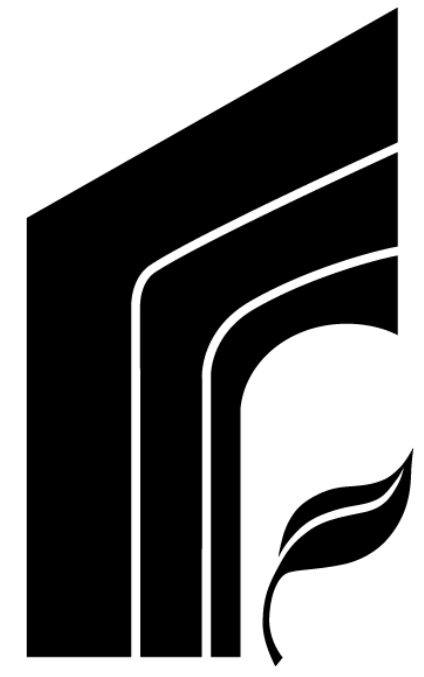
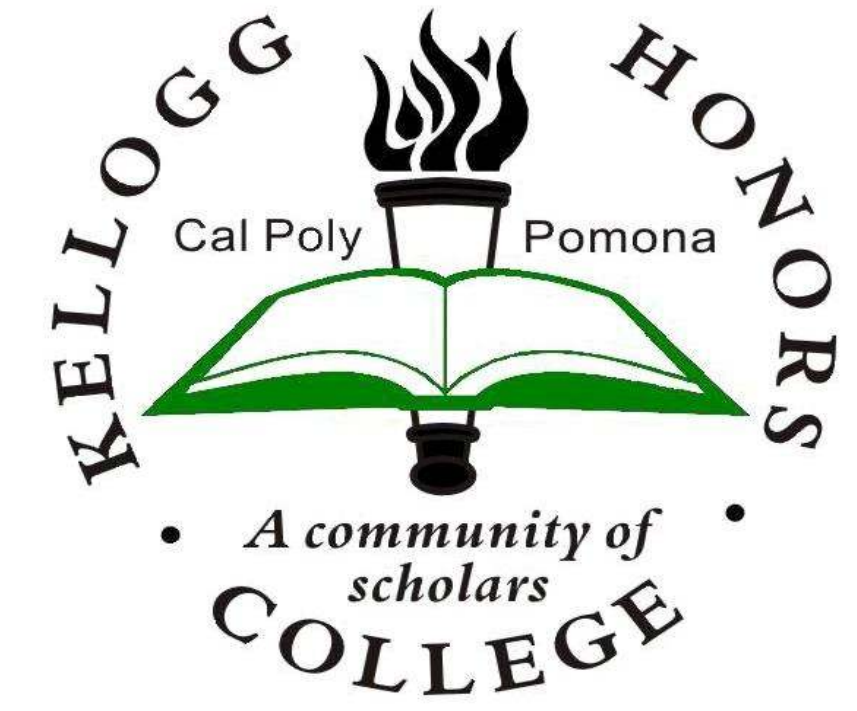


Women in Horror: From Running for Cover to Holding the Hatchet



Wendy Martinez, Communication
Mentor: Dr. Jane Ballinger
Kellogg Honors College Capstone Project



Literature Review

Based on the research I have completed, there is strong evidence of the betterment of women's place in the film industry. This is not to say they are not dramatically underrepresented in terms of numbers and types of roles compared to men in the industry. Men outnumber women both in front and behind the camera. According to my research for every 15 males directors for a feature film there is one female director. The cause for this cannot be directly determined without further research but many academics believe the fact that heads of studio are male may have something to do with the discrepancy in numbers. Additionally, research showed that the higher number of females behind the scenes as directors, writers, and producers correlate to a higher number of females in films.

In terms of female roles, women largely have been and continue to be limited in terms of age, are defined by their relationship with a males, and are generally one dimensional. Most female characters are between the ages of 20 and 40 years old, are sexualized different ways, and fall into the categories of sidekick or supporter of a male protagonist. As a means to speak out against these stereotypical portrayals of women in film, Alison Bechdel created the Bechdel Test in 1985 as part of a running comic strip. The Bechdel test uses simple criteria to point out the low bar set female characters in film.

The horror genre is slowly making its way closer to equality both in front and behind the camera. With the creation of female centered festivals and new scripts being written from female perspectives. Females in horror films have evolved from having little chance of surviving the story to driving the plot and emerging victorious. Early horror films feature strong male protagonists and female characters who are physically abused, sexualized and objectified, or simply ignored. Over the years, female roles in horror have developed into strong, independent, intelligent, and complex female characters, including the evolution of the Final Girl archetype.



Abstract

Since film began, women have played a secondary role to their male counterparts both on and off screen. The objective of this research paper is to identify and analyze the shortcomings of women's representations in the film industry both numerically and in role variety, with special attention given to what could be considered the most developed genre for women, the horror genre. Additionally, the Bechdel test and other relevant criteria are used to test three movies from the horror genre to provide a brief overview of the r of the genre's steady evolution pertaining to female roles.

Through literary research, this project gives a general analysis of women in film, women in horror film, and the Bechdel test. The Bechdel test uses these three simple criterion to evaluate film: (1) There must be at least two named female characters (2) who talk to each other (3) about something other than a man. Using this test as a jumping off point, the project's analyzes three horror movies [*Evil Dead* (1981), *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), and *the Descent* (2005)] corroborated the results of literary research indicating a positive trend for women's presence in horror film. The goal of this research project is to inform readers of women's progress in the horror genre, and the hurdles they still face today.

Analysis

Using the Bechdel Test and other relevant criteria I chose to analyze three movies based on their rating from the bechdeltest.com in order to show the evolution of the genre, as well as exemplify what each rating can reflect about the movies as a whole.

The Bechdel Test

Other Criteria

The Rules

1. There must be at least two named female characters
2. Who talk to each other
3. About something other than a man

The Points

1. Hypersexualization/ Sexual exploitation
2. Unnecessary physical abuse
3. Misogynistic language or behavior

Movie

Evil Dead
(1980)

A Nightmare on Elm Street
(1984)

The Descent
(2005)

Bechdel
Rating

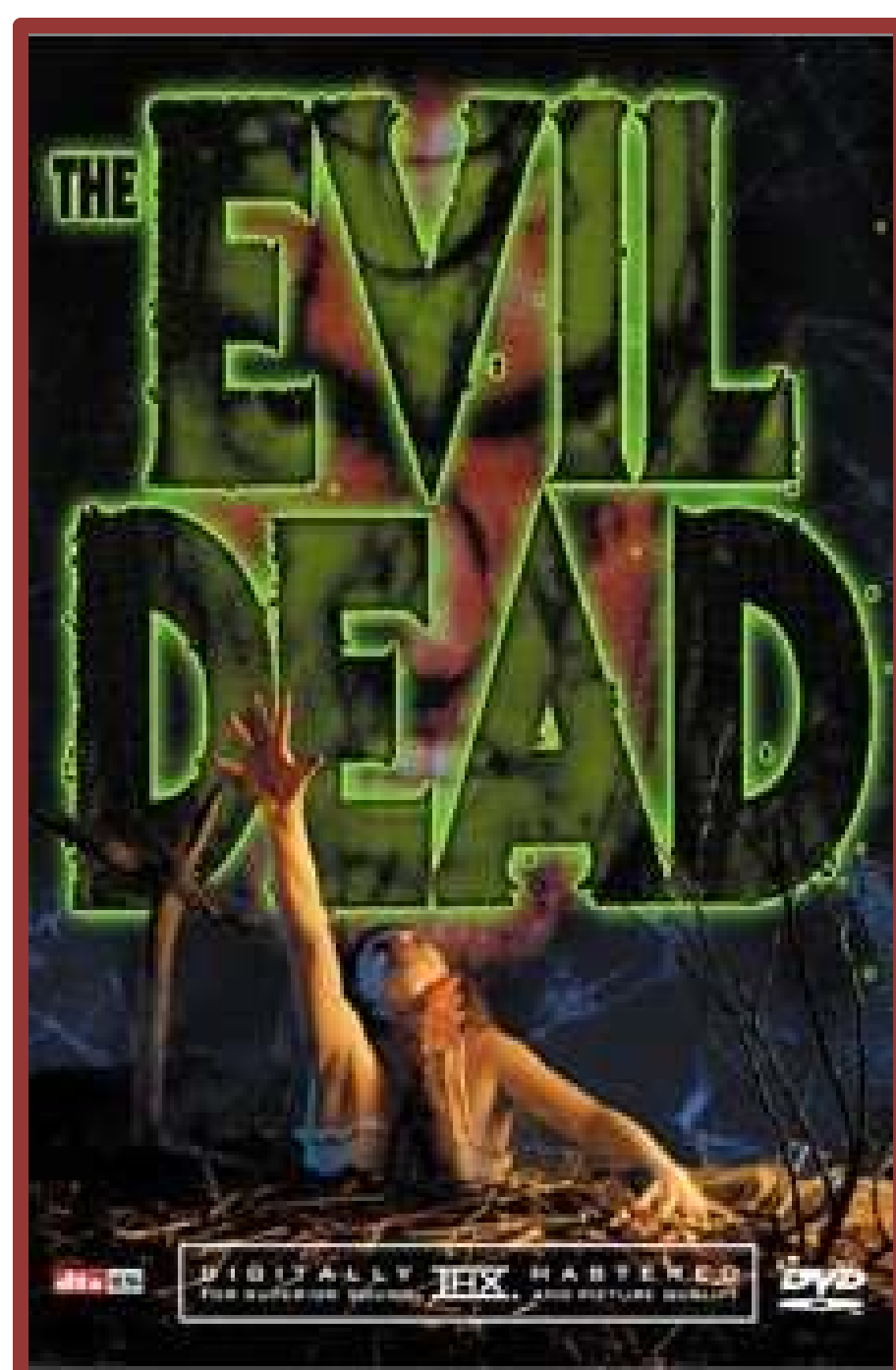
1

2



The Final Girl Archetype

The Final Girl archetype is a character seen in most horror films, slasher films. First identified by Carol J. Clover in her 1992 book *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, the Final Girl is the last female character left alive in the film to escape or defeat the killer. Over the years the Final Girl has developed from the female character who merely escapes with her life after a tough fight against the killer, such as Sally Hardesty in *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), to being well equipped in offensive and defensive tactics as she brings the fight to the killers, such as Erin in *You're Next* (2011)



Evil Dead

Evil Dead is a horror classic that fails the test miserably. Although it does pass rule one by including two named female characters, it doesn't go further than that. Of the three female characters none of them address each other in one on one conversation, unless you count interaction once they have already been possessed. Because the demon is never given a gender, I did not let this qualify as female interaction. Additionally, all of the female characters are physically abused to a further extreme and for lengthier

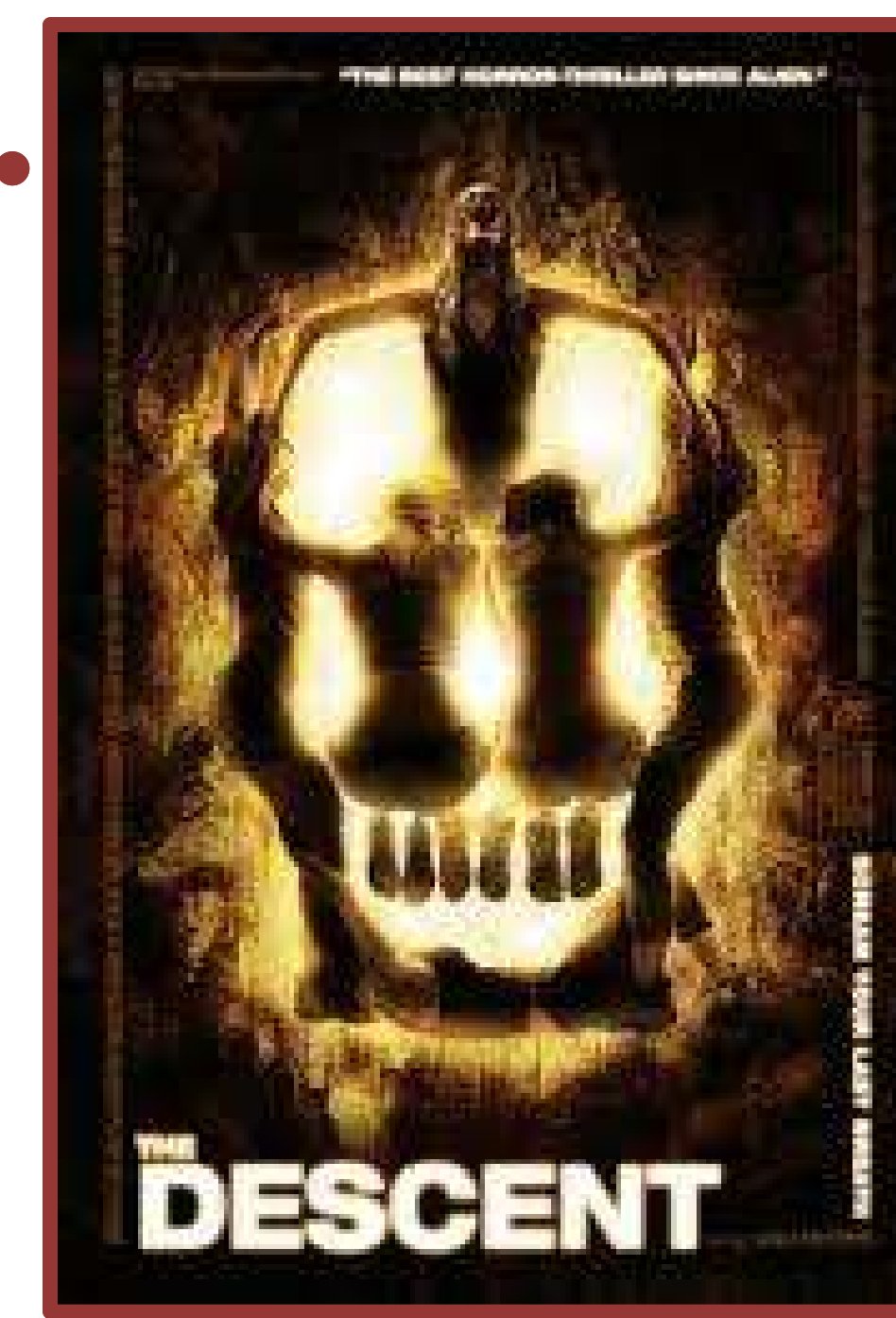
period of time than their male counterparts. Sexual exploitation in this film come in the form of gratuitous rape. In this case it is particularly grotesque as the female is assaulted by a possessed tree.



A Nightmare on Elm Street

A Nightmare on Elm Street is another horror class that passes two stages of the Bechdel test. There are two named female character who speak to each other. Unfortunately, the females in the films only talk about Freddy or the subject matter surrounding him. There is no talk about the female characters other problems, their schooling, their careers, or their relationships with each other. Instead, they speak about their relationships with their significant male others, male friends, or Nancy's father. Some progress in the genre is show by Nancy herself.

Nancy plays the role of the resilient "Final Girl." Despite being terrorized by Freddy, she decides to take her destiny into her own hands and temporarily defeats him.



The Descent

The Descent is one of the most talked about horror films in the last few years. It passes all three stages of the Bechdel test. There are six named female characters who talk to each other about everything: their careers, academic, relationships, and and sports. The female characters are not sexualized, suffer extreme physical abuse, or are subject to misogyny. Although the characters do suffer from physical injuries, there are no lingering shots that drag up their bodies or unnecessary removal of clothing. All of the

Characters in a way play the role of the strong "Final Girl". They are all smart, strong, capable. and due to the athletic nature of the cave diving, somewhat stripped of their femininity.

Conclusion

Through my research and own analysis, I have found a strong positive trend for women in cinema, but particularly the representations of women in the horror genre. The victimization of female characters in the slasher movies of in horror movies and general lack of presence has given way to strong, three dimensional female characters who bring about the downfall of the monsters in their respective films. This research project scratched the surface of the issue of females in horror films, and females in cinema in general. With the social barriers for women slowly crumbling, it is likely that their representation in front of and behind the camera will swell in numbers and develop in complexity.