

Logging into Horror's Closet:
Gay Fans, the Horror Film and Online
Culture

Adam Christopher Scales

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
University of East Anglia
School of Art, Media and American Studies

September 2015

© This copy of the thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with the author and that use of any information derived there from must be in accordance with current UK Copyright Law. In addition, any quotation or extract must include full attribution.

Abstract

Harry Benshoff has boldly proclaimed that 'horror stories and monster movies, perhaps more than any other genre, actively invoke queer readings' (1997, p. 6). For Benshoff, gay audiences have forged cultural identifications with the counter-hegemonic figure of the 'monster queer' who disrupts the heterosexual status quo. However, beyond identification with the monstrous outsider, there is at present little understanding of the interpretations that gay fans mobilise around different forms and features of horror and the cultural connections they establish with other horror fans online.

In addressing this gap, this thesis employs a multi-sited netnographic method to study gay horror fandom. This holistic approach seeks to investigate spaces created by and for gay horror fans, in addition to their presence on a mainstream horror site and a gay online forum. In doing so, this study argues that gay fans forge deep emotional connections with horror that links particular textual features to the construction and articulation of their sexual and fannish identities. In developing the concept of 'emotional capital' that establishes intersubjective recognition between gay fans, this thesis argues that this capital is destabilised in much larger spaces of fandom where gay fans perform the successful 'doing of being' a horror fan (Hills, 2005). This, I argue, illustrates that gay horror fandom is constructed and performed differently across fan spaces as a means to articulate gay identity in culturally meaningful ways.

In presenting the voices of gay fans, the significance of this thesis lies in challenging existing models of horror fandom by suggesting its multiplicity for the fans researched. Indeed, whilst the 'knowledgeability' (Hills, 2005) of horror fans is important, this study explores the meaningful connections that gay fans establish with one another and the cultural significance of horror to the identity work of fans across distinctive online spaces.

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations	I
Acknowledgments.....	II
Introduction	1
Background	1
Interventions.....	3
Justifications: Gay Fans Online.....	11
Literature Review	14
Gender, Sexuality and the Horror Film.....	14
Audiences and Fans of Horror	20
Gay Audiences and Fans	25
Communities and Interactions Online.....	29
Sexuality and Identity Online.....	33
Methodology	37
Multi-Sited Netnography.....	37
Selection of Micro-Communities	42
Coming out as a Gay Horror Fan: Investments & Scholar-Fandom	46
Research Ethics	53
Data Collection and Analysis.....	59
Thesis Outline	63
 SECTION ONE	
 Chapter One: Out of Horror's Closet: Fan Spaces, Reviews and Receptions of Horror on Queerhorror.com and Campblood.org	67
Introduction	67
Monsters Among Us: The Space of Queerhorror.com.....	70
'Not for Straight Boys': Reviewing Queer Horror.....	76

‘We’re here. We’re queer’: Counselors and the Space of Campblood.org.....	86
Fan Theory/Knowledge.....	90
Campblood and the Homo Horror Guide.....	92
Fan Trivia/ Knowledge.....	94
Emotional Realism	96
Postmodern Play: Gender and Sexuality	100
Conclusion.....	103
Chapter Two: ‘<i>Something is Trying to Get Inside My Body</i>’: Fan Blogs, Gay Sexuality and <i>A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy’s Revenge</i>	105
Introduction	105
Monsters, Victims and Online Blogs	109
‘Jesse! Fight Him!’ The Final Boy.....	119
<i>Elm Street</i> : A Real Nightmare for Gay Fans.....	123
Web of Nightmares: From Perversion to Paratexts.....	131
Conclusion.....	139
Chapter Three: ‘<i>I think they saved my life, actually</i>’: Micro-Community, Fan Memories and Growing up Gay with Horror	141
Introduction	141
The Space of Tribe.net	147
Memories of Growing up Gay with Horror	150
Sexual Identity and Early Consumptions of Horror.....	157
Interpretive Micro-Community and a Generation of Fans.....	163
Generation	167
Conclusion.....	170
SECTION TWO	
Chapter Four: ‘<i>We have our own group on this site now</i>’: Gay Horror Fans, Bloody-Disgusting and the Struggle for Legitimacy	174
Introduction	174
A Bloody-Disgusting Battle: Coming Out on a Horror Fan Site	179

Horror, Taste and Legitimising Fandom	184
Performing Identities, Reaffirming Practices	190
Reclaiming a Space: Fan Values and Capital	198
Healing the Wounds? Afterthoughts from the Camp Next Door	201
Conclusion	204
 Chapter Five: <i>Scaring the Jock out of You: Gay Masculinities, Taste and Horror Fan Identity on RealJock.com</i>	 206
Introduction	206
Some Scream Louder than Others: Identity and the Profiles of (Non-) Horror Fans ..	214
The Fem Amongst the Men: Consumptions of Horror	224
Genre and the Affect/Effects of Horror	229
To the Depths of Horror: Moving beyond the ‘Popular’	235
Conclusion	239
 Conclusion	 242
Readings and Interpretive Strategies	243
Emotional Connections	244
Identity and Performance	246
Gay Horror Fandom: Practices and Micro-Communities	248
Screaming for More: Future Directions	252
Final Reflections from a Gay Horror Scholar-Fan	254
 Bibliography	 256
Filmography	276
Webography	279

List of Illustrations

Figure 1: The process of netnography (Kozinets, 2010).

Figure 2: An autograph by Robert Englund at a Collectormania convention (2005).

Figure 3: Meeting George A. Romero at a Collectormania convention (2005).

Figure 4: The *Queerhorror.com* homepage (1997).

Figure 5: A film entry on *Queerhorror.com* (*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, 1975).

Figure 6: The *Campblood.org* homepage (2003).

Figure 7: A screenshot from *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (1985) depicting Jesse Walsh (Mark Patton) donning the claw of Freddy Krueger.

Figure 8: A screenshot from *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (1985) depicting Jesse Walsh (Mark Patton) with a monstrous elongated tongue.

Figure 9: A screenshot from *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (1985) depicting Freddy Krueger (Robert Englund) coming out of Jesse's body.

Figure 10: My member profile on *Tribe.net* (last updated: 23 August 2015).

Figure 11: The *Tribe.net* homepage (2003).

Figure 12: The homepage for the 'Gay Guys into Horror Films' tribe (2004).

Figure 13: The 'All Things Horror' section of the *Bloody-Disgusting.com* forum.

Figure 14: A member view of the *RealJock.com* homepage when logged into the site.

Figure 15: My member profile on *RealJock.com* including 'My Stats and Info' and 'About Me'.

Acknowledgments

I'd like to say a special thank you to the University of East Anglia for the personal and professional training provided throughout my studies. I am fortunate to have spent eight years at this fine institution that has nurtured my intellectual growth from a student fresh out of A-Levels to a doctoral degree holder. UEA is a truly 'wonderful' place.

I'm especially grateful to staff in the School of Film, Television and Media Studies who have cultivated my interest and enthusiasm for film and media. Thank you to Dr Rayna Denison and Dr Keith Johnston for your impassioned seminars throughout my undergraduate degree and for encouraging me to further my studies. A special thank you to Dr Eylem Atakav for being there just at the right moments to provide a friendly shoulder and in helping me to realise my academic potential. I'm also grateful to the School for awarding me a three-year scholarship to pursue my research.

My supervisors, Professor Mark Jancovich and Dr Tim Snelson have been invaluable; deepening my enthusiasm for the fields of horror and fan studies in exciting ways. I'm grateful for your direction and ongoing feedback on chapters of my work. I'd also like to acknowledge Professor Yvonne Tasker for her early supervision and for introducing me to possibility that fandom is best researched online! I wish to send a huge thank you to my examiners Dr Brett Mills and Dr Milly Williamson for a productive viva, and for providing me with invaluable insights into my work and for future research directions.

Special recognition to my fellow students and close friends: Martin Tease, Irene Cuder, Llewella Burton, Helena Dare-Edwards and Emily Warner. I'm extremely fortunate to have gone through this journey with such a warm, friendly and supportive group of people. Helena, your enthusiasm for fandom is infectious and kept me going through moments of uncertainty. Thank you for being an inspiration.

My family, especially my parents Maureen and Christopher and brother Ryan, have displayed unwavering support and unparalleled degrees of encouragement. Thank you for getting me into horror and for putting up with the 40cm figures of Freddy, Jason and countless other figurines that continue to embellish my bedroom. You've never prohibited my self-expression and I thank you for being my rock for the past 27 years.

I met Patrick in 2010 at a bar in Richmond, Virginia as we struck up a conversation about horror films. Here, just under 6 years later, we are married and are completing our studies in the UK. You've been by my side the entire journey and I am grateful to have you in my life. Thank you for your love, encouragement and support. You mean the world to me.

Finally, thank you to all the horror fans I've encountered throughout this study. Like me, you realise that there's far more that lurks beneath the closet of horror...

I contacted Grannell and other gay men I consider horror aficionados to get a better handle on a question I've mulled over for years: Why do gay men love horror? I remember my transition from a kid too fearful of boogeymen to sleep with the lights off to a gore fiend who gleefully looks for any excuse to bring up *Halloween* in casual conversation. And in many ways, I liken it to my experience coming out: Both involved first coming to terms with my identity, then abandoning fear, and finally sharing it with the world.

(Peitzman, 2013)

Introduction

Background

In 2014, the results of a Nielson survey conducted on LGBT moviegoers found that of the 12 common filmic genres featured, horror ranked as their favourite overall genre. When compared with their heterosexual counterparts: ‘they were 27 per cent more likely to select horror and 17 per cent more likely to select Sci-fi’.¹ The results of the Nielson survey would appear to suggest that there is an abundance of LGBT moviegoers comprising the audience for horror who have investments in, and derive particular pleasures from, the genre. Furthermore, audiences of the horror film continue to come out of the closet at LGBT film conventions, screenings and festivals globally, such as the recent BFI event ‘Scream Queens: Gay Boys and the Horror Film’ (2014). The scale and popularity of these events would appear to indicate the thirst that non-heterosexual audiences have for the genre, but also the cultural significance of particular horror films that have resonated, in a series of ways, with LGBT audiences and fans.

Despite what would appear to be a popular genre with appeal for non-heterosexual audiences, little work has been undertaken on the identifications, pleasures and emotional connections of non-heterosexual audiences to horror. Specifically, there remains little understanding of a niche demographic made up of gay horror fans who have used the Internet to search out others who share interests in their object of fandom. Indeed, despite scholarly claims that there are a number of active fandoms in cyberspace produced and inhabited by horror fans (see Hoxter, 2000; Williamson, 2005a; Hills, 2005; Cherry, 2010), little work has sought to investigate the presence of non-heterosexual fans in these accounts, nor the extent to which non-heterosexual fans have created and maintained their own online spaces catering to their idiosyncratic investments in horror. Furthermore, there remains little understanding of how gay fans of horror have used the Internet in an attempt to foster communication with other fans who self-identify as gay, lesbian,

¹ The findings continue to add: ‘they were also more likely to say that these two genres were always worth the added ticket price to see in 3D (47% and 24% respectively)’.

bisexual or transgender; or, as Alexander Doty (1993, p. xv) puts it, those who are: ‘contra-, non-, or anti-straight’.²

In seeking to fill this gap, this thesis presents online horror fan cultures populated by self-identifying gay male persons. This work attends to three central areas of investigation: fans’ interpretive reading strategies, their emotional connections to the object of horror and other fans and the performances and negotiations of their identities online. Despite growing up as a horror fan and continuing to honour this badge of distinction (as later elaborated), I remained detached from horror fandoms online, let alone horror fandoms structured around non-normative sexual identities. In going online in search of gay fans of horror for this thesis, I was less exposed to a single unified gay horror fandom, than what Bertha Chin (2010) has referred to as several distinctive ‘micro-communities’ of fans. For Chin, the notion of micro-communities signifies ‘(smaller) communities that cater to very specific shipper groups or interpretations of the texts’ (p. 119).³ Chin goes on to argue that these micro communities ‘have their own sets of boundaries, rules and hierarchical structures that may not necessarily conform to the wider fan community’ (p. 119). Although work in fan studies has been attentive to single fandoms, whether around a particular text, series or genre (Tulloch and Jenkins, 1995; Baym, 2000; Brooker, 2002), less work has investigated the emergence of micro-communities produced by and for a smaller faction of fans, whose fandom variably exists on the periphery of larger fan groups (Williams 2008, 2015). An analysis of several distinctive fan micro-communities thus allows for a holistic understanding of the contextual specificity of gay horror fan practices as they are inflected across a number of different online spaces and platforms.

² The acronym ‘LGBT’ refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender audiences. However, for the purposes of this thesis, I use the term ‘non-straight’ or ‘non-heterosexual’ to refer to audiences and fans who define with an identity other than strictly ‘straight’ or ‘heterosexual’. My use of the term ‘gay’ refers to self-identifying gay male fans of horror, which is the demographic focus of this thesis.

³ Chin contends that the term ‘shipper’ is short for “relationship-per”, and is a fan term used to describe fans who support the pairing of specific characters on a show. The origin of the term is believed to be The X-Files fandom’ (2010, p. 7).

Interventions

A sustained focus on gay fans of horror departs from the heterosexual matrix underpinning much of the work in horror fan studies (Hills, 2005; Cherry, 1999a, 2002; Pinedo, 1997). In conjoining and synthesising scholarship on horror's audiences and fans with the broader field of fan studies and online culture, this thesis aims to provide a comprehensive portrait of the investments and cultural connections gay fans have with horror films and each other. It also investigates how these micro-communities are created, maintained and negotiated within the parameter of larger or macro horror fandoms and spaces. Whilst a focus on gay fans is borne from my own personal investments in horror, it is strongly motivated by a smaller field of scholarship on sexuality and horror (Wood, 1986; Halberstam, 1995; Berenstein, 1996; Benshoff, 1997). Central to much of this work is a concern with the theoretical viewing positions of audiences claiming a non-heterosexual identity, whereby scholars have attempted to theorise the particular pleasures and positions extended to gay, lesbian and 'queer' audiences of horror. This body of work has been particularly fruitful in elucidating upon the cultural specificity of the gay and lesbian spectator's reading strategies, particularly what has been argued to be their identification with the counter-hegemonic figure of the monster. This has been theorised through methods of textual analysis (Wood, 1986; Halberstam, 1995; Benshoff, 1997) and critical and cultural reception (Berenstein, 1996; Benshoff, 1997).

This thesis supports existing claims that gay fans read into or unearth the gay subtexts of disparate horror productions, but offers an explanation that this is exercised precisely because the cultural category of 'queer horror' is problematised by fans in terms of genre, quality and taste as argued in Chapter 1. This study's central departure from current scholarship is in its claim that gay fans assume more agency over these readings, which serve a number of cultural functions, including: facilitating belonging, meaning making and significantly, sexual identity construction. Therefore, whilst this thesis is interested in the particular forms and features of horror that structure gay fans' identification and generate 'fan talk' (Fiske, 1992), it claims that these are far more nuanced and interwoven with gay subjectivities than existing scholarship has presented. However, this project ultimately claims that the interpretive strategies and cultural practices of gay fans are inflected differently across the cultures investigated herein.

This thesis critically investigates several distinctive micro-communities online, from gay fan blogs (Chapter 2), social networking sites (Chapter 3), horror forums (Chapter 4) and gay online sites (Chapter 5). It makes the overarching argument that, whilst gay fans of horror have initiated and participated in micro-communities online (Chin, 2010), and where fans in these micro-communities produce their own ‘boundaries and rules’, gay fans position, negotiate and perform their fandoms and identities differently across distinctive online spaces. Specifically, this thesis claims that, whilst smaller or micro spaces of gay horror fandom have facilitated a space for fans’ emotional connection to horror and with other fans, gay fans perform a ‘doing of being’ a horror fan (Hills, 2005, p. 79) in larger or macro online forums. Therefore, as well as interrogating the differential investments in the object of horror and the emotional connections established between gay fans, it additionally attends to the complex formations of identity construction and performance across the online cultures studied. These cultures facilitate communication in asynchronous time.⁴

John Fiske (1992) proposes a model of fan engagement based on the following trichotomy: semiotic productivity, ‘the making of meanings of social identity and of social experience from the semiotic resources of the cultural commodity’; enunciative productivity which refers to fan talk suggesting ‘the generation and circulation of certain meanings of the object of fandom within a local community’; and textual productivity, the creation of new cultural productions (pp. 37-42). The forms of ‘communication’ examined in this thesis primarily correlate with Fiske’s use of enunciative productivity, delineating the production of meanings that fans make from the object of horror and how these are shared, negotiated and made meaningful through textual postings within the micro-communities studied. Although existing scholarship has provided clues around the relationship of particular films and features of horror to non-heterosexual audiences (or what Fiske would refer to as the ‘semiotic productivity’ of fans), less attention has focused on the appropriation of these features into the production and expression of gay identities. That is, there is at present little understanding of the significance of horror to

⁴ Asynchronous time refers to online communication where fan ‘postings’ are intermittent, as opposed to synchronized ‘real time’ exchange (see Chapters 3, 4 and 5).

the lived sexual identities of self-identifying gay men as they are produced and negotiated with other fans.

Beyond horror, scholarship on self-identity and media consumption has been a productive strand of enquiry in fan studies, anchoring an understanding of the relationship between the self and object of fandom; but also in how fans relate and connect with one another (see for instance Jenkins, 1992; Baym, 2000; Hills, 2002; Sandvoss, 2005; Cavicchi, 1998). The field of fan studies is thus pertinent to this thesis in theorising the significance of horror to the lived experiences of gay fans, and how they make meanings from horror through their interactions with one another. This study seeks to demonstrate that, for some gay fans, horror signifies more than a generic cluster of films which can be read and appropriated subversively (read non-normatively) or simply as acts of fannish resistance against dominant culture (Fiske, 1992). Instead, horror forms an integral part of the way fans have produced and made sense of their sexual identities, and, as I argue, to the fans with whom they engage in fan talk online.

In expounding upon the thesis' central intervention that gay fans find modalities of expression and emotional connection in the micro cultures studied (Chapters 2 and 3), this thesis presents an alternative model of horror fandom. This model supplements existing work around the 'knowledgeability' of horror fans (Hills, 2005) by introducing the concept of 'emotional capital'.⁵ As scholars have worked to recuperate horror's audiences and fans from models of pathologization that marked the field of fan studies as a whole (Jenson, 1992; Jenkins, 1992), horror fans have since been theorised in terms of fan and subcultural capital (Fiske, 1992; Thornton, 1995). These capitals stem from Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) work, which illuminates relationships between class, social space and the transference of different forms of capital that confer value and status within

⁵ The concept of emotional capital has been theorised by Diane Reay (2000, p. 569) who discusses it in terms of the 'emotional resources passed on from mother to child through processes of parental involvement' in their education. Drawing upon the work of Bourdieu (1984), Reay finds differences in the way this capital operates between class groups and specifically, the emotional investments of different class factions in their children's education. Moreover, in the field of fan studies, Ciarán Ryan (2015) argues that fanzine collectors acquire degrees of emotional capital precisely because these publications help to construct a sense of their identities; hence, their ongoing propensity to collect copies. Indeed, I further and build upon Ryan's argument around the emotional connections that fans share with these objects. In doing so, I argue that gay fans can achieve symbolic forms of emotional capital through the sentiments imbued within their online postings that resonate with the experiences of other fans within the micro-communities.

a field of class struggle. Sarah Thornton's term 'subcultural capital' augments Bourdieu's ideas to argue that subcultural groups, such as club cultures, fashion their own values and competencies in an attempt to distinguish their 'hipness' from mainstream and commercial culture. Thornton argues that these distinctions are exercised as a means by which youth clubbers can assert the authenticity of their subcultural knowledge and musical tastes. In terms of horror, subcultural capital operates to celebrate fans' generic competencies about horror directors, stars, sub-genres etc., but more importantly, has done so to position horror fans against 'indiscriminate' and 'mainstream' audiences (see Jancovich, 2000).

Operating alongside subcultural capital, this thesis presents emotional capital as signifying the ability of a fan post to resonate with the life narratives of other gay fans as felt and experienced intersubjectively. While not seeking to supplant the generic competencies that these fans exercise, emotional capital can be achieved when fans discursively link particular characters, themes and interpretations of horror with the experiential contexts in self-identifying as gay. Indeed, these posts are recognised and valued by fans, primarily, I argue, because such postings allow fans to receive 'pleasure and relief to find others who are like them' (Pullen, 2000, p. 53) – an exposure and confirmation that other fans too share idiosyncratic investments in, and undertake (sub)cultural interpretations of, horror texts. However, emotional capital not only lends recognition to a fan's ability to unearth the gay subtext of a horror film, but also signifies a fans' agency in articulating the role of horror in the construction of their gay identity. Importantly, these micro-narratives must resonate with the emotional connections that other gay fans invest in the genre. While the fan blogs in Chapter 2 point towards the value of emotional capital in gay horror fandom, this model is extrapolated in Chapter 3 where fans variously link their coming out narratives with their becoming a fan narratives.

The first section of this thesis therefore illuminates how fans construct and articulate their emotional investments in horror, as well as using these micro-narratives (Hills, 2005) to establish meaningful connections with other fans. In this way, this thesis employs a definition of fandom offered by Cornel Sandvoss as:

The regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text in the form of books, television shows, films or music, as well as

popular texts in a broader sense such as sports teams and popular icons and stars ranging from athletes and musicians to actors. (2005, p. 8)

The usefulness of Sandvoss' definition for this project captures the 'emotionally involved consumption' of filmic horror narratives, serving as a useful definition in redressing models of horror fandom to capture the emotionally charged intra- and interpersonal expressions of horror consumption. However, Sandvoss' inference of 'regular' consumption is problematic for the purposes of this study. In surveying a number of distinctive fan micro-communities online, it becomes apparent that some fandoms are framed through a discourse of growing up with horror (see Chapters 2 and 3) and thus fans' emotional involvement with the genre is nostalgically positioned within the contexts of their youth. For gay fans, this has particular resonance (as abovementioned) in that their narratives of growing up with horror intersect with a realisation and maintenance of their burgeoning gay identities (see Chapter 3). As a result, I argue that their 'becoming a fan' narratives of horror are discursively tied to a broader 'becoming' narrative that ontologically encompasses sexuality (Cavicchi, 1998). This argument intervenes in 'becoming a fan' accounts, suggesting that these narratives are not merely *de facto* primers to the construction of a fan's identity, or something to be positioned against their 'rational' self, but are intrinsically linked to the construction of gay fans' sense of self and thus called upon to perform identity work in their broader fan practices.

Sandvoss' (2005) conceptualisation of fandom is additionally useful in theorising how horror consumption can function as an extension of the self – as a kind of symbolic mirror. That is, fans use their objects of fandom to self-reflect upon their values, beliefs and importantly, a sense of who they are – their self-identity. For scholars such as Benshoff (1997) and Miller (2002), gay fans have historically identified with the counter-hegemonic figure of the 'monster queer', the repressed outsider (Wood, 1986) who disrupts heteronormalcy and represents the cultural spectre of homosexuality whose defeat restores social normalcy within a heteronormative society. In interrogating the discourses of gay fans, however, this thesis argues that figures of identification are not merely confined to the monstrous outsider; rather, they include figures such as the victim (see Chapters 2 and 3) who emerge as significant when positioned at the intersection between the textual features and fans' micro-narratives of gay sexuality.

Gay readings, and modes of identification, then, are more complex, promulgated by specific textual configurations that blur the iconic oppressor and victim figures. In investigating *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2* as a case study, this thesis intervenes in these debates, arguing that the figure of the final boy Jesse Walsh (Mark Patton) disrupts traditional accounts of slasher spectatorship along sadistic/masochistic lines. He does this, I argue, by embodying both the symbolic figure of the monster (Freddy Krueger) but also the conventional role of the victim who must defeat the oppressor to survive. Gay fans, I argue, are invited to identify with the internal logics of this textual configuration, for it holds symbolic currency in rendering intelligible their own identity narratives. Much like the final boy undergoes a process of ontological uncertainty about his identity and his role in one usually reserved for a female figure, gay fans identify with these identity struggles and ultimately interpret textual moments in line with their own gay awakening within prevailing social structures of oppression that coloured the periods of their youth.

The central intervention here contends that gay fans identify with more eclectic forms and features of horror than is accounted for in current scholarship. These features and forms, I argue, are those that can be used to make meaning of their sense of self and are appropriated within discourses around their sexuality at specific life moments as recalled in their micro-narratives. Thus, rather than conceptualising micro-communities of gay fans as a 'powerless elite' (Tulloch and Jenkins, 1995) or reiterate their marginalisation as a socially disenfranchised group, this study illuminates the agency of gay horror fans in using horror to make meaning out of their identities. This includes subgenres of horror such as the slasher film, which is currently undertheorised in terms of gay readings when compared to a larger body of work around gender and spectatorship (Dika, 1986; Clover, 1992). However, as I have explicated thus far, this study not only offers a critical intervention around the forms of horror appropriated to make meaning of their sexual and fannish identities; but, more importantly, it is interested in how fans have mobilised these meanings to establish interpersonal ties with other fans where emotional capital becomes a symbolic marker of distinction.

Rather than position the concept of micro-communities as isolated clusters of fans demarcated from larger fandoms, this thesis suggests that micro-communities of fans can

develop within much larger spaces where tensions, hierarchies and bids for legitimacy are central (see for instance, McDonald, 1998).⁶ Specifically, I am interested in the extent to which gay horror fans position, negotiate and perform their identities (both gay and fannish) in horror forums (Chapter 4) and exclusively gay spaces (Chapter 5). Further, it also examines the tensions, cultural distinctions and hierarchies produced intragenerically between factions of gay fans within larger online spaces. Current arguments in the field of horror fandom have suggested that consuming horror is a predominately male endeavour as an articulation and indeed confirmation of masculinity (Clover, 1992; Hills, 2005; Hutchings, 1993). However, this thesis offers an intervention that challenges and works to destabilise rigid and essentialist binaries of horror fandom that are perceived as either an inherently 'masculine' or 'feminine' practice. It addresses this by drawing attention to the performative qualities of gender and sexuality as they intersect with the construction of their horror fan identities in different contexts of fandom.

If, as I have suggested, emotional capital is a marker of distinction in smaller micro-communities of gay horror fandom, this thesis posits that the migration of gay horror fans into larger online forums and spaces with a diversity of self-identifying fans challenges this capital. This is because the successful 'doing of being' a horror fan is framed within the values of (hetero/homo)normative structures in these spaces. In furthering this project's concern with the identity of gay horror fans, it suggests that whilst they are not wholly marginalised from these macro spaces, specific discourses around consumption, genre and taste are discursively constructed in order to bid for recognition as performing culturally sanctioned displays of masculinity. I further argue that in terms of gay culture, these identity displays share complex relations to Lisa Duggan's (2002) notion of homonormativity within contemporary neoliberal culture. Mobilising these cultural frameworks does not seek to reinstate gendered divisions around horror fan practices, but instead points to how particular tastes and definitions of horror service specific constructions of identity within the differing cultures studied. This includes a mainstream horror forum *Bloody-Disgusting* (Chapter 4) and an exclusively gay online fitness and workout space named *RealJock* (Chapter 5).

⁶ My reference to 'larger spaces' or forums refers to firstly, the sheer number of threaded conversations featured in the forums and secondly, the number of registered members to the respective sites. This is considered in comparison with the smaller micro-communities of fans researched in Section One.

Ultimately, this thesis interrogates the complex intersections of identity as they are discursively produced across distinctive micro-communities. It seeks to engage with an under-researched demographic of horror fans who have been overlooked in current scholarship in the fields of horror and fan studies. Understood in this way, the tripartite structure of this thesis around reading strategies, emotional connections and identity and performance is driven by the following primary research questions:

- What reading strategies do gay fans of horror exercise and how are these negotiated with other fans?
- What features and forms of horror are central in the reception of gay horror fans?
- What emotional connections do gay fans of horror invest in their object of fandom and with other fans?
- To what extent do gay horror fans position, negotiate and perform their identities within larger online forums?

In her work on female science fiction fans, Camille Bacon Smith (1992) has observed the formation of interest groups or ‘circles’ of fans who actively depart from the central fandom, which she views as too large to cater for the specific needs of all its members. The development of this thesis, however, operates from a reverse approach. It focuses on the establishment and interaction of fans in culturally specific circles or micro-communities created by and for gay horror fans, before proceeding to investigate their complex bid for entry and legitimacy in larger and more comprehensive online cultures. However, rather than produce and sustain a simplistic binary between micro and macro fandoms, this thesis attends to the relationship between micro-communities, as evidenced through the connectedness of fan blogs (Chapter 2), and the formation of subgroups within larger and more diverse forums (Chapters 3, 4, 5). As such, this challenges the spatial dynamic between what has traditionally been a focus on either larger scale fandoms, smaller circles or subgroups as evidenced in the field of fan studies. Framed in this way, this study is as equally concerned with the creation of micro-communities produced by and for gay fans of horror, as it is with the production and maintenance of smaller micro-communities (or threads) within larger online cultures.

Justifications: Gay Fans Online

A justification to delimit the parameters of this study to male fans that self-identify as gay can be explained through my own personal investments in horror as a fan who identifies as a white, educated gay male; but crucially, this arises out of the findings acquired during the stages of data sampling. Whilst the data revealed that the non-heterosexual makeup of horror fandom transgresses conventional markers of sexual identity, including: lesbian, bisexual and queer, the boundaries around a substantial portion of horror fan blogs and threads (such as ‘Growing up Gay, with Horror’, see Chapter 3) were policed and self-regulated around discussions of gay *male* sexuality. An exception is evidenced across non-heterosexual forums that were frequented by mixed genders – where horror was discussed across markers of sexual identity. I would conjecture *à la* Brigid Cherry’s (1999a) finding that females (including lesbians and other sexual minorities) could be reluctant to define themselves as horror *fans*, precisely because of deep rooted historical associations of the genre as consumed by a predominately male audience.⁷ Furthermore, I would also suggest that this division is the result of their differential tastes in horror (Cherry, 1999a, 1999b; Williamson, 2005a), which could offer an explanation as to why gay male fans produce boundaries around the cultural specificity of their fandoms and why deep emotional connections occur with other self-identifying gay fans as a result.

This is not to suggest, however, that a theoretical concern with gay male fans is wholly liberated from conceptual difficulties and reservations. In his introduction to *Gay Horror Filmmakers, Actors and Authors* (2013, p. xii), Sean Abley provocatively downplays the cultural associations between gay people and horror: ‘Sometimes it’s just fun to watch people get killed in crazy ways. Does it need to be more than that? Does it need to be a gay reason? Can’t it just be fun?’ Despite the interest of this thesis in the broader connections between the horror film and gay identity and culture, it does not proffer a unified ‘grand theory’ of these connections, nor does it risk homogenising the diversity and complexity of the identities of the fans researched. For as Abley might claim, some of these fans might self-identify as gay and just so *happen* to have a

⁷ Echoing a similar finding, on their empirical study of lesbian and gay men’s uses and readings of popular media, Alexander Dhoest and Nele Simons (2012, p. 267) find that ‘men more often ranked action and adventure, historical, science fiction, and horror films as their favourite film genre, but also musicals, where women more often preferred romantic films but also crime and gangster films’. This would largely confirm the reproduction of gender and taste as has been argued in terms of their heterosexual counterparts.

proclivity for horror films, thus discursively disentangling any cultural relations between the two. Indeed, this sentiment is echoed by some of the fans featured in this thesis and presents an additionally fruitful area of enquiry. Despite these caveats, both popular and academic accounts continue to highlight that, in the darkened realm of the movie theatre, there have long been gay male audiences and gay fans of horror. Perhaps these are the 'lone consumers' of the horror audience described by Carol Clover (1992) or the 'male rogues' identified by James Twitchell (1985): those ostracised figures who have been physically and metaphorically displaced in academic accounts which claim to depict the precise demographic breakdown of the genre's audiences and fans.

For gay fans, the significance of the Internet must not go unnoticed. As a socially marginalised and historically discriminated group, it has been argued that the Internet affords safety and greater autonomy to express the self than in offline contexts. Christopher Pullen (2010, pp. 1-2) proffers a list of such potentials including: 'opportunities for virtual coming out', 'connecting to and constructing communities' and 'establishing identity ideals'. Furthermore, as marginalised fans of a historically maligned genre, the Internet allows gay fans to access streams of content pertinent to their own interests in horror: joining spaces, networks and communities of others with whom to share this information and engage in ephemeral and sustained forms of conversation. Geographically specific interest and 'meet up' groups exist for gay fans of horror to meet. A profusion of articles and blogs continue to target gay fans, interrogating their tastes in horror; articles have also emerged that critically interrogate 'horror's link to homosexuality' in a number of popular outlets (Stockham, 2014). This is in addition to a series of articles and blogs that theorise the cultural specificity of the emotional connections between audiences and horror, often written by fans that self-identify as gay.

In conducting research online, this thesis illuminates both the social exchanges between gay horror fans, while furthering an understanding of the cultural reception of said fans in interpreting horror in light of their sexual identities and positions in culture. That is, whilst online research affords greater access to the reviews and reception materials created and circulated in gay fan-produced spaces, it allows a further consideration as to how this material underpins fans' communicative exchanges with one another; additionally, how particular readings are negotiated and legitimised in micro-

communities of fandom. For instance, gay fans have used the Internet to access the paratextual cultures of films to bolster and authenticate their readings. This is evidenced in the case of *Elm Street 2* in a bid to legitimise the film as a 'gay horror' (see Chapter 2). This material includes interviews and features on gay and horror sites and knowledge acquired through interaction with Mark Patton himself through social media platforms including *Facebook*. Unequivocally then, the fans researched have access to a plethora of resources surrounding the horror film to legitimate their readings and cultural associations to the genre. It is important, therefore, to explain how these sources of information inflect the cultural practices of fans, but also how fans produce their own reviews and reception materials from their minority cultural positions (see Chapter 1).

I have suggested that the Internet affords fans greater access to sources of information about the cultural connections between horror, gay identity and culture. However, this thesis warns that the 'e-utopian' possibilities of cyberculture must also be cautioned against (Williamson, 2005a). Indeed, whilst it will be argued that gay fans engage in meaningful and empowering dialogue, it could be argued that the spaces they inhabit are equally problematic in that they are dispersed (as in blogs, see Chapter 2), prone to intrusion by others (as in threads created in larger sites, see Chapter 4) or unable to sustain dialogue between fans for prolonged periods of time (as in fan-produced webpages with limited functions for written exchange, see Chapter 1). Thus, rather than subscribing to Rhiannon Bury's (2005) contention that these are unequivocally 'cyberspaces of their own', this thesis attempts to critically interrogate the limitations and potentials of websites, blogs and forums in facilitating self-expression and for establishing intrafannish dialogue between gay fans of horror. The relationship between space, self-expression and micro-communal formations of fandom are therefore considered in tandem in the five chapters featured within this thesis.

Literature Review

The following literature review outlines some of the key debates that underpin the interventions of this thesis. It commences by investigating how scholars have theorised the horror film through a cultural lens of gender and sexuality. As transpires from these debates, non-heterosexual audiences of horror have been theorised in current thought, albeit these accounts have employed reductive models of spectatorship that elide the complexity of relations between gay fans and the genre. Proceeding to survey the literature on horror's audiences and fans, one finds the centrality of gender to these accounts, albeit gay fans are significantly absent. Indeed, whilst this scholarship has been attentive to cultural distinctions that operate in horror fandom along axes of gender (linked to the knowledgeability and affective responses of fans), this literature review identifies a significant lack of understanding of how gay fans fit into current debates. Section 3 of proceeds to survey scholarship on gay audiences and fans. It finds that whilst work on the reading strategies and subversive practices of gay audiences are well documented, less work accounts for the socialisation of gay fans in online contexts. The final sections proceed to survey key debates about communities and identities online. This is useful in allowing me to frame my approach and definitions of micro-community within current debates, whilst positioning the performative qualities of gay horror fan identity within current scholarship concerning the presentation of the self online.

Gender, Sexuality and the Horror Film

The complex intersections of sexuality and horror can be traced back to gothic fiction from the eighteenth century. In her work on gothic horror, Valdine Clemens (1999) offers an account of gothic fiction as the 'return of the repressed', the emergence of that which had previously been rejected by consciousness. Valdine describes this thusly: 'Something – some entity, knowledge, emotion, or feeling – which has been submerged or held at bay because it threatens the established order of things, develops a cumulative energy that demands its release and forces it into the realm of visibility' (p. 4). Clemens' description is a significant one, for it chimes with a related body of scholarship on the horror film with its roots in the 'return of the repressed' hypotheses informed by a psychoanalytical

framework (see Creed, 1993; Schneider, 2004). In her psychoanalytically informed account of sexuality and horror, Margaret Tarrett (1970) argues that science fiction from the 1950s is preoccupied with tensions between social sexual mores and individual sexual needs and desires. For Tarrett, the monster or worldly 'extraterrestrial forces' are understood as an 'externalization of the civilized person's conflict with his or her primitive subconscious or id' (p. 347).

Tarrett's conceptual linkage between social structures of power and sexual subjectivity was indispensable in shaping Robin Wood's (1986) argument about 1970s and 1980s horror. For Wood, the true subject of the horror genre is 'the struggle for recognition of all that civilization represses or oppresses, its reemergence dramatized, as in our nightmares, as an object of horror, a matter for terror, and the happy ending (when it exists) typically signifying the restoration of repression' (p. 75). For Wood, horror is a collective nightmare defined through the temporal surfacing of the 'Other' as 'that which bourgeois ideology cannot recognize or accept but must deal with' (p. 73). Wood formulates two distinct forms of repression: basic and surplus, the former delineating a universal transition required in order to make us fully human, and the latter culturally specific, signifying that which falls beyond 'monogamous heterosexual bourgeois patriarchal capitalists' (p. 71). This includes a deviation from hegemonic norms of sexuality, which for Wood, comes to represent one manifestation of the monstrous 'Other' in horror as that which must be suppressed and annihilated and ultimately subjugated to the dominant order – the classical horror ending.

It is important to note the historical and generic specificity of the psychoanalytical approach that shaped Wood's ideas, as well as his claim that 'the monster is, of course, much more protean, changing from period to period' (p. 79). For Harry Benshoff (1997), this is a launching point to trace the shifting configurations of the monster – tracing trends and cycles of horror from classical iterations through to the 'postmodern' 1980s. Although Wood's 'return of the repressed' model is deployed to structure Benshoff's figure of the 'monster queer' as a counter-hegemonic and perverse 'Other', Benshoff's work signifies a shift from psychoanalytical approaches in theorising (homo)sexuality and horror. Benshoff's work is informed by Michel Foucault's (1978) understanding of the role of discourse as constitutive in the construction of homosexuality. This permits

Benshoff to provide clues into the sutures between textual representations of homosexuality and monstrosity and the cultural position of the gay and lesbian spectator, who he argues, has already situated themselves outside the heterosexist order, predisposed to an identification with horror's monstrous other. Benshoff's work has proven fruitful to the field, and has since been explicated by Sam J. Miller (2011) who laments what he views as the death of the monster queer in a post-9/11 assimilationist discourse. Here, the monster queer's demise is indicative of the normalisation of queer identity. This notion of queer assimilation has further underpinned the work of Darren Elliot-Smith (2012) who analyses televisual horror shows such as *True Blood* (2008-2014) to argue that historically queer signifiers such as the vampire have been (homo)normalised which he sees as leading to either subcultural rejection (by gay culture) or assimilation (into the mainstream) – a precarious outlook indeed.⁸

These accounts constitute rich ideas about the relationship of the gay spectator to these films, as well as their affective and interpretive investments in different horror texts. By investigating *fans* online, this thesis furthers Benshoff's claim that individualised gay subjectivities have prepared fans to 'acknowledge the complex range of queerness' (1997, p. 15) by focusing on the reading strategies mobilised in the reception of gay fans. I suggest that although reading at the level of connotation is alive and well within these spaces, fans read into different aspects of divergent horror texts, influenced by their knowledge and interpretive agency, but also the contexts and priorities of their fan-produced spaces (Fiske, 1992) (see Chapter 1). Benshoff draws attention to four ways in which horror and homosexuality intersect: (1) discernible gay and lesbian characters, (2) written produced and/or directed by a gay man or lesbian, (3) subtextual readings and (4) 'the sense that any film viewed by a gay or lesbian spectator might be considered queer' (pp. 13-16). Absent from this, and other accounts, is a fuller understanding of how horror narratives, themes and characters intersect with the lived experiences and subjectivities of material gay fans. A comprehensive understanding of gay receptions of horror in the

⁸ The figure of the monster has been the focal point of much scholarship on (homo)sexuality and horror, particularly in relation to the figure of the vampire. For some scholars, the figure of the vampire speaks about the zeitgeist of a period; for instance, where its reappearance in the early 1970s can be explained through feminist and lesbian liberationist movements (Zimmerman, 1996), or as a product of conservative politics in the 1980s where a previously queer figure fell under the reigns of hegemonic control: 'they lost their immortality, but they also embodied unalterable oppression' (Auerbach, 1995, p. 171).

context of their fan-produced online spaces yields the potential to reveal more than the reading strategies exercised by fans, but also the specific forms and features of horror foregrounded in their accounts and the different ways that the category of ‘queer horror’ is discursively produced.

As I contend, the forms and features of horror central to the reception of gay fans also attends to the figure of the ‘monster queer’. However, rather than correlating gay subjectivities with the outsider figure of the slasher killer/monster, this thesis suggests a more complex relation to the victim and monster figure in films such as *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy’s Revenge* (1985) (hereafter *Elm Street 2*), foregrounded most abundantly in the personal blogs of gay fans. Carol Clover (1992) introduced the figure of the final girl, the slasher film’s survivor, arguing that the slasher film facilitates a cross-gendered identification between the male spectator and final girl; suggesting that these films speak to male anxieties and masochistic fantasies. Careful not to preclude the male spectators’ sadistic investment, Clover contends that whilst the slasher, along with the occult and rape-revenge film, may position the female as victim, they equally speak about male anxieties, internal fears and gender displacements, playfully inferring instances of homoerotic and homosexual positions assumed by its ostensibly heterosexual audience. Problems arise from Clover’s account from a number of perspectives: chiefly its limited conception of the horror film audience (as predominately male and heterosexual) and a theorisation of a homogenous male and youthful audience of horror.

Where this thesis aligns most congruently with Clover is in her suggestion that the slasher film is concerned with the destabilisation of gender roles and the negotiation of identity. This notion is accelerated through Judith Halberstam’s (1995) contention that queer and feminist pleasures of the horror film lie not in an inversion of gender and sexuality but through a reconstruction of existing categories. For Halberstam, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* suggests that gender ‘is skin, leather, face, not body, not internal mechanics, certainly not genitalia’ (p. 152). Halberstam’s argument is useful in theorising the transient nature of gender and sexuality, ‘deflected through a series of gender positions’ rather than fixed to a material body on-screen. Furthering Halberstam’s idea of horror in producing ‘new [identity] categories’, this thesis focuses on the emergence of the ‘final boy’ figure in the slasher film. As I argue in Chapter 2, the figure of the final

boy, as represented by Jesse Walsh in *Elm Street 2*, symbolises a confluence of the monster and victim, as traditional gender roles of the slasher film are blurred, and stable identifications are fractured. In exploring why *Elm Street 2* is often considered to be the ‘gayest horror film’ within fan and popular critical accounts, this thesis suggests that even though Freddy can be read as the figure of the monster queer, a more nuanced approach is required to understand his relationship to the male victim Jesse, as the configuration resonates with the subjectivity of the gay fan who view themselves as both monster and victim within the contexts of their youth (specifically, their teenage years).

This thesis thus facilitates the emergence of new theoretical perspectives about a demographic of horror fans overlooked in current scholarship. One method of achieving this is through a more nuanced consideration of how textual features of divergent horror texts resonate with gay fans in culturally specific ways (such as the amalgam of monster and victim as manifested in characters such as Jesse Walsh in *Elm Street 2* (played by Mark Patton)). The field of reception studies is beneficial to this thesis in elucidating upon the cultural identities brought to the viewing experience, and further, the reading strategies of horror exercised in their reception material (including reviews). To a large degree, the influx of reception accounts of horror serve as a corrective to the arguments and methodologies put forth by scholars such as Linda Williams (1996) who argues that the female viewers’ act of looking is punished (see Laura Mulvey, 1975). In her look at the monster, Williams argues that she comes to recognise an affinity between the two, cementing their status as culturally subordinate within ‘patriarchal structures of seeing’ (p. 24).

For Andrea Weiss (1992), Williams comes close to considering the lesbian spectator, but maintains a position along heteronormative dimensions of sexuality.⁹ Weiss argues that the historical emergence of the lesbian vampire film has allowed for lesbian forms of empowerment and desire to emerge, but ultimately punishes these identificatory positions in restoring the heteronormative and patriarchal order. However, Weiss points out that the ambiguous endings of some ‘artful’ lesbian vampire films has allowed lesbian spectators to exercise subversive reading strategies through cultural strategies

⁹ My use of ‘heteronormativity’ here and throughout is used to signify a cultural belief that there are distinct categories of gender (a man and a woman) whereby heterosexuality represents the ‘norm’. In this belief, heterosexuality represents a fixed ‘given’ to which other identities are rendered subordinate.

such as camp (see Sontag, 1964; Babuscio, 1993). Rhona Berenstein's work (1996) maintains the monster's centrality to threats of human identity, but dismantles claims around the sadistic male spectator located in the psychoanalytic model. Berenstein develops a more flexible account of horror spectatorship to argue that classical horror's transgression of social norms frees audiences from constraints of gender by facilitating a more fluid identificatory model of viewing and reacting to classical horror cinema, drawing upon the metaphor of 'spectatorship-as-drag'. Drawing from a wealth of reception material, Berenstein illuminates classical horror's address to male *and* female viewers, noting that films were marketed through these performative dimensions with critics acknowledging not only a female presence but also their unexpected responses and pleasures to horror.

Reception accounts of gender and horror have been further mobilised to reveal a more inclusive female presence in horror viewership. These accounts elucidate horror's female address, and the pleasures of the female audience within and across differing historical contexts such as the 1940s (Snelson 2009, 2014) and in particular cycles and trends such as the slasher film (Nowell 2011a, 2011b). Janet Staiger (2005) develops a historical materialist approach to reception studies to consider the relationship between textual readings and the social and historical circumstances of viewing. Staiger's reception approach offers a corrective to widespread and unjustified assumptions about the filmic spectator by suggesting the possibility that they could engage with filmic texts in more nuanced, unpredictable and highly complex fashions. Importantly, Staiger's approach allows for a more sustained consideration of *gay audiences*, for instance, through their motivations in 'outing' Jodie Foster in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) to further their own political agendas. This is similar to an argument developed in this thesis whereby I argue that gay fans foreground specific textual and extra-textual features which pertain to the social and cultural contexts of their gay identities, whilst using Mark Patton's real life struggles to legitimise their readings of *Elm Street 2*. I suggest that this is both a way to 'out' particular horror texts as 'gay', and more significantly, to make meanings that resonate with the emotional realism (Ang, 1985) of their gay subjectivities.

Audiences and Fans of Horror

As well as denigrating the horror film over the course of much of its history, critics and public discourse have also denounced audiences and fans that subject themselves to the genre's offerings. Rick Worland (2007, p.120) argues that there have been genuine social fears of the horror film, especially that 'the distinction between fictional monster and the reader/consumer of horror stories may be lost, and an otherwise innocent viewer become the most tragic victim by acting out this new identity or compulsion in society at large'. Because much horror output has been dismissed as debased and trashy, so too have its audiences historically been conceptualised as uncultured, uneducated dupes who pose a threat to the rest of civilised society (see debates on media violence and the video nasties; for instance, Barker and Petley, 1997; Egan, 2007). Scholars, however, have employed different disciplinary persuasions to document the appeals and ideologies of horror, using psychoanalytic and cognitive approaches in an attempt to rationalise and make sense of the particular pleasures and meanings offered to audiences. James Twitchell (1985) for instance, argues that the pleasures of horror rest in its cautionary tale for adolescent audiences in eliciting information about the development of appropriate reproductive sexuality; whereas Noel Carroll (1990) suggests that the appeal of horror can be located through the figure of the monster who violates cultural categories resulting in the dual emotions of fear and disgust which Carroll argues could explain the spectator's fascination with horror.

As Andrew Tudor (1997) argues, a central issue of this work is that both the cultural category of horror and the heterogeneity of the audience who partake in its offerings are reduced to restrictive, essentialist accounts. Tudor warns of the tendency for scholars to produce a 'self-selected group by virtue of their conjoint taste' (p. 444) meaning that their individual and highly complex predispositions for horror are consolidated, or at least significantly unaccounted for. One explanation for this has been the significant lack of empirical research on horror's audiences, leaving unchallenged a tacit assumption that a young (16-24) male audience constituted its primary demographic makeup, whilst reinforcing archaic claims based on little empirical evidence. Indeed, several chapters in one of the first book length studies on *Audience Preferences and Reactions to Horror* (1996) reaffirmed existing claims that the emotional responses to

horror ensue the viewing experience, particularly in the case of children (Cantor and Oliver, 1996), and that horror allows ‘all boys and male adolescents to strive perfect displays of fearlessness and protective competence, whereas essentially all girls and female adolescents strive to perfect displays of fearfulness and protective need’ (Zillmann and Weaver, 1996, p. 98).

More recent work on horror’s audiences and fans has served as a corrective to two central and interrelated strands of scholarship: one pertaining to issues around gender, and the other, the knowledge and tastes exercised by horror fans. Brigid Cherry presents convincing empirical evidence on female viewers of horror (1999a, 1999b, 2002) to challenge previous claims about female audiences. Cherry identifies a large presence of female audiences and fans of horror, where particular pleasures are sought and delivered. Meanwhile, in relation to their more conspicuous and vocal male counterparts, Cherry also identifies differences in the tastes of female horror fans, in addition to the differences of their fan practices (or indeed lack thereof). Moreover, Matt Hills (2005) draws attention to what he refers to as the ‘connoisseurship’ of horror *fandom*, where fans use their knowledge and mastery of horror to resist the affective dimensions of the genre’s offerings. Hills contends that this gives fans a sense of subcultural agency and masculine endurance over their object of fandom. Despite these revisionist accounts of horror’s audiences and fans who are somewhat recuperated from historical denunciation, it has also been argued that there are a series of cultural distinctions evident within horror fandom. As I proceed to explore, these continue to relegate factions of its audience and their ‘inauthentic’ tastes in horror intragenerically – from within horror fandom.

The present state of the field indicates that, whilst the demographic makeup and the pleasures sought from horror are more diverse than earlier theorised, fan tastes, practices and distinctions (Jancovich, 2000, 2002) are formulated along axes of gender. Joanne Hollows’ (2003, p. 46) work on cult illuminates this most clearly: ‘cult fans must distance themselves from the feminine shopper and adopt dispositions towards consumption which are more assertively masculine’. Moreover, Sarah Thornton’s (1995) work on subcultural capital is productive conceptualising the sense of exclusivity fostered within subcultures wherein gender divisions are central in sustaining a sense of exclusivity against the ‘mainstream’. This has been important to horror fandom, for as

David Church (2009, p. 342) argues, this allows horror fans to acquire subcultural recognition through consuming the ‘very sickest films ever made’ as a strategy of distinction from other ‘mainstream’ (and ostensibly female) viewers, reaffirming their enduring masculinity. Indeed, these debates have manifested in work around fans of *Scream* (1996) (Jancovich, 2000), and have recently resurfaced in fan discussions around *Twilight* (2008), where struggles and distinctions around gender and genre are foregrounded by fans who seek to distance themselves from other consumers of horror (Bode, 2010; Sheffield and Merlo, 2010; Jancovich, 2014).

Although Cherry’s (1999b, p. 193) research reveals that ‘92 per cent’ of female viewers liked ‘all or most’ vampire films, many were unwilling to refer to themselves as *fans*. Indeed, this is against a smaller contingent of viewers who professed a proclivity for slasher films and consequently proclaimed a fannish investment in horror. Indeed, this represents an important congruence with science fiction fandom (Jenkins, 1992; Bacon-Smith, 1992; Tulloch and Jenkins, 1995), where it has been argued that marginalised female fans frequently branch off into their own factions, where traditionally female coded fan practices (such as fan fic and slash) are cultivated and shared. This work informs us that fan practices and the tastes that fans have in particular generic iterations are bound and indeed evaluated within structures of patriarchy. Indeed, this has largely informed the tastes of female fans in horror. Importantly though, it has also shaped the perceptions of their cultural tastes by other horror fans. These distinctions are important to this thesis in considering the cultural significance of gay fans’ tastes in horror, but also how these tastes are challenged and negotiated within different spaces of fandom. For instance, I argue that in smaller micro-communities, a range of texts are discussed that have significance to their gay identities and are appropriated by fans to make meaning out of their sense of self. However, in larger horror and gay forums, these tastes, I argue, can be seen as more performative (by dismissing certain forms) in a bid to assimilate as ‘serious’ horror fans (see Chapters 4 and 5).

As I have suggested, horror’s audiences and fans continue to be considered along axes of gender and youth/adolescence. This has resulted in far less work attending to non-heterosexual fans specifically. As Peter Hutchings (2004, pp. 89-90) argues, where gay and lesbian fans have been considered, it is to theorise the subversive qualities of the

horror audience against the intentions of filmmakers through queer readings; with gay and lesbian viewers ‘snatching’ moments from horror that are significant to their cultural identities. This sentiment is congruent with Henry Jenkins’ (1992) notion of fans ‘poaching’ media texts: re-working and re-writing them to make meaning out of them. Indeed, this has been the theoretical zenith of illuminating horror’s non-straight audience and fans. Investigating fans of the gothic series *Dark Shadows*, Harry Benshoff offers an explanation: whereas the utopian futures central to science fiction facilitate imaginable queer possibilities, ‘gothic horror is more historically earthbound [...] determined by pragmatic formal characteristics’ (1998, p. 206). However, this does not preclude Benshoff from arguing that *Dark Shadows* has been appropriated en masse within gay publications and fandoms where camp readings and subversions of gender and sexuality are indicators of its appeals and pleasures for gay and lesbian fans. Similar to Benshoff’s observation, this thesis suggests that the ‘earthbound’ qualities (read the social specificity) of (gothic) horror do not prohibit an appropriation of particular films and cycles for gay fans. Rather, I argue that it serves to foster more defined and indeed personal correlations between the self and features of horror, where discourses of authenticity, verisimilitude and sameness emerge as central.

This focus on the self and horror has been elucidated in the work of Milly Williamson (2001a, 2001b). Following Benshoff’s work on vampire fan cultures, Williamson proffers alternative accounts of how vampire fandom affords female fans a way to negotiate the complex contradictions that are placed upon women and specifically the female body. Williamson argues that by engaging in sartorial practices (dressing up as vampires) and talking to other vampire fans, females find a way to challenge traditional constructs of femininity, whilst actively drawing attention to their sense of difference in symbolic contestation of the impossibility of these ideals placed upon them. The strength of Williamson’s account is evidenced through its focus on the cultural practices of fans, but also the way these fans negotiate the complexity of their identities through the vampire itself. Whilst Williamson offers an account of how the vampire is appropriated by fans to forge more complex negotiations to cultural norms within structures of power, this thesis suggests that alternative categories of horror, such as the slasher film, also allow marginalised fans to make sense of their differences. However, where the figure of

the vampire has historically held more identifiable links with issues pertaining to gender and sexuality, gay fans, I argue, mobilise their interpretive strategies and fan knowledge around other iterations of horror such as the slasher film. This is significant, I argue, not only in producing meaning of their investments in the object of fandom, but to 'out' what they perceive to be 'closeted' horror texts (see Chapters 1 and 2).

Whilst attentive to the relationship between textual features of the slasher film and the construction of gay identity, the scope of this project extends to consider the parallels between gay sexuality and tastes in horror (both historically and in terms of specific productions). One way this is offered is through drawing parallels between 'becoming a fan' narratives (Cavicchi, 1998) and their intersection with 'coming out' narratives. This thesis suggests that a wealth of current scholarship on horror's audiences and fans is framed through paradigmatic links between knowledge/gender and the tastes of horror's audiences and fans. This elides additional concerns about the position of horror within the micro-narratives (Hills, 2005) of fans as they are articulated dialogically in light of their personal lived experiences. In surveying personalised spaces of blogs and a gay horror fan tribe where micro-narratives of the self are freely expressed, I contend that although scholarship on horror fandom has separated the 'rational' adult self from former (and affected) youthful consumptions of horror (Kermode, 1997; Weigl, 2002; Hills, 2005), gay fans embrace these nostalgic narratives through reifying parallels of how early consumptions of horror intersected with their memories of coming to terms with their sexual identities. In this way, tastes in horror exercised in smaller micro-communities are not to be understood through the 'right' forms of horror to consume, but rather through the cultural significance of films as they pertain to their gay subjectivities (see Chapters 2 and 3).

This thesis suggests that micro-narratives of gay fans' investments in horror operate in contradistinction to the culture of horror forums where an expression of the gay self is, to varying degrees, proscribed (see Chapter 4). However, it would be erroneous to suggest that even the more personal spaces inhabited by fans are entirely liberated from cultural constraints and fan-produced norms. As Milly Williamson (2005) has argued, the fan studies 'model of resistance', which has hitherto conceptualised the socially disenfranchised fan (Fiske, 1992), does not adequately account for the 'elitist

distinctions' operating within socially marginalised fandoms, nor the extent to which these fandoms are able to foster a democratic collective as envisioned by scholars including Henry Jenkins (1992) and Lisa A. Lewis (1992). However, whilst this thesis does not identify 'elitist distinctions' within smaller micro-communities per se, it suggests that particular ways of reading horror and growing up with films in certain periods represent a symbolic badge of belonging. For instance, I argue in Chapter 3 that the 'Growing up Gay, with Horror' thread on *Tribe.net* is predominately inhabited by gay fans who grew up in the 1980s. This allows fans to frame their tastes in horror through a collective memory of watching particular films, which in turn, assists in the construction of their gay identities as articulated within the spaces.

Whilst it is in smaller micro-communities, including threads and blogs, where tastes in horror are reified as they link to the context of gay youth (including growing up), this thesis proceeds to argue that a taste for different forms of horror are (re)produced quite differently across different micro-communities. That is, particular articulations of taste are important in the presentation of the gay self as articulated in alternative spaces including horror fandoms (Chapter 4) and a homonormative masculine gay space (Chapter 5). In surveying different micro-communities of gay horror fans, this thesis considers the performative nature of fan taste, informed by the debates around cultural distinctions in horror fandom. However, it argues that performances of taste in horror must also be considered in light of the interactions between and amongst non- and anti-fans of horror (Gray, 2003). This allows me to maintain a dual focus on the significance of horror fandom in the construction of gay identities, but also, how tastes in the genre must be considered as performance when communicating with demographics of online participants who have variable investments in, and attitudes towards, horror.

Gay Audiences and Fans

For John Fiske (1992, p. 30), the gay fans researched in this thesis would constitute 'the cultural tastes of subordinated formations of the people'. Interestingly, Fiske refers to these 'subordinated formations' as those 'disempowered by any combination of gender, age, class and race', eliding markers of sexual identity in his account of subordinated factions of people. When considering the cultural politics of sexuality, I argue that the

semiotic productivity of fans has largely dominated the field of study. Broadly, this has encompassed the ‘subversive’ qualities of gay, lesbian and ‘queer’ readings through reading strategies such as camp and models of spectatorship and identification informed by fantasy theory (see Farmer, 2000; DeAngelis, 2001).

Scholars focusing on gay, lesbian and ‘queer’ audiences have attempted to proffer particular reading strategies mobilised by audiences in ‘subverting’ mainstream popular cultural texts which are ostensibly produced for a majority heterosexual audience. In researching queer youth audiences for instance, Mark Lipton (2008, p. 168) offers three potential readings for non-straight audiences: ‘alter the intended meaning of a text [...] specific practices of negotiation [...] place the reader in the role of detective [...] their job is to find the hidden messages’. Similarly, Larry Gross offers a further four: ‘internalization, subversion, secession and resistance’ (1991, pp. 19-46). However, these accounts have been criticised by scholars including Paul Burstn and Colin Richardson (1995) because of their essentialist tendencies in homogenising non-straight audiences and their identificatory and reading positions of popular culture texts. Burstn and Richardson thus advocate an ‘anti-essentialist’ account of identification with popular culture for gay, lesbian and straight spectators. This seeks to challenge fixed conceptions of identity as stable and rooted in biological accounts that stitch sex, gender and sexuality within rigid binary systems. Moreover, scholars have also criticised previous research for its lack of empirical evidence around the viewing positions and reading strategies of actual gay and lesbian audiences of popular culture forms (see Dhoest and Simons, 2012).

As the field of fan studies has gained currency in the academy, investigations have shifted onto what fans *do* with texts produced within heteronormative culture, such as the process of making meaning from pop culture through fan practices and productions such as slash fiction (fiction which takes two male characters from a textual object and places them in a same-sex relationship). Scholars, and the fans producing such fictions, have suggested that such practices yield possibilities for exploring the complexities of sexual fantasy and desire, but also for experimenting with the possibilities of reconfiguring one’s marginalised identity within the context of heterosexist and patriarchal male culture (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Jenkins, 1992). However, scholars have suggested that this is predominately produced by straight, white, female fans, where

questions of ‘pleasure, power, and subversion’ are central (Hellekson and Busse, 2014, p. 80). Ultimately, where slash fiction has largely been attached to particular genres (such as science fiction) this leaves both the category of horror as well as the cultural activities of gay fans in question.

In focusing on *horror*, this thesis moves beyond marginalised fans of other popular genres such as science fiction, wherein a larger corpus of work has focused. Henry Jenkins and John Campbell (2006), observe that gay fans in the Boston area (‘Gaylaxians’) mobilised a movement around *Star Trek*, protesting the absence of LGBT characters in its vision of a future utopia. As they argue, ‘fans wanted to be visible participants within a future that had long since resolved the problem of homophobia’ (p. 97). This underscores the notion that where the textual properties and narrative landscape of science fiction may present opportunities for gay and other sexual minority representations, genres such as horror are often seen to align gay sexuality as monstrous, precluding possibilities for identifying gay and lesbian characters. It is for this reason, I argue, that fans continue to exercise ‘subversive’ readings of horror texts in a bid to collectively ‘out’ what they perceive to constitute ‘gay’ horror texts. Moreover, this highlights the importance of a social approach to gay horror fandom that not only attempts to explore the meaning of fans’ interpretive strategies, but one that focuses on the collective negotiation and confirmation of these interpretive practices within the micro-communities studied.

Cheryl Harris (1998, p.5) suggests that post-industrial society has intensified the marginalisation of the disenfranchised, making fandom particularly pertinent for expressing ‘their otherwise silenced identities through a common interest in a symbol, icon or text, and then redress their alienation through the *social nature of fan practice*’ (my emphasis). In focusing on contingents of gay fans online, this thesis seeks to explore the social nature of gay fandoms. This represents a manoeuvre beyond the ways that gay audiences and fans ostensibly read and position themselves in relation to popular culture texts. That is, it attends to the significance of these readings in fans initiating their own interpretive micro-communities, establishing connections with one another, and in rendering these readings as dominant within the interpretive frameworks of their spaces.

Shifts to online fandom have enabled scholars to focus more productively on gay and lesbian fans' connection to their object of fandom and importantly, the social dimensions that shape their emotionally charged interactions with other marginalised fans. This constitutes Rosalind Hanmer's (2010a) central argument, which explores how fans of *Xena: Warrior Princess* established online connections with other fans about their object of fandom, affording them a platform to discuss their sexually marginalised lesbian identities. In a rare instance of such accounts in horror fandom, Milly Williamson (2005a, p. 175) identifies a smaller 'writing circle' of vampire fans in cyberspace which affords a channel of communication for lesbians to explore 'the connections and explorations of identity which opened up possibilities about sexual identity and the self and enabled these women, through a fan community, to come out as lesbians and fall in love'. Importantly however, and worth reiterating from earlier, Williamson suggests that this 'e-utopia' should be cautioned as hierarchies, power relations and conflicts around expectations and the legitimacy of certain forms of writing permeate these spaces.

Williamson highlights some of the ongoing debates regarding how sexually marginalised fans seek platforms and communities for individual and collective expression. Importantly, Williamson acknowledges that these online contexts are rarely, if ever, liberated from broader structures of power. Further, intrafannish forms of dominance and power in the offline arena are said to reproduce themselves in the domain of cyberculture. This thesis is therefore interested in furthering these debates, by exploring the extent to which the norms and values of the micro-communities inflect the ways in which gay fans articulate their self online. Specifically, it is interested in the interplay of how sexual and fannish identities are (re)produced across the distinctive spaces investigated herein. This conceptual slippage between identities, spatial canvases and finding ways of expressing the self speaks in many ways to Susan Driver's (2007) work on queer girls and popular culture where she finds that the Internet and the establishment of communities provides a platform for fans to experiment with their identities and social connections with other queer fans in their mutually productive online interactions.

However, this thesis also attends to the shifting dynamic of gay fan discourse across the micro-communities investigated. Therefore, rather than limit the focus to the

interpersonal connections between gay horror fans, this thesis is additionally focused on the reception of gay fans in the horror community and further, the reception of horror fans within an exclusively gay community. Undertaking a similar task, Camille Bacon-Smith (2000) conducted an ethnographic study of gay, lesbian and other sexual minority fans within science fiction fandom. Bacon-Smith's work is important in illustrating how fans organise local gay science fiction fandoms whereby they struggle to negotiate their sexual and fannish identities. Bacon-Smith finds that, whilst local science fiction chapters and the larger Gaylaxicon convention has been welcoming to non-heterosexual fans, conflicts exist for fans within the gay community, rooted in perceptions that science fiction serves as a hostile ground for non-straight representation and expression. In acknowledging the cultural struggles in claiming an identity as a gay horror fan, this thesis is not only interested in these tensions, but also how fans negotiate their marginalised sexual identities through their performances of the 'doing of being' horror fans. As Sandvoss argues: 'fan performances in everyday life thus become a source of stability and security, performing one of many areas of social interaction' (2005, p. 47). In other words, I argue that despite what some fans report to be their socially disenfranchised status as gay, claiming and performing a horror fan identity can bestow certain privileges and symbolic capitals in a bid for recognition and status (see Chapter 5).

Communities and Interactions Online

The migration of fans into cyberculture en masse, roughly from the mid to late nineties onwards, has enabled online communities to develop around popular culture interests. This technological terrain has enabled scholars to further concerns about the investments and emotional attachments of fans in their object of fandom, opening up debates about the social bonds between fans where arguments about community and socialisation are pertinent. Central to these debates however, is what the notion of community signifies, and importantly, how the notion of 'community online' intersects with traditional offline conceptions of community found in anthropological and sociological studies. Steve Jones (1997, p. 16), for instance, writes that 'if we are to create a sense of community beyond mere recognition, we require far more than its construction – physical or virtual – we also require human occupancy, commitment, interaction, and living among and with others'.

The issue in these accounts, including one offered by Howard Rheingold (1993), is that these conceptions of community hinge upon the sustained interaction and participation within a group.¹⁰ This elides considerations of how socially disenfranchised persons – as explored in this study, have appropriated the potentials of cyberculture to establish their own communal formations. As Andrea MacDonald puts it, it is time to ‘gain insights into how a particular group integrates the possibilities of CMC’ (1998, p. 132).

I suggest that conceptions of community that erect boundaries around members, or the contours of the group itself, are problematic. As Benedict Anderson (1983) has argued, this is because even the largest units such as a nation, have permeable borders beyond which other communities exist. Anderson contends that ‘all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined’ (1991, p. 6). Anderson’s argument is useful here, as I suggest that definitions of community brought by the researcher to the object of study leaves little space to consider the different ways that fans *themselves* conceive of themselves as a community. For Nancy Baym (1998, p. 38), ‘in ongoing communicative interaction, participants strategically appropriate and exploit the resources and rules those structures offer. The result is a dynamic set of systematic social meanings that enables participants to imagine themselves as a community’. Whilst maintaining historical associations of community as that which signifies ‘expression’, ‘identities’ and ‘relationships’, Baym’s argument is important to this thesis in attending to the ways that the language of fans and the emotional connections they establish with one another underpins *their* perceptions of the communities that they consider themselves to be a part.

Embracing this argument allows me to contend that fan blogs, threaded conversions within forums and the ‘comment’ function on an author’s editorial can be considered to constitute micro-communities in the eyes of fans. As Mary Kirkby-Diaz argues emphatically: ‘our online conversations (a.k.a. computer-mediated communication) can create a territory that is boundaryless: we *can* create a community in cyberspace’ (emphasis in original) (2009, p. 29). I argue that these micro-communities not only

¹⁰ Howard Rheingold understands a virtual community as: ‘social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public [and private] discussions long enough, with sufficient feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace’ (1993, p. 5).

facilitate interaction, but also foster a sense of belonging and mutual understanding that ultimately constitutes a form of empowerment for gay horror fans. In maintaining this stance, I contend that the invested, communal and emotionally charged qualities of a community can sustain themselves on smaller, and more dispersed micro levels. Kristen Pullen (2000, p. 60) identified several distinct communities of lesbians around *Xena: Warrior Princess* concluding that ‘despite the different interpretations and disparate fan communities on the Web, a significant Xena unity is visible’. More recently, Ruth Deller finds that there was not ‘one single unified Belle & Sebastian fandom, rather there were several interlocking communities’ (2014, p. 239).

Explanations for the dispersed and fragmentary quality of some fan cultures have been explained through the hierarchies and conflicts that can arise in larger scale fan cultures, or the difference in interests that some fans have from the larger group. It has been argued, that for these reasons, some fans are incentivised to create more inclusive and hospitable fandoms on a smaller-scale. As Susan Herring (1996, p. 43) argues in studying *X-Files* fans on newsgroups: ‘Although fans value the multitude of voices and opinions on the large groups, they also seek out smaller circles to discuss their special interests’ (see also Chin, 2010). However, this thesis suggests that the presence of fans across a multitude of distinctive spaces not only allows for different ‘interests’ to be explored and shared, but for different expressions of identity and cultural taste to be performed for other horror fans (and non-fans). Of course, most fans are to some extent nomadic, shifting between interests, objects and platforms to discuss and consume popular culture. However, if it has been claimed that the parameters of horror fandom are established through particular taste cultures and distinctions along axes of gender, it is important to examine the ways that gay fans negotiate these cultural norms as a means to find expression and confirmation of their minority identities across different online micro-communities.

My use of ‘micro-communities’ is employed to signify the smaller scale of fan groups, and their difference from larger fandoms in terms of the values and norms, topics discussed and the cultural identities of fans. Conceptions of ‘community’, as traced in fan studies, is therefore useful to this thesis in exploring how the semiotic productivity of fans in making meaning from the codes and clues in horror texts is challenged, negotiated

and/or legitimised by others within the spaces they interact (see Chapter 3). As Nancy Baym argues in relation to a community of soap opera fans called r.a.t.s:

The social context of an online community is perhaps the single most important influence on the identities constructed within it. In r.a.t.s., the need to interpret soaps through reference to personal experiences encourages a group norm of (relatively) honest self-representation. (2000, p. 157)

Following Baym, this thesis traces a similar argument noted elsewhere in fan studies that fans value (micro-) communities precisely because they enable them to foster communal interpretations, legitimise one another's readings, and relate horror texts to the construction of their gay identities (Jenkins, 1992; Fiske, 1992). As I argue in Chapter 3, the function and maintenance of micro-communities can themselves constitute as much pleasure, if not an even greater one, than the object of fandom itself (Fiske, 1992). Developing this line of argument in the tribe of gay horror fans, I suggest that the inclusive culture fostered within the micro-community represents a therapeutic function for fans. I argue that this not merely the case in legitimising their otherwise 'subversive practices', but by making them more intelligible and meaningful; informing them that their unique consumptions of, and feelings towards horror, are echoed in the micro-narratives expressed by other fans. Katherine Larsen and Lynn Zubernis have poignantly argued for the therapeutic potentials of fan communities:

Cathartic expression of emotions within any group, whether organized counselling group or a fan community, results in a sense of cohesion and greater self-understanding. Group members sense that they are not alone in their struggles, identify with one another, and begin to view their life challenges as universal instead of idiosyncratic. (2012, p. 114)

I suggest that in expressing the complexities of the self and finding likeminded others who share their experiences, platforms (or genres) such as blogs can be defined as a cluster of micro-communities. That is to say, fans in the blogosphere are connected to a broader network of gay horror blogs, writing their own content and reading those of others. This, I argue, means that fans can forge emotional bonds with one another, similar to those found in an online forum. Whilst these debates are explored in Chapter 2, Paul Booth (2010, p. 46) puts it thusly: 'to post a blog online is to be aware that others might read your writing – and is to join in a community of other blog readers'. An argument

threaded throughout the thesis is that the symbolic demarcation of these micro-communities from larger horror fandoms is marked less by the differences of the tastes of gay fans in horror, than the cultural connections they forge with one another in more personal locales. However, I now proceed to explore some of the debates around identity online, exploring possibilities for the (re)production of gay and horror fan identities.

Sexuality and Identity Online

Scholarship on cybercultural studies has been interested in attending to the identity potentials facilitated in the virtual realm, seeking to theorise a potential liberation of the self from the oppressive controls of the body offline. In a powerful argument put forward in a postmodern view of cyberculture, Sherry Turkle (1995) argues that the presentation of the self online is multiple, fluid, and in an ongoing state of revision. In other words, in cyberculture, 'you are who you pretend to be' (p. 192). Turkle's argument bears strong parallels with a body of work on sexuality online that capitalises on the potential of the Internet for sexually non-normative persons to liberate themselves from rigid and indeed binaristic identity formations that have sought to control and oppress them in the 'real' world. Coining the term 'cyberqueer studies', Nina Wakeford (1997) argues that queer spaces online operate as a point of resistance against the primacy of heterosexuality, yielding new possibilities and opportunities for (re)constructing the self for sexually marginalised persons. Wakeford argues that:

The importance of a new space is viewed not as an end in itself, but rather as a contextual feature for the creation of new versions of the self. The possibility of anonymity on some services and the lack of face-to-face social cues lead authors to suggest that coming out may be easier on-line, thus transforming the notion of what it means to be gay (p. 31).

Wakeford's conception of cyberqueer shares neat parallels with work on queer theory, in that online culture offers a corporeal liberation from the materiality of offline identities which are produced and governed by heteronormative standards. Whilst this thesis concurs with Wakeford's democratising view that some 'cyberqueer' spaces afford greater possibilities for identity creation, this work elides concerns with the relationship between the primacy of spaces in shaping identity and discourse, and how fans use these spaces to (re)produce the gay self within the micro-communities they communicate.

Randal Woodland (2000), for instance, frames queer identity online within spatial metaphors that define the contours of queer communities: 'community is the key link between spatial metaphors and issues of identity. By helping to determine appropriate tone and content, the permanency or transience of the discourse, these places descriptors help to shape a discourse community' (p. 430). Although online 'queerspaces' may crystallise an exploration of identity, Randall argues that these identities are simultaneously 'shaped, tested and transformed' by the spaces themselves. Randall's argument is pertinent to this thesis in conceptualising how the micro-communities are shaped by the nature of the discourse exchanged between fans, but also, the limitations and possibilities these spaces present in (re)constructing sexual identity. However, a series of alternative debates have attended to the (re)production of offline identities in cyberculture, and the expectations and values imbued within the fabric of spaces themselves.

In his work on gay male sexuality and embodied identity, John Campbell (2004) argues that gay online spaces can actually serve to reproduce the social hierarchies of identity, distant from the utopian view of the Internet as a site of disembodiment. Campbell's ethnographic online study reveals that gay users, concerned with 'a certain masculine sexual posturing' (p. 65) actually hold the view that 'inverting or complicating this relationship of biological sex and gender roles is viewed as deviant by some even on these channels' (p. 67). Similarly, Kate O'Riordan presents evidence to argue that 'online queer communities are stratified into fixed identity hierarchies and anxiety about bodily identity is a strong determinant in online queer formations' (2007, p. 26). With the increasing prevalence of gay dating sites and online apps, an embodiment of the self through digital photos, for instance, can become a symbolic marker of status and physical desirability. As a result, it could be argued that with increasing technologies, there is greater emphasis on the material bodies of online users in exclusively gay spaces. Marjo Laukkanen (2007, p. 95) supports this argument in discussing 'young queers' online, but his argument applies to gay persons broadly: 'if a user's self-representation does not fit into socially constructed and negotiated (self)representations, it is unimaginable and thus it does not exist for others'. These debates around identity, performativity and (dis)embodiment underpin this thesis, in exploring how the identity of the gay horror fan

is discursively positioned, negotiated and performed in relation to the values and norms of the spaces, but also the bodily ideals promulgated in a gay online space (see Chapter 5).

Whilst this thesis is interested in the identity possibilities for gay fans across the forums investigated, it also examines the (re)production of fan identity across distinctive online cultures. If existing work on sexuality online has primarily focused on the marginalised cultural identities of non-heterosexual persons, this leaves little understanding of the intersectionality of marginalised gay *and* horror fan identities, and how these are negotiated across different online spaces (see Chapters 4 and 5). In considering gay and horror fan identity in tandem, I refer to Matt Hills' argument about the 'cultural work' of fan identity:

Fandom is not simply a 'thing' that can be picked over analytically. It is also always performative; by which I mean that it is an identity which is (dis)claimed, and which performs cultural work [...] its status and its performance shift across cultural sites. (2002, p. xi)

Following Hills, this thesis suggests that definitions and permeations of identity in horror fandom are contextually specific, and are produced, performed and negotiated differently within and across online cultures. This focus on performance and performativity has broader resonances to the work of Erving Goffman (1971) and Judith Butler (1990) around the presentation and construction of the self and how these are inflected in everyday life. For Butler, gender performance means 'a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, a natural sort of being' (p. 33). In arguing for these 'repeated acts' within a 'regulatory frame' as prescribed by other (straight) horror fans and embedded into the values of those spaces, gay fans produce intrageneric distinctions by 'Othering' (Duffet, 2013) gay fans. This works, I argue, to position themselves in opposition to these 'feminised' and inauthentic consumers with whom they come to see themselves as different. The work of Lori Kendall (2002) (in addition to Campbell and R.W. Connell (1995)) is useful in attending to the performances and embodiments of masculinity in these spaces, as fans navigate their sexual identities in spaces where particular iterations of identity are normalised and valued. Indeed, in Chapters 4 and 5, I frame these performances in terms of gay masculinities that can be understood through a more recent lens of homonormativity as coined by Lisa Duggan (2002).

These approaches to identity and performativity are significant, for they sidestep important questions concerning the veracity and authenticity of online identities that have shaped the debates around the self online. Thus, my approach to identity follows a similar line of thought put forward by Christine Hine:

Rather than asking whether Internet interactions are authentic, or whether people really are who they say they are, the ethnographer aims to assess how the culture is organized and experienced on its own terms. The intention is to sidestep questions of what identities really are and whether reality is really there, by shifting to an empirical focus on how, where and when identities are realities are made available. (2000, p. 118)

Hine's approach to identity online is a productive one, for it enables this thesis to elide concerns about the 'truthfulness' or 'authenticity' of the identities that fans claim and the performances they enact, by focusing on 'how, where and when' these identities are inscribed and what effects they attempt to achieve. Therefore, rather than sustaining arguments about the utopian possibilities of the Internet in facilitating the fluidity of identities against debates about their embodiment, this thesis suggests that it is more productive to view the performative practices of identity online as contingent upon the contextual nature of the spaces and the relationship between different horror fans (and non-fans) under the forms of power and control where interactions take place.

Methodology

Multi-Sited Netnography

This thesis takes the form of a qualitative audience study conducted online. In tracing a number of micro-communities of self-identifying gay horror fans, this study employs a qualitative methodology by adopting a multi-sited approach to netnography (Kozinets, 1997, 2010) iterated elsewhere in the literature under different labels including ‘networked ethnography’ (Howard, 2002), ‘cyberethnography’ (Carter, 2005) and ‘virtual ethnography’ (Hine, 2000), each with differing conceptual tenets. Much of the literature on netnography, as an extension and adaptation of traditional forms of ethnography, discusses its (dis)continuities from a more traditional anthropological offline approach whereby the researcher conventionally immerses themselves within a culture by ‘going native’ for extended periods of time within the field researched. These approaches have structured Kozinets’ definition of the netnographic approach as ‘a participant-observational research based in online fieldwork. It uses computer-mediated communications as a source of data to arrive at the ethnographic understanding and representation of a cultural or communal phenomenon’ (2010, p. 60). Kozinets provides a simplified methodological flow outlining the process of netnography, having defined the ‘research questions’ and ‘topics to investigate’ in step 1 (see introduction):

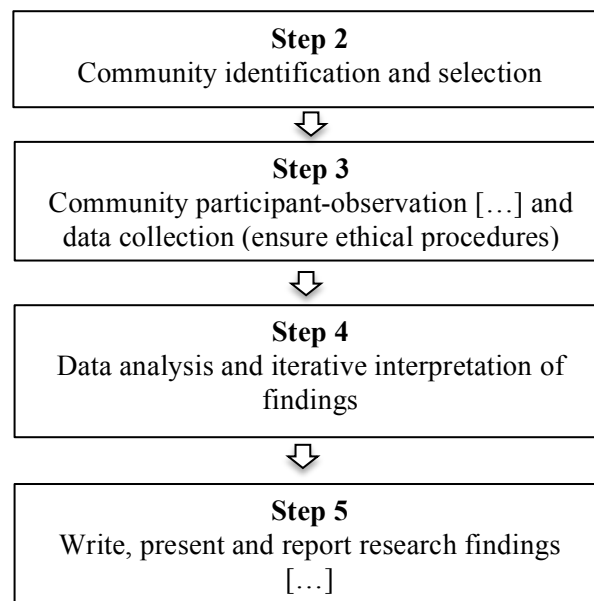


Figure 1: The process of netnography (Kozinets, 2010)

Because the netnographic method is rooted in a participant-observational tradition, important to ethnographic research, I would argue that it is particularly suited to the sustained presence of the researcher within a particular online fandom or community. This sustained presence has historically promised to present a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) of the culture or communities studied, important to more recent netnographic accounts (a thick description accounting for the full range of meanings in a culture, offering a nuanced and multi-dynamic view; see for instance, Phillips, 2013). Attentive to the decentred nature of the spaces however, this thesis required an adaption of Kozinet’s netnographic method, whilst seeking to maintain a participant-observational approach whereby the researcher is part of the community studied. Furthermore, this thesis required a method that could transcend existing concerns with single communities or fandoms, yielding possibilities to conduct research across different online locales. This enables this thesis to consider the meaning of the links and (dis)continuities between the spaces themselves and importantly, the discourses of gay fans. The field of fan studies has been attentive to the immersion of the scholar into a single field of study. However, Rebecca Williams observes that ‘the use of “collective case studies” to draw points of cohesion of conflict across apparently incongruent cultural sites remains rare’ (2015, p. 5). I would argue that this could be partially explained through the methodological complexities in sampling and collecting data across multiple sites of fandom, threatening sustained forms of immersion advocated in traditional qualitative audience research.

This thesis undertakes what I refer to as a multi-sited netnography, informed by the work of George Markus who develops the use of multi-sited ethnographies (1995, 1998). Markus frames this approach within a shifting dynamic between the unit of the local and a world system perspective, whereby a sense of the ‘whole’ is flattened onto the locality of cultures. In other words, a broader picture of the gay horror phenomenon can be created through the micro associations and connections that constitute its whole. I define multi-sited netnography in a similar way to how Markus discusses multi-sited ethnographies as the:

Always local, close-up perspective...[discovering] new paths of connection and association by which traditional ethnographic concerns with agency, symbols and everyday practices can continue to be expressed on a differently configured spatial canvas. (1995, p. 98)

Central to this approach, Markus argues that the task of the researcher who deploys a multi-sited approach must attend to the ‘chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites’ (1998, p. 90). In this way, a multi-sited approach allows for the researcher to adopt a participant-observational approach central to the netnographic method, whilst presenting a holistic portrait of a given phenomenon within and across a multiplicity of spaces. Importantly, however, this thesis does not claim to provide a conceptual ‘map’ of gay horror fandom online, nor does it claim to undertake a strictly comparative analysis between the different spaces investigated (from websites to threads). Rather, the ‘chains’ and ‘paths’ I follow represent the different threads of fan reception and discourse, looking at how the voices of fans are produced differently across several distinctive spaces. In researching multiple spaces, I offer an understanding of the extent to which the differences of fan dialogue and the (re)production of their identities can be attributed to the culture of the spaces themselves – i.e. the values and norms they foster, and as a result, how fans construct their discourses in relation to the spaces they inhabit and interact.

A multi-sited approach to netnography is particularly useful in considering how identities are discursively (re)produced across different spaces, giving a further insight into how the culture they foster could encourage certain performances of the self amongst different demographics of fans who have different relations to, and investments in, horror. In attending to this constant interplay between the micro (the language of fans) and the macro (the links between the spaces and the micro-communities therein), Philip Howard, develops a method of which he refers to as a ‘networked ethnography’:

Network ethnography is the process of using ethnographic field methods on cases and field sites selected using social network analysis. Active or passive observation, extended immersion, or in-depth interviews are conducted at multiple sites or with interesting subgroups that have been purposively sampled after comparison through social network analysis [...] identifying several nodal events or physical locations does not dilute the evidence because the important material – the social interaction of community members- remains constant. (2002, p. 561)

Howard’s method has clear conceptual linkages with the multi-sited netnography deployed in this thesis, making intelligible the ‘contexts of micro-level group interaction

and the large-scale machinations’ (p. 566). This allows for a more effective interplay between the different cultures within the context of a whole. Only this way will richer meanings of the individual spaces emerge, providing a sense of the values, norms, and hierarchies that relate to a macro context that encompasses multiple locales. However, in testing the idea of a ‘networked ethnography’, I faced a degree of uncertainty about the idea of implementing a social network analysis, unsure about the notion of who, exactly, would constitute the ‘actors’ in this thesis (as I additionally study heterosexual as well as non- and anti-horror fans). Despite these reservations, Howard’s method has been influential in shaping my multi-sited netnography, giving a context to trace the ‘nodes’ that emerge across the spaces; that is, the lines and themes that link ostensibly disunited contingents of fans. This further allows this study to provide a broader spatial map of gay horror fandom online, making sense of the complexity of the multiple spaces I traversed.

The spatial logic put forth by Markus has particular resonance when applying a queer approach to qualitative research (as adopted in this study). Influenced by a less-bounded logic of identities within online spaces, a multi-sited approach to netnography intersects with queer approaches to qualitative research in investigating how sexual identities are discursively produced across different spaces, and the different subject positions assumed by fans. As Markus argues, this method ‘tends to challenge and complicate in a positive way the hyperemphasis on situated subject positions by juxtaposition and dispersion through investigation in more complex social spaces than many recent varieties of poststructuralist theory’. In drawing from Michael Warner’s notion of queer publics, Michael Connors Jackman (2010, p. 126) calls for ‘a less bounded understanding of sexuality and subjectivity that has been put forth in studies requiring delimited fields’ in helping to structure the formation of queer approaches to ethnography (see Chapters 2,3,4,5). Importantly then, the principles of the multi-sited approach to netnography are particularly fitting with my approach to the non-essentialist identities of gay fans. That is, the stance I adopt throughout this project is that fan identities and their relations to horror are discursively produced and that different subject positions are adopted across the different micro-communities researched (see literature review).

This multi-sited approach to netnography could potentially give rise to concerns, even methodological limitations, concerning whether such a study could achieve the ‘thick descriptions’ espoused in mono-sited ethnographic accounts. One argument could contend that the researcher cannot analyse any one community in enough depth to reach the fuller descriptions of a given culture and its nuances, norms and values, important to the data I set out to collect. However, as the focus in this thesis is on the formation of smaller micro-communities, including blogs and single threads of discourse, this compression of time and space is productive in offering a ‘thick’ description of smaller cultures (websites, blogs, and threads), in addition to tracing the ‘chains, paths and threads’ between them. Significantly, this approach is useful in giving meaning to how different subject positions are adopted by gay horror fans across disparate online spaces, and how their identities and performative utterances are connected to the culture of the communities studied (as argued so far in defending the significance of this approach).

The potential limitation discussed here returns us to the centrality of the participant-observational approach to traditional conceptions of ethnography. As I have argued, scholars including Hine (2000) and Kozinets (2010) advocate this approach in undertaking an ethnographic investigation of cultures online, as a form of immersion in the field. This means interacting with participants, acquiring a greater sense of the culture of the communities researched. However, there appears to be a significant tension in Kozinets’ conception of the role of immersion. Kozinets contends that ‘it is possible to conduct a purely observational netnography’ (p. 46) in fostering a ‘naturalistic technique’ that utilises fan discourse that is publicly accessible such as in blogs and forums (as I do with blogs in Chapter 2). However, he subsequently argues that ‘removing the participative role of ethnographer from netnography also removes the opportunity to experience embedded cultural understanding’ resulting in a ‘flat and two-dimensional study’ (p. 75). In other words, whilst the researcher may utilise publicly accessible fan discourse, this method threatens the ‘participative’ role and thus the tradition of the netnographic approach itself. Navigating the complexity of the researcher’s role in immersing within the fan community was complicated by the nature of the forums and threads selected for this study. This is because the spaces were largely inactive upon my arrival, following relatively long periods of fan discussion. Ultimately, this means that

this thesis analyses fan discourse as data, albeit maintains a netnographic tradition of participant-observation (Chapters 3, 4 and 5) by conversing with active fans in an attempt to offer a richer account of the micro-communities (see research ethics).

The complexity of my methodological approach was compounded by the notion that a few fans remained in some threaded discussions (see Chapters 3 and 4), necessitating further considerations of the extent to which I would forge a virtual dialogue with said fans and the broader implications this would have on the collection, analysis and presentation of my data (see research ethics). Natasha Whiteman and Joanne Metivier produce an apt analogy between post-object fandoms and the figure of the ‘zombie’ as both a space in decline, but also a metaphor that ‘can also be seen as reflective of our anxieties about our interference in the settings and how we understand ourselves as witnesses to the events discussed’ (2013, p. 294). Although Whiteman and Metivier are concerned with the relationship between the end of the fan text and the activity on fan spaces, this study attends to the methodological complexities of ‘zombie’ landscapes marked by a series of ‘desolate spaces’ where some fans had opted to remain long after the crux of communication had curtailed (see Chapters 3 and 4). Ultimately, this means that whilst I immerse myself in the micro-communities studied (Chapters 3, 4 and 5), I use fan discourse as the data analysed (see data collection and analysis).

Selection of Micro-Communities

The micro-communities featured in this thesis were selected using purposive data sampling. This is a strategy whereby the researcher ‘develops and tests theoretical arguments through strategic sampling strategies chosen to get at what it is the researchers want to know about a universe that they will specify as the research progresses’ (Emmel, 2013, p. 46). Indeed, these ‘theoretical arguments’ have been informed by the three areas of investigation underpinning this thesis: fans’ reading strategies, emotional connections to horror/other fans and articulations of identity. Rather than selecting micro-communities based merely on the number of members, frequency of posts, or sustainability (including the longevity) of the community (as might be suited to a netnographic approach), my criteria was informed by the impetus of this project in examining spaces initiated and inhabited by gay horror fans, in addition to their presence

in macro forums. In identifying micro-communities for this study, I developed the following criteria to inform the selection process: spaces where firstly, people who self-identify as gay communicated with other people about the object of horror; secondly, communication that primarily focused on horror films as its primary object of dialogue over its literary and other media counterparts; and thirdly, spaces that are, and continue to be publicly accessible, i.e. – not password protected or hidden behind a wall (see research ethics).

An exception to this overarching criteria is evidenced in Chapter 1, whereby I selected *Queerhorror.com* and *Campblood.org* based on the sheer volume of reviews and reception material featured on the sites, in addition to the finding that these are spaces created by and for gay horror fans and are referenced but under-investigated in current scholarship (see Benshoff, 2012). Along with *Unspeakablehorror.org* (now defunct), *Queerhorror.com* and *Campblood.org* are the two largest websites reserved for ‘queer’ and/or gay or sexually non-normative horror fans. Not only can fans read reviews, articles and fan fiction, but the sites’ authors invite fans to write and contribute their own.

In Section One, the emotional connections of gay fans to their object of fandom sought to locate micro-communities where there was evidence of ‘accounts in which fans seek to explain the particular importance of the object of fandom emphasizing the way in which the object of fandom speaks to them’ (Sandvoss, 2005, p. 107). Specifically, this included the openness of gay horror fans in their online communication with other self-identifying gay fans; intelligible links between fans’ variable investments in horror and their non-normative sexual identities; and a sense of fans building an emotional connection with one another through discussing the object of horror. Seeking to locate spaces that facilitated open communication with a sense of intracultural recognition meant that, in an unexpected finding, a network of blogs were identified. These blogs are significant, as they allow fans to articulate their unique connections to horror and present possibilities to forge connections with other fans by commenting on their blogs. 115 blogs were identified on two central online blogging platforms – *Blogspot.com* and *Wordpress.com*. These are all authored by self-identifying gay men. All blogs researched feature both written and visual content (pictures, videos, illustrations) on horror. Importantly though, not all authors self-identify as ‘horror fans’. However, I felt that

material pertaining to horror featured in blogs authored by self-identifying gay men justified their inclusion into the sum total sampled. Sampling each blog revealed the recurrence of particular films discussed, with *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (1985) featuring in 52 out of the 115 blogs. The 52 blogs were analysed in a purposeful way in light of the reading strategies identified in Chapter 1, with fans forging emotional connections to the film (and horror broadly) and engaging with the film's paratextual culture. This constituted the final ten blogs that feature in Chapter 2.

The sociological concerns of community and the emotional connections between fans were illuminated through a particular tribe entitled 'Gay Guys into Horror Films' featured the social networking site *Tribe.net* (see Chapter 3). Initiated in 2004, the tribe has 588 'active' registered members and 337 topics (or threads) of conversation. Whilst I immerse myself in several threads of conversation (see research ethics), it is evident that the 'Growing up Gay, with Horror' topic has the largest number and most significant responses, with a total of 106 replies expanding two titular threads. The topic of 'Growing up Gay, with Horror' is a thread with particular significance, as it permits a further investigation of the themes that emerge from Chapter 2 on the emotional connections established between gay horror fans. This presented an opportunity to investigate how these connections are exchanged in a tribal forum that enables more direct and sustained asynchronous communication within the same spatial plane. The idea of a *tribe* of gay horror fans was itself significant to my selection process through the notion that 'tribes exist between and within formal organizations in varying numbers and sizes. They are throngs of people dedicated to an idea, purpose, function, or even a way of being. Their number can be small or large enough to encompass an entire community' (Adams and Smith, 2008, p. 14). This tribe of gay fans existing within larger structures permitted an additional area of enquiry into how fans negotiate the parameters of their tribe with the larger structure of a social networking site, and furthermore, how the development of individual tribes can be perceived as micro-communities on the site.

The spaces of fan blogs and tribes, I argue, facilitate an open forum for gay fans to congregate to discuss horror and forge personal connections with each other. However, as I have propounded, these threaded topics of communication must be considered holistically, as part of larger networking sites inhabited by a diverse population. David

Bell (2001) appears ambivalent towards labelling online fandoms as ‘cybersubcultures’ because of the sense of resistance and opposition to an incoherent mainstream historically signified through this term. Rather than engage in debates about subcultures, following from Bell, ‘the discursive patterns that most interest me are the social codes developed within online communities; the ways in which members of communities establish groups norms and find ways to put these in place’ (2001, p. 102). Further, I was interested in the extent to which these micro-communities could establish and sustain themselves in larger fandoms within heteronormative systems of power, and the extent to which gay fans position and negotiate their identities beyond the spatial parameters of smaller communities (as in Section Two).

If Section One identifies smaller micro-communities of fans communicating across blogs and tribes within a social networking site, Section Two (Chapters 4 and 5) is interested in the formation of smaller groups of gay fans that emerge in forums at the macro level. I initially sampled six horror forums, searching for threaded discussions on gay fans or fandoms (or were inferred), or where horror fans, who self-identify as gay, communicated with other fans within the forums. Searching for said threads across the forums, I identified the *Bloody-Disgusting* forum that features a thread entitled ‘Gay Horror Fans’ initiated by a self-identifying gay horror fan in 2007.¹¹ At the time of my immersion in March 2014, the thread had exceeded 900 posts with a smaller contingent of fans still active. The demographic eclecticism in the *Bloody-Disgusting* forum permitted an examination of how self-identifying gay fans interact and perform their horror fan identities in larger forums.¹² Moreover, the volume of the thread permitted a fruitful investigation of the extent to which gay fans could produce their own smaller micro-community within the remit of the forum, and the extent to which the boundaries around the thread were contested by other horror fans.

Maintaining a focus with performances of identity, it was important to investigate the presence of horror fans in non-heterosexual spaces, specifically online forums where communication occurs in asynchronous time. A total of 18 non-heterosexual spaces were

¹¹ The six horror forums sampled were: *Bloody-Disgusting.com*, *Horormovies.ca*, *HorrorMovieFans.com*, *Horrorforum.com*, *Horrorexpress.com* and *Horrortalk.com*.

¹² A broad demographic of horror fans including: gay, bisexual, lesbian and heterosexual communicate with one another on the ‘Gay Horror Fans’ thread (see Chapter 4).

sampled and solicited as potential sites for analysis: those with particular emphasis on non-heterosexual participants (exclusively gay forums and broader non-heterosexual spaces for ‘LGBT’ persons), and forums demarcated around particular regional and national contexts (*thegayuk.com/forum*). Whilst 4 of these forums feature more than 10 threads on the horror film, *RealJock.com* features 180 threads on ‘horror’ and 118 on ‘horror film’.¹³ In addition to the abundance of threads dedicated to horror on *RealJock*, the site is further significant as it maintains focus on *gay men*. Seeking to further the findings in Chapter 4 around the centrality of gay masculinities in horror fandom, it was significant to assess the extent to which these performances were rejected, negotiated or reproduced on the masculine, homonormative *RealJock* space. Moreover, *RealJock* is an additionally fruitful space in observing how horror fans, or those who claim to have particular investments in horror, are received by other members (and non-fans) on an exclusively gay space. However, the multitude of positions taken to horror required a data collection procedure that extended horror threads, to the profiles of members on the site. This was useful in investigating how members use their profiles to position horror within their ‘presentation of the self’ (Goffman, 1971), negotiating and performing their identities in relation to the gay masculinities valued on the site.

Coming out as a Gay Horror Fan: Investments & Scholar-Fandom

I self-identify as a gay man and have been a fan of horror films since my childhood, from at least the age of six or seven. A precocious child growing up in the nineties, I was intrigued by, and fixated on, my father’s extensive VHS collection of horror, particularly the ominous green undead figure on the front of the *Evil Dead* (1981) VHS box. It instilled both excitement and fear into my young curious mind. The prospect of friends sleeping over nearly always signified a late-night horror marathon, entailing a trip down to the local corner shop to identify the goriest, scariest horror we could scout, slasher films being a mutual priority. Around the age of twelve or thirteen, my interest in horror films intensified, as collections of horror memorabilia embellished my bedroom, and 40

¹³ I used the search function on the *RealJock* forum to locate threads that featured ‘horror’ and ‘horror film’ in their titles. This dual search was necessary, as a search for ‘horror’ revealed threads that ostensibly chimed with the sensibility of ‘horror’ generally (such as ‘dating horrors’). A search for ‘horror film’, on the other hand, specifically displayed topics of interest to this thesis, specifying the medium of film.

centimetre figures of Michael Myers, Freddy Krueger and Jason Voorhees were positioned adjacent to my horror books and DVDs.



Figure 2: An autograph by Robert Englund at a Collectormania convention (2005)



Figure 3: Meeting George A. Romero at a Collectormania convention (2005)

In reading horror fiction (mainly Stephen King), I would also write my own. Having watched *The Dentist* (1996) around the age of ten, I proceeded to write my own version of the film. It was this early writing of horror fiction that culminated in my creative writing project in Primary School. Entering my teenage years, I was a regular attendee at the Collectormania Conventions in Milton Keynes, where I relished the opportunity to purchase an autographed photograph of Robert Englund (Freddy Krueger) (Figure 1) and a photo opportunity with George A. Romero (director of *Night of the Living Dead*, 1968) (Figure 2). I would also start to write my own horror scripts, *Waltham Woods* and *The Unwelcome*, the latter constituting the raw material for my A-Level Media Studies production trailer. Throughout these years, I would watch anything up to ten horror movies a week, heavily informed by my father's horror collection. These were mainly films that dated from 1974 (*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*) onwards, with slasher films having a firm grounding in an otherwise eclectic collection of horror. Although my father's propensity for the macabre undoubtedly cultivated my own curiosities for horror, I felt, and continue to feel, that there was more at stake here,

tentatively tying these cultural consumptions to my burgeoning gay identity throughout my formative years.

I cannot recall a tangential moment when I first came to the realisation of my sexual nonconformity to society's standard of 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich, 1980), but recall having same-sex crushes in high school that coincided with the growing intensity of my investments in horror. The conflation of the two (of my covert gay identity and overt displays of horror consumption) is illuminated most clearly in my mind through the way in which horror facilitated sleepovers with same-sex friends. This permitted curiosity and sexual titillation to be safely explored through the mutual fear we shared in subjecting ourselves to taboo and scary movies. In my later teenage years, as the realisation of my gay identity came to the fore, I took solace in watching these movies, of people being threatened and mutilated – knowing that whatever uncertain trajectory my sexual identity would take, nothing would be as bad as what was happening to the vulnerable characters on-screen. Somehow, watching horror seemed to promise a future utopia, giving me hope that everything would be okay. As L. Andrew Cooper puts it in his own account of growing up watching horror: 'I remember Nancy winning her battle against Freddy, and I thought that if she could, I could' (2010, p. 2).

These personal anecdotal memories of my horror fandom do not seek to negate the 'objectivity' that qualitative research has historically demanded of academic scholars. In other words, it is all too easy to dismiss these self-narratives as an affective fallacy of overinvestment and impartiality on the behalf of a researcher. However, I do contend that a project as personal and idiosyncratic as this could benefit from more thorough grounding in the personal investments of the scholar, rather than forging an academic pretence of detachment and disconnect from the fans and objects of the research study. Writing on the 'Responsibilities of a Gay Film Critic', Robin Wood writes:

I believe there will always be a close connection between critical theory, critical practice, and personal life; and it seems important that the critic should be aware of this personal bias that must inevitably affect his choice of theoretical position, and prepared to foreground it in his work. (1978 reprinted in 1995, p. 13)

In bifurcating his scholarly output into a pre and post-coming out narrative, Wood claims that for people he spoke with, a gay subtext was discernible in his earlier work, forming

the impetus behind his ‘confessional’ stance in subsequent publications.¹⁴ The confessional qualities of Wood’s article could be seen as a precursor to theories of scholar-fandom that have permeated the field of fan studies. Despite my enduring horror fandom as a (closeted) gay fan, I seldom engaged in sustained online communication with other horror fans, let alone those who self-identify as gay. My fandom was marked by certain emotional connection to horror growing up gay and I cannot recall why I did not try to scout out likeminded others in the globalised sphere of the World Wide Web where I have since identified gay horror fandoms.

Despite my personal and academic investments in gay horror fans, I occupy a liminal position in sharing their idiosyncratic connections to, and consumptions of, horror. This is because I remained disconnected from experiential contexts of online communication as a *fan*. Whilst on the surface, I am on the inside of the micro-communities of fans I interact with in this thesis, my prior detachment from horror fandom, and online fandom broadly, suggests a more complex reification of my identity as a scholar-fan. The notion of scholar-fandom stems from *Textual Poachers* (1992) where Jenkins negotiated his role as a media scholar and insider fan, who felt responsibility in soliciting the feedback of fans who featured in early manuscripts of his work. Indeed, what was hitherto considered to constitute two separate cultural fields, with their own values and traditions, were blurred. In explicating the dual identity of the scholar-fan, Matt Hills illuminates the tensions between the academy and cultures of fandom: ‘Respect is aligned with, and given to, the imagined subjectivity of the ‘good’ and rational academic who is expected to be detached and rational even about his/her own investments in popular culture’ (2002, p. 12). Importantly for Hills, these are ‘imagined subjectivities’ precisely because they do not correspond with the embodied subjectivities of fans or academics as the borders between them and their respective practices, vernaculars, and values are seen as nebulous, at best.

Meanwhile, fan-scholars such as Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse have emerged, proclaiming that in merging the two identities, they are not ‘trying to aca-colonize fandom or lose our academic allegiance through our fannish one. But we also

¹⁴ One only has to observe the editorial exchanges between Robin Wood and John Hepworth (1995) to deduce the ‘reactionary aspects’ of Wood’s earlier work. This precisely because of Wood’s precarious detachment from gay culture, whilst covertly engaging with issues of sexuality in his writing.

want to profit from this intersection and to use our academic and fannish tools and insights to give a more complex and multifaceted image of fandom and its communities' (2006, p. 25). Thus, rather than viewing the two identities as fractious, governed by cultural discourses of power and legitimacy, the identity of the scholar-fan offers a more comprehensive portrait of the communities studied through the reciprocity imbued within their dual identities. If these accounts have attempted to reconcile the scholar-fan, Jonathan Gray (2011 quoted in Jenkins), in conversation with Alisa Perren and Matt Hills, laments the idea that the merging of the personal with the academic is confined to a small fraction of 'aca-fans' which, in his view, actually serves to isolate their position. In other words, Gray argues that this produces further distinctions between 'aca-fans' who boldly proclaim their investments in popular culture and the expectations of 'rational' media scholars. Importantly, the centrality of fandom to the scholar badge in accounts such as Hellekson and Busse's creates a sense of unease for Gray: 'I thought I was a fan until I encountered fan studies and was told by many therein that fandom required a community and production. If that's the case, I've only ever truly been a fan of Star Wars' (2011).

Similarly to Gray, I position my own account of horror fandom on the fringes of the micro-communities researched in this thesis. Ultimately then, it could be claimed that this confession challenges my claim of embodying an 'authentic' scholar-fan identity and practice.¹⁵ It was not that I was adverse to the utopian possibilities promised by online interaction with other (gay) fans, but that I had never fully fleshed out the connections between my gay identity and proclivities for horror (like some of the fans I research). These cultural practices remained personal, disarticulated and in a sense, closeted. A further complexity arises in attempting to disconnect my dual identity as a gay man and a horror fan. For, the queer readings and emotional connections that I have historically invested in horror calls upon my non-normative sexual identity, and likewise, recollections of my gay identity and narratives of coming out are recalled from moments in my life when I started to consume and collect horror. Whilst Gray is right to illuminate the particular iterations of fandom called upon by fan-scholars, this is further complicated by the personal and cultural identities subsumed in the scholar-fan label. Discussing

¹⁵ Fan scholars, including Cornell Sandvoss (2005) and Mark Duffet (2013), have challenged the notion of a 'fan' identity entailing automatic membership into a particular community.

scholar-fandom, Alexander Doty makes transparent his process of publishing a chapter on the *Wizard of Oz*:

Related to the issue of “appropriation”, the editor(s) also “would like [me] to discuss more directly the process of reading an externally ‘straight’ text as ‘queer’. Oh, yes, and while I’m at it, since my “reading will probably outrage many in the straight community”, could I “address that anger?” (2000, p. 53)

The tensions implicit in Doty’s account are significant. Firstly, Doty suggests that in his experience, the cultural practices that regulate academic work actually call upon a personal reflection of his own cultural ‘process of reading’ that hinges upon his fannish enthusiasm for the film subsumed within a narrative of growing up gay with the *Wizard of Oz*. In this way, his narrative, like my own, is predicated upon a complex reconciliation of one’s personal sexual identity *and* fannish predilections that sit uncomfortably with his professional performances as an academic of popular culture. The ‘fan’ in ‘scholar-fan’ does not merely signify a certain cultural competence or community membership, but represents a myriad of identities and allegiances which themselves intersect in complex ways with the cultivation of one’s cultural (and sexual) identity. Daniel Cavicchi recognises this in his work on fans of Bruce Springsteen: ‘fandom tends to enhance problems of being a native, since most people are not wholly defined by being a fan, and their identities are always shaped by various other social connections and relationships’ (1998, p. 11). Even though I am a gay scholar-fan of horror, this discursive construction does not necessarily position me as native or a priori ‘inside’ the fan cultures investigated in this project. For as I argue, claiming or embodying a gay identity illuminates complex positions and negotiations to gender, sexuality and fandom within the culture of the spaces investigated.

Proclaiming my personal investments in horror films and in this project broadly seeks to champion my ‘overly confessional’ (Phillips, 2010) approach to fandom. This provides an insight into the formation and development of this project and prudently, my methodological approach and feelings towards the fans researched. Whilst I have historically remained on the fringes of online horror communities, I share with these fans an investment in the reading strategies of, and emotional connections to horror, through mobilising my own cultural identity to condition this project. Although I am, then, a gay

fan of horror, the online cultures studied in this thesis represent a new and productive terrain to conduct research, with the intention of bringing gay horror fans out of the closet.

Research Ethics

Researching online cultures of fans presents the researcher with greater access to fandoms and communities than has previously been the case. With the opportunities it presents however, the ethical implications of online research must be carefully considered to sustain the integrity of one's academic work. Further, ethical decisions in the virtual sphere must be seen as fundamental to the entirety of the research journey including the collection, analysis and presentation of data. With this perspective, I seek to justify the ethical standpoint and procedures I adopt in this study within existing debates in the field of qualitative online research. Katharina Freund and Dianna Fielding conclude their study on research ethics in fan studies by informing that 'both agree that each researcher must evaluate the ethics of a study on a case-by-case basis. The ethical considerations of the ethnographer are not necessarily the same as an interviewer' (2013, p. 333). Indeed, I would add here that even within the ethnographic or netnographic tradition, there exists a series of debates around the public/private domains of online spaces, issues of informed consent, and ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of participants solicited for academic research purposes (Rosenberg, 2010).

Navigating the public/private distinction of online spaces is complex, compounded by the question of 'who determines the public-private classification of particular online sites: site administrators? Researchers? Site users and participants?' (McKee and Porter, 2009, p. 6). The question presented is a significant one in the debates that have emerged regarding participants' expectation of privacy or 'perceived privacy' (Lotz and Ross, 2004; Whiteman, 2012) – that is, the degree to which fans themselves perceive the privacy of the communication and the spaces they interact. More conventionally, scholars have circumvented such issues by immersing themselves in the online cultures they study, becoming an active participant and soliciting informed consent from participants before using their voices in the presentation of their findings. Christine Hine advocates for a 'more active form of ethnographic engagement in the field', which 'instead of being a detached and invisible analyst, the ethnographer becomes visible and

active within the field setting' (2000, p. 23). This is a view shared by Bell (2001, p. 198) who notes the power struggles that come into play with the gaze of the detached researcher who stands apart from those under their watchful eye, a form of 'virtual voyeurism'.

Conversely, for some researchers, qualitative data located in online cultures and communities have been treated akin to publicly archived material where they assume the role of a non-participant observer, often referred to as 'lurking' or 'covert observation', as a way in which to collect and analyse their data. These approaches are often justified by developing comparisons with offline sources, to theorise the idiosyncrasies of the online arena. Ian Convery and Diane Cox, for instance, suggest that 'this could lead to message boards and chat rooms to be viewed in the same way as a newspaper archive, with postings the equivalent of letters and correspondence, which are typically viewed as legitimate sources of data' (2012, p. 51). Reasons for adopting such ethical approaches are numerous, with some advocating that such a stance seeks to preserve and sustain the 'naturalness' of the community studied without the disruptive potential of the researcher who could permanently alter the flow and even trust within the community. For the purposes of this thesis, these dichotomous ethical standpoints proved to be too rigorous in accounting for a multi-sited approach to the micro-communities of fans researched. Further, existing debates did not prove useful in accounting for the localised nature of the micro-communities researched, where communication had largely ceased during the stages of my data sampling and collection.

The micro-communities researched in this study are all publicly accessible forums – one can access the full range of content, including member profiles, without registering to the sites, and no information collected and presented is hidden behind a password-protected 'barrier'. Indeed, it is this public accessibility of the spaces that shaped the ethical stance adopted by Natasha Whiteman in her doctoral thesis on the Silent Hill Heaven and City of Angel communities:

The public nature of these settings, and lack of the need to register membership in order to see the posts, strongly influenced my ethical approach to these sites [...] I decided that I would quote from these publicly accessible forums without asking for the consent of the participants. (2007, p. 77)

In setting out to justify the practice of lurking in online research, Whiteman's contention is strengthened by acknowledging that 'arguments that configure lurking in public settings as spying are undermined by the fact that the 'natural' state of engagement in these settings is shared invisibility: unless you make an utterance' (p. 83). Nancy Baym (2000) refers to the notion of 'unlurking', whereby fans reveal themselves to the community after lurking for extended periods, reinforcing the notion that for many fans, this is a default state of interaction and identifying as part of an online group. So, whilst the forums and threads investigated in this thesis have disproportionate levels of activity, it is probable that fans have, and continue to lurk; albeit, it is perhaps less probable that said lurkers would survey the sites with a research agenda. However, the personal nature of the threads researched, and their resonance to my own identity as a gay horror scholar-fan, influenced my decision to engage in a participant observational approach in three forums (see Chapters 3, 4 and 5). Initially, I registered to the sites with an email address created for research purposes (through *Gmail*), and proceeded to create an online profile in each of the forums I registered. Across the 3 spaces, my member profile was publicly accessible to all fans who may have visited my page; even to those not registered on the sites. My online profile reads as follows:

Hello, I'm Adam. I'm a fan of horror films and PhD researcher in Film Studies at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK researching gay fans of the horror film online. I enjoy reading, writing, socialising with friends, working out and travelling. Feel free to talk to me about my interests or my research.¹⁶

Across the three forums, I made a decision to publicly disclose my status as a PhD researcher in my profile instead of within individual threaded topics of fan talk. Because conversation had largely ceased (see Chapters 3 and 4), I did not anticipate a public display of my status in the threads as reinvigorating what was several years of productive conversation; and I felt that this could have appeared as unwanted (and untimely) in what were threads in a metaphorical zombie state – that is, forums in a liminal state between life and death. To this end, I had arrived to these threads at the end of their life; albeit, a small contingent of fans continued to engage in conversation at the time of my

¹⁶ I used a stock of pertinent information across the three profiles I created within the spaces I immersed myself. This included: my name, age, interests and my PhD research topic. However, I included additional information according to the differential criteria featured in profiles across the three sites.

registration (see Chapters 3 and 4). Through the creation and maintenance of my profile, I intended to share information about myself as a scholar-fan by inviting questions from fans still active. This was a judicious move, I believe, in allowing fans to seek information about the purpose and content of my research (I was messaged privately in Chapter 5 as elaborated in the chapter). The ethical tensions, however, are magnified through the idea that I was interacting with fans without fully ascertaining whether they were aware of my status as a researcher. Further, in using fan discourse as the data analysed, I bypassed informed consent within each of the forums researched. However, in upholding my ethical commitments to the field of fan studies, but also my institutional affiliation at the University of East Anglia, I consulted UEA's Research Ethics Policy, Principles and Procedures (last approved by the Senate on 15 June 2011). This was useful in consulting an institutional position with regards to consent in research involving human participants:

Obtaining content from every individual participating is not always possible or practical. In such cases, researchers should ensure that: such research is only carried out in public contexts [...] appropriate individuals are informed that the research is taking place [...] particular sensitivity is paid to local cultural values and to the possibility of being perceived as intruding upon or invading the privacy of people who, despite being in an open public space, may feel they are unobserved.¹⁷

It could, however, be argued that my ethical standpoint treads close to 'covert participant observation' (or 'secret' or 'disguised' observation) which can be defined where 'the real identity of the observer as a social researcher remains secret and entirely unknown to those with whom he or she is in contact. The investigator purports to be a complete participant and is in fact something else' (Bulmer, 1982, p. 252). This has been widely criticised for the apparent deception and dishonesty of the researcher (as levelled at Laud Humphreys' Tearoom Sex study (1975), which focused on same-sex interactions between men in public toilets, referred to as 'tearooms', without their informed consent). More recently, Brotsky and Giles (2007) enter an online 'pro-ana' community assuming the identity of a 'fellow eating disordered site user' and take considerable effort in justifying this controversial approach through their self-reflexivity of its implications. That is,

¹⁷ 'UEA's Research Ethics Policy, Principles and Procedures'. University of East Anglia – Research Ethics Policy Annexes (January 2012). Accessed through www.uea.ac.uk.

Brotsky and Giles argue for the ‘potential benefit of our findings to the eating disorders clinical field’ (p. 96). The difference, in this thesis, is that I did not adopt a façade in concealing my ‘true’ identity, but rather, this information was revealed in my member profile, where other users naturally disclose additional information about themselves. However, I could not assume that the fans with whom I conversed had viewed my profile, and were thus aware of my researcher status. Moreover, throughout my time in the field of study, I remained cognisant of the notion that my dialogue and unstructured questioning of fans could have generated new empirical data without fans aware that they were conversing with an academic researcher.

Throughout my immersion, I remained aware of the possibility that fans could probe further into the nature of my research (as invited through my profile). Should this have been the case, I intended to disclose this information fully, reflecting upon the ethical implications of such. In adhering to my ethical standpoint, the research presented in this thesis uses fans’ discourse as data analysed *prior* to my arrival and immersion in the forums. That is to say, the data collected for this study is in no way *directly* inflected by my immersion and activity in the spaces. Of course, the data acquired is not entirely liberated from these interactions – as my feelings and attitudes towards the spaces, topics of discussion, and particular fans were affected by these interactions, regardless of how sporadic they were. Further, my immersion and dialogue with fans has altered the fabric of the spaces, and these implications need to be considered in my ethical position.

Mary Walstrom refers to the idea of a ‘participant-experiencer’ as opposed to the more traditional role of the ethnographic ‘observer’ as ‘a researcher who has personal experience’ with the discussions and who ‘supplies historical and emotional understanding of the discussions, drawing both on one’s background as a cultural member (or native) of the local support group and of the larger social community that group represents’ (2004, p. 175). As a researcher who has immersed myself in three distinctive forums, acquiring a ‘feel’ for the types of discussion and the temporal rhythms of communication in the groups, I mobilise my identity to offer my own experiences to these micro-communities as a gay scholar-fan of horror, in talking to a faction fans who remained in the spaces, or had returned following periods of inactivity. I shared my interests in horror and asked questions in line with the remit of the thread(s). Further, I

used field notes to keep records of my observations and feelings about my interactions, comparing my experiences in each of these communities as they relate to a macro portrait of gay horror fandom.

An area of complexity in this project has been a deliberation over the anonymity of the participants solicited for research purposes. Within the covert tradition of online research, it has been suggested that fans' real names or usernames be anonymised, with scholars applying pseudonyms to protect the identity of fans and the personal information attached to them. However, in referring to the names of the forums, with material still publicly accessible, one is still able to access the fans' identities, despite the ethical procedures implemented in this thesis. In navigating these complexities, Amy Bruckman offers different levels of disguise the researcher may adopt in discarding the identities of those researched. Between 'no disguise' and 'complete disguise' is what Bruckman refers to as 'light disguise'. This contains the following components and is adopted in this thesis:

'The group is named', 'Pseudonyms and some other identifying details [...] are changed', 'Verbatim quotes may be used, even if they could be used to identify an individual, 'An outsider could probably figure out who is who and with little investigation'. (2002, n.p.)

Maintaining the names of the sites, forums and threads is pertinent to this thesis, as they serve as meaningful signifiers of the cultural identities of fans and topics discussed within. As Rebecca Williams questions, 'if one cannot refer by name to the community under examination, how can one offer their research as an example of how this community works'? (2008, p. 116). In believing that the usernames adopted by fans are significant to their online identities – including their status and recognition in communities, I adopt a system of labelling fans to protect their online identities. For each fan, I use the first two letters of the site they interact, with a number in the order they appear in the chapter. For example, 'TR1' would indicate a fan researched on *Tribe.net* (see Chapter 3), signifying the first fan quoted in that chapter (repeating the number if quoted again). Whilst quoting from fans verbatim is an additional area of contention, leaving quotes in their original condition, I argue, maintains the authenticity of the fan. This preserves the accent of their voice, presenting a more accurate depiction of their identity. Annette Markham puts a compelling argument forward in preserving the language of fans verbatim:

We literally reconfigure these people when we edit their sentences, because for many of them, these messages are a deliberate presentation of the self. Even when they are not deliberate, texts construct the essence and meaning of the participant, as perceived and responded to by others. (2004, p. 153)

However, I inserted all quotes recruited for research into the *Google.com* search engine to ascertain whether the material could be directly traced back to the fans quoted. In some cases, I sought to minimise these virtual traces by inserting ellipses into portions of quotes predicated upon the sensitivity of the topic discussed. However, said quotes cannot be entirely guarded against the outsider, as publicly accessible online forums and threads constitute the domain of the material collected throughout. Finally, it is worth pointing out that I do not annotate fan quotes with the Latin *sic* ('just as') to denote any erroneous writing, as all fans are quoted verbatim. Thus, a distinction between correctly and incorrectly typed language(s) is considered unnecessary for the purposes of this project, as fan quotes appear exactly as they do on the sites in which they were retrieved – unless shortened by an insertion of ellipses.

Data Collection and Analysis

Robert Kozinets (2010) outlines three data collection strategies underpinning the netnographic method adopted in this thesis: archival netnographic data, elicited netnographic data and netnographic field notes. For Kozinets, archival data allows the netnographer to 'benefit from the prior transcription of posted text, images, and other messages. Collecting and analysing this archival data is an excellent supplement to cultural participation' (p. 104). The use of archives is an apt description for this thesis, as the research obtained from *Queerhorror.com* and *Campblood.org* (Chapter 1) and fan blogs (Chapter 2) are extracted from material archived on the sites. Whereas in Chapter 1, I conceptualise these archives as repositories of historical content on the sites (dating from 1997 on *Queerhorror.com*), these archives are prescriptive labels featured on *Blogspot.com* and *WordPress.com*'s blogs, the two platforms where I elicit my data.

In subsequent chapters (3, 4 and 5), I mobilised an elicitation of netnographic data through 'communal interaction', whereby fans' 'answers to postings became opportunities to continue the conversation' reminding myself that I was the 'neophyte in the culture' (p. 109). However, where Kozinets encourages the researcher to collect data

generated from their interactions with participants, this thesis collects data that preceded my immersion (see research ethics). Understood in this way, the three forums investigated (Chapters 3, 4 and 5) could equally be conceptualised as archival data in that ‘these data are unaffected by the actions of the netnographer’ (p. 104). However, in straddling the rigidity of the lines between archival and elicited data, I was cognisant of the potential that my immersion and ephemeral dialogue with fans impacted the nature and culture of the spaces studied. It could thus be argued that this method inflected the data collected and analysed. This includes my feelings towards the cultures and the fans observed. These ‘feelings’ constituted a component of the field notes collected, as I sought to document my journey from ‘outsider to insider’ across the different spaces. Further, I documented how I learnt to navigate the language, norms, and rituals of the sites in which I immersed myself as a scholar-fan (particularly during more sustained communication with members as evidenced in Chapter 5).

The data collected and analysed in Chapters 1 and 2 is framed in what Stine Lomborg (in a comparable fashion to Kozinets, 2010) refers to as a web archive analysis, which she notes, intersects with media audience reception studies and ethnography:

From an audience studies perspective, using web archives allows for examining in detailed fashion processes of meaning-making in a circuit of production, text, and reception. It also allows for a detailed account of the contextualized practices of interaction and engagement with media and with fellow users that are key constituents in a media ethnographic approach. (2012, pp. 226-227)

The interplay between modes of production, horror texts, and fans’ reception constituted the primary data collected in Chapters 1 and 2. In collecting data from reviews and blog archives, it was evident that there were not only significant differences in the reception material analysed, but that the meaning of these differences could be explained through the historical and cultural context of the spaces. That is, the spaces themselves are analysed to provide clues into the priorities of fans in interpreting and discussing horror in particular ways. This is a similar approach traced throughout the thesis, as an analysis of fan discourse and the themes identified through their reception material are framed within the structural features of the spaces including their iconographies, colour schemes, physical layouts and typographic elements. For Hine, these elements would constitute the

importance of ‘texts’ to the contemporary ethnographer insofar as they are ‘an important part of life in many of the settings which ethnographers now address, and to ignore them would be to produce a highly partial account of cultural practices’ (2000, p. 51).

Across the spaces, this thesis predominately collects and analyses written language. The written material was saved into a Portable Document Format (PDF) and downloaded to my desktop. Where the reviews in Chapter 1, and threads of discourse in Chapters 3 and 4 were captured as one document (as fans occupy the same spatial plane), the blogs and dispersal of threads (in Chapters 2 and 5 respectively) were extracted and saved as singular documents before comparing them in light of the themes that emerged (see below). All material collected was subsequently printed and colour coded to delineate the different themes that I had identified in the material, as informed by the theoretical focus of each chapter. Kozinets (2010) advocates a process of analytic coding in analysing qualitative data. For the purposes of this thesis, analytic coding was a pertinent way of identifying recurring words, phrases and the sentiments of fans in developing ‘categories’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) in the reception material and fan talk researched. The themes initially identified through colour coding the data were subsequently extrapolated into larger conceptual categories, which could paint a fuller picture of the cultures researched. Therefore, where the selection of the micro-communities is directly informed by the theoretical concerns of this thesis (as outlined in my selection process), the collection of material: the reviews, reception material and fan quotes are informed by the conceptual themes initially identified in the data, a comparative analysis between them – those that share ‘common characteristics’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 105) and finally, abstracting these themes to larger categories that provide a fuller and more holistic portrait of the micro-communities. Analytic coding has been particularly useful in identifying pertinent themes and categories of communication within the context of a culture studied, maintaining a holistic concern with the ‘links, chains, and paths’ between these themes across the spaces analysed.

Having identified recurring themes in the data through analytic coding, I further analysed fan talk as discourse, taking a post-structuralist approach informed by the work of Michel Foucault (1995). The ontological position I adopted here is that the discourse of fans does not simply reflect a pre-constituted reality or the ‘essence’ of their identities,

but that the meanings, identities and realities of fans are constructed through discourse, unbounded by the essence of a particular 'truth'. Although there are significant differences in the way discourse is conceptualised by theorists across disciplines, Sara Mills argues that they share a concern with the social and situational context of language use. Mills writes:

A discourse is not a disembodied collection of statements, but groupings of utterances of sentences, statements which are enacted within a social context, which are determined by that social context which contribute to the way that social context continues its existence. (1997, p. 10)

Mills' approach to discourse is pertinent for this thesis. Firstly, it forges clear parallels with the local and indeed situational context of discourse that makes certain utterances possible, through which certain subject positions can be adopted and articulated. Further, it also suggests that discourse performs social functions: whether constructing fans' identities, producing specific ways of talking and theorising their object of fandom and giving particular meanings to their communication. Further, and as Norman Denzin (1999) argues, discourse is also a useful way in which to consider messages as 'performance texts' which is 'a way for one person to make connections to another person or to his or her text' (p. 111). Whilst Chapters 4 and 5 specifically address the performative utterances of fans in the 'doing of being' a horror fan, this does not preclude a consideration of fans as performers across the micro-communities studied.

Thesis Outline

The structure of this thesis is divided into two key sections, informed by the dual focus of this project in attending to the formation of spaces and micro-communities created by and for gay horror fans, in addition to their presence in macro online spaces. This structure corresponds to the three central areas of enquiry this thesis seeks to investigate: Section One, consisting of Chapters 1, 2 and 3, investigates the reading strategies mobilised by gay horror fans and their emotional connections to the object of horror and one another. Section Two, consisting of Chapters 4 and 5, investigates the positions and performances of gay horror fans in larger online spaces, where fans position, negotiate and perform their identities on a mainstream horror forum and an exclusively gay one.

Current scholarship informs us that gay audiences and fans of horror have forged particular investments and cultural identifications with the figure of the monster (Benshoff, 1997), or have oscillated their viewing positions in a fluid non-binaristic sense (Berenstein, 1996). However, this work has not adequately informed about the different ways that gay fans interpret horror from the position of their cultural identities. Nor has it explored the different ways that a compilation of queer horror films can be discursively produced at the site of fan reception. In seeking to fill this gap, Chapter 1 compares two distinctive fan spaces of reception. In presenting evidence that the author of *Queerhorror* seeks to acclaim both overtly queer and generically recognisable horror, I suggest that this discursive coupling is fraught with struggles over genre, quality and value. As I argue, films considered to constitute ‘overtly’ queer horror are not seen by some fans to be serious iterations of the genre, and similarly, more ‘serious’ forms of horror are not considered to be ‘queer’ enough to fulfil the criteria applied on the site. In forming a comparison with *Campblood*, I suggest that the site’s authors have deployed a vast repertoire of knowledge and interpretive prowess to ‘queer’ horror from their cultural positions. These queer readings, I contend, seek to illuminate the agency of gay fans in reading horror, exposing an array of divergent horror texts as significant in their reception.

Furthering a concern with the interpretations and reading strategies of fans, Chapter 2 focuses on *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy’s Revenge* (1985), a slasher film that features on many of the gay fan blogs collected. I proffer an argument that the film is subjected to such active and dynamic readings by gay fans because it calls upon

them to mobilise their emotional identification with the figure of Jesse Walsh, a sexually repressed final boy. Moreover, I argue that gay fans have appropriated the film in the context of their blogs, a personal online space, to reflect upon their micro-narratives of coming to terms with their sexual identities and significantly, to establish connections with other gay fans within and across a micro-community of blogs. In possessing knowledge about the paratextual culture of the film and forging connections with Mark Patton, the actor who played Jesse, I suggest in Chapter 2 that the significance of online culture has not only enabled fans to use horror to express their sexuality, but has enabled them to authenticate these readings through communicating with other gay fans. Moreover, it has also afforded channels of communication with Patton himself, whereby fans access his personal life struggles as traced through the film's paratextual culture.

Where for scholars such as Hills (2005), horror fans often disentangle their former affected self from their rational adult 'knowledgeability' of horror, I argue in Chapter 3 that childhood memories of consuming horror are not only evident, but become central to understanding their emotional and ongoing investments in horror. As I suggest, gay fans discursively align their 'becoming a fan' narratives with their 'coming out' narratives. This dual rhetorical strategy, I argue, enables fans to express why horror appeals to them on an emotional and affective level, but also, how discourses around their consumptions of horror as 'abnormal' or as something 'secret' intersected with how they made sense of their identities in their micro-narratives of growing up gay. As I contend, it is precisely the way that these investments of horror are tied into the construction of their gay identities that fosters a micro-community of mutual recognition; where fan postings can achieve degrees of what I refer to as 'emotional capital'. I claim that this capital grants recognition to fans that render intelligible the links between their gay identities and early investments in horror as understood intersubjectively by fans that occupy the space.

In departing from micro-communities created by, and for, gay horror fans, Chapter 4 investigates the presence of self-identifying gay horror fans in a mainstream horror forum: *Bloody-Disgusting*. Rather than dismissing gay fans as inauthentic interlopers (Jancovich, 2000) in this heteronormative space, some (putatively heterosexual) fans seek to downplay the relationship between being gay and proclaiming an interest in horror. This, I argue, disavows cultural parallels between gay fandom and

horror, sustaining what has been argued to be the heteronormative dimensions of horror consumption. Current debates in horror fandom offer a masculinist view towards horror consumption, or have challenged these claims by attending to the investment of female fans for particular iterations of the genre. Chapter 4 evades this binarism, by offering a more malleable approach to ‘identity work’ in horror fandom. That is, Chapter 4 attends to the cultural position of gay fans through a homonormative conception of identity (Duggan, 2002). Operating within this dimension, I proceed to argue that some gay fans perform what Hills has referred to as the successful ‘doing of being’ a horror fan (Hills, 2005) by claiming a propensity for certain forms of horror, whilst other fans strategically disassociate themselves from imaginary gay consumers who embody an effeminate and non-fannish tolerance for the genre. Chapter 4 thus attends to the cultural practices of gay fans within the horror forum, but also the distinctions and struggles that operate between factions of gay fans that can be understood through a lens of gender and sexuality.

In fleshing out the performative qualities of the ‘doing of being’ a horror fan, Chapter 5 proceeds to focus on the role of horror fandom in constructing, positioning and negotiating gay identity on *RealJock.com* – a gay online community. In contending that the embodied masculine jock reifies a homonormative conception of gay identity, Chapter 5 argues that the cultural work of horror fandom allows fans to negotiate their identities in relation to the jock ideal, but also to express their erotic predilections for other gay men through embodying a non-fannish (Gray, 2003) stance towards horror as traced within their member profiles. Further, where scholars have argued that intrafannish distinctions are drawn in horror fandom around the cultural legitimacy of certain forms, I argue that claiming an identity as a horror fan in a space where the physical jock is valued allows fans to rehabilitate associations of fandom through claiming a ‘horror geek/nerd’ identity. What this does, I argue, is perform a knowledgeability about particular definitions and subcultural forms of horror in an attempt to position horror fandom within the homonormative construct that is valued on *RealJock*. This thesis concludes by returning to the research questions as a way of summarising its key findings. By way of considering the limitations of this study, I suggest future directions for research into gay horror fandom beyond the methodological approach deployed herein.

SECTION ONE:
READINGS AND EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS

Chapter One

Out of Horror's Closet: Fan Spaces, Reviews and Reception of Horror on Queerhorror.com and Campblood.org

Introduction

Queerhorror.com (1997) and *Campblood.org* (2003) (hereafter *Queerhorror* and *Campblood*) are 'queer' fan produced online spaces featuring reception material on horror. Both sites feature an eclectic range of horror from across the cultural spectrum, including: film, television and literary fiction. The significance of these sites is evidenced in the way they conceptualise horror through the lens of queer identity; a term designated to signify the elasticity of non-normative sexual identities – not limited to: gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender. In terms of the breadth of content on the sites, *Queerhorror* and *Campblood* are two of the most significant online spaces for queer interpretations of horror online. The two sites, and particularly a comparison between them, presents a pertinent case study in beginning to explain how fans review and interpret horror from the cultural position of their non-normative sexual identities (see Doty, 1993).

Queer readings of horror have been undertaken on the relationship between (hetero)normalcy and the Other (Wood, 1986) or through the figure of the monster queer (Benshoff, 1997; Miller, 2011) that seeks to disrupt the heterosexual narrative romance. Meanwhile, other scholars have directed their energies to the spectatorial positions adopted by non-straight audiences of horror (Berenstein, 1996) who have been argued to transgress fixed viewing positions along the lines of sadistic/masochistic standpoints (see literature review). Although this work has been fruitful in theorising the particular pleasures and positions adopted by non-straight spectators of horror, I argue that they have not been as effective in considering the differences *between* the reception practices of actual gay fans, nor providing clues as to the different ways in which said fans interpret particular features and forms of horror, and privilege certain ways of reading.

This chapter undertakes a reception analysis of the two fan-produced online spaces *Queerhorror* and *Campblood*. In arguing for the merits of this chosen methodological framework, Sonia Livingstone (1998, p. 190) has pointed out that such a reception approach has been fruitful in: 'making visible an audience which has hitherto

been devalued, marginalised and presumed about in both theory and policy within and beyond the field of mass communication'. In seeking to destabilise the notion of a homogenous gay fan of horror through their reception material, this chapter illustrates some of the fundamental differences in the material spaces and interpretive strategies of fans.¹⁸ This chapter intervenes in the debates about the agency of fans in practising queer readings and interpretations of horror films. Further, it concurrently illuminates some of the central disparities in the reception practices of fans; questioning what a compilation of 'queer horror' films signify, and further, how fans' readings of horror are linked to the broader cultural priorities and fan knowledge that they bring to the texts (see Staiger, 1992, 2000).

This chapter argues that broadly, the differences between the two spaces must be considered in light of the discursive priorities of fans and their fan capital (Fiske, 1992) in conceptualising the relationship between sexuality and the horror film. Coinciding with the publication of Benshoff's *Monsters in the Closet* in 1997, I argue that Qvamp, the author of *Queerhorror*, sought to legitimise and make sense of the investments of non-straight fans in horror. Qvamp, I argue, initiated a space where fans could seek out information about the cultural parallels between their non-normative sexual identities and the object of horror. However, where Benshoff reads these texts at the level of connotation, for how homosexuality is signified in different productions of horror, I argue that Qvamp privileges more explicit representations of gay and lesbian identity in horror, informing users of how gays and lesbians have been represented within and across a range of horror productions. Therefore, I contend that the space of *Queerhorror* is significant in being one of the first spaces where a multitude of horror texts are featured and critically evaluated according to their merits as a 'queer horror' film.

With the advancement of the Internet, and more overt representations of gay and lesbian identity appearing in horror film and television, the formation of *Campblood* in 2003 signified the emergence of horror fans that possess greater degrees of fan capital (Fiske, 1992), including knowledge of the academic scholarship on horror and sexuality.

¹⁸ Both *Queerhorror* and *Campblood* define themselves as 'queer' spaces, albeit their authors both claim a gay male identity. Whilst the identities of reviewers cannot be ascertained, this chapter uses 'gay' or 'non-straight' to signify fans on a non-heterosexual horror space, who are putatively reading horror from the position of their sexual identities. However, it does not claim that heterosexual fans are wholly absent.

It is within this context that I argue the ‘Counselors’ of the site forge more complex readings and interpretations of horror, exposing the queerness of wider range of films, despite reading at the level of connotation à la the work of Benshoff. These queer readings are what Stein and Plummer have referred to as a use of queer theory to signify: ‘a willingness to interrogate areas which normally would not be seen as the terrain of sexuality, and to conduct queer readings of ostensibly heterosexual or non-sexualized texts’ (1994, pp. 181-182). To put it another way, *Campblood* represents a space where interpretive agencies are exercised as a means to expose the multitude of ways that horror can be *queered*. Indeed, this represents a space that interprets the queerness of horror in ways that parallel, and even surpass, the kinds of analyses undertaken by scholars. Together, the two fan spaces reveal the significance of horror for non-straight fans. This is a means to illuminate a gay and lesbian presence *in* horror, legitimising their draw to a genre that speaks about non-normative sexual identities and practices; as well as performing queer readings of horror texts to publicly exercise their cultural agencies – exposing the queer undercurrents of horror across different productions that might not appear as ‘gay’ or ‘queer’ texts, or at least speak to gay fans in culturally specific ways.

The differences between the sites are illuminated through their spatial features – i.e. how the homepages frame particular definitions and overlaps between queer and horror; as well as the reception material contained within, not limited to: reviews, articles and features. As Harry Benshoff (1997) rightly predicts in his work on homosexuality and the horror film, fan readings at a subtextual or connotative level are alive and well in both spaces of reception.¹⁹ Ultimately, the ideological commitment of *Queerhorror* is for fans to identify the most salient signifiers of *gay and lesbian identity* across a range of horror productions. However, I argue that tensions and cultural distinctions are imbued within the reviews, revealing the complexity of discursively producing a category of queer horror films. As I suggest, films with more overtly gay and lesbian content are often dismissed as low quality or not ‘serious’ horror and on the reverse, covertly gay and lesbian films are often dismissed as eliding cultural signifiers of gay and lesbian content as identified by fans. In evading these distinctions, the Counselors on *Campblood*

¹⁹ On *Queerhorror*, readings are situated along a denotative/connotative chain whereby the former represents the first-order meaning along an infinite possibility of second-order ones à la the work of Roland Barthes (1972).

exercise a vast repertoire of cultural knowledge and interpretive agency to appropriate *queerness* as a reception strategy. This is a strategy that Alexander Doty has advocated in approaching mass culture (1993, p.3) through ‘attempts to account for the existence and expression of a wide range of positions within culture that are queer or non-, anti-, or contra-straight’.

The first two sections of this chapter attend to the space of *Queerhorror* before proceeding to analyse the spatial features and reviews on *Campblood*. I undertake a comparative analysis of the spatial features of *Queerhorror* and *Campblood* respectively, focusing on elements such as the aesthetics, layout and written content featured on the homepages. Underpinning this analysis is a central concern with how ‘queer’ and ‘horror’ are conceptualised in these spaces, and further, how the intersections between non-straight sexualities and horror are discursively framed. Moreover, I am also attentive to how the two spaces are designed to implicate other non-straight horror fans into their textual fabrics as the imagined audience of the sites. This chapter proceeds to analyse a sample of fan reviews. The reviews analysed in *Queerhorror* are films that have been rated both by Qvamp and other fans, followed by a compilation of films in the Homo Horror Guide produced by Buzz, the ‘lead Counselor’ on *Campblood*. Barbara Klinger’s work on critical reception is used to inform an understanding of fan reviews as ‘types of social discourse which, like film advertisements, can aid the researcher in ascertaining the material conditions informing the relation between film and spectator at a given moment’ (1994, p. 69). These fan reviews are analysed as types of social discourse, not merely to inform the conditions under which horror is discussed and interpreted, but for clues as to the ‘broader cultural attitudes’ of gay fans to horror, and further, how horror films are valued differently across two contradistinctive fan-produced online spaces.

Monsters Among Us: The Space of Queerhorror.com

The material space of *Queerhorror* illuminates the overlaps of discourses between ‘GLBT’ identity and horror. Whilst it seeks to interrogate what is fundamentally queer about horror fiction, I argue that the overarching project of the site is to illuminate how discourses of horror and the horrific have seeped into historical conceptualisations of non-normative sexual identities and cultures. Therefore, rather than frame horror fandom

as that which perpetuates the obsessive or pathological nature of (horror) fans (see Jensen, 1992; Hutchings, 2004), Qvamp naturalises horror into the context of fans' lived experiences in self-identifying as GLBT. As I argue, this framework illuminates two fundamental purposes, 1) to implicate self-identified gay fans of horror into the fabric of the site as a way to introduce the equivocal connection between queerness and horror; and 2) to serve as an arbiter of taste in naturalising the propensity of gay fans for horror in one of the first online fan sites to achieve such. Therefore, I argue that the ideological project of *Queerhorror*, founded in 1997, was to serve a pedagogical role in informing imaginary non-straight fans about horror's affective proximity to non-straight lived identities. As I argue, this serves as a means to initiate a collective effort of interrogating this hitherto unique and underdeveloped symbiotic relationship.

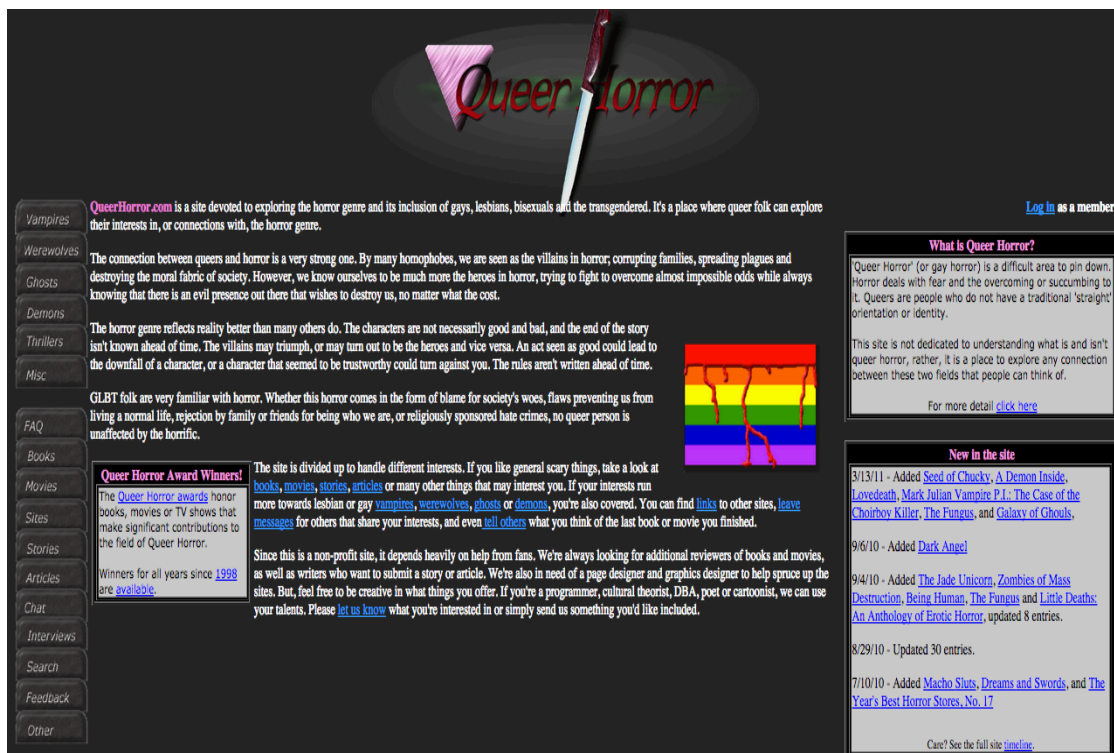


Figure 4: The *Queerhorror.com* homepage (1997).

Queerhorror is described on the homepage as: 'a place where queer folk can explore their interests in, or connections with, the horror genre'. The site is a space where fans of horror can visit to acquire information pertaining to the queer undercurrents of

horror, or as is suggested, realise their own idiosyncratic ‘connections’ with horror in light of their sexually non-normative identities. The aesthetic design of *Queerhorror* mirrors what one may consider to constitute the iconography of a conventional horror website; embellished with a dark-grey background, ominous typography, a knife penetrating the ‘Queer Horror’ title and a GLBT rainbow flag with blood trickling down it (Figure 4). Its distinction from more conventional horror sites, however, is that discourses of sexual identity are deployed to offer new perspectives on the genre, perhaps the only space of its kind for fans who visited the site in the 1990s. As a result, knowledge of the generic productions of horror, its history, key players and sub-generic categories takes precedence as sources of information, especially as they intersect with an understanding of gay life experiences as intersubjectively understood by fans who visit and contribute to the site.

Describing himself as a ‘gay-boy with a strong interest in horror’, the site’s author Qvamp (Queer Vampire) amasses and controls the flow of content. Qvamp informs fans that he happens to be ‘a website developer’, admitting that whilst he has ‘read many books on horror, and watched almost as many movies’, he is ‘by no means the most knowledgeable in the field’ (FAQ section). The space of *Queerhorror* thus benefits from Qvamp’s self-proclaimed expertise in website development, possessing the tools necessary to produce a site on queer horror in the context of the mid to late 1990s. Rather than serving as an officially authorised guide to ‘queer horror’ for other fans (as does the Homo Horror Guide in *Campblood*), Qvamp structures the site for imaginary GLBT fans in cultivating an ongoing and generative effort in collectively shaping a non-straight horror space. Fans are encouraged to submit articles, stories or transformative works (fan-fic, art) to collectively shape the definitions and parameters of the amorphous relationship between GLBT identity and horror. When registered to the site, fans may write reviews, suggest films for inclusion and rate films included by Qvamp.

As the author of *Queerhorror*, Qvamp inscribes himself into the fabric of the site within the expressive resources featured on the homepage. Writing on homepages, Charles Cheung (2000) notes that they can be useful in presenting ‘hidden’ aspects of the self that one could be ‘cautious to reveal in real-life because of fear of rejection or embarrassment’ (p. 48). Cheung’s central argument contends that the homepage affords a

controlled aspect of self-presentation (see Goffman, 1971) in that: 'homepage self-presentation is a wholly voluntary affair, where we choose our own target audience, or audiences and decide which part(s) of our 'selves' are most suitable for presentation to them' (p. 45). However, where the homepage can be viewed as a self-presentation of Qvamp's gay self, I would argue that the imagined fan is implicated into its textual fabric. In this way, a particularly recognisable cultural construction of the 'GLBT' self is inscribed into the textual elements of the homepage, particularly as categories of sexual identity parallel characters in, and discourses around, horror. Qvamp thus fosters a sense of community and shared sense of belonging 'signified through fragments of texts rather than embodied in material social relations' (Driver, 2007, p. 160). That is to say that fans who identify as 'GLBT' are implicated precisely because the space of *Queerhorror* frames the relationship between horror and 'queerness' in ways that accounts for the multiplicity of identificatory perspectives subsumed within their cultural position as 'GLBT' and its intersection with the category of horror. On the homepage, Qvamp writes:

GLBT folk are very familiar with horror. Whether this horror comes in the form of blame for society's woes, flaws preventing us from living a normal life, rejection by family or friends for being who we are, or religiously sponsored hate crimes, no queer person is unaffected by the horrific (emphasis added).

Horror is thus conceptualised through the discourses, or ways of talking about 'GLBT' identity.²⁰ This is similar to the argument made in *Monsters in the Closet* (1997) around the production and shifting conceptions of gay and lesbian identity in different periods as they are constructed by institutional discourses as informed by the work of Michel Foucault (1978). However, I argue that the use of the acronym 'GLBT' is significant in a 'queer' space as it sits at odds with rhetoric around 'queer' in the 1990s, which sought to destabilise fixed identity labels and subjectivities. Therefore, the task of Qvamp was not to destabilise fixed notions of identity or to challenge the identificatory fluidity of the gay and lesbian fan of horror. Rather, it was to render intelligible the oppression and difficulties that gay and lesbian fans have faced, using discourses of horror to give definition to these perils in the context of their lives. However, I would argue in

²⁰ Whilst the tenets of queer theory might argue that the 'GLBT' spectrum is fluid and should be free from restrictive and essentialist binary logics, it is employed on the site to refer to fans that identify as non-straight, as well as those who might refuse identity categorisation altogether.

focalising a collective marginality signified through the 'GLBT' acronym, Qvamp seeks to legitimise the tastes of GLBT fans in horror, where fans identify with the fears, struggles and conflicts central to its generic definitions. Understood in this way, this authenticates the investments of fans in a generic category that on the surface could deny information, identification, and/or meaning for them.

Although fans may be innocuously unfamiliar with the discursive parallels between GLBT identity and horror before entering the site, or perhaps lack the cultural competence in contributing to the site in a productive way, Qvamp reminds them that the very nature of the genre itself is intricately connected to life in identifying under the umbrella of GLBT. In this way, a version of horror is deeply ingrained into their lived experiences, including the act of coming out, and the personal ramifications of such:

Because most of us had to face significant fear in order to come out of the closet, horror affects us differently. In dealing with our orientations, we learn a lot about it. Not only do we learn to face it head on and deal with it, but we also learn that after we deal with our fears, we're better off than we were before. Horror becomes the doorway to a better world.

Whilst the site works to naturalise the propensity that GLBT folk have towards horror as ostensible fans, they are also positioned as having a particular emotional investment in the genre because of the horror that they recognise as pervasive in their own lives – from their opposition to 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich, 1980). This notion of horror as an extension of the lived experiences of the GLBT self is reminiscent of Cornell Sandvoss' (2005, p. 102) contention that the object of fandom can be seen as a textual extension of the self: 'the active construction of parallels, identity and 'identity' between fans and their object of fandom'. Sandvoss proceeds to argue that these discursive parallels are not objectively verifiable, 'but based on the particular meaning which fans construct in their reading of the fan object' (p. 103). Like the horror text which elicits scares and anxieties in its audiences as something that they are tasked with overcoming, this discourse of survival has particular resonance in this space, where horror is a natural gateway to acceptance through the process coming out and defeating the odds (see Chapter 3 for more on gay fans and the victim characters in horror).

Qvamp structures the site according to two broad categories of films: 'horror movies that have queer content in them' and 'movies that are not expressly horror

movie[s] but contain supernatural creatures’.²¹ The latter category is afforded their own tabs on the left-hand side of the homepage under the labels of Vampire, Werewolf, Ghost and Demon. Thus, films featured in the monster tabs are spatially demarcated from other horror films on the site, which form a large bulk of the films featured on ‘The Best Of...’ and the ‘Complete List’ hyperlinked from the homepage. This spatial demarcation highlights a distinction between horror films with queer content, or what Barry Keith Grant has referred to as genre movies which are ‘those commercial feature films which, through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations’ (2012, p. xvii) and ‘queer’ films featuring generically identifiable features of horror. Despite featuring what some fans perceive to be more denotative examples of queer representation, I argue in the following section that the latter category of films falls outside of what some fans may consider to be horror films consumed and celebrated by serious or more ‘authentic’ horror fans (Jancovich, 2000) (see Chapter 4).

These monster tabs feature not classical horror films, but rather those marked through their inclusion of queer ‘affection’ ‘sex’ or ‘porn’. Revealingly, of the sixty films listed on the three monster tabs, fifty of these (or 83 per cent) are marked with more overtly gay content including sex, porn, kissing and same-sex relationships. The departure from Benshoff here is that where the figure of the supernatural monster has symbolic currency in the fabric of fan-produced spaces, these categories of films are spatially demarcated from a unified category of horror in ‘The Best Of...’ list of films. As scholars including Brigid Cherry (1999a, 2002) and Milly Williamson (2005) have argued, although generic categories of horror including vampires have been popular with female audiences, they have also been dismissed by other factions of horror fans as ‘feminine’ or not ‘real’ horror, tangential to what some fans perceive to constitute more serious (or ‘authentic’) iterations of the genre. Even though these films are significant for containing more overt representations of queer identity, they are symbolically contested within the category of horror despite, or perhaps because of, their more denotative representations of gay and lesbian themes and characters. As I argue in the following section, this highlights the discursive complexity in producing a category of ‘queer horror’

²¹ The latter category of films is divided into ‘horror monster’ tabs on the homepage, whereas the former category is dispersed throughout the site. These can be located through ‘The Complete List’ hyperlink on the ‘Movies’ tab (on the homepage), where an eclectic list of films is featured.

films, as struggles over generic definitions, quality and value coexist in fans' attempts to break open the door of horror's closet in exposing the 'queerest' horror films.

'Not for Straight Boys': Reviewing Queer Horror

When logged into the site, fans can assign two letter ratings to their reviews of films ranging in value from **A-F**.²² The first is the overall 'rating' of a film a: 'general rating [indicating] how well you liked an item overall' and the second marks its 'Queer Vampire Rating' that is: 'based on how well you liked it as an item of queer horror'.²³ Most films on the site are afforded their own page where a short 'description' outlining a film's central narrative is included, appended with a 'Qvamp says' segment where Qvamp imparts a short commentary of the film, typically outlining the most salient instances of gay and lesbian content, and whether he recommends the film to users. This is headed with ancillary information including the year of production, director, producer, country of production and running time of each film reviewed (Figure 5). With Qvamp's information positioned at the top of each page, fans' ratings and reviews feature chronologically at the bottom, accompanied by their username, and occasionally their email.

²² Fans can select a rating from the following scale: A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, D- and F.

²³ Qvamp does not provide specific values of what the A-F ratings signify. However, one can deduce that A+ represents the highest critical ratings and most overt and positive 'GLBT' representations, whereas F signifies the lowest. Qvamp has not, however, rated all films that feature on the site.

movie

fiction

Rocky Horror Picture Show

- Author: Richard O'Brien and Jim Sharman
- Director: Jim Sharman
- Producer: Lou Adler
- Year: 1975
- Country: UK
- 100 minutes

Warnings

Sex:

Violence:

S&M:

ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW

SPECIAL EDITION

[Other images](#)

Description:
 Scientist, alien and bisexual transvestite Dr. Frank N. Furter is visited by average Americans Brad and Janet; the latter two giving themselves over to 'absolute pleasure.' A whacked-out, spoofy, goofy, hip and campy one-of-a-kind musical.

Qvamp says:

*A cult classic, that has been continually shown in theaters since it was created and is based on the black and white movie *Old Dark House*. A review of the film cannot summarize the experience of seeing it with a theater full of fans. Renting it to watch it at home will not give the same experience.*

This movie is extremely openly and unabashedly queer, which is unusual in and of itself considering the time it was made. The main character, Doctor Frankenfurter, is a Transylvanian transvestite who makes a hunk of a man for his sexual desires. He then seduces both Brad and Janet, who then have sex with each other.

Rating	B+
Queer Vampire Rating	A
Amount of Gay Content	affection

Figure 5: A film entry on *Queerhorror.com* (*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, 1975).

Attached to a film's rating and queer vampire rating is a barometer featuring the 'amount of gay content' in films; essentially a way of classifying signifiers of 'gay content' (or gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender identity). I contend that broadly, the labels employed by Qvamp reflect two central concerns: more overt or denotative significations of queerness in horror films: 'porn', 'sex', 'same-sex relationship', 'kissing', 'affection' and 'making-out'; and more covert or connotative ways where reviewers identify queerness that is 'alluded to' or 'lightly homoerotic'. Therefore, Qvamp produces a list of culturally coded gay signifiers, which are deployed to assess the relative merits of a given film. The sample of reviews analysed herein are those that have been rated and reviewed by Qvamp and users of the site.²⁴ Qvamp explains the guidelines employed to filter films submitted to him for consideration on the site:

All items must have queer horror (or related) content, however subtle. Being written by a gay woman/man isn't enough [...] Items created after the 1940s has to have fairly obviously queer characters or a fairly obvious queer theme [...] Items created after 1990 must have openly queer characters portrayed in

²⁴ The criteria used to select reviews in this section are those to which Qvamp has provided an 'overall rating' and a 'queer vampire rating'. Further, this criteria is shaped by films that have been reviewed by multiple fans to give a broader sense of the multiple and conflicting discourses in a particular review.

a non-homophobic way (in this genre, being a killer isn't negative, but being a 2-D stereotype is), have a strong queer theme or be remarkable in some other way. (FAQ section)

Whereas many examples of classical horror cinema have long been associated with queer themes (Berenstein, 1996), consumed by queer audiences (Weiss, 1992; White, 1999) or made by queer producers (Benshoff and Griffin, 2006), less attention had been paid, up until the inception of the site in 1997, to the queerness of contemporary horror outside of this seemingly small canon of classical horror and cultish films such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) (see Weinstock, 2008). As Peter Hutchings puts it: 'such readings [have been] so convincing and persuasive that they take on a wider, canonical status' (2004, p. 90). Indeed, the fact that Qvamp suggests that films along a historical trajectory should feature more overtly 'queer content' suggests that rather than fans reading *into* these films to find traces of gay and lesbian content, a more overt presence should be normalised and be the focal point in a gay reception of them. As Alexander Doty argues in his work on queer reception: 'connotation has been the representational and interpretive closet of mass culture queerness for far too long' (1993, p. xi). Moreover, where Benshoff contends that horror produced by gay and lesbian identified persons can be seen to infuse 'some sort of "gay sensibility"' into the films either consciously or otherwise' (1997, p. 14), these are precisely the markers that Qvamp seeks to transgress in shaping the queer horror canon as signifying more overt representations or themes.

Qvamp's ratings indicate that those featured on the monster tabs have an overall rating of C- but a queer vampire rating of C. However, the more eclectic range of horror films on the 'Full List' have an average rating of C but a queer vampire rating of C-. This suggests that although queer 'monster' horror films have higher overall queer ratings, Qvamp bestows a slightly higher critical rating to films that do not necessarily feature more profoundly into the canon of overtly 'queer horror'. As the reviews demonstrate, in privileging overt representations of gay and lesbians in horror, covert reading strategies are not only illegitimated, but seen to be ineffectual in interrogating horror's closet which Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has referred to as 'the defining structure for gay oppression in this century' (1990, p. 71). However, as I argue, tensions around genre, quality and value (Williams, 2013) emerge around those films that are seen to be more overtly queer. This,

I argue, reveals the complexities imbued within the cultural category of ‘queer horror’, as is evidenced in the reviews I now proceed to investigate.

The Lost Boys (1987) is said to be ‘lightly homoerotic’ and is awarded a rating of **A** and queer vampire rating of **C+**. Qvamp writes the following about the film: ‘oh sure, nothing is ever said overtly, but the younger brother of the vampire (the vampire hunter) is definitely gay. Check out the posters, the ‘born to shop’ T-shirt, and the bubble bath are hints’. In textually deconstructing the ‘younger brother’ character (Sam), as the film’s gay character, a queer analysis of the film is hinged on the most pronounced significations of gay identity as manifested through characters who succumb to culturally identifiable markers of GLBT identity and culture (such as signifiers of gay fashion and memorabilia). This, I would argue, points towards a semiotic textual analysis of the film, rather than a queer interpretation thereof. Of the eleven fans who contributed a review, five explicitly bemoan the lack of queer content in the film or ‘homo-erotica’ as fan QH1 refers to it, with fan QH2 writing: ‘What is it with gay people that they have to find something gay in everything?’ I would suggest that the example of fan QH2 highlights the incongruence of these reading strategies in ‘queering’ certain films that some fans feel do not necessitate such interpretations. In response to this review, fan QH3 writes:

Sure, there's Sam and his posters, his clothes and so on. But the real queer theory centers around MICHAEL, not Sam. This movie was made in 1986-7, a year after AIDS was declared worldwide and everyone got scared. This movie deals with infection, from David's blood to Michael, and his subsequent descent into 'vampirism', which obviously means something else here. It's really not that hard to draw the parallels, if you're educated enough to remember the social context that this film was borne from.

QH3’s interpretation of protagonist Michael as a metaphor for those unsuspecting victims of AIDS who are represented as an abject community of degenerate vampires is clearly an acute allegory for how queer readings could potentially fashion around the text, especially in referencing the historical context in which the film was produced. The reference to ‘queer theory’ however, coupled with the inference that such readings are based on an awareness of the social context of eighties (gay) culture, makes this review an anomaly for how Qvamp and fans of the site partake in extracting the queer properties of horror films, hence their interpretive priorities. This semantic coupling also suggests that such readings are of a variety beyond the horror fandom on the site, more akin to

something stemming from ‘queer theory’ within academic contexts, and evident in other spaces such as *Campblood*. It is not, I argue, that fans do not possess the cultural competence to read horror texts allegorically or as informed by the tenets of ‘queer theory’, but these remain as tentative articulations of GLBT identity on a continuum whereby more overt GLBT representations are disassociated from what are these more ‘theoretical’ interpretations.

Similarly to *The Lost Boys*, *Fright Night* (1985) is interpreted by Qvamp as being ‘lightly homoerotic’, however the rating and queer vampire rating is lower at **B-** and **D-** respectively. Though claiming that ‘this classic piece of horror doesn't have a significant amount of overt gay content’ Qvamp acknowledges that ‘while the vampire does seduce mostly women, there is significant homo-eroticism between him and his ghoul’. Further, ‘Chris Sarandon, seduces the misfit boy, known as Evil Ed’ telling him that ‘he knows what it's like to be different and an outsider’ augmented with the knowledge that ‘Ed starred in gay porn under the name Stephen Geoffreys’. Surprisingly, these highly symbolic themes of recognising other social outcasts like oneself (the gay on the fringes of society), coupled with the knowledge around Geoffrey's foray into gay pornography, failed to constitute what Qvamp considers to be a strong entry in the queer canon of horror because of its perceived lack of overtly gay signification.

Although two fan reviews seemingly contradict Qvamp in awarding the film a queer vampire rating of **A** and a further fan issuing a **B**, these are predominately predicated on textual clues, such as fan QH4 wanting ‘to talk to others about looking at this movie more closely [...] interested in discussing?’ This is because QH4 notes, ‘there is one particular scene that is fraught with homoeroticism’. This brings into focus what Henry Jenkins has noted in the ways fans are: ‘responsive to the somewhat more subtle demands placed upon them as members of fandom – expectations about what narratives are “appropriate” for fannish interest, what interpretations are “legitimate” and so forth’ (1992, p. 88). In other words, these tentative textual readings necessitate corroboration from other fans on the site as a way to assess the ‘accuracy’ of their textual inferences. Therefore, whilst fans exercise high degrees of interpretive ability in extracting the queer content of a range of films, the lack of corroboration from other gay fans renders such

interpretations as interpretively isolated, and ultimately, culturally ‘provisional’ (Clerc, 1996).

Indeed, the bulletin board system, once featured on *Queerhorror* has since been removed, as Qvamp explains: ‘there are now many places for people with an interest in this genre to find others to talk to’. Indeed, I would suggest that it is the lack of a social channel on the site that contributes towards these interpretive uncertainties, which have since been interpreted ‘queerly’ in alternative social online spaces (Chapters 2, 3 and 4). Furthermore, in acknowledging that the film ‘did manage to capture a slight ‘gay’ storyline’, noting that ‘Jerry Dandridge [tells] him he knows how it is to be ‘different’, fan QH5 proceeds to write that: ‘only a gay horror fan might pick up on this’. Therefore, QH5 suggests that there is a kind of double textual layering of the film whereby the interpretive strategies of gay fans permits access to a subsidiary or secondary narrative, albeit, one that is delimited to this interpretive community. The issue suggested here is that these readings would not have a wider currency in the larger horror fan community where dominant readings of horror are generated and ultimately secured (see Chapter 4).

As *The Lost Boys* and *Fright Night* are argued to contain more covertly queer content, other vampire films such as *Gayracula* (1983) are referred to as ‘porn’ movies, with a rating of **D-** and a queer vampire rating of **C+**. Qvamp writes that: ‘while being one of the very first gay vampire porns, this, sadly, is a fairly bad one. One gets used to weak plots in sex videos, but in this one the plot, as it was, jumps randomly around, not really making any sense’. Whereas films such as *Gayracula*, unlike the aforementioned vampire films, is said to contain overtly queer content, discourses of evaluating *Gayracula* are positioned within a generic framework of ‘pornography’. Writing a review, fan QH6 opines: ‘For a pre-condom movie, it’s a lot of fun, if not especially erotic. It has a reasonable plot and that’s what makes this better than most of the porno crap out today’. What is significant here, is not that Qvamp and QH6 disagree on the effectiveness of the film’s ‘plot’, but that a critical evaluation the film’s ‘plot’ and the coherency of its narrative suggests that the category of horror ‘porn’ does not transgress the evaluative criteria applied to other forms of horror. That is, for Qvamp, the quality and value of these ostensibly ‘non-horror’ films are dismissed as inferior because of their substandard production values. This is despite the low expectations that some fans have of them

(Qvamp). Indeed, although another fan QH7 agrees with Qvamp that ‘the plot is jumpy’, they proceed to write that in the end, ‘gay love saves everything (just like in Lord of the Rings) so I love that’. This underscores the notion that, although these films are seen as inferior when considered alongside other categories of horror, they attract recognition as adaptations of the vampire narrative from a gay perspective, cementing their entry into the fan-produced queer horror category.

The issue here is that, on the one hand, more overt instances of ‘queerness’ are privileged on the site. However, more overtly queer films are challenged generically as they are reviewed through discourses of production quality that rail against the tastes of fans. This points towards the generic struggles attendant within fan-produced definitions of queer horror. Reviewing the porn film *Love Bites* (1988) for instance, fan QH8 writes that ‘while the idea behind this movie seems great, I was disappointed that this movie came off more like a soft porno movie than a queer vampire love story. It would be interesting to see a modern remake of this one’. For this reviewer, the more subtle ‘queer vampire story’ is positioned in opposition to more overt ‘softcore porn’ which not only elevates the status of ‘queer vampire stories’ as a generic category of films, but suggests that its quality is hinged upon its subtle handling of sexuality which is positioned in opposition to ‘softcore porn’ films. Indeed, whilst ‘queer vampire’ love stories may be dismissed in some factions of horror fandom because of their association with feminised forms of horror, these films are revalued within a fan-produced hierarchy of queer horror films. This is because, for some fans, they are positioned as subtle and ‘well made’, against inferior iterations of queer horror that are seen as too overtly queer and thus delimited from generically recognisable forms.

However, whilst covertly queer horror is often depreciated for ‘concealing’ gay and lesbian characters and/or themes, fans nevertheless report particular pleasures from them. David DeCoteau’s *The Brotherhood* (2000) is labelled as ‘homoerotic’ with a rating of **B** and queer vampire rating of **A**. Fan QH9 writes: ‘while the movie was NOT a good movie, by far, it was the best eye candy I have seen in a long time’. Another fan QH10 writes that the movie is ‘campy, corny and hilarious. The directing and acting are bad which makes this such a fun watch’. Significantly, whilst acknowledging the substandard quality of the film, fans still gain pleasures (camp and homoerotic pleasures)

that transgress ‘bad quality’ and value, or rather, are produced through them. That is, there is a sense in which because of the ‘bad’ quality of the film, this substandard or ‘inferior’ production of horror actually reinforces its queer potential; as a marker of non-conformity to the standards of horror that other fans consume. For instance, Qvamp writes that ‘the movie has a heterosexual story laid over it, but it would be hard to watch this movie and think that it was for straight boys’. Indeed, whilst this ostensibly refers to the ‘homoerotic’ subtext of the film, this is overlaid with the idea that films that are *too* homoerotic (verging on being overtly gay) are not for ‘serious’ and ‘straight’ horror fans. These reviews around *The Brotherhood* thus reinforce the idea that fans strategically attribute poor filmmaking and ‘bad effects’ with many of the ‘queerer’ horror films on the site – as something disdained by ‘straight boy’ horror fans, against which the category of queer horror is defined. Writing a long diatribe of the film, fan QH11 writes:

When is the gay community of which I am part going to wake up and realize that a gay themed piece of sh** is still a PIECE OF SH** and not support this garbage like any other film [...] by going to see these celluloid bowel movements we’re saying that we’re okay with lazy film making and that filmmakers can continue to spoon feed us this crap.

Where for some fans, the ‘substandard’ quality of DeCoteau’s film may legitimise its ‘queerer’ potentials – as not for ‘straight boys’ – as something potentially disruptive to the codes of horror filmmaking, other fans dismiss the film as ‘lazy film making’ and in the process, render the ‘gay themes’ as illegitimate, precisely because they sit uncomfortably with the expectations of horror reviewers on the site. Following the work of Göran Bolin who looks at an alternative sphere of film swappers in horror fanzines:

It does not have to be agreed on which director is the greatest, or which horror and violence genres are the best. But there has to be a mutual acceptance of the legitimacy of discussing these genres and directors on the same terms as everybody else. (2000, p. 63)

As such, where Harry Benshoff argues that ‘straight male fans of B horror have repeatedly used the Internet to denounce or condemn DeCoteau, and to warn other straight men to avoid his films’ (2012, p. 135), other gay horror fans engage in similar practices not in a mode of ‘homosexual panic’ as he argues, but precisely because of the idea that despite the homoerotic themes, the film is ultimately still a ‘piece of sh**’ as

opined by QH11. Following a similar argument put forward by Bolin, despite some fans acknowledging that certain films are indeed ‘gayer’ than others (in their themes and characters), these features are ultimately nullified by the legitimacy of their cultural value and worth, and in the eyes of some fans, must be delegitimised at all costs within the gay horror community.

The crux of my argument at this juncture is that the label of ‘queer horror’ is reviewed within discourses of value, quality and generic definitions, problematising the category. I have suggested that where more overtly ‘gay themed’ movies are frequently challenged generically as ‘horror’, other (horror) films featured are often read as being more subversively ‘queer’ or ‘homoerotic’ which rail against the priority of the site in exposing ‘fairly obvious’ or more ‘openly gay’ characters in horror (Qvamp). Fan QH12 echoes the latter sentiment in writing a review of *Blood Rayne* (2005) (alluded to) – ‘the queer content in the film is so non-existent that I can’t remember it’. However, the tensions circulating these cultural labels and generic definitions coalesce in some reviews featured on the ‘Full List’, including *Hellbent* (2004). With the highest rating of A+ and queer vampire rating of A+, I argue that the film is revered by Qvamp and in fan reviews precisely because it rehabilitates the aforementioned tensions around generic definitions and sexual identity labels, under the film promoting itself as the ‘first gay slasher film’. Awarding the film a commensurate A+ and A+ rating, fan QH13 writes the following:

This movie I have been waiting for all my life. I have been a Horror fan all my life and still am. It is a fun, scary, sexy, and well done. This flick has several hot men and gore. It seemed to start porn star looking men but this is nowhere near being a porn. It is a real movie. It looks like Halloween meets Friday the 13th only all the cruising/getting fresh scenes are with fun gay men.

For fan QH13, *Hellbent* is positioned in a production of films with generic ancestry in *Halloween* (1978) and *Friday the 13th* (1980). Despite featuring ‘fun gay men’, *Hellbent* is discursively disassociated from ‘porn’, and thus constitutes what QH13 considers to be a ‘fun, scary, sexy and well done move’ – pointing towards the film as unequivocally a ‘gay’ and a ‘horror’ film, with a firm foundation in the history of the genre. Using an analysis of the extra-textual material coupled with a textual analysis of the film, Claire Sisco King (2010) argues that *Hellbent* ‘discourages queer pleasures’, ultimately emptying queer of its oppositional and subversive potential by forcing the gay characters

in the film to ‘play it straight’, through the casting of straight actors and the directives of Paul Etheredge-Ouzts. For the reviewers, however, the homonormative politics that King identifies are elided, as fan QH14 puts it, because ‘the movie was the typical slasher film but flooded with gays. I really enjoyed it’. Thus, amongst a compilation of ‘queer horror’ films where the generic category of horror is negotiated, and the ‘queer’ potential of films are vociferously debated, fans praise *Hellbent* precisely because it is a generically ‘purer’ horror with overtly gay characters, qualities missing in many of the films featured throughout the *Queerhorror* site and in contradistinction to King’s argument.

I would argue that whilst *Hellbent* is received as a queer horror film, fans position it within a generic heritage of slasher films. This is significant, for it allows a more pronounced interplay of their dual gay and horror fan identities. Fan QH15 opines why they consider *Hellbent* to be an effective example of ‘queer horror’:

This movie really needs to be an example to anyone who's going to make a queer-horror movie. There's cute homos, copious amounts of gore, and it takes itself seriously. I've always been obsessed with horror movies, but I found myself watching this one very differently than I would a 'straight' movie: I was uncomfortable. It may sound shallow, but having gay protagonists got me to relate to them in a way I haven't experienced with other slasher movies (i.e. Halloween, Prom Night, etc.). Aside from being a gay horror movie, it's actually a good horror movie in general, which I didn't expect.

Positioned as a ‘queer horror movie’, fans of *Hellbent* maintain a significant distinction between the film as a ‘gay horror movie’ and ‘good horror movie’. I suggest that this is because the fan is able to ‘relate’ to the gay protagonists without disassociating the film entirely from a generic lineage of ‘straight’ slasher movies. Similarly, in a review for *Bride of Chucky* (1998) (both ratings A), fan QH16 writes ‘all in all a very good movie ... especially for the demon-doll slasher genre. It was very witty with good amount of well rendered gore. As for the queer horror aspect, while most of the movie was almost excessively hetero, there was a major gay character, the hero’s best friend’. Like *Hellbent*, *Bride of Chucky* is praised by fans precisely because of its generic heritage within the ‘demon-doll slasher genre’ concurrently featuring a central gay character within its diegesis. It is for these reasons, I argue, that films on the site such as *Cruising* (1980) and *Basic Instinct* (1992) previously denounced by gay and lesbian audiences, are

critically revered. The former is a ‘historical document of the sex world unknowingly on the verge of the AIDS disaster’ and the latter is ‘more like a Hitchcock film than anything else [...] full of Hitchcock motifs’ – both foregrounding quality through ‘historical documents’ and the work of ‘Hitchcock’; values missing from more overtly queer horror reviewed on the site.

I have suggested that *Queerhorror* was founded on the premise of compiling and negotiating ‘queer horror’ films, privileging more overt representations of gay, lesbian and ‘queer’ characters. I conclude this section by suggesting that the reviews are equally concerned with preoccupations around generic definitions and discourses of quality, correlating with the way that the films are received and reviewed by fans. Further, I contend that a central tension evidenced in a compilation of ‘queer horror’ films is that the category is disconnected from the tastes of many fans on the site – i.e. films are not seen as being ‘horror’, or films do not feature enough queer content (or are homophobic). As we move on to see in *Campblood*, other fans have worked to expand the queer canon of horror, drawing upon different modes of fan capital and knowledge as a means to position queerness less as a product of the texts, than something attributed to the texts through their interpretive agencies. The overarching argument here is that, where some fans such as Qvamp produce a hierarchy of readings where covertly queer horror is rendered subordinate, the Counselors on *Campblood* work to authenticate these subtextual readings, and in the process, produce a more eclectic canon of ‘queer horror’.

‘We’re here. We’re queer’: Counselors and the Space of Campblood.org

The site of *Campblood.org* was established in 2003. The Staff hyperlink featured on the homepage directs one to a page whereby the ‘Counselors’ provide biographies in informing fans about their credentials and investments in horror, and importantly, about the impetus of the site. In his biography, ‘head Counselor’ Buzz writes the following:

Back in 2003, Brian Juergens was just a scrappy film student working on his first horror short. It occurred to him that a lot of his favorite horror movies had gay or gayish things about them, so he did some research and was shocked to find that no online resource existed for folks looking to study modern horror films from a gay perspective. (Staff hyperlink)

A fan analysis of horror from a cultural position of queerness was afforded little recognition within online fan spaces at the time; hence the impetus for the formation of this unique space could be realised. Interestingly, *Queerhorror* was alive and well in 2003; clearly incongruous to Buzz's imperative to *study* horror from a uniquely gay perspective. Buzz, alongside Kyle, Ross and Chuckie, comprise the Counselors of the site – signalling the multiple figures of authorship benefitted in this space compared with Qvamp, the sole author of *Queerhorror*. However, where Qvamp describes himself as a 'gay boy with a strong interest in horror', Buzz has 'blossomed, going on to write film reviews for *Bloody-Disgusting*, *Freezedriedmovies*, *Pretty-Scary* and dozens of print publications'. Moreover, Buzz proceeds to inform fans that in 2007: 'he took an editorial job at gay entertainment site AfterElton [now *The Backlot*], where he ran the blog for more than two years and wrote film and television articles and reviews'.

Buzz's presence in official online spaces illustrates not only the economic transference of his fan capital, but the symbolic presence of his crossover fandom between both gay entertainment and online horror spaces; cultivating what could perhaps most aptly be referred to as a 'queer fan capital' – an ability to mobilise 'queer readings' 'positions' and 'discourses' around different horror texts (Doty, 1993). I argue here that this bestows a status of what Matt Hills (2006) has referred to as a 'big name fan' (BNF) in gay horror fandom. Hills contends that such fans can achieve what he refers to as a 'subcultural celebrity status' in a fandom, through their production of tertiary and secondary texts; their name thus carrying 'typographic rather than iconic' cultural recognition (p. 110). The self-adopted name of 'Buzz' from Brian 'Buzz' Juergens as referred to on *Bloody-Disgusting*, underscores his typographic recognition, as his name produces a distinction between his 'real life' identity and celebrity status nickname. This is achieved through his professional capacities as a horror critic and cultural commentator, but also his insider knowledge through working in horror and having interviewed many producers. Therefore, Brian has a professional subcultural capacity in both the production *and* reception of horror, thus greater access to a repertoire of cultural knowledge to interpretively scrutinise the relationship between queer and horror.



Figure 6: The *Campblood.org* homepage (2003).

Unlike *Queerhorror*, *Campblood*'s homepage does not anchor a framework for the queer-horror relationship; rather, the homepage is broadly structured into three areas: 'features', 'recent reviews' and 'latest shizz' emphasising the site's focus around horror media rather than implicating the GLBT fan in specific ways into the fabric of the site. Aesthetically, *Campblood* does not represent a traditional horror website. Rather, the light wooden planks in the backdrop, coupled with mini caricatures in the banner of the page engender a frolicsome feel; a light-hearted queer media site containing horror content, rather than a horror site wherein specific versions of the GLBT self are embedded (Figure 6). The site therefore engenders a more playful, and indeed, critical approach to queering horror, within a repertoire of cultural resource and capital that benefits from the subcultural status of Buzz as a big name fan. Where on *Queerhorror*, central features and players of horror are used to produce particular discourses around 'GLBT' sexual identities, the space of *Campblood*, on the reverse, enables features and forms of horror to be explored through the imaginations, desires and cultural positions of gay male subjectivities. The reification of *Campblood* as a 'queer' site thus signifies a

less prescribed and more fluid way of framing horror. The bulk of content featured on *Campblood* is therefore included because of its wider cultural significance (such as the commercial popularity of films and sexual appeal of certain male ‘beefcake’ stars in horror) rather than content that seeks to produce particular subject positions through features of horror. What this achieves for non-straight fans, I argue, is an exposure to the sheer range of horror media and texts susceptible to queer interpretation, normalising different forms of horror as significant for them.

The space of *Campblood* is aesthetically and thematically distinct from a horror space; yet it generates its own cultural competences about the genre. Where *Queerhorror*, founded in 1997, represented a unique space to explore the discursive connections between GLBT identity and horror, *Campblood*, founded in 2003, has arguably realised such connections and carved a unique space to expand the parameters of how non-straight fans actively engage with horror. The site features boxes reading ‘horror musts’ and ‘friends of the camp’, hyperlinking other horror spaces to the site. In this way, fans can actively mobilise their way through various online horror spaces: both ‘normative’ such as *Bloody-Disgusting* and horror spaces that privilege queer readings and fandoms such as *faggotyasshorror* (blog, see Chapter 2). Furthermore, *Campblood* is also connected to its titular *Facebook* page (1,749 ‘likes’), permitting fans a foray into social media spaces, whilst maintaining a queer position to horror central on the site. Unlike *Queerhorror*, *Campblood* does not, therefore, attempt to position itself as ‘Other’ to more traditional spaces of horror reception. Instead, it positions itself outside of this spatial distinction. Rather than subscribing to the notion that a queer space of horror exists in opposition to normative horror spaces, *Campblood* threatens this logic by creating its own distinctive space where (gay) fans can frequent as part of their larger online networks of horror fandom. However, as I proceed to argue, what does differentiate *Campblood* from other online spaces is its subculturally queer interpretations around horror. These interpretations are bolstered through the theories and knowledge that fans bring to their reception material. It is here I now turn, before investigating the reviews.

Fan Theory/Knowledge

The Counselors on *Campblood* draw upon a repertoire of cultural knowledge, exercising their proficiencies by producing their own theories to cultivate interpretations across distinctive horror texts. Discussing fans of cultural theory, Alan McKee (2007) argues that fans of theory are producers as well as consumers. That is, ‘they do not simply read the work of theorists – they also produce [...] fan theory (much like other fan groups produce “fan fiction”’ (p. 91). For *Campblood*, however, it is less the case that fans produce interpretations of theory texts, than using current academic theory around horror to produce their own queer interpretations and theories of sexuality. Theory is used here in a looser sense than the philosophical writings to which McKee is concerned, but rather, with how fans use existing scholarship to extrapolate and develop their own ideas about the relationship between (homo)sexuality and horror. Counselor Ross (2012b), for instance, posted a features article entitled ‘What Is the Gayest Horror Movie of the ‘90s?’, which promised fans a series of features purporting to analyse horror produced in the 1990s. He writes the following:

In the tradition of Robin Wood, of Andrew Britton, of Carol J. Clover and Barbara Creed, of Sharon Stone and Vincent Price, Summer Campers, our green grasses will be home to a critical quest, one you should joyously follow if one chooses [...] seeking out the genre fare from each year known for their, um, Wilde streak to discover once and for all which of them, uh, wears the tightest pants. Big budgets to art-house indies, ice-pick damsels to beautiful mistakes: no one is safe [...]

Counselor Ross carves a symbolic subspace within the site, where different instances of horror from the decade are placed under scrutiny from a gay perspective in the theoretical tradition of the abovementioned scholars. The 1990s is a revealing choice, as it is perhaps the least theorised in terms of gender and sexuality in horror: Carol Clover (1992) for instance, focuses on seventies and eighties subgenres including the slasher, occult and rape-revenge films; whereas Robin wood (1986) focuses largely on seventies and eighties horror. In this way, the site works to extrapolate upon this academic scholarship as a way to develop fan theories around a largely overlooked decade of horror, drawing on this academic knowledge to inform its central interpretive framework. The framework for such analyses is articulated to fans, with an exposition into the analytic criteria: ‘films are viewed in their entirety’, and ‘a grading curve will be approximately such, out of 100’.

Part of the criteria focuses on critical properties of film ‘acting graded out of ten’ and ‘dialogue graded out of five’. Interestingly, ‘openly gay characters are graded out of ten’ and, more significantly:

The queer themes graded out of 20. Alienation, impossible love, subtextual bonds and mommy’s boys...I’m sniffing them out, my classically trained queer-reading snout at the ready [...] The FUN VALUE, graded out of twenty (20). What’s a gay horror without being as joyous as a moonwalk inflated with cotton candy and housing Lucy Liu!?

Strikingly, the emphasis is on queer themes and the ability for fans to extract the ‘fun’ factor from the films. One could conjecture that the latter points towards a camp reading strategy whereby fans creatively subvert, through humour and/or ironic reading strategies, the ideological structures of the genre, which have historically represented GLBT persons in unfavourable ways. Further, the fact that the presence of queer themes carries more significance than ‘openly gay characters’, and even ‘queer-friendly cast and crew’ (graded out of 10) suggests a deeper predilection for fans to embolden their interpretive repertoire to identify something queer about particular films and forms of horror, rather than identifying overtly gay characters and associated signifiers as I have suggested is practiced on *Queerhorror*. Indeed, where Qvamp’s guidelines forecloses the inclusion of films with more subtle queer themes and/or interpretations, these are championed in *Campblood* in not only identifying the queer properties of films, but in legitimising the cultural status of the Counselors as possessing greater degrees of knowledge and fan capital. The emphasis here is thus on metaphor, connotation, and allegorical readings, which resultantly expose a wider range of horror films as fertile ground for interpretation and, importantly, for queer cultural analysis.

Furthermore, fans, including Counselor Ross, formulate their own theories of horror. For, continuing the preoccupation with the series of ‘Gayest ‘90s’ trend of articles, Counselor Ross formulates a theory of ‘straight-queers’ in horror; that is, monsters that, on the surface, appear to be ‘straight’ but in light of their framing of outsidership and ostracism, can be seen in light of themes that resonate deeply with fans. In developing a theory of straight-queers in an article entitled: ‘Gayest ‘90s: Depp & Burton, Them Straight Queers’ Ross (2012a) writes: ‘Outsider arrives in a community of others who have firmly set their ways in stone. Outsider disrupts the calm. Typically there’s one or a

handful of community members who see past outsiderdom and show care'. In applying this theory to the films of Tim Burton, Ross continues: 'So then, theoretically, many films directed by Tim Burton are queer — outsider stories that spoof normality, praise and sympathize with abnormalities, and do it all with a camp flair'. This includes entries such as *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), *Ed Wood* (1994), and *Sleepy Hollow* (1999). The queer properties of these texts are therefore unearthed through the extrapolation of fan theories and capital, drawing upon a wide cultural repertoire to illuminate themes salient for queer interpretations. Moreover, where I argued that fans on the space of *Queerhorror* work to privilege more generically identifiable examples of horror in their reviews such as the slasher film, fans in *Campblood* discursively fashion their own production of films. These are united less by the formal elements of the texts, than clusters of films interconnected through the theories and interpretive strategies formulated through the Counselors' reception. The larger argument here is that, the space of *Campblood* opens the cultural terrain to account for diverse productions of horror, which, to varying degrees, become significant in formulating new categories of queer horror through their reception strategies.

Campblood and the Homo Horror Guide

Compiled by the Counselors on *Campblood*, the Homo Horror Guide is a comprehensive list of 109 horror films. The Guide was the first addition to the site, as a way for the Counselors to analyse horror from a queer perspective, and to share with fellow horror fans. Each entry is accompanied with varying amounts of commentary and each film is awarded a critical rating on scale of zero to five.²⁵ Unlike the reviews featured on *Queerhorror*, there is no critical distinction between a film's overall and queer ratings, nor is there any indication of the 'amount of gay content' in each film. Thus, the amount of queerness identified in a particular horror film is less a priority than the sheer number of films subjected to different queer interpretive strategies exercised throughout the Guide. Significantly, data collected from the Guide reveals that of the 109 films listed, only 25 (or just over 27 per cent) of these feature with their own page on *Queerhorror*.

²⁵ Fans are not afforded the opportunity to comment or infer their own analysis of horror texts in the Homo Horror Guide. They can, however, comment on features and articles elsewhere on the site.

Further, seven films featured in the Guide were occluded from inclusion on *Queerhorror*, subsequently featuring on the site's 'list of rejected entries'. It is within this discrepancy that this subsection is primarily concerned.²⁶

The following seven films feature in the Homo Horror Guide but were rejected from entry on *Queerhorror*: *Apt Pupil* (1998), *The Faculty* (1998), *Ginger Snaps* (2000), *Nightbreed* (1990), *Psycho Beach Party* (2000), *Night of the Creeps* (1986) and *Slumber Party Massacre* (1982). Though culled from different historical periods and productions of horror, these films contain few instances of queerness, especially when compared to some of the more overtly queer films featured on *Queerhorror*. Despite this, these films are to varying degrees, perceived to qualify on *Campblood* as ostensibly queer horror films primarily, as Jodi Cohen (1991) has argued, through the relevancy of cultural identity in making meaning from horror. Indeed, this is different to the reading strategies exercised in *Queerhorror* 'because it does not reduce meaning to moments of dominance and resistance, or denotation and connotation' (p. 445), but rather, readings are mobilised as they relate to their gay subjectivities and horror fan knowledge. Despite the creative dissonances between the films, I argue that they are reviewed in light of the following three reception strategies: (1) drawing on fan trivia that circulates extraneously to horror texts, (2) fans drawing upon their (queer) emotional realism as informed by the work of Ien Ang (1985) and (3) fans identifying a postmodern play of gender and sexuality – destabilising the ideological foundations of the horror genre through textual subversions of binary notions of gender and sexual identity.²⁷ Although these categories are by no means exhaustive in accounting for the inclusion of all 109 films featured in the Guide, these categories, I argue, ultimately serve to illuminate some of the significant differences in the reception strategies across *Queerhorror* and *Campblood*, whilst furthering the debate around fan theories/knowledge as introduced in the previous section.

²⁶ The 'List of Rejected Entries' is a compilation of 125 books, pulp novels, poems and films that Qvamp rejected for inclusion on the *Queerhorror* site. An explanation for their omission is typically predicated on their lack of either horror or gay and lesbian content, but these explanations differ considerably.

²⁷ It is worth noting that these three categories operate alongside films that feature overt gay and lesbian characters (one of Benshoff's, 1997 criteria). Unlike *Queerhorror*, however, the space of *Campblood* does not produce distinctions between covert and overt gay and lesbian content in horror.

Fan Trivia/ Knowledge

It has been argued in the field of fan studies that the knowledge that fans draw upon from outside the source text is largely motivated by epistemophilia – a desire to possess extra forms of information about their favoured objects of fandom. Nancy Baym, for instance, argues that soap fans use their knowledge to ‘show off for one another’ (Baym quoted in Jenkins, 2006, p. 139) making ‘individual expertise’ more readily available within their community. However, for non-heterosexual horror fans, possessing such knowledge is valuable less for the formation of knowledge hierarchies (although this occurs), but to enable or corroborate their queer interpretations of the genre. In this way, and as Janet Staiger (2000, 2005) has proposed in her work around historical reception studies, meanings should be viewed less as a product of the texts themselves, than on the discourses and information audiences *bring to their encounter* with films under specific conditions. For Staiger, this transforms the contexts of reception into what she sees as an event or the process of generating meanings, which exists outside of the textual diegesis.

However, where Counselor Buzz possesses insider knowledge pertaining to both horror and gay culture/entertainment, his reviews are imbued with what Nathan Hunt (2003) has referred to as fan trivia, which is a defining marker of one’s fan capital. As Hunt notes, through the use of trivia: ‘fans lay claim to having special access to, and hence dominance over, specific texts owing to their supposedly superior knowledge of them’ (p. 186). However, rather than claiming, as Hunt does, that trivia bestows a certain ownership over the object of fandom, it grants ownership over the *cultural meanings* of horror texts with the ultimate goal of legitimising their status into the canon of queer horror films produced on the site. Adapted from a novella by Stephen King, *Apt Pupil* features in *Queerhorror’s* list of ‘rejected entries’ as a: ‘Thriller with no gay content other than a gay director and actor’. Featuring in *Campblood’s* Homo Horror Guide, Counselor Buzz writes that the film is:

Loaded with homo subtext and a bizarre scene featuring homeless guy Elias Koteas offering up gay sex to McKellen (now where did I put my wallet ...). The source of yet another lawsuit, this one involving the filming of the scene featuring boys showering. Rumor has it Kevin Spacey made frequent set visits....

Central to the review is the trivia and knowledge that Buzz sources as a means to legitimise its inclusion into the Homo Horror Guide. Not only, for instance, does the authorship of gay director Bryan Singer (*X-Men*, 2000) and actor Ian McKellen help to legitimise its inclusion, but knowledge about the lawsuit that circulated the film against Singer, which equated Singer's sexuality with accusations of perversion, allows fans to deploy this trivia as a way for the film to be discussed within a fixed contextual framework. Moreover, even though the director's sexuality may not in itself qualify the film as an item of queer horror, possessing knowledge about the lawsuit could also serve to corroborate the 'homo subtext' identified in the film. As a result, accusations of seemingly 'wishful' readings or 'misreadings' (Doty 1993, p. 16) so frequently levelled towards queer readings are legitimised vis-à-vis the scandal surrounding the film, as well as knowledge of the openly gay sexualities of director Bryan Singer and Ian McKellen.

The pejorative connotations attendant with the deployment of fan trivia and its culturally maligned forms of information is equally comparable with what Andrea Weiss (1992) has noted around forms of lesbian gossip circulating female stars in the 1930s. Indeed, the reference to Kevin Spacey represents further trivia concerning the public speculation of Spacey's sexuality at the time of the film's production. However, taken together, these culturally produced forms of knowledge allow fans to produce alternative streams of knowledge around films, giving them greater agency over the control of representation, which has at worst subordinated them, and at best painted them negatively (see Spacks, 1985). Thus, these forms of knowledge do not operate as secondary or subsidiary from the more official interpretations acquired from the texts, but rather in tandem with the meanings generated from their systems of representation. What fan trivia does, I argue, is expose textual contradictions and dissonances buried in the structure of the texts, and for fans, enables the transference from seemingly 'subversive' readings into legitimate textual interpretations. Ultimately, this authenticates the inclusion of films on the site and allows fans to apply these discourses to subsequent viewings.

Hunt argues that fan trivia produces hierarchies and distinctions between those who possess more esoteric forms of knowledge and those who do not. However, for fans across the two spaces of reception, such knowledge is a matter of generating and deliberating over the most authentic iterations of queerness across a range of films. I

further argue that definitions and meanings of horror itself are reconstituted through displays of fan trivia. In the inclusion of *Clownhouse* (1989) for instance, Buzz discusses the scandal concerning director Victor Salva, who sexually molested a child actor Nathan Winters during its production. In his review, Buzz writes that the movie would be scary: ‘even if you didn’t know about the lawsuit that stemmed from its production’. Consequently, the review points toward a kind of double textual layering, whereby the notion of ‘horror’ takes on new meanings in light of this knowledge; allowing the reception strategies themselves to imbue different layers of meaning into the text, thus bolstering the film’s status as an entry of ‘queer horror’ (see Benshoff, 2012 for a detailed reception of Victor Salva’s films in light of this public controversy).

Emotional Realism

In her work around viewers of the American serial *Dallas*, Ien Ang (1985) argues that for her letter writers, the concept of ‘realism’ is conceptualised at different textual levels, including the connotative level – the ‘associative meanings’ of the text. Ang finds that at this textual level, notions of empiricist realism and classical realism are rendered subordinate when accounting for how viewers perceive realism in the serial. Hence, Ang introduces the term ‘emotional realism’ to capture the idea that ‘what is recognized as real is not knowledge of the world, but a subjective experience of the world: a ‘structure of feeling’ (p. 45). In his work on science fiction fandom, Henry Jenkins (1992) extends Ang’s notion of emotional realism, which is conceived less as a ‘property of fictions’ than an ‘interpretive fiction’. Jenkins thus extrapolates upon Ang’s term in applying the concept to media texts, which depart to greater degrees from Dallas’ empirical reality to a range of cultural artefacts, where, hyperbolically, ‘earthmen and aliens navigate the stars and encounter strange new worlds’. Summarising this, Jenkins claims:

What counts as ‘plausible’ in such a story is a general conformity to the ideological norms by which the viewer makes sense of everyday life. Such a conception of the series allows fans to draw upon their own personal backgrounds as one means of extrapolating beyond the information explicitly found within the aired episodes. (1992, p. 107)

In light of Jenkins’ contention, the realism of media texts can only be fully assessed by focalising on how viewers or fans make sense of their everyday life through the features

contained within a cultural text. To a large degree, this is a concept pertinent to the reviews on *Campblood*, where horror texts are interpreted as they relate to the emotional realism of fans, rooted in their lived experiences in identifying as gay or non-straight. Indeed, this legitimises the inclusion of a range of films that resonates with gay subjectivities. However, until this point, queer and horror scholars have done much of this interpretive work for fans, applying theoretical frameworks to illuminate the queer properties of a range of films which purportedly correlate with their lived experiences. However, there is evidence in the Homo Horror Guide to suggest that fans are themselves undertaking this work in ways equally, if not more comprehensively, than said scholars.

According to Qvamp, *Ginger Snaps* ‘contains no lesbian content’ and was therefore occluded from entry on the site. However, Qvamp goes on to note that ‘although there is a slight suggestion of sexual content between two sisters’, ‘it was said to disturb, not to imply sexual desire’. Although Qvamp fixes a specific connotative reading onto sisters Brigitte and Ginger, this is essentially incompatible with the homoerotic reading strategies employed by fans on the site and consequently failed to register as an entry of queer horror. In its entry on *Campblood* however, Buzz writes the following: ‘although not *explicitly* queer in any way, the themes of this fantastic horror film – teen alienation, body terror, out-of-control or destructive sexuality – resonate with queer audiences’. Furthermore, it is seen as being ‘the story of two sisters who are pulled apart by one's movement into sexual maturity [...] *Ginger Snaps* is a *Carrie* for the Goth age’. Although *Queerhorror* focuses more literally on the semiotic potentiality of lesbian content between the two sisters, Buzz sees the film's handling of aberrant corporeal experiences and transformations as analogous to the queer experience of masquerading as ‘normal’, meanwhile the burgeoning queer-self strives to take control of the body creating palpable tension and angst. According to Buzz, this resonates with an emotional realism recognised intersubjectively across life experiences; that is, the experiential relations between multiple non-straight persons. Martin Barker and colleagues (2006) have recognised the significance of gender and identity to the reception of the film, arguing that these serve as tools through which audiences make cultural meaning of such texts. However, rather than argue that these ‘frames of interpretation’ (p. 493) are produced through textual clues, I suggest that such reviews reveal that gay fans make

meaning through reference to their own cultural subjectivities – rendering intelligible metaphorical transformations of the body, regardless of the protagonists' gender.

Moreover, Buzz's reference to the symbolic potency of the titular character in *Carrie* (1976) should not be overlooked here. This is because *Carrie* resonates with some gay fans, as they perceive themselves as lonely and ostracised outsiders, struggling with the norms of sexual maturation. Indeed, Darren Elliot-Smith (2009, p. 139) argues that the film could be viewed as a 'variation on the coming out tale'. These sexual identity themes are thus used as a point of reference for the cultural resonance of *Ginger Snaps* to non-heterosexual fans, and despite both films featuring female protagonists, it is in the 'excessive performances of femininity, that gay male subject seeks indications of his own socially constructed, performed and gendered subjectivity' (2009, p. 139) highlighting the fluidity and instability of queer readings as they transgress markers of the text, including overt gender representations. Unlike audiences who may have identified with *Carrie* at the time of the film's 1976 release, *Ginger Snaps* is said to speak to a new generation of fans in light of the realism experienced across different periods of growing up as non-straight (see Chapter 2). This comparison underscores the notion that the emotional realism felt by fans is shaped intergenerationally, as the political contexts and social milieu of their upbringing resonate differently with the representational strategies deployed in different horror films. This is especially true as anticipated gender norms, and the cultural norms of sexual maturation, change in different historical contexts, as does the production of realism both textually and as felt emotionally (see Chapter 2).

In continuing a concern with the seven films 'rejected' from entry in *Queerhorror*, *The Faculty* is seen by Qvamp as containing 'no queer content'. However, the film features in the Homo Horror Guide accompanied by the following review:

The Faculty takes the whole Body Snatcher structure and puts in a Texas high school that is oddly staffed by some fantastic character actors[...]Hats off to Robert Rodriguez for showing high school as the nasty, brutal place it is, and for giving the spotlight to the underdogs' (in this tale, the pretty people aren't the ones you root for).

The 'body snatcher' or alien 'invasion narratives', a marker of 1950's horror (as well as in films by directors such as David Cronenberg), is here reworked into a high school setting, commonly viewed as a place of social ostracism and antagonism for fans who

may have struggled in coming to terms with their sexual identity during their formative years. This discursive coupling illuminated in the review between particular themes of horror such as bodily struggle and transformation, set within institutions inimical to the lives of queer people (such as schools) facilitates a queer reading of *The Faculty* in ways often unforeseen at a denotative level, or indeed at the level of production. Whether the teacher-as-alien concept is understood as a kind of sadistic revenge against proverbial school-jock bullies or against the perceived failure of teachers to contain homophobic rhetoric, would, however, necessitate a more in-depth analysis.

On *Queerhorror*, Qvamp acknowledges that *Nightbreed* features in Harry Benshoff's (1997) seminal work. However, the film is ultimately debarred from *Queerhorror* because: 'no character identified him/herself as being gay'. This illustrates a direct contrast between scholar accounts of queer identification (through the monster) against the actual discursive priorities of fans through their reception practices. In contrast, Buzz writes of the film that 'queer connections are many'. Buzz proceeds to explicate upon such a claim by writing the following: 'He [Clive Barker] has created a fascinating allegory about discovering one's true nature and finding a home in a group of subordinated, 'underground' outcasts whom society wants to destroy'. Buzz, therefore, foregrounds the anthropomorphic qualities of the monsters in *Nightbreed* in that they are misunderstood creatures pitted against the 'true' villains of the film – the patriarchal and authoritative police who seek to disrupt their manufactured 'community'. Further, the central theme of the film is said to resonate with the life trajectory of fans, who initially conceive of themselves as lonely outsiders, but ultimately come to find a community of likeminded non-straight folks who come to accept themselves, and others, through their shared disenfranchised social status. Moreover, the fact that Qvamp references, but consequently disavows Benshoff's analysis, whereas Buzz proceeds to analyse the film in a way uncannily similar to Benshoff's scholarly interpretation must not go unnoticed here. For, not only does this reinforce the fundamental differences in the reading strategies between the sites, but suggests that the cultural knowledge of fans allows for different interpretive strategies, inflected by differing reception priorities that cannot be captured entirely through theoretical accounts put forward by scholars.

Postmodern Play: Gender and Sexuality

Harry Benshoff (1997) and Robin Wood (1986, p. 73) have argued that horror cinema is preoccupied with the relationship between bourgeois ideological structures and the conception of the 'Other' 'which bourgeois ideology cannot recognise or accept but must deal with [...] either by rejecting and if possible annihilating it, or by rendering it safe and assimilating it'. Indeed, it is within this structuralist position whereby binary notions of gender and sexuality are momentarily fractured but ultimately recouped through the destruction of the monster (and its aberrant sexuality). However, through subversive reading strategies rooted within postmodern theories of the decentred self, binary structures are eroded, or at least challenged, and the artificiality of cultural structures are exposed. For non-straight audiences, finely attuned to monitoring and self-regulating their identities and questioning 'appropriate' ways in which to articulate their gender, the postmodern sensibilities of horror texts have a larger stake in their visual lexicon, and, hence, interpretive repertoires; making queer interpretations possible, but also credible. Buzz describes *Night of the Creeps* as 'a masterful blending of a half-dozen genres (sci-fi, 50's monster movie, zombie, college comedy, film noir, slasher)'. Further in a hyperlink that leads to a full review of the film, Buzz writes:²⁸

It's got everything -- aliens, zombies, prom dresses, mutant pets, axe maniacs, frat parties, slugs, flamethrowers, convertibles, explosions, decapitations, cryogenics, and... a gay sidekick. Yes, in the oft heterocentric world of 80's studio teen horror, *Night of the Creeps* emerges a standout in its inclusion of a warm, genuine friendship between a gay and a straight man, and a genuinely heartbreaking scene in which they finally address their bond... after one of them has died.

Although much of the review focuses on the subtle hints of queer romance between the lead characters Chris (Jason Lively) and J.C. (Steve Marshall), this is framed through references to conservative forms of horror such as the 1950's 'monster movie' and 1980's 'slasher film' whose central narrative structures are playfully destabilised. Where these forms of horror famously construct a central 'us/them' dichotomy, whether through humans and other worldly creatures or between a psychopathic killer and

²⁸ A handful of films featured in the Homo Horror Guide contain a hyperlink to a full review located on the site. These provide a longer and more insightful critique of specific films. At the time of writing, there are in excess of 200 'full' reviews featured.

(suburban) communities, in *Night of the Creeps*, the monster is far more omnipresent. The giant leeches are ubiquitous, penetrating almost everyone, and thus, amid the moral chaos and absence of generic rules or principles, queer readings can be realised between these two characters (at the film's conclusion). In other words, normalcy becomes something defined without a fixed point of reference, as bodies become inhabited and the line between human and monster, clean and infected, normalcy and performativity become sites of struggle and contestation. This is especially pertinent in a world where the social structures that have typically constrained and celebrated specific gender and sexual performances are textually unhinged and opened up for queer readings by fans.

In this postmodern tradition, sexual and gendered identities contained within the films, as well as generic definitions of films themselves, are playfully deconstructed. *Psycho Beach Party*, for instance, was 'rejected' from entry on *Queerhorror* because 'though plenty of queer content and has a slasher, this is a bit too much of a comedy to be included as a thriller'. However, where the film's generic impurity precluded the film from entry, it is, paradoxically, this very eclecticism that allows for a more playful approach towards gender and sexuality in the film. Indeed, as was argued in the reviews on *Queerhorror*, the site misses out on those films that could be labelled as camp, which for Kim Newman, signals a central tenet of postmodern horror. For Newman, this postmodern turn signals an inability or at least futile attempt for horror to adequately depict 'the horrors and neuroses of the age' (1988, p. 211). For the conservative invasion and slasher narratives aforementioned, the camp turn signals their impotency to sustain the normal/other binary in politically efficacious ways; and, thus, cracks begin to form and alternative ways of interpreting the film are able to be realised.

Admitting the film to be 'more camp than blood', Buzz writes the following about *Psycho Beach Party*: 'this unholy blend of beach movie and slasher flick has everything a queer horror fan could want: beheadings, bitchy women, drag queens, multiple personality disorder, gay lust, dance numbers, fabulous costumes, and [...] celebrity sightings'. Paying homage to the 'slasher flick', *Psycho Beach Party* destabilises a formula often centred on stable gender functions such as male-aggressor/female victim or female victim/male hero, affording the queer spectator a position outside of these heterocentrist identificatory models (see Clover, 1992). Thus, in a subgenre which has

worked to exclude the interests and representations of non-straight audiences, or worse painted the psychosexual killer as the dangerous embodiment of queer (in films such as *Dressed to Kill* (1980) and *Cruising* (1980)), *Psycho Beach Party* represents a comedic subversion of the slasher formula, fracturing its ideological foundations and conservative values. To a large extent, these textual ruptures conform to what Harry Benshoff (1997, p. 233) has labelled as ‘utopian postmodernism’, identified by a ‘hodgepodge of images culled from different races, gender and sexual positions, as well as both high and low art’. This allows non-straight fans to envision their own world with free-floating symbols and motifs, fracturing the ideological structures of horror. Moreover, the playful, hyper sexualised references to gender and identity: ‘bitchy women’, ‘drag queens’ and ‘fabulous costumes’ suggests how the film mockingly imitates the slasher formula, exposing its inherent unnaturalness and the falsity of ideologies that have been argued to oppress women and cultural minorities along axes not limited to sexuality, race and ethnicity (Butler, 1990).

Aside from the celebration of all things postmodern and camp, it could be argued that any rupture to an established narrative system invites queer readings, especially in a genre whose sustained ideological efforts have worked to exclude non- or contra-straight people from its established system of representation (such as the slasher film). Films, such as *Slumber Party Massacre*, subvert the slasher formula by featuring an all-female cast in what Buzz labels as a ‘feminist horror, slasher-style’. Qvamp writes that the film ‘is unique in the focusing on women and women destroying the slasher without the help of males’, containing ‘not overt enough lesbian coding for inclusion’. Buzz however, describes the film as ‘hypersexed, nasty, and fun’, adding that ‘New girl Val is too butch for the other girls [...] so she opts out of the slumber party [...] having to save the day by dispatching a psycho killer with a drill’. Buzz illuminates the contestation over gender roles, underscoring the film’s challenge to traditional conceptions of gender and sexual identity inscribed in the slasher formula.

As the review for *Slumber Party Massacre* attests, the three reception strategies outlined in this section operate in tandem in many of the reviews. That is, although the abovementioned review foregrounds the playful gender roles in the film, fans often draw upon their wider knowledge of the conventions of horror, but also the knowledge of its

lesbian screenwriter, Rita Mae Brown, in an attempt to authenticate their interpretations and rationalise specific films as an entry of queer horror. In light of their knowledge, however, the category of queer horror is itself complicated as Buzz includes *Slumber Party Massacre* into an entry of what he labels as ‘a strange subgenre of lesbian-created slasher films’. This illustrates the ways in which some fans produce their own genetic categories of horror, prescribed less by their unified textual features, than the exercising of cultural competencies deployed to fashion new generic labels which speak to their particular cultural positions.

Conclusion

Where the identificatory connections between non-straight viewers and horror have been theorised, this chapter has linked different queer reading strategies and modes of interpretation to the nature of the fan spaces. I have argued that Qvamp, who founded Queerhorror in 1997, sought to produce a queer cannon of horror that could expose the way that gay and lesbians have been understood and represented within the formal system of the genre. In this way, Qvamp and fans on *Queerhorror* seek to produce a canon of films featuring ‘gay content’ – as a way of legitimising the draw of non-straight fans to a genre that could initially appear to be antithetical to their tastes and pleasures. As the first part of this chapter argued, covert instances of queerness can be dismissed as ‘theory’ reading, or can frequently represent unsubstantiated claims (accompanied by a lack of evidence or corroboration from other fans). On the other hand, overtly queer horror films are often generically challenged as horror, antithetical to the tastes exercised by users on the site. In this way, I have shown that the establishment of a ‘queer horror’ category of films has proven to be replete with distinctions and struggles, where broader issues of genre, taste and quality colour the reception of fans.

In contrast, by the time of *Campblood*’s formation in 2003, I have argued that fans more attuned to the queer undercurrents of horror were able to create a space as an exploration of horror from a culturally articulated queer perspective. Drawing upon their cultural competences and fan knowledge, the Counselors in *Campblood* illuminate the queerness of horror across a range of productions. As I argued, the site is less about contextually rating the ‘gay content’ of a range of films, than it is an exercise in fan

knowledge and theory, exercising readings of metaphor, allegory, and connotative signification. Moreover, the Homo Horror Guide reveals that reading strategies predicated on a denotative/connotative continuum cannot accurately capture the possibility that multiple reception strategies work concurrently. In this way, the reception strategies deployed in *Campblood* open the cultural terrain of horror to account for a broader range of films that could be interpreted queerly from the reception accounts of gay fans. In other words, because the category of overtly ‘queer horror’ is replete with struggles and distinctions, gay fans turn towards more mainstream or commercially recognisable texts and interpret them from the position of their cultural identities.

Ultimately then, the two spaces of concern intervene in the debates on the reading strategies exercised by non-straight fans, but also the range of possibilities in interpreting horror from their unique cultural positions. As I proceed to argue in Chapter 2, since the launch of *Queerhorror* and *Campblood*, fans have produced their own online blogs as a platform to articulate their emotional connections to horror. As I argue, the genre of blogging is particularly significant for gay fans in affording a platform to articulate their unique connections to horror. Further, the comment features of blogs are pertinent in legitimising the cultural interpretations and emotional connections exercised by other fans in their network. This is significant for some fans, whose readings of, or connections to horror, have been delimited to their semiotic productivities. It is on blogs that particular films, such as *Elm Street 2* are interpreted. This text is important not only for the gay interpretations circulating it, but for how fans see themselves in the object, and further, how such films are made meaningful to their gay identities. However, rather than suggest that knowledge and interpretive prowess in horror fandom is only exercised by big name fans such as Brian “Buzz” Juergens, I argue that other gay fans have deployed forms of knowledge and interpretive strategies to legitimise their readings, and ultimately, to ‘out’ *Elm Street 2* as what they perceive to be a gay horror film.

Chapter Two

‘Something is Trying to Get Inside My Body’: Fan Blogs, Gay Sexuality and A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy’s Revenge

Introduction

‘Could this be the gayest horror movie ever made...by accident? [...] when you watch this campy horror classic from a homo perspective, it's hard to miss all the subtext – intended or otherwise’ (Soares, 2008). This refers to an advertisement for *A Nightmare on Elm Street: Freddy’s Revenge* (1985) that played at the ‘Homo Horror: Seattle Lesbian & Gay Film Festival’ in 2008. That an entry into a mainstream slasher franchise from the 1980s is being rhetorically advertised as the ‘gayest horror movie’ at a gay and lesbian film festival is the culmination of years of vociferous dialogue, speculation and fan interpretation around the film concerning what many perceive to be its gay subtext. Online, several outlets including gay, horror and entertainment sites have published lists of the ‘gayest horror films’ wherein *A Nightmare on Elm Street: Freddy’s Revenge* (hereafter *Elm Street 2*) features, and often ranks in the number one spot. This chapter offers an argument for the cultural status of *Elm Street 2* as the ‘gayest horror film’ by suggesting that this assertion is best conceptualised at the intersection between the film’s textual properties and sites of reception; specifically on blogs produced by gay fans.

This chapter argues that many fans consider *Elm Street 2* to be the ‘gayest horror’ film precisely because it calls upon them to mobilise the three reception strategies outlined in *Campblood* (Chapter 1) to comprehensively interpret the film: emotional realism; a play on horror conventions and subversions of sexual and gendered representations; and trivia, or specifically, access to paratextual information that circulates the source material online. The structure of this chapter attends to each reception strategy systematically, particularly how they relate to the way fans have interpreted the film in and across their blogs. In seeking to explain the significance of *Elm Street 2* for gay audiences, I suggest that the film has come to resonate with their gay subjectivities. Specifically, the film comes to represent experiences of being a gay teenager, and the emotion of *horror* is elicited precisely through these internal struggles,

forbidden desires and repressed urges, colouring their memories of gay youth as articulated in their micro-narratives.

In Section 1 of this chapter, I argue that gay fans have created online blogs to articulate their personal connections, or emotional realism (Ang, 1985) to horror, writing for a readership of other gay horror bloggers. I contend that fan produced online blogs constitute an effective amalgam of the public and the private, affording fans an opportunity to self-narrativise their investments in horror, particularly with the figure of the monster *and* the victim. As I argue, blogs are instrumental in affording a platform to write ‘confessionally’ for other fans who form part of their broader online network in the blogosphere. In this way, the online genre of blogging provides a shared experience and recognition of sameness for gay fans of horror, forging a micro-community of fans who may otherwise feel marginalised from the broader horror fandom (see Chapter 4). In analysing personal fan blogs, Section 1 provides a context for the rest of the chapter. This explores how some fans use blogging as a form of autobiographical expression and confession – anchoring their lived experiences in identifying as gay with their investments in, and cultural interpretations of, particular features of horror.

As I suggest, the emotional connections that gay fans have forged with *Elm Street 2* frames the film within the eclectic category of ‘teen horror’. Pamela Craig and Martin Fradley outline some defining characteristics as:

Photogenic young actors playing characters in high school or college campus environment [...] set in a suburban and almost exclusively white, middle-class milieu [...] characterized by a hybridized fusion of horror, comedy and melodrama with a concomitant emphasis on inter-personal relationships [...]. (2010, p. 84)

Despite Craig and Fradley’s definition of teen horror having currency for this chapter, they contend that a fundamental distinction between key slasher franchises from the late 1970s onward and today’s teen horror is a focus on the return of the ‘iconic monster’ in the former and a sustained focus on the ‘troubled teen protagonists and their physical, emotional and psychological suffering’ in the latter. However, in considering films such as *Elm Street 2* from the 1980s, this chapter not only refutes this claim, but narrows this distinction by calling for a more complex relationship between horror’s victims and their relationship with the figure of the monster; human or supernatural.

Scholarly work on horror victims has predominately focused on the female as an overly sexualised and tormented figure, whereas the films featured in Brian Juergens' (2014) article 'The 13 Most Homoerotic Horror Movies of All Time' are broadly united through a concern with the teenage victim as *male*, but like the monster, a figure of ontological uncertainty. These films depict the perils of being an outsider figure unable to control an internal conflict (*Fear No Evil*, 1981; *Elm Street 2*), youngsters 'recruited' into an abject community of vampiric outsiders (as in *Fright Night*, 1985; *The Lost Boys*, 1987), existing on the fringes of a collective group (*The Covenant*, 2006; *The Forsaken*, 2001), or as demasculinised and eroticised by the monster queer itself (*Hostel*, 2005; *Jeepers Creepers 2*, 2003). Themes of internal conflict, desire for assimilation, and negotiating identity/masculinity has come to identify many of these teen films featuring central male characters of which I argue *Elm Street 2* is central. Jeffrey Dennis (2008, p. 144) posits that 'several characteristics of the teen gore movies suggest a structural resistance to heterosexual destiny' citing a strong emphasis on male characters and the male body as a marker of these films in the sexual climate of 1980s conservatism. However, this chapter suggests that gay fans give alternative explanations for the 'gayness' of films such as *Elm Street 2*, which reside not only in the text but in their readings of them.²⁹

Where discussions around teen culture in horror has maintained a distinction of the perils of sexuality in adolescence, alongside separate theorisations around the counter-hegemonic sexualities of the monster or the slasher killer, I argue that these accounts have overlooked the complex relationship between the monster/slasher and victim/final girl (and boy) in horror. That is, there is little understanding of how their relationship speaks in particular ways to cultural anxieties and signifiers pertaining to monstrosity and victimhood as they are subsumed in cultural discourses around gay male sexuality. Discussing the conflation of these figures, Peter Hutchings argues:

Within the various narratives of horror, the victim and the victimiser are indispensable elements, although, of course, the way in which these elements are deployed can change from one film to the next. It is also by no means uncommon for individual characters to combine within themselves the victim and victimiser roles. (1993, p. 86)

²⁹ Significantly, Dennis (2008) cites Mark Patton from *Elm Street 2* as part of the 'underwear-clad' of male actors in 'teen gore movies' along with Nick Corre and Johnny Depp. However, Dennis does not proceed to discuss the wider implications of *Elm Street 2* in terms of gay readings as this chapter attends to.

In light of Hutchings' contention, Section 2 of this chapter suggests that the cultural status of *Elm Street 2* can be attributed to the way in which the film's fusion of the monster and victim collapse onto the character of Jesse. As I suggest, *Elm Street 2* subverts Carol Clover's (1992) figure of the final girl, by introducing what many fans perceive to be horror's first 'male scream queen': *a final boy* named Jesse Walsh (Mark Patton). In analysing the significance of this figure for gay fans, this section argues that the final boy embodies traits of both the traditional monster/killer and victim of the slasher film as Jesse destabilises traditional modes of slasher spectatorship and identification as has been argued by scholars such as Carol Clover (1992) and Vera Dika (1987). Whereas L. J. DeGraffenreid (2011, p. 956) argues that the *Nightmare* films 'make literal the adage that puberty and the concomitant exploration of sexuality can be painful', I suggest that this 'exploration' of Jesse's sexuality is best understood through his amalgam of the monster *and* the final boy. I argue that this is a symbolic construction that resonates with their own cultural position of being seen as social outcasts who threaten (hetero)normalcy, but whose subjectivities are coloured through subordination to this sustained oppression resulting in 'gay shame'. As Leo Bersani (2010, p. 68) argues: 'shame is an eminently social emotion; others make me feel it. Consequently, shame is accompanied by innocence; we might even say that it is a sign of innocence' – reifying the sense of victimisation embedded into gay subjectivities as imposed by others.

The final section of this chapter proceeds to interrogate the textual parameters of *Elm Street 2* as I argue that paratexts (Gray, 2010) circulating the film produce supplementary meanings that mediate the interpretive strategies of fans. Whilst the orbital nature of paratexts sheds further light on the meanings of the source text (*Elm Street 2*), this section contends that paratexts circumvent the conundrum presented in Chapter 1 regarding where gayness resides in horror, as there is symbolic contestation between and certainly *within* them. In this way, the paratexts feed into an ongoing and vociferous speculation about the film, which render gay readings as credible, but ultimately deny the locus or source of the film's gay subtext through which much speculation is characterised (see Chapter 1). In other words, gay readings are never fully stabilised, but represent sites of debate and conjecture, inflected by conflicting knowledge about the film from cultural

or ‘official’ sources of information. This section proceeds to focus on the star image of Mark Patton, who played Jesse Walsh, arguing that for fans, Patton represents the potential to bring *Elm Street 2* out of horror’s closet as a film which speaks about the emotional perils of a sexually repressed teenage boy.

While fans often self-identify as gay in their online blogs, I take into account the fluidity of subjectivities and lived experiences under the cultural label of ‘gay’. In the blogs analysed, authors either self-identify as gay in their biography, or are preoccupied with the material links between gay identity and horror. I am primarily concerned with the ways in which gay male fans have received and interpreted the text, despite the fact that the film’s narrative has been similarly interpreted across a vast demographic of fans.³⁰ A discourse analysis of online blogs constitutes the bulk of analysis herein, and the methodological approach for the second part of this chapter is a textual analysis of *Elm Street 2* guided by a reception of the film in fan blogs.³¹ This methodological approach yields the potential to dissect more thoroughly how the lived realities of gay fans relate to specific textual moments from *Elm Street 2*, using fans’ interpretations to inform an analysis of significant scenes. Klaus Bruhn Jensen has previously advocated this unique methodological intersection: ‘The combined analysis of textual structures and audience responses can become the basis of a more comprehensive approach to reception’ (1987, p. 27).

Monsters, Victims and Online Blogs

Susan C. Herring *et al.* define blogs (or weblogs) as: ‘frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence’ (2004, p. 1). As a deeply personal space, online blogs are comparable with a personal journal or diary, in that they contain autobiographical, often sensitive information about its author and their affective investments in horror. This analogy is fleshed out in some detail by Viviane Serfaty

³⁰ There are a number of online spaces where *Elm Street 2* has been understood as a gay narrative. Such readings are also found in ostensibly heterosexual oriented blogs, forums and articles. While there is little space to explicate on the differences between readings of the film based on cultural identity, terms such as ‘coding’, ‘subtext’ and ‘homoerotic’ have been employed in an attempt to capture a seemingly homosexual narrative.

³¹ Such a reader guided analysis remains rare in the field of fan studies. As I would suggest, scholars’ concerns with the interpretive strategies of fans have rarely linked these back to the structure and internal logics of the source material itself.

(2004), who contends that online blogs are the ‘latest avatars’ in an extensive history of self-representational writing. As Serfaty puts it: ‘by communicating about their inner lives, diarists are not merely engaging in self-expression, but are actually trying to better appropriate some elements of their own lives by theatricalizing them through words and pictures’ (p. 92). Serfaty continues, this helps ‘to externalize inner processes and display them to others in the hope that they will respond, so that they can be internalized anew, in modified form’. Wishing to circumvent the psychoanalytical implications of such, the wider suggestion is that these blogs are as much a process of writing for *others* as it is a process of personal self-reflection, the writing of personal thoughts and feelings for an online audience of readers and bloggers.

In his work on ‘new media studies’, Paul Booth (2010) contributes to the debates by agreeing with Serfaty insofar that the blog is best thought of as: ‘written by a particular author with a particular mental schema and in a particular context’. However, Booth proceeds to argue that the blog is ultimately an amalgam of post *and* comments, rendering traditional conceptions of blogs that privilege the blog entry itself as the primary text wholly incomplete, as they are open to revision and rewriting. Understood in this way, the blog is not authored by an individual, but a collective; the notion of the text is furnished by a communal effort and dialogue between fans who occupy the same textual space. Booth refers to this as ‘intra-textuality’; an enquiry into the ‘meaning that occurs inside the transmediated text itself’ (p. 43). Booth conjures a sense in which the reciprocity between blog entries is still a form of self-expression; but also a form of creative labour that is coded to resonate with likeminded subcultural others, whether readers or fellow bloggers, to be commented on and reblogged (or disseminated in their own textual space).

Although the diary has been thought of as a channel of self-expression through language, Booth’s intervention opens the terrain to theorise blogging as a community, mindful of the presence of others on the blog and thus the establishment of a collective of readers (and authors). For Booth, the interactiveness within individual blogs engenders readers to respond to individual posts, facilitating written communication in asynchronous time not too dissimilar from a message board or online forum (see Chapters 3, 4 and 5), where community has taken on wider currency in scholarship.

Nicholas Hookway (2008, p. 96) argues that ‘there seems to be a paradox built into blogging: bloggers are writing for an audience and are therefore potentially engaged in a type of ‘face-work’ but at the same time they are anonymous, or relatively unidentifiable’. Although arguing that this duality can lead to identity play and questions of veracity, it ultimately marks blogs as having a ‘confessional quality’ – one can express themselves freely ‘as we enter the presence of others’ (p. 97). Of course, recognising that not all blogs contain the potential for interaction, this section argues that for gay fans of horror, the blog as a genre is a particularly apposite and indeed felicitous platform in facilitating individualised self-expressions about their unique cultural connections to horror through ‘I narratives’ (Reed, 2005). Simultaneously, they forge a subcultural network with other gay fans who comment on one another’s blogs as a way to legitimise feelings or readings. Indeed, this is what could be referred to as a form of ‘subcultural insularity’ (Hodkinson, 2007). This cartography of gay horror fandom leads to the simultaneous segmentation and interconnectedness of blogs, in what is aptly described by Nina Wakeford (1997) as ‘distinctive cultural clusters’.

As should be clear, I consider fans not as isolated bloggers, but as connected producers, reviewers, critics, storytellers and writers (Jenkins, 1992). I believe that the textual fragments of a blog contain clues into the construction and presentation of the self; and likewise, the textual elements of the blog are produced and regulated to resonate with a faction of other gay horror writers with whom they are (dis)connected in the blogosphere. Writing on the archive and subcultural queer lives, Judith Halberstam argues:

The notion of an archive has to extend beyond the image of a place to collect material or hold documents, and it has to become a floating signifier for the kinds of lives implied by the paper remnants of shows, clubs, events and meetings. The archive is not simply a repository; it is also a theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory, and a complex record of queer activity. (2005, pp. 169-170)

As individual blog entries are archived, each piece of writing becomes a part of the complex record of the gay horror fan as a fuller picture of their (sub)cultural identity can be deduced through the textual fragments dispersed within the blog; but also traced through their comments on other blogs, constituting their online footprint. Mindful of the

readership of their blogs, fans exercise their cultural competencies about horror with the aim, I argue, of bolstering their status within their online network. For gay fans, this can be achieved through a recognition of their horror fan capital (Fiske, 1992) but also a subcultural recognition of their metaphorical and subtextual gay readings of films as they chime with those mobilised by other gay horror fans dispersed throughout the blogosphere.

In the blogs that follow, some fans post entries about horror (i.e. a discussion of films, directors, stars, subgenres), whilst others write about gay identity and culture, with an additional faction of bloggers illuminating the discursive fusion of the two. *Billylovesstu.blogspot.co.uk* is a popular blog amongst the community of gay horror fans in the blogosphere, with hundreds of post entries and comments. At the time of writing, the blog has 21 ‘networked blogs’ and incalculable references in other fan blogs. In the ‘about me’ section BL1, the blog’s author, describes himself and the space as follows:

I love horror films, been watching them all of my life. As a gay man, I've come to note the more homo-erotic subtext in many of these films [...] So, what I intend to do with this blog, is, from time to time, highlight a movie that is both scary as well as sensual,(or just plain campy) provided those elements are borne of gay or lesbian sensibilities. (Date unavailable)

BL1’s blog articulates his fannish interest in which a subcultural capital borne from ‘gay and lesbian sensibilities’ generates new knowledge and approaches to an analysis of the genre. In this way, the subcultural lens through which horror is interpreted does not depart from the concerns and types of ‘scary’ films that are of interest to the serious male horror fan (see Chapter 4), rather, remains integral to this network of blogs. However, the blog clearly targets a gay demographic of horror fandom, as entries such as *It Gets Better* (2010) illuminate the *horrors* of teen suicide as the result of social intolerance and oppression, in a means to cultivate new meanings around horror as they resonate with gay fans. The biographical section of the blog is pertinent to gay fans in positioning themselves as different, as outside of what one would expect from a horror fan blog, whilst generating new perspectives on the genre and its associations with gay culture. In an entry entitled: ‘Monster Empathy’, BL1 proceeds to self-express, in a ‘confessional’ tone, his personal connections with the figure of the monster:

The empathy I felt towards these fantastic creatures, was that, through no fault of their own, they were scorned, hated and hunted. Growing up gay, I related to that. Through no fault of my own, I happened to be sexually attracted to members of my own sex. Therefore, much like other monsters, I had to hide who I really was and put on a mask so that I could blend in with society. I was made to question my self worth when I overheard kids in my high school make "fag" jokes. I was lucky, in that my mask rarely slipped in those days, and most people were pretty clueless as to who I really was. (7 June 2010)

Rather than merely empathise with the transgressive figure of the monster, BL1 recalls his own experiences *as* the monster; much like the slasher killer who masks his deformed identity and the aberrations that boil beneath the façade that the mask represents. However, if the horror monster/perpetrator provided BL1 with an externalisation of his harboured thoughts and feelings within the context of growing up gay, likewise, the genre of the blog provides an outlet for his personal expressions: to communicate with likeminded others to foster their own cultural associations with horror. To this degree then, the genre of the blog serves as a useful tool in externalising an autobiographical account that has hitherto underpinned a central part of his lifelong associations with horror in a highly charged personal sense.

Indeed, BL1 appears to recognise the value of the blog within the entry: 'But imagine my surprise when I started this blog and found hundreds of other gay guys who love the horror genre – it's nice to know that there are so many of us out there; all of those beautiful monsters, no longer hiding in the dark, no longer lurking in the shadows' (2010). BL1 frames this writing within a discourse of community formation that clearly points to a sense of symbolic connectedness between the fan blogs. It is a genre that presents an expressive outlet to articulate their sense of difference, whilst normalising this difference through their connections with other gay horror bloggers within the vicinity of their network. This blog entry received six comments, with three fans writing the following:

BL2 said ...

[BL1] I really LOVE this entry. It really speaks to me, with the exception of being a teen in the mid 70's, I really connected to it. I also wore a mask, but the damn thing was clear. I suppose I didn't think people would look closely enough to see through it. ;). (7 June 2010)

BL3 said ...

To me, the best stuff has always been and always will be about the plight of the outsider regardless of gender. I think I had a similar growing up experience as your own and I only wish I knew then what I know now, that being different is a great gift (especially if you happen to have the power to telekinetically blow up your prom!)-Unk. (9 June 2010)

BL4 said ...

Excellent biographical post! I've always been really drawn to the tragic monster characters, especially Frankenstein's monster, the Wolf Man, and Romero's living dead, and even Martin. Being able to liken one's own alienation, repression, oppression etc is a special thing and makes you realize there are others out there who feel the same. (10 June 2010)

Multiple entries on BL1's blog resonated with the affective sensibilities of the three fans cited above, as they articulate their own identifications with the figure of the monster that for them, embodies their own (formative) feelings of social 'alienation'. Where this has historically been conceptualised through the supernatural Frankenstein-esque monster, there is certainly a sense in which the slasher killer, and the slasher figure's metaphorical baggage, resonates in particular ways with gay fans. As Jason Huddleston (2005, p. 220) has argued about the visual symbolism of the mask in the slasher film: 'the mask seems to allow the slasher to hide who he is, compensate for who he is not, and enable him to release the anxiety created by his own sexual repression'. As I would suggest, this allows them to make meaning from their sense of difference, whilst concurrently taking solace in the sense of sameness and recognition invested in these figures by gay fans.

Upon further analysis, the blog comments are affectively embroiled within the context of a 'collective memory' (Halberstam, 2005) of growing up with horror (see Chapter 3), where the monster/slasher killer as an outsider figure chimes most poignantly with a time in which these fans are forced to come to terms with their sexual identities, as BL2 explicitly mentions, as a 'teen'. Further, BL1's reference in the blog entry to 'being a teenager in the mid-1970s' (and indeed BL2's effort to separate himself from that) coupled with BL3's reference to Carrie in the titular film (around the same time), reinforces the notion of a shared generation of fans who forge identifications with certain forms of horror (see Chapter 1). As BL1 puts it, this functions in ways that will distinguish them from 'younger generations' of fans. The reference to Carrie, therefore, solidifies their sense of alienation as processed through the lonely outsider figure,

framing this within the period of their growing up, which recalls their affective connection to these horror figures (Elliot-Smith, 2009). It is thus my contention that BL1's blog is referenced by a significant faction of fans precisely because it combines an astute knowledge of the genre, with new approaches, as well as an affective charge that resonates with a smaller, albeit pervasive and spatially transient contingent of fans who identify as gay or non-heterosexual.³²

If the figure of the monster served as an externalisation of the sense of alienation and difference from compulsory heterosexuality felt by gay fans growing up, these figures continue to represent a metaphorical analogy, for some, in expressing their sense of distinction from the broader horror fandom. Thus, where BL1's blog points towards the material exchange between horror fans within their personal blog spaces, these spaces are also used by other fans as an autobiographical expression in conveying their sense of difference from other identifiable horror fandoms. In a blog titled 'Midnight Movie Gay' (*midnightmoviegay.wordpress.com*) for instance, self-identifying gay horror fan BL5 recalls when he invited people in his personal network to view his 'Midnight Movie' page, only to recall their stupefaction when he revealed to them his sustained interaction 'with so many other fans' and his intermittent writing of 'reviews and articles and lists'. However, having 'come out' as a dedicated and invested horror fan to his personal (offline) network, BL5 uses his blog to articulate the reactions to his readership:

At first I was taken back by the reaction, but as I said I quickly came around to understanding it. Even later on though, I kind of had an introspective moment and thought to myself, "I really am not like a lot of the other fans. I'm pretty much the Marilyn Munster of horror nerds." [...] Now, of course not every horror fan is the same, not by any means, but there are *usually* some key indicators among the blood-thirsty community we all consider ourselves a part of. (29 September 2014)

The Marilyn Munster analogy is an apt one, as fan BL5 comes to mark himself through his sense of difference from those fans he feels he exists apart from. As Adam Reed

³² BL1 is recognised for designing a 'meme for horror bloggers'; a format comprised of fifteen questions for horror bloggers/fans to reveal more about themselves and their proclivities for horror to their readership. This includes questions such as: 'what cinematic era were you born?' and 'the Carrie compatibility question. Who would you take to prom?' This points to the centrality of the 'autobiographical self' in some factions of horror fandom – fans encouraging other bloggers to 'open up' to their readership. Such an endeavour also underscores the sense of camaraderie and exchange of material between gay and straight fans that is evident in the blogosphere.

(2005, p. 230) argues of blogs: 'web logs are viewed as a space in which persons can be themselves, free of constraints and able to say what they think and feel about everyone around them'. However, like Marilyn's 'beauty' and sense of difference from the 'true' monsters of Herman and Lily Munster, the construction of monstrosity is effectively displaced onto those imaginary horror fans – who carve 'tattoos representing the beloved genre, maybe a piercing or two or six' in contradistinction to the 'preppy' aesthetic that marks his everyday attire. Thus, BL5's language effectively serves to disqualify him from the imaginary aesthetic of a 'horror fan', through his sense of 'normalcy' from the emotionally invested fan whose image emulates that of the monster they fervently extol. Discussing a similar sentiment about a subculture of goths, Paul Hodkinson explains why they migrated from a virtual community of Usenet groups to individualised online blogs on *LiveJournal*:

Like goth email lists, Usenet groups and web boards, the subject matter and tone of interactions on such communities required conformity to collective expectations and, in an apparent rejection of this group ethos, the respondents' use of LiveJournal was dominated unequivocally by personal journals, each of which was regarded as the sovereign territory of its owner. (2007, p. 634)

This suggests that where some gay fans affectively view themselves as the ostracised figure of the monster when growing up with horror, they subsequently fail to be monstrous *enough* (read conformist, daring, masculine) to constitute an imaginary ideal of what it means to assimilate into the broader horror fandom. Therefore, where the fashion and cultural tastes of Hodkinson's subculture of goths depart from the 'mainstream', this gay fan positions himself and his identity against the eccentric commodification of 'tattoos' and 'piercings' that he sees as marking fans who have a badge of belonging in horror fandoms. In light of this duality of the monster, the blog serves as an effective genre to be mobilised in signifying an expressive outlet of this fan's sense of difference from an imaginary horror fandom.

However, that BL5 links his fan produced *Facebook* page 'Midnight Movie Gay' ('46 likes') and *Twitter* account ('2,152 followers') to his blog points towards the impetus to fashion his own sense of dialogue and community around the gay associations of horror as they collectively embody the displaced 'Marilyn Munsters' of horror fandom. In turn, this serves to illustrate the connectedness between the private (the blog) and the

public (social media pages) that benefits the subcultural identities and broader cultural imperatives of the gay horror fan. I suggest that by having a social media outlet connected to the blog, BL5 attempts to emulate more sustained forms of asynchronous communication and the establishment of communal ideals found in forums (see Chapter 3 and 4). Importantly, this would enable him to produce and police the norms and values of these social media pages, as they depart from mainstream horror fandoms. As I have suggested, however, the fan blog can also function as a micro-community, albeit in ways that can be augmented with linked social media pages, which could serve additional functions for this minority contingent of horror fans (see Chapter 3, 4 and 5).

As Harry Benshoff (1997) contends, the figure of the monster offers a point of identification for the oppression of gay horror spectators, a metaphor further mobilised in gay fan blogs to signify their outsiderdom. However, where the monster has been central to considerations of non-straight sexualities in horror, the figure of the victim has significantly been overlooked apart from their heterosexual promiscuity as a symbol of youthful rebellion (Clover, 1992). That the figure of the final girl is initially framed as a victim but gradually transforms into a fighter does appear to be fertile ground for gay readings, particularly as she parallels the struggles of star personas such as Judy Garland (see Staiger, 1992; Dyer, 2004). BL6 is a horror fan and ‘Stoker Award-winning editor of *Unspeakable Horror: From the Shadows of the Closet*’ and is currently at work on his second novel, ‘*Final Girl* and editing *Unspeakable Horror 2: Abominations of Desire*’. As an author and producer of horror material, BL6, like Brian Juergens, is a big name fan with crossover capital in horror and gay popular media. In an entry on his blog published in 2008 (*vinceliaguno.blogspot.co.uk*) entitled: ‘The Queer Appeal of Slasher Films’, the following parallel is proffered between the final girl and the coming out experience:

There is also an interesting metaphorical comparison that can be drawn between the transformation of the slasher film’s “final girl” and the coming out process. In the beginning of the slasher film, the heroine usually presents as weak, timid, uncertain of how to navigate through the situation she finds herself in; for gays, this uncertainty is the same in the coming out process. As the film progresses, the heroine transforms...she toughens and becomes confident in her abilities to overcome the malevolence stalking her. For GLBT people, they, too, transform during the coming out process; they develop a thicker skin...they summon the courage to confront the unseen

enemy of homophobia waiting for them around every darkened corner. (2 January 2008)

Like the final girl, gay fans are said to undergo a transformative process (typically during their adolescence) when many struggle to navigate their sense of sexual difference from compulsory heterosexuality. This includes building the courage to combat societal homophobia, ostensibly figured onto the perpetrator (slasher killer) to survive another day. Rosalind Hanmer (2010b, p. 153) similarly argues that ‘the queer text of *Xena Warrior Princess* and my interpretation of the online fandom proposes that some fans can gain a sense of agency and empowerment by reflecting on their internalized homophobic past that may have restricted their sexual autonomy’. This discourse of agency and empowerment is mediated between the textualised struggles of characters on-screen and the lived experiences of non-straight horror fans. However, where Hanmer’s use of queer ‘does not reflect a biological or predetermined reality’ the final girl can be read as queer to the extent that her visible gender may have less significance for gay fans than how she is coded vis-à-vis cultural constructions and performances of sexuality and gender. This includes her transformation from a culturally coded ‘feminine’ state (weak, timid) to a ‘masculine’ state (tough, confident) that is necessary in order to defeat her oppressors (Clover, 1992).

In 2012, Jase Peebles on *Gay.net* published an article entitled ‘She is Nancy, the Queen of Elm Street’, an interview with Heather Langenkamp (who plays Nancy Thompson in the first film). When asked why so many gay fans love Nancy, Langenkamp responds: ‘I also think Nancy has helped some gay fans face their fears. After all, coming out of the closet when you’re a teenager has got to be more daunting than fighting Freddy in the boiler room and that’s the age that a lot of people are when they’re first watching horror films’. Interestingly, not only are parallels drawn between the struggle of the heroine/victim figure and gay fans, but these discourses also implicate the monster (Freddy) as the object to *overcome*, which to fans of the film, equates Freddy Krueger as Jesse’s repressed homosexuality. In arguing for a more nuanced consideration of the victim in light of their relationship to gay fans, whilst not eliding a consideration of the monster/killer, the following section argues that Jesse in *Elm Street 2* embodies both the monster and victim figures, a fusion that I argue serves to explain the film’s cultural

status as a gay, albeit ‘closeted’ text. Unlike the final girl’s astute observations of her surroundings and her ability to define herself against her victimised peers (the heterosexual capability to take control), Jesse’s emotional journey registers as an introspective one – marked by an inward awareness of an inherent monstrosity that necessitates control itself. Indeed, this is an ongoing reflection and remediation of those inner sexual conflicts that comes to mark Jesse’s symbolic journey in the film.

‘Jesse! Fight Him!’ The Final Boy

A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy’s Revenge, directed by Jack Sholder, is a 1985 slasher sequel to Wes Craven’s commercially successful film, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984). The sequel introduces the character of Jesse Walsh (Mark Patton) the film’s high-school protagonist whose distinctly middle-class mother Cheryl Walsh (Hope Lange), father Ken Walsh (Clu Gulager) and younger sister Angela (Christie Clark) move into a house on the infamous Elm Street previously inhabited by Nancy Thompson (Heather Langenkamp) in the preceding film five years earlier.³³ In Wes Craven’s predecessor, Nancy was plagued with a series of nightmares concerning the physically scarred and monstrous figure of Freddy Krueger (Robert Englund). Freddy, who was previously burnt alive by the adult residents of the street for molesting children, has regenerated himself once again. This time however, Freddy seeks to penetrate Jesse’s dreams, utilising Jesse as a host body as a means to kill those close to him. A thematic departure from Craven’s original film is that Freddy is permitted to surface in the real world. He is not limited to the realm of nightmares. *Elm Street 2* focuses on Jesse’s internal struggles with Freddy, whilst struggling to navigate a friendship with school friend Lisa Webber (Kim Myers) who develops obvious romantic inclinations for Jesse. The film also explores Jesse’s friendship with school jock Ron Grady (Robert Rustler), meanwhile subjected to the surveillance of his parents who become increasingly concerned by what they perceive to be the inexplicable qualities of Jesse’s behavior.

The *Elm Street* franchise has received a voluminous amount of scholarly

³³ Whereas in *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, Tina (Amanda Wyss) and Nancy reminisce over their shared dreams of Freddy Krueger (the queer penetrating the vulnerable heteronormative realm), in the sequel, Jesse is forced to traverse these foreboding realms alone where it seems that nobody quite understands what he faces until close to the end of the film. As Freddy states: ‘he can’t fight me, I’m him’ (1985).

attention, particularly around its presumed youthful audience and their idiosyncratic pleasures. Much of this work, however, has elided gay interpretations, a surprising finding considering the online activity devoted to the franchise from both straight and gay fans alike. Scholarship around the films has framed youth in a rigid heterosexist model, one that James Twitchell (1985, p. 68) has argued conveys warnings to horror's adolescent audience about 'the transition from individual and isolated sexuality to pairing and reproductive sexuality. It is a concern fraught with inarticulated anxiety and thus ripe for the experience of horror'. In his analysis of the film, Gary Heba borrows Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of 'monoglossic' ('the language of power') and 'heteroglossic' discourses ('a decentring of tradition') to argue that the *Elm Street* franchise is an incoherent narrative, posing an ongoing threat to dominant ideologies represented by bourgeois families and authority figures such as the police. Indeed, this heteroglossic narrative celebrates the return of the repressed (Wood, 1986), in facilitating what Heba argues:

There is always an ideological kinship of "otherness" between youth and the monster which may partially explain the popularity of horror movies among younger audiences – they can identify with the monster because it, too, stands outside and apart from the members of dominant culture. (1995, n.p.)

As the 'Others' to dominant culture (authority figures), youth, understood as a subculture, shares an ideological kinship with the figure of the monster who Heba argues, is a subculture unto himself. Indeed, although Heba comes close on multiple occasions to proffering a queer reading of the ideological kinship between youth and Freddy, he ultimately maintains that 'the youth subculture codes in the first two Nightmare movies initially convey a stereotypical view of white, apparently middle-class teens. They are not distinguished from one another except in terms of gender' (1995, n.p.). Despite suggesting that the *Elm Street* franchise problematizes the codes of dominant culture in its incoherent narrative structure, Heba maintains a heteronormative conception of youth despite the resistive 'rite of passage' that the youth must undergo in order to subvert the codes of the monoglossic dictate. Similarly, despite interrogating the cultural allure of Freddy Krueger to America's youthful demographic, Ian Conrich contends that Freddy's popularity stems from his 'power' and 'personality'. Conrich likens this 'seduction' of the consumer by the object to Jesse Walsh who is the 'weaker identity of the subject [...] lost as it is replaced by the strong identity of Freddy' (1997, p. 125). Although a fitting

metaphor for Freddy's corporeal dominance of young consumers that buy into the extensive merchandise, including Freddy's infamous claw, it ultimately forecloses further consideration of how Freddy serves as a gay/camp icon (inscribed into the 'personality' of Freddy) for said youth, or otherwise represents a transgressive sexuality (the symbolic 'power' of subversion) that manifests itself through Freddy's iconic attire.

Maintaining a concern with youth and the *Elm Street* franchise, Jeffrey Sconce (1993) focuses on the relationship between audiences of horror and cinematic identification. In using audience identification to explain the critical status of the *Elm Street* series and *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (1986), Sconce argues that 'The Nightmare films are distinct in that their "pleasure" operates almost entirely at the level of primary identification. Secondary identifications with characters and a subsequent investment in the narrative simply are not important or even necessary' (p. 114). This is in contradistinction to the latter film which is predicated upon 'originality, character, and realism' over the 'formula, sensationalism and special effects' of the *Elm Street* franchise (p. 118). However, I argue that gay fans of *Elm Street 2* have not merely identified with the character of Jesse (and Freddy), but have used this identification to make sense of their burgeoning gay sexualities. My argument is shaped by work in fan studies from scholars such as Sandvoss (2005), who have focused more intricately on the 'identity' between fans and the fictional text that speaks about their own reality, an extension of the self as reflected through their object of fandom. Therefore, this challenges Sconce's critical valuation of characterisation in the *Elm Street* franchise, as well as his bifurcation of the horror genre into 'trashy' teen horror and 'artistic' realist horror.

Unconventionally for the slasher sub-genre of horror in the 1980s, Jesse is configured as a 'stand in' for the traditional final girl figure, who is, in Carol Clover's words, 'the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and perceives the full extent of the preceding horror and of her own peril' (1992, p. 35). The final girl, a staple of the slasher sub-genre, is often recognised as one of the most defining features of the slasher film, typically featuring her locked in a physical and mental showdown with the film's belligerent killer figure. Slasher precursors to *Elm Street 2* typically reserved this figure for the morally shrewd and judicious character, existing in a pool of male and female victims defined by their social insurgence in pursuit of drugs, alcoholism and

sexual promiscuity (Oliver and Sanders, 2004). With a few exceptions (such as *The Burning* (1981), that depicts the acumen of Alfred (Brian Backer) and Todd (Brian Matthews) in a precarious final encounter with disfigured camp caretaker Cropsy), this figure was predominately reserved for a female character; albeit, much scholarship has focused on her liminal position between the socially inscribed roles of masculinity and femininity (Clover, 1992; Berenstein, 1996; Duda, 2008).

Carol Clover argues for the fluidity of gender and sexuality spectatorship in the slasher film whereby the male spectator shifts in identification and allegiance from the slasher killer to the final girl (facilitated through camera point of view), cheering her on in the final moments. Clover's psychoanalytical account acknowledges the fluidity of spectatorship in the subgenre, as she contends that the characters' gendered identities are constantly negotiated. That is, the 'masculinity' of the killer and the 'femininity' of the final girl are destabilised through a transformational process as the narrative unfolds. Clover's psychoanalytical model allows her to maintain that, for the male spectator, 'the threat function and the victim function coexist in the same unconscious, regardless of anatomical sex' (p. 47). Whilst the coexistence of the threat and victim function may illuminate the fluidity of identification for (straight) male viewers, the ideological ramifications of such are literally played out in *Elm Street 2*. As I argue, Jesse comes to represent both the monster and the victim, as Freddy Krueger attempts to inhabit Jesse's body throughout the film. Whereas the shift in identification from the figure of the slasher killer to the final girl might be a masochistic or 'feminising' experience for the (straight) male spectator, I argue that *Elm Street 2* ultimately refuses to find a home for traditional constructions of gender as they are infused within the character of Jesse whose dual function as monster/victim represents a configuration that resonates with gay fans.

The rare inclusion of a final boy figure then, allows for a more fluid account of the ways in which gay audiences are implicated in the relationship between the threat and victim function, particularly as it destabilises Clover's heterosexist model. The significance of the film for gay fans is hinged upon the notion that Jesse represents a split subjectivity of being victim and monster, where these are not bifurcated into an oscillation between the two. The character of Jesse theretofore comes to represent the contours of their sexual identity: at once victim to the patriarchal society in which they

operate, meanwhile acknowledging the monster within who could erupt at any moment revealing its preternatural sexual identity. In departure from Clover, Klaus Rieser (2001) argues that the slasher film actually upholds cinema's patriarchal signification by equating femaleness with victimhood, consequently reinstating the strict gender roles that others have challenged. Although Rieser's conflation of femaleness with victimhood may have some resonance in the fundamental operations of the slasher film, his argument cannot be easily translated to account for the final boy. In other words, the fundamental roles of victim and killer/monster, I argue, are still in operation in *Elm Street 2*, though traditional borders collapse and roles are renegotiated. Cultural constructions of gender predicated on the masculine/monster feminine/victim binary are thus blurred through the figure of Jesse, explaining the emergence, I argue, of gay readings.

Elm Street: A Real Nightmare for Gay Fans

Despite the fact that protagonist Jesse Walsh is not revealed to be homosexual or non-straight, much of the film's reception engineers Jesse's journey as one marked by his struggles with repressed gay urges, manifested via the links drawn between Jesse's (gay) identity and those tenanted by gay fans of the film. If fans have read Freddy as representing the monstrosity of Jesse's repressed sexuality, many fans have attended to its dolorous resonance with their own lives, wherein they fought to suppress their identities in performing what it means to be a 'normal' (read heterosexual) high school teenager. As on the exterior, Jesse is forced to undergo performances of normativity. For within the narrative, Lisa (Kim Myers), Jesse's high school 'friend' subtly professes her sexual attraction to Jesse. Jesse overlooks these sexual proclamations, creating a perpetual and indeed palpable tension in the film. In his fan blog *Faggotyasshorror.com*, self-identifying gay fan BL7 employs *Elm Street 2* as a case study to forge more intricate parallels between Jesse and his own closeted sexuality during high school. He writes the following:

Jesse continues repressing the homo within as only a teenage gay can. [...] I love this movie a lot. I relate to Jesse, having had a pretty girlfriend in high school that I refused to have sex with, and he has an amazing swatch watch that I still covet. (In defense of Lisa, it's hard to be the thankless girlfriend to a gay boy in high school. They won't touch your vagina and they barely kiss you. They have SO much drama and rarely listen to anything that's going on

with you. (30 September 2009)

Reference is made to the idea that the film presented the potential for a heterosexual coupling between Jesse and Lisa, only to forestall such with Jesse's internal conflicts where possibilities of latently gay urges are brought into focus. However, the fact that this potential heterosexual coupling presents itself as realisable throughout the diegesis allows Jesse the ascendancy over his sexuality (and Lisa), authenticating his character for audiences who, like BL7, had consciously rejected heterosexual female advances. Therefore, one could argue that Jesse's sexual identity is not demarcated from a heteronormative arena, but operates within it, denied a humanly manifestation of its own. BL7's further inference that 'Jesse continues repressing the homo within as only a teenage gay can' configures Jesse's sexuality as repressed within those teenage years, when many homosexual boys are actively coming to terms with their sense of difference, negotiating their sexual trajectory and surveying the ideological ramifications that such a disclosure will have on their social standing. This is particularly the case amongst peers in a school setting, where status, hierarchy and cliques are omnipresent (Milner, Jr. 2004). One commenter to the blog entry candidly writes 'This is the NOES2 review from an actual gay fella that I've always wanted to read'. This commenter suggests that, despite the permeation of gay readings within the broader horror fandom, there is a particular affect embedded into blog entries written by gay fans. I would argue that this is because of the parallels that bloggers recognise between the narrative turmoil of Jesse Walsh and the lived experiences gay fan bloggers (as imagined by straight fans). Further, such comments potentially give greater currency to the interpretative strategies of gay fans from within the broader network of horror blogs.

The way that fans interpret *Elm Street 2* to construct narratives of outsiderdom shares strong parallels with Milly Williamson's (2005b) findings in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fandom. Arguing that 'vampire fans respond to the same conditions by experiencing themselves as outsiders and misfits, which is why the vampire appeals to much' (p. 295), Williamson argues that Spike, as a figure of pathos, shares a heritage with 'a cross-textual, cross-generational sympathetic vampire which transcends him' (p. 299). However, *Elm Street 2*, as a teen slasher film, I argue, is valued precisely because Jesse Walsh as monster/victim resonates with fans within a particular *moment* in their

lives – through memories of their formative high-school years. Therefore, where gay interpretations of the film are evident across fan websites and blogs, it is within gay produced blogs and websites that links are established between the personal struggles of fans and the journey of Jesse Walsh. Although horror fans across diverse markers of sexual identity mobilise gay readings around the film, there exists a certain verisimilitude of the film to gay fans, necessitating personal online spaces to explicate upon their interpretations. In his fan website *Terror from Beyond the Daves* for instance, BL8 writes:

Many horror fans who grew up homosexual look back on NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET: FREDDY'S REVENGE with a sombre understanding. Many of us homosexual viewers had also been uncomfortable with Patton's performance, perhaps because it hit a little *too* close to home. Being bullied by a testosterone charged coach and teased by your fellow classmates was, for some of us, a nightmare not exclusive to Elm Street. (27 June 2011)

Despite understanding BL8's reference to 'performance' as referring to Mark Patton's portrayal of Jesse, the notion of performance is also one whereby Jesse performs 'on stage' (Goffman, 1971) as heterosexual in order to maintain a position within heteronormative acceptance. For the fan, this performativity becomes too homologous to the actual experiences of gay fans as teens, meaning that the film, for some fans, is met with dejected sentiments. Therefore, gay fans are able to tap into a deeper narrative meaning of the film that mirrors their own experiences in simultaneously coming to terms with their sexuality as a gay teen, meanwhile reflecting on the sense of 'gay shame' (Bersani, 2010) they felt. As a result, the film is imbued with cultural meanings that recall memories of the 'many horror fans who grew up homosexual' as *imagined* across blogs (and websites) that foster autobiographical gay expression.

If it has been argued that the final girl exhibits traits of both genders, shifting from a state of femininity to masculinity as the narrative unfolds, Jesse oscillates between both poles in heterosexist terms – hiding his 'feminine' coded desire for men while attempting to sustain his 'masculine' exterior, albeit to comical effect (Clover, 1992). In any sense, the spectatorial positions proffered by Clover are destabilised in *Elm Street 2* through the gendered and sexual fluidity inherent in Jesse's characterisation. Unlike the final girl's toughening in order to rescue herself and her friends, Jesse's internal struggles intensify

as the narrative unfolds, navigating the possibilities he faces, especially the courage to overcome internal and external resistances. And although these struggles are frequently interpreted by the broader horror fandom, the notion of performing as heterosexual and struggling with internal sexual struggles resonates particularly potently within personal gay fan spaces to explicate upon these (sub)cultural parallels.

This is pronounced most clearly in the film through Jesse's father Ken and mother Cheryl. Throughout much of the diegesis, Jesse's parents identify behavioural transformations in their son but cannot fully delineate them, culminating in a series of questions directed to Jesse, to which he perpetually deflects. I concur with arguments that figures of authority are depicted as largely ineffectual in aiding the younger generation in the slasher film, and the *Elm Street* franchise specifically (Heba, 1995; Gill, 2002; DeGraffenreid, 2011). However, I would suggest that they are equally as ineffectual in ascertaining the precise nature of Jesse's internal struggles – the sexual perils repressed in the offspring of the white, suburban, bourgeoisie; understood as a heteronormative denial of same- or at least non-straight sexual desire. Of course, the interrogation levelled at Jesse, coupled with the unintelligibility of his behavioural changes, could be identified by gay fans whose sexual identities may have been speculated by close social circles, usually because of a deviation from a hegemonic masculine ideal. This ideal is epitomised in the film by school-jock Ron Grady, the character that fans read as the object of Jesse's affection.

Where some fan blogs represent distinctive horror spaces produced by gay fans, other blogs are spaces created for an exploration of gay identity. One such blog is *insearchofadam.wordpress.com*, written by horror fan BL9, who, since initiating the blog, has come out as a gay man, using the blog to document his journey. BL9 structures his blog into tabs including: 'About BL9', 'Closeted BL9' and 'BL9's coming out'. He also includes a series of categories along the sidebar including: 'Gay Interest' and 'Horror Movies'. BL9 writes that the formation of the blog was to serve 'as a tool to help me deal with being closeted and being frightened of my sexuality' but also 'a resource for anyone struggling with fear or confusion of their own sexuality'.³⁴ Whilst the blog serves as both

³⁴ Discussing the notion of a collective identity, J. Patrick Williams (2011) stresses the importance of sharing a collective gay identity to allow homosexuals to attach positive meaning to what might otherwise

an expressive tool and therapeutic function in externalising his thoughts and feelings, it serves a therapeutic function for other non-straight persons who are struggling to come to terms with, or navigate their identities. The fact that *Elm Street 2* features as the second horror entry on the titular page suggests an affective link between the formation of a blog space to express his sexual identity, but also how cultural texts such as *Elm Street 2* feed into the broader impetus of the blog on closeted sexuality. That BL9 employs terminology to interpret Lisa as ‘the beard’ and Jesse and Grady’s relationship as one of ‘gay, teenage love and self-discovery’ further reinforces the affective charge between his (former) closeted identity and the language he employs to analyse the film. In conceptualising Jesse as the film’s victim figure, BL9 writes:

So why would the director cast a physically awkward actor with no screen presence for such an important role? Is this director an idiot or was he insightfully trying to relay a message through Jesse as Freddy’s chosen victim? Perhaps a character such as Grady (who is more typical leading man material) would not have been as easily susceptible to Freddy’s influence. Does the blatancy of Jesse and Grady’s differences make a powerful statement about this leading man? (26 October 2014)



Figure 7: A screenshot from *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (1985) depicting Jesse Walsh (Mark Patton) donning the claw of Freddy Krueger.

be seen as merely individual acts or as a ‘pejorative label’. Therefore, coming out represents a shift from a state of individual choice, to one of collective identification and action.

BL9's conceptualisation of Jesse as 'susceptible to Freddy's influence' is manifested most clearly in Jesse's dream about halfway through the film (a screenshot of which is featured in his blog). Gay coded Coach Schneider is murdered in the school shower, next to Jesse, revealing a medium shot of Jesse actually donning the infamous claw of Freddy (Figure 7).³⁵ Jesse, donning Freddy's claw, offers a moment of personal subjectivity whereby his suppressed homosexuality has temporarily surfaced and acted in aberrant and uncontrollable ways. As a result, the fact that Freddy actually kills the gym coach can be seen to represent Jesse's own inherent fear of conforming to such facets of gay life – of disclosing his homosexuality within a milieu reified through the very notions it seeks to repress. This scene culminates in Jesse killing Coach Schneider because of the deep anxiety over what he could become should he act on the homosexual feelings he possesses in his nightmares. This blatantly homoerotic moment in the film is conceptualised through Jesse donning Freddy's glove in what Harry Benshoff (1997, p. 248) reads as Jesse's 'metaphoric homosexual panic attack'. This crystallises an understanding of Jesse as both victim and monster; even a victim of his own inherent monstrosity, which threatens to manifest in unpredictable and ferocious ways unless safely contained. The fact that Jesse is escorted home in the middle of the night by the police following this scene suggests that these homosexual 'revelations' are not delimited to the realm of nightmares (as was the case of Nancy's nightmares in the original), but like the experiences of gay fans, are very much embedded into the ontological reality in which they exist.

Parallel to the way in which BL9's blog is presented as a journey from a closeted sexuality to eventually coming out and reflecting on this transition, so too is Jesse's journey marked in the film through a series of stages where his homosexual identity shifts from clues or speculations in the beginning (such as the sign on his bedroom door reading 'no chicks' as well as the metaphorical significance of discovering Nancy's journal in his bedroom *closet*), to Jesse dreaming himself in a gay sadomasochist nightclub about halfway through the film. Therefore, for many fans interpreting the film (straight and

³⁵ At one point in the film, when Coach Schneider forces Jesse and Grady to do push-ups, Grady remarks that 'The guy gets his rocks off like this. Hangs around queer S&M joints downtown. He likes pretty boys like you' (1985).

non-straight alike), the triangulation of Freddy, Jesse and Coach Schneider represents the climax of Jesse's journey from an initial state of concealment to one of 'coming out'. Of course, that is to say, Jesse unveils his fantasies through the monstrous manifestation of Freddy, figuring himself simultaneously as both monster queer (Benshoff, 1997) and victim of such uncontrollable urge and emotional peril. If, therefore, we are able to view the disturbed monster as 'queer' and the final girl as the helpless victim seeking to liberate herself from his evil peril, Jesse represents an amalgamation of the traditional victim and monster figure. It is this conflation, I contend, which invites gay fans of the film to recognise Jesse's status as something that can speak to them: through which notions of being a victim – of being ostracised, bullied and/or provoked – but also recognising their burgeoning monstrous sexuality strongly resonates in a series of ways.



Figure 8: A screenshot from *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (1985) depicting Jesse Walsh (Mark Patton) with a monstrous elongated tongue.

One scene that is germane to fans' gay reception of the film can be identified towards the end. At a pool party hosted by Lisa, Jesse opens up about his recurring nightmares and his mental capacity to handle them. Subsequently, and as a result of this confiding, Lisa and Jesse share an intimate scene of kissing, which has been anticipated

throughout the film. While positioned on the ground kissing Lisa, Jesse's tongue elongates and comes to resemble that of a monster – as if to suggest that his repressed homosexual interior (Freddy) is surfacing as a result of this heterosexual encounter (Figure 8). Quite clearly here, Jesse's heterosexual quest is disrupted because of the manifestation of the monster within, allowing him to look into the mirror at a distorted image of himself. This can be read as if to suggest the heterosexual-homosexual pairing is literally an unnatural one, permitting Lisa to view Jesse not as a potential heterosexual partner, but as a degenerate, homosexual monster.



Figure 9: A screenshot from *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (1985) depicting Freddy Krueger (Robert England) coming out of Jesse's body.

Having abandoned Lisa following this symbolic encounter, Jesse arrives at Grady's house demanding to sleep there that night whilst scantily clad Grady observes him sleeping. It is in this scene that Jesse professes a line much discussed by fans: 'something is trying to get inside my body' – strongly connoting a male penetrative act (from Freddy). As anticipated, Jesse experiences another nightmare, but this time, Freddy manifests himself through Jesse's stomach and proceeds to kill Grady in his bedroom (Figure 9). Having positioned Jesse's heterosexual quest as futile, the film proceeds to

explore the potential pairing of Jesse and Grady, only to disrupt it with the surfacing of Freddy, through Jesse. If Freddy represents Jesse's latent homosexuality, then Grady's death signifies the inability for Jesse's sexuality to surface in a socially moralistic fashion, delimiting homosexuality to the formidable realm of nightmares, where it is to be contained and played out in non-threatening ways.

To conceptualise Jesse as the film's sole final boy figure is, however, to elide a more nuanced account of the film's narrative, whereby Jesse is actually saved by Lisa at the end of the film. Physically colonised by Freddy Krueger, Lisa repeatedly professes her 'love' to Freddy/Jesse, to which this hegemonic, heterosexual offering literally vanquishes Freddy and rematerialises Jesse through the former's body. Understood in this way, the conventional 'final figure' of the slasher film, the one who 'saves the day', is actually reserved for Lisa, the film's symbolic heteronormative figure (whose teen sexuality is not compromised). Therefore, where some fans have championed the film for its daring tale of a sexually repressed teen in the conservative slasher milieu, others have denounced the final sequences for what they perceive to be its homophobic imperative in re-establishing the power of heterosexuality to overcome the vulnerable homosexual inside. This final sequence culminates the film's commentary of the monster/victim fusion in Jesse, as Jesse's physical colonisation is overcome by the power of heterosexuality (manifested as Lisa) and thus the homosexual monster temporarily defeated. Indeed, this is not too dissimilar from the rhetoric espoused from some Judeo-Christian and conservative political factions that seek to 'cure' the monster inside the homosexual, liberating them from their 'victims' susceptibility for non-heterosexual 'inclinations'.

Web of Nightmares: From Perversion to Paratexts

In a post entitled 'Nightmare on Gay Street' published in his fan blog *Vintage Horror Films*, BL10 writes: 'as a gay man with a partner of 20 years, who also happens to love horror films, I thought I'd add my perspective to the discussion' (4 November 2012). BL10's intervention forms part of the broader dialogue around the film within the networked (gay) horror community in the blogosphere. Having surmised in his post that 'Jesse Walsh is gay but he hasn't quite figured it out yet', BL10 proceeds to 'consider the

facts' around the paratextual material that circulates *Elm Street 2*, material that feeds into vociferous speculation about the film's gay narrative. This includes an interview by Robert Englund (*Attitude magazine*) and Mark Patton (*Dread Central*), and information obtained from the documentary *Never Sleep Again: The Elm Street Legacy* (2010) in an interview with the film's scriptwriter David Chaskin. I contend here that one significance of this blog entry is BL10's symbolic access to the flow of paratextual material that circulates the film. Jonathan Gray defines a paratext as 'both "distinct from" and alike – or [...] part of – the text [...] they create texts, they manage them, and they fill them with many of the meanings that we associate with them' (2010, p. 6). This paratextual knowledge is exercised to corroborate the readings of fans who may have been accused of 'reading too much into it' (Doty, 1993) or accused of mobilising 'subversive' interpretations of the film.

The past few years has witnessed a resurgence of activity around the *Nightmare on Elm Street* franchise. There has been a remake of Wes Craven's initial film (Samuel Bayer, 2010), a commercial release of documentary films (*Never Sleep Again: The Elm Street Legacy* (Daniel Farrands and Andrew Kasch, 2010; *I Am Nancy* (Arlene Marechal, 2010)), re-screenings of *Elm Street 2* at film festivals ('Homo Horror: Seattle Lesbian & Gay Film Festival'; 'Frameline37' in San Francisco), public appearances of Robert Englund, Mark Patton and other cast members at international fan conventions and interviews with the cast and crew published across gay and horror sites (*Out*, *Advocate*, *Dread Central*, *Fangoria*). Where these cultural artefacts serve as texts in their own right, they have ultimately preserved and indeed reanimated the legacy of *Elm Street 2*, as meanings of the film are negotiated and re-written within and around the paratextual culture circulating the *Elm Street* fandom. The cast and crew have recognised the interpretive practices of fans and have addressed these in the paratexts. This is illustrated most potently in the documentary film *Never Sleep Again: The Elm Street Legacy* (2010).

For many fans, the four hour documentary is significant in that the cast and crew acknowledge fans' speculations around the sexual identity of Jesse Walsh – widely referred to as horror's first male 'scream queen'. In the coverage of *Elm Street 2*, responses to fans' creative interpretations around Jesse's character constituted a bulk of the discussion. This is coloured less by a denial of how the film could be interpreted as

such, but rather, a refusal to anchor the locus of gayness in the film framed around who was 'responsible' for the gay subtext. In intercutting between the director, writer, cast and head of New Line Cinema Robert Shaye, director Jack Sholder claims: 'I simply did not have the self-awareness to realise that any of this might be interpreted as gay' (2010). Sholder maintains throughout that the interpretation of Jesse by fans, while legitimate, was completely unpremeditated: 'All I can say is that we were all incredibly naïve, or, all incredibly latently gay. I'm not sure which' (2010). However, despite proclaiming his impunity from the film's now pervasive and manifestly 'dominant' reading, writer David Chaskin and Mark Patton (Jesse) have been credited by many fans as bringing the film out of horror's closet.

Intervening in the debates, David Chaskin has the following to say: 'You know, we have always pussy footed around this. Look, I, I, it was supposed to be subtext, alright, it really was [...] I started thinking about guys being like unsure of their sexuality, and I thought oh, that's pretty scary' (2010). Further, Mark Patton interjects: 'David Chaskin, without a doubt, knew what he was writing [...] and I think that's what I was doing in *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, is, erm, I was revealing who *I* really was and I think that came clearly through the screen' (2010). What Chaskin may have intended to be coded as subtext has since become a widely accepted interpretation within and beyond the gay horror faction. Further, the specificity of fans' reading strategies such as the coding of Freddy as Jesse's latently gay sexuality is broadly symmetrical with what Chaskin reports in the documentary: 'Freddy appeals to that gay part that's like the questions'. As a result, whilst the film's writer legitimates fans' reading strategies in interpreting Jesse as the manifest monster/victim, the documentary ultimately denies the locus of gay sexuality amid the competing claims and discourses of 'authorial intent'. Thus, it could be argued that where in a televisual 'cult' text such as *Buffy*, the cast and producers have likened their own feelings of outsiderdom to the text itself (Williamson, 2005b), it would appear that discourses around *Elm Street 2* maintain degrees of denial around the meaning of the source text, as further traces of evidence and support for fans' readings are sought.

If the film's subtext has been unequivocally transparent for fans as manifested through the character of Jesse Walsh, I contend that this has much to do with the public profile and star image of Mark Patton. Since the release of the film, Patton has publicly

come out as gay, disclosed his status as HIV positive and voiced his experiences of identifying as a gay actor in Hollywood in the sexually conservative climate of the 1980s. Even though such an admission has served to authenticate the transference of Patton's real life sexuality into his on-screen portrayal of the final boy Jesse, it has, more significantly, solidified the already fertile parallels between Jesse and Patton's personal life. That is, Patton's personal struggles and sexual identity has come to closely mirror that of the character he once portrayed on-screen. Much like the online blogs produced by fans, Patton has created his own blog where fans can access material pertaining to his private life and personal struggles. In an entry titled 'Deep in the Night-Artistic Anorexia', Patton writes:

I want to be at the real table again. I want back what I lost so many years ago..when I let a bunch of fools move me off my dream, my life. So I am starving and malnourished while creating and making so many people happy but I am tired, tired of avoiding what seems to me inevitable. So here I am starting once again and I believe this time..I will win. (Date unavailable)

Much like the character he portrayed, Patton struggled to navigate his sexual identity as a gay actor, negotiating his options of staying in the closet to further his career, or publicly exposing his sexuality. This threatened his professional capacity in Hollywood in the 1980s. Surrounded by a dearth of friends and colleagues who became victim to the AIDS epidemic in the mid-1980s, Patton has since opened up about his personal and professional conflicts that have blurred the boundaries between himself and Jesse Walsh. That is, Patton's life has come to be seen as both a mirroring and an extension of Jesse's, the character he once played. Like Jesse's nightmares, Patton's star image has blurred the symbolic distinctions between fiction and reality in discourses surrounding the film, as the boundaries around Jesse and Mark become strikingly nebulous within the fan and reception contexts circulating within the online sphere. This is congruent with what Andrea Weiss (1992, p. 33) has argued about lesbian audiences and stardom: 'what the public knew, or what the gay subculture knew, about these stars' 'real lives' cannot be separated from their star images'. Agency and control over Mark Patton's star image has thus shifted from the realm of production to one of reception (DeAngelis, 2001).

In an interview with Mark Patton in *The Advocate* (Peeples, 2013) entitled 'A Nightmare in Hollywood Couldn't Kill Mark Patton', Jase Peeples writes: 'Patton went

along with the real-life charade he was forced to play in his new Hollywood life, and in 1985 he landed his now-iconic role in *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2*. But he was playing one nightmare on film while living another behind the scenes'. The paradox here is that, by Hollywood regulating Patton's star image in being marketed as ostensibly 'straight', this hegemonic repression chimed with fans, many of whom would have struggled to liberate their own self-expression, particularly within the conservative climate of the 1980s under the Reagan administration. In this way, Hollywood, and the film's production team specifically, are implicated in the construction of Jesse's manifest homosexuality as an offshoot of its regulatory heteronormative practices. However, and in spite of the fact that Patton may have initially been framed as a victim to Hollywood's oppression, he has since 'embarked on the best chapter of his life' that embroils him, like Jesse, as a survivor, as a person to defeat the odds and tell their story to a generation of horror fans. As one commenter succinctly writes: 'I love stories with a happy ending, the hero standing tall'.³⁶

Discourses around Patton's off-screen stardom and private affairs that permeate both gay and horror spaces promise to stabilise the interrelations between Patton and Jesse, as Patton's star image represents an embodiment of the character fans have long appropriated. For Michael DeAngelis (2001, pp. 4-5), the greater network of star texts functions as a fantasy scenario, 'that permits spectators and fans to access the star persona emotionally and sexually'. However, DeAngelis suggests that this fantasy relation is ultimately predicated upon the maintenance of certain ambiguities in the star's image such as James Dean's youthful rebellion or Keanu Reeves' pansexuality. However, for Mark Patton I would argue, it is precisely a strategic resolve in what ambiguities are present around his star image that is necessary for fans to firmly anchor their emotional relations to Jesse, but also in using Patton's private struggles to legitimise and indeed justify their reading strategies in interpreting Jesse as a closeted gay teen.

Patton's star image is thus framed within the tensions between the public and the private. However, as the *Advocate* article suggests, the former is positioned as fabricated

³⁶ Fans are keen to point out that Jesse is the only central male character in the *Elm Street* franchise to have survived (although there is a reference in the third film to a boy 'cutting off his eyelids to stay awake' which some fans have suggested refers to Jesse). Thus, the parallels between Jesse and Patton are further solidified through discourses of survival that resonates with gay fans that grew up in the 1980s.

and unnatural, whereas the latter yields possibilities to authenticate Jesse's sexuality in light of the discourses around Patton's personal life. In extending the public/private tension, Mark Patton authored a series of diary entries collated into a published journal entitled 'Jesse's Lost Journal' (Part 1). The journals represent a paratextual illumination and *extension* of Jesse's internalised struggles, as perceived by Mark Patton himself. The 68-entry journal collection is written from the perspective of Jesse Walsh who exists extraneously to the fictional realm of *Elm Street*. Two entries read:

Entry 25 (1982)

I hear people talking, I hear the things they are saying... it hurts, badly but I know who I am so fuck them. If only they knew, nobody knows... except you my journal friends (I guess I am dead or in Prison if you are reading this) How horrible life is... (Date unavailable)

Entry 47 (1985)

My worst dreams have come true. I just saw A Nightmare on Elm Street Part 2: Freddy's Revenge and I am completely wrecked. I know they found my first journal because so much of it is there on the screen, everything about me. Watching Mark Patton was like looking at myself, I feel like we are the same person. (Date unavailable)

Jesse commences his entries through allusion to the speculation that surrounds him (entry 25), which ostensibly concerns his sexual struggle, much in the way fans have come to interpret and understand the character of Jesse. The juncture occurs when Jesse, having come out as openly gay and partnered with Vogue photographer Colin in New York, watches *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and its sequel, where he comes to recognise a projection of his own life mirrored in the horrors of Freddy Krueger inhabiting his body (entry 47). Like Patton's current profession as an artist in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, Jesse too is figured as a painter and artist, expressing himself through art, and developing a connection with Mark Patton who he recognises as a facsimile – a part of himself. The journal not only transposes Jesse onto Patton's self – fusing their identities, but I would argue that Jesse is framed as a stand-in for gay fans, as imagined by Patton, who have faced their own internal struggles, to see this projected on-screen. In this way, Patton writes from a cultural perspective that acknowledges the interpretations that gay fans have exercised around *Elm Street 2*.

Mark Patton has mobilised multiple online communities of fans on the social

media site *Facebook*, including one dedicated to his journal: 'Jesse's Lost Journal' (621 likes) where Patton solicits feedback from members. Patton has an additional three groups on the social media site: 'Mark Patton, the Real Me' (617 likes), 'Mark Patton' (1,759 likes) and 'Mark Patton Actor' (2,058 likes) which represent a blurring of Jesse and Mark Patton as they discursively coalesce. Across all of Patton's groups/pages, fans are exposed to varying forms of knowledge about the production of *Elm Street 2*, Patton's symbolic conflicts with David Chaskin over the legitimacy of the gay subtexts, his personal life off-screen, future projects, Patton's charitable work with youth suicide prevention projects ('The Trevor Project') and international appearances at fan conventions. Though dispersed, I contend that the groups/pages are interconnected within a discourse of authenticity, whereby fans are lured and sustained by a promise of discovering the 'true' story behind *Elm Street 2*, giving a voice to Jesse's struggles as they come to be intertwined with the life of Mark Patton.

The enduring promise of access to the 'truth' of *Elm Street 2* encourages fans to join *Facebook* pages/groups to forge a dialogue with Patton (who initiated the pages), rather than a means to communicate with other fans (in as much as *Facebook* fosters such).³⁷ Writing about fans' relationships with celebrities online, Charles Soukup argues:

Web surfers choose to construct virtual communities around the "identities" of celebrities. Essentially, people are "identifying" with the public "identities" of celebrities [...] the celebrity's personal and "private" choices in her/his family life, professional life, and political life are integrated into people's everyday experiences in profound ways. (2006, p. 333)

Patton seeks to erode any imaginary barriers between himself and his fans, as his authenticity, I would argue, is hinged upon his likeness to those fans and their shared commitment in exposing the 'truth' about *Elm Street 2*. The group 'Mark Patton: The Real Me' was created precisely to allow a platform to expose his 'real self', a page where he attempts to demarcate his personal life and public image to friends and fans.³⁸

³⁷ Researching Kevin Smith's online fandom, Tom Phillips (2013) similarly argues that Smith's ownership of the 'Boardies' grants him a hierarchical status over other fans, becoming the focal point of attention.

³⁸ During the early stages of data collection, the *Facebook* group 'Mark Patton: The Real' me was a 'public' group. This means that anyone could access content without joining the group. However, the current status of the group is now 'closed', meaning that one has to join in order to access content and communicate with Patton himself. For this reason, and maintaining the integrity of my ethical position, I deemed it unethical to present the research data that I had collected from this group.

However, it is exactly this attempt to differentiate the two, in the fragmentation of these spaces, which reinforces the struggles between the public and the private – between Mark and Jesse. It could be construed that there is a hierarchy of access to Patton’s ‘real’ self at stake, with fans traversing the multiple spaces to piece fragments of significant information and using these to build a fuller picture about their inferences of *Elm Street 2*. That is, a presence on these social media spaces exposes one to additional information about the film; information that can be brought to their personal blogs to bolster their readings and indeed fan capital.

However, the promise of the authentic ‘truth’ around the film is predicated upon fans sustaining the stardom of Mark Patton who relies on them as an anchor of support (through, for instance, convention attendance); but also as collective financial backers, or crowdfunders, for future productions. For instance, Patton used his social media fan base to help fund an *Indiegogo* crowdfunding campaign to support his planned documentary *There is No Jesse with Mark Patton* (in production) – promoted within a discourse of promising to reveal the ‘truth’ about *Elm Street 2*. As Paul Booth (2015, p. 155) suggests, although the “‘power’ of creation may still lie within the media producer’, donating to the documentary carries an affective promise of legitimising the readings of fans, allowing them to render intelligible their own connections with the film denied through other paratexts. In this way, the mainstream produced and financed documentary *Never Sleep Again* is discursively reframed to have initiated a broader dialogue around the ‘truth’ of *Elm Street 2*, which is reignited with each paratext produced around the source material, remaining open to a constant state of revision within a discourse of authenticity.

As I have argued, Mark Patton embodies a unique amalgam of the monster/victim (final boy); he is widely credited as being the ‘true star’ of *Elm Street 2*, a position usually reserved for the slasher killer (Freddy Krueger), the central defining figure of the slasher subgenre. Since 2012, Patton’s attendance at conventions has witnessed a crossover between gay (*FlameCon*) and horror (*Texas Frightmare*, *Monster Mania*) conventions and events. I contend that, for gay fans, Patton’s stardom has come to signify a bridging between a smaller gay faction of fans and a more diversified horror fandom. This is bolstered by Patton’s signature attire at conventions – the donning of Freddy’s iconic glove from the shower scene where Jesse/Freddy kills Coach Schneider. Patton’s

stardom and public image continues to embody what is traditionally seen as the monster/killer of the horror film which, I would argue, legitimises his status at horror conventions alongside the more recognisable celebrity name of Robert Englund (who played Freddy Krueger). Of course, as fans across the horror demographic continue to make meanings from the film, Patton has been vocal about outing the gay subtexts of the film, something that some horror fans are reticent to admit. Though, as many horror fans are themselves frequently positioned as outsiders (outside of, and indeed within horror fandom – see Chapter 4), there is little doubt that Jesse Walsh and Mark Patton embody a symbolic manifestation of difference that resonates across the horror fandom, potentially uniting fans. Perhaps this helps to explain why *Elm Street 2* is so often referred to as the ‘gayest horror film’ ever produced.

Conclusion

This chapter has put forward an argument that the cultural status of *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy’s Revenge*, as the ‘gayest horror film’, must be considered at the intersection between the textual features of the film and the reception contexts of fans. In focusing specifically on gay male sexuality as subsumed within discourses of repressed and closeted sexuality, many gay fans of the film have discursively appropriated and re-coded specific moments and characters that reproduce a sense of their own personal lived realities, located through the film’s male lead Jesse and his relationship to the monstrous Freddy Krueger. In this way, some fans have interpreted Freddy in light of Harry Benshoff’s figure of the monster queer and Jesse as the film’s male victim. As I have argued, although the victim and killer/monster figure are still at play in *Elm Street 2*, they are infused in the figure of the final boy, where borders collapse and gender and sexuality become sites of contestation. For gay fans, the final boy affectively reflects their lived experiences of being both the victim and monster within a heterosexist society. To this end, I argued that this infusion destabilises Carol Clover’s (1992) theories around (male) spectatorship, to account for the ways in which gay and other non-normative audiences are implicated through the figure of the final boy.

This chapter has illustrated the significance of online blogs for gay horror fans. As was suggested, blogs afford both an expressive outlet for fans to write about their

idiosyncratic connections to horror and the position of certain films in the construction of their identity. Meanwhile, the text of the blog allows other fans to comment and share their own feelings, to acknowledge one another, whilst maintaining their own space for self-expression. Often, these comments resonate with the main text of the blog, as fans deploy metaphors and characters from horror to make sense out of their cultural identities, and likewise, their gay identities are embedded into the fabric of these spaces to offer more 'authentic' reading strategies around films such as *Elm Street 2*. In referring to a network of blogs as a micro-community, whilst acknowledging their difference from forums and other channels of communication, some gay fans use blogs to demarcate themselves from the larger horror fandom, acknowledging their displacement from these imaginary communities, whilst generating their own knowledge about particular films, and their particular investments in the monsters and victims of horror.

As the final section proceeded to argue, there is symbolic contestation within and indeed between the paratexts around *Elm Street 2*, which to some fans, threatens to 'out' the film. Amidst the competing discourses around the film, Mark Patton's personal life – his experiences of working in a homophobic Hollywood and HIV diagnosis, has mirrored the struggles of the vulnerable teen character he once portrayed in the eighties. I argued that Patton has used fans' interpretations around the film to frame his burgeoning celebrity status within a discourse of authenticity. That is, in his interactions with fans, Patton promises to reveal the ultimate 'truth' about Jesse through the creation of social media pages and future productions, generating further meanings around the source text. Patton's stardom thus represents a promise of legitimising what many fans have for years been speculating. While I have presented evidence to suggest that *Elm Street 2* is particularly significant for gay fans in the context of their youth, Chapter 3 proceeds to study narratives of growing up gay with horror. Despite the affected memories evoked through texts such as *Elm Street 2*, I proceed to argue that they are significant precisely for giving meaning to fans about their identities, and furthermore, serving as a therapeutic function from the harsh realities of growing up. In furthering my concern with the formation of micro-communities, Chapter 3 argues that the establishment of a tribe of gay horror fans can also serve a therapeutic function in rendering meaningful their connections to horror, through fostering emotions felt intersubjectively.

Chapter Three

‘I think they saved my life, actually’: Micro-Community, Fan Memories and Growing up Gay with Horror

The horror of growing up gay is the horror of having a secret that you don't understand, and that you're afraid to tell anyone for fear that they won't love or respect you anymore. The questions that I'd like you to keep asking yourselves as you look at the words, and at the films we're about to see, are 'If I was gay, how would I feel, and, who would I tell how I feel?'

(McNaught, 2005, p. 302).

Introduction

For some, growing up gay is an emotionally difficult and isolating time in one's life. For younger gay people, identifying one's sexual nonconformity catalyses feelings of confusion, self-hatred, fear and even suicide, hence the central impetus for the recent development of the *It Gets Better Project*, which has offered help and advice to young gay persons. Often confused, precluded from seeking information or guidance, young gay people turn to popular culture for a multitude of reasons: from liberation and escape, to seeking help and information about their non-normative identity, to using pop culture as a talking point with peers at school in a desperate attempt to assimilate. Richard Dyer (1984, p. 1) encapsulates such experiences when he notes that: 'because, as gays, we grew up isolated not only from our heterosexual peers but also from each other, we turned to the mass media for information and ideas about ourselves'.³⁹ Whilst Dyer is referring to a particular historical moment, uses of the media are also generationally specific. In their empirical study on gay and lesbian audiences of mass culture, Alexander Dhoest and Nele Simons (2012, p. 269) find significantly different uses of the media for participants during their process of coming out: 'the group over 30 watched significantly more television programs containing LGB characters [...] than the younger group, the latter turning more to the Internet for information, social contacts and partners'.

³⁹ Academic scholarship, particularly in film and media, is lacking in documenting homosexuality and childhood. Perhaps this is because such considerations are often viewed as an extremely sensitive, even a taboo area of research. As Rita Reed (1997) argues, there is a reluctance to admit the existence of such young gay people against conventional wisdom, which holds that same-sex attractions are a staple of an adolescent phase and thus conceptually forbidden when theorising childhood.

Whilst the age related differences in Dhoest and Simon's study are revealing, they do not provide clues as to whether older viewers (or fans) who, instead of consuming LGBT friendly media, consumed genres such as horror when coming to terms with their sexuality. Moreover, whilst access to the Internet may have been unattainable for gay fans when consuming the genre at an early age, I argue in this chapter that micro-communities such as the 'Gay Guys into Horror' tribe are used to discuss their memories of consuming horror, and coming to terms with their gay identity. For Matt Hills (2005), whilst micro-narratives of young people consuming horror are pervasive in fan accounts, these tend to demarcate the 'obsession/fascination' of the child-self from the rational subjectivity of the adult fan. Importantly, for Hills, 'such discourses cannot logically or readily account for why horror so affected or inspired the proto-fan in the first place' (p. 78). Missing then, is a more ideologically balanced and nuanced sense of the extent to which fans' memories of consuming horror provided them 'information' and 'ideas' about themselves, and further, the extent to which their former consumptions of horror shapes their (fan) identity and current practices. For the adult-self then, one's memories are frequently marked by the unintelligibility of their 'obsession' with the genre through the child self. As Charles E. Weigl recalls in writing about his own memories of being a horror fan (in the third person):

Truth be told, it has always been more of an obsession than a fascination. When he was a boy, from the moment he was able to read the television listings in the newspaper, he spent almost every Saturday afternoon glued to the set for that afternoon's line-up of old horror films... (2002, p. 707)

For Weigl, horror is recalled through a discourse of 'obsession' – evoking the ongoing, emotionally involved and irrational former self, lured by the offerings of older horror films. Notable in this account, and accounts by horror fans such as Mark Kermode (1997), is an inability (perhaps refusal) to theorise their initial draw to the genre, or the specific pleasures afforded to them other than the 'obsessive' nature of their 'overinvestments' in horror. As Kermode notes in his account of being a teenage fan: 'I also sensed from the very beginning that there was something incomprehensibly significant about the actions being played out on-screen, something which spoke to me in *a language I didn't quite understand*' (p. 57) (my emphasis). Whilst both Weigl and Kermode articulate the significance of horror in their memories of their past/child self,

the affective dimension of horror superseded a rational understanding of not only what it was *about* horror that sustained their ongoing interest, but about their *selves* that gravitated towards horror. As Kermode goes on to write: ‘I felt from the outset that beyond the gothic trappings *these movies had something to say to me about my life*. I just didn’t have any idea what’ (p. 58) (my emphasis).

Missing then, is an account of how fans themselves, at a later point in their lives, attempt to provide a language to these former affective sensibilities underpinning micro-narratives of their early forays into horror. As Dyer (1984) suggests, this is especially important for sexual minority fans who, in a series of ways, have been denied any information about their identity from other more child-friendly media. Seeking to fill this gap, this chapter focuses on how horror fans that self-identify as gay critically deconstruct their early predilections for horror – especially absent from Kermode’s account. This chapter furthers debates about the cultural function of early horror viewing as recalled in fan accounts, specifically focusing on the role of horror in the lived experiences of young gay fans – and the language through which emotional connections to horror are recalled through their autobiographical micro-narratives.⁴⁰

Important to this chapter is what I refer to as the therapeutic function of horror, as it aided young gay horror fans in coming to terms with their identity. Furthermore, I am also attentive to how discourses around consuming horror intersected with discourses about their non-normative identities, as shaped within the social climate in which they grew up. It is these accounts, as articulated through their memory narratives, that fans can achieve degrees of emotional capital in the tribe. Distinct from fan and social capital, emotional capital refers to the potential of a fan post to resonate, on a deeper emotional level, with the posts of other fans. Indeed, whilst much scholarship has been attentive to subcultural forms of knowledge that circulates horror fandoms, this chapter suggests that emotional bonds are also established between fans in smaller micro-communities. This capital gives recognition to particular postings that render intelligible the links between investments in horror and the sexual identities of fans as understood intersubjectively.

⁴⁰ It is not my intention to demarcate the ages of that which should constitute ‘childhood’ or even the more eclectic marker of ‘youth’. Rather, the concern here is with processes of growing up. Indeed, this is a rather murkier terrain that fluctuates for the individual and their cultural perceptions and definitions.

Lamenting what he views as the myopic and monolithically explained approaches to the pleasures of horror, Andrew Tudor (1997, p. 455) suggests that it is necessary to 'describe what is appealing and explain, by reference to extra-textual factors, to whom and why it appeals'. Indeed, this chapter seeks to address Tudor's call for analysis on the specific social contexts in which the appeals and uses of horror are theorised beyond textually determinist approaches that have positioned horror's audiences in particular ways. For Tudor, this represents a progression beyond psychoanalytical theories around the supposed appeal of horror as well as the particular idiosyncrasies of its homogenised audience. By focusing on a specific cultural and generational group, this chapter avoids the precarious tendencies of previous work to perpetuate the pathological or repressed nature of horror's consumers, such as the work of Gixti (1989), who Tudor (1997, p. 445) challenges for claiming that horror appeals to their deep-seated, repressed desires, releasing the 'bestiality concealed within' them. Nor does it subscribe to blanket conceptions of pubescent youth as evidenced in the work of James Twitchell (1985) who argues that horror is a complex tale warning adolescent viewers of the rite of passage from onanism to reproductive sexuality. The universality and indeed reductive nature of these accounts, I argue, lies in their unwavering tendency to universalise the psychological and cognitive processes of the horror consumer. Moreover, such accounts proffer myopic explanations as to the role of horror in how audiences make sense of their identities, and articulate these to other fans.


This chapter focuses on the autobiographical memories of how self-reported gay fans recall their memories of consuming and watching horror growing up. A unique focus on the memories of horror fans is a particularly useful approach, 'given that autobiographical memories are, by nature, highly personal and affective, autobiographical memory would seem to be a fruitful avenue for studying the highly affective experiences of viewing frightening films' (Hoekstra, Harris and Helmick, 1999, p. 119). Although Hoekstra and colleagues warn of issues pertaining to the veracity of cultural memory, I argue that it has the benefit of accounting for the long-term and indeed shifting affective responses to horror, as well as illuminating the significance of growing up narratives in light of fans' present consumptions of horror and their broader fan practices.

The first part of this chapter focuses on the cultural significance of horror for fans who grew up with the genre.⁴¹ I pay close attention to the construction of language through which fans articulate their emotional investments in horror, framing this through a discourse that is akin to a therapeutic function. I contend that horror aided some fans in relieving what was for them, the emotional difficulties of growing up gay within the oppressive climates they recall. Section 2 of the chapter proceeds to focus on how some fans position horror as constitutive in the process of coming to terms with their sexual identity, giving them a language through which to recognise and render intelligible their sexual nonconformity. Moreover, it also looks at the function of horror as a life marker for fans' shifting emotional states – allowing them to negotiate their feelings and life experiences through their memories of consuming horror. Finally, Section 3 of this chapter focuses on the boundaries of this micro-community, the contours of which are shaped through fans' interpretive practices and emotional connections with one another. As I suggest in the final section, underpinning this community is a cultural generation of fans who grew up with particular forms of horror in the context of the 1980s. This, I argue, fosters additional bonds within the space of the 'Growing up gay, with Horror' thread, whilst strengthening the boundaries of what I argue is a gay interpretive micro-community of horror fans.

⁴¹ Despite the nature of the tribe name 'Gay Guys into Horror Films', it would be precarious to assume that all fans who partake in online conversation self-identify as 'gay'. Where possible, I have sought to include fans that self-report their sexual identities, but this information is not always readily available. As a result, I treat those fans with caution in relation to the arguments presented.

[your profile](#)
[add modules](#)
[edit style](#)

Adam



online
[4 friends](#)
[10 photos in album](#)

joined on 03/08/14
 last updated 08/23/15

[edit bio](#)
[manage photos](#)
[invite friends](#)
[tribecast](#)

▼ My Bio edit

here for [To socialise with other film fans, to talk about horror films, to make new connections.](#)

gender **Male**

age **26**

location [United Kingdom](#)

interests [Horror films](#), [writing](#), [travelling](#), [socialising](#) [exercising](#), [swimming](#), [squash](#)

hometown [Waltham Abbey, United Kingdom](#)

schools [University of East Anglia](#)

about me
Hello, I'm Adam. I'm a PhD researcher in Film at the University of East Anglia, researching gay fans of horror online. I enjoy watching horror films, reading, writing, socialising with friends and travelling. Feel free to talk to me about my interests or research.

[view more](#)

Figure 10: My member profile on *Tribe.net* (last updated: 23 August 2015).

This chapter undertakes a study of a particular social online group: ‘Gay Guys into Horror Films’ which is a tribe on the website *Tribe.net*. Having initially observed the site for a period of 8 months, I registered on 8 March 2014 and created a profile – including biographic information such as my ‘interests’ and a little ‘about me’ (this is visible to all members) (Figure 10). My biographical information articulates my interest in film, particularly horror, but it also discloses my status as an academic researcher, with the impulsion that this could have invited discussion either openly on the tribe, or through personal messaging in the form of a short interview. Whilst this was not the case, I did converse with a particular fan about sexuality and horror, as they explained that they are a student in Film who studies horror academically. Upon registering to the site, I initially joined two tribes, ‘Gay Film Club’ and ‘Gay Guys into Horror Films’ – both areas of academic enquiry, but also personal interests. I posted in both tribes, but did not receive a substantial number of replies on either. Having initially posted in the ‘Growing up Gay, with Horror’ thread in the latter tribe, I initiated my own thread entitled ‘Growing up Gay, with Horror ... Part 2’ where I partook in conversation with one fan until their final post

on 1 June 2014.⁴² Since then, I have engaged in conversation with another fan, although the thread, and the tribe broadly, have remained relatively inactive since the time of my immersion and data collection. Consequently, this chapter analyses fans' communication prior to my registration and initial post on the tribe.

The Space of Tribe.net

Founded in 2003, *Tribe.net* hosts an online community of members who can subscribe to specific topical forums, referred to as 'tribes'. At the time of writing, there are 96,344 tribes featured on the site, subsumed within different interest categories including: 'Entertainment & Arts', 'Schools & Education', 'Government & Politics', and 'Hobbies and Crafts' available to online users globally (Figure 11). Users are able to select a broad interest category, such as those aforementioned, and then a more specific tribal group that pertains to their specific area of interest. Users can thus cultivate friendship networks across different interests and facets of the site (listed on one's profile page). Indeed, users of the site may create their own tribes (subsequently becoming a moderator of such) or initiate topics of conversation within tribes, referred to as 'threads'. These are designed to generate communication around specific topics within a tribe. Typically, users initiate dialogue by 'posting', to which users within a tribe may 'reply'. Conversations occur in asynchronous time with posts displayed in chronological order. 'Gay Guys into Horror Films' is a subgroup featured within the wider category of 'Arts & Entertainment'. There are currently 336 threads of dialogue within the tribe, ranging from discussions of horror films, to directors, cast and crew and gay readings of particular texts.

⁴² Having initially posted in 'Growing up Gay, with Horror' thread after registering to the site, it appeared that the thread had reached the 'maximum thread depth'. Consequently, I initiated a follow-up thread entitled 'Growing up Gay, with Horror ... Part 2' with the intention of furthering a dialogue with fans.

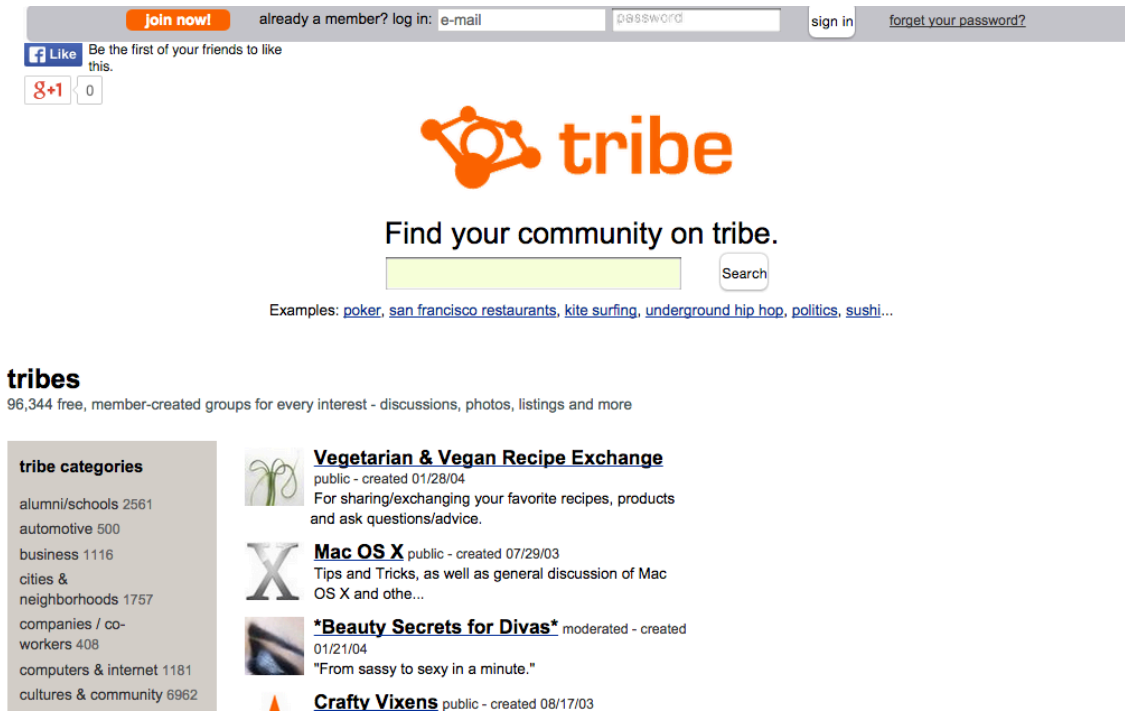


Figure 11: The *Tribe.net* homepage (2003).

At the time of writing, ‘Gay Guys into Horror Films’ has 588 ‘active’ members. The tribe commenced on 12 August 2004, but communication has since curtailed. ‘The Growing up Gay, with Horror thread’, constituting the bulk of analysis herein, was initiated on 10 March 2005 and, combined with the ‘...Part 2’ thread I initiated, features a total of 106 replies of varying posting lengths – from 27 registered contributors. This excludes multiple anonymous users whose username and biographic information are hidden.⁴³ Significantly, this thread of conversation is the most contributed to within the tribe by a substantial margin. As one may expect, members’ participation within the tribe (and thread more broadly) fluctuates from posting once and dematerialising, to frequenting the site on a regular basis and immersing in various threads, or simply patronising a single thread of interest. Users’ posts are accompanied with their name alongside a digital photo. Each tribe is structured with tabs at the top of the page which read as: ‘all posts’, ‘topics’, ‘photos’, ‘listings’, ‘events’, ‘reviews’ and ‘requests’ to

⁴³ Although users must register to *Tribe.net* as a prerequisite to posting, some users do not create a member profile and thus their information (including username and digital photos) is absent from their posts. In light of this, it is difficult to ascertain the number of anonymous fans who have posted on the tribe, or indeed, whether the same fan writes multiple posts. Cognisant of this, I treat anonymous fans in the tribe with extra caution when presenting their fan quotes in this chapter.

which members may utilise as a way to actively engage with the tribe by uploading and sharing digital photos or by creating a tribal event.



Figure 12: The homepage for the ‘Gay Guys into Horror Films’ tribe (2004).

The ‘Gay Guys into Horror Films’ homepage features its main descriptor which reads as follows: ‘There are Tribes for Horror Fans, and There are Tribes for Gay Guys, but those two hardly ever cross over. That's my friend [TR1's] biggest complaint, so this tribe is for him’ (Figure 12). The tribe therefore calls for an active convergence between a gay fan demographic and the horror genre, appropriating a smaller space within a broader and heterogeneous online community as a way to collectivise their interests and foreground particular versions of their personal identity in the tribe (Bell, 2001). Moreover, one gets a sense that this crossover between the two seemingly disparate topics is absent (or perhaps excluded) from other tribes, highlighting the need for a designated space where this underexplored intersectionality can crystallise. Indeed, this intersection between what is initially positioned as two seemingly disparate groups has attracted a significant member pool, more so than related groups such as the ‘Gay Film Club’ and the ‘Gay Metalheads’ which at the time of writing, have 404 and 330 registered members respectively.

Memories of Growing up Gay with Horror

In the book *From Boys to Men: Gay Men write about Growing Up*, D. Travers Scott (2006) observes the significance of the ‘Growing up Gay, with Horror’ thread within the tribe; framed within an autobiographical account of his own experiences growing up gay as a horror aficionado. Scott commences his account in a fashion similar to that of Weigl and Kermode, by attempting to make intelligible his initial obsession with horror as a young boy growing up. He writes:

I was clueless that there was anything wrong with blood and guts. I never thought anything might be odd about decorating my bedroom in twentieth-century guignol: rubber hands, fingers, and toes; real cows-teeth and Trav-teeth, unhidden copies of Fangoria and Famous Monsters, newspaper clips of Friday the 13th, Maniac and Bloodsucking Freaks. (2006, p. 243)

Scott articulates his early horror fandom through the excessiveness of his displays of memorabilia and human remains in his bedroom. Further, as he came to realise his difference from the normative expectations of child/youth consumption, Scott bonded with his school friend Steve over their ‘fractured identities’ – cultivating a friendship based on their shared propensity for horror. However, in having visited the ‘Gay Guys into Horror Films’ tribe, Scott became conscious of, and intrigued by, the meanings behind his early proclivities for horror, becoming self-reflective about his former consumptions of the genre. Now in his thirties, Scott theorises the cultural significance of horror for gay fans, concluding that its ‘queer appeal’ ultimately concerns the ‘rebellion of the body, whether through sickness, invasion, or science out of control’ – linking such to his own perverse corporal experiences growing up, but also the degenerative nature of the body in adulthood (p. 250). Indeed, where Scott’s analysis follows the trajectory of the ‘overinvested’ child against the ‘rational’ adult fan, this chapter contends that not all fans are able to explicate a life trajectory of their horror fandom, nor are all fans able to forge parallels between their early consumptions of horror and coming to terms with their sexuality (or are otherwise reluctant to communicate such to others). Fan TR1, for instance, writes:

Well in my case the only connection i can made between horror movies and being gay is that i discovered my sexual orientation the same year i got into horror films but that was not related to each other. Anyway Horror films helped me a little bit to go through being a gay kid and school geek-outsider

for a while, it was nice to just come from school a friday, go to the videostore and watch something entertaining and forget about classes, homework and all the rest of crap. (10 March 2005)

TR1's dialogue heightens the notion that for some fans in the tribe, recalling specific connections between growing up gay and watching horror is tenuous at best, or as TR1 suggests, is merely coincidental – such as both occurring at similar points in history. This is in itself significant though, for horror is still reified as a conduit through which memories of coming to terms with one's sexuality are able to be recalled. However, I would argue that in the case of this fan, this is not incidental – for he teases out the notion that horror did aid him in relieving his 'gay kid and school-geek outsider' status for a while. However, the specificities of what is particular about *horror* in this process remains relatively unclear. One may infer that, whilst fans cannot (or do not) always concretise the discursive intersections between watching horror and constructing their gay identity, fans unequivocally romanticise the significance of horror during their period of growing up – as a kind of unwavering companion during times of emotional distress and/or social dislocation. Moreover, it could also be the case that fans are ashamed or unconvinced about the legitimacy of overestimating the significance of horror as a cultural category, or are unsure about the credibility of their own distinctive connections as hitherto theorised in isolation.

However, as can be traced through an analysis of many autobiographical recollections, memories of how horror aided fans are particularly pervasive, framed within a discourse of therapy – interwoven through copious micro-narratives within the thread (see Jenkins, 2007). In his first post for instance, fan TR2 writes: 'I loved grwoing up being into horror becuase it let me escape my terrors and dissolve into other worlds and terrors i could handle. I think they saved my life actually' (13 March 2005). One line of analysis here could argue that for TR2, the therapeutic quality of horror lies in the notion of the genre's contained conflicts – a genre well documented for its prescribed narrative struggles – presenting him with conflicts that, unlike those he faced in 'real life', he could tackle head on. As argued in the body of research Mary Beth Oliver and Meghan Sanders (2004, p. 249) draw upon, horror's violence is salient to their social contexts precisely because it presents a coping strategy through the safe channelling of negative or stored

emotions. In contrast to his memories of watching horror, TR2 feels that he did not have any mastery over the perennial and localised terrors that he faced in real life, framing horror through a sense of overcoming that seemed uncertain in the real life micro-narrative he presents. In response to TR2, fan TR3 writes 'I gotta say, I identify with [TR2] here! I had a pretty shitty childhood, and horror/sci-fi were a big part of my escape and coping mechanisms' (14 March 2005). Even though the particular uses and pleasures of horror cannot be captured through their micro-narratives, TR2 and TR3 present the idea that horror provides a conceptual point of reference in recalling their earlier emotions. Rather than viewing horror as too 'real' or 'scary' in the memories of these fans, it afforded them a therapeutic escape from what they remember as the harsh 'realities' of growing up, as the terrors of horror are both similar to, but dissimilar from, those that they faced in 'real life'.

Although these accounts frame horror as therapeutic, other fans are more precise about what it is about *horror* when recalling their 'becoming a fan' narratives (Cavicchi, 1998). These narratives are typically framed within the context of how their initial interests in horror intersected with the construction of their sense of self, or indeed others' perceptions about their non-normative sexualities. As a result, some fans seem to rationalise their initial investments in horror through the lens of their sexual identities. Fan TR4 for instance, writes the following: 'Ya know, i was thinking about this again and realized that I got into horror because I was usually looked upon as a freak. This was long before I realized that I was gay. I just always liked being scared (ghost stories etc.). Outsider syndrome anyone else?' (18 April 2005). TR4's propensity for horror, whilst predating his sexual awareness, was motivated, partly at least, because of his epithet as a 'freak', his position on the fringes of social assimilation and acceptance. Significantly, this lends definition to being a horror fan at an early age and its attendant labels of being a 'freak', or otherwise different from the normative consumption practices prescribed in childhood. Furthermore, TR4's inhibitions of 'Outsider syndrome' are significant, in that the act of consuming horror, not dissimilar to his sexual identity, is framed as a cultural taboo (especially in terms of youth), but often one with fewer moral consequences.

The notion of ‘Outsider syndrome’ is doubly significant, for it not only gives a language to the differences of their identities, but it normalises one’s childhood/youth consumptions of horror as a natural inclination for outsiders. Understanding this duality as the ‘grand narrative’ of the thread, fans whose micro-narratives resonate with this configuration imbue their posts with degrees of what I refer to as ‘emotional capital’. This capital means that a fan posting on the thread is likely to resonate, in meaningful ways, with the micro-narratives of other gay fans. Individual micro-narratives of the self are thus recognised and personally felt by other fans, producing a ‘metanarrative’ of connections to horror that encapsulates the majority sentiment. Where memories of consuming horror as a young child may have produced or at least reaffirmed one’s perception of being a ‘freak’, or a social outcast, these feelings can be articulated in the thread in a bid for emotional capital where their micro-narratives of growing up gay yield the potential to resonate with those of other fans – not merely within the confines of this thread, but across threads in the tribe. Like TR4, other fans mobilise their growing up narratives in ways that they feel will have a broader cultural resonance with fans, exercised, I argue, in a bid for emotional capital. As fan TR1 writes:

There is a book that i love that i think u guys will love although it doesn’t has any gay content or references it talks about growing up alone and with the feeling of being out of place and how you look in other places to get that feeling that you can still fit in this world which i think all of us being gay teens at some point felt. (17 May 2005)

What I would like to argue for here, is the extent to which some fans acutely discuss and diagnose their own fan psychology; their own uses of horror mitigate the struggles of their social contexts in coming to terms with their identities. For whilst TR1’s personal experiences are ostensibly materialised in the book he is referring to (‘The Thief of Always’), this is expressed with the intention of resonating with the memories of other fans within the tribe. Therefore, in articulating his feelings of ‘being out of place’, TR1’s narrative produces an intersubjective recognition within the thread, where his personal feelings and proclivities for certain forms of fiction encapsulates the experiential contexts of other fans. Indeed, TR1 acquires degrees of emotional capital because his posting embodies the feelings and experiences of others. It is also valued, I argue, in helping to make sense out of their ‘difference’; for, individual micro-narratives feed into a

metanarrative that solidifies the parallels between investments in horror and growing up gay.

The discourse of ‘Outsider Syndrome’ or the feeling of ‘being out of place’ inferred by TR1 and TR4 has been projected onto the figure of the monster in an attempt to account for its allure to audiences. George Ochoa (2011, p. 7) recognises that horror contains the ability ‘to take our minds off our everyday problems [...] a form of therapy’, although concluding that such explanations ‘have little likelihood of explaining the primary purpose of horror films’. Instead, Ochoa argues that it is horror’s presentation of ‘deformed and destructive beings’ that allows audiences to satisfy their insatiable desire ‘to see new beings otherwise inaccessible to them’ (p. 6). This clearly evokes Noel Carroll’s (1990) formulation of what he labels as the monster’s ‘categorical interstitiality’ as a primary draw to the genre. Not only does Ochoa grossly overlook the alternative pleasures afforded by horror to different social and cultural factions of its variegated audience, but even in celebrating the monster as the core of audiences’ fascination, the ‘star’ of horror (Worland, 2007), it fails to account for the different, and indeed shifting allegiances audiences have to different players in horror, especially those salient to their childhood memories.

As I suggest, when specific textual features of horror are foregrounded in their autobiographical accounts, there is a significant absence of the figure of the monster. Instead, it becomes clear that the figure of the victim, in some accounts, is central not only in their memories of particular films, but also in mirroring the vulnerability they felt as young gay fans. In this way, fans recall narrative moments where, as young gay viewers, they could position themselves within the diegeses to make sense of their own ‘perverse’ identities and desires. Discussing the horror flick *Phantasm* (1979), fan TR5 writes:

I was like scared and turned on at the same time! I was a young teenage boy turned on by the teenage boy character running from the Tall Man and those stupid flying things with the blades! It messed me up! (LOL) I was skinny and had long hair at the time, so I really identified with his character. Anyways, thanks for making me think back about that moment in my Life. (10 March 2005)

TR5's memory of *Phantasm* is firmly anchored in the empathetic memories he has of identifying with the vulnerable 'teenage boy character' on-screen (Mike Pearson played by Michael Baldwin). TR5's most salient memory of the film is thus recalled through what he remembers as the foreboding oppressor charging after the vulnerable teenage boy, perhaps reflecting the way TR5 felt about the nature of the oppressors he and other fans faced, imbuing such textual moments, through his memory, with emotional currency, and perhaps vicarious association with his own social situation (see Tamborini, 1996, for a discussion of the dimensions of empathy in horror). Furthermore, a number of fans recall specific films which resonated more personally with their own lived experiences, occupying a significant place in their memories of growing up gay watching horror. Discussing the film *Fear No Evil* (1981) for instance, fan TR6 (anonymous) writes: 'The flic was cheezy as hell but G.A.Y. to the hilt! (dick shots even!) I remember feeling bad for Andy's character (gay unity i guess). I wanted him to win in the end. Still enjoyed it anyway' (14 March 2005). Early memories of watching *Fear No Evil* for TR6 was, like *Phantasm* for TR5, recalled through discursively illuminating the perilous situations of the victim figure – in which this fan found an emotional parallelity (or 'unity' as phrased). This largely confirms what Cynthia Hoffner and Joanne Cantor (1991) note in that, not only do media viewers seem to enjoy characters with whom they see as similar to themselves, but these characters confirm one's own beliefs and sense of self. Through this mutual sense of 'victimness', TR6 was able to develop an emotional connection with Andy. Indeed, this enables him to legitimise his interpretation of Andy as a gay character precisely through the sense of affinity he shared with his character, making such a textual inference possible, whilst challenging previous assumptions that gay audiences are preconditioned merely to identify with the counter-hegemonic figure of the monster (Benshoff, 1997) (see Chapter 2).

Rather than recalling films that they found to be most 'scary' or 'daring' to watch growing up, fan memories are shaped by particular textual moments, even specific shots from films through what can only be described as a fannish 'selective memory'. These memories are coloured less according to a generic production of horror, or from the work of a particular director, but rather through textual fragments or moments that remain

salient in their memories as they intersect with growing up gay. That is, through a sense of who *they* were (Kuhn, 2002; Williams, 1980). In one example, fan TR7 writes:

I remember sneaking "Fear No Evil" into the house and watching it late one night when my parents were asleep. I expected the usual tits and ass nudity that was so prevalent during that era, but lo and behold, the director threw in a full frontal shot during a shower *scene where a boy is being taunted by bullies* (my emphasis). (10 March 2005)

Early memories of watching *Fear No Evil* (1981) for TR7 was, similar to TR5 and *Phantasm* (1979), framed in their memories through illuminating the perilous situations of the victim figure – in which gay readings of the film were materialised. Moreover, the way in which the binary opposition of ‘tall man/teenage boy’ (TR5) or ‘boy/bullies’ (TR7) is materialised, continues to centralise the figure of the victim in horror. Rather than remembering the lonely outsider figure of the ‘monster queer’, younger gay fans remember the oppression inflicted onto the victim figures, where the true monsters of the films represent those who threatened them. Indeed, in the period of the late 1970s and 1980s wherein these films are conceptualised, monster movies appeared with less frequency. This gives rise to an explanation for the salience of the victim in their memories that is tormented by the killer/monster as is often the case in the slasher subgenre. Indeed, the absence of such theorisations around the victim figure is revealing for, as Mark Jancovich (1992, p. 118) argues, if there is any one feature that all horror films share, it is ‘the victim under threat’ – a figure, I contend, who is far less theorised compared to its monstrous counterpart: perhaps with the exception of Carol Clover’s (1992) work (see also Cowan and O’Brien, 1990, for a content analysis of victim kills in horror). It might thus be apt to argue that Benshoff’s contention of gay audiences needs account for the differing viewing positions and the stage in one’s life when viewing horror films. This is because in youth, the figure of the victim holds particular memories for some fans as they faced their own oppressors, and like the victim figure, sought to overcome the odds against them to ‘survive’.

This notion of the victim figure in horror as remembered through the micro-narratives of fans is foregrounded most clearly by one fan with reference to Clover’s figure of the final girl. Fan TR8 writes: ‘Another film I saw in 81 was "The Burning"...I always thought that Alfred...was that his name...was definitely going through classic

teenage confusion with his sexuality. Furthermore, he's the "final girl" in the movie that definitely ups the ante a bit with the whole homo subtext' (28 February 2010). Whilst TR8 suspected that Alfred in the film was experiencing ontological uncertainties about his sexuality, he exercises his fan capital, at a later point in his life, to draw upon the conventions of the slasher film (or rather the gender reversals of such), as a way to legitimate his former readings of Alfred's sexuality as exercised in his youth (see Chapters 1 and 2). Thus, where some fans remember the perils of the victim figure through their empathetic feelings with their outsiderdom, other horror fans draw upon their knowledge of the genre to critically evaluate films – applying theoretical frames of reference onto their youthful readings. Thus, rather than suggest that TR8's 'rationalisation' of horror functions in opposition to his former child 'affected' self, it would be more accurate to suggest that his knowledge seeks to render intelligible his former meaning making from horror, and in turn, credits his early memories of watching horror with cultivating his current agency as a fan. As I move on to suggest, other fans articulate quite different micro-narratives around growing up gay with horror, which I proceed to explore in the following section.

Sexual Identity and Early Consumptions of Horror

The previous section argued that, for some fans, early consumptions of horror served a therapeutic function during difficult times, as well as allowing an identification with the victim figure to make sense of their vulnerability growing up. However, this line of argument risks the assertion that fans had fully embraced their sexual identities, and further, that their coming out (to the self) predated their initial investments in and consumptions of horror. As the data from the thread suggests, this is not always the case. That is, in some autobiographical accounts, horror is positioned as providing fans with information or a language (Dyer, 1984) about their own sexual identities. One way this can be understood is through their interpretive practices, which for them, verified the differences of their reading strategies from how they 'should' have read the texts; thus, it cements the incongruence of their readings from 'dominant' interpretations. As a result, rather than arguing that fans' early consumptions of horror were hinged upon a fully articulated marginalised identity, the argument extends to suggest that, for some fans,

their initial interests and investments in horror predated self-acknowledgements of their gay identity; their viewing positions and consumption practices cemented the feelings of their nonconformity.

Whilst I have demonstrated the ways in which one's outsiderdom is reflected in the object of their fandom, for some fans, horror is remembered as providing *them* with information about their difference. Fan TR9 (anonymous), for example, writes: 'Nightmare on Elm St. 2 also had both gay and S&M tones for me and I think it might be the movie that first made me realize the more pervy side of myself existed' (17 May 2005). Significantly, the language of the 'pervy' side suggests not only an internalised sense of deviance, but it strongly evokes the perversity of deconstructing *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (1985) in unexpected or aberrant ways (Staiger, 2000), which in turn, reaffirms TR9's sense of difference in which such 'S&M tones' could be intelligibly deconstructed. The notion of the gay-fan-as-horror-victim argued in the previous section resonates with Cornel Sandvoss' (2005) argument about fans recognising aspects of the self in their object of fandom, particularly in certain life periods when engaging with these objects. However, fan TR9 complicates this idea by inferring that horror provided *him* with confirmation about his non-normative sexual identity. This would support the notion that for some fans, the object of fandom itself can shape and even construct the way that one understands and makes sense of the self, rather than the theory inferred by Sandvoss, which hinges on a pre-constituted subjectivity of who they were, prior to engaging with horror.

Interestingly, some fans remember these films as being significant to their initial encounters with horror, often remembered as the first horror film that some fans claimed to have watched. As fan TR10 puts it in his account: 'OMG!!! I LOVE Basket Case! It was my first horror movie when I was just a wee lad! It was one of the first movies to make me think that I liked boys. I didn't dare admit at the time' (11 March 2005). Whilst for fans in online horror forums (see Chapter 4), discourses around the 'first horror movie' typically arouse memories of being scared or recoiling at a film for the first time, which is positioned against the durability of their current (rational) self (see Hills, 2005); for some fans on the tribe, it embodies memories of the time in which their consumptions of horror started to intersect with thoughts about their own sexualities in relation to certain

features of horror that they remember. As a result, specific films carry significance outside of the 'effects' of horror by retrieving a sense of the self, the contours of which were directly connected to their object of consumption. This confirmed, for them, the differences of their identities from a heterosexual norm. Moreover, it also solidifies the parallels between their identities and horror, in that the object of their fandom was constitutive in the construction of their identities and erotic desires. This is central to how some fans recall their 'becoming a fan' narratives and continues to justify their ongoing investments in the horror genre.

However, not only are memories coloured through the way horror mirrored their feelings of difference, but fans' child/youth identities are also implicated to serve as a point of comparison to the social abnormalities of watching and/or being a fan of horror itself. That is, there is a kind of moral tension present between the aberration of growing up gay and one's copious consumptions of horror. Here, it is not uncommon for fans to implicate their families in their narrative accounts, particularly in light of their perceptions (implied or otherwise) of horror as an object of youthful consumption. As fan TR11 (anonymous) writes: 'Horror has always seemed to be part of my life thanks to my older sister. I had an endless supply of "Fangoria" and "Gorezone" at my disposal (when she wasn't home of course lol) and tons of flicks' (23 March 2005). In another account, fan TR12 (anonymous) writes:

This thread is reminding me how my religious family freaked when I came out at 15 ... but they were always cool about the collection of decaying, severed, acid-burned , etc. heads all over my room, severed hands and other body parts, Fangoria subscription, Super-8 horror movies, not to mention the endless parade of 80s slasher flicks on cable. I mean they never said a -word- about the gore at all, but having a boyfriend was, of course, a huge deal. (23 March 2005)

Despite the divergence of their narratives, both fans professedly acknowledge the proscribed nature of their youthful consumptions, either as an audacious secret – a kind of 'closeted fandom', or through the disproportionate, even gratuitous memorabilia that signifies the degree of investment that these child/young fans had in horror. Particularly in the case of the latter, fan TR12 puts forward the cultural status of horror as a way in which to measure the deviance of his sexual identity, in which his coming out was seen

as more of an infraction than his excessive articulations of taste as outlined in his account. Indeed, a similar account is put forward in D Travers Scott's (2006, p. 244) autobiographical fan account where he writes: 'it had never occurred to me that there was anything off about my gory proclivities [...] my proclivities with boys down the block, however [...] I full well realised were somewhat out of line'. Where for many of these fans, horror played a significant role in their physical and emotional development, they nevertheless acknowledge the perversions of their tastes as young consumers, and in turn, use these value judgements to produce their own moral hierarchies of what was seen as (un)acceptable at particular moments in their lives.

Discourses around early investments in horror and fans' burgeoning gay identities are pervasive within the thread, as each is called upon to make sense of the other – imbuing them with meanings at an earlier point in their lives. Indeed, much like the way fans evaluated the ramifications of their sexual identity, their immoderate displays of horror memorabilia and consumptions of certain films were also framed as something taboo or at least contrary to their parental boundaries of acceptability within the context of their upbringing. Ultimately though, this duality of being a young horror fan *and* understanding oneself to be gay facilitates a kind of mutual recognition between the two. In other words, this allows fans to recall the perceptions and norms governing one as a way in which to rationalise the other; as for many fans, both were concomitantly central to their memories of growing up. It is this dual aberration that further cements horror's significance in the present lives of some fans, as much like their sexuality, it is a part of their identity that is not only understood as socially unacceptable, but was also secret, and to certain degrees, regulated in different contexts and at different moments in their lives.

It is this mutual exclusivity that allows fans to reflect upon these memories, and to evaluate the emotional impact of horror in their current lives. To borrow words from Nick Stevenson's work on fans of David Bowie: 'it [is] striking how a connection to Bowie acted as a relatively permanent anchor through many men's lives' (2006, p. 85). Fan TR13 writes:

Even now--when I'm substantially happier than I was when I first really got into horror films--whenever I am upset or stressed out about something, if there's a horror movie that I love playing somewhere, I feel happy and at

peace while I watch it--like somehow everything will be okay. (6 October 2006)

One could infer here that TR13 uses the genre to compare and contrast different stages of his life, particularly in light of how he has managed his sexual identity. C. Lee Harrington and Denise Bielby (2010) have persuasively argued that memories of such moments of when one first ‘became a fan’ ‘gives new meaning, structure and purpose to specific life stages, and marks periods of one’s personal past – hallmarks of a major turning point’ (p. 438). Moreover, as Annette Kuhn (2002) has argued in her study of cinema and cultural memory, horror is a particularly effective genre to recall such ‘hallmarks’ due to its capacity to evoke ‘repetitive memory discourse’ – that is, ‘memories of responses and reactions to frightening films rather than of the films themselves’ (p. 78). Memories, in other words, are sometimes coloured not only in light of the specific textual moments or shots (as argued in the previous section), but also the intense feelings and reactions associated with particular films that are remembered and (re)evoked at later points in life, though never wholly detached from one’s feelings attendant when initially watching horror in their youth. Kuhn continues:

The fear element has a particularly strong purchase in the individual psyche and the collective imagination; for in reaching back to retrieve their memories of terrors in the cinema, informants demonstrate an extraordinary capacity to access the voices of the children they once were. (2002, p. 80)

In light of Kuhn’s analysis, I would suggest that although fans do not always recount filmic examples in their discourse; they nevertheless mobilise their memories attached to horror to materialise specific feelings against which they are able to assess their current ‘happiness’ – to use the words of fan TR13. In this sense, horror, as a cultural resource, serves as a kind of cultural repository enabling fans to flesh out and measure conflicting emotional states. Moreover, as discussed previously, this is often associated with their fannish reflectivity in acknowledging the proscribed qualities of their youthful consumptions. Fan TR14, for instance, writes the following: ‘A few movies that actually psychologically scarred me as a kid were BLACK CHRISTMAS, TERROR TRAIN & TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE. I was too young to be watching that kind of brutality, but now it's become good therapy to watch them again and, of all things, enjoy

them! God help me!!!'(6 October 2006). Despite associating these specific horror films with 'scarred' memories, there is a therapeutic quality, it is claimed, in revisiting them, in reliving youthful viewing habits, allowing fans to compare the former 'brutalities' of horror with their cultivated endurance for the genre. In her research into female readers of the romance novel, Janice Radway (1984) discovered that these women tended to reread particular novels when encountering difficult moments in their lives, precisely, Radway argues, because there was a preconceived understanding of how their chosen novels would affect their emotional states. Thus, where it has been claimed that horror fans distance themselves from their former affective ties to the genre against their current rational self, some fans on the tribe seek to preserve their childhood memories, as TR13 implies, for it allows them to return to a genre that yielded possibilities to overcome the most difficult moments in their lives.

Although for some fans, horror served as an emotional assuagement from the conflicts and struggles of growing up gay, current consumptions of horror often (re)evoked memories of their former practices, allowing them to explicate upon the therapeutic qualities of watching horror. In light of this, some gay fans are compelled to defend the cultural status of the genre against criticism that has historically been levelled at the genre's products and consumers in moral panics about horror (see Barker and Petley, 1997; Egan, 2007). Whilst these accounts have largely been predicated on the psychological dangers of consuming horror – especially the effects of young children exposed to such 'damaging' content, the potential of horror to function as a form of therapy compels fans to defend its cultural status, and in the process, disassociate themselves from other fans with whom their psychological capacities are at odds. After writing about how horror makes him 'happy and at peace' fan TR13 proceeds to provocatively state that horror is: 'definitely a great form of tension-aggression-violence release! Anybody who's gonna kill somebody doesn't need HALLOWEEN or whatever to give them the idea' (6 October 2006). Unlike the imagined and indeed unbalanced consumers TR13 alludes to, he and other fans seek to champion the therapeutic qualities of horror as a form of 'aggression-violence' release that is safely channelled within the emotional connections forged between other fans on the tribe.

This is antithetical to physical displays of violence as in the case of the fans they allude to – highlighting the pleasure of horror as a conduit in which to safely channel their affective and emotional energies and dejected sentiments, rather than through physical displays of prowess or violence (as historically sensationalised through popular accounts of horror). As the following section proceeds to argue, there is a sense in which the discourses of therapy around horror are not bound to their object of fandom itself, but are intrinsic to the appeal and the emotional empowerment of the thread and the tribe more broadly. That is, the fandom itself, I move on to argue, serves as a form of therapy; not only through the shared emotions and feelings cultivated through their fan talk, but through the ways fans legitimise the feelings and practices of others and the cultural generation to which they belong.

Interpretive Micro-Community and a Generation of Fans

This section shifts focus from the role of horror in the lives of gay fans growing up, to the function of the tribe/thread itself in fostering what I contend is an interpretive micro-community of gay horror fans. Stemming from literary studies by Stanley Fish (1980), but important to audience and fan studies (see Radway, 1984; Amesley, 1989; Jenkins, 1992; Lindlof, Coyle and Grodin 1998; Tulloch and Jenkins, 1995; Staiger, 2000), my definition of interpretive community is inflected less by Kermode's notion of the 'right' way horror fans should interpret texts in the cinema, than a broader conception informed by Daniel Cavicchi's findings of how Bruce Springsteen fans used each other 'to combat feelings of loneliness and find validation by seeking out others with the same experiences and feelings while not unintentionally finding themselves living in shared geographical territory' (1998: 162). As can be extrapolated from Cavicchi, the notion of interpretive community as I refer to it here, signifies the feelings of fans as they resonate with the wider micro-community, but also the way in which fans corroborate the textual readings and fan practices of others that were cultivated at an earlier point in one's childhood/youth.

As discussed elsewhere (see literature review), referring to the tribe and threaded topics within as a micro-community departs from traditional accounts of how online community has been conceptualised (Rheingold, 1993; Jones, 1997; Smith and Kullock,

1999; Baym, 2000). That is, the fragmented nature of the threads, coupled with the transitory nature of fans' participation, poses a challenge to the idealistic sense of an active and ongoing membership pervasive within some accounts of virtual community. I argue here that the conception of the tribe as a micro-community brings together hitherto spatially divided fans, allowing them to find each other and share their unique connections to horror. In this way, the notion of community, as deployed when referring to threaded topics within a tribe, hinges on the idea that their highly personal connections to horror become central to the bond formed within the group – the emotional capital imbued within their posts. Indeed, I argue that where fan social capital (see Chapter 4) can be accorded from participation in macro spaces amongst a larger network of fans, a bid for emotional capital can be obtained amongst a smaller population on the tribe where fans share similar cultural narratives and investments in horror that resonate widely.

Central to the significance of this micro-community is the emotional assuagement that some fans express at the prospect of having found other (gay) fans, whereby fans no longer feeling 'alone' is symbolically displaced with a badge of affective belonging. Indeed, the title of one thread entitled 'I've been looking for this [tribe] all my life' evokes the extent to which fans on the tribe long for degrees of belonging, or simply acknowledging that other fans have forged similar connections to horror in their posts. In a thread titled 'Introductions...' for instance, fan TR15 writes the following:

Hi all! Just wanted to post to say hello and introduce myself. I am new to Tribes and was very excited to see a gay horror movie buff group! I thought I was alone in the world! I am looking forward to discussing one of my favorite hobbies and making some new friends here! (12 October 2005)

Katherine Larsen and Lynn Zubernis (2012) have recognised the therapeutic qualities of fan communities. For them, this represents an 'expression of feelings and the discovery that others share them' in cultivating the sense of cohesion and greater understanding amongst the fandom (p. 114) (see literature review). Unlike more sanctioned spaces of horror fandom such as horror forums (see Chapter 4), the tribe affords more autonomy in the way individual threads can be initiated to articulate the feelings and life interests of gay fans; this fosters greater cohesion across their micro-narratives. Indeed, although the tribe is a designated safe-space for gay fans to converse about horror, it is also seen as a space where new connections can be established, and one can receive confirmation that

they are not ‘alone’ in identifying as a gay horror fan; but rather, this is an identity claimed by a much larger contingent of fans than one had initially suspected. Important to the tribe then, is less about entering with the possession of particular forms of capital, or a proclaimed durability for horror, but rather a willingness to make sense of the significance of horror for them; in the process, this renders their own investments more intelligible. In the ‘Growing up Gay, with Horror’ thread, fan TR16 writes the following in his first post:

I read this topic and it made me realise how much horror helped me when i was growing up. i also had a troubled childhood. bullied all through school and had drunks for parents. when i would get home i would beg for \$3 to go to the video store and get the scariest horror movie i could find till in the end i had seen them all. i agree with both [TR1] and [TR2] when they said they would watch horror to escape, felt weird to read that some of you guys were kinda the same. not meaning to get deep with you guys but just had to write to this post. felt like someone might understand me. (15 March 2005)

Importantly for TR16, not only is it uncanny or ‘weird’ the extent to which other fans’ memories of growing up gay with horror resonate with his own, but the memories of other fans, as expressed through their posts, contain sufficient emotional capital in making him ‘realise’ his own investments in horror. Subsequently, this provides TR16 with a language, and confirmation, to articulate his own personal memories to other fans on the tribe. However, there is also a sense in which, by TR16 not wanting to get ‘too deep’, some fans feel the need to regulate the boundaries around their emotions; getting ‘too deep’ could risk displacing themselves from the feelings and experiences recognised by other fans in the thread. Ultimately though, this sense of having seen copious amounts of horror is directly tied to his sense of being ostracised by others, tying his displays of excessive fan consumption with the personal struggles he endured when growing up. Indeed, this chimes with the majority sentiment articulated in the thread (and in other posts within the tribe).

Despite the emotional sentiments of posts that depart from those in horror forums (see Hills, 2005), the focus on childhood consumptions, in addition to the longevity of their fandom, maintains the commitments that fans have to the genre, similar to those expressed by other (straight) horror fans (see Chapter 4). Rather than arguing that gay fans have vastly different tastes in horror to those found in other horror fandoms (see

Chapter 4), there is a sense in which 'serious' iterations are consumed; albeit, the differences lie in their viewing positions and readings of them. This micro-community thus allows fans to sustain an identity as 'serious' horror fans, whilst articulating their personally charged micro-narratives to find expression and confirmation in a spatial configuration distant from other (straight) communities of horror fans. Similar to other horror communities, fans on the tribe circulate their own knowledge and cultural competencies about horror. However, as I proceed to argue, these are tied to their micro-narratives of self-identifying as gay. In the 'Growing up Gay, with Horror' thread for instance, fans frequently discuss their queer interpretations of horror as young/child gay fans. In doing so, fan TR1 writes:

An example popping into my mind is "A nightmare on Elm Street 2" and when i saw that it was like more well let's see i think that had some gay overtones but hmmm not sure maybe i am starting to see gay stuff where is not just cause i found out i am gay...then when i grew up i was like oh hell yeah that was defenetly gay. (10 March 2005)

Responding to TR1, fan TR3 legitimises his readings of the film writing: 'Oh, well, yes ... 'Nightmare On Elm Street 2' was definately homo-erotic ... probably the most, out of the series!' (10 March 2005). I would argue that there are at least two significant ideas imbued within this exchange. Firstly, TR1 has cultivated his interpretive repertoire during the process of growing up, granting him the autonomy to retrospectively authenticate his own youthful readings. Therefore, rather than uphold the binary between young/affective and older/rational (Hills, 2005), some fans authenticate their youthful readings of particular horror films enabling them to apprehend the interpretive agency that they have as fans even when consuming the genre at a much younger age. This makes intelligible to themselves, and others, the cultural agency that was exercised in the early stages of horror viewing, missing from many accounts within horror fan scholarship. Secondly, the inferences of such interpretations allows other members, such as TR3, to legitimise these readings through their own subjectivities, shifting the focus from culturally provisional and isolated readings, to a dominant and accepted reading of the text within this spatial confine. As Henry Jenkins (1992) argues, this means that the process of making meaning out of horror is largely a social one. To a certain extent, this parallels the broader endeavours (or pressures) of the gay individual: to exit the closet as a means of sharing

experiences and ultimately, to make meaning from practices and feelings which, for many years, may have remained confined to oneself without little (or any) confirmation from other gay persons.

Generation

The sense of community fostered within the tribe is bounded not merely through an intersubjective recognition of their feelings and interpretive practices, but through symbolic membership to a cultural generation of fans who grew up with particular horror films – predominately from the 1980s. I conceptualise this generation of fans not in terms of a demographic absolutist approach by referring to ‘age cohorts of people who were born and happen to be alive at about the same time’ but rather a cultural approach, which emphasises the idea of generation as a culmination of ‘shared experiences of the same formative events and collective memories’ (Vittadini *et al.*, 2014, p. 65). Although the former approach has some currency in capturing fans born at a particular time, it is more accurate to suggest that fans focalise their memories of a period in their lives wherein specific forms of horror emerge and become central to their memories of consuming horror. Moreover, the latter approach better captures the zeitgeist of a particular social context where identifying as anything other than heterosexual created a climate of hostility; allowing fans to bid for emotional capital in their posts as they address the same ‘collective memories’ through consuming particular forms of horror.

The argument here is similar to what Nathan Hunt (2011) suggests in relation to the uses of memory narratives in film fan culture: ‘certain texts become affectively associated with particular historical periods of fans’ engagement with film’ (p. 99). For Hunt, commercial fan magazines facilitate the circulation of popular histories of film perpetuating their ongoing and indeed cult (or ‘classic’) status. Indeed, fans on the tribe recycle what Hunt refers to as ‘memory narratives’, where films retain their value and cultural status within their memories of having grown up with a shared accumulation of horror films from the 1980s. For fans on the tribe I argue, the sense of an interpretive community is strengthened through having occupied an imaginary shared space in childhood, despite the spatial divide that marks their online interaction. It is apparent that horror produced in the 1980s is central to the majority of fans’ conception of ‘childhood’

or ‘growing up’, and is pervasive within many accounts in the thread. As fan TR17 demonstrates:

I remember watching many many horror films growing up in the 80's. I really enjoyed both the well-done and the b movies. I remember seeing Street Trash and films like Night of The Creeps and loving them as a kid. I remember that even then a lot of them had heavy gay undertones. Especially in the 80's. I enjoy all types...am looking forward to seeing some non-cliche gay characters in horror. The last few I've seen have all been the same queeny, going to die 3/4 of the way through the plot for comic relief types. (8 February 2010)

Having grown up in the 1980s, this decade of horror has particular significance for TR17 as a horror fan, a time when the ‘gay undertones’ were playfully detected, framing for him how horror is conceptualised in terms of his childhood. Indeed, this particular period of horror is positioned against contemporary horror, where representations of gay and lesbian characters fail to meet fan expectations, and in his opinion, signifies a lacklustre period of horror production. Fan TR18 (anonymous) echoes a similar sentiment, writing that: ‘there's the whole new "cute boys in underpants series" (young warlocks, the brotherhood, vood doo academy etc) that are expliclty gay, but they are not scary in any way (not even any gore really) and their being so obviously gay almost takes the fun out of it’ (10 March 2005). To varying degrees, both fans position more overt forms of gay and lesbian representation against what TR17 refers to as the ‘gay undertones’ of horror extracted by fans and their interpretive strategies (see Chapter 1). Not only is there a discrepancy in privileging different periods of horror, these are also framed in light of their interpretive agencies, which for many fans were central to their memories of growing up and interpreting horror through a sexually non-normative lens.

This fan-produced generic categorisation of a ‘cute boys in underpants’ series of films (referencing the films of David DeCoteau) signifying contemporary horror is significantly positioned against other categories of horror that are meaningful to the structure of this interpretive community. Fan TR19 for instance writes that *Fright Night* (1985) is in his top five of ‘all 80's campy horror films! It's fantastic!’ (28 June 2008). Also referencing *Fright Night*, fan TR20 credits it as one of his favourite ‘for and by homos but nobody knows it’ films (10 March 2005). This discursive category of ‘80’s campy horror’ or films ‘for and by homos’ demarcates particular forms of horror which

resonate with the categorical definitions used by other fans in recalling films from their period of growing up, further strengthening the notion of a gay interpretive micro-community. Furthermore, both TR19 and TR20 produce a hierarchy of horror predicated on films' value of being 'campy' or made 'by homos, for homos', reiterating the notion of a specific taste community where value is placed upon particular groupings of texts that stitch the interpretive micro-community. Indeed, one can identify recurring films that are mentioned across fan postings, five of the most frequent being the following entries: *Fright Night* (1985), *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (1985), *Basket Case* (1982), *Fear No Evil* (1981) and *976-Evil* (1988).

As a particular grouping of horror films become a symbolic marker of belonging to this interpretive community, other fans remain outside of the sense of unity fostered in the 'Growing up gay, with Horror' thread. As Will Brooker (2002) argues, different generations of *Star Wars* fans hold vastly different perspectives and interpretations of films in the franchise where the age of fans draws symbolic but permeable borders around a particular interpretive community. However, where fan age is important for Brooker, a shared imaginary space in childhood is significant in shaping the boundaries of this generation of fans. As fan TR21 writes: 'I feel really young. All of you are talking about movies you saw in the 80s and my oldest horror movie memories are from the 90s' (11 May 2005). Despite the emotional comfort afforded in discussing horror with other gay fans, the centrality of this generation to the interpretive community erects symbolic barriers between being in/out of the collective identity central to the thread – further reinforced through TR21 proceeding to capture the (homo)eroticism of *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* (1994) which is clearly at odds with the more central discussion around *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (see Chapter 2). In this way, a particular group of gay fans emerge, distinguished from other fans through their unity of having grown up with particular horror films in the context of the 1980s. Moreover, the fact that this thread received significantly more posts than any others in the tribe stresses the currency of micro-narratives of growing up, but also how these are framed in a particular period that strengthens the interpersonal bonds between fans.

The shared sense of belonging to a cultural generation of having grown up with horror, primarily in the 1980s is, for some fans, the defining stronghold of their current

identities as horror fans. That is, a large majority of fans lament the state of contemporary horror, which is seen as being culturally inferior to the forms of horror they grew up with. This sentiment is summarised by fan TR22 in the 'Growing up Gay, with Horror' thread, who writes succinctly: 'I grew up loving horror films. unfortunately since the late 90's i only have liked a handful of them' (12 June 2009). As a result, one can deduce that the interpretive community is, to a large extent, comprised of *memories* from a particular period of horror; a community defined through the resonance of shared narratives that shape the enduring quality and significance of these films in the context of their youth. In sum, this suggests that, whilst forging dialogue with fellow gay horror fans crystallises the appeal and benefits of participating on the tribe, horror is particularly significant in the lives of some fans growing up, which for them, shapes the boundaries and values embedded within this interpretive micro-community.

Conclusion

This chapter initially argued that memories of consuming and watching horror served a therapeutic function for some gay fans growing up, alleviating their real life struggles. Indeed, although not all fans are able to explicate upon the specific therapeutic qualities of horror, or how their burgeoning sexual identities intersected with their forays into the genre, horror did, in the vast majority of accounts, deflect attention from their social struggles in a heteronormative society. As was argued, for some fans, the figure of the victim holds particular resonance with whom they are able to locate a sense of their social vulnerabilities. As I argued, this sheds new light on a horror player that little scholarship has investigated, particularly in light of their ideological function in the lives of some (gay) fans in the hostility of the school environment, but also in the micro-narratives of their conservative familial settings growing up. Informed by Dyer's argument that gays have traditionally turned to the media to acquire information about themselves, Section 2 proceeded to argue that some gay fans recall utilising horror to provide them with information about their sexual difference; especially through the strategies deployed to interpret particular texts. This, I argued, reaffirms their symbolic departure from 'normative' ways of viewing horror. Finally, this section argued that for some gay fans, horror serves as a life marker for shifting emotional states where returning to specific

texts recalls the residues of feeling attendant in earlier viewings of horror, allowing fans to use horror texts to compare different emotions.

Ultimately, these idiosyncratic investments in and consumptions of horror at an earlier point in one's life facilitate an interpretive micro-community of fans, specifically in the 'Growing up Gay, with Horror' thread. As I argued, this interpretive community serves a variety of functions: notably, fans share the personal significance of horror in their lives, but they also reaffirm the interpretive practices of others. In turn, this creates an environment where childhood readings become normalised in light of the interpretive practices of other fans, which is central to the way that the micro-community is stitched. Therefore, rather than framing this fandom as privileging fan or social capital, I have argued for the significance of emotional capital in fans' postings. Possessing this capital allows fans to render intelligible their own unique connections to horror in light of growing up gay, whilst using this narrative to resonate with the feelings and emotions harboured by other fans on the tribe.

Moreover, this section interrogated the generational component of this online community, which strengthens this sense of belonging, not only to the tribe, but to an imaginary social context of growing up in the same period of horror production. For some fans, their current identities as horror fans are very much predicated on these former memories of consuming horror, which is positioned against the inferiority of today's productions. This not only shapes the boundaries by which this community is defined in relation to specific periods of horror, but illustrates the sheer gravity that memories of watching horror have in giving meaning to their present day fandom. Therefore, where work on online fandom and community boundaries has been attentive to the formation of fan spaces structured around present day objects (for example, a current TV series or culturally relevant celebrities), this chapter suggests that the contours of certain micro-communities of horror are shaped through memories of the past. This is a way to discuss, what is for these fans, a period in their life that gives meaning to their identities as gay horror fans. However, gay horror fans are not delimited to these smaller micro-communities, but as we will see, are also present in larger online forums including horror and exclusively gay spaces. Proceeding to explore these spaces, Section Two argues that gay horror fans position, negotiate and perform their identities and fandom in

an attempt to subscribe to the norms and values embedded in those spaces, and importantly, in the presence of the members and fans who occupy them.

SECTION TWO:
IDENTITY AND PERFORMANCE

Chapter Four

'We have our own group on this site now': Gay Horror Fans, Bloody-Disgusting and the Struggle for Legitimacy

Introduction

For some horror fans, exclusive online spaces reserved for horror media such as *Bloody-Disgusting*, *Dread Central* and *Fangoria* represent authentic and intensely charged environments in which to read, discuss and consume the genre. Furthermore, such spaces also afford fans the opportunity to exert their horror fan capitals, that is, the knowledge they possess about the genre: its productions, films and histories (Fiske, 1992; Hills, 2005). The inclusion of a forum also allows fans to strengthen their fan social capital, summarised in the context of fandom by Matt Hills as 'the network of fan friends and acquaintances that a fan possesses, *as well as* their access to media producers and professional personnel linked with the object of fandom' (emphasis in original, 2002, p. 57). It is in these spaces, as Hills argues, where fans can increase and strengthen their social circle of horror fans, but also their access to forms of 'insider knowledge' that circulates horror forums. Ultimately then, such spaces offer members the chance to expand their social network of horror fans, particularly compared to the smaller micro-communities of fans as presented in Chapters 2 and 3.

Whilst I contend that both forms of capital are valued in horror fandoms online, fans that self-identify as gay or otherwise sexually non-normative are presented with a moral dilemma of 'outing' their non-normative identities within the long assumed heteronormative dimension of horror fandom. Nancy Baym has observed some of the positive reasons for doing so in her work on online culture, as she notes: 'testing out honest self-disclosure and expressing one's 'real self' online can be empowering and liberating' (2010, p. 15). As a result, disclosing one's true identity authenticates them within the social circle of horror fans, simultaneously allowing them to reach out to other gay fans within the horror fandom. By using the mainstream horror site *Bloody-Disgusting* as a case study, this chapter argues that such forums present tensions for gay fans in committing to out their sexual identities within the fandom where fan and social capital are most valued. Ultimately, this chapter argues that not only are there discernible

tensions, conflicts and contradictions evident in identifying as gay on a mainstream horror forum, but the performance and negotiation of their identities is, for some fans, central in legitimising their position within the fandom. As I suggest, this is performed in a bid for recognition as a serious horror fan – as ‘culturally one of the boys’ (Thornton, 1995).⁴⁴

This chapter seeks to engage in and redress some of the debates around work on fan distinctions, conflicts and hierarchies (see for instance MacDonald, 1998; Hills, 2002; Williams, 2004; Williamson, 2005a; Stanfill, 2013). Although it seeks to further the debates on the conflicts at play between different contingents of fans in relation to the object of fandom (horror), it simultaneously attends to the role of fan identity in negotiating these discursive hierarchies. In his work on horror fandom, Matt Hills puts forward the argument that: ‘the connoisseurship that online fans display is thus always a badge of appropriate belonging, and an articulation of subculturally defended norms concerning what it means to be a horror fan’ (2005, p. 80). However, this notion of what it means to be a horror fan, or as Hills (2005, p. 79) refers to it, the ‘doing of being a horror fan’, implicates the ongoing and indeed performative nature of horror fandom, resonating with accounts pertaining to the social construction and articulations of gender itself (see for instance, Beauvoir, 1973; Butler, 1990). Discussing identity online, Smith and Watson (2014, p. 82) argue that ‘people are situated and situate themselves discursively in relation to context-specific social norms, which determine and constitute identities as subject positions’ which, in the *Bloody-Disgusting* forum, must resonate with what it means to successfully perform as a legitimate horror fan on a mainstream horror space.

To an extent, I concur with Hills (2005) that cultural agency (or fan knowledge) is central to the connoisseurship of horror fandom. However, I also contend that this ‘doing

⁴⁴ Whilst this chapter primarily focuses on fans that self-identify as gay male, there are a handful of fans that self-identify as lesbian and bisexual. Further, one fan identifies with a ‘deviant orientation’ and another with a ‘mixed orientation’. Although gay men form the majority populace in the thread, this is often at the expense of other fans ‘outing’ themselves as anything other than gay. As one fan writes: ‘I’m bisexual and I know that may not count with some people’. Therefore, although the thread affords a voice for gay fans, this could be at the expense of other sexual identities that exist outside of the homo/hetero binary. Moreover, in the entirety of the thread, only 4 fans self-identify as ‘female’ or as a ‘woman’, 2 as ‘straight’, 1 as ‘bisexual’ and a further as a ‘straight teratophilic woman’.

of being' a horror fan must not undermine the performative aspects of the self, including the (re)production of gender and sexual identities. I suggest that fan hierarchies and conflicts that are prevalent within (online) horror fandoms do not only hinge upon distinctions formulated along axes of gender linked to the knowledgeability of fans and the legitimacy of certain tastes, but that these tastes and identities must themselves be seen as performative bids for legitimacy, especially when positioned against those in the same social group (i.e. other gay horror fans). Moreover, where much work in fan studies frames fan hierarchies and distinctions in light of the object of fandom itself (such as those who possess greater fan capitals or hold knowledge of spoilers – see Williams, 2004), this chapter rebalances such work by illuminating the performative aspects of identity – both fan identity and sexuality/gender – in legitimising one's status as a horror fan who self-identifies as gay or otherwise non-straight on the *Bloody-Disgusting* forum.

After introducing the horror website *Bloody-Disgusting* and the forum within, Section 1 of this chapter theorises the implications of outing oneself on a horror forum. Further, it is attentive to the sense of distinction levelled at gay fans in their ostensible attempt to erect boundaries between themselves and other (straight) fans. That is, some fans feel that gay fans are deliberately demarcating themselves from the fandom because of their sexual non-conformity. This line of argument differs from previous work around intrageneric fan distinctions and hierarchies, in that, rather than attend to the power struggles and hierarchies which operate within the parameters of a particular fan community, some fans within the thread seek to narrow these distinctions by dismissing the sense of difference that non-normative sexual identities pose to the established horror fandom. However, whilst this assimilationist stance may initially appear to be a politically progressive move, I argue that it could equally be understood as a rhetorical strategy that attempts to prohibit gay fans from reaching out to other gay fans in the thread, precisely because of these covert regulatory practices.

Section 2 of this chapter proceeds to focus on the ways in which some gay fans seek to legitimise their horror fandom within the thread. This is considered within a context of how other (straight) fans seek to naturalise horror within heteronormative contexts of viewing, wherein specific forms of horror emerge. As a result, rather than gay fans disassociating themselves from the practices of what it means to *be* a horror fan in

this forum, a substantial portion of gay fans go to great lengths to perform their ‘doing of being’ a horror fan, wherein the legitimacy of their identity as a gay fan and their status within the fandom is ultimately at stake. Moreover, Section 3 of this chapter proceeds to look at the performative aspects of fan identity, resulting in the production of distinctions between factions of gay horror fans. In some cases, I argue, this is achieved by disassociating themselves from what they perceive as the ‘effeminacy’ of other imagined gay consumers. Following a similar argument put forth by Joanne Hollows (2003, p. 49) that cult fans adopt positions towards consumption and collecting that are more ‘assertively masculine’ and thus distinctive from the spectre of femininity, I argue that horror fandom seeks to ‘reproduce cultural distinctions and cultural hierarchies along the lines of gender’. Importantly, however, I further attend to how the lines of gender intersect with and produce further distinctions along axes of sexual identity in the forum.

Section 4 of this chapter contends that contingents of fans seek to legitimise their gay horror fan identities through forming their own ‘fan circles’ within the thread (Bacon-Smith, 1992). This is where they cultivate their own fan capitals and express their investments in horror. In other words, once communication had curtailed on the thread, a group of gay fans reclaim the space and proceed to forge parallels between their identities and the object of their fandom. What started as a thread where fans sought to legitimise their identities as gay fans to others, culminates in a space where fans inscribe their own values and connections to horror, eventually reclaiming the purpose of the thread (although, perhaps mindful of the covert presence of other fans). In focusing on a recent editorial written for gay fans of horror, the Afterthoughts to the chapter suggests that the editorial’s provision for comments affords a liminal space to render intelligible cultural parallels between their identities and object of fandom, parallels that are often refuted and disdained in the more central space of the forum to which, I argue, the editorial is spatially demarcated.

This chapter focuses on a particular online horror fan forum: *Bloody-Disgusting.com*, focusing on a thread entitled ‘Gay Horror Fans’. This thread was initiated in August 2007, with the most recent ‘reply’ posted by myself in March 2014; this means that the thread hosted fan discussion for a period of just over six and a half years. With 98 pages of dialogue, and contributions from hundreds of fans of differing

self-reported identities and varying commitments to horror, the thread presents a rich case study in which to discursively interrogate the presence of gay fans in a mainstream online horror community. This chapter focuses primarily on gay men because of their larger population and voice in the thread (the title of the thread itself invokes gay males).⁴⁵ Fan posts featured in this chapter are analysed in light of what Hills has illuminated around the production of identity in fandom, as he writes: ‘postings need to be analysed [...] as a specific textual production of fan identity, one that is aimed at a readership assumed to be made up of other horror fans’ (2005, p. 78). Although the thread may seem to represent a subcultural space for gay horror fans, this chapter is attentive to identity performance in the ‘doing of being’ a horror fan, where the presentation of self (Goffman, 1971) is constantly shaped for the benefit of other horror fans, both within the thread and forum broadly.

After initially visiting the *Bloody-Disgusting* site in 2013, creating a profile and reading the 98-page dialogue, I immersed myself in the ‘Gay Horror Fans’ thread, and had productive conversation with a few horror fans for a brief period of time.⁴⁶ I first posted to the ‘Gay Horror Fans’ thread on 26 March 2014, with the final post published on 31 March 2014. At the time of writing, my post is the final one to appear in this thread, although the thread remains open for further communication. It immediately became apparent, however, that as fan talk curtailed, the thread was consigned to almost an ‘archival’ status upon my immersion. I can only conjecture that fans felt that they had exhausted this discussion and proceeded to other topics in the forum, or indeed other sites. Due to the lack of exchange between fans at the time of my immersion, I decided it was futile to disclose my status as an academic researcher in the thread, though this is clearly visible in my online profile on the site (see research ethics). As such, this chapter analyses the dialogue of participants in asynchronous time, prior to my immersion.

⁴⁵ The demographic information of fans such as gender, age and sexuality is concealed from view on the forum. As a result, this chapter uses the self-reported identities of fans. There are, however, times when their sexual identities are not stated explicitly and are thus treated with extra caution to prevent ascribing them with a particular identity.

⁴⁶ When subscribing to the site, users must select a username that represents their identity within the forum. Given the nature of the forum, many fans select names of famous horror characters, films, or their favourite subgenres as a symbolic marker of their interests and indeed knowledgeability of horror.

A Bloody-Disgusting Battle: Coming Out on a Horror Fan Site

Launched in 2001 (Est.), *Bloody-Disgusting* is a website dedicated to horror media, replete with horror news, reviews and interviews. With the titular *Bloody Disgusting* in capitalised red font, framed against a background that resembles bloody red saw blades; the aesthetic excessiveness of the site supports its claim to be the ‘#1 source for all things horror’ – its officially adopted slogan. The homepage hyperlinks its official *Facebook* (485,448 likes) and *Twitter* pages (64.9K followers), as well as its own *Youtube* channel (21,220 subscribers), where portions of the site are disseminated onto its twinned social media platforms where horror fans are able to follow the latest horror news and releases. Although there is an emphasis on the film medium, the site also features tabs on video games, comics and music, providing a concoction of different varieties of horror, drawing fans from different mediums and interests into a space whereby an array of horror is focalised and revered.

All Things Horror

Forum Category	Description	Posts	Threads	Featured Post
General Horror Talk	Does it have something to do with horror? Does it not fit in anywhere else? Post It Here!	5,083	227,718	Huge list of Horror games & movies recomm... by [User] Today, 12:56 PM
Horror Movies	Post about your favorite, or not so favorite horror movies here. Sub-Forums: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Classic Horror (153/4,113)Underground Extreme (80/1,062)What Movie Is This? (820/5,442)Golden Age (710/27,313)Foreign Horror (1,004/35,798)Modern Horror (1,526/100,314)Independent Horror (302/2,889)	4,607	178,980	The Editor (from Astron-6) by [User] 08-20-2015, 06:06 AM
Horror Gossip, News, and Rumors	Got a scoop? Heard a rumor? All your horror news and rumors go here.	1,023	43,339	Another (ANOES) Remake. by [User] 08-22-2015, 05:38 PM
Franchise Horror	Come here to talk about all the big names in horror with 3+ films in the series. Halloween, Friday the 13th, A Nightmare on Elm Street, etc...	730	121,916	Ultimate A Nightmare On Elm Street Thread by [User] 08-21-2015, 08:48 PM
The Horror Swap	Have something you want to sell, trade, or buy? Post it here.	3,248	23,577	You're Next - Adam Wingard signed mask by [User] Yesterday, 12:13 AM
The Fan Forum	Post all your fan art here for everyone to enjoy. Fan Films, pictures, songs, poems, stories, whatever...	1,104	20,985	Member f Artwork by [User] 08-15-2015, 05:40 AM

Figure 13: The ‘All Things Horror’ section of the *Bloody-Disgusting.com* forum.

With 174,794 registered members, 48,066 threads and 2,689,232 posts, *Bloody-Disgusting*'s forum is bustling with a variety of horror and non-horror related topics. The forum is structured into three macro sections: 'All Things Horror', 'General Talk' and '*Bloody-Disgusting.com*'. These are further divided into a series of micro areas, the former featuring topics such as 'Horror Movies' and 'The Fan Forum'; the second 'Forum Games', 'Books', 'Magazines' and 'Literature'; and the latter 'News and Announcements' and 'I'm a Newbie', where fans can introduce themselves to others in the forum upon registering. Within the micro topics, individual 'threads' can be created to focalise a particular area of the larger topic, whereby fans can 'post' and 'reply' to others. The thread 'Gay Horror Fans' features in the macro section 'All Things Horror' under the micro topic of 'General Horror Discussion' – although, as the title suggests, this is an eclectic area of fan activity where different aspects of horror are discursively discussed (Figure 13). Significantly, with 912 replies, the 'Gay Horror Fans' thread is the eleventh most posted to thread of the 5013 currently featured in the 'General Horror Discussion' subsection of the forum.⁴⁷ Despite the limitations that arise with a narrowed focus on one particular thread, I argue that the scope of the 'Gay Horror Fans' thread functions as a microcosm for how gay fans on a mainstream horror forum position, negotiate and perform their tastes and identities within the norms and values of horror fandom. That is, the analysis of this particular thread aids in a broader understanding of how the identity of a gay fan is positioned in a horror forum that has, I believe, far reaching implications beyond the parameters of *Bloody-Disgusting*.

At the time of writing, there does not appear to be another thread afforded to gay horror fans on *Bloody-Disgusting*, although even a basic search performed on the site reveals the abundance of posts with the word/phrase 'gay' or 'gay fan' in them.⁴⁸ Likewise, there is a significant absence of threads in other horror forums surveyed that are initiated by and for gay fans of horror (see selection of micro-communities). Whilst I did not locate a thread reserved for discussion on gay fans of horror, there were threads in which sexuality was evoked, however usually to detrimental effects. One example can be

⁴⁷ Fans can search for specific threads at the bottom of each micro topic. This can be achieved through the 'display options' section at the bottom of the page, whereby users can sort threads by a calculation of the number of views, replies etc. that each thread has achieved in ascending or descending order.

⁴⁸ Performing a keyword search for 'gay' or 'gay fan' displays threads and posts with references to specific characters and readings thereof, rather than a discussion about the particular identities of fans.

seen on the *Horror-movies.ca* forum in a thread entitled ‘Jason Voorhees gay? WTF?!’. Here, one fan posts a (now broken) link that purports to depict Jason Voorhees (*Friday the 13th* series) as a gay killer. The response of one fan, ‘What a stupid way to degrade a badass mofo like Voorhees’ illustrates the tensions that arise when inferences of gay sexuality are placed upon their object of fandom. However, this homophobic rhetoric does not address the position of actual gay fans within the fandom, nor the ostensible threat they pose to the heteronormative dynamic of horror fandom as historically understood.⁴⁹

For some, self-identifying or perceived by others to be gay (or else sexually non-normative) and a fan of horror could appear to be oxymoronic in light of the heterosexuality (and attendant masculinity) associated with its primary audience (see Zillmann and Weaver, 1996; Berenstein, 2002). As a result, feelings of being preternatural through the act of consuming horror as a self-identifying gay fan could unveil to varying degrees, especially when sequestered from other gay fans. Initiating a thread targeting a niche demographic of horror fandom thus serves as a way to verify that others, like them, exist beyond their geographically divided offline contexts of consuming horror. Thus, the initial impetus behind the creation of the thread was for horror fan BD1 to innocuously enquire about the presence of other gay fans, as he writes in his own words:

This may seem like an odd post, but I am curious how many gay horror film fans are out there. As a gay man living in Los Angeles, I am shocked how few I come across (pun not intended, but it's a good one!). It seems gay men have some sort of natural aversion to horror films, I have always had an affinity to them since childhood. Anyone have anything to say about this? (22 August 2007)

It could be argued that exclusive online horror spaces such as *Bloody-Disgusting* represent one of the only few thriving communities of horror fans in which gay fans feel they can articulate what fan BD1 refers to as his ‘affinity’ to horror.⁵⁰ In other words, only in dedicated horror forums do some gay fans feel that their emotional investment in

⁴⁹ For some ostensibly straight male fans, this causes what Harry Benshoff (2012, p. 135) has referred to as a form of ‘homosexual panic’ (see Chapter 1).

⁵⁰ Although fans frequent exclusively gay online spaces (such as dating sites), it could be argued that their relationship status, in addition to their desire to be seen as ‘serious’ horror fans, may inform their decision to circumvent exclusively gay or otherwise sexually non-normative online spaces (see Chapter 5).

horror will be understood and reciprocated, despite the heteronormative contexts wherein such consumptions have been theorised. One of the ways this comes to light is through the way in which people who exist outside of horror fandom perceive the investments of those who identify themselves as fans. As BD1 goes on to explain shortly after his initial post: 'I was once walked out on during a date because we were watching a horror movie and the guy was disgusted that I was enjoying it' (22 August 2007). The central problem which surfaces is that some gay fans articulate the difficulties of being a horror fan through their anecdotal micro-narratives of gay dating and culture, simultaneously finding it difficult to find other gay fans within the predominately straight (and male) horror community.

However, whereas Camille Bacon-Smith (2000) finds that gay fans have historically found it more difficult to articulate their interests in the gay community than to tell people they were gay in the science fiction community (see literature review), there is evidence on the 'Gay Horror Fans' thread to suggest that the act of 'coming out' in horror fandom, whilst not univocally discriminatory, is nevertheless complicated.⁵¹ Rather than simply argue for a binary conflict between ostensibly straight and non-straight fans, some self-reported gay fans themselves seek to deride the thread designated for discussion on gay fans of horror. For instance, fan BD2 puts it the following way: 'Anyways, .. This topic is as random as someone saying "Blacks like Horror?" [...] I am gay, but am not going to sit here and list my pro's and con's on Horror films... haha. Wtf' (27 October 2007). Whilst the reference to black audiences of horror acknowledges the marginalised voices of some factions in horror fandom, fan BD2 nonetheless refuses to link his horror fandom with his gay identity, which is seen to be a trivial matter ('haha'). Moreover, the conception of the thread as a place in which to list the 'pros and cons' of horror suggests not only a crude misunderstanding of its purpose (not uncommon amongst the wider fan populous), but it also seeks to sustain attention on the object of fandom itself (horror), which as I argue, is central to displays of 'proper' horror fandom. Indeed, this is because, I argue, it is safely distanced from what is seen as the abstruse and indeed frivolous exchange about the sexual identity of fans.

⁵¹ Whilst Bacon-Smith's research is situated within an offline context, scholarly accounts of gay fans within science fiction (see Jenkins, 2006) have shown that there exists an active and sustainable gay fan contingent of the genre, unlike the curious absence of gay fans in current scholarship on horror.

In the case of some fans moreover, the demarcation of a thread in which to converse about gay fans is itself subjected to criticism because of what some fans perceive as the attempt of gay fans to disassociate themselves from the larger fandom. As fan BD3, in capturing a pervasive sentiment in the thread, pointedly writes:

This shouldnt even be a topic though. Sexual orientation has nothing to do at all with peoples day to day lives nor does it make them anymore or less special/different than anyone else. You dont see me making posts about straight horror fans do you? Being straight, gay, lesbian or whatever is made to much of a difference, if were ever going to accept ourselves as what we are then differentiations base on sexual preference need to stop. (7 May 2009)

Interestingly, there is a sense here in which the spatial demarcation of gay horror fans is received pejoratively by some fans in the forum. Of course, an argument could be made that BD3's language longs for the inclusivity of gay fans, in an attempt to downplay their sense of difference from other ostensibly straight fans in the forum. Of course, the paradox here is that this could have the effect of expunging the very identities that fans foreground to meet others who self-identify as gay or otherwise non-heterosexual within the horror forum. Thus, although the assimilationist discourse of some fans could be argued to render gay sexualities as irrelevant to one's status on the site, the rhetoric of 'don't ask, don't tell' could ultimately deny them the ability to forge connections with other gay fans that such threads have been initiated to achieve (as evidenced in the initial post by BD1).

However, I would contend that the ostensible incongruity of being 'gay' with 'liking horror movies', works to safely demarcate a taste in horror from the spectre of gay identity. This has the effect, I would argue, of sustaining its position as a genre made for heterosexual consumers and consumed *by* heterosexual consumers. Consequently, for these fans, the 'doing of being' a horror fan necessitates a repression, or at least regulation of their sexual difference, eliminating the threat of their symbolic demarcation from the majority heterosexual fandom. This is a rhetorical strategy, I will argue, that works to uphold the inscribed heterosexuality of horror, thus bearing a reflection on the identity of the fans who consume such. As a result, any fan that discusses their consumptions of horror vis-à-vis their sexuality is not only contravening this opinion, but

is posing a threat to the implied heterosexuality for a taste in horror that some fans seek to preserve.

Horror, Taste and Legitimising Fandom

The initial post by fan BD1 contains two key elements: both a means to gauge the volume of gay horror fans who frequent *Bloody-Disgusting* (although only those who have signed up will respond, discounting lurkers) as well as locating other gay fans who share an ‘affinity’ to horror (since childhood), or conversely have an ‘aversion’ to the genre. Of course, although not all fans in the forum will be able to discursively penetrate these personal ‘affinities’ that some gay fans share with horror (see Chapter 3), some (ostensibly straight) fans seek to theorise and offer explanations as to why the consumption and pleasures of horror may be delimited to heterosexual male fans. Indeed, this is particularly palpable through the ways that some fans naturalise the reception contexts of horror within a strictly heterosexual milieu. Early in the forum, for instance, fan BD4 writes:

Maybe gay men don't like Horror films because of the sexual vibe they give. Like, if I'm in the room with a chick and there's a horror movie on, I'm getting laid. It works everytime [...]I honestly couldn't think of how two men would like get off on it, but hell it's possible... (22 August 2007)

In positioning the function of horror within the (hetero)sexual context of viewing, the ability of gay men to appropriate the genre into their own social contexts of reception is interrogated; consequently, the particular pleasures and social uses of the genre for them is questioned. In a similar vein, fan BD5 questions: ‘i was wondering while reading this thread.what do you do when theres female nudity? just curious’ (22 August 2007). Indeed, one could infer from BD4 and BD5’s comments that not only is the place of horror within non-straight contexts of viewing challenged, but specific definitions of horror predicated on the visual displays of scantily-clad female sexuality, traditionally associated with subgenres such as the slasher or stalker film (see Dika, 1987) are produced and sustained as salient examples of *horror*. Indeed, both fans’ discourse strategically ties the ‘true’ pleasures of horror to a heterosexual context of reception wherein gay viewers are ostensibly precluded. For these fans then, the pleasures of horror are directly recalled

through the ways in which the genre facilitates heterosexual pleasure, using these contexts as a rhetorical strategy to exclude gay fans within the heteronormative matrix in which these films are discursively framed.

However, rather than challenge or position themselves outside these generic forms of horror, some gay fans adopt these definitions in their own discussions. This, I argue, demonstrates one of the ways in which gay fans are able to reinforce their own position as ‘serious’ fans of horror. Later in the forum, for instance, fan BD6 writes: ‘I’m gay and I’m lucky to have a boyf just as mad into horror as I am! I’ve never noticed a distinction between sexual preference and appreciation of horror. Personally, I feel cheated when a slasher doesn’t include the gratuitous Tits & Ass shots’ (25 May 2009). Thus arises a sense in which gay fans on the site must work to dispel the myths around their own culturally imagined viewing practices, and in the process, align themselves with definitions of horror that are produced and sustained within the broader male and heterosexual horror fandom. In the process of privileging these specific forms of horror, moreover, gay fans also dismiss less ‘authentic’ forms of horror, including what many in the thread refer to as ‘queer horror’ films, including titles such as *Hellbent* (2004).⁵² As BD7, a younger self-identifying gay fan puts it: ‘I have been thinking of seeing *Hellbent* but it sounds dumb even to me’ (26 May 2009). For Mark Jancovich (2000) these generic distinctions operate along a continuum of ‘mainstream’ versus ‘underground’ horror, with the latter seen as more ‘authentic’ horror. On the reverse, some gay fans seek to disassociate themselves from more subcultural forms of ‘queer horror’ by proclaiming a taste in more mainstream (or at least generically recognisable) horror which, for these fans, constitutes a legitimate form of cultural consumption where ‘cheap’ or independently produced films could invoke the spectre of queer horror dismissed by fans in the thread. Interestingly, *Hellbent* (2004) is received well by many reviewers on *Queerhorror* (see Chapter 1) precisely because it represents an amalgam of being a generically pure slasher featuring overtly gay characters. That gay fans in a mainstream horror forum dismiss the film serves to highlight and indeed reinforce the performative

⁵² Although fans do not readily use the generic label of ‘queer horror’, this category refers to a particular production of films, usually low budget and independently produced. The films of ‘beefcake’ director David DeCoteau often fall under this generic category (see Benschoff, 2012) (see Chapter 1).

nature of tastes in horror, where ‘authentic’ and ‘inauthentic’ iterations are differently conceived across distinctive spaces of horror fandom.

Moreover, while Brigid Cherry (1999a) finds that female audiences favour more subtle horror forms such as the vampire or occult/supernatural over the more gory splatter counterparts, there is evidence to suggest that a substantial number of gay fans claim to consume these more ‘serious’ or hard-core forms of horror privileged by straight fans on the site, dismissing inferior queer horror productions in the process. However, in a separate account, Cherry (2002, p. 44) discovers that those who considered themselves to be horror *fans* ‘were significantly more likely to like slasher films than those who did not think of themselves as fans’ further underscoring the correlation between inhabiting an identity as a *fan* and having a proclivity for specific forms of horror that would support this symbolic badge of identity.

The obvious hypocrisy here is that, whilst correlations between being gay and proclaiming a taste for horror are destabilised from the outset, other fans are able to naturalise their own tastes for horror within the evocation of their heterosexual reception practices (such as the implicit reference to an opposite-sex companion). However, rather than challenge these normative contexts in which horror is consumed, some gay fans actually seek to authenticate them, and, as seen above, legitimise their own tastes for similar forms of horror. For this contingent of (gay) fans then, the thread is less about iterating the differences of their tastes in horror from other fans, but rather about exercising ‘appropriate’ articulations of horror fandom (displaying the successful ‘doing of being’ a horror fan), with the ultimate goal, I argue, of acquiring greater degrees of social capital within the forum amongst other demographics of fans who frequent the thread.

While it is possible that some gay fans have achieved significant levels of social capital in other threads on the site, and in alternative online contexts entirely, I would like to suggest that some fans use the site as a substitute for their absence of membership within offline gay horror networks, and even within the contexts of their personal relationships. As fan BD8 clearly demonstrates:

I've given up trying to find a boyfriend that likes horror as much as I do. Hell, I'd be happy with someone that at least tolerates my obsession with horror. Once they get to my house and see all my horror figures and posters on the

walls...well, I usually don't hear back from them lol!! Worst part is, they seem to think it's something that I'll grow out of. After 27 years of loving horror, I just don't think that's going to change any time soon. The only other gay horror fans I meet are online and live far too far away. (26 August 2007)

In her research on science fiction fans, Bacon-Smith aptly observes that: 'the primary identity is where we invest the major commitment of our time and effort even when the gain we might receive from that commitment is not obvious to others' (2000, p. 142). Indeed, Bacon-Smith is referring to the notion that the transference of this 'gain' or value is only achieved through an active participation in what she refers to as 'the web of relationships' that support the primary identity that one adopts (or performs) within their social circle. Even though this may seem reductionist or limiting, for fan BD8, self-identifying as a horror fan is reified as the primary identity, which supersedes that of being gay. Indeed, this is to the extent that his potential partners must at least be willing to 'tolerate' his conspicuous displays of horror merchandise and associated fan practices. Furthermore, it is clear that whilst the intention of forging networks with other gay horror fans is a priority, some nevertheless work to articulate their status as 'good' (Hills, 2002) or 'authentic' (Jancovich, 2000) horror fans – reinforced through the longevity of having partaken in the genre's offerings for '27 years' – with a clear intention to continue.

In light of fan BD8, it is apparent that some gay fans use this space within the larger horror fandom as a means in which to reflect upon their offline social network of horror fans, particularly in light of their personal relationship(s) (or lack thereof).⁵³ However, not only do fans demand that their partners 'tolerate' their fandom, but some deploy their fandom to produce a hierarchy of value in which to measure their offline social network of fans. As fan BD9 writes: 'I'm gay and i find it hard to find a bf that likes horror. i have 2 friends that i go to the movies with that love horror. but yet to find a bf with the same taste as me in movies' (24 August 2007). One could infer from this language that despite the '2 friends' facilitating BD9's regular consumption of horror, the subtle longing of the prospect of a potential partner also into horror could strengthen the

⁵³ There appears to be a division between gay fans who lament the lack of fellow offline gay horror fans (or even horror fans period) and fans who express their symbolic membership to a lively offline network of other gay horror fans. This leads one fan, in particular, to discredit the initiator of the thread for too easily 'generalising' that it is difficult to find gay fans that are invested in horror (as they identify as being part of an offline network comprising of other gay fans).

symbolic value where information and knowledge pertaining to the genre is shared. Further, it could also be suggested that this lack of a partner into horror places additional significance on such threads in the larger fandom, where a chance to network with other fans presents unrealised opportunities to meet other gay men who are absent from their offline contexts of consuming horror.

For some fans, however, dialogue that is predicated on personal, even ‘intimate’ relationships reinstates the precarious position of identifying as gay with a taste for horror. In entering such a forum and attempting to deflect attention away from the object of horror, dialogue around sexuality and their personal lives more broadly becomes the primary point of discussion. As such, their sense of distinction from the values of *Bloody-Disgusting* is a point of vexation for others.⁵⁴ Perhaps this is not so surprising, considering Julian Hoxter’s finding in researching online fans of *The Exorcist* (1973): ‘There is [...] a kind of double play with the notion of fandom. All fans are equal and welcome, but this is *my* site, *my* contents (even if [...] every other site has many of the same entries) and I’m teaching you *my* way’ (2000, p. 175). Hoxter’s point is crystallised in what is admittedly a sensational example from fan BD10, who writes:

If I was 100% gay and proud of it, I still would not publicize it here, at the coolest Horror Movie News Site. Why? Because it would seem that no one really talks about their sex lives here. We're too busy debating and being friends. [BD1] pops up with this post every six months or so and then we don't hear from him again. His question is stupid and boring. Will somebody please find him a boyfriend?!! (9 July 2009)

Here, the seriousness of *Bloody-Disgusting*, and perhaps even horror fan sites more broadly, are espoused as sites of meaningful dialogic exchange about the primary object of fandom. Indeed, this sense of exchange, or ‘debate’ as BD10 refers to it, is positioned against the frivolity of ‘reaching out for same-sex partners’, one of the ways in which gay fans are accused of indulging. In this way, gay fans are charged with the accusation of perversely carrying baggage associated with sites reserved for gay networking and dating (see for instance Shaw, 1997), which potentially threatens the seriousness of the horror

⁵⁴ For some fans, this vexation centres on the notion of what they perceive to be gay fans disassociating themselves from the wider fandom on the site. For others, this hinges on the topic of conversation itself, which deflects attention away from the central object of their fandom – horror.

space. As Matt Hills has noted, 'if a horror message board posting does not resonate with subcultural knowledge then it is likely to become the subject of flaming and abuse' (2005, p. 79).⁵⁵ Although Hills is referring to horror message boards more broadly, there is evidence to suggest that even subcultural spaces carved within the wider forum are subjected to regulatory fan practices. Such comments therefore illuminate the extent to which some fans of horror seek to police what is appropriate in sustaining the seriousness of horror fandom, where some threads of conversation are dismissed as flippant – impeding what they consider to constitute serious enunciation valued within the boundaries of horror fandom.

However, despite targeted accusations that fan exchange concerning social and personal relationships are 'stupid and boring', I argue that a careful analysis of such seemingly 'trivial' dialogue shows that a large gay faction of fans actually use such topics as a way in which to reinforce their fandom, and legitimacy as gay fans, rather than detract from it. As evidenced previously, this is achieved through the ways in which some gay fans mobilise their fandom as a precept in which to evaluate the strength of their (gay) social networks; employing their identity as horror fans to measure the compatibility of potential partners, or lamenting the lack thereof. I argue that not only does this bolster the legitimacy of their status as horror fans, but it does so through articulating 'tensions' that resonate with a larger faction of horror fans. That is, seemingly idiosyncratic tensions of being a gay horror fan become interwoven within the larger fabric of horror fandom, exposing the cumbersome nature of identifying as a *horror fan* – despite other aspects of the self that clearly resonates with the larger fan populous. As one fan BD11 puts it: 'Just as I never met or dated any chicks who were really into horror like I was/am, I shouldn't assume that you'd be able to automatically hook up with a fellow genre fan. Obviously it's no easier for you to meet like- minded lovers than it was for me' (18 September 2007).

For some fans then, the thread facilitates the opportunity to express the difficulties in acquiring membership to a thriving social network of offline (gay) horror fans. However, this actually epitomises a more ubiquitous problem for other (assumedly

⁵⁵ There are several instances of flaming in the thread. One fan appears to interpret the thread as a place in which to discuss 'queer horror', making explicit references to Victor Salva (*Clownhouse* (1989), *Jeepers Creepers* (2001)) and the controversy surrounding his paedophilic history. For some fans, this evokes the precarious connection that is forged between sexuality and the object of horror.

straight) horror fans, relieving for some what may have been dejected feelings of dislocation – without the mutual confirmation from other horror fans. *The Examiner* (Calindas, 2009) features an article pertaining to gay relationships entitled ‘Horror films and gay men’ which reads: ‘*Just like any other relationships* there will always be differences between partners in terms of movie preferences. A partner will like drama, tear-jerking films while the other likes spiritual flicks’ (my emphasis). If donning an identity as gay horror fan may, in the eyes of some fans, represent a certain degree of contradictoriness, I would suggest that the primary problem is assumed to be with the devotion that underpins horror fandom (and its associated marginal status as a cultural category), rather than anything unique in identifying as a gay fan. This, I argue, positions horror fandom itself as something ‘distinctive’ or on the fringes, creating a space in the thread for gay identity and expression to be understood through discourses of difference that resonates with larger factions of (straight) fans. As I argue in the following section, however, these discourses of difference are further mobilised through the distinctions forged between gay fans – foregrounding the performative qualities of gay identity in the forum. I contend that fans enact different performances for differing ideological reasons with the ultimate goal of achieving potential gains within the *Bloody-Disgusting* fandom.

Performing Identities, Reaffirming Practices

Until this point, I have argued that some self-identifying gay horror fans seek to legitimise their tastes and practices within the heteronormative dimension of horror fandom. This was illustrated through examples of how fans align their tastes in horror with definitions produced by other horror fans, as well as highlighting their dedication to horror through the ways in which it mediates aspects of their gay lives, including potential partners. As is evidenced from some accounts, this willingness can perhaps be broadly framed within a discourse of sacrifice: that a devotion to horror and horror fandom can, in some instances, dislodge fans from aspects of gay culture including relationships and dating. For some, the thread thus represents a space in which to reach out to other gay fans that share similar investments in a culturally marginalised filmic genre. Moreover, fans successfully perform the ‘doing of being’ a horror fan by

articulating a sacrificial and intensely charged investment in the genre through their micro-narratives.

However, if legitimising oneself as a gay fan is important in a space where such is brought to the fore, a series of distinctions emerge when fans articulate their gay identities within the thread. As I argue in the following sections, while some gay fans seek to position their identities against the imagined construction of gay ‘Others’, other fans reclaim the thread as a means to redress communication in light of their gay identity; that is, their distinctive consumptions of horror as gay fans. This includes some coming out as gay in the parameter of the thread and soliciting advice from others, but also exercising esoteric displays of horror fan capital that is symbolically at odds with the knowledge secured by other fans. Consequently, where some fans perform the masculinity of horror fandom, understood through a lens of homonormativity – other fans embrace their gay identities to strengthen the collective ties that unite a faction of gay horror fans, who reclaim the thread to foster more intimate social ties with one another.

Perhaps falling between these seemingly polarising practices and by providing a more nuanced picture of fans’ negotiated identities, there is a sense in which some fans explicably seek to disconnect their sexual identities from their concomitant cultural status as horror fans. This is put forth particularly lucidly when fan BD12, for instance, writes the following: ‘I’m gay and a HUGE horror fan. But I would rather not be known as the gay horror lover’ (2 August 2008). Critically scrutinising BD12’s use of language is revealing, for the displacement of ‘horror fan’ to ‘gay horror lover’ clearly delimits the use of horror fan from inferences of being gay. This highlights an implicit tension in comfortably balancing being gay *and* a fan of horror, because, to be gay would here mean being relegated to a horror ‘lover’ and arguably not a true ‘fan’. Furthermore, it can also be inferred that there is a (dis)reputation invoked with the notion of being widely ‘known’ as a gay horror fan – and thus being ostracised from symbolic membership into what some fans may perceive as the ‘inner’ circle of (heterosexual) horror fandom on the site.

Although gay identity could be seen as a culturally constructed performance across a number of distinctive online forums beyond horror (see Chapter 5), what compels its significance in the thread is a strategic disconformity to the construction of gay identity as conceptualised by other (straight) horror fans. That is, gay fans must

counteract the perversity of cultural myths that frame their sexuality in a bid to be recognised as performing what it means to be a horror fan as collectively understood in the culture of the *Bloody-Disgusting* forum. Fan BD13, for instance, writes:

Not too be judgemental..... Butt I kinda think that the gay crowd is just a little too sensitive too the whole blood and guts thing. I mean come on..... Gay dudes get scared that thier shoes won't match their outfit.. LMAO LOL..... (28 May 2009)

Resultantly, BD13 works to essentialise the ‘sensitivity’ of the gay fan against the endurable qualities manifested in the more daring nature of some horror fans. For David Sanjek (2008, p. 424), this is similar to the rhetoric found in horror fanzines which challenge notions of ‘good’ or ‘respectable’ taste in which select fans emerge with the endurance to partake in what he refers to as its ‘hard-boiled tone [which] goes hand in hand with the fanzines’ belief that only the most hardened sensibilities can bear the assault of offensive imagery’ – often at the exclusion of female, but I would also add gay, consumers. Furthermore, this also works as a rhetorical tool in sustaining the parameters around specific forms of horror, such as those gratuitous films centred on ‘blood and guts’. This functions to strategically demarcate the fortitude of some horror fans against the ‘sensitivity’ of other inauthentic consumers within the forum and in Sanjek’s case, guardians of respectable or ‘good’ taste. More recently however, Steve Jones’ (2013) research into torture porn and online fan forums argues that categories of horror, such as the video nasties (Egan, 2007) and slashers (Clover, 1992), like the category of torture porn, serve as a useful benchmark ‘against which the users’ credentials as a horror fan are measured’ (p. 52). In his pivotal attempt to explain the appeal of these seemingly detestable films, Jones also argues that the act of consuming torture porn can be seen to be ‘a macho endurance test’, often pitted against the feminine consumptions of what he refers to as ‘soft’ forms of horror (p. 49).

However, whilst plausible and indeed compatible with accounts put forward by Hills (2005) and Hoxter (2000), Jones appears to overlook the notion that this ‘hard/soft’ binary of horror consumption can be destabilised through the affordances that online contexts provide (gay) horror fans to *perform* an identity within the horror fandom. Where previous accounts in horror fandom have argued for the ‘macho endurance’ of horror fans through their consumption practices, this crucially excludes how online

contexts afford a more malleable version of identity when it comes to articulating one's fandom, where identities are performed linguistically to maintain the impression one seeks to make (Goffman, 1971). Indeed, these performances of identity in horror fandom are central in challenging the 'theories' that fans develop to make sense of why they believe a cultural disconnect exists between gay men and consumptions of horror. As fan BD14 writes:

Perhaps the truth of the matter is that gay men are trying to perpetuate the stereotype themselves, and as such won't watch horror films. In the same way that a lot of straight guys feel it would be 'unmanly' not to do certain things, some gay men may think it 'ungay' to do certain things, and horror films might well be one of those things. (31 July 2008)

What is suggested here is that in consuming horror, gay men symbolically disassociate themselves from culturally acceptable performances of 'gayness', or at least how their identities have historically been constructed and stereotyped. To be gay and claim a propensity for horror is to rail against socially prescribed roles; and thus, any confession of consuming horror, in the eyes of some fans, automatically positions them as 'ungay'. For other fans, however, this 'unmanly/ungay' configuration is too rigid in accounting for their sense of virtually concealed gayness that is only revealed when actively 'outing' the self. This positions the language and performance of some fans as a priori being culturally 'one of the boys' unless actively interrogated about their sexuality by others. Indeed, this could be understood, in terms of gay culture, as 'passing as a straight horror fan' in dialogue with others, as fan BD15 writes: 'I'm a masculine gay guy who nobody would ever expect is gay. I don't make my sexuality an issue but don't hide from it either. It's who I am so it will come up eventually in conversation' (5 May 2009). Thus, whilst the thread is unique in allowing fans to 'out' themselves as gay horror fans, this is achieved through the agency of fans themselves, where they would otherwise blend with other horror fans through their culturally constructed and arguably regulated iterations of masculine identity.

I argue here that some fans attempt to conform to what R.W. Connell has referred to as performances of 'complicit masculinity' in exchange for a secure place within the fandom. Connell argues that the term best signifies 'masculinities constructed in ways that realize the patriarchal dividend, without the tensions or risks of being the frontline

troops of patriarchy' (1995, p. 79). However, where Connell omits gay (or otherwise non- or contra-straight) people from the realm of complicit masculinity, instead positioning them in the category of 'subordinated masculinity', I contend that there is evidence of a complicit masculinity within the thread, precisely through the distinctions produced between horror fans who just 'so happen' to be gay, against other gay fans. This is similar to what Lori Kendall (2002, p. 4) has argued in relation to the masculinity of the forum *BlueSky* – 'a type of interactive, text-only online forum known as a *mud*' (emphasis in original). For Kendall, few of the men she researched in *BlueSky* actually embodied Connell's 'hegemonic masculinity' because of their 'nerdish' computer identities which bids for a more complex relationship to traditional conceptions of masculinity (see Chapter 5). However, Kendall finds that men in the forum benefited from a patriarchal dividend, primarily through performing masculinity such as displaying dominance over women. Kendall proffers an explanation:

Like adolescent boys who feel compelled to invent sexual exploits about which they can brag, men in groups create sexual and gender narratives that may not resemble their lived experience but nevertheless form important elements of their masculine identities and their connections with other men (p. 87).

Because of their exclusion from 'hegemonic masculinities', Kendall underscores the performative qualities of the men on *BlueSky* who bid for masculine recognition by consciously constructing and articulating sexual and gender narratives that operate to subjugate other identity categories including women. Similarly, rather than suggest that identity performances in the 'Gay Horror Fans' thread are indisputably congruent with their lived experiences offline, fans create narratives about their sexual and gendered identities precisely through disassociating themselves from cultural signifiers of gay sexuality that they perceive to threaten their bid for a patriarchal dividend in the thread. Illuminating these sexual and gender narratives, fan BD16 writes:

I just happen to be a guy who likes other guys. You'd never know unless I told you - which can be VERY frustrating. Of the handful of times I have been to gay clubs mostly everyone just assumes I'm some straight dude out with his girlfriend for a drink and a dance [...] I HATE gay porn. It does nothing but make me cringe. I love straight porn though. The vast majority of gay people I've met me annoy me. I completely understand why straight guys can become bothered by gay guys [...] Flamboyant gay guys represent the

rest of us to the ignorant because you stand out. You further perpetuate the stereotypes and unintentionally make MY life more difficult. (12 May 2009)

Whereas in Jones' (2013) research, horror's direct association with pornography and its attendant sexual aggression reinforces its appeal to a majority male demographic, fan BD16 discursively positions himself against 'gay porn' which is seen to be trivial culture at odds with his decisively veiled sense of appearing as gay. Furthermore, BD16 positions himself against other 'flamboyant' gay guys who are perceived to tarnish the character of gay men in general, and thus their symbolic point of entry into spaces such as *Bloody-Disgusting*. Although this argument may function ultimately to uphold rather than challenge the masculinity associated with horror fandom, it nevertheless illustrates the way that some gay horror fans forge more complex negotiations to hegemonic masculinity, whilst reifying these versions of masculinity in opposition to the 'subordinated masculinities' of other gay fans.

Lisa Duggan (2002) has proffered this notion through what she labels 'homonormativity'. Duggan's argument refers to a set of politics that 'does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions. Rather, it upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption' (2002, p. 179). Residing between an 'imagined' gay public and the national mainstream, the centrist neoliberal context of homonormativity functions to naturalise a 'fixed minority' of queer people around a heterosexual primacy rooted in cisgender articulations, monogamous marriage, white, male, middle-class privilege, and I would argue, normative constructs of hegemonic masculinity. Understanding homonormativity as the subjugation of marginalised identities within the gay fandom that do not subscribe to gender-normative constructs, some fans perform the 'doing of being' a horror fan by imitating culturally endorsed hegemonic masculinities by disassociating themselves from other 'feminine' gay fans. I suggest that this ideal yields possibilities for the mainstreaming and normalisation of gay identity that is positioned against other (imaginary) gay consumers who are precluded, by virtue of their sexual performance, from being 'serious' horror fans in the eyes of some.

Factions of gay fans within the thread strategically position themselves against imaginary gay consumers. As I have argued, contingents of other (straight) fans have already positioned gay consumers as ‘sensitive’ or questionable as horror fans. In this way, these fans potentially benefit from the ‘patriarchal dividend’ – that is, a bid for recognition as legitimate horror fans. As in the case of fan BD16, one strategy to achieve this is for fans to present themselves offline as ‘passing as straight’, benefitting from a cultural assumption of heterosexuality (as a ‘default’ identity) unless fans ‘stand out’ by exposing culturally produced signifiers of gay sexuality to other fans. I would also infer that, whilst the thread may present the opportunity for BD16 to ‘out’ himself on the horror site to which fans would otherwise fail to deduce, his tastes are positioned alongside the acceptable masculine ‘straight’ fans and there is thus a sense of denying any overt displays of gay sexuality that could potentially ostracise him from symbolic membership into the locus of horror fandom.

I therefore argue that it is more productive to refer to these fans in homonormative terms. This is significant as it relates to Connell’s notion of ‘complicit masculinity’, as particular iterations of gay identity are articulated in a bid for the ‘patriarchal dividend’; that is, being recognised as culturally ‘one of the boys’ despite one’s confession of a non-heterosexual identity in the thread. Indeed, I suggest here that one of the ways in which some gay fans seek to perform their sense of complicit masculinity, however covertly and in homonormative terms, is achieved precisely through the legitimacy of their own identity *and* tastes against the inferiority of other gay consumers – evident across multiple posts. In linking sexual preference and a taste in horror, fan BD17 posits:

This is an intresting topic actually. I don't think sexual preference much decides on much I think it honestly depends though on the type of gay man were talking about [...]Now i myself being bi-sexual and im not gonna argue with someone on that because people claim you can't be bi that your confused well love is love regardless of gender but thats a seprete topic. Anyway I have dated a few guys who were beyond gay and they seemed to not be thrilled about wanting to see a horror movie. (18 April 2008)

I argue that in contradistinction to his self-identifying ‘bisexual’ identity, BD17 discursively positions others as ‘beyond gay’ through which the evocation of effeminacy or histrionic performances arise. Indeed, this rhetorical strategy works, I would argue, to

secure his own sexual identity as inherently different from those who express a strong dislike or distaste for the genre's offerings, perhaps a by-product of their 'subordinated masculinity'. Thus, despite claiming a 'bisexual' identity, BD17 illuminates the point that a bid for legitimacy as a horror fan is less about the object of one's sexual desire, than the way in which these desires are iterated in the construction of one's identity. That is, legitimate entry into the horror fandom is positioned as achievable only for those fans that manage to sustain 'acceptable' iterations of their non-heterosexual identity, which for many fans, is directly linked to a taste in horror.

This argument can be traced through multiple posts in the thread, even when discussion deflects from the object of horror itself. For instance, in a conversation that arises around music, fan BD18 writes the following in discussing his musical tastes: 'I dunno, mine can get pretty "gay," but never typically gay. The vids I posted earlier are not of the type of music I listen to. Still, I have plenty of musique to balance "that stuff" out. And I don't even consider Morrissey to be very gay. Elton John? Alrighty' (6 June 2009).⁵⁶ Although BD18's language evokes a sense in which his musical tastes could be perceived to further perpetuate his self-reported gay identity, he nonetheless bypasses what he considers to be more stereotypically gay musical genres and artists. Indeed, as Pierre Bourdieu (1984, p. 60) reminds us, 'explicit aesthetic choices are in fact often constituted in opposition to the choices of the groups closest in social space, with whom the competition is most direct and most immediate'. Bourdieu's framing of distinction between those who occupy the same social space usefully captures the meaning of how BD18's tastes are structured both within, but also outside of, the musical tastes of other gay fans. Ultimately, this works to strengthen the boundaries that are produced and sustained between some fans and the cultural tastes of those *imaginary* and symbolic gay others. In this sense, the 'doing of being' a horror fan involves not only the regulation of taste configurations through other objects of fandom, but also the symbolic gain that can be achieved by departing from the tastes of other 'typically gay' fans who occupy the same social space.

⁵⁶ As with alternative threads surveyed in the forum, conversation veers off-topic (i.e. not discussing gay fans or horror) at various points. The topic of music appears to be a popular one, which as I argue, (re)produces cultural distinctions between different factions of gay (and non-gay) fans.

Reclaiming a Space: Fan Values and Capital

I have argued that some fans attempt to authenticate their horror fandom through strategically performing and positioning their identities and cultural tastes vis-à-vis others. Other fans, on the contrary, capitalise on the topic of the thread to deploy their gay identity as a lens through which to articulate their personal investments in horror. As Rhiannon-Bury (2005, p. 15) has noted in her work on female fandoms online: ‘in the case of female fans who were made to feel like outsiders in male dominated forums, the dream of community bringing together like-minded women had a powerful resonance’. Significantly, this notion of a ‘like-minded’ faction of gay fans reclaiming the thread occurs when other fans withdrew from dialogue, materialising open expression between gay fans and their cultural investments in horror.⁵⁷ Careful not to reduce the explanations for such, there is solid evidence of not only a sizeable segment of fans ‘outing’ themselves to others, but sharing their own personal investments in horror through their micro-narratives anchored in their sexuality. Some fans themselves recognise a shift in dialogue within the thread, motivating fan BD19 to write: ‘wow when this thread first started there were no replies at all. Good to see there are some honest ppl out there, and horror junkies to boot’ (3 July 2009).

Whilst displays of horror fan capital are imperative as a means to secure one’s position within an official space of horror fandom, some gay fans of horror have produced their own ‘fan circle’ within the thread as a means to cultivate their own communal values (Bacon-Smith, 1992).⁵⁸ Broadly speaking, this encompasses the triad of honesty, support and respect. I would infer that these are the values that foster the act of coming out within the thread, affording a disclosure of their ‘real’ identities, akin to exclusively gay online forums (see Chapter 5). Indeed it is through these values that a space is provided for some fans to solicit advice from others regarding the possibility of coming out to friends and family (BD7), sharing their recent coming out stories (BD20) and gauging the predicaments they face in coming out; as one fan puts it in light of the

⁵⁷ My use of the ‘latter half of the forum’ is somewhat relative here. I am referring to the latter half of the data collected and analysed. The time frame of this broadly corresponds from 26 May 2009 to the most recent post published (by myself) to the thread on 31 March 2014.

⁵⁸ Although the notion of ‘fan circles’ captures the practices in the thread, the circle is by no means clearly defined. In other words, it refers to the cultivation of values and fan practices carried out by what appears to be a smaller contingent of fans (with differing self-reported sexual identities).

‘uber religious and old fashioned’ nature of his family (BD21, 3 July 2009). Remarkably, the fact that multiple closeted fans have, perhaps for the first time, divulged such sentiments in a horror forum suggests both the sheer gravity of the horror forum in their lives, but also the ability for gay fans to reach out to others in a horror space, where their connections with one another is as equally important as the object of fandom itself (see Chapter 3 for a similar argument).

However, this is not to suggest that discussions surrounding the object of fandom itself are elided within the conversations that come to light in the latter half of the thread. Rather, I would argue the opposite: the values of honesty and support actually encourage fans to report more nuanced accounts of their horror practices. One pertinent example is reified through the ways that some legitimate their status as gay horror fans through the symbolic intersectionality of their horror consumption and gay identities. In this way, rather than position their non-normative sexuality as incongruous with their status as horror fans (as evidenced by other fans), some fans use their identity to recall early forays into the genre (see Chapter 3) or to exercise their queer readings of horror (see Chapter 1). Fan BD22 for instance, states: ‘We’re Queer, We Like Fear, Get Used To It! Incidentally I’m thinking of watching *Nightmare on Elm St 2* tonight. That coulda been the one that turned me, damn my parents letting me watch that at 10!!!’ (26 May 2009). As I would argue, the language used here, coupled with the reference to *Elm Street 2*, is reminiscent of the fan discourses in Chapter 3, whereby they position horror as constitutive in the construction of their gay identities; drawing clearer parallels between the two micro-communities once other (straight) horror fans departed the thread.

The political vehemence evoked through Queer Nation’s slogan ‘We’re Here! We’re Queer! Get Used to It’ highlights the sheer determination that some fans have in legitimising their identities in the fandom – almost in protest for assimilation into the forum, beyond the confines of an individual thread. Moreover, not only has BD22 been a fan since age 10, but specific examples of horror such as *Elm Street 2* (see Chapter 2) are suggested to have intersected with his memories of watching horror at earlier points in his life (see Chapter 3). In this way, certain texts have played a part in the transformative aspects of his sexuality, in turn, legitimising his natural inclination for a genre, which to some degree at least, shaped his current sense of self. In response to fan BD22’s post,

initiator of the thread BD1 writes: ‘well, that’s the movie that turned me on to the concept of camp anyway’ (26 May 2009). Here, not only is horror fundamental in shaping the sense of self, but for some fans, it gives them a language through which to make sense of gay culture, providing some with a vernacular in which to later discuss and dissect particular horror films. Moreover, these fan capitals are exclusive precisely because of their opposition to the forms of knowledge (or lack thereof) secured by others. As fan BD23 (sexuality undisclosed) earlier in the thread writes:

Anyone notice the homosexual undertones of nightmare on elm street 2? whenever i show that movie to friends and try and explain what freddy represents and what the filmmaker was REALLY trying to say, they say i'm crazy. (27 October 2007)

Fan BD23 exerts their subcultural fan capital by claiming to have unearthed the ‘undertones’ that director Jack Sholder was ‘really’ trying to articulate about homosexuality in the film. Not only does BD23 claim to possess the ultimate ‘truth’ about *Elm Street 2*, but articulating this knowledge to ‘friends’ (positioned as unobservant) results in a kind of discursive rebuttal, foreclosing outlets through which such fans can articulate these more esoteric forms of capital to others, especially outside the fandom. Likewise, other fans bring these capitals to the forum, including knowledge about the sexuality of specific gay horror producers including Kevin Williamson (screenwriter) and Clive Barker (horror author and director), both being particularly notable in this respect.⁵⁹ This fan trivia (see Chapter 1), I argue, not only bolsters their interpretive practices, but challenges the capital secured by other fans, important to the values of the horror space (Hills, 2005). Responding to the prospect that Clive Barker is gay for instance, fan BD24 writes in seeming disbelief: ‘Clive Barkers gay? Are you serious?’ (28 August 2009). Even though the production and circulation of these cultural forms of knowledge may rail against that which is valued or comprehended within the horror space, for some fans, it simultaneously achieves the ‘doing of being’ a horror fan (possessing high degrees of capital), whilst illuminating horror’s uneasy proximity to gay culture and creative talent; a prospect that some horror fans would perhaps like to reject

⁵⁹ Various online sources corroborate fans’ knowledge that horror director Clive Barker and Screenwriter Kevin Williamson self-identify as gay men. See, for instance: http://www.glbtc.com/arts/williamson_k.html and http://www.glbtc.com/arts/barker_c.html.

or disbelieve. Whilst a reclaiming of the thread is a progressive move, fans are still under the watchful eye of other (straight) horror fans and thus the potential for true expression could be circumscribed. As I argue in the following section, a ‘liminal’ space has since emerged that exists within the *Bloody-Disgusting* site but is demarcated from the forum. It is here that an alternative micro-community of fans are afforded a platform to come out of the closet as gay and articulate their connections to horror.

Healing the Wounds? Afterthoughts from the Camp Next Door

On 22 May 2015, Trace Thurman authored an editorial on *Bloody-Disgusting* entitled ‘Coming Out Screaming: How a Gay Man Found Acceptance Through Horror’. The editorial is significant precisely because it is the first on the *Bloody-Disgusting* site where an author foregrounds their personal and affective connections between their sexual identity and investments in horror. Trace writes the following in his editorial:

My point in writing this post is to highlight this sub-culture of gay horror fans. I felt isolated for most of my life because I didn’t feel as if I fit in with any particular group. Because of my position in writing for BD I’ve been introduced to so many people I have things in common with. This isn’t to say I’ve never had any gay friends or friends who weren’t into horror movies. I have and still do, but there’s just something different about discovering people who share two of the biggest parts of your life in common with you.

At the time of writing, Trace’s editorial has received 208 comments from other fans, many proclaiming the personal resonance that Trace’s article has to their own identities, and further, the idea that fans occupy a liminal position on the fringes of both gay culture and the horror community. That is, they claim to occupy a nomadic position between the polarities. In encapsulating a pervasive sentiment in the comments, one fan writes ‘thanks for opening the discussion about being gay and loving horror films. I’m glad I’m not the only one, though I knew I wasn’t!’ As Trace is a member of *Bloody-Disgusting*’s editorial team, his article has an affective resonance, but one that is authenticated because of his official recognition as possessing higher degrees of horror fan capital. This serves a

credible outlet for the collective feelings of other self-identifying gay fans, achieved through the degree of emotional capital imbued within his editorial (see Chapter 3).⁶⁰

The emotional connections forged within the comments, I would argue, positions the editorial itself as a micro-community of gay fans, which operates in parallel to the *Bloody-Disgusting* forum. Whilst I argued in the preceding section that some fans have carved a space within the thread to forge closer connections with other gay fans (precisely when many fans had withdrawn from communication), fans use the comments of the editorial to discuss their object of fandom, favourite films and fan productions, whilst positioning these within a spatial confine that is beyond the immediate purview of other (straight) fans. That is, the editorial is demarcated from the more ‘official’ space of the forum itself. As one fan puts it: ‘it’s hard finding others like me out there but seeing there’s a big community here makes it better’. Referring to a the collectivisation of comments as a micro-community in and of itself draws parallels with the tribe in Chapter 3 where fans make their identities intelligible to themselves and to other fans in a bid for emotional capital. To support the notion that the comments can be conceived as a micro-community, one fan uses the editorial to notify others that ‘this is the first time I have said I’m gay online or anywhere’, another fan notifies other fans that they came out recently and that their family/friends ‘took it better than expected’. Moreover, a further two fans use the word ‘camaraderie’ to discuss the exchanges between fans and a further fan proclaims that they are ‘excited to see something like this happening on this site instead of hate speech and bullying’ – referring to the closer connections forged between different demographics of horror fans, absent to some, in the ‘official’ space of the forum.

Where I have suggested that fans perform their tastes in particular forms of horror as a way to perform the ‘doing of being’ a horror fan in the space of the forum, the micro-community of comments allows fans to articulate, in more culturally resonant ways, their precarious position between both the horror and gay communities. This is because the editorial represents a liminal space – appended to a horror site, but fostering honest self-expression outside of the central fandom in the forum. As I suggest, this further legitimises the significance of such editorials in fostering discussions around horror

⁶⁰ Similarly to Brian Juergens on *Campblood*, Trace is a graduate from the Radio/TV/Film program at the University of Texas at Austin. This, I would argue, could potentially render him as being more aware of current debates and theories that surround the horror film from non-normative cultural positions.

fandom, in a space that is autonomous from the cultural norms and values permeating the larger horror fandom itself. Further, a careful analysis of the comments reveals that the formation of the micro-community of comments facilitates closer parallels between discourses of sexuality and horror fandom, different to those found in the forum. One fan, for instance, writes the following:

My love of horror eased my self acceptance of being gay too, Trace. In part because being a horror fan, I was part of another group that was constantly questioned for what I was/am (i.e. Why do you like horror? Are you a serial killer?); variations on the same types of misconceptions people have about gay people. As I analysed the personal appeal horror held for me, I became stronger in my belief of myself as a person, and this allowed me to be able to face the challenges of being gay with the knowledge that I could articulate the positive realities of being gay and of being a horror fan.

Thus, where some fans in the forum work to maintain a discursive (and affective) distance between their gay identities and their proclivities for horror, fans in the comments, on the reverse, seek to discursively construct the interconnectedness of their identities, articulating the ways in which discourses of difference allowed them to make sense of their gay self through their consumptions of horror and vice versa. This follows the argument in Chapter 3, where discourses of difference and secrecy point towards a natural propensity of these fans in the horror genre. This is especially true as other media fandoms and their consumptions are perceived to be more culturally appropriate as well as more legitimate.

In line with the more ephemeral conception of micro-community employed throughout this thesis, fans anticipate the comments coming to an end, seeking recourse to alternative spaces to maintain their communication with one another (and I would suggest their shared emotional connections to the object of horror itself): 'I would love to talk to anybody who would love to just talk or whatever. We need to be supportive of us all'. Thus, the functioning of such editorials facilitates closer connections between gay fans, primarily to circumvent the tensions within the central space of the forum itself. This motivates one fan to fulfil a long held desire to produce a blog to 'delve deeper into the relationship of horror and homosexuality' (see Chapter 2). In sum, the editorial permits gay fans to carve a liminal space that operates both within the *Bloody-Disgusting* site, but outside the more regulated space of the forum. It is here that fans forge deeper

emotional connections with the object of horror, but more importantly, with one another, asserting their liminal position on the fringes of both the gay and horror communities.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered a nuanced account of how self-identifying gay horror fans seek to legitimise their identity in the ‘Gay Horror Fans’ thread in the *Bloody-Disgusting* forum. It commenced with an analysis of the ways that some fans (from a cross demographic) sought to downplay the relevance of sexual identity in horror fandom, potentially precluding gay fans from reaching out to other fans in the thread. Although this could be argued to constitute a progressive manoeuvre of rendering irrelevant sexual identity in horror fandom, it also functions, I argued, to sustain the heterosexuality of horror fandom, whilst precluding the possibility of gay fans reaching out to one another. I then proceeded to illuminate further tensions around the identity of gay horror fans, explicated through the way some (straight) fans seek to naturalise the heterosexual consumptions of horror, as well as regulating a space initiated to facilitate dialogue between gay fans.

However, as I argued in Section 2 of this chapter, multiple gay fans attempt to legitimise their identities in the thread, such as proclaiming their tastes in what I argued to constitute more ‘serious’ forms of horror – produced by straight fans, as well as articulating the role of their fandom in mediating aspects of their gay lives. Through these mediations, I provided evidence to suggest that some gay fans frame their fandom within discourses of sacrifice: to be gay *and* a fan of horror means carefully negotiating their offline gay network, including their friends and potential partners. Through this, it became apparent that whilst there are tensions in identifying as a gay horror fan, these tensions resonated with a larger contingent of horror fans. This, I would argue, ultimately illuminates the precarious position of horror fandom in social circles outside of the fandom itself. It further suggests that a mutual alliance can be forged between gay and non-gay fans through discourses of difference, which, to an extent, normalises their position in the thread.

Section 3 of this chapter focused on the performative qualities of fan, gender and sexual identity in the thread. Here, I argued that some fans perform particular versions of

masculinity that can be understood in terms of homonormativity as informed by the work of Lisa Duggan. As was suggested, in claiming particular versions of identity such as ‘straight-acting’, in addition to disassociating themselves from the spectre of femininity manifested through the alleged ‘effeminacy’ of gay men, gay fans perform their identities in a bid for legitimacy within the thread. I argued that this functions in a bid for recognition within the fandom in that, although they are open about their sexuality, they are still able to fit in with, and as, ‘one of the boys’. In support of the notion that these are performances for the benefit of other horror fans, I proceeded to argue that once communication in the thread had curtailed, other gay fans sought to cultivate their own values and knowledge about the object of horror. Although these exercises in fan knowledge are at odds with those circulating the wider fandom, I argued that in drawing upon a repertoire of cultural resources to ‘queer’ horror, gay fans eventually reclaimed the purposes of the thread to forge connections with one another.

This chapter has also demonstrated that an online horror community such as *Bloody-Disgusting* can offer forms of emotional assuagement to gay fans, a prospect said fans may find difficult to achieve outside the boundaries of horror fandom. In becoming producers of their own content such as editorials, gay fans have mobilised their cultural status to carve alternative spaces that operate both within, and parallel to, the central forum. In the Afterthoughts to this chapter, I extended my use of the term ‘micro-community’ to encompass the use of comments within the editorial, where self-proclaimed gay fans sought to render intelligible the links between their identities and investments in horror by establishing connections with other sexual minority fans. However, as I argue in Chapter 5, performances of taste and identity are reproduced in gay masculine spaces such as *RealJock.com*, where members negotiate their identities within the homonormative culture promulgated on the site. Because horror fandom is discursively tied to an identity as a ‘nerd’ or ‘geek’ in the space of *RealJock*, I contend that fans are compelled to display particular tastes in, and iterate certain (dis)pleasures of, horror. Indeed, this functions, I suggest, in a bid to (un)subscribe to appropriate articulations of masculinity valued on the site, and to negotiate these masculine values through performing their horror fandom in a series of different ways.

Chapter Five

Scaring the Jock out of You: Gay Masculinities, Taste and Horror Fan Identity on RealJock.com

Introduction

Much work on sexuality online is in agreement about the relative safety afforded to non-heterosexual participants in conversing openly and honestly about their sexual identity across different cybercultural spaces. Whilst claims about the possibilities for reconfiguring sexuality online have been argued (see Wakeford, 1997), other scholars have attended to more complex relations between sexuality on- and offline, where discussions about sex, authenticity and embodiment are central. Researching gay male sexuality online, John Edward Campbell (2004) seeks to challenge the ‘online disembodiment thesis’ where the body transcends physical markers of identity, arguing that such logics posit an oversimplification of the virtual and the ‘real world’ where in fact online discourse itself ‘takes on a physical consequence through bodily performance’ (p. 13). Similarly, David F. Shaw (1997) found in his interviews that whilst bodiless communication was an initial appeal for gay chat users online, most gay men interviewed made efforts to embody physical markers of identity through exchanging GIFs and meeting offline. In this way, Shaw uses an analogy of the ‘gay bar’ to reify parallels between online and offline modes of communication and desire for gay men. Proceeding from scholars including Campbell and Shaw, this chapter argues for the centrality of the gay male body in cyberculture, which in the space of *RealJock*, is framed in homonormative terms. Contending that the space of *RealJock* privileges embodied gay masculinities, this chapter seeks to explore how gay men negotiate their identities to this ideal, but more importantly, the role of horror fandom in forging more complex relations to it.

If, as was argued in Chapter 4, gay fans in horror forums such as *Bloody-Disgusting* position their identities as a way to perform the connoisseurship of the ‘doing of being’ a horror fan in a predominately heteronormative space, this chapter seeks to interrogate the tastes and performances of horror fans in an exclusively gay online space. However, as the name suggests, the gay online space of *RealJock.com* (hereafter

RealJock) is a virtual arena whereby the embodied masculinity of the gay jock carries both social and sexual or 'erotic capital'. Catherine Hakim (2010) provides a theory of erotic capital, which exists alongside economic, cultural and social capital (see Bourdieu, 1984). For Hakim, the term represents an amalgamation of physical and social attractiveness, reified through a commodified 'sexy body'. However if this is rendered problematic when applied to discourses of the female body, I argue that it has currency when applied to the gay online context of *RealJock* when theorising the links between physical masculine embodiment and the popularity/status of members in the forum.

In arguing that subcultural articulations of masculinity within a context of homonormativity (see Chapter 4) underpin the values and norms of the *RealJock* site, this chapter is interested in investigating how fans position and perform their horror fandom on this space. Furthermore, it is interested in how the masculinity associated with horror fandom intersects with, and is negotiated by, the broader cultural values of the site. Although the culture of this masculine gay space means that it is not conceived as being representative or emblematic of other gay spaces, it does serve as a pertinent case study in examining the extent to which horror fandom is positioned and understood in particular ways within the gay masculinities of the forum; this occurs in a space where the physical athletic body is symbolically revered as a marker of distinction. Similar to the standpoint put forth by Arthur Brittan (2001, p. 51), 'my position is that we cannot talk of masculinity, only masculinities'. Although one could contend that the *RealJock* space does intend to produce a singular authentic masculinity as understood (homo)normatively, the plurality of the term employed throughout this chapter seeks to recognise the slippery nature of gay masculinities within the *RealJock* community, specifying their shifting and local nature.

Because of the mutual acceptance in identifying as gay, but also the openness of expression that gay men find in this space, gay fans proclaim their horror fandom more openly in *RealJock* than is evidenced in horror forums such as *Bloody-Disgusting* (see Chapter 4). However, as this chapter argues, identifying as a 'horror fan' in the *RealJock* community reveals a series of complex identity formations and discursive negotiations to the masculine real jock ideal. Central to this argument is that the cultural label of 'fan' is itself rendered problematic, as proclaiming an interest, passion and/or desire for horror in

a space unreserved for horror fandom is replete with cultural power and distinction. For as Section 1 suggests, many horror fans self-identify as a ‘horror geek/nerd’ that, whilst not subjugating them to the gay masculine ideals valued in the community, seeks to negotiate a more complex relationship to it, by conjuring an anti-physical and anti-athletic aesthetic. However, if fandom, and specifically horror fandom, maintains a symbolic rupture from gay jock masculinities (as defined in the following section), Section 1 proceeds to explore the way some members deploy a ‘non-fannish’ stance towards horror (Gray, 2003). This allows them to negotiate complex relations to the jock aesthetic, whilst articulating their sexual desires as embodied in their online profiles and discourses within the forum.

In arguing that the nerd/geek label attached to horror bids for legitimate masculinities on the site, Section 2 proceeds to argue that some fans (and members) use their consumption of horror to construct and perform their own versions of masculine identity, whilst negotiating the sexual desirability of others. It is here that discourses around gay sexualities are analysed, such as the ‘straight-acting’ gay man – exposing the performative qualities of gender and sexuality in the forum. Thus, rather than argue for an erosion of the discursive struggles and distinctions around gender and sexuality as formulated in Chapter 4, this chapter argues for their reproduction in the *RealJock* space. For, as I suggest in Section 2, some gay members use their consumptions of horror to forge distinctions with other members as a way to position their own identities in homonormative terms (Duggan, 2002) (furthering arguments made in Chapter 4). Further, Section 3 proceeds to analyse the discursive definitions and evaluations of horror itself as informed by Jason Mittell’s (2004) cultural approach to genre. Here, I link particular reifications of the genre to both an understanding of what horror signifies to gay members of the *RealJock* community; furthermore, it illustrates how distinctions are produced between horror and other cultural categories.

Continuing to explore the complex relationship between the horror geek/nerd and the masculine gay jock, the final section argues that one particular member, RJ1, emerges as a ‘true’ horror fan of the *RealJock* space. Not only does RJ1 link convincing iterations of masculinity through his horror fan practices, but these practices serve as a benchmark for other horror fans in delineating a successful ‘doing of being’ a horror fan (Hills, 2005).

As the final section proceeds to argue, RJ1 positions his tastes through particular discourses and definitions of horror. In this way, RJ1 initiates threaded topics that transgress more ‘popular’ forms of horror, cultivating knowledge around subcultural forms of horror and special effects that combines the geek/nerd knowledge associated with fandom with a broader masculinity (and endurance) for more serious iterations of the genre. In this way, where distinctions are produced between factions of horror fans across threads, fan RJ1 inscribes his own tastes in horror against other fans/members. In concurring with Lori Kendall’s (2000, 2002, 2011) assertion that the identity of the geek/nerd develops complex relations to traditional conceptions of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987, 1995; see also Messerschmidt, 1993; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), I show how the generic competences exercised by some horror fans allows them to negotiate more complex relations to gay masculinities, and other (non-) fans within the forum.

A search performed for ‘horror film’ in the forum reveals 118 threaded matches, whereas a broader search for ‘horror’ reveals 180 threads, some devoted specifically to horror film in their titles, as well as threads pertaining to other topics which feature horror in their titles (such as television horror and the ‘horrors’ of ‘real life’). Although the high number of threads reserved for horror (compared to other non-heterosexual spaces sampled) could be attributed statistically to the large 389,184 member population of *RealJock*, I suggest that it is no coincidence that a large number of threads are devoted to horror in a gay site that hinges upon displays and performances of masculinities (Hills, 2002, 2005; Pinedo, 1997; Hutchings, 1993). Discussions of horror fiction fall under the remit of ‘arts and entertainment’, however threads not designated to this location when posted will, by default, appear in the ‘all things gay’ section of the forum. Discussions of horror are varied in the forum: ranging from particular films, directors, releases, sub-genres; but perhaps more frequently, threads soliciting members’ feelings about horror, growing up with the genre and the effects elicited upon its audience. These are the primary threads collected and analysed in the latter sections of this chapter.

Having analysed over 100 threads of exchange about ‘horror’ and ‘horror film’ over a six-month period, I registered as a member of the *RealJock* site on 18 March 2014. Maintaining the ethical integrity of this thesis (see research ethics), I felt ambivalent

about the prospect of creating a profile and uploading my pictures on a site where gym, fitness and the embodied 'jock' is valued. As a result, I created my profile to impart information about my interests, including my PhD project. I chose to upload 5 digital photos of myself without posing/flexing/working out, feeling more at ease in uploading headshot photos of myself. The sum of my profile could thus be viewed as unequivocally misaligned from the values the site promulgates, and by association, that of many other members. Thus, whilst my subscription to the site and my immersion in conversation with members is undertaken in an attempt to become part of the community, to gain richer insights into the field of study and to gauge the responses of members to my immersion, I continued to feel on the periphery of this community; not really conforming to the 'jock' aesthetic pervasive on the site, and further, not finding an identity as a scholar-fan because of the diffusion of horror fans and threads throughout the forum.

At the time of writing, I have posted 121 times throughout the *RealJock* forum. My posts span 69 different topics of dialogue, the majority on the object of study, horror, but other topics pertaining to popular culture, lifestyle, gay news/culture and offering advice to other members. On 3 April 2014, I initiated my first and only thread on the site titled 'What kinds of horror movies do you watch?' in an attempt to foster dialogue on horror, ascertaining the kinds of films members of the forum consumed.⁶¹ In addition to my presence across multiple threaded conversations, I also received a number of private mail messages from members. Whilst some of these messages were discernibly coquettish, in others, members wished to initiate conversation about the object of horror, soliciting my opinion about particular films. Responding to messages concerning horror, I had a conversation with three members, albeit the dialogue did not proceed to the extent that my research, or presence on the forum, became a focal topic of exchange. Whilst I confess that the nature of these private conversations, detached from the public nature of the forum, coloured my 'feelings and attitudes' towards the site and its members, they do not feature as data analysed in this chapter, nor do the members with whom I conversed.

⁶¹ At the time of writing, the thread 'what kinds of horror movies do you watch?' has received 22 replies, including those posted by myself in response to other members. As stated in my ethical procedure, the content of this thread does not feature in my data analysis, as this chapter is concerned with content posted prior to my immersion, unaffected by the nature of my unstructured questioning of members.

Who's a Real Jock Here? The Space and Jocks of RealJock.com

RealJock describes itself as an 'online meeting place for gay men looking to connect with other gay men who share their interest in fitness and a healthy life' (About us). Situated in the centre of the site's homepage is a tab with 'workouts' and 'meal plans' for users to peruse as they relate to their nutritional needs and fitness goals (Figure 14). The primary feature of *RealJock* is a forum that facilitates asynchronous communication, with thousands of threaded discussions and 'more than 2000' posts added daily (*Facebook.com*). These are contained under six umbrella topics segmented into: general discussion; fitness; dating, sex and relationships; nutrition; and health and sports. Under these rubrics, the topic of threads are varied; ranging from discussions of the quotidian: daily routines, personal feelings, leisure interests and pursuits, to more sobering discussions on health, disease and significant global news/events, particularly as they resonate with the lives of gay men. Although the site is ostensibly one where gay men can visit to solicit advice and engage in discussion with others including that pertaining to fitness (such as nutrition, bodybuilding and workout regimes), it is also, as Noah Tsika (2010, p. 235) has pointed out, a site which 'closely resembles other such gay dating and "hookup" sites as *DList.com* (2009), *ManHunt.net* (2009), *Gaydar.co.uk* (2009) and *Gay.com* (2009)'.

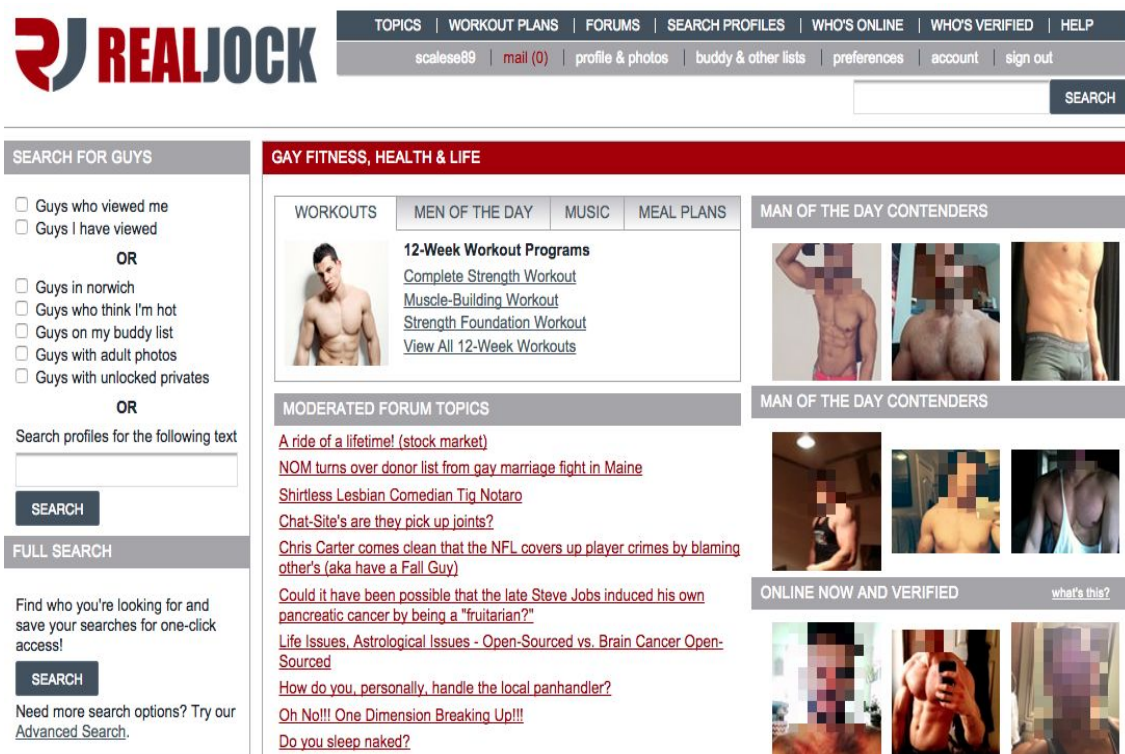


Figure 14: A member view of the *RealJock.com* homepage when logged into the site.

The site is one that calls upon the interests of members in health and fitness, but also a space where sexual curiosity and the erotic pleasures of members can be realised through its key functions. For instance, the search facility on the homepage allows users to search other gay men by their city and country, but also in locating the ‘type’ of man one eroticises/desires through their body type, ethnicity, and what they are ‘looking for’; from platonic ‘training buddies’ to ‘dating/ [a] relationship’. Moreover, in creating a profile on the site, central to one’s public identification, users are invited to upload digital pictures of themselves to espouse the intimacy and sense of camaraderie that the site seeks to foster through its communication channels. Although the average member photo depicts the gay man’s muscled arms and torso, authenticating their conformity to the jock prototype, such images also serve to proffer the commodified male body as an object of eroticisation for the pleasure of other gay men. Consequently, whilst the jock identity is at once an embodiment of the site’s project, it also becomes an object for the gaze of other men who may submit comments on photos to publicly articulate their admiration for a particular member of the site. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that the site’s

‘Man of the Day’ – determined by a democratic system of user votes, is unequivocally young, attractive and muscular; he epitomises the ‘real jock’ aesthetic of a homonormative identity *and* a potential object of desire.

The centrality of one’s photo as a marker of identity and as a symbolic badge of belonging to the archetypal jock image allows some users to achieve considerably higher degrees of erotic capital through their network of fellow members – or ‘buddies’ to appropriate the vernacular of the site. However, where fans in official spaces of fandom such as *Bloody-Disgusting* exercise fan knowledge about horror, or at least specific sub-generic categories and traditions of the genre, users of *RealJock* fashion and cultivate a ‘sexual knowledge’ that, as Sharif Mowlabocus (2007, p. 210) observes, ‘draws heavily on the aesthetics, codes, and conventions of gay pornography’. This sells the spectacle of their embodied identities to the *RealJock* community in exchange for a bid for subcultural recognition and popularity on the site. Of course, the status one achieves through erotic capital is not solely determined by their corporeal aesthetic, although it serves to identify them in all public communications on the site, and is therefore a significant marker of distinction. In developing an argument in Chapter 4, this emphasis on the muscular and well-defined jock inherits constructs of homonormativity (Duggan 2002), propagated through heteronormative ideals of the masculine body, refashioned and commodified as a virtual gay ‘hegemonic’ masculinity (Connell, 1995) which resultantly works to subordinate alternative gay bodies and identity labels.

The construction and maintenance of the well-defined muscle male body is thus directly tied to the fabric of the site. That is, the *RealJock* space espouses the commodification of the homonormative jock aesthetic by offering dietary plans and workouts to achieve culturally signified masculinities that reify the jock ideal. As this chapter proceeds to illustrate, users of the site produce and manage articulations of their virtual identity in light of this homonormative standard, whilst forging more complex relations to it. Discussing queer bodies and sexualities, Heather Jane Sykes (2011, p. 32) argues that ‘in one way, the gay gym body can be interpreted as a homonormative gay male body, with the skinny, soft and obese gay male body representing abject forms of embodiment’. Whilst Sykes is right to point out that the muscular and well defined gay gym body can be seen to bid for and subscribe to homonormative conceptions of identity

(especially as defined against the ‘skinny’ or ‘diseased’ bodies of other gay men), this chapter argues that some users deploy their leisure interests and objects of fandom, such as horror (fiction and media) in their profile to strategically negotiate their gender and sexual identity in relation to the ideal of the homonormative jock. This not only complicates claims around the *heterosexual* masculinities of horror consumption, but points to the notion that horror fandom can be deployed to negotiate identities within and against the (undertheorised) homonormative ideal, privileged on some gay online spaces.

Some Scream Louder than Others: Identity and the Profiles of (Non-) Horror Fans

A greater understanding of the construction of gay identities and desires can be achieved through an analysis of member profiles, which reveals information to other members of the *RealJock* site (Figure 15). Typically, profiles include digital photos of users (face shots, body shots, posing, flexing), accompanied with biographical information: ‘age, location, relationship status’ and information about what they are ‘looking for’ on the site, from ‘friends’ to ‘dating or relationship’. Further down the profile page, members may insert information about their ‘stats’ including their ‘build, height and weight’ but also their ‘HIV status’ and whether they practice ‘safer sex’. Finally, members can provide additional personal information in the ‘about me’ section, inclusive of but not limited to details regarding their personality, interests/hobbies, career, personal qualities and ambitions.

Member since: 03/18/14
Last active: This week
Direct link: <http://www.realjock.com/Scalese89>
Age: 26
First location: Norwich, Norfolk, United Kingdom
Relationship Status: Monogamous Relationship
Looking for: Friends, Online Chat

MY STATS AND INFO

Build: Slim	Weight training: 3 times per week 40 minutes per session
Height: 5' 10"	Cardio training: 3 times per week 20 minutes per session
Weight: 160 lbs	Sports I like: Badminton, Golf, Running, Swimming, Weight training, Wrestling
Waist: 32 inches	Other sports I like:
Chest:	HIV status: HIV -
Arms:	Safer sex?: Always
Hair color: Brown	
Eye color: Hazel	
Ethnicity: White	
My gym: The Gym Group	

ABOUT ME

Hi I'm Adam, 26, and live in Norwich, UK. I'm a PhD student in Film at the University of East Anglia, researching gay fans of horror online. I enjoy writing, going to the gym, socialising, swimming and staying active. I'd like to chat to people who have similar interests or would like to talk about my PhD research.

GUYS I'M LOOKING TO MEET

I'm looking to meet and talk to people who share similar interests as me, including horror films, exercising, writing and culture.

Figure 15: My member profile on *RealJock.com* including ‘My Stats and Info’ and ‘About Me’.

Members may further opt to complete a ‘guys I’m looking to meet’ section which creates an imaginary ideal of the ‘guys’ one is looking to chat, meet or date; usually explicated within criteria which details a series of desirable qualities, interests or ambitions that would render them compatible, whether platonically (as in friends they are looking to meet) or in terms of embodying a potential sexual/romantic partner. At the bottom of member profiles, members can view a photographic list of one’s ‘mutual buddies’ who constitute part of their closer network of members, as well as members with whom one has ‘hot listed’ – i.e. who they find to be physically desirable.

Members of *RealJock* may search profiles for other users, specified within criteria such as ‘guys who viewed me’, ‘guys I have viewed’, or alternatively, by other criteria including geographical proximity (‘guys in Norwich’) and ‘guys who think I’m hot’. Members may also perform a ‘full search’ for other members with more precise information including their age range and geographical proximity within a specified mile

radius, selecting whether they would only like to display members who are online now, have photos, videos or other specified criteria. Finally, members may search profiles inserting particular words/phrases that feature on a member's profile, displaying a full list of members who fulfill the search criteria. Indeed, it is the aforementioned search criteria whereby horror fan profiles were solicited for research. Initially, I performed an extensive search for all member profiles containing the words/phrases: 'horror', 'scary', 'scared', 'terror' and 'terrified'. This revealed 700 relevant member profiles (or 0.18% of total registered members). Discourses around horror and horror fandom can be traced through a relatively small number of member profiles in terms of the broader *RealJock* community. Of particular interest here though, is an understanding of the relationship between horror fandom and constructions of the gay self as they are negotiated within the embodied ideal of the muscled and masculine jock. Rather than simply argue that positions in horror fandom automatically register as conforming to embodied gay masculinities, I instead point towards the formation of more complex identities produced within member profiles, through discourses of consuming horror.

An unexpected finding from the data analysed reveals that few members with the word 'horror' featured in their profiles develop intelligible parallels between consumptions or fannish predilections for the genre and their gay-jock masculinities. Member RJ2 however, claims that 'I love to see scary movies, in fact no any scary movie could make me scared ha ha ha' ('about me'). RJ2's profile is framed within the failed effects of horror, whereby the genre fails to elicit any cathartic reaction, disassociating himself from what are the feminine associations of 'refusing the look' of horror (Williams, 1996). Further, in his 'about me' section, member RJ3 claims that 'I love snuggling and watching a good scary movie (comedy if ur a pussy)'. Where RJ3 enjoys watching horror, there is a sense in which gay guys unable to withstand its offerings are pejoratively labelled as 'pussys' (effeminate) against his own performance of masculine endurance. However, RJ3 frames his proclivity for horror within a sacrificial discourse, different from the discourses generated from fans in Chapter 4. For whilst fans on *Bloody-Disgusting* expressed a longing for potential (gay) partners to support their displays of horror fandom, many self-professed horror viewers/fans on *RealJock* are

willing to cease (or at least moderate) their horror consumption to accommodate potential companions.

Of course, this could be partially explained away by the nature of the relative spaces, whereby *Bloody-Disgusting* constitutes a subcultural space carved for fans of horror in contrast to their marginalised presence in the *RealJock* forum. However, the prevalence of horror mobilised in profiles to articulate a form of non-fandom (Gray, 2003; Theodoropoulou, 2007; Classens and Van den Bulck, 2014) warrants further investigation. Jonathan Gray (2010, p. 74) argues that, unlike the investment in an object that distinguishes fans, non-fans are the ‘comfortable majority’ in that ‘even many fans are lax fans’. For Gray, non-fans ‘watch when they can rather than when they must, loving a text but watching it only occasionally, perhaps even at times out of a sense of duty, and hence blurring the boundary between non-fan and fan’ (p. 74). Like anti-fandom, non-fandom is mostly hinged upon a limited exposure to texts and their paratextual materials, making probable that non-fans have only a limited exposure to the ‘nucleus’ of the text itself. However, Gray’s conception of non-fans and their relationship to their object of consumption as a ‘duty’ only alludes to the incentives or potential ‘rewards’ bestowed upon fans for consuming a particular object. However, I suggest that this ‘duty’ for non-horror fans in *RealJock* must be considered as a performance of identity in the space. For, as I argue, some members of *RealJock* deploy their ostensible non-fannish aversion to horror as a kind of symbolic ‘departure’ from homonormative masculinities. However, they also articulate their erotic desires for particular men (including horror fans) who are positioned with enough (sexual) agency to transform one’s non-horror fandom into an engagement with the ‘nucleus’ of the genre itself. In this way, an aversion to horror may be explained in terms of an irrational *resistance* to the genre, which, for these members, represents the *potential* to be overcome. In the ‘about me’ section of their profiles, three members articulate their views about horror:

RJ4:

I'll watch anything except horror. I hate horror films. If you want a guy to cuddle to you real close then pick a horror movie and I will do that. I will cuddle anyways, it doesn't matter which type of movie we watch.

RJ5:

I love anime and will watch just about anything but I don't do very well with horror or scary movies unless I have someone to cuddle with.

RJ6:

Horror/Scary movies scare the living crap out of me, literally I will not be able to sleep alone for a month if you try and get me to watch one. So unless you are willing to take on that responsibility, the answer is no, I will not watch one.

The examples above, I argue, add to Gray's conception of the non-fan. This is because they assume what could be referred to as a 'potential fan' position whereby possibilities of engaging with horror is largely predicated upon the object of their sexual desire. This object, I argue, is imagined as the historically significant figure of the masculine protector. For these members, their object of desire constitutes a man whose own proclivities and/or mastery over horror yields the potential to challenge one's non-fannish 'aversion' (verging on anti-fannish hatred) towards the genre by facilitating a romantic configuration of the protector and protected as it has been argued along patriarchal conceptions of gender. As Isabel Pinedo argues in relation to horror, 'culturally, males are expected to display bravado and unflinching vision, whereas females are expected to cower and look away' (1997, p. 57). As RJ7 pronounces more explicitly in his member profile: 'I am looking for a guy who will hug up to me when watching horror films and make me feel safe and who will care for me and look out for me whenever i am in trouble' ('guys I'm looking to meet'). The potential investments in horror then, tells us less about the promises of the 'nucleus' genre than it does about the promise of same-sex intimacy and moral security, which hinges itself upon articulations of a potential fannish identity, as opposed to an anti-fannish refusal to engage in the 'nucleus' of horror. In this way, the reification of the non-fan is produced less by the 'overflow' (Brooker, 2001) of information shaping one's feelings and attitudes toward horror, than the cultural value, gains, and possibilities these fannish positions bring in allowing members to negotiate their identities *and* gay desires in a space that promulgates embodied masculinities.

It must not be overlooked that, for members RJ5 and RJ6, a simultaneous conflation and disassociation of 'horror' and 'scary movies' crystallises a particular version of horror that underpins their performative aversions. For both members, horror

films unequivocally equate to ‘scary movies’ and thus a ‘potential-fannish’ display is performed in relation to a particular definition of horror that would necessitate a potential partner to take control of their symbolic passivity. As Hills (2002) has argued, this culturally coded feminine/anti-fan reception of horror is closely linked to ‘literalist reading strategies’, as the aesthetics of the genre are treated as ‘real-seeming’ rather than understood symbolically or metaphorically. This is manifested most notably in the case of RJ6 whose potential exposure to horror threatens to precipitate sleep deprivation, which to serious horror fans, is coded as both feminine *and* non-fannish.

For other members, on the reverse, their consumptions of horror share more complex relations to declarations of their masculinity. In this way, and like the non/potential fans, these fans seek same-sex companionship and/or comfort through horror; albeit, this is reconciled with a broader commitment and indeed conformity to the masculine ideal on the site. Member RJ8 writes the following in the ‘about me’ section of his profile:

I love to cuddle up with someone special I could do it all day and with someone and watch movies my favorite types of movies are horror and suspense. I am a big freak on the flipside I am a very straight acting type of personality I am very descreet and honest.

RJ8’s initial discourse is strikingly similar to the aforementioned members, whose ‘potential-fan’ position presented possibilities to use the horror as a facilitator of gay intimacy and comfort. However, as a means to disassociate himself from the feminised position of recoiling over horror and its associated suspense, RJ8 claims that he is, on the flipside, a ‘very straight acting’ guy which allows him to adopt a masculinised position in consuming horror. The concept of ‘straight-acting’ has received an extensive body of scholarship in gay online culture, despite largely being disjointed from Duggan’s (2002) concept of homonormativity (see for instance: Eguchi, 2009; Payne, 2007; Clarkson, 2006). Jay Clarkson (p. 192) explains that: ‘a straight-acting gay identity is positioned in opposition to cultural stereotypes of gay men that conflate femininity with homosexuality’. As Robert Payne reminds us however, the notion of ‘straight-acting’ draws attention to ‘its own process of self-construction’ as the self is positioned in a state of ‘becoming’, seeking to disassociate itself from semiotic markers of femininity that homonormativity seeks to disavow as a means to politically stabilise its mimicry of

hegemonic masculinity. Thus, for some members, using horror as a facilitator of same-sex companionship necessitates a performance of ‘straight-acting-ness’. This allows them to assume ‘appropriate’ positions in consuming horror by disassociating themselves from cultural markers of femininity, or at least off-shooting these momentary relapses with convincing displays of gay masculinities.

In a space that espouses disciplined bodies and a commitment to health/fitness regimes, overt displays of film fandom are seen to rail against the inscribed values of physicality and athleticism which comes to mark authentic displays of the embodied gay jock active on the site. However, for one to perform legitimately as a horror fan, displays of fan capital, and thus generic competency, must be strategically aligned with masculine performances, that not only authenticates the masculinity associated with horror fandom, but also their broader position within the culture of the site. Horror fans thus occupy a liminal position between generating idiosyncratic forms of capital around their object of fandom, whilst successfully performing embodied markers of masculinities. This yields the potential to offer greater recognition and status within the *RealJock* community. In this way, discursive tensions between gay sexuality, gender and horror fandom as elucidated in Chapter 4 are reproduced, rather than challenged, on the *RealJock* site. However, the remainder of this section argues that some members use their profiles to construct an alternative relation to real jock masculinities. Here, an identity of the ‘horror nerd/geek/dork’ emerges which simultaneously departs from homonormative masculinities valued on the site, whilst negotiating more complex relations to it. Member RJ9 writes the following in the ‘about me’ section of his profile:

I am avid reader (Sci-Fi Fantasy and Military Fiction, dorkie I know). I love to sit and home and rent movies on my Apple TV in my free time. When I do go out to the movies, I am a Horror genre junkie (again I know kinda dorkie). Thought Id give you a glimpse of who I really am, not just put all kinds of masculine macho stuff, haha.

There exists a significant link here between the obsessiveness of horror consumption as ‘dorky’, and the consequent departure from the ‘masculine macho stuff’ that members feel the culture of the site demands of them. Scholars such as Kendall (2002) have noted the discursive conflation in such taxonomies as geek, nerd and dork, and although recognising the distinctive contexts and etymological significance of the respective terms,

appreciates that they overlap and are united through a structural opposition and symbolic negotiation to traditional conceptions of hegemonic masculinities. Interestingly, it would appear that, for member RJ9, consuming horror lends little or no distinction from its generic counterparts such as science-fiction, a genre that has traditionally been perceived of as 'geekier' or 'dorkier' than the masculinity associated with horror consumption. This is articulated most clearly in Matt Hills' autoethnographic account of his adolescent shifts between generic fandoms, directly inflected in a bid for masculinity. Discussing his shift from *Doctor Who* fandom to a subcultural horror fandom, Hills writes:

Horror, in this case, provided a clearer sense of 'enduring' masculinity and an imagined 'toughness' through which my cultural identity could be reconstructed. If I used horror to perform a different type of masculinity, I also used more marginal forms of horror literature rather than 'mainstream' film, retaining a sense of unease with 'good' masculinity and tempering with an 'anti-mainstream' cultishness and an 'anti-physical' bookishness. (2002, p. 56)

For Hills, the transition from *Doctor Who* (1963-) to subcultural literary horror represents a shift in performative displays of masculinity. This is evidenced in the way he tampered with marginal forms of horror in a bid to sustain his anti-physical bookishness and thus sense of distinction from culturally sanctioned displays of masculinity. Moreover, Francesca Coppa (2006) has noted the formation of 'geek hierarchies' within an 'online comedy troupe' called the Brunching Shuttlecocks, whereby the Shuttlecocks form hierarchies about the value of fan labour, ranking 'the dramatic below the literary and the erotic below the dramatic'. For Coppa, this maintains traditional values that 'privilege the written word over the spoken one and mind over body'. Thus, if the geek identity associated with fandom privileges the mind over the body (knowledge over fitness), this situates itself at odds with the communal values of the *RealJock* community. For as I have suggested, this is a space that univocally celebrates body over the mind as epitomised through the athletic body of the gay jock, and the significance placed upon their digital photos. It is thus fair to argue that the departure of the horror nerd/geek (as it relates to fandom) from the embodied jock renders futile attempts to distinguish between generic categories of film, as well as the intrageneric values and beliefs of respective fandoms. This is a significant departure from Hills' account, where horror and science

fiction maintain distinctive cultural values, allowing him to strategically navigate his masculinity by sustaining their generic polarities.

A refusal to distinguish between genres is therefore common, as a declaration in consuming horror does not lend meaningful distinction from other ‘geeky’ fandoms. The way in which RJ10 describes himself as a ‘Quiet guy, bit of geek, love action, horror, scifi movies’ (‘about me’) therefore channels his self-proclaimed ‘geek’ identity not through any one generic category, but through a confluence between the three. After all, RJ10 claims that he ‘is not trying to be a “muscle man”, just stay in shape’ as a way to distance himself from claims to embodied masculinities, albeit is still able to benefit from a symbolic dividend through his professed commitment to fitness, bodily health and ‘staying in shape’. For other members, their ostensible embrace of the nerd/geek identity is attended by displays of their tastes in horror; tastes that have been argued constitute more masculine forms of consumption (see Jones, 2013; Cherry 1999a, 1999b). Member RJ11 writes: ‘I am very passionate about movies, with horror being my favorite as well as music. My favorite horror films are *The Exorcist*, *Poltergeist*, *Suspiria*, and of course slasher films. I’m a nerd and a geek and that’s just what I am. I collect memorabilia, I’m a book worm...’ (‘about me’). Initially, it could be inferred that RJ11’s unabashed confession of being a ‘nerd and a geek’ may disqualify him from embodying desirable jock-esque masculinities. The films featured however, including *The Exorcist* (1973) and *Suspiria* (1977) constructs a more complex relation of his identity. Writing for the *New York Times*, for instance, Janet Maslin (1977) opines that although *Suspiria* ‘does have its slender charms’, ‘they will most assuredly be lost on viewers who are squeamish’.⁶² Even though it could be argued that RJ11’s identity is incongruent with the desirable embodied masculinities in the community, he is able to construct his own sense of masculine endurance for these films. As we will see, this situates his profile against other members for whom horror is ‘too scary’ or else have a propensity for ‘illegitimate’ forms. In his ‘about me’ section, member RJ12 writes:

⁶² In 1974, *The Exorcist* was initially given an ‘X’ certificate in the UK. Caught in the midst of debates surrounding the video nasties, and the harmful effects of the film, it was not released on home video/DVD in the UK until 1999 with an ‘18’ rating. See BBFC: <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/case-studies/archive%E2%80%A6-exorcist>.

I'm A Bit of A Nerd/Gamer And I Love It! Haha
I Love Horror Movies...I Grew Up With The Halloween and Scream Trilogy!
I <3 The Twilight Saga
Madonna Is Awesome!!! I <3 Her!!!!

Whilst both RJ11 and RJ12 frame their proclivities for horror through a 'nerd/geek' 'nerd/gamer' discourse, the disparities between the members are anchored in the differences of their tastes in horror, and thus their *potential* levels of access to a real jock ideal. The reference to *Twilight* (2008) is particularly significant, for the franchise has attracted as vocal an anti-fandom as it has a fandom, which is imagined to be comprised of indiscriminate, pubescent girls in the vein of what Joli Jensen (1992) has referred to as 'the hysterical crowd' (see Sheffield and Merlo, 2010; Bode, 2010). Furthermore, as in the case of *Scream*, Mark Jancovich (2000, p. 29) has argued that 'the success of the film threatens fans rarity and distinction and this situation requires these fans to distinguish between real horror fans and the inauthentic interloper'. As argued in the following section, it is not that RJ12's nerdish predilection for horror challenges his potential to be recognised as a 'real' jock (though debatable with reference to Madonna as a gay icon), but that his tastes are marginalised within a cultural consensus of what constitutes *horror* in the forum. For, one could argue that the admittance of growing up with *Scream* (1996) not only signals his symbolic lack of endurance for more unnerving horror that fans often embrace in youth (see Chapter 3), but some fans' tastes are at odds with what is later defined as more 'serious' forms of horror. That is, horror perceived to be less authentic than that consumed by other gay members in the forum. As RJ13's profile states: 'I like my scary movies with minimum cheese factor. If you think that Drag Me to Hell was an awesome horror flick, go back to your homepage now' ('about me').

As I have argued, the socially constructed identity of the horror geek/nerd may not in itself represent a departure from hegemonic masculinities à la Kendall. Rather, the geek/nerd and its devotion to acquisitions of fan capital can confer status on horror fans who rehabilitate associations of horror fandom with displays of 'appropriate' tastes and consumption practices, whilst simultaneously conforming to the masculinities valued on the site understood in homonormative terms. Here emerges a member of the *RealJock*

community who, I, along with other members of the site, have identified as what can best be termed a ‘true’ horror fan: RJ1. In his profile he writes:

Average, geeky, Masculine, southern (with a "drawl") guy here into weightlifting, the macabre (true crime + paranormal), The Horror Movie Genre (mainly the old-school 70s-80s stuff, when Horror was actually good & inventive!), classic rock/classic metal music, the outdoors & Beer! (‘about me’)

The real significance of RJ1’s member profile is its strategic coupling of his ‘masculine’ coded proclivities for ‘weightlifting’, the ‘outdoors’ and ‘beer’, with his self-identifying ‘geeky’ confession for appropriate articulations in horror, locating this within a period which he argues constitutes the genre’s historical zenith. In his work on professional computer gamers, T. L. Taylor (2012) documents tensions between a gaming geek identity and participation in playing e-sports, suggesting that one way in which his gamers sought to negotiate their identities was to perform Connell’s hegemonic masculinity (including ‘athletic/star posturing’). This, he argues, ‘seeks to simultaneously inhabit traditional forms of privilege while shedding the outsider status and marginalization geek identity has long held’ (p. 118). However, the fact that RJ1 uploads a series of digital photos displaying his horror memorabilia, costuming as horror characters, as well as his *YouTube* videos replete with horror reviews and commentary, suggests that rather than attempting to downplay or discursively disentangle his geek identity, it is reappropriated to function as parallel to his embodied muscular and athletic body. Understood in this way, RJ1 benefits both from symbolic conformity to the real jock aesthetic, whilst achieving subcultural recognition and status as the site’s ‘true’ horror fan. As we will see, the ubiquity of RJ1’s presence in horror threads precipitates dialogue around specific forms of horror, which, to some degree, epitomises ‘authentic’ performances of horror fandom on the space. It is through the reasons discussed above, however, that the horror geek/nerd of *RealJock* should be seen as having a more complex relationship with gay masculinities, rather than excluded from them.

The Fem Amongst the Men: Consumptions of Horror

In the threads analysed, one finds a symbolic lack around the intersection of sexuality and horror: either discussions on overtly queer horror films or discussions of horror films as

subtextually gay or open to queer interpretations (see Doty, 1993). Initially, this was a surprising finding considering the population of horror threads in an exclusively gay male forum. One thread entitled ‘Whats Your Favorite Scary Or Gay Movies’ (2010) actively demarcates the two categories, with some members pondering whether they could be ‘synonymous at times’ (21 June 2010). By far, the most popular thread reserved for this was initiated by RJ1, entitled ‘Homosexual overtones in the HORROR film...’ (2009), which, at the time of writing, received 59 replies. Having initiated a series of horror related threads, RJ1 claims a wanting to ‘get deeper’ with horror, writing the following: ‘Horror is rife with many social/political subtexts of our times, as well as horrors dealing with growing up, coming out, being different & your body working against you’ (18 August 2009). RJ1 lists *Fear No Evil* (1981) and *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy’s Revenge* (1985) as illustrative respectively of ‘latent homosexual erotica’ and ‘coming out themes’ – mobilising his capital through both a textual deconstruction of particular scenes (illustrated with screenshots), but also through the choice of films interpreted. For as argued, both films are widely perceived to constitute two of the ‘gayest horror films’ within gay horror fandoms online (see Chapters 1, 2 and 3). Seen in this way, RJ1’s symbolic recognition as the ‘true’ horror fan is perhaps framed more precisely as an amalgam of both masculine aesthetic and geek/nerd knowledge, with a subculturally produced fan capital exercised through astute interpretations of horror’s thematic relevance for gay audiences.

RJ1’s thread precipitated a number of responses from members mobilising their own gay interpretations and erotic desires for particular male horror stars. *Fear No Evil*, *Elm Street 2*, and *The Covenant* all prove to be admissible choices in fans exercising gay readings around horror, as well as illustrating the ‘homoeroticism’ that fuelled the desires of some.⁶³ However, a significant number of members proclaimed sentiments such as ‘wow. I’ve never seen it like that before. I should watch these movies again’ (RJ14, 19 August 2009) or else formulated questions such as RJ15: ‘The guy who played Jesse in ANOES2 is Mark Patton. What porn films did he make? Just curious...’ (19 August 2009). That RJ1 corrects RJ15 by suggesting that he was indeed referring to Stephen

⁶³ Many of the films listed feature on Brian Juergens’ article ‘The 13 Most Homoerotic Horror Movies of All Time: Happy Halloween’ (2014) (see Chapter 2) and elsewhere on *Queerhorror* and *Campblood*.

Geoffreys from *Fright Night* (1985) (who subsequently went on to perform in the gay porn industry) demonstrates the notion that this subcultural knowledge of horror is not readily exercised within the *RealJock* site, and more significantly, may not be a criterion by which members' credentials and performances as horror *fans* are measured. Rather than interpretively dissecting the gay undercurrents of horror in the forum, I argue that fans seek to discuss consumptions and the effects of horror in a bid to normalise (or at least rehabilitate) their 'nerdish' consumptions. It is through these discussions, I argue, that fans are able to (re)articulate their gay masculinities as argued in Chapter 4. As I will suggest, this is partly enacted through a symbolic divarication from other imaginary consumers of horror, but also, by interrogating generic classifications and discourses of horror itself.

In their work on audience reactions to horror informed by gender socialisation, Zillmann and Weaver (1996), similar to an account offered by Pinedo (1997), conclude that all boys and male adolescents 'strive to perfect displays of fearlessness and protective competence' when exposed to watching horror; whereas, on the reverse, 'all girls and female adolescents strive to perfect displays of fearfulness and protective need' (p. 98). Although this finding has been challenged (Cherry, 1999a, 1999b; Williamson, 2005a), notwithstanding the deployment of a heteronormative model of the horror audience, it is somewhat useful in demonstrating the ways in which a bid to be recognised as inhabiting gay masculinities frames discourses of consuming horror through normative conceptions of gender and, I would add, sexual identity. Zillmann and Weaver stress that: 'those who are able to exhibit great skill in displaying appropriate emotions should impress others, their peers in particular, in specific ways' (p. 87). This would suggest that, despite the root of these models in historical configurations of gender and power, they are ultimately practiced as a conscious performance for the benefit of others, where one's status and symbolic recognition of masculine bravado is at stake. This is evidenced most clearly in a thread entitled 'Horror buff question' (2009). RJ16 (hidden member) writes:

Ok so I love horror movies I'm a HUGE nerd when it comes to them and I watch them all no matter how shitty they may seem, I know everyone has their stupid meaningless turn offs and I just found mine. I Get SO turned off when a guy says " oh I can't watch scary movies unless u hold me I get

scared". I'm all down for cuddling during a movie but when someone tries to be cute it just seems really gay, anyone else get turned off by that? (9 October 2009)

The use of RJ16 addressing horror 'buffs' in the thread's title, coupled with his proclamation of being a 'nerd', suggests a reaching out to horror *fans* culled from within the broader *RealJock* community. This could be seen as an attempt to fashion a micro-community of horror fans, where ties are strengthened through positioning themselves against 'cute' guys who cannot endure horror (such as those non-fans in the previous section), whilst associating this feminised behaviour with being 'really gay'. This operates, I would argue, to disavow culturally pervasive signifiers historically rooted in the construction of gay identity. Although it would not be a stretch to view this as an example of internalised homophobia displaced onto others, it simultaneously constructs more feminised or passive guys as 'non-desirable', reaffirming a sense of their own masculine endurance for horror. In his work on masculine black gay men on a website called Steve4Steve, Jeffrey McCune, JR. (2014) found that those men who described themselves as DL (on the down-low – concealing their same-sex attraction for other men) 'often identify the characteristics that potential mates must possess'. For McCune, 'this desire for men who are like the interactant is not only about a desire for more masculine men, but also a way to feel more "straight"' (p. 121).

Continuing a concern with the 'Horror buff question' thread, which received 56 replies, a similar sentiment to McCune's findings is evident. This can be seen through the following comments: 'It can be quite a turn off if somebody tries to pull that kind of thing' (RJ 17, 10 October 2009) and 'Any guy who can't watch a Horror Movie with me is a no' (RJ18, 26 March 2014).⁶⁴ For these members, their horror fandom necessitates a particular investment in the genre from their potential gay companion, but also the conformity to particular behaviours in the context of horror reception. In this way, same-sex desirability is partly conceptualised through homonormative gender norms, as they

⁶⁴ Following RJ18's post, I posted on the thread, adhering to the honesty and open expression that the thread fostered. My post reads: 'I agree, it would be difficult for me to be with a guy who wasn't into horror. I'm fortunate because not only is my partner a huge horror fan, but he's not scared easily when watching horror movies. I think I'd get fed up with comforting him all the time if he was frightened' (6 April 2014). Maintaining my ethical position, I do not analyse members' postings after my immersion.

are stabilised through discourses of watching and consuming horror. For other gay members, however, their cultural consumption of horror with a male companion is more negotiable as can be seen in the following statements: 'hahaha yeah no well.. kinda.. depends on the guy..' (RJ19 (hidden member), 9 October 2009) and 'never had anyone ask to be held because they're scared of it, I think I mite be slightly annoyed, depending on the situation, movie, and how they went about it' (RJ20 (hidden member), 10 October 2009). Thus, particularly in terms of RJ20's posting, it would seem that there is a performativity at stake within the thread whereby 'appropriate' ways of consuming horror is positioned at the intersection of textual effects, the consumption environment, and performances of gender norms. Together, these are mobilised in the thread to measure their own masculinities, but also the sexual or 'erotic capital' of imaginary gay others.

Discussing notions of gender performativity more explicitly, (hidden) member RJ21 writes the following:

My ex was a guy the 'straight acting" kind of whatever you call it, but he got really scared by horror movies. But he didn't say the "would you hold me?" crap, he would ACT as if it didn't scare him HAHAAHA which was even more pathetic because I could see him being very nervous and anxious during the movie, even jumping or holding a cushion , and afterwards he couldnt sleep making up excuses like he wasn't tired or that he was hungry or just wanted to "talk". He also always found a lame excuse NOT to watch horror movies (which is a genre I LOVE) to me the whole situation was fuckin funny specially because he pretended to be tough and failed each time. (26 March 2014)

What can be inferred from RJ21's discourse is the notion that the effects of horror carry the potential to reveal the slippage imbued within the socially constructed straight-acting identity of gay men through exposing the symbolic cracks in their performance. Therefore, while some members illuminate the contexts of horror consumption to ridicule 'cute/feminine' guys, similar strategies are employed by other members to challenge and indeed denaturalise the sense of straight-acting masculinities performed by some in the thread. However, in framing the effects of horror as capable of frightening even the most ardent of masculine gay men, fans/members who claim to withstand the genre's offerings recuperate their bid for recognition as successfully performing a version of virtual gay

masculinities understood on the site. RJ1 illuminates this most clearly in writing the following:

HAHAHAHAHA ! Yeah, I've heard of big masculine guys "screaming" or Covering up in a movie - & to picture that is KINDA funny. But yeah, due to me being pretty known as a horror nut, some guys make comments about "will you hold me?" hahahaha It is funny. (9 October 2009)

Through challenging 'big masculine guys', RJ1 rehabilitates his own sense of masculinity. Such statements are significant for they could function as confirmation for others whose masculinities could hitherto be undermined through the 'geekiness' associated with fandom and, by association, an investment in horror. Understood in this way, and as argued, the nerd/geek label attached to horror fandom is best understood as forging a more complex relationship to that of 'big masculine guys'; whilst it potentially undermines their own masculinities when watching particular kinds of horror.

Genre and the Affect/Effects of Horror

Historically, studies around media genres have foregrounded the text as the primary object of study in an attempt to identify recurring features across productions. As Keith M. Johnston (2011, p. 8) recognises: 'the quest to isolate that unknown 'X' has been at the core of genre studies since it became institutionalized within Film Studies in the late 1960s and through the 1970s'. More recently however, a shift has taken place that challenges the notion of the text as the locus of genre by looking at broader cultural structures wherein said texts are produced and consumed. Arguably, the most significant work in this area comes from the work of Jason Mittell (2004) who develops a cultural approach to television genres. For Mittell, genre categories are constituted by historical and cultural practices that are linked to broader cultural processes and the politics of taste, hierarchy and the cultural identities of audiences, all of which can be elucidated in decentering the text itself as the primary object of investigation. Mittell argues that: 'genre categories consist of discourses of generic definition, interpretation and evaluation. The last category seems to be a crucial issue for genre audiences, as hierarchies between programs and genres are one of the primary ways in which television viewers situate themselves in relation to media texts' (p. 101). Applying Mittell's cultural approach to genre in *RealJock*, I argue, can yield an insight, not merely into gay fans'

interpretations and reading strategies of horror, but how discourses around tastes in particular forms of horror are imbued with meanings relating to their gay identities, and further, how these identities intersect with those of other horror fans and ‘non-/anti-fans’. In maintaining a focus on the performative qualities of gay identity, this section focuses on particular definitions and evaluations of horror itself, and how these are tied to the cultural or identity work of fans.

Mittell’s research into audiences of talk shows reveals that ‘cultural practices constituting generic categories through definitional discourses typically focus on textual features’ (p. 108). Where, for Mittell, textual features remain salient to audiences’ conception of generic categorisations, for gay horror fans on *RealJock*, generic categories of horror are produced through the effects elicited upon its audience. In this way, discourses around horror, as a cultural category, link the effects of the genre with the durability of fans. A significant finding that emerged from the data is the idea that horror is simply ‘not scary’ to many members of the *RealJock* horror community. Threads entitled ‘I don’t get scared of scary movies anymore...’ (2013) are revealing, for horror comes to be defined through the very emotional affects it fails to elicit. Brigid Cherry’s research into horror fans confirms this finding as she observes the ‘frequent suggestions that long term fans do not (or no longer) find the examples they cite or that they accept as key horror films personally scary’ (2008, p. 205). For members of *RealJock* however, I argue that this serves a dual rhetorical strategy in articulating their (masculine) endurance for horror, and relatedly, constructing an identity for themselves as *fans* through their invoked (or over-invested) familiarity with horror.

In a thread entitled ‘Do Movies really SCARE you ANYMORE?’ (2010), many members lament the inability of horror to ‘scare’ them. The following example is typical of this sentiment: ‘Horror movies don’t really scare me since they’re soooooo formulaic and ineptly written and produced. A good suspense movie will definitely keep me on the edge of my seat, but the one horror movie that still has an affect on me is "The Exorcist."' (RJ22, hidden member) (22 June 2010). Member RJ22’s posting is representative in articulating the failed effects of horror against ‘suspense movies’, which are capable of eliciting an effect. In this way, the category of horror, as defined by films such as *The Exorcist* (1973), are often conceptualised as formerly effective but have since been

rendered as inefficacious in achieving desired effects upon its audience. For many of these members, horror-as-fiction (Noel Carroll's 'art-horror' (1990)) is positioned against the verisimilitude of other media, including documentaries, which contain a real potential to scare. As (hidden) member RJ23 writes:

When it comes to fiction I don't get scared anymore. I may appreciate one if it's any good... But funny some people should mention documentaries because to a point, no matter how disturbing a subject matter is, I would just let it sink in and acknowledge the fact, but not so long ago I came across a movie about... things that sometimes inhabit human bodies (among other organisms). The face-grabber from *Alien* is a cheap parody compared to that... (22 June 2010)

Member RJ23's discourse can be understood along Noel Carroll's (1990) distinction between 'art-horror' and 'natural horror', which delineates horrors elicited as a result of mediated representations, versus the horrors of real life, such as images of war or the devastating reports of 9/11. Therefore, if being scared by horror can be mastered and overcome (from a childlike state), the 'disturbing' subjects explored in documentaries produce a different kind of visceral reaction. For some members who use the *RealJock* community to frame their real life gay identities within a discourse of horror (such as the horrors of coming out or being bullied/ostracised), it is perhaps of little surprise to see the formulation of such distinctions between what is seen as real life, unmediated horror set against the 'parodic' qualities of fictional horror (as with RJ23). Further, this discourse can be framed through appropriate articulations of 'moving away' from the effects of horror (i.e. growing out of it); but, it is also about being aware of the distinctions between fiction and reality vis-à-vis the claims historically levelled against horror fans who are unable to distinguish between the two (see Chapter 3).

In this way, a cultural approach to genre and taste must not be detached from performances of fan identity wherein the category of horror is discursively produced. For, if an identity as a horror fan is entangled within ostensibly subordinate geekish/nerdish identities, the knowledge associated with these labels are exercised to contest definitions, interpretations and evaluations of horror. In other words, this allows them to position the genre in terms of how *they* perceive and frame their identities. Significantly, of the threads pertaining to discussions of 'horror', one of the most popular is 'A Movie that

SCARED THE SHIT out of you as a KID' (2010) which received a total of 734 replies. That members dismiss being scared by horror later in their lives is corroborated precisely because of threads designated for them to share their childhood experiences of being scared by specific films. In this way, fans can discursively separate a child/affective charge to an adult/rational one, dismissing any challenge to their sense of masculine endurance for particular films. Almost univocally, members claimed to be scared by particular films growing up. Many claimed to occupy a present immunity to being scared, whilst others claimed to continue being scared through their anchored memories of particular films or features therein (Pennywise the clown from *It* (1990) being a prominent example). This led member RJ24 to write: 'You guys are funny. Some of you have arms like half the size of a nation, yet were scared by some movies. I say you come on over and protect us little guys' (24 February 2010). Therefore, where the thread offers a space for members to candidly and openly articulate their former affective responses to horror as well as their cultivation as *fans*, for some members, this threatens a recognition as embodying the 'real jock' masculinities valued on the site, again illustrating the tensions evident between horror fan/masculine identities.

However, if such threads authenticate the emotion of being scared with childhood consumptions, members and self-identified fans mobilise other strategies of distancing themselves from these practices and sustaining appropriate articulations of horror fandom *and* performative displays of masculinities. One approach commonly adopted by fans, I argue, is to negotiate the generic boundaries of horror alongside other cultural categories. Whilst their investments in horror were cultivated at a young age, many fans now appear to negotiate a fannish interest in horror with an anti-fannish disdain for its offerings. Indeed, this works to subjugate contemporary offerings as inferior compared to the 'true horror' consumed in youth. For Gray, anti-fans must 'find cause for their dislike in *something*. This something may vary from having previously watched the show and having found it intolerable; to having a dislike for its genre, director or stars; to having seen previews or ads, or seen or heard unfavourable reviews' (emphasis in original) (2003, p. 71). In the same thread, member RJ25 writes: 'when I was 9, watched the "Evil Dead 2". Was not able to sleep for two weeks. Then watched that again when I was 16 and laughed the hell out like crazy' (24 February 2010). I initially suspected that this

seemingly generic transformation of affective response was unique to the camp and comical undertones of *Evil Dead 2* (1987). However, this sentiment spilled over into other threads where members solicited opinions from others about horror.

In a thread entitled 'Horror Movies' (2009), for instance, member RJ26 writes: 'I saw *Mirrors* in the cinema, I spent the whole time laughing my ass off because it was so lame and some woman came up to me at the end to tell me 'it wasn't a comedy you know!', you could have fooled me!' (1 April 2011). Recollecting memories of watching *Mirrors* (2008) for RJ26 is coloured by the way in which they clearly exhibited non-normative behaviors in the cinema – 'laughing my ass off' as a kind of symbolic refusal to accept that this particular film could ever be classified as constituting horror. I would further argue that this discourse also positions their value judgements of the film in opposition to other cinemagoers, as battles over evaluations of horror become locked into a self/other dichotomy where 'less knowledgeable' consumers are framed as being less critical about the effects elicited by the horror category. Whereas I have previously argued that some fans resist the scary effects of horror by refusing to partake in viewing, there also exists a vocal contingent of anti-fans within the forum. These anti-fans seek to degrade particular films, periods and cycles, challenging popular definitions and evaluations of 'scary horror', which for them signifies a genre incapable of eliciting affective reactions.

However, in investigating further, the category of horror is itself rehabilitated within the discourses that circulate its reception, shifting from 'scary' to 'disturbing'/'creepy'. This serves a dual purpose of illuminating more 'serious' manifestations of horror, allowing fans to exercise a sense of non-affective endurance. Therefore, where discussions of scary movies are frequently delimited to discussions of youthful consumption as a way to convey their early exposure to daring films, a larger portion of thread titles read: 'Most "DISTURBING" movie(s) ya have seen?' (2011) and the 'Creepiest Movie You've Seen' (2011). Rick Worland (2007, p. 10) distinguishes between the emotions of 'terror' and 'horror', concluding that 'the former is more artful and unsettling than the latter, which is condemned as aesthetically cheap, perhaps even ethically suspect'. Likewise, Matt Hills found the following amongst horror fans online:

To be disturbed is hence figured as an imaginative, conceptual response; horror is once again treated here as at least partially non-affective or disembodied. It is contextualized and valorized as a 'mind genre' of aesthetic extremes and devices rather than an a priori 'body genre' that possesses any sensationalist or literalist effectivity. (2005, p. 82)

In an online community of horror fans, it is therefore of little surprise that the fans Hills researched were keen to differentiate between the 'mind genre' of aesthetic extremes and a 'body genre' that possesses greater 'literalist effectivity'. Indeed, in a space such as *RealJock*, wherein embodied masculinities of the gay jock is valued, I would argue that horror is framed as a 'mind genre' against claims of horror as a 'body genre' within specific threads. However, this is not to dismiss the notion that large contingents of members and fans have claimed to be 'scared' of horror at some point in their lives. Important to these fans/members then, is not necessarily dismissing the emotion of being scared (on the contrary, many members claim to be scared by horror); rather, they possess appropriate and indeed performative displays of knowledge, which highlight the distinctions between definitions of horror and their affective charges. That is, some fans are aware of when it is *acceptable* in claiming to be scared. In this way, the 'sensationalist' or 'literalist effectivity' of horror has less significance than fans' abilities to perform a knowledge central to the 'connoisseurship' (Hills, 2005) of the 'doing of being' a horror *fan*. In turn, this allows them to distinguish between particular generic definitions and effects of horror in a bid to negotiate their masculine endurance for particular iterations. One therefore finds that discourses around the generic category of horror are defined and evaluated by many fans, as traced through the following examples:

RJ27:

Disturbing horror movies are the best kind! They are the deepest kind of fear. Not cheap gratuitous violence for shock value, not weak scares from pop ups or loud noises, but true fear that stays with you when you turn off the TV or leave a theater. This kind of fear can stay with you forever. ('Most disturbing film you've ever seen?' 25 March 2014)

RJ28:

Most of the movies on this list are good for a few scares, but for creepiness--like a sense of unease that stays with you long after, I have to agree on *The Strangers*. The randomness of the violence, and the masks, really clinch it. ('Creepiest Movie You've Seen', 2 October 2011)

RJ1:

Man,,,,dang!,,,there are a plethora of 'em - another creepy "paranormal" movie from 1983 titled THE ENTITY is F**king scary (plus that pounding soundtrack adds to it & it stars a young Barbara Hershey!) Not to go too "mainstream" - but we gotta give a shout out to John Carpenter's HALLOWEEN (1978). That movie added a whole new level o' creepiness of "the shape" stalking Laurie, Annie, & Lynda. ('Creepiest Movie You've Seen', 2 October 2011)

In the case of member RJ27, 'disturbing' movies represent 'the deepest kind of fear', a fear defined through its sense of longevity that must surpass the viewing experience itself. This is positioned against 'cheap gratuitous' violence which provides 'weak scares' and arguably fails to solicit any response or mental endurance from fans. Moreover, member RJ28 echoes a similar sentiment defining 'creepiness' against 'scares' through the sense of 'unease' which prolongs the viewing experience and extends horror to a more central realm within their cognitive processes. As the example of RJ1 illustrates, however, 'creepy' paranormal films can also be conceived of as 'scary'; thus, there appears to be less of a distinction formulated between these emotions. That is, for some fans, their choices in films are considered to be so 'daring' that a claim of being 'scared' is naturalised in reports of their reactions to them. What is revealing, however, is encroaching on the territory of the 'mainstream', as in the case of *Halloween* (1978), which positions creepiness as something antithetical to popularised and commercially available horror. Therefore, whilst discursive definitions of horror and its effects are negotiated across multiple threads in the forum reserved for horror, there is perhaps a more central distinction at play between different *forms* of horror, and their evaluation by fans. It is these forms of horror that I turn to investigate.

To the Depths of Horror: Moving beyond the 'Popular'

As the ultimate gay horror fan of the *RealJock* community, RJ1 positions films such as *Halloween* as too 'mainstream' when theorising discourses of 'terror' and 'creepiness', despite conceding that the film served as a precursor to these effects.⁶⁵ Rather than argue for the production of cultural distinctions between a 'feminised' mainstream horror and a masculine cult/independent or 'paracinematic' one (Sconce, 1995; Jancovich, 2000,

⁶⁵ *Halloween* was, in fact, independently produced and distributed, becoming a big commercial success.

2000; Hollows, 2003), fans on *RealJock* exercise their horror fan capitals as a way to reveal their exposure to a wider category of films, railing against the ‘gory’ and ‘mindless’ films of more recent cycles. These distinctions, however, continue to give meaning to the ways in which definitions and discourses around the genre are linked to *appropriate* articulations of horror fandom, in a bid, I argue, to recuperate the position of the fandom in the forum. For the complex identity of a gay horror geek/nerd is celebrated and reclaimed not through any anti- or ‘non-physical’ deficiency, or a subordinate jock masculinity, but because of specific forms of knowledge which grants access to, and mastery over, subcultural forms of horror, but also definitions and evaluations of them (Mittell, 2004).

Discussing gender and boundary policing in fandom, Kristina Busse (2013, p. 79) argues that the geek hierarchy ‘articulates a strong need and desire within fannish circles to articulate some form of hierarchy, mostly to prove to oneself that there are more intense geeks out there’. Whilst Busse’s account perpetuates a largely negative portrayal of the geek predicated upon intrafannish hierarchies and distinctions, the same cannot be said for RJ1 as these fragmented horror fan threads operate within a predominately non-fannish space and this reclamation of the geek identity is therefore necessary in dismissing ‘other fans by their lack of commitment and affect’ (2013, p. 84).

In articulating tastes in horror against those claimed in the profiles of some members (including ‘non-fans’ or what I referred to as ‘potential fans’), RJ1 extends definitions and evaluations of horror, and in the process, reveals examples of the genre that are consumed by a ‘true’ or authentic gay masculine horror geek/nerd. In one thread titled ‘A Thread for the Horror Movie GORE HOUNDS (Gore, Creature/Monster, & Special effects)!!!’ (2012) for instance, RJ1 writes the following:

*Note: Me being a Gore/Special Effects geek has nothing to do with me actually like seeing REAL LIFE gore (at all!). This is STRICTLY about gore & creature effects being crafted by the hands of a person & put on celluloid! It's a appreciation & passion for that "magic" trick! [...] I know alot of you RJ'ers on here prefer your Horror with the "Smart/Psychological/Makes you think/Less is more" approach (which I love too!) , but this is for the ones who like the other side of the fence as well. (18 October 2012)

The notion of a 'gore/special effects geek' produces subcultural forms of knowledge about horror, concerning its special effects. As noted by Hills (2005), Pinedo (1997) and Cherry (2002), discussions of special effects typically constitute a masculine endeavour of denaturalising the 'scare' of these films and thus demystifying their potential effects upon the viewer/fan. Perhaps more significantly though, RJ1's claim that a lot of 'RJ'ers' prefer 'smart/psychological/makes you think' horror, appears to chime with Brigid Cherry's findings that *female* fans preferred 'imaginative, intelligent, literary or thought provoking' films in opposition to 'gore or other effects used to evoke repulsion in the audience' (1999b, p. 195). This is precisely what RJ1 seeks to discuss. In this way, although tastes in horror are more covertly linked to distinctions along axes of gender and sexual identity (and are more covert than is evidenced on *Bloody-Disgusting*), they are still at play. For as I would suggest, RJ1 appears to displace these 'female' and by association 'feminised' coded tastes onto other horror 'fans' within the forum. As the thread itself calls for 'gore hounds', some members partake in conversation to express their opposition to these tastes in horror. As member RJ29 writes: 'never really liked gorrer. there's something too easy about scaring a person with gore that it doesn't even seem scary. it just is repulsive' (18 October 2012). Fan RJ1 replies: 'this thread is about gore & old-school special effects. Gore isn't meant to "scare" one first off, ONLY thrill. Theres a difference' (18 October 2012). The issue then is one about the particular affective responses to these forms of horror, which as RJ1 suggests, are concerned to 'thrill' rather than 'scare'. However, where Cherry reports that the fans she researched have a disinclination for 'gore-driven films', RJ1 dismisses the 'TIRED "torture porn" sub genre of past decade' (18 October 2012). This signifies a thread nostalgic for older 'splatter films' combining both a subcultural knowledge and affective endurance for former thrills that symbolically precede current and inferior examples of horror.

Whilst some members seek to legitimise their horror fan identity in the forum by creating distinctions between horror and other generic categories (comedy, documentary), 'true' horror geeks position themselves and their threads beyond the consensus of these members, creating a hierarchy within the community. These 'true' geek fans, such as RJ1, actually displace other 'inauthentic' generic categories onto members of the *RealJock* community. In a thread entitled 'Low Budget Horror...' (2009), again initiated

by RJ1, he writes the following: ‘So - if any of ya know me, ya’ll know I’m a horror movie loving geek. With that said, I have noticed there are some who don’t like so much ‘horror’ movies but more Hollywood “thrillers” w/ A-list casts & big budgets’. RJ1 continues: ‘Anyhow - Growing up, were there any Horror films ya remembered loving for the crazy effects that either scared ya at wits end or grossed you out??’ As with the previous thread, fan RJ1 positions himself as the purveyor of horror fandom, claiming that other members are not really into ‘horror’ per se rather ‘Hollywood thrillers’, which appears to be congruent with his claim that they have a proclivity for more ‘psychological’ fares.

That the thread received 104 replies against the mere 20 posts in the ‘gore hounds’ topic is again indicative of how RJ1’s relationship to horror ‘fans’ is conceptualised through growing up narratives, which univocally privilege affect/emotion over knowledge/endurance. However, because of RJ1’s subcultural recognition on the site and the nature of the question, some members were tentative in their responses: ‘This probably isn’t what you’re looking for, but I would like to suggest “The Tourist Trap” (RJ30, 11 August 2009), ‘I don’t know if this has any place, but my first horror movie I watched was Alien’ (RJ31, 11 August 2009) and ‘I don’t know if this fits your criteria, but Stephen King’s IT always scared the shit out of me as a kid!’ (RJ32, 11 August 2009). Where some members/fans are able to recall their former affective responses to horror and the ability to master them at a later point in life, what distinguishes RJ1’s posts are the links he makes between his horror fan capital and his affective responses to the genre, which discriminate between different definitions and iterations of the genre. Member RJ14 laments the current state of horror, writing that it is: ‘sad that most “horror” movies today are just “psychological thrillers” that are usually predictable and have a generic formula’ (11 August 2009). RJ1 confesses that he ‘couldn’t agree more’ (11 August 2009). Although RJ14’s lamentation could be read as a cultivated endurance for horror, that no current release (or remake) can have an effect on him, it could equally be understood that this member, and many others, are simply consuming the ‘wrong’ horror films. For as RJ1 previously wrote, these members are more into ‘Hollywood thrillers’ than ‘horrors’.

Whilst the ‘Low Budget Horror...’ thread invites members to recall a time when horror ‘scared ya at wits’, other threads transfer this affect into being ‘thrilled’ or ‘creeped out’, which is also symbolic of a fannish journey between physically being scared (body sensation) against the more rational mind effects of horror. Therefore, the remit of particular threads points to the diverse qualities of horror fandom in *RealJock*, with differing competencies, dispositions and distinctions being called upon across the forum. Although I have argued that the horror geek/nerd identity linked to horror fandom shares a complex relationship with the real jock ideal, RJ1 can be seen as reconciling the two, not merely through his beefed up athletic prowess, but through distinguishing himself from other self-proclaimed horror fans in the forum. As I have argued, this is achieved through generating knowledge about different forms of horror, granting new ways of defining and evaluating them, whilst contesting their ability to scare. A combination of these factors, I conclude, demonstrates RJ1’s mastery of horror in a bid to be recognised as *RealJock*’s ‘true’ horror fan.

Conclusion

This chapter has illuminated some significant tensions between horror fandom and gay masculinities on a gay site that values the embodied athleticism of the real jock. In arguing that the gay jock promulgates particular performances of hegemonic masculinities, this chapter has attempted to illustrate the position of horror fans within this homonormative arena. It has attended to the distinctions and power struggles formulated between horror fans, but also the position of ‘non-’ and ‘anti-fans’ to the horror category. In focusing on the position of horror across member profiles, this chapter was able to illuminate the ways in which members share complex relations to the genre. This was argued to function in a bid for homonormative recognition, but also as a reaction against it; where particular sexual desires and needs could be communicated. In framing fandom as an anti-physical, even bookish (Hills, 2002) identity, I found that the horror fan is accompanied with a sense of self as a geek/nerd. Although I have argued that this does not necessarily exclude members from claiming gay masculinities, it nevertheless forges a more complex relation to it. As I argued, particular members such as RJ1 emerged as ‘true’ fans, not merely for their horror fan capital and subcultural

displays of fandom, but for reconciling the geek/nerd associations of horror with their embodied online masculinities.

If some gay members assume a symbolic, non-fannish stance to horror as a means to articulate certain desires and erotic predilections for other men, other members dismiss these performances in a symbolic attempt to articulate their homonormative endurance for particular iterations of horror set against the spectre of feminised 'Others'. In this way, discourses of horror and its effects register a more complex position in mediating the desires and sexual possibilities for gay members. Previously, this has only been theorised along heteronormative dimensions of viewing horror. In subscribing to homonormative ideals, some members discursively play with definitions and evaluations of horror itself, lamenting the failed effects of horror through seeking more 'disturbing' or 'creepy' films. As was argued, this resonates with horror as a 'mind genre', disavowing their physical reactions and sustaining appropriate embodiments of their masculinity, which as I have argued, was closely scrutinized by some members.

As the 'true' horror fan of the site, RJ1 positions himself within the panopticon of horror fandom, interrogating the tastes and practices of other members, and positioning his tastes in opposition. Although some members claim to be disillusioned by contemporary horror (as 'not scary'), leading them to produce distinctions between horror and other generic categories (such as comedy), there is a sense that it was not really 'horror' per se that these members were concerned with, but less 'authentic' generic categories. Central here was the argument that cultural distinctions and the politics of taste in horror are (re)produced in such gay spaces, rather than disavowed or challenged.

This chapter has argued for the complexity in identifying as a horror fan on a gay space that values homonormative iterations of masculinities. It has not, however, attempted to argue for the complexity of these formations in alternative gay online spaces. That cultural constructs such as homonormativity and the vernacular of straight-acting have significance within the gay community, both online and offline (and in the relations between the two) would suggest that horror fandom shares a complex relationship to these cultural constructions. Even though the masculinities associated with particular consumptions of horror and fan practices have long been argued in academic scholarship, this does not prove to be adequate in understanding how gay online spaces

(re)produce these masculinities, and furthermore, how they are negotiated within culturally specific homonormative contexts. For whilst this research reveals that horror fandom and gay online masculinities share a rich and dynamic relationship, the ways they intersect and are negotiated will continue to reveal this complexity as the category of horror expands, and homonormative practices are appropriated, challenged and revised.

Conclusion

In attending to the relationship between the cultures of the spaces studied, the identities of fans, the reception material and fan discourses within, it has been possible to illuminate the complexity of gay horror fandom across distinctive online micro-communities. In maintaining the argument that gay fans hold vastly different investments in and emotional connections to horror, this study has additionally found that gay fans position and perform their fannish and cultural identities differently within the cultures of the spaces they inhabit. The multi-sited approach to fandom has therefore enabled this thesis to take a more holistic approach in attempting to understand the practices, relationships and identity performances that arise in gay horror fandom. Underpinning this concern, it has also enabled this study to explore and intervene in some of the debates about community and belonging online, and more importantly, the role and performance of horror fandom in rendering intelligible the cultural identities of fans, particularly as they are constructed and inflected by the distinctive cultures in which fans participate.

What this thesis has argued is that there exists several distinctive micro-communities of horror fans online and gay fans utilise these cultures in the service of making meaning from their complex cultural identities. Indeed, whilst the field of fan studies has been attentive to the establishment and maintenance of larger fandoms where the notion of ‘community’ has signified a sense of immediate attachment and sustained dialogue over an extended period, I have used the notion of micro-community to capture smaller scale spaces and communities, arguing that individual threads can themselves be conceived of such in the eyes of fans. As I have suggested, my conception of micro-community has been employed despite what could be argued as the fragmentary nature of the platforms researched, such as fan blogs (Chapter 2) and the oft-ephemeral nature of dialogue that curtailed upon, or shortly after, my arrival to the fan forums (Chapters 3 and 4). Further, I have also employed the term ‘micro-community’ to signify the establishment of smaller factions of gay horror fans in larger spaces (delineated through more users) – namely horror fandoms (Chapter 4) and exclusively gay online spaces such as *RealJock* (Chapter 5). In conclusion to this thesis, I proceed to summarise the central tenets I set out to investigate, offering reflections on key findings as retrieved through my multi-sited methodological approach. By way of reflecting on the limitations of this

study, I suggest future directions for research into gay horror fandom before offering a final reflection.

Readings and Interpretive Strategies

In analysing two spaces of fan reception, this thesis has argued that gay fans undertake different reading strategies of horror. As I suggested, fans on *Queerhorror* (1997) evaluate horror texts according to their degrees of overtly queer representation. This strategy is exercised, I argued, as a way to legitimise their investment in a generic category that features gay and lesbian themes, characters and narratives. However, I suggested that for many fans, producing a canon of queer horror is fraught with struggles and distinctions over taste, quality and generic definitions of horror. Therefore, whilst the production of a queer horror canon may enable some fans to expose and celebrate non-heterosexual features of horror, I have suggested that these films are not considered to constitute ‘authentic’ horror, pointing toward the conflicts and distinctions inherent to this cultural category. Having problematised this category, I proceeded to argue that fans on *Campblood* (2003) have mobilised queer interpretations of horror by drawing upon a vast repertoire of fan capital. In this way, queer readings focus on the cultural significance of a broader range of horror texts relevant to their cultural subjectivities. Indeed, whilst these readings may arguably sustain the ‘closet’ of horror as read subtextually (Doty, 1993), they are ultimately productive in exposing the multitude of divergent horror texts that are significant to gay fans beyond the category of queer horror.

Where scholars in the field of horror have been productive in extracting the ‘queer’ properties of the genre through modes of textual analysis and historical reception accounts (Wood, 1986; Benshoff, 1997; Berenstein, 1996; Halberstam, 1995; Staiger, 2000), the focus on gay fans has enabled this thesis to move beyond cultural signifiers of queerness as expressed within the texts, to the cultural resources of fans; that is, exploring how fans make texts meaningful to their sense of self. It is here that gay fans read films such as *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy’s Revenge* (1985) as relating to their micro-narratives of coming to terms with their sexuality and the perils of self-identifying against compulsory heterosexuality during their youth (see Chapter 2). Significantly, whilst scholarship has long assumed that the counter-hegemonic figure of the monster/killer

holds currency for non-straight audiences of horror, Chapter 2 argued that the introduction of the figure of the final boy (as a stand in for Clover's (1992) final girl) of Jesse Walsh has resonated particularly saliently with gay fans through the cultural resonances of his relationship with the monstrous Freddy Krueger. I have suggested that, whilst subversions of traditional gender roles in films such as *Elm Street 2* are ideologically revealing, and whilst such subversions of the slasher formula give rise to gay interpretations, it is indeed the significance of these reconfigurations that matter, and the meanings that emerge between these textual features and the interpretations mobilised by gay fans to make sense of them, i.e. through discourses of sexual repression.

In adopting Alexander Doty's contention that queer readings of popular culture texts should not be conceived of as "'alternative readings'", 'wishful or wilful misreadings' or "'reading too much into things'" (1993, p. 16), this thesis has suggested that virtual culture (specifically social media platforms such as *Facebook*) has facilitated communication between fans and celebrities such as Mark Patton (Jesse Walsh). For fans, Patton comes to embody a discourse of 'authenticity' hinged upon the notion that Patton's real life struggles with his sexual identity has resonated with the reading strategies mobilised by fans around Jesse, blurring the boundaries between his fictionalised character and celebrity profile. The broader implication here is that, where previous studies have suggested that a non-straight producer may (sub)consciously infuse a kind of 'gay sensibility' into their work to be decoded at will by horror's audiences, the contemporary significance of social media platforms has afforded a more direct platform for gay fans to access streams of production information via celebrity interaction. Therefore, rather than merely decoding the latent messages encoded by horror producers, I have suggested that gay readings have greater legitimacy than before precisely because they are partly structured through the paratextual culture that circulates the source text.

Emotional Connections

In utilising *Elm Street 2* as a case study, I argued that fans interpreted the film in light of their own sexual identity struggles. An analysis of the blogs suggested that this was particularly salient for gay fans that grew up with the film and have since used online platforms to articulate their intrapersonal connections to its protagonist Jesse Walsh.

Whilst textual subversions of gender through an introduction of a final boy has facilitated the emergence of gay readings, it was the resonance of this narrative within the context of fans' youth and the conflicting emotions of being simultaneously monster and victim that stitched together the significance of the film within their micro-narratives. As Cornell Sandvoss argues, this is based on 'the perception of the external object as part of the self'; indeed, it is 'based on the recognition, consciously or unconsciously, of aspects of the self in the external object' (2005, p. 97). Although previous studies have recognised the potential agency of gay audiences in unearthing the gay content of different horror productions, I have suggested that gay fans have forged much deeper emotional connections with films such as *Elm Street 2* that surpass reading for clues in the text. This is because such films become central to the ways that fans recall and make sense of their identity narratives, particularly those relating to coming to terms with their sexual identities.

Whilst the memories fans have of viewing such texts are recalled through the struggles they faced in growing up gay, I augmented this growing up narrative by arguing that horror served a therapeutic function during their childhood (see Chapter 3). I have argued that, for some gay fans, horror served a cathartic escape from the harsh realities of growing up as gay (with anti-gay rhetoric), mitigating the precariousness of their real life situation. I suggested that specifically, the tribulations of the victim figure in horror made their own lives seem more manageable, giving them a language for their own social oppression. Moreover, this thesis also argued that for some fans, their consumptions of horror preceded their self-acknowledgments of their gay identities confirming for them, that their reading strategies were 'different' or 'subversive', pointing towards the nonconformity of their cultural viewing positions. Therefore, in seeking to advance an understanding of 'becoming a fan' narratives in the field of fan studies, I contend that these narratives must be fully integrated with an understanding of fans' cultural identities.

However, the emotional connections fans invest in such texts rails against current debates in the field of horror fandom in that knowledge/subcultural capital is privileged over emotion/affect (see Hills, 2005; Church, 2009). It has been claimed that knowledge/capital about horror seeks to secure one's status as a 'horror fan', where fans perform a non-affective stance in claiming to be unaffected by the most brutal and

gratuitous fare. In analysing their emotional connections with particular films, the gay fans researched in this thesis would appear to rail against this ‘discursive mantra’ by articulating their emotional connections to specific features and forms of horror. This thesis therefore offers an alternative model of horror fandom hinged upon emotional capital. This capital operates in a way that bestows value to fan postings that resonate with the feelings held by other gay fans within the cultural spaces they occupy. Indeed, whilst it would be erroneous to suggest that fan knowledge is not readily exercised in these micro-communities, I have argued that it is secondary to making sense of their investments in horror as they are anchored in their memories of growing up, building the foundations of such micro-communities and the focal point of exchange within. As I have argued, this entails their micro-narratives and recollections of ‘becoming a fan’ of horror (Cavicchi, 1998) to discursively intersect with their narratives of ‘becoming aware of their gay identity’ as they are recalled through their memory narratives.

Identity and Performance

Existing work in the field of horror fan studies has suggested that the successful ‘doing of being’ a horror fan entails particular displays of knowledge and capital, closely linked with cultural exercises of masculinity (Hutchings, 1993; Hollows, 2003; Hills, 2005). In focusing on fans with different self-reported identities (including gay and heterosexual) and with varying investments in horror, this thesis has redressed these debates by focusing attention to the performative dimensions of horror fandom – the construction and articulation of cultural identity across horror and gay cultures. In analysing the ‘Gay Horror Fans’ thread on *Bloody-Disgusting* (Chapter 4), I argued that a paradox arose in that, in ‘outing’ their gay identities in the forum, fans are accused of departing from more conventional topics of conversation within the remit of the forum. Indeed, when Bacon-Smith (2000) observes that gay science fiction fans occupy a precarious position within both the gay and science fiction communities, this thesis has argued for a similar pattern within gay horror fandom. However, in navigating the complexities of this position, and under the scrutiny of straight fans, some gay fans embody performances of homonormativity (Duggan, 2002) – the mirroring of heteronormative ideals and displays of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ that have been central to previous accounts of horror fandom.

However, rather than reinstate binaries between either the ‘masculinity’ or ‘femininity’ of horror fandom, this thesis has pointed to the links between performing cultural identity and proclaiming a taste in, and consumption of, particular forms of horror. This argument was developed to account for the cultural distinctions exercised amongst factions of gay fans as they position their identities and tastes against other effeminate and, by extension, ‘inauthentic’ gay consumers.

Moreover, this thesis sought to investigate how horror fan identities were received, negotiated and performed within a gay online space where the embodied, masculine gay jock is valued (see Chapter 5). I argued members who self-proclaim to be a horror ‘fan’ often claimed an identity as a ‘geek’ or ‘nerd’ – as subcultural *knowledge* about horror evokes the anti-physical associations of fandom, negotiating their claims to the imaginary ideal of what a jock signifies. Thus, whilst previous studies have largely reinforced the masculinity of horror fandom, including work within female horror fandom (Williamson, 2005a; Cherry, 1999a, 1999b, 2002), this thesis has suggested that, in foraying into spaces with a heterogeneity of fans and non- or anti-fans alike, circles of horror fandom do not automatically register as being a masculine practice. Rather, this fandom must be carefully constructed and articulated in specific ways through displays of fan capital, taste, but also by proclaiming particular viewing positions. The larger claim here is that, whilst these practices allow members to bid for a place within the site’s circle of horror fans, these ‘authentic’ displays of horror fandom permit fans to construct and articulate their gay masculinities that adhere to the norms and values of the cultures they participate.

This thesis has argued that, whilst there are tensions and power relations that structure the relationships between fans of differing sexual identities, there are a series of hierarchies, struggles and distinctions operating *within* gay horror fandom. What this reveals is that fans can and do claim particular viewing positions and consumptions of horror in order to perform identity work online. In the process, gay fans negotiate their identities through cultural labels such as ‘straight-acting’ that expose the performative dimensions of gay horror fandom, symbolically disavowing culturally prescribed constructions of gay identity as they permeate distinctive online cultures, including horror and gay forums. Moreover, whilst scholars have hitherto claimed particular gendered

tastes in horror, such as female fans preferring subtle and more thought provoking horror (Cherry, 1999), with male fans preferring gratuitous ‘gore’ and visceral forms (Hills, 2005), I have suggested that these tastes must be situated within the cultural context in which they are proclaimed, and, more importantly, considered alongside the construction, negotiation and articulation of identity. For, I have demonstrated that some gay fans reject subcultural productions of ‘queer horror’ in favour of more commercially recognisable and ‘legitimate’ horror (Chapter 4), whilst other fans deconstruct the affective dimensions of horror between claims of being ‘scared’ versus ‘disturbed’ (Chapter 5). Whilst this thesis does not find a unified taste or viewing position towards particular iterations of horror, it does conclude that gay fans mobilise horror as a rhetorical strategy in constructing their identities, desires and fan-self/status in culturally significant ways.

Gay Horror Fandom: Practices and Micro-Communities

In focusing on fan practices within micro-communities of gay horror fandom, this thesis has pointed towards the deployment of different types of capital in different online spaces. Therefore, in maintaining my concern with a holistic approach to gay horror fandom, it is necessary to converge these conclusions in reflecting upon the multiplicity of fan practices encountered in this thesis, especially as they pertain to different performances of fandom and different constructions of fans’ sexual identity. Rather than posit a unified narrative of gay horror fandom, this thesis has suggested that gay fans utilise distinct online cultures in order to approach the horror film in culturally significant ways. Further, the cultural specificity of fans’ approaches to and investments in horror structure their interpersonal relationships with other horror fans. As I have suggested, these relationships are inflected differently across the spaces and micro-communities studied and are often replete with struggles, distinctions and bids for symbolic recognition promulgated by the values and norms embedded within the cultures.

For fans identifying with non-normative sexual identities, the formation and maintenance of smaller micro-communities has enabled them to carve a cultural space in which to invest in the object of horror, often through the production of autobiographical accounts. This thesis has argued that these autobiographical accounts are not merely

productive in rendering intelligible their own cultural investments in horror, particularly in the construction of their sexual identities, but aid in the cultivation of interpersonal connections with other fans. In illustrating the parallels between fan blogs (Chapter 2) and a fan produced tribe on *Tribe.net* (Chapter 3), I have suggested that these spaces facilitate a confluence of using the object of horror to make sense of the self, whilst securing the promise that these textual postings will accrue degrees of what I have referred to as ‘emotional capital’ amongst contingents of gay fans. Often on the fringes of larger fan groups or the ‘inner’ circles of horror fandom, emotional capital presents opportunities for fans to acquire recognition within their smaller fan circle; albeit this capital, I have contended, is not readily convertible into fan social capital. This is because emotional capital circulates within smaller factions of fans whose very presence within these micro spaces results from their displacement from, or sense of difference to, the fans, topics and tastes that circulate within larger and more recognisable horror cultures (Chapter 4).

Moreover, this thesis has claimed that bids for emotional capital in smaller and more inclusive spaces of horror fandom can be achieved by fans who grew up with particular periods of horror and who intersect these growing up narratives with cultural narratives around coming out within a milieu of social oppression. This thesis has thus demonstrated that fan/subcultural capital (Chapter 1) and emotional capital (Chapter 3) can be achieved and exercised on the fringes of central horror fandoms; especially for those fans whose interpretations of horror resonate with the micro-narratives of other gay fans. As I have argued, gay identities are made sense of through particular ‘becoming a horror fan’ narratives that foreground the ‘life’ moments of fans that carry deep personal meaning and form the basis of intersubjective understanding and identification. As Matt Hills writes: ‘fandom may well be experienced as intensely personal (having a kind of intensified use-value) but if this sentiment cannot return to the cultural space of exchange-value (carrying shared, intersubjective value) then it is likely to wither or to be temporarily abandoned’ (2002: 49). However, whilst gay fans’ cultural investments in horror underpin the significance of emotional capital in micro spaces, I have argued that their ‘exchange-value’ is negated, even challenged, in postings within macro online forums (see Chapters 4 and 5).

This thesis has suggested that in migrating to horror forums, greater degrees of social capital can be acquired *if* gay fans perform culturally sanctioned displays of horror fandom in a bid to be seen as ‘culturally one of the boys’ (Thornton, 1995). However, I have suggested that membership to this ‘boys club’ entails a disavowal of cultural signifiers of gay sexuality, namely effeminacy and histrionic performances of gay sexuality. This produces a series of cultural distinctions between self-identifying gay fans. Consequently, this fandom and its values are entrenched within male heteronormativity, a necessary primer to authentic displays of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell, 1992). Lisa Duggan’s conception of homonormativity has been useful in giving meaning to the way these heteronormative ideals are appropriated within gay horror fandom, but also how homonormative practices function to exclude other gay consumers. Not only have I argued that personal bonds are disavowed in this space, but any hope of achieving emotional capital by forging parallels with other gay horror fans threatens one’s entry into the ‘inner circle’ of horror fandom. Despite reclaiming the thread, connections between gay fans were structured through their horror fan capitals where knowledge is important and where emotional capital is symbolically censored. Therefore, whilst it has been argued that different bids for capital operate in spaces of gay horror fandom, this study claims that these capitals are non-transferable and are often at odds: for instance, emotional capital is not necessarily transferable into social capital.

If mainstream horror forums represent spaces where fans can achieve greater degrees of social capital, one might conclude that, unless gay fans subscribe to homonormative logics of expressing the self, their entry and legitimacy within horror fandom is challenged. However, this thesis has demonstrated that in gay spaces hinged upon a homonormative gay ideal, horror fandom itself is performed and articulated as a means to subscribe to ‘authentic’ displays of gay masculinities. These performances of horror fandom, I argued, seek to rehabilitate connotations of fandom that privileges ‘mind’ over the ‘body’ and arguably the feminine associations of fandom as ‘passive’ forms of cultural consumerism. In one sense, this challenges hitherto scholarly claims of horror fandom as a practice that registers as unequivocally ‘masculine’ without consideration of the spaces within which these practices operate. Further, it suggests that for gay fans, the successful ‘doing of being’ a horror fan (Hills, 2005) is not necessarily

proscribed because of their non-heterosexual identities. Instead, I have argued that gay identities can be constructed and authenticated in certain ways by proclaiming particular tastes in horror, subscribing to specific generic definitions and by claiming particular affective responses that are valued differently in conversation with horror fans across distinctive online cultures.

This also means that the ways in which horror, as an object of fandom, is framed and conceptualised, differs across micro-communities. In arguing that the category of queer horror is rendered problematic in Chapter 1, fans proceed to ‘read’ into specific textual moments or scenes that invoke gay readings in the space of smaller micro-communities (Chapters 2 and 3). However, fans discuss particular subgenres, producers (Chapter 4) and even their affective responses and generic definitions of horror in other spaces (Chapter 5). As I have argued, it is not only these differences that matter, but how the meaning of these differences aids in the way gay fans use horror to make sense of their identities to themselves, and further, how they wish to present themselves to other fans by using the genre as a cultural resource in the complex process of ‘doing’ identity work online. In spaces such as blogs and tribes for instance, normative readings of the slasher film are destabilised and textual subversions of gender propagate gay readings of the ‘final boy’ figure. However, on *Bloody-Disgusting*, gay readings are significantly absent and the slasher film is sustained along heterosexual viewing contexts. Therefore, whilst one finds entirely different modes of gay fans engaging with horror, I have argued that these practices are tied to the construction of their sense of self and rooted in the different bids for capital that circulate within the cultures fans inhabit.

For Bertha Chin (2010), whilst the concept of ‘micro-communities’ signifies smaller clusters of fan circles, this sustains a unilateral notion of a ‘main’ fandom group to which these micro-communities are defined. On the contrary, this thesis has argued that in gay horror fandom, there is no one ‘main’ fandom. Instead, I have found smaller micro-communities of fans who use the object of horror to make meaning out of their gay identities and who construct and articulate these identities in significant ways. However, rather than view these micro-communities as perpetuating the social disempowerment of fans, this thesis has suggested that gay fans appropriate the uses of these spaces in highly personal and meaningful ways: as a mode of autobiographical expression and as a means

to forge connections with others. Although I have argued that the norms and values of larger spaces have a structuring influence on fan practices, and what generic discourses can be expressed and exchanged, this study has found that gay fans often navigate these norms to negotiate their identities and to expose the distinctions that operate within gay horror fandom itself. Therefore, the investments of gay fans in horror informs not about the queer properties of the genre, but how horror is used to make meaning of the self and how this sense of self can be constructed differently across distinctive online cultures.

Screaming for More: Future Directions

Methodologically speaking, previous studies that have employed a textual analysis or reception account of horror have not fully attended to the cultural identities of gay fans, nor the ways in which fans' readings are tied to the subject positions they adopt. A key strength of the multi-sited approach has been the ability to illuminate the discursive configuration of fans' identities across the distinctive spaces researched, focusing on their conceptual shifts and performances within the different 'norms, hierarchies, and boundaries' (Chin, 2010) that define the contours of the fan locales. As such, this thesis did not seek to offer a monolithic or reductionist approach to gay horror fans, or risk homogenising their voices and interpretations by focusing on a single site of study. Rather, the multi-sited approach employed has enabled this project to attend to the richness of gay voices as they are inflected in different spaces in the presence of different horror fans. By way of reflecting on the limitations of this method and the approaches taken, I suggest possible avenues for research into gay horror fandom.

As discussed in the methodological procedures to this thesis, the purposive data sampling meant that the spaces identified for data collection were informed by the research questions underpinning this project. In doing so, I selected spaces based on the richness of the data, rather than on the frequency of posts or the size of the communities. Ultimately, then, whilst this thesis has undertaken a participant observational approach, and whilst I have immersed myself in three distinctive online forums (Chapters 3, 4, 5), it has not presented the possibility for fans to elaborate upon the language that I have used as data in this thesis. Indeed, whilst all of the forums presented the opportunity to impart my own thoughts and opinions about the topics discussed, it remains that my

interventions into the spaces, as a self-identifying scholar-fan, operate tangentially to a time when communication in these spaces was productive (i.e. – when larger contingents of fans were engaged in the spaces). Consequently, whilst I have positioned myself as ostensibly *in* the forums researched, my immersion has not presented the possibility for gay fans to expand or revise the claims in their postings. This has limited the potential for fans to clarify, interject and negotiate their voices as used throughout this study.

Further, the limitations of this approach means that it remains difficult to ascertain the online footprint of the fans researched in this thesis. That is, I present a limited understanding of the full range of spaces that any one fan engages in, and how they might negotiate their practices and identities within the norms and values that colour the different cultures studied. Thus, whilst the multi-sited approach adopted renders possible a holistic understanding of different spaces, and the links, paths and chains between them, it does not offer an account of how specific fans negotiate these paths, or how they perceive the different spaces to inflect their fan practices. Future research into this online phenomenon could attend more fully to the spatial navigation of fans, or contingents of fans, yielding further insight into why such forums and threads dissipate after fans have forged what I have argued to be deep emotional connections with one other.

In making decisions about the spaces to be included in this thesis, I have inevitably excluded alternative sites that could have yielded additional insight into the practices, identities and connections of gay horror fans. I am referring in particular here to social media sites, including *Twitter*, *Tumblr* and *Facebook*, amongst others. As social media channels continue to grow in popularity, and as new possibilities are created, gay fans of horror have emerged as more visible – where a tweet on *Twitter* or publishing a fan photo or illustration on *Tumblr* can potentially reach far wider audiences than is evidenced, for example, in a thread on *Tribe.net* (see Chapter 3). Further, where this thesis has implicitly produced a contrast between spaces initiated and inhabited by gay horror fans, against their entry into larger online spaces, future research could investigate gay horror fandom on a range of social media platforms. Such research presents opportunities to question the extent to which gay fans find expression on these platforms and whether their practices are negotiated amongst other contingents of fans.

Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to make intelligible the links between the micro and the macro – that is, the relationship between fans’ practices and communication within the broader culture of the spaces they inhabit. For whilst I suggest in Chapter 3 that the contours of the tribe are marked through a cultural generation of fans who grew up gay with horror films in the 1980s, researching gay horror social media pages through the lens of generation and coming of age could yield different results entirely. Furthermore, whilst Chapter 5 suggests that the masculinity of horror fandom reproduces itself in exclusively gay spaces where the homonormative body of the jock is valued, this could produce different results in more diverse, non-heterosexual forums where lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer and non-binary persons converse over the object of horror. Unequivocally then, the choice of micro-communities in this research project has direct correlations to the results presented. Consequently, further studies are necessary to attend to a range of alternative online spaces inhabited by gay horror fans, as a means through which to offer a fuller picture of gay horror fandom. Indeed, this foray into alternative spaces is particularly important as new online spaces and platforms are created, and as shifts take place within the production and reception of horror itself.

Final Reflections from a Gay Horror Scholar-Fan

Whilst I have immersed myself in three of the spaces investigated and engaged in communication with fans, I continued to feel on the periphery of the micro-communities researched. Whilst this must be partially attributed to my heretofore absence from online fandoms until the commencement of this study, there is a sense, I feel, that the norms, values and hierarchies within the spaces are positioned against my own self-identity as a gay scholar-fan. Whether framing their consumptions of horror within the contexts of their growing up in the 1980s (Chapter 3), forging distinctions between other gay fans (Chapter 4) or embodying what I have referred to as a homonormative construction of the ‘real jock’ body (Chapter 5), I never fully identified with the practices or subjectivities of the fans within the spaces presented in this study. What this does show, however, is that whilst scholar-fans may enter sites of fandom with a preconceived notion that they are a priori stitched into the discourse of the fans with whom they identify, a multi-sited

approach reveals complex convergences of identities and practices that are constructed quite differently across distinctive online fandoms. As I have demonstrated, this applies even within the same minority demographic of gay fans.

Bibliography

- Abercrombie, N. and Longhurst, B. (1998) *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination*. London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage.
- Abley, S. (2013) *Out in the Dark: Interviews with Gay Horror Filmmakers, Actors and Authors*. Maple Shade, New Jersey: Lethe Press, Inc.
- Adams, T.L. and Smith, S.A. (eds.) (2008) 'A tribe by any other name' in *Electronic Tribes: The Virtual Worlds of Geeks, Gamers, Shamans, and Scammers*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, pp. 11-20.
- Amesley, C. (1989) 'How to watch Star Trek', *Cultural Studies*, 3(3), pp. 323-39.
- Anderson, B. (1991) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised edn. London: Verso.
- Ang, I. (1985) *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. London: Routledge.
- Auerbach, N. (1995) *Our Vampires, Ourselves*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Babuscio, J. (1993) 'Camp and the Gay Sensibility', in Bergman, D. (ed.) *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*. Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts.
- Bacon-Smith, C. (1992) *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Bacon-Smith, C. (2000) *Science Fiction Culture*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.
- Barker, M., Mathijs, E. and Mendik, X. (2006) 'Menstrual Monsters: The reception of the Ginger Snaps Cult Horror Franchise', *Film International*, 4(3), pp. 68-77.
- Barker, M. and Petley, J. (eds.) (1997) *Ill Effects: The Media/Violence Debate*. London: Routledge.
- Barthes, R. (1972) *Mythologies*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Baym, N.K. (2010) *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Baym, N.K. (1998) 'The Emergence of On-Line Community', in Jones, S. (ed.) *Cybersociety 2.0: Revisiting Computer-Mediated Communication and Community*. London: Sage, pp. 35-68.

- Baym, N.K. (2000) *Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community*. London: Sage.
- Bell, D. (2001) *An Introduction to Cybercultures*. London: Routledge.
- Benshoff, H.M. (1997) *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Benshoff, H.M. (1998) 'Secrets, Closets and Corridors Through Time: Negotiating Sexuality and Gender Through Dark Shadows Fan Culture' in Harris, C. and Alexander, A. (eds.) *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity*. Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, pp. 199-218.
- Benshoff, H.M. and Griffin, S. (2006) *Queer Images: A History of Gay and Lesbian Film in America*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Benshoff, H.M. (2012) 'Way Too Gay To Be Ignored: The Production and Reception of Queer Horror Cinema in the Twenty-First Century' in Picart, C.J.S. and Browning, J.E. (eds.) *Speaking of Monsters: A Teratological Anthology*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 131-144.
- Berenstein, R.J. (1996) *Attack of the Leading Ladies: Gender, Sexuality, and Spectatorship in Classic Horror Cinema*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Berenstein, R. (2002) 'Horror for sale: The marketing and reception of classic horror cinema' in Jancovich, M. (ed.) *Horror, the Film Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Bernhardt-House, P.A. (2008) 'The Werewolf as Queer, the Queer as Werewolf, and Queer Werewolves' in Giffney, N. and Hird, M.J. (eds.) *Queering the Non/human*. Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, pp. 159-184.
- Bersani, L. (2010) *Is the Rectum a Grave?: and Other Essays*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bode, L. (2010) 'Tastes: Teen Girls and Genre in the Critical Reception of Twilight', *Continuum*, 24(5), pp. 707-719.
- Bolin, G. (2000), 'Film Swapping in the Public Sphere: Youth Audiences and Alternative Cultural Publicities', *Javnost: The Public*, 7(2), pp. 57-74.
- Booth, P. (2010) *Digital Fandom: New Media Studies*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Booth, P. (2015) 'Crowdfunding: A Spimatic application of digital fandom', *New Media & Society*, 17(2), pp. 149-166.

Bourdieu, P (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Brittan, A. (2001) 'Masculinities and Masculinism', in Whitehead, S.M. and Barrett, F.J (eds.) *The Masculinities Reader*. Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 51-55.

Brooker, W. (2001) 'Living on Dawson's Creek: Teen Viewers, Cultural Convergence, and Television Overflow', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 4(4), pp. 456-472.

Brooker, W. (2002) *Using the Force: Creativity, Community, and Star Wars Fans*. New York: Continuum.

Brotsky, S. and Giles, D. (2007) 'Inside the "Pro-ana" Community: A Covert Online Participant Observation'. *Eating Disorders: The Journal of Treatment & Prevention*, 15(2), pp. 93-109.

Bruckman, A. (2002) *Ethical Guidelines for Research Online*. Available at: <http://www.cc.gatech.edu/~asb/ethics/> (Accessed: 10 January 2015).

Bulmer, M. (1982) 'When is Disguise Justified? Alternatives to Covert Participant Observation', *Qualitative Sociology*, 5(4), pp. 251-264.

Burston, P. and Richardson, C. (1995) *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men, and Popular Culture*. London: Routledge.

Bury, R. (2005). *Cyberspaces of their own: Female fandoms online*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Busse, K. (2013) 'Geek Hierarchies, Boundary Policing, and the Gendering of the Good Fan', *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 10(1), pp. 73-91.

Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.

Campbell, J.E. (2004) *Getting It on Online: Cyberspace, Gay Male Sexuality and Embodied Identity*, Binghamton: New York, The Haworth Press, Inc.

Cantor, J. and Oliver, M.B. (1996) 'Developmental Differences in Responses to Horror' in Weaver, J.B. and Tamborini, R.C. (eds.) *Horror Films: Current Research on Audience Preferences and Reactions*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., pp. 63-80.

Carroll, N. (1990) *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart*. New York: Routledge.

- Carter, D.M. (2005) 'Living in Virtual Communities: An Ethnography of Human Relationships in Cyberspace', *Information, Communication and Society*, 8(2), pp. 148-167.
- Cavicchi, D. (1998) *Tramps Like Us: Music and Meaning among Springsteen Fans*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Chauncey, G. (1994) *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*. New York: Basic.
- Chin, B. (2010) *From Textual Poachers to Textual Gifters: Exploring Fan Community and Celebrity in the Field of Fan Cultural Production*. Unpublished PhD thesis. Cardiff University, Wales.
- Cherry, B. (1999a) *The female horror film audience: viewing pleasures and fan practices*. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Stirling.
- Cherry, B. (1999b) 'Refusing to Refuse the Look: Female viewers of the Horror Film' in Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (eds.), *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies*. London: British Film Institute. pp. 187-202.
- Cherry, B. (2002) 'Screaming for release: femininity and horror film fandom in Britain' in Chibnall, S. and Petley, J. *British Horror Cinema*. London: Routledge, pp. 42-57.
- Cherry, B. (2008) 'Subcultural Tastes, Genre Boundaries and Fan Canons' in Geraghty, L. and Jancovich, M. (eds.) *The Shifting Definitions of Genre: Essays on Labeling Films, Television Shows and Media*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, pp. 201-215.
- Cherry, B. (2010) 'Stalking the Web: Celebration, Chat and Horror Film Marketing on the Internet' in Ian Conrich (ed.) *Horror Zone*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, pp. 67-85.
- Cheung, C. (2000). 'Identity Construction and Self-Presentation on Personal Homepages: Emancipatory Potentials and Reality Constraints' in Gauntlett, D. (ed.) *Web.Studies: Rewiring Media Studies for the Digital Age*. London: Arnold, pp. 43-51.
- Church, D. (2009) "'Of Manias, Shit, and Blood": The Reception of Salo as a Sick Film', *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 6(2), pp. 340-372.
- Clarkson, J. (2006) "'Everyday Joe" versus "Pissy, Bitchy, Queens": Gay Masculinity onStraightActing.com', *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 14(2), pp. 191-207.
- Classens, N. and Bulck, H.V.D. (2014) 'A Severe Case of Disliking Bimbo Heidi, Scumbag Jesse and Bastard Tiger: Analysing Celebrities' Online Anti-fans' in Duits, L. Zwaan, K. and Reijnders, S. (eds.) *The Ashgate Research Companion to Fan Cultures*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, pp. 63-76.

- Clemens, V. (1999) *Return of the Repressed, The: Gothic Horror from The Castle of Otranto to Alien*. Albany, New York: University of New York Press.
- Clerc, S.J (1996). 'DDEB, GATB, MPPB, and Ratboy: The X-Files' Media Fandom "Online and Off", in Lavery, D., Hague, A. and Cartwright, M. (eds.) *Deny All Knowledge: Reading The X-Files*. New York: Syracuse University Press, pp. 36-51
- Clover, C.J. (1992) *Men Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. London: BFI.
- Cohen, J.R. (1991) 'The 'Relevance' of Cultural Identity in Audiences' Interpretation of Mass Media', *Critical Studies in Communication*, 8, pp. 442-454.
- Connell, R.W. (1987) *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*. Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press.
- Connell, R.W. (1995) *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California.
- Connell, R.W. and Messerschmidt, J.W. (2005) 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept', *Gender & Society*, 19(6), pp. 829-859.
- Conrich, I. (1997) 'Seducing the Subject: Freddy Krueger, Popular Culture and The Nightmare on Elm Street Films' in Cartmell, D., Hunter, I.Q., Kaye, H. and Whelehan, I. (eds.) *Trash Aesthetics: Popular Culture and its Audience*, London: Pluto Press, pp. 118-131.
- Convery, I. and Cox, D. (2012) 'A Review of Research Ethics in Internet Based Research', *Practitioner Research in Higher Education*, 6 (1), pp. 50-57.
- Coppa, F. (2006) 'Writing Bodies in Space: Media Fan Fiction as Theatrical Performance', in Hellekson, K. and Busse, K. (eds.) *Fan Fiction and Fan Communicates in the Age of the Internet*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, pp. 225-244.
- Cooper, L.A. (2010) *Gothic Realities: The Impact of Horror Fiction on Modern Culture*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland.
- Cowan, G. and O'Brien, M. (1990) 'Gender and Survival vs. Death in Slasher Films. A Content Analysis', *Sex Roles*, 23(3/4), pp. 187-196.
- Craig, P. and Fradley, M. (2010) 'Teenage Traumata: Youth, Affective Politics, and the Contemporary American Horror Film', in Hantke, S. (ed.) *American Horror Film: The Genre at the Turn on the Millennium*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, pp. 77-102.

- Creed, B. (1993) *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge.
- DeAngelis, M. (2001) *Gay Fandom and Crossover Stardom: James Dean, Mel Gibson, and Keanu Reeves*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- De Beauvoir, S. (1973) *The Second Sex*. New York: Vintage Books.
- DeGraffenreid, L.G. (2011) 'What Can you do in Your Dreams? Slasher Cinema as Youth Empowerment', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 44(5), pp. 954-969.
- Deller, R. (2014) 'A Decade in the Life of Online Fan Communities' in Duits, L., Zwaan, K. and Reijnders, S. (eds.) *The Ashgate Companion to Fan Cultures*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, pp. 237-249.
- Dennis, J. (2008) *Queering Teen Culture: All-American Boys and Same-Sex Desire in Film and Television*. New York: Harrington Park Press.
- Denzin, N.K. (1999) 'Cybertalk and the Method of Instances' in Jones, S. (ed.) *Doing Internet Research: Critical Issues and Methods for Examining the Net*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc., pp. 107-125.
- Dhost, A. and Simons, N. (2012) 'Questioning Queer Audiences: Exploring Diversity in Lesbian and Gay Men's Media Uses and Readings' in Ross, K (ed.) *The Handbook of Gender, Sex and Media*. John Wiley & Sons Ltd, pp. 260-276.
- Dika, V. (1987) 'The Stalker Film, 1978-1981' in Waller, G.A. (ed.) *American Horrors: Essays on the Modern American Horror Film*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, pp. 86-101.
- Doty, A. (1993) *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.
- Doty, A. (2000) *Flaming Classics: Queering the Film Canon*. London: Routledge.
- Draper, J. (2010) "'Gay or Not?!: Gay men, straight masculinities, and the construction of the *Details* audience', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 27(4), pp. 357-375.
- Driver, S. (2007) *Queer Girls and Popular Culture: Reading, Resisting, and Creating Media*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Duda, H. (2008) *The Monster Hunter in Modern Popular Culture*, Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc.
- Duffett, M. (2013) *Understanding Fandom: An Introduction to the Study of Media Fan Culture*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

- Duggan, L. (2002) *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. Uckfield: Beacon Press.
- Dyer, R. (1984) *Gays and Film*. New York: New York Zoetrope.
- Dyer, R. (2002) *The Culture of Queers*. London: Routledge.
- Dyer, R. (2004) *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, 2nd edn. New York: Routledge.
- Egan, K. (2007) *Trash or Treasure? Censorship and the Changing Meaning of the Video Nasties*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Eguchi, S. (2009) 'Negotiating Hegemonic Masculinity: The Rhetorical Strategy of "Straight-Acting" among Gay Men', *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 38(3), pp. 193-209.
- Elliot-Smith, D. (2009) 'Queering the Cult of Carrie: Appropriations of a Horror Icon in Charles Lum's *Indelible*' in Smith, I.R. (ed.), *Cultural Borrowings: Appropriation, Reworking, Transformation. Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies*, pp. 138-156.
- Elliot-Smith, D. (2012) 'The Homosexual Vampire as a Metaphor For ... The Homosexual Vampire?: True Blood Homonormativity and Assimilation, in Cherry, B. (ed.) *True Blood: Investigating Vampires and Southern Gothic*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, pp. 139-154.
- Emmel, N. (2013) *Sampling and Choosing Cases in Qualitative Research: A Realist Approach*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Farmer, B. (2000) *Spectacular Passions: Cinema, Fantasy, Gay Male Spectatorships*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Fish, S. (1980) *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Fiske, J. (1992) 'The Cultural Economy of Fandom' in Lewis, L.A. (ed.) *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*. London: Routledge, pp. 30-49.
- Foucault, M. (1978) *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, translated by R. Hurley. New York: Random House.
- Foucault, M. (1995) *Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge.
- Freund, K. and Fielding, D. (2013) 'Research Ethics in Fan Studies', *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 10(1), pp. 329-334.

Geertz, C. (1973) 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture' In *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Gill, P. (2002) 'The Monstrous Years: Teens, Slasher Films, and the Family' *Journal of Film and Video*, 54(4), pp. 16-30.

Glaser, B.G and Strauss, A.L. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine.

Grant, B.K. (ed.) (2012) *Film Genre Reader IV*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press.

Gray, J. (2003) 'New Audiences, New Textualities: Anti-Fans and Non Fans', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6(1), pp. 64 - 81.

Gray, J. (2010) *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers and Other Media Paratexts*. New York: New York University Press.

Gray, J. (2011) *Aca-Fandom and Beyond: Jonathan Gray, Matt Hills and Alisa Perren (Part One)*. In Jenkins, H. Available at: http://henryjenkins.org/2011/08/aca-fandom_and_beyond_jonathan.html (Accessed 3 October 2014).

Grixti, J. (1989). *Terrors of Uncertainty: The Cultural Contexts of Horror Fiction*. London: Routledge.

Gross, L. (1991) 'Out of the Mainstream: Sexual Minorities and the Mass Media' in Wolf, M.A. and Kielwasser, A.P. (eds.) *Gay People, Sex, and the Media*. New York: The Haworth Press, Inc., pp. 19-46.

Goffman, E. (1971) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Middlesex: Penguin.

Hakim, C. (2010) 'Erotic Capital', *European Sociological Review*, 26(5), pp. 499-518.

Halberstam, J. (1995) *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Halberstam, J. (2005) *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: New York University Press.

Hanmer, R. (2010a) *Understanding Lesbian Fandom: A Case Study of the Xena: Warrior Princess (XSTT) Lesbian Internet Fans*. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Birmingham.

Hanmer, R. (2010b) 'Internet Fandom, Queer Discourse, and Identities' in Pullen, C. and Cooper, M. (eds.) *LGBT Identity and Online New Media*. New York: Routledge, pp. 147-158.

- Harrington, C.L. and Bielby, D.D. (2010) 'A life course perspective on fandom', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 13(5), pp. 429-450.
- Harris, C. (1998) 'Introduction Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity' in Harris, C. and Alexander, A. (eds.) *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity*. Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, pp. 3-8.
- Heba, G. (1995) 'Everyday Nightmares: The Rhetoric of Social Horror in the Nightmare on Elm Street Series', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 23(3), pp. 106-115.
- Herring, S. L., Scheidt, S. Bonus and S. Wright (2004) 'Bridging the Gap: A Genre Analysis of Weblogs', in Proceedings of the 37th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences. Available at: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.160.939&rep=rep1&type=pdf> (Accessed: 4 February 2015).
- Hepworth, J. (1995) 'Hitchcock's Homophobia' in Creekmur, C.K. and Doty, A. (eds.) *Gay, Lesbian and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, pp. 186-196.
- Hellekson, K. and Busse, K. (2006) *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.
- Hellekson, K. and Busse, K. (eds.) (2014) *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
- Hills, M. (2002) *Fan Cultures*. London: Routledge.
- Hills, M. (2005) *The Pleasures of Horror*. New York: Continuum.
- Hills, M. (2006) 'Not just another powerless elite?: when media fans become subcultural celebrities' in Holmes, S. and Redmond, S. (eds.) *Framing Celebrity: New Directions in Celebrity Culture*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, pp. 101-118.
- Hine, C. (2000) *Virtual Ethnography*. London: Sage.
- Hodkinson, P. (2007) 'Interactive Online Journals and Individualization', *New Media & Society*, 9(4), pp. 625-650.
- Hoekstra, S.J., Harris, R.J. and Helmick, A.L. (1999) 'Autobiographical Memories about the Experience of Seeing Frightening Movies in Childhood,' *Media Psychology*, 1(2), pp. 117-140.

Hoffner, C. and Cantor, J. (1991) 'Perceiving and Responding to Mass Media Characters' in Bryant, J. and Zillmann, D. (eds.) *Responding to the Screen: Reception and Reaction Processes*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: L. Erlbaum Associates, pp. 63-102.

Hollows, J. (2003) 'The Masculinity of Cult', in Jancovich, M., Rebol, A.L., Stringer, J. and Willis, A. (eds.) *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 35-53.

Hookway, N. (2008) "'Entering the Blogosphere": Some Strategies for Using Blogs in Social Research', *Qualitative Research*, 8(1), pp. 91-113.

Howard, P. (2002) 'Network Ethnography and the Hypermedia Organization: New Media, New Organizations, New Methods', *New Media Society*, 4(4), pp. 550-574.

Hoxter, J. (2000) 'Taking Possession: Cult Learning in *The Exorcist*' in Mendik, X. and Harper, G. (eds.) *Unruly Pleasures: The Cult Film and Its Critics*. Guildford, Surrey: FAB Press, pp. 173-185.

Huddleson, J. (2005) 'Unmasking the Monster: Hiding and Revealing Male Sexuality in John Carpenter's Halloween', *Journal of Visual Literacy*, 25(2), pp. 219-236.

Humphreys, L. (1975) *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places*. Enlarged edn. Chicago: Aldine.

Humphries, R. (2002) *The American Horror Film: An Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Hunt, N. (2003) 'The Importance of Trivia: Ownership, Exclusion and Authority in Science Fiction Fandom' in Jancovich, M., Rebol, A.L., Stringer, J. and Willis, A. (eds.) *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 185-201.

Hunt, N. (2011) 'Nostalgic [re]remembering: film fan cultures and the affective reiteration of popular film histories', *Image & Narrative*, 12(2), pp. 96-117.

Hutchings, P. (1993) 'Masculinity and the Horror Film' in Kirkham, P. and Thumim, J. (eds.) *You Tarzan: Masculinity, Movies and Men*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, pp. 84-94.

Hutchings, P. (2004) *The Horror Film*. Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited.

Jackman, M.C. (2010) 'The Trouble with Fieldwork: Queering Methodologies' in Browne, K. and Nash, C.J (eds.) *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, pp. 113-128.

- Jancovich, M. (1992) *Horror*. London: Batsford.
- Jancovich, M. (2000) "'A Real Shocker': Authenticity, Genre and the Struggle for Distinction', *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 14(1), pp. 23-35.
- Jancovich, M. (2002) 'Cult fictions: cult, movies, subcultural capital and the production of cultural distinctions', *Cultural Studies*, 16(2), pp. 306-22.
- Jancovich, M. (2014) "'Cue the Shrieking Virgins'? The Critical Reception of *The Twilight Saga*' in Clayton, W. and Harman, S. (eds.) *Screening Twilight: Critical Approaches to a Cinematic Phenomenon*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, pp. 26-39.
- Jenkins, H. (1992) *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Jenkins, H. (2006) *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York and London: New York University Press.
- Jenkins, H. (2007) *The Wow Climax: Tracing the Emotional Impact of Popular Culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Jenkins, H. and Campbell, J. (2006) 'Out of the Closet and into the Universe: Queers and Star Trek' in Jenkins, H. (ed.) *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York and London: New York University Press.
- Jensen, K.B. (1987) 'Qualitative Audience Research: Toward an Integrative Approach to Reception', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 4(1), pp. 21-36.
- Jensen, J. (1992) 'Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization' in Lewis, L.A. (ed.) *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*. London: Routledge, pp. 9-27.
- Johnston, K.M. (2011) *Science Fiction Film: A Critical Introduction*. London: Berg.
- Jones, S. (2013) *Torture Porn: Popular Horror after Saw*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jones, S. (1997) *Virtual Culture: Identity and Communication in Cybersociety*. London: Sage Publications.
- Kendall, L. (2000) "'Oh No! I'm a Nerd!': Hegemonic Masculinity on an Online Forum', *Gender and Society*, 14(2), pp. 256-274.
- Kendall, L. (2002) *Hanging out in the Virtual Pub: Masculinities and Relationships Online*. London: University of California Press, Ltd.

Kendall, L. (2011) “‘White and Nerdy’: Computers, Race, and the Nerd Stereotype”, *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 44(3), pp. 505-524.

Kermode, M. (1997) ‘I was a teenage horror fan: or, “How I learned to stop worrying and love Linda Blair”’ in Barker, M. and Petley, J. (eds.) *Ill Effects: The Media/Violence Debate*. London: Routledge, pp. 57-66.

King, C.S. (2010) ‘Un-Queering Horror: Hellbent and the Policing of the “Gay Slasher”’, *Western Journal of Communication*, 74(3), pp. 249-268.

Kirby-Diaz, M. (2009) *Buffy and Angel Conquer the Internet: Essays on Online Fandom*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc.

Klinger, B. (1994) *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Kozinets, R.V. (1997) “‘I Want to Believe’: A Netnography of The X-Files’ Subculture of Consumption”, *Advances in Consumer Research*, 24(1), pp. 470-475.

Kozinets, R.V. (2010) *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online*. London: Sage.

Kuhn, A. (2002) *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Larsen, K. and Zubernis, L.S. (2012) *Fandom at the Crossroads Celebration, Shame and Fan/producer Relationships*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars.

Laukkanen, M. (2007) ‘Young Queers Online: The Limits and Possibilities of Non-Heterosexual Self-Representation in Online Conversations’ in O’Riordan, K. and Phillips, D.J. (eds.) *Queer Online: Media, Technology & Sexuality*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., pp. 81-100.

Lewis, L.A. (1992) *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*. London: Routledge.

Lindlof, T.R., Coyle, K. and Grodin, D. (1998) ‘Is There a Text in This Audience? Science Fiction and Interpretive Schism’ in Harris, C. and Alexander, A. (eds.) *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture, and Identity*. Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, pp. 219-247.

Lipton, M. (2008) ‘Queer Readings of Popular Culture: Searching [to] Out the Subtext’ in Driver, S. (ed.) *Queer Youth Cultures*. Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 163-180.

Livingstone, S.M. (1998) *Making Sense of Television: The Psychology of Audience Interpretation*. 2nd edn. Sussex: Routledge.

- Lomborg, S. (2012) 'Researching Communicative Practice: Web Archiving in Qualitative Social Media Research', *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, 30(3-4), pp. 219-231.
- Lotz, A.D. and Ross, S.M. (2004) 'Toward Ethical Cyberspace Audience Research: Strategies for Using the Internet for Television Audience Studies', *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 48(3), pp. 501-512.
- Lyons, C. (1997) *The New Censors: Movies and the Culture Wars*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- MacDonald, A. (1998) 'Uncertain Utopia: Science Fiction Media Fandom & Computer Mediated Communication' in Harris, C. and Alexander, A. (eds.) *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity*. Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, pp. 131 – 52.
- Marcus, G.E. (1995) 'Ethnography in/of the world system: The emergence of multi-sited ethnography', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24, pp. 95–117.
- Marcus, G.E. (1998) *Ethnography through Thick and Thin*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Markham, A.N. (2004) 'Representation in Online Ethnographies: A matter of context sensitivity' in Johns, M.D., Chen, S.S. and Hall, G.J. (eds.) *Online Social Research: Methods, Issues & Ethics*. New York: Peter Lang, pp. 141-155.
- McNaught, B. (2005) *Sex Camp*. Bloomington, Indiana: Author House.
- Messerschmidt, J.W. (1993) *Masculinities and Crime: Critique and Reconceptualization of Theory*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Mathijs, E. (2013) *Joan Fawcett's Ginger Snaps*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- McCune JR, J.K. (2014) *Sexual Discretion: Black Masculinity and the Politics of Passing*. London: The University of Chicago Press, Ltd.
- McKee, A. (2007) 'The Fans of Cultural Theory' in Gray, J., Sandvoss, C. and Harrington, C.L. (eds.) *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*. New York: New York University Press, pp. 88-97.
- McKee, H.A. and Porter, J.E. (2009) *The Ethics of Internet Research: A Rhetorical, Case-Based Process*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Miller, S.J. (2011) 'Assimilation and the Queer Monster' in Briefel, A. and Miller, S.J. (eds.) *Horror After 9/11: World of Fear, Cinema of Terror*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, pp. 220-235.

- Milner JR, M. (2004) *Freaks, Geeks and Cool Kids: American Teenagers, Schools, and the Culture of Consumption*. London: Routledge.
- Mills, S. (1997) *Discourse: The New Critical Idiom*. London: Routledge.
- Mittell, J. (2004) *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Mowlabocus, S. (2007) 'Life Outside the Latex: HIV, Sex, and the Online Barebacking Community', in: O' Riordan, K. and Phillips, D.J. (eds.) *Queer Online: Media, Technology and Sexuality*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Mulvey, L. (1975) 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16(3), pp. 6-18.
- Newman, K. (1988) *Nightmare Movies: A Critical Guide to Contemporary Horror Films*. New York: Harmony Books.
- Nielson (2014). *Lights, Camera, Action! State of the LGBT Moviegoer*. Available at: <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/reports/2014/lights-camera-action-state-of-the-lgbt-moviegoer.html> (Accessed: 4 January 2015).
- Nowell, R. (2011a) '"There's More Than One Way to Lose Your Heart": The American Film Industry, Early Teen Slasher Films, and Female Youth', *Cinema Journal*, 51(1) pp. 115-140.
- Nowell, R. (2011b) *Blood Money: A History of the First Teen Slasher Film Cycle*. New York and London: The Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Ochoa, G. (2011) *Deformed and Destructive Beings: The Purpose of Horror Films*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland.
- Oliver, M.B. and Sanders, M. (2004) 'The Appeal of Horror and Suspense', in Prince, S. (ed.) *The Horror Film*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, pp. 242-59.
- O'Riordan, K. (2007) 'Queer Theories and Cybersubjects: Intersecting Figures', in O'Riordan, K. and Phillips, D.J. (eds.) *Queer Online: Media, Technology & Sexuality*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., pp. 13-30.
- Payne, R. (2007) 'Str8acting', *Social Semiotics*, 17(4), pp. 525-538.
- Penley, C., Lyon, E., Spigel, L. and Bergstrom, J. (eds.) (1991) *Close Encounters: Film, Feminism and Science Fiction*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

- Phillips, T. (2010) *Embracing the "Overly Confessional": Scholar-Fandom and Approaches to Personal Research*. Available at: <http://flowtv.org/2010/12/embracing-the-overly-confessional/> (Accessed: 13 July 2014).
- Phillips, T. (2013) *Fandom and Beyond: Online Community, Culture and Kevin Smith Fandom*. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of East Anglia, Norwich.
- Pinedo, I.C. (1997) *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.
- Pullen, C. and Cooper, M. (eds.) (2010) *LGBT Identity and Online New Media*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Pullen, K. (2000) 'I-Love-Xena.com: Creating Online Fan Communities' in Gauntlett, D. (ed.) *Web.studies: Rewiring Media Studies for the Digital Age*. London: Arnold.
- Radway, J.A. (1984) *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina.
- Reay, D. (2000) 'A useful extension of Bourdieu's conceptual framework?: emotional capital as a way of understanding mothers' involvement in their children's education?', *The Sociological Review*, 48(4), pp. 568-585.
- Reed, A. (2005) "My Blog Is Me": Texts and Persons in UK Online Journal Culture (and Anthropology)', *Ethnos*, 70 (2), pp. 220-242.
- Reed, R. (1997) *Growing up Gay: The Sorrows and Joys of Gay and Lesbian Adolescence*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Rheingold, H. (1993) *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Pub.
- Rich, A. (1980) 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 5(4), pp. 631-660.
- Rieser, K. (2001) 'Masculinity and Monstrosity: Characterization and Identification in the Slasher Film', *Men and Masculinities*, 3(4), pp. 370-92.
- Rosenberg, Å. (2010) 'Virtual World Research Ethics and the Private/Public Distinction', *International Journal of Internet Research Ethics*, 3(12), pp. 23-37.
- Ryan, C. (2015) 'Music fanzine collecting as capital accumulation', *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 12(2), pp. 238-254.
- Sandvoss, C. (2005) *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Sanjek, D. (2008) 'Fans' notes: The horror film fanzine' in Mathijs, E. and Mendik, X. (eds.) *The Cult Film Reader*. Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill Education, pp. 419-428.
- Saunders, M.W. (1998) *Imps of the Perverse: Gay Monsters in Film*. Westport: Praeger.
- Schneider, S.J. (ed.) (2004) *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis: Freud's Worst Nightmare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sconce, J. (1993) 'Spectacles of Death: Identification, Reflexivity, and Contemporary Horror' in: Collins, J., Radner, H. and Collins, A.P. (eds.) *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*. London: Routledge.
- Sconce, J. (1995) "'Trashing' the academy: taste, excess, and an emerging politics of cinematic style', *Screen*, 36(4), pp. 371-393.
- Scott, D.T. (2006) 'Growing Up in Horror' in Williams, R. and Gideonse, T. (eds.) *From Boys to Men: Gay Men Write about Growing up*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, pp. 243-251.
- Sedgwick, E.K. (1990) *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Serfaty, V. (2004) *The Mirror and the Veil: An Overview of American Online Diaries and Blogs*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Shaw, D. (1997) 'Gay men and computer communication: A discourse of sex and identity in cyberspace' in Jones, S. (ed.) *Virtual Culture: Identity and Communication in Cybersociety*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 133-145.
- Sheffield, J and Merlo, E. (2010) 'Biting Back: Twilight Anti-Fandom and the Rhetoric of Superiority' in Click, M.A., Aubrey, J.S. and Behm-Morawitz, E. (eds.) *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media, and the Vampire Franchise*. New York: Lang, pp. 207-222.
- Smith, M.A. and Kollock, P. (eds.) (1999) *Communities in Cyberspace*. London: Routledge.
- Smith, S and Watson, J. (2014) 'Virtually Me: A Toolbox about Online Self-Presentation' in Poletti, A. and Rak, J. (eds.) *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online*. Madison Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, pp. 70-96.
- Sontag, S. (1964) 'Notes on Camp'. Reprint. In Mathijs, E. and Mendik, X. (eds.) *The Cult Film Reader*. Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill Education, 2008, pp. 41-52.

- Soukup, C. (2006) 'Hitching a Ride on a Star: Celebrity, Fandom, and Identification on the World Wide Web', *Southern Communication Journal*, 71(4), pp. 319-337.
- Spacks, P.M. (1985) *Gossip*. New York: Knopf.
- Snelson, T. (2009) 'From grade B thrillers to deluxe chillers': prestige horror, female audiences, and allegories of spectatorship in *The Spiral Staircase* (1946)', *The New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 7 (2), pp. 173-188.
- Snelson, T. (2014) *Phantom Ladies: Hollywood Horror and the Home Front*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Staiger, J. (1992) *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Staiger, J. (2000) *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception*. New York: New York University Press.
- Staiger, J. (2005) *Media Reception Studies*. New York: New York University Press.
- Stanfill, M. (2013) 'They're Losers, but I know better': Intra-fandom Stereotyping and the Normalization of the Fan Subject', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 30(2), pp. 117-134.
- Stein, A. and Plummer, K. (1994) "I Can't Even Think Straight" 'Queer' Theory and the Missing Sexual Revolution in Sociology', *Sociological Theory*, 12(2), pp. 178-187.
- Stevenson, N. (2006) *David Bowie: Fame, Sound and Vision*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1998) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Sykes, H.J. (2011) *Queer Bodies: Sexualities, Genders, & Fatness in Physical Education*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Tamborini, R. (1996) 'A Model of Empathy and Emotional Reactions to Horror' in Weaver, J.B. and Tamborini, R.C. (eds.) *Horror Films: Current Research on Audience Preferences and Reactions*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., pp. 103-123.
- Tarrett, M. (1970) 'Monsters from the Id'. Reprint. In Grant, B.K. (ed.) *Film Genre Reader 3*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2003, pp. 346-365.
- Taylor, T.L. (2012) *Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming*. Cambridge: Massachusetts: MIT Press.

- Theodoropoulou, V. (2007) 'The Anti-Fan within the Fan: Awe and Envy in Sport Fandom' in Gray, J., Sandvoss, C. and Harrington, C.L. (eds.) *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*. London: New York University Press, pp. 316-327.
- Thornton, S. (1995) *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Tsika, N. (2010) 'Compartmentalize your Life: Advising Army Men on RealJock.com' in Pullen, C. and Cooper, M. (eds.) *LGBT Identity and Online New Media*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, pp. 230-244.
- Tudor, A. (1997) 'Why Horror? The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre', *Cultural Studies*, 11(3), pp. 443-463.
- Tulloch, J. and Jenkins, H. (1995) *Science Fiction Audiences: Watching Dr Who and Star Trek*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Turkle, S. (1995) *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Twitchell, J.B. (1985) *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Vittadini, N., Siibak, A., Reifová, I. and Bilandzic, H. (2014) 'Generations and Media: The Social Construction of Generational Identity and Differences' in Carpentier, N., Schröder, K.C. and Hallett, L. (eds.), *Audience Transformations: Shifting Audience Positions in Late Modernity*. New York: Routledge, pp. 65-81.
- Wakeford, N. (1997) 'Cyberqueer', in Munt, S.R. and Medhurst, A. (eds.) *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader: A Critical Introduction*. London: Cassell, pp. 20-38.
- Walstrom, M.K. (2004) 'Ethics and Engagement in Communication Scholarship: Analyzing Public, Online Support Groups as a Researcher/Participant-Experiencer' in Buchanan, E.A. (ed.) *Readings in Virtual Research Ethics: Issues and Controversies*. London: Information Science Publishing, pp. 174-203.
- Weigl, C.E. (2002) 'Introducing Horror' in Jenkins, H., McPherson, T. and Shattuc, J. (eds.) *Hop on Pop: The Politics and Pleasures of Popular Culture*. Durham North Carolina: Duke University Press, pp. 700-19.
- Weinstock, J.A. (ed.) (2008) *Reading Rocky Horror: The Rocky Horror Picture Show and Popular Culture*. New York, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Weiss, A. (1992) *Vampires & Violets: Lesbians in the Cinema*. New York: Penguin.

White, P. (1999) *Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Whiteman, N. and Metivier, J. (2013) 'From Post-object to "Zombie" fandoms: The "deaths" of online fan communities and what they say about us', *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 10(1), pp. 270-298.

Whiteman, N. (2007) *The Establishment, Maintenance and Destabilisation of Fandom: A Study of Two Online Communities and an Exploration of Issues Pertaining to Internet Research*. Unpublished PhD thesis. Institute of Education.

Whiteman, N. (2012) *Undoing Ethics: Rethinking Practice in Online Research*. New York: Springer.

Williams, C.T. (1980) *The Dream Beside Me: The Movies and the Children of the Forties*. Rutherford, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.

Williams, L. (1991) 'Film Bodies: Gender, Genre and Excess', *Film Quarterly*, 44(4), pp. 2-13.

Williams, L. (1996) 'When the Woman Looks' in Grant, B.K. (ed.) *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*. Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 15-34.

Williams, R. (2004) "'It's About Power": Spoilers and Fan Hierarchy in On-Line Buffy Fandom'. *Slayage: The Journal of the Whedon Studies Association*, 11-12, Available at: http://slayageonline.com/essays/slayage11_12/Williams.htm (Accessed: 21 March 2013)

Williams, R. (2008) *Television Fan Distinctions and Identity: An Analysis of 'Quality' Discourses and Threats to 'Ontological Security'*. Unpublished PhD thesis. Cardiff University, Wales.

Williams, R. (2013) 'Unlocking The Vampire Diaries: Genre, Authorship, and Quality in Teen TV horror', *Gothic Studies*, 15(1), pp. 88-99.

Williams, R. (2015) *Post-Object Fandom: Television, Identity and Self-Narrative*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Williamson, M. (2001a) 'Vampires and Goths: Fandom, Gender and Cult Dress' in Keenan, W. (ed.) *Dressed to Impress: Looking the Part*, Oxford: Berg, pp. 141-157.

Williamson, M. (2001b) 'Vampires and the Gendered Body' in Watson, N. and Cunningham-Burley (eds.) *Reframing the Body*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, pp. 96-111.

Williamson, M. (2005a) *The Lure of the Vampire: Gender, Fiction and Fandom from Bram Stoker to Buffy*. London: Wallflower.

Williamson, M. (2005b) 'Spike, sex and subtext: Intertextual portrayals of the sympathetic vampire on cult television', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 8(3), pp. 289 - 311.

Wood, R. (1986) *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Woodland, R. (2000) 'Queer Spaces, Modem Boys and Pagan Statues: Gay/lesbian Identity and the Construction of Cyberspace' in Bell, D. and Kennedy, B.M (eds.) *The Cybercultures Reader*. London: Routledge, pp. 416-431.

Wood, R. (1978) 'Responsibilities of a Gay Film Critic'. Reprint. In Creekmur, C.K. and Doty, A. (eds.) *Gay, Lesbian and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995, pp. 12-24.

Worland, R. (2007) *The Horror Film: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Zillmann, D. and Weaver, J.B. (1996) 'Gender-Socialization Theory of Reactions to Horror' in Weaver, J.B. and Tamborini, R.C. (eds.) *Horror Films: Current Research on Audience Preferences and Reactions*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Zimmerman, B. (1996) 'Daughters of Darkness: The Lesbian Vampire on Film' in Grant, B.K. (ed.) *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*. Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 379-387.

Filmography

A Nightmare on Elm Street (2010) Directed by Samuel Bayer [Film]. USA: New Line Cinema.

A Nightmare on Elm Street (1984) Directed by Wes Craven [Film]. USA: New Line Cinema.

A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge (1985) Directed by Jack Sholder [Film]. USA: New Line Cinema.

Alien (1979) Directed by Ridley Scott [Film]. USA/UK: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.

Apt Pupil (1998) Directed by Bryan Singer [Film]. USA: TriStar Pictures.

Basic Instinct (1992) Directed by Paul Verhoeven [Film]. USA: TriStar Pictures.

Basket Case (1982) Directed by Frank Henenlotter [Film]. USA: Analysis Film Releasing Corporation.

BloodRayne (2005) Directed by Uwe Boll [Film]. USA/Germany: 41

Bride of Chucky (1998) Directed by Ronny Yu [Film]. USA: Universal Pictures.

Carrie (1976) Directed by Brian De Palma [Film]. USA: United Artists.

Clownhouse (1989) Directed by Victor Salva [DVD]. USA: MGM Home Entertainment.

Cruising (1980) Directed by William Friedkin [Film]. USA: United Artists.

Dressed to Kill (1980) Directed by Brian De Palma [Film]. USA: Filmways Pictures.

Edward Scissorhands (1990) Directed by Tim Burton [Film]. USA: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.

Ed Wood (1994) Directed by Tim Burton [Film]. USA: Buena Vista Pictures.

Evil Dead 2 (1987) Directed by Sam Raimi [Film]. USA: Rosebud Releasing Corporation.

Fear no Evil (1981) Directed by Frank LaLoggia [Film]. USA: AVCO Embassy Pictures.

Friday the 13th (1980) Directed by Sean S. Cunningham [Film]. USA: Paramount Pictures.

Fright Night (1985) Directed by Tom Holland [Film]. USA: Columbia Pictures.

Gayracula (1983) Directed by Roger Earl [Film]. USA: Rod and Reel Films.

Gay Zombie (2007) Directed by Michael Simon [Short Film]. USA: Undead Film Festival.

Ginger Snaps (2000) Directed by John Fawcett [Film]. Canada: Motion International.

Halloween (1978) Directed by John Carpenter [Film]. USA: Compass International Pictures.

Hellbent (2004) Directed by Paul Etheredge [Film]. USA: Regent Releasing.

Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer (1986) Directed by John McNaughton [Film]. USA: Greycat Films

Hostel (2005) Directed by Eli Roth [Film]. USA: Lions Gate Films.

I Am Nancy (2011) Directed by Arlene Marechal [Film]. USA: Camelot Entertainment Group.

It (1990) ABC.

Jeepers Creepers 2 (2003) Directed by Victor Salva [Film]. USA: United Artists.

Love Bites (1992) Directed by Marvin Jones [Video]. USA: Simitar Entertainment.

Mirrors (2008) Directed by Alexandre Aja [Film]. USA/Romania/Germany/France: 20th Century Fox.

Never Sleep Again: The Elm Street Legacy (2010) Directed by Daniel Farrands and Andrew Kasch [Film]. USA: 1428 Films.

Nightbreed (1990) Directed by Clive Barker [Film]. USA: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.

Night of the Creeps (1986) Directed by Fred Dekker [Film]. USA: TriStar Pictures.

Night of the Living Dead (1968) Directed by George A. Romero [Film]. USA: Continental Distributing.

Phantasm (1979) Directed by Don Coscarelli [Film]. USA: AVCO Embassy Pictures.

Psycho Beach Party (2000) Directed by Robert Lee King [Film]. USA: Strand Releasing.

Scream (1996) Directed by Wes Craven [Film]. USA: Dimension Films.

Sleepy Hollow (1999) Directed by Tim Burton [Film]. USA: Paramount Pictures.

Slumber Party Massacre (1982) Directed by Amy Holden Jones [Film]. USA: New World Pictures.

Suspiria (1977) Directed by Dario Argento [Film]. Italy: Produzioni Atlas Consorziate (P.A.C.).

The Brotherhood (2001) Directed by David DeCoteau [Film]. USA: Artist View Entertainment.

The Burning (1981) Directed by Tony Maylam [Film]. USA/Canada: Filmways Pictures.

The Covenant (2006) Directed by Renny Harlin [Film]. USA: Screen Gems.

The Dentist (1996) Directed by Brian Yuzna [Film]. USA: Trimark Pictures Inc.

The Evil Dead (1981) Directed by Sam Raimi [Film]. USA: New Line Cinema.

The Exorcist (1973) Directed by William Friedkin [Film]. USA: Warner Bros.

The Faculty (1998) Directed by Robert Rodriguez [Film]. USA: Miramax.

The Forsaken (2001) Directed by J.S. Cardone [Film]. USA: Sony Pictures Releasing.

The Lost Boys (1987) Directed by Joel Schumacher [Film]. USA: Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.

The Rocky Horror Picture Show (1975) Directed by Jim Sharman [Film]. USA/UK: 20th Century Fox Film Corporation.

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974) Directed by Tobe Hooper [Film]. USA: Bryanston Distributing.

Twilight (2008) Directed by Catherine Hardwicke [Film]. USA: Summit Entertainment LLC.

Wes Craven's New Nightmare (1994) Directed by Wes Craven [Film]. USA: New Line Cinema.

X-Men (2000) Directed by Bryan Singer [Film]. USA: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.

976-Evil (1988) Directed by Robert Englund [Film]. USA: New Line Cinema.

Webography

British Film Institute (2014) *Scream Queens: Gay Boys and the Horror Film*. Available at:

<https://whatson.bfi.org.uk/flare/Online/default.asp?BOParam::WScontent::loadArticle::permlink=screamqueens> (Accessed: 28 November 2014).

Calindas, M. (2009) *Horror Films and Gay Men*. Available at:

<http://www.examiner.com/article/horror-films-and-gay-men> (Accessed: 3 June 2012).

Fangoria (2014) *Gay of the Dead*: Available at:

<http://www.fangoria.com/new/category/columns/gay-of-the-dead-2/> (Accessed: 23 March 2015).

Juergens, B. (2014) *The 13 Most Homoerotic Horror Movies Of All Time: Happy*

Halloween. Available at: <http://www.newnownext.com/gay-horror-movies-homoerotic-halloween/10/2014/> (Accessed: 21 November 2014)

Maslin, J. (1977) "'Suspiria,' a Specialty Movie, Drips With Gore'. Review of *Suspiria*, directed by Dario Argento. Available at:

<http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=990CEFDB1F3BE334BC4B52DFBE66838C669EDE> (Accessed: 2 October 2013).

Peeples, J. (2012) *She is Nancy, The Queen of Elm Street*. Available at:

<http://www.gay.net/movies/2012/10/31/she-nancy-queen-elm-street> (Accessed: 3 February 2013).

Peeples, J. (2013) *A Nightmare in Hollywood Couldn't Kill Mark Patton*. Available at:

<http://www.advocate.com/health/hiv-aids/2013/08/08/scream-king-nightmare-hollywood-couldnt-kill-mark-patton?page=full> (Accessed: 3 October 2013).

Peitzman, L. (2013) "*There's Something Inside of Me*": *Coming Out As A Gay*

Horror Fan. Available at: <http://www.buzzfeed.com/louispeitzman/coming-out-as-a-gay-horror-fan#.ibM8ke5JNj> (Accessed: 3 April 2015).

Ross (2012a) *Gayest '90s: Depp & Burton, Them Straight Queens*. Available at:

<http://campblood.org/Newblog/archives/11177> (Accessed: 3 December 2014).

Ross (2012b) *What Is the Gayest Horror Movie of the '90s?*. Available at:

<http://campblood.org/Newblog/archives/10715> (Accessed: 29 November 2014).

Soares, A. (2008) *Homo Horror: Seattle Lesbian & Gay Film Festival*. Available at:

<http://www.altfg.com/film/homo-horror-seattle-gay-festival-2008/> (Accessed: 12 March 2013).

Stockham, E. (2014) *Feature: Horror's link to homosexuality*. Available at: www.movieramblings.com/2014/04/04/feature-horrors-link-to-homosexuality/ (Accessed: 4 June 2014).

Thurman, T. (2015) *Coming Out Screaming: How a Gay Man Found Acceptance Through Horror*. Available at: <http://bloodydisgusting.com/editorials/3346089/coming-out-screaming-gay-acceptance/> (Accessed: 10 August 2015).