laurie is in the kitchen with a towel over her shoulder and an apron around her waist. Fashioned as a housewife from the fifties, the audience distinguishes Laurie's actions with Annie's. At this point in the film, Laurie is not yet the target of Myers' homicidal patriarchal rage. Instead, Myers follows Annie and murders her in her car, dealing out a physical form of moral punishment for transgressing the social line of her gender.

As Michael Myers continues his slasher reign through the film, Dr. Loomis has been trying to find Michael Myers after his escape. He remarks to a Haddonfield police officer that he "watched him for fifteen years, sitting in a room, staring at a wall, not seeing the wall, looking past the wall, looking at this night, inhumanly patient. Waiting for some secret silent alarm to trigger him off." (*Halloween* 00:57:32-00:00:57:50) As a film antagonist that was born out of 1950s values, Michael's trigger came in the form of his feelings of patriarchal superiority culminating in urges to dole out physical punishment to those he considered to be sexually transgressive. Michael embarked on a mission of fifties morals that directly appealed to the conservative populations in America at the time of the film's release.

In a true performance as a slasher, Michael Myers turns toward another teenager in the film. His sense of superiority grew after murdering Annie. Laurie's other friend, Lynda, was tasked with taking her younger brother trick-or-treating. Instead, the film cuts to her and her boyfriend drinking while driving and making plans to have sex that evening. In showing the pair immediately inebriated whilst driving a motor vehicle signals to the audience that these characters behave in a far more debaucherously manner than Annie. Soon after they arrive at the

house where Annie is supposed to be babysitting, they have sex where Michael waits and watches. By this point in the film, the audience expects that Michael is lurking nearby, observing in his panoptical way. Similar to Michael's sister, Lynda and her boyfriend have sex in a room that is not theirs. As Lynda's boyfriend leaves the room after their sexual tryst, he finds himself locked in just as Annie had been. Myers comes out of a closet and kills Bob, Lynda's boyfriend, by stabbing him and pinning him to the wall. In doing so, he elevates Bob in a higher position on the wall that affords Bob's corpse the ability to observe just as Myers does.

Interestingly, Michael appears to escalate his own behaviors. For the first time in the film, Michael Myers wears a sheet over his head with Bob's glasses and pretends to be Lynda's boyfriend as he walks over to kill her as well. For the entirety of the film, the film places the audience in the point of view of Michael, possessing an observing slasher's point of view. Here, Michael is inhabiting a different persona. This action does not fall in line with the typical behavior the audience has seen thus far. Lynda sits up in bed, and the sheets fall down, revealing her bare chest. She does not truly know that it is Bob under the sheet. Her promiscuity enrages Myers, and he starts to choke her. In a struggle, she tries to call Laurie. Myers kills Lynda in the same fashion that he kills Annie. Strangulation, often seen as a crime of passion, is reserved for the female characters in this movie, except for his sister, Judith. A crime of passion, as defined by The Legal Information Institute at Cornell Law School, "is a crime committed in the 'heat of passion' in response to provocation, as opposed to one that was premeditated or deliberated." ("Crime of Passion") Myers kills these women only after they engage in behavior he does not like. His murders are not planned out to a meticulous degree. Instead, Myers murders impulsively. The contradiction between Bob's death and most of the women in this film suggest that Michael is holding a double standard of murder methods that stem from his own sexist

upbringing. With Bob, he resorted to stabbing, a more violent, bloody mode. When murdering the women in this film, Myers chose strangulation, suggesting that there is a highly emotional, even sexual, reaction that Michael is having toward these women. It explains why he reserved stabbing for his own sister as opposed to strangulation. As Michael continues to kill, the audience members can recognize the differences in how Michael murders his victims.

Laurie, after growing suspicious at the sudden disappearances of her friends, heads over to the house where Annie and Lynda supposedly were. Dressed in a masculine-presenting outfit of a button-down and jeans, Laurie heads upstairs where she discovers Annie's body laid out on the bed with a headstone that reads "Our Beloved Daughter, Judith Myers." (*Halloween* 01:15:41 01:15:55) Michael, for the first time that the audience sees, has manipulated a body post-death. While Lynda's actions were more in line with Judith's prior to her death, Michael chose Annie to represent his late sister. A seventies audience may have been questioning Myers' motives at this point. If one were to analyze the anxieties caused by Laurie, Annie, and Lynda, a viewer expects to see Michael Myers place Lynda in this position as her actions closely resembled his sister's. Is there another reason why Myers would choose Annie for this placement? The answer in how Annie performs her gender. In contrast to Lynda's appearance, Annie aligns more so with Laurie's representation of gender. Both are tomboy-ish in nature and favor shorter hair and jeans. When Annie spilled food on her clothing in an earlier scene, she chose to wear a men's shirt while she cleaned her clothes. The combination of her gender performativity along with her socially deemed promiscuous behavior prove to be highly motivating for Myers, as evidenced by her murder and subsequent body placement.

2.8 LAURIE STRODE'S ROLE REVERSAL

While Laurie's actions in this scene suggest a 'good girl' persona, her gender performativity is still causing tension for Myers. As she views her dead friends, she displays grief as Michael watches her from behind. His obsession with Laurie and her performativity reaches a high point as he finally makes a move toward her. In the growing climax of the movie, Myers chases Laurie extensively, trying to stab her as he did with Bob. By trying to stab Laurie instead of strangling her to death as he did to her friends, this proves that he sees her performativity as too masculine. Her masculinity causes too much anxiety for Myers. While an audience is supposed to identify with Laurie as she is the main character, her screen time has not been very high throughout the film. The film up until this point has focused solely on Myers and his victims. By changing the camera shots and showing Laurie as subject instead of as object, the path to the film's climax is centered solely around Laurie. The audience is no longer placed into the point of view of Michael and the male gaze. Instead, audience goers must now reconcile with Laurie's role as the Final Girl.

Interestingly, as Michael tries to stab Laurie, she too picks up another phallic shape and stabs Michael in the neck. This role reversal affirms Laurie's more masculine representation and gives her more agency through the film's last scenes. Her character portrayal evolved from the beginning of the film where she embodied the fifties ideals and values to the end where she represents a seventies youth. Her actions while being stalked and attacked by Michael Myers are indicative of someone with agency, a role largely left to males both in fictional stories in film as well as society at large. She is able to keep Lindsey and Tommy safe, cementing her domestic, maternal side, while she pretends to have escaped by opening a door that leads to the outside. As she hides in a closet, hoping that Michael will follow the fake path outside, Laurie demonstrates

a knowledge that few female characters have been shown to have in films like these. However, Michael is able to see through Laurie's ruse and breaks down the closet where she is hiding. In the midst of panic, Laurie has the mind to grab a wire hanger from above and quickly fashion it into a weapon as Michael is beating down the door. In her role, she exhibits an ability to exert autonomy and stabs Myers face once more with a now-phallic-looking object. She also takes Michael's knife from him and stabs him with it. This does not kill Michael. Instead, he resorts to an attempt at strangulation, a method of murder he reserved for Annie and Lynda. By using both stabbing and strangulation techniques with Laurie, he is demonstrating to the audience her complexity as a character and the complexity of gender performativity. Laurie's conduct, while in line with a younger seventies' generation, proves to incite tension within an older audience by way of Michael Myers' slasher persona. Be that as it may, Myers is only able to function as an unknown assailant because he has remained masked. When Myers tries to strangle Laurie and she pulls his mask off, his ability to move about the film as "The Shape" is hindered.

Figure 2: *Halloween* 1978 Movie Poster.

As mentioned, Myers has been able to function as a slasher due to a combination of factors. He had to have been masked in order to achieve an 'everyman' appearance. Indeed, even the original movie poster, as shown in Figure 2, indicates a level of anonymity until he is unmasked. The new specificity to his character profile forces the audience to view Myers through a new gaze, but he is still very much "The Shape" as his bodily size and physicality has not changed. His face is somewhat deformed, and this places Michael into a role for younger audiences with which to view him. A younger audience, while more familiar and comfortable with changing attitudes regarding sexual liberation, would have included a diverse range of morals and beliefs.

Those who agreed with sexual liberation and second-wave feminism would have found Michael's character as monstrous and indicative of a bygone era. For those in the audience who still held on fervently to their older beliefs about sexuality, Myers represents something different. He places the mask back on seconds after Laurie unmasks him. Despite the change in appearance, Myers still embodies a fifties nostalgia through his character. He did not kill every person he came across just for the sake of killing them. His motives are set in the beginning of the film with the murder of his sister. He did not harm children, and it can be assumed that his motives rest with "promiscuous" teenage women as that is who he was shown to be obsessed with. As the movie ends with Dr. Loomis, a male doctor who was familiar with Michael and his impulses, shooting him five times, Michael falls out of a second-story window. While most people who have been shot and fall from that height are presumed to be dead, Michael's character does not suggest such a thing to an audience who has viewed his character thus far. Seconds after falling to his supposed death, Michael Myers has vanished. In his ability to survive being shot, falling from a second-story height, and walking off-screen within seconds, Michael

Myers has reclaimed and solidified his character as a founding slasher in the horror subgenre. The repairment of his function as a slasher allows for subsequent slasher films to feature a similar character that resembles “The Shape.” Additionally, the trajectory of the Final Girl from its inception in Laurie Strode continues to rise as the slasher subgenre spills over to the 1980s.