How to Die in a Slasher Film:

The Impact of Sexualization, Strength, and Flaws on Characters' Mortality

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Abstract

Popular culture has often referenced formulaic ways to predict a character's fate in slasher films. The cliché rules have noted only virgins live, black characters die first, and drinking and drugs nearly guarantee your death, but to what extent do characters' basic demographics and portrayal determine whether a character lives or dies? A content analysis of forty-eight of the most influential slasher films from the 1960s – 2010s was conducted to measure factors related to character mortality. From these films, gender, race, sexualization (measured via specific acts and total sexualization), strength, and flaws were coded for 504 non killer characters. Results indicate that the factors predicting death vary by gender. For male characters, those appearing weak in terms of physical strength or courage and those males who appeared morally flawed were more likely to die than males that were strong and morally sound. Predictors of death for female characters included strength and the presence of sexual behavior (including dress, flirtatious attitude, foreplay/sex, nudity, and total sexualization). The cultural and social relevance of these films and their portrayals of characters in terms of value and mortality are discussed within.

Introduction

Slasher films by nature are grounded in the concepts of maniacs and gore, fulfilling the audience's desensitized need for a graphic, quick thrill (Keisner, 2008). They have gained popularity for their inclusion of gruesome special effects, extreme violence, and often categorized by sex and sexualization of characters (Keisner, 2008; Rockof, 2002). Based on their formulaic nature (Menard, Weaver, & Cabrera, 2019; Normanton 2012; Rockof 2002), part of the viewing experience for fans has become guessing which characters will live and which characters will die (Mendard, et al., 2019).

The media and various films have referenced methods to survive a horror/slasher film. According to Townsend (2011), there are ten simple rules to follow if you want to live. These rules include:

1. Don't Ever Investigate or Say You'll "Be Right Back"
2. Turn Around, Because It's Always Behind You
3. Never Watch a Horror Movie When You're in One
4. Make Sure Your Car is Always in Perfect Working Order
5. Don't Ever Split Up
6. When Haunted, Just Move Out of the Damn House
7. Wear Comfortable Shoes
8. Avoid Proms and All Other High School Parties
9. Always Assume Your Attacker is Still Alive
10. Keep Your Pants On

Likewise, the *Scream* franchise has its characters reference these so-called 'rules' of slasher films and survival. At a party in the film *Scream* (Konrad, Woods, & Craven, 1996), Randy explains that if you want to survive, you should never have sex, drink or do drugs, or say "I'll be right back." In *Scream 2* (Konrad, Maddalena, & Craven, 1997), new rules are added for slasher sequels. To successfully execute a sequel, the body count has to be bigger than the first movie, scenes must be gorier and deaths more elaborate, and one should never assume that the killer is dead. By *Scream 3* (Konrad, Williamson, Maddalena, & Craven, 2000), fans can add the fact that even the main character can die and the killers have to be superhuman and nearly impossible to kill, having to basically "cryogenically freeze his head, decapitate him, or blow him up." A recognition that past sins will come back and haunt you and that you should never be alone are also added. The list continues to grow in *Scream 4* (Craven, Labunka, & Williamson, 2011), with the ominous warning, "don't fuck with the original." Throughout the film new rules call for death scenes to be even more intense, note the killer should include technology as part of the plot, there must be an opening sequence, and the unexpected is the latest cliché. Even more so, virgins can now die. With the recognition that that once off-limits good girl character can die, Charlie Walker states: "Modern audiences get sappy to the rules of the original. So, the reverse has become the new standard. In fact, the only sure-fire way to survive a modern horror movie, you pretty much gotta be gay." The characters banter that they are hopeful nudity will make its way back into the films.

Regardless of the "rules" portrayed in scary movies, what variables truly make a character more vulnerable to dying in a slasher film? The current study measures the mortality of characters in the 48 most influential slasher films from 1960-2018 to measure the impact of their role, sexualization, flaws, and demographic factors on whether they live or die. Mortality in slasher films, a comparison to true crime statistics, and the social/cultural impact and meaning of such portrayals are discussed within.

Literature Review

Despite fans' belief that there is a prescription for dying in scary movies, few researchers have explored factors that influence mortality in slasher films. Findings on significant factors predicting characters' fate have varied across studies. It is often stated that women in horror films are abused, sexualized and tortured more than men (Cowan & O'Brien, 1990, Donnerstein, Linz, & Penrod, 1987; Welsh, 2010), that the virgins live (Clover, 1992; Weaver et al., 2015), and that minority characters are killed more often and more violently (Barone, 2016; Benshoff, 2000; Coleman, 2001), but scholars do not agree on the reality of these urban legends. Sapolsky et al. (2003), for example, found that male characters were more likely to be the victims of violence and to be exposed to greater violence and graphic torture than female characters. Welsh (2009) contradicted these findings, noting that women were more likely to be brutalized in a violent act, subjected to psychological torture, and confined.

Cowan and O'Brien (1990) conducted a content analysis of 56 slasher films. Their findings on gender were in direct contrast to scholars who state that women are killed and brutalized more than men (ex. Donnerstein, Linz, & Penrod, 1987). In fact, they found that women are less likely to die in slasher films, a finding consistent with Sapolsky et al. (2003). They argue that characteristics of each gender do, however, play a role in a character's fate. Sex and slasher films are an innate pairing, and Cowan and O'Brien (1990) found that 33-35% of victims killed were sexualized or engaging in sex prior to their death. Women who died in the films were sexualized at higher rates than female characters who lived and male characters that died. Female survivors were often the good girls and portrayed as strong characters. Similarly, Welsh (2010) found that sexualized women were more likely to die and to be tortured for longer periods during their death compared to female characters that were not sexualized. Cowan & O'Brien (1990) also found common predictors of death for male characters. For men in slasher films, traits such as character flaws and strength were significant indicators of survival or death. Egotistical or cocky men who exhibited strength were more likely to die than those who were less "masculine."

Even sexualization has been debated in terms of mortality. In an analysis of the top 30 slasher films from 1980-2010 (Ménard, Weaver, & Cabrera, 2019) found little support for traditional arguments about these films, noting that gender was not a significant predictor of death. In their analysis, virginal characters and minority characters were not more likely to die. Instead, they found that characters shown nude on screen, who dressed in a sexualized fashion, who didn't fight the killer, and who exhibited character flaws were most likely to die. Sapolsky, et al. (2003), however, found that there was no significant relationship between depiction of sexual imagery and violence.

Many roles within the slasher formula potentially influence the characters' fate. The role of the "Final Girl" includes the valuable female who uses her intelligence, curiosity and vigilance to survive. She is often the character left to tell the horrific tale. Compared to the "Vamp" character, who is highly sexualized and often lethal herself and to the "whore," who is sexually active and often dies, "Final Girls" are often presented as physically attractive yet androgynous, not sexually active and more prosocial (Clover, 1992; Weaver et al., 2015).

The impact of race in horror films is difficult to measure. A problem across all genres of Hollywood (Lauzen, 2020), minority characters are rarely featured in slasher and horror films (Barone, 2016). Given that horror films historically have been created by and for whites (Coleman, 2011), when minorities are featured in these films, they tend to be the monster, villain or violent madman (Benshoff, 2000; Coleman, 2001). Despite the belief that these characters also die first, some have found this not to be the case, noting that not only do they not die first but that in many instances they do not die at all (Benshoff, 2000). Barone (2016) agreed they are likely not the first to die but argues that minority characters are at a larger risk of death at some point in the film.

The current paper presents data from 48 of the most influential slasher films from 1960-2015, measuring factors that influence the fate of the characters within. Gender, race, sexualization, and flawed characteristics, along with character roles are explored.

Methodology

Film Sample Frame

To develop the most inclusive and influential sample of films, a sample frame was compiled from 13 lists of best, top, most influential slasher films (Barone, 2017; Bonner & Tannenbaum, 2019; Esquire Editors, 2018; Gursky, 2016; Harris, 2019; Murrian, 2021; Navarro, 2018; Ranker, 2018; Ricard, 2019; Top Ten, 2019; Vorel, 2020; Wales, 2014; Wilson, 2017). A comprehensive list of the various titles appearing within the top 30 films in each article was developed. The list was extensive as the ratings of slasher films widely varied across sources due to the subjective nature of these lists and the debate as to what constitutes a slasher film. For each of the 91 films, researchers noted how many of the "top lists" they appeared on and what their ranking were on each of these lists.

Film Sample

Two primary criteria were used to narrow down the sample frame of 91 films. First, any film that received a top 10 recognition on any of the lists used to generate the frame was included in the sample. Second, any film that was identified on at least 7 of the 13 lists was also included. In doing this, we derived 42 films that met one or both of our criteria and which were targets for analysis; a secondary and tertiary selection processes supplemented our first.

While most decades were adequately represented in our sample, 2010s and 1960s had less than 5. For the 1960s, no other films from the 60s existed on the "top lists" we used for the sampling frame. This being the case, we used a ranking of slasher films made specifically in the 1960s to complete our sample (Ranker, 2018), adding two films to the sample to bring the number of films from the 1960s to five. For the 2010s, we added the top 4 next highest-ranking films from this decade on the original "top" lists to bring the total number of films to five. Given these additions, a "most influential list" of 48 films became the sample for this content analysis. See Table 1.1. for the complete sample film list.

Table 1.1. Complete Sample Film List by Title and Year

Film Title	Year	Film Title	Year
Peeping Tom	1960	Tenebrae	1982
Psycho	1960	Sleepaway Camp	1983
Blood Feast*	1963	A Nightmare on Elm Street	1984
Dementia 13*	1963	Friday the 13th: killer cut- Part 4	1984
Blood and Black Lace	1964	Friday the 13th Part 6: Jason Lives	1986
A Bay of Blood	1971	A Nightmare on Elm Street 3	1987
Torso	1973	The Stepfather	1987
Black Christmas	1974	Child's Play	1988
Texas Chainsaw Massacre	1974	Evil Dead Trap	1988
Deep Red	1975	Silence of the Lambs	1991
Alice Sweet Alice	1976	Candyman	1992

The Hills Have Eyes	1977	*Scream*	1996
Halloween	1978	*I Know What You Did Last Summer*	1997
Alien	1979	*Scream 2*	1998
Friday the 13th	1980	*Final Destination*	2000
Maniac	1980	*Texas Chainsaw Massacre- Remake*	2003
Prom Night	1980	*Freddy v Jason*	2003
The Burning	1981	*Saw*	2004
The Prowler	1981	*Behind the Mask: The Rise of Leslie Vernon*	2006
My Bloody Valentine	1981	*You're Next*	2011
Friday the 13th Part 2	1981	*Scream 4**	2011
The Funhouse	1981	*Silent Night**	2012
Halloween 3	1982	*Cabin in the Woods**	2012
Alone In The Dark	1982	*Suspiria**	2018

* = Movie not in original list. Added as the result of being listed as a top slasher film in a given decade to provide a minimum of 5 films per decade

It should be noted, the purpose of this paper is not to provide clear conceptualization to the definition of "slasher film." Therefore, all definitions of the genre and all of the subjective evaluations of any film were given equal credence in attempting to generate a sample from our frame and for our analysis. This debate is what motivated the researchers to utilize a large sampling frame to select the films included for analysis to encompass the various ways in which "slasher films" are categorized. The current research focuses on the formulaic content of these films as defined as a "slasher film" by popular culture and is not designed to provide a narrow, specific definition of what constitutes classification into this category of film.

Procedure

Prior to the assessment of films, the researchers established a list of variables to measure within the films. Each construct was carefully operationalized (see operationalization). the operationalization of each of the identified constructs was thoroughly discussed and elaborated by the research team. A sub-sample of the films of interest was used to develop and identify the needed constructs and for use in piloting the applied definitions. These initial definitions were used to independently code the subset of films. Upon this preliminary screening, further discussions of operationalization led to the development of a master code sheet that allowed each film to be coded by character for the identified variables. Using the master code sheet, the first 6 films were coded simultaneously by researchers to ensure consistency and agreement. Comparing the datasets, no variables had a Cronbach's alpha less than our standard of .80. The variables averaged a Cronbach's alpha = 0.91, indicating high internal consistency and reliability among the researchers' coding (Krippendorff, 2018). A content analysis was then performed on the complete film sample, limiting each researcher to a maximum of two films in a single sitting to prevent fatigue.

Unit of Analysis

The individual characters coded are the units of analysis in this study. To be included as a character, the character needed to meet the following criteria: 1) Any character who had singular contact with the killer was included, unless the "contact" occurred in a mass/crowd where the character was deemed insignificant as a solo character, 2) Any character who did not have singular contact with the killer but appeared in more than one

scene with a talking part was also included. The significance of the role placed the character at risk of becoming a victim, and 3) Any character who was the killer in the film. In total, across the 48 films that were used for investigation, 578 characters were identified and coded.

Measures and Operationalization

In total, 9 specific constructs were assessed for analysis. While three of these constructs were relatively obvious in their assessment (Race, Gender, Killer/Nonkiller), six of the constructs merit full elaboration. These include: 1) Sexualization; 2) Strength/courage in relation to slasher; 3) Personal fate in relation to the slasher; 4) Personal flaws; 5) Brutalization; and 6) Impact on the fate of the slasher.

Sexualization was coded in two ways: individual acts and total sexualization. First, four types of sexualization were coded as present or absent, including sexualized dress (revealing clothes, swimwear), sexual attitude (discussions of sex and attempts to engage in it), participation in sex/foreplay (manifest sexual behavior including kissing passionately and fondling) and nudity (buttocks, chest [men or women] or genitals). These individual measures were then summed to create a "total sexualization" score for each character, ranging from 0 (no presence of sexualization across the four measures) to 4 (all sexualization measures present).

The way a character exuded courage and strength in relation to the immediate threat was coded as strong, weak, or neither. In other words, how they reacted in vital scenes in the movie and not general characteristics or backstories were used to evaluate their strength. Strong characters tended to lead threatened groups, attack the attacker and sacrifice themselves for others. There is clear indication of purpose and plan in their behaviors. Weak characters are prone to hysterics, tend to yield themselves to the attacker and run from danger leaving others to fend for themselves. Those coded as "neither" showed no clear inclination in purpose in relation to dealing with their situation, the attacker, or group safety.

A character's personal fate in relation to the slasher/killer was coded as either lived or died. It is important to note that it was only the character's actual outcome that was used for analysis. Several of the films had dreams sequences or character premonitions that were acted out in the film but were fictional in the contexts the story's depicted world. These were ignored in the analysis. Killers were also excluded from the sample.

Presence of a personal flaw was a binary assessment: present or absent. There were a variety of flaws present within the sample of character, including common flaws such as the stereotypical "mean girl" or "boorish bro, drug use or excessive alcohol consumption, criminal behavior, and marital infidelity.

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Results

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The results of the analyses are broken into three parts: the fate of all nonkiller characters, male nonkiller characters, and female nonkiller characters. First, analyses were done on all 504 characters that were not killers in the films. Characters who were coded as having "no contact" with the killer were not included in this sample. A correlation was run to establish relationships between variables. In terms of character fate, there was a significant positive association between fate and dress ($r(504) = .115$, $p = .010$), fate and attitude ($r(504) = .123$, $p = .006$), fate and sex ($r(504) = .135$, $p = .002$), fate and nudity ($r(504) = .135$, $p = .002$), fate and total sexualization ($r(504) = .157$, $p = .000$), and fate and flaws ($r(504) = .152$, $p = .001$). A significant negative association existed between fate and strength ($r(504) = -.208$, $p = .000$). The associations between fate and gender and fate and race were not significant. Full results are presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Correlation Results for All Characters

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.	Character Fate	1									
2.	Gender	-.010	1								
3.	Race	-.043	-.004	1							
4.	Dress	.115**	.416**	.005	1						
5.	Attitude	.123**	.200**	.094*	.515**	1					
6.	Sex	.135**	.156**	.018	.409**	.669**	1				
7.	Nudity	.135**	.292**	-.009	.532**	.416**	.468**	1			
8.	Sexualization	.157**	.339**	.048	.780**	.829**	.806**	.742**	1		
9.	Strength	-.208**	-.192**	-.019	.005	-.061	.004	-.083	-.040	1	
10.	Flawed	.152**	-.100*	.089*	.039	.180**	.128**	.121**	.144**	-.287**	1

** = significant p < .01; * = p < .05
Notes: Variables were coded as Fate (1 = lived; 2 = died); Gender (1 = Male; 2 = Female); Race (1 = Nonwhite; 2 = white); Dress, Attitude, Sex, Nudity, Flawed = (1 = no; 2 = yes), Sexualization (0-4 sum); Strength (1 = weak; 2 = neutral; 3 = strong)

To measure for significant differences between nonkiller characters who lived and died (N = 504; Lived = 181; Died = 323) Chi-Square Tests of Independence were performed. The relationships between fate and the four measures of sexualization were all significant. Characters who were killed were more likely than those who lived to be provocatively dressed characters, $X^2(1)= 6.642$, p = .01. Overall, 35.5% of the characters were dressed in a provocative manner, with provocative dress worn by 28.2% of characters who lived and 39.6% of characters who died. Characters who were killed were more likely than those who lived to have a flirtatious/sexual attitude, $X^2(1)= 7.680$, p = .006. Of all the characters, 35.5% had sexualized attitudes. 27.6% of the characters who lived were flirtatious, compared to 39.6% of the characters who died. Characters who died were more likely than those who lived to be engaged in foreplay/sex, $X^2(1)= 9.191$, p = .002. While 27.4% of all characters engaged in sexual foreplay or sex in the films, 19.3% of characters who lived were portrayed in this manner compared to 31.9% of characters who died. 34.7% of females were featured in a sexual act compared to 20.8% of male characters. Characters that died were more likely than those who lived to appear nude in a film, $X^2(1)= 9.138$, p = .003. Nudity was the least common of the sexualization measures in the films, with 19.2% of all characters appearing nude at least once. 12.2% of the characters who lived appeared nude, compared to 23.2% of the characters who died. Those who lived were more likely than those who died to be portrayed as strong, $X2(2) = 26.599$, p = .000. 46% of the characters were portrayed as strong, but when broken down by fate, 61.3% of the characters who lived were strong, compared to only 37.5% of the characters who died. Finally, those characters that were killed were more likely than those who lived to be portrayed as flawed, $X2(1) = 11.569$, p = .001. The differences between fate and gender and fate and race were not significant. See Table 2.2 for complete results.

Table 2.2 Chi-Square Results Measuring Character Fates of All Characters

Variables	Overall	Lived	Died	Chi Square Test of Independence
Gender				
Male	265 (52.6)	94 (51.9)	171 (52.9)	X2(1)= .047
Female	239 (47.4)	87 (48.1)	152 (47.1)	p = .828
Race				
White	475 (94.2)	173 (95.6)	302 (93.5)	X2(1)= .927
NonWhite	29 (5.8)	8 (4.4)	21 (6.5)	p = .336
Sexual Dress				
Yes	179 (35.5)	51 (28.2)	128 (39.6)	X2(1)= 6.642
No	325 (64.5)	130 (71.8)	195 (60.4)	p = .01*
Sexual Attitude				
Yes	179 (35.5)	50 (27.6)	129 (39.9)	X2(1)= 7.680
No	325 (64.5)	131 (72.4)	194 (60.1)	p = .006**
Sex/Foreplay				
Yes	138 (27.4)	35 (19.3)	103 (31.9)	X2(1)= 9.191
No	366 (72.6)	146 (80.7)	220 (68.1)	p = .002**
Nudity				
Yes	97 (19.2)	22 (12.2)	75 (23.2)	X2(1)= 9.138
No	407 (80.8)	159 (87.8)	248 (76.8)	p = .003**
Strength				
Weak	162 (32.1)	42 (23.2)	120 (37.2)	X2(2)= 26.599
Neutral	110 (21.8)	28 (15.5)	82 (25.4)	p = .000**
Strong	232 (46.0)	111 (61.3)	121 (37.5)	
Flawed				
Yes	229 (45.4)	64 (35.4)	165 (51.1)	X2(1)= 11.569
No	275 (54.6)	117 (64.6)	158 (48.9)	p = .001**

** = Significant at .01; * = Significant at .05

Results of an independent sample t-tests (see Table 2.3) indicated that there were significant differences in the mean total sexualization between characters who lived and characters that died (t(442.524) = -3.797, p = .000). The average sexualization score for characters who lived was .87 (SD = 1.211) while the average score for characters who died was .134 (SD = 1.510).

Table 2.3 Fate and Total Sexualization of All Characters

	N	M	SD	t	p
Sexualization				-3.797	.000**
Lived	181	.87	1.211		
Died	323	1.34	1.510		

** = significant .01

Parts two and three of the analysis focused on the significance of these variables when genders were isolated. Part two focuses on the 265 male characters who were not killers in the film. A Pearson's correlation was run to explore the relationships between fate and other factors for the males (see Table 2.4). There was a significant negative relationship between fate and strength ($r(265) = -.167$, $p = .006$) and a significant positive relationship between fate and flaws ($r(265) = .224$, $p = .000$). The relationship between fate and the other variables (race, dress, attitude, sex, nudity and total sexualization) were not significant.

Table 2.4 Correlation Results for Male Nonkiller Characters

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Character Fate	1								
2. Race	-.045	1							
3. Dress	.055	-.022	1						
4. Attitude	.069	.073	.377**	1					
5. Sex	.068	.045	.297**	.643**	1				
6. Nudity	.080	.015	.454**	.347**	.352**	1			
7. Sexualization	.084	.068	.681**	.821**	.799**	.659**	1		
8. Strength	-.167**	-.029	.178**	.042	.105	.055	.129*	1	
9. Flawed	.244**	.083	.039	.135*	.100	.163**	.135*	-.414**	1

** = significant $p < .01$; * = $p < .05$
Notes: Variables were coded as Fate (1 = lived; 2 = died); Race (1 = Nonwhite; 2 = white); Dress, Attitude, Sex, Nudity, Flawed = (1 = no; 2 = yes), Sexualization (0-4 sum); Strength (1 = weak; 2 = neutral; 3 = strong)

Chi-Square Tests of Independence were performed to measure the differences between nonkiller male characters who lived and those nonkiller male characters that died (N = 265, Lived = 94; Died = 171). A significant difference existed between fate and strength, $X^2(2)= 11.826$, $p = .003$. Characters who were killed were less likely than those who lived to be portrayed as strong. Of all male characters, 55.5% were strong, but for those who died only 48% were strong compared to 68.2% of male characters that lived. There was also a significant difference between fate and flaws, $X^2(1)= 13.255$, $p = .000$. Male characters that died were more likely to be portrayed as flawed (abusive, addicted, etc.) than those male characters that lived. 50.2% of all male characters were flawed, with 35.1% of those who lived being flawed and 58.5% of those who died being flawed. No significant differences existed between fate and the other variables (race, dress, attitude, sex, and nudity). See Table 2.5 for full results.

Table 2.5 Chi-Square Results Measuring Fates of Male Characters

Variables	Overall	Lived	Died	Chi Square Test of Independence
Race				
White	250 (94.3)	90 (95.7)	160 (93.6)	X2(1)= .539
NonWhite	15 (5.7)	4 (4.3)	11 (6.4)	p = .463
Sexual Dress				
Yes	44 (16.6)	13 (13.8)	31 (18.1)	X2(1)= .810
No	221 (83.4)	81 (86.2)	140 (81.9)	p = .368
Sexual Attitude				
Yes	70 (26.4)	21 (22.3)	49 (5.6)	X2(1)= 1.244
No	195 (73.6)	73 (77.7)	122 (94.4)	p = .265
Sex/Foreplay				
Yes	55 (20.8)	16 (17.0)	39 (22.8)	X2(1)= 1.235
No	210 (79.2)	78 (83.0)	132 (77.2)	p = .267
Nudity				
Yes	22 (8.3)	5 (5.3)	17 (9.9)	X2(1)= 1.702
No	243 (91.7)	89 (94.7)	154 (90.1)	p = .192
Strength				
Weak	68 (25.6)	19 (20.2)	49 (28.6)	X2(2)= 11.826
Neutral	50 (18.9)	10 (10.6)	40 (23.4)	p = .003
Strong	147 (55.5)	65 (69.2)	82 (48.0)	
Flawed				
Yes	133 (50.2)	33 (35.1)	100 (58.5)	X2(1)= 13.255
No	132 (49.8)	61 (64.9)	71 (41.5)	p = .000

** = Significant at .01; * = Significant at .05

Results of an independent sample t-tests (see Table 2.6) indicated that there were no significant differences in the mean total sexualization between male characters who lived and male characters that died $(t(236.067) = -1.482; p = .140)$. The average sexualization score for males who lived was .59 (SD = .932) while the average score for males who died was .78 (SD = 1.220).

Table 2.6 Fate and Total Sexualization of Male Characters

	N	M	SD	t	P
Sexualization				-1.482	.140
Lived	94	.59	.932		
Died	171	.78	1.220		

** = significant .01

Part three focuses on fates of the female nonkiller characters in the coded films (N = 239, Lived = 87; Died = 152). Pearson's correlation was used to establish relationships between fate and other variables. In terms of female characters' fate, there was a significant positive association between fate and dress $(r(239) = .195, p = .002)$, fate and attitude $(r(239) = .186, p = .004)$, fate and sex $(r(239) = .205, p = .001)$, fate and nudity $(r(239) =$

..193, p = .003), and fate and total sexualization (r(239) = .244, p = .000). A significant negative association exists between fate and strength (r(239) = -.264, p = .000). The associations between fate and race and fate and flaws were not significant. Full results are presented in Table 2.7.

Table 2.7 Correlation Results for Female Characters

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.	Character Fate	1								
2.	Race	-.041	1							
3.	Dress	.195**	.033	1						
4.	Attitude	.186**	.121	.566**	1					
5.	Sex	.205**	-.005	.445**	.673**	1				
6.	Nudity	.193**	-.023	.484**	.413**	.510**	1			
7.	Sexualization	.244**	.041	.787**	.836**	.822**	.747**	1		
8.	Strength	-.264**	-.011	.030	-.086	-.029	-.085	-.053	1	
9.	Flawed	.070	.095	.134*	.278**	.191**	.163*	.241**	-.201**	1

** = significant p < .01; * = p < .05
Notes: Variables were coded as Fate (1 = lived; 2 = died); Race (1 = Nonwhite; 2 = white); Dress, Attitude, Sex, Nudity, Flawed = (1 = no; 2 = yes), Sexualization (0-4 sum); Strength (1 = weak; 2 = neutral; 3 = strong)

Chi-Square Tests of Independence were performed to measure the differences between nonkiller female characters who lived and those nonkiller male characters that died. Significant differences were found between fate and all four sexualization measures. First, a significant difference existed between fate and dress, $X^2(1)$= 9.129, p = .003. Females that were killed were more likely than those who lived to be dressed provocatively. Of all female characters, 56.5% were dressed provocatively, with 43.7% of those who lived and 63.8% of those who died being dressed in this manner. A significant difference existed between fate and attitude, $X^2(1)$= 9.129, p = .003. Females portrayed with flirtatious attitudes were more likely to die than those who did not. 45.6% of all female characters were flirtatious, with 33.3% of those who lived and 52.6% of those who died emoting sexualized attitudes. A significant difference exists between fate and sex, $X^2(1)$= 10.025, p = .002. Female characters were more likely to die if they engaged in sex or foreplay than those characters who did not. Of the female characters, 34.7% were shown in engaging in sexual behavior, yet a significant difference exists with 21.8% of those who lived and 42.1% of those who died having been sexually active. A significant difference existed between fate and nudity, $X^2(1)$= 8.906, p = .003. Female characters that were nude were more likely to die than those who were not nude. Nudity was the least common sexualization amongst the female characters, with 31.4% of all females being featured nude. For females who died, 38.2% were nude compared to 19.5% of those who lived. Finally, a significant difference existed between fate and strength, $X^2(1)$= 18.368, p = .000. Females that were killed were less likely to be strong than those characters who lived. 35.6% of all females were portrayed as strong, but only 25.7% of those who died were portrayed as strong compared to 52.9% of those who died. There were no significant differences between fate and race and fate and flaws. See Table 2.8 for full results.

Table 2.8 Chi-Square Results Measuring Fates of Female Characters

Variables	Overall	Lived	Died	Chi Square Test of Independence
Race				
White	225 (94.1)	83 (95.4)	142 (93.4)	X2(1)= .394 .
NonWhite	14 (5.9)	4 (3.6)	10 (6.6)	p = .530
Sexual Dress				
Yes	135 (56.5)	38 (43.7)	97 (63.8)	X2(1)= 9.129
No	104 (43.5)	49 (56.3)	55 (36.2)	p = .003**
Sexual Attitude				
Yes	109 (45.6)	29 (33.3)	80 (52.6)	X2(1)= 8.307
No	130 (54.4)	58 (66.7)	72 (47.4)	p = .004**
Sex/Foreplay				
Yes	83 (34.7)	19 (21.8)	64 (42.1)	X2(1)= 10.025
No	156 (65.3)	68 (78.2)	88 (57.9)	p = .002**
Nudity				
Yes	75 (31.4)	17 (19.5)	58 (38.2)	X2(1)= 8.906
No	164 (68.6)	70 (80.5)	94 (61.8)	p = .003**
Strength				
Weak	94 (39.3)	23 (26.4)	71 (46.7)	X2(2)= 18.368
Neutral	60 (25.1)	18 (20.7)	42 (27.6)	p = .000**
Strong	85 (35.6)	46 (52.9)	39 (25.7)	
Flawed				
Yes	96 (40.2)	31 (35.6)	65 (42.8)	X2(1)= 1.171
No	143 (59.8)	56 (64.4)	87 (57.2)	p = .279

** = Significant at .01; * = Significant at .05

Results of an independent sample t-tests (see Table 2.9) indicated a significant difference in the mean total sexualization between female characters who lived and female characters that died (t(237) = -3.874; p = .000). The average sexualization score for females who lived was 1.18 (SD = 1.394) while the average score for females who died was 1.97 (SD = 1.563).

Table 2.9 Fate and Total Sexualization of Female Characters

	N	M	SD	t	P
Sexualization				-3.874	.000**
Lived	87	1.18	1.394		
Died	152	1.97	1.563		

** = significant .01

Discussion

Women in slasher films were not statistically more likely to die than men (Menard, Weaver, & Cabrera, 2019). However, to determine if survival was based on the same factors for male and female characters, each gender was isolated. Significant differences emerged, thus while the rate of death was consistent between the genders, the "risk factors" for each gender were distinct. Presenting as weak or having flaws made men more likely to die (Cowan & O'Brien, 1990; Menard, Weaver, & Cabrera, 2019). Race, dress, attitude, sex, and nudity were not significant predictors for male characters. Sexualization was not different for those males who lived and those who died.

For females, sexualization was a significant predictor of death, a finding consistent with Cowan and O'Brien (1990) and Welsh (2010). Women who were dressed provocatively, expressed a flirtation attitude, engaged in sex, and/or appeared nude were more likely to die than those who did not. Accordingly, female characters that died had a higher total sexualization than those females who lived. Like the male characters, strength was also a major indicator of fate. Strong women were more likely to live while those portrayed as weak were more likely to die. Race and flaws had no effect on females.

Viewers of slasher films are being misinformed about the reality of homicide. Traditional homicide rates (USDOJ FBI, 2018) and circumstances and the realities of serial killings (Aamodt, 2016) are in stark contrast to the murders in these slasher films. Guns were used in 72.7% of all homicides and 42.96% of serial homicides. Slasher films, by their very name, use extreme measures such as knives, machetes, hooks, and chainsaws. The majority of homicides are single offender and single victim, with less than 1% of cases being attributed to a serial killer each year (Aamodt, 2016; USDOJ FBI, 2019). Overall, in traditional homicides, 44.16% of killers were black in 2018. Despite the belief that serial killers are white males, in any given decade 28.3-59.8% of serial killers have been black (Aamodt, 2016). In the films, a single black killer existed. Finally, when studying the victims of traditional homicides, race and gender breakdown includes 45% black males, 30% white men, 13% white females and 8% black females. Gender and race are different in the cases of serial killers. The victims in serial killings were predominantly white, with victims represented as 37% white females, 31% white males, 12% black females, and 12% black males (Aamodt, 2016).

While the fictional portrayals in these films do not accurately depict homicide and serial killings, the larger social and cultural messages they send are very real. The findings that female characters are more likely to be killed if sexualized reflects the mainstream belief that female sexuality is immoral and thus punishable (Baumeister & Twenge, 2002; Conley, Ziegler, & Moors, 2011; Loughnan, Pina, Vasquez, & Puvia, 2013; Peterson & Hyde, 2010; Travis & White, 2000). While men were also sexualized in these films, it was only a significant predictor of death for women. This sexual double standard is a prevalent moral code that implies sexual behavior should be judged by different standards for each gender, with men allowed to engage in casual sex while women are not (Peterson & Hyde, 2010). For men, sex and numerous sexual partners raises their status while women who mirror similar behaviors are stigmatized (Conley, Ziegler, & Moors, 2011). Some scholars, such as Baumeister and Twenge (2002), argue that this sexual double standard is the result of a patriarchal society that is made for and run by males, leaving females as its victims. This patriarchy then views sexually active women who seek sexual gratification for their own pleasure as a threat to male privilege and control (Travis & White, 2000). It is no surprise that such behavior becomes villainized and worthy of punishment, as individuals withdraw their moral concern for sexualized women (Loughnan, Pina, Vasquez, & Puvia, 2013).

In the instance of sexual assault, victims are scrutinized for their sexual behavior as a means of attributing responsibility of the assault to the victim themselves. If able to process a rape as the result of a victims' own sexualization or ignorance, one can deny the suffering and provide an explanation for such aggression (Beck, Boys, Rose, & Beck, 2012; Loughnan, et al., 2013, Sinclair & Bourne, 1998). Subscriptions

to rape myths, including beliefs such as a woman's dress invites sexual assault, result in an environment where there is little sympathy for a sexualized woman (Beck et al., 2012). By assuming a victim is responsible for their own victimization as a result of "bad behaviors" such as sex, there is a perpetration of the idea that we live in a just world and bad things only happen to bad people (Sinclair & Bourne, 1998).

A similar narrative surrounds the murder of prostitutes. For serial killers, prostitutes become easy prey given their limited social ties and high-risk lifestyle. The public also recognizes prostitutes as "appropriate" victims, as they embody the notion of the "bad woman." Therefore, the hysteria, trauma, and horror surrounding the murder of a "innocent" woman or girl is far greater than it is for a woman who has degraded herself to a life of sex (Baldwin, 1997; Simpson, 2001). With a social narrative presenting the sexualized woman as less valuable, she by her very nature becomes expendable.

Just as the women in these films were "punished" for their lack of conformity to the "good girl narrative," male characters were more likely to die when they presented as weak in physical/emotional strength and/or presented with non-sexualized character flaws. The ideals of valuable masculinity being illustrated in terms of powerful physical bodies, courageous spirit, and moral soundness represent both Western hegemonic and Eastern masculinity (Haung, 2007; Louie, 2002). Respectable masculinity involves self-surveillance and the practice of self-improvement (Walkerdine, 2003). When males behave in a way that is undisciplined, disrespectful, irresponsible or unhealthy, this reflects moral failure (Croghan, Griffin, Hunter, & Pheonix, 2006). Therefore, the ideal man has a balance of physical and mental/moral strength, thus resulting in cultural and critical worth (Louie, 2002). Thus it is possible to conclude that male characters who present as physically weak, scared, and flawed are less valuable and therefore prime characters to die in slasher films.

Even though race was not statistically significant in predicting death for either gender or for the population as a whole, it is worth noting that race stood out as a distinct variable for another reason. The sample of characters was overwhelmingly white, with only 29 minority characters having substantial roles in the films. While not the purpose of this paper, it is necessary to note the lack of diversity within the context of these slasher films. The results indicate race is not a significant predictor of death, thus combating common narratives that black characters die first and more frequently (Barone, 2016). However, in the larger context of race and film, the maltreatment against minority characters in slasher films may actually be the absence of their inclusion (Barone, 2016; Coleman, 2011; Lauzen, 2020). This devaluing and lack of inclusion in popular media only furthers the realities of racial disparities, injustices, and misrepresentation in our culture (Negra & Asava, 2013).

While the formulaic nature of death in slasher films is often viewed as tongue and cheek, the prescriptive fate narrative that is contained within slasher films reinforces dangerous beliefs and practices including traditional gender roles and victim blaming. Sexual women are often demonized, thus promiscuous female characters are brutalized more as entertainment and their victimization loses its horror (Hartmann, 2009; Mulvey, 1989). Following traditional gender roles and a just world premise, character treatment in slasher films demonstrates that sexual females incite the violence they endure and thus deserve the punishment that follows (Byers, 1995; Lacombe, 2002; Schuller & Hastings, 2002). Victim blaming exists beyond the big screen, with victims of sexual assault and other violent crimes being blamed for the crimes perpetrated against them due to their behaviors or dress (Lacombe, 2002; Dawtry, Cozzolino, & Callan, 2019). Sexual history that does not mirror purity expectations increases blameworthiness, denies suffering, and justifies abuse and assault (Dawtry, Cozzolino, & Callan, 2019; Beck et al., 2012), thus reducing resources, support, and acceptance of victims.

Male characters in these films also contribute to a larger, often dangerous narrative. Some aspects of these films contribute to toxic masculinity by reinforcing subscription to traditional gender roles, glorifying violence, and portraying misogyny, chauvinism, and entitlement to sex from women (Sculos, 2017). On screen, men who do not conform to traditional gender roles are dispensable, thus the lack of masculine characteristics can be lethal. Toxic masculinity can be dangerous for men in the real world, increasing risk of mental health

disorders, physical health problems, and substance abuse (APA, 2018). Like pornography, viewers of slasher films witness the coupling of violence and sex, potentially leading to unhealthy sexual behaviors, antisocial behaviors, increased aggression, and unrealistic sexual expectations (APA, 2008; Gartside, 2013). Future studies should explore the impact of slasher films on viewers' attitudes regarding gender, self-worth, blameworthiness of victims, and sexual/relationship expectations.

Conclusion

Slasher films consist of exaggerated imagery, unrealistic portrayals of homicide, and stereotypical messages. Despite the way in which these films are often snubbed by critics, they attract a deep and loyal fan base. Given the strong narratives and messages that are portrayed in these films and their ability to influence attitudes and beliefs of their followers, slasher films are an important body of media to understand. The current study furthers the conversation of mortality and the factors that make a character more likely to die. For female characters, sexualization and physical weakness contribute to their death. It is likely the patriarchal ideals that sexualized females are less valuable than the "good girl" are responsible for this trend. Male characters are not punished for sexual behaviors, but instead are killed when they present as a "unworthy" male. These characteristics include physical weakness, a lack of courage, and the presence of immoral, albeit non-sexual acts. The belief that gender and race are predictors of death were not supported in this study. Instead, characteristics and behaviors of the characters were better measures of survival or death in a slasher film.

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