

Bury Your Gays (They Might Just Come Back to Haunt You) - A History of Queerness Within Horror Cinema from the Introduction of the Hays Code to Modern Day

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Read Time (Approx.): 63 minutes

Preface from Sophie Coleman



Figure 1

The path that led me to this dissertation was atypical to say the least. For the past few years my practice has focused on sickly sweet pastels, nostalgia and most importantly, the colour pink (Appendices 2-4). I've been obsessed with your grandmother's wallpaper patterns and the shapes found within your favourite childhood toys for the duration of my practice, which leaves the question of how blood, guts, and gore fit into this kitsch little package.

To put it simply; I blame John Waters.

In my infatuation with the home and the notion of the 'Queer Colour Palette', I found myself repeatedly coming back to the work of John Waters, an extravagant display of all

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things colourful and camp, but most notably all things shockingly disgusting. Of course, John Waters is not the only cause (merely the symptom), horror has been on the fringes of my awareness for as long as I can remember.

Bizarrely, I hated horror for a very long time, an anxious child whose first memory is my older sister telling me Dracula was coming to snatch me from my cot later that night. I grew up with a horror obsessed mother – the first movie my parents ever saw together was *Silence of the Lambs* (1991) – and it felt like there was always a horror flick playing in the background as I staunchly tried to ignore it in an attempt to stave off nightmares. I always said real life was scary enough on its own, I didn't need false anxieties on top of that.

At the age of 12 I discovered bisexuality and decided that sounded cool and announced my new label to my 36 Tumblr followers. Two weeks later I remembered lesbians exist and that was it for me, I've called myself a lesbian since that day. Discovering my sexuality was surprisingly easy and honestly quite underwhelming, and for those first few months whilst it was contained to myself and the small online sphere of other young queer people, I found myself in, I avoided a lot of the negative feelings most queer people experience at the beginning or throughout their journey.

It wasn't until I was outed that my life became a horror flick. I went from being the shy, innocent, baby of the family, to somewhat of a teenage werewolf. Whilst no one in my close family said anything outrightly homophobic, I felt ostracised. I couldn't shake the pit in my stomach, the hairball in my throat, I felt disgusting. My secret was out in the open and I wanted nothing more than to take it back, nothing would ever be the same and no one would ever see me the same way again. I had turned from Andy Barclay to Chucky (Although these days I fancy myself more of a Tiffany) in the time it took to say I'm a lesbian.

I didn't discover horror until the age of nineteen, when I watched Bryan Fuller's *Hannibal* (2013) on the premise that it was 'pretentious and gay'. I became obsessed with the show, eventually finding myself in an online community dubbed the 'Hannibal Lesbians'. My obsession with queer coded cannibals and the realisation that I could handle the small amount of horror that I'd been exposed to brought me to a very specific quest: Rewatching *Freddy vs Jason* (2003) which would of course mean watching every movie in the *Friday the 13th* and *Nightmare on Elm Street* franchises. And if I was watching those franchises then I might as well throw in *Halloween* and *Child's Play* whilst I was there. Without fully

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comprehending what had happened I'd watched 391 horror films within the space of a year (this number does not include the five separate occasions I rewatched every *Saw* movie). I was spending my days dressing as a proto-type barbie and painting pastel abstractions of gingham tablecloths to spend my nights watching teenagers getting eviscerated by a masked killer, a bizarre juxtaposition of interests I've only just managed to combine.

This new interest sparked something within me, my interest in academia was revitalised, I was reading every bit of critical theory I could get my hands on, I was trawling through classical art to compare to modern day horror movies. And most importantly, I had never felt more comfortable within my queer identity. A lot of queer media hadn't resonated within me up until this point, perhaps it was because it was written by non queer writers and aimed at a non queer audience and I felt like it was too clean and processed, inauthentic to myself and the other queer people I knew. But the queer coding I found within horror movies was the most accurate reflection of myself I had seen within media. I'll never quite relate to Mitchell Pritchett and Cameron Tucker in *Modern Family* the same way I relate to Frankenstein's Monster or Dracula's Daughter.

I've learnt to stop hiding my monsters in the closet, Frankenstein's Monster was never the villain, it was the world who wanted to hurt him.

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'Only in the darkness will you find your true self' draws Elvira, Mistress of the Dark (2019) in an homage to Vincent Price's chilling verse in Michael Jackson's 'Thriller'. This spoken interlude features on *Turn Off the Light* by Kim Petras, transgender popstar, and self-proclaimed *'spooky bitch'* (Petras, 2020), a track that empowers the monsters and the others. Elvira's interlude uses the werewolf trope within horror as an allegory for the queer experience, fitting as a queer woman herself working alongside a trans artist.

Kim Petras' 2019 album *Turn Off the Light* is a small drop in the oceanic history between queer people and the horror genre. Whilst the genre of horror has roots within ancient history, being found within folklore tales of demons, witches, and ghosts (Jackson, 1981 pp.53–69), this dissertation will focus on the horror genre from the 20th Century to the present day 21st Century. The 19th Century saw the boom of Gothic Horror literature with authors such as The Brothers Grimm, Mary Shelley, Washington Irving, etc. (Frayling, 1996) and the 20th Century gave birth to the horror movie which was a term that had been used to describe certain movies but was not classified as a genre of film until the 1931 release of *Dracula* (Rhodes, 2014). Westwell and Kuhn (2012) define a horror film as one that features *'disturbing and dark subject matter, seeking to elicit responses of fear, terror, disgust, shock, suspense, and, of course, horror from their viewers'*.

When referring to queerness this dissertation draws from Nikki Sullivan's *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (2003), which immediately proposes that defining queer is a *'decidedly un-queer thing to do'* (2003) – before offering a few examples of ways queerness has been defined and used by theorists and queer activists.

David Halperin (1995) suggests:

Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers*. It is an identity without an essence.

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Halperin (1995 cited in Sullivan, 2003, p.44) further explains that the term queer is not confined to homosexuals but is also applicable to those who feel ostracised due to their sexual practices. Queer is therefore not an '*essential identity*' (Sullivan, 2003), it becomes a political identity, referring to an attitude or lifestyle.

Opposing this, Gabriel Rotello (cited in Duggan, 1992, p.21) states:

When you're trying to describe the community, and you have to list gays, lesbians, bisexuals, drag queens, transsexuals (post-op and pre), it gets unwieldy. Queer says it all.

Whilst some people disapprove of queer as an umbrella term, suggesting that it erases or veils over the differences within the community that should be acknowledged and celebrated (Anzaldúa, 1991), for sake of efficiency and ease this dissertation will be using queer to reference the LGBTQ+ community.

Returning to horror– this dissertation specifically discusses the horror genre from 1934 to present day. Queer horror certainly didn't begin in 1934, but what that year did bring was the Hays Code. In an attempt to prevent federal censorship within Hollywood, the studios insisted that the industry would be able to self-censor with Will Hays, postmaster general, reviewing the content within Hollywood films (Benshoff and Griffin, 2004, p.39). The Hays code prohibited depictions of homosexuality, interracial relationships and acts of graphic violence, as well as strictly supervising any political themes or issues to do with sex (Benshoff and Griffin, 2004, p.39).

The code was initially created within 1930 but had no official standing and no way to enforce the rules it had set out to create. In fact, during this time, movies had become raunchier in a bid to attract the depression era audiences back into movie theatres, and the Hollywood homosexual was not hard to find with rampant portrayals of the pansy craze and lesbian chic (Benshoff and Griffin, 2004, p.303).

1933 brought an invigorated moral disagreement against Hollywood films from religious and other groups which Benshoff and Griffin (2004, p.39) suggest coincides with the inauguration of President Roosevelt and the general optimism within American society. Thus, the inclusion of the Seal of Approval within the Hays Code, officially introduced in

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1934. Hollywood theatres agreed to only show films with the Hays Seal of Approval and a new era of cinema was born (Benshoff and Griffin, 2004, p.39).

However, this did not mean queerness was completely erased from the narrative, as Patricia White (1998, p.8) identifies '*the motion industry practitioners recognised censorship as a set of codes for producing meaning, and particularly sexual meaning, and indeed for producing readings*'. The forbiddance of queer desire had paradoxically formed a queer desire. Just like heterosexual sex was alluded to through visual metaphors – fireworks, the crashing waves on a shore- (Benshoff and Griffin, 2004, p.303) homosexuality had to find its own way of sneaking back onto the big screen. This will be discussed at further length within *Chapter 1 – It's Alive! Making the Monster Queer*.

To understand the queer subtext of horror within this era, we must firstly understand the roots of queerness within the genre pre-Hays Code as well as the theory behind why queer people are drawn to horror. Horror films exist as an act of subversion, often covering what is considered taboo well before the mainstream even begins to touch upon the topic. David Hogan (1986, p.xiii) inputs '*The horror film, as the most basic and primal of all movie genres, has always been in a unique position as ideal chronicler of contemporary mores*' suggesting that horror's natural inclination towards the subversive puts it in a position where it is often one of the first instances representation within media. For instance, Ed Wood's *Glen or Glenda* (1953) is one of the first films to feature a transgender character within film. Benshoff (1997, p.13) explains the experience of watching a horror film as a space where it is acceptable to celebrate deviance and reject normality for a brief period, similarly to Halloween where so called 'normal' people to experience the delights of drag for one night before returning to real world. Whereas as those considered normal by societal standards can chose to enjoy these forays in deviance for pleasure, those who are othered must live within that world as Alexander Doty proffers '*everyone's pleasure in these genres is 'perverse,' is queer, as much of it takes place within the space of the contra-heterosexual and the contra-straight*'.

Benshoff (1997, pp.13-15) establishes four ways that queerness intersects with horror; the inclusion of queer characters, films directed, written, or produced by queer people (variations include queer cast members), the subtextual and connotative suggestion of queerness, and the viewing of a film spectated by a queer person and therefore is interpreted as queer. What Benshoff focuses on within *Monsters in the Closet* (1997) isn't just the queer intersecting with horror, but on the queer relation to monsters within horror.

Recommended Citation

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Benshoff (1997, p.2) points out the coinciding meanings of the words monster and homosexuality within homophobic rhetoric;

When they are seen, they are often filtered through the iconography of the horror film... Both movie monsters and homosexuals have existed chiefly in shadowy closets, and when they do emerge from these proscribed places into the sunlit world, they cause panic and fear... To create a broad analogy, monster is to "normality" as homosexual is to heterosexual.

Monster and queer as concepts appear to trigger similar fears of death and sex within society.

Joe Vallese (2022, p.5) notes the reclaiming and recontextualization of the genre within queer communities and the integration of it within the culture '*horror becomes more textured, more nuanced, and far more exciting when viewed through a queer lens*'. The essays he has compiled following this introduction are further evidence of the queer attachment to the genre.

The most referred to instance of the Monster Queer Pre-Hays Code is undoubtedly *Frankenstein*, originally wrote by Mary Shelley in 1818 and adapted to feature length film by James Whale in 1931 (followed by a slew of adaptations over the next 90 years). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985, p.91) observes that '*the gothic was the first novelistic form in England to have close, relatively visible links to male homosexuality*'.

Mary Shelley is written about as a queer woman, in reference to her unconventional relationship with Percy Shelley (which came with a relationship with Lord Byron) and her aptness to get 'tousy-mousy' with women after the death of her husband as quoted by Alaska Thunderfuck in the documentary *Queer for Fear* (2022, episode 1). James Whale was openly homosexual and directed four of the classic Universal Monster Movies, offering what Benshoff (1997, p.14) refers to as a gay sensibility within his work. Although *Frankenstein* is therefore inherently queer because of the queer minds bringing it to life, it extends beyond this within the subtext of the story. *Frankenstein*, in the most watered-down terms, dares to show a man create life without the need for heterosexual sex. The audience then follows Frankenstein's monster as he is ostracised by the village's people under the basis of him being different. Frankenstein was not born evil but becomes evil due to others labelling him

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as evil. Although he is the monster of the story, the audience is meant to sympathise with him.

At the time of the release of this film there was a large moral panic occurring in the USA over sex offenders, primarily stirred by Head of the F.B.I J. Edgar Hoover which Emily Horowitz (2017) cites Charles Morris' (2002) theory on Hoover's own sexuality as his motivation to create suspicion around homosexual men. Because of a string of child murders, such as the Wineville Chicken Coop murders, people became very concerned with sex crimes against children which led to an uptick in mob justice, as well as the increase in arrests against men, primarily homosexuals for the charge of sodomy (Dead Meat Podcast, 2019) which leads to misinformed opinions on homosexuality being associated with child perversion, which is still prevalent to this day. One of the most shocking scenes in the film is Frankenstein unknowingly murdering a little girl by throwing her in a pond, expecting her to float like the flowers they had been throwing in the water together (Figure 2). Due to negative audience response, Universal wanted to cut the scene just before showing the death of the child which Chelsea Rebecca in the Dead Meat Podcast (2019) cites David Lewis (producer of Frankenstein and James Whale's longtime partner) as saying:

Without it the audience is left to imagine what he'd done to her before he drowned her. The implication with this cut would be that he had raped her, yes, and so worse.

When taking into consideration the political context of this time, it becomes apparent why Universal would want to avoid showing a morally grey character who is the victim of a misguided witch hunt. By removing the scene and implying what happened was worse, it completely changes the character of Frankenstein and the message of the movie. It wasn't until 1985 that the scene was restored to the film (Kennedy, 2020). *Frankenstein* is rich with subtext and has been analysed at length by many theorists, and as this dissertation focuses on horror from the introduction of the Hays Code, won't be going further into the original film or text. However, *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) will be covered within Chapter I.

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Figure 2 – Frankenstein’s Monster playing with flowers with the little girl in Frankenstein (1931)

The five chapters of this dissertation covers horror within the past 90 years, separating specific eras with Chapter I discussing the films made within the years the Hays Code was active. Chapter II then ruminates on the years following the abolishment of the Hays Code immediately succeeded by Chapter III which details the beginning years of the AIDS crisis. Chapter IV looks at the 90’s and noughties, and the research ends with Chapter V which discusses ‘modern’ horror from the 2010’s to present day. This formatting makes the most sense for the area of research as queerness within horror is very much influenced by the socio-political context of the time, and chronologically is the most effective way to showcase this.

With the subject of cinema being a key concern, a historiographical methodology has been utilised to approach the bulk of the research addressing how horror has been studied and written about within Film, Gender, and Queer Theory. Horror as a genre has been studied extensively, particularly within the context of gender and queerness, primarily from the Recommended Citation

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1980's onwards as discussed within the literature review. This dissertation will draw on a range of texts surrounding the genre to conduct research on the intersections between queerness and horror throughout the last century. This includes the evolution of queer culture and the queer rights movement and the development of queer horror and how this is influenced by the former.

A historical methodology will also be used to look at the films that this dissertation will discuss, studying, interpreting, and understanding the films themselves as well as the events of the time that shape the context of the films. This will involve drawing from both primary and secondary sources such as newspaper articles, first-hand accounts, posters, photographs, film reviews, etc.

A lesser used approach, but still vital to the research is the narrative inquiry, taking individual persons perspectives and their personal relationships as queer people with horror. Personal experience is equally important to academic theory for this research as so much of the queer relationship to horror comes from emotion and connection due to particular circumstances. The narrative inquiry has been researched through a range of essays from queer writers as well as interviews conducted.

Chloë Leeson, founder of Screen Queens which focuses on uplifting the voices of women and queer filmmakers and film critics, agreed to an interview (Appendix 1) to talk about the horror genre through a feminist lens and why marginalised groups feel an attraction to horror.

In addition to this, a survey was conducted on public perceptions of queerness within horror (Appendix 8). However, with 23 respondents, of which 82.6% belong to Generation Z, 91.3% being fans of horror and 91.3% identifying as queer, the results recorded within the survey belong to a small pool of people and do not reflect on the views of the wider public.

Each chapter will have a case study of one or more films that encapsulate the statements each chapter is making about queerness and horror within that period. The analysis of particular films functions as an example of the theory and research being discussed, further solidifying the points made. Additionally, the in-depth study of an individual film allows for advanced research of the time as the subtext and context behind the film and its cast crew provide an insight to what was occurring. For example, discussing *Frankenstein* 1931 reveals

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information on self-censorship within Hollywood, moral panic surrounding homosexuality, and James Whale as an openly gay horror director within the 1930's.

The data being collected is largely qualitative, relying on interviews, narrative inquiries, observations, and analysis, forming an understanding of people's thoughts and perceptions on the subject matter. Quantitative data may be used to support points on public opinion towards a film or genre, for example low box office statistics would indicate that the public has a negative opinion of the film, which would lead to further inferences of subconscious bias from the societal standards of the time. For example, in years where homophobia was more common, audiences picking up on homosexual subtext would affect the way the film is received.

Through the methods utilised for the research process, this dissertation takes on a relativist ontological approach, shaping truth by context and taking into consideration multiple viewpoints and versions of reality. Queer people are not a monolith, having a varied range of opinions and emotions surrounding the notion of queer horror, and it is important to consider the different sides of that. Coming from a queer author, this dissertation takes on an emic standpoint, as an insider perspective of the community coming with an awareness of the contextual factors, and personal participation of the culture being studied. It is essential to the understanding of queerness within horror to firstly establish a definition of queer within the terms of this dissertation, and secondly to have a base knowledge of representation within film.

A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory from queer theorist Nikki Sullivan puts gay and lesbian politics into historical context, discussing the origins of Queer Theory within Western Culture in the late 20th Century. Sullivan covers key texts from authors such as Judith Butler and Michael Foucault and introduces key terms within the process. A comprehensive overview is provided of a range of topics in relation to Queer Theory such as: pop culture, transgender, race, heterosexuality, performative politics, race, community, BDSM, and fetishism.

Dr. Harry Benshoff, Critical Film Theorist and Film Historian is a fundamental part of the research for this dissertation. His written work explores multiculturalism within film and is largely known for his work on queer sexuality within the horror film. Although Benshoff has an abundance of published texts on the subject, the two in particular that were studied at length for this dissertation were *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film*

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(1997) and *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality in the Movies* (2004).

America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality in the Movies (2004) offers a broader insight to the issue of diversity and reputation within cinema, pulling away from the specialised genre of horror. To understand sexuality within the horror film, it is essential to understand the history of cinema and how transgressive subjects have been handled over the years. This book covers the topics of genre, feminism, auteurism, the male gaze, queer theory, cultural studies, and orientalism interspersed throughout the historical framework provided by the authors and features case studies for multiple films. By investigating diversity and representation outside of the genre, it becomes clear how horror exists as a transgressive art form.

Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film (1997) is a comprehensive history of the horror genre, specifically in relation to homosexuality within America. Although a broad history of homosexuality and horror is covered, the book focuses in on the role of the movie monster through the homosexual lens with varied religious, medical, social, and psychological models. This book was the first to introduce and analyse the idea of the monstrous queer, from queer coding within the classic horror film, to the AIDS related fearmongering within films of the 1980's. The content explored within this text offers a vital insight to the topics explored within the first three chapters of this dissertation, which look at the horror genre from pre-Hays Code to the 1980's.

Barry Keith Grant's *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film* (1996) discusses through a collection of essays from different authors, the reflection of societal fears within the horror film, particularly the fear of the feminine. Theoretical generalisations are balanced with critical analyses of films and iconic figures within the horror canon, providing a scope of critical methods. Two essays stand out within this collection; Elizabeth Young's *Here Comes the Bride: Wedding Gender and Race in Bride of Frankenstein*, and Bonnie Zimmerman's *Daughters of Darkness: The Lesbian Vampire on Film*.

Whilst Knee (1996) focuses on the work of a singular director, Young (1996) provides a case study of a singular film with *Here Comes the Bride: Wedding Gender and Race in Bride of Frankenstein*. Young investigates the queer history of Frankenstein as a character, from his literary roots with Mary Shelley, to director James Whale's queer sensibilities as well as offering insight on how it functions as a film made post-instated Hays Code. The contents of

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the film are scrutinised as examples of compulsory heterosexuality, and homoeroticism of male bonds as displayed within media.

Bonnie Zimmerman's *Daughters of Darkness: The Lesbian Vampire on Film* (1996) discusses the long history of lesbians within vampire media from Joseph Sheridan LeFanu's *Carmilla* (1871) to *Daughter of Darkness* (1970) in relation to advancements within feminism and the public awareness of lesbianism. The lesbian vampire trope functioning as a reaction to female sexuality within the 60's and 70's is an interesting sector within queer horror, especially in comparison to the queer vampires that emerge in the 80's as a response to the AIDS Crisis.

In a similar vein, to *The Dread of Difference*, David J. Hogan's *Dark Romance: Sex and Death in the Horror Film* (1986) examines cinematic obsession with sexuality through the evolution of sexual attitudes and societal fears of sex. Hogan explores over 500 films, ranging from the silent era to the publication of the book in 1986, focusing on sex and death as 'the horror film's two greatest preoccupations' (Hogan, 1986).

On a narrative level, Joe Vallese's *It Came from the Closet: Queer Reflections on Horror* (2022) assembles the writings of 25 queer authors, contemplating their personal relations with horror and how it weds to their queer experience. *It Came from the Closet* does away with the academia of film theory and has the gritty lived in experience of the individual, offering unique perspectives on the genre from the complicated familial relationships within *The Wolf Man* (1941) to the homoeroticism of the male touch within *Jaws* (1975). Laura Maw writes a heart wrenching description of queer teen love interwoven with a deep connection to Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963) in *Loving Annie Hayworth*. A rich example of the attachment queer people form with media and the impact subtext can make.

It's Alive! Making the Monster Queer

One could be mistaken in believing it would be almost impossible to make a horror film under the strict regulations provided by the Hays Code, but film historian Gregory Black (1989, p.172) states that basic premise of the code was such 'no picture should lower the moral standards of those who see it'. The point of the code was not to erase the mention of immorality and evil, but to clearly establish the difference between right and wrong to the audiences. Therefore, films were not to create feelings of sympathy for the villain, question

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or challenge societal values and to uphold the concept of the law (Black, 1989, p.172). So, horror could, and did, exist under the rules of the Hays Code from 1934 to 1968.



Figure 3 – Digital Collage of Universal Monsters, Dillen Phelps, 2020

This era of horror gave birth to the classic Universal Monster's which to this day, remain deeply embedded within popular culture e.g., Frankenstein, Dracula, The Wolf Man, The Mummy, The Creature from the Black Lagoon and The Invisible Man. As Benshoff (1997, p.36) suggests, these monster movies often tell a tale of a single male (the villain) or more commonly, the male villain and his same sex companion who exhibit queer mannerisms and behaviours. The protagonists of these movies tend to be a heterosexual couple who uphold all societal values, and throughout the course of the film are disrupted by the queer villain. However, as the Hays Code would dictate, the queer force is destroyed, and heterosexual society remains intact.

Similarly, to the monsters, homosexuality (at this time) had a mysterious point of origin and prompted questions on nature vs nurture and the meaning of otherness. Was the homosexual made just like Frankenstein or was it a condition that could not be helped like

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the lycanthropy of the Wolf Man. Either way, the monster (and therefore the homosexual) was a threat to normal society. Although the audience could sympathise with the monster, in most cases, the ending ultimately tells the audience that the 'other' will lead to tragedy.

It is also worth noting the implications of the Great Depression after the stock market crash in America. Occurring from 1929-1939, the effects are prominent within films from the time. David M. Lugowski (1999) analyses the shift in gender roles as men were feeling wary of their future prospects and therefore were threatened by effeminate men and 'women in pants'. Lugowski (1999) cites Robert McElvaine (1984) stating that the Depression caused a feminisation of American Society as men were pushed into the dependant roles that women had always occupied. Male gender was directly linked to capitalist structures with the concept of work and value and the struggles that came with the economic crash was viewed as failing masculinity. The queer imagery within film, such as the pansy craze or lesbian chic, were no longer comical depictions as American society and masculinity was threatened by the mere concept (Lugowski, 1999).

The horror movies of this time have conflicting public opinions with some critics claiming that Universal was overusing the same monsters, however it is also a period where horror was receiving large budgets from major studios (Jancovich, 2010).

The Bride of Frankenstein (1935), *Dracula's Daughter* (1936), *Rebecca* (1940), *The Wolf Man* (1941), *Cat People* (1942), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945), *Rope* (1948), *I Was a Teenage Frankenstein* (1957), and *Psycho* (1960) are important films to consider when discussing the queer context within films produced under the Hays Code. This chapter covers the longest time period, 34 years, and of course cinema did not stay the same throughout this time especially with outside factors such as World War II and the Cold War. However, it is interesting to look at the films from the beginning of this era and compare them to the end of the era as people began to push against the Hays Code.

Bride of Frankenstein (1935) directed by James Whale, for example, serves a covert commentary on gender roles, particularly the role of women within homoerotic/homosocial relationships between men. This is firstly shown within the introduction of the film, a depiction of Mary Shelley, Percy Shelley and Lord Byron as the men implore Shelley to continue her story. Elizabeth Young (1996, p.315) suggests that the triangular visual references between the three are a '*working of the film's gender triangles, as it oscillates*

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between an overt mode of female exchange and the implicit homo-erotic connections can be seen to underlie it'.

The audience sees this theme continue through the titular Bride – who is not given a name – created purely for male gain, as a mate to the Monster and as an experimental act from Frankenstein and Dr. Septimus Pretorius. In a reversal of the analysis from the first film, Benschhoff (1997, p.51) implores that the monster may be the most heterosexual character. Dr. Pretorius is played by Ernest Thesiger -bisexual female impersonator- and characterised as a flamboyant, camp man, and as Benschhoff (1997, p.50) suggests is the most visibly gay character in American cinema of this time. The love story portrayed here is not between the monster and his bride, as she visibly recoils away from him and rejects the notion of being his mate, which is itself a queer reaction to the heterosexual expectations pushed upon her, but rather tells the story of Dr. Pretorius vying for Frankenstein's attention. Pretorius repeatedly disrupts Frankenstein's relationship with his wife Elizabeth to convince the scientist to create life with him, eventually resorting to kidnapping her to finally commit the forbidden act. Although the film is titled *Bride of Frankenstein*, the bride herself functions to support the relationship between these two men, and as the film climaxes the monster forces her to stay with him and Pretorius in the flames under the belief that the three of them belong dead and Frankenstein and Elizabeth deserve to live.

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Figure 4 - Drag Artist Tayce dressed as The Bride of Frankenstein.

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Despite the Bride committing no crime, she is unnatural, a life created from two men and must perish with the villainous queer man in order to restore heterosexual society. Frankenstein is permitted to live in face of his past mistakes which led to the creation of a monster who would go on to accidentally kill a child, simply because he can uphold the societal ideals pertaining to the marriage and domesticity.

In contrast to the monster being made, the 1940's brings forth the monster within depicted within *The Wolf Man* (1941) and *Cat People* (1942). Larry Talbot of *The Wolf Man* is 'pop culture's fuzziest tragic hero' as described by Hogan (1986, p.43). His monstrosity is not purposeful or made by a mad scientist, it is a result of a tragic accident and Maria, the mother of the werewolf that turned Larry empathetically tells him '*the way you walk is thorny through no fault of your own*'. It is made clear that Talbot does not take pleasure in the attacks he unconsciously bestows, and Hogan (1986, p.43) states that the director George Waggner made an effort to disestablish any notion that the Wolf Man's attacks were not motivated by a lust towards women. Although Larry Talbot is a sympathetic monster who cannot help his affliction, the film ends with his death at the hands of his own father. Tosha Taylor (2022, p.113) relates the bond between Larry Talbot and his father to her own experiences with fatherhood as a queer person:

Sir John doesn't know the werewolf he beats to death is Larry until it is too late and he sees the monstrous body transform back into that that of his son... Though Larry is much larger than his father, his death makes him appear smaller and vulnerable. Sir John sees that his son was indeed the monster terrorizing the countryside but, rather than recoiling from him, kneels beside his son's body and strokes his face.

Co-host of *Scream, Queen!* and author Tommy Pico places the werewolf within gay nightlife culture for episode 3 of *Queer for Fear* (2022):

Werewolves transform under the light of the full moon. I always considered that to be like the disco ball, you know, that they come alive at night.

The Cat People (1942) shows a feminised version of the animal that lurks within, where Irena, a beautiful young woman fears her Balkan heritage because of the belief that intimacy with her husband will turn her into a Panther with an urge to kill. This film is often seen as a metaphor for lesbian sexuality, and the scenes between Irena and her

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psychotherapist therefore serve as the stand in for conversion therapy as her therapist attempts to have sexual relations with Irena to 'cure her delusions' leading to his death at the hands of the cat. What is portrayed as an affliction could be seen as Irena's innate fear of romantic and sexual relationships with men, the 'monster' inside of her is protecting her from unwanted advances. This metaphor becomes more relevant when noting that screen writer DeWitt Bodeen was a queer man.

In a poignant scene, the day of Irena's wedding a woman walks into the café Irena, her husband and his family are gathered at and immediately eyes up Irena. Renée Bever for the episode 3 of *Queer for Fear* (2022) describes it as the stranger 'clocking' Irena similar to a queer person recognising another queer person in public. Irena is put in a situation where she is forced to acknowledge her heritage or affliction as the woman states 'Moja sestra' before slinking away, she has been outed to herself and to her new family.

Within the same episode of *Queer for Fear* (2022) author and critic Carmen Maria Machado comments on the werewolf as a queer metaphor:

The eruption is physical and it's happening from within, and it's happening through the body. So, you're not just in the thing, but the thing is inside of you. People are afraid of it, and you're afraid of it. It's like you're the haunted house.

The Universal monsters would continue across the 40's and 50's, spawning offspring of the iconic figures, as well as various crossovers. However, the 50's came with a renewed sense of paranoia instated by the cold war and gone was the beloved, sympathetic monster (Benshoff, 1997). American society was set on the nuclear family, and American cinema became very interested in the alien invasion film. The medical community was still conflicted on the origins of homosexuality, but it became clear that a profit could be made from the 'curing' of such abnormalities. Suddenly the monsters are stripped of their human qualities, and such is the empathy they previously received, the threat now comes from faraway lands and is set out to destroy society as we know it (Benshoff, 1997).

By the 1960's the monster is no longer dominating the screen, alien or otherwise, and horror focuses on the terror of people. Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) could be referred to as the father of the slasher genre, introducing many of the sub-genre's tropes (Benshoff and Griffin, 2004). Norman Bates, the antagonist of the film, tells a well-known tale of the young

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queer son with an overbearing mother. Norman dresses as a woman when committing murder because of the damage on his psyche from his relationship with his mother, an egregious display of cross-dressing under the Hays Code that can only exist because Norman is undoubtedly the villain of this story. The character of Norman was played by closeted actor Anthony Perkins, whose career suffered tremendously after choosing this role (Oz Perkins, 2022, Queer for Fear Episode 2). What is shown in *Psycho* is the real pain and turmoil of a gay man who struggles with keeping his true self hidden away.

Queerness had left behind the veils of wolves, vampires and monsters and began to confront society in shockingly upfront ways that the heterosexual was not used to.

Skeletons Outside of the Closet: Gay Liberation and the End of the Hays Code

Although the Hays Code was officially disbanded in 1968, in 1952 the Supreme Court declared that *'film was indeed an art form guaranteed protection under the first amendment'* (cited from Griffin and Benshoff, 2004, p.42) which led to an increase in independent filmmakers addressing subjects the Hays Code deemed taboo. When directors began to release films without the Seal of Approval and still garnered audiences, it implied that the code was no longer socially relevant and weakened the support behind it (Griffin and Benshoff, 2004, p.310). The Hays Code would be replaced by the MPAA rating system which aimed to warn the audiences on what content they would be shown instead of restricting the content filmmakers were allowed to produce.

The 1960's marks an important change in American Society influenced by the Vietnam War as well as crucial developments to the Gay Rights Movement. The Stonewall Riots of June 1969 are often discussed as the pivotal moment of Gay Liberation, but it is necessary to point out, this was not the first instance of queer people fighting for rights (Sullivan, 2003). The two-day conflict between the police and the queer people (particularly drag queens of colour) in Greenwich Village is considered a dividing event in Queer History. Before Stonewall is associated with secrecy, bar culture and complex codes, whereas after Stonewall is an era of pride, coming out and the modern queer identity (Mennel, 2012, p.49). Carl Wittman (1970) outlines the revised principles of Gay Liberation as such:

Liberation for gay people is to define for ourselves how and with whom we live, instead of measuring our relationships by straight values... To be a free

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territory, we must govern ourselves, set up our own institutions, defend ourselves, and use our own energies to improve our lives.

During this time there was an uprise in protests against the Vietnam War from international students as well as civil rights movements and the emergence of second wave feminism (Mennel, 2012, p.49). The United States were awash with counterculture and in conjunction with the new possibilities of the big screen, cinema would start slowly making changes.

As established in the previous chapter, the horror genre had moved away from fantastical monsters, focusing on human killers and films became more graphic, an uptick in blood and guts which co-insides with the desensitisation of western society because of news coverage of the Vietnam War. In 1968 the zombie as we know it is created in George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, and we see the beginning of the slasher movie within *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), *Halloween* (1978) and *Friday the 13th* (1980).



Figure 5 – Leatherface wearing makeup in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974)

The *Lesbian Vampire Film* is an acknowledged and extensively studied subgenre of horror and until the rise of queer independent filmmaking in the 1980's this was the largest form of representation for queer women (Benshoff and Griffin, 2004, p.305). American critic of literature and women's studies scholar Bonnie Zimmerman traces back the two sources of the lesbian vampire in her essay *Daughters of Darkness: The Lesbian Vampire on Film*

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(1996). Firstly, the legend of Countess Elizabeth Bathory, a Hungarian noblewoman who allegedly bathed in the blood of virgins to maintain her beauty and youth in the 16th Century. Secondly, *Carmilla*, the 1871 novel wrote by Joseph Sheridan LeFanu which is perhaps the most adapted source within the *Lesbian Vampire Film* (Figures 6-8).

Zimmerman (1996) studies the 1970's as the peak of this subgenre but acknowledges the instances of lesbian vampirism before this period such as *Dracula's Daughter* (1936) and *Blood of Dracula* (1957). The 70's caused the lesbian vampire boom for a number of reasons; the increased public awareness of lesbianism and feminism due to women's right movements, the capitalisation of the pornographic market, and men's fear of women's sexuality (Zimmerman, 1996, p.380). In *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in Film* Andrea Weiss (1992, p.84) expands on this fear:

It had to do with the status anxiety that straight men must have felt during those years, between the rise of the second wave of the women's movement and after Stonewall. There was a kind of fear about lesbians that could be articulated in the vampire film.

Weiss (1992) also identifies that the lesbian vampire was marketed towards men, not women, despite being displays of intimate relationships between women, the subjects of these depictions were coded as heterosexual women in order to catch the attention of the straight male. These films contain the suggestion that lesbianism is devastatingly destructive to men (Alonso, Duralde, *Queer for Fear* Episode 4, 2022) which can be seen in *The Blood Splattered Bride* (1972) where vampire Mircalla Karnstein tells newlywed Susan to murder her husband:

Kill him! Kill him now! Get closer to him! Slash his face! Find his heart and cut it out. Silence him! Destroy his masculinity!

Because of this threat to male supremacy, the Lesbian Vampire cannot win, its primary focus is to depict attraction between women as a form of sexual violence, therefore alleviating the male's fear that lesbianism could be a suitable alternative to heterosexuality and eliminate the need for men (Zimmerman, 1996).

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Figure 6 – *Les Frisson Des Vampires* (1971) Title Card



Figure 7 – *The Velvet Vampire* (1971) Title Card

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Figure 8 – *Lust for a Vampire* (1971) Title Card

Regardless of the intent behind the *Lesbian Vampire*, it is not unusual for queer women to find empowerment within the genre, after all why not take solace in women loving one another and murdering the men who threaten their freedom? Whilst the Lesbian Vampire seemed to dominate the 70's, they weren't the only queer horror villain of this era. The murderous transgender (referred to as transsexual or cross-dresser during this time) trope was on the rise, following the path laid out before it from *Psycho* (1960).

Dr Jekyll and Sister Hyde (1971) takes the queer subtext of the original *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931) as discussed by Harry M. Benshoff (1997, pp.19-21) and expands upon it with Dr. Jekyll experimenting with female hormones to create a solution to eternal life. Instead of turning into the hideous Mr. Hyde, Dr. Jekyll instead transforms into a beautiful, sadistic young woman. This is a common theme within the transgender killer trope, in which the so-called feminine side evokes violent urges, and unfortunately is still found in horror to this day.

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Figure 9 – Sister Hyde from *Dr Jekyll and Sister Hyde* (1971)

Another example of this happens to be yet another doctor, this time Dr. Frank N. Furter of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) a comedy musical that has become a beloved cult classic for queer people. The film begins with the required heterosexual couple, Brad, and Janet, perfectly fit to normal society in every way possible. On the way to invite their old high school teacher to their upcoming nuptials, their car breaks down and the unsuspecting couple find themselves at Frank N. Furter's castle (named the *Frankenstein Place* by the music dubbed over the top) looking for help. The castle is inhabited by a bizarre family of characters named Riff Raff, Magenta, Columbia, and of course, Frank N. Furter who is introduced with the song *Sweet Transvestite* in which he refers to himself as '*a sweet transvestite, from Transsexual, Transylvania*'.

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Figure 10 – Dr. Frank N. Furter and Rocky in the lab (1975)

Frank invites the couple to stay for the night and tells them about his plan to create a man with perfect muscles, hair, and a tan to keep him company. The film delves into debauchery with Frank seducing both Brad and Janet, as well as Janet going on to seduce Rocky, Frank's creation (Figure 10), whilst Columbia and Magenta watch. By the finale of the film, it has devolved into complete absurdism with the reveal that the inhabitants of the castle are aliens from the planet Transylvania and the castle is a spaceship.

It turns out Frank is the villain of this story instead of his 'monstrous' creation, whilst Rocky quivers away in fear, a reversal of the classic *Frankenstein* tale. Despite the negative connotations this has for trans people, it is still a mainstay in queer culture. Frank is a delightfully camp and theatrical figure clothed in fishnets, corsets and outrageous heels, a giggling manic icon who demands the attention of those around him.

The feature garnered negative criticism at first, but quickly gained a cult following of groups of people who would attend midnight showings of the film dressed as the depraved character shown in the movie, speaking alongside every line and shouting out responses to the dialogue on the screen. A tradition that still continues to this day, where actors will act

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out the movie in front of a projected playing of the film itself, complete with audience participation which involves spanking those who are 'virgins' to the Rocky Horror live experience (Siegal, 1980). Ron Rosenbaum (1979, cited in Siegal, 1980, p.306) refers to the showings as:

a mutant form of organized religion, ... a midnight mass that was less satanic than sophomoric, but utterly serious for all that. The pre-scripted lines the audience called out were like the responsive readings of a congregation to a holy text. The absurdity of the passion play on screen was less important than the state of ecstatic communion the audience worked itself into while watching.

The sexual revolution of the 1970's was not long lived and by the 1980's America reverted back to the traditionalism of the 1980's under the presidency of Roanld Reagan and in response to the AIDS Crisis.

It Passes Through the Blood: The AIDS Crisis, Vampires, and Slashers in the 80's

The 1980's is the focus of a heavy wave of Nostalgia within the late 2010's and early 2020's seen in *Stranger Things* (2016-Present), *It* (2017) and the onslaught of films and TV shows that followed in their wake. But the 1980's weren't the brightly coloured, obnoxious patterned, synth music soundtracked glory days for everyone. Harry M. Benshoff (2004) recalls the *New York Times* running the first story on AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) in 1981, discussing the newly identified disease and the large numbers of gay men in urban areas who had contracted the illness. Initially, the virus had been called GRID (gay-related immunodeficiency) and the quickly spreading virus made a large impact on the newfound sexual freedom of the 1970's (Benshoff, 2004).

Gay men being the primary group suffering from contracting the virus led to an extremely homophobic narrative surrounding the epidemic. Drew Dalton (2017) discusses how the virus was seen as a 'disease' caused by a particular lifestyle, with some scientists claiming the '*fast-lane gay lifestyle*' was the cause of AIDS. As a result, the government, under the presidency of Ronald Reagan, denied funding both scientific research and public educational information in regards to AIDS, an act fuelled by homophobia (Benshoff, 2004).

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Figure 11 – ACT UP Slogan SILENCE = DEATH

Groups such as ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) engaged in public protests and civil disobedience to raise awareness to the virus and to demand access to medical intervention (Mennel, 2012). Their poignant slogan of SILENCE = DEATH (Figure 11) claimed that being open about sexuality was the only way to save lives and pushed the issues surrounding death and sexuality to the forefront of the movement (Mennel, 2012).

AIDS would not be addressed in Hollywood until 1993 in *Philadelphia*, but this did not mean America's latent fears surrounding sex and death were ignored entirely. The most profitable horror film of the 80's was the *Slasher Film* giving birth to icons like Jason Vorhees, Freddy Krueger, and Michael Myers. *Slasher Films* were geared towards the teen audience, featuring groups of young, sexually active teenagers who would be killed off one by one from a usually masked killer (Nowell, 2011).

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Figure 12 – Leatherface threatening Stretch in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (1986)

In the 1992 essay *Her Body, Himself* Carol J. Clover points out that the killer's weapon of choice is rarely a gun, usually a knife, occasionally a hammer, pitchfork, needle, saw, axe, ice pick, and other similar objects. The weapon is often times a phallic representation (Figure 12), or in the case of a monster movie, an extension of the body such as teeth or claws, necessitating a closeness between victim and killer. Clover (1992, p.32) uses the 1978 film *spit on Your Grave* as an example of curated choices in weaponry:

The heroine forces her rapist at gunpoint to lower his pants, presumably with the intention of shooting him in the genitals. But she changes her mind... she castrates him with a knife. If we wondered why she gave up the pistol, now we know: all phallic symbols are not equal, and a hands-on knifing answers a hands-on rape in a way that a shooting, even a shooting preceded by a humiliation, does not.

The *Slasher Film* draws a direct line between sexual activity and death, a trope egregiously utilised within the *Friday the Thirteenth* franchise, in couples are often murdered post coitus or even during the act (Clover, 1992). Harry M. Benshoff states that '*the 1980's slasher film also seems to demonstrate in metaphoric ways our nation's fear and hysteria over sex and sexuality during the first decade of the AIDS crisis.*'

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These films created the *Final Girl* a term coined by Clover in *Her Body, Himself* (1992) which refers to the girl who outlives the disposable teenage friends in her group and goes on to defeat the killer or survive the film. The *Final Girl* is the main character, and this is made clear, she is not sexually available, intelligent unlike her vapid girlfriends who are simply bodies for the count, she is resourceful under duress, and sometimes lacking in femininity just as the killers may possess a lack of masculinity (Clover, 1992). Many theorists and critics have argued that the *Slasher Film* is inherently sexist due to its gratuitous violence against women, and that the intended young male audience is supposed to relate to the killer. However, Clover (1992, p.47) argues that the use of the *Final Girl* forces the male audience to see the narrative from the female perspective, an unexpectedly feminist twist that most film genres would not employ.

Clover (1992) cites William Schoell (1995, p.55) commenting on the male relationship with the *Final Girl*:

They don't realise that these same men cheer on (with renewed enthusiasm, in fact) the heroines, who are often strong, sexy and independent as the [earlier] victims, as they blow away the killer with a shotgun or get him between the eyes with a machete. All of these men are said to be identifying with the maniac, but they enjoy *his* death throes the most of all, and applaud the heroine with admiration.

In an interview (Appendix 1) with founder of *Screen Queens* Chloë Leeson (2023), she discussed the way audiences misunderstand horror as being a genre that mistreats minorities, when in actuality horror is a place where most people will experience something terrible, not just the minorities. She states that '*horror is where women get to succeed*'.

Once again, the vampire is used to express America's fears, this time the fear of a monster who walks around 'normal' people and passes on an incurable illness through bodily fluids. Harry M. Benshoff (1997) recalls headlines published on the AIDS Crisis comparing it to vampirism 'AIDS Wary Vampires Pull in Their Fangs' and 'Gay Vampire Catches AIDS'.

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Figure 13 – Michael and David fight in The Lost Boys (1987)

The Lost Boys (1987) directed by Joel Schumacher was a new variation on the classic vampire. Gone is the suave European famously played by Bela Lugosi and replaced by young teenage boys dressed in leather with tattoos and bleach blonde hair, strolling the streets of Santa Carla. Two contrasting groups are presented in the film: the punky troublemaking homoerotic vampires, and the comic book obsessed, vampire hunting adolescents, a social commentary that reflects on the war between queer subculture and paramilitary types (Benshoff, 1997).

When Michael and his younger brother Sam move to Santa Carla, Michael is inducted into the group of vampires by leader of the gang David. Meanwhile, Sam befriends the Frog brothers, self-titled vampire hunters. The relationship between Michael and David is intense (Figure 13), with David seducing Michael into vampirism ‘How far are you willing to go Michael?’. The boys pressure Michael into drinking vampiric blood in a scene reminiscing the iconic Tod Browning’s *Freaks* (1932) ‘One of us’ scene. Michael’s transformation causes a rift between him and his younger brother, similarly to the conflict that can occur between family when someone comes out as queer. Sam even comments on Michael’s new taste in

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accessories, making a comparison to *Dynasty* (1980) which features one of American television's first gay characters, Steve Carrington.

The vampire hunting Frog brothers inform Sam that he must kill his brother, because after all a dead brother is better than a '*shit-sucking vampire*', much like those who believe someone is better off dead than queer.

An interesting detail to note is that the flesh of these vampires, sparkle, a fact that is not addressed within the film, but is more visibly seen within higher definition copies of the film. The concept of the glittering vampire would not become popularised until *Twilight* (2008), which became synonymous with the term gay vampire.

Of course, as any queer monster movie must accomplish, the gay vampires are defeated and Michael – who it turns out was only a half vampire due to not undertaking his first kill – can return to his normal human (heterosexual) self. This is further implemented by the other half vampire characters of Star and Laddie, the attractive girl who is used to bait him into joining the group, and the young boy she tends to. The three form the perfect heterosexual family now they have been removed from the influence of the deviant other (Benshoff, 1997).

Blood diseases as both vampirism and AIDS are spread through intimacy, passion, and connection articulates Vera Dika in *From Dracula – with Love* (1996). The vampire augments the fear of blood, of sex, of women, of AIDS, but as Dika (1996, p.395) explains:

The ultimate effect is not revulsion; instead, woman, blood, and even the monster are presented, often in contradiction to earlier renditions, with the added connotation of life. And in the end the film's elements coalesce, promoting a response to both life and death as one of liberation and voluptuous acceptance.

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Figure 14 – Miriam mourns lover Sarah in *The Hunger* (1993)

Gay blood is also ruminated upon in Grant Sutton's *Blood Actually* (2022) in which he recounts his experiences as a gay male and how the homophobia caused by the AIDS Crisis affected him:

Gay blood must be toxic, and I visualised it clogging my veins like black Jell-O... Slasher films gave me a way to order the violence and death that occupied most of my attention. My toxic blood seemed less terrifying when I saw fake blood spilled on screen.

Other queer coded vampire films to take into consideration for this decade include *Fright Night* (1985) and *The Hunger* (1983) with the former being much more subtextual and the latter an explicitly bisexual vampire flick (Figure 14) featuring David Bowie.

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Figure 15 – Freddy Krueger murders gay gym coach in S&M bar in A Nightmare on Elm Street, Part 2: Freddy's Revenge (1985)

A Nightmare on Elm Street, Part 2: Freddy's Revenge (1985) has been deigned the most accidentally gay film in the history of horror (Mark Patton, *Scream, Queen! My Nightmare on Elm Street*, 2019). The male protagonist, Jesse, of this sequel was unusual for this period, dubbing him as one of the few male scream queens. Freddy Krueger spends the bulk of the film attempting to get inside of the teenager, quite literally, he wants to possess the boy's body. The homoerotic undertones of this film and its effects on closeted actor Mark Patton, who played Jesse, were extensively analysed within the 2019 documentary *Scream, Queen! My Nightmare on Elm Street*. What was intended to be a sequel to an iconic slasher film, upping the death, gore and quipping villains became a commentary on the fear of coming out of the closet featuring a gay coach, an S&M bar (Figure 15) and a child murderer forcing his fingers down a teenage boy's throat.

Guts, Gore, and Gays: Entering the New Millenium

Cultural landmarks for both queer rights, cinema and western society seemed to be in abundance within the 1990's and the early 2000's. Technology was developing at a rapid rate, the Cold War had ended, but America had become threatened by terrorism.

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Don't Ask, Don't Tell was a policy instated in 1993 that allowed gay men and lesbians to serve in the military as long as they did not discuss their sexual identity. If the sexual orientation of the individual was made clear, it would become grounds for an investigation that would result in dismissal from the military (National Defense Research Institute, 2010, p.44).

The Defence of Marriage Act (DOMA) defined marriage as union between one man and one woman. Put into place in 1996, DOMA meant that same-sex marriages would not be honoured in states where it was not legal (Adam, 2003).



Figure 16 – Amanda Young in the Reverse Bear Trap in *Saw* (2004)

On the 11th of September 2001, the terrorist attack against the Twin Towers caused a large cultural shock, the ramifications of which are still visible today. Kevin J. Wetmore (2012) refers to a 'post-9/11 mindset' which led to increased suspicions and the augmentation of homeland security. The shift in cultural attitudes also caused a big change in the horror film. *Torture Porn* is introduced as the new horror craze, they're graphic, gory, and gritty and reflect a hopelessness in the state of humanity. *Saw* (2004) and *Hostel* (2005), Wetmore (2012, p.5) states, '*are rooted in American ambivalence and concern that we have become a nation that tortures*'. These films don't end with the monsters being defeated, or a masked killer being brought to justice, they spawn franchises that reveal secret underground groups that continue to bring suffering. No one wins.

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Horror also has a renewed interest in the film remake, whether that be English spoken remakes of foreign films, or remakes of older horror films, upgraded to be more gruesome, sexy, and modern. Rob Zombie's *Halloween* remake (2007) is dark and dingy, reminiscent of the musician and director's signature 'Hellbilly' style (Figure 17). There's an increase in sexual violence and Michael Myers gets a thirty-minute origin story that was not present in the original film, a glimpse into the depraved lifestyle that would affect his psyche. Similarly, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003), *Dawn of the Dead* (2004), *House of Wax* (2005), *Friday the 13th* (2009), and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (2010) reinvent horror classics making them meaner and bloodier than ever. All elements of camp and cheese present in the original of the 70's and 80's is nowhere to be seen, Freddy Krueger has been transformed from child murderer to child molester, Jason Vorhees is a survivalist woodsman.



Figure 17 – Sheri Moon Zombie as Michael Myers Mom in *Halloween* (2007)

The early 2000's is a particularly mean era of horror, where women are brutalised, commentary on appearance is rife and gay jokes are plentiful. A reflection of the dark mentality that was overtaking the population. The 2005 remake of *House of Wax* created an

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entire advertising premise over getting to see the pop culture icon Paris Hilton, who was largely disliked at the time, die within the film (Figure 18).

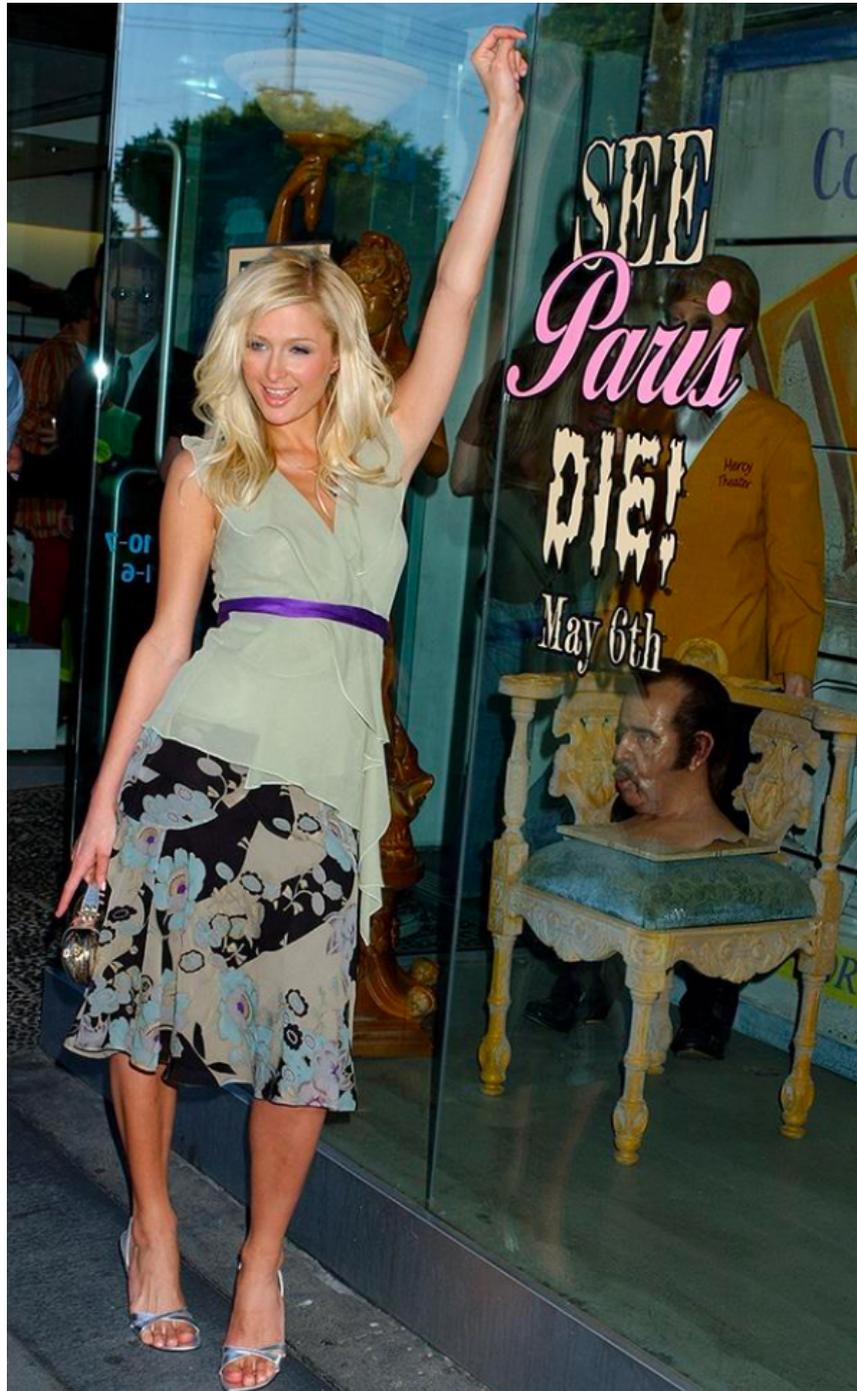


Figure 18 – Paris Hilton during the ‘See Paris Die Campaign’

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Queer characters were more visible than ever within film, but not all representation is equal to positive representation. *Silence of the Lambs* (1991) is a psychological horror that depicts a young FBI agent enlisting the help of Hannibal Lecter, former psychiatrist, and cannibal, to aid in the capture of a serial killer who is murdering young women. Hannibal Lecter has become a queer figure within his own right thanks to Bryan Fuller's 2013 TV show *Hannibal*, however this dissertation pertains to the horror film and not the serial drama, but the topic of such is thoroughly discussed in Geoff Klock's *Aestheticism, Evil, Homosexuality, and Hannibal: If Oscar Wilde Ate People* (2017).



Figure 19 – Buffalo Bill in *Silence of the Lambs* (1991)

The sought out serial killer is named Buffalo Bill because after the murder is committed, the killer takes their skin. The motive of which being that Buffalo Bill suffers gender dysphoria and is using the skin to make a 'female suit', the murders therefore do not come from the intent to kill, but the need for materials (Halberstram, 1995, p.576). Hannibal argues that Buffalo Bill is neither homosexual nor transsexual, a point that Jack Halberstram (1995, p.576), transgender professor, author, and academic, is inclined to agree with:

Buffalo Bill hates identity, he is simply at odds with any identity whatsoever; no body, no gender will do so he has to sit at home with his skins and fashion

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a completely new one. What he constructs is a posthuman gender beyond the body, beyond human, a carnage of identity.

The killer is seen parading around an attic wearing a wig and with their penis tucked between their legs (Figure 19), prowling the words '*Would you fuck me? I'd fuck me. I'd fuck me hard. I'd fuck me so hard*'. But despite the Buffalo Bill's need to be contained within the skin of a woman, Halberstram (1995) believes that Bill is the symbol of unease that the modern person feels within their body and self.

Regardless of whether Buffalo Bill is 'truly' transgender, or not the film contributes to the long ancestry of the transgender killer trope. Queer representation is difficult to discuss in terms of negative and positive representation within the horror genre compared to other genres. As discussed with Chloë Leeson (Appendix 1), the horror genre functions with different rules, different communities, and different expectations. The bury your gays trope was used heavily within the 20th century, a response to the Hays Code. Killing off the gay character would ensure that the content creator would not receive backlash for endorsing homosexuality (Hulan, 2017). However, the trope persisted long past the abolishment of the code. Many queer people take offense to queer character dying within modern media due to the history of this trope, but this is where the difficulty with horror lies. As previously mentioned, horror has different rules, death is almost a staple within the genre, and in certain subgenres it is expected that most or all the characters will perish or suffer. Expectations are often subverted, villains become the characters the audience roots for, and the viewer enjoys the gruesome death of the members of the established main cast. Therefore, if a queer character is presented as evil, or is killed off within a horror film, can this be judged within the same parameters of a drama who kills of the queer lover, or a comedy who presents the queer character as mean stereotype?

The other side of the Buffalo Bill character would be Glen/Glenda from *Seed of Chucky* (2004), an example of the transgender killer created by queer people, for queer people. The first *Child's Play* film was released in 1988 based on the screenplay by openly gay writer Don Mancini. Unlike other horror franchises, Mancini has stayed with the franchise since its conception, writing for every film, directing the final three films and show running the TV series (2021-present). Mancini has a penchant for bringing new life to the franchise when things are beginning to look stale. After the first three *Child's Play* films, the slasher had been overdone and so came *Bride of Chucky* (1998), influenced by the meta commentary of

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Scream (1996), the film took on a parodic, self-referential tone and heralded a nu-goth aesthetic that hadn't been present in the franchise.



Figure 20 – Tiffany Resurrects Chucky in *Bride of Chucky* (1998)

Recommended Citation

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Tiffany is introduced as our titular Bride (references to *Bride of Frankenstein* are aplenty throughout), played by Jennifer Tilly who had become known for her role as Violet in lesbian crime thriller *Bound* (1996). The ongoings of this film are outrageously camp, including a sex scene between two dolls, which results in the final scene – a shot of Tiffany in doll flame burning as a baby doll is ejected from her body in a horrifying birth scene.

Seed of Chucky (2004) centres around the baby who is first introduced as Shitface, an androgynous doll who has somehow ended up in England. On a journey to find out who they are, they resurrect Tiffany and Chucky as the inciting act of the film. The film did not perform well at the box office, making the least profit (TheNumbers.com), which meant that the Chucky franchise would not see another movie until 2013 with *Curse of Chucky*. The mixed critical response to the film may be due to the overall absurdity of the film, as well as the overtly queer themes.



Figure 21 – Queer director John Waters cameos in *Seed of Chucky* (2004), pictured with Chucky and Glen/da

Because of Shitface's ambiguous gender, and lack of genitalia, Chucky and Tiffany fight over whether they are a boy or girl, Chucky refers to his son as Glen and Tiffany to her daughter as Glenda, a glaring reference to Ed Wood's *Glen or Glenda* (1953). Glen is timid and bears no interest in the murderous activities that his father wants him to pursue, but Glenda is a

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femme fatale which doesn't pair well with Tiffany's recent obsession with motherhood and giving up murder. Halberstram (2012, p.278) comments:

In this brilliant intersexual thematic, gender legibility is shown to be important for the parents, not the child, and the film foregrounds the ways in which normative identity requires stable gender. In refusing to be either Glen or Glenda and in insisting on being both, Chucky and Tiffany's kid focuses or attention on the horrific effects of heteronormativity and turns attention away from the monstrosity of the ambiguously gendered body.

In a stunningly progressive turn for a film of its era, Glen/da states '*Sometimes I feel like a boy. Sometimes I feel like a girl. Can I be both?*'. Glen/da's nonbinary identity is revolutionary, making them one of the most openly queer icons within horror. This is further touched upon in season 2 of *Chucky* (2022).



Figure 22 - Jennifer kills Needy's boyfriend Chip in Jennifer's Body (2009)

Approaching the 2010's, sapphic horrors such as *Grace* (2009), *Jennifer's Body* (2009), and *Black Swan* (2010) are released, depicting intense relationships between women focused on

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female sexuality and the complexities of lesbian relationships within a male dominated society. Upon its release *Jennifer's Body* (2009) was received terribly due to sexist coverage and botched marketing (Machado, C.M, 2022). Over the past few years, the film has been revisited by a new generation of critics and academics who have found a new appreciation for the film. Jennifer Check is now a staple to the modern bisexual's Pinterest board and no queer horror discussion is complete without the standout quote from the film:

'I thought you only murdered boys.'

'I go both ways.'

In 2011, Don't Ask Don't Tell was repealed, and other advancements in queer rights were making huge strides. A new era for queer pride was beginning, and across the horizon, the new horror canon was rising. They were here, queer, and ready to fill you with fear.

"To Survive a Modern Horror Movie, You Pretty Much Have to be Gay": The Modern Horror Queer

Wes Craven's final contribution to the *Scream* franchise and final directorial role *Scream 4* (2011) comments on the state of horror within the millennium, making meta jokes on the endless sequels and remakes that seemed to dominate horror at the time. Most importantly, *Scream 4* (2011), gave birth to the line 'to survive a modern horror movie, you pretty much have to be gay' a statement which was very much not true then, and isn't even guaranteed today.

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Figure 23 – Robbie Mercer’s final words before Ghostface stabs him to death in *Scream 4* (2011)

The truth, however, is that in the latter half of the 2010’s queer representation within media had become a bigger focus within queer activism, which could be linked to rising support in marriage equality (Bridges, 2013). There was a demand to see queer people on screen more than ever.

June 26, 2015, the Supreme Court granted same-sex couple marriages the right to full recognition within the law in all 50 states, a landmark ruling in gay rights. Over the past decade, it has appeared that queer rights in America have improved rapidly, at a quicker pace than ever before. And over the last decade queer people have been represented more in media, and more importantly, represented outside of the stereotypes that were commonplace for queer characters of the 90’s and early 2000’s. GLAAD’s (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) Studio Responsibility Index is a report that analyses the level quantity and quality of LGBTQ+ representation in films released by major motion picture studios. It is released once a year with the intention of increasing positive representation within film. The reports also use the Vito Russo test inspired by the Bechdel test to analyse how queer people are represented with media. The criteria is as follows (GLAAD, 2013):

The film contains a character that is identifiably lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender. That character must not be solely or predominantly defined by their sexual orientation or gender identity. I.e., they are made up of the same sort of unique character traits commonly used to differentiate straight

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characters from one another. The LGBT character must be tied into the plot in such a way that their removal would have a significant effect. Meaning they are not there to simply provide colorful commentary, paint urban authenticity, or (perhaps most commonly) set up a punchline. The character should matter.

GLAAD's debut SRI (2013) reports that of the 101 films released by the major motion picture studios studied, 14 of the characters were gay, bisexual, or lesbian (Appendix 5). 6 of the 14 films passed the Vito Russo test. 2019's SRI notes a significant increase in queer representation from films released in 2018 with 20 queer character in 110 films with 65% of them passing the Vito Russo test (Appendices 6 and 7). These statistics only account for major motion picture studios, and therefore do not contain information regarding independent filmmaking in which a lot of horror and queer filmmaking is produced under.

In the late 2010's queer activists are more vocal about offensive depictions of LGBTQ+ characters, particularly the bury your gays trope. Public outrage is commonplace with fans of media petitioning and campaigning against the use of the trope (Framke, 2016).

Although public perceptions and the treatment of queer people seems to have improved over the last decade, it is vital to acknowledge that in 2023 a number of transphobic bills have been suggested, and some even passed within the United States, putting restrictions on education about transgender issues, the healthcare trans people may receive and creative pursuits such as drag (Trans Legislation Tracker, 2023).

Compared to the films looked at in Chapter I, the queer characters of the 2010's and 2020's, are out, proud and most importantly some of them even get to live. Large budget horror movies like *Scream VI* (2023), *Bodies Bodies Bodies* (2022), *Candyman* (2021), and so many more feature queer characters whose sexuality and or gender is not relevant to the storyline and are not depicted in an offensively stereotypical manner. However, in films where a queer orientation is relevant to the plot or the horror of the film, it is done in a way that does not automatically link queerness to evil.

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Figure 24 – Girlfriends Mindy and Anika in *Scream VI* (2023)

The *Fear Street Trilogy* (2021) is three films directed by Leigh Janiak, shot and produced at the same time and released within one-week intervals. The core of the trilogy is two lesbian relationships, one of which takes place in 1666 and the other in 1994. The first film *Fear Street: 1994* tells the story of freshly split (due to homophobia from Sam's mother) lesbian couple Deena and Sam. Deena, Sam and their ragtag group of friends become entangled in a

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twisted series of murders caused by the legend of the witch Sarah Fier who is said to be the cause behind the town of Sunnyside's abundance of murderers.

The second film *Fear Street: 1978* looks at one of these murderers who was the cause of a massacre in a summer camp. The final instalment *Fear Street 1666* shows the audience the real truth of Sarah Fier who alongside her girlfriend Hannah Miller, is accused of witchcraft and blamed for the murder of an entire congregation of church members. To save Hannah, Sarah takes responsibility and is hanged for her crimes, a scapegoat for townsman Solomon Goode who has made a deal with the devil in exchange for wealth and power. The long line of Goode men have continued on the pact, writing down the name of a person for the devil to possess and commit various murders within Shadyside to maintain the power and wealth of the family.



Figure 25 – Hannah buries Sarah with red moss crown in *Fear Street: 1666* (2021)

The second half of the film refocuses back on the group from 1994, with Sam and Deena going against the latest in the line of Goode men, Sheriff Nick Goode. In a shock ending, Sam and Deena are successful, and not only do they defeat the evil, they both live and get their happy ending, a reversal on so many queer love stories told before. Sarah and Hannah in 1666 are played by the same actors who portray Sam and Deena, a beautiful depiction on the legacy continued from generations of queer people. Sarah Fier begins as the typical portrayal of the evil queer who wreaks havoc on those who have wronged her, but it is revealed that she has been taking the blame for hundreds of years for wrongdoings that are not her own, similar to how many queer people are accused of crimes and labelled as disgusting or wrongful because of their identity.

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Sarah and Hannah don't get their happy ending, but the spirit of Sarah does aid Sam and Deena to defeat the true evil, giving them their own happy ending. The final shot of the film (Figure 26) is an overhead of Sam and Deena kissing in a sea of red moss which had been earlier established as a symbol of Sarah and Hannah's love (Figure 25). The lost queer lives and love of those who came before live on in the queer people of today, and will continue to live on.



Figure 26 - Sam and Deena kiss in the red moss in *Fear Street 1666*

Living in a modern era does not always constitute that representation is equal to good representation. *It Chapter 2* (2019) received mass criticism for its opening scene which featured a brutal attack on a gay couple resulting in murder. Jonathan Lee and Taylor Drake (*The Advocate*, 2019) state that the scene serves no purpose and can even be seen as 'pornography' for homophobes. They go on to say:

At best, the scene is a cheap political statement, a virtue-signalling reminder to queer and non-queer audience members about how "dark humans can get." At worst, the scene is a subversive plot-point to tout progress that anyone -- even gay people -- can be killed in a horror film nowadays. Nothing is progressive about this form of queer visibility.

Many queer viewers who saw the film in cinemas were deeply affected by the scene (Garzia, 2019) which was witnessed by the author both in person, and within online discussions. Andy Muschietti (2019, *Time Magazine*) defends the inclusion of the scene stating that 'leaving bigotry and homophobia and that kind of violence out would not only not be

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accurate to the times that we're living in, it would be omitting something that is still happening to this day and is horrible'.

Whilst the scene may be thematically relevant, it does not take away from the fact that this is reality for many queer people and is something that can be extremely distressing to view and harkens back to times when the only queer representation on screen was the suffering of queer people. The queer themes continue within *It Chapter 2* through the character of Richie Tozier who has been speculated as queer since the 1986 release of the Stephen King novel *It* (Brands, 2023). Though Richie never explicitly states he is gay, a flashback shows him being called a homophobic slur prior to encountering the evil clown Pennywise who taunts him for having 'a dirty little secret'. It is implied that Richie has feelings for his childhood best friend Eddie, which is further supported by one of the final scenes of the film where Richie carves 'R+E' onto the Derry bridge after the death of the character.



Figure 27 - Richie and Eddie hold hands in *It Chapter One* (2017)

Most queer people came away from the film definitively stating that Richie was gay, taken from the context clues the film offers, as well as supporting statements from the cast and crew. However, this was controversial with many heterosexual viewers being surprised that people were viewing the character as gay, an example of such being Anthony Aycock's 2019 article for Medium titled '*I Don't Think Richie from Stephen King's IT Is Gay*' disagreeing with the queer readings of the character. The discussion surrounding the film is one of the clearest examples of the difference in which queer subtext is picked up by different people from varying communities and with different experiences. Whilst queer people readily pick up the subtext, much like the codes and forms of hidden communication used between

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queer folk for many decades, heterosexual people will often deny the queerness of a character unless it is explicitly stated within the media.

Queer representation still has a long way to go within mainstream media, and the horror genre, but as queer characters become more frequently shown and effectively portrayed, progress is being made. Queer stories are allowed to be told more explicitly within the horror film, without the requirements of queerness meaning evil or unnatural or the expectation that the queer characters will be killed. Horror movies featuring queer characters or queer storylines that show the true evil to be those who ostracise and pursue hatred are being made and released, and the future of queer horror is a bright one.

Queer relationships with horror span well beyond the years and media covered within the confines of this dissertation and has been discussed within academic circles since the 1980's. Harry M. Benshoff and Jack Halberstram are vital to the discussion on queer horror, writing multiple publications on the subject matter which perfectly dissect 20th century horror and the queer implications behind it.

Frankenstein (1931) is briefly discussed within this paper as one of the earliest examples of queer subtext within queer horror, and it is vital to note that it is a repeated motif throughout the last century, not just as a horror icon, but as a representation of what it means to be queer. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), *Bride of Re-Animator* (1990), *Bride of Chucky* (1998), *May* (2001) are stand outs within queer horror that take on the idea of making a monster from humans. Interestingly, the queer horror film does not just draw from *Frankenstein* (1931), but more specifically *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), with the notion that companionship cannot be found from 'normal' people and therefore must be created. Queer people often struggle to make connections with family or the people around them, and as a result must make their own connections elsewhere, be it from a found family, or outsourcing other people who share their experiences through queer communities or even online.

Recommended Citation

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Figure 28 – The Bride rips out her own heart after her love is rejected in *Bride of Re-Animator* (1990)

The true tragedy of Frankenstein’s Monster isn’t that he is born a monster, he is made one by society’s rejection of him because he is unnatural, a tale that many queer people relate to.

The chapters of this dissertation split the last century of horror film into 5 eras, exploring the societal, political, and cultural ongoings of each one and discussing how that effected horror, and more specifically queer horror of the time. In a survey conducted on public perceptions of intersections between queerness and horror (Appendix 8) 89.5% of the respondents picked 4 and 5 on a 1-5 scale (with 1 being not at all and 5 being completely) of how much they believed the political and societal context of the time effects films (Appendix 11). Using the same scale, 89.5% of people also picked 4 and 5 for how much film effects culture and society (Appendix 11). These findings are reflected within the research conducted within each chapter through the analysis of films within the period that reflect what was going on at the time.

Chapter I looks at the Hollywood monster film under the Hays code from 1934-1968 and identifies why queer people relate to horror, and more specifically, why queer people relate to the monster using *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), *The Wolf Man* (1941), and *Cat People* (1942) as case studies. The monster is oftentimes not a monster through their own fault, in the case of the Bride, she is made by a mad scientist, and for Larry Talbot and Irena, they are

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simply born that way or have been transformed by another being. They end becoming monsters because of the way they are treated, cast out and ashamed by 'normal' society who does not understand them much like the queer people who face discrimination for the identities they do not choose.

The Hays code itself is explored at length, examining how it affected queer representation within cinema at the time also establishing methods of queer communication and intertextual readings that would remain within the horror genre long after the disbandment of the code.

Chapter II draws from the writings of Bonnie Zimmerman and Andrea Weiss to explore the *Lesbian Vampire* film of the 1970's in a post Hays Code Hollywood era. The late 60's and the 70's exist in a strange vacuum of sexual freedom and revolution sandwiched between two eras of puritanism and conservatism influenced by the cold war and the AIDS Crisis. As a result, producing some of the most sexually explicit lesbian cinema within the genre. The *Lesbian Vampire* is a conflicting subject, as is most queer representation within horror, as critics are torn between the anti-feminist and anti-lesbian implications of sexually driven movies about women written and directed by men for men, and the empowerment that some lesbians find within the subgenre.

Repeated throughout queer readings, theories, and criticism on horror is the notion of queer people finding comfort within or reclaiming media that was not initially intended for queer people, or even depicted queer people in offensive ways. If a heterosexual man creates a lesbian vampire to convey the male fear of women loving one another and threatening their masculinity, a lesbian can find power in the characters presented who love freely and murder the men who are their oppressors. Similarly, a trans person may relate to the trans killer within a horror flick, not because of a connection between transness and violence, but because it is cathartic to watch someone get their revenge against the people who have mistreated them, such as Angela in *Sleepaway Camp* (1983).

It is difficult to solidly define queer representation as good or bad, most of the time it will live in the grey spaces, much like how a human being is rarely ever definitively good or bad. Therefore, it is up to the individual to weigh up the positives and negatives, acknowledging the flaws that exist within the representation, and choose for themselves whether they deem it as reclaimable or empowering.

Recommended Citation

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Vampires arise once again in Chapter III, this time as a reflection on the AIDS Crisis beginning in the 1980's alongside slashers. Carol J. Clover's essay *Her Body, Himself* (1992) coins the term *Final Girl* and delves into the gendered relationship male audiences have with female protagonists within horror. The horror films of this time are a product of their time, depicting America's fears of sex and the other, which is particularly shown within the slasher genre (the sexually active friend will die whereas the sexually unavailable *Final Girl* defeats the monster and lives to tell the tale).

Unlike the early Universal Monsters who are oftentimes sympathetic villains, the monsters of the 80's slashers are terrifying and unforgiveable, purposely infecting others with their vampirism or murdering with careless abandon. The homophobic attitudes resulting from the AIDS Crisis under Reagan's presidency are mirrored within the unsympathetic villain, and blood seems to be a pressing issue on everyone's minds.

Entering the new millennium, Chapter IV is a retrospective on the rapidly increasing developments in technology, awareness of queer people, and the longstanding cultural effects of terrorism within the west. Before this point, the traditionalist commentary and distaste for the other was buried within layers of subtext, however the pessimistic attitudes of the 2000's creates an openness that was not their prior. Trans people are murderers, and it is explicitly established they murder because they are trans, namely, Buffalo Bill. Gay characters are the butt of the joke, and everything has a dreary blue or green filter on it.

Moreso than ever, queer characters are unequivocally queer and being represented within the horror film, but that representation is neither kind nor accurate to the complexities of the queer individual.

Chapter V brings the research back to the present, looking at the previous decade of horror and the increased positive representation of queer people within media. This period is the least studied and written about academically as we are still living through it and have yet to fully reflect upon the implications of the modern queer horror film. Despite this, the chapter uses *The Fear Street Trilogy* (2021) as a case study exemplifying horror using queerness as a tool within the storyline to create a sense of horror without linking queerness to being wrong, unnatural, or evil. Alongside this, *It Chapter 2* (2019) is discussed as an example of modern queer representation within horror that received criticism from the queer community. The emerging representation of the queer within horror is often referred to as

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monsters coming out of the closet, but it might just be the Final Girl coming out of her hiding place as dawn breaks and escaping the clutch of her pursuer.

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List of Figures

Figure 1: Smiles, S. (2022) *If you don't like pastel Halloween, We don't care... Were painting everything pink over here.* [online image] Available from: https://www.instagram.com/p/Cjqfoo9uaRh/?img_index=6 [Accessed 27 August 2023].

Figure 2: Whale, J. (1931) *Frankenstein's Monster playing with flowers with the little girl.* [online image] Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Frankenstein-film-by-Whale> [Accessed 23 August 2023].

Figure 3: Phelps, D. (2020) *Digital Collage of Universal Monsters.* [online image] Available from: <https://decider.com/2020/10/20/universal-classic-monster-movies-are-really-gay/> [Accessed 23 August 2023].

Figure 4: Szura-Radix, T. (2021) *Drag Artist Tayce dressed as The Bride of Frankenstein.* [Instagram] Available from: https://www.instagram.com/p/CK7R1-PlhqJ/?img_index=2 [Accessed 22 August 2023].

Figure 5: Hooper, T. (1974) *Leatherface wearing makeup in The Texas Chain Saw Massacre.* [online image] Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pm-iurWBNKM> [Accessed 23 August 2023].

Figure 6: Rollin, J. (1971) *Les Frisson Des Vampires Title Card.* [screenshot] Available from: <https://www.shudder.com/play/877d4f0076aea0fc> [Accessed 23 August 2023].

Figure 7: Rothman, S. (1971) *The Velvet Vampire Title Card.* [screenshot] Available from: <https://www.shudder.com/play/877d4f0076aea0fc> [Accessed 23 August 2023].

Figure 8: Sangster, J. (1971) *Lust for a Vampire Title Card.* [screenshot] Available from: <https://www.shudder.com/play/877d4f0076aea0fc> [Accessed 23 August 2023].

Figure 9: Baker, R.W. (1971) *Sister Hyde from Dr Jekyll and Sister Hyde.* [online image] Available from: <https://bloody-disgusting.com/editorials/3602425/horror-queers-dr-jekyll-sister-hyde/> [Accessed 25 August 2023].

Figure 10: Sharman, J. (1975) *Dr. Frank N. Furter and Rocky in the lab.* [online image] Available from: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0073629/mediaviewer/rm2573777664?ref=ttmi_mi_all_sf_33 [Accessed 24 August 2023].

Figure 11: Finklestein, A. (2019) *ACT UP Slogan SILENCE = DEATH.* [online image] Available from: <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/community/articles/a-history-of-silence> [Accessed 25 August 2023].

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Figure 12: Hooper, T. (1986) *Leatherface threatening Stretch in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*. [online image] Available from: <https://m.imdb.com/title/tt0092076/mediaviewer/rm4216383233/> [Accessed 25 August 2023]

Figure 13: Schumacher, J. (1987) *David and Michael Fight in The Lost Boys*. [online image] Available from: <https://www.sideshow.com/blog/8-best-lost-boys-quotes> [Accessed 25 August 2023].

Figure 14: Scott, T. (1983) *Miriam mourns lover Sarah in The Hunger*. [online image] Available from: <https://bloody-disgusting.com/podcasts/3758556/hunger-horror-queers-podcast/> [Accessed 25 August 2023].

Figure 15: Sholder, J. (1986) *Freddy Krueger murders gay gym coach in S&M bar in A Nightmare on Elm Street, Part 2: Freddy's Revenge*. [online image] Available from: <https://cinema.indiana.edu/upcoming-films/archive/screening/2016-spring-program-friday-march-11-930pm> [Accessed 25 August 2023].

Figure 16: Wan, J. and Whannell, L. (2004) *Amanda Young in the Reverse Bear Trap*. [online image] Available from: <https://aftercredits.com/2011/11/saw-2004/> [Accessed 26 August 2023].

Figure 17: Zombie, R. (2007) *Sheri Moon Zombie as Michael Myers Mom in Halloween*. [online image] Available from: <https://m.imdb.com/title/tt0373883/mediaviewer/rm1693140480/> [Accessed 26 August 2023].

Figure 18: DeGuire, G. (2005) *Paris Hilton during the 'See Paris Die Campaign'*. [online image] Available from: <https://www.eonline.com/news/1148602/remembering-how-moviegoers-got-psyched-to-see-paris-die-in-house-of-wax> [Accessed 26 August 2023].

Figure 19: Demme, J. (1991) *Buffalo Bill in Silence of the Lambs*. [online image] Available from: <https://www.dazeddigital.com/film-tv/article/54010/1/torture-vacation-rent-buffalo-bill-house-from-silence-of-the-lambs> [Accessed 26 August 2023].

Figure 20: Yu, R. (1998) *Tiffany Resurrects Chucky in Bride of Chucky*. [online image] Available from: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0144120/> [Accessed 26 August 2023].

Figure 21: Mancini, D. (2004) *Queer director John Waters cameos in Seed of Chucky, pictured with Chucky and Glen/da*. [online image] Available from: <https://m.imdb.com/title/tt0387575/mediaviewer/rm3334947840/> [Accessed 27 August 2023].

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Figure 22: Kusama, K. (2009) *Jennifer kills Needy's boyfriend Chip in Jennifer's Body*. [online image] Available from: <https://culturalgutter.com/2018/02/08/friends-dont-eat-friends-boyfriends/jennifer-killing-chip/> [Accessed 27 August 2023].

Figure 23: Craven, W. (2011) *Robbie Mercer's final words before Ghostface stabs him to death in Scream 4*. [online image] Available from: https://twitter.com/scream_spain/status/1250528397249310720?lang=ar [Accessed 27 August 2023].

Figure 24: Bettinelli-Olpin, M. and Gillet, T. (2023) *Girlfriends Mindy and Anika in Scream VI*. [online image] Available from: <https://fetcherx.com/post/twitter/1623473949559472130>

Figure 25: Janiak, L. (2021) *Hannah buries Sarah with red moss crown in Fear Street: 1666*. [screenshot] Available from: https://www.netflix.com/watch/81334750?trackId=14170286&tctx=3%2C0%2Cf4e1922f-411b-4548-a828-5cb0838f2bbb-13597082%2CNES_949FFBB64454E5F7BF74CE2E115CB5-994911DC4F528C-CFE79D924A_p_1693340988221%2CNES_949FFBB64454E5F7BF74CE2E115CB5_p_1693340985467%2C%2C%2C%2C%2CVideo%3A81334750%2CminiDpPlayButton [Accessed 28 August 2023].

Figure 26: Janiak, L. (2021) *Sam and Deena kiss in the red moss in Fear Street: 1666*. [screenshot] Available from: https://www.netflix.com/watch/81334750?trackId=14170286&tctx=3%2C0%2Cf4e1922f-411b-4548-a828-5cb0838f2bbb-13597082%2CNES_949FFBB64454E5F7BF74CE2E115CB5-994911DC4F528C-CFE79D924A_p_1693340988221%2CNES_949FFBB64454E5F7BF74CE2E115CB5_p_1693340985467%2C%2C%2C%2C%2CVideo%3A81334750%2CminiDpPlayButton [Accessed 28 August 2023].

Figure 27: Muschietti, A. (2017) *Richie and Eddie hold hands in It Chapter One*. [online image]. Available from: <https://twitter.com/bylerspage/status/1558895484625879040> [Accessed 30 August 2023].

Figure 28: Yuzna, B. (1990) *The Bride rips out her own heart after her love is rejected in Bride of Re-Animator*. [online image] Available from: <https://gruesomemagazine.com/2016/05/09/bride-re-animator-1990/> [Accessed 30 August 2023].

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview with Chloë Leeson

SC: I want to start at the beginning I suppose, with when did your interest in horror begin?

CL: So basically, I had this friend at gymnastics club who was having a birthday party and she was like its fancy dress, and she said you should come as an emo, and I was like 'what? I don't know what that is'. So, she showed me what one was, and I was like 'that's fucking sick, I would dress like that' So I dressed like a little goth emo child for a fancy-dress party and then it all started snowballing from there. It started with the fashion and then sort of same friend was into horror movies and she suggested watching Jeepers Creepers, she cleared it with my mam and everything, so we watched it together. I had watched part of it previously at somebody else's house under the care of a babysitter because their parents decided to leave but told us we couldn't watch the gory parts. So anytime there was gore the babysitter would make us hide and I think that because I wasn't allowed to see those specific parts, it really like ignited a curiosity. So, when I finally watched the full film, I was like 'alright okay that's what it's all about'. So, I was probably maybe in year 5. God that's really early. So yeah, I think it started with the idea of seeing what I shouldn't be allowed to see. I was raised religious too, so that's its own big pile of issues. When you've been to Jesus camp and done all that stuff and they condemn you to Hell for everything, and talk about the most horrific things you could possibly imagine, you're then thinking 'hmm, maybe I'd like to watch some real horrific stuff'. I've pinpointed it very recently to growing up Catholic, seeing The Prince of Egypt at a very formative age paired with Jeepers Creepers and just running with it from there. And I think the religious thing definitely relates to Queer people and the reason that they like horror because it's exactly like, as much as I'm not part of that community, it totally relates to those people who are marginalised and oppressed by the church.

SC: I suppose that kind of I want to ask you as well, do you feel like you have like a personal connection horror? Because I know a lot of people are into the genre and they're never into it casually it's always a really intense connection.

1

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CL: Yeah, it's very intense for me because I am a fan of like extreme horror. What's the limit? What's the furthest I can go? But I think there is a lot of people have a connection to it because they have a trauma in their past and that's why they relate to it. Personally, that's not something I have experienced, so it doesn't come from that place, it probably just comes from being really fucked up [laughter].

SC: I did ask about this prior, but is there specific subgenres within horror that you're interested in?

CL: Yeah, I mean I love anything branded feminist horror, any horror film directed by a woman, I will lay my eyes upon it. Writing for Screen Queens, anything that drops in my inbox, if it's directed by a woman I will say yes even if it looks like the worst movie I will ever watch in my life. I guess that isn't a genre it's kind of limiting, but I do like teen horror and coming of age stuff. Like *Ginger Snaps*, that sort of vibe, *Carrie*, all those kinds of things. That's probably related to literally never wanting to be anything other than a teenager. I love body horror because of the gore, and I think it has a lot to say about women, about queer people and anybody of a marginalised identity. I like extreme horror I like lots of gore and I really really like New French Extremity. So, I'll give you a recommendation. It's called *Haute Tension* in French so high tension, but it's also known as *Switchblade Romance*, but I think that the other title is a spoiler. Watch it watch it and then you'll see that it will relate to what you're writing. It's very gory, but it is queer.

SC: Also, while we're talking about feminist horror, I think horror gets this rep of treating women badly within film and I feel like that's a blanket statement, do you want to discuss that?

CL: Yes! I think that horror is the one genre, looking at modern stuff and eradicating anything pre-2015, horror is where women get to succeed. Yes, horrible things do happen to them, and there is a lot of films that are about the exploitation of women and feature serious violence against women and minorities, but I think that it is also a place where women do get to succeed. Because they do get the final girl, they get their own back, revenge. Big fan of revenge films. So, I think blanket statementing that horror as giving women a bad go of it is quite incorrect really. They do have horrible stuff happen to them, but it's well balanced by just kicking the shit out of people [laughter]. Which I know I probably shouldn't like, but unfortunately, I just do

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and that's what I thrive off. If you're talking about post-2015 sort of horror, maybe early A24 horror onwards, I think women are in the majority and are the ones that are winning. I definitely think it's the best genre for women to play around in. It's also a really thriving community behind the cameras.

SC: I kind of have a similar feeling about queerness within horror where I feel like in mainstream cinema it does this thing with representation where queer people cannot be the villains because it's a bad reflection on real queer people. Whereas I feel like in horror, the queer people tend to be the villains, or are subtextual within these monsters and it's okay within that genre because those are the people that you are rooting for. It's like if you watch a movie and you want to watch someone kill someone and that villain happens to be queer coded, you don't have this negative feeling towards queer people, you're rooting for them.

CL: Yeah absolutely

SC: That's why horror is such an interesting genre. How different it is from mainstream cinema and how the rules are almost switched completely for everything.

CL: Yeah definitely! Horror is like, you go to the cinema and if you were sat in a screening of Mission impossible which has just come out, the rules of being an attendee at the cinema are so different from if you went to see Insidious: The Red Door. It's a different audience, a specific audience, you know exactly what you're going to get with the people that are there, and they know the rules of being in the audience as observers. but they also know the rules of what the movie provides because it is somewhat by the book, and it is rare for it to divert from it. You have your subgenres of horror and people do specific things, specific beats, specific scares within that. So, there is rules, always rules. Talking about queer villains, have you seen What Keeps You Alive? And there's also the documentary Queer for Fear.

SC: Yes! I've just sat and watched all of that again recently. You said something interesting about the sense of community within horror people where everyone knows what they're getting into, and I suppose that's another reason may be why queer people would resonate with the genre because it's such a tightknit community that it almost feels like an outsider community. Not even just queer people, I know a

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lot of people out who consider themselves outsiders or others who are really into the genre because funnily enough, that's where they feel the most accepted.

CL: Yeah, I agree. There's probably something about that idea of the found family aspect to it and I think that people who are really into horror, that is totally their personality. The people who walk around in horror shirts and wear all black, the girls always have dyed hair and dark lipstick on. Those people do feel ostracised for their interests because they probably have been bullied at some point for being interested in the dark, gloomy shit. So, there's definitely a sense of a little found family to understand your quirks.

SC: *How do you feel about representation within modern horror? Thinking about the past 5-10 years. Movies like Fear Street, Bodies Bodies Bodies, The Neon Demon, where queer representation is more open than it's ever been before, but I know some people have issues with the way it's been done. I suppose it would be a case of pandering where people feel like the queer representation doesn't have that authentic feeling to it and I suppose you can say the same for representation for people of colour or women as well.*

CL: Yeah, I'd agree with that but, I don't think in horror that it comes across as badly as it does in normal films. Me and my partner watched Strange World, the Disney movie. We watched that hungover on a Sunday and it was awful. It was the most pandering thing within the first 10 minutes it was like 'like my son is queer. Here is the boy that he fancies, my wife is a different ethnicity to me' It was very much tick, tick, tick for every representation box it could. Then all of this was never mentioned again. But I feel like these qualities often do play into horror. The most recent example would probably be *Scream 6*, but I think *Mindy* is a great character. The TV show *Yellowjackets* is doing a mint job of that. Sometimes it does feel pandering, but I do feel like horror comes from a more honest place and I think it can be more tongue in cheek and funny. I feel like those character all has that comedy element, and there aren't many examples I can think of where it isn't comedy and I think its because those queer character fetch an awareness of the rules of a horror movie. These queer characters have that awareness of 'I should die, and this is funny because I'm gonna acknowledge it'. There's a long way to go, but I think it is getting there. I would like to see more characters that are more serious and outright queer

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villains where the fact that they are gay isn't relevant but more like 'I just murdered the shit out of someone and now I'm gonna go home to my husband'. And more stuff where it isn't a plot point, which is similar to a lot of representation.

SC: It's kind of a similar topic to people in other genres of film would be very against the gay people dying in it, whereas I feel like in horror, that's an issue that you can't really take because it's a horror film people are generally going to die, we can't take issue with queer people dying within them. If gay people are dying in horror films, then it means gay people are in horror films.

CL: Yes! Make minorities more disposable. Once we've represented people and acknowledging they exist, then we can just start killing them off randomly and that's true equality.

SC: It's like people saying when a minority makes a film it's always expected to be amazing and true equality would be getting really shitty films made by queer people. The day that we get a Sharknado movie made by gay people is true cinematic equality.

CL: I've always said that about women directed films too.

SC: I know it's probably not your speciality, but is there any films that stand out to you as queer horror?

CL: My friend has convinced me that Carrie is a queer icon, and there's the remake of *Carrie* from 2002 which is gayer.

SC: Yes, the woman who plays her is Angela Davies who is also in May from 2001 which is with Anna Farris as well and that's just really queer.

CL: *What Keeps You Alive* is a very interesting one because that is like what if the lesbian people were killers? so that's interesting. *Jennifer's Body*, obviously, if that isn't a big eureka moment for a lot of queer women, I don't know what is. *We're All Going to The World's Fair*, new film that's interesting because that's a very queer movie made by a non-binary filmmaker called Jane Schoenbrun. It's very interesting because it's artsy, and Jane describes it being about young queer people in their bedrooms and being dependant on the internet for their stimulation and how it relates to their trans experience. And *Sleepaway Camp*, which I've never seen, but it

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has a trans character as the villain. *Knife in Heart* is a French film, so camp and opens with a killer who murders people with a knife attached to a dildo.

SC: That's perfect! Well, I think that's everything I wanted to ask you. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to me, and I'll keep you updated.

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Appendix 2: *The Sewing Circle* (2021), Acrylic Paint and Wool on 23x33 inch Canvas by Sophie Coleman.



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Appendix 3: *TV Dinner* (2022), Acrylic Paint and Lace on Wooden Table and Analogue TVs by Sophie Coleman.



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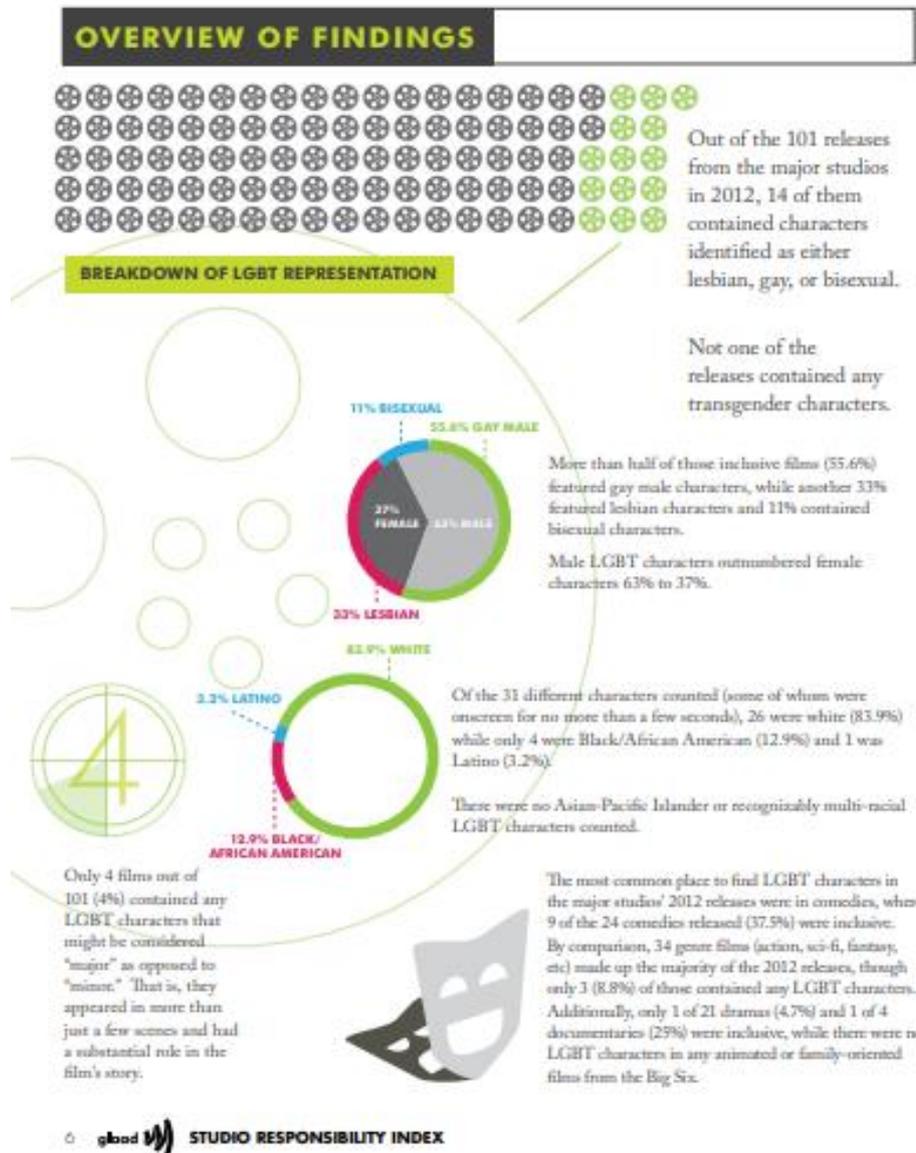
Appendix 4: *Lesbian Bed Death* (2022), Acrylic and Lace on 3x4 foot Canvas by Sophie Coleman.



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Appendix 5: GLAAD's Studio Responsibility Index Report, 2013 findings.



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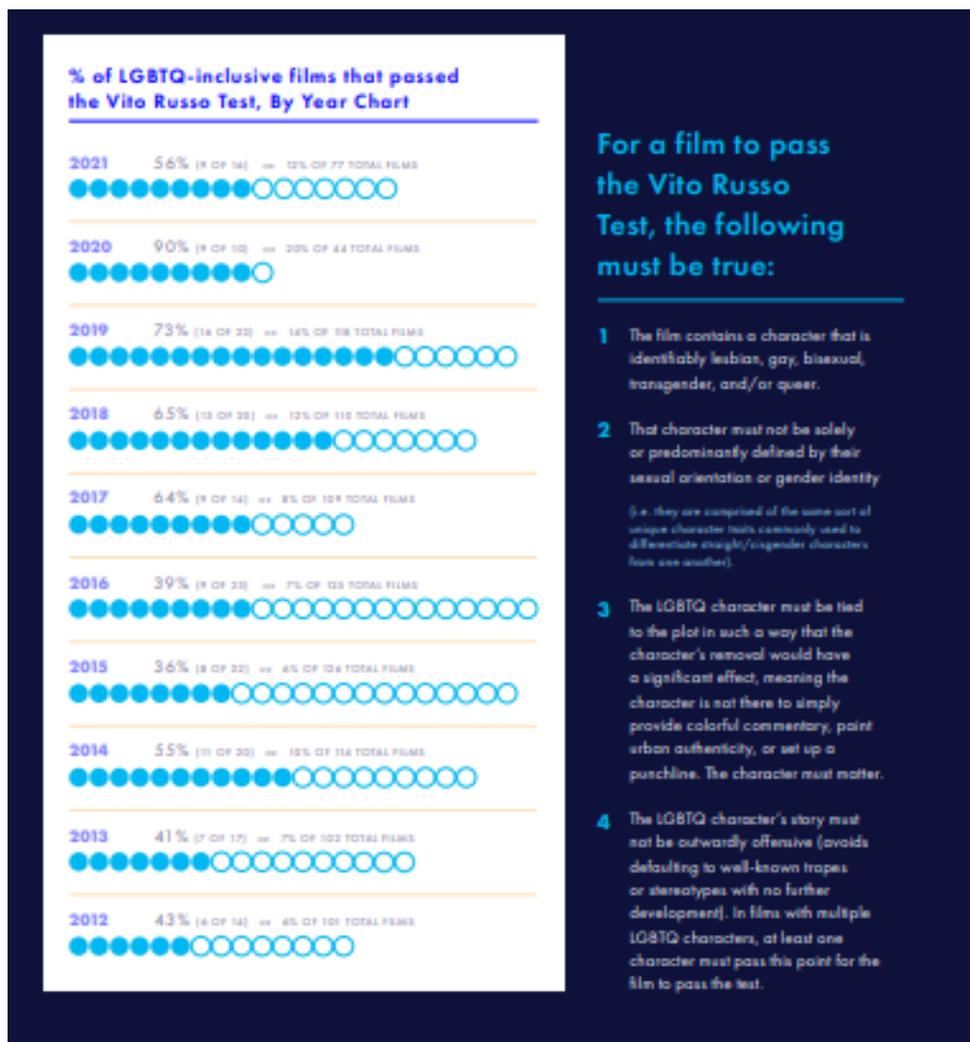
Appendix 6: GLAAD's Studio Responsibility Index Report, 2019 findings.



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Appendix 7: Statistics of the Vito Russo test pass rate from 2012-2017.



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Appendix 8: Blank copy of Google Form survey on public perceptions of horror and queerness.

Do you consider yourself to be queer? (identifying outside of heterosexuality or cisgender labels) *

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

Are you a fan of the horror genre? (includes books, TV, film, and video games) *

Yes

No

What generation do you belong to?

Baby Boomer (1946-64)

Generation X (1965-1980)

Millennials (1981-1996)

Generation Z (1996-2012)

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If yes, what age did you become interested in horror? *

- Not interested in horror
- Always been interested
- Under the age of 12
- 13-16
- 17-18
- 19-21
- 22-25
- 25+

Do you think that horror has more queer subtext than other genres of film? *

- Yes
- No

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If yes, why?
Long answer text

If no, why?
Long answer text

To what degree do you think that the political and societal context of the time effects films?

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all Completely

To what degree do you think films effect culture and society? *

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all Completely

Do you believe that horror treats queer characters unfairly, in comparison to other genres of film?

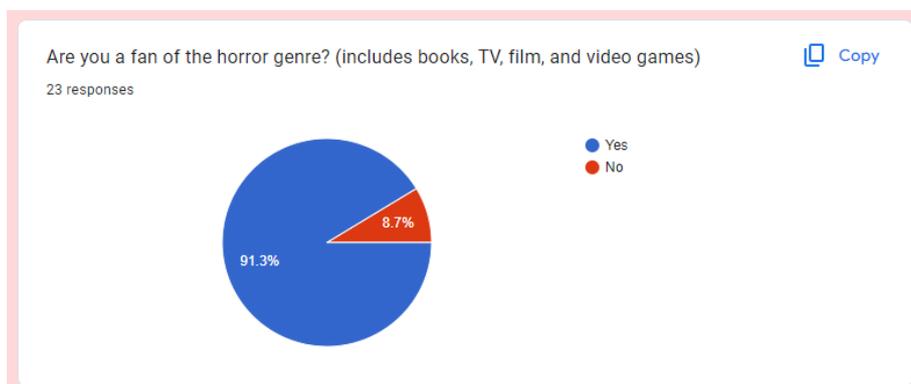
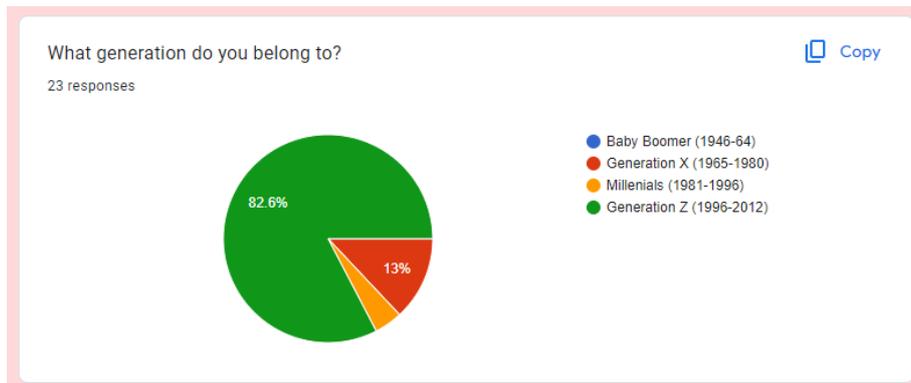
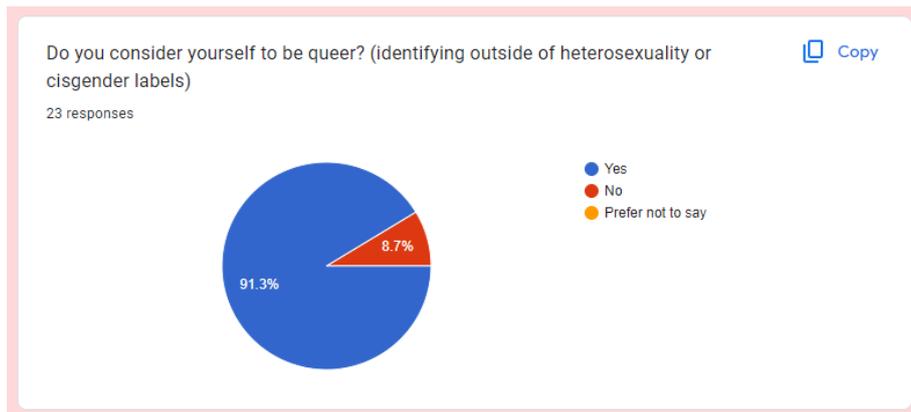
Yes
 No
 Other...

Explain your answer to the previous question.
Long answer text

Recommended Citation

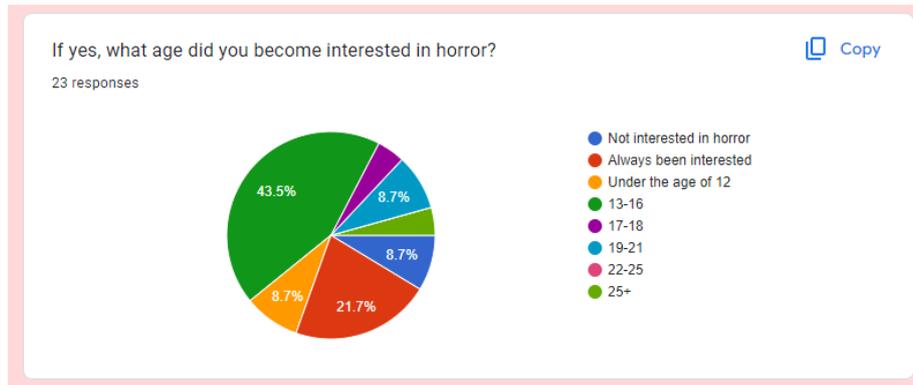
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Appendix 9: Responses to survey on public perceptions on queerness and horror to questions asked about respondents age, sexuality, and relationship with horror.



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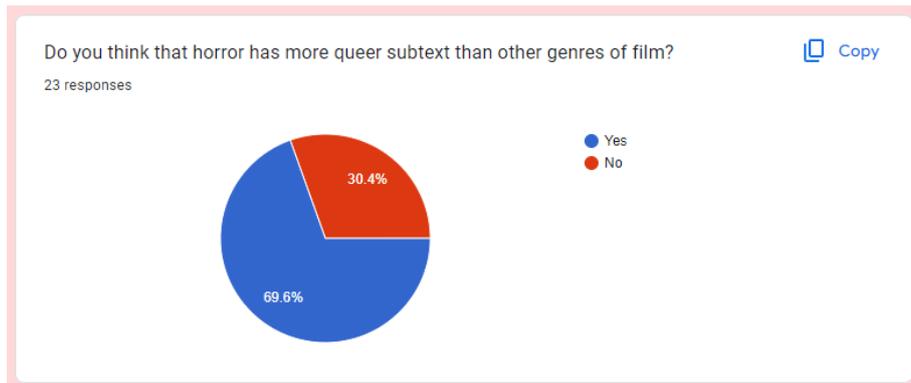
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Appendix 10: Pie chart and responses to 'Do you think that horror has more queer subtext than other genres of film?'



If yes, why?
15 responses

Horror is a subversive genre which addresses taboo topics more so than other genres

it used a lot of queer story telling devices and it built subcultures for the queer community such as the final girl trope being very popular amongst queer spaces

Because Micheal Myers is girlypop

There are a lot of horror movies that have an overt 'campiness' and drama to them that a lot of movie genres typically avoid or overall don't have. Along with that in recent years there have been many horror movies with main female antagonists/protagonists who drive the plot forward that are consistent in drawing attention to the LGBT community.

back in 80s/90s horror i think they made antagonist more 'queer-coded' to further vilify them to the audience of that time , gay = bad and scary. some more parody based / straight to dvd type of horrors/slashers also are just incredibly camp by indulging in their bad writing/storylines and fully committing to the bit. and of course, campness and queerness forever live hand in hand beautifully

i think it's easier to portray queer people in a horrific setting because many people perceive us as horrific

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the alienation from the rest of the world is something a lot of horror antagonists may feel and the fear of the unknown from people outside the community towards us is given a voice to through horror

A lot of films deal with themes of otherness expressed through violence, particularly in supernatural horror

There's two academic texts/theories within queer film theory that argue nearly all horror films can be read as queer / providing queer subtext as they are often representations of heteronormative capitalist society and an "other" unable to conform. Robin Wood's essay *The American Nightmare* (1979) discusses this as does Harry Benshoff in his essay 'The Monster and the Homosexual' (2004). He also highlights the connection between monsters (operating as the 'other' as stated by Wood) in horror films and queer identities.

There's two reasons I think this. The first is that creators can convey unsubtle subtext due to the extremity of the events depicted in horror media. For example, creators can link queerness with deviance in either a negative or positive way when they're depicting things like murder and flesh peeling off. The second is that a lot of influential horror works have been created by queer people. I think horror attracts queer people because we can relate to being perceived as monsters and love things that challenge the status quo.

The strongly imposed gender roles upon characters that are typically divided into 'strong jock', 'nerd/weird guy', 'smart girl' and 'femme girl' are also the same stereotypes applied to homosexuals within the queer community, with the jock and weird guy bonding over a niche thing throughout the course of the film, and typically the hypersexualisation of the femme character and smart girl, usually with the smart girl character showing a distaste or lack of interest towards sex, not dissimilar to asexuality.

There's something about being viewed as monstrous for going against the societal norms expected of you. Take vampires as an example, and Stoker's (the author of *Dracula*) own shame regarding his speculated queerness - the idea of a figure that sends people down a deviant path, that only appears at unconventional times when they were less at risk from outsiders, is very familiar to many queer audiences. There is also something to be said about horror characters, particularly villains, having the freedom to delight in their wickedness and reclaim all that has been stripped from them. If these beings have such instincts, who is to stop them? Why are they to feel deep shame? They are not restrained in the way that many queer people are forced to be. This also is paired with many explicit examples of queerness in the genre, so when the two are put side by side, it certainly makes choices of queer coding appear a lot more of a genre based choice, instead of a misunderstanding from a straight creator.

It's the vibes

A lot of horror movies are about social outcasts, and I feel that as a queer person a lot of us can relate to that aspect of horror since many of us might relate to the protagonists. Not only that but we also encounter queer-coded characters who often reject the status quo, which could be incredibly relatable to some. In my opinion, horror has always been queer and will continue to be.

Feeling othered, being seen as abnormal, in general just feeling like there's no place for you in society, which is something a lot of monsters/villains feel in typical horror.

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If no, why?

6 responses

I feel that queerness is only just becoming a factor in filmmaking as a whole

I don't remember any particular horror movies or shows in which I got a strong gay message

Don't really notice it

Stereotype of highschool boyfriends and girlfriends getting off. Also the catering of sexuality to a male audience, especially of 80s horror where an undressing scene of the highschool hottie is compulsory

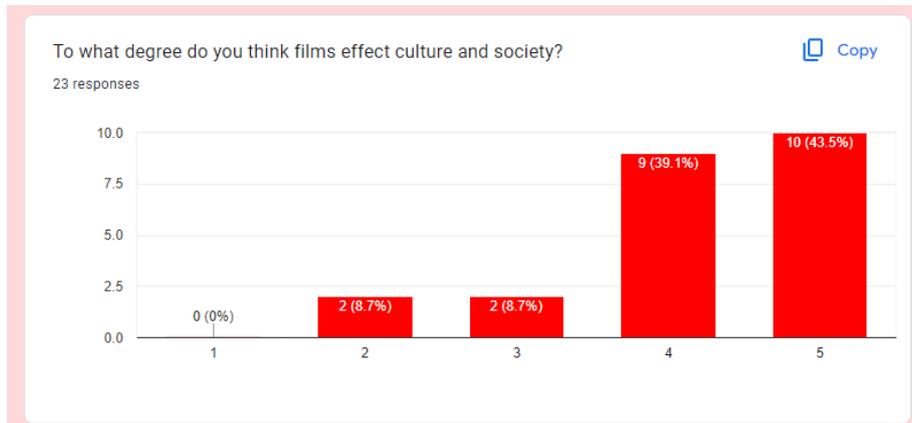
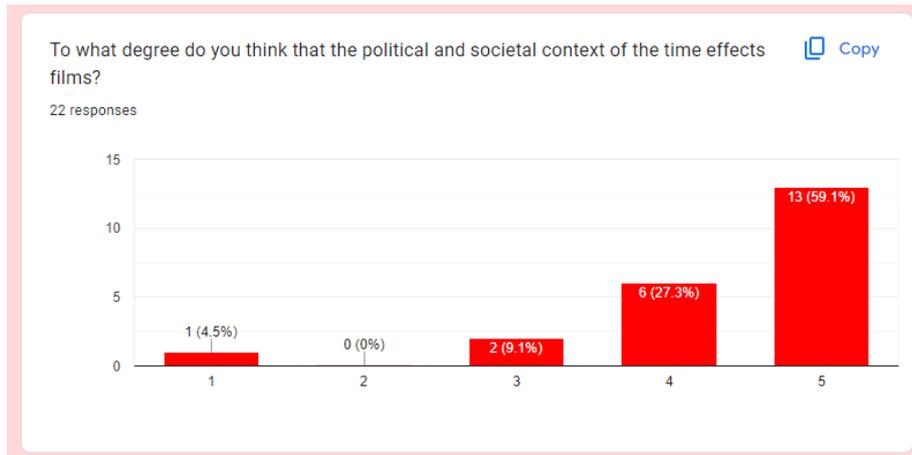
I don't watch horror so I don't know

I don't know as I don't like horror films

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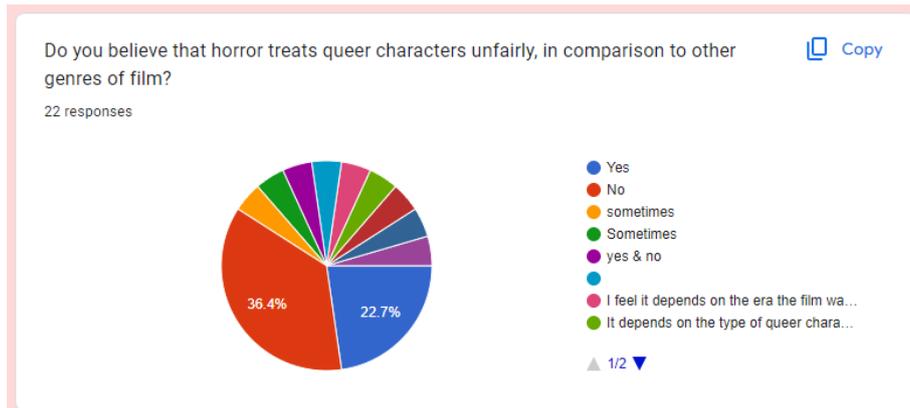
Appendix 11: Survey responses to 1-5 scales (1 being not at all and 5 being completely) on the impacts of society, politics, and culture on film and vice versa.



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Appendix 12: Pie chart and responses to ‘Do you believe that horror treats queer characters unfairly, in comparison to other genres of film?’



Explain your answer to the previous question.

21 responses

Cinema as a whole treats queer characters unfairly. In horror movies, bad things are more likely to happen to queer characters than other genres, but the same could be said for any other character. Therefore the unfortunate things these characters experience is not a result of their queerness but is a result of the type of film the genre makes.

its completely relevant to who is making the movie, the context and subplot within it the time it was made and what the message being put across is. for example in movies like sleepaway camp the antagonist is perceived as a manic and killed bc they were "forced to be a girl"

I feel that along with POC, queer people are often the victims or villains of horror films

Because gay people dont die

I believe that in the past having a queer person within the cast was a troupe that would be a base character, such as 'the blonde', 'the jock', 'the goth' and has time has gone on the representation within horror has slowly strayed away from being a typical character troupe to a naturalistic implementation within the film itself.

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Yes & No. I think the obvious answer for Yes is that the queer coded characters are often antagonists or the main villains themselves, which serves the anti-lgbt+ message for a general audience. However, horror is a genre of film that has such a dedicated audience (beyond the general public that may view the film) that often end up rooting for the villain and want to know more about their story. And back when lgbt+ representation was so sparse (if any at all), a small slice represented by a beloved villain to a dedicated audience isn't always such a bad thing in my opinion

I think homophobic discrimination is similar across all genres and is more of a root issue than the film industry as a whole

I prefer an acknowledgment of queer people, even if it's a demonization, than outright denial or ignorance of our existence. "evil" lesbian vampires can be reclaimed!

while I enjoy horror as a queer person because I see myself in the feeling of isolation in them, there's also many horror films that perpetuate queer stereotypes to add another type of character to be violent towards or rudely characterize because it adds comic relief or "diversity" (diversity being "look at this weird queer 😊")

Horror stories doubling as a queer allegory can be quite a cathartic thing to experience within a film or tv show, but can also go the other way and push those experiences further from 'normalcy', equating queerness as bad/abhorrent behaviour. There is also a lack of overt queerness in the horror genre, and when there is it is often overwhelmingly stereotyped, negative or punished in the narrative.

I don't think this is an easy question to answer and there are examples of both negative and positive portrayals. The horror genre operates as an opposing force to the Hollywood cinema canon and it's based upon being horrific so naturally treats most of its characters unfairly. There's no real simple answer to this. Characters in a rom-com or other genres aren't necessarily put in life threatening/ unfair survival situations so the comparison is difficult

There's a long history of queercoded monsters and murders but I don't think that makes the treatment of queer characters in horror inherently more unfair than the treatment of queer characters in other genres. I think that sometimes explicitly queer or queercoded monsters are a more empathetic and relatable depiction of queerness than mundane queer characters in sitcoms and dramas. To continue, the most negative depictions of queer villains in horror happened when queer people were being depicted equally as bad (if not worse) in genres like comedy and drama. Also, I think sometimes the audience interpretation of queer characters in horror is worse than the actual depiction of queer characters due to ideas already pervasive in society. For example, the dialogue in *Silence of the Lambs* made it very clear that Buffalo Bill wasn't a "real transsexual" (which is problematic by today's standards but at the time it was progressive and sympathetic) but a large proportion of the audience went away thinking Buffalo Bill was a predatory trans woman.

I feel more recent films have steered away from queer stereotyping and are closer to actual queer representation, however some older films definitely imply that the antagonist is queer in some way, or that queer people can't be trusted. There are also examples of hypersexuality in older films, however I feel this is more rooted in sexism than the queer community (although they definitely have effects on one another). Basically some films just have queer characters in them and their sexuality/gender has no bearing on the story, whereas others really lean into the whole 'queer people bad and insane, look they're killers!' (sleepaway camp is a good example of the second mindset).

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There is still a long way to go for queer representation in horror films, even for those that are the most privileged, despite there being moves towards a more ideal future. With higher amounts of involvement from queer creatives and actors, and more art being created by allies to the community, many projects are now taking steps away from reinforcing such harmful stereotypes, or relying on the death or suffering of an explicitly/coded queer character to be seen as the culmination of events that allows for a resolution. There is still, however, a long way to go. A lot of the success that we have seen has still been overwhelmingly white, and very much portrayed through one specific lens of queerness - most characters being able-bodied, cisgender, wealthier, not GNC, and as was said before, white and western. We need to do better for the queer non-white, GNC, and trans people that wish to see themselves in horror, not just as monsters and victims, but as survivors. Certain other genres, particularly dramas, are starting to centre black and transgender queer stories in much less dehumanising ways than most horror stories are.

As written above

I think it depends entirely on how it's being written and directed. While some horror stories are cult classics and are held very dear by queer people, there can still be homophobia and violence against queer people in horror anyways. It depends completely on the way it was written, directed and perceived by the audience since horror is subjective and these movies are often a reflection of the sociopolitical climate they originated in. However, I still believe that horror is one of the few spaces where queer cinema really thrives, allowing for further self expression and exploration of the complexity of queerness.

Films treat queer people fairly equally

I'm not too sure tbh

I don't watch horror so I don't know

Don't watch horror but there was no 'don't know' tick box - sorry

I'm sure there's horror movies/books/games that treat their queer characters well, and many that do the opposite, but I do feel like none of the media I've consumed has had many explicitly queer characters.

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