

Women and Horror

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Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Introduction | 3 |
| Women in Horror | 6 |
| History of Horror and Psychoanalysis | 6 |
| The Victim, the Monster, and the Final Girl..... | 9 |
| Am I Just a Body? – Virginity and Female Sexuality | 12 |
| Her Pain as Entertainment | 14 |
| The Depiction of Violence Against Women..... | 14 |
| The Staunch Prize and Interview with Bridget Lawless | 15 |
| The Female Spectator | 17 |
| What Can We Do Differently? | 19 |
| The Future of Horror..... | 19 |
| Conclusion | 22 |
| Bibliography | 23 |
| List of Images | 25 |
| Declaration of Own Work | 27 |

Table of Figures

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 1 Psycho, 1960..... | 3 |
| Figure 2 Theatrical release poster for the film Dracula, 1931 | 6 |
| Figure 3 The "Psycho" scene that changed film forever, 1960..... | 8 |
| Figure 4 Jennifer's Body, lake scene, 2009 | 10 |
| Figure 5 Jennifer attacks, Jennifer's Body, 2009 | 13 |
| Figure 6 You, 2018 | 15 |
| Figure 7 Midsommar, 2019..... | 19 |
| Figure 8 Dani is consoled by the women of the cult, Midsommar, 2019 | 20 |
| Figure 9 Us, 2019..... | 21 |

“The representation of women in society, especially through the mass media, has been the most delusional act ever.”

-Abhijit Naskar (Naskar, 2017)



Figure 1 Psycho, 1960

Introduction

This thesis explores the representation of women in horror and the depiction of violence against women within this genre. As quoted by Abhijit Naskar, as seen above, “The representation of women in society, especially through the mass media, has been the most delusional act ever.” (Naskar, 2017) Within, but not limited to, the horror genre, the portrayal of women is a subject that needs addressing. Historical representations of women in horror cinema can be overall perceived as chiefly negative due to the cultural practice of gendered stereotypes. They are often misogynistic, over-sexualised and the female characters reduced to helpless victims. However, in recent years as discussed by Beth Younger in her article ‘Women in Horror: Victims No More’ (Younger, 2017) “the genre has moved from taking pleasure in victimising women to focusing on women as survivors and protagonists”,

but there is still a long way to go. According to film theorist Claire Johnston, “the image of woman operates in film as a sign, but as a sign which derives its meaning not from the reality of women’s lives, but from men’s desires and fantasies” (Stewart & Johnston, 2020). Films such as *Halloween* (Halloween , 1978) and *Psycho* (Psycho , 1960) are examples of where this theory holds true. In a similar approach to Laura Mulvey’s film theories where she incorporates the Freudian phallogocentric ideas (Mulvey, 1975), Johnston argued that the representation of women in film derives from male fantasies. “Male fantasies, male fantasies. Is everything run by male fantasies?” (Atwood, 1993) Claire Johnston’s and Laura Mulvey’s work are a few film theories that I will be referencing throughout this essay. This essay was also inspired by Barbra Creeds ‘The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis’ (Creed, 1993), Carol J. Clover’s ‘Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film’ (Clover, 1992), and research paper by Erin Harrington ‘Gynaehorror: Women, Theory and Horror Film’ (Harrington, 2014). Despite the undoubted influence of some of these works, the subject of women and horror remains under-theorised.

I approached this research project with the intention of looking at the horror genre and why we are so enthralled by it. As a fan of horror, I wanted to open a discussion surrounding the terrifying, nightmare-inducing media we consume. It must be noted that, as a fan of horror, my analysis of the genre may be biased. Although I had tried to separate myself, as a viewer, from a student writing a research paper, my own feelings and opinions became useful when writing about female spectators of horror and why we would want to watch it. Through my research I became interested in the portrayal of women in horror. With violence against women on the increase in our society it became hard to ignore it on screen and in books alike. Post the *#MeToo* movement, there have been many discussions around women in film and small changes made to what and who we are showing on screen. However, rarely has this been applied to the horror genre. Women have been and still are used as objects to further the

plot of these stories; their bodies battered, assaulted, and killed for the purpose of entertainment. These films include *Scream* (Scream, 1996), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (The Texas Chainsaw Massacre , 1974), and *Psycho* (Psycho , 1960) to name but a few. Films like *Midsommar* (Midsommar , 2019) directed by Ari Aster and *Jennifer's Body* (Jennifer's Body, 2009) directed by Karyn Kusama do challenge these tropes and are examples of role reversal. *Jennifer's Body* is a satirical commentary on the stereotypes typically used in horror and *Midsommar* presents the female protagonist as a woman who learns her strength after an emotional experience that led her to escape a toxic relationship. These Films are brilliant examples of what can be done with horror when we dare move past the gendered stereotypes that have been used so often in the past. I will, towards the end of this essay, discuss further examples of horror that have challenged the outdated tropes and storylines of the genre and what can be looked forward to in the future. That being said, it must also be noted that these refreshing films are but a few among the countless others within the horror genre and spanning over many sub-genres. As stated before; there is still a long way to go and one issue that needs to be looked at is the lack of diversity.

Speaking of diversity, it is important to note that the films I refer to throughout this thesis are predominately made in the United States. Although this was not intentional, it was frankly unavoidable. Erin Harrington quotes Steffan Hantke in her essay as saying: “Even though the horror genre has been fed by tributaries from many national literary traditions ... and even though horror cinema has prospered and developed its unique forms of expression in many film industries around the globe, it is in the United States and the American film industry that horror, for as long as cinema itself has existed, has been a staple genre.” (Harrington, 2014) As well as this, over the course of writing this thesis it has become glaringly obvious, if not already before, that the women in horror are not a diverse set.

Female characters in horror films are mostly white, middle class, and heterosexual. As a result, in a cultural context this analysis reflects a certain type of woman.

Women in Horror

History of Horror and Psychoanalysis

“If movies are the dreams of the mass culture...horrors are the nightmares.”

- Stephen King

Horror films have been around for more than a century, deriving from folklore, religion, and superstitions. Horror in literature began as gothic horror in the form of books by Mary Shelley, Edgar Allen Poe, and Bram Stoker. Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (Stoker, 1897) was later turned into a film of the same name and is considered the beginning of the horror genre in film. (*Dracula* , 1931) Since then, there have been many more adaptations of the story of Count Dracula, the vampire of the Transylvanian castle.



Figure 2 Theatrical release poster for the film *Dracula*, 1931

Horror films make us feel anxious, uneasy, and fuels our nightmares, so why do we watch them? From research by philosophers, psychoanalysts, and psychologists there are theories that can explain why we are drawn to watching horror films. Most influential is that of Sigmund Freud's. Freud's theory explains that horror comes from the "uncanny". The purpose of horror films is to highlight unconscious fears, desire, urges, and primeval archetypes that are buried deep in our collective subconscious – images of mothers and shadows play important roles because they are common to us all. (Park, 2018) Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (Psycho , 1960) is an example of where this theory rings true. In Ryan Terry's analysis of Freud's uncanny through the film *Psycho*, he notes that the character of Norman Bates became a revolutionary breakthrough in cinema and entertainment as Freud's psychoanalytic theory gained prominence in a major motion picture. (Terry, 2018) The film follows the story of Norman Bates, a lonely motel owner who, as revealed at the end, adopts the role of his mother to kill his guests. This is how the female protagonist of the film Marion Crane meets her death. Although the feelings and actions of Norman Bates were unpleasant, it was clear to see he enjoyed them. Freud also touches upon this and refers to it as the "unpleasurable pleasurable". Noel Carroll, film scholar, also theorises that horror is the product of curiosity and fascination. Carroll quotes that, "horror genre gives every evidence of being pleasurable to its audience, but it does so by means of trafficking in the very sorts of things that cause disquiet, distress, and displeasure." (Park, 2018)

In Robin Wood's 'Return of the Repressed' (Robin Wood, n.d.) He suggests that there is a strong connection between films and dreams, noting that "losing oneself in the fantasy-experience" is integral to the film watching experience. In Wood's analysis of *Psycho*, the idea of the "repressed" first comes to light. *Psycho*'s horrors are not as far removed from the real world as people wish to believe. In a review of Robin Wood's essays, Greg Burriss states that Hitchcock's film does not present a picture of another world, it presents a picture of this

world; a picture of the repressed forces and energies that constitute society itself. (Burris, 2019) *Psycho* is one of the most famous horror films and not only is it a film where the psychology behind horror can be explored but it is the perfect place to start when discussing the role of women in the genre.



Figure 3 The "Psycho" scene that changed film forever, 1960

Marion Crane, a real estate agent played by Janet Leigh is seen at the beginning of the film stealing cash from her work and setting off to her boyfriend's home in California. On her way she stops of at The Bates Motel and meets the owner, Norman Bates played by Anthony Perkins. He invites her to dine with him and while in the other room Marion overhears him arguing with his mother. We see Bates spying on Marion and it becomes clear that he has developed a special interest for his new female guest. Later, while showering, Marion is approached by a shadowy figure and stabbed to death in a brutal, bloody attack. At first, we believe Norman's mother is the murderer but later it is revealed that it is in fact Norman

himself dressed as his mother. Choosing to situate Marion, as Hitchcock so did, in the shower, naked and helpless when she was attacked makes it obvious that it was sexually motivated. Marion's character is reduced to a body. The story is no longer about her because the twisted thoughts and inner demons of Norman Bates are far more important, aren't they?

The Victim, the Monster, and the Final Girl

Time and time again, women in horror are the victim. In my study of film and women, I've become familiar with the term 'the male gaze'. 'The male gaze' is a term coined by feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey (Mulvey, 1975) as the act of depicting women and the world in visual arts from a masculine, heterosexual perspective that presents and represents women as sexual objects for the pleasure of the male viewer. The male gaze has three perspectives: the men behind the camera, the male characters in the film, and the male spectators. Most if not all horror films from the last century privileges the male gaze. *Halloween* (Halloween, 1978) sees Laurie Strode, a high school student and babysitter, portrayed by Jamie Lee Curtis, stalked, and terrorised by murderer Michael Myers. In the opening scene of *Scream* (Scream, 1996), another high school student Casey Becker, played by Drew Barrymore, receives a mysterious and creepy phone call from a mysterious male. Another girl, Sidney Prescott, played by Neve Campbell, then becomes the target of a killer in a Halloween costume known as 'Ghostface'. These two films like *Psycho* portray these young women and girls as the victims to men's or 'the monster's', violent crimes, fuelled by internalised misogyny, freaky fantasies and impulse.

Jennifer's Body (Jennifer's Body, 2009) plays on these male fantasies and as mentioned before is a satirical commentary of the issues seen in most horror films that sexualise and victimise females. In a run of the mill opening sequence, Jennifer, played by Megan Fox, is lead into the woods by older men where she is sexually exploited and then

murdered as they make a deal with the devil. This is then when Jennifer returns from the dead to seek revenge on these men and all men who harm women by killing and devouring them. In parts, Jennifer becomes ‘the monster’ of the film. She lures men to their deaths using her sexual appeal which is ironically what got her killed in the first place. Jennifer uses the men’s desires against them to seek her revenge. The director, Karyn Kusama, toys with men’s desires and the male audience. Drawn to the screen by the allure of conventionally attractive Megan Fox, they sit down to watch the movie only to realise it’s nothing as expected. A notable scene is when Jennifer is seen swimming in a lake. As she prepares to get out of the water, we, the audience, prepare ourselves to see a soaked, half naked Megan Fox slowly get out of the lake like countless other scenes in films before. The camera then quickly cuts to another scene. In many films women’s bodies are shown, zoomed in, with the camera lingering a bit too long at their chests. What I believe this scene in *Jennifer’s Body* tries to get across is that sexually displaying women’s bodies is not at all necessary for the overall plot of the film.



Figure 4 *Jennifer's Body*, lake scene, 2009

The ending of the film sees the character, Needy, played by Amanda Seyfried, putting an end to Jennifer's murderous streak. Stabbing her in the chest, 'the monster' is finally slain. As she is stabbed, Jennifer exclaims in an apathetic tone "My boob!". "No, your heart" replies Needy. Once again, now through the dialogue, the film mocks the over-sexualisation of the female body in the mass media.

Another trope often used in horror when it comes to female characters is that of 'the final girl'. 'The final girl' refers to the last character left alive to confront the killer in a slasher film. In older films particularly, this woman is usually a virgin, and I will be touching upon how women's virginity plays a role in horror in the next section of the essay. The final girl is also usually more intelligent than the other victims and their characters are usually involved in overcoming a personal problem or some sort of inadequacy. Carol J. Clover first coined the term in her book 'Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film' where she describes the final girl as "the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and perceives the full extent of the preceding horror and her own peril; who is cornered, wounded; whom we see scream, stagger, fall, rise, and scream again. She is abject terror personified." (Clover, 1992) Examples of the final girl include Sidney Prescott in *Scream*, Laurie from *Halloween*, Ginny from *Friday the 13th* (Friday the 13th, 1980), and Nancy from *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (A Nightmare on Elm Street, 1984). In an article that examines the trope, Jason Hellerman claims that "for many, the final girl is the living embodiment of stereotypical conservative attitudes of what women "should be"—virginal, subservient, untouched by the menace of the outside world." (Hellerman, 2020) More recently though, in feminist terms, the final girl forces the male audience to identify with a woman in the climax of the film. An example of a film where this is the case is Jordan Peele's *Us* (Us, 2019).

Am I Just a Body? – Virginitly and Female Sexuality

“Throughout history, and across culture, the reproductive body of woman has provoked fascination and fear. It is a body deemed dangerous and defiled, the myth of the monstrous feminine made flesh, yet also a body which provokes adoration and desire, enthrallment with the mysteries within. We see this ambivalent relationship played out in the mythological, literary, and artistic representations of the feminine, where woman is positioned as powerful, impure, and corrupt, source of moral physical contamination; or as sacred, sexual, and nourishing, a phantasmic signifier of threat extinguished. Central to thus positioning of the female body as monstrous or beneficent is ambivalence associated with the power and danger perceived to be inherent in woman’s fecund flesh, her seeping, leaking bleeding womb standing as a site of pollution and source of dread.”

- Jane M. Ussher, *Managing the Monstrous Feminine: Regulating the Reproductive Body* (Ussher, 2006)

The female body and female sexuality are a point of interest for most creators of horror. Erin Harrington states that “female sexuality in the horror film is often presented in simplistic, binary terms, which are embodied on one hand by the figures of the virgin hero and the chaste, feminine sacrificial virgin, and on the other by the unbounded sexual threat of the mythical vagina dentata, the toothed vagina.” (Harrington, 2014) Jane M. Ussher articulates that historically women’s bodies have been positioned as a site of horror and ambivalence, in which women are framed as either chaste, sanctified, and pure, or dangerous, promiscuous, and threatening, something that is popularly termed as the ‘Madonna/Whore’ dichotomy. (Harrington, 2014) Female virginitly is used in many horror films as the deciding factor in whether the woman survives. It must be noted that the definition of ‘virginitly’ in most of these horror films seem to be defined as heterosexual penile-vaginal intercourse. In the opening scene of *Scream* it is discussed that there are certain rules to surviving a horror film, especially one with lots of nudity, and one of these rules is that you can never have sex. *It Follows* (It Follows, 2014) is about a young girl who is followed by a paranormal entity

after having sex with the entity's previous target. The virginity rule also plays out in *Halloween*.

The chaste virgin is just one side of the sexed woman in horror, the other is what happens when the female's sexuality is released. In *Jennifer's Body*, as discussed previously, as Jennifer seduces and feasts on her male victims, she adopts a demon form with sharp teeth with which she tears off the genitals of her victims. This image of her dangerous, gaping maw is a symbolic representation of the other, more dangerous, and unruly side of female sexuality: the vagina dentata, or toothed vagina. (Harrington, 2014)



Figure 5 Jennifer attacks, *Jennifer's Body*, 2009

The toothed vagina, the reproductive body of females, and even the pregnant body are used in horror as 'the monster' itself. In *Rosemary's Baby* (*Rosemary's Baby*, 1968) the female protagonist is impregnated by a Satanic ritual. Barbara Creed offers an in depth psychoanalytic account of the vagina dentata in 'The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis' where she argues that Freud's conceptualisation of Medusa's head, with her fanged mouth, hair of phallic, fetishist serpents and 'stiffening' gaze, is a clear expression of the castration anxiety that is evoked by the female genitals, be it a literal castration or a symbolic one, such as the loss of the mother's body or a loss of identity. (Creed, 1993)

Similarly, we can also view home invasions in horror films as a metaphor for the invasion of a woman's body. Women's bodies become 'a space for a man'. They are raped, assaulted, coerced into pregnancy, and killed all for the purpose of a terrifying tale, as entertainment.

Her Pain as Entertainment

The Depiction of Violence Against Women

"The distance and detachment of a reader who must leave his or her body behind in order to enter imaginatively into the scene of violence makes it possible for representations of violence to obscure the material dynamics of bodily violation, erasing not only the victim's body but his or her pain"

- Laura Tanner (Tanner, 1994)

Several sub-genres of horror, including the slasher film, utilize aspects of the body to carry forward narratives. There is a difference between concentrating on a subject in literature to draw attention to its pervasiveness in society, and simply using it as a literary device. The fundamental problem with horror and thriller fiction is that female characters often 'have to be raped before they can be empowered or become casual collateral to pump up the plot' (Staunch, 2018) In horror and thriller fiction alike violence against women is depicted almost all of the time. *Psycho* saw Marion Crane stabbed to death as she took a shower. *Halloween* depicted the stalking of a young woman by a murderous psychopath. *You* (2018), the hit *Netflix* television series sees countless women stalked and sometimes killed by Joe Goldberg. Sensationalised accounts of gendered violence prioritise the shock factor of fantasy over the seriousness of this offence, undermining the justice that needs to be achieved, both in film and reality.

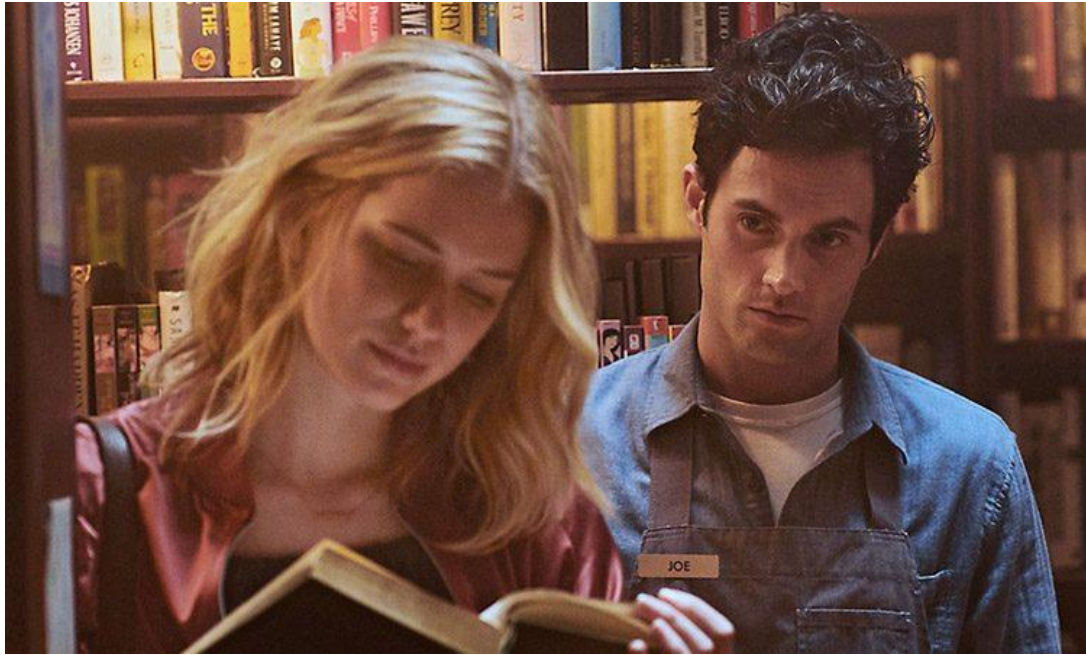


Figure 6 *You*, 2018

The Staunch Prize and Interview with Bridget Lawless

In 2018, writer, and editor Bridget Lawless launched a literary prize called *The Staunch Prize* which awards thrillers that avoid the depiction of violence against women. It was founded to honour books where no woman is beaten, stalked, sexually exploited, raped, or murdered. It came off the back off the #MeToo movement and the fact that she was a voter of the BAFTA Awards. That year the film and TV shows had a lot of depictions of sexual violence in them and so Bridget decided not to vote in the awards. With a lot of men in the industry being accused of abusing women she didn't want to award anybody. She wrote an article about her choice to abstain from voting. (Lawless, 2018) Bridget then asked herself what else can she do and so she launched the prize. Very quickly it became controversial especially among female crime writers which made it very newsworthy. For example, crime writer Val McDermid is quoted as saying "As long as men commit appalling acts of misogyny and violence against women, I will write about it so that it does not go unnoticed."

(Flood, 2018) I had the privilege of interviewing Bridget Lawless about the prize, her work, and opinions on the matter. Her response to this quote was simply that that's not good enough. When 90% of people who are raped know the perpetrator prior to the offence and when most depictions of sexual violence in fiction are at the hands of a stranger, writing more graphic depictions of rape is not helpful; not to the victims of these crimes or the hard work done by many activists and organisations that try to put an end to the culture that allows them to happen in the first place. While *Staunch* may be situated alongside, rather than in opposition to, the historical practices of thriller fiction, its emergence would suggest that many believe there needs to be a cultural reckoning of how, why, and when gendered violence is written into fiction. Considering that 20% of women have experienced some type of sexual assault in their lifetime (Rape Crisis UK, n.d.) authors have a responsibility to acknowledge that it is more than possible that someone reading their work is a victim of the same violence they have chosen to write about. (Huttington-Whitley, 2021)

Ultimately the prize was set up to draw attention to the amount of casual violence and increasingly graphic violence against women that there is in popular culture and in books in this case. She very quickly got a lot of support, from readers particularly, and then publishers came on board and started entering. In an article about the prize by Esther Huttington-Whitley, she states that "the archetype of thriller fiction, including the underrepresentation of women, both being portrayed in and producing this literature, renders the *Staunch Prize* imperative to overcoming literature's obsession with representing gendered violence as entertainment." (Huttington-Whitley, 2021) In my interview with Bridget Lawless I asked what her immediate reaction is when she comes across violence against women on screen or in books. "A weary yawn" she replies. She first tries to analyse what she's looking at. She usually tries to evaluate the tropes that are used more often than others; women frequently get their heads bashed against walls. They are also often raped, abducted,

and held prisoner. As well as the book prize, Bridget set up *The Staunch Test* for rating films and television dramas for violence against women from a database of the different kinds of violence. I then asked if she thinks the way cases of rape and abuse are portrayed in film, TV, and books have an impact on whether women are believed in real life. For example, in many horrors' women are hesitant to put themselves into danger or "enter the haunted house" but their intuition is not listened to by those she's with. Bridget explains how, in a lot of crime dramas, the woman is believed in cases of rape or abuse but then the story becomes all about the detective, the case ultimately being solved and tied up nicely, which offers the assumption this happens in reality when very rarely it does. It is very clear that Bridget's issues with the depiction of violence against women in the media, and what I am trying to argue in this thesis, is that it is overused, unhelpful, hard to watch, and rarely lines up with reality.

The Female Spectator

Horror sees an excess of stories where women are beaten, abused, raped, and murdered so why are there female fans of the genre? Many would believe that horror is created for a predominantly male audience, but this is not true. Yes, most films privilege the male gaze but there are women who watch horror and enjoy it. I myself am a woman who is a fan of horror. Theories centring on the spectators of horror focus on the male gaze and the male spectator. Male horror fans are characterised as sadistic delighting in the onscreen torture of the female characters. Cynthia Freeland considers horror to be anti-woman and claims that women are always the target of monsters. (Vosper, 2013) It would appear that most theorists believe that horror is not for women. James Twitchell briefly touches on the female spectator, but his analysis suggests that the genre is misogynist and therefore, the female spectator is forced into a masochistic role. The female viewer must witness horrific acts of degradation and violence against onscreen females, and he suggests that the only types

of females who may derive pleasure from this experience are those who are able to masochistically surrender. (Twitchell, 1983) Similarly, Miriam Hansen considers horror spectatorship to be a dynamic of sadism and masochism. (Hansen, 1986)

So, we masochistically surrender and assume the role of the male viewer to make it bearable for us to watch the violent demise of the female characters. This may be true, but I think, as with the male viewer, we also like the thrill. In recent times however, it has become more difficult to watch depictions of violence against women, especially when they are overly graphic. Touching back briefly on the words of Bridget Lawless I think there comes a time when enough is enough. We are tired of seeing the overused tropes in the things we watch. Everyday we hear new reports of women and young girls being attacked and so watching re-enactments of these attacks for entertainment becomes harder and harder. Each year, the Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media publishes research that shows how gender imbalances in film affects women and girls. For example, they've found that positive and prominent roles for women in movies "motivate women to be more ambitious" professionally and personally. But when there is a death of women being depicted in positive ways, it has an opposite, negative effect. (Geena Davis Institute, n.d.) Conclusively it is not just a matter of opinion that there should be less violence against women portrayed in media, but it is statistically proven. Films like *Midsommar* (Midsommar, 2019), *Us* (Us, 2019), and *No Good Deed* (No Good Deed, 2014) are refreshing examples of films where either the woman is not the victim or the story touches upon other issues like race as in Jordan Peele's *Us* and is something never seen before. As a female fan of horror, I hope to see more like this.



Figure 7 Midsommar, 2019

What Can We Do Differently?

The Future of Horror

Midsommar (Midsommar , 2019) is a folk horror film written and directed by Ari Aster. It follows the story of Dani Ardor played by Florence Pugh who, after experiencing a family tragedy, follows her boyfriend and a group of friends to Sweden for a festival that occurs once every 90 years only they find themselves at the hands of a Scandinavian pagan cult. With her family horrifically taken from her in the opening sequence Dani needs support but instead is shrugged off by her emotionally unavailable boyfriend. Throughout the film Dani is noticeably depressed, hopeless, and often seen breaking down in tears. At one point the women of the cult come to console her, kneeling beside her, empathising with her tears. They too feel her pain. They cry as she cries. What follows is a horrific sequence of events that sees her friends and boyfriend killed off one by one, but in a strange turn of events Dani finds herself more at peace than ever before. She is crowned May Queen and decorated in a dress of flowers. As the sacrifices of her friends and boyfriend take place during the final ceremony, Dani sobs in horror and grief, but then, she begins to smile. Dani is the ultimate

‘Final Girl’ in a way never seen before. The film is twisted, shocking and everything horror should be. Ironically though, it is described as a breakup movie by the director. *Midsommar* is an example of what can be done with the horror genre when all stereotypes and tropes are thrown out the window and womanhood is celebrated – even if terrifying. This film is simply based on a really good story. Rarely does a horror film like this grace our cinema screens but I hope to see more like it soon.



Figure 8 Dani is consoled by the women of the cult, Midsommar, 2019

Us (*Us*, 2019) is a horror film written and directed by Jordan Peele that represents the racism and classism prevalent in our society through dark metaphors. The story follows Adelaide Wilson portrayed by Lupita Nyong'o and her family, who are attacked by group of menacing doppelgängers. Adelaide has an encounter with her own doppelgänger as a child at the beginning of the film. The doppelgängers known as the ‘Tethered’ are genetic clones created by the government and abandoned underground. Adelaide’s tethered counterpart

known as ‘Red’ organised an uprising of the oppressed clones and take vengeance. This is when the attack of Adelaide’s family occurs and later that of a rich, white family.



Figure 9 Us, 2019

Us features a black woman in a prominent role in a major horror film. It not only deals with matters of race, but the cast is made up of many black actors. Considering this is a rare occurrence and the only other films I can think of that features such a diverse cast are Jordan Peele’s other films *Get Out* (*Get Out* , 2017) and *Candyman* (*Candyman* , 2021), is testament to how little diversity there is within the horror genre.

These films pave way for a new age of horror cinema. One where overused tropes and plotlines are a distant memory. Where women are writing, directing, and starring in original pieces of entertainment.

Conclusion

Over the course of this thesis, I have sought to open a discussion around women and horror. As argued throughout, the representation of women in horror is clearly problematic. Time and time again we have seen sexist tropes, stereotypes and the over sexualization of the female body in films of this genre. Not only is there a lack of diversity with the plotlines but also with the casting and production of these films. From when horror began, women have been used as objects and the violence they're put through are lazy literary devices to make the stories scarier, and bloodier.

There is another way to create horrifying films though, and we've seen this in works like *Midsommar*, *Jennifer's Body*, and *Us*. Women don't need to be exploited to create good cinema. The future is bright, or more so really, dark.

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Fig. 1 Shamley productions (1960) *Psycho* [Online] available from:

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Fig. 2 Universal Pictures (1931) *Dracula Release Poster* [Online] available from:

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Fig. 3 Shamley Productions (1960) *The "Psycho" scene that changed film forever* [Online]

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Fig. 4 Fox Atomic, Dune Entertainment (2009) *Jennifer's Body, lake scene* [Online]

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Fig. 7 A24 (2019) *Midsommar* [Online] available from:

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Declaration of Own Work

School of Visual Culture

I declare that this **Critical Cultures Research Project** is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

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Date: 04/02/22